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विद्येविना मति गेली, मतीविना नीति गेली
नीतिविना गति गेली, गतिविना वित्त गेले
वित्तविना शूद्र खचले, इतके अनर्थ एका अविद्येने केले

-महात्मा ज्योतीराव फुले

❖ विद्यावार्ता यां आंतरविद्याशाखीय बहुभाषिक त्रैमासिकात व्यक्त झालेल्या मतांशी मालक, प्रकाशक, मुद्रक, संपादक सहमत असतीलच असे नाही. न्यायक्षेत्र:बीड



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to change as more number of people gain access to internet and start doing everyday things online.

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The Study of Women Empowerment and Achieving Gender Equality in Swarup's Novel The Accidental Apprentice

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Abstract

Vikas Swarup, one of the eminent novelists in contemporary India, has earned honours for his originality, propensity and for his societal dedication. In his novels, Vikas Swarup has depicted problems of women, like abuse and exploitation of women. Swarup shows that Women's rights are not properly protected. With few exceptions, they are not openly allowed to participate in various issues in our country, are rather subjected to violations. Women are highly affected by Empowerment problems. According to Swarup empowerment of women and restoration of their rights is a perfect solution on their slavery in male dominated societies like India. Hence, this paper calls for the strong commitment to empower women to achieve gender equality and to bring about sustainable development.

Keywords: Empowerment, Economic growth, social and cultural development.

Vikas Swarup has carved his name in the galaxy of eminent modern India writers writing in English today as authors of marvellous skills.



It is imperative to see that, the Indian English novelists, right from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, started focusing their attention largely on contemporary problems. Motivated by socio-cultural and political awareness and changed historical situation, they began to conceive the values all around the state and presenting that life and society realistically in their fictional world.

The purpose of this paper is the study of women empowerment and achieving gender equality in Vikas Swarup's third novel, 'The Accidental Apprentice' (2013). Swarup is realist and truthful portrayal of the Indian Society is the important feature of his writings. Swarup's novels include serious studies of contemporary socio-cultural and political issues. He is firmly on the side of the underdog and rages against the abuse of power. Swarup's 'The Accidental Apprentice', a coming-of-age story set in a fictional Eastern European country is about a 23 years old ambitious and determined to succeed sales assistant Sapna Sinha who works in an electronics stores in downtown Delhi.

Still, in India, the thought of male and female roles as civic and individual respectively, proceeds, in spite of the fact that we have had numerous national figures just like before freedom the Rani of Jhansi some time and after freedom Indira Gandhi. Maybe this clarifies the long hold up of Indian female for break even with representation in Parliament.

Indian female literary writers particularly the writers within the post freedom time have been enthusiastic in disassembling the idea of the Indian women as a negligent casualty. Indian female literary writers particularly Kamala Das, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Manju Kapoor, Manjula Padmanabhan and Geeta Hariharan have attempted to return to and retell India's history from a women's point of view. In a lecture in 1989, Nayantara Sahgal said, "...I prefer to think of my fiction as having a sense of history, in a country where race, religion or

caste can decide the course of a love affair, where it can take as much raw courage to choose a husband or to leave him, as to face a firing squad..." (Sahgal: 19).

According to the 2011 census, India's current child sex-ratio is 914 females per 1000 males, which is the lowest since the 1961 census (Special Supplement - Competition Success Review 86). The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recorded an 873% rise in rape cases between 1953 and 2011. While a case of rape is reported every twenty-two minutes, a case of bride being burnt for dowry is reported every fifty-eight minutes (cited in Sehgal, The Deccan Chronicle). Existing laws have been to a great extent incapable; concerns government departments are to a great extent one-sided towards male dominated society. The conventional frameworks of control strengthen and utilize of savage implies to rebuff rebellious women 'offenders'.

Subsequently, feminist and environmental activities with their idea of the individual as political, have come to control the nationwide talk as never some time recently. According to Mies and Shiva, ecofeminism fights the capitalist, patriarchal world system which is founded on three colonization - of women, of colonies, and of nature (Singh and Saxena 335). Such movements articulate alternate and inclusive governance through revival of civil society and subalterns (Parajuli 258-288). In this context, women empowerment and achieving gender equality like Swarup's The Accidental Apprentice assume more significance than ever before.

The Accidental Apprentice is centred just about the exceptionally plain twenty-something woman protagonist as Sapana and her travel to ended up the CEO of India's largest business group. Few critics have criticized with Swarup's depiction of a female champion who valiantly takes on collective ills and zooms from experience to enterprise wherein a genuine



woman would have fallen to pieces. They too criticize his simplicity, the clear-cut view of the universe, the ultimate shower of great chance that produces the story more appropriate for a well known film. (Thomas, Deccan Chronicle). But the near perusing of the novel uncovers that it holds its place in the social discourse i.e. women strengthening and gender uniformity. Swarup's work asserts the development of woman from the edge to the front of the scholarly account. He is among the few male writers who expertly handling the women point of view with all its in-your-face resistance.

