

# The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking  
Double-blind, Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 5 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2025 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 22-29

[www.literaryhrm.org](http://www.literaryhrm.org)  
[www.cavemarkpublications.com](http://www.cavemarkpublications.com)



## Female Characters in Prof. Vikas Sharma's *Sana* and the Issue of Women Empowerment

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### Research Article

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Feminist Theory, Identity Crisis, Patriarchy, Tradition vs Modernity, Postmodern India, Female Agency, Social Issues

### Article History

**Received:**

June 1, 2025

**Revised:**

June 14, 2025

**Accepted:**

July 1, 2025



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPLJLH)



### Abstract

**Aim:** This paper aims to identify the issue of women's empowerment as demonstrated in Vikash Sharma's novel *Sana* through the eventful lives of several female characters. Prof. Sharma highlights various important issues faced by women in contemporary times, marked by complexity. The paper focuses on their struggles with career building, marriage, adultery, and many other social problems, as well as how they quest for their identity. The clash between traditional values and modern Western attitudes toward life is also clearly emphasized. This paper attempts to examine these points from different angles.

**Methodology and Approach:** The author has consulted both primary and secondary sources as part of his research. Furthermore, feminist theories have been applied to analyze the problems faced by the female characters. Additionally, several online materials have been utilized in this paper.

**Outcome:** Through this paper, the researcher found that in the cities of today's postmodern India, rich and educated women have established themselves as independent human beings, revolting against the social bondage of patriarchy. The paper highlights different issues in which female characters emerge as a dynamic force in society, capable of writing the script of their own lives.

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** The paper concentrates on the conflict between tradition and modernism in Indian society regarding women's emancipation. It focuses on how the new age welcomes women endowed with the spirit of independence, while their minds remain deeply rooted in tradition.

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In contemporary Indian-English fiction, Prof. Vikas Sharma is undoubtedly a promising name. In his novels, the way he demonstrates the complex lifestyle of modern Indians is quite remarkable. The renowned professor of English, Dr. Sharma's latest novel, *Sana* which is a wonderful study of women's emancipation. In his work, divided into several chapters, a number of women characters undertake serious struggles to achieve their self-reliance. The novel is a fine study of the conflict between tradition and modern ethos. Throughout the story, illusion clashes with reality. Dr. Sharma blends myths with modern life from time to time to show the clashes of past and present attitude to life. As the novelist uses Hindi words freely, his work ceases to be artificial and seems an original version of modern life.

The fiction is set against Faridabad, which is now one of the fastest-developing cities of the country, and it is in this city that Sana, the central character of the story, lives with her husband Vrizz Bhatt. Sana comes from an industrialist family, and her father Naveen Nischal and her husband is a well-to-do pundit whose father, Nirmal Bhatt, was also a renowned pundit. The story is written against the background of the serious outbreak of Covid-19, when Vrizz Bhatt was suffering from financial stringency due to lack of priesthood work. Sana is a modern lady of superfast modern city life who likes to lead a vibrant, fashionable life. On the other hand, Vrizz Bhatt is quite traditional. Both his upbringing and vocation make him so. As a result, there is an emotional gap between the husband and wife, causing Sana's involvement in two other post-marital relationships. Adultery is a recurrent theme in the story and is treated in the novel as part and parcel of modern life. In the absence of Vrizz Bhatt, his wife Sana gets involved in love with one of his trainees, Pt. Revati Prasad. Sana shares her loneliness with Revati Prasad and desperately implores him to make love with her, saying: "Promise me Panditji, you'll ever take care of my beauty, youth, passion and obsession. Poor rejected woman as I am, I don't want to lead the life of a sannyasin. Loneliness, depression and frustration lead a woman to dementia. But love and romance keep her cheerful. Now it all depends upon you—whether you expect your Brijbala to be a Gopi or a Sanyasin?" —and she sobbed and sobbed. This is how Sana offers her love to Revati Prasad, and Dr. Sharma lays bare a woman's heart with unfulfilled desire in a very simple way.

