

Dreams and Priorities Representation of Indian Youth in Vikas Sharma's *Hope Against Hope*

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(Abstract)

The novel *Hope Against Hope* is a document of social realism especially the youth in contemporary Indian society. The present chapter explore analyses the psychological conditions of youth twenty first century India from different segment and backgrounds of the society. Professor Awasthi, a retired college Associate Professor is the narrator in the novel who narrated the story with some college students and academic institutions. Literature is the mirror of life and part and parcel of human nature that stimulates an individual and shows various images of society whether they are positive or negative. Literature also has an important role in providing knowledge and entertainment. Although literature has been a part of Indian culture and society, ever since civilization developed here, it began with the *Vedas* in oral form and then compiled. The *Vedas* have been composed by some sages coming into the literary scene of Indian society. Stories inspire humans whether they are oral or written or acted. Literature is a very useful and powerful medium. The present novel peeps into the lives of twenty first century Indian youth persuading their dreams and priorities. The novel unveils the naked realities youth's struggle, hard work and compromises too. The present explores the representation of youth's dream and priorities through the characters and events in the novel.

Keywords: Hope, Class Struggle, Gender consciousness, Business Environment. Capitalism, Extramarital Relationship and Marital Bliss

Vikas Sharma is a recognized and well acclaimed author in the modern fiction writing realm in Hindi and English. His first novel *Raah Ke Patthar* focused on the theme of religious harmony of Hindu-Muslim unity published in 2021. He has authored many famous novels such as *IAS Today*, *Love's Not Time's Fool*, *Medicine: Light in Twilight*, *498A: Fears and Dreams*, *Ashes and Fire*, and *Hope Against Hope*. All his novels have been well received and thoroughly loved by the readers as well as critics. He has been the face of productivity and optimism through the corona virus pandemic. He is a well-known name in the literary spheres, hailing as a well-acclaimed Researcher, Professor, Poet, and Novelist. He has also written anthologies titled '*Epiphanies*', a famous collection of poems and short stories. He has made his own place in the writing world in a very short period of time by utilizing the pandemic as an opportunity to nurture his creativity and innovation. The present paper is an attempt to help various students to gain a better understanding, a wider and newer perspective, and a whole new set of ideas about Vikas Sharma's novel *Hope Against Hope* (2023). The novel begins with the optimistic assertion of the some have a number of opportunities to learn from different person and worldly events if one asks question – "Why it happened and how it happened?" (5). The narrator of the novel a retired Associate Professor who haunted by his good and bad memory during his life. Once it seems his life has become completely desolate and nothing is left for him and he seems lost in day reveries and old good bad memory:

My afternoons make me feel drowsy after lunch, and hence I enjoy my siesta for an hour. After my retirement, my favourite students and research scholars have almost

forgotten me. But why to blame them? They too have their families and engagements to keep them busy...After retirement, a new routine of life began of its own though I didn't plan it. No alarm to me to get up by 6 A.M., shave myself Have a rapid bath, put on my suit, tie and polish my pair of shoes. No more preparation of notes at night sacrificing T.V. serials....Of course, I failed to join my political party as I had no ambition to become M.L.A. or M.P. (5-6).

The narrator not only becomes desolate in his routine but find himself difficult to run a family of five members. He decides to give tuition instead of spending time on leisure activity like book reading. The narrator discusses the episode of Nishan Singh who had lost all the hopes of a bright career in life. Nishan Singh represents the numbers of Indian youth to do heart core efforts and hard work to fulfil their dreams and priorities. Their all hopes and dreams upon their high percentage in examination and got dejected when they couldn't perform well and expected level in exam:

Nishan Singh reached my home and stopped his scooter where I was talking with my next-door neighbour. After paying regards, he showed me his marksheet of M.A. Pre. (English) and congratulated him for having passed. But he was full of anger as he had secured only 42 percent marks. He replied back when on his success— 'I've lost my career. What the hell will I do with this low percentage of marks?... I came ton you high expectations. Son of poor widow as I am. Perhaps destined to be a peon or at the clerk in some office now. As he continued to be rash, I lost my temper because I found myself overpowered by the dictatorial conduct. Out of anger, I called him 'a fool' (9).

