

Original Article

The conflict between materialism and Human Values in Dollar Bahu by Sudha Murty

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Abstract

Indian English literature often addresses the ethical and social challenges faced by modern society. Many writers explore the conflict between traditional human values and the growing influence of materialism. Among contemporary writers, Sudha Murty has earned recognition for presenting moral reflections through simple yet meaningful narratives. Her novel Dollar Bahu highlights the impact of wealth, foreign lifestyle and social prestige on family relationships. The story examines how economic success can influence attitudes toward respect, love and responsibility. Through the characters of Gouramma, Vinuta, Jamuna and Chandru, Murty reveals the ethical consequences of judging individuals based on financial status rather than moral character. This research paper analyzes the conflict between materialism and human values presented in Dollar Bahu, focusing on themes such as materialism, family relationships, women's identity and moral transformation. Through textual analysis and selected quotations, the study demonstrates that Murty promotes values such as compassion, humility and emotional understanding as essential elements of harmonious social life.

Keywords: Materialism Ethics, Human Values, Indian English Literature, Family Relationships, Social Values.

Introduction

Indian English literature has emerged as an important field that reflects the social, cultural, and ethical realities of Indian society. Writers in this tradition often explore issues such as social inequality, gender roles, family relationships and moral responsibility. Literature therefore functions not only as an artistic form but also as a powerful medium for ethical reflection and social awareness.

Among contemporary Indian writers, Sudha Murty is widely known for her ability to communicate profound moral messages through simple and realistic storytelling. Her works often focus on ordinary individuals and everyday experiences. Through these narratives, Murty emphasizes values such as honesty, compassion, humility and empathy. Her writing style is accessible and engaging, allowing readers from different backgrounds to relate to the ethical dilemmas presented in her stories.

The novel Dollar Bahu is one of Sudha Murty's most significant works that examines the influence of wealth and foreign culture on family relationships. The story revolves around Gouramma, a middle-class mother who becomes fascinated with the idea of financial success after her son Chandru moves to the United States. Because Chandru earns dollars and lives abroad, Gouramma begins to admire his wife Jamuna more than her other daughter-in-law Vinuta, who lives in India and devotes herself to the family.

Through this narrative, Sudha Murty explores how materialistic attitudes can distort social values and create emotional distance within families. The novel raises important ethical questions about the meaning of respect, the role of women within the family and the influence of wealth on human relationships.

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Research Method:

This research paper deals with The Conflict Between Materialism and Human Values in Dollar Bahu by Sudha Murty. The qualitative method is used for the analysis of the novel.

Objectives of the Research:

The primary objective of this research paper is to examine the conflict between materialism and Human Values in Dollar Bahu by Sudha Murty. The secondary objectives are to analyse the women characters particularly Gouramma and Vinuta as they represent the materialism and human values and conveyed the ethical lesson through the experiences of the characters Gouramma.

Review of Literature:

The works of Sudha Murty have attracted considerable scholarly attention for their portrayal of ethical values, humanitarian concerns and the moral dilemmas of middle-class Indian society. Critics frequently emphasize her ability to present complex social issues through simple narratives and relatable characters. Her novels often focus on family relationships, social responsibility and the conflict between materialism and human values.

Bhupendra N. Kesur and Shekhar B. Vispute argue that Murty's writings reflect a "global humanitarian outlook rooted in Indian cultural ethics." According to them, Murty portrays compassion, empathy and social responsibility as the core principles that guide human life. Their study suggests that Murty's narratives encourage readers to recognize the importance of moral values in a rapidly changing and materialistic world.

Aayushi Kamboj and Sonam Kamboj analyze Murty's novels Dollar Bahu and House of Cards as critiques of modern consumerism. They argue that Murty exposes the illusion of wealth and social prestige through the emotional struggles of her characters. In Dollar Bahu, the authors observe that the obsession with foreign currency symbolizes the growing influence of globalization on Indian middle-class aspirations. The novel illustrates how material prosperity often fails to provide emotional fulfillment and instead creates conflicts within families.

Some scholars have also highlighted Murty's portrayal of women as moral anchors in society. Critics note that female characters in her works often represent ethical strength and resilience. In Dollar Bahu, the character of Vinuta is frequently interpreted as a symbol of humility, patience and moral integrity. Her character contrasts sharply with Jamuna, whose identity is shaped largely by wealth and social status.

Present research paper examines the conflict between materialism and human values faced by women from middle class society.

Materialism and Social Attitudes:

One of the central themes in Dollar Bahu is the growing influence of materialism in society. Gouramma represents a social mindset that measures success primarily in terms of economic prosperity and foreign lifestyle. Her admiration for Chandru and Jamuna reflects a common belief that living abroad automatically brings prestige and superiority.

Murty portrays this attitude through Gouramma's treatment of her daughters-in-law. Jamuna receives admiration and special attention because she lives in the United States and enjoys financial comfort. In contrast, Vinuta's dedication and sincerity are often overlooked. The narrator observes that "Vinuta worked tirelessly for the family, yet her efforts often went unnoticed" (Murty 45).

This statement reveals the emotional injustice experienced by Vinuta. Despite her sacrifices and commitment, she is not appreciated because she does not possess wealth or foreign status. Murty uses this situation to criticize a social attitude that equates financial success with moral superiority.