Sapna's opening words within the novel are typical of the Indian woman's life-long fight for survival- 'In life you never get what you deserve: you get what you negotiate' (p.1). When the novel opens through prologue, we see the courageous woman who has battled against social streams, seen everything from bottomless pits to astonishing victory, anticipating passing punishment in jail:

"I want to hope, to dream, to have faith again, but the soulless weight of reality keeps crushing me down" (p.2).

Given the revolting substance of the nation, isn't this the voice of the 21st century Indian woman? Who struggle for empowerment and equality. It is from this vantage point that she describes in flashback the story of her brief momentous life.

One day this ordinary middle-class working woman in New Delhi, Sapna Sinha, is offered to run a company by an eccentric billionaire provided she passes a series of seven tests. Through Sapna's tests of leadership, integrity, courage, foresight, resourcefulness and decisiveness in the narrative of 'The Accidental Apprentice' Swarup has also dealt with Khappanchayts, kidney rackets, family dramas and dilemmas, corrupt politicians, Gandhian crusaders, child labour, reality television shows, haughty Bollywood stars, investigative journalists and corporate rivalry.

Through it Swarup wanted to show no matter how poor you are you can make progress in life with the help of your virtues and qualities, and also that even an ordinary middleclass girl can have capability of becoming a CEO of a ten billion dollar company. Swarup believes that the qualities required to become a top CEO are not very different from what it takes to succeed in everyday life.

The protagonist and narrator of the novel Sapna Sinha, describes the tragic events in her life. Born and brought up in the Hill-Station of Nainital, Sapna's idyllic life is shattered when her sister Alka hangs herself after being reprimanded by her strict teacher father for her love affair with a spoilt brat. In Nainital they were living on the campus of Windsor Academy, an all-boys residential school, where her father was a senior teacher of mathematics. The three sisters lived there happily but their father was very strict disciplinarian especially with reference to boys. But Alka fell in love with a student. Sapna caught her kissing the boy and told her that it was not love but infatuation and took a promise from her that she would not meet the boy for some time in exchange for not telling father about her. But after some days she found a packet of brown sugar in her shoe. Alka warned her that she would commit suicide if she told their father about it. Sapna informed about it to father instantly, thinking that he would be able to persuade her but he failed to do so. In the end he slaps her and she enters her bedroom locking its door from inside. Next day, they found her dead body hanging from the ceiling fan. Since then she considers herself responsible for Alka's death.

The family relocates to Delhi to escape the trauma and stigma. They live in their uncle's house. After Mr. Sinha is killed in a hit and run accident, the responsibility of fending for her mother and her younger sister falls on young Sapna. Sacrificing her own dreams, she takes up the job of a sales assistant at Gulati and Sons,



an electronic and home appliances showroom in Connaught Place, earning eighteen thousand rupees a month. She hates her job; knows that money brings in her family won't be able to survive. Each day she is fighting with life. Though she has talent that is to pursue the customer to buy the product increasing the sale rate of the showroom but still she is neither given the bonus or a higher position but has to work extra hours on some day. However, she is ambitious and determined to succeed. Her uncle demands a rent of fourteen thousand rupees a month and also an advance of one year otherwise they have to vacate his house within two weeks. Her father has helped her uncle in establishing his restaurant business but now he has become ungrateful. Her mother decides to sell her four gold bangles to pay the advance rent. Next day when she goes to sell her mother's bangles a thief snatches her purse and the bangles are stolen. When she comes to the showroom devastated she finds that the faithful accountant is being punished and asked to be arrested for embezzlement of two lakh rupees. But actually that amount is taken by Raja Gulati, the playboy son of the shop owner but when Sapna informs of this to the owner, she is silenced with the threat of losing job. Sapna is so disgusted with how the rich treat the poor. She thinks that the same thing may happen with her. Sapna is much disappointed by the events related to Choubay the accountant, her uncle, the bangle theft and the need for money.

On one Friday, 10 December, during the lunch time of her electronic showroom she goes to the nearby Durga temple to pray to goddess Durga for forgiveness for causing her sister Alka's death. As soon as she completes her darshan a sixty eight year old man taps her shoulder and introduces himself as Vinay Acharya, the owner of ABC, a ten billion dollar company and asks her for her ten minutes so that he can explain to her what proposition he has for her to become the CEO of the ABC Group

of Companies. He tells her that since he is sixty eight year old and has no one to inherit his business, before he retires, he wants to hand over his company in the hands of a person who believes in the same values as he.

