

# Heterogeneity of Thematic Patterns in IAS Today by Professor Vikas Sharma

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## Abstract:

IAS Today is Prof. Vikas Sharma's second English novel after the successful and well received, "Love's Not Time's Fool" and after his first novel in Hindi, "Raah ke Pathar". The novel presents a variety of themes. Professor Vikas Sharma is a very progressive novelist and his writings present the concerns of the contemporary world. His novels are a mirror of the modern Indian society and world. He also presents the difference and conflicts between the urban and rural way of life, between morality and the blind pursuit for materialistic gain. The different characters in the novel are symbolic of the various walks of life. Romesh represents a simple way of life based on ethics and morals whereas Tinny represents the corrupt and immoral way of life where physical pleasure and materialistic gain is everything. The novel was written during the pandemic and it addresses the various concerns of the time, like the speculations in the minds of the normal people, the ups and downs of the economy and other such issues. This adds to the achievements of this novel.

**Keywords-** contemporary, pandemic, ethics, corrupt, morals.

The well known poet and critic, T. S. Eliot, has righteously said, "*The more perfect the artist the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.*" This quote has been proved right in the times of the covid 19 pandemic, where almost all the writers have become virtual. The true job of a literary artist is to express their true selves, and in times like these, this expression has mainly been constricted to online platforms; but even in such hard times, some writers are still expressing themselves through a pen and a paper, thus, keeping the true form of the art alive. One such evolving writer is Prof. Vikas Sharma, who has turned to writing in such depressing times to let his expressions, emotions and intellect run free among his writings. He can be rightly called the *novelist of the pandemic*. He has used his thoughts as a catalyst does but to empower change and inspire growth in the society through his words and stories. The two of his beautifully written English novels, IAS Today and Love's Not Time's Fool, present to us a writer who motivates us to live life to the fullest by overcoming all the problems and the struggles that fate throws our way. Prospero, the famous creation of the Victorian poet and philosopher, Robert Browning, appropriately describes the

passion and enthusiasm of Prof. Vikas Sharma, through the following lines,

*"I was ever a fighter, so one fight more! The best and the last!"*

A huge number of young Indians aspire to become bureaucrats in the world's largest democracy. This youth also includes the students who come from a middle class family background and are not well equipped with all the required resources to turn their dreams into reality. They might not have the means but undoubtedly, have the enthusiasm and passion that is needed. The protagonist in IAS Today, stands for such people. He has a goal in his life and he persistently tries to achieve it with all his might. He has high ideals which he is unwilling to compromise at any cost. But, this society is filled with all sorts of people, if there are people with high ideals, there are also people who are not hesitant to resort to unfair means to reach their goals. The protagonist Romesh is faced with these people who are willing to do anything to rise. Along with Romesh's interactions and struggles with these people, we are also presented a glimpse into his love life and the propaganda of modernization.

The novel is a beautiful amalgamation of various stories that take place together, this serves the readers with a variety of themes. Ambition and disappointment go together hand in hand. We see enthusiasm and passion, but we also get a glimpse of depression and exhaustion. If the novel talks about realism, it also talks about romanticism. The story is told through a wide range of characters, that differ from each other to some great extents, such characters include, Romesh, the protagonist; Shivangi, his cousin; Danny, Shivangi's husband, Inspector Karmveer, and Tinny, son of S.D.M., who is also the batch mate of Romesh in his college days.

Romesh is an excellent scholar, who is pursuing his education in arts. While studying for his bachelor's degree, he was also preparing for the civil services exam. Romesh was not well off and his poor financial condition was a barrier in his education, but he was able to keep it going with the help of his teachers. While preparing for civil services, he finds his interest in literature and other disciplines like philosophy and politics. He read about various famous personalities like Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, J. Krishnamurti and many others who deeply inspire him. He idolizes such people with a great character and aspires to be like them someday. Dr Vikas

Sharma is an excellent writer and his writings can be compared to those of well established writers like Chetan Bhagat and Manju Kapoor. The difference that stands between the two is that Prof. Vikas Sharma saw the pandemic as an opportunity and utilized it to give life to words through his writings. Prof. Vikas Sharma and his writings are an amazing example of how adversity can be beautifully seen and utilized as an opportunity to let out your creativity. Dr Vikas Sharma is a progressive novelist of the contemporary era. He talks about female independence and female rights and how they are an important issues of concern. He also stands for radical changes, however, he does not advocate the use of unethical means to achieve milestones in life. In IAS Today, Tinny and his friends are the representatives of the notion of epicurean philosophy and that success is everything and they are ignorant towards morals and values in life. On the other hand, through the example of Romesh, Prof. Vikas Sharma, brings to our notice how anything can be achieved through hard work and that one does not have to do away with their morals and values to become successful.

