

Sudha Murty's Dollar Bahu: A Literary Panopticon of Indian Values

Shekhar B. Vispute

Asst. Professor,
PG. Dept. of English,
Vasantrao Naik Government Institute of Arts
and Social Sciences, Nagpur. (MS)

Dr. Bhupendra N. Kesur

Professor & Head,
P.G. Dept. of English
KCE Society's M. J. College,
Jalgaon. (MS)

HHH

Abstract

Indian values are regarded as the fundamental principles of living happy and contented life. Sudha Murty, an eminent Indian English and Kannada writer is best known for the exploration of her philanthropical and axiological perspectives in her writings. Dollar Bahu is one of the masterpieces of the projection of Indian values with cosmopolitan sensibility. It is a literary panopticon of Indian values which deals with the conflicts between Indian and western values faced by the characters in the select novel. This realistic picture is delineated through the textual and critical analysis of Dollar Bahu. It is explored through an Indian family living in Bangalore which represents two distinctive perspectives towards life. The division of family into two groups is the emblem of Indian and Western values. Dollar Bahu ends up with the central figure, Gouramma's realization of Indian values and its significance rather than western values.

Keywords: Crises, human relationship, Indian values, philanthropy, western values

Value is a Latin term derived from the word 'valere' which means 'to be of worth or to prevail'. It is generally defined by the social scientists, philosophers and the writers as per their profound knowledge. Values come from the formation of habits, customs, traditions and the cultures of society. Values seem to have dynamic nature. The values are being changed over the period of times. Milton Rokeach has defined values as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (5). There are different kinds of values in the world which can be either identical with one another or different in some respects. But the prominent thing is that the values should be based on the fundamental principles of human life. This paper evaluates the nature of Indian values which differ from the values of other countries in the globe. Indian values are especially rooted in the Indian cultures. The history of Indian values is as old as human civilization. It is based on the fundamentals of ethics that are the supreme and ideal ways of living a happy and peaceful life.

A Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'-which

means 'the whole world is a family'-shows the real nature of Indian values that in real sense seem to be the underlining guidelines to be followed by each individual creature in the world. India has always been a land of rich cultures, values and heritage. India has occupied a remarkable place in the world due to his ethical, cultural, and humanitarian values which are the core of the hearts of people. Indian values can be seen through the enactment of law, religious scriptures and the cultures. Since ancient times to the present era, values are being changed as per the time changes. But the core values which could hold the people together under the one roof of humanity, love, affection, kindness, simplicity, brotherhood etc remain same. Though today is the time of globalization and technology, yet the Indian values are followed by the Indians with the sense of humanitarian perspectives. Indian values are highly appreciated by the foreign countries as well due to the applicability of its doctrines to the mankind for the spiritual and eternal development. Mark Twain acknowledged his views about India- "India is, the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandfather of tradition. Our most valuable and not instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only" (India). Though there is diversity in India in terms of religions, caste, creed, sects and geographical features, yet there is unity in diversity due to the Indian values only. Despite of having different religions and cultures, Indian values are strongly followed by Indians which is really a commendable thing.

Unfortunately, the mindsets of Indian people are getting changed due to the impact of western values. The world has come so close through the technology and Scientific inventions. It has been easier to go to any country in the world and understand the values or cultures. Many people migrate to the foreign countries for the different purposes. As a result of it, they indulge in the atmosphere of those countries. It creates conflict in their minds sometimes due to the different values of different countries. India seems to be affected by this kind of migrations. Likewise there are many other reasons that are responsible for the change of mindsets of some Indians who have great attraction of western cultures. Sudha Murty being a

chairperson of Infosys Foundation has seen the world closely. She has experienced the changing mindsets of Indian people and their inclination towards the materialistic values of western countries. The hybridity of the Indian and western values is prominently depicted in the present Indian societal scenario through the portrayal of the characters in the *Dollar Bahu*. The fascination of western values and lifestyle has been a trend for most of the Indians who prefer to follow the western values on the account of disregard and negligence towards Indian values. Sudha Murty strongly exposes the reality of Indian society in which people are inclined towards the western values through her novel *Dollar Bahu*. She tried to show the various reasons of the changing mindsets of Indians who are highly fascinated to the western values rather than Indian values through the character of Gouramma, Chandra Shekhar, Jamuna and Surabhi. Fascination of western values make the characters suffer from the conflicts and identity crisis. At last, Sudha Murty has explored the significance of Indian values through the characters of Vinuta, Shamanna, Girish and transformation of Gouramma in *Dollar Bahu*.

Dollar Bahu is one of the most popular fictions of Sudha Murty which is best known for the subjugation of Indian values over the western values. The conflict between Indian values and western values is the major concern and the problem faced by many Indian people in the modern and post modern world due to many reasons. The financial status of a country seems to be more importance for the growth of the nation. India is a developing country and at second number in population. In compare to other western countries, the financial status of India seems to be low. In addition to that, there are many problems such as poverty, education, unemployment and so on. It affects the mentality of many Indian people. They too want to live a happy and luxurious life like other people in the world. They too incline to have the materialistic assets that could give them pleasure. It is a natural tendency to long for the things that one does not have. Murty raised real issues of Modern Indian society through *Dollar Bahu*. The conflict between Indian values and Western values is especially shown through the character of Gouramma.

