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**VALUE VS. VALUE: AN AXIOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
 SUDHA MURTHY'S *DOLLAR BAHU***

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**Abstract:**

*This paper is an attempt to analyse the impact of economic issues on the life of an individual. Literature being an umbrella term reviews the factors moulding human life. Economic issues have always been a factor playing vital role in deciding the position of a human being not only in bigger family called society but also the smaller society called family.*

*Sudha Murthy a philanthropist and Chairperson of Infosys Foundation and a well-known Indian writer, better understands the pivotal role of money matters in human life. In her wide quoted novel 'Dollar Bahu' she delineates the life of a middle class Indian girl from middle class family who suffers the consequences of lack of value in family because of the lack of value of her earnings. The protagonist in the novel, Vinuta champions the cause of value of human virtues over the value of money and objects. In the course of the novel Murthy has portrayed many characters who confront with each other on the issue of money. Some of them care more for money so all their relations and decisions depend on the material position of the person and some of them care more for human relations so they advocate the importance of human virtues in life. Murthy has also discussed the issue of calling metaphorically a daughter-in-law as Laxmi, the Goddess of Wealth in Indian context because she brings good money and pile of objects in the form of dowry. So naturally the one who brings bigger dowry is Laxmi and the one who brings the biggest is Mahalaxmi. In 'Dollar Bahu' Vinuta, the younger daughter-in-law earns in rupees cannot get the place of Laxmi at her in-laws but Jamuna the eldest daughter-in-law earns in dollars that's why she becomes the 'dollar bahu' The paper is a communique on the need of deciding the importance of money and human relations over each other. As a philanthropist, Murthy reads the corrupt impact of economic issues on social and personal human relations.*

**Introduction**

Present research paper evaluates the fiction *Dollar Bahu* (2007) by Sudha Murthy on the basis of value theory. The paper is an attempt to apply the ten basic values mentioned by Schwartz, Schwartz and Bilsky- Self direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism to the text *Dollar Bahu*.

**Conceptual analysis**

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains Value theory as a 'catch all label used to encompass all branches of moral philosophy, social and political philosophy...' (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory>) It further views that value theory designates the area of moral philosophy that is concerned with theoretical questions about values and goodness of all varieties... (It) encompasses axiology, but also includes many other questions about the nature of value and its relation to the moral category. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entires/value-theory>)
2. The term value is ambiguous as far as its theoretical insinuations are concerned. It may refer to value in terms of economics and philosophy. It may refer to value as economic worth of goods and services. It may value worth of a human being on the basis of his qualities. Values are further understood as- beliefs, motivational construct, abstract goals, an ordered systems of priorities

(essedunet.nsd.uib.no/cms/topics/1/1/1. htm)

3. Value theory is also defined as desirable trans-situational goals varying in importance that serves as guiding principles in people's lives(essedunet.nsd.uib.no/cms/topics/1/1/1. htm)
4. Thomas Hurka states that value theory says which states of affairs are intrinsically good and which intrinsically evil. (<https://thomashurka.files.wordpress.com>)
5. Encyclopedia Britannica explains axiology as theory of value and further adds that 'the term 'value 'originally meant the worth of something chiefly in the economic sense of exchange value ...Ralph Perry theorized value as any object of interest. Later he explored eight realms of 'value': morality, religion, art etc.' (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/axiology>)

### **Value Vs. value in *dollar bahu***

Suha Murthy, a renowned name of Infosys, is a prolific writer who has written fiction and non-fiction. The book *Dollar Bahu* is originally written in Kannada and has been translated into many languages. Sudha Murthy in the preface of the novel makes clear her intention behind writing this book. She says, "I hope this book will show some families that love and affection can be important than money" (From Preface). Being a professional from corporate sector Sudha Murthy perhaps better under the value of value. *Dollar Bahu* narrates the story of a middle class family based at Bangalore. The characters in the family elaborate the idea of value vs. value. The head of the family, Shamanna being a teacher of Sanskrit advocates the virtues that confer on a human being an enriched personality. He considers values in human beings on the basis his virtues. Whereas his wife Gouramma, has a strong belief in the economic perspective of value. For her, money is the deciding factor in human life. Therefore does not value her husband who cannot generate the financial assets. Their elder son Chandrashekhar, a civil engineer inherits his mother's craze for money, Particularly for dollars and aspires to go to America, earn dollars and thus earn social status. His mother too encourages him and feels proud of him when he sends dollars for every event in the family. Whereas Chandru's younger brother inherits his father's perspective of charity and social welfare. Girish's wife, Vinuta comes from poor family; so fails to bring good dowry and expensive gifts. Naturally she is not even treated as *bahu* i.e. *Laxmi* but as a maid servant. Though Vinuta is virtuous and earning woman, she is valued as secondary. Chandru's wife, Jamuna belongs to rich family who brings dowry, expensive gifts, jewellery after marriage, she is honoured as '*Mahalaxmi*' by her mother-in-law. Her marriage with Chandru promotes her as *Dollar Bahu*. Shamanna's family is battle ground for the war between material value and virtues as value. Gouramma and Shamanna, Vinuta and Jamuna are the characters through whom Sudha Murthy comments on the superiority of human virtues over material value. She has commented over various concepts of value theory like hedonism, desire, perfectionism, comparison and aggression, intrinsic goodness, egalitarian value from literary viewpoint. Literature being an umbrella term incorporates philosophical dimension of human life and tries to simplify the abstract philosophical idea through the fabrication of a story and placing the characters in a situations. A novelist does so to explain the abstract and ambiguous philosophical ideas through the means of entertainment, of course, with the ultimate aim of educating the readers. This paper also attempts to elaborate the philosophical tenets on the basis of the main characters whose ideas are based on the value theory and theory of value. The basic values are considered in domestic context in particular and in social context in general.

