

SP Publications

International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:8.337(SJIF)**

ISSN: 2581-8333|Volume 8, Issue-8(August);2026

Female Agency And Resistance In Contemporary Indian English Fiction: An Analysis Of Professor Vikas Sharma's Ideas And Events

1.Prof. (Dr.) Geeta Gupta

Department of English, Govt. Girls Degree College, Kharkhoda, Meerut

2.Raju

Research Scholar, Department of English, CCS University, Meerut

Article Received: 19/07/2026

Article Accepted: 21/08/2026

Published Online: 22/08/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.426

Abstract:

Professor Vikas Sharma is a very significant contemporary Indian writer. His works have made a significant impact on the Indian literary world. He started his writing career during the coronavirus pandemic. He has written extensively about Indian society and the issues that prevail in our society, earning him the title of a social writer. He has written about many issues in his novels. Professor Vikas Sharma has become the face of modern Indian literature in English. The themes in his novels are very diverse. His novel, *Ideas and Events*, is another testament to his commitment to reforming Indian society. With an intriguing storyline, this novel also touches upon many aspects of human life. The present research paper explores the themes of female agency and resistance in Professor Vikas Sharma's *Ideas and Events* through the two central female characters: Sandhya and Vindhya, and highlights their resistance against patriarchal structures and institutions.

Keywords: Female agency, resistance, patriarchy, independence, gender roles.

Introduction:

Professor Vikas Sharma acts as a social reformer, and his writing works as his weapon of change. He advocates for a more equitable social order where everyone is given an opportunity to grow and develop. He reimagines Indian society as a place where there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, class, religion, gender, and other such superficial differences. He supports the idea of a society where equality and fairness prevail. He is a strong supporter of social justice. His ideas are a very good inspiration for Indian society. He sets an example through his works, which we must follow as responsible citizens. Professor Vikas Sharma is an inspiration for many young people. Through his novels, he has given them space to dream and work towards their goals. He inspires youth to walk on the right path and stand by righteousness and ethics. He has been the inspiration for many young people who have completely transformed their lives based on his advice and guidance. Even

before he became a writer, Professor Vikas Sharma was an inspiration to many people. As a professor and the Head of the Department in the Department of English at C.C.S. University, Meerut, Professor Vikas Sharma has spent the greater portion of his life as a teacher. For his pupils, he is more than just a teacher. He is their friend and guide. He helps his student outside the classroom as well. He acts as a mentor to his students and guides them in life, and not just in academics. Professor Vikas Sharma's novels cover a number of issues. As a feminist, one of his favorite themes is undoubtedly women's issues and feminism. He addresses various feminist themes through his novels. He believes in equality for both men and women. His works reflect the same values. This is something that he has learned from his family. In his novels, he has given a lot of space and consideration to feminist issues. He never confines women to a stereotypical idea where they are treated as subordinate beings. His novels portray women as symbols of strength and bravery. He represents women as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal structures and discriminatory social practices.

While it is true that Professor Vikas Sharma has authored a number of novels with very interesting themes and plots, *Ideas and Events* stands out from the rest of his works. It is very unique and significantly different from his other novels. The plot of this novel is also very interesting. This novel offers us a glimpse of Professor Vikas Sharma's other side. This is his only science fiction, and it has been appreciated by readers all over the country. In this novel, Professor Vikas Sharma beautifully captures the scientific development in the present world while also addressing some grave concerns about this development. This novel deals with a very important issue: to what extent is scientific development actually useful, and when does it become harmful? The line between these two things is very blurry, and human beings often cross it without realizing. The consequence of this overstepping is very harsh. This is what Professor Vikas Sharma captures in this novel. He talks about the dark side of scientific development and also highlights how science turns harmful despite the fact that the main reason behind scientific development has always been to make life easier and better for human beings. Despite this motive, scientific developments often pose a threat to mankind. In the contemporary world, a major scientific development that has invited a lot of criticism and speculations is the development of artificial intelligence.

Professor Vikas Sharma addresses a similar issue in this novel. While this novel is largely structured and built around the issue of scientific development and science fiction, it is hard for Professor Vikas Sharma to part from his role as a social writer. Consequently, we see that themes of feminism and social development have been discreetly woven into the main plot. This is a very remarkable feature of his writing. He delivers a very interesting and mind-blowing plot while also addressing some of the most important and monumental issues in today's world. This is what makes him so popular among the younger generations who are able to identify themselves with the characters of his novels. They also feel connected to his writings because he writes about the issues that they face on a daily basis. This makes them feel represented. It also helps them work out a solution for these problems.

