

ACCULTURATING EXPERIENCE IN SUDHA MURTY'S *DOLLAR BAHU*: BEHOLDING CULTURAL SHOCK

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English has reached global acclaim in the hands of various embryonic new writers of this contemporary era. In recent times numerous writers contribute to the growth and development of Indian English literature through their artistic portrayal under various literary genres. Sudha Murty — who blooms in this category of modern women writer — contributes to Indian English literature on a large scale. She captures the true spirit of Indian culture in all her creative works. She tries to incorporate many Indian mythologies too in her literary works. Her fiction *Dollar Bahu* apprehends realistically the Indian culture and on the other hand, she attempts to bring out the hardships of immigrant marriage experience in the milieu of Indian background through her characters. This paper aims to trace the elements of culture shock as experienced by the character — Gouramma — which in turn creates a great awareness to the readers in terms of marriage and foreign land.

Keywords- 1. Cultural shock 2. Marriage 3. Earning 4. False belief

Introduction

Sudha Murty — who writes in the backdrop of Indian literature — brings out the element of Indian culture in all possible ways. Her fiction *Dollar Bahu* traces the immigrant experience in the land of the US through various characters. Gouramma — one of the lead characters of the novel — visits America, feeling so happy for experiencing and witnessing her long term goal in life. Through the eyes of Gouramma, Sudha Murty brings various immigrant experiences which in turn teaches many life lessons in the backdrop of Indian culture.

Objectives

1. To analyze the immigrant experience of various characters of the novel in a foreign nation
2. To empathize the hardships encountered by the characters in their life journey

3. To understand the intricacies behind marriage life and its significant role in society

Methodology

This paper involves the textual analysis of Sudha Murty's literary fiction *Dollar Bahu* and the critical analysis of the story as described by the writer.

Discussion

Omar Moufakkir (2016, p. 323) quoted in (Furnham and Bochner, 1986) who states,

Culture shock was introduced to the literature by Oberg in the 1950s. It refers to a situation when a group of people entering a different culture encounters a feeling of confusion and experience disorientation.

In this context, Gouramma enters and witnesses varying degrees of cultural perplexities which resulted in self-realization which in turn benefitted her as well as her family. She longs to go to the US — the Dollar Nation — and her dream has come true because of her son Chandru. He holds a green card and officially he has become a resident of America. James Rajasekar and Franck Renand (2013, p. 144) quoted Kohls (1979) who defined culture shock as The term used for the pronounced reactions to the psychological disorientation that is experienced in varying degrees when spending an extended period of time in a new environment.

Apparently, Gouramma visits the dollar nation with so much excitement and anticipation in life for the dollar nation. Acculturation in Dollar nation taught her so many life lessons and after witnessing numerous disorientations it indeed gave cultural shock for her in preserving life and its predicaments. Antonio Lebron (2017, p. 126) quoted in (Lee, 2006) in defining culture,

Culture refers to society and its way of life. It is defined as a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviors that we share with others in a particular society, giving us a sense of belongingness and identity.

Gouramma finds it very hard in adjusting to the new situations in a foreign nation. She feels very difficult in adopting its new culture. During her stay in America, she has come across many situations and people from different backgrounds wherein she faces cultural shock under many circumstances. Felix Nayak (2015, p. 593) avers “when a person moves away from his own culture and imbibes another; his old values come into clash with the new ones he finds”. Exactly, Gouramma endures a similar situation in this novel.

Hitherto she has been experiencing a complete Indian lifestyle. After she visits the Dollar nation, she finds it difficult to imbibe the new culture of America and its lifestyle.

Gouramma's Cultural Shock in the Land of Foreign Nation

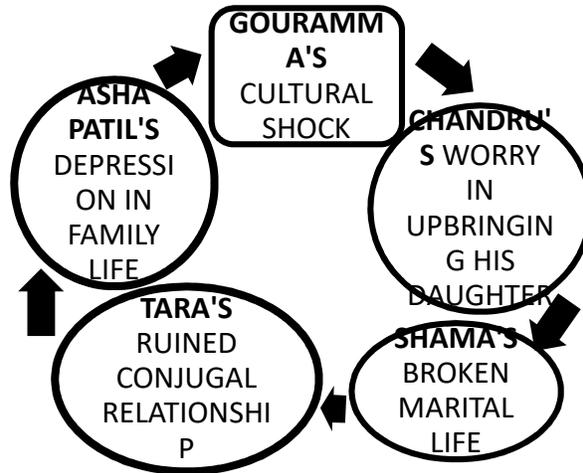


Figure 1 Gouramma's experience in a foreign land

Chandru's Fear in Raising His Daughter

Gouramma experienced cultural shock under various circumstances. For instance, once Chandru was worrying about his difficulty in growing his child in the land of a foreign nation. He expressed as,

