

Living with Difference: Disability and Empathy in Durjoy Datta's *The Girl of My Dreams*

Anu D.

Research Scholar (Register number: 241131502048),

Department of English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil- 629 002.

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627 012)

Email: anupenelope@gmail.com

Dr. R. Senitha

Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor,

Department of English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil- 629 002.

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627 012)

Email: senitha87@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Living with difference is a life that has a strong and long-lasting ability. Differences in lifestyles demand much struggle, both from personal and social perspectives. In the novel *The Girl of My Dreams*, the protagonist Daman suffers from his past trauma, mental disorders, and social exclusion. This paper discusses how these people relate their emotional and mental health issues to others and stresses their difficulties in maintaining relationships.

Durjoy Datta highlights the importance of empathy as a tool for personal growth. Furthermore, it enables one to feel other people's emotions or pains as if they were their own. Daman's ongoing battle with PTSD and memory loss causes him a great deal of stress and makes him doubt who he is. He

becomes aware of his strengths and values because of his gradual recovery. He develops emotional resilience after dealing with a variety of mental health issues. His travel as a disabled person promotes awareness about the importance of an inclusive environment. Durjoy Datta brings out the challenges faced by the socially marginalized people with emotional or psychological disorders.

Keywords: Disability, Empathy, Inclusive, Trauma.

Living with difference seems to be a different term. It indicates a life of pain and social pressure. In the context of disability, it is especially critical to accept diversity and recognize the unique experience of individuals with disabilities as normal and natural. Through the lens of empathy, certain prejudices are broken down. It clears the path for the creation of an atmosphere that values them more in all aspects of life.

Durjoy Datta is a popular best-selling Indian writer. His works primarily focus on Young Adult fiction. His novels examine the themes of youth trauma, mental health, emotional relationships. As a budding writer, he shows much interest in the complexities of human nature and contemporary issues. His writings concentrate on young people's emotional difficulties, common problems, and eventual recovery. He became famous with his debut novel, *Of Course I Love You...!* Some of his famous works are *She Broke Up, I Didn't*, *The Girl of My Dreams*, and *Now That You're Rich!*

The challenges that individuals with disabilities face daily are examined. It also illustrates how important empathy plays in developing them as individuals. The consequences of dealing with mental health and profound psychological problems are presented in the novel *The Girl of My Dreams*. The character questions how disabilities are portrayed because they are not obvious; they are invisible. Durjoy offers a very thorough and sympathetic account of the struggles faced by individuals with disabilities.

After a tragic accident, Daman is considered a person who suffers from tragic memory loss and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His desire to become a writer develops from his own encounters with the haunted character, Shreyasi. It reveals the resilience and strength of a disabled person as they attempt to lead a different and more fulfilling life than what is expected from them. Daman's past trauma is lessened with the support of his girlfriend, Avni. She is with him and motivates him to take the right options in his career.

Shreyasi, who plays a prominent role, struggles with her own psychological and emotional problems. Her interference in Daman's life destroys his bond with Avni. Unable to recognize his own past and present, he finds himself in a state of confusion that really hurts him. Accepting Daman's pathetic condition, Avni makes an intentional attempt to explain the facts. However, the incidents from the past might make his current mental state worse. Thus, to a certain extent, Avni exhibits patience and sympathy for Daman.

Daman learns to accept, integrate, and manage his disability because it is presented as an essential component of who he is. Furthermore, instead of being something that can be "cured," disability is viewed and experienced here as a component of a broader process of self-acceptance and personal growth. Daman faces Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), memory loss, and hallucinations. This mental illness affects a person's mental, physical, social, and spiritual health and is brought on by going through or witnessing a traumatic event. A mental illness known as PTSD can arise because of being exposed to terrifying or dreadful situations.

Daman's identity as a young writer is deeply connected to his internal struggle, as the weird presence of Shreyasi increasingly diverts him. Daman's confused memory makes him doubt reality, identity, and the past, leading to confusion and paranoia. Because there are no obvious signs of his illness, people often ignore his struggles, which makes him feel isolated. Daman becomes more dependent on

Shreyasi, who exploits his vulnerability for her own obscure purposes. He feels even more troubled and helpless as his weakness and self-doubt grow.

People close to Daman find some sort of difficulty in understanding his mental health problems. His own father fails to realize his son's mental trauma. This demonstrates how society easily sympathizes with physical disabilities and ignores or misinterprets invisible ones. Datta writes, "People around me need to stop thinking about what's best for me" (97). Even though his psychological turmoil and memory gaps require empathy, he frequently encounters suspicion or indifference from those around him. His challenges are also a reflection of the social stigma attached to invisible disabilities. Daman's behavior is misinterpreted by those who are around him because they are unable to recognize the obvious symptoms of his disability.