Thomas Hurka considers values as states of affairs... Since these states are not actions they cannot be right or wrong but they can have positive or negative value. (<https://thomashurka.files.wordpress.com>) Literature believes in transformation in people in the course of life. So their journey could be from good to bad or bad to good. Moreover the factual understanding of human being leads to the conclusion that a human being cannot be permanently good or bad but his situational perceptions leads his categorization as good or bad and there is always a scope for change in a human being. The central character Gouramma in the novel *Dollar Bahu* travels from bad to good. She is a hedonist in initial stages because of wrong

perspective but because of her intrinsic goodness she has the ability to differentiate between good and bad and therefore moves from hedonism, power, and to self-direction, benevolence and universalism. Her surrounding characters and their actions, responses and reaction help to bring the positive change her and to understand the meaning of 'value'

Gouramma is delineated as an ambitious woman she is a traditionalist and thus believes in domestic hierarchical power structure. She feels that financial status of a person increases his value in society. Her lust for money, jewellery, silks diamond, gold, big house, car power stand in sheer contrast with the self-contented, generous and charitable nature of her husband. That's why 'Since her husband had been unable to full fill her dreams, Gouramma had pinned her hopes on her children' (Murthy, P. 19). Every day She prays to God that 'her children should go abroad and earn lots of money' (Murthy, P. 20) Chandru her elder son displays his capacity of earning. He soon gets the deputation in America and thus Gouramma's dream partially comes true. Chandru's fascination for dollar is rightly reflected when talks about dollar to his brother 'The dollar is the most powerful financial instrument of modern times. It is magic money--- (Murthy, P.25). Chandru is instrumental in adding to the principle of hedonism in Gouramma. Her belief is strengthened because of her perspective that

'It was the dollar, not Indian rupees, which could elevate her into the elite circle at social gatherings and marriage halls. The dollar was like the Goddess Lakshmi, with a magic wand' (Murthy, P.25).

Gouramma counts everything in terms of money. Her concepts of happiness and pain are related to money. This further results into comparison and aggression. She keeps on comparing her two daughters-in-law, Jamuna and Vinuta, not on the basis of their virtue potential but on the basis of monetary potential. Vinuta the virtuous but poor is always subsided and neglected whereas Jamuna, the rich girl and dollar *bahu* is always praised and valued.

The Dollar Bahu Jamuna too reflects the value of conformity. She has been influenced by her mother who has taught her to speak well with the relatives but not allow them to stay in her house. She knows the greedy and stupid nature of her Gouramma and Surbhi. But she allows Gouramma to come to America and stay with her because she is pregnant. Jamuna's practical and calculating behaviour is very well displayed when she speaks out her real feelings,

'I give them what I don't like and they don't suspect anything. For example I pass on all my old saris to Surbhi and I tell her due to customs restrictions, I rewrapped them. ... I always believe divide and rule' (Murthy, P.129).

To avoid the robbing nature of Indian relatives she prefers to stay in America. She says 'it is better to send them some dollars as gifts than to settle in India' (Murthy, P.129). By purchasing to and fro ticket for Gouramma and allowing her to stay in her house, Jamuna encashes every dollar spent on Gouramma by making her to do all the household work, to look after them and to baby sit Manasi. Chandru, Gouramma's son staying in America has also his clear views about economic value. He says,

"Everyone there (India) thinks that it very is easy to earn in dollars--- what they don't understand is that we also have to struggle, far away from home, family and culture. We worry about our children who are confused between the two value systems. Actually the price you pay is very high. The dollar is very expensive if you take into account all these points All Indians back home only equate the dollar to forty three or forty five rupees." (Murthy, P.100)

Chandru fulfils the desires of his mother by staying in America far away from family but he too is aware of the fact that his value for his mother and sister is counted in terms of dollars he sends to them and not for he himself.

