

Being normal is outlandish in the *Convenience Store*

Woman by Sayaka Murata

Dr.V. Vishnu Vardhan,

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli-17
drvardhan12@gmail.com

and

Dr. Suresh Frederick,

Associate Professor and UG Head,
Department of English,
Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli-17
sfheber@gmail.com

During an interview in a smoky subterranean cafe in Jimbocho, Tokyo's book district, Ms Murata is regarded as one of the most exciting contemporary writers in Japan. She mainly focuses on adolescent sexuality in her works. It includes asexuality, involuntary celibacy and voluntary celibacy. Her works are "Jyunyū (Breastfeeding)", "Gin iro no uta (Silver Song)", "Mausu (Mouse)", "Hoshi gasūmizu (Water for the Stars)", "Hakobune (Ark)", "Shiro-iro no machi no, sono hone no taion no (Of Bones, Of Body Heat, of Whitening City)", "Tadaima tobira", "Satsujinshussan", "Shōmetsusekai (Dwindling World)", "Konbininingen (Convenience Store Woman)" and "Clean Breed (A Clean Marriage)". Contemporary Japanese writers of Sayaka Murata - Hiromi Kawakami, Fuminori Nakamura, Hitomi Kanehara, Risa Wataya, Hideo Furukawa, Mieko Kawakami, Nao-oka Yamazaki and Ryu Murakami.

"When something was strange, everyone thought they had the right to come stomping in all over your life to figure out why" (Murata, *Convenience Store Woman* 36). The tale began with a girl named Keiko Furukawa, who was the protagonist of this short novel. She was a simple and normal innocent girl; she was living as a spinster. She never had a relationship even lovemaking. But she was happy with it. She recognized that she was being different from others. She decided to fit her in the machine of society. Also, she wants to be a useful tool. She worked in a dead-end job as a Convenience store employee. She found it easier to have human contact in the Convenience store.

The researcher stated the incidents at the school. Keiko Furukura found a pretty bird dead in the park. She took the cadaver of the bird to her home and urges her mother to make food for her father. She had a good rapport with her father. So she urged her mother to make food for her father. She knew that her father likes it but her mother bizarrely looks at this matter. Her mother told her to bury the bird's cadaver which was the say-so matter of every girl but here the scenario was little changed, she did not even pity it and forcing her mother to prepare food as 'Yakitori' for her dad. Being possessive on her father she did not show any soft corner to the bird. This scene depicts that her nature was a little bit different to other children which were a symptom of strange behaviour. The following lines were evidence of the above interpretation.

“What’s up, Keiko? Oh! A little bird...where did it come from I wonder?”
she said gently, stroking my hair. “The poor thing. Shall we make a grave for it?”

“Let's eat it!” I said.

“What?”

“Daddy likes yakitori, doesn't he? Let's grill it and have it for dinner!”

(Murata, Convenience Store Woman 06).

As per the story, Keiko Furukura hits two boys with a spade from the toolbox. So people started to accuse her that she was not normal. She was not like others but the fact was that she was an innocent girl. Simply she wanted to stop that fight of unruly boys that was why she used the spade tool to stop fighting. She thought that this was the only way to prevent ruining their boys' life of unnecessary things rather she did not get a good response from the society point of view. She wants to explain everything to her teacher but they took in the wrong way.

The researcher stated that a teacher had to observe her statement fully. Keiko Furukura didn't do this intentionally. She did it to sort out this matter in haste. The teacher didn't notice when she explained this incident patiently, which meant the protagonist was not strange. Her society considered her to be strange because of this incident. To be simple as everybody knew a girl should be like a girl which meant if any girl did a fight with boys and bashed their head was a sign of a strange or maybe mentally disturbed or psychological problem. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

There were many other similar incidents. There was also that big commotion soon after I started primary school when some boys started fighting during the break time. The other kids started wailing, “Get a teacher!” and “Someone stops them!” ... “But everyone was saying to stop Yamazaki-Kun and Aoki-Kun fighting! I just thought that would be the quickest way to do it,” I explained patiently. Why on earth were they so angry? I just didn't get it” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 8-9).

The third scene of normal as strange occurred in her school. As per the story, she pulled the dress of the teacher. Again the teacher accused her that she was strange. She was not like others but the fact was that she was an innocent girl. She simply wanted to stop the teacher from hitting the desk. This was the way to stop the teacher that was why she pulled the dress of teacher, but the teacher took this incident as a strange. The teacher questions about this incident to her. She explained that she learnt from the TV once. They were not ready to accept her explanation.