The psychological disability in Daman brings anxiety and pressure to collaborate with society. Shreyasi's re-emergence in his life has brought both thoughts of emotions and challenges. Daman's struggles to recall his memories lead to confusion whether to continue his relationship with Shreyasi or to end it. "I'm stupid! How could I believe that Shreyasi wasn't real She was there all the time. How could I have been so blind!" (133). However, it's clear that Shreyasi's presence still haunts him. Shreyasi's emotions such as uncertainty and vulnerability affect her interactions with Daman.

Daman's desire to regain control over his own life reflects the challenges associated with having an invisible disability. When writing the book, he makes every effort to strike a balance between reality and imagination. Daman is constantly threatened by Shreyasi's appearance in the dream. So, he is oblivious to the situation and urinates in bed. Shreyasi's performance creates a sense of terror and excitement. Since Daman and Shreyasi were once lovers, Daman believes that Shreyasi is responsible for the accident. However, Shreyasi's unexpected return affects Daman's health condition, and so he is hospitalized. It shows how much he is affected by the haunted memories of Shreyasi.

Shreyasi too suffers from severe psychological and personality disorders. Even though she is married, she tries to live with Daman and becomes the cause for the separation of Avni and Daman. Daman is manipulated and haunted by Shreyasi's portrayal of extreme possessiveness. Because she enjoys playing mind games, she exudes an unsettling and erratic presence. "YES, I WASN'T THE PERSON FROM THE POSTS! BUT I BECAME THAT PERSON! I became the girl from the posts. SHE WAS ME, AND I WAS HER! THERE WAS NO DIFFERENCE!" (207).

People who live differently are usually not accepted by society. Daman has a shifted perception of reality and experiences psychological trauma. He feels alone because of his differences, which makes it hard for him to fit in with society's expectations. Due to his self-doubt, Daman finds himself in a dangerous situation. His girlfriend Avni is consciously aware of Daman's suffering. She faces his worst anxieties and the horrific experiences that wounded his past.

According to Herman, "The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secrets and deflect attention from it. It can be understood that someone with a traumatic experience is not easy to express his feelings or to tell his story even though to his family" (1992). Empathy is frequently defined as the ability to understand and feel another person's feelings. The American Psychiatry Association (1994) defines empathy as "awareness and understanding of other's feelings and thoughts". Daman is treated with a lot of love and care by his girlfriend, Avni. He is drawn to Avni's appealing personality and finds comfort in her company whenever he sees her. Since both Avni and Daman must face their pasts and come to trust one another, their relationship faces many obstacles. Avni supports Daman in overcoming every difficult circumstance, as penned by Datta. "Avni got up and hugged him. She whispered in his ear, 'stay calm,' and took his leave" (25).

Daman's inner self is reflected in Avni. She frequently expresses his repressed feelings and thoughts through her actions and words. She expresses feelings that he finds hard to put into words. As a result, she becomes more sympathetic to Daman and helps him face his emotions.

Instead of simply expressing sympathy, she forces him to engage with his own ideas. Titchner points that, "empathic ideas are psychologically interesting, because they are the converse of perception. Their core is imaginable, and their context is made up of sensations that carry the empathic meaning."

Empathy is a key concept frequently used in disability studies. It is used as a complex force that can heal and empower. Avni's role in fostering empathy is readily apparent. Avni has a difficult life as Daman's girlfriend, but she supports him in getting over his past. He feels convinced and empowered to face the world with Avni's support. He has unbearable support from Avni in his writing, and she is with him in all endeavors.

Despite Daman's trauma and paranoia, Avni accepts him. With Avni's emotional and physical guidance, Daman gradually recovers. When Daman falls victim to Shreyasi's manipulation, Avni also experiences certain depression and stress. At one time he ignores Avni and begins to live with Shreyasi. But Avni follows him and tries to teach the truth about Shreyasi's existence. But the typical health of Daman stops her from doing so. She is too concerned about Daman and tries hard to protect him from the horrific character Shreyasi. Daman's depression and tensions alter his own identity. However, the love, care, and affection that Daman receives from his friends, family and girlfriend underscore the transformative power of empathy in navigating emotional and psychological challenges.

Daman returns to his life as a successful writer and learns to accept the differences. He used his uniqueness as a tool to grow as a person. He senses reality through Avni's constant encouragement. Daman removes all stereotypes, especially those related to disability, through self-discovery and steadfast

dedication. Avni understands his mental health issues and supports him morally, accepting him for who he is. The importance of accepting is emphasized rather than believing what other people feel.

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