



International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORIES (IJELLT)

ISSN: 3107-6505

Vol.:2: Issue: 7: 2026.

(International Peer Reviewed and refereed English Journal)

Editorial Board:

Dr. R. Gobinath

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman

Dr. Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan

Dr. Athisayaraj Jebakumar J

Dr. P. Dinakar

Dr.P.Chitra

Dr. M.K. Praseeda

Dr.S.P. Sasirekha

Prof. D. Deepikadevi

Dr. K.Usha Savithri

Dr. D.Solomon

Dr. S.Subash

Dr. K.M. Keerthika

Dr. B. Lingeswaran

Mr. B. Damodhara Prasath

Ms. P. Sherli

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience. The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

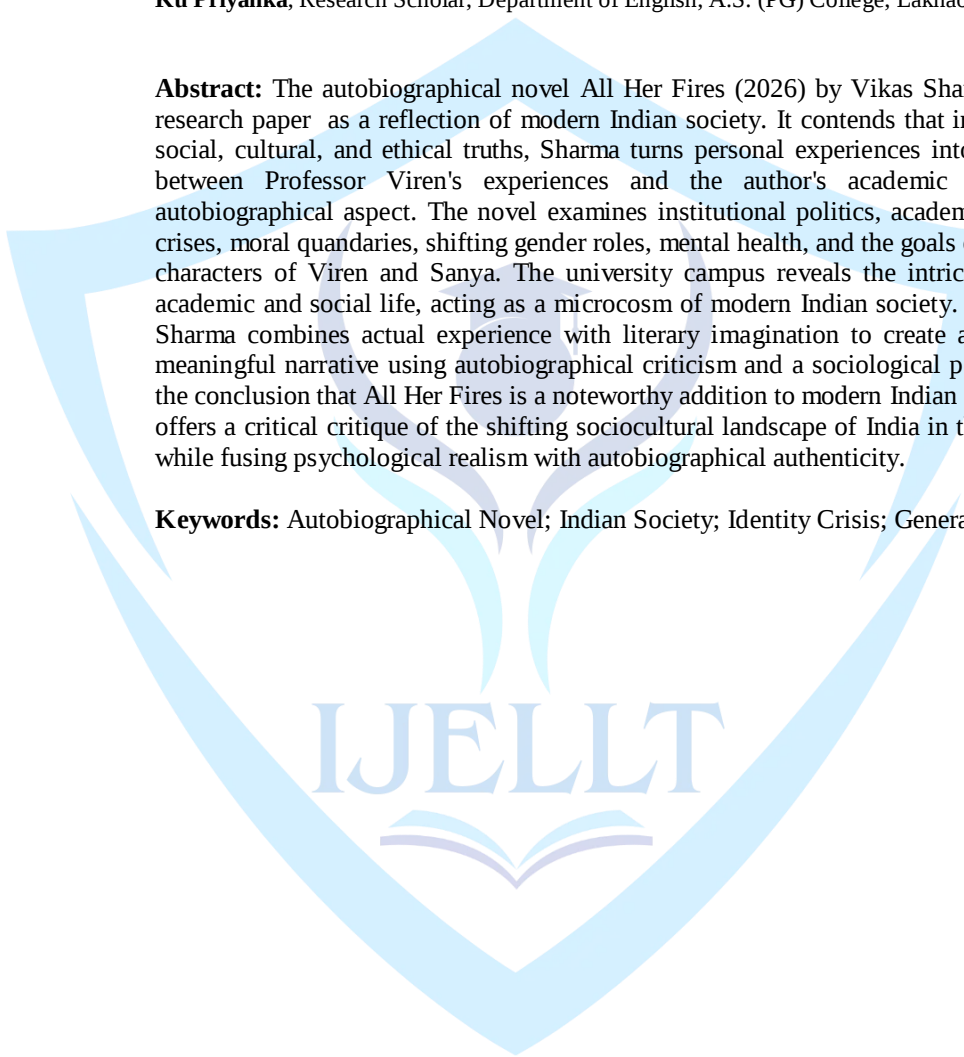
All Her Fires as an Autobiographical Novel and a Mirror of Contemporary Indian Society: A Critical Study

Dr. Divya Bala Pathak, Department of English, A.S. (PG) College, Lakhaoti, (Bulandshahar).

