

Incompatible Relation between Human and Society Affecting Behaviorism: A Close Study of the Characters in the Select Works of George Saunders

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Abstract— Society profoundly impacts human behaviorism, shaping how individuals think, feel, and act. It studies how people's actions and responses are influenced by their environment and social context. The 'Science of Society' was established in the year 19th Century and gradually was recognized to be specifically the study of societies and also to ponder over the relationships among individuals within the societies. This study delves into examining the human personality and behaviorism disturbed by the loosely conjoined relation between an individual and society. There are several key ways in which society influences the characters' behavior in George Saunders's works. Saunders's technique of depicting the reality in the fictional characters has always gained appraisal and the readers have empathized with him. The cultural norms and values, socialization, bullying, social roles, group influence, social pressure, conformity, 'out of reality concepts', cultural diversity, rejections, social hierarchies, conflicting interests, unrealistic expectations, etc. have massively affected the human psyche. Saunders portrays the reality of society and how it impacts human cognition, which arises from the inherent complexities of human nature and structures and expectations imposed by society. This paper emphasizes the personality study and his readers to learn that we live in a society that provides a framework for organizing and governing human interactions, which can also lead to various challenges and conflicts. The significant works of Saunders, at some point, create awareness among the people.

Index Terms— Behaviourism, Cultural diversity, Human psyche, Society, Unreal

Human behaviorism refers to the study of how people's actions and responses are influenced by their environment and the social context they are in. Society has a profound impact on human behaviorism, shaping how individuals think, feel, and act. There are several ways in which society may influence human behavior. Group influence could be one of the most significant reasons for the effect of behaviorism. Group dynamics can lead individuals to conform to the group's norms, adopt its values, and sometimes even engage in behaviors they might not engage in. Human beings, we believe, are social creatures, and their behavior is often influenced by the groups they belong to. The second thing is 'Social pressure and conformity'. The fear of being ostracized or rejected by the group can lead people to adopt certain behaviors or beliefs, even if they might not personally agree with them. The process of socialization begins early in life and involves learning the norms, customs, and behaviors of one's society. There is mental pressure on individuals because various conventional societies throw societal rules and regulations on a person, and a person is helpless to worry about the status, image, and background of the family. Family, peers, schools, and media significantly shape an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, children learn language, manners, and social roles through interactions with their family and peers.

The book *Pastoralia* by George Saunders is a collection of darkly comedic stories that explore aspects of modern society and human nature. *Pastoralia*, one of the stories from the anthology *Pastoralia*, delves into themes of workplace

dynamics, dehumanization, group influence, and the struggle for survival in a surreal and absurd setting. The character named Janet works with the protagonist at a theme park called Pastoralia which features a prehistoric exhibit where they play cavemen for the amusement of the visitors. Janet is portrayed as a someone annoying and talkative coworker who often irritates the protagonist. The protagonist plays the role of a caveman named "Kendall", and his job is to interact with visitors while pretending to be a caveman. The story primarily revolves around the protagonist's frustrations with Janet and the absurdities of their working conditions. The theme park's management insists that they adhere strictly to the "Script" provided for their caveman roles, which includes speaking in broken English and performing bizarre rituals for the amusement of the visitors. Janet is humiliated in her workplace; she goes through several challenges in the jail with her son over there. There are extreme abuses and vulgar comments made for each other. "The cavewoman called me a suckass in front of my child" (Saunders 57-58). The conversation goes to intense profanity. "We learned that some cavewomen had potty mouths" (57). The huge captions used to disgrace, "LOSS THE CAVELADY, SHE IS THE WORST" (58). Society has a multifaceted influence on human behaviorism, affecting everything from individual actions to broader cultural patterns. Understanding their influences is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and individuals seeking to address societal issues and promote positive change. Despite the challenging working conditions and the bizarre environment, the protagonist tries to maintain some sense of

dignity and professionalism. He also struggles with personal issues, such as dealing with his nagging ex-wife who constantly demands child support payments.

