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**Prof. VIKAS SHARMA'S 498A: FEARS AND DREAMS AS A SUBLIME  
PIECE OF ART**

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**Abstract**

Various shades and kinds of dowry and family disputes have been narrated by Prof. Vikas Sharma in *498A: Fears And Dreams* to assert the importance of principles of *The Bhagwadgita*. The author finds the victory of love against lust, ethical values against lechery and possessiveness. The article 498A is basically meant for the security of women from dowry seekers and the author traces the cruel and cunning advocates like R.K. Sharma who contest the cases for high profits. They protect women under abnormal conditions and often cheat them for money. A few episodes have been added with the main plot of separation between Jatin and Tanvi but none of them seems to be unwanted. He is the first English artist to point out the problems created by terrible epidemic Corona. A few situations create pity and fear in our heart and make us think of the utility of marriage and higher education. As Prof. Vikas Sharma has done advanced research work on *American Renaissance*, he has referred to the views of R.W. Emerson and H.D. Thoreau in this novel.

**Keywords:** Ten-dollar words, possessiveness, nemesis, American Renaissance, Colonialism, Fascism, Nazism, Imperialism, Positive Psychology etc.

**Introduction:**

Prof. Anand Kumar Awasthi, Dr. Nempal Singh, Mohit Patel, Megha Singh, Archana Singh, Riya Deshwal, Pragya Awasthi, Preksha Sharma, Mamta Upadhyaya etc. have written critical articles on the various aspects of the novel *498A: Fears and Dreams* and their analysis confirms the loftiness of thought in this novel. Dr. Mamta Upadhyaya aptly calls it a 'social novel' as many contemporary issues have been analyzed by Vikas Sharma here. Anshu Devi admires the use of proverbs, idioms and words of daily life in this novel as the artist has no intention to make any parade of learning. No 'ten-dollar words' are used in it to make it look bombastic and obscure. Jay Sharma accepts Jatin's wife Tanvi and her daughter Neha and the novel ends rationally. In spite of the major role of Jatin and Sophia, I find that Jay is an

impressive figure as he follows the ideals of simplicity and idealism in life and his book *Indian Cultural Heritage* wins international prizes. Various shades of realism as pointed out by Damian Grant have been painted with clarity and precision. The narrator asserts the victory of positive psychology against negative attitude to life.

As a socio-political critic Vikas Sharma raises many contemporary issues in *498A: Fears And Dreams* and makes the readers think about the problems related with Article 498A such as — Are all married women tortured and harassed by their in-laws? Are all Indian women aspirants for divorce? Has hatred taken birth in the heart of Indian girls against marriage? Is dowry demanded in all sections of society? How many parents offer dowry at the cost of family economy? Are all dowry demands fulfilled by the parents of brides? Are rich jewelers like Jain not found in general society who arrange the marriage of son without dowry and seek only suitable match for the son? Is higher education being given to modern Indian girls to protect them from dowry seekers? How many girls wish a very comfortable house/room for themselves just after marriage?

The author asks — How many brides have patience to buy freeze,

T.V., double bed etc. after a few months of marriage with the income of husband? Are all women death due to dowry demands? Are all newly married girls perfectly healthy, friendly, cooperative, and adjustable? How many young brides accept in-laws as brother, sister, father and mother? What has standard of living to do with dowry death? Do women get justice from the court in cases of 498A? How much money is required to contest the dowry case? How many years pass when divorce petition is finalized? etc.

All such issues have been minutely analyzed by Vikas Sharma in the novel *498A: Fears And Dreams*. It is of course true that the dreams of brides and bridegrooms shatter in many cases when they face the harsh realities of life. In spite of sexual pleasure of married life, temporary as it is in many cases, there are tough economic realities to be accepted by the couple and the family members. A girl marries the bridegroom but then there are other members of two families that invariably interfere and pass remarks good or bad about the marriage issue.

In the beginning of this novel Vikas Sharma follows the pattern of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and describes conflict between God and Satan. Satan and Beelzebub are not

prepared to give up their interest in divorce cases as they too are pretty serious about their job — if the human beings seek divorce from their life-partners, it'll be rewarding for the civil lawyers and the courts will have job to do throughout the year. After all God can't be allowed to have monopoly in all the earthly matters and then divorce is not a matter of creation at all.

