

Homosocial Relationships: A Comparative Study based on Short Stories by Tagore and Gurdial Singh

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Abstract:

The west perceives the closeness of a man with another man, and a woman with another woman with somewhat biased mind. The terms gay and lesbian have got so established in the minds, that the moment we talk about same-sex relationships, these notions cloud our imagination. This is probably because the west perceives every relationship with sexual associations. However, these social relations and communications convey how the members of a society make sense of life and define themselves and others around them. Relationships and interactions in society can serve as valuable analytical tools to comprehend the social fabric, as these regular interactions in the lives of people, inadvertently place them in relationship with these people. A society is a construct of different powerful forces which accord its functioning and relationships to people's needs and requirements. So, as discussed earlier, we get our existence and relationships defined through various forces ranging from social, moral, ethical, economic, religious and administrative.

This paper aims to analyze the associations and affiliations amongst the non-familial members of the societies presented by the two writers in their short stories under study. It is a concern of this research to strive and delve deep into these same-sex relationships, and probe their psychological and social nuances against the cultural backgrounds and ideologies of the two writers. It entails studying the emotions of jealousy, hatred, victimization, competition, affection, respect, admiration, trust, etc. found in the man-man or woman-woman relationships. In brief, the research concentrates on the role played by psychological, emotional, cultural constructs in defining these relationships.

Introduction

West applies different parameters to perceives human- relationships. Sex and Materialism play a significant role in any human connects. Freud and Lacan have endeavored to establish through their research, that sex is the driving force in all associations, and even in most of the mental ailments. In the East, however, it is not so. The bonds are not always studied in the sexual background. For that, the term- homo-social; a “social bond between persons of the same sex” (Hammarén, 2014) fits well and makes it clear that the sexual undertones in the relationships will not be the topic of analysis in this paper.

In recent times we have witnessed the emergence of the concept of homo-sociality in Sociology. It denotes same-sex relationships without romantic or sexual orientation, such as friendship, mentorship, comradeship, and so on. The counterpart of homo-social is hetero-social, with again a reference to non-sexual relations with the opposite sex. “Generally, the more polarized the gender roles and restrictive the sexual code, the more homosociality one expects to find in a society” (Herdt and Storr, 1999). Homosocial relationships are relevant in any society, but in Indian society their role is even more imperative.

Tagore preferred to find the divine in man and not in temples, images, and scriptures. In the background of his personal beliefs, Tagore entails in his stories, an interesting and a dramatic interplay of his various characters to bring up the existing problems of his times through the presentiment of these relationships. Gurdial Singh jolts his readers and makes them identify and confront the hidden aspects of their selves in his depiction of characters. He has reconciled with the fact that violence is an inevitable part of human life, so his characters are often caught in situations which result in inimical and hostile relations, gruesome interactions and confrontations. His tragic vision, the depiction of social reality (Siddhu, 2004), cultural contexts (Wading, 2005), and his poetic vision of the marginalized make their presence felt even in his depiction of these relationships.

Man-Man Bonding

All human relationships determines whether they will make for the growth, enhancement, openness, and development of both individuals or it will make for inhibition of their psychological growth. Carl Rogers emphasizes

The greater the communicated congruence of experience, awareness and behavior on the part of one individual, the more the ensuing relationship will involve a tendency toward reciprocal communication with the same qualities, mutually accurate understanding of the communications, improved psychological adjustment and functioning in both parties, and mutual satisfaction in the relationship. (1959, p. 241)

People sometimes find bound in such congruent relationships which are many times deeper and more understanding than ties of blood as these entail an accurate matching of experience and awareness. . Sometimes a similar situation brings them tightly bound into an empathetic connection. For example, only the father of a daughter can understand the feelings, the fears, and dreams of another person who is the father of a daughter like him. Tagore brings the narrator in “Cabuliwallah,” in a situation where he finds himself bonding with the prison-returned Rahmat, the Cabuliwallah, who has come from Afghanistan, ‘the far off land’ to earn money. In Mini, the narrator’s daughter, who is of the same age, he lives his daughter’s childhood. That is why the first person he wishes to meet after coming back from his eight year imprisonment is Mini. The narrator empathises the turbulence of a father’s heart and despite the opposition from family, lets Mini meet Rahmat although it is the day of her wedding. He comprehends the significance of a charcoal imprint of a child’s hand that Rahmat carries folded close to his heart.