The researcher stated that a teacher had carefully observed her statement. As she was a child didn't do that intentionally. She did it to sort out this matter in haste. The teacher didn't notice when she explained this incident patiently which meant the protagonist was not strange. Her society taught her by the means of TV but accused her as strange. While she was not fully understanding why she gets into trouble. As everyone knew that a child learns many things by the means of society which shows that if any child did the activities shown in the media was a sign of not strange. A girl child didn't know whether the thing was right or not but did the pictured images in reality. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

When our young class teacher became hysterical and began bawling and hitting her desk furiously with the attendance register, and everyone started crying... The teacher from the next class came running in and asked me what had happened, so I explained that I'd once seen on TV how a grown-up woman who was all worked up went quiet after someone took her clothes off” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 9-10).

The researcher stated the incident in the Convenience store where she found to fit in society. For the first time, she was taught how to accomplish the expression and mannerism. The manual had an important role in the protagonist life. It was a sign of unity, discipline, and

teamwork. This was the only object which taught her to survive in this world. After her graduation, she got a job in the departmental store. There she learnt many things which she had to learn from her school days. This was the only place where she learnt discipline, punctuality and dedication.

The researcher used the manual as a tool to say that she became normal in her store because there Keiko Furukura got an equal status which had various meaning like freedom, respect, etc. In her school days, she was good at mimicry but nobody knows about it. After that incident, she started to stop her conversation with students and teacher, which made her be a silent girl in her life but she used her mimicry talent which helped her lot to learn quickly from her managers. In her life, she got real teachers in the form of a manager who taught her many things in the form of a job but not in the name of education. The researcher concluded with his statement that every child was special. It was the role of the teacher to reveal the hidden talent of their students. He pointed out that every person had a responsibility to give special attention to their kids with care then only they will get a solution to every problem. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

I was good at mimicking the trainer's examples and the model video he'd shown us in the back room. It was the first time anyone had ever taught me how to accomplish a normal facial expression and manner of speech... We practised looking the customer in the eye, smiling and bowing, cleaning our hands with alcohol before handling items from the hot-food cabinet, putting hot and cold items into separate bags, and sanitary products into paper bags. The money in the till was real so we would become accustomed to handling it, but the receipts were marked training in big letters, and our "customers" were our fellow uniformed workers, so it was rather like playing at the shop (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 15).

Keiko Furukura thought to herself that she became a part of the machine of society. "I've been reborn, I thought. That day, I became a normal cog in society" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 19-20). She was enjoying her life in the Convenience store but her family and friends were very much disappointed with her behaviour like a blue-collar job saying and to no marital status. She eliminated the parts of her life that others find strange. Others want to 'cure' her because she was strange. "Here was everyone taking it for granted

that I must be miserable when I wasn't" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 37). She was connected with the Convenience store though she was far away.

Shiraha joined the Convenience store as a part-time worker like her. He said that he joined the Convenience store for the sake to gratify his sexual desire. He doesn't work properly in the Convenience store. He behaved as an adult with the coworkers and with the customers. Everyone in the store accused him of his behaviour. He simply declared with them that he was there only to find a partner. Also, he referred to the Convenience store as the Stone Age life. He didn't like to work anymore in the Convenience store and so he quits the job from the Convenience store without noticing them. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

This sort of work isn't suited to men, he muttered. "After all, things haven't changed since the Stone Age, have they? Men go hunting and women keep the home and gather fruit and wild herbs while they wait for the men to come back. This type of work is more suited to the way women's brains are set up" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 50-51).

Keiko Furukura thought that Shiraha was alienated from the machine of society because he was a deadener, worst type, just more to on the society burden on society. "People must fulfil their role in society either through the workplace or the family" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 62). She realizes that "Marriage is a matter of paperwork, an erection is a physiological phenomenon" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 92). If she took Shiraha with her and feeds him means all the questions about spinsterhood around her would vanish. Generally, young people in Japandon't think to gratify sexual desires. Even the married couple to lost their feeling in indulging in a sexual relationship. As like them she too thought the same. This scene showed that her nature is normal but others thought as strange. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

That's simple enough, you just wear a uniform and do as the manual says. And before you say anything, it was the same in Stone Age society, too. As long as you wear the skin of what's considered an ordinary person and follow the manual, you won't be driven out of the village or treated as a burden" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 93).

