

The Dynamics of Human Relationships in the Select Short Stories by Sayantani Dasgupta

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Abstract:

An Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, Sayantani Dasgupta was born in Calcutta and raised in New Delhi. The books by the author include *Women Who Misbehave*, *Fire Girl: Essays on India, America and the In-Between*, *The House of Nails: Memories of a New Delhi Childhood* and *Brown Women Have Everything: Essays on (Dis)Comfort and Delight*. In addition to the remarkable essays on a variety of topics on women's status and social obligations, the author has published a number of short stories. The stories deal with the psycho-social oscillations in the lives of the characters-mostly women-who display the characteristics of the modern free woman but are compelled to conform to the norms due to the societal pressures. One of the recurrent themes in the stories is the changing contexts of human relationships in the wake of the demands of globalisation and the corporate work culture. The present paper proposes to explore the dynamics of human relationships as depicted by Sayantani Dasgupta in some of her select short stories.

Keywords: dynamics, globalisation, human relationships, oscillations, social obligations

Introduction:

Syantani Dasgupta is one of the most prominent literary and academic figures not only on the Pan-Indian but also on the International level. Her essays on different topics related to the lives and experiences of women have made an indelible mark on the scholarly discussions about the status of women in the modern times. Dasgupta deals with a variety of questions like women's marginalisation, racial discrimination, problems faced by the working women and many other. Through her stories, Dasgupta raises a number of questions about the intricacy of human experiences in the wake of the changing demands thanks to globalisation and the corporate work culture. One of the recurring themes handled by the author in her short stories is the dynamics of human relationships in the 21st century multicultural world. The present paper proposes to analyse the dynamics of human relationships as depicted by Sayantani Dasgupta in her select stories.

Dasgupta's *The Party* deals with the experiences of a young working woman who tries her best to maintain relationships with her colleagues and friends, though faced with a number of problems. The story is set in New Delhi and the temporal setting of the story is the scorching hot summer. Using the second person narrative, the author tries to give the readers a sense of immediacy and relate the woman's story with their own experiences.

Though it has been a long day and the last working day of the week-a Friday, the protagonist has to attend the three-month anniversary celebration organised by her former colleague-Tanu. The lady is not interested in the occasion, but cannot avoid it, being a good person. As she enters the house of her

colleague, the woman envies the beauty and elegance of the structure and the furniture. When the woman meets the husband and wife-Mahesh and Tanu, she clearly feels the age difference of fifteen years between them. This is a clear indicator to the fact that in modern times marriages are used as a means of financial and social security and the things like age difference do not matter much.

A number of guests have been invited for the party and Pia and Projapati are also present on the occasion. The couple is lesbian and the protagonist is well aware of their new romance and decides to forgive them in case they ignore her. The man who is hired to replace the protagonist when she left the previous job, Auro is also present for the party. One more woman named Rani is also attending the evening party.

The people present in the party discuss topics like the philosophy and principles put forth by Nietzsche, topics of least interest to the lady. The woman is quite tired and hungry but nobody offers her any food or drink. She has to take some drink for herself and she is astonished to find no ice in the house. She receives another shock to see potato chips kept as appetisers in the party. When it is declared that Mahesh would cook Biryani for dinner, the woman doubts the quality of dinner she would get. In spite of all this, she becomes ready to help Mahesh in the kitchen as there is no other way for her to pass time.

The woman is quite aware of the relationship between Tanu and Projapati before Pia joined the company. She quite extensively comments on the lesbian relationship between the two and later Pia and Projapati entering into a love-hate relationship. After a lot of time spent in the kitchen with Mahesh, the woman sees Tanu and Projapati and is reminded of their past relations once again. When the lady knows about Mahesh's ignorance about Tanu's lesbian orientation and thinks of him as a vulnerable man, she decides to reveal the secret to Mahesh. She is quite aware that Mahesh will not be able to accept Tanu's bisexuality and it would be a shock for him. Finally, when the truth is revealed, Tanu accepts her lesbian orientation and shows a growing interest in Pia rather than Projapati.

The story, in this way, is about the revelation and acceptance of the sexual identity of the women and contextualises it in the social norms in the form of Mahesh's expected reaction at the strange revelation. It also deals with the attempts of the protagonist to maintain social relations in spite of a lot of differences. The story *Geographies* deals with the theme of the disparity between the virtual and the real when it comes to relationships. The lovers in the story are online lovers and their relationship has seen two years of online exchange of letters, poems and messages. The woman in love is a resident of Delhi, whereas the man dwells in America. The regular exchange of letters on the email has made the woman dream about the nature of the man and about their first meeting face to face.

However, the woman receives a mail from the man wherein he confesses his relationship with another woman and just dumps her in a very direct way. The woman decides to follow suit and, out of vengeance, decides to get rid of his memories by developing relationship with other men. His tactics to forget him don't work as she doesn't have any 'gritty and tangible' complaint against him.

The meeting between the lovers turns out to be a realization for the woman. It takes place in Seattle and they meet over a dinner. After spending the evening together, the man drops the woman at a long distance from her hotel. This action on the part of the man makes the woman realise that he did not care much for her and there is no true love for her in his heart. The woman is quite assured now that by getting rid of the memories of their mutual exchange of words of love would not cause her any significant loss.

The story, in this way, is an eye-opener critique of the modern day concepts of online love and relationships. The vast disparity between the virtual and the real is underlined by the author in a very apt manner.

The story *Gabriella* depicts the predicament of a working girl who has to continue her work even after getting the news of her mother's death. In spite of the news of the sad demise of her mother from a severe stroke, Gabriella has to face the customers in the restaurant on the strip where she works, with a smile. Gabriella can surely ask for some days' break from her work but she is told that it is not necessary for her to attend the funeral. Gabriella remembers her mother when she beholds the fingers of another person who works in the restaurant.

The couple being served by Gabriella doesn't seem to be on good terms with each other. The girl looks as if tortured and even thrashed by the man as she bears some bruises on her ankles. Gabriella also bears some marks of which her sister is totally unaware. Gabriella also remembers about the scornful and sarcastic comments on her by her sister. The memories of her mother make Gabriella restless for a while and she finds herself unable to face the reality of the world around her.

The story, in this way, tries to redefine the concept of human relations and the obligations thrust upon the people due to circumstances.

Conclusion:

The close analysis of the above stories by Sayantani Dasgupta clearly displays the author's concern with human relationships. The author attempts to explore the changing facets of the family and other relations in the wake of the demands of the compelling multicultural work atmosphere and the urge to catch the deadly speed of the modern progress. She raises concerns over the deteriorating human bonds and the self-centeredness of the modern working class people.

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