When they are young, they mingle with other kids, talk in their accent, and feel very proud. But when they behave like American teenagers, we get upset. At times, I think about my daughter and get scared. (91)

He brooded over his mental struggle in growing his newborn child, which he associated with the difficulty encountered by one of his friends named Venkant in America. Venkant's daughter was experiencing a teenage problem due to which their family got shattered into pieces without real happiness. Gouramma was shocked to know about the difficulty in raising the children and agonized inwardly after empathizing and realizing the difficulty endured by her son in raising his daughter.

Shama's Life Struggle

Gouramma experienced a cultural shock from the life of the immigrant couple — Radhakrishna and Savitri. They arranged marriage for Shama — first daughter — at the age of twenty-one. Savitri expresses as “we were afraid that she would get into wrong company and find a boyfriend or some such thing” (96). So they decided to marry their daughter by finding a guy from an Indian background. Antonio Lebron (2017, p. 126) quoted in Bodley (1999) who adds

Three basic components of culture, namely: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. All forms of culture exhibit unique ways and value systems that aid and affect individuals in their perception and reaction to different life circumstances.

Radhakrishna and Savitri were worried exactly about the same thing. What people may think if their daughter finds her own life partner troubled them so much, so they arranged a quick marriage for Shama. Nevertheless, Shama's marital life was broken because the groom was interested in amassing the benefits and material wealth that her parents owned rather than spreading real love and happiness. After her broken relationship with her husband, her live-in-relationship with a Brazilian boyfriend tormented Gouramma even more. Shama retaliated, "from now on I want to live the way I want. Don't you dare interfere!" (97). Gouramma was baffled and felt a strange fear thinking about her grand-daughter and her future life in a foreign land after knowing about Shama's current situation and the problems encountered by her parents in the foreign land.

Tara's Broken Marital Life

Gouramma happened to meet Tara during her stay in America. Her life story was yet another shock for her. Tara was married to Ramesh and she came to the US after her wedding. Her parents sold their property to give her a lavish wedding. But after her wedding, she was astonished to know the fact that Ramesh got married already in a foreign nation and he was running a marital life. Ramesh married her because of his family pressure, indeed without revealing his secret marriage life in America. Gouramma related Tara's incident with her daughter's married life and she was worried about the unknown humiliation which she might encounter in her life through the life of her grandchildren.

Asha Patil's Melancholy

Asha Patil's — yet another character with fragile relationship — life story also brought cultural shock to Gouramma. Asha Patil was married to Sathish Patil by her parents thinking that he was a great businessman. But he owned a bhel-puri cart in reality and she was assaulted very cruelly by his family members. Later, Asha Patil sank into a great depression and she struggled a lot to overcome her difficult situation. Her broken marriage was indeed a great shock for Gouramma because she thought life in America is so luxurious and comfortable than in India. But after witnessing her struggle for survival she understood the difficulty and the intricacies involved behind it. Adrian Furnham (2010, p. 87) quoted in (Ward et al. 2001) definition for a cultural shock in the following words,

Surprise, anxiety, even disgust, and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences. Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment. After witnessing so many disparities Gouramma was perplexed and worried and she found it very difficult to digest the hard realities of life in a foreign land.

Conclusion

Gouramma experienced so many intricacies in the land of the foreign nation through the eyes of various immigrant characters during her short stay in America. As the proverb goes 'The grass is always greener on the other side' Gouramma longed for the life in Dollar nation and she wished that all her sons and daughter settle in the US. She realized the fact that life always looks green on the other side and finally valued the importance of her own land. Gouramma's self-realization because of her short stay in America resulted in understanding herself and it resulted in maintaining a good relationship with her family members irrespective of their earnings in dollar or rupee.

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