

## SOCIAL WELLNESS IN SUDHA MURTY'S *DOLLAR BAHU*

By

**\*Harsha vardhini, M. & \*\*Udhayakumar, S.**

*\*Research Scholar, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.*

*\*\*Head and Assistant Professor, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.*

### Abstract

*Economic hardships frequently have an impact on interpersonal relationships within the family. Stressors related to money can weaken marriages and family ties by causing disagreements about spending, budgeting, and long-term financial planning. Furthermore, financial difficulties may have an impact on children's general well-being and parenting practices. In this particular context, family dynamics and social human relations can be positively impacted by economic policies that tackle the underlying causes of financial strain. In a socio-cultural context, owning assets or wealth in dollars is sometimes seen as a status symbol in India, reflecting global connectivity and economic prosperity. In the novel *Dollar bahu*, the writer brings out the troubles of a middle-class woman who is ill-treated by her mother-in-law. Money corrupts the way family members look at one another. The story delves into the complexities of family relationships, particularly the dynamics between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. It explores how money and societal expectations can influence these relationships, often leading to conflict and misunderstanding.*

**Keywords:** *relationship, dollars, marriage, cultural contrast, society, economical status.*

### Introduction

Social wellness refers to the quality of our relationships and interactions with others, as well as our sense of belonging and connectedness within our communities and social networks. It encompasses our ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships, communicate effectively, show empathy and compassion, and contribute positively to the well-being of others. One of the main concepts is Building and maintaining relationship. This involves developing meaningful connections with family, friends, colleagues, and other members of our community. It also includes nurturing these relationships over time through communication, trust, and support.

Effective communication is necessary in developing a relationship. Social wellness relies on our ability to express ourselves clearly and listen actively to others. Effective communication helps us understand different perspectives, resolve conflicts, and build stronger relationships. Having a supportive network of people we can rely on during both good times and challenging situations is essential for social wellness. This network can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and encouragement when needed. Feeling connected to a community or social group gives us a sense of belonging and purpose. It provides opportunities for social interaction,

shared experiences, and a feeling of being part of something larger than ourselves.

Social wellness involves showing empathy and compassion towards others, understanding their feelings, and being sensitive to their needs. This helps to foster deeper connections and strengthen relationships. Contribution to society, Engaging in activities that benefit others and contribute to the well-being of society can enhance social wellness. Volunteering, participating in community events, and supporting causes we believe in are examples of how we can make a positive impact on the world around us.

Overall, social wellness plays a crucial role in our overall well-being, influencing our mental, emotional, and physical health. Prioritizing and nurturing our social connections can lead to greater happiness, resilience, and fulfillment in life.

### **Family and societal dynamics**

*Dollar Bahu* is a thoughtful novel on the sociocultural facets of Indian society that highlights the influence of financial circumstances on interpersonal and family ties. It presents a critical perspective on the pursuit of monetary success at the expense of enduring relationships and values. *Dollar bahu* was written in the year 2007. While the story primarily follows the life of the protagonist, it also offers insights into the thoughts and feelings of other key characters. This technique allows readers to understand the motivations behind each character's actions and how those actions impact others within the story. It enriches

the narrative by presenting a multifaceted view of family and societal dynamics. One of the most prominent themes in the novel is the contrast between materialistic aspirations, symbolized by the American dream, and the traditional Indian values of love, family, and contentment with one's lot in life. This theme is embodied in the characters of the two bahu (daughters-in-law) - the eponymous Dollar Bahu, who lives in America, and the Indian bahu, Vinuta, who lives a modest life in India. The story critiques the glorification of wealth and foreign lifestyle at the expense of familial warmth and simplicity. The book begins simply with the train journey of Chandru & Vinuta, and then progressively shifts its focus to a variety of topics, including relationships, money, and the diametrically opposed cultures of India and America. Murthy has skillfully interwoven all of these issues with Vinuta's relationship with her surroundings, her cherished "garden," the changes in her life brought about by having to leave her hometown and become a "urban dispossessed" in the city, and all of the suffering caused by her own family, particularly Gouramma and Surabhi, as well as occasionally Jamuna.

