

MATRIX OF LOVE AND CRIME IN VIKAS SWARUP'S: *THE ACCIDENTAL APPRENTICE*

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Abstract: Love is the most earnest and prevalent emotion reflected in literature. From the beginning, romantic novels have always attracted the attention of readers. Be it young or old, romantic themes have fluttered the hearts of all. Whether romantic or platonic, love has remained the driving force of any civilization. The theme of love and crime have coexisted in literature since its emanation. Contemporary literature manifests complex human relationships and delves into love-hate emotions resulting in crime. Postcolonial Indian English fiction has been used as a vehicle to address the socio-cultural issues of contemporary society. The issues of class, caste, race, gender, and corruption have constantly been voiced in contemporary crime novels. The present paper discusses the matrix of love and crime in Vikas Swarup's famous novel *The Accidental Apprentice*. The novel has established an example of the art of storytelling. *The Accidental Apprentice* is a social critique representing the Indian vista and unfolding the journey of a young working girl toward exploring the self. It represents the matrix of complicated relationships interwoven in a crime tale. The present study attempts to explore the narratives of the mentioned work and probes the theme of love and crime voicing the postmodern conditions. Further, the paper has endeavored to investigate the crime theory in the given novel.

Keywords:- Platonic, romantic, love, crime, contemporary, narrative

Love is not an obvious theme in *The Accidental Apprentice* but is the driving force behind the major incidents. *The Accidental Apprentice* is a crime novel that deals with how love becomes an obsession and driving force behind revenge and crime. It recounts the story of a bold and brave young working girl Sapna who bears all the hardships of life without any grudge. Having lost her father, she becomes the sole jobholder for her family. With Sapna as the epicenter, the novel presents an authentic and artistic re-creation of Modern India and appears to upset the status quo of Indian patriarchy. The protagonist single-handedly solves all the problems and qualifies for all the tests life offers to her and manages a life of dignity for herself and her family.

The Accidental Apprentice focuses on the journey of Sapna Sinha from a twenty- two years old sales girl to becoming the CEO of India's biggest business empire owned by Viney Mohan Acharya who proposes Sapna become the CEO of his empire if she passes seven tests from the textbook of life. This novel registers the journey of a woman from the margin to the center. It depicts the ceaseless fight of a woman for survival. Living with her mother and younger sister Neha, Sapna undergoes many struggles to survive in a heartless society where money makes the mare go. She works as a salesgirl at a showroom of electrical appliances. She is compelled to leave her college to earn to look after her ailing mother and narcissistic sister. Sapna endures all the tantrums of her nagging and ever-demanding sister. The opening line of the novel reflects the endless struggle of a girl to establish her identity "In life, you never get what you deserve: you get what you negotiate." (*The Accidental Apprentice* 1)

Sapna is a noble girl who faces all the challenges in her life having lost her father and the youngest sister Alka. Amidst the hardships of life, she finds solace in the friendship and affection of her neighbor Karan. Before the death of Alka, Sapna enjoys a peaceful life at boarding school at Dehradun where her father is a teacher. Sapna gets to know about Alka's being in love with a boy named Hiren who according to Sapna is a bad influence on Alka. Sapna informs her father about Alka's relationship who forbids her to continue it. Desperate in love, Alka commits suicide leaving behind a letter for Hiren accusing Sapna and her father of her suicide. Sapna's family has never seen Hiren. After Alka's death, Sapna shifts to Delhi with her family where Karan comes to live in their neighborhood. The true identity of Karan is revealed only at the end when he confesses everything in front of Sapna who loves him passionately. The novel is a revenge story of a psychopath lover who murders people whom he feels responsible for the death of his beloved.

Hiren's love for Alka becomes an obsession and he makes it his aim to avenge her death by killing everyone responsible for it. Karan alias Hiren becomes a murderer in love to avenge the death of his beloved. He commits two murders and attempts to kill Sapna; the protagonist. Karan, for Sapna, is her best and most affectionate friend and neighbour whom she trusts blindly and in whom she confides all her secrets. It is only Karan who knows about Sapna's agreement of seven tests with Vinay Mohan Acharya. Karan provokes Sapna against Acharya. He maneuvers a fatal attack on Sapna and blames Acharya for it.