Vinay Acharya tells Sapna that for becoming the CEO of his company she will have to pass seven tests from the book of life. Most of her tests are based on the burning issues of contemporary India. These seven tests exemplify the various qualities of the modern Indian woman which Swarup sees as the touchstone for a meaningful national life. Sapna deftly handles and comes out a winner in six of the seven life tests set by Acharya. In one of the test we can see that she goes in village of Hariyana where even the dominant are not even able to use electronics and as a lady she teaches all of them to how to use it. That society is against of women working out of the house but Sapna is shown as and looked respectfully by all of them even she fights bravely against much powerful Khaap Panchayat. Another exceptional example presented where she fight against police equally injured with a man who is kept in police custody, she helps the lover to unit and marry by going against the old rituals and traditions. Sapna, with the help of a lady reporter challenges the male dominant society and wins the battle. She uses all her rights and rescues the couple and herself. She fears a lot but shows courage and fights with the situation to prove "Courage is not the absent of fear: it is the ability to act in spite of fear and overwhelm opposition."

The seventh test, the hardest of them all, then spirals out of Sapna's control. It is one test she is not prepared for. It pushes her to her limits, but she fights back. The book looks at Sapna's life - her family, the tragedy in her life and speaks of the people close to her and ends on a surprising note. The first exchange between Sapna and Acharya reveals some solid facts that from the core of Swarup's understanding of the



Indian woman: one, the Indian woman has an insatiable hunger for success, which is born in the desert of dissatisfaction; second, she has a mind of her own which guides this hunger; third, she can be the self-sacrificing bread winner and fervent devotee on one hand and the ruthless achiever and detached rationalist at the same time.

Sapna, at other side, tells her friend and neighbour Karan Kant everything about the tests and the daily occurrences in her life but it is here that she makes the serious mistake because Karan Kant is actually her sister Alka's lover who has come here for taking revenge on her and her family. She also violates Acharya's rule of keeping it a secret. Karan cautions Sapna against Acharya's trap. He tells her that Acharya might be laying a trap to kill his wife and to pin the murder on her. He also tells her that in place of his wife he might kill his twin brother and rival AK. In this way he creates doubt in Sapna's mind that Acharya might deceive her.

Swarup uses the novel to examine the complexities of the life, especially the life of woman at the clutches of the burning issues in the contemporary society. Answering on his third novel he said that, "I was inspired by the woman of India." The issue of women empowerment problem and gender equality is at the top of agendas across the world, as gender inequality is widespread in all cultures compared to the developed countries. Women empowerment and gender equality is not only essential for the development of women sector but also to reform the society. Women empowerment is one of the issues exposed by Swarup in his widely read the novel, *The Accidental Apprentice*. Through Sapna Sinha the novelist highlights this issue in Indian society, especially the worst conditions that women have to go through for their right place in the male dominated society like India. Like Arvind Adiga, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy, Vikas Swarup also writes for the betterment of society. Novel has achieved an astonishing

success.

Vikas Swarup has dealt the women's world with keen observation and with penetrable sight. Through Sapna he exposes a common world of women, where they are treated as a puppet in the hands of males while doing job in any field. He clarifies how every woman aspires to have empowerment and liberation, free will and inner space. "Empowerment is viewed as a process; the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (7...) He has presented in Sapna a challenging as well as self-conscious, a constant, a sensible young woman. Through a realistic approach Swarup projects in Sapna a struggling woman with courage and capabilities, confidence and iron-will, a woman on the way to get assertion, to prove herself and to create a space for herself. Despite going through so many problems Sapna faces these problems bravely, trying her best to bring her family members out of personal tragedies.

In the epilogue, Sapna gets an after death letter from Acharya advertising her authority of his domain as a CEO, but Sapna denies. Swarup's characters are continuously at last effective in fabric terms but conclusion up looking for otherworldly riches. In his humanistic mission as a novelist, Sapna achieves the most elevated objectives of self-discovery and self-fulfilment. When the woman like Sapna rises to her complete fame, her original attitude is totally inverted. The opening sentence of the novel – "In life you never get what you deserve: you get what you negotiate" (p.1). Becomes "Life does not always give us what we desire, but eventually it does give us what we deserve" (p.434) – in the last sentence of the novel.

Through Sapna's tests, from current affairs, Swarup has highlighted employment problems of women, specially life of women in cities like Delhi and other cities. Swarup is able to draw upon their inner reserves to challenge the statuesque in life and negative compelling



human relationships. This novel provides a poignant and realistic description of continuous efforts of women for the establishment of her identity in her society. Through the protagonist Vikas Swarup tries to demonstrate that what women should do for their liberation and how our society can become conscious about them. Swarup seeks to present gender equality here which will ultimately contribute to the economic growth of the country.

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