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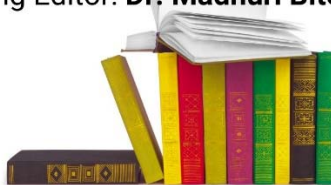
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The Complexities of Love and Desire in Vikas Sharma's *Love's Not Time's Fool*

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Abstract:

Prof. Vikas Sharma's *Love's Not Time's Fool* is a compelling exploration of the evolving dynamics of love, desire, and relationships in contemporary society. Written during the COVID-19 pandemic, the novel reflects the emotional, social, and psychological struggles of modern life and highlights how love often becomes transactional and driven by physical gratification. Through the central character, Richa Pandit, the narrative delves into the complexities of extramarital affairs, casual encounters, and the emotional emptiness that permeates postmodern relationships.

The present paper explores the moral ambiguities of modern intimacy and themes such as open relationships, same-sex experiences, and the emotional detachment that defines many contemporary connections. However, amidst these moral ambiguities, the story ultimately advocates for the enduring power of love.

Through *Love's Not Time's Fool*, Prof. Sharma offers a bold and unflinching commentary on the complexities of human relationships in a world driven by personal gain and fleeting satisfaction. The novel serves as both a mirror and a critique of modern society while encouraging readers to reflect on the true nature of love and intimacy in their lives.

Keywords: Contemporary Relationships, Physical Gratification, Moral Ambiguity, Transactional Love.

Prof. Vikas Sharma is a leading voice in Indian English fiction who brings to life the evolving dynamics of love and relationships in his English debut novel *Love's Not Time's Fool*. His writing captures the dilemmas of modern youth and explores their search for success, independence, and emotional fulfilment. In this novel, Prof. Sharma offers a bold portrayal of desire and sexuality which reflects upon the increasingly transactional nature of love in contemporary society. Written during the COVID-19 pandemic, the novel mirrors the social, emotional, and psychological challenges of the time and emphasizes the fluidity and fragility of human connections. The novel's title draws from William Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, which describes love as eternal and steadfast.

Love's Not Time's Fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me prov'd,

I never writ, nor no man, ever loved. (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116)

However, Prof. Sharma uses the title ironically to highlight how modern love often lacks permanence and focuses instead on lust and fleeting encounters. In contrast to Shakespeare's idealized love, *Love's Not Time's Fool* presents a reality where relationships are driven by physical gratification and personal convenience rather than emotional depth or spiritual connection.

The central theme in *Love's Not Time's Fool* is the unquenchable desire for physical satisfaction among the youth. The novelist delves into the complexities of love and portrays it as an emotion frequently overshadowed by lust. At novel's heart lies Richa Pandit, an upper-middle-class woman trapped in a loveless marriage with her husband, Malya Vaidik, a successful businessman in Agra. Their marriage, devoid of warmth and intimacy, mirrors the emotional detachment that plagues many modern relationships. Malya's extramarital affairs, impotence and emotional indifference leave Richa yearning for companionship and understanding. Her unmet emotional needs drive her into the company of Abhilash, a young and ambitious IAS aspirant from a modest background. Their relationship, which begins innocently at a bookstore, gradually evolves into a deeper emotional bond and ultimately crosses the realm of physical intimacy. The novelist draws attention to the way sexual attraction often overrides social conventions, as seen in scenes where Richa, despite being married, openly surrenders to Abhilash's advances. In one striking moment, Abhilash embraces her in the bathroom, kisses her without hesitation, and Richa reciprocates without shame. This dynamic critiques the fragile boundaries between emotional connection and physical desire and sheds light on the moral complexities of extramarital relationships.

A deeper layer of the novel draws a subtle yet powerful comparison between Richa and the Lady of Shalott, a figure from Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous poem. Prof. Sharma weaves this allusion seamlessly into the text and invites readers to reflect on the similarities between Richa and the tragic Lady of Shalott. Like the Lady, Richa is trapped by societal expectations. The line, "One loses one's sense of wisdom due to one's passions." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 15) resonates deeply with Richa's character and emphasizes how passion can cloud judgment and drive individuals to break societal norms. This literary parallel between classical literature and contemporary struggles is really commendable which enriches the novel's thematic depth and

allows readers to perceive Richa not merely as an individual but as a symbol of the larger human condition who is torn between desire and duty.