One of the major themes of this novel is love. The romantic aspect of the novel is exhibited through the young students. While for some people, love is spiritual and platonic, for the others, it is only constricted to physical pleasure or lust. The author appreciates and welcomes the obstacles in the course of true love, but he is all against the mere physical pleasure. The author also throws light on the evil aspects of the show business. When Shivangi goes to meet Devadev, the so called producer and director of the film, he regards her as a mere “puppet, and a doll for physical pleasure that night”, and during her dance, the producer and Devadev really try to physically assault her, but she comes out of this difficult situation with courage and her judo skills. The author attempts to make the young girls and boys aware about the evils of this business, who dream of it like a bed of roses.

The novelist expresses how a bad deed always ends drastically and brings trouble and miseries as evil dies it's own death. Tinny or Jay Tapase and his friends start their misdeeds with petty crimes like stealing vehicles and other such possessions. But in the end, their crimes know no bounds and they end up as murderers and dacoits. This shows how evil actions have no end and keep going on. You can not stop the vicious cycle of misdeeds and it keeps going on and on. Gannu dies an early death in a police encounter. Tinny lives a luxurious and lecherous life with Kanti, Rewati and Swati. But even he has to pay the price for his misdeeds as he is poisoned by Swati, who wishes to seek revenge through this act of hers. On the other hand, Romesh lives a strict and disciplined life according to Gandhian principles. Finally, he achieves his goal and becomes an IAS officer and lives a successful and reputed life. Both these characters, Tinny and Romesh, present a stark contrast. While is Mussoorie, during his

training, Romesh refuses to wear a formal suit in front of his professors as he considers it against the Gandhian principles of simplicity. Tinny lives a luxurious life with the money and power of his family, he has everything at the tip of his fingers, but he is still not at peace. He fails to find mental stability and peace. The novelist also throws light on the ambitious nature of the female counterparts who are running after materialistic gain and pleasures. Rewati is an example of this. She knows it very well that Tinny or Jay Tapase is married, but she is more than willing to stay with him in an illicit relationship as his mistress.

Professor Vikas Sharma has discussed the erotic scenes at length that makes the novel realistic and modern. Physical passion could be a part of life, but Prof. Vikas Sharma, in no way, justifies illicit relationships and other immoral practices. The novel presents a conflict between love and lust. In the beginning, Romesh explains the famous poem by Shakespeare, True Love;

***“I have no experience of such love. But this literary artist asserts that pure love is for the sake of love and above worldly consideration and social bondage. Lovers ignore all rituals and authorities to gain their love at any cost.”***  
(P 16)

The novel is well packed with discussions on various disciplines, like sociology, politics, world history, and literature, of course; Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, Winston Churchill, Jawaharlal Nehru, M. K. Gandhi, Hitler, all find a place among the novel. There are references to various epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and what not. The novel showcases a wide and deep knowledge about various disciplines. The novel has a touch of religion at all times. Chanting of Gayatri Mantra, Om Shanti Mantra, Om Namah Shivaya, Jai Shri Krishna, all repeat themselves, which provide a sense of spiritual peace to the readers. The discussion of Ramayana and the characters of the epic have a deep and long lasting influence on Romesh. Sigmund Freud's interpretation of dreams, is clearly visible on the psyche of the characters in the novel.

