



An Examination Of Cultural Transformation In 'Dollar Bahu'

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Abstract

Indian writers who live abroad quite often write about their experiences in foreign land along with their experiences of their mother land. Many a time it is found that they write about cultures, incidents, and impressions imprinted on their minds as writers. Sudha Murty is one of the prominent writers of 21st Century India. She is a bilingual writer who writes in Kannada and in English. She is well known for her writings. Wise and Otherwise, How I taught My Grandmother to Read?, Grandma's Bag of Stories are her remarkable literary works. 'Dollar Bahu', the novel is written by her which revolves round the worlds of three women characters viz. Vinuta, Jamuna, and Gouramma. The first two are the daughters-in-law, the former, an Indian Bahu and the later the dollar Bahu. Moreover, the novel has many stories of the Indians who went to the US. In this sense, the novel is a kaleidoscope of human faces of different cultures from Indian to American. It is a multicultural novel which shows cultural transformation of the characters due to variety of factors.

People of Indian roots gathered in the US for different purposes are depicted by Sudha Murty. She describes two generations of Indians- first, Indians by roots and second American by roots. Murty's novel, Dollar Bahu can be divided into two parts. One of these parts is the stories of Indians settled in the US. It is in this part that the novel deals with the problems of cultural transformation. The second generation of the Indians in America face problem in relation to cultural and traditional practices in their lives. Shama, an elder daughter of Radhakrishna and Savitri is a representative of that group which is born in India but brought up in America. Chandra Shekhar and Radhakrishna belong to that group of Indians who are Indians at their root and did use of foreign culture for fulfilling their dream of wealth and luxuries. The paper attempts to examine the cultural conflicts and cultural transformation depicted in the novel particularly in relation to the characters that are in problem of cultural identity.

Key words: Dollar Bahu, Cultural transformation, cultural identity.

Introduction: Sudha Murty's Dollar Bahu is a domestic novel in its nature. It has been set in India as well as America. It thoroughly describes Indian family system, Indian Culture and cultural transformation of the Indians who live in America. The novel delineates the accounts of the Indian families, their shifting to the US, and their reasons of living in America in a kaleidoscopic manner. The stories of the US settled Indians are delineated one after another in the last few chapters of the novel. The novel is a domestic and mostly deals with the family problems. It also portrays the problems of Indian parents, their culture and traditions. The characters, in the novel are suffering from the problem of cultural identity. The most important aspect of the novel is the treatment given to both the daughters-in-law. The Indian Bahu, Vinita is a typical Indian bahu who follows the Indian roots of Indian culture. She serves her father-in-law and mother-in-law from the bottom of her heart. Jamuna, though Indian by her roots, transformed as dollar bahu. She settles herself with her husband in the US. She forgets the Indianess that lies within her and transforms herself as foreigner.

Hypothesis: The research paper is based on following hypotheses-1. It is hypothesized that human beings absorb the cultures inadvertently of which he/she becomes part for long period of time. 2. Children adopt the culture in which they grow and are exposed to. 3. The alien culture surpasses the root culture in case; the human being lives in the places of multi-cultural set ups. 4. It is hard to accept non-native culture of the third person just for the sake of materialistic needs.

Objectives: 1. The paper attempts to examine the cultural conflicts and cultural transformation depicted in the novel particularly in relation to the characters that are in problem of cultural identity. 2. The paper studies the impacts of the cultural practices upon infants and children. 3. The paper also studies cultural conflicts in the minds of the young and aged people who belong to different cultures in their childhood.

Discussion: Human beings developed them from the state of animals in the jungles and the caves to the state of civilized human beings of villages and towns, cities and metropolitan cities. In this journey he pondered over many things changed them according to the need of time. Culture is one of the fundamental institutions human beings made for them. It is a code of conduct for human society. Culture is the set rules of the human society which are not permitted to violate in general at cognitive level of the people of same culture and keen interests. In an edited version of the small copy of the book entitled, 'Culture and Society' Prof. Dr. Ümrان Sevil and others describe culture as "*a shared concept and is specific to individuals within a society and transmitted through communication. Culture is shared by means of observation, listening, speaking, that is, communicating with others. Thus, not only its material elements, but also its beliefs, values, anticipations, lifestyles and even mentality are transferred to the others.*" (Prof. Dr. Ümrان Sevil) In the 21st century, in the process of globalization many cultures have mixed together by this way or that way. In multicultural set up of the globalized world, single culture of human species seems impossible. The novel, 'Dollar Bahu' is a multicultural novel because it has reference to Indian, American and Intermingled cultures of East and West.

The novel opens with the journey of a civil engineer, Chandra Shekhar. He is an engineer in a Bangalore situated company and has been promoted to work on a project in Dharwad in North Karnataka. He had long cherished dream of America. Very soon he got an opportunity by his company to work for it for some time in America. Like a few Indian 'skippers', Chandru also disappears in America without informing his Indian company. He joins an American company by violating the agreement he had done with his Indian company. Spending almost six years in exile in America, he obtains visa. He gets married with Indian girl, Jamuna. His mother, Gouramma is very much allured by America. She visits her son and daughter-in-law there. Her attraction of Dollar and American ornaments bring her there. She meets Indian families there in America. The narrator through these Indians describes cultural transformation of the Indian people. In one sense it is a problem for American whose roots are in India. She also finds her son, Chandru thinking seriously about something. To her enquiry, Chandru relates her the story of Radhakrishna's family. Few days later she meets Radhakrishna's family. In her conversation with Savitri, wife of Radhakrishna, she realizes the problem of culture with the Indians settled in America.