I saw the black imprint of a little hand on that paper: not a photograph, nor a painting, just a rough print of a little hand made from burnt charcoal smeared on the palm. He brought back this little memento of his daughter with him every year, held close to his big lonely heart as he roamed the streets of Calcutta as if the touch of her soft little hand brought some comfort to her pining heart. (Tagore, 2000, p. 103)

The bonding of the fathers of daughters transcends the barriers of caste, creed, language, and country. The narrator empathizes with Rahman and helps him to go back to his daughter.

Despite its sentimental overtones, this story touches the universality of the primal emotions. Only a father can only understand the feelings of another father. The two characters, the narrator and the afghan are bonded in a relationship of mutual human understanding just like the narrator does in “Folly,” with Harinath and the poor peasant. He is able to sympathize with the other two only when he suffers the tragic loss of his daughter on the eve of her wedding. The loss of a child is what binds these three in a close bond of anguish and loss.

Sometimes a relationship begins with an interaction that starts with a prejudiced mindset but culminates into a mature understanding of human nature. The narrator in Tagore’s story ‘Grandfather’ also famous by the name ‘Babus of Nayanjore’, represents a different social and economic system to Kailashchandra Ray Choudhuri the last extinguishing lamp of famous Babus of Nayanjore. The declining feudal order is seen in relation to the rising capitalism, and we see the narrator caught in a relationship fuelled with unreasonable dislike and scathing criticism of the older man and his affectations. The antipathy of the narrator is owing to the realization that people like Kailash babu never worked in their life and still boasted of their glorious past. In contrast, people like the narrator’s father worked so very hard their entire life but are looked on as a lesser human being ‘because his dhoti¹ did not descend below his knees.’ (Tagore, 126)

The childish prank played by the arrogant narrator meant to display the hollowness of Kailash Babu’s display of lost aristocracy is actually nothing but his own insecurity. The nature of their relationship changes owing to their solicitous consideration of Kusum, and it makes them learn to transcend their affectations and learn to live with the reality.

If love can result in bringing two people close and mutually evolve, it can also have an adverse impact. Gobindlal and Pyarimohan, Uma’s brother and husband in Tagore’s “the Exercise-book,” feel bonded because of the similarity of their prejudiced convictions on the position of women in the society. Their conceits act as a strangulations of Uma’s innocent efforts to learn to write.

Gurdial Singh’s story ‘Doosra Jama’² brings a picture of a silent and deep closeness of two friends, which makes them empathize with the thoughts of the other. Years of familiarity also build a relationship that comes in the purview of friendship that attains a status of uniqueness

¹ A traditional cloth tied in a specific way around the waist so that it covers the lower part of body. It differs in the style of tying in different regions of India.

² Doosra Jama – this story has not been translated in English. The words mean- the second birth.

when the mutual understanding reaches a point that one friend understands the other better than he knows himself.

The childhood friendship of Mota Singh and Mahla Singh is a relationship marked by their mutual understanding. Mota Singh knew his friend's attitude towards life: its joys and sorrows, and death, for he has seen many deaths in family-his parents, all his children at a very young age, and always presented a very stable exterior. When Mahla Singh's wife, Channi, dies all of a sudden in the wee hours of the night, Mota Singh is the first and only one to be informed. The togetherness with his wife of sixty years is over, but Mahla Singh does not lament the death.

One does not need words to know the feelings of the person you know very well. A sympathetic heart knows the pain in the friend's heart, howsoever deep-seated it may be. Mota Singh can sense that his friend Mahla may seem stable and in same detached frame of mind and soul, but he is somewhat affected by this loss. Hence, he doesn't leave the side of his friend, who, he knows, is devastated with grief.

A similar empathy is visible among the narrator and Mohan Singh, his tenant, in Gurdial Singh's story "Do Mawan" (Two Mothers). Mohan Singh understands the narrator's helplessness when narrator's wife refuses to send Mohan Singh's child, Pyare, with them when they are shifting from their house because of her attachment with the child whose care she has taken right from his birth. Mohan Singh leaves his child with them knowing that the narrator will be able to reason with his anguished wife and bring them their child later.

Woman-Woman Bonding

The impacts of the ideologies of society and culture are visible in all the relationships. Men are engaged in earning livelihoods and women, because of their involvement in the family and their emotional nature, are more inclined towards forming relationships.

In Tagore's "The Wife's Letter," Bindu's bonding with Mrinal is that of love and admiration, for this helpless girl feels secure in her presence in a household where even her own sister neglects her. Mrinal feels a deep sympathy for this orphaned girl, and tries to protect her from the injustice of the world. The politics which are a natural companion of economic status are visible in the story in the form of two daughters in law. Mrinal's elder sister-in-law is so

conscious of her own parent's inferior social status compared to her husband and her younger sister-in-law that she could not summon up enough courage to help her sister, Bindu, though she feels relieved when Mrinal takes her under her wings.

