

Psychoanalytic Study of Suvidha in Prof. Vikas Sharma's *Ashes and Fire*

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Abstract

The present research article is an attempt to study the main character, Suvidha from the perspective of Psychoanalysis in the novel, *Ashes and Fire* by Prof. Vikas Sharma. Psychoanalysis is a means to examine and investigate the mind, anxiety, desire or behaviour of a character and his/her consequent actions. Prof. Vikas Sharma possesses a unique ability to create unique characters in his fiction writings. His characters become familiar people no sooner the reader begins reading his novels. Through his characters, Prof. Vikas Sharma is able to depict the keen understanding of human nature. The literary giants be it Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, D.H Lawrence, Albert Camus, Dorothy Richardson, Chinua Achebe, Anita Desai and many more have been successful in portraying artistically the psyche and unconscious working of the mind of their protagonists in their respective literary works. Similarly Suvidha, the protagonist of *Ashes and Fire* by Prof. Vikas Sharma is presented in conflict with the social order and traditional norms of society. While dealing with the novel the readers get an insight into her inner self who faces an inner conflict because of the clash

between her own romantic ideals and traditional norms of society. The objective of the present research article is to study and analyze the nature of the main protagonist of the novel, *Ashes and Fire* in light of the Psychoanalysis. This is an attempt to interpret the main character, her behaviour and her consequent actions. In this way the paper will delineate the human psyche and the protagonist's motives in the novel.

Keywords: Characters, Human behaviour, Mind, Psyche, Unconscious, Ego, Desire, Anxiety, Psychoanalysis.

Prof. Vikas Sharma is one of the profound literary authors of our times. He has contributed a lot in the field of contemporary Indian English literature. Apart from fiction writing, Prof. Vikas Sharma is great at poetry recitation as well. He holds the power to explore various aspects of romanticism which can be felt throughout his novels and poetry collections. The most important aspect of his fiction writing is that his fictional world delves deep into the realistic world.

Methodology

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist who introduced Psychoanalysis in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, 1917*. Psychoanalysis is a method for treating mental illness and also a theory which explains human behavior. It is about human behavior particularly the unconscious mind of an individual. Freud divides the human mind into conscious, preconscious and unconscious levels. He uses the analogy of an iceberg while describing the three levels of the human mind. On the surface level it is the conscious mind consisting of those thoughts which are the focus of our attention at present. The other level is the preconscious that consists of all which can be retrieved from memory. The third and the most significant level is the unconscious. Like an iceberg, the most important part of the mind is the part you cannot see. Here lie the processes that are the real cause of most behavior. Later, it developed as The Theory of Personality, implying the meaning and explanation of the three elements Id, Ego and Superego. Here Freud states that the three elements are used to explore the unconscious desire, feeling and passion. In the research article "Id, Ego, and Superego", Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey state:

Sigmund Freud divided mental life into three agencies or "provinces," id, ego, superego. The id is the oldest and most primitive psychic agency, representing the biological foundations of personality. It is the

reservoir of basic instinctual drives, particularly sexual (libidinal) drives, which motivate the organism to seek pleasure. The ego is a modification of the id that emerges as a result of the direct influence of the external world. It is the "executive" of the personality in the sense that it regulates libidinal drive energies so that satisfaction accords with the demands of reality. It is the center of reason, reality-testing, and commonsense, and has at its command a range of defensive stratagems that can deflect, repress, or transform the expression of unrealistic or forbidden drive energies. The superego is a further differentiation within the ego which represents its "ideal." The superego emerges as a consequence of the Oedipal drama, whereby the child takes on the authority and magnificence of parental figures through introjections or identification. Whereas the id operates in pursuit of pleasure, and whereas the ego is governed by the reality principle, the superego bids the psychic apparatus to pursue idealistic goals and perfection. It is the source of moral censorship and of conscience (01).

In *Critical Theory Today* Loss Tyson describes psychoanalytical criticism as, "The notion that human beings are

motivated and driven by desires, fears, needs, and conflict of which they are unaware –that is unconscious.”(12). Since Super Ego follows the morality, social norms, religious values etc., Freud explains that “Conscience is the internal perception of the rejection of a particular wish operating within us” (Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo; Resemblances between the mental lives of savages and Neurotics, 1913). In addition, another part of this theory which Freud developed comes from the theory of Id-Ego-Super ego. Tyson elaborates, “The three ,the id is irrational and tends to want instant gratification ,the super ego works in direct opposition to the id because it internalizes cultural taboos and works to keep the id at bay, the lastly the ego is the conscious self that experiences the external world“(25).

