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*DOLLAR BAHU*

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## EXPLORING THE EXISTENCE OF DISCREPANCY BETWEEN MORALITY AND ETHOS IN SUDHA MURTHY'S *DOLLAR BAHU*

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**Abstract:** *Murthy writes with a deliberate simplicity, drawing her stories from the moral universe of ordinary Indians. Dollar Bahu reflects concern for integrity, empathy, responsibility, family relationships and fortitude in the face of social discrimination. Ethos is presented not as a tradition but as a living moral compass shaped by experience, hardship and change. The study examines the interaction of ethos and morality in the books of Murthy through the characters who uphold or violate moral codes. Sudha Murthy also reinterprets morality in a way that is appealing to contemporary readers and proves and reaffirms the timeless significance of the Indian ethos. Her stories ultimately serve as a bridge between cultures, helping Indian society to balance modernization with tradition without sacrificing its moral foundation.*

**Keywords:** *Ethos, Morality, Integrity, and Tradition*

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### **Introduction:**

Indian English writing is heavily influenced by themes of identity, continuity of culture and moral decision-making. Famous writers like Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan explores moral puzzles in traditional communities. The special thing about Sudha Murthy is that she writes for common readers intentionally and not for opulent literary circles. The clarity, conciseness and universal approach to moral situations in her storylines makes her writing approachable and powerful. &Mudha Murthy explores the ideas of moral judgement, selflessness, empathy and honesty. This essay examines Murthy's corpus of writing from an ethical and ethos perspective. The study analyses Murthy's interpretation of Indian cultural values, challenges to social preconceptions and creation of characters that exemplify or stray from ethical principles with the help of two typical works.

Sudha Murthy is a famous Indian author, philanthropist and social worker who has made significant contributions to social welfare, education and literature. She was born on 19th August 1950 in Shiggaon, Karnataka and has grown to become one of India's most beloved contemporary writers and a responsible voice for social change. Sudha Murthy is a prolific

writer in Kannada and English and is well known for her simple yet insightful style. She writes in a variety of genres, including non-fiction, travelogues, children's books and fiction.

She holds a Master of Science degree in computer science and was the first female engineer to be recruited by TATA Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO), the largest automaker in India. She is married to N R, co-founder of Infosys. Narayana Murthy. Sudha Murthy is an inspiring personality who has contributed a lot to the society and her work keeps impacting Indian literature and social development.

Morality has its roots in the ancient critics such as Plato and Aristotle. Socrates explores the notion that “knowledge is virtue” and delineates ideas like knowledge of self and rational understanding. Plato also discussed morality, and how to discover the moral facts that exist outside the physical universe. In modern times , critics such as John Stuart Mill , Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant talked about the categorical imperative as the supreme moral principle. The ideas of Dharma and Santana Dharma go well with the books of Sudha Murthy which can be read as a comparative study of the great Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The clash between traditional values and the forces of modernisation, globalisation and cultural hybridity has emerged as a more prominent issue in the discussion of morality in contemporary Indian literature. One of the significant works in this literary context is Dollar Bahu (2007) by SudhaMurthy which provides a scathing critique of the erosion of moral values in post-liberalization India due to materialistic pursuits and obsession for the Western wealth. The novel’s exploration of ethical dilemmas is strongly supported by the Indian ethos, the philosophical and cultural value systems that have shaped Indian culture for millennia.

The Indian ethos is derived from ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads and epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, that emphasise the ideas of dharma (righteousness), karma (action and consequence), ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth) and seva (selfless service). These ideas are not just abstract philosophical ideals, but useful guidelines for moral behaviour and social harmony. As literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, Indian fiction has traditionally acted as “a moral vehicle, reflecting the eternal conflict between duty and desire, righteousness and worldly temptation” (Mukherjee, 2000). Murty’s work is a prime example of this tradition, using the vehicle of storytelling to look at current societal changes, and also as a vehicle for moral instruction.

Critics have recognised Murty’s unique contribution to Indian English writing as a chronicler of middle-class Indian society and its moral ambiguities. According to ShashiDeshpande, Murty’s stories “capture the essence of Indian family dynamics with an authenticity that

resonates with lived experience, while never abandoning their commitment to ethical clarity” (Deshpande, 2010). Her stories are simple and had didactic meaning, reflecting what is called by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar as the “Indianness” in literature, which means the writings that have a local sensibility, cultural rootedness and moral purpose (Iyengar, 1985).

Dollar Bahu (Srinivas 1966) deals with the process of "Westernisation" in which Indian society adopts Western ideas, technologies and lifestyles often at the expense of traditional cultural moorings. The story takes a dig at the rising cult of NRI worship, a phenomenon that exaggerates social status and family privilege with geographical migration and dollar income. The literary historian Jasbir Jain has noted that Murty’s fiction “consistently foregrounds the ethical ramifications of social change, particularly the manner in which economic liberalisation has recalibrated family relationships and generational values” (Jain, 2011).