Mrinal understands the mental torture that Bindu is undergoing in her having 'to have to take shelter with strangers against their wishes-how immense a humiliation!' (Tagore, 209) The love and care Mrinal shows towards Bindu makes love-starved Bindu worship the earth on which Mrinal walked. Mrinal's inability to save Bindu from the tyranny of the world estranges her from her husband and her family irrevocably and leaves a deep mark on her soul. She questions the entire men's world for this injustice. A woman's understanding of the plight of another woman is what binds them in a relationship. Patal and Kurani also are bonded in such a close relationship in Tagore "The Wedding Garland". Patal feels a deep sympathy for this mal-nourished orphaned Kurani, and this makes her take care like a mother.

Gurdial Singh presents this humane empathy in the story "Price of a Bride." Only a woman can understand the plight of another woman. Santi is initially consumed with hatred for her brother-in-law's bought bride as she seems to be responsible for ruining her married life, but the reality leaves her stunned. All her husband's friends are using this bought bride – 'these men have scrapped my skin with their teeth...' (Singh, 2002, p. 96) She is consumed with sympathy for this helpless woman, who is nothing but a bought 'commodity' being tortured by these male animals. Her heart bleeds for this bride, who pays the price of being a bought bride every day. It is her woman's heart that empathizes with the pain of this woman. And feels bonded in a relationship of understanding by woman who suffers the atrocities of the male world sympathizes with the other who is even worse off.

In Gurdial Singh's story "Ambo," a similar situation arises when in a chance encounter Surjit, a young and fragile woman learns a lesson of life from the older woman Ambo, a bold and loud woman. This meeting of two complete strangers begins with a dislike and mistrust, but in the short span of the train journey changes into a better understanding. What explanation could be given for this? Is it the 'collective unconscious' (Durkheim, 2009) that forges a tie of mutual understanding in these two women who are evidently from entirely different backgrounds and age groups. The experiences of the entire feminine population in this male-oriented world tend to be similar, and this is what brings these two women to discover a common meeting point.

The younger woman finds the uninhibited and brash manner of the older one inspiring and admirable, and the older woman probably finding in the younger one the reflection and glimpse of her own insecure and timid youth. The two women find themselves imperceptibly drawn during a short journey by their collective identity of belonging to the female race. It has a very positive outcome as it results in a metamorphosis of diffident Surjit into a confident and self-assured woman. She has learned the valuable lesson of stepping out from the stereotype image of womanhood impinged on her mind.

Women, however, face a tough time when they try to come out of the stereotypes of a self-sacrificing wife or a daughter-in-law. Feminists like Julia Mitchell, feel that it is safer for the patriarchal world to view a woman as an object in social transactions. The protestations of the female hearts, which beat in sympathy with the victims of the patriarchal atrocities, give birth to the various movements in Feminism and also result in forging strong relationships of empathy and compassion among women.

Conclusion

When two or more works are studied side by side converging and contrasting attitudes of their writers get highlighted. Art or literature is a very versatile medium through which these affinities and differences can be observed. Essential human experiences are similar but the artists can differ in their approaches to present them.

Both Tagore and Gurdial Singh narrated in their native dialect these indigenous stories, which carry the nuances of native expressions and the significance of the contexts. Both are essentially a realistic writers and show extraordinary fidelity to their surrounding and truthfulness in the human relationships in the stories. Tagore, in his stories, while dealing with social, psychological, cultural, economic and political issues, ponders about human nature and human relationships, and show how our fundamental values, attitudes and emotions either unite us or separate us. Opposites coexist and define life itself as “where there is no possibility of evil, there can be no place for good” (Das, 1996) Hence we find men and women connected with their counterparts in their pursuits for finer human feelings or selfish evils.

“These two forces co-exist in us like light and shade, day and night, ebb-tide and high-tide, and

sometimes love triumphs in us and sometimes we are overtaken by the impulse of evil.”(Quayam, 2014, p. 142) . Tagore is less concerned about the class differences and aims at ideal collaborations in his tales. Gurdial Singh, a carpenter’s son, fictional oeuvre explores the lower class especially in rural settings with an uncanny insight. His delineation of relationships bear the writer’s understanding of life and its complexities. (Nayar, p. 237) Thus the similar sympathies, empathies and antipathies are treated by both the writers in their stories, despite the cultural and biographical backgrounds of the writers. Attachment, jealousy, empathy and sympathy remain timeless and prevalent in any age or culture.

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