

Generational Consciousness of Gen Z in Prof. Vikas Sharma's novel *All Her Fires*

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Abstract

The Significant rise of Generation Z worldwide has dramatically reshaped contemporary sociocultural landscapes across the globe. Prof. Vikas Sharma's latest novel, *All Her Fires*, published in 2026, provides a compelling literary representation of this generation, where it captures the numerous contradictions, aspirations, and anxieties associated with it in the context of modern Indian society. This research paper examines the generational consciousness of Gen Z as portrayed in the novel "All Her Fires", focusing on its involvement with relation to digital culture, gender dynamics, and socio-economic diversity, through close textual analysis and engagement with contemporary youth behaviour.

This study argues that a paradoxical identity marks Gen Z—They are simultaneously empowered yet vulnerable, globally connected yet emotionally fragmented. The novel's depiction of characters such as Prof. Viren, Sanya, Disha, and Shivani reflects broader generational tensions between tradition and modernity. As noted in the RJOE article, Redhu aptly asserts that the novel "examines the moral and intellectual dilemmas confronting Generation Z in contemporary India" (Redhu 466). By placing the novel within current global and Indian developments—such as rising digital dependence, fickle social media influence, and unstable socio-economic patterns—the paper foregrounds its relevance as a sound cultural text. Ultimately, Prof. Vikas's Sharma novel *All Her Fires* emerges as a significant literary work that outlines the complexities of Generation Z consciousness in the twenty-first century.

Keywords

Generation Z, generational consciousness, digital culture, identity crisis, Indian youth, contemporary fiction

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Introduction

The raw concept of generational consciousness refers to the socio-cultural framing of collective awareness and shared experiences that define a particular generation within a specific historical moment. It not only embraces divergent demographic identities but also how individuals within a generation recognise themselves in relation to society, technology, and global transformations. In the twenty-first century, Generation Z—generally defined as those born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—has emerged as one of the most influential and complex groups, shaped by unprecedented technological advancement, rapid globalisation, and swift socio-economic changes. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has grown up in an environment immersed in digital technology where modern, sophisticated Smartphones, viral and influential social media platforms, and constant internet connectivity are not mere external tools but integral elements of their everyday life. This has radically transformed how they communicate, learn new ideas, form relationships, and construct their identities. In India, this transformation is particularly noticeable, as the country is now home to one of the largest internet user populations in the world. According to recent media estimates, India has over 950 million active internet users, with roughly 90% of them accessing it daily, a substantial proportion belonging to Generation Z, indicating the deep penetration of digital culture into young people's lives.

In the novel, *All Her Fires*, Prof. Viren remarks about this generation by affirming that, “Gen Z carry the hunger to excel, to rise, no matter the cost. They do not care for hierarchy, do not blow with age. They talk of inclusivity, justice, equality—and they mean it. However, they also want instant gratification.” (Sharma 19). As Redhu observes in the RJOE article, the novel foregrounds “alienation, identity crisis, and moral conflict” as central to Gen Z experience (Redhu 466). At the same time, Generation Z is shaped by major global and national events that distinguish it from earlier generations. Globally, this generation reached adulthood during significant universal crises, including the 2008 global financial crisis, the rapid expansion of social media in the 2010s, and most importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022). The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on Gen Z, disrupting their education, social interactions, and career prospects. Mandatory complete Lockdowns increased digital dependency, normalised online education, and intensified feelings of isolation, detachment and anxiety among young people.

In the Indian context, Generation Z is also shaped by substantial socio-political and economic transformations. The emergence of modern start-up culture and social media content creation as viable career paths among this generation has

further redefined traditional notions of employment and success. At the same time, increasing urbanisation and shifts in gender roles have influenced how young people perceive education, relationships, and identity. In the novel, Shivani, while writing her research paper, expresses that, “Gen Z is not one thing, not a single face- it is a collage of contradictions shaped by geography, class, and opportunity. In the cities, Gen Z carries smartphones like a second skin. They are fast, sharp, endlessly scrolling, plugged into global trends, K-pop, podcasts, and start-up culture. They speak a language of hashtags and reels, impatient for success, unwilling to wait for age or seniority. Hierarchy irritates them- they want results, not rituals.” (Sharma 20).

