

*Relationships Redefined: Situationships and Ambition in Prof. Vikas Sharma's Novel Sana*  
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## **Relationships Redefined: Situationships and Ambition in Prof. Vikas Sharma's Novel *Sana***

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### **Abstract**

*Prof. Vikas Sharma's novel Sana provides a compelling critique of 21st-century society and emphasizes the erosion of moral values, the commodification of relationships, and the dominance of materialism. Through the titular character, Sana, the narrative explores the complexities of modern youth, ambitious yet morally detached who is caught in a web of opportunism, situationships, and personal gratification. Sana, an ambitious and self-serving woman, exploits relationships with her husband, lovers, and colleagues to fulfill her material and professional goals and embodies the decay of traditional values. Similarly, characters like Naveen, Silky, and Katty further highlight the pervasive moral degradation in corporate and familial settings, where exploitation and opportunistic behavior prevail.*

*The present paper also draws a parallel with T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, which critiques the emotional emptiness and transactional nature of modern relationships and portrays characters who prioritize ambition and lust over love, loyalty, and integrity. The novel warns of the chaos resulting from the abandonment of ethical principles in a society driven by professionalism and materialistic aspirations. With profound insight into contemporary challenges, *Sana* offers a mirror to the disconnection and moral dilemmas of today's generation and urges readers to reflect on the consequences of their choices and values.*

### **Key Words**

*Contemporary society, Moral degradation, Materialism, Situationships, Ambition and lust*

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Professor Vikas Sharma stands as a significant postmodern novelist in contemporary Indian literature, widely known for his ability to delve into the social complexities of modern India. Currently a professor at CCS University, Meerut, Prof. Sharma has penned eleven remarkable novels, including *Raah Ke Patthar* (Hindi novel), *Love's Not Time's Fool* (debut English novel), *I.A.S. Today*, *498A: Fears and Dreams*, *Medicine: Light in Twilight*, *Ashes and Fire*, *Hope Against Hope*, *Sana*, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *Ideas and Events*, *Media Revolution 2030*, and *Love and Ego*. His novels are a blend of fiction and realism, which explore vibrant themes such as love, passion, dowry, and the complexities of family life, the administrative system, youth aspirations, and the corporate world.

The novelist's literary journey is deeply influenced by his academic upbringing. Raised in an academically driven family, where each member excelled in their respective fields, the novelist finds inspiration in this intellectually rich environment. This environment not only nurtured his curiosity but also motivated him to create a unique literary voice. As a professor, he gains inspiration from observing the evolving behaviors and experiences of students across generations. These observations deeply influence his storytelling and add depth and relatability to his work. This blend of intellectual upbringing and personal experience shapes his creative expression, makes it authentic, impactful, and resonates with a wide audience.

Renowned as a writer, critic, researcher, and mentor, Prof. Sharma is respected for both the quantity and quality of his contributions. His works go beyond conventional storytelling to present-layered narratives that reflect the intricacies of contemporary society. Many of his novels carry semi-autobiographical elements, drawing from personal experiences and close observations. Prof. Sharma's novels often explore the lives of the younger generation, particularly those in the corporate sector. His characters reflect a society where traditional values are rapidly dissolving and replaced by ambition, materialism, and the quest for success. These individuals lead robotic lives, detached from their cultural roots and driven by modern aspirations. His works vividly portray this detachment and offer a critique of the corporate world and its influence on personal and societal values.

One of Prof. Sharma's distinguishing traits is his ability to create characters inspired by real individuals. For him, storytelling is a therapeutic process, a way to honor the people who have influenced his life. By incorporating real personalities, quirks, and traits into his narratives, he creates characters that resonate with authenticity and depth. In novels like *Hope Against Hope*, *498A: Fears and Dreams*, and *Sana*, these real-life inspirations become integral to the storytelling and blend fiction with reality in a seamless manner.

*Sana*, one of Prof. Sharma's most acclaimed novels, is considered his most autobiographical work. The novel revolves around Sana, a young and ambitious woman, whose story explores themes of societal expectations, situationships, extramarital affairs, nymphomania and corporate life. The character of Sana is based on a real-life individual who was an ex-assistant of the novelist. Similarly, one of Prof. Sharma's students inspires the character of Chandan, Sana's boyfriend in the novel. Interestingly, the novel's cover features the real-life Sana, with her consent, which further blurs the line between fiction and reality. While the real-life Sana remains unmarried, the novel portrays her as a married woman and offers a creative twist to her story. Prof. Sharma has acknowledged observing both Sana and Chandan closely, weaving their traits and interactions into the narrative with remarkable precision.