Ku Priyanka, Research Scholar, Department of English, A.S. (PG) College, Lakhaoti, (Bulandshahar).

Abstract: The autobiographical novel *All Her Fires* (2026) by Vikas Sharma is analysed in this research paper as a reflection of modern Indian society. It contends that in order to depict larger social, cultural, and ethical truths, Sharma turns personal experiences into fiction. The parallels between Professor Viren's experiences and the author's academic life demonstrate the autobiographical aspect. The novel examines institutional politics, academic corruption, identity crises, moral quandaries, shifting gender roles, mental health, and the goals of Generation Z via the characters of Viren and Sanya. The university campus reveals the intricacies of contemporary academic and social life, acting as a microcosm of modern Indian society. This paper shows how Sharma combines actual experience with literary imagination to create a realistic and socially meaningful narrative using autobiographical criticism and a sociological perspective. It comes to the conclusion that *All Her Fires* is a noteworthy addition to modern Indian English writing since it offers a critical critique of the shifting sociocultural landscape of India in the twenty-first century while fusing psychological realism with autobiographical authenticity.

Keywords: Autobiographical Novel; Indian Society; Identity Crisis; Generation ; All Her Fires.



IJELLT

**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

Introduction

“Professor Vikas Sharma is a distinguished author, poet, and researcher who is recognised for his contributions to Hindi and English literature. He serves as the General Secretary of The Association for English Studies of India and is a Professor in the Department of English at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut (UP). *Raah Ke Patthar* (2021), his debut Hindi novel, was met with widespread acclaim from readers and delves into the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity. Professor Sharma has edited four anthologies on poetry, prose, and drama under the title *Epiphanies*, in addition to fiction. His literary portfolio comprises numerous novels, including *Love's Not Time's Fool*, *I.A.S. Today*, *498A: Fears and Dreams*, *Medicine: Light in Twilight*, *Ashes and Fire*, *Hope Against Hope*, *Ideas and Events*, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, *SANA*, *Never Together Never Apart*, *Media Revolution 2030*, *Love and Ego*, *Honey Trap*, *Hell For The People* and *All Her Fires*. Numerous universities have integrated numerous of his novels into their undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, and scholars are currently conducting research on his works. Additionally, fifteen critical volumes have been published on his literary contributions, and his novels have been translated into a variety of Indian languages.

Contemporary Indian English literature has become an increasingly potent medium for investigating the intricate relationship between personal experience and social transformation. In the past few decades, novelists have expanded their narratives to explore the psychological, ethical, and cultural aspects of contemporary India, surpassing the confines of traditional narratives. Vikas Sharma is unique among these emerging voices due to his realistic depiction of academic life, generational conflict, and moral dilemmas. His novel *All Her Fires* is especially noteworthy due to its profound critique of contemporary Indian society and its autobiographical impulses. The novel is both an autobiographical work and a reflection of the rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape of twenty-first-century India, as it illustrates how individual experiences can be transformed into literary narratives that illuminate broader social realities.

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories

Autobiography has become one of the most significant genres in Indian literature, allowing writers to reflect the historical, social, and cultural realities of their era while narrating their personal experiences. Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is on his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (Lejeune 4).

James Olney also notes that autobiography is "the closest thing to life itself" (Olney 19), underscoring its close connection to lived experience. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson further contend that "autobiographical acts are acts of self-representation" (Smith and Watson 4), emphasising that life writing reconstructs identity through memory and narration. Autobiographical writing has been embraced by numerous Indian writers as a means of documenting their personal struggles, intellectual growth, and social experiences. Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography*, and Kamala Das's *My Story* are examples of how the individual lives of individuals can shed light on broader historical and cultural realities. In a similar vein, Vikas Sharma's latest campus novel *All Her Fires* extensively incorporates the author's personal experiences, academic life, emotional struggles, and observations of contemporary Indian society. The work, despite its status as a novel, closely resembles the author's personal experiences, thereby eroding the distinction between autobiography and fiction. Sharma adheres to the autobiographical writing tradition by converting personal memory into literary narrative, which utilises the individual narrative as a vehicle for investigating broader issues such as identity, relationships, morality, and the realities of modern Indian society.