However, despite this apparent empowerment, Generation Z is marked by deep contradictions. While they are globally connected, they often experience emotional isolation. Prof. Sharma asserts in the novel that, “A rich Gen Z’er in Delhi is closer in mindset to a teen in New York than to someone his/her own age in a village in Uttar Pradesh.” (Sharma 21). while seeking independence and autonomy, they remain ingrained within familial and cultural expectations; and while they challenge authority, they also navigate uncertainty and instability. These paradoxes form the core of what may be termed Gen Z consciousness—a state of being that is simultaneously dynamic and fragmented. It is within this context that literature becomes an essential medium for understanding generational identity. Literary texts do not merely reflect social realities but also interpret, critique, and reimagine them. In particular, Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly turned toward youth narratives that explore themes such as alienation, identity crisis, gender conflict, and digital modernity. Prof. Vikas Sharma’s novel, *All Her Fires*, stands as a significant contribution to this emerging body of literature. The novel offers a refined portrayal of Generation Z by highlighting its engagement with digital culture, its objection to traditional hierarchies, and its pursuit of identity in a rapidly changing world.

One of the most striking aspects of the novel’s narrative is its precise recognition of generational diversity. This insight aligns closely with contemporary sociological observation, which emphasises that generational identity is deeply influenced by socio-economic context. In India, for instance, the experiences of Gen Z youth vary significantly across urban, semi-urban, and rural spaces. Urban youth often have greater access to digital technologies, through which they encounter various global cultural trends and educational opportunities, therefore enabling them to participate actively in global conversations. Prof. Sharma articulates in his novel that, “In towns, Gen Z is different. They balance between aspirations and tradition. They scroll TikTok and Instagram, yet touch their parent’s feet before leaving for exams. They dream of getting out-big jobs, big cities, big salaries - but are still

pulled back by family expectations. Their rebellion is cautious, their inclusivity tentative, like a door half open.” (Sharma 20).

In contrast, young people in smaller towns and rural areas often navigate a hybrid identity, balancing themselves between modern aspirations and traditional values while facing limited access to resources. This thinly layered understanding of generational consciousness is effectively captured in the novel *All Her Fires*, where the characters embody distinct sociocultural realities. Prof. Sharma enunciates in the novel, “In Villages, Gen Z wears another face altogether. Access is thinner- with patchy internet, fewer colleges, and tighter family control. However, even here, there is restlessness. They see the world through borrowed screens, compare their fields and narrow roads to skyscrapers and highways on Instagram. They are impatient too, but their paths are harder, knotted with caste, poverty, and patriarchy. For them, instant gratification may mean a second-hand bike, or the thrill of data packs, not international travel or branded sneakers.” (Sharma 21). Globally, similar patterns can be observed. Generation Z is often described as a “creator economy generation,” with many individuals engaging in content creation, digital marketing, and freelance work. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and other digital media spaces have enabled young people to redefine success and visibility. However, this digital empowerment is accompanied by numerous challenges, such as algorithm-driven content pressures, instant online validation, and the constant need for self-presentation.

The novel, *All Her Fires*, captures these contradictions through its characters and narrative structure. The character of Sanya, for instance, represents the assertive, digitally aware, and emotionally detached Gen-Z individual who questions traditional norms and embraces personal freedom. In contrast, characters like Disha and Shivani reflect the persistence of older social structures and emotional realities, particularly regarding gender and marriage. Through these contrasting figures, the novel presents a spectrum of generational experiences, highlighting both continuity and change. This paper, therefore, examines how *All Her Fires* reflects the generational consciousness of Generation Z through its thematic concerns, character representation, and narrative strategies by highlighting its importance as a literary text that not only represents but also critically engages with the complexities of contemporary youth identity.