Psychoanalysis as a theory is applied in literature. The connection between psychoanalysis and literature has been developed by way of literary criticism or literary theory. When talking about the critical approaches to literature, psychoanalysis has been one of the fascinating approaches in the interpretation or analysis of literary texts. As a result psychoanalysis has become one of the interpretative tools to explore the inner self of a character and the hidden meaning of a literary text. In the present article psychoanalysis has been applied to explore the inner workings of the protagonist's personality as factors contributing to her experience and consequent actions.

Discussion

Ashes and Fire was published in 2022 that revolves around Suvidha, the protagonist of the novel. The course of the novel is about Suvidha who has been brought up by her conservative family and is married to Samyak. Due to the murder of her husband, she encounters many complications but at the same time experiences life with a passionate vision and psychological upheavals. The entire plot in the novel revolves around the external and internal struggle of Suvidha.

Since in *Ashes and Fire* the plot is mainly centered on the life of Suvidha who has done post-graduation in English Literature and having read Lord Buddha and Swami is influenced by their teachings. As her father follows Arya Samaj, She also starts following some major principles of Satyarth Prakash. Unfortunately Suvidha's mother dies of dengue and her father does not remarry for the sake of her upbringing. Suvidha being a beautiful and wise girl desires to pursue Ph.D.

Suvidha meets a young man, Samyak Garg who works in the Department of Irrigation as an Engineer. He had done B.Tech from the Engineering College of Rudrapur. Since they fall in love with each and want to marry but Samyak's mother being greedy looks for dowry in the marriage for her only son. Samyak's father had passed away and they couldn't afford a comfortable life. They were poor and lived in a rented house. Samyak completed his education by taking a loan and was also supported

by his maternal uncle financially. Suvidha developed liking for Samyak and convinced her father for marriage with him. Finally they got married and started living a happy and loveable life. The newly married couple was supported by Suvidha's father in every way to settle in their life. They left for Lucknow with new hopes in their new journey of life. They started living in a new home at Lucknow. Both of them loved each other, helping and making their home a perfect place to live in. Suvidha started enjoying life in Lucknow but sometimes felt lonely. She asked Samyak to let her join Ph.D. from G.D.H. College Lucknow. Suvidha was a very bold by temperament and had also practiced Judo techniques, and could defend herself well.

Life continued and after a year and four months of successful and enjoyable married life, Suvidha gave birth to a baby boy. The boy was named Arshdeep. In coming years of their married life Suvidha and Samyak were blessed with a second son, Mandeep and a daughter, Niharika. In the meantime Samyak decided to shift, and purchase a house in Ghaziabad, U.P where his maternal uncle, Sudesh also lived. Samyak discussed the issue with his father in law who managed the purchasing of a bungalow in Ghaziabad for them. The family shifted to Ghaziabad with a hope to live a happy and prosperous life there. Samyak and Suvidha were not aware about the way people led their daily activities and about the complexities in Ghaziabad. They unfortunately became victims of a gang of Jaggu. In the course

of time, Samyak was murdered and Suvidha was left alone to look after her children. The whole responsibility of the family now on the shoulders of Suvidha who was a very strong woman. She took revenge of her husband's murder. She believed any problems in life are to be faced great vigor. "Suvidha finally decided to be an optimist and prepared herself for a life of tough struggles and convinced herself, 'I was ever a fighter' (*Ashes and Fire* 24). She was also a devotee of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, Lord Rama, and Lord Krishna. She not only raised her children but also submitted her Ph.D thesis and believed that 'hope is the thing with feathers' (*Ashes and Fire* 23).

Suvidha wanted to do a job but her father opposed her plan advising her to take care of the children. In the meantime, Suvidha happened to meet Vijay Shekhar who had got selection in UPPCS. He had come to Suvidha to learn English while preparing for IAS. Suvidha's father felt that the future is always uncertain and his daughter couldn't realize the complexities of life. 'Who could help princess Sita after her being cunningly eloped by Ravan? After all she had to lead a lonely pathetic life in Ashok Vatika! (*Ashes and Fire* 39).