The novel is narrated through a complex plot constructed through a stream of consciousness technique in which the past encounters the present frequently. Sometimes the novel tells the story of Sana and sometimes her parents', and this is how two generations come close to each other with frequent use of flashbacks and flashforwards, following a cinematic style. Sana's parents, Naveen and Kavya, married each other being united in love, and with his special endeavors, Naveen has developed his career. It shows the struggle of a middle-class youth to become an industrialist using his innovative ideas. But Naveen is a womanizer who gets involved in multiple relationships with his sister-in-law Silky and her friend Katty. Not that because of this his relationship with Kavya goes cold. All it happens beyond the knowledge of Kavya, who is so much satisfied with her husband. In fact, Naveen is a rare type of person who can manage both his family and company in a balanced way. Naveen, as his name means, is the representative of emerging modern India marked by unending innovation and creativity. Naveen keeps an illicit relationship with the girls, but always asks them to add some new ideas to develop his business.

In this novel, the title character Sana is a dynamic woman who searches for her identity beyond the boundary of 'narrow domestic wall' just like her father. Though she is involved in a post-marital affair with two other persons, she never stops her 'tireless striving for perfection' in her enterprise of school education. Sana is a PhD, and she sets up two big English medium schools which are run by her perfectly without taking any help from her husband. It is with the young principal of this school she develops another relationship, and what is important in this case is that again Sana plays the more dominant role in lovemaking with Mohan.

Kavya's sister Silky also wants to be an independent woman, and like most of the young girl students of the time, she could compromise with anything to build up her career. She agrees to share a bed with Naveen, who gives her full support to get a job in his company. Silky is ultra-modern, as her name suggests. She is unlike her sister Kavya, who believes in traditional values and keeps herself satisfied with Naveen. Though not so dynamic or vibrant like her daughter and sister, Kavya is a good woman with a dignified character. She is very much like her son-in-law Vriza Bhatt, and she has deep faith in Indian tradition. In spite

of having matchless physical beauty, Kavya remains quite satisfied with her husband Naveen and never intervenes with Naveen in his life. She has absolute faith in Naveen as his dedicated wife, and perhaps what Naveen does with other girls beyond the marital bond doesn't matter to her. Obviously, Kavya represents typical Indian housewives who are embodiments of grace, mercy, and toleration. On the other hand, her sister Silky is always ready to compromise with anything to develop her career, and that's why she doesn't hesitate to keep an illicit relationship with her brother-in-law, Naveen Nischal. It is Silky who represents young women of modern India who are quite committed to stand on their own feet by building up a career of their own. In one point, Silky is to be credited that for the development of her career, she focuses more on innovative thinking than on educational degrees. It may be termed as a modern 'Make in India' project. There is another side of Silky, and that is her. Silky gets involved in love with another girl named Katty with whom she stays in Naveen's guest house, and in treatment of love, whether it is post-marital or lesbianism, Dr. Sharma is all the while free and frank in his presentation.

Silky is a dynamic character whose desire for self-development is almost unending, and to fulfill it, she can't keep herself confined within the boundary of Naveen's workshop. She approaches the owner of a mobile company and flies to Shanghai to learn about mobile engineering, and it is with Silky that the novel gains an international panorama. The description of her life in Shanghai is brief but lively. Sharma writes, "She often felt that Shanghai was far superior to Faridabad. She couldn't speak any word except 'Hi' to the people wandering by her by her side." There also, Silky gets involved in love with a Chinese guy named Fufu, who shocks her by questioning things about Indian cultural heritage—of which Silky has little knowledge—and the author criticizes modern Indian youngsters who are almost ignorant of their glorious culture. It is in Shanghai, far from India, that Silky has her realisation, which is nicely recorded by Dr. Sharma: "Will her life fly like a smoke or spray of perfume? Is she like a lily that blooms for a day and then fades out without leaving any memory? Is she a common girl that is to be seduced by her seniors? What were the expectations of her parents when she left Gurugram? Is life worth living like this?" Silky comes

back home and marries and flies to America to stay with him there. So America is also shown at a glance in the novel, and there we find a faster lifestyle.

As it is said before, in the novel there is a happy combination of tradition and modernism. Disillusionment with modern society gives way to a yogic way of life for Vriza Bharti, who starts learning yoga under the guidance of a beautiful young girl named Shayli. He feels attracted to her and is fascinated by her beauty. They travel together and spend time together. But the moral education of traditional values restricts him from making love with the girl. Vriza Bharti is upset after seeing the miseries of poor people on the beach of Mumbai. What is more, the service of suffering humanity in Vivekananda Ashram opens his eyes, and he dedicates the rest of his life to this noble cause. Vriza Bharti is inspired by the advice of his sagacious father, who taught him four important lessons:

“Look back and get experience.