The Accidental Apprentice is a saga of love and revenge based on the matrix of complicated relationships. The novel is a story of unrequited love and deceit that has established an example in the art of storytelling. The present research paper deals with all forms of love. The first chapter "Love in the Time of Khap" deals with the controversial issue of honour killing in which the protagonist saves a couple from getting murdered by the cruel khap members. Babli and Raju are ready to sacrifice their lives in the name of love. The love of Alka and Hiren is symbolic of obsession with love. Alka commits suicide after failing to be with Hiren who goes on a killing spree to avenge her death. Sapna finds a lover in her best friend Karan.

Amalgamating entertainment with social realism has become the latest trend in contemporary Indian literature. Swarup's third novel *The Accidental Apprentice* published in 2013 is one such novel that depicts the corruption prevailing in different strata of contemporary society. Swarup has used the tool of crime fiction to expose the disparities in society. This novel has reserved its place as an acknowledged and celebrated crime novel. The present study attempts to explore the similarities in the novel that resembles various subgenres of crime fiction. The novel shares certain characteristics of a suspense novel, thriller, and mystery novel. *The Accidental Apprentice* focuses on the journey of the protagonist; Sapna Sinha, from a twenty- two years old salesgirl to becoming the CEO of India's biggest business empire owned by Viney Mohan Acharya who proposes Sapna become the CEO of his empire if she passes seven tests from the textbook of life.

The novel comprises seven chapters and every chapter symbolizes one test of life that Sapna has to qualify to become the CEO of the company of Vinay Mohan Acharya. The first chapter named "The First Test: Love in the time of Khap" recounts the horror of honor killing that Sapna manages to prevent and exposes the Khap to reuniting lovers. While struggling to solve the issue of honour killing, she explores herself through the novel, discovering her ability to lead. The second chapter named "Diamonds and Rust" deals with the next test that tests her integrity. Sapna shows a sense of maturity while handling the whims and fancies of narcissistic Bollywood superstar Priya Kapoor. Having misplaced The actress her expensive diamond ring worth rupees two crores, the actress blames Sapna for stealing her ring. Despite being in the dire need of money, Sapna locates the ring and returns the ring to Priya Kapoor. This incident affirms her integrity and thus she qualifies for the second test of life. The third chapter titled "Locked Dreams" explores her sense of courage while dealing with a notorious gangster who compels minors to toil under hazardous conditions in his factory. She liberates those children displaying her sense of courage thus passing the third test of life.

"The Fourth Test: The Blindness of Fame" deals with the fourth test that Sapna qualifies to prove her ability of foresight. She exposes the sexual exploits of Raoji who molests and exploits the struggling female singers. Sapna exposes the mal intentions of producers and Raoji of the singing reality show when she accompanies Neha to Mumbai to participate in a singing competition. Swarup exposes the ugly reality of the glamorous page three lives of urban socialites. The fifth chapter titled 'The Atlas of Revolution' celebrates Sapna's resourcefulness when she exposes the corruption in Atlas Company. Sapna's neighbor Nirmala Ben; a widow and strong believer in Gandhian philosophy, holds a protest against the mysterious owner of Atlas Company. Disturbed by awestruck corruption, she decides to wage a war against it. Her son sacrifices his life in Kargil because of a substandard bulletproof jacket. is in a way Swarup 'The character of Nirmala Ben appears to be influenced by Anna Hazare. Jantar Mantar transforms into a "showroom of democracy" and a "museum of the powerless" (250). It represents a display of fake democracy appearing utterly ironic when protestors bribe policemen to let them stage a fast until death against corruption. Swarup airs his disgust over the mind setup of the public who would rush to see a movie star but pay no need to die satyagrahis. "...Half the middle class indulges in bribery and the other half just doesn't bother to come out on the streets and do something about it" (252). Sapna uses her resourcefulness to spread a piece of fake news regarding the arrival of a film celebrity to support the fast.

Swarup has highlighted the significance of media in social cause quoting Shalini Grover; a journalist friend of Sapna Shalini who represents the authority of media in power politics. Shalini plays a significant role while rescuing Sapna from the psychopath lover of Sapna's deceased sister Alka. The sixth chapter titled "The Sixth Test: 150

Grams of Sacrifice” discusses the traits of decisiveness in Sapna when she exposes the organ trafficking racket run by an affluent MLA. She needs a kidney for her ailing mother and decides to donate her kidney in the process comes across the horrendous reality of organ traffickers and exposes the organ mafia through a sting operation. Satirizing the corruption and apathy of authorities toward Indian hospitals, Sapna comments “A trip to the government hospitals is enough to make an atheist out of a believer” (268). Sapna qualifies for the six tests of life with flying colors but before the seventh test could commence Neha becomes the victim of an acid attack. Sapna accuses Viney Mohan Acharya of the attack. Meanwhile, Viney Mohan Acharya gets murdered and Sapna is charged with the murder. It is only at the end that the truth is revealed and Karan is exposed as the mysterious lover of Alka who attacks Neha with acid and kills Acharya to avenge the death of Alka making Sapna and her family suffer.