***“Romesh agreed that seeing dreams is very common throughout the world and people of all age groups see decent and indecent dreams. A child may cry after seeing his teacher beating him with a cane for his incomplete homework. In her dream, a woman may see her husband flirting with other women and then beating him. An old man may dream of himself making love to a young film actress. Similarly, Romesh saw himself being beaten by his uncle for cutting the lock of Shivangi Another night he found himself in the Garden of Eden wandering with Shivangi's friend Sadhana Reutela. But then God banished both of them from heaven as she had plucked an apple from the forbidden tree of knowledge.”***  
(P 11)

The novel is actually a story of friends who grow up and choose different paths for life as adults. People like Romesh, who rise from the grass root level, see their parents struggling as kids, their whole life and when they grow up, they choose the same path for themselves, the path of struggle, challenges and morals. On the other hand, we have people like Tinny, who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth. They have ready access to anything and everything and hence, they are never able to understand the true value of honesty, hard work and other values. They become a blemish to the family and their parents. People who commit petty crimes at a young age usually grow up to become serious criminals. Professor Vikas Sharma is seen giving a warning to such people through his novel.

***“It is never too late to study books because one must control one’s passions, worldly ambitions and material desires if one wants to achieve one’s aim.”***  
(P 31)

Prof. Vikas Sharma gives us a warning through the people who have chosen the wrong path in their lives. For an example, there are three students, Arun Vaibhav, Kumar Siddharth and Kumar Sambhav who brutally rape and murder the wife of Professor Sanjay Kaul, the head of the department of Chemistry in Jammu and Kashmir University. The novelist raises the question;  
***“Where are women safe if not inside the University campus?”***  
(P 143)

These three criminals pay the price for their heinous crime. After a lawsuit, they are pronounced death sentence.

A good writer is one who addresses the contemporary world and it’s problems. Purposeful literature is one which mirrors the society it is being written in. Professor Vikas Sharma is well aware of this fact. He also includes the essence of the pandemic, and portrays it through the disastrous consequences.

***“Covid 19 had brought many changes all over the world in a short time and a lot of industries stopped production. Schools and colleges were closed indefinitely. Poor hawkers faced hardships though free ration was distributed to them for more than four months. But the economy of India got a sudden break and the GDP rate went down. Prices of shares fell drastically, though the property rates increased tremendously. A lot of lands were sold so as to pay the loans of banks. Physicians dedicated themselves to the service of people without any consideration of caste, color and creed.”***  
(P 165)

The novel presents the female characters with a strong personality and a major role in the novel. Just like

in the comedies of Shakespeare, women in IAS Today, take the initiative. The female characters are brilliant, smart, elegant and powerful and physically, they can’t be called timid. The first female character to appear in the novel is Shivangi, who leaves a mark on everyone through her powerful personality. Shivangi is the cousin of Romy or Romesh and his student as well. She takes tuitions from him but she forces him to teach her on her conditions. After the death of Shivangi’s father, Bishan Shrotriya, she comes forward and showcases her full personality. She handles the financial matters and also runs her own musical dance group. In matters of love, she is open minded, frank, modern and candid; but she doesn’t let anyone use her as a tool.

***“when she was dancing, the producer and Devadev assaulted her physically and tried to press her boobs. By this time she had understood the evil desires and lust of these fellows and take precaution. She used to keep a small Rampuri knife which she could easily handle. Without losing any second she took out her knife and boldly said- “come and attack me if you dare! Sons of pigs! Come if you wish to be killed!””***  
(P 26)

Other female characters like Kanti, Rewati and Swati are minor characters, but they also leave a strong impression on the readers. Trishala Vasu, who came closer and got married to Romesh, during the training in Mussoorie, is also a very powerful character. Professor Vikas Sharma is very aware as a feminist writer. He gives them space and is aware of their rights. And sometimes, it seems that the male characters are the puppets in the hands of their female counterparts. Like Kanti, who forces a man like Tinny to marry her and Swati who doesn’t hesitate to poison Tinny to take revenge, as Tinny had killed her husband, Chandra, in a robbery. Aside from these unconventional female characters, we are also presented some traditional female characters, like the wife of S.D.M. Bharat Bharti and the mother of Tinny, who still loves her son and wants to bail him out to get him back home even after the many crimes he commits.

On the whole, the novel presents a wide variety of themes in unison. The novel is packed with deep knowledge and discussions on a huge number of disciplines as the writer himself is well versed with many fields of intellect. However, this makes the novel quite cumbersome. Like Milton’s writings, the novel is not for the layman. It is scholarly and for the intellectuals. There are references, minute details and discussions. The novel is vast like the syllabus of IAS, which is indicated in the title itself. The writer does not leave behind the moral and ethical part of our lives and he shows how morality always succeeds in the end and the immoral receive punishment for their sins.

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