“You eliminate the parts of your life that others find strange--maybe that's what everyone means when they say they want to ‘cure’ me.” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 94). As she thought, took Shiraha to her apartment. She informed her family about Shiraha. At once, her family got excited and congrats she for being changed as an ordinary person, on the other hand in and around her started to inquire about a guy living in the apartment also they responded that being a blue-collar worker, she had no value to survive in the society. She doesn't have to satisfy her sexual desire. After that, she advised him to “Either get admired and have kids or go hunting and earn money, and anyone who doesn’t contribute to the village in one of these forms is a heretic. And the villagers will come poking their noses into your life as much as they want” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 104-105). She feeds him like a pet. “It’s the first time I’ve kept an animal at home, so it feels like having a pet, you see” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 109). The following lines were the evidence from the text:

So the manual for life already existed. It was just that it was already ingrained in everyone's heads, and there wasn't any need to put it in writing. The specific form of what is considered an “ordinary person” had been there all along, unchanged since prehistoric times I finally realized (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 98).

“Without a career or a husband, you’re of no value to society, and people like you get expurgated from the village” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 106). As per the story, she eliminated herself from sexual desire. Sex had no role in the protagonist life. It was just a part of life, also a basic need for a living being. Though everyone had many goals and ambitions or maybe achievements, it was ultimate for them indirectly. Without it, life was a total disaster.

Sex is fine during the early stages of a love affair, but as time goes on and you're living together, it's horrible when your partner feels you up when you're asleep, or he suddenly comes on to you when you're relaxing. I want to be able to turn my sexual desires on and off when I please, and to keep the switch off at home (Murata, A Clean Marriage).

As per the story, Keiko Furukura was an exception. So people started to accuse her that she was strange. She was not like others but contemporary. Simply she doesn't like it that’s why she quitted it from her life. She thought that this is the only way to prevent her from snitching according to the opposite gender mood. “I read history books trying to find out when society went so wrong. But far back I went, a hundred years, two hundred years, a thousand years, it

was always wrong. Even if you go back as far as the Stone Age!” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 54). Rather she did not get a good response from the society point of view. She wants to explain every aspect of her to others but they took in a wrong way. The researcher stated that others should strictly observe her statement. She didn't do this intentionally. Her society considered her to become of her attitude towards it. To be simple as everybody knows a girl did not have sexual relation is a sign of strange. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

And so I realized. This society hasn't changed one bit. People who don't fit into the village are expelled: men who don't hunt, women who don't give birth to children. For all we talk about modern society and individualism, anyone who doesn't try to fit in can expect to be meddled with, coerced, and ultimately banished from the village. (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 54)

As per story Keiko Furukura realizes, a girl without a sexual relationship and earning like a man is ultimately wrong. People started to blame her, she changes her attitude towards relationship and further on. “Ever since you started working at the convenience store, you've gotten weirder and weirder. The way you talk, the way you yell out at home as if you were still in the store, and even your facial expressions are weird. I'm begging you. Please try to be normal!” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 77) . So she wanted to initiate her life with Shiraha that's why she quits her job at the convenience store. Initially, Shiraha rejected her proposal. “In a way you kind of suit each other, but ... Look, I know it's none of my business, but you should really either get a job or get married, one or the other. I mean, seriously. Or better still, you should do both. Otherwise, you're going to end up starving to death sometime, you know. You're living on the edge.” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 81) She wants to make her life pleasant and meaningful. Being alienated from society, she wants to fit like a normal cog. She thought simply that she fits in society but not strange. Later he moved on with her.

The researcher stated that the society point of view to her carefully Keiko Furukura made it intentionally. She did it to sort out this matter in haste. The society noticed when she made it, particularly which means the protagonist was normal. Her society considered being normal because of this incident. As like them she too thought the same. This scene shows that her nature was normal in her society. The following lines are the evidence from the text:

You need to wake up, Furukura. To put it bluntly, you're the lowest of the low. Your womb is probably too old to be of any use, and you don't even have the looks to serve as a means to satisfy the carnal desire. But then neither are you earning money like a man. Far from it, you're only working part-time without even a proper job. Frankly speaking, you're just a burden on the village, the dregs of society. (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 62)

As per the story, Keiko Furukura felt ultimately different even before. She thought that the years were filled only with eat-work-sleep, but then the things were a little bit different. She listened to the silence after a long time. "After all, I absorb the world around me, and that's changing all the time. Just as all the water that was in my body last time we met has now been replaced with new water, the things that make up I have changed too" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 23). She thought to have a child but others insist to grasp a job and settle down. This made to think wild as bit but moves.

