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Feminist Critique of Patriarchy In Professor Vikas Sharma's *Love's Not Time's Fool*

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Abstract

Traditional portrayals of women in literature have been heavily influenced by patriarchy as they provide little to no importance to women's issues and their characters. However, the contemporary world has witnessed a much-needed change in this regard. Professor Vikas Sharma is a leading feminist writer in modern India. His novels address women's issues in detail. His first English novel, *Love's Not Time's Fool*, also follows the same pattern as it sheds light on the life and transformation of the female protagonist, Richa Pandit, who defies patriarchal norms and reclaims control over her life. This novel criticizes patriarchal structures that limit women and their capabilities. The present research paper presents an analysis of the novel from a feminist lens and explores its critique of patriarchy.

Keywords: patriarchy, feminist, contemporary, women's rights, patriarchal institutions.

Introduction

Professor Vikas Sharma is known widely for his novels that add to the contemporary discourse on feminism. As a modern Indian writer, Professor Vikas Sharma has contributed to Indian society in multiple ways. His novels are always structured in the form of a social chronicle. As a professor and academician, he has spent a great portion of his life understanding Indian society. His cultural heritage and family background also adds to his understanding of Indian society and its people. Professor Vikas Sharma has written extensively about a number of social issues that prevail in our society. He has addressed major problems like poverty, class distinction, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, crime, etc. One of the major themes in his novels has always been feminism. This is one of the themes



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that can be traced to all of his novels. While some of his works are entirely based on feminism, the others that deal with other issues are not isolated from this theme. His commitment to the theme of feminism and the issue of women's rights can be traced back to his first English novel, *Love's Not Time's Fool*. This novel was published during the covid-19 pandemic. It is entirely based on a feminist theme. The protagonist of the novel is also a woman named Richa Pandit. Professor Vikas Sharma has used this novel to showcase his dedication and commitment to the cause of women's rights in Indian society. Professor Vikas Sharma stands against patriarchy and other practices that affect women and their freedom. This novel is based on the journey of Richa Pandit as she navigates different spheres of life. As a modern and intelligent woman, she faces multiple challenges, the biggest one being patriarchy. Despite her skill and potential, she has to undergo very traumatic experiences, solely because of her gender. Professor Vikas Sharma highlights how Richa Pandit has to manage a lot of things on her own in the absence of her husband. Richa is not like that traditional image of women who are constrained by patriarchal institutions. She knows how to take a stand for herself and she does not back down easily. She works very hard and does not believe in gender discrimination or gender roles at all. However, Professor Vikas Sharma also maintains consonance and harmony between feminism and Indian traditions. He also highlights how patriarchy is not actually the result of old age Indian practices; instead, it is the result of the greed and hunger for power of a few men who wanted to retain control over society. Richa Pandit does not abandon her religion or her traditions in the name of modernity. She maintains a balance between her modern lifestyle and her devotion to God. She does not take anything for granted and works very hard for whatever she has.

Despite being born in a very well to do family, Richa Pandit does not have an easy life. She grows up in a society where she is taught to always remain subordinate and obedient. This novel is dedicated to the plight of Indian women who are trapped by patriarchal Institutions and structures that limit their potential and confine them to the four walls of their home. Richa Pandit is a revolutionary figure as she breaks all stereotypes and breaks free from the chains of patriarchy. This novel can be described as Professor Vikas Sharma's critique of patriarchy and such institutions that intend to confine women and limit their potential. Dr. Bijendra Kumar Pradhan writes in his research paper titled '*A Comparative Analysis of the Intermingling of Feminism and Psychoanalysis in Vikas Sharma's novel Love's Not Time's Fool and Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse*':

“Richa’s willingness to assist Abhilash in purchasing books for his I.A.S. examinations and her later offer to help him financially and with a job



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highlight her support for education and gender equality in intellectual pursuits. The narrative challenges traditional gender norms by depicting Richa as a woman unafraid of expressing her desires and engaging in a consensual relationship. This challenges societal expectations regarding women's behaviour and sexuality. The character of Richa manages her work and personal life on her own terms, suggesting a feminist perspective on achieving a balance between career and personal fulfilment."

