

Richa Pandit: A Puissant Portrayal

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Abstract

This paper examines the puissant portrayal of the character of Richa Pandit in Professor Vikas Sharma's novel; "Love's Not Time's Fool". Too often strong female characters are relegated to being sidekicks and afterthoughts - compliments to male protagonists, so the purpose of this study is how a female character can beautifully lead society just by using some wit and intellectuality, on her own. Using a method of textual analysis, this study analyses how Richa survives in this cruel patriarchy with the help of her broad-mindedness and cerebral which prevails above any physical beauty or charm. Richa as a protagonist plays a vital role in the novel and sets an example not only for all other female characters that are mentioned in the novel but for every other female in this world to think wisely and take a firm stand whenever or wherever it is necessary. Along with the analyses of the character of Richa, this paper also looks at how the author has attached importance to the rights of women and attracts the attention of the rich people towards the problems of widows, orphans, and helpless old people as well as how Richa inspires everybody else to any kind of problem whether it is on economic or on a social level that too without feeling tense, which is not at all an easy task for any female even in the present scenario.

Keywords: Puissant, Sidekicks, Patriarchy, Cerebral, Love's Not Time's Fool.

Introduction

"Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider, some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." (Bacon 79)

One should not read books just to be able to refute others. Nor should he read to believe anything he/she finds there. Nor should he/she read them to obtain the material of the conversation. A person reads to think about what he/she has read and to judge the value of what is contained in the book. Some books can only be read partially. Some books can be read quickly and in a hurry. There are only a few books worth reading carefully and thoroughly. And the character of Richa of Love's Not Time's Fool knows it well as it has been seen in the very first paragraph of the novel itself, where Richa Pandit is keenly interested to read more sublime books to sharpen her intellectual level. Though she has already studied various subjects like Theories, World History, Social Science, Botany, and Zoology, along with some critically famous writers namely,

Vladimir Nabokov, Salman Rushdie, D. H. Lawrence, Khushwant Singh, and others as well yet, her quest for knowledge never gets suppressed. She says, "So, I decided to go to the book market in the evening and buy some new books for my leisure time so that I may be up to the mark in the field of knowledge".

As she supports those who love and do care for books. She feels bad and pity for all those who ignore the value of the books and give all the importance to materialistic life and unnecessary things instead of making this life worthy by giving a raise to intellectual enlightenment. Richa Pandit believes:

But alas! Who cares for my opinion on books and intellectual enlightenment? But I also ignore the people who ignore books and are not prepared for any discussion on socio-ethical and eco-political matters. Why can't modern students be ready for communication in Hindi and English all the time? How can they be afraid of speaking at conferences and seminars? Why don't they visit their college library where grand books are gathering dust?

'Love's Not Time's Fool', written by critically acclaimed author, Vikas Sharma, is a captivating novel, that traces the life of an upper-middle-class woman, Richa Pandit, married to the owner of a footwear firm in Agra. Her married life as we discover later is far from happiness. This marriage, as we see many around us, is marked by a mechanical relationship devoid of warmth and mutual love. What she could not get from marriage; she seeks outside the marriage. The sheer coincidence led her to Abhilash, nicknamed Abhi, and M.Com. Final year student of St. John's College, Agra. Abhi is the son of a postmaster from a small town. In a way Richa and Abhi complemented each other; one possessed what the other lacked. Abhi has a humble background and finds himself struggling financially while Richa is the de-facto owner of a footwear firm having an overseas business. Similarly, Abhi is passionate and succumbs to the desires and fancies of Richa Pandit, the very traits for which she looked up to her husband Malya Vaidik but was eventually disappointed. Abhi and Richa proved to be natural companions to each other. The two grew closer and closer to each other in absence of Richa's husband Malya as he went abroad for some business-related work.

