

**Beyond Archetypal Femininity: the complex and dynamic women in
Vikas Sharma's 'Ideas and Events'**

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Abstract:

The research paper seeks to bring into light the multifaceted and often contrasting characteristics of the female protagonists in Vikas Sharma's 'Ideas and Events'. The protagonists of Sharma's 'Ideas and Events' are Vindhya and Sandhya; young, ambitious, career- oriented women who go through life with both compassion and cunning. It shows how the women characters of Sharma go beyond the typical tropes categorizing women in popular literature. The paper makes a brief analysis of the different feminine archetypes developed by Jungian theorists, which influenced the development of tropes in later films and literature. The paper seeks to do an in depth investigation into the characters of the two protagonists of 'Ideas and Events'- the sisters, Vindhya and Sandhya; and aims to exhibit how these characters go beyond the archetypal femininity. The paper seeks to elucidate how Sharma makes his women characters dynamic and multidimensional and makes them escape easy categorization. The paper also aims to shed light on the art of characterization that Sharma employs in his novels; and through which he conveys his ideals of Realism and feminism.

Keywords: feminine archetypes,women, popular literature, dynamic, multidimensional, characterization.

Introduction:

Vikas Sharma is a master craftsman when it comes to his characters. The characters and especially the women in his novels show magnificent depth and complexity which is evidence to his genius. His women characters are incredibly nuanced and complex and go beyond the stereotypes and feminine archetypes prevalent in popular culture and media. The women of Sharma's novels are multidimensional and possess contrasting qualities.

Sharma's novel 'Ideas and Events' has two women characters as its protagonists-sisters Sandhya and Vindhya. At the first glance, both the sisters present some distinct dominant characteristics which categorizes them as a particular feminine archetype.

C.G. Jung in his 'The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious' introduces the concept of archetype "as an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious. Archetypes are...forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin". Jung rejects the concept of 'tabula rasa'(blank slate)which states that every human being is born with a blank slate. Instead he posits his idea of archetypes as imprints of behaviours or universal sets of characteristics which exist in the 'collective unconscious' and with which human beings are born. According to Jung, these archetypes manifest themselves in dreams, art, myths and religion across cultures.

Jung develops four main types of archetypes in his works which are: The Self, The Persona, The Shadow, The Anima/ Animus. Later, followers of Jung used Jung's theories to extend the concept and the number of archetypes. Jungian theorist and psychiatrist Jean Shinoda Bolen describes seven main feminine archetypes corresponding to the Greek Goddesses in her ' Goddesses in Everywoman: Thirteen Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives'. The main Archetypes developed by Shinoda Bolen are The Maiden, The Mother, The Huntress, The Lover, The Queen, The Mystic, The Sage and The Wise Woman. The different archetypes embody some distinct feminine qualities which dominate the characters of the women categorized under those archetypes.

The archetypes developed by Shinoda Bolen have extensively shaped the portraiture of women characters in popular fiction, visual media and art forms. But a portrait such as this is reductionist. It reduces women to a set of qualities or attributes and essentializes those qualities. It limits women and discourages contrasting elements in their personality often leading to inauthentic performativeness on the part of women to fit these structured and pre-given narrative categories.

Sharma's women characters are iconoclastic in the sense that they go beyond these archetypal feminine categories and present real modern women who reject easy categorization. Sharma's women are multifaceted and complex; at the same time, ambitious and homely, cunning and loyal, demure and powerful, worldly and innocent.

The character of Vindhya in Sharma's novel 'Ideas and Events' at first glance, embodies the qualities of the Huntress archetype. The Huntress archetype inspired from the

Amazonian princess Diana and the Greek goddess of hunt Athena is characterized by a strong sense of self and purpose. These women are goal oriented, strong headed and also value their freedom. When we first encounter Vindhya in the novel, she possesses all of these qualities. She is immensely aspirational and nurtures the ambition of leaving an indelible mark in the academic world.

