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## The Disparity between Human Perceptions and Reality in Life with Sudha Murty's Dollar Bahu

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### Abstract

Sudha Murty's *Dollar Bahu* deals with the protagonist Gowamma and the disparity between her daughters-in-law, Jamuna and Vinita. She lived a comfortable life with her three children, Chandra Sekhar, Girish, and Surabhi. Her dream to go abroad did not allow her to live a contented life. Her desire came true when Chandru got an opportunity to go to America on an official Project. Her greediness made Chandru go on Skipping until he acquired the green card. Chandru approved Girish, his younger brother, to get married before him. Hence Girish and Vinuta's marriage took place. He received his green card, visited India, and married Jamuna. Gouramma compared and contrasted Vinita, who earns in Indian rupees with Jamuna, the dollar bahu, who makes in dollars. When Jamuna became pregnant, her pending desire to visit America came true. Everything around her was mechanical, and she felt suffocated day after day. Her dream paradise became hell when she could make out radical changes and contradictions in Jamuna. She understood that aspects of human life and life's perceptions change in reality when one stands as a distant observer.

**Keywords:** disparity, greediness, human perception, reality, distant observer.

Sudha Murty is a renowned contemporary Indian Novelist in English. Most of her novels are enormously influential and deal with the practicality of life. She is a writer known for her simple, lucid style of writing. She speaks more about women's rights, freedom, and empowerment.

In Sudha Murty's *Dollar Bahu* (2003), Gowamma, wife of Shammana, a Sanskrit teacher, lived a comfortable life with her three children, Chandra Sekhar, Girish, and Surabhi. Though she led a comfortable life, her obsession with opportunities for her children for a worldly life did not allow her to live a contented life. She wished to fulfil her desires through her children. Her wish came true when her eldest son Chandru, a Civil Engineer, got an opportunity to go to America on an official project.

Gowamma's joy knew no bounds. She was happy to tell everyone that her son worked in the US. The dollars that she

received from her son made her more greedy and selfish. She requested her son Chandru to settle there permanently so she could lead a luxurious life. These are evident from the below words:

She would dream about the Dollar, that magic green currency that could change her house and fulfill her dreams. The Dollar, not Indian rupees, could elevate her into the elite circle at social gatherings and marriage halls. The Dollar was like the Goddess Lakshmi with a magic wand. (25)

Chandru, due to his mother's ambition for him to settle abroad, decided to do so. After he visited America, his opinions changed drastically. After the project was over, Chandru longed to return to India for two reasons. One was that he felt very lonely in a foreign land. The second was his interest in a girl. Before going abroad, he worked in Dharwad, a small city in North Karnataka. He had fallen in love with Vinita, his house owner's daughter. Before he was about to propose to her, the offer letter to go to America had come.

Gowamma was adamant and expressed her wish vociferously. Being an obedient son and systematically hard-working man by nature, Chandru sacrificed his entire life for his family's sake. He planned to settle in America, for which he decided to go on 'Skipping'(Wikipedia), changing his workplace in America. He found Nashville, Tennessee, near the East Coast, America, as it could be the right

hiding place. The other reason was that the company he planned to join promised to help him acquire a green card. Chandru then sold his car, packed his things and his luggage, and disappeared from Florida, where he had been working.

Meanwhile, whenever the talk about his marriage came, Chandru rejected the proposals stating that he could not return to India, not yet appropriately settled in the states, and hence gave approval to Girish, his younger brother, to get married before him. Chandru often remembered Vinita and wrote to her once expressing his love for her, but he did not receive any reply; instead, he received the letter he had sent. On the other hand, Vinita reached her aunt's house in Bangalore after his uncle Bhemanna's death. He had been Vinita's caretaker after her parents died. Girish, a bank clerk, meets Vinita on his way and is attracted by her. Finally, their marriage was fixed with the acceptance of both sides.

Chandru was informed about Girish's marriage, but Chandru did not bother to ask for the details of his brother's bride since he was told that the girl was a music teacher in the same school where his father, Shamanna, was working. Moreover, he excused himself, citing his inability to come to India for the wedding. Instead, he informed his mother that he would gift her five hundred dollars as a wedding gift. Gowamma demanded a great marriage and a dowry from the bride's side suggesting that Vinita sell her ancestral property in Dharwad. Shamiana intervened, saying that Girish and Vinita would decide on the

matter. Girish understood the unwillingness of Vinita to sell the property and rejected the sale; he further agreed to have a simple wedding too.

Girish sent his wedding photos to Chandru. Looking at them, Chandru was shocked and astonished. Only then did he realize that he had missed Vinita for his dollars. "HIS Vinu, the same girl with the golden voice, had become his brother's Wife!"(43). Though his love for Vinita did not succeed, he could fulfill her mother's ambitious dream. He received his green card and visited India. As he was a green card holder, there was so many alliance in the offing. Gowamma, the mother of Chandru, was overwhelmed with happiness as she had a list of choices to find a bride for Chandru. She then chose Jamuna, the daughter of a wealthy property developer, Krisnappa, and his wife, Parvati. The grand wedding took the place of Gowamma to her satisfaction.

