



A Portrayal of Women Characters in Vikas Sharma's Novel, *I.A.S. Today*

Prof. S.P.Singh, Prof. & Head, Dept. of English &

Dr. Manisha Singh, Associate Professor of English,

S.N. Govt. P. G. College, Khandwa, M.P.

Abstract:

The present paper aims at focusing on the study of the portrayal of women characters e.g. women as dignified creatures who have the capacity to transform and to be transformed, intellectual superiority, discriminative power, decision-making faculty, struggling power, boldness, uncompromising attitude to discard the evil and above all, to raise voice against the injustice inflicted on them. Four characters namely, Shivangi Shrotriya, Trishala Vasu, Rewati and Swati are taken into study for critical analysis. All women characters in the novel make forward journey and move from ignorance to knowledge, from negation to affirmation and from imperfection to perfection. Women characters as depicted are intelligent and play a crucial role in strengthening the plot. They are guiding force and for each of them, her "domain is within her ambit of argument where she is the centre of order, the balm of distress, and the mirror of beauty."

Key Words: summum bonum, bourgeois-filth, femme fatale, male chauvinism, guilt-consciousness, existentialism, 'purush', 'prakriti, transformation.

Introduction:

Vikas Sharma's magnum opus, *I.A.S. Today*, holds a place of singular distinction among the contemporary fictional writings. The novel excellently presents before us the picture of a degenerated society that by amassing of wealth in defiance of the sanctified values of its tradition like honesty, integrity of character, selfless service and honour, has gone into abyss. The immoral, corrupt, and degenerated society unfolds itself through Tinny. Like Caliban, he is an "Abhorred slave,..... Being capable of all ill. (*The Tempest*, Act -I, Scene -2) Like Ratan Rathor in Arun Joshi's novel, *The Apprentice*, Tinny considers money as summum bonum of life: "What could one do without money? Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money." (P.19) He insists that: "If I had everything and no money I would be little better than a beggar's shoe." (P.19) He considers money as supreme power: "It was not patriotism but money, that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeds where all else failed. There were many laws... but money was law unto itself." (P.19)

Delving deep into the text, it is apprehended that Ruskin's statement, "Shakespeare has no heroes;- he has only heroines", is applicable on Prof. Vikas Sharma's novel as well. Like Spenser, he draws the character of his women figures in noble and dignified terms. Indigenous form of woman as 'shakti (power) is nicely expressed through the character of Trishala Vasu. Shivangi is bold and courageous; she proved her worth by winning over the evil design of Devadutt, a villain and a cheat. Rewati undergoes the process of transformation and shows the path to others that we are never too late in life. At any point of life, we can start in a fresh way. It is this attitude and the determining power that can save our life to be a wastage. It is equally true that catastrophe is caused by Tinny and his racket by committing forge and murders and it is Rewati who alone by denouncing it could come out of the corrupt world. Swati proved her worth as a woman when she, with the help of Karmveer, a Police Inspector, succeeded in detecting the real culprit, Tinny, and fulfilled her revenge by killing him.

Shivangi Shrotriya is a positive character who moves from ignorance to knowledge. In the beginning when she was young and ignorant to the ways of world she expected to be a celebrity but soon she comes to the realization that it is like getting sugar from sand. She challenges Romesh by saying, "let us see who makes more money in life, you as a teacher or I as a stage teacher." (P.24) After the death of her father she sells some portion of her agriculture land to begin with her own "Parvati Music Group." She charges for it, fifty thousand rupees for one night program. Her ambition to become a celebrity takes her to Mumbai where she meets Devadev, a fraud and a cheater. Taking Shivangi merely a puppet and a doll for physical comfort, Devadev during the dance, assaulted her physically and tried to press her bobs. To it, she comes forward like a lion and attacks with her knife saying, -- 'come and attack me if you dare! Sons of pig! Come if you wish to be killed! (P.26)

Understanding that Mumbai is a place where it is not possible to flourish "without push and pull (P.27), she comes back to her native place and selects Danny as her life partner. Moreover, she pursues him to complete his engineering. By learning from her experiences, she attains the knowledge that "All that glitters is not gold", and makes a positive move by maturing herself from her past experiences.