Vindhya, who is a researcher in Finance falls for her professor; partly out of attraction and partly to further her aims in life. Sharma doesn't offer any moral commentary on the transactional nature of the relationship and neither portrays Vindhya in a negative light. She is a dutiful daughter, a diligent scholar, who also happens to have soaring ambitions: "After all it was the beginning of a new chapter in her life. Had she applied for a job on the basis of an MBA , she would have had an appointment in some industry? But her aims were not normal and she wanted to break all barriers of her life and fly very- very high at the top in the blue sky where no other girl had reached. Problems arise when one is climbing up the hill as it is easier to come down the peak of the mountain. As an ambitious girl, she was prepared to face the snow, the tempest, and even the avalanche that may come her way"(Sharma 16). Even though Vindhya is aware of the intentions of Dr. Tayal towards her, from the very beginning of their acquaintance, she still agrees to form a sexual liaison with him because it would help her in achieving her academic ambitions.

Vindhya's relationship with her supervisor Dr. Tayal is a manifestation of Vindhya's ambitions. Even though she comprehends the bleak future of their relationship, she continues sleeping with him: "Often Dr. Tayal wished her success in her research work so she may achieve the aim of life. At times she tried to analyze the meaning of love as Dr. Tayal was a married man with a young son and her love for him had no traditional future...Of course she knew at heart that she won't be able to achieve anything great without the blessings of her mentors like Dr. Tayal.(18)

But even though Vindhya is extremely goal oriented and competent like the Huntress, her character goes beyond this archetype. She possesses complex and oftentimes contrasting qualities like most of Sharma's women. She is close to her mother and follows her advice in going through her life: "Due to her faith in the infinite nature of God, she was not the least afraid of death or untimely and unexpected physical problems. She had been trained by her mother to face all oddities of life if she wanted to be at the top of society" (Sharma 17). In the later chapters of the novel, Vindhya's ambitious and career oriented nature becomes secondary to her matrimonial and maternal ambitions. Her marriage to Professor Goel and the untimely death of her son makes her shift her focus and prioritize her domestic life. She softens and tries to become a good wife to Professor Goel: "After the

seminar on Finance and International Trade, she noticed that her husband Dr. Goel felt highly pleased in the company of his new research scholar Miss Monika, daughter of the Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister of Delhi. This created a feeling of jealousy in her heart and she planned to draw the full attention of her husband towards herself only- Better late than never. After all, she too was pretty young and had become a qualified lady for the senior position of a Professor. Promotion or no promotion, husband's love was given top priority by her” (Sharma, 76).

Vindhya therefore transitions from a young, goal oriented, ambitious girl, who doesn't have any scruples in sleeping with a married man to further her aims in life, to that of a woman who embraces all the traditional motifs of femininity. She engages in performative femininity to secure her husband's love and devotion: “She bought two new sarees, two suits and other necessary cosmetics to appear prettier than she was.(76) For many of Sharma's readers- especially middle and upper class working females who form a large part of his readership-the shift in Vindhya's priorities might seem regressive. Yet, Sharma simply brings to light the complex nature of the modern woman. He makes the character multidimensional and gives her the power of choice without judgement.

Vindhya's character therefore experiences a shift from The Huntress archetype to The Queen archetype. Ayesha K. Faines in *Women Love Power* describes the Queen archetype as “ associated with a goddess- given instinct to marry and build meaningful alliances. The queen archetype can make a woman feel incomplete without a partner...As a companion, queen women are often attracted to powerful, assertive men, and are capable of demonstrating complete loyalty to their spouse and his personal goals. Like Hera of myth, who was repeatedly humiliated by Zeus’ many extramarital affairs, Queen women are predisposed to feel jealousy and rage towards other women, particularly those who threaten their position socially or their status as a wife.”

Vindhya's career ambitions gradually transform into matrimonial ambitions and then to maternal ambitions. Vindhya's grief over losing her son makes her unreasonable and she seeks unnatural measures to bring him back. It is the archaic grief of a mother over the loss of a child which Vindhya goes through. Her bereavement knows no bounds and she goes to her sister and pleads for her to bring her son back with the powers of necromancy. A firm believer in God and religion; Vindhya is willing to explore the dark arts only to bring her lost child back: “...Vindhya felt very upset these days and recollected the memories of her son Jayaksh- his lovely face, black hair, nice forehead, his jokes and the way he enjoyed fairy tales narrated by her. Soon it became an obsession for her to revive him. But alas! She knew no magic art to do so. She took leave for fifteen days and reached Jaipur and requested

Sandhya to help her- Didi, you please help meet my son Jayaksh!”(60) All of Vindhya's moral scruples, intellectual reasoning and modern sensibilities fall short when confronted with the primal love of a mother for her child. Here, Vindhya's character grows beyond the Huntress and Queen archetype and embodies the qualities of the Mother archetype.

