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Warning and Hope: A Study of Environmental Concerns in Vikas

Sharma's Writings

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Abstract: The environment refers to the surroundings in which living organisms exist, including air, water, land, and all the living things, such as plants, animals, and humans. It is a complex system that is essential for the possibility of life on Earth, where numerous environmental concerns like climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, water scarcity, soil erosion, ocean conservation, etc., are creating difficulty for living beings and hence need attention and action to resolve them. These issues are interconnected and require collective action to address through literature, environmental science, and different organisations of national and international repute. Vikas Sharma, an emerging writer of the present age, has emphasised burning environmental issues in his writings. This paper is an attempt to critically analyse those efforts in his writing, particularly in novels *Love's Not Time's Fool* (2021), *Ashe and Fire* (2022), and *498 A: Fears and Dreams* (2022). It also highlights the warning and hope about ecology.

Key Words: Attention, Biodiversity, Environment, Deforestation, Pollution, etc.

Introduction:

Environmental concerns loom large in our era, with climate change at the forefront—an escalating menace fueled by rising greenhouse gas emissions, culminating in global warming and erratic weather patterns. Pollution remains a dire affliction, with air, water, and soil contamination wreaking havoc on ecosystems and imperiling human health. Deforestation and natural habitat destruction accelerate biodiversity loss, endangering countless species and threatening the delicate balance of nature. The relentless surge of plastic waste exacerbates pollution on both land and sea, while the unchecked depletion of natural resources, driven by rampant overconsumption and unsustainable practices, casts a shadow over the future of essential life-sustaining elements. The oceans, too, bear the brunt of human recklessness, with acidification disrupting marine life's fragile equilibrium. Meanwhile, overpopulation strains resources and ecosystems, and agricultural practices contribute to environmental degradation through soil exhaustion, excessive water consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions. These

concerns imperil not only life itself but the very essence of existence, affecting both the animate and the inanimate realms.

Main Text:

Writers across generations have lent their voices to these grave issues, stirring consciousness and igniting discourse. Among them, Vikas Sharma stands as a formidable force—his pen wielding the power to challenge environmental degradation and advocate for the preservation of nature's splendor.

A consummate storyteller and an evocative voice in contemporary Indian literature, Vikas Sharma has carved a distinguished place in the literary world. His novels, celebrated for their depth and resonance, have captivated readers, leaving them spellbound. His debut English novel, *Love's Not Time's Fool*, emerged as a compelling narrative that interweaves romance with a poignant commentary on environmental concerns. These novels trace the journey of Richa, an independent and modern woman, and Abhilash, an unemployed yet earnest young man. Beyond their love and the social dilemmas, they navigate, the novel subtly underscores environmental anxieties. One of its first such instances unfold in Agra, where, amidst the backdrop of a business trip, Richa and Abhilash find themselves immersed in a discourse on pollution—a moment that seamlessly entwines the personal with the universal, the intimate with the existential. Richa says,

“The Yamuna was benign only in times of Lord Krishna when he played on her bank. Now, a lot of Agra factories pour their waste into the Yamuna, and its water naturally gets polluted, causing a lot of diseases to human beings as well as animals. Pollution happens to be beyond the control of the Mahapalika Authorities, and there are various factors responsible for environmental pollution. If steps are not taken now, the problem may become serious for Agra inhabitants.” (13)

This statement encompasses the thoughtfulness with regards to pollution in the city of Agra where Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders, is located and its white stone is fading to yellowness day by day. For decades, pollution has been a serious concern which is discussed on some many stages, conferences, seminars, books, research projects and high-level meetings in India. Through the character of Richa, the author underscores this environmental problem and also warns against the hazardous impact of environmental degradation. Dr Mahesh Chandra, in his paper titled *Environmental Concerns in India: Problems and Solutions*, writes, “*Poor sanitation conditions and sewage problems compound the problem affecting the health of ordinary citizens in India.*” (2)

Another scene of environmental concerns is seen in the novel when Nora, the caretaker of Amitabh, the son of Richa, took him to Agra, and he demanded to see the birds. “*On way to Agra, he had watched some new birds and expressed his desire to see parrot and koel. By chance koel was found chirping on the mango tree and he enjoyed hearing her music.*” (125). This conversation indicates concerns and hopes regarding nature. Nature heals up all kinds of wounds humans have. When a human is frustrated and desperate, he looks towards nature to get mental and physical peace. This discussion leaves a profound message for humanity and hints to conserve the natural resources.

A middle-class widow named Suvidha is depicted in Vikas Sharma's novel *Ashes & Fire* as being reduced to ashes and losing her husband Samyak, who was killed by gangsters in Ghaziabad. Although she adheres to some patriarchal belief systems, she eventually musters

the fortitude to face life's hardships and comes to terms with them. Significant changes occur in Suvidha's nature. She fights against the phase of adversity, completes her doctorate, and eventually equals Laxmi Bai's pinnacle of accomplishment. She defied all expectations as a fresh new Miranda.

Ashes and Fire has indeed been an inspiration for many readers and especially for the youth. In this novel, apart from the main frame story, the author has also showcased the natural resources and degradation of environment. The author has depicted the filthy condition of the Hindon river that flows through Ghaziabad, a city of Uttar Pradesh. It also highlights the mentality of people in preserving natural resources. "Pollution increased in the town, and the waste was diverted towards Hindon. Consequently, the river became a danger from the point of view of the environment and air quality index." (33) The rivers are called 'life-line' of any society and civilization as in ancient time, all the ancient and prominent civilization of the world set up near the rivers and these civilizations developed into modern cities and countries. But now a days, the rivers have been polluted; wastes are being poured into the rivers at large scale across the world. It might be a matter of discussion whether garbage is being poured into the rivers in a state or not but somehow all of us are responsible for the predicament of all water bodies particularly in India. The author warns against mounting pollution in natural water bodies. The author also generates hope for betterment through examples. In the story of the novel, when a team of selected Indians went to the United States of America, they visited Muskegon and watched the cleaning system of water coming from toilets and kitchens of the people. With the help of chemicals, this dirty water was purged in three processes and then diverted towards fields as the best fertilizer.