Gouramma's daughter Surbhi inherits the commercial approach of her mother. She reflects the value of conformity. She herself is lazy, neither interested in household work nor in education. She is

delineated as greedy and violates the familiar expectations. Gouramma's money minded behaviour also influences Surbhi's nature and life. When Surbhi is noticed watching movie with an ordinary boy Gopinath by Vinuta and reported at home, Gouramma admonishes Surbhi explaining value of money even in deciding alliances. She openly tells her,

“What does he (Gopinath) have? An ordinary job and a small house! If you marry him, your life will be like Vinuta's. You will have to count every penny and try to save all the time. Look at Jamuma! She has two cars; she can spend money in lakhs because she has money in dollars. The dollar is all powerful. --- you can lead that kind of life if you marry someone who is in the U.S. or someone very rich in India” (Murthy, P.59)

Gouramma is ready to buy a rich husband for Surbhi by spending lavishly in Surbhi's marriage. Even in Surbhi's marriage more importance is given to Jamuna because she and Chandru have paid two lakhs whereas Girish and Vinuta are totally neglected because they have contributed only one lakh

Vinuta who is always compared with the dollar *bahu* Jamuna suffers the depression because she is very often flabbergasted by the questions like 'Should a marriage be arranged on the basis of love and understanding or on the love for the dollar?' (P.59). She feels hatred for the word 'dollar' and 'she prayed to God, Let a day come when forty five dollars are equal to one rupee. If that did happen, what would this dollar *Bahudo*? (Murthy, P.137)

Shamanna, Gouramma's husband is the only person in the family who could realize the corrupt and devastating influence of dollar on his family. He stands for unification axiology because he knows the worth of material value and spiritual value. Being a teacher, he knows the true meaning of 'Value' that's why when Gouramma speaks out the need of pleasure life for their children, he emphasizes the need of good education to his children because it is the education, knowledge that could set the right perspective of looking at life. It is he who explains Vinuta at the end of the novel that all problems of life could not be solved with the help of money. He has the common sense of knowing the material value of dollar and tells to Vinuta,

“I can only be grateful that many of our comforts were bought by the purchasing power of dollar. We are now financially better off. Many lower- middle class families have benefitted from their children going to America. Many parents have been settled there. They have been able to build houses and marry off their daughters without too much of trouble” (P. 139)

So he underlines the need of money for leading a comfortable life but being a man of value theory, he is perfectly aware of what happens if the need turns into greed. This he could illustrate from his own life. He states,

“Look at Gouri, her desires were mostly fulfilled because of Chandru. But she does not understand that money is not everything in life.”(Murthy, P.139)

He then explains the corrupt influence of dollar on his family and familial relations. He says,

“Nothing comes free Vinu. And definitely when it comes to financial help. This dollar may have transferred the lifestyle of some families, taken them from poverty to wealth but it has also broken up some families and destroyed peace of mind... If Gouri had been more mature, she would not have been in awe of the dollar and danced to its tune. Her greed burnt the peace and harmony in our family.”(Murthy, P.139)

Shamanna reflects the values like self-direction, stimulation, achievement, security benevolence and universalism.

Though various incidents in the novel throw light on Gouramma's greed for money, Sudha Murthy also explains through Shamanna that her desires were oppressed due to her childhood poverty and even after marriage she to constrain all her desires due to the meagre salary and generous nature of her husband. But the flow of dollars from her America based son and her observation of the ways of the world at once



catapult her desires and consequent comparisons and aggression by Gouramma destroy the peace of her family. But her intrinsic goodness helps her to come out of the maze of the money as well as the influence of the maze runners. Her realization of the true nature of the dollar bahu and the understanding of American life help her in shedding out her assumptions of pleasure life and she comes back to India with a new perception of life and human relations.

### **Conclusion**

Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Bahu* speaks the universal experiences of people who are always caught in the eternal conflict of value and virtue. They feel the need of both in life but very often fail to balance the both and perhaps experience the loss. Sudha Murthy's almost all writing is centred at value theory. She deftly draws the outcomes of the increasing hedonist tendency in human beings. Their constant comparisons with the rich people results into aggression and follow up of wrong means to accumulate wealth. All the NRIs staying in America depicted in the novel have reached to America for the money. Majority of them are compelled to do so because of their family responsibility. There they realize that their hard work is properly paid but they also realize that they are being indirectly robbed by their own relatives in India because the Indians in the novel think of dollars in terms of money. Sudha Murthy's character Shammana rightly says that nothing comes free. Not even money. One has to pay price for everything one wants. Money may be accumulated by losing relations and relations may be earned by losing money. Jamuna has money but no relations. Vinuta has relations but paucity of money. Chandru loses both money and relations because his mother and sister as well as his wife care for his money and not for him. Gouramma, earlier caught between the conflict of value and virtue learns in the course of time that one cannot have both at a time and one has to decide the priority. Shamanna can better understand the places of value and virtue in life. He knows the necessity of money but is also aware that money cannot solve all the problems. Sudha Murthy has effectively elaborated on the idea of need and greed as well as value and virtue. A beautiful thought says-

'God created human beings to love and objects to use

But in this world people have learnt to use human beings and love the objects.'

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