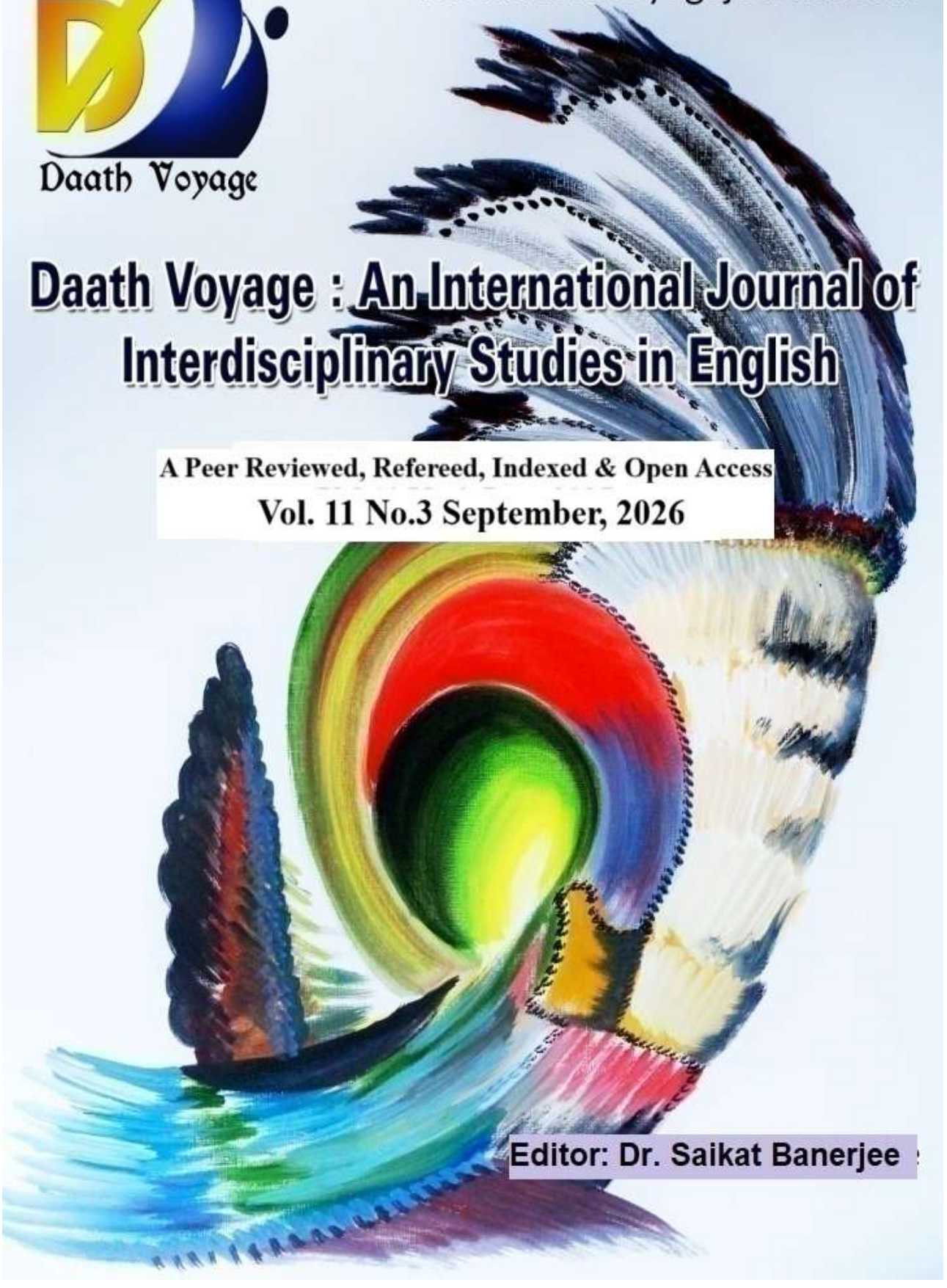
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Nature, Culture and Human Values: A Green Humanistic Reading in Sudha Murty's *House of Cards* and *Dollar Bahu*

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Abstract: Green Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationship between human beings, environment, culture, literature giving importance to ethical and ecological interconnectedness. It analyses the values of human responsibilities and enduring engagement with nature. Sudha Murty's novels *House of Cards* and *Dollar Bahu* depict simple village life and rural landscapes giving importance to family bonding and ethical values. It explores the effects of materialism, migration and moral decline on human relationships and environmental harmony. *House of Cards* highlights materialistic greed, corrupted practices in the medical field, destruction of moral and environmental degradation. *Dollar Bahu* depicts the ecological isolation caused by materialism and western culture. This research paper reflects on green humanistic values observing moral living and being one with nature. Through Eco-critical elements, focusing on rural life, differentiating between materialistic and country life, the author promotes ecological peace and sustainable human patterns in her works. This study focuses on the concept of Green Humanities, by Lawrence Buell who has laid a theoretical framework analyzing the ethical connections that literature creates with human beings and nature. Sudha Murty's narratives encourage readers to promote environmental well-being in relation with human beings.