Vikas Sharma's academic career and personal experiences are strikingly similar to the fictional events depicted in *All Her Fires*, which exemplifies this literary tradition. Scholars of the present day have exhaustively examined the similarities between the author and Professor Viren. The novel places Viren in an academic environment that is strikingly similar to Sharma's own professional journey, which encompasses his appointment as a professor, his tenure as principal, and his experiences in university administration. Similarly, fictional locations like "Mayarashtra" are strikingly similar to Meerut, and Baran serves as a symbol for Bulandshahr. This suggests that the locations were intentionally fictionalised rather than entirely invented. These parallels indicate that Sharma employs fiction not to obscure reality, but rather to reimagine it through the lens of artistic imagination.

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories

The novel's autobiographical nature is further underscored by its depiction of interpersonal relationships. The fictional characters and real-life individuals associated with the author exhibit substantial similarities, as noted in critical studies. These personas serve as artistic reconstructions that allow Sharma to explore emotional conflict, ethical responsibility, and intellectual struggle, rather than functioning as literal biographical representations. The novelist is able to maintain the artistic autonomy of the narrative while transforming private experiences into broader reflections on contemporary society through this fictionalisation.

In addition to its autobiographical significance, *All Her Fires* serves as a significant social document that reflects the evolving realities of modern India. The novel depicts a generation that is currently grappling with the challenges of globalisation, rapid technological advancement, changing family structures, and evolving social values. Sharma delves into a variety of topics that have become central to Indian society, such as identity formation, alienation, institutional corruption, academic politics, gender relations, emotional isolation, mental health, and moral uncertainty, through the experiences of Sanya, Viren, Shivani, Disha, and other characters. These themes show that the novel is a broader commentary on the conditions that shape modern Indian existence, extending far beyond an individual life story.

This paper has three objectives. Initially, it examines the autobiographical elements that are incorporated into the novel and the manner in which Sharma transforms lived experiences into literary fiction. Secondly, it examines the novel as a reflection of modern Indian society by examining its portrayal of youth identity, academic institutions, gender relations, moral conflict, and social change. Lastly, it assesses the novel's impact on contemporary Indian English literature by illustrating the dual functions of autobiographical fiction as both artistic expression and social commentary.

Review of the Literature

In his research paper "Alienation, Identity, and Moral Conflict in *All Her Fires* by Prof. Vikas Sharma," Dr. Vishal Redhu contends that the novel explores the psychological alienation, ethical dilemmas, and identity crisis that contemporary youth encounter. In her research paper, "The Depiction of Gen Z in *All Her Fires* by Professor Vikas Sharma," Dr. Vandana Sharma considers the novel to be a realistic representation of the emotional complexities, contradictions, and aspirations of India's younger generation.

The interview of Vikas Sharma by Poorvi Garg enhances the critical comprehension of the novel by revealing the author's intention to depict the social realities, emotional struggles, and diversity of contemporary youth. Sharma elucidates that the autobiographical aspect of the narrative is bolstered by the characters' inspiration from real-life observations, rather than solely fictional inventions.

Research Methodology

In order to analyse All Her Fires as a reflection of contemporary Indian society and an autobiographical novel, the current study employs a qualitative and analytical research methodology. The research is primarily based on All Her Fires by Prof. Vikas Sharma and the available scholarly studies on the novel, including Dr. Vishal Redhu's article, the research paper of Dr. Vandana Sharma, and the published interviews of Poorvi Garg and Tushar Kumar with Vikas Sharma. These sources collectively provide critical insights into the novel's thematic concerns and social relevance.

