

Theme of Woman Employment and Empowerment in Vikas Swarup's the Accidental Apprentice

Ganesh M. Dhote^a, Hitendra B. Dhote^b

^aProf. Department of English RTMN University, Nagpur ,Adarsh Arts and Commerce College, Desaigang(Wadsa), Dist. Gadchiroli, MS, India

^bResearch Scholar, Department of English, RTMN University, Nagpur ,Adarsh Arts and Commerce College, Desaigang(Wadsa), Dist. Gadchiroli, MS, India

Abstract

The fictional works of 20th century noted writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and their successors of late 20th century and 21st century reflect the contemporary society and are replete with authentic and bold depiction of the Indian society. Among the modern Indian writers in English award winning writer Vikas Swarup has continued the stream of the realistic depiction of exploitation, miseries and humiliations of the marginalized classes in his fictional works. Vikas Swarup is a realists and the truthful portrayal of the Indian society is the chief feature of their writings. He has raised very vital issues of the contemporary time such as social discrimination on the grounds of caste, religion and class, poverty, corruption, crime, brutality, venality, oppression, injustices, occupation, status of women and their empowerment.

KEYWORDS : Employment, empowerment, poverty

Vikas Swarup is the award-winning author of three novels, as well as short stories and articles, book reviews in a wide range of publications. His debut novel 'Q & A' became the Oscar winning film 'Slumdog Millionaire'. Since then he has stepped on the literary scene and quickly earned himself the status of one of the finest novelists with undoubted skills and enormous talent. All the novels of Vikas Swarup are a provoking analysis of the Socio-cultural and political issues in contemporary India. He has explored the rapidly developing Indian society and its abundant social problems, like Slum, Poverty, corruption, brutality, venality and exploitation. Swarup has given voice to the voiceless. Swarup's novels are about ordinary people placed in extraordinary situations who are able to draw upon their inner reserves to challenge the status-quo in life and navigate compelling human relationships.

The purpose of this paper is to study Vikas Swarup's thematic concerns in his third novel 'The Accidental Apprentice' (2013) in general and employment and empowerment of women, in particular. He describes this novel as a 'modern-day coming-of-age novel'. Replying about the background of this novel, he said, "when I was looking for a subject for my third book, it struck me that old books such as 'Prince' by Machiavelli and 'Arthashastra', the ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, talked about the attributes of a good king. Today, most business books talk about the attributes of a good CEO. In fact, CEOs have become the equivalents of kings. So I thought it would be an interesting premise to set a story in the world of business – but with a total greenhorn as the protagonist who gets a tantalizing offer to become the CEO of a company." The novel, told in a voice of a woman from the female perspective, is about a 23-year-old sales clerk, Sapna Sinha who works in an electronics store in downtown Delhi. Sapna lives a "very humdrum, middle-class existence". She prays at a local temple every Friday. She hates her job, but she is

ambitious and determined to succeed, and she knows without the money she brings in, her family won't be able to survive.

One day, as Sapna leaves the shop for her lunch break, she is approached by a man, Vinay Mohan Acharya, who claims to be CEO of one of India's biggest companies. He tells her he is looking for someone to take on his business empire. And that he has decided it should be her. She will become the heir of his empire on one condition that she has to pass seven tests. The seven tests from the 'textbook of life' are everyday events that would not require prior preparations. Along her way she meets memorable personalities, from a Bollywood superstar to a Gandhian social worker. Through these tests, from current affairs, Swarup has highlighted employment, problems of women, life of women in cities like Delhi and other problems. Sinha is a middle class salesgirl working hard to make ends meet. Being the bread winner of the family she tries hard to fulfill her mother's needs and sisters demands without losing her sanity. Sapna deftly handles and comes out a winner in six of the seven life tests set by Acharya. 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. Swarup explains that the premise of the story stems from the perceptive idea that nobody "knows their own limits, and it is only when you are placed in an extraordinary situation that you realize this". The narrative of 'The Accidental Apprentice' also deals 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 Sapna's tests of leadership, integrity, courage, foresight, resourcefulness and decisiveness. However, it is a glimpse of existing bonding between Vinay Mohan Acharya and Sapna Sinha which is at the centre. Swarup makes us look in India through Sapna Sinha's eyes, exploring various forms of corruption in modern India.

Swarup has dealt with the women's world with keen observation and with penetrable sight. Swarup clarifies how women are treated as a puppet in the hands of males, and every woman aspires to have empowerment and liberation, free will and inner space. He presents Sapna as a challenging as well as self-conscious, a sensible young sales woman endowed with lot of courage and capabilities, confidence and iron-will. She lives in a problematic family, facing her personal tragedies boldly. Going through her sister's suicide and her father's grief and decline, she is fully determined to give seven test for CEO in the company and secure a position in one of the top companies in India.

Through these tests from current affairs, Swarup has highlighted employment problems of women, specially life of women in cities like Delhi and other cities. Sapna deftly handles and comes out a winner in six of the seven life tests by Vinay Mohan Acharya, but the last one, means 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, and even then she fights back, because of the tragic life of Sapna family. The book looks at Sapna's life- her family, the tragedy in her life and speaks of the people close to her life and ends on a surprising note.

As such, in 'The Accidental Apprentice', Swarup has exposed the real issues in the life of a women, particularly their employment and empowerment. Facing a challenge of a series of tests before Sapna is, in fact, the problem of every other struggling woman in India who want empowerment, to get assert herself and is on the

way to create a space for empowerment. He highlights how women in Indian society, dutiful towards society and family have to go through hurdles to stand up in their lives. Swarup shows, at the same time, tremendous employment opportunities available in different service sectors can be sought by such emboldened girls like Sapna Sinha.

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