Society assigns specific roles and responsibilities to individuals based on their gender, age, and other factors. These roles come with expectations about how individuals should behave and interact within their social groups. For example, traditional gender roles may influence how men and women are expected to behave in various contexts. On the other hand, institutions like religion, government, and education systems play a vital role in shaping behavior by establishing rules, and regulations. As the story unfolds, the protagonist's patience with Janet is tested to the extreme. The theme park's management continuously makes excuses for Janet's inadequacies and never addresses the issues, leaving the protagonist increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with his job. *Pastoralia* is a scathing commentary on workplace dynamics, the dehumanization of employees, and the absurdity of modern society's focus on entertainment and consumerism. Saunders uses dark humor and satire to criticize the way people are often treated as disposable and replaceable cogs in a soulless machine.

The story is just one example of the thought-provoking and often unsettling tales found in the *Pastoralia* collection, showcasing the juxtaposition of social commentary with a distinct and imaginative narrative style. Winky's brother Neil Yaniky, is a tiny man, around thirty, who encourages himself to attend the seminar of Tom Rodgers to gain inner peace. He too, like other characters isn't satisfied with his life, his physical features, and his economic status. His appearance disturbed him, he was "balding on top and balding on the sides" (74). He lacked confidence because he knew what society accepted was not in him. He is losing all the qualities that a young or middle-aged man should inherit. "He had no career, really, and business but only soldered little triangular things in his basement" (74). Group influence is one of the principal factors that break the bridge between the human and the society. Whether Neil finds inner peace in the seminar is uncertain but one thing is certain he gets negatively influenced regarding living one's own life. After he reaches home, his sister welcomes him heartfully, and on the other hand, he is planning to kick his sister Winky out of the house. He might have misunderstood the lectures of Rodgers. "I seem to be trapped! ... I can't seem to get what I want" (70). More than the desire for peace, he then wishes for hope in his life, "Is there no hope for me" (70).

A group influence can be positive, it can be negative, Neil was taught a negative mantra in the seminar. "A mantra. A mantra can be thought of as a repeated internal reminder, can't it?" (71). Tom Rodgers conducts a series of seminars and in one of the seminars, he finds Neil to be stressful and unsatisfied with his life. Rodgers, while talking to Neil, gets to know that Neil is frustrated with his life, he is not comfortable living with his sister Winky. On the other side, Rodgers talks in such a manner that infuriates and influences

Neil to set his sister out of the house. "Winky: needs her own place ... See how we've simplified?" (76). Neil thinks this decision would be the best for him and this could solve the problem. Neil completely gets swayed away by these statements, since he is already on the verge of deserting Winky but he never gathers courage. Rodgers' seminar and talk has boosted Neil to finally take a step. "Have you told this person, this Winky, that her living with you is a stumbling block for your personal development? said Tom Rodgers" (77). The other side of the thoughts is bewildering, on the one hand, he thinks of abandoning her and on the other hand, he is also feeling bad and disturbed. His mind is in chaos, this becomes clear to the readers when Rodgers says, "You're kind-hearted. You don't want to hurt her. That's nice, but guess what? You are hurting her. You're hurting her by not telling her the truth" (77). Neil had determined to find inner peace for himself but the path that he had chosen to achieve his aim was not acceptable. This could hamper both Neil and his sister Winky.

After the seminar when he was returning home, "Neil was coming home soon and Winky was way way behind." (79). The living standards of Neil were a fantasy and an imagination of high sophisticated livelihood, in the high-class society. He had his false dreams which was the primary reason that triggered him and bothered him about his life. "Someday soon, when he came into these shops with his sexy wife, he'd simply point out items with his riding crop and they would be loaded into his waiting Benz" (84). Society creates such a benchmark that people go beyond their living standards to reach out the others. One can confidently refer to the story 'The Semplica Girl Diaries', the short story from the collection *Tenth of December*, the father of the house brings the semplica girls to the house as a birthday present for his daughter. It's quite clear that he has brought them not as a gift for his daughter but to elevate the status and wealth of his family and showcase their livelihood. No matter what the act is, legal or illegal the only thing that matters is reputation, appraisal, admiration, and gossip (to be in the limelight). There is always an insecure feeling that revolves around the common man like Neil in the society. It disturbs deeply when an individual returns to the real world and sees what he is. Neil walks back home from the seminar he goes through a thought process that his dad is a poor man and he remembers his mother in her Sunday dress which was torn, and her mother had taped because she couldn't afford to sew. There was a drastic difference between his imagination and his real life, which made it more difficult for Neil to survive. He desired utter joy and success and accomplished his motif, a motif, that was unhealthy, "Power Boost ... what you felt like doing at any given time, with certainty and joy, which was what, he realized, he was about to do, by kicking our Winky!" (86). Winky's messy behaviour depicts that she is unwell mentally, and her behaviour is not so appreciated by her brother, this is one of the reasons Neil hates his sister. He calls her by various awful names. "He wanted to smack her, insult