Materialism in the novel also affects the emotional dynamics of the family. Gouramma's obsession with her son's wealth gradually creates tension among family members. By focusing on money and status, she fails to recognize the emotional needs and contributions of others.

Murty's portrayal of this conflict highlights the ethical dangers of materialistic thinking. When money becomes the primary measure of respect, genuine human values such as kindness and empathy are overshadowed.

Vinuta as a Symbol of Human Values:

Vinuta's character represents the ethical ideals that Murty seeks to emphasize in the novel. She embodies qualities such as humility, patience, kindness and dedication. As the wife of Girish, Vinuta performs her responsibilities with sincerity and devotion. She supports her family despite facing neglect and unfair treatment.

Murty presents Vinuta as a symbol of moral strength. Unlike Jamuna, whose identity is closely associated with wealth and foreign lifestyle, Vinuta's character is defined by her compassion and emotional resilience. Through her experiences, Murty highlights the importance of recognizing genuine human values.

At one point in the narrative, the author remarks that "money had become the measure of respect in the household" (Murty 62). This line captures the central ethical conflict of the novel. It suggests that the family's attitude toward Vinuta is shaped not by her character but by her economic position.

Vinuta's quiet endurance reflects the moral imbalance within the family. However, Murty does not portray her merely as a victim. Instead, Vinuta represents the enduring strength of human values even in the face of injustice.

Illusion of the American Dream:

Another important theme in *Dollar Bahu* is the illusion associated with life abroad. For Gouramma, America represents success, comfort and prestige. She imagines that Chandru and Jamuna's life in the United States must be perfect and luxurious.

However, Murty gradually reveals that this perception is based on illusion rather than reality. When Gouramma eventually visits the United States, she discovers that the lifestyle she admired is not as fulfilling as she had imagined. The narrative notes that "life in America was not the paradise Gouramma had imagined" (Murty 101).

This realization becomes a turning point in the novel. Gouramma begins to understand that wealth and luxury do not necessarily bring emotional satisfaction. Murty uses this experience to challenge the belief that foreign lifestyles automatically lead to happiness.

The contrast between Gouramma's expectations and her actual experiences highlights the difference between material success and emotional well-being. Murty suggests that genuine happiness arises from meaningful relationships rather than financial prosperity.

Moral Transformation:

One of the most significant developments in the novel is Gouramma's moral transformation. Her experiences in America gradually change her perception of wealth and relationships. She begins to realize that the admiration she once felt for Jamuna was based on superficial values.

As Gouramma observes the emotional distance and materialistic attitudes present in Jamuna's lifestyle, she starts to appreciate the sincerity and dedication of Vinuta. The narrative reflects this realization when it states that "true affection cannot be measured in dollars" (Murty 118).

This statement expresses the ethical message of the novel. Murty suggests that human relationships cannot be evaluated in terms of financial success. Instead, qualities such as love, respect and empathy determine the true value of a relationship.

Gouramma's transformation demonstrates the possibility of moral growth through experience and self-reflection. By recognizing her earlier mistakes, she moves toward a deeper understanding of human values.

Women and Social Identity:

The novel also explores the role of women within the family structure. Vinuta and Jamuna represent two contrasting experiences of womanhood in contemporary society. Vinuta embodies traditional values such as patience, sacrifice and emotional strength. Jamuna, on the other hand, represents modern aspirations associated with economic independence and foreign lifestyle.

Through these contrasting characters, Murty highlights the ways in which women are judged according to their economic and social background. Jamuna's status as a "dollar bahu" gives her prestige within the family, while Vinuta's contributions are often ignored.

Murty uses this contrast to criticize a social system that values women primarily for their financial or social position. Instead, she emphasizes that women's dignity should be recognized through their character, efforts and emotional contributions to family life.

Murty reinforces this message through the observation that "wealth may bring comfort, but it cannot replace love and understanding" (Murty 134). This statement summarizes the ethical lesson conveyed through the experiences of the characters.

Ethical Message of the Novel:

The ethical message of the novel *Dollar Bahu* is clear and powerful. Murty emphasizes that material success should never overshadow human values. The novel encourages readers to reflect on the importance of compassion, respect and emotional connection in maintaining healthy relationships.

Murty's storytelling demonstrates how ordinary situations can reveal deeper moral truths. By portraying realistic characters and relatable conflicts, she invites readers to examine their own attitudes toward money, status and family relationships.

The novel ultimately suggests that the true measure of a person lies not in wealth but in kindness, sincerity and empathy. These values form the foundation of harmonious family life and a compassionate society.

Conclusion:

Sudha Murty's novel *Dollar Bahu* provides a thoughtful exploration of conflict between materialism and human values in contemporary Indian society. Through the experiences of Gouramma and Vinuta, Murty examines the influence of materialism on family relationships and social attitudes.

The story reveals how fascination with wealth and foreign lifestyle can lead to emotional neglect and misunderstanding within families. At the same time, the novel highlights the enduring importance of compassion, humility, and sincerity.



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The character of Vinuta represents the strength of moral and human values, while Gouramma's transformation illustrates the possibility of ethical growth through self-reflection and realization. Murty ultimately reminds readers that real happiness arises not from material success but from meaningful human relationships.

Through its realistic narrative and ethical insights, Dollar Bahu demonstrates the transformative power of literature in promoting moral awareness and human values.

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