Look forward and see hope.

Look around and find realities.

Look within and find yourself.”

Another woman character we meet towards the end of the novel is Asha Apoorva, who has a painful past marked by the death of her husband. Now, through an arranged marriage, she comes into the life of Naveen, who becomes a widower after Kavya’s sad demise. Asha comes into his life as a ray of hope, and she adjusts with Naveen perfectly, leaving behind her miserable past life. Naveen, who has chased after physical beauty all through his life, leading a voluptuous lifestyle, now changes his attitude toward womenfolk. Being disillusioned with beauty, he now concentrates more on character, and in Asha we find a manifestation of completeness. When Sana hears from her father the news of his decision to marry again, she congratulates him.

In Sharma’s novel there are three major women characters—Sana, Kavya, and Silky—and a number of minor women characters like Katty and Asha Apoorva, and in their characterization, Sharma maintains a rich variety because of which most of them develop as round characters. It’s not for nothing that the contemporary social background against which they emerge is emphasized. Written during the time of lockdown, the novel perfectly captures its contemporary time marked by the COVID situation, political corruption, Ukraine

war, dominance of the internet, commercialization of educational institutions, emergence of pharmaceutical products, etc. It is a hard time of financial depression also, when people suffer from unemployment due to a worldwide depression caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. Against this backdrop, Sharma shows the emergence of modern Indian women who try to search for their own identities in their own ways.

Of course, like many other novels of the author, in this novel there is also a cultural clash between the past and present, traditional values and modern attitudes. In the matter of adultery, the novel is quite frank. Sana, the protagonist of the novel, gets involved in as many as three relationships beyond the marital bond. She is a dedicated educationist who has a mission of organizing a school, but in the question of adultery, she spares no pain to celebrate her youth in the company of different partners. In fact, she is her father's daughter, as her father Naveen Nischal practices adultery with a number of women. On the other hand, his beautiful wife Kavya remains faithful to Naveen all through her life. Vriza Bhatt also, Sana's husband, overcomes the temptation of adultery and follows the tradition of his erudite father. So here we find a conflict between two different approaches to life.

In some ancient societies, adultery was considered a sin, and proper punishment was arranged for the crime. Not that adultery was a taboo topic in ancient Indian literature; rather, it is treated liberally in the stories of Indian epics. For example, we may refer to the love affair of Viswamitra and Menaka. In Sharma's postmodern world, adultery is no more a crime—it is a fashion, rather. That's why Sharma's heroines don't take it seriously and celebrate their affairs. Sana's first adulterous love with Revati, who is a student of her husband, reminds us of the adulterous love involving Ahalya, wife of Gautam Rishi, and Indra. Whatever may be the fact, such affairs of Sana prove her boldness as a new woman of the present age.

The theme of adultery projected in the novel reminds the readers of the great American Novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne, in which the protagonist has to pass through painful suffering caused by society because of her adultery with a priest. But in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, adulterous love was glorified to a height of spirituality, though it was banned at that time because of

the charge of obscenity. Vikash Sharma's novel is the product of contemporary society, which provides enough freedom to women like Sana who are financially rich enough. Sana enjoys her youth, getting involved in one relationship after another. Not only for this—in her character, the concept of women empowerment has its full manifestation because of her success as an educator and also her boldness with which she faces two attackers by shooting them down. She is really of blood and flesh and is a complete woman of the new age.

In the novel, love is democratized perfectly, reminding us of H. L. Mencken's comment: "Adultery is the application of democracy to love." Here the issue of adultery projected in the novel can be compared with the attitude to women in society as it is demonstrated in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Silence! The Court is in Session*, in which the child is aborted in the womb of its mother. But in Sharma's novel, Sana gives birth to her baby boldly and celebrates her motherhood. In another novel, *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the narrator aborted her child, while in Sharma's novel, the narrator gives birth to her child. So, with the change of generation, women's position is changed, and Dr. Sharma nicely captures this change of social ethos in his time. To conclude, in the character of Sana we find a complete woman of blood and flesh, who is not unnecessarily deified but allowed by the novelist to live her own life.

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