
Viren Sharma and Inder Kumar: Contrasting Personalities, Values, Ambition, and Social Outlook in Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires*

1. Dr. Aseem Tripathi

Head, Department of English

K.S.S.P.G. College, Ayodhya, U.P. (Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya).

2. Pawan Kumar Shukla

Research Scholar, Department of English

K.S.S.P.G. College, Ayodhya, U.P. (Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya)

Paper Received on 24-08-2026, Accepted on 26-09-2026

Published on 27-09-26; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.11.09.737

Abstract:

The modern campus novel *All Her Fires: Every Flame She Lit Had a Cost* (2026) by Vikas Sharma explores interpersonal conflict, ambition, caste, corruption, university politics, Generation Z, and the shifting moral environment of Indian higher education. These issues are highlighted by the divergent personalities of professor Viren Sharma and Inder Kumar. Despite having prominent academic positions, they have very different attitudes, aspirations, professional behaviors, and social perspectives. Viren is shown as a competent academic, writer, and teacher who upholds his professional integrity and frequently supports others who disagree with him. In contrast, Inder is linked to the desire for institutional influence, ambition, resentment, and conspiracy. His sense of victimization is exacerbated by his experiences with poverty, social insecurity, and caste marginalization. Using Du Bois's double consciousness, Spivak's strategic essentialism, and Campbell and Manning's idea of victimhood as moral capital, this study investigates their perspectives regarding academic life, caste, students, coworkers, morality, and institutional authority. In the end, Viren stands for tolerance, forgiveness, accountability, and professionalism.

Keywords: Viren Sharma, Inder Kumar, *All Her Fires*, students, ambition, caste, victimization, academic, and University.

Introduction:

Universities frequently reflect the main issues and shifts occurring in society since they are not isolated from the larger social framework. A university is a social institution where people with various backgrounds, beliefs, aspirations, and values

interact in addition to being a center for teaching and research. Academic life can therefore involve concerns like caste, gender, class, inequality, political influence, economic pressure, professional competition, corruption, and shifting moral ideals. The university is becoming a more popular location for contemporary Indian fiction since it gives authors a focused area to investigate these broader social concerns. Disagreements among educators, learners, administrators, and other staff members may be a sign of more significant conflicts involving authority, ambition, power, and social standing. In a similar vein, issues of favouritism, corruption, manipulation, and power abuse can be exposed through scholarly competition and institutional politics.

As a result, the university might be thought of as a miniature version of society. Contemporary writers can explore shifting intergenerational connections, traditional and modern ideals, personal aspirations, and societal responsibility through college life. As a result, depiction of higher education in Indian fiction go beyond scholarly issues and offer a more comprehensive literary framework for comprehending the social, political, economic, and moral complexity of modern Indian society. The setting of Vikas Sharma's novel *All Her Fires* is a university. The fictitious circumstances portrayed in *All Her Fires*, a prime example of this literary tradition, have a remarkable resemblance to Vikas Sharma's academic career and personal experiences. The author and Professor Viren's parallels have been thoroughly studied by contemporary scholars. The academic setting in which the novel situates Viren is remarkably similar to Sharma's own career path, which includes his time as principal, his appointment as a professor, and his experiences in university management. In their paper, "*All Her Fires as an Autobiographical Novel and a Mirror of Contemporary Indian Society*," **Dr. Divya Bala Pathak and Ku Priyanka** have shown :

All Her Fires, Vikas Sharma's most recent novel, heavily draws from the author's observations of modern Indian society, academic life, emotional challenges, and personal experiences. The line between autobiography and fiction is undermined by the work's close resemblance to the author's personal experiences, even though it is a novel. (Pathak and Priyanka 3)

The novel's focus on a larger ethical dilemma is confirmed by recent research on *All Her Fires*. According to Satya Dixit, the novel explores the moral consequences of competitive social connections and the decline in empathy in modern campus life. **Satya Dixit** in his article, "*Wanting Too Much, Feeling Too Little: Hyper-Realism, Ethical Crisis, and Social Texture of Prof. Vikas Sharma's All Her Fires*", writes:

Sharma relies on his vast experience as a writer and thinker to depict the ethical and social dimensions of the university. The novel's strength is its capacity to depict the intricacies of interpersonal relationships within broader institutional and

social contexts. Sharma is able to illustrate how the university affects the lives of its employees and students by portraying it as a totality. (Dixit 774)

In a similar vein, **Vishal Redhu** interprets the novel through moral conflict, alienation, and identity. Within this broader context, Viren and Inder's contrast makes sense. Viren stands for the potential for accountability and empathy to coexist with academic authority. Inder stands for the peril of separating intellectual success from moral self-control. Thus, the difference is more than just personal. It is both social and institutional.

