



CLASS DISPARITY IN INDIAN SOCIETY: A STUDY OF MAJOR NOVELS BY PROFESSOR VIKAS SHARMA

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Abstract

It is not news to anyone that Indian society has always struggled with problems of class disparity. A person's intellectual worth and potential are often overpowered by his/her social status, financial background, power, etc. This has been the case not only with India but instead, with the whole world. It is hard to imagine a society where such class disparity does not exist. What contributes to its existence and growth is the support that it gets from the people who reap the benefits of such discrimination, that is, the people who are on the receiving end, the people who are the exploiters. As Karl Marx has said there are two types of people in the world; the exploited and the exploiters. It is the way of the world that the exploiters will never question the established order and that revolution has always been inspired by the exploited. Professor Vikas Sharma is an Indian novelist who deals with a wide range of vibrant themes. Being a social novelist, he has written extensively about this class disparity. This research paper aims to analyse the major novels of Professor Sharma in the backdrop of the issue of class disparity.

Keywords: social, class, economic, social status, class disparity, desperation.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Vikas Sharma hails from a family of writers and poets. From a very early age, he was exposed to a sea of knowledge because of his family background. With an opportunity to read and learn from his family, Professor Vikas Sharma soon developed a passion for literature. And it is to date that he

carries this passion. A devoted professor, he started his writing career during the period of lockdown and he has never looked back again. With over a dozen novels to his credit, Professor Sharma has inspired many young readers and he has changed many lives for the better.

His popularity can be attributed to his writing style, which is easy to understand and

yet packed with immense knowledge, and his careful selection of themes. Not only does he give his readers a very beautiful and powerful storyline, but he also weaves in a very beautiful selection of themes that carry a very deep meaning. He understands the importance of doing so and it is a tradition that he has kept alive in all his novels. He is a social novelist. Almost every novel of his is based on a social issue and this is what makes him so unique. He loves to talk about the problems of our society. Professor Vikas Sharma feels deeply for the underprivileged people in our society and he has often taken out his concerns on paper and the result is his collection of novels. He has written extensively about class disparity in Indian society and how it has affected a huge number of people. He understands the problems of the common people and he advocates for their rights and raises their voice through his novels. In the words of Mr. Amit Kumar Soni in his research paper titled;

Novel as Social Criticism: Rethinking Gender Justice in Prof. Vikas Sharma's Novel 498A: Fears and Dreams:

Social relevance is at the heart of Prof. Vikas Sharma's literary oeuvre. His novels encompass a wide range of social and political issues such as dysfunctional marriages, sexual tensions, female empowerment, unemployment, social precarity, urban crimes, and post-pandemic challenges for social integration and formal education. Since the rise of novels, the novelistic space has enabled the writer to discuss and portray manifold ideologies and social realities in a larger framework. (An Insight into the Fictional World of Vikas Sharma, 93)

LOVE'S NOT TIME'S FOOL: LOVE AND CLASS DISPARITY:

Love's Not Time's Fool is the first English novel written by Professor Vikas Sharma. This novel deals with many themes that

have a very deep meaning and significance. Along with the themes of poverty and feminism, the novel also deals with the problem of class disparity in our society. The novel revolves around the themes of social status and poverty. The protagonist of the novel is a woman named Richa Pandit. While Richa is a rich woman, who is highly educated and manages the business of her husband, her lover is not the same. Richa falls in love with a young man named Abhilash. Unlike Richa, Abhilash struggles a lot because of his social class. Coming from a lower-middle-class family, he is a student who is struggling to make ends meet. The first time that he meets Richa is a very good example of showing the difference between their classes. Their first interaction is as follows:

This student wanted books on General Knowledge, General English, Essay Writing (latest edition), Indian Culture And History (by A.L. Bhasham), World History (by J.L. Nehru), World Geography (by Dr Jagdish Singh) and Political Theories (by Dr M.G. Gupta). Fortunately or unfortunately all these books were available on this Lakshmi Narain Book Depot but the total cost of the books was more than twenty-five hundred rupees. Unfortunately, the young man had only seven hundred rupees in his pocket. So, he chose to buy the first three books on compulsory papers and told the salesman to preserve the other four books for his next arrival. But the salesman lost his temper and misbehaved with him. 'Why did you ask me for a lot of books if you had only a little money in your pocket? This is quite a senseless way of buying books. I had to search them out for you and now you ask me to preserve them for you for your next arrival. What the hell!'" (Love's Not Time's Fool, 6)

This interaction is symbolic of a lot of things. This shows us how merely because of one's socio-economic status, so many things change. While Richa is buying books because she loves to read, Abhilash is buying books because he wants to study and get a job to support himself. What is a luxury for one is a

necessity for the other. While Richa has money to enjoy her hobbies and buy books to spend time with, Abhilash does not even have enough money to buy the books that he desperately needs to study as a student. Their class disparity is not only visible through their economic status but also through their social status. While Richa is treated very nicely and the shopkeeper lets her take her time, Abhilash is treated like a burden and let alone taking his time, the shopkeeper just wants him to get out of his shop. And all hell breaks loose when Abhilash informs the shopkeeper that he does not have the money to pay for all the books he needs. It seems like he just wants to get rid of him and he starts scolding him and Richa comes to his rescue. The only reason that the shopkeeper lets him go is because of her intervention.

Throughout the novel, we see how Richa has everything and Abhilash is just struggling to make ends meet. She helps him a lot to establish himself. She offers him a job and he starts working for her. Because of his poor social background, Abhilash has to struggle a lot. The same was not the case with Richa as she came from a very good background and she could easily get what she wanted. Even when she got pregnant with her boyfriend, her mother helped her a lot and even made sure that her life would not be affected by this incident. She arranged a nice groom for her and got her married, telling her to move on. Had the same happened to Abhilash's sister, her whole life would have been destroyed.

I.A.S. TODAY: CONFLICT BETWEEN CLASS AND POTENTIAL:

I.A.S. Today is the second English novel written by Professor Vikas Sharma. While this novel deals with many themes, it is majorly a social novel. The novel deals with the lives of two friends and the different paths they choose. The protagonist of the novel is a young man named Romesh.

Romesh comes from a comparatively weaker social background. His father is a poor

farmer and Romesh, along with his family, has to survive with very limited resources and means. Romesh wants to gain an education at a good university but his father's financial status is not strong enough to support this and he has to give up his dream. On the other hand, his classmate, Tinny, has all the resources to gain education wherever he wants to, but he simply has no interest whatsoever. Tinny has the privilege of staying back after the classes and pursuing his hobbies. He stays back every day and plays tennis, cricket, etc. But Romesh can not even think of doing so. He knows that his family needs him and he has to sacrifice a major portion of his development to support his family. The poor boy walks back to his home after classes and helps his father.

The class disparity is also very evident in their conduct. While Romesh is not as confident and outgoing, Tinny finds it easier to talk to people, make friends, and even start relationships. Romesh can not even think of all this. He knows that he can not afford to spend his time on all this. While Tinny's free time is spent in having fun and smoking cigarettes, Romesh hardly gets any time off, and when he does, he either studies or works to support his family. Romesh neither has the time nor the resources to keep hobbies. He knows that he has nothing except his knowledge and hard work. For Tinny, these things hardly matter. He is only concerned with having a good time. The difference between the two can be seen as written by Ms. Sumayla in her research paper titled, Exploring the Dual Nature of Characterisation: A Comprehensive Analysis of Positive and Negative Impacts in Vikas Sharma's I.A.S. Today:

Romesh and Tinny were good friends who discussed contemporary issues at national and international levels. However, Tinny, being from a well-to-do family, indulged in different activities, like playing cricket and smoking cigarettes. He also had friendships with girls. In contrast, Romesh preferred discussing national, social, and international problems faced by

citizens worldwide." (An Insight into the Fictional World of Vikas Sharma, 171)