The generational consciousness of Gen Z in Prof. Vikas Sharma's novel *All Her Fires* is articulated through a powerful recognition of its fragmented and contradictory identity. Prof. Sharma categorically defines Generation Z as “not one thing but a collage of contradictions shaped by geography, class, and opportunity”. This statement becomes the conceptual foundation of the narrative, emphasising

that Gen Z cannot be understood as a uniform group but as a diverse and layered generation shaped by socio-economic realities. The novel further characterises Gen Z as “fast, sharp, endlessly scrolling and impatient for success”, capturing the essence of a digitally driven generation that thrives on rapid growth, constant visibility, and instant gratification. This depiction aligns with contemporary realities where Gen Z, particularly in India, is emerging as a dominant economic and cultural force, influencing consumption patterns, digital markets, and career structures.

Sanya, one of the most compelling characters in Prof. Vikas Sharma’s novel *All Her Fires*, powerfully represents Generation Z consciousness. Prof. Sharma sketches this seemingly empowered image through the character of Sanya, who embodies both the confidence and contradictions of Gen Z consciousness. While Sanya is assertive, independent, and dismissive of traditional norms, her emotional instability reveals the deeper anxieties of her generation. Her approach to relationships—reducing them to temporary engagements—demonstrates a detachment that reflects a broader generational shift toward fluid and non-committal identities. Sanya dismisses Disha and mocks her, “You are stuck in some third-rate soap opera. What do you want me to say- cry for you?..... But do not expect me to be your therapist. I do not do sympathy.” (Sharma 03). Moreover, the narrative highlights that beneath the surface of ambition lies a profound sense of emptiness. Sanya’s character captures this paradox. Thus, Gen Z in *All Her Fires* is not merely ambitious and progressive but also emotionally fragmented and uncertain. Through its portrayal of characters and their lived experiences, the novel effectively presents Gen Z consciousness as a dynamic interplay of aspiration, contradiction, and existential struggle. As Redhu examines, the novel captures the emotional and intellectual unrest of contemporary youth. It centres on Sanya, a rebellious young woman who challenges social conventions, and Viren, a professor who represents moral idealism and intellectual responsibility (Redhu 469).

Through her personality, actions, and worldview, Prof. Sharma constructs a nuanced portrayal of contemporary youth marked by contradiction, rebellion, and emotional instability. Sanya mutters, “People carry tragedies like handbags these days”. (Sharma 03). Sanya embodies the defining characteristics of Gen Z—assertiveness, resistance to authority, digital sensibility, and a fragmented sense of identity. At the core of Sanya’s character lies her non-conformist attitude toward social norms and institutions. She challenges traditional expectations, particularly those related to relationships and marriage. Her dismissive view of romantic commitment is evident when she reveals, “Chandan and I? Are you kidding?... He is just ‘time-pass’... Putting together five sentences in English properly is impossible