Prof. Sharma's narratives are interconnected and reflect recurring themes of societal decay, ethical dilemmas, and human struggles in modern India. His works aim to act as mirrors, allowing readers to see themselves within the stories. By addressing issues such as ambition, infidelity, situationships and materialism, he captures the evolving spirit of the times and offers a lens through which readers can understand contemporary challenges. Through his fearless storytelling and realistic characters, Prof. Sharma sheds light on the complexities of modern society. His works serve not just as entertainment but also as thought-provoking explorations of the human condition and leave an enduring impact on readers and critics alike. This connection between the novel and real-life individuals has been highlighted by Prof. Vikas Sharma in his interview and by several critics, including Dr. Shivaji D. Sargar, Mr. Salinder Ranga, and Dr. Shashi Kant Tripathi. In one of his interviews, Prof. Sharma states:

"I'll be honest, it is true. Someone from my personal life served as the inspiration for the character of Sana. The novel's cover features her photograph, and she provided written consent for its use. Many other characters in the novel are also drawn from real people I know personally" (Sharma, 206).

The novel *Sana* provides a profound critique of the 21st-century corporate world and the younger generation navigating it. It portrays a society characterized by ambition, professionalism, and detachment, where materialism, situationships, and a "use-and-throw" mentality prevail. The narrative explores themes such as sexual desire overshadowing genuine love, and the absence of morals, values, and emotional depth in personal interactions. Through its characters, particularly Sana, the novel vividly illustrates the degradation of ethical principles as individuals prioritize material wealth, personal gratification, and social status over integrity and meaningful connections. Sana's actions serve as a powerful representation of

this moral decline and offer readers a stark reflection on the challenges of contemporary societal values.

The novel unfolds around its titular protagonist, a young, ambitious, and highly educated woman who marries Pandit Brij Vrat as part of a family compromise. Sana's marriage to Brij Vrat is driven by her parents' desperation to avoid societal disgrace after discovering her physical relationship with a former boyfriend, Chandan. Brij Vrat, a man of simple means and strong faith in divine order, offers a sharp contrast to Sana's privileged upbringing as the only child of Naveen Nishchal, a wealthy businessperson, and Kavya, a celebrated hockey player. Sana's dissatisfaction with her life becomes evident as she struggles to adjust to her modest surroundings on the outskirts of Noida. Unlike her husband, who is content and indifferent to societal expectations, Sana feels trapped and restless in a childless marriage of ten years. Her discontent, coupled with her ambitious and self-serving nature, drives her to manipulate circumstances for personal gain. This manifests in her engagement in multiple extramarital relationships, including an affair with Pandit Revati Prasad and her subordinate, Mohan Akshay.

Brij Vrat is portrayed as a devoted and loving husband who accepts Sana despite her flaws. However, Sana betrays him by pursuing an affair with Revati Prasad in his absence. Sana's actions reflect her ambition and disregard for moral boundaries as she seeks emotional and physical fulfillment outside her marriage. Justifying her infidelity as a response to her unfulfilled needs, Sana manipulates those around her to achieve her goals. She deceives Pandit Revati Prasad by presenting herself as a helpless woman whose talents are being wasted and thus gains his promise to help her secure a job at the International Institute of Engineering and Technology. In a particularly revealing moment, she emotionally persuades Revati Prasad by saying:

“Promise me, Pandit ji, you'll never 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, desperation, and frustration soon lead a woman into dementia. But love and romance keep her gay and cheerful. Now all depends upon you whether you expect your Brijbala to be Gopi or Sannyasin?” (Sana, 14).

The affair results in Sana's pregnancy. True to her opportunistic nature, Sana after becoming pregnant and securing material benefits from Revati Prasad, she abandons him without a second thought and shifts her focus to establishing schools and advancing her personal goals. This highlights her manipulative tendencies and her willingness to exploit relationships for personal gain.

Later in the novel, Sana turns to Mohan Akshay, the principal of her CBSE school. Impressed by his personality and professionalism, she begins to feel an attraction toward him. This relationship gradually transitions into an intimate affair when Sana initiates a business trip to Agra to procure science equipment for the school. During the trip, Sana skilfully manipulates Mohan's emotions, tests his reactions and gradually seduces him. Their physical relationship begins at a hotel in Agra, where they indulge in romance and eventually confess mutual attraction. Despite the professional pretext of their visit, their interactions reveal a deeper, personal connection fuelled by passion and opportunism.

“She came close to him and kissed his cheeks. Saree was removed within five minutes and they made love” (Sana, 76).

Sana's affair with Mohan extends beyond this trip. She frequently engages with him intimately after school hours to satisfy her desires and maintain her dominance over him. Mohan, although initially captivated by her, expresses his interest in a more meaningful relationship, including marriage. However, Sana deflects his ideas and keeps them limited to her terms.