Understanding Female Agency And Resistance:

Just like all the other novels of Professor Vikas Sharma, the theme of feminism is central to this novel as well. The fact that almost all of Professor Vikas Sharma's novels have a very strong and impressive female protagonist tells us a lot about his devotion towards feminism and its facets. Themes of female agency have become increasingly significant in modern Indian literature. In such works, female agency does not only mean individual success or the victory of a single woman. Instead, it means an active resistance against institutions and structures that promote patriarchy and suppress women. This structured approach strikes at the forces that perpetuate gender inequalities. Dr. Sarala Kisan Sanap talks about this theme in various Indian literary works in her research article titled "*Gender, Identity, and Resistance: The Representation of Women in Contemporary Indian Novels in English*". Talking about Shashi Tharoor's *The Elephantine Dance*, she writes:

"Another example of feminist resistance is found in Shashi Tharoor's *The Elephantine Dance* (2013), where the female characters assert their agency despite oppressive traditional structures. In the novel, the protagonist's search for freedom is not just about leaving an oppressive relationship, but about reimagining herself outside the restrictive bounds of gender expectations. Tharoor's portrayal of women's struggle to resist patriarchal oppression, while simultaneously negotiating their place in family and society, reflects the complex dynamics of modern Indian womanhood."

Professor Vikas Sharma follows a similar ideology. In his novels, his female characters not only take a stand for themselves, but they also work hard to eliminate gender inequality altogether. They are not selfish in their efforts, i.e., their efforts are not limited to their personal gain. They want to reform society. They do not only have a problem with the way they personally are treated, but they have a problem with the way society treats women in general. This helps them advocate for female agency on a larger level and also resist patriarchal structures and institutions.

Ideas and Events also relate to themes of female agency and resistance towards patriarchal structures. This novel is built around the lives of two sisters, Sandhya and Vindhya. Their father, Captain Surya Pratap, had died during the Kargil war. After his death, their mother raised them all alone. This also signifies how strong women are. Their mother took care of her children and managed everything all alone. She never complained about anything. Not only did she help her daughters emotionally and psychologically, but she also inspired them to gain an education and supported them throughout. Their mother understands the true value of education in a person's life. It is true that it was her efforts and her mindset that made her daughters so successful. Both of her daughters soon became very successful. They were highly educated and independent. They earned a lot of respect in society because of their skills and position.

Vindhya's Journey: Resistance In The Academic Sphere:

In India, women's education is not given much importance. Parents often ignore or overlook the importance of education for their girl children while spending huge amounts on their male children. This clearly highlights the discrimination that Indian women face on a daily basis. Despite the fact that women are often more eager to gain education and the devotion is also more than that of their male counterparts, people are often reluctant to support women in gaining higher education. Some even think that education corrupts women. It is as absurd as it sounds. While they support the same thing for men, it surprisingly becomes corrupting when it comes to women. Indian society is structured in a way that women's educational needs and aspirations are often suppressed and overlooked. People prefer to train their daughters to do household chores rather than providing them with a good education. This represents the deeply ingrained gender roles and patriarchal structures that still continue to shape and affect Indian society and the way that people think. This influences people's idea that women are supposed to stay within the boundaries of the household and engage themselves in doing household chores instead of going out and working. Women's education is often treated as a luxury. Even if parents support their daughters in their academic goals, society makes it very hard for women to pursue their dreams of higher education, as it robs them of a lot of facilities and opportunities that are available to men. Not only this, but women also have to work twice as hard as men to prove their worth and intellect.

However, Vindhya's mother did not believe in all this. She knew the importance of education. She did everything in her power to support her children and their dreams of gaining higher education. She never discouraged them from pursuing their academic goals and supported them financially as well as emotionally. After their father's passing away, she took complete responsibility for her children and provided them with all the facilities and opportunities they needed and deserved. Vindhya was very intelligent from the very beginning. She was very passionate about education and learning. She was highly educated and posted as an associate professor of business administration at R.S.M. University in Modinagar. Courses like business administration, science, technology, etc., are often treated as a man's domain. The orthodox and conservative people in our society feel justified in confining women to fields like the arts. While there is nothing inherently wrong with choosing a field that one appreciates, whether it be science or the arts, but confining a person to a certain field on the basis of their gender speaks volumes about a society's structure. People associate women with fields like the arts because, in their understanding, women do not possess the required skill set and intellect to work in fields like business and science. This is very wrong and represents a very harmful type of sexism that limits people's capabilities and options.

