

CONCEPTUALIZING THE STATE OF POOR IN SUDHA MURTY'S '*DOLLAR BAHU*'**S.PRAISELIN MILCAH,****M.Phil, English,****Aditanar College of Arts and
Science,****Tiruchendur.****ABSTRACT:**

This paper is an attempt to analyse the suffering and oppressions of poor through the principle of Marxism in the novel "*Dollar Bahu*" by Sudha Murty. Unfortunately poverty has become the symbol of Indian Nation. The Western Countries consider the Indian Sub-Continent as a poor nation. But ironically that is not the truth. India is a country that is lavished with riches and sophisticated wealth. Then from where does the poverty come from? It is an important question to answer. The reality behind is that the rich become richer and poor become poorer. The economically high class people subjugate and exploit the labours of the poor people. Even the poor people too give themselves up to all the exploitations by the rich, because they need to fill their belly atleast for once in a day. Through the novel "*Dollar Bahu*", Sudha Murty picturize the role of poverty in a common middle class family. The protagonist Vinuta, the second daughter-in-law of the family, is mistreated only because she didn't bring any large dowry. The money-minded mother-in-law Gouramma praises the rich daughter-in-law, whereas as Vinuta is oppressed.

KEY WORDS:

Subjugation, Alienation, Exploitation, Conceptualizing.

As a multi-faceted personality, Sudha Murty is a renowned writer in both Kannada and English. She also actively participates in many social services at Karnataka. This novel *Dollar Bahu* was first published in Kannada and also adopted as a televised dramatic series by Zee TV. This paper focuses on how Marxist principles work through the novel. As Wikipedia points out, Marxism is a method of socioeconomic analysis that uses a materialist interpretation of historical development, better known as historical materialism to understand class relations and social conflict as well as a dialectical perspective to view social transformation. It originates from the works of 19th century German Philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism is a living philosophy.

In his work *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry comments, “Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. This view of history as class struggle regards it as ‘motored’ by the competition for economic, social and political advantage”(156). One of the female lead characters of the novel, Gouramma, is considered as an embodiment of materialism. As Barry states, Gouramma wants to get that social advantage. She wanted to show off like other luxurious ladies in the wedding ceremonies. In such gatherings, the rich ladies would form a circle and boast about the glories of their children living abroad and earning in Dollars. Gouramma would feel completely left out in such occasions. This beautiful line from the novel captures this characteristic feature more vividly. “Every day she would pray to God that her children should go abroad and earn lots of money so

that she could join that circle and tell them, 'See I am equal to you.' (DB 20). All these greed over money in the mind of Gouramma destroys the inner peace of the family.

One of the important Marxian concepts is the theory of Alienation. Marx has identified four levels of alienation. Firstly, man is alienated from his own product and from his work process. Here in the novel the 'own product' may be considered as the own family. The protagonist Vinuta is alienated from her own family. When she finds her sister-in-law Surabhi with a neighbourhood boy, she reports it to her father-in-law. But this incident turns as a boomerang towards her. After that incident, both her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law stays aloof and offhand with her. The victim is thus affected psychologically and has no control over her deeds. She feels lonely in her own family. The exploitation of poor thus results in alienation. Peter Barry also comments on this in his work *Beginning Theory*. He opines,

“The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth century form. The result of this exploitation is *alienation*, which is the state which comes about when the worker is 'deskilled' and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence of whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp”.(156)

Secondly, man is alienated from nature. Work becomes monotonous. After the major conflict, the family faces in the marriage issue of Surabhi, Vinuta becomes a silent onlooker in the family. The girl who came into the family with lots of cheer and happiness of getting a new family has now become a machine that serves the house. The author beautifully captures the mental trauma of Vinuta through these lines. “Vinuta, on her part, had become thin and frail like a drooping flower. She looked depressed and went about the housework in a listless, machine-

like manner” (DB 76). She never takes part in any of family discussions, not even in the family’s happy occasions. She is not taken care of eventhough she is pregnant. Surabhi’s marriage also takes place in the absence of Vinuta. As Vinuta’s delivery date draws closer, Gouramma made it as an excuse and sent her away to her own house. She understood her stand in the family. This has been the position of many poor girls in the families. They silently endure all the sufferings and un-ending subjugations.