Here the author puts emphasis upon ethical terms just as creation, preservation, love, tolerance, justice, social order and disorder, love, discipline, harmony self-finance system etc. and condemns greed, lechery, pride, gluttony, revenge, anger, manipulation, simulation, possessiveness etc. (5) As a feminist he refers to the new movement of Nari-Shakti Mission, a safeguard for modern women all over the world. Here the author has defined justice:

'... justice means that all the legal aspects of the case are analyze minutely lest the future should regard us to be foolish, irrational and impatient. (7)

When God is worried about the regular source of income of lawyers, Satan asks Him not to worry as justice will depend upon

self-finance system and the divorce-seeks will spontaneously offer money to the law-givers. Here the tone of the artist is satirical when he repeats the saying —

Justice hurried is  
justice buried. (7)

And

Justice delayed is  
justice denied. (7)

Here the novel is remarkable for social criticism. Like John Galsworthy and G.B. Shaw, he discusses the various aspects of Indian law. The legal case of Tanvi and Jatin gets settled out of the court and the alimony she gets, is enjoyed by her brothers and mother and she gets just a minor part of it. Secondly, Tanvi does not know that she is getting married second time with R.K. Sharma, an advocate of Delhi, because the latter has given fifty lac rupees to her mother Sumitra. Here Sumitra becomes Kaikey, unethical and impure, as she is selfish and self-centred. She takes dowry rather than gives dowry. Fifty lac rupees make her feel secure in old age as she is a widow.

Breaking all norms of decency, Tanvi and Sumitra borrow a lot of garments from the garment factory of Pratiyush and then occupy 2 B.H.K. apartment and shop of R.K. Sharma in Dwarka. What fun! This is how the divorce

between Jatin and Tanvi becomes a source of income for the three members of family and advocate R.K. Sharma, in spite of being cunning and clever, fails to understand that clever scheme of Sumitra.

In the first chapter the author suggests that Eve and Adam got no chance to plead their innocence before any authority and hence Eve didn't get justice in being denied her entree into the paradise. After all women too have a right for redemption. No autocracy can be tolerated even in divine system — How can women be protected from patriarchy if even Eve does not get justice in heaven? Let there be Lamp of Justice (10) to guide God and His followers.

The narrator asserts that sublime authors like Plato, Christ, Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Spenser, Henry Fielding etc. didn't refer to the validity of dowry system. Even Jane Austen condemns Wickham when he demands dowry for getting married with Lydia. Robert Browning exposes the Lord in *The Duchess* when he expects dowry even in second marriage.

In this novel the author refer to the reasons for growth of divorce cases in India. First, the ego of the bride as well as the bridegroom counts a lot. Secondly, a few greedy people never feel satisfied with the

goods that a bride brings with her at the time of marriage. Marriage is almost a trade like any other trade and the expectations of the parents of bridegroom often are unlimited. When such demands are not fulfilled, either the innocent bride is burnt to death or turned out of home with one lame excuse or the other.

Thirdly, a few young girls become proud of themselves after getting university degree and claim a lot of facilities from the in-laws. For example, Tanvi puts the pressure upon Jatin for T.V., freeze, scooty, furniture etc. though her parents don't have such items in their home.

Fourthly, the main reason of divorce is the kitchen work because these semi-educated and employed wives ask the husband the first day that domestic help must be appointed immediately. It is not surprisingly to note that now-a-days elderly women don't train their daughter for kitchen chores. Gandhi ji used to assert — if two persons need a maid-servant, a lot of maid servants will be required in the whole nation. This is the reason that Joseph advises Joe Beverley that 'self-help' is to be followed in U.S.A. even in rich families. Women got liberated here much earlier and hence enjoy equal rights.

Then modern girls wish to maintain high standard of living at

every cost and like heroine Methilde of *The Diamond Necklace*, wish to show off that they are rich in spite of their poor financial background. Every month new things are advertised by the producers of various goods and women wish to possess the same by hook or crook. (14) Ironically, they may quarrel with husband for one new thing or another and yet fail to control their sexual passion.

Towards the end of second chapter the author satirizes the students like Tanvi who don't study the best text books and just depend upon cheap guides for success in examination. How can anybody succeed in life without studying the sublime books written by the sublime writers? Robert Southey, Virginia Woolf etc. assert the need of good libraries for every generation as merely modern clothes are not enough to make us 'modern'. Here the author is positive in his approach to life and through Ghan Shyam asserts —

Welcome the dawn! (15)

Chapter third is the shortest in this novel and yet the author asserts here that tension continued to grow between Tanvi and Jatin due to her demanding nature. She failed to understand the merits of Jatin — a loving, well-mannered fellow and only American Sophia could analyze his nobility, generosity, simplicity,

virtuous nature and loving moods. It is too late when Tanvi recollects Jatin as she fails to get physical love from advocate R.K. Sharma. The author asserts that only sarees and ornaments and furniture are not enough in home to make it a loving home.