Gouramma is a traditional Indian woman living with her husband in Bangalore. She has two sons and one daughter. Her husband, Shamanna is a Sanskrit teacher. He is very simple and responsible man. Gouramma manages household expenditures in her husband's modest salary along with the education of children. She is shown a greedy, selfish and practical woman who has many ambitions in life. She is not happy and content in

what she has. She longs to have money and the materialistic luxuries like rich people. She wants her children to have good education so that they can fulfill her desires. When she comes to know that her husband could not fulfill her aspirations, then she pins her hopes on her children. Her elder son, Chandra Shekhar is her favourite child. Because he follows what his mother tells him to do. He is very good at study and ambitious like mother. The second son, Girish is an average in study. But he follows his father rather mother. Girish believes in the human values like his father. Surabhi, her daughter is too practical and selfish.

Gouramma always dreams to live an aristocratic life like her rich friends. Ultimately her dream comes true to some extent through Chandru who gets job in America. Her happiness remains no bound. She is immensely fascinated to the America and its lifestyle. When Chandru tells her about American Dollar and the lifestyle of America, she completely immerses in the dream of going to America and wishes to enjoy the lifestyle. Her love and fascination for Dollar can be seen through the following lines-

Gouramma was in India only in body at such times; her spirit would be flying across the length and breadth of America. She would dream about the Dollar, that magic green currency, which could change her house and fulfill her dreams. It was the Dollar, not Indian rupees, which could elevate her into the elite circle at social gatherings and marriage halls. The Dollar was like the Goddess Lakshmi, with a magic wind. (Murty 25).

When Girish gets married with Vinuta who is a poor and parentless girl, then Gouramma becomes very angry that she could not get dowry and expensive gifts from Vinuta. Therefore she exploits Vinuta humiliating her all the time. She shows disregard and hatred for her. Gouramma gets Chandru's marriage with Jamuna who belongs to a rich family and brings huge dowry and expensive things. She respects Jamuna and gives her everything. Jamuna lives with Chandru in America after the marriage. Gouramma makes the distinction between Vinuta and Jamuna through comparison. She calls Jamuna as *Dollar Bahu* and Vinuta as Indian rupees. It shows her hedonistic mindset which has come from her fascination towards the western values. She does not have any adherence towards Indian values. She does not follow the human values. The aim of her life is to seek pleasure from money and the materialistic assets.

Gouramma's dream of going to America is fulfilled by Chandru. She goes to America and lives with Chandru for a year. She sees America and its lifestyle closely. At last she realizes her mistake after being humiliated by

Jamuna before her friends. She comes to know that she has mistaken her ways. She understands the value of true Indian relationship. She immediately comes back to India and lives happily with everyone. She realizes the significance of Indian values which are truly the source of real happiness. Her transformation in the novel is the result of her realization of Indian values. If one looks at the character of Gouramma from the critical point of view, it can clearly be seen that she has always been in the conflict of Indian and American values. She has many friends whose relatives would live in America and speak about Dollar and lifestyle. She too longs to have someone in America for long time. Such thinking makes her practical and selfish so that she can fulfill her desires through her children. Her husband knows her nature well so he always tries to make her understand that she should be happy and content in what she has.

Indian values are the great source of true happiness. But Gouramma never listens to him. At last, she realizes that she was running after the false mirage of American Dollar and lifestyle which could not give her eternal pleasure. Money cannot buy the human relationship and the true values of life. Sudha Murty's view about money seems to be much relevant in the context of Gouramma's character. "Money comes with an expectation and spoils the delicate equilibrium of social work" (Phulsunge 55). The conflict faced by Gouramma is resolved through self realization of Indian values which is the turning point of the novel. Sudha Murty intended to depict the realistic societal scenario of India where there are many people like Gouramma who are the victims of such conflict.

Indian values are the paradigm of human life which embodies the Indian society from the humanitarian perspectives. The intrinsic forms like eternal pleasure, love, affection, human relationship, humanity, brotherhood, peace, duties, politeness etc are embedded in Indian values. Dollar Bahu is metaphorically a literary panopticon of Indian values which are suveiled by Sudha Murty through her own experiences and profound knowledge. Being a corporate leader, she has witnessed to the changing mindsets of Indian people. She explores the significance of Indian values which are in real sense the lighthouse of mankind. Her adherence towards Indian values is reflected through the characters of Shamanna, Girish and Vinuta in Dollar Bahu.