(An Insight into the Fictional World of Vikas Sharma, 40)

Patriarchal Structures In Love's Not Time's Fool

Professor Vikas Sharma paints a very realistic picture of Indian society in this novel to highlight the patriarchal structures. As a young woman, Richa encounters multiple situations where she has to face the adverse effects of patriarchy. All of this begins from a very young age. As a girl, she is always made aware of her place in society. When she goes to America for higher education, she meets a man named Robert Lee. She falls in love with him and soon finds herself pregnant with his child. We must understand that this is the child of both of them. It is not Richa's sole responsibility. However, Robert does not feel the same, and he abandons her as soon as he learns about the pregnancy. No one blames him for anything. It is only Richa who has to bear the burden all alone. This highlights how our society favours men by giving them an easy escape. Robert does not have to think about anything. He can just run away. Society is structured in a way that allows men to leave whenever they want to, and it places the majority of the burden on women. Not only does Richa have to worry about raising a child alone, but she also has to face society's criticism. Here, Professor Vikas Sharma highlights a very important thing. He shows us how no one questions the character of Robert. Even if people knew that he had a child with someone else, hardly anyone would question him. On the other hand, Richa's own mother advises her to remain silent about the fact that she has a child. She tells her to hide this fact from everyone and leave her child in America so no one finds out about him. This is because she knows the truth about society. She understands that her daughter would be viewed as a characterless woman for having a child with a foreigner without getting married. She would have trouble finding a partner and fitting into society. However, Robert has no such problems. He can easily escape the responsibility, and even if he had stayed with his child, no one would have questioned his character or viewed him as a bad man. In fact, it is possible that he would have been applauded for stepping up and taking responsibility. This is very ironic, as Richa is looked down upon for doing the same thing that he would have been appreciated for. Richa has to hide this from



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society, while he would have been viewed as a responsible human father. This is the harsh truth about our society. It is concerning that society has such low expectations for men, while women are expected to balance everything at the same time. The patriarchal structures do not recognise or acknowledge the responsibility and struggle of women while awarding men for the bare minimum. Priyanka writes in her research article titled *“Intertextuality in the Novels of Vikas Sharma: A Study”*:

“Richa is a bold, frank, and brave woman. She is not shy or afraid to do whatever her heart desires. She has spent a few years in the United States of America while gaining her higher education. There, Richa also had a relationship with an American man named Robert Lee. This shows her modern approach to life and her bold nature. Richa gets pregnant, and as soon as her lover learns of this fact, he abandons her. Richa refuses to do away with her child and boldly gives birth to a son that she names Amitabh, and when she has to come back to India, she leaves him under the care of a nanny. She handles all this on her own, with no help from anyone.”

(An Insight into the Fictional World of Vikas Sharma, 159)

After getting married to Malya, Richa continues to hide the fact of her motherhood and lives alone as her husband spends his days abroad. He constantly cheats on his wife and overlooks her. He is not a good husband at all. Richa is left alone in India to manage everything alone while he enjoys himself in America. While Richa worries about her son, whom she cannot meet, Malya enjoys the luxuries of life. Despite all this, Richa cannot leave her husband or get a divorce as he is still viewed as a competent husband and a worthy man by society. However, if we switch the roles, we will find that society would not have been equally supportive if Richa was the one who was cheating on her husband and ignoring his needs. Professor Vikas Sharma highlights this difference very vividly. The comments on the dual standards of patriarchal structures in our society. While Richa has to hide the fact of her motherhood, Malya need not worry about his infidelity. Dr. Shashi Kant Tripathi writes in his research article titled *“Portrayal of Women in Love’s Not Time’s Fool by Prof. Vikas Sharma”*:

“Richa is the embodiment of a woman's earnest struggle for emancipation in every walk of life. She illustrates Professor Vikas Sharma's concept of