After some days, Chandru left Jamuna in India and left for America until he could send her the visa. Jamuna made excuses and frequently went to her parent's house and escaped doing any duties at her in-laws' place. She returned only when her passport arrived and departed to America to live with her son Chandru. Chandru and Jamuna earned in dollars and made Gowamma more proud and boastful. At the same time, Vinita was scorned for working hard, fulfilling both home and work duties. However, she was never appreciated or recognized for her dedicated and committed responsibilities. Despite all

her efforts, she was constantly compared and contrasted with Jamuna, the dollar bahu who earns in dollars, with the one who reaches in Indian rupees. Though Vinita was offended, she bore up with all the insults.

Surabhi, Gowamma's daughter, was a spendthrift, lazy, and wasted time. She fell in love with Gopinath, an ordinary postmaster's son, so her mother rejected him. Gowamma wanted an NRI to marry her daughter, but her wish did not come true, and Surabhi's marriage was arranged with a lawyer from Hyderabad. When they were about to fix a date for Surabhi's wedding, the priority was given to Jamuna rather than Vinita, who was in her final days of pregnancy; Gowamma's words reveal her priority: " ' No, that won't be right. How can we afford to upset Jamuna? We have to fix a date convenient to her. You should not meddle in such matters.'"(68). The continuous insults and comparisons made Vinita feel alienated in her household. Vinita then left for Dharwad for her delivery, and a few days before Surabhi's marriage, she delivered a baby boy, Harsha.

Gowamma's pending desire to visit America came true when Jamuna became pregnant. Gowamma was invited to America; she willingly left for America with great awe and interest. Shamiana, her husband, rejected the invitation stating that he was not willing to be separated from his grandson Harsha. After reaching America, great cultural shock awaited Gowamma. All her preconceived of foreign lands were

shattered. Her dream paradise became hell. She also made out that Jamuna was a pretender and misused Gowramma's trust in her. Gowramma was able to make out radical changes and extreme behavior and contradictions in Jamuna regarding her attitude, dressing styles, and speeches.

Gowramma underwent shocks, both pleasant and unpleasant ones. The revelation of gender before birth, the unhealthy babysitting process, leaving the newborn alone in a different room, pumped lactating milk in refrigerators, and pre-cooked foods for days left to freeze and warm when required. All auspicious days celebrations, and even traditional rituals were scheduled for weekends and leisure days. Gowramma felt everything around her was mechanical and ran on electronic gadgets and machines. She felt suffocated day after day. She longed for private talks and communication, even with her son and daughter-in-law. All her private spaces were locked. She was almost dependent on her son and her son's family. All her freedom was nearly curtailed. She grits her teeth and awaits to back to her homeland.

One day when she overheard a conversation between Jamuna and her friend, she felt as if she had been hit by an iron rod on the head. Jamuna said she invited her mother-in-law only as a babysitter for her newborn daughter Mansi and as an unpaid servant to do the household chores. The comments and criticisms highlighted her cruelty. Only then was Gouramma reminded of her other daughter-in-law, Vinita, in India and her

sincere uncomplaining attitude. Despite all her suppression and oppression. Vinita was a boon to her family who did not raise her voice nor express her emotions against her mother-in-law Gowramma. The following incident from the past reveals it: "Vinita was pregnant and had had a tiring day at school. Nevertheless, She did everything as per her mother-in-law's wishes, as the word 'no' did not exist in her dictionary"(60). Now she understood the worth of Vinita and repented for her mistakes and the bad treatment she had meted out to her.

The highest insult she received from her elder daughter-in-law, Jamuna, was when she accidentally witnessed the photo album of Jamuna, her friends, and her family members. She understood that the sarees which Jamuna presented for Surabhi, including her wedding saree, were her sarees and not new. "Gowramma found a photograph taken at Jamuna's cousin's wedding. Jamuna and her mother had posed with the bride in expensive silk saris. The same saris had been ironed, professionally folded, and gifted to Surabhi at her wedding."(127) This made her almost insane, and she wanted to return to India immediately. But at the behest of her son, she stayed for some more days. Meanwhile, her loneliness troubled her, and she traveled around and visited many other families like Chandru, who had migrated to America from different parts of India. She understood that life is not easy in any foreign land. During all her visits to others, she gained a lot of life experiences, learned many lessons, and changed her perspectives on life drastically.

Gouramma understood that aspects of human life and life's perceptions change reality when one stands as a distant observer. But they are different in real-life situations. As soon as she landed in India, she rushed to meet Vinita for reconciliation and ask forgiveness for all her mistakes. An ironic twist in her expectations surprised her. She knows that her dutiful daughter-in-law Vinita was scared of Gowramma's arrival and moved to her ancestral house in Dharwad along with her husband Girish and her son Harsha on a permanent transfer.

Though this made her feel an ironic note, she, who understood the practicality of life, respected her emotions and was willing to grant her the freedom of choice for her individual growth and prosperity of understanding self-realization. This unexpected turn of events made Gowramma wiser since she had already understood herself and how one should face reality from illusions, pride, and respect for others.

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