When Brij Vrat departs suddenly for Rishikesh, Sana plans to meet Mohan Akshay for an intimate encounter. However, when she calls him, she grows restless and bored upon finding his phone switched off. Eventually, she lies in bed and switches on the television. Thus, Sana's actions demonstrate her ability to adapt to circumstances and seek emotional or physical connection based on convenience. When Brij Vrat is absent, she turns to Mohan Akshay, but when he is unavailable, she quickly shifts her focus. This behavior aligns with the modern concept of “situationships,” commonly seen in today's generation, where relationships are casual, flexible, and often lack deep commitment.

Sana not only engages in situations outside her marriage but also manipulates her husband, Brij Vrat, for her own benefit. When Brij Vrat returns from Agra, she entices him with love, romance, and physical intimacy to fulfill her desires, such as obtaining a mobile phone and expressing her wish to work.

“But then she requested him for a mobile phone.... And that was enough to please him. But then she needed his permission for the job” (Sana, 19).

“Finding him happy, she proposed to join the job in an engineering college” (Sana, 21).

Through this, she uses their relationship to achieve her personal goals.

The character of Sana in the novel *Sana* can be compared to the Typist in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* in Section III, “The Fire Sermon.” Both works

portray a similar critique of societal degradation, which focuses on themes of moral decay, lack of spirituality, and the prioritization of lust and personal gratification over meaningful relationships. While Eliot examines the decline of 20th-century society, Prof. Vikas Sharma extends this critique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and highlights similar issues in modern youth through the characters of Sana, Naveen and others.

In “The Fire Sermon,” the speaker, Tiresias, narrates the story of the Typist—a working woman in London. After returning to her room in the evening, she mechanically goes about her routine, cleans the breakfast table and heats her dinner. Soon, a young man, described as a house agent’s clerk, arrives and assumes she will be receptive to him. He fulfills his physical desires with her and then departs without any emotional connection or commitment. Surprisingly, the Typist is content once the act is over and indicates the mechanical and emotionless nature of their encounter. Through this scene, Eliot critiques modern relationships, which have become devoid of emotions and reduced to mere transactions of physical need.

Similarly, Prof. Sharma uses Sana’s character to depict the moral and emotional emptiness of contemporary society. Sana is portrayed as an opportunistic individual who uses others for her personal gain, whether in matters of pregnancy, her career, or school affairs. Like Eliot’s Typist, Sana’s actions reflect a lack of emotions, love, and values, driven instead by ambition, lust, and selfish desires. This mirrors the nymphomania and spiritual barrenness observed in Eliot’s as well as Prof. Sharma’s modern characters. In both works, relationships are depicted as mechanical and transactional, where human connection is overshadowed by personal gratification. Prof. Sharma extends Eliot’s critique by situating it in the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century youth and illustrates their ambition coupled with a loss of moral and emotional depth.

The novel does not limit its critique to Sana alone. Naveen Nishchal, Sana’s father emerges as another morally compromised character. He indulges in extramarital affairs, exploits women in his workplace and prioritizes wealth and status over integrity. His relationships with Silky, his sister-in-law and Katty, an employee in his factory underline the pervasive corruption in the corporate world. Naveen manipulates Silky and offers financial support to pursue her education. In exchange for sponsoring her B. Tech studies, Naveen coerces Silky into an inappropriate relationship:

“And he kissed her on her cheeks to check if she resists. But then she reciprocated kissing him twice. Then he asked her to check the name of the college and was admitted in I.I.T.E. with online payment of one lac rupees” (Sana, 48).

Katty is another character who willingly compromises with her integrity for material benefits. Naveen exploits Katty for his sexual pleasure while Katty willingly complies in exchange for financial support and material gains. This exemplifies the objectification and exploitation prevalent in such environments.

Through the characters of Sana, Naveen, Silky, and Katty, Prof. Vikas Sharma offers a striking portrayal of a society driven by ambition, materialism, and the relentless pursuit of personal gratification. The narrative critiques the erosion of traditional values and the emergence of superficial relationships that prioritize convenience and self-interest over authenticity and genuine connection.

In conclusion, the novel *Sana* delves deeply into the complexities of contemporary society and highlights critical issues such as the commodification of relationships, the decline of moral values, and the blind pursuit of material success. With a heavy heart, Prof. Sharma reflects on the plight of the 21st-century youth. While acknowledging their ambition and professionalism, he laments the loss of morals, emotions, and meaningful connections in their lives. He portrays a generation driven by materialism and devoid of love, loyalty, and a sense of belonging, where relationships are reduced to transactional “situationships” rather than genuine bonds. His concerns extend to the uncertain future of this generation, as they prioritize ambition over humanity. Thus, the novel serves as a warning and emphasizes the chaos and emptiness that follow when ethical foundations are neglected.

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