for him.....Will I even think of spending my life with him? I would not marry him even if he were the last man on Earth” (Sharma 73). This statement reflects a broader Gen Z tendency to question conventional ideas of permanence and emotional attachment. For Sanya, relationships are not sacred or lifelong but temporary and negotiable, reflecting a shift in generational attitudes. Her critique of marriage further reinforces this perspective. She was against marriage altogether. She says, “It is only beneficial for a man to get married, so the woman should at least look for good looks and financial benefits”. (Sharma 02). Further in the novel, she bluntly asserts, “This whole marriage institution seems bullshit to me. The only objective of marriage is to become financially stable. What is the need for romanticising it?” (Sharma 77). This rejection of traditional institutions highlights her pragmatic and often cynical worldview. It also aligns with contemporary Gen Z perspectives, where young individuals increasingly prioritise independence, career, and personal freedom over socially prescribed roles. Sanya’s character also reflects a strong assertion of gender autonomy. Unlike traditional female figures, she refuses to conform to patriarchal expectations and instead constructs her identity on her own terms. However, Sharma complicates this autonomy by revealing its emotional consequences. Despite her confidence and rebelliousness, Sanya experiences inner emptiness and instability. Another important dimension of Sanya’s character is her linguistic and behavioural irrelevance. She spoke in her clipped, cool tone, “I did not bother. She was abusing me in Hindi, and I do not respond in Hindi. If I speak, I will only speak in English”. (Sharma 220). She uses abusive language casually, even in academic spaces, indicating a breakdown of traditional hierarchies and respect structures. The novel observes that she “tossed abuses as casually as she flipped her hair” (Sharma 220), normalising a form of expression that challenges established norms. This reflects a generational shift in communication styles, in which authority is questioned, and informal expression becomes dominant. She began to malign her research supervisor, Dr Nirmala Sharma, at RSM University, by mocking her physical appearance, mimicking her English accent, her modest sarees and remarked openly, “Oh! She knows nothing. She should retire now and take care of Chullah-Chawka.....She behaves like she is my Saas.... I bet no one cares about her in her personal life; she never smiles, and she takes her frustration out on me.... Maybe she is envious because she does not have a godfather like I have Viren....” (Sharma 367)

Furthermore, Sanya’s relationship with her so-called mentor, Prof. Viren, symbolises the broader conflict between generations. While Prof. Viren represents discipline, morality, and intellectual responsibility, Sanya embodies rebellion and scepticism. The novel Opines that, “Traditional values bored her. Prof.Viren’s lectures

about literature and moral sense, his insistence on character and sincerity, were to her just old man's talk, she mocked his diet of home cooked meals or Satvik food." (Sharma 222). Their interaction highlights the tension between tradition and modernity, illustrating what critics describe as the "moral and intellectual dilemmas confronting Generation Z". she once remarked, "An English professor, a writer, and still tied down with Indian sensibility. Shakespeare in the classroom, dal-chawal at home." (Sharma 223). The novel asserts that, for a long time, Prof. Viren was unaware of her double game and, as a result, he paid dearly. Sanya told her friends, "I thought gaining Prof. Viren's favour would be a tough nut to crack. However, I did not have to do anything. A small quantity of intellectual talk, some fake admiration, and he is yours. A small quantity of Camus here, a little Kafka there, and admire his own novels and your work is done." (Sharma 123). Moreover, when Prof. Viren finally confronted her to teach her some professional boundaries and decorum expected from a teacher at an educational institution, she admonished Viren by asserting, "Do not try to be my Baap again and again like you did earlier. I am not your student anymore." (Sharma 361) In essence, Sanya is not merely a rebellious character but a complex representation of Gen Z consciousness. She reflects a generation that is bold yet uncertain, independent yet emotionally fragile. Through Sanya, Prof. Vikas Sharma captures the contradictions of contemporary youth, shaped by shifting social, cultural, and technological realities. The interaction between Sanya and Viren represents "rebellion and responsibility," reflecting the tension between youth autonomy and traditional authority (Redhu 466).

The characters of Prof. Viren, Shivani, and Disha collectively construct a layered representation of generational consciousness in *All Her Fires*, highlighting the tension between traditional values and emerging Gen Z realities. Prof. Viren, as an intellectual and moral anchor, represents the older generation's commitment to discipline, ethical responsibility, and structured authority. He embodies what may be termed "moral idealism," attempting to guide younger minds toward clarity and responsibility in a rapidly shifting world. He once advised Shivani, "A kind heart is a rare gift. . . . sometimes too much kindness becomes a burden you cannot carry. And it can hurt you, if you are not careful" (Sharma 14). However, his struggle to reconcile these values with the changing attitudes of Gen Z reflects a deeper crisis of authority in contemporary society. As critical commentary suggests, the novel explores the conflict between "rebellion and responsibility" through the interaction between Sanya and Prof. Viren, positioning Viren as a symbolic figure caught between preservation and adaptation.