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women empowerment. In spite of her honest love for Robert Lee, she has been cheated by the latter. Despite her bitter disappointments in her first love, she did not put a stop to achieving her dreams. She continues to set her eyes on her goal, not on disappointments; she makes herself ready to prudently face every challenge. Every small success inspires her to go ahead. She is determined to live the life she likes and wants. She prefers to fight the battle of life and finally comes up as a victor. All the decisions related to business deals, charity projects, purchasing land, and expanding financial resources are independently taken by her. She is quite competent to lead the entire empire of her business. In the eyes of her employees, she sets a prestigious image.”

(Critiquing the Novels of Vikas Sharma, 148)

RICHA PANDIT AS A MISFIT IN THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

The life of Richa Pandit is not like the patriarchal idea at all. Despite going through a lot in the early years of her life, she finally gains control of her life and starts living according to her wishes. As a young woman, she found herself very intrigued by business and took over her husband's business as he spent much of his time abroad. In his absence, she manages everything very efficiently and effectively. In her everyday life, she defies patriarchy. She refuses to be objectified or contained by patriarchal notions. Unlike the traditional idea of patriarchy, Richa Pandit does not engage in activities that are specifically mentioned for girls in patriarchal institutions. It would not be wrong to say that she breaks this structure by leading a life that aligns with a modern and open approach. Traditionally, patriarchal ideas expect women to live as subordinate to men and entertain themselves with household chores and other activities. In India, patriarchy also limited women's education and their social lives. However, Richa Pandit refuses to lead such a life. She has a very keen interest in studying and reading. She can also be seen engaging in activities that are not assumed to be lady-like by patriarchal notions. She loves playing tennis and going out with her friends. Richa Pandit is also a very capable businesswoman. Here, we can clearly understand Professor Vikas Sharma's perspective regarding women and patriarchy. He criticizes patriarchy and presents before us a model where women are free to pursue whatever they like. In this way, his novel defies the traditional rigid notions of patriarchy. Professor Vikas Sharma does not believe in gender roles or differentiation among people on the basis of gender. For him, no activities should be categorised on the basis of gender. Richa Pandit is a very good example of this. She



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does not engage in activities that are only specifically associated with girls in patriarchal institutions. We can hardly see her doing things like cooking or cleaning the house. She has ambitions in her life. As a highly ambitious woman, she has clear ideas for her career and her business. In the absence of her husband, she handles everything all on her own without any problem. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that she probably does things better than her husband could have done. She does not care about what society thinks of her for leading her life this way. She has realised she should engage in activities that make her feel fulfilled.

Richa Pandit fights against patriarchal norms and expectations constantly. She does not believe in rigid notions of patriarchy. She is an educated woman who is also highly capable. From the very beginning, Richa engaged in intellectual activities. She did not follow the rigid notions of patriarchy. Richa's entire life is based on defying patriarchy and patriarchal expectations. The rigid and conservative minds of Indian society expect women to refrain from gaining higher education and leading a life of intellectual pursuits. Women are traditionally expected to engage in household activities. However, Richa does not lead her life according to this notion. She values education and a career. For this reason, she is also somewhat of a misfit in the patriarchal society. But for her, it is more important to lead her life according to her own wishes instead of fitting in society.

LOVE, GENDER, AND POWER DYNAMICS

Professor Vikas Sharma criticizes patriarchal structures in every aspect of one's life. He does not only comment on how Richa's social and professional life is affected by patriarchy, he also shows us how she combats such notions in her personal life. In her first relationship with Robert, she faced a lot of problems because of gender roles. In this relationship, society successfully imposed obligations on her and altered the course of her life. She had to go through a lot merely because of her gender. Robert could do all this to her because they were living in a patriarchal society that favoured men and she was a woman living all alone in foreign land. However, throughout the novel, we see growth in Richa's character as she successfully stands against patriarchy and reclaims control over her life. In every relationship, she grows little by little and ultimately becomes independent and powerful. This is a very clever technique employed by Professor Vikas Sharma. He does not show a sudden unrealistic and absurd change in her behaviour and thinking. He shows his readers how she grows step by step with time in a very natural manner.