All Her Fires as an Autobiographical Novel

The autobiographical nature of Vikas Sharma's All Her Fires is one of its most noteworthy features, as it converts personal experiences into literary expression. Despite the novel's status as fiction, it incorporates a plethora of autobiographical elements that forge a close connection between the author's life and the fictional narrative. Prof. Vikas Sharma begins with the novel by the famous lines of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* "The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular". All the students of English literature are well known about Fyodor Dostoevsky. This shows that the writer is also well known of Dostoevsky. Sharma employs imaginative narration to reconstruct his lived experiences, thereby enabling individual memories to acquire universal significance, rather than composing a conventional autobiography. Vikas Sharma elucidates that the characters of Sanya, Shivani, & Disha were motivated by the diversity of students he encountered during his academic tenure and by "real observations." He says in the interview with Poorvi Garg:

It was of an immense significance. My novel is fundamentally a personal journal of seven years of observation. I did not sit down one day and decide to write about Gen Z. Among them, I resided. I observed them during conferences, trips, classrooms, and corridors. I observed that they discussed equality but implemented hierarchy. (Garg 3)

He underscores that these characters are not exact replicas of specific individuals, but rather imaginative reconstructions that are influenced by lived experience. This assertion confirms that All Her Fires extensively incorporates autobiographical memory while maintaining the imaginative freedom that is indispensable to fiction. Vikas Sharma's novel is an autobiographical reflection of society and reflects the reality he has observed in his own life. The writer states in the interview conducted by Poorvi Garg regarding the novel All Her Fires:

I have encounter red both extremes of life. I have observed absolute fire in certain individuals, and I have observed remarkable equanimity in others. I envision Shivani as the embodiment of equilibrium. She is compassionate and grounded; however, life eventually challenges her and causes her to become more resolute. The extreme is Sanya—brilliant but perilous, akin to a conflagration that lacks a container. Disha is unable to be either of these two, as she is caught between them.(Garg 3)

The novel is widely perceived as autobiographical, closely paralleling Sharma's experiences, although he has not confirmed this. This autobiographical bridge utilises Sharma's genuine struggles with institutional politics to provide the protagonist's psychological isolation with a visceral authenticity. The protagonist, who embodies Sharma's journey, experiences alienation in a corrupt, rigorous academic environment as a result of his refusal to comply with unethical practices. The narrative illustrates the evolution of a self-defined identity in contrast to a predetermined professional identity. Sharma demonstrates that intellectual independence is the foundation of a scholar's authentic self. The narrative is largely centred on ethical dilemmas. The characters, like Sharma, are compelled to choose between professional advancement and moral integrity, underscoring the significant cost of maintaining ethical values within a corrupt system. The text adopts a realist perspective, favouring fictionalisation over documentation, as evidenced by the altered names of characters and locations.'Mayarashtra' is the historical name of Meerut, and the protagonist, Viren, is a literary representation of Prof. Vikas Sharma, who was assigned as a Professor at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. The narrative also mentions a college in Baran, which was previously known as Bulandshahr. Sharma served as the Principal and Professor of the institution for seventeen years. Sharma's career trajectory is mirrored by Prof. Viren's interview and ensuing appointment as a professor on April 30, 2018 and May 2, 2018, respectively. (Redhu 467)

The most striking autobiographical element is the character of Professor Viren, whose professional life bears a striking resemblance to that of Vikas Sharma. Redhu asserts that "Professor Viren's appointment as professor, his tenure as principal, and his encounters with institutional politics closely parallel the academic career of Vikas Sharma" (Redhu 467). These similarities indicate that Viren serves as the author's fictional counterpart rather than an entirely imaginary character.

The novel's autobiographical quality is further emphasised by its institutional and geographical settings. Critics interpret the fictional state of Mayarashtra and the town of Baran as fictional representations of locations that are associated with Sharma's personal life and career. Redhu observes that "Mayarashtra is reminiscent of Meerut, while Baran is comparable to Bulandshahr," suggesting that the novelist intentionally fictionalises actual locations while maintaining their emotional authenticity (Redhu 467). Throughout the narrative, the transformation of actual places into fictional spaces demonstrates the coexistence of autobiography and fiction. The novel's autobiographical depth is also evident in the relationship between Professor Viren and Sanya. Their interactions are not limited to the traditional teacher-student relationship; rather, they develop into a philosophical discourse that addresses the changing social values, education, and morality. Sanya's declaration, "Sir, I believe that I should be the one to determine what is beneficial for me and what is not" (Sharma 107), embodies the independent perspective of modern youth while concurrently challenging Viren's conventional moral framework. Sharma's educational philosophy is mirrored by his unwavering conviction that education is a means of intellectual and ethical growth. The novel converts personal experience into a broader meditation on duty, conscience, and human values as a result of Viren's introspection, disappointments, and resilience. The interpretation of *All Her Fires* should not be that of a literal autobiography, but rather as an autobiographical novel in which personal experiences are artistically transformed into a meaningful literary narrative. Sharma's work is both universally relevant and intensely personal, as it integrates memory, imagination, and social observation. The novel illustrates that autobiographical fiction can transcend the depiction of an individual life and evolve into a profound examination of the evolving realities of contemporary Indian society, education, morality, and identity.