### **Review of Literature:**

In Dollar Bahu, the most common way to discuss the relationship between morality and ethos is to investigate the effect of materialism on moral behaviour. Through their analysis of humanitarian perspectives and materialism, Aayushi and Kamboj exemplify the novel’s world in which traditional moral ideals are gradually replaced by economic concerns. The writers say that Murty describes characters who have to deal with the alluring temptation of moneyed wealth, especially success in terms of dollars, and humanitarian urges based on traditional Indian ethos. This struggle creates moral dilemmas that challenge the moral system that the characters have created to govern their relationships and identities. The axiological analysis of the Literary Endeavour Journal presents a systematic consideration of the systems of values operating in the book, demonstrating the ethical vagueness of the opposite moral systems. The analysis emphasises that the moral dilemma of women is related to how they perceive their own value and success, through two contrasting visions, i.e. traditional virtue and material prosperity, which affect the family relationship. When values collide, the fragility of moral certainty is revealed in a rapidly changing culture. An article in the Journal of Social Research Foundation further develops the study on the dehumanising effects of globalisation and materialism. The article claims that there is a serious moral problem when traditional morality and the current materialistic ethos meet. The study uses Murty’s story as an example of how the uncritical acceptance of Western economic ideals undermines the moral foundations of Indian family life, replacing obligation and compassion with self-interest and calculation. This is not just a change in economic activity but a fundamental change in the moral atmosphere in which human relationships are conducted.

In *Dollar Bahu*, Kanwar's thorough examination of tradition and modernity is a strong statement about the clash between the traditional Indian ethos and modern morals. The present study discusses the novel's portrayal of the tension between the preservation of moral standards and the contemporary materialistic ideologies. Murty is not merely setting up a confrontation between moral tradition and corrupt modernity, but is rather exploring the complex ways in which characters negotiate between these competing moral universes. (Kanwar) The collision is not one of devastation, but of creative tension forcing characters to rethink their presumptions and perhaps create new ethical syntheses.

Joshi and Rao's discussion on feminist consciousness and traditionalism deepens our understanding of the clash between morality and ethos. They argue that the novel brings up the question of gender-specific morality, as the women characters are forced to reconcile modern expectations of individual freedom with the traditional idea of feminine virtue. This collision creates particularly difficult moral conundrums for female protagonists who want to assert their claims to dignity and self-determination while adhering to traditional values. Instead of framing such disputes as intractable contradictions, Murty treats them as opportunities for moral growth, the authors argue.

The most visible conflict between ethos and morality is in the familial ties in the way that Loknete's *Researcher* portrays a materialistic society. The study demonstrates how the worship of the dollar produces moral hierarchies that undermine equality, respect and duty, central to traditional family values. In a society where value is based on economic productivity, characters who follow traditional moral principles are devalued, creating major ethical dilemmas. The study shows how Murty exposes the moral shortcomings of values systems that are solely materialistic, through the lens of family relationships, and simultaneously acknowledges the legitimate needs for social mobility and economic stability. Vedha and Audichya's nuanced analysis on materialism and family dynamics provide valuable insight into how moral conflicts manifest in quotidian interactions. They view the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship as a microcosm of the broader ethical conflicts between the contemporary rights-based ethos and old duty-based morality. The study shows how characters struggle to maintain moral integrity while adjusting to changing societal realities, some succumbing to materialistic corruption and others managing to maintain moral values in an era of change.

Kumar's close reading of the status of women in *Dollar Bahu* reveals the gendered dimensions of the tension between ethos and morality. The study investigates how female characters are disproportionately assigned the responsibility of maintaining morality in their

families, while being subjected to discriminatory actions justified by a conventional ethos. Kumar argues that Murty does not present women as mere passive recipients of traditional morality but as active moral agents who critically evaluate traditional and modern value systems. From this point of view, the tension between ethos and morality reveals how spaces for ethical reflection and possibly progressive change, especially with regard to the rights and dignity of women, are opened up.

The intersection of gender and morality becomes more important when one thinks about how conventional ethos has often rationalised patriarchal actions that go against the basic moral values of fairness and equality. Murty's female protagonists must navigate this perilous landscape in order to distinguish genuine moral values from oppressive practices disguised as tradition. The morality-ethos collision is complex and sophisticated ethical reasoning that recognises this complexity is required to make this differentiation and not fall back on simplistic formulations.