### **Socio economic status**

In many Indian families, a daughter-in-law's socioeconomic status is an important consideration. Women from 'lower' economic backgrounds who marry into more affluent families may face discrimination and are frequently expected to conform to the standards and lifestyles of their husband's family. This expectation can

manifest itself in a variety of ways, including pressure to change their clothing style, manner of speaking, and even culinary preferences. In the novel, Vinuta's friend, Sashi's marriage gets cancelled as the groom rejected the marriage proposal. The Main reason for the rejection is he fell for the family that offered him a green card through marriage and promised to support his Ph.D studies. Vinuta asks Sashi,

“But Shashi, you have resigned your job and everyone knows about your marriage. Is nobody worried about that? What's a teacher's job, a simple girl's life, in front of the Dollar.” (Murty, 42)

Through this we could get to know how the dollars have the ability to change the life of a middle-class women.

### **Marriage**

Marriage for middle-class women in India is frequently a profound and multifaceted transition, reflecting the complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. This transformation can occur in a variety of areas of life, including personal identity and social roles, as well as financial status and lifestyle preferences. A middle-class Indian woman's identity often changes after marriage. Traditionally, she may take on her husband's surname and become a member of his family, indicating a new stage of life in which her roles as wife, daughter-in-law, and possibly mother take precedence. The expectation to conform to her in-laws' customs, values, and daily routines can be

difficult, especially if it requires moving to a new location or adjusting to different socio-cultural norms. In this novel, even though Vinuta cheerfully took all the responsibilities, she was not valued by her in laws. But Jamuna, who is from a well to do family was glorified by her mother-in-law, because she is married to a wealthy man who earns dollars.

“Ever since he had started earning in dollars, people respected him, envied him and showed him that extra bit of warmth. In the process, however, he had also lost real love and mutual trust. It was an unalterable fact that no amount of dollars could buy the warmth of genuine affection”. (Murty, 70)

Marriage frequently causes women's social circles to shift; expectations and responsibilities toward the husband's family can impede personal time and opportunities for independent socializing; women may find themselves spending more time with their spouse's friends and family, sometimes at the expense of their pre-marriage friendships; and yet, many women manage these changes by preserving their pre-marital social networks and creating new ones within their married lives. Money plays a major part in deciding the life of a newly married women. Vinuta was in a situation to sell her ancestral house to meet the financial needs for her marriage. fortunately, Girish understands her situation and accepts to have a simple wedding.

### Cultural contrast

Through the experiences of its characters, the novel explores the clash between Indian traditions and Western values, examining the struggles of Indians who try to assimilate into Western society while retaining their cultural identity. The story reflects on the notion of cultural superiority and the identity crisis experienced by immigrants. Murty effectively uses the technique of contrast to highlight differences between cultures, lifestyles, and values. The contrasting lives of the "Dollar Bahu" (the daughter-in-law who lives in America) and the Indian daughter-in-law living with the family in India serve as a critical narrative device to explore themes of materialism, family expectations, and the true meaning of happiness. Murty enriches her narrative with detailed descriptions of Indian customs, traditions, and daily life, providing a vivid backdrop against which the story unfolds. Symbolism is used to represent broader themes, such as the comparison between the glittering allure of the dollar (representing material wealth) and the warmth of family love and traditional values. Joint family systems, in which extended families live together or maintain extremely close ties, have historically been highly valued in India. Respecting the elders is very important in our tradition American families, on the other hand, prioritize the immediate family and are typically more nuclear. Even when it comes to family matters, there is typically greater emphasis on the individual's choice and a strong value placed on individualism. When Gouramma visited US, she went through lot of cultural differences. She

expected Jamuna to receive her in the airport. But she did not come to the airport to welcome her. This was the first shock to her, but in excitement of seeing America for the first time, she did not mind all these things. Jamuna had already decided to name her daughter as Manasi without the concern of Gouramma. This made her wonder about their culture.