Even as the two came closer Richa is still somewhat wary as she has a troubled past and has seen what betrayal means, the trauma of which is still afresh to her. The sudden demise of both of Abhi's parents back home in quick succession shatters him from within. At this crucial

moment, Richa extends her emotional support to Abhi which he so desperately needed. The passions intensify as time passes by. But to the outside world, Richa Pandit is still the wife of Malya Vaidik. She didn't know what shape her relationship with Abhi would take once Malya is back from abroad. But as fate had it Malya died of a lung infection caught while he was admitted to hospital for the treatment of injuries sustained while playing baseball. In the meantime, Richa also came to know of Malya's extramarital affair with a female worker of his office who accompanied him on his visit abroad but came back abruptly. This absolved her of any guilt she might have harbored. Finally, Abhi and Richa decided to tie the knot.

The story told from the perspective of female protagonist Richa is a reflection of contemporary upper-middle-class society. It lays bare the insecurities and fears of the people seemingly living happy and comfortable lives. The novel is bold in its depiction of intimate scenes. It also deals with many other issues of social importance like the fate of children born out of wedlock, the fate of arranged marriages not faring well, social aspirations of persons with disabilities, the place of widows in society, the question of social acceptance of widow remarriage, etc. Through the character of Richa, we enter the world of a well-to-do upper-middle-class woman dissatisfied with her marriage and her quest to compensate for it. Abhi represents an ambitious young man who aspires to become an I.A.S. officer but circumstances lead him to a different avenue.

What is a Strong Female Character?

"The Strong Female Character trope often shows us the "underlying deficit of respect the character starts with, which she's then required to overcome by whatever desperate, over-the-top, cartoonish means to hand"—just to bring herself up to the man's level." (Cristea, 2015).

There is no such thing as a Strong Male Character, it is just assumed that male characters are inherently strong. This is mainly due to the male-dominated society we live in. Often, when a female character is described as "strong", we associate her traits with male notions of strength - power, aggression, and warrior. While portraying strong female characters isn't a bad thing, it's problematic because that's often the only definition that gets paid attention when focusing on portraying strong women. Because of these writers, readers, and everyone in between are starting to expect some type of female character.

"If we're constantly expecting these strong women to be – let's face it – female incarnations of our rudimentary SF/F heroes (traditionally and typically male). How are we supposed to start demonstrating realistic characters? This is a problem on all sides of the gender spectrum: the concepts of masculine and feminine need to be pared down to basics to utilize them correctly. As concepts instead of

labels that are rigidly applied. But it's complicated and people prefer simple." (Cristea, 2015).

When the reader thinks of a strong female character, they usually think of a woman in a leather jacket, her dark hair pulled casually from her face, a bow and arrow strapped to her shoulders, and a knife to her thigh. She is looking back, and you can tell from the heresy that she has a dark and torturous past. This is just one definition of strong means. Female warrior. The girl action hero. "Never mind the fact that she is catering to a "mostly" male-appreciated aesthetic" (Cristea, 2015). And while women do love seeing themselves in these demagogues characters they can only dream of being, these characters are "essentially speaking for or to women" (Cristea, 2015).

It's consummately fine for women to appreciate themselves in this physical sense and see themselves as warriors in fiction. The bigger problem is that readers are starting to see this type of character as a standard female character. She is not the only woman out there saving the world.

It takes par excellence to portray such a strong character as it has been a tendency of patriarchy just to show the physical charm of their female characters, their looks, their homely nature, and their appearances in all. There are hardly a handful of writers, who takes the courageous step to talk about the intellectuality of a female character, not only that but takes a step ahead and proudly praise their presence of mind, their abilities, their skilfulness, their worth and portray a female character honestly so that they can show their real worth. And they just do not write but believe that females stand equal to the males. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft argued in her excellently written work namely, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", that education should be provided regardless of any gender; it should not only be provided to men but to women as equally as it has been conveniently provided to men. There must not be confinement or any kind of limitations for any female to work or behave homely only. Similarly, an apt example of Jane Austen, a prominent writer of the Victorian Age, can be taken here, who portrayed her leading female characters as smart and intelligent as any other male character in her novels. In the same way, an impressive and grand narration of a feisty woman by the name of Richa Pandit can be seen in the very famous English novel entitled "Love's Not Time's Fool" which is penned down by an uprising star of Indian English Literature, Prof. Vikas Sharma. Prof. Sharma, being a keen observer of the surroundings and the society very aptly narrates or justifies the character of Richa Pandit as a puissant lady.