### **Representation of Indian Ethos:**

Explaining Dharma and Artha, the two facets of Indian philosophy, with Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Bahu* as an example, it can be stated, through a lucid analogy, that monetary prosperity without moral obligation leads to spiritual deprivation. In this ever more globalised world, Sudha Murthy re-establishes the eternal relevance of the Indian ethos. Sudha Murthy's *Dollar Bahu* is a masterly representation of the moral and cultural complexity of the contemporary Indian society which is in the process of coping with the impact of globalisation. The book is based in Bangalore and presents two different perspectives of life through the lives of two daughters-in-law. They are compared on financial status, the impact of wealth especially having dollars which is considered as a symbol of success and status by the middle class in India. Murty, with this perspective, investigates how money can materially improve life and at the same time generate emotional chaos and tear family bonds. Murthy introduces two daughters-in-law: Vinuta, Gauramma (Greed), and Moral Duty; and the "Dollar Bahu" (Jamuna), who lives abroad and sends riches. Vinuta, the personification of compassion, family responsibilities and simplicity. First, Gouramma, the mother-in-law, values Jamuna for the value of the word "dollar" and ignores Vinuta's emotional commitments. The moral dilemma is about how wealth can warp family love and respect. The book also dramatizes the clash of Indian values with globalization. Gouramma favours her daughter-in-law Jamuna who initially makes a lot of money because she thinks financial success is the same

as virtue. But she believes that being isolated in America has helped her to understand that family ties and emotional warmth are more important than material things. As the story progresses, we find that Vinuta is projected as the epitome of Indian culture as she marries Girish and accepts her responsibilities as a wife and daughter-in-law with grace and self-restraint. Her morals are rooted in the traditional Indian values of sacrifice, patience and service, which were embedded in her middle-class Indian background. The novel is critical of moral relativism and mindless westernization. It suggests that material wealth earned outside should not replace the moral obligations at home. Financial gain dilutes the Indian ethos. The Indian ethos is compassion, respect for elders and family unity.

In *Dollar Bahu* Sudha Murthy examines the fragile moral fabric of a modern Indian family caught between traditional values and material aspirations. Indian humanism is the basis of moral vision in this book, says Murthy. Sudha Murthy speaks about this in a moral which says, preach virtue publicly and worship wealth privately. *Bahu dollar* The novel is a satire on commodification of morality. Respect, love and family status are apportioned on the basis of money, not virtue. The morality of the novel is not abstract but works with family dynamics and social expectations. It reflects the moral dilemma of post-liberalization based on empathy and self-realization as civilisations enticed by money.

Sudha Murthy also discusses ethical issues of globalisation and social mobility. Murthy's moral philosophy is more akin to Gandhian ideas. Genuine morality is characterised by simplicity, sincerity, and service to others. It is not money itself that is evil, Murthy makes clear; money is only evil when it creates moral empathy and interpersonal connection.

The Vinuta that emerges in this book is a blend of Indian moral principles with a sense of self-respect and autonomy. Education makes her self-reliant, which strengthens her moral and emotional fortitude. Morality is not passive endurance, it is ethical self-respect: Vinuta Thus, for Murthy, morality through vinuta is a balanced synthesis of ethical integrity with contemporary self-awareness and not a mindless devotion to conventional ethos. The book is a challenge to consumerism, keeping Indian ideals like simplicity, sincerity and empathy relevant.

### **Conclusion:**

Sudha Murthy *Dollar Bahu* Finally, the book suggests the true morality lies in the inner moral balance that allows us to respect tradition, not in external wealth or rigid tradition. It also

subtly situates the cross-section of Indian ethos and morality. SudhaMurty's *Dollar Bahu* is a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between modern socioeconomic changes and traditional Indian moral philosophy, focusing on the phenomena of NRI worship and materialistic desires in middle-class Indian households. The book is a moral fable and a social critique, an examination of the erosion of dharmic ideals in the face of globalisation and Western influence.

The story's exploration of morality is deeply embedded in the Indian ethos, drawing on traditional concepts like dharma (righteousness), karma (action and consequence), tyaga (sacrifice) and satya (truth). Vinuta's characterisation reveals that preservation of qualities of the past will lead to eternal happiness, not temporary temporal riches. Murty demonstrates the idea of nishkama karma in the Bhagavad Gita—performing one's duty without desire for reward. In contrast, Jamuni's moral decay is an example of the effects of ahamkara (ego) and moha (illusion), providing a clear pedagogic framework that prioritises inner virtue over the approval of others.

The representation of mother-son relationship in the book questions the monetisation of family relationships which is becoming more and more common in Indian society now. Murty contrasts Jamuni's devotion, based on the social capital and economic usefulness of her sons, with the mother love that is typical of traditional Indian society. The analogy underscores the author's fear that kartavya (duty) and seva (service) are being supplanted by mercenary interests.

*Dollar Bahu* also talks about the cultural schizophrenia of India in the post-liberalization era, where the native value systems are threatened due to the lure of Western riches. But Murty's is not an essentialist approach to culture; she does not call for a retrograde return to tradition but for a synthesis where modernity and tradition coexist in harmony. This balanced attitude is in conformity with the Gandhian idea of retaining one's moral integrity while assimilating the best features of all cultures.

The ending of *Dollar Bahu* reinforces the relevance of Indian moral philosophy to address the problems of the present. The only way to achieve eternal human happiness and social harmony, says Murty, is to adopt an ethical way of life based on compassion, humility and dharmic principles of conduct which are the cornerstones of Indian civilisation and are relevant even today in a world that is becoming increasingly materialistic.

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