Prof. Awasthi did a lot of hard work and guided him personally. Ultimately after getting second division in M.A., he joined coaching centre in Delhi, and got success in his first attempt in the U.P.S.C. competition for Excise Officer and got posted in Mumbai airport. The journey of the character Nishan Singh from a failure and hopeless student to U.P.S.C. successor endorse the justification of the title of the novel and represents the youth and Indian higher education system. The episode also solidifies the statement of Emily Dickenson, 'Success is counted sweet, by those who never succeeds...' The narrator emphasizes the point that failures are pillars to success. One should not give up even in the worst situation. One can turn his/ her fortune by hard work and planning. Any failure can be used as a stepping stone towards success. Lame excuses cannot be considered in the missionary journey of success. Nissan Singh proves the point that how someone can transform himself from a desolate situation to successful life.

\ But all the youth of the country is not as lucky as Nishan Singh. The majority of population especially in rural area is illiterate, poor, orthodox and superstitious due to lack of proper schooling and school, lack of teachers and basic amenities in school, book, note books, pencil and pen buying is big challenge due to poverty. The problem is not constrained to education but health also. The people don't get proper medical aid as qualified physician and the staff nurses. No sports facility was available in the various part of the country. People has no guidance and clear idea about the government jobs and training. Some philanthropists make some arrangement in this field to provide basic facility to the people but this is not sufficient. Lack of proper guidance and counselling many adolescents spoil their lives. The narrative reveals the how some young girls eloped with their boyfriends and never returned home. Death scenes were common due to corruption and mal practice of industrialist. The people cursed their fate for all these problems and politician and feudal lords never bothered for them. However, the overall condition of the self-reliance of country is making proud the narrator:

However, today's Times of India, November 26,2021, makes me feel proud of our farmers 'efforts— 'Born After A Famine, India A Food-grain Exporter Now.' I recollected (1964) when our families had to survive with brown wheat received from the

U.S.A. etc., and yet a lot of people died of starvation. Thanks to our farmers who produced enough food grains even during two years of Corona period and gave a boost to the Indian economy with nearly 24 percent output. Due to the production of Indian tractors, tube-well, thrashers, pumping sets, tillers other engines India hopes to be among top five major world economic powers (24-25)

The narrator tells the stories of struggle of his own son Pradeep who wants to be either a captain or senior police officer and hated the teaching profession but when he faces difficulties of his aims and turned out by selection committee then he decided to join the teaching profession and joined the coaching center of his father. His student Karandeep, son of a tea vendor, whose father died of flu leaving behind a widow. He prepares tea/ coffee for Rampur lawyers and judges of Rampur court and bears the responsibility of his widow mother. He becomes firstly a temporary lecturer on monthly salary of eight thousand rupees and got Ph.D. degree with his determination and hard work and finally got selected in U.P. Higher Education Service Commission. Another young boy Abhay Kant, son of a landlord and banker who contested the election for the post of President of the Student' Union but lost the election by a few votes and became desperate in life. He joined the coaching centers in Delhi to prepare for I.A.S. and P.C.S. competitions. But he could not succeed in the selection process and rejected twice in interview. He becomes a successful farmer and sugar manufacturer, "Then he joined as a temporary lecturer in degree college and worked there for two years. Some he developed interest in cultivation and sugar production" (23). Prof. Avasthi, the narrator, tells the story of Alam who becomes I.A.S. officer after getting coaching and guidance from him. Thus, the novelist has a firm opinion as the cases of different young persons discussed in above description, "This confirms the theory that two persons work simultaneously but then their results are different from that of each other" (23).

The news of opening of Noor Medical College by feudal lord Aslam Beg Sahib is also very soothing in the pitiful condition of farmers and laborers. This great philanthropic project also provided an opportunity to the medical professional aspirant young persons. Prof. Avasthi, a man of Humanities, was appointed custodian in the medical college. He started to take keen interest in organizing seminars and conferences to prove his worth and position. This new position of Prof. Avasthi provides him an opportunity to peep into lives of different segment of youth of contemporary society, especially the medical profession aspirant youth including his own daughter Asna (19) and son Srijesh (17), and Tamanna (25). Ms. Shivani (19) daughter of Dr. Arun, a pretty beautiful as well as intelligent girl well skilled in playing badminton, tennis and billiards. The other young characters in the novel new S.P. Kushal (24) his sister Ms. Minti (20). The modern youth doesn't believe in Indian social taboos and have association within their peer group. The narrator narrates as he knew through faculty conversation:

Often, I got the report from the faculty members that a few boys had a permanent association with particular girls and were found enjoying each other's company, such as Niket was happy with Ayashi. Prashant Bharti liked Asna. Saboo Raja felt comfortable in the company of Kameshwari. Vijay Vikas flirted with Samita, and so did Kamaldeep with Advaita. Rishank Jain and Pernika made the same with particulars with the support of each other. Finally, Srijesh loved Shivani.... After all, they had come out of their teenage and could understand their future well. If they concentrate upon studies, all is O.K. If at all they enjoy kissing and hugging secretly, I was nobody to be a bone in their way. It was enough to be respected by the students, and the college trustees were happy with the reports they got from other employees. Personally, I didn't feel tired.... It was a pleasure for me to feel young with young students anyway (39-40)

The malicious advances of S.P. Kushal, firstly towards Shivani and later towards Asna, depicts the true nature of some bureaucrats and how he manages firstly to impress Asna. He offered her to have a cup of coffee in hotel but she denies him. He used unfair tactics firstly to impress Asna and later by kidnapping

her. Although, she was retraced safely by the efforts of Prof. Avasthi and his links. S.P Kushal Kushagra committed suicide due to self-humiliation as his misconduct and conspiracy revealed. Miss Minti, sister of S.P.Kushal approached Prof. Avasthi to take shelter because she was facing mental trauma after the suicide of her brother. She requested Prof. Avasthi and his family to allow him to stay at their home as paying guest. Avasthi family members, especially Mrs. Avasthi was not ready in the beginning, but ultimately, they allow her to stay along with them as paying guest. Actually, Miss Minti seeks psychological support and social security instead of financial support. As the novel moves forward, it reveals that she was involved in a very intimate relationship with an unemployed young man Jagmohan. A number of episodes in the novel shows their intimate scenes and lovemaking scenes. They decided to live together as Minti gives him the assurance for financial security. They make plan to live together and run a joint venture as school project in Khurja but Jag Mohan doesn't fulfil his promise and leave her in the midway of her literal as well as metaphorical journey. Although, she has decided to complete her mission alone:

Finally, she decided to move ahead as Fate and Nature had gifted her a lot of resources so far, and it was her turn to do something for the beautiful and innocent minds of the area. Nothing appeared impossible to her, and Pandit Ji was invited to offer prayers to Lord Shiva to seek His blessings. A few villagers, Pradhan Ji, members of village Panchayat, the Physician etc., were verbally invited at the time of the inauguration of the school.... Now the villagers had a feeling of the future of the school. The hope of certainty made her work easy (83-84).

Vidya Mohan and Preet Mohan are brothers of Jag Mohan who used to live in joint family and annexed his shop which was bought by his father. The incident reveals the family property disputes in the joint family system. Preet Mohan's wife Pummy was wretched and restless as she failed to get sexual satisfaction from Preet Mohan. Being modern, cunning and clever, she didn't share this weakness of her husband though she planned to enjoy sex secretly. She made love to her neighbour, an engineer of Jal Nigam, for nearly six months and yet failed to conceive. Finally, she entrapped Jag Mohan and indulged in extramarital affairs and ultimately got pregnant and gave birth to twins. On the other hand, her sister nanny eloped with her driver's son Salman and found later. But Pummy's Papa K.L.Gupta successfully managed the marriage of Nanny with Jag Mohan using his richness and money and Jag Mohan became a successful businessman after marrying her. Pummy enjoyed motherhood and Jag Mohan became a successful businessman using unethical means and tactics compromising their honesty and integrity. They continued the extramarital relationship even after the marriage of Jag Mohan and Nanny. Dr. N.P Singh has a point when he asserts, "Professor Vikas Sharma has increasingly commented upon the deteriorating moral character of today's generation. While this generation is absorbed by many vices like, greed, crimes, lust, etc., unfaithfulness is also one of the big problems in today's world" (Singh 227).

Thus, the novel is a very realistic novel describing the brighten and darken aspects of contemporary Indian society. It is a novel which motivates the readers to fight against all oddities and injustices and be optimistic towards life. The novel basically represents the various segments of society but especially focused on the academic environment of the country, business problem, unemployment and decaying human and ethical values among youths.

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