Ayesha K. Faines describes the Mother archetype as “...a natural caretaker. The mother archetype represents a woman's maternal instinct, the desire to create life and to provide physical, mental and spiritual sustenanceMothers run the risk of putting others before themselves, and neglecting their own boundaries, a characteristic that makes them phenomenally emotionally accessible...”

The desire “to provide physical, mental and spiritual sustenance” is what governs Vindhya's character as she tries to navigate her identity as a mother. Even though Asha isn't her biological daughter, she goes to great lengths to care for her. When Asha gets pregnant with Apurva's child, Vindhya comes to her rescue and banishes Apurva from their family. Even though she feels obligated towards him since he is Dr. Tayal's son, she puts the sanctity of her own family first and chastises Apurva for his careless behaviour towards Asha.

Sandhya, a student of medicine harbours in her heart the desire to go beyond the boundaries of contemporary medicine and to take the agency of creation into her own hands: “the desire for invention was a fairy that attracted Sandhya every moment ... She asked herself after closing her book- Should she give up this project? Was it a burden for students of medicine? Will no one come forward for advance work? Will Indian medical students always be the followers of research scholars or Fellows of Royal Colleges of England? Was it O.K. to start working each Monday, after relaxing on Sunday? Was life just a story for earning money for paying mess bills, electricity and water bills, M.O. for parents etc.?”(Sharma,40)

Her ambitions remind the readers of the myth of Icarus who flew too close to the sun and got burnt. Sandhya spurs caution and morality for the sake of her ambition and creates Youngstein; a grotesque assemblage of human parts with mysterious powers. Sandhya suffers immense personal and professional losses while harboring Youngstein as he commits one crime after the other. She also refuses to reveal his identity even after he becomes the cause of the death of her colleague's son; all because she wants to protect the manifestation of her medical genius and ambitions. Sandhya therefore exhibits the qualities of the Huntress archetype. She is headstrong and goal oriented and she doesn't let anything come in her way of fulfilling her aims. And yet, Sandhya is also a recluse and leads almost an ascetic life. She doesn't care for material comforts and her pursuits for scientific discovery

are not channeled towards any motives of personal gain. In this, she goes beyond the archetype of the Huntress and also differs from her sister Vindhya whose hard work and relentless dedication is geared towards her personal betterment.

At 35 and unmarried, Sandhya doesn't nurture grand romantic ambitions, neither does she spend her hours socializing or husband hunting like other women her age. Instead, she isolates herself from her friends and colleagues and relentlessly works towards her medical invention. Her iconoclastic ideology further alienates her from her colleagues and the unnatural and unethical nature of her work shocks and scandalizes many: "Dr. Yashvani failed to appreciate her scheme of creation of an artificial man. Dr. Anugrahi felt shocked when Sandhya visited two- three slaughter- houses to possess a skull, bones, eye socket, knee- plates, hip bones, skin etc. It was highly pleasing for Dr. Sandhya but nauseating for her friends."(Sharma 39). Sandhya's persistent quest to broaden the scopes of Medicine and Science makes her an embodiment of the Sage archetype. The sage archetype as defined by Ayesha K. Faines“ represents a woman's pursuit of worldly knowledge, strategy and objectivity. Sage women face the world by arming themselves with information and forming meaningful alliances. The sage archetype encourages discipline, the pursuit of knowledge, proximity to power and goal oriented news.”

Sandhya is so fervent in her pursuit of knowledge that she violates all moral and ethical codes and even incurs personal losses. Sharma almost makes her a symbol of the Faustian thirst for knowledge in the novel. When Youngstein- her new medical invention- wreaks havoc on the masses; even leading to the accidental death of her colleague's young son, Sandhya still abets him because she is unwilling to see her invention being discovered by the masses and Youngstein being taken captive or punished. Even when her own mother is severely injured and is hospitalized because of Youngstein, she still keeps him a secret. After Sandhya is informed of the accidental death of her sister's young son Jayaksh, she fears it to be caused by Youngstein and yet again she remains silent: “ The next day Sandhya went to the residence of her younger sister by car but all the time had the doubt that Youngstein had caused this death too. But the problem was- How to reveal this secret to Vindhya? How to apologize for the creation of a giant like son? After all, she had been creative for the last four years and had worked very hard for the last three”(Sharma, 48).

