

Inner Conflicts of Leading Female Characters in Sudha Murthy's 'Dollar Bahu'

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Abstract – *The characters of Sudha Murthy's novels are drawn from everyday lives. The attitude and trait of her characters is highly influenced by social conformity, where the individual's behavior has been paramount from the early stages of personality development. Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan focus on women and social context and inter personal relationship. A research on personality and its related issues can be possible only with the understanding of other social sciences. As anxiety is a part of personality, it influences the overt behavior of the characters under discussion – Gowamma, Vinutha and Jamuna from Sudha Murthy's novel "Dollar Bahu". This paper attempts to bring out the back ground of Sudha Murthy's characters and the setting for their spontaneous reactions and the effects of the character's personality upon her relationship to the society. It also considers personality as the source of insight and tries to discuss the personality of the character to the basic social concepts, emotion and thoughts.*

Keywords: *Personality, Sudha Murthy, anxiety, social conformity*

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Every human being is a microcosm in a larger society. The nature of every individual varies highly with respect to his personality. Even a very normal person when brought under the microscope of psychology opens up a world of new interpretations.

Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan focus on women and social context and interpersonal relationship. Horney believed that personality is significantly affected by the unconscious mind, and she also theorized that both interpersonal relationships and societal factors were key factors contributing to mental development. The characters brought under study here are Gouramma, Vinutha and Jamuna from Sudha Murthy's 'Dollar Bahu'

In the Indian context when a woman gets married, she marries not only the individual but a whole family consisting of numerous relationships like, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law and so on. Sudha Murthy silently perceives everything minutely and delicately. She explores the different roles of women as that of a wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

'Dollar-Bahu' is a beautiful portrayal of a middle class family residing at Jayanagar, Bangalore. The novel highlights the fact that family love, affection and bonding are more important than money.

The story is set in two countries, the first half in India, in which is explored the sensibility of the protagonist Vinutha, within the framework of the disintegrating relationship in her household, due to the blinded passion developed by her mother-in-law for the 'Dollar'. The second part of the story is set in America, when Vinutha's mother-in-law, Gouramma, visits her older son Chandru. On the American stage, Sudha Murthy has successfully interwoven stories of many Indians living in America, juxtaposing one story with another. As Gouramma meets every character she matures inwardly, and finally understands that family bond holds more riches than 'Dollar'.

The main focus of the novel is on the interesting twists it holds. As the plot unfolds, the twists are disentangled one after the other lending a lot of unexpected surprises. The relation between Vinutha and Chandru is snapped abruptly when Chandru is sent to America. Vinutha's peaceful life at her home in Dharwad catapults when Bheemanna, Vinutha's uncle dies of an unexpected heart attack. Vinutha relocates to her aunt's house in Bangalore and joins the same school in which Shamanna (Chandru's father) teaches. Vinutha and Girish, Chandru's brother are united in a wed-lock.

Chandru returns to India after a good six years. He becomes the eligible bachelor and a wedding is

arranged for him with Jamuna, the only daughter of an affluent property developer Krishnappa. They return to America soon after the wedding.

Gouramma (Chandru's mother), has trouble in coping with and handling the societal stress resulting in the fear of unacceptance. She always dreamed of diamonds, gold and silver, jewellery, cars, a big house, servants etc. and thought that these were the tickets to help her move in the elite circle. She found her desires getting fulfilled through Chandru's dollars. Between Jamuna's dollars and Vinuta's selfless devotion, Gouramma finds favour with the dollar and ignores Vinuta's devotion and family bonding which actually is truly priceless. Vinuta bears the brunt of endless comparisons between her and 'Dollar Bahu'. She starts withering physically and mentally at these constant attacks meted out at her.

Gouramma then gets a chance to go to America to live with her son for a year, she opens her eyes to the faults of Jamuna and realizes that Jamuna is basically a very selfish person. She gets to meet a lot of Indian families settled in America and this helps her to change her opinion on life she had till then. She understands the affection and devotion Vinuta holds for the family in contrast with Jamuna's selfishness. Money does speak honey but it also corrupts the way people look at each other and has the power to tear the family apart.

Vinuta becomes very depressed as Gouramma's arrival draws near. She begins to resent the word 'dollar'. The continuous erosion of family values impairs the bond Vinuta has with her mother-in-law.

Seeing the misery of Vinuta, Shamanna finally decides to send Vinuta and Girish to Dharwad. The decision comes as a surprise for Vinuta. Shamanna reasons that the decision would make Girish independent, assertive and confident just as Chandru has become after going to America.

Vinuta and Girish leave for Dharwad to live there on the insistence of Shamanna, before Gouramma reaches Bangalore. Though upset that they have left without her permission, she understands that it is time to leave her children to their independence.

Analysing the three major characters, we can appropriate them to Karen Horney's idea of neurosis and psycho analysis involving inner conflicts.

Gouramma is in a desperate need for acceptance in the elite circle. When this aspiration does not get met, it pops up as anxiety, anger etc. and Vinuta becomes her soft target and wields control over her. This arises due to the neurotic need to have control and power over others. She is obsessed with the thoughts of becoming rich and sees Chandru's job as the perfect gateway to acquire this. Her experience in America greatly influences her personality. She realizes that she is treated with no self-respect and is

at the loss of cognitive abilities which was her forte while at Bangalore. This new analysis of herself changes her opinions and perceptions of life and brings about a potential self-realization. In the three ways of neurotic needs proposed by Karen Horney, Gouramma is seen as moving against people because she is bossy, demanding and sometimes even cruel.

Jamuna is seen as moving away from people her because of her indifferent attitude. She manipulates Gouramma. She wishes to be accepted, praised and worshipped and flaunts her wealth at them to mute them against her shortcomings of not respecting or spending time with her wedded family. She thinks that she is entitled to special privileges and has a false pride based not on reality but on a distorted and idealized view of self. She can also be seen to be suffering from hyper competitiveness. She is cold and aloof not only to Gouramma and Vinuta but towards Chandru as well.

Vinuta starts developing inner conflicts after the wedding of Jamuna. She struggles to cope with and control her interpersonal issues that arise because of the comparison between Jamuna – The Dollar Bahu and she, the simpleton. She is emotionally disturbed by the fears and tries to find compromising strategies for her fears. But she wallows all the more in depression. She becomes a kind of neurotic feeling isolated, helpless and afraid. She worries that she would become hostile not only to her mother in law but her whole family. She is finally liberated from these emotional conflicts by her father in law's decision to send her away to her childhood home at Dharwad, the place she is emotionally attached to and has a lot of childhood memories. She is seen to move towards people because she seeks affirmation, acceptance, approval and love from her family members.

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