The Contemporary Indian Society as Reflected in *All Her Fires*

Indian literature has long been a reflection of the social, political, cultural, and moral realities of contemporary society. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Chetan Bhagat, and Amitav Ghosh are among the writers who have depicted a variety of aspects of Indian life, such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, communal conflict, political corruption, economic transformation, and the aspirations of the middle class. Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires*, which advances this literary tradition, offers a realistic portrayal of contemporary India by investigating institutional politics, ethical conflicts, familial relationships, mental stress, and the obstacles encountered by young people. The novel functions as a compelling reflection of contemporary Indian society by combining personal experience and social observation.

All Her Fires functions as a potent reflection of modern Indian society by depicting the intricacies of marriage, gender discrimination, emotional neglect, and domestic violence,. Sharma reveals that women frequently forgo their personal aspirations, careers, and education in order to prioritise the welfare of their families, yet they continue to be susceptible to exploitation and abandonment. The novel illustrates the enduring influence of patriarchal attitudes on contemporary relationships, despite the advancements in society. Sharma's narrative serves as a realistic depiction of the challenges encountered by numerous women in modern India by revealing the emotional and psychological repercussions of infidelity through the protagonist's distressing experiences. Disha, a significant character, recalls:

"When I married Rohit during my undergraduate studies, my parents were incensed." We possessed nothing. Our parents disconnected us. While he completed his BDS, I secured employment and diligently laboured for several years. Then, my daughter arrived, and ultimately, our parents provided assistance and acquiesced. Rohit established a clinic with the assistance of our parents and commenced earning income. However, at this time..." She paused, her gaze fixed on her hands. I am currently being cheated on by him. Additionally, when I confronted him, he struck me". (Sharma 2)

The novel's realistic portrayal of Generation Z is one of its most significant contributions. Sharma portrays young people as the result of globalisation, digital technology, consumption culture, and evolving social expectations, rather than as idealistic or irresponsible. The novelist notes that Generation Z is "a jumble of contradictions that have been influenced by geography, class, and opportunity" (Sharma 20). They are distinguished from previous generations by their reliance on smartphones, social media, global popular culture, and rapid success, which also results in emotional uncertainty and identity conflicts (Sharma 20).

The diversity of contemporary Indian youth is collectively represented by the characters of Sanya, Shivani, & Disha. Sanya is a representation of ambition, rebellion, and emotional instability, while Shivani is a representation of empathy, moral balance, and resilience. Disha is a reflection of perplexity and uncertainty. Sharma himself clarifies that these three characters namely Sanya, Disha and Shivani collectively represent "the truth" and "the variety" of Generation Z, rather than reducing the entire generation to a single stereotype (Garg 4). In a similar vein, Dr. Vandana Sharma deduces in her research paper that the novel depicts Generation Z as socially and psychologically diverse, influenced by a variety of cultural realities, rather than a uniform identity (Va. Sharma 781).

Sanya is a representative of the younger generation, which is defined by its cynicism toward traditional values, emotional intensity, and rebellion. Viren is a representation of the older population, which is committed to intellectual responsibility, morality, and discipline. Their interaction demonstrates the broader conflict between modernity and tradition in Indian society. Sanya challenges conventional norms. Viren endeavours to maintain moral order. The novel does not present either perspective as entirely correct or incorrect; rather, it exposes the boundaries of both extremes. Sharma links personal struggles to broader societal concerns by depicting this generational conflict, which raises questions about the future of moral and cultural values in a swiftly changing society. Sanya's character challenges patriarchal expectations and conventional roles when it comes to gender. She challenges traditional notions of femininity by refusing to adhere and asserting her autonomy. She maintains an alternative perspective on marriage, which is consistent with the perspectives of Gen Z in the present day.