However, Vindhya defies these expectations and becomes a professor in business administration. While she is attending a seminar at Himachal University, she met another

professor named Soumya Deep Goel, who was the head of the department of business administration in Lakshadweep University, New Delhi. They talked to each other and realised that they were very similar and had similar expectations from life. This makes them decide to get married. Vindhya continues to defy society's expectations. Even after she gets married to Professor Goel, she continues to excel in her career. She writes a book and even completes her Ph.D. after her marriage. Despite living in a society where women are denied the most basic opportunities, she works hard to resist patriarchal structures that stop her and other women from excelling in the academic field. She is not someone who can be restrained by societal expectations. Her actions and determination not only impact her and help her, but they also lay down the foundation for a change. As a woman who has struggled in a society where she was actively discouraged and prevented from following her passion and her dreams, she works hard to ensure that other women do not have to go through the same.

“As an optimist, she was ready to face the challenges of life. Due to her specific knowledge of Business Administration, she hoped to march ahead in the future. 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. The barrenness of opportunities failed to check her vigour and zeal. In spite of absurd authorities around her she continued to read the best books on her subject.”

(Ideas and Events, 17)

Sandhya And The Ethics Of Creation:

While Vindhya was an acclaimed professor and academician, Sandhya, on the other hand, was very passionate about science. She had studied a lot about biology and human anatomy. She was very hard-working and dedicated. She often spent days in her laboratory where she was indulged in a number of experiments. She is the true representative of a female agency. She represents a woman who is strong enough to make her own decisions and follow her passion. She is very independent. She is so obsessed with her work that she chooses not to have a partner. This is also a sign of her independence. Unlike the general idea of society that expects women to be married and live as their husbands' better halves, Sandhya is someone who has her own independent identity and existence. She is not an extension of her partner. Society often views unmarried women with pity. But Sandhya is not the one who needs pity. She is very strong and determined. She does not need the support of a male partner to sustain herself in this world. Sandhya's agency and autonomy are very dear to her. This also reflects through her choice of career and profession.

Sandhya was always very passionate about medical sciences and this is what had inspired her to do M.B.S.S. As an M.D. student, she spent most of her time with books. This was also because she was an introvert. Sandhya's interest in medical science and human biology inspired her to become a surgeon. Despite being very good at her job, she often had nightmares about the surgeries that she had performed. In the beginning, we see that she feels

scared to do her job as she thought that she was interfering with the laws of nature. Despite this, Sandhya went on to create a supernatural creature.

“It had been a passion for Dr. Sandhya to study medicine and she always enjoyed reading Anatomy, Orthopedics, Physiology, Gynecology etc. But then she often saw horrible dreams after operating the patients. Once she removed the uterus of a young lady (36) as the latter had developed a severe infection and there was every possibility of cancer there soon. That night she felt as if she was a butcher taking out the important organs of human body. It is true that she followed the principles of medical science and cutting off the hand of a cancer patient, removal of the gall bladder, vasectomy, tubectomy, kidney transplant, removal of heart's valves, adding and removing pacemakers etc. needed a lot of knowledge and experience that she possessed and yet all this made her restless.”

(Ideas and Events, 26)

Sandhya decided to create a creature that she named Youngstein. This decision is reflective of her independent nature and willingness to take major steps on her own. This highlights her determination and strength to utilize her true potential. She does not want to let herself get defined by patriarchal notions of femininity and gender roles. She knows what she is capable of, and she does not give up easily. Sandhya presented her proposal to some professors and medical students. No one was in support of her decision to create a supernatural being who could defy the laws of nature. But Sandhya was determined.