After her relationship with Robert, Richa has definitely learned some important lessons. When she gets married to Malya, she ensures that she does not give up all of her power in his favour. Patriarchal structures treat women as mere objects. Wives are supposed



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to remain subject to the authority of their husbands. They are expected to remain subordinate and dependent. However, Professor Vikas Sharma criticizes this idea and presents a narrative that shows women in power and control. Richa does not become a slave to Malya. She retains control over her life and does not agree to being reduced to a mere object. After getting married, Richa does not lose her independent identity and existence. She is not just Malya's wife, she is still Richa Pandit. She spends time reading and playing tennis, things that she enjoys, and also works hard for her career. She leads an independent life. However, despite all this, she is still not able to change things entirely. Her husband continues to cheat on her and abandons her. Instead of getting disappointed, she takes this as another lesson. She realizes what she wants and starts actively demanding it instead of staying passive like she did with Malya. When she meets Abhilash, she is a new woman. She acknowledges her worth and she is not shy of demanding what she knows she rightly deserves. Her relationship with Abhilash shows us how she has completely transformed. From a scared girl who was left by her love, Richa has become a strong businesswoman who demands an equal status in relationships and takes charge. During her relationship with Abhilash, she never lets him treat her badly or make her feel subordinate to him. Unlike Malya, she knows that she will not tolerate anything anymore and if Abhilash does not treat her correctly, she is also ready to leave. This is a complete transformation. She has regained control and the power dynamics have finally shifted in her favour. She controls her relationship with Abhilash, offers him a job, and asks him to move in with her. She does not do anything she is uncomfortable with and she is also not afraid of asking what she rightly deserves. In the beginning, she was the complete opposite of this and in her relationship with Robert Lee, she had lost her entire existence. Through this journey of transformation, Professor Vikas Sharma highlights how modern Indian women can also transform themselves and bring a change in their personal lives. He inspires them to break free from the chains of patriarchy and regain control of their lives.

Another important incident occurs when Richa Pandit is pressured by her brother-in-law to have a relationship with him, after the death of her husband, Malya. In the beginning, Richa complies because she is scared. However, she soon realizes how wrong this is and refuses to entertain him any further. She pushes him out of her life and refuses to adjust with unfavourable power dynamics. She is aware of her personal choices and independent will and she acknowledges them as she refuses to entertain people who overstep her boundaries.



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“I asked myself a question- ‘Is a widow everybody’s wife?’ Immediately my intuition responded to ask me to be wise and prudent and maintain my self-dignity at every cost.”

(Love’s Not Time’s Fool, 143)

SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHY: A FEMINIST READING

Love’s Not Time’s Fool is a very good critique of patriarchy. Throughout the novel, Professor Vikas Sharma challenges patriarchal norms and presents examples of alternative models of social structures where women’s voices, opinions, and desires are given importance instead of being sidelined. He gives power and strength to his female characters and gives them a status equally important to men, if not more. This novel highlights the journey of Richa Pandit and her life struggle to gain this power and strength. As a young woman, Richa faces the ill-effects of patriarchy, but instead of giving in to the pressure, she resolves to change the status quo and lead her life freely and happily. This results in her transformation as a powerful woman that is used as an inspiration by Professor Vikas Sharma for his women readers.