'No wastage was allowed to be diverted towards the river, and that is why the water of Lake Superior and Michigan Lake remained perfectly pure. The city's river flowed without any waste material. The Muskegon Sewage system was soon imitated and installed by the Bombay Municipal Corporation.'" (144)

The next day the team visited the Millennium Park River and saw many beautiful daffodils and other flowers. Fortunately, they could watch the peacock dancing here. After this, they visited Mayor May House and felt pleased with the reception managed by Rotary Club Members. Through this piece of information Vikas Sharma also highlights the hopes for a better environment.

In *498A: Fears and Dreams*, the author explains that right knowledge, right philosophy and right conduct are the main pillars of the society and condemns ego, greed, violence, falsehood, untruth, unwisdom and hypocrisy etc. Vikas Sharma hopes for a bright and new prosperous society if people decide to give up deceit, cunningness and wickedness. A happy married life can be led by couples if they follow the dictates of tolerance, compromise, self-help, personal duty as well as personal freedom. In this novel, the main characters are Tanvi and Anjula who are responsible for their miseries and loneliness, because they fail to compromise with the realities of marriage life. On the other hand, the author explained that men also have to realize that women are not mere toys to be played with. In this novel, an effort has been made to support the demands of women as mental liberty is equally important for them too.

Apart from all these, issue of environmental degradation is also raised by the author. He draws readers' attention towards the polluted rivers and imagines the clean and open-flow rivers; Jay, a character of the novel, enjoying with his female friend Procne, draws some figures. "With his

pencil, he prepared several sketches of Procne such as — Procne as Psyche goddess making love to Cupid, Procne as Chitra taking bath in the river Ganga.” (145) Through this scenario, the author indicates the possibilities of bathing in rivers which is now a days a challenging task due to pollution in the rivers. Most of the rivers flowing in India are desecrated and their water is contaminated. This is happening across the globe tirelessly. The author warns against such tendencies which are accountable for such vitiation of natural resources. Through the imagination of a girl bathing in the river Ganga, the author underscores the sanctity of water bodies if they are not debauched. There has been a culture of bathing in the holy rivers like The Ganga and The Yamuna in India since ages, but now these rivers also are flowing with lots of garbage and scum. This is serious concerns of which the author mentions in the story of the novel and grabs attention and hope for rectification of the ongoing condition of the rivers. Further, in the novel, the author describes about Thames River and Alps Mountain range so that one can think about the environment and biodiversity. When Tanvi, a female character of the novel, visited the United Kingdom with her mother Sumitra, among others, she realised the beauty of these natural elixirs. “*They enjoyed crossing the river Thames and Alps Mountains. Heathrow airport delighted them a lot and Sumitra asked Tanvi to enjoy British coffee at the airport.*” (181) The beauty of natural resources is awesome everywhere until they are encroached. The author’s concerns about environmental depletion evoke the minds of human and appeal for environmental up gradation.

Pratibha Tyagi, in her article, *Religious and Cultural Myths in the Novels of Professor Vikas Sharma*, writes, “*Love’s Not Time’s Fool is a romantic novel but it is packed with references from Hindu mythology; in the beginning of the novel, Professor Vikas Sharma gives a reference to Lord Krishna and the holy river Yamuna. He associates it to the modern problems of pollution which can be seen in the river today.*” (Vandana’s 240)

The Yamuna was benign only in the times of Lord Krishna when he played on her bans. Now, a lot of factories from different cities pour their waste into the Yamuna and its water naturally gets polluted causing a lot of diseases to human beings as well as animals. This description also highlights the predicament of rivers which causes several other loses to natural environment.

Conclusion: Nature has forever been the cradle of civilization, a silent guardian nurturing life with infinite grace. It whispers in the rustling leaves, sings in the murmuring streams, and breathes through the vast, untamed wilderness. But history bears witness to humanity’s restless endeavour to reign over this boundless force - to mould it, to tame it, to bend it to fleeting desires. Yet, nature remains a sovereign entity, eternal and unshackled, unyielding to the transient ambitions of man. Today, however, a shadow looms over this harmonious existence. The ceaseless plundering of natural resources has turned abundance into scarcity, rivers into dust, and forests into barren scars upon the earth. The urgency to reflect, to change, to mend our reckless ways has never been greater. Vikas Sharma, a voice of conscience and a scribe of the forgotten truths, emerges as a sentinel against this silent catastrophe. With the wisdom of an oracle and the fervour of a guardian, he sounds the alarm against mankind’s insatiable greed. Through his words, he unveils the fragile balance we disrupt, the peril in our negligence, and the dire fate that awaits should we refuse to listen. Yet, amid the ruins of indifference, hope glows like a dying ember refusing to be extinguished—persistent, resilient, waiting to ignite once more.

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Sharma does not merely warn; he awakens. His words, like the ebb and flow of a river, mourn the losses yet hum with the promise of renewal. He does not leave his readers adrift in despair but offers glimpses of a world where man and nature coexist in harmony. His voice urges us to rise, to reclaim our responsibility, to heal what is broken—before the silence of a dying world becomes irreversible.

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