“In every meeting on Youngstein, the members and Professors rarely agreed with each other as most of them were tired of ward duties and private practice. Yet the desire for invention was a fairy that attracted Sandhya every moment and often she saw handsome fellows in her dreams making love to her Arcadia. She asked herself after closing her book - Should she give up this project? Was it a burden for students of medicine? Was it enough to study routine books on medicine? Will no one come forward for advance work? Will Indian medical students always 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 of earning money for paying mess bills, electricity and water bills, M.O. for parents etc.? Was her life out of proportion? Had she lost the balance between mental capabilities and physical tolerance?”

(Ideas and Events, 40)

She went on to create Youngstein all on her own without any help. Now, this is where the line gets blurry. What Sandhya does is an act of defiance and determination. She has the strength to pursue her dreams despite the lack of support. This shows us that she is a very brave woman. She is independent, and her female agency allows her to do things that she wants to do without any external influence or pressure. She resists social pressure that stems from patriarchy and attempts to confine her in a small, prejudicial role. However, it can be

said that Sandhya goes too far in the exercise of her female agency and autonomy. She goes beyond the laws of nature and does not pay heed to the warnings given by her seniors. She is so blinded by her ambition and dream that she fails to differentiate between right and wrong. Sandhya is independent and strong, but she uses this for the wrong purpose. She does not use this to benefit herself or society, instead, she ends up creating a monster that is very volatile and harmful to mankind. Youngstein is undoubtedly a threat to human existence, but Sandhya fails to see this as she is blinded by her dream of creating a supernatural being. This creature even kills the son of her own sister and even steals money from her mother, but Sandhya fails to analyze the situation rationally and continues to keep doing further experiments. Hence, it is hard to ascertain whether Sandhya is a symbol of female agency or if she is a symbol of blind and uncontrolled ambition.

Narrative Strategies And Characterization:

What stands out in all of Professor Vikas Sharma's novels is his narrative technique. In *Ideas and Events* as well, he employs a very wide and diverse range of narrative techniques to foreground the agency and resistance of Sandhya and Vindhya. Traditionally, women were shown as objects as vessels. They were portrayed as passive recipients of fate. Professor Vikas Sharma's novels are very different from this narrative as his female characters are often symbolic of depth, inner strength, and autonomy. A very remarkable feature about his writings is that he does not portray his protagonists as perfect human beings. Instead, he shows us the reality. They are complex individuals who navigate real-world challenges. Vindhya's determination and academic journey reveal a quiet yet firm form of agency. Not only is she a victim of patriarchy, but she is someone who actively negotiates her boundaries and asserts her dignity. Similarly, by creating Youngstein, Sandhya also reclaims her intellectual and creative space, that was traditionally dominated by men. Ms. Pragya Awasthi writes in her research article titled "*Human's Overarching Ambition in Vikas Sharma's Novel Ideas and Events*":

"Dr. Sandhya's character in the novel is that of an ambitious and strong woman who wants to do something different. Her desire to be the leader rather than the follower is evident when she questions herself."

(An Insight Into the Fictional World of Vikas Sharma, 187)

Both Vindhya and Sandhya have their own distinct voices and monologues that articulate their thoughts and fears. This helps the readers in understanding their internal battles and emotional conflicts. This helps the readers in learning about empowerment as an evolving and conscious struggle instead of an outcome.

The novel also incorporates a number of symbols. Youngstein, for instance, is a symbol of growth as well as moral ambiguity. He reinforces the ethical dimensions of Sandhya's agency. For Vindhya, her workplace, the university setting, is symbolic of broader social structures that attempt to silence of subdue women. The recurring motif of ideas

preceding events highlights the philosophy behind resistance- change begins with thought and insight. Additionally, both Sandhya and Vindhya are very independent and strong. They do not comply with traditional gender roles. They do not wait for a man to come and save them. After the death of their father, their mother took all responsibility and shaped them into independent human beings. Their journeys are self-driven. They break free from gender roles.

Conclusion:

Hence, we see that Professor Vikas Sharma's commitment to feminism reflects very evidently in his novel *Ideas and Events*. This novel is a story that celebrates female agency. Both Sandhya and Vindhya are examples of strong women who have built their whole lives on their own. After the tragedy of losing their father, their mother raised them alone with great wisdom and strength. She is undoubtedly the true source of their strength and bravery. Both the sisters represent a strong form of female agency and a determined resistance against patriarchal structures that affect women all over the country. They refuse to comply with traditional gender roles and defy the expectations of society.

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