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Richa is not only a mirror of modern society but she also has some innate qualities which make her strong not only

in her nature but in her decisions too where she always supports intellectuality and purposefulness due to her bound and determined attitude towards life. She is not only fond of reading books but also has an equal interest in sports, which presents a different kind of image to the world of today's women. Generally, it is seen that a major number of writers only talk or write about cosmetics, outward form, countenance, or daily routine to their heroines but this novel "Love's Not Time's Fool" is an exception where it is shown how a level-headed girl, Richa praises and fond of playing tennis with his husband and offers others to play with her as well. On seeing her endearment for tennis

Abhilash (an I.A.S. aspirant and friend of Richa Pandit) shockingly exclaims, "Really! You enjoy playing tennis?..." No. Very few people play tennis in this country. And there are even lesser number of women tennis players here"

Richa Pandit, a protagonist of "Love's Not Time's Fool", by Prof. Vikas Sharma is an apotheosis of the state of women in the post-modern era. The novel heralded the beginnings of modernism while presenting the individuality of modern women's rights by describing the professional and personal growth of an independent and gifted heroine. Among post-modern Indian writers, Prof. Sharma is one of the most radical authors, who can express his views in a strong contemporary and ultra-modern way through his novels. Women in his works play a vital role. In his novels, women are depicted in a very idiosyncratic and unconventional way. His novels blend romance, love, lust, hatred, and extramarital affairs, but in a luxurious way. He tries to portray the reality of cities and cosmopolitan societies. His female characters are ultra-modern and westernized, with no faith or belief in any kind of sanctimonious, counterfeit, or hollow society. His female characters break multitudinous prescriptions and feel unconventional.

Similarly, contemporary popular Indian novelist, Chetan Bhagat featured this new woman in his book. Chetan portrays his female characters as forerunners of social change and equality, as evident in his book *One Night @ the Call Centre*, where men and women are treated equally and work in night shift. Likewise, Prof. Sharma's novels emphasize the vital reality and create awareness of how a female can be strong-willed, mulish, and unyielding to make her life better, just like Richa Pandit who lives on her terms and enjoys a successful life in a society where there patriarchy rules, she auspiciously makes her place. Conclusion

To conclude, 'Love Is Not Time's Fool' is an attempt to navigate through the world of so-called 'haves' who possess almost all the materialistic comforts but still long for the fundamental human need to love; the desire to love

and be loved and very sophisticatedly exhibits the efficacious character of Richa Pandit.

What is most astounding about Love's Not Time's Fool's Richa Pandit is her strength of character. Her indomitability, her self-assurance, her relentlessness, her obstreperousness of convention, her honesty, and her compassion may have been in her character all along, but her bold way towards life brings them to our attention. She, in the end, is a survivor in this so cold post-modern world. Where even today every house wishes for the birth of a son, there, in that narrow-minded world, portraying a bold, resolute, independent and highly spirited character like Richa Pandit in that society is not an easy task at all. Prof. Sharma not only writes about the open-mindedness and uniqueness of Richa Pandit but very cunningly he raises some more questions to make society aware of various important matters to look into, one of them is gender discrimination along with a double-faced attitude of some females and he sheds the light on a fierce topic like women are each other's worst enemy. In another novel, entitled *Ashes and Fire* he writes, "Why do the ladies generally aspire for sons and not for daughters?"

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