"Gouramma was surprised. Everything had been decided before the delivery. Back in India, no preparations were made before the birth of the child." (Murty, 82)

Gouramma expected Jamuna would welcome her by touching her feet, neatly dressed in a sari but in contrast to her expectations, she looked so strange with short hair, loose gown, neither a bindi nor her Mangalsuthra. The Mangal sutra holds significant importance in Indian tradition, particularly within Hindu culture. It is not just a piece of jewellery but a symbolic and sacred thread of love and goodwill worn by married women. On seeing a different version of Jamuna, Gouramma was very much disappointed she was shocked to see the commode and the bath tub in the same room, as she was not used to it in India. The idealization of life in America versus the reality faced by immigrants is a recurring theme. The novel portrays how perceptions can be misleading and how the grass is not always greener on the other side. This theme is exemplified through the disillusionment experienced by those who believe that happiness and success are guaranteed by moving to America.

## Influence of Dollars

The novel scrutinizes how money and the promise of a better lifestyle can distort family dynamics and relationships. The preferential treatment given to Dollar Bahu because of her financial status and the perceived prestige of living in America illustrates how financial success can skew values and priorities within a family. She wants to receive every dollar and benefit that an NRI offers. She firmly believes that her precious son should be married off to the highest bidder. Regarding her younger son who is happy working as a bank clerk, she goes with the unattractive Vinu. Even though the girl is good and hardworking, Gouramma never says anything to her or shows her gratitude because she didn't bring in the money. Gouramma is content to hand over the day's chores to Vinu not because she thinks highly of her, but because that's what a perfect Bahu should do lessen the load of taking care of the family on the mother-in-law. Gouramma begins by holding a strong belief in gender roles.

“The Dollar is all-powerful. You know it is the Dollar that has changed our lives! Have you not seen the photos of your brother's house? You can lead that kind of life if you marry someone who is in the US or someone very rich in India. Vinuta was in the kitchen. She heard this conversation and was utterly flabbergasted. 'Should a marriage be arranged on the basis of love and understanding or on the love for the Dollar, she wondered.' (Murty,59)

## Conclusion

Sudha Murty's "Dollar Bahu" is a poignant narrative that captures the essence of human values in the face of changing social dynamics and globalization. It is a reflective piece on what it means to find one's place in the world amidst the pulls of tradition and modernity. As the narrative progresses, Gouramma's outlook on life completely changes when Chandru is wed off to Jamuna, a simple girl from a wealthy family, only to since he's an NRI. She is oblivious to the shortcomings of this match, which was made with consideration for money and social standing. Gouramma felt very at ease with Jamuna because of her warm friendship with Surabhi. Saying, "The match is not in our hands," Parvati gave them baskets full of fruits and vegetables as they were leaving. However, let's at least maintain our friendly relationship. Gouramma walked out, her eyes full of tears. While driving back home, Gouramma started listing her son's qualities in a quiet prayer that her son would select Jamuna as his bride. She frequently encounters instances of Indian girls being married off by their parents at a young age, drawn by the allure of a newly developed nation and how these women were abandoned in a foreign country, forced to pick up the pieces of their lives and move on. The narrative makes it clear that young women made a valiant effort to free themselves from their chains. Education alone was insufficient to effect that change. Their circumstances and personal adversity provided them with the much-needed motivation. However, they all eventually made their fortunes in the United States, a



nation very different from the traditional chauvinist mindset of India.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



M.Harsha vardhini

**M. Harsha Vardhini** is a Full time Research Scholar pursuing her Ph.D. in the Department of English and Comparative Literature in Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. She holds M.A Degree in English Literature from The American College. She has participated and presented papers in many National and International conferences. She has published one research article in Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal.



**Dr. S. Udhayakumar** is the Profesor & Head, Department of English and comparative Literature in Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. His areas of specialization are Translation, Canadian Literature and Comparative literature. He has qualified in the UGC NET also. He has published many books in both English and Tamil literature. He has translated all Shakespearean sonnets into Tamil Language in two volumes.

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