Richa breaks patriarchal structures throughout her life. Through her example, Professor Vikas Sharma proposes alternative models where women are given equality and dignity. He expresses how he feels that such models should be the basis of our society. Richa is not like other women. She is modern and independent. She does not believe in the regressive idea that women’s role should be limited to household chores and that they should lead a life of subordination. Richa breaks these stereotypes and lives freely. Professor Vikas Sharma portrays her as a highly educated and outgoing woman who is professionally acclaimed. This is a very good example of defying patriarchal norms. This entire novel is based on Richa Pandit and the journey of her life. This is a women-centric novel. The author has made sure to give his female protagonist the same treatment that male protagonists get. In this novel, we can see that Richa is not just someone’s wife or mother. Instead, the general idea is that the other characters are dependent on her for their identity. The story is entirely focused on Richa. People like Malya and Abhilash are only part of the story because of their relationship with her. Malya is just Richa’s husband and Abhilash is also portrayed in a limited role as her lover. The author focuses on building her character and refining her personality for the reader. He is not much concerned with other male characters who are only additional props to the story of Richa. This is a very strong and bold representation as the majority of the novels influenced by patriarchal structures rarely address women and their characters as the entire



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focus is on the male characters. Professor Vikas Sharma's narrative focuses on Richa alone. This is a very remarkable feature of his writings and can be seen in almost all of his novels. Dr. Runoo Ravi writes in her research article '*Vikas Sharma, Exploring Feminism in the Character of Richa Pandit in Love's Not Time's Fool with Regard to Morality and Identity*':

“Richa acts as the catalyst which binds all the characters and events in the novel. The novel traces the journey of Richa, touching her past as well as her present, and focuses on how she manages to derive utmost happiness even in the most adverse circumstances. For Richa, mental peace and satisfaction is paramount: she believes in the philosophy of carpe diem; living in the present moment.”

(Dynamic Narrative Concerns in the Novels of Vikas Sharma, 79)

Richa also defies all gender roles. She does not lead a life of household chores. She is a businesswoman who manages an entire company. She is not portrayed as a weak woman who needs someone's help to manage the business and the properties in her husband's absence. She does it remarkably well all on her own. She does not let anything come in the way of her business, not even her relationship with Abhilash. She buys his ancestral land from him as she knows that it could prove to be an asset for her business. She even gets agitated when she finds out that he is planning to sell it to someone else. She does not let her personal relationships come in the way of her personal life. Even after the death of her husband, she is not portrayed as a 'damsel in distress'. Despite being a widow, she does not let anyone take advantage of her. She continues to live her life like she did before. This is also a very bold representation. Traditionally, women are expected to lead a life of grief and misery after their husband's death. They are supposed to avoid wearing bright colors or jewelry. However, the same is not expected from men and in many instances, men are remarried within a very short period of time as society recognizes their needs for a companion, while no such sympathy is offered to women. Richa defies this patriarchal norm and refuses to lead the life of a widow after Malya's death. She continues to live like she did and even gets remarried to her lover. Dr. Kamal Kant Sharma writes in his book:

“After the sudden demise of her husband, Malya, Richa makes a bold and unconventional choice. Even after knowing about the backlashes she is going to encounter, she marries Abhilash. Many in her social circle expect



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her to conform to societal expectations, like her brother-in-law Nirupam Kaul, to either remain a widow or remarry within her class. However, Richa does not allow such opinions to dictate her life. Without fear of repercussions, she takes the leap, erasing all class distinctions and proving that love is not bound by economic or social status. Her marriage to Abhilash is not just a personal decision; it is a statement against the rigid structures that define relationships based on wealth and prestige.”

(Vikas Sharma and His Literary Works: Defictionalising the Reality, 98)

CONCLUSION

This novel is a very good critique of patriarchy from a feminist perspective. It showcases how patriarchy imposes certain obligations and expectations upon women and limits their lives. Professor Vikas Sharma is an advocate for women’s rights and this novel is a testimony to his ideology and commitment to gender equality. The entire novel is based upon the life of Richa Pandit who constantly defies gender norms and patriarchal expectations. As a young woman, she has faced the harsh reality of living in a patriarchal society. She is determined to live her life fully and completely. She takes lessons from every incident in her life and applies them. She has changed her life entirely and grown a lot. She has transformed into a strong and independent woman who knows her worth and claims control over her life. She is not subordinate to anyone and she demands equal rights and equal treatment in society. This novel provides a very interesting area for the study of feminist critique of patriarchy.

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