Richa's decision to hire Abhilash at her company, Peppe & Tette Footwear, marks a pivotal moment in their relationship, which provides her with emotional comfort and practical support. Their arrangement reflects a transactional dynamic, where both know their needs and priorities. Abhilash, focused on his IAS preparations, sets clear boundaries from the outset, stating, "But, Madam, remember, I work only for three hours a day lest my studies should be disturbed." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 16). This statement emphasizes a relationship driven by necessity and convenience. For Richa, Abhilash fills the emotional and physical void left by her husband Malya, while also helping her manage the business in his absence. Simultaneously, Abhilash benefits financially, receiving a steady income, accommodation, and freedom to continue his studies without interference. Their relationship thrives on this unspoken give-and-take, where Richa fulfils her sexual and emotional desires, while Abhilash gains economic stability and intimacy. Abhilash expresses his gratitude as

"I have simple ambitions and wish to be faithful to you and my job. Thanks for your cooperation and love and affection. You supported me at a crucial time. Had you not supported me till now, I might have returned to my fields, ploughing my land." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 72)

Prof. Sharma skilfully highlights the pragmatic nature of modern relationships, where physical intimacy often becomes an outlet for emotional stress and dissatisfaction in modern relationships. The protagonist Richa consistently turns to Abhilash for comfort and escape, and highlights the emerging trend of "situationships", the relationships driven by convenience, desire, and mutual benefit. For instance, one evening, Richa is visited by Ankit Saini, a Senior Excise Officer, who warns her about potential drug smuggling through her company's footwear

supply chain. The encounter leaves Richa anxious and distressed. Seeking solace, she confides in Abhilash, who reassures her and proposes involving chemistry students to address the quality control concerns. However, their conversation soon shifts, and Abhilash initiates physical intimacy as a way to divert her mind from the stressful situation. The evening concludes with them making love and reinforcing the idea that physical closeness serves as a coping mechanism for Richa's unresolved emotional and professional burdens.

This incident reflects how, in contemporary society, physical relationships are often seen as a quick remedy for more profound psychological and emotional struggles. Additionally, the novel delves beyond the exploration of extramarital relationships to address the broader dimensions of modern intimacy, including open relationships, casual sexual encounters, and same-sex experiences. Through Richa Pandit's interactions with characters like Tara, Rikki, and Ishqi, Prof. Sharma highlights the fluidity and evolving nature of contemporary relationships. One significant episode occurs during a massage with Tara, which begins innocently but gradually transitions into a sensual experience. Although Richa initially feels uneasy, she later accepts and even enjoys the intimacy, which reveals the underlying openness in their relationship. Such experience is further exemplified when Abhilash massages her. The physical touch evokes memories of her intimate moment with Tara. She recalls, "His hands were harder than those of Tara. But he put oil on my legs and hips. I felt delighted, and he pressed my hips with his hands and rubbed them in a superb manner." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 83). Similarly, during another massage with Ishqi, Richa once again recalls Tara, "Her hands were softer than those of Tara but harder than those of Abhi. It was useless to blame her for lack of skill of massage, and she applied oil to my body softly without doing any mischief." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 91). This indicates a recurring pattern of seeking comfort and companionship in physical intimacy, regardless of the partner's gender or relationship status. She remarks, "It was all fun anyway." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 91).

Thus, Prof. Sharma's portrayal of Richa's frequent engagement in these interactions reflects the reality of open relationships in contemporary life. Richa consistently turns to different individuals like Tara, Abhilash, or Ishqi to fill the emotional and physical void created by her loveless marriage and personal loneliness.

In addition to open and casual sexual encounters, the novel subtly hints at the possibility of lesbian relationships, though the narrative leaves these connections ambiguously defined. Prof. Vikas Sharma explores the intimate and often blurred boundaries between Richa and Rikki, as well as between Nikki and Rikki. These relationships, though not explicitly labelled, mirror the emotional and physical closeness often associated with same-sex desire.

The dynamic between Richa and Rikki, particularly when they share a bed, strongly suggests undertones of a lesbian relationship. Richa's increasing sexual desire and the constant pursuit of intimacy manifests not only in her interactions with Abhilash but also in her physical closeness with Rikki. The text vividly portrays this through scenes where Rikki joins Richa under the same quilt, with Richa dressed only in panties.

"It was almost buttonless and Rikki entered her quilt and found her only in panties. She told Rikki that generally she slept without clothes. She too can remove the gown if she so desired yet she lay down by her side in the same quilt. Soon madam embraced her bosom taking him to Abhi, both of them kissed each other for a long four five times."

(Love's Not Time's Fool, 45)

Similarly, the relationship between Nikki and Rikki carries subtle implications of lesbian intimacy. As roommates in a PG (Paying Guest) accommodation, the two share a bed and experience a closeness that borders a romantic connection. Though their relationship is not explicitly sexual, Prof. Sharma hints at the underlying physicality and affection that defines their bond.

“During sleep, Nikki embraced Abhi taking him to be Rikki. Quite often both the room partners often shared a bed in P.G. home and enjoyed kissing and embracing each other at night. Of course, they were virgins but young age had its own demands.” (*Love’s Not Time’s Fool*, 45)

The narrative acknowledges the natural desires and curiosities that accompany youth and reinforces that such relationships, while possibly platonic, can exist in a space that transcends conventional friendship. Through these portrayals, Prof. Sharma reflects on how sexual exploration and enchantment have become integral to contemporary life. The novel does not overtly categorize these relationships but presents them as fluid expressions of human desire, unconfined by labels or rigid social norms. This varied depiction challenges the reader to reconsider the complexities of intimacy, where emotional bonds often intertwine with physical attraction and reflect upon the evolving landscape of modern sexuality.