Trishala Vasu

Trishala Vasu is central and very powerful woman character in the novel. She transforms Romesh from top to bottom. She is her mentor. According to Shankhya system of philosophy, 'Prakrati' (woman) is an active force while 'Purush' (man) is inert, inactive. It is by coming in contact with 'Prakrati' that 'Purush' becomes active. It is a woman who lures a man for union, enjoyment and the fulfillment of life. In the novel, Trishala Vasu is presented as 'prakrati'. She not only tempts Romesh but transforms her also as a better human being. She is his 'shakti'. After the rape incident in the University campus with a lady lecturer, the words uttered by Romesh to his wife Vasu, "I feel worried about you" say a lot. He is possessed and captivated.

She is dynamic, attractive, humorous and beautiful girl with sparkling wit and unfolding charm. She is intelligent and capable of taking right decision at right time. She selects Romesh as her life partner and informs of it to her mother who feels happy over the suitable selection but asks her to wait for the consent of her father. Her father is Prospero-like who after investigation permits her daughter for marriage.

In the beginning when Romesh was allotted shared room number 105 with Miss Trishala Vasu from Dharasthala Karnatka, he felt strange. It was a new experience to him to be in the company of a girl who has come from upper strata of society and follows modern way of life. Romesh differs from her in food habits and pattern of thinking as well. But soon, Vasu wins over him and both feel comfortable in the company of each other. Romesh is full of innovative ideas and expresses his views in a commendable way. Soon, he learns to command over English language too.

Romesh accepts the trip for Kempty Falls designed by Vasu Trishala. Here, both feel attracted and decides to live with each other as life partner. Photos of the trip were sent by Trishala Vasu to her mother who finds Romesh as suitable match and asks her to wait for the consent of his father. Abhipal Vasu contacts Hapur DM to enquire about the parents of Romesh. At his instance DM Hapur visits Romesh's village and meets his parents and finds them simple and kind hearted.

After the successful completion of the training, both were given postings in Haryana state and they live happy-ever-after.

Rewati

Apart from other women characters, Rewati, after killing Vallu who in drunken state assaulted her for sex, underwent an overhauling process. Now, She emerges as totally different, a transformed one; now she shuns everything that tempted her earlier. Existential questions as who she is?, Why do we exist?, What is the purpose of our life? etc. too often surround her from all sides. Guilt-conscious, she recites "Gayatri mantra", chants "Om Namah Shivay" etc. to get the sleep that depicts that her soul is still alive and guiding her to select the right path. Finally, she leaves all allurements of worldly life and comes to live in an 'ashram' in search of peace and perfection of life.

In the beginning, death of her husband and the state of utter poverty forced her to seek the nearest sheltering place that she finds in the house of her sister -in-law, Kanti and Jay Tapse alias Tinny. Attracted by her beauty (femme fatale) Jay willingly permits her to stay in the house. It also soothes Kanti as she wants to help Rewati. Tinny develops physical relations with her and uses her aadhar card for his selfish and forged purposes. Things go on normally until Rewati killed Vallu with the bottom of the brass flower vase that resulted in his death. After the death of Vallu, She feels guilt-consciousness and suffers like Lady Macbeth. State of guilt-consciousness makes it difficult on her part to sleep. In her sleep she dreams of Vallu "riding on a black horse". In the beginning, she uses sleeping pills and recites Gayatri mantra for sleep but all in vain. Ultimately, she decides to leave the world of crime and decides to live in an Ashram for peace. She wants to go far away from the hustle and bustle of life.

Appearance of Anand, popular disciple of Buddha, in the dream of Rewati takes her to confront with the existential questions: "There is no real home to earthly people. They come from afar and have to return one day to their eternal home.....like tenants, human beings stay for brief hours in this prison called home but they have to be liberated. Being a saint, I don't desire to return to the life of bondage and earthly limitations." (PP. 190-91) Anand also reveals his own position to Rewati that he, too, is "wandering for years in search of self-illumination and divine light. The day he feels liberated after controlling his five senses, he will "loose this physical body to become a part of divine soul."

Rewati felt guilty as she could not resist on worldly temptations offered by Tinny. But now, she wants to come out of the spider's web that was woven by none other than by her herself. She decides to rise above greed, violence, pride, lust, anger, restlessness, falsehood and other vices. She chants 'Om Namah Shivay' to get peace.