Eventually Tanvi had to stoop to low level to get physical pleasure from step-son Pratiyush. Previously Tanvi had seen the value of money as she had to work in a primary school just for two thousand rupees a month. In the fourth chapter the author satirizes the hypocrisy of school authorities who pretend to be followers of R.N. Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan but exploit the teachers. The author asks — How can we expect good education from low paid teachers?

Being greedy by nature Tanvi enjoys life in the mansion of advocate R.K. Sharma and possesses the sarees and ornaments of Premlata, first wife of R.K. Sharma. Since Sharma ji earns a lot of money, Tanvi enjoys material pleasures to her heart's content. She feels that she is financially secure here.

In a clever manner she wins the heart of Pratiyush and makes love to him in the hotel La Meridian where he had a mood to celebrate his birth day. As a gift she offers

her total self to him. Here the author asserts —

A man is  
incomplete  
without a  
woman. (39)

### **Nucleus:**

Sharma ji creates her interest in new life and asks her not to bother for money. His wardrobe will ever remain open for her. Here the author has minutely analyzed the psychology of Pratiyush as he thinks of his 'real-self'. He asks himself — Is Tanvi a cheat? Is he going to be cheated by her? Will he be a passion's slave? Is her physical beauty a trap for him? But the problem is — If Papa stops supporting him, he will be ruined.

Here a short reference has been made to the contribution of Subhash Chand Bose to Indian freedom struggle by Tanvi. Then she aptly tells him like a philosopher that 95% people eat, drink and sleep and don't have higher aims. The author points out the difference between late Premlata and present Tanvi. Premlata used to take part in philanthropic deeds and donated a lot of money for the welfare of old people, orphans and widows though she had the ego to be regarded a merciful lady. While enjoying the

company of Pratiyush in the hotel, Tanvi realizes the gap between her poor past and prosperous present — the gap between Haves and Have-Nots. (45)

The author refers to Oedipus Tyannus who had enjoyed sex with his mother out of ignorance. Yet Tanvi knows the nature of Pratiyush

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How could  
he ignore his  
work for the  
sake of love?  
(47)

Vikas Sharma's R.K. Sharma resembles with cunning lawyers of Charles Dickens such as Mr. Jaggers and Mr. Spenlow who twisted law for personal gains. In 9<sup>th</sup> chapter the author refers to Jugnu Sahne, an opium smuggler who had to transfer his small factory of Delhi in the name of Premlata to escape from the clutches of law. Jugnu's file was shown burnt later on in the office of Tees Hazari Court and Jugnu left India for Mauritius for ever.

In the case of elopement of Anjula from Kashipur industrial area by her brother-in-law Salil Nath, R.K. Sharma demanded heavy fees from Kalpana and then from Anjula. When Kalpana failed to give him the second installment, he asked her to write the sale deed of her

twenty bighas of land in the name of his junior advocate.

But R.K. Sharma was a clever fellow like Iago, Edmund, Claudius, Cassius and Bosola and adopted foul means to help Anjula and protect her from the murder episode of Salil Nath. In the bail petition he didn't show any involvement of Salil Nath in the elopement of Anjula and later on hid the involvement of Anjula in the murder of Salil Nath. The murder of Salil Nath remained a mystery for the court though the author has followed the theory of nemesis — How could Salil Nath escape from the punishment of his cruel deeds? It is true that Anjula had no right to take law in her hand and kill Salil Nath in the hotel of Ranikhet but then she had no other remedy. She felt badly injured when Salil Nath seduced her even in the period of menses.

Prudent R.K. Sharma does not reveal the secrets of Kalpana to Anjula. He talks with Anjula in the absence of Kalpana and threatens both of them not to reveal the secret trial affair to anybody. It was a matter of chance that T.P. Singh was bailed out by the merciful support of S.S.P. Chandra and the Principal Aggarwal.

It is through narrator Aggarwal, formerly Professor of Kalpana and then Principal of the College that the Vikas Sharma has

linked various dowry cases in this novel. The author aptly shows that all dowry cases are not simple and need extra-intelligence to solve them. The case of Tanvi differs from that G.R. though both of them are greedy, eccentric, egoists, extra-modern, unadjustable, uncompromising and unsuitable for family life. Anjula's fault was that she had failed to control her sexual passion for Salil Nath before marriage. But the rascal aspired to possess the total two hundred bighas of land — that of his wife Veena and also that of Anjula. Had Anjula not revolved against the rascal, she would have lost her home, husband, peace of mind and land.