Savitri unfolds her daughter, Shama's 'heart-breaking' marriage story and the ground of her hate of Indian marriage institution. She states that they forced her to marry an Indian boy so that their connectivity to Indian culture will be continued and instilled to the next generation. They did everything to develop love and affinity about Indian culture in her mind. They would send her to India at Savitri's mother. They did this because they wanted her realizing the greatness of Indian festivals and culture. Even in America they took care that their daughters should not give up their native Indian culture. In order to keep them hammering through Indian Culture they would organize gatherings of Indian couples on the occasion of Indian ceremonies. Being an obedient daughter, she followed the order of her parents and married with Indian boy, Surendra.

The tragedy of her life is that Surendra betrays her. He just wanted to complete his study in America. He was in need of American Visa. He gets financial support from her parents to complete his study in America. He starts fighting with Shama every now and then, as soon as he completes his study. The disharmony in their relationship leads them to divorce. Soon they separate from each other. This betrayal by Surendra was enough to flame fury and anger against Indian marriage system in Shama's mind. This incident resulted into her separation from her parents. Gouramma was shocked to hear that she was then living in the live-in relationship with her Brazilian boyfriend, Michael. She was completing her incomplete study and was engaged herself in a part-time job in a cafeteria. She was also informed that she speaks with her parents once in a week.

Shama's parents think that she should love Indian culture. Although she was born in India, was brought up in American cultural set up. Her mind was cultivated more in American cultural set up than Indian. Her maiden experience of Indian Arrange Marriage System was not good. In her accidental meeting with Chandra Shekhar in a canteen, she demands him to speak in English instead of Kannada. She wanted her boyfriend should understand their communication. She mocks at the double standard behavior of Indians in America. She says, *"Though all of you are American citizens, your roots are in India, specifically in your home towns. You come to this country only to earn money but can never become a part of it. You want the best of both the worlds, which is not possible."* (Murty-98)

Shama's great shock concerned with marriage changes her view about Indian culture and its tradition. She loves American culture and the outlook the foreigners have. In her opinion, being her joblessness isn't matter for Michael's father which is a big concern for Indian parents in America. Her cultural transformation mostly comes from her experiences of both the cultures and American-Indian institutions. She started to love American culture wherein one's personal life is more important than his/her social life. Nobody was allowed to interfere in it, not even the parents and close relatives.

Chandra Shekhar once advises his mother that she must not give advice to his friends, Tara and Shrikant. He tells her that here in America we can not advice one or interfere in one's life. Gouramma was talking about Tara and Shrikant's relationship. She even had put their marriage proposal to Chandra Shekhar. He clarifies, *"Amma, after staying here for so many years, we absorb this culture without realizing it. Though Shrikant is my close friend, I do not interfere in his life. In this country, everyone loves the complete freedom of their private life. Even parents do not ask personal questions of their children. There is an invisible line in any relationship."* (Murty, 112-113) This is a testimony of the point that after residing for many years the Indians in America absorb American cultures so naturally that they do not think it an alien culture. This is a cultural transformation. The second generation of these Indians follows the American culture and declines Indian culture as their own culture. Radhakrishna and Savitri, Chandra Shekhar and Jamuna are the first generation who accepts American cultural set up for earning money but their second generation Shama and Savita deny Indian culture as their own because they grow up in American cultural set up that seems very close to them. When Savitri proposes to go back to Bangalore to settle there permanently, Savita denies and says, *"If we want, we can go back, but she belongs to this country as she was born here."* (Murty, 98)

Malati whom Gouramma visits with her son one day is an Indian but a businesswoman in America. She possesses a shop there. She sells fancy stuffs and Indian items like beaded handbags, silk scarves, Banarsi cushion in her shop. Mostly the Indians are her customers there. She also possesses another shop in India which is run by her brother wherein they sell American ornaments. Being Indian, she praises the non-native country, America. She says, *"This country rewards those who work hard. We are both extremely happy and admire and appreciate this country."* (Murty, 114)

Conclusion:

The novelist describes persons of different types who came to America. The first generation and the second generation of the employees. The working people and professionals. She describes the view of the people who settled in America and their heirs. The first hypothesis proves true as Shama, Tara and Malati absorb the American culture, though somewhere they are Indians at their root. Shama is a fusion of Indian and American culture. She listens to her parents and turns out rebellious to live with her boyfriend. The last hypothesis surpassing of non-native culture over native culture has proven true as the characters adopt the American culture. However, the parents of Indian roots can not digest the thing their children accepting American culture and declining their native culture.

Thus, the stories of the Indians in America have colors and fragrance of both the cultures. Even the amalgamation of the varied cultures transforms them comprehensively. The intentions and need are the different things. They follow American culture but at the same they have social gatherings on the occasion of Indian festivals. It is a cultural hybridization as mentioned in the research article, Hybridisation and Cultural Amalgamation in Kamala Markandaya's Possession by Dr. S. Parvin Banu and A. Selvi. They mention hybridity as "one of the cultural amalgamations" (Dr. S. Pravin)

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