

Cultural Identity in Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Bahu*

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Abstract: Language plays an important role, and it aids as a tool in Literature and Culture. Indian novelist Sudha Murthy is considered as an exceptional well-known writer in the 21st century. Many of her works reflect a kaleidoscope of reality faced across different cultures be it in India or the globalized world. Culture plays an important role and is a fundamental institution in the society and at times we see a hybridity in cultural identity. In Sudha Murthy's novel *Dollar Bahu*, we find cultural clashes in identity, traditions and influence of other factors in the character's lives. Sudha Murthy explores relationships, impact of materialism and cultural values as perceived in this novel, where it reflects societal perspectives with status and money. Different cultural frameworks assert societies which is deeply rooted in values, family, social and cultural aspects. We view cultural transplantation with different embodiments in social life. This paper attempts to view and analyse the conflicts faced and transformation as seen in the context of culture and identity.

Key Words: Culture, Cultural identity, Transition, Transformation.

Introduction:

Language plays an important role and aids as a tool in Literature and Culture. Indian Writing in English has marked an indelible mark in the global scenario with well acclaimed writers in this contemporary world. Writers have immensely contributed towards growth and development in an artistic depiction in Indian English Literature.

Some of the prominent women writers in Indian Writing in English are Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Kiran Desai, Sunidhi Namjoshi, Meena Alexander and many more who have contributed their refined artistic works which have a global reach and influenced many writers across the world. Indian Writing in English has attained a gradual growth in the global world. Sudha Murthy is one such writer who is not only a novelist but also a short story writer, philanthropist and has numerous features in her hat. One of the writers who emerged as spontaneous, creative and graceful projection of reality as depicted of cross-cultural traditions in the modern world is seen in her work *Dollar Bahu*. Through her writings she has captured a sense of Indian culture and presented various dimensions and hybridity of culture and identity.

Dollar Bahu is one of the novels of Sudha Murthy which represents reality and portrays hardships of immigrants in an Indian background as expressed through the characters. This paper aims to exhibit aspects of cultural shock as perceived through characters like Gouramma and few other characters which impacted their mindset. Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Bahu* critiques the clash created between Indian values and culture alongside the western influence stating "dollar" as a status -co created and an amalgamation of identity based on cultural differences. We also associate disorientation of culture and a gradual transformation from interdependence of family life towards consumerism and overlapping of identity created in characters individually. An evaluation of cultural roots and a rude shock where you come from and where you belong.

Dollar Bahu is considered as one of her finest works who projects Indian sensibility and caters the Indian values, traditions versus western cultural perspective. We can view a critical and realistic depiction through her characters in a critical perspective. Values are considered as fundamental foundations for better living, we see how the demarcation in a family into two separate groups as perceived in this work. *Dollar Bahu* explores conflicts which arise when there is a clash between the Western and Indian values, especially how “Dollar” in pursuit of materialism drives a crisis in cultural identity.

Discussions:

The novel majorly revolves and projects the life of Gouramma along with her husband Shamanna, a Sanskrit teacher with a middle-class background have two sons and a daughter. The elder son Chandra Shekar who is considered as favorite son to Gouramma gets married to Jamuna, who later along with her husband immigrates to US for better living. Gouramma has high regard for Jamuna and is considered as *Dollar Bahu*. Vinuta, Gouramma’s second daughter-in-law who is married to Girish, a bank clerk is a very simple, loving and caring Indian Bahu who serves the family members with great devotion, respect towards them and regards Indian culture and tradition with complete deviation without complaining. She is often humiliated by Gouramma most of the time and a constant comparison with Jamuna, her co-sister-in-law. The novel gives a kaleidoscope perspective of different cultural clashes related to ideologies, mindset between India and the western world. We find characters in the novel are in constant conflict in adopting, transforming to an extent and clashing in identity as well.