Though the Sage archetype primarily dominates Sandhya's character, she is not defined by it. She possesses the complexities and multifacetedness which characterizes all of Sharma's heroines. Even though she alienates herself from her friends and family for the sake of her scientific pursuits and is almost maniacal in her obsession for a new medical breakthrough; she is not without the human qualities of compassion and sympathy. She

gravely regrets the accidental deaths of her colleague and her sister's children and is extremely saddened when her mother is hurt by Youngstein. She goes through a period of intense mental agony as she holds herself accountable for all the mishappenings around her: "It became a life and death for her as Youngstein made her dull and a patient of melancholia. She felt as if her spleen had spread creating only negative thoughts. Somehow she felt that she had no desire to live anymore... But then Sandhya often thought of her lonely mother and planned to find out the way to adjust Youngstein." (Sharma 44)

Sandhya's compassionate nature is also revealed when she helps her sister to make contact with her dead son with the powers of necromancy. Even though she is unwilling and tries to repeatedly convince Vindhya to let go of the desire to meet her son again; at last, she gives in to her sister's pleadings and uses her powers of necromancy to contact the departed soul of Jayaksh.

Sandhya's character goes through a major shift as she develops a liking for her colleague, Dr. Samarth. Sandhya was satisfied living the life of a spinster and didn't care for romantic or sexual relationships and often spurred the advice of her parents to get married. But after she has achieved success with her medical inventions and created both Youngstein and Lady Youngstein, she gradually starts developing marital ambitions. Encouraged by her father, Sandhya enters into a relationship with the recently widowed Dr. Samarth. Sandhya feels inadequate for Samarth because she thinks she has crossed marriageable age and considers herself inferior in beauty to his late wife Yami. Eventually, she proposes marriage to Dr.Samarth and he agrees to it. They are well matched in their intellect, ambitions and ideologies and Sandhya enjoys a blissful honeymoon period. As a wife to Samarth, Sandhya exhibits the characteristic traits of the Queen archetype. She is dutiful to and extremely besotted by her new husband. She assimilates her identity with that of her husband's and her marriage becomes the primary priority in her life: "Dr. Sandhya offered her love to him and slept in his arms. Now she lost her identity as Sandhya and became Mrs. Samarth."(Sharma 138)

Like her younger sister Vindhya, Sandhya too gradually experiences a shift from The Queen archetype to The Mother archetype. As she gets married quite late in life, she immediately starts preparing to become a mother and is overjoyed when she conceives. Her maternal ambitions take precedence over everything in her life and the centre of her universe shifts: "Dr. Sandhya's joy was limitless when she conceived her child for the first time and shared the feeling with Papa, husband, Vindhya and close friends. Much in advance she started planning for the comforts of the baby. She hoped that her husband would cooperate with her in looking after him/ her."(Sharma 186).

Sandhya is completely devastated when her first child is born disfigured and retarded. She chastises herself for not being careless during the pregnancy and worries about the child's future. She even questions divinity and blames herself for her past misdeeds which she feels have worked against her. Sandhya's grief and lamentation over her child's fate is the archetypal mother whose sole responsibility is her child's safety and well being.

Conclusion

Vikas Sharma emerges as one of the foremost contemporary authors who practice literary Realism. His novels hold a mirror to the ever shifting, multicultural, modern Indian society which is characterized by multiplicity, variance and contrasting consciousness. And these qualities are reflected in his characters. Sharma is a true individualist when it comes to characterization and especially in the drawing of his female characters. His female characters are intricately woven and display magnificent subtlety and intricacy. The narrative of his novel 'Ideas and Events' pivots around the lives of two women characters who are presented in sophisticated details; their dilemmas and predicaments highlighted with observant intention; making them escape the fear of being stereotyped or essentialized.

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