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## Traces of Grass is Greener Syndrome in *Dollar Bahu* by Sudha Murthy

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### Abstract

*Sudha Murthy writes the issue of the common on the ideas which are closer to heart. Her writing style is simple with a moral at the end of the story. Her writing attracts reader ranging from the school children to the grannies. Everyday incidents are explained with the fictional facts to seek the attention of the public. This paper concentrates on one such everyday issue of Shamanna's family. The one of the important characters, Gouramma was deeply infected by the Grass is greener syndrome. Recovery became simple. Life is a lesson. One has to learn their lesson every day. No one is exempted.*

**Keywords: Depression, Ingratitude, Expectations, Love and Affection.**

We the human being have variety of lifestyles, as individuals or in communities. We have different economic, social and political factors that determine our lifestyle. It differs from place to place, country to country and people to people. If a person lives in rural area, he thinks more of agricultural activities ie agrarian lifestyle. Where as a person in urban area thinks high-tech lifestyle, which involves shopping, fancy living and time spent working. Wherever you live, either rich or poor, one feels jealous of others. Or at the basic level, people compare oneself with other people.

The poor wanted to live a life of a rich: the rich wanted to lead a richer life. If not, even in the same circle of living, one compares with the other. They develop a feeling that their life is not better when compared to the other. Heaving, dreaming without proper sleep at night about the happiness of others. Such kind of people will never get the point that human life style is ever-changing. The factors that shape these changes include technology, economic conditions and personal choices. What one has to do is just work little more to make themselves better than others instead of sighing or talking ill about others. There is popular song by Brenda Lee which says about how people feel after letting out what they had. One will never be satisfied with what they have. They long for what others have. Even this song tells how a lady thought her life with the other man would be happy but actually not. After realizing she says “I know the grass is greener there, For that's just where you are”

When a person is not satisfied with what he has and desires to live a life of others is found to be grass is greener syndrome. It is a psychological disease named after the proverb – grass is always greener on the other side. The general idea of the proverb is that people think that their situation would be happier if there is a change in their current circumstances. The inference is that others situation is not as palpable as it thought to be. This proverb is based on the old saying of the poet Ovid. In his book *The Art of Love* he “the harvest is always richer in another man’s field (102)” which was modified from a Latin proverb.

The grass is greener syndrome is a mental illness which block a person to see the positive around and acknowledge. Even after obtaining the greener side of the life, the person hunts further and feels unsatisfied throughout. This happens since the person looks at the negative side of himself. This led to the increase the chances of anxiety and depression. There are various common symptoms of this disease like perfectionism, preoccupation, commitment, comparison, constant need and ingratitude. It is not such a threatening mental issue if it is addressed in the beginning stage.

*Dollar Bahu* by Sudha Murthy is an Indian novel which revolves around a middle class family in Bangalore. The novel talks about the issues faced by the common middle class families and the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The characters in the novel are ordinary and tried their best to lead a moralistic life. The scenes shift between India and America. Grass is greener syndrome is identified among few characters in the novel and is found in the narration part.

As the novel shifts between India and America, it was thought that the other side better than this side. It was the thought of Chandru that America is always rich, healthy and vibrant. The government is efficient and effective to tackle any kind of problems of the country. The youth has wide opportunity to find any job at any time. People can move around without anybody’s help apart from Google map. It is very easy to buy a car or house. Life will be more affordable without power cuts or water shortages. He opined that life in America would be happier that being in India. After moving to America Chandru would address on different issues that he has witnessed to his mother Gouramma like the availability of cheap food, trustworthiness of people around while buying newspaper or while paying for the bus.

Gowamma when landed on America felt the same as of Chandru. She thought that it is some new unnamed loka like, “nagaloka, yakshaloka, kinnaraloka (81)” which was described in Hindu mythology. On her way to Chandru’s house, she sighted the glimpses of scenery with new variety of trees queued on both sides of the road. The weather was cold and she could not find any people walking on the road except high speed cars. There was “...no cyclist, no rickshaws, cows, bulls, donkeys, horses, handcarts (81)”.