Romesh struggles a lot because of his financial condition and this is what makes him work even harder. On the other hand, Tinny gets everything without even having to ask for it. He feels that he can get anything and this makes him even worse. Romesh knows that he has nothing except his knowledge and hard work. He studies hard and he aims to become an I.A.S. Officer. He fails in his first attempt and this does not discourage him. He works even harder and finally achieves his goals. Even when he becomes an I.A.S. Officer, he does not have money to buy clothes for himself and he packs a small suitcase with very few old clothes.

He had no money with him when he was ordered to train at Shastri Administrative Training College, Mussoorie. He had never been to any hill station so far and hence a lot of dreams captured his fantasy. The weather is pleasant there but then he had only one worn-out pullover that he could buy three years ago. His father Raman gave him eight hundred rupees as a parting gift and asked him to 'concentrate on his training and become a responsible citizen of the nation'. He had two old shirts and pants, Khaddar Kurtas, a few undergarments, and an ordinary towel to pack in the old suitcase that his father bought for his mother long back. (I.A.S. TODAY, 108-109)

This is symbolic of the class disparity between Romesh and Trishala. It can be said because of the clear differences between them. When Romesh goes to the training institute, he finds out that his roommate is a young woman named Trishala. Trishala comes from a very good family, she is rich and she is definitely upper class. She has a very different way of dressing up, she is confident, and she is modern, unlike Romesh. Romesh is very intelligent but he is not as confident and outgoing because of the fact that he grew up in a social class that was comparatively lower. This affected his confidence and personality to a great extent.

TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW: THE IMPACT OF CLASS DISPARITY ON YOUNG INDIVIDUALS:

The novel *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* revolves around the theme of poverty and class struggle. It shows us how people who come from a lower class struggle all their lives to be able to change their social and economic status in hopes of leading a better life. The story shows us how two young boys coming from the same house take two different paths to get out of poverty. Their desperation to lead a better life makes them do anything and everything.

The protagonist of the story is a young man named Pritesh. Pritesh comes from a lower middle-class family and his father is a subordinate clerk in Tehsil. He had five children and providing resources for their education and other things was never easy. He struggled a lot and this was not hidden from his children. The eldest son Pritesh wanted to study and change his family's fate. Ajoy, his younger brother, also wants to be able to change his family's fate. However, he is not like his elder brother and he does not believe in working hard with patience.

The class disparity is very visible when Pritesh's friends visit him on the day of the result. While they all are planning to go off to another city for their degree and also to enjoy themselves, Pritesh can not even go to another city to get an education when he is very intelligent and deserves the required facilities to be able to study and succeed. Unlike his friends, it is not as easy for him to simply move to another city to attend college. This shows us the difference between the economic status of Pritesh and his friends. Professor Ajay Shukla writes very appropriately in his research paper titled, *The Prominence of Education as Depicted in the Novel "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow"*:

The novel sheds light on the barriers that hinder access to education for marginalized communities. It addresses

socio-economic constraints that often limit educational opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, it highlights the challenges faced by rural and backward areas in terms of accessibility and infrastructure. The novel prompts readers to contemplate the inequities in educational opportunities that exist in society and the urgent need to address these disparities. (Dynamic Narrative Concerns in the Novels of Vikas Sharma, 57-58)

Ajoy also struggles financially, just like the rest of his family. He is not good at studies, so he chooses the wrong path. He takes a shortcut because of his desperation to get out of poverty. He just wants to be rich and happy and that is all that matters to him. While his actions and ways are definitely very questionable, we need to analyze the reason behind his decision to act this way. Ajoy knows what he is doing is very wrong. This is evident from the anxiety and stress that he experiences when he does all this. But he also knows that he needs to get out of his present situation no matter what and the desperation to change his social class surpasses his morals, ethics, and values. This is what happens to people who suffer because of class disparity. In a way, they are made to trade their morals and ethics for a change of class and hopes for a better life.