We see the transformation of Indian families and culture who live in America. The shifting of Indian mindset shifts and clashes in differentiating of where they belong and how few adapt to the new culture in a different land. The treatment given by Gouramma upon her daughter-in-laws varies, later transforms and identifies the true reality and how to lead a content life. Culture is a fundamental institution instilled in human beings. We follow and imbibe values, traditions and culture in the society. In a globalised world, we see amalgamation of various cultures and in a multi-cultural world it seems impossible to be entailed to one.

Like few of the Indians like Gouramma’s elder son Chandrashekar had a long-cherished dream and aspired to go to America, when the chance has passed his way, he finally succeeds and gets settled along with his wife Jamuna. Gouramma is swayed away due to the American Dollar lifestyle and sees her daughter-in-law with loads of reverence and considers her as *Dollar Bahu* and usually associated and equates status to materialistic wealth. Sudha Murthy projects how “Dollar Bahu” can influence money, command respect from her family members as her co-sister-in-law Vinuta who is a sincere, caring and concerned and who possess traditional Indian values and culture has been sidelined and overlooked. The gradual shift of emotional bond in the family, relationship slip and is equated to “money” enforces the dangerous repercussions on a long run in terms of cultural identity. “Money” has become a defining factor, and identity is associated rather than the bond shared in family, relationship ties etc. materialism had a high impact in relationships amongst the family members.

Results:

The novel also highlights and examines how predetermined roles are based on status be it in a society i.e. economic, social etc and how materialistic wealth define your role as a woman. “For years, she (refers to the traditional bahu) had been silently bearing the weight of expectations; now, she felt lost in a world where dollars speak louder than love and affection” (Murthy, 200, p.112). Delves into cultural identity with social power and neglecting relationship, psychological needs of certain characters in the novel. Recognition is based on cultural identity in relation to

conflict where success is based on materialism is over emphasised than true cultural identity in terms of relationships is concerned.

We see how voice is being lost when we see traditional bahu than the dollar bahu where identity is related and associated to materialistic wealth. The central issues revolve around obsession with dollar portraying American materialistic progress which takes an upper hand over social and cultural values, traditions and effects roots of Indian household living as well.

The contrasting dual role of the daughter-in-law projects how Vinuta is ingrained firmly in traditional roots, humble, simple, committed to her family life and takes care of every member in the family with utmost care were as Jamuna pursues luxury and accesses status materialistically, neglects her roots in India and amalgamates with the US westernised culture. We also see other characters in the novel that adopt and transform gradually after realistically understanding that a content life is better than a luxurious lifestyle. Gradually Gauramma also understands the clash and shift in cultural identity that was initially fascinated and inclined towards lavish lifestyle, dollar later realises the breakdown in culture, a setback in relationship's, understands Vinutha and realises that cultural identity is far more important and leading a contentful life gives more meaning to life.

Conclusion:

Language plays an important role, and it aids as a tool in Literature and culture. Culture plays an important role and is a fundamental institution in the society and at times we see a hybridity in cultural identity. Sudha Murthy explores relationships, impact of materialism and cultural values as perceived in this novel, where it reflects societal perspectives with status and money. We see how voice and identity is being lost when we see traditional bahu than the dollar bahu where identity is related and associated to materialistic wealth. We see realisation that roots in tradition, culture and identity favour more than the western driven lifestyle. The impact over the Indian psyche examines cultural identity which examines the impact of globalization. At times cultural identity is compromised for few of them who choose to stick to the roots, tradition and their cultural identity which gives immense faith in themselves and the society as whole. Through this paper we see how values might clash in a globalised world but being firm and enduring values, culture, and Indian tradition is considered more favourable. Hybridity is seen as a cultural amalgamation where narratives of Indians in America have imbibed from both Indian and US culture. Few of them are transformed whereas few remain rooted strongly in their traditional values and culture. This paper attempted to project conflicts through culture and how few of the characters realise and change in relation to their cultural identity.

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