Chandru, after being in America for six years returned to India for his wedding. He found India felt that the country is very populated, crowd and people are in hassle. He found pollution in air, water and food. He felt disconnected and thought that country has changed a lot with dustier and dirtier streets, hectic construction activity all around and people struggling to move around freely because of over crowd. He also thought that there was no empty ground or site nearby. It was diagnosed that his stomach pain was because of spicy and rich food that he took after his long journey from America.

The desire to be in America did not last long. After stating his life in America, he found things interesting only for a shorter period. He started missing his family, especially his mother. He would call his mother every weekend to describe his life in America. Though he felt proud to earn in dollars which “ is the most powerful financial instrument of modern times. It is magic money (25)” he missed his family. After getting green card and settled in America, he managed his living which means he survived without happiness. He felt the same when he visited India for his sister’s wedding. He realized that though he earned in dollars, became rich, he lost the real love and mutual

trust. “It was an unalterable truth that no amount of dollars could buy the warmth of genuine affection. (70)” Chandru shared his true self to Vinutha when she said that he has everything in life in this way

You, Vinutha, are living among your own people speaking the same language, sharing the same culture. Your child will grow up with his grandparents, with the same set of values. You are not compelled to live in another country with a different language and alien climatic conditions. (72)

Even Gouramma realized the same after her short stay in America. She suffered all sort of discomfort like bathroom and toilet attached no ritual to be celebrated with the neighbours on the day, the language and life style. She felt so bad how children were brought up independently without much pampering. Her anxiety started to increase and awaited a chance to return to India after a stressful life in America. She was delighted to see cycles, rickshaws, street hawkers, the dust and the heat of India after landing into the mother country. She accepted that “America is great but our country is no less (136)”.

Chandru thought that life in America would be heavenly till he went to America without knowing the practical difficulty that he would face in the alien land. After landing he understood the worth of his true happiness and peace which was abundant in his mother land. Gouramma felt jealous when women in gatherings wear expensive saris and jewel; when they spoke of their children who were in abroad. She wanted even her children to be placed in abroad somewhere. Gouramma though stayed for a short duration, decided not to turn back ever to America. She was the one who prayed God almost all the time to get a chance to visit America who, well along realized that it was not a suitable land for living. Only on later stages, she understood how people after losing all their loved ones, kith and kin, live in foreign countries just for dollars. She was sorry for the people who settled down in abroad. She felt really bad about her son Chandru and her granddaughter who is to be brought up in American Culture.

Chandru and Gouramma has compared India with America in all these terms whereas, Shamanna’s views on America is very different and practical from these two. He comprehends the need of the money to live lavishly among today’s generation. He gave out his opinion to Vinutha based on common sense since he has not visited or lived in America. He accepted that it is only because of dollars the family’s financial situation has raised and they were able to raise the upper floor. He opinioned that it could be the case in many other lower middle class families also; they would have built house, marry off their daughters and live without economic crises. He continues further stating that the dollars has fulfilled the basic requirement of the families with the cost of peace of mind. Though dollars has changed the lifestyle of so many, it has created a rift among the family members like financial and social distinctions within families. Shamanna is very rational in this instance when compared to Chandru and Gouramma.

Gouramma not only compared the lifestyle of two countries but also her daughters-in-law. Though she was satisfied with the services of Vinutha at the beginning, Gouramma started to compare the behaviour and financial status of Vinutha and Jamuna after the engagement of Jamuna and Chandru. Vinutha is a poor soul from Hyderabad who was brought up by her relatives. She is very simple at heart. She worked as a teacher where Shamanna worked. Vinutha was very happy to be married herself in a family with all sorts of relatives. She was very dutiful and sincere not only in her school but also in her house. After the arrival of Vinutha, Gouramma forgot to enter into the kitchen. Vinutha never complained about anybody on any occasion. She accepted life as it is and wanted to lead a peaceful life. When Gouramma was diagnosed with breast cancer, Vinutha took complete care by sitting next to her every moment. Not the daughter or elder daughter-in-law took risk to visit her. All the verbal abuse of Gouramma was taken by Vinutha. For Surabhi’s wedding

Gouramma asked her opinion from everyone and importantly from Jamuna but Vinutha was least considered. “Vinutha remained silent. As usual, nobody has asked for her opinion. If there is no respect for the opinions of a particular member in a family, she thought bitterly, the person is an outsider. (62)” Vinutha stood on her stand and decided not to expect much from her mother-in-law or sister-in-law. At the same she does not want to give up her duty as a responsible daughter-in-law.