Key Words: Ecological elements, sustainability, Green Humanistic values, environmental degradation.

Introduction

Green Humanities explores and emphasizes the significance of human values and ideas which shape the natural world. Deterioration of the environment endangers both ecological stability and diversity of cultures. Green Humanities is associated with Eco-Criticism and it studies the relationship between

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human beings and nature. It deals with the understanding of human culture and its interaction with nature giving significance to moral living and critiques of consumerism.

In *House of Cards,* the author depicts Aladahalli, a village in Karnataka and how it stands as a symbol of peace and serenity. It has less noise pollution. The description of the natural environment and landscapes are amazing in their beauty. The author has immense admiration for the natural world. The great advantage is the school which has both English and Tamil medium. Education is given significance for the students in the village. Mridula, the protagonist hails from this peaceful village which is closely associated with nature. The village symbolizes the Green Humanistic concept of being one with nature. As Lawrence Beull states "Environmental texts insist that human and nonhuman interests cannot be disentangled" (Buell 6). The opening lines in the novel depicts village life as a harmonious ecological space where the community is closely connected with the natural world. Mridula was among the top students in the class. She has long dark hair and always wears a string of flowers on her hair while going out of her house. She enjoyed her life to the fullest being one with nature. The novel focuses on Mridula who is an intelligent woman from a rural background and her husband Sanjay an ambitious impoverished doctor. Sanjay and Mridula's marriage shifts from a natural and peaceful environment to urban existence. This transition is one of the central concepts in connecting the text with ecological sensibilities. Their life changes drastically as they move from village to city for their living. Sanjay becomes ambitious and slides into corrupt practices. The couple's migration from rural to urban life brings a drastic change not only in their lifestyle and behavior but also marks a rupture with the ecological rootedness. In times of emotional turmoil, Mridula's recollection of rural landscapes acts as an ecological memory indicating that nature is a source of healing and reshaping personal identity.

Dollar Bahu revolves around two daughters-in-law Vinuta and Jamuna. Gouramma has two sons Chandru and Girish. Chandru goes to the United States and earns well. He marries Jamuna and they settle in the United States. Gouramma feels very proud of her elder son and daughter in law as she has brought wealth and prosperity to the family. She calls her 'Dollar Bahu' referring to her daughter-in- law Jamuna who has brought wealth in dollars. Jamuna seems to be uncaring and disrespectful.

Girish her second son stays in India and marries Vinuta who is a traditional and simple girl. Vinuta is a soft spoken and hardworking woman. She belongs to a poor family and did not bring wealth for the family. Due to her poor background her mother-in-law mistreats her. Her only companion is nature which

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symbolizes ecological consciousness. This family is deeply rooted in ethical values in India whereas the other family who lives in the United States deals with materialism.

Cheryll Glotfelty examines Green Humanities as the study of the interaction between nature and literature. This shows how texts often reflect and encourages readers to view ecological awareness. Lawrence Buell talks about the concept of environmental imagination where nature plays a vital role in shaping human identity and ethical values in literature (Buell). Das and Vidya in their article states in Dollar Bahu, Vinuta's connection with nature has a deep sense of psychological resilience and personal fulfilment (Das). Sarita Pandey's examines ecofeminism as an intersectional study of feminism, eco criticism and literature creating a relationship between women and nature which can be seen in the characters of Sudha Murty (Pandey). Kesur and Vispute in their article, *Dollar Bahu* and *House of Cards* highlight the significance of ethical values and human interactions, portraying characters who navigate societal challenges with empathy and understanding (Kesar).

These multiple perspectives help the readers to analyze Sudha Murty's novels in terms of ecological awareness embedded with social, ethical and cultural narrative. *House of Cards* represents fragility, imbalance and the basic foundation of marriage is neglected which is seen in a family and environment. It becomes a powerful symbol where the delicate relationship between nature and humanity is portrayed in the novel. *Dollar Bahu* reflects ecological and ethical imbalance. Based on economic status the narrative critiques the glorification and commodification of relationships.

Green Humanism is the term emphasizing the interdependence between humanity and the natural world. Both are intertwined. Humanism talks about ethical values, dignity and environmental limits that should never be neglected.