In contrast, Shivani represents a transitional consciousness—one that balances traditional emotional intelligence with modern resilience. Her affirmative

support for Disha is reflected when she says, “You are not a tragedy... you are a fighter... Most of us cannot even manage our own moods.... You are stronger than Sanya, stronger than me, stronger than you think” (Sharma 04). It reflects a voice of stability and support, suggesting the possibility of navigating modern challenges without abandoning emotional depth. Unlike Sanya’s detachment or Disha’s vulnerability, Shivani occupies a middle ground, embodying a pragmatic response to contemporary pressures. She opines, “strength... is not always walking out. Sometimes, it is staying and demanding change.” (Sharma 04). She reflects a segment of modern Indian women who, while aware of changing realities, negotiate them with strength rather than rejection. Disha, on the other hand, represents the emotional and psychological burden imposed by lingering patriarchal structures. Disha’s confession about her troubled married life with Rohit, “Sometimes, I feel like I am trapped, and soon I will shatter into pieces” (Sharma 02), reveals the internal conflict of a woman caught between modern independence and traditional expectations. Despite social progress, her character underscores the persistence of emotional dependency and societal pressure, illustrating that generational change is uneven and incomplete.

Together, these characters highlight the complexity of generational consciousness in the novel. While Viren represents moral continuity, Shivani signifies adaptive resilience, and Disha reflects emotional entrapment, their coexistence contrasts sharply with Sanya’s Gen Z detachment—dismissively termed as “a soap opera.” This interplay of perspectives not only illustrates the diversity of female and generational identities in modern India but also underscores the transitional nature of contemporary society, where tradition and modernity exist in constant negotiation.

Conclusion

Prof. Vikas Sharma’s latest novel, *All Her Fires*, emerges as a significant literary exploration of generational consciousness in the age of Generation Z, offering a deeply nuanced portrayal of a cohort defined by contradiction, transition, and transformation. The novel goes beyond simplistic representations of youth rebellion to present Gen Z as a generation actively negotiating the complexities of a rapidly evolving socio-cultural landscape shaped by digital technology, shifting gender roles, and uneven socio-economic realities. Through the character of Sanya, Prof. Vikas Sharma captures the essence of Gen Z as assertive, independent, and resistant to traditional norms, yet simultaneously marked by emotional fragmentation and existential uncertainty. Her rejection of institutional structures such as marriage, her fluid approach to relationships, and her detachment from conventional morality reflect a broader generational shift toward autonomy and self-definition. At the same time, her inner instability reveals the psychological cost of such freedom, reinforcing

the paradox of “wanting too much and feeling too little,” which defines contemporary youth experience. As Redhu remarks, the novel presents “a nuanced view of modern ethical ambiguity,” highlighting the instability of values in contemporary society (Redhu 466)

In contrast, Prof. Viren represents the older generation’s commitment to moral order, intellectual discipline, and ethical responsibility. His struggle to maintain these values in the face of changing attitudes highlights the crisis of authority in modern society. The tension between Prof. Viren and Sanya thus becomes symbolic of a larger generational conflict between tradition and modernity, stability and fluidity. Shivani, positioned between these two extremes, embodies resilience and adaptability. She reflects a transitional consciousness that neither fully rejects tradition nor passively accepts it but instead negotiates modern challenges with emotional strength and pragmatic balance. Disha, on the other hand, reveals the persistence of patriarchal structures and emotional vulnerability, reminding us that generational change is neither uniform nor complete.

Together, these characters construct a multidimensional representation of contemporary Indian society, in which diverse experiences coexist within the broader framework of generational transformation. Ultimately, *All Her Fires* stands as a powerful cultural text that captures the evolving nature of identity in the twenty-first century. It reflects a generation that is globally connected yet internally conflicted, ambitious yet uncertain, liberated yet searching for meaning. By situating individual experiences within broader social realities, Prof. Vikas Sharma not only portrays the lived complexities of Gen Z but also invites critical reflection on the future of identity, relationships, and values in a rapidly changing world.

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