Suvidha's father prayed to Lord Shiva to grant wisdom to his daughter who having met Vijay Shekhar got fascinated towards him. Suvidha's fascination towards Vijay Shekhar broke all the social barriers. Suvidha's father tried his best to discourage her about being physically inclined towards Vijay Shekhar. Suvidha did not listen to her

father when she got involved with Vijay Shekhar. Suvidha also started joining Kitty parties developing relationships from different sectors who offered her certain social services in different sectors for the betterment of the society. Suvidha wanted and strived for becoming an independent lady. "I wish to establish my own image in society" (*Ashes and Fire*47).

A dilemma between love and lust constantly disturbed the mind of Suvidha. After the death of her husband, Samyak, a good number of men approached her. She also spent ample time with Ayush, Ganesh Salil, etc. Despite this she was seen hung between the values of right and the wrong. Her subconscious mind constantly demanded to fulfill her desires. But, she thought about her children as well as her father, Seth Deenanath Ji who always supported in her life and particularly after the death of her husband, Samyak.

Suvidha came to know about Ganesh Salil having bad intentions towards. He was a teacher at her college and she believed that he was following her. However, in course of time She got physically intimated with Ganesh Salil. Their physical engagement was captured on CCTV and she lost her sense of reason. She repented for the relation with Ganesh Salil. One day she realized about her physical weakness. She got highly conscious of her youth and beauty and asked her father, "Papa what happens when the widow marries with a widower having children?" Her father replied by saying that:

Well marriage is a subjective issue and has no hard and fast rules. In our time widows adjusted with the situations for a healthy and happy atmosphere in the family. First, she adjusts with the mood of her husband, children and in-laws. Secondly, she gives birth to her own children and then tries to create harmony among them all. He says it's not bad to marry a widow or widower.

Suvidha and Ayush decided to marry. After marriage they took the responsibility of all the children. However, Suvidha's life after marriage was not satisfactory as Ayush suffered from mental disorder. But she held herself and the unfavorable circumstances responsible:

Since she felt a little tense that night, she took Valium to have an undisturbed sleep. Soon she slept physically when her conscious mind saw three Gods standing before her. She asked the first God after bowing before them with folded hands- 'What do you want, O Lord?' 'Nothing in particular. Tell me- are you pure at heart?'

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud and other psychologists presented the fact that human beings always look for happiness, despite the fact that they are always aware of the social barriers and restrictions. Suvidha who is the central figure in *Ashes and Fire* is also strongly influenced by the pleasure principle. She is seen living her

life by her own wish and will. The norms and values of the society don't let her down. She is seen as being motivated by an obsession to justify herself and would fix her identity through radical acts of ego assertion. The author presents her mind during sleep and shows how her mind is made up of connected and disconnected thoughts and feelings which occur in the form of strange dreams. The conscious mind of Suvidha plays a great role in shaping her personality and she is portrayed as a new woman. Her search for self-identity and personality development is her characteristic trait. She has been made equally important like other female protagonists by the author. She is very sensitive and thoughtful who tries to overcome the predestined faith and position in a traditional and conservative society. Suvidha is seen doing her utmost to know her value and position. She bravely reacts in case of mistreatment or expected to follow an age-old tradition. There are moments when she feels alienated in the society to develop a cordial relationship with other members of the social order. However, she always overcomes such barriers of orthodoxy and conservatism after a struggle and realizes the significance of fulfilling her emotional and existential requirements. Though a widow and having to care for her three children and father, her life is not dispassionate, waning or bored. She turns out to be a woman who lives her life according to her own standards with bold and fearless attitude.

The novel ends with the fulfillment of the journey of life led by Suvidha. She is a bold character who presents a sharp contrast to those traditional Indian women who live on the mercy of their fathers, husbands or sons. She is a symbol of triumph of modern Indian women who aspire their own life and don't adhere to male chauvinism. However, at the same time her psychological conflicts explicitly show that she also undergoes a terrible struggle between the social expectations and her own identity. Yet she emerges a successful woman after facing all odds, trials and tribulations and creates her own identity. She at the end is transmuted into the generation of new women who are able to combat and rise above the social, political, physical and spiritual taboos.

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