Academic success coexists with departmental politics, personal competition, caste consciousness, corruption, ambition, student conflicts, and shifting social ideals at the University of Mayarashtra, according to the novel. Viren is portrayed by the author as a "old-school professor" who is focused on mentoring pupils, but he also fights against injustices and plots that endanger him. Professor Viren Sharma frequently makes an effort to direct and control Gen Z behavior in accordance with accepted social norms and values. The conflict between traditional expectations and the evolving attitudes and choices of the younger generation is reflected in such initiatives. In her paper *The Depiction of Gen Z in All Her Fires by Professor Vikas Sharma*, **Dr. Vandana Sharma** states:

Professor Viren makes an effort to change Sanya's behavior, which reflects the older generation's wish to direct and control Gen Zers' behavior in accordance with accepted social standards and ideals. Professor Viren believed that she was a lost soul in need of an intelligent and morally upright mentor like him. (Sharma 781) Though Viren Sharma and Inder Kumar are professors in the same department but react to academic life so differently, the novel's characterization of them is especially noteworthy. In his research paper "*Character Analysis of Professor Inder Kumar in Vikas Sharma's Novel All Her Fires*," **Dr. M. S. Vimal** identifies Inder as the male antagonist and Viren as the male protagonist. He highlights the difference between Inder's involvement in conflict and conspiracy from the time list of shortlisted candidates for the post of professor and Viren's willingness to help students and researchers. According to Dr. M.S. Vimal:

As a candidate, Viren gets ready for the advertized position of English professor at the University of Mayarashtra. Inder Kumar began plotting against Viren as soon as the list of shortlisted candidates for the professorship was made public, fearing that Viren would be chosen. (Vimal 123)

In a similar vein, the article portrays Inder as a professor whose professional behavior is frequently tainted by personal competition, while Viren is described as hardworking, diligent, and vibrant. "Viren, by nature, is a laborious, studious, and a man of dynamic personality popularly known as the career maker of his students,"

writes **Dr. M.S. Vimal**. (Vimal 123) In his paper, "*Alienation, Identity, and Moral Conflict in All Her Fires* by Prof. Vikas Sharma," **Dr. Vishal Redhu** states:

The novel serves as a reflection of contemporary Indian culture. *All Her Fires* continues Prof. Vikas Sharma's investigation of contemporary identity and social conflict within the broader framework of his body of work. He is a significant voice in modern Indian English fiction since his novels frequently explore moral dilemmas, gender difficulties, and psychological struggles. (Redhu 472)

Therefore, labeling one character as virtuous and the other as cruel is not the only goal of this research. Rather, it focuses at how their personalities, attitudes, aspirations, and societal perspectives differ from one another. The intricacy of Inder can likewise be comprehended through such a comparison. His personality has been shaped in large part by his experience of poverty and caste marginalization. Even after becoming a professor, Inder, who comes from a poor SC family, is still mentally aware of his caste and financial status. "Inder came from a SC family that had seen days of absolute poverty," writes Professor Vikas Sharma. As a result, he felt self-conscious about his caste and the previous financial circumstances (Sharma 32). Two distinct reactions to social experience are produced by the novel: While Inder frequently views current interactions through the lens of historical injustice, Viren makes an effort to transcend inherited barriers.

Despite having academic standing, Viren and Inder use their positions in different ways. Teaching, writing, assisting students, and upholding his professional position in the face of opposition are all aspects of Viren's academic identity. Redhu writes, "Viren stands for reason, morality, and intellectual discipline. His goal as a lecturer is to guide pupils toward social responsibility and ethical clarity. His fight against conspiracy and injustice exemplifies the importance of intellectuals in society". (Redhu 471 In contrast, Inder's academic standing is intimately linked to departmental power, personal connections, student manipulation, and competition with Viren.

Professional boundaries are called into question by Inder Kumar's candid discussion of his romantic failures and personal love affairs in the classroom. Academic debate, intellectual growth, and knowledge sharing are the main purposes of a university classroom. As a result, it may be considered improper for a professor to discuss personal relationships in class, especially if they have nothing to do with the material being taught. Vikas Sharma says "He even took poison twice and cut his wrist once as a reaction to his failed love episodes, He didn't stop having tantrums until the doctor warned him that if he continued, he might lose his vision." (Sharma 33). Inder's actions imply that he doesn't always keep a clear separation between his personal and professional obligations. His propensity to confide in pupils about

personal emotional experiences adds to the impression that he is a self-dramatic and emotionally distracted person.