The novel also provides a critical perspective on the Indian higher education system. Universities are depicted as institutions in which academic excellence frequently competes with bureaucratic politics, professional rivalry, and ethical compromise. By authentically depicting the experiences, conflicts, and aspirations of Generation Z and encouraging readers to contemplate the evolving social realities around them, Sharma's statement confirms that *All Her Fires* functions as a mirror of contemporary Indian society.

He clearly intends to present *All Her Fires* as a realistic representation of contemporary society, as evidenced Tushar Kumar's Interview with Professor Vikas Sharma on *All Her Fires*. Vikas Sharma articulates the novel's objective as follows:

In the novel, I have tried to show reality as it is, which is complex, confusing, and full of contradictions. Today's world is changing very fast, and Generation Z is at the centre of this change. Through my characters, I have tried to show how they are constantly struggling with identity, pressure, relationships, and expectations. (Kumar 67). In contemporary India, the obstacles encountered by scrupulous educators are exemplified by Professor Viren's ongoing endeavour to maintain integrity in the face of institutional pressures. His experiences illustrate that intellectual honesty frequently necessitates personal sacrifice, rendering education not only a professional obligation but also a moral obligation. Sharma's social vision is further enriched by his consideration of gender relations.

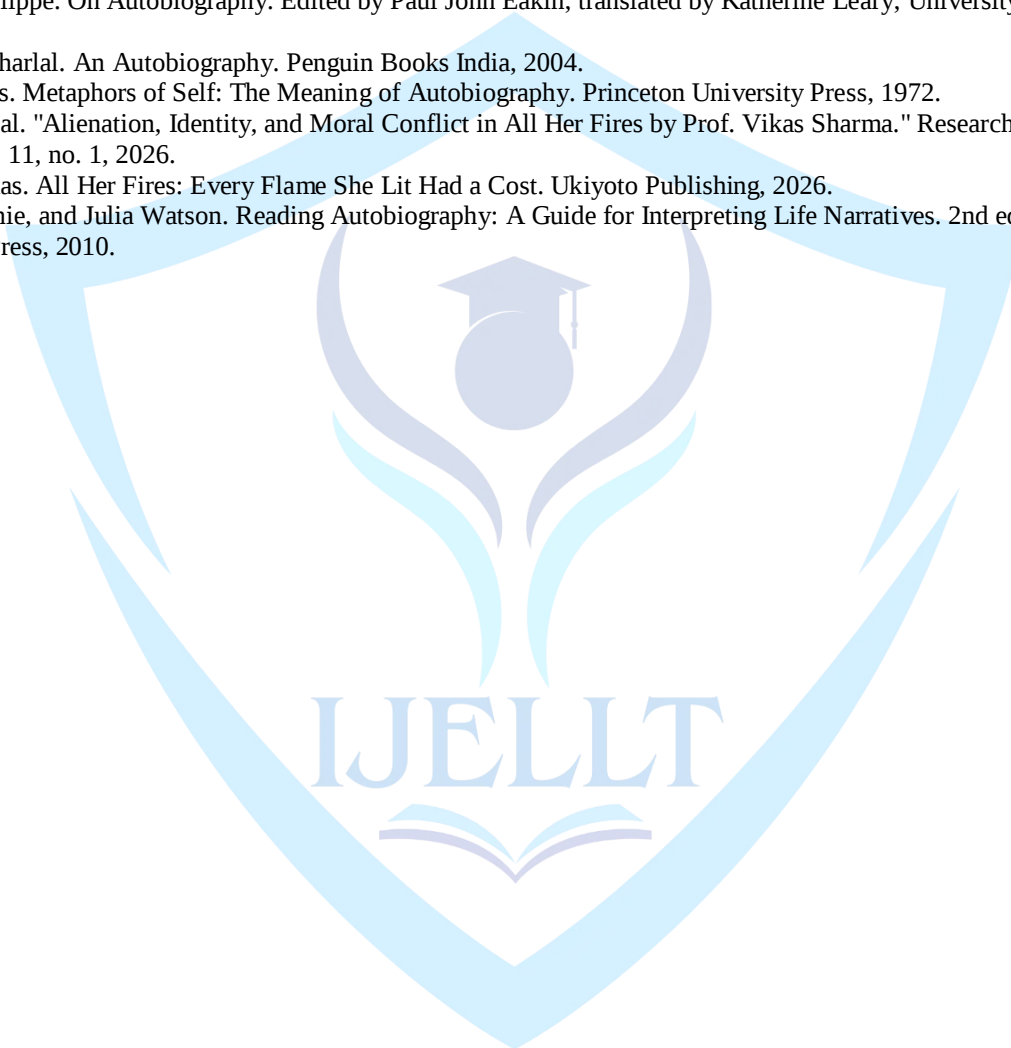
Sanya openly challenges conventional notions of female identity and marriage, characterising the institution of marriage as predominantly a means of financial security (Sharma 77). These statements are indicative of the evolving perspectives of numerous educated urban women who prioritise autonomy over conformity to traditional gender roles. However, Sharma does not romanticise unrestricted freedom. Rather, he illustrates that authentic empowerment necessitates personal responsibility, ethical awareness, and emotional maturity, thereby offering a comprehensive comprehension of female agency. *All Her Fires* is a compelling examination of moral conflict, alienation, and identity in modern society. Prof. Vikas Sharma's subtle portrayal of generational tension and metaphysical uncertainty is exemplified by the contrasting characters of Sanya and Viren. In the novel, Viren discusses Generation Z. He silently acknowledged, "They are not like us. We were a people who obeyed authority, respected boundaries, and feared public shame." These young adults, or rather, these children, have developed a tendency to query everything. They openly express their anxiety, challenge teachers, laugh at tradition, and tweet at politicians. They are restless spirits, but they are not without fortitude. (Sharma 179). *All Her Fires* succeeds as a reflection of contemporary Indian society by transforming individual experiences into a broader social commentary. The novel documents the aspirations, contradictions, and moral complexities of contemporary India by realistically depicting youth culture, academic institutions, ethical dilemmas, gender relations, and psychological struggles. In *All Her Fires*, Sharma demonstrates that literature has the capacity to interpret collective social experience and preserve personal memory, thereby making a substantial contribution to contemporary Indian English literature.