her, say something to wake her up but only kept moving toward his room, calling her terrible names under his breath” (88). The clash between individuality and societal expectations can lead to feelings of alienation and frustration. Neil was one of them.

Moreover, socioeconomic conditions can significantly impact human behavior, including factors like consumer behavior, work habits, and spending patterns. Economic inequalities and opportunities can affect how individuals perceive themselves and others, leading to various behavioral responses. For instance, the story *The End of Firpo in the World* from the collection *Pastoralia* is one of the disheartening stories of Saunders. The schoolboy named Cody is not content with his life. The boy of this age speaks depressing words that “would shrink their houses and flush them down the shitter” (127). How can a person ever imagine these threatening words coming from a boy of hardly an age? Before throwing all the blame on the boy (Cody), once examine the background, the history or ask a question to oneself “Why?”. Saunders gives the reason for such behavior and the thoughts that the boy had. It comes from one’s experiences, the ill-treatment from society the bullying from society, friends, and sometimes family. Moreover, Cody was named FIRPO. The term ‘firpo’ means the notorious, mischievous kid. Cody was discouraged everywhere and every time. There were several other names used for the little boy. “Cody you dick” (128). A lot of harshness and cruelty he had to face, not a word of love “Were you born a rectal shitbrain or did you take special rectal shitbrain lessons, in rectal shitbrain lessons did they teach you how to ruin everybody’s things?” (128). Cody’s behavior and his strange words did not surprise the readers, because such behavior and attitude usually take place in an individual when he/she is treated the same. “What’s impressive is Saunders’ ability to present familiar themes as if we’re seeing them for the first time” (Jain & Pathak b841).

Every reaction has an equal and opposite reaction and it is rightly said. Another reason for being such a mischievous boy is because of a lack of love and affection, no proper care and teaching. Cody was a schoolboy, like all other boys who wished to get their stuff like sports articles, school bags, playing stuff, skating tools, etc. but the other students in the school and the society had their things. As a result, he grows notorious because his needs are not satisfied by his parents, rather he is abused and beaten physically. The rich kids Dalmeyers, showcased their expensive materials and Cody destroys their things out of jealousy. “He had ruined a few Dalmeyer things in his life” (Saunders 128). If the boy had been lovingly taught things about right and wrong, good and bad, etc. things would have been different, Cody would be alive and would be fortunate to see his future and the world. Finally, Cody takes his bicycle and drives rashly on the roads, recalling all the tortures, bullying, and ill-treatment of society towards him, he dashes the vehicle and even before his last breath remembers the negative side of the society. “God loves

you, you are beautiful in His sight” (135). These were the first and the last positive words that Cody heard before his death, though it was too late.

Addressing the incompatibility between society and human beings requires thoughtful considerations of individual rights, cultural diversity, equitable systems, and environmental sustainability. Emphasizing empathy, understanding, and open conversation can help bridge the gap and foster a more harmonious coexistence between individuals and the societies they inhabit. Society has a multifaceted influence on human behaviorism, affecting everything from individual actions to broader cultural patterns. Understanding these influences is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and individuals seeking to address societal issues (sharing inner thoughts) and promote positive change. It is essential to strike a balance that allows for both societal cohesion and individual freedom, acknowledging that the needs of the collective and the individual are interconnected and interdependent.

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