Ecological Alienation and consciousness

Ecological Alienation refers to distancing from nature which leads to imbalance in human values and relationships. Ecological imbalance can be seen through the lives of Mridula and Sanjay. As the couple shifts from the rural to urban life there is a transition from the connectedness with nature to ecological alienation. The rural life portrays a balanced harmony with nature, fresh and less polluted air, community living and open fields. Being one with nature shows how one's character is formed through moral values and ecological awareness. The village where she resides emphasizes the ecological setting and her father's connection to it. Her father Bhemanna, treats the animals who are sick with natural remedies and teaches

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his daughter ethical values. “You should always be open. Don’t hide, Hiding is a sin” (*House of Cards* 23). This states the genuineness and openness of the natural world and how human beings should also adhere to nature.

As they move into the city the connection with nature fades. The city is with huge buildings, hospitals, and ambitious living. Urban life causes excessive ambition, artificiality, material success and alienation from humane and ethical values and even disturbs the natural harmony. As stated by Lawrence Beull "a new kind of moral and political accountability in human engagement with other species and ecosystems"(Buell 11). Sanjay’s ambitious nature drives him to earn more wealth and financial status reducing the decline of his moral values. His obsession with the pursuit of the advancement of his career creates a gap not only with his family but also with moral responsibilities indicating that alienation from nature is closely linked with the separation from compassion and meaningful relationships. Environmental contexts are shaped by ethical consciousness. Rain acts a symbol of renewal in her life "The earth is full of dust and is dry in the summer. Rain settles the dust, washes away the dirt and makes the world green” (*House of Cards* 13). Nature acts a restorative and living force in Mridula’s life when she feels isolated and depressed.

In *Dollar Bahu*, Vinuta lives with sustainable principles, her careful use of resources, community-oriented living, and she has the ability to accept struggles in life. She gives importance to relationships more than money and her lifestyle is low consumption in using resources for living. Ecological consciousness can be seen in Vinuta’s relationship with nature and through her simplicity. As stated by Lawrence Beull "The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 7). Vinuta’s gardening gives her inner peace despite the emotional neglect which is seen within her family. Due to the radiance of the sun in her face as she gathered the Bakula and Parijata flowers, she closed her eyes and felt that happiness in her heart. The home garden symbolizes ecological space, belongingness and staying away from materialistic world. The garden creates a peaceful and restorative atmosphere in her surroundings. Vinuta’s small garden “resulted in the peaceful soothing environment within the campus” (*Dollar Bahu* 78). Nature plays a significant role in Vinuta’s life as a healing space, ethical living and sustainability which is mistreated and undervalued by her in-laws.

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Materialism and Ecological Imbalance

Lawrence Beull states "The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest" (Buell 7). The trajectory of Sanjay's life reflects ecological imbalance as his growing ambition on accumulating wealth disrupts family relationships, personal values and a sense of social responsibility. In his early stages of life, he had a balanced connection with family and surroundings which mirrored a steady equilibrium found in nature. Later, he totally detaches himself from moral values and gives more importance to wealth rather than family disrupting the balanced existence. The title of the novel *House of Cards* signifies the fragility of life built on ambition, greed and instability which can be easily collapsed due to pressure. Sanjay's drive to material advancement reflects the exploitation of nature where significance is given to money over sustainability and harmony. Greed and Money begin to govern him and he deteriorates from family bonding and morality. He detaches himself from his wife Mridula, which once structured his existence with sustainability and harmony.

The rhythms of rural life reflect harmony between human beings and the natural world as stated by Buell that "ethical consciousness is shaped by human interaction with the environment" (Buell 7). Detachment from nature fosters materialistic desires and excessive ambition as Sanjay gradually erodes emotional well-being and family relationships. As the pursuit of wealth and social status takes precedence over compassion and human connection, individuals experience emotional alienation, resulting in the loss of peace, belonging, and ethical values within the family. Buell's Green Humanistic framework interprets the detachment as a symptom of an androcentric worldview in which materialism dominates human relationship and environmental values.

Ecological imbalance in *Dollar Bahu* emerges through a rupture in domestic life where the family becomes obsessed with wealth and foreign prestige. The home which was rooted with simplicity and emotional bonding is disturbed with consumerist culture which is associated with migration and economic advantages. As stated by Lawrence Beull "Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation." (Buell 7) Gouramma, mother of Chandru and Girish, is deeply captivated by foreign currency and status. She gets herself disconnected from emotional and family bonding. Her fascination with wealth disturbs the ecological balance creating conflicts within the family. When she visits the United States to meet her son and her daughter-in-law, she realizes that the dazzling lifestyle which she idealized proved to lack genuineness. This is the turning point in her life and she realizes the kindness, simplicity

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and the true value of Vinuta. She realized that "the grass is always greener on the other side" (*Dollar Bahu* 135). True happiness lies in peace and cultural rootedness rather than materialism which is the key priorities to green humanities.