The same happens with Ajoy. In this desperation of wanting to lead a better life and establish a social and economic status that he was not born with, he goes down a rabbit hole and ends up ruining his life at a very young age. The price that he has to pay for a better life is way too high and he pays with his health, happiness, and his character. This is symbolic of his struggle and desperation to change his social class. This is only a glimpse of how class disparity affects so many people.

498A: FEARS AND DREAMS: RUINED LIVES BECAUSE OF CLASS DISPARITY:

498A: Fears and Dreams is a social documentary written by Professor Sharma. This novel deals with a section of the Indian Penal Code that penalizes any acts of cruelty against a woman by her husband or his relatives. While it appears that this section is a very good initiative to change society for the better, Professor Vikas Sharma highlights the other part of the picture in this novel through various stories. He tells us how people misuse this section to exploit innocent people and how class disparity plays a major role in inspiring such acts.

Upon analyzing the novel, we find that most of the people who misuse this section are people belonging to a lower economic class who are willing to make a drastic change in their lives and economic status. The first story that we come across is that of Tanvi and Jatin. Both of them come from a lower-middle-class family. Jatin is an honest man and he works hard to make life better for him and his family. He wants to make Tanvi happy and he does everything in his power to do so. Tanvi, on the other hand, comes from a very financially weak family. For her, all that matters is being rich and having all the things that a person from the upper class has. She constantly forces Jatin to fulfill her never-ending demands. She does all this because she just wants to live like an upper-class individual. She does not want to work hard for the same, she just wants to reap the fruits. Tanvi fails to understand the importance of being happy with what you have because she is envious of other rich and upper-class people. This is what leads to a failed marriage and she sues Jatin under section 498A and extorts a huge sum of money.

This is all because of her desperation to get rich and become an upper-class woman. She just wants a better economic and social status and this is why she gets married to a rich lawyer who does not take dowry but instead gives

money to Tanvi's mother upon her marriage. Tanvi marries a man

who already has a son of her own age just to change her social and economic class. This is because her mother has always only taught her to aspire to become rich and hence, she ends up ruining her life and her happy marriage just for the sake of becoming richer. Mohit Patel highlights this in his research paper titled, A Critical Study of Novel 498A: Fears and Dreams: 498A: Cure or Crime:

Knowingly, unknowingly choosing a path which wasn't appropriate for her, she was actually guided by her desires and expectations without acknowledging the love and care of her husband, his effort to make her life beautiful with the resources. (Critiquing the Novels of Vikas Sharma, 251-252)

What Professor Vikas Sharma is trying to tell us here is how one's social class impacts their behavior and thinking. Tanvi has always struggled with money and having a good social value and this is the only thing she wants. Her mother also constantly tells her that this is what her worth depends upon. So, she tries to change her class to become worthy. People like Tanvi and her mother often associate happiness with their social class and in this desperation, they end up making decisions that are harmful to them. While this appears to be very wrong and uncalled for, it is not entirely baseless. It is the society that tells people that their worth depends on their class. People from different classes are treated differently and the ones who are subjected to ill treatment yearn for what they lack and this leads them to become so desperate to change their class.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, we find that Professor Vikas Sharma has done a wonderful job of highlighting the problems in our society and the problem of class disparity is only one of them. In a society, people often calculate the worth of

others in terms of their social status and the economic value of their assets. This leads to differential treatment that affects the lives of many people. The people who are not born into a more privileged and upper class are forced to struggle much harder even when they have a lot of potential and are willing to work hard. This class disparity affects the opportunities that are offered to a person as they are calculated based on their class instead of their potential. Characters like Romesh and Abhilash are very good examples of this. They tell us a lot about how people from lower social and economic classes are constantly discriminated against. On the other hand, Ajoy and Tanvi tell us about people who are so fed up with their class that they are willing to go to any lengths just to make a change.

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