Shamanna is one of the most important character who belongs to old generation of Indian society but shown with strong believer of Indian values. Being a Sanskrit teacher in school, he understands the value of Indian cultures, customs, history, and land. He tries to inculcate

such values amongst his children and wife. He is a simple, kind and contended man who does not have any attraction of money and rich life. He believes in virtuous that give him true happiness. He knows that his wife is greedy, selfish and practical, yet he never quarrels her. He tries to make her understand the significance of Indian values which are rich and appreciated by the other countries in the world. But she neglects him. He feels happy that his younger son, Girish follows his father's ways of life. But his elder son, Chandru and daughter, Surabhi have no respect for the Indian values. Shamanna gets worried about the changing mindsets of Gouramma, Chandru, and Surabhi who have mistaken their ways of life. He knows that the fascination of money has destroyed the peace of minds of many people in the society. When Chandru gets settled in America, he never shows interest to go there like Gouramma. He seems to be happy in India itself in the spiritual atmosphere of human relationship. When Girish is married, his wife, Vinuta is exploited by Gouramma. Shamanna feels very sad for her. He treats Vinuta like his daughter. He always looks after her and encourages her to go ahead in life.

Shamanna is a responsible head in the family who always takes care of his children and wife. In his modest salary, he manages the things that he could do performing his sincere duties towards his family. He feels great concerns for Gouramma especially who is mistaken somewhere due to the fascination of money and rich life. His concerns for her are expressed with his true love for the Indian values and the human relationship-

This Dollar may have transformed the lifestyles of some families, taken them from poverty to wealth, but it has also broken up some families. It has created financial and social distinctions within families and destroyed peace of mind. Very few people have understood this. If Gouri had been more mature, she would not have been in awe of the Dollar and danced to its tune. Her greed burnt the peace and harmony in our family.... Gouri is not a bad human being, but she is misguided. I am sure she will realize that the enchanted forest is a mirage, but I am afraid it might be too late by then. (Murty 139).

When Gouramma realizes her mistake after coming from America, he feels very happy looking her transformation. He always believed that his wife would realize the significance of Indian values one day. It happens in the form of her transformation. Thus, Shamanna remains a good figure throughout the novel, Dollar Bahu who holds the Indian values and inculcates in his family.

Unlike Shamanna, Girish and Vinuta represent Indian values through their actions and thoughts. Girish is

shown a free and amiable person who is already ready to help the people out like his father. He is a bank clerk and happy in life. He does not crave for more money and luxuries like his elder brother and mother. He feels very proud of his father's ways of life. He has great love and adherence for Indian values that he cherishes through his helpful nature. Girish is scolded by his practical mother for his humanitarian perspectives. But he ignores his mother. His love for Indian values can be understood through his reply to his mother- "Amma, I don't agree with you. What Appa says is right. As a human being it is our duty to help everyone" (Murty 20). He is seen happy and content throughout the novel. As a result of his good nature, he gets a good better half of having same kind of nature, Vinuta.

Vinuta is too a simple, educated and responsible girl. Though she is badly treated by mother-in-law, but loved and respected by Shamanna. She never complains against her mother-in-law though she is not ever appreciated by Gouramma. She is a parentless child who was grown by her uncle in Dharwad. So she craves for the motherly love from Gouramma. But she is frustrated. She loves and respects her husband who never hurts her. So she remains happy due to the good nature of her husband and father-in-law. She is hurt when Gouramma shows hatred for her and likes Jamuna, Chandru's wife. The notable aspect in the character of Vinuta is that she does not get affected by the jealousy of Jamuna for her rich life. Vinuta's simplicity and love for Indian value is seen in her reply to her aunty. When her aunt asks her whether Vinuta wants a Class I officer or engineer, she simply answers- "No. I don't have any such demands. Nor am I bothered about

his family's riches. If necessary, I will continue to work. All I ask for is to be contented" (Murty 31). That was what Vinuta really felt and what she honestly believed. At the end of Dollar Bahu, it is clearly shown that Vinuta's good nature and her selfless duties towards her in-laws are highly appreciated by Gouramma after her transformation from a selfish and greedy woman to a responsible and lovable one.

Thus, Dollar Bahu is a literary panopticon of Indian values which surveys the changing perspectives of Indian people due to the fascination of the westernization. Values are the indispensable phenomenon of human life which must be cherished to survive humanity and individuality. The significance and the subjugation of Indian values are explicated by Sudha Murty through the characters in Dollar Bahu with an appeal to the Indian people to respect and cherish the rich Indian values.

Works Cited

- 1 Murty, Sudha. *Dollar Bahu*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007. Print.
- 2 Phulsunge, Sangeeta. *Novels of Sudha Murty: A Critical Study*. Nagpur: Dattsons Publication, first edition, 2018. Print.
- 3 Rokeach, Milton. *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: The Free Press, 1973. Print.
- 4 Twain, Mark. "India is the Cradle of the Human Race". *Bangalore.explocity.com*.
- 5 11/10/2019. Web. 27/05/2021.
- 6 <<http://bangalore.explocity.com/article/india-is-the-cradle-of-the-human-race/>>