The relationship between Nikki and Abhilash further illustrates the transient and transactional nature of contemporary connections. Prof. Vikas Sharma delves into the psyche of modern youth to highlight how sexual gratification often takes precedence over emotional depth or long-term commitment. For Nikki and Abhi, physical intimacy becomes a pastime rather than an expression of love or attachment. Nikki’s fascination with Abhi’s appearance and charm leads to an immediate sexual encounter. Unlike traditional narratives where intimacy implies deeper emotional bonds, Nikki clarifies that her intentions are purely physical. When Abhi hesitates at the prospect of continuing their relationship without emotional involvement, Nikki’s response is direct and unapologetic,

"But I never asked you to marry me tomorrow. You go ahead jobs. I’ll not be an obstacle at any stage in your scheme of things. But I am helpless in the hand of my heart and soul.”

(*Love’s Not Time’s Fool*, 95)

Through Nikki, Prof. Sharma portrays a shift in societal values, where relationships are no longer anchored in the institution of marriage or lifelong promises. Nikki's perspective mirrors the growing trend among young individuals who seek pleasure and companionship without the weight of obligation. This relationship, which is devoid of emotional permanence, reflects the larger cultural shift towards casual and non-committal engagements.

Abhilash, on the other hand, is depicted as a passive participant in these encounters. The novelist crafts Abhi's character as someone who rarely opposes sexual advances and allows himself to be shaped by the desires of the women around him. His ambitions, such as his goal of becoming an IAS officer, gradually recede into the background as he becomes entangled in the web of Richa and Nikki's desires. This dynamic not only highlights Abhi's submissive nature but also the reversal of traditional gender roles, where women take charge of their sexual agency while men become instruments of gratification.

Richa's affairs with Robert Lee, her ex-lover, and Nirupam Kaul, her brother-in-law, reveal relationships that transcend traditional love ideas and expose the layers of deception and false love that shape contemporary society. These relationships reflect the fragmented and self-serving nature of modern love, where personal desire often overshadows ethical considerations.

The relationship between Richa and Robert Lee embodies betrayal and loss of trust. Robert Lee, Richa's lover in the U.S., abandons her when she becomes pregnant with his child. Despite their passionate encounters, Robert's ultimate disappearance forces Richa to confront the harsh reality of being left alone with a disabled child. The emotional weight of this betrayal lingers and shapes her perception of love and trust.

Similarly, Richa's relationship with Nirupam Kaul, her brother-in-law, further underscores the novel's focus on moral ambiguity and the fluid boundaries of familial roles. What begins as an innocent interaction escalates into a physical relationship, driven by Nirupam's persistent

advances. Prof. Sharma captures the tension between desire and guilt, as Richa succumbs to his affections despite her awareness of the betrayal it represents towards her sister. Nirupam's willingness to indulge in this affair, even proposing to establish a separate apartment for Richa, reflects the erosion of traditional values and the normalization of forbidden relationships to pursue personal gratification.

Thus, the portrayal of these entanglements serves as a broader commentary on the moral decay within postmodern society. Dr. Sanjay Johari effectively compares Yeats' view of modern society with Prof. Sharma's portrayal of postmodern relationships. The novel reflects similar themes to those in W.B. Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*, where Yeats mourns the fleeting, self-centered nature of youth and love:

"That is no country for old men. The young

In one another's arms, birds in the trees,

Those dying generations" (W. B. Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*)

Prof. Sharma mirrors this sentiment and illustrates how love in contemporary settings often revolves around rivalry, lust, transient satisfaction, and devoid of lasting emotional fulfilment.

In *Love's Not Time's Fool*, the novelist explores the complexities of extramarital relationships, casual relationships, false love and presents them not as endorsements but as reflections of the emotional emptiness that often pervades modern life. The novel highlights the transactional nature of many contemporary connections, where individuals seek comfort, financial gain, or personal satisfaction without deeper emotional investment.

As a literary figure and academician, Prof. Sharma expresses concern over the diminishing meaning of love in contemporary society, where lust often replaces genuine emotional connections. Through his writing, he critiques this degradation, yet his work ultimately offers

hope. The novel's conclusion reflects Sharma's belief in love as a transformative and redemptive force. Richa's pregnancy at the end of the story symbolizes renewal and the triumph of love over societal judgment and personal struggles. Abhilash remarks, "Our life is complete now." (*Love's Not Time's Fool*, 176). This hopeful resolution reinforces the idea that, despite the challenges and moral ambiguities the characters face, love endures as a powerful and unifying force.

To conclude, the novelist advocates for a balance between physical passion and soulful connection which reminds readers that love, in its truest form, remains timeless and resilient.

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