The researcher absorbed that Keiko Furukura is initially happy in relation without any deviation. But then the scenario made different because of society's ideology. She wants it to sort out this in a matter of time. This scene pictured that she behaved as per society behaved but with a different perception. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

Give me a break! How do you think a store worker and an unemployed good-for-nothing are going to be able to raise children? Please don't even consider it. You'll be doing us all a favour by not leaving your genes behind. That's the best contribution to the human race you could make" (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 89).

Being in a relationship did not make any good sound. All Keiko Furukura instinct made her strange. He made her thought in a little different perspective. He just led down the relationship. That was why she made to thought relationship as a strange. She was not comforted in a relationship. She also thought that he was a synthetic to nature. She made herself to fit as the normal cog or maybe so-called a part of machine society but it failed. Generally, a relationship was making comfort each other and feeling bonded with each other but she varied. Rather here the protagonist felt strange or abnormal being the relationship. She quit her relationship with him. She wants to explain her opinion to the society is not ready to accept but they prejudiced.

The researcher stated that others should listen to Keiko Furukura explanation carefully. She did not do it intentionally her society considered her to be strange because of breaking the relationship. To be simple being in a relationship is quite serious but breaking it is very easy. Everybody will have their own opinions, they should not insist it on others as if they know everything. Here Shiraha insisting Keiko that “People who are considered normal enjoy putting those who aren’t on trial, you know. But if you kick me out now, they’ll judge you even more harshly, so you have no choice but to keep me around” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 72). As she was an independent woman and wants to live her life the way she wants. Everybody else, even her so-called pet Shiraha uttered that she was abnormal or strange, she did not get scared. The following lines were the evidence from the text:

No. It's not a matter of whether they permit it or not. It's what I am. For the human me, it probably is convenient to have you around, Tirana, to keep my family and friends off my back. But the animal me, the convenience store worker, has no use for you whatsoever (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 94).

As per the story, returning to the convenience store made a good sense. Maybe Keiko Furukura sense was a little bit different but she did in pretty. She listened to the worldly sounds of the convenience store which made her love and pleasure. Maybe “ I’m relieved to know I’m not the only one who’s abnormal” (Murata, A Clean Marriage). But the prejudice of abnormality made her normal. She worked in the convenience store for 18 years, a dead-end job but gives her life pleasure. She wants to continue as a convenience store woman. She thought that being an employee in the store makes her proud. Also, she wants to be a useful tool. It eradicated the strange ideology and the prejudice of machine society.

The researcher stated that society should carefully understand one’s individuality nature. but her society failed to recognize that. To the society point of view, her nature towards others might be strange. “Through the reflection, a bright voice resembling mine rang out. I could distinctly feel all my cells stirring within my skin as they responded in unison to the music reverberating on the other side of the glass” (Murata, Convenience Store Woman 95). Simply she moved to the store once again. This scene depicts clearly that being odd or normal is strange. As everyone knew a girl should be in real identity which means if a girl did not stick with the rules are strange. Here the protagonist sticks with the true ideology, she was said to be strange. The following lines werethe evidence from the text: “I realize now,” I went on relentlessly.

“More than a person, I'm a convenience store worker. Even if that means I'm abnormal and can't make a living and drop down dead, I can't escape that fact. My very cellsexist for the convenience store” (Murata, *Convenience Store Woman* 93).

The researcher concludes with the combination of extra themes and additional theories, which would give a more integrated outcome to the topic and improved value to the researcher. The study emphasis on the theme being ordinary is outlandish. While it could be of interest to conduct a study on more areas of work and including the theories which give more comprehensive understanding and overview of the difference in the weak and strong cultural practices in different nationals. Since the novel culture is pervasive to different themes, and even different theories related topics like, psychological realism, modernism, feminism, materialism, Eco criticism, etc., would, therefore, be interesting to study. Here the study concentrates only the typical Tokyo woman. While a comparative study of other novel, forces on theories would be an stimulating study to examine the regional variations in multilingualistic and multicultural. It would be a thought-provoking piece of information for the researcher.

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