The seventh test is symbolic and the ultimate test that challenges the protagonist physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. Feeling drained and broken after Neha gets injured in an acid attack. Karan mimics the voice of Acharya and confesses that he (Acharya) is responsible for the acid attack. Infuriated Sapna goes to Acharya’s house to know the reason behind such a heinous act but finds him dead and is arrested for his murder. Nirmala Ben helps her to escape from prison. Sapna hides in Nainital where she used to live with family during school days and where Alka commits suicide. Sapna recovers a box containing a letter blaming her for Alka’s death along with photographs of Alka and her lover. She feels dumbstruck when she discovers that Alka’s lover is none other than Karan whom Sapna loves secretly. All the past incidents start rotating before her eyes and she comprehends Karan’s role behind every hardship she and her family suffers. She returns to Karan’s rented room in Delhi in the neighborhood of Sapna and discovers that Karan is a psychopath who has been planning for months to avenge the death of Alka destroying Sapna and her family. Sapna confronts Karan like a wounded tigress when he fatally attacks her. She gets timely rescued with the immediate help of the police. It is Shalini Grover who puts a microphone in Sapna’s handbag to locate her whereabouts. The microphone records the confession of Karan who confesses the murder of Acharya and the acid attack but also the murder of Sapna’s father. Sapna gets acquitted of the charge of murder. She even turns down the offer of Ajay Mohan Acharya; twin brother of Viney Mohan Acharya, to become the CEO of his company. The contract made by Sapna reminds me of the Faustian pact with Lucifer but Sapna turns out to be an exceptionally remarkable person who passes all the tests life offers to her.

The present research paper has attempted to investigate if *The Accidental Apprentice* qualifies for the Fair Play Model. The novel doesn’t follow the third, seventh, and tenth rules of the Fair Play Model. The first rule advocates the absence of any secret door in the story but in *The Accidental Apprentice*, the secret passage at the house of Sapna in Nainital hides the secret of Karan. The seventh rule discusses that the protagonist must not get any accidental help but Sapna accidentally recovers the secret box from the secret passage. In this way, the seventh rule of the Fair Play Model has been ignored by Swarup in the novel. The tenth rule dismisses the presence of any twin role or double agent in the mystery but the character of Ajay Mohan Acharya; the twin brother of Viney Mohan Acharya, acts as a Red Herring, and readers keep on suspecting him for the murder until the real culprit is accidentally exposed to the readers. So, in this way, Swarup has somehow compromised the Fair Play Model but he has been successful in engaging the readers till the last page.

As far as the nature of the novel is concerned, the novel falls into the category of a suspense thriller and cozy mystery. In suspense and thriller, the crime must be stopped and solved in a given timeline. The given novel is a suspense and thriller as Sapna needs to stop Karan to save her family and prove her innocence. A cozy mystery underplays sex and violence and the novel fits in because of the lack of sex and violence with the exception that it focuses on the struggles of urban life rather than a crime in a peaceful countryside. Swarup uses first person narrative to narrate the story of the Sapna. The protagonist Sapna narrates the journey of her life while facing seven tests of life and describes the changes the tests brought to her life.

The Accidental Apprentice has won critical acclaim and literary critics have acknowledged this novel as an emphatic example of crime fiction that narrates the tale of corruption in contemporary Indian society. Sapna is compelled by her financial needs to accept the proposal and has to qualify for seven tests of life. Critics assert, “The Indian literary novel may be riding high, but there is such a shortage of crime fiction set in India’s capital that Vikas Swarup can be considered a pioneer after producing whooping books.” (qtd. In Sawhney)

To conclude, contemporary literature has vividly voiced the complex matrix of love and hatred through crime literature. Crime fiction can serve as a watchdog of society giving a wake-up call to the readers and cautioning them against social evils. The present research concludes that however pure, love can be toxic and destructive. Love can be a motivating force to reform individuals or a toxic energy driving toward madness or violence.

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