Viren is shown as a rigorous, diligent, and thought-provoking professor. He is widely considered a career-maker for his pupils. Patience is another quality that defines his personality. When Inder is against his appointment, Inder Kumar's aggressive and caustic attitude toward Viren's career growth. Rather than thanking him, Inder tries to discredit his accomplishment by challenging his previous administrative position and implying that he needs to go back to teaching. According to Sharma, Professor Inder Kumar makes fun of Viren shortly after his appointment by saying, "Doctor Sahab Ab tak principalship or teachers ki politics karte rahe, ab thoda padhana padega." (Sharma 36) Inder Kumar suffers greatly from caste inferiority. "Bhai Inder, we will eat Sarso ka saag with Makke ki Roti," Viren joyfully asks Inder as he and his two students visit Inder's village, Sadpur, close to Baran (Sharma 36). Viren's mention of a traditional village supper implies that he is open to interacting with Inder without prejudice or social distance. His acceptance of Inder's socio economic and cultural background is also demonstrated by the warmth of his answer. When their professional rivalry escalates into accusations of physical threat, Inder's hostility to Viren intensifies. The dispute between the two professors intensified when Inder accused Viren of planning an attack against him, as described in the novel:

"At the time when Viren was in a very good place, Inder staged a fake-firing scenario going to be a frosting on the cake." According to Inder, Viren summoned goons from Baran to kill him, and the only way he avoided the onslaught was by ducking in time. (Sharma 37)

Viren does not instantly launch a similar campaign of retaliation in response to Inder's continuous attempts to harm Viren's reputation. Rather, he keeps up his academic obligations. When Viren aids those who have been connected to opposition to him, this element becomes more important. After their confrontations with Inder, Viren eventually assists Suchi Chauhan and Mini Rana, according to the novel. He shows that he separates professional obligation from personal retaliation by being willing to help students in spite of personal animosity. Thus, forgiveness, patience, academic responsibility, and social openness can be linked to Viren's personality. Additionally, his reaction to Inder's actions shows that he does not permit caste identification to serve as the exclusive foundation for his relationships.

Conflict between Personality and Psychology

Inder has a far more nuanced psychological personality. He hails from a Scheduled Caste background that is economically challenged and has been marginalized and impoverished. Kamal Kant Sharma contends that even after becoming a professor, his past continues to influence who he is. The crucial issue is

that, despite his academic accomplishment, Inder's social background does not vanish. Rather, it becomes a part of his worldview. He often sees Viren as a representation of a socially privileged group rather than just as an individual. The novel demonstrates that Inder's hostility for Viren starts before he is appointed in the university as a professor. He organizes resistance to Viren's appointment through students and student leaders. According to Vimal's research, Inder also made an effort to stop Viren from being appointed. Dr. M.S. Vimal in his article, Character Analysis of Professor Inder Kumar in Vikas Sharma's Novel All Her Fires, writes, "Driven by caste prejudice, he was not ready to tolerate his (Viren's) entry. The second most dominating reason was that Professor Inder Kumar wanted to see his old girlfriend, Kavita at that post." (Vimal 122)

Contrasting Ambitions:

In the novel, Professor Vikas Sharma writes that while ambition is a crucial aspect of both individuals, it is very different. Viren's aspirations are mostly related to career success, academic advancement, and literary endeavors. He has already held significant academic positions and made a name for himself as a reputable instructor and academic administrator before coming to the University of Maharashtra. His dedication to literature and an office bearer in the University Teachers' Association demonstrate his strong sense of professional identity. His choice to get appointment at the university is explained as being driven by his desire for a calm setting for creative work as well as personal and family issues rather than an attempt to obtain political power. However, several colleagues feel insecure due to his power and notoriety. Professor Inder actively opposes his appointment to the university and turns into one of the most vocal opponents of his appointment. Thus, Inder's resistance highlights the institutional rivalry around Viren's career, whereas Sharma portrays Viren's desire as professionally and creatively focused. According to Vikas Sharma:

Opposition of any type is necessary for a strong personality to exist. Enemies and hatemongers are like those cold-blooded insects that quickly flock to even a single drop of light. Viren had the same thing. His adversaries began to band together as soon as word leaked out about his university application. One such man was Professor Inder. He was most threatened by Viren's fateful entrance, so he made it his life's greatest goal to prevent Viren from ever being admitted to the