Gouramma was immensely happy to get a rich bride for his elder son Chandru. Jamuna’s constant excuse to escape from the Gouramma’s family were immediately accepted and left to her own choice. Gouramma’s eyes were blinded towards the presentence of her elder daughter-in-law because of money. When Vinutha reported Surabhi’s relationship with Gopi, Surabhi and Gouramma cursed Vinutha and grudged at every possible moment. Surabhi commented that, “Not all that glitters are gold. She is very cunning woman. That is the reason people say you should bring brides from good families. Look at Jamuna! It reflects on her family. She is so unselfish and kind (56)”.

Gouramma would repeat almost every day that her family is very lucky to have Jamuna as daughter-in-law. Constant praise of Jamuna was enchanted in the house for the unknown and absent. Whenever she talked about Jamuna, she addressed like “ .... Our Jamuna, in America ... (55)” the two daughters-in-law were compared regularly. Whenever a guest a visited Gouramma would display the wedding album of Chandru and Jamuna and would talk about the gift presented for their wedding to show off the expensive marriage of their son. She even thought of taking her daughter and son-in-law to America and make them stay in Chandru’s house for a year or two till her son-in-law gets a good job in America. Everytime the dollars send from America made Gouramma to think high of Jamuna; the money for Surabhi’s wedding, the gifts and saris given for her wedding and the money for her treatment. She always thought that Jamuna was kind, generous and affectionate towards the family.

The true self of Jamuna was revealed when Gouramma spent few months in America. Gouramma observed a different Jamuna in America. Jamuna who showed herself “carefree, talkative, a spendthrift” was really a “quieter, calculating and very conscious of her diet. She would drive even twenty miles if she could something for five dollars less. (103)” Gouramma was really upset the way Jamuna behaves. Jamuna wanted things to be done in her way without interrupted either by Chandru or Gouramma. She refused Manasi to sleep with her grandmother. She declined the offer made by Gouramma to give bath to Manasi. After some months Gouramma came to know that the gifts and saris given to Surabhi for her wedding were already used by Jamuna. On the days of Jamuna’s friends, Gouramma traced her true identity.

..... I wanted my mother-in-law for one year. She was dying to come to US anyway, and my husband wanted his mother to come. It was the right time that I called for her. In this one year, she has looked after us. The house and baby sat Manasi. (129)

Gouramma was collapsed to listen to these words of Jamuna. She never expected such words from her. Gouramma had high opinion on Jamuna but she never thought that she was cleverly used well by her daughter-in-law. She could not blame Chandru too. Since, he was living in an alien land, he as to subdue himself to lead their family life peacefully though he was successful in his official work.

The misery of Gouramma ended when she landed in Bangalore. She agreed that

Grass was always greener on the otherside. America was no longer a fantasy land for her. There was pain, misery and happiness there, as in any other country. It was no longer the land of the mighty dollars, which made magic. It was not paradise. (136)

Not only the life with Jamuna made her to decide this but also her exploration on the lifestyle of other people in America made her to take this decision.

Chandru once obsessed with the desire to spend his life in America accepted that life was miserable in America expect for the money that he has earned in dollars. Gowamma who was fantasied by both America and her elder daughter-in-law was awaiting to grasp the true love of Vinutha and Harsha. Gowamma was identified with the symptoms of anxiety, expectation, depression and ingratitude. Life taught them the lesson at the right time. The thought of grass is greener went wrong after the experience that she had in America. She recognized the beauty of her own land which is more fresh, healthy and beautiful.

Sudha Murthy used the best language which was easily understood by every one – MONEY. More than words, more than humanity, money speaks better in today’s world among people. The impossible can be made possible through money. It becomes the mediator between people. The stronger the mediator the stronger the work gets over. In this digital world people have no time to turn to others and talk or to give a word concern. People assume that money can make things alright but really not. It was nicely conveyed through the character Chandru that “anyone can help in the form of Money. But one should not forget the presence and care of people around you. (75)” people are more important than anything else in this world. So let us stop feeling jealous of others and lose our own life. Live your life to the fullest.

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