Here the pictures of Salil Nath and R.K. Sharma are true to life as such people exist in Indian society. R.K. Sharma can be compared with lawyer Tiwari of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*.

There is a sense of waste in the novel as Engineer Vipul, loses his job on charge of elopement of his own wife Anjula. Secondly, he is given third-degree treatment in the prison for many months (A real case of Moradabad 2008). Thirdly, T.P. Singh was suspended from his job and the culprits, whom he had treated harshly in the past, felt delighted seeing him in the prison. Fourthly, Mrs. T.P. Singh too was

arrested in spite of being innocent. Here the author depicts the story of many police officers who get entrapped in the intrigue of politicians and rascals like Salil Nath. And yet the author asserts — Satya Mayo Jayata.

Salil Nath can be contrasted with Vipul and not Jatin. Vipul is fully innocent and is sinned rather than sinning. Till the end of 24<sup>th</sup> chapter Joe is a dedicated (adopted) son of Joseph and looks after shipping and farming trades. He remains sincere to his Papa J.P. Sharma and brother Jay till he falls in love with Procne. He follows all ethical values of married life till Sophia conceived baby. I find conversion of character in Joe as he proceeds from virtue to lechery and loses self-restraint and sense of reason out of sexual passion for Procne.

In the ancient mythological tale, narrated by Sir Philip Sidney in *Arcadia*, it was husband of Procne who had illegally enjoyed sex with Philomela on way back home and cut her tongue lest she should reveal the fact of rape to sister Procne. In *498A : Fears And Dreams* Vikas Sharma depicts some modern highly educated women who have lost faith in ethics. Like this present Procne, they enjoy extra-marital love and even stoop to a low

level for material gains and promotions in jobs.

Through this novel the author asserts that the new students of contemporary India ought to study Nano Technology, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Astro Physics, Quantum Physics, Quantum Chemistry and Quantum Maths. etc. as they can't hope to get good jobs in this digital world without sound knowledge of all such subjects.

At the same time the author admires Joe, Sophia (Jatin) and Jay for writing research papers on interdisciplinary topics as no subject can be studied in isolation. Procne is interested in writing a book on *Artificial Intelligence And Its Relation With Nano Technology*.

26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> chapters are remarkable for intellectual realism as Jay has rewritten his book on *Indian Cultural Heritage* and the book got Pulitzer Prize and the Booker Prize. So far Procne had ignored the knowledge and intellectual skills of Jay. As she failed to write even the first chapter of her book she badly needed his help. But alas! Jay had understood her tricky nature and whimsical temperament. She was unable to treat him on equal level and regarded him fit for clerical and administrative jobs.



As Jay meets Sumitra, Rakhee and Tanvi in Sri Narayan Temple of New Jersey, he shows sympathy for Tanvi and feels attracted towards baby Neha and Tanvi.

As discussed in his book *Novel As An Art Form* Vikas Sharma has answered many questions on art and its relation with ethics and political matters (26<sup>th</sup> chapter).

'... as each artist has his own tools though the abject or sight may be the same.' (170)

A painter, a musician, a sculptor etc. paint the same natural objects in a different manners. Then Vikas Sharma accepts the theory of art for morality. Page 172 of this novel is unique in itself as he forces the readers to analyze many questions with relation to art such as —

'Should each work of art answer the question — How to live? How many artists fail due to lack of purposeful art? How is visual art related with life? ... Is artist worried of his income from art pieces? Can realism be added to each work of art.' (172)

The author asks other questions also such as —

'How to point out the relation between art and sex? Was Hindi artist Vatsayan a real artist? How far has art been successful in exposing socio-economic issues? Is art the right medium to reform society? ...' (172)

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, Vikas Sharma has critically analyzed the feelings, passions, obsessions and emotions of Jatin, Tanvi, Jay, Procne, O.P. Jain, Meenakshi, Raagi, Chitrang, Pratiyush, Sophia, Joseph, G.R., Purohit etc. and linked them with the problems as created by Dowry and article 498A in *498A : Fears and Dreams*. This novel is remarkable for exposing various socio-ethical and eco-political matters of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Vikas Sharma is the first novelist to paint the terrible effects of Covid-19 that horrified the people of the world for more than two years.

With this novel the author creates the interest of readers in Renaissance Movement, American Independence, French Revolution, Bolshevik Revolution and Gandhian Movements. He refers to the evils of Imperialism, Fascism, Nazism, Colonialism and then various theories such as Utilitarianism, Anarchism, Individualism, Marxism, Socialism etc. that changed the

shape of world economy. So, this novel is more than a treatise on dowry and article 498A.

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