Conclusion

Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires* is a noteworthy piece of contemporary Indian English literature that effectively integrates autobiographical elements with a realistic depiction of contemporary Indian society. The investigation demonstrates that the novel surpasses the confines of conventional fiction by incorporating the author's personal experiences into a more comprehensive examination of identity, morality, education, and social transformation. Sharma's academic journey is fictionalised through the character of Professor Viren. The novel also functions as a powerful reflection of contemporary India by illustrating the aspirations, emotional struggles, and ideological conflicts of Generation Z. The university campus is a representation of the broader socio-cultural realities of the nation, while characters like Sanya, Shivani, Disha represent the diversity of contemporary youth. Identity crisis, alienation, gender equality, academic corruption, and generational conflict are all themes that underscore the novel's relevance to contemporary Indian society.

Works Cited

1. Das, Kamala. *My Story*. HarperCollins India, 2009.
2. Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Translated by Mahadev Desai, Navajivan Publishing House, 1948.
3. Garg, Poorvi. "Fires That Mirror a Generation: A Conversation with Prof. Vikas Sharma on *All Her Fires* and the Realities of Gen Z." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 17, no. 2, Apr. 2026, www.the-criterion.com.
4. Kumar, Tushar. "An Interview with Professor Vikas Sharma on *All Her Fires* and the Realities of Generation Z." *Cognitive Thinking: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, Apr.–June 2026, pp. 62–68. ISSN 3107-5088, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20085883>
5. Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Edited by Paul John Eakin, translated by Katherine Leary, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
6. Nehru, Jawaharlal. *An Autobiography*. Penguin Books India, 2004.
7. Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press, 1972.
8. Redhu, Vishal. "Alienation, Identity, and Moral Conflict in *All Her Fires* by Prof. Vikas Sharma." *Research Journal of English*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2026.
9. Sharma, Vikas. *All Her Fires: Every Flame She Lit Had a Cost*. Ukiyoto Publishing, 2026.
10. Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed., University of Minnesota Press, 2010.



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**