

DOLLAR SOSE -A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SUDHA MURTHY'S DEBUT NOVEL

Abstract

It is a matter of great gusto and excitement to see the fast progress of Indian Writing in English in the past few decades. Indian writing in English has scaled a height never before achieved and witnessed a rich collection of Indian creative writings in English. The present literary scene of Indian Writing in English has completely changed. It has not been, "a Janus-faced Literature" coming from a cross-fertilisation of two faithful cultures"-Indian and American. A writer is free to express himself or herself in any language provided he or she can do so effectively. Many comprehensive both male and female writers contributed a lot for the growth of Indian Literature during the pre-colonial and post-colonial period to modern day. Indian Writing in English have attained a luxurious growth in respect of work, variety and maturity. Most of the early writings lacked depth, style and techniques to leave any permanent imprint on the literature lovers. The emergence of a few talented writers like the 'The Big Three' – Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan brought Indian writings to the International level. The great writers of the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties and writers of today brought out the bold characters out of their restricted frame and unfold the realities of their times and occupied a significant place in all round development in the literary history. The women of today are not a spontaneous emergence. She has her own identity after long years of subjugation and positioning in the subordinate cadre. She was not supposed to take decisions, her task was only to follow. She had to abide by and never revolt. It can be said that it was silent portrait of faith, subordination and an existence without any identity. Then the brain started crying for an identity. She started raising

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their voice for equality of rights and finally today she got her capacity to pen down her own thoughts. They made a mark through their works and some of them even settled abroad. Sudha Murthy has been a voluminous writer in English today, writing on dominant issues related to women in modern India at the age of globalization. Her writings are marked by her impartial way of looking at man's relations with women and women's relations with other women. In her debut novel, Dollar Sose or Dollar daughter-in-Law, she emphasized the value of mutual attachment and respect in domestic relations

Keywords: *Comprehensive, Emergency, Gusto, Luxurious, Subjugation, Voluminous.*

I. INTRODUCTION

English education was introduced in India after East India Company first set itself up in India and the English rule, later, was established. Lord Macaulay's famous 'Minute' mentioned the necessity of English education in India and made several derogatory remarks about Indian languages and their literatures. It is now a well-known fact that the English wanted the personnel to work for them in offices to do clerical jobs and they framed the educational programme to fulfil this need. Raja Rammohan Roy wrote a letter to Lord William Bentick emphasizing the importance of the western style of education to raise people from superstitions and to cultivate analytical and rational attitude in them and requesting him to begin schools in the English style. Whatever maybe their intentions and objectives, gradually schools giving education in the western style were opened and also led to the formation of the English educated elite initially. The ruling class naturally influenced the rich class of the rules and effect of the western style of life could be seen. These people also began to write creatively. It's a matter of great gusto and excitement to see the fast progress of Indian Writing in English in the past few decades. It has scaled a height never before achieved and witnessed a rich collection of Indian writers.

In our society, a woman is a non-person, an appendage, a slave to the master man. In our culture she is not an individual in her own right but a medium through which man aspires for self-affirmation and self-realization. The culture that created a Sita and Savitri has denied the rights of existence to woman save as daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. She is yet to achieve individuation and an authentic self-identity. A woman rarely leads an independent life. She exists in a bipolar world: on the one hand, she is subordinated to the masculine world of her husband and on the other, committed to the assertion of her woman hood, her female ego.

In Indian writers in English, women play two types of roles: traditional and unconventional. The orthodox suffer for their flouting of accepted social norms, for their rebelliousness. The conventional suffering too, but their suffering is sanctified by the norms of a patriarchal male-oriented culture. Modern and post-modern Indian English women novelists wrote on different themes except nationality, the culture-conflicts-tradition and modern life of the East and the West, which has a touch of personal and individualistic themes dealing with the lives of women. The role of Indian women has the iconic image undergoing an evolutionary process and Literature being the medium to create and talk about this feminine image. The modern woman reflects the efforts of female psyche to redefine women, their identities and space.