Home - a symbol of the Eco System

Lawrence Beull draws Tuan's concept of "centers of felt value" where home refers to love, warmth and stability and not really a physical structure but later in the novels it becomes a place of conflict and isolation. When the ecological systems are disturbed, it collapses and human relationships are easily broken down when moral values are lost. This happens in the case of Mridula and Sanjay in *House of Cards*. Home resembles a balanced eco system but out of professional ambition, ethical values decline, emotional harmony disrupts and affects family bonding. When there is ecological imbalance -pollution, depletion of resources weakens the natural eco system just like Sanjay's greed and materialism disturbs the atmosphere of the family creating a rift between husband and wife.

In *Dollar Bahu,* a balanced domestic eco system is disturbed by materialism and foreign currency as stated by Lawrence Beull "Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text" (Buell 7). A healthy home requires care and affection but Gouramma disturbs the domestic equilibrium giving importance to dollars. Vinuta, her daughter-in-law sustains the family by supporting and sacrificing her physical comfort. Just like pollinators and wetlands perform indispensable work without any appreciation, so does Vinuta's work and emotional labour sustain the eco system in silence.

Fragility and Collapse of relationships

The family relationship which is built on greed and overconsumption collapses just like materialism promotes overconsumption leading to environmental degradation. As Lawrence Beull "identifies attachment to place as a defining characteristic of environmental literature, arguing that literary texts cultivate an ethical and imaginative engagement with particular environments" (Buell 55–57). Mridula values inner peace and human relationships as Lawrence Beull highlights the importance of ethical values rather than materialism.

The novel signifies ethical values which are the essential things for a meaningful life and not ambitious for money. The title *House of Cards* metaphorically symbolizes the character Sanjay who is ambitious over material world and his family relationships become fragile and collapse. *House of Cards* is delicate

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and should be maintained but if there is slight disturbance it could lead to destruction. When seen in the family, ethical foundation should be given priority over material success. The ecological environment is also fragile but if it is disturbed it leads to destruction. The novel shows how detachment from nature and material desires reshape human beings and ethical values and identity.

The title *Dollar Bahu* suggests materialism and growing obsession with money in a middle-class family. Economic aspirations and globalization distort human relationships. Significance of money over emotional values reveal the moral degradation caused by materialism. Buell explains that "environment should not be limited to wilderness but includes the human-built world and lived environments" (Buell 24). Relationships are governed by financial status rather than genuine affection. It gives a contrast between western culture with Indian traditional simplicity emphasizing the character of Vinuta as a healing force.

Nature as an active presence

Nature is seen as a significant participant rather than a decorative backdrop as stated by Lawrence Beull that nature shapes human existence. *House of Cards* and *Dollar Bahu* are domestic novels but nature plays a vital role in molding their emotions, decisions of the character and moral values. Gardens, flowers, rain and rural landscapes portrayed in every individual's life makes nature more peaceful, calm and influential to human beings. In *House of Cards*, Mridula faces disappointment or loneliness and the natural environment gives her comfort and peace. Nature becomes her protector where she regains inner strength. Rather than portrayed as decorative scenery these elements actively contribute to her emotional and psychological healing.

In *Dollar Bahu*, Nature embodies the characteristics of compassion, simplicity and contentment through the character of Vinuta. Nature is like a framework for a balanced and harmonious living. The absence of emotional bonding is reflected in Jamuna who lives in America. While she is economically attractive, she is emotionally detached from the family. The physical environment plays a significant role in influencing identity, relationships and priorities. Nature seems to be silent and brings a transformation to Gouramma who equates happiness with wealth, status and life in America. "Gouramma returns from America having realized that wealth does not guarantee love or respect" (*Dollar Bahu* 134). Later she understands the importance and genuine satisfaction come from cultural rootedness, compassion and mutual respect rather than materialism. Her transformation suggests Buell's argument stating that human beings are inseparable from the natural world.

Conclusion

These novels explore emotional ecology, critiques of materialism significantly contributing to Green Humanities. There are connections between moral life, ecological harmony and emotional well-being. Through the character of Sanjay in *House of Cards*, the researcher states how ambition destroys emotional stability and moral values within the family. Sanjay's transformation is viewed as ecological alienation where the loss of human values parallels the disruption of natural and emotional harmony under capitalist modernity. When consumer culture and materialism are unchecked, there are destructive consequences of emotional trust and intimacy within the family.

In *Dollar Bahu*, the researcher focuses on the emotional disintegration where the family is obsessed with wealth and the status weakening the bonds of relationships. This is a form of ecological imbalance in which the ethical and emotional sustainability of domestic life is disrupted. Through her novels it reminds the readers that home, family bonding and environment are interconnected and it requires care, affection and harmony to sustain it. Traumatic experiences faced by the characters, narrative techniques used and sociological issues can be explored for further research.

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