Keeping in mind the example of Mother Teresa who resigned from her post of the Principal of Senior secondary School to serve the poor and the needy, she likewise left the hotel with ornaments that she got from Jay as gifts. She left the room with a note to Kanti: "Going out in search of peace and light. Bondage is troublesome and unbearable to me now. Giving up my earthly things to you out of love and affection. I will feel obliged to both of you for timely support. Perhaps, I am not meant for worldly things and hence going. Take it easy." (P. 194)

Wearing a white sari, she reaches the Ashram and hands over an amount of Rs. Two crores to the trustee of Brahmakumari Vishwavidyalaya with the intention that she does not want to be a burden on it.

Rewati saves her soul by renouncing the world of corruption and joining the ashram for the peace of mind.

Swati

Swati is the widow of the bank manager who was killed by the bullet of a bank robber at the time when he was resisting. She is bold and courageous and comes forward to fight at two fronts; at first, to fight against the poverty and to win over it, she joined as bar manager in Aurobindo hotel, and secondly, she makes all possible efforts to take revenge of the innocent killing of her husband during bank robbery. She is constantly in search of the real culprit who supplied AK—47 to the robbers.

The way she, with the help of Karmveer, a Police Inspector, succeeded in decoding the racket of the criminals who robbed and killed the innocent people including her husband makes her comparable with the bold and intelligent Indian heroic ladies of the Vedic period. It will not be an exaggeration if we compare her with Savitri who succeeded in getting back the life of her husband from Yama (Death) on the basis of her intelligence and boldness. Swati too, succeeds in uprooting the racket of the criminals who turn out to be another name of death, killed and played fraud with the innocent people. To unearth the criminals and to kill Jay Tapse alias Tinny was not an ordinary task. To be precise, she acts not only boldly but wisely too.

Swati is made of such stuff that will not allow her to rest until she succeeds in getting the information about the criminals and they are punished for their villainy. For longer hours, in loneliness, she meditates over the innocent killings of six people in few seconds and disappearance of criminals from the scene so easily. Incapability of the police to detect and punish such culprits also fills her heart with grief.

She remains alert to the happenings around her. The mysterious deaths of Praveen Nikhil, Kumar Sayam and Gannu created doubt in the mind of Swati and she reached to the conclusion that the car number of Praveen Nikhil can take her near the disclosure. For this, she contacted Inspector Karmveer Singh for help and the sincere efforts of Karmveer resulted in tracing the car driver Nehi Singh who revealed Krishna Colony, Gurugram as the place from where AK—47 was taken for bank robbery.

In his inquiry, CID chief Romesh realized a lot of resemblance between the faces of Jay Tapse and Tinny. He also doubts the signature of Nirmal Kant as that of Jay. The names of Kanti, Master Kanti, Nirmal Kant and Jay Tapse were new to Romesh as well as D.I.G. Greater Noida. So, they asked the officers to trace Kanti, Rewati and Jay alias Tinny. The phones of Kanti, Jay, and Rewati pointing towards Love Nest Apartments in Dwarka were traced. Now it was clear that Jay changed his identity and Karmveer disclosed it to Swati.

To fulfill her revenge, Swati poured the drops of Potassium Cyanide in the wine of Jay and a sip of it ended the life of Tinny alias Jay Tapse, another name of fraud and terror. Uttering the words— ‘Rascal. This is justice’, Swati felt contented as she succeeded in taking the revenge of the death of her husband.

Conclusion:

On the basis of the thorough and a critical analysis of the text, it can be concluded that the women characters portrayed by Prof. Vikas Sharma in his novel are vivid, enthusiastic and life-like. Some of the characters including that of Rewati and Swati, due to inevitable reasons, face various problems like poverty, corruption, male-chauvinism, exploitation, hunger and deprivation but they struggle hard to survive and win over. They are endowed with the tremendous innate capacity to adjust even in adverse situations. Ultimately, all women characters reach to their destination, to their desired goal. Trishala after winning over Romesh gets united; Swati by detecting the criminal responsible for the innocent killing of her husband, feels satisfied; Rewati, by denouncing the world and its temptations, joins an ashram to attain the peace and happiness; Shivangi attains knowledge by her experiences.

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