Thirdly, as Marx states, man is alienated from other men. The competitive character of the capitalist system forces everyone to live at someone else's expense and divides society into antagonistic classes. The competitive character in the novel is the rich daughter-in-law Jamuna. According to Gouramma, she is the Mahalakshmi of the house. But the true face of Jamuna is unknown to her mother-in-law. She perfectly understands the poor state of Vinuta and misuses it. During the occasion of fixing marriage date for Surabhi, Vinuta's delivery date is taken into account. But Jamuna gives a lame excuse that they have a summer trip to Europe and asks the family to change the date as per her own comforts. She also adds that if she wants to be present at the wedding, then the dates should be as per her own wish. Gouramma who never want to upset Jamuna, dances to the tune of her dollar bahu only because they have contributed a large amount for the marriage. Vinuta understands the reality of the fight for the power inside the family. Gouramma is proud to boast about her Dollar Bahu and not daughter-in-law whose husband is only a clerk. The thoughts of Vinuta showcases the situation in the family, “Things had come to a flashpoint: this was going to be a fight for power, to be decided by money. It was a tussle between the Dollar and the Rupee. Jamuna had bluntly made that clear”(DB 68).

On the other hand, Jamuna, the competitive character is furious by seeing the extravaganza and needless gifts lavished for Surabhi on her wedding. Although Jamuna smiles

for the camera, in her heart of hearts she resented Gouramma's acts. She thinks of the hardships she had taken away from her homeland and under tougher conditions, which is carelessly spent here for sophisticated ceremonies and gifts. But she never showed it to anyone because she is regarded as the Dollar Bahu of the family. She also decided in her mind to reduce the monthly allowance send to them so that automatically everything would be put to order. Thus she controls the family through her expenses.

Final level of alienation identified by Marx is, the man is alienated from himself. The realm of necessity dominates his life and reduces him to the level of animal existence. This exact characteristic feature also matches in the life of Vinuta. Before the Jamuna's entry into the family, Vinuta is considered and respected more. But after her arrival, Jamuna's sun begins to shine brighter while Vinuta's life became more like that of a dog. "If you have money, like the sun you will shine; if you don't have money, like a dog you will whine"(DB 55). Vinuta also goes through initial stages of depression, when she hears the news of her mother-in-law's return after her visit to America. She is unable to bear the fact of the constant comparisons between both the daughters-in-law that is to come. She fears that the comparison may continue through the grandchildren's life and her son Harsha would become a victim like her. Even the thought of all these things drags her into depression. She is alienated from her own self. She suffers from inside and fears the outcome. Fortunately her Father-in-law Shamanna, understands all her mental trauma and advises her to go away and begin a new life. Not all the poor daughters-in-law around the nation are blessed with such understanding people with them. In most cases the life of those poor girls meet with a tragic end.

The novel *Dollar Bahu* delineates the class struggles between the daughters-in-law who are varied from each other by the Dollar and the Rupees. The poor daughter-in-law is not poor

but her state is not equal to that of the Dollar Bahu. And such a drawback actually destroys her life. She is ill-treated and disdained. She silently bears all the pains and sufferings. She is alienated from her own self and her whole lot of surrounding. Therefore the characteristics of the theory of alienation suits to the plot of the novel *Dollar Bahu*.

The author Sudha Murty has amazingly conceptualized the state of poor in her novel. These kind of stories are not fictional but taken from reality. They perfectly capture the state of poor in the societies in and around India. Though India is free for more than 70years, some of it's superstitions and wrong beliefs cannot be uprooted from the people's mind. The societies keep on following the Class differences and write norms like do's and don'ts for the people in bottom class. It's all in the hands of future youngsters to uproot the class struggles from India. It's their broad-minded attitudes that is going to uplift India to a more heart-warming level.

WORK CITED

Murty, Sudha. *Dollar Bahu*. Penguin Book India, 2007.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi, Viva Books, 2018.

WEB CITED

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism>

<http://egyankosh.ac.in/handle/123456789/21029>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudha_Murty