

Laxity and Discrimination: A Study of Detrimental Effects in Human Psychology, from the works of George Saunders

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Abstract— *The paper intends to delve into the impediments in the human mind causing mental illness, due to tensions, anxiety, fear, discrimination, bullying, negligence, etc. In all age groups from maturity, the mental disturbances are quite common but it is rightly said that anything excessive is perilous. Psychological disturbances are a very serious issue that one may go through, therefore there is always a basic reminder for all human beings to be kind towards other fellow mates and inculcate a humble nature. George Saunders is an American writer of short stories, essays, essays, novellas, etc. In the books, Tenth of December and CivilWarLand in a Bad Decline, he has successfully portrayed the serious effects in human minds that are caused through various reasons in the society from the earlier times till date. Moreover, the majority of the characters (victims) in the story confront challenges in life. The motive of this paper is not only to study the detrimental effects in psychology but also to discuss the consequences and possible remedies, to maintain the stability of the human mind. Saunders uses his stories as a weapon to enthrall as well as to convey several messages and themes to his readers.*

Index Terms— Anxiety, Discrimination, Society, Psychological Disturbances

I. INTRODUCTION

The stories from the collection, *Tenth of December* and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, depict the hindrances caused in human psychology due to several misfortunes, like; bullying, negligence, discrimination, isolation, etc. Saunders throws light upon major issues dealing with psychology in society. He portrays through his characters in the stories. The reality of mental illness caused in human beings is interpreted ingeniously by the author, through his works. He adds, 'understanding and kindness towards people can be the best possible move to eradicate psychological disturbances.

Saunders characters are usually are painted as cheerful and bright externally, and they talk about "positive thinking, self-improvement, etc." [10]. Though internally, the characters are alarmed, frightened, aghast, "lonely" [10], and ruined by guilt, gluttony, and rage. Al Rooster, a businessman from the story *Tenth of December*, is disgraced at the event of charity, he further takes revenge for an act. Therefore, the discriminations, humiliation, and bullying of others might be entertaining and enjoyable for the people but they fail to interpret the consequences and dreadful results that might occur. *Home*, the bestseller book in the New York Times, the story highlights the two major themes of shame and humiliation. The theme falls in the majority of Saunders' works, though humiliation has something more to do in this particular story, *Home*. The protagonist Mikey, confronts all kinds of unnecessary embarrassments, shame and he is mortified by the attitudes of people towards him. Mike is a veteran running his house, he is only the head of the family with several responsibilities. When he returns home from work after a long period, he doesn't feel the "homecoming"

[10]. The things seem quite strange, which was out of his expectations. For instance, his mom's "old partner" [10] is replaced by the new one, who is completely alien to Mike. Secondly, Mike's ex-wife is married to one of his schoolmates, thirdly, his sister Renee seems not at all excited to welcome Mike home. Therefore, it doesn't seem like a homecoming for Mike. On the same day in the evening, Mike's mother gets expelled from the house, which immensely affects Mike, as a result, it was disclosed that he has been suffering due to "post-traumatic stress disorder" [10]. His behavior and reactions were stranger for the members of the family for the first time, for instance, getting astray, isolated, quick rise of anger, further they are followed with the fatal consequences, not so good ending of his life. Through this short fiction, Saunders tries to draw a line between the psychological problems in humans and an individual's behavior towards those sufferers.

The book *Tenth of December* has so much more to examine the mental condition of human beings. The laxity or say negligence of the family members of Mike, caused him to suffer a lot, similarly, the old man, who has been living alone that is witnessed in the story *Sticks*, is not taken care of accordingly. He is a victim of the lack of love, care, affection from the members of his family. The old man, around the 70s, gradually seems to be losing his memory, and behaving strangely every day, especially on occasions. His son marries and leaves the house with his family that isolating the old man (his dad). The behavior of an old man is typical because he celebrates every day with some of the other themes. The pole plays a vital role in this story and the life of an old man. In the yard, he used to dress the pole according to the themes, on one day the pole would symbolize Santa Clause, another

day a crucifix. The other day he dressed the pole in jersey symbolizing "Super Bowl week" [4]. Fourth of July the pole was seen as "Uncle Sam" [4], Veteran's Day, a soldier, on Halloween Day the pole was dressed with the ghost attire. The pole was the only thing that granted happiness to the old man. The old man's son accepts the guilt that he had, left his old father alone at home, and realizes his selfishness within him to have a better life. By the time he returns to his dad's house to visit him, he finds his father dead sitting in the chair. The remorse elevates higher than before. Isolation at this age easily can developmental imbalances, psychological disorders, madness, and much more to mention. The poor old man, after all, how far can he keep defending his ailments.

The story *Tenth of December* illustrates a man dealing with cancer, who well knows that he has a lesser life-span and this thought is gradually eating him away from within. He begins to be unhappy, unsatisfied with life and to ethicize himself he walks "in the woods" [4] to find solace and make himself ready to die (suicide). The turning point in the story is, he meets a little boy who talks about the life that astonishes him. The boy discloses how he has been leading his life with greater difficulties than him yet he lives a happy life. This changes the mentality of the cancer patient and starts living whatever life is left ahead [6]. Saunders outlines the significance of "deep humanity" [8] in one's life. Humiliation and discrimination don't end here rather hiked up to another level of practicality. Jeffery, who works "for a pest control company" [7], is inexorably teased and demeaned for his overweight, which sets him out of countenance. He is a physically strong man but humiliation detrudes him mentally, which later infuriates him for illegal actions. The character Jeffery reminds of one of the characters from the book *Pastoralia*, in the story, *The Barber's Unhappiness*. His unhappiness is due to various reasons, but one of the reasons is mocking and being discriminated against for his deformed toes. Having his toes not formed rightly, violates him, for this becomes generally a substantial reason for rejections in various fields.

The severe cognitive debacle is observed when a reader studies the life of the character 'Mary' in the story, *Downtrodden Mary's Failed Campaign of Terror*. A 92-year-old woman works at this age to make her living, since, after the death of her husband, the remaining amount, and very little wealth they had was all stolen. The robbery compelled her for the work in the "children's museum" [2]. She faces enormous challenges in life, especially in her workplace from her boss. Exhausted with life, and the ill-treatment from her manager causes mental hindrance and she decides to end her life, committing suicide. Though she was saved by the bystanders and passers-by. Mary mentally deteriorates through her life's experiences which were not so much in her favor. Moreover, she was fired by her boss with no warnings, due to her petty mistake. Helplessly, she forced herself to take the grievous decision, i.e., ending her life.

II. CONCLUSION

Saunders features the reality of life, what a common life goes through his captivating stories. Everyman can understand and empathize with the characters in the works of Saunders. Today society has received various upcoming challenges, whether it is humiliation, bullying, mental disability, anxiety, it is the duty of every individual living in the society to have some concern and humble and kind attitudes towards the other dwellers and inmates. Love, care, affection, kindness, etc. are the best medicine for psychological imbalances. There are not all the stories that consist of a happy ending, most of the works of Saunders are not just short fiction but a denouement.

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