There are many men and women writers who handled and depicted contemporary issues. Traditional themes like Indian poverty, Superstitions, culture, child marriage and illiteracy are now replaced by themes like crumbling family relations, devastating effects of globalization, exploitation of employees etc. These writers came from highest centres of learning in India. The writers like Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi, Sashi Tharoor, Arvind Adiga have presented variety of unconditional themes with innovative techniques. Women writers like Kiran Desai, Arundathi Roy got coveted Booker prizes for effective presentation of realistic social, cultural and political situations in India.

Sudha Murthy is an Indian educator, author, philanthropist & former chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. She is married to the co-founder of Infosys, N.R. Narayana Murthy. She was nominated as Member of Parliament, for her contribution on social work & education. Sudha Murthy's critical study in the topic includes the study of themes, characterization, narrative techniques & setting. She has written innumerable books that have received laurels at the National level. She deals with burning issues of the disastrous effects of globalization of Indian economy & urbanization of Indian society on the domestic relations in India. Her characters originate from the rural background & through incessant hard work rise to the level of upper middle-class section of the society. As long as they have financial crunch, they are together. Once they have abundant money, they become arrogant. Sudha Murthy follows the traditional staright forward technique of storytelling in all her works. She has made eloquent use of rural & urban settings in her works. Her short stories are entertaining & instructive for the children. She believes in the great Indian traditions & ethics of the past which good always win & bad is always defeated.

Sudha Murthy's writing is a wonderful combination of old Indian and the new twentieth century Indian culture. She is a psycho-analyst as well as an entrepreneur. Her works reflect a rare combination of philanthropic attitude and logical thoughts. Her writings take us deep into the human mind with all complexities. The delineation of characters depicted by her represents new reality which is revolutionary feature in modern literature. She is not a feminist in traditional sense who fights for women's cause. She writes about men and women both struggling for their own existence in globalizing India. It will be an interesting and innovative attempt to find out about her writing in detail. Her writings involve analysis of themes, characters, narrative devices and setting employed in her literary works.

Indian fiction writers in English have been writing on the themes related to castes, classes, social discrimination, exploitation, alienation, segregation, unemployment, rural and urban divide etc. A novelist may deal with one or more of the above themes simultaneously. Arundathi Roy in her "*The God of Small Things*" deals with the exploitation of women in India, wretched condition of an untouchable boy on the society, faces that wear masks etc. In fact the greatness of a novel depends on the effective handling of various themes. It is interesting to note at the outset that though a woman, Sudha Murthy's themes are not restricted to women's issues only. Her writings show remarkable shift in overall perspective to feminine writing. It is general practice in feminine writing to blame men for the sufferings of women as if men and women were born enemies and marriage was a license to carry out an agenda of exploitation of women by men. Sudha Murthy is perhaps the first Indian writer in English to reason out the issue by blaming one woman for the miseries of another woman along with the man in the family.

Another theme that Sudha Murthy deals with is the ending effects of emerging Capitalism in Indian society on the close human relations. Liberalization in Indian economic system brought scores of opportunities for the Indians to acquire riches. Young boys and girls got a chance to go to the first world countries and avail of modern amenities easily. On the one hand, it changed their social and financial status. On the other hand, it created tension in the traditionally close domestic relations. Sudha Murthy artistically dealt with crumbling domestic relations in all her works.

Sudha Murthy sets her novels by weaving the threads of traditions and modernity in all her works. Indians of the old generation even today boast of their social and cultural heritage

and many Indians are proud of it. She sets the action of her novels in the villages and rural tendencies that exist in big cities. Juxtaposition of rural life with cosmopolitan life of the cities makes her work representative of overall Indian life. It also helps her to bring out the confrontation between two generations. Sudha Murthy today comes from Bangalore in Karnataka. Though Maharashtrian by birth, she settled her business empire and philanthropic work basically in Karnataka. Naturally, she is well acquainted with the people and their life styles in that area. Her characters possess Kannada names like Akka, Avva, Appa etc. This does not however mean that her novels are regional in scope and appeal. We find people with such characteristics elsewhere in India. Her skill to enlarge the canvas of her novels is noteworthy.

Sudha Murthy's debut novel 'Dollar Bahu' or 'Dollar Sose' have been set in two different Countries, America and India. The story talks about her son Chandru who got a job in America & migrated there with his wife, Jamuna. Chandru's mother Gouramma was very proud of her son & Daughter-in-law- because they were earning in dollars. She hated her second daughter-in-law as she hailed from a middle-class family. Gouramma was disillusioned by her experiences with Jamuna in America as she did not respect her, neither did she treat her as a human being. She remembered her second daughter-in-law in America when she was troubled and unhappy. The novel showed the ill-effects of dollar on closely knit human relations.

The novel Dollar Bahu is set partly in USA and partly in Karnataka. Gouramma in Dollar Bahu goes to her son and daughter-in-law in the USA for a year. The writer places her squarely with American atmosphere expecting some change in her attitude to others. There is no change. Her novels are set in post-independence India, the period of economic liberalization of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the new millennium. India was going through a new phase of economic reforms. Indian boys and girls acquired new skill in Information and Technology sector which opened the gates to America for better opportunities. Sudha Murthy deals with the new generation of Indians and their interaction with the old generation. The novel emphasized the value of mutual attachment and respect in domestic relations. There are two prominent themes in this novel. The first theme is the dehumanizing effect of globalization on the traditional Indian psyche and the second one is crumbling domestic relations in India and Indians. Sudha Murthy has closely related with the professionals in IT industry through Infosys. She minutely observed the changes in the behaviour pattern of the young male and female employees of the IIT sector. Her first-hand knowledge of the people in the industry is reflected in this novel.

Last decade of the twentieth century witnessed amazing boom in the IT sector of the Indian industries. Thousands of boys and girls preferred to take engineering degree in IT because it opened new vistas of opportunities within and outside India for them. It also provided them an opportunity to go broad, particularly to America and earn dollars in thousands. Growth and development in IT and their positive economic implications enchanted Indians though the other side of this boom was gloomily dark. It eroded the personal relation not only in Indian society but also within the family. Sudha Murthy has dealt with this phenomenon in *Dollar Bahu*.

It is remarkable that *Dollar Bahu* herself did not earn dollars. She was not even employed anywhere in America, neither did she have any private business of her own to accumulate dollars. She was just a parasite housewife there. Yet she spoiled the peacefully

integrated atmosphere in Shamanna's family. Shamanna and his wife Gauramma had well settled life with two sons and a daughter. Shamanna being a school teacher led a straight forward life without creating any problems for himself or for others. His middle-class mentality was obvious in all his dealing with others. He slowly pushed his daughter-in-law Vinuta into teaching for steady but guaranteed income. He was satisfied with a small income of his son Girish. He was not at all vociferous or excited even when dollars began to come in. In a way, it was a self-selected docile sort of life. The sudden entry of dollars disturbed the peaceful and otherwise cohesive structure of Shamanna family as his wife Gowramma was insane by it. She began to calculate each and every person in dollars. Personal human touch has lost its value for her. It was replaced by commercial considerations Dollars purchased not only lifeless objects like cars and houses for her but also living human beings like servants. Its touch turned human beings into commodity and it ruled the minds of the family.

Dollars reversed the chronological order that was conventionally followed in the children's marriages. Indian parents generally celebrated the eldest son's marriage first, followed by other son's marriages age wise for a long time. Unless there was any serious problem like physical or mental disability in the child, this pattern was not broken. But Gowramma preferred to take up her second son's marriage before her first son's marriage. She knew that once her second son Chandru began to earn dollars, she would get ample wealth in the form of dowry; she would be able to show off with her friends, neighbours and relatives. Gouramma overpowered Shamanna and Chandru because she was blinded by the sumptuous money and glittering jewellery that Jamuna brought along with her in marriage. Jamuna and her parents started ignoring Gouramma and her other members of the family immediately after marriage. Jamuna went to her father's house and returned only a day before her departure to America. She broke her promise and Gouramma did not dare ask her or question her. This put forward the black mailing capacity of the dollar in modern India.

Dollar has torn the prevalent thick weave of family ties. Chandru became an instrument in the mechanical world of America. He became a workaholic and did not pay any heed to other things in life. Likewise, his wife Jamuna did not involve him in the domestic chores like household items like vegetables, grocery etc. It was noteworthy that not much communication took place between Jamuna and Chandru in America and were forced to communicate with other women there. Jamuna had contacts during festivals like Pongal, Sankranti and Deepavali. Gouramma repented her visit to America. It is true that female section of the society must be given equal status in all the family matters. Gouramma, Jamuna, Vinuta and Surabhi should not be prevented from expressing their opinions simply because they are women. But Jamuna was not allowed to express her mind. This discriminatory treatment had certainly to do with the dollar maniac. Jamuna spoke because she had dollars and Vinutha did not speak because she did not have any dollars. Thus, different form of untouchability had entered in the family with the arrival of dollar in Indian life.

Gouramma did not dare to hurt Jamuna simply because Gouramma knew that Jamuna possessed 'nirvana dollars. She was Mahalakshmi the Goddess of Wealth. Jamuna sent used sarees for Surabhi's wedding in decorated boxes. According to traditional Indian belief, bride was not supposed to put on saris that were already used by someone else. It was thought to be ominous. Gouramma who believed in family deities and auspicious days did not feel hurt when she found out that Jamuna had sent second hand sarees for her own daughter, because the dollar had enslaved her. It had intoxicated her power to think, feel and react. Gouramma

is a representative of the modern Indian women who are ready to forgo self-respect in order to acquire dollars. Jamuna insulted Gouramma often in America. She refused to take her along to hospital at the time of her delivery. She deflated her enthusiasm to carry out the puja extensively in her house. She ignored her suggestion on the auspicious and inauspicious moments of the day. Gouramma wanted to take the newly born baby in her arms but Jamuna prevented her doing so. Anything that Gouramma suggested or tried to do was snubbed badly by Jamuna. This belittled her image of a respectable mother-in-law.

Traditionally, Indian mothers looked at their sons as property and are very possessive about them. One cannot approve of this tendency today. After all, every person is born individual. Yet, one thing is obvious about Gouramma who sacrificed her 'possessiveness' for dollars. It would have been a welcome in other circumstances. But intentions of Gouramma in this 'sacrifice' are malafide ones. It made Gouramma a helpful character. One cannot sympathize for her tone of her repentance in the end. Traditional Indian society believed in the power of money. Chandru ran after dollar so much that he had no time to share his feelings with his mother when she was in America. It was as if he had forgotten his parents, brother, sister-in-law, sister and brother-in-law back home. Incoming dollars had tricked him into subdued silence. Thus, globalization brought dollars that crippled the Indian mindset and are blinded by its glaring power. People lost their interest in each other without reasonable explanation for it. *Dollar Bahu* came to be regarded as a scathing attack on Indian madness for money.

There was a time in India when members of the family were tied together by a sense of attachment. Though there were some stray cases of disharmony in the family. The women, children, aged and disabled people of the family got sufficient protection from the members of the family. Recent commercialization of Indian society however brought unpleasant changes in this scenario. Shamanna and Gouramma had two separate ways of looking at life. Shamanna, being a teacher did not change his perspective of life. He was straight forward and has consideration of others and helped others without any selfish motive. He constantly took care of others without hurting others. It did not bother about the atrocious happenings of the outside world and it does not have much effect on him. That is why, he had to face problems while dealing with other members of the family.

Vidyut Bhagwat, a renowned social thinker and worker has made following statement on the prevalence of hegemony in Indian society even in the age of liberalization. 'Structural changes will interact on the way woman can see herself and call into question the assumption of social secondaries. But unless the internal process of subjugation is understood, unless the language of silence is experienced from inside and translate into the language of oppressed communicating themselves, male hegemony will remain'.

Gouramma was the opposite of the proverbial coin. She thought only about money and the name and fame it would bring along with it. She was quick to read the changes in Modern India. She knew that money was more powerful than considerate nature. She knew that Chandru would fetch handsome dowry in marriage but Girish would not. Therefore, she valued Chandru and took care not to hurt him as he was a source of riches. At the same time, Gouramma spoke harshly to Girish and his wife Vinutha as she did not bring any dowry and did not add to their property. Two sons were weighed by their capacity to earn money and not by the simple fact for being her sons. If Chandru's dollars have blinded Gouramma, Jamuna's was not any different. Her husband's dollars have made her insensitive to normal human

relations. She could rule Shamanna's family simply because she brought gold and diamonds in her marriage. She could ignore Gouramma's suggestions because she knew the power of dollars. It is noticed that Jamuna tolerated Gouramma's presence in America till the time of her needs. She was pregnant and has to deliver a child. She and the child needed Gouramma's services and that is why, she was allowed to stay with them in America. Chandru, Jamuna and Gouramma lived together in a huge bungalow in America without mutual involvement and a sense of belonging. That is why, the writer commented that, the home that had been cozy heaven so far had suddenly erupted like an inferno, the flames of which were blistering its very soul. The demon dollar had devoured its peace and harmony.

There is not much communication between the brothers because of the unbridgeable gap in their income. Chandru earned in dollars whereas Girish earned in rupees. One earned internationally acclaimed currency and the other continuously fluctuating and unreliable Indian rupee. Girish had to marry Vinutha without grumbling as he had no say in the matter. He was deprived of his voice by the circumstances. Chandru was impressed by Vinutha's melodious voice during a train journey. When he heard that she was getting married to his brother Girish, he felt sorry for hapless Vinutha. He knew that Girish was incompatible for her yet did not say or oppose. This showed that he preferred money over human relationship. Vinutha was very talented in music and Shamanna employed her qualities to earn regular income rather than let her grow independently.

There were six elderly people and two children in Shamanna's family. Surprisingly, six lived in six different worlds. Gouramma's world was inhabited by selfishness. Shamanna was crushed underneath the heavy weight of family. Girish was attacked by inertia and Vinutha's world resembled the tedious routine life of a bull yoked to a revolving mill. Though sensitive and intelligent, Chandru had devoted his life to his job in America. Thus, the six members had torn the integrated fabric of Indian family.

The social thinkers always talked about personal freedom. They believed that individual cannot progress without necessary freedom, but they forgot to apply for two separate yardsticks to two different social realities. Indian families always comprised of children, women, men & old persons. Members developed together. The old Agrarian economy and thick population needed joint family. It was basis human values like disinterested sacrifice and mutual respect. Modern industrial society has changed the old structure of the family and the change was inevitable. Nuclear family is the need of the time and it does not mean that members themselves should become nuclear and molecular. It was possible for Gouramma to be impartial to both Vinutha and Jamuna. She like her husband could have been considerate to Girish and Chandru. It would not have hampered her personal freedom in any way. But obsessive thought of money created imbalance in her dealing with others. The same can be said about Jamuna. Instead of sending used sarees to Surabhi, she could have sent new sarees. She was financially capable of doing that. Her husband Chandru had helped his parents to build a new house by sending dollars from America. He could have done the same by sending dollars for Surabhi's wedding. But she did not do it because she had psychologically cut herself off the other members of the family.

It is often that power corrupts and absolutely. One can say that money corrupts and it blinds the holder of it.

Sudha Murthy was not against modern technology. She herself had been closely associated with the world-famous IT Company, Infosys. She wanted Indian boys and girls to accept and meet the challenges of the modern world. She was also not against the hard-earned riches. The only thing that pained her was deadly effects of riches on personal and domestic relations. Sudha Murthy believed in the traditional family structure in India in which parents and close relatives had honourable place. Gouramma in *Dollar Bahu*, Radhakka in *Mahashweta*, Ratnamma in *House of Cards* and Gangakka in *Gently Falls the Bakula* handled the cases of their son's marriages. Her novels send a clear message that human relationship is of prime importance and must be maintained at all costs. Life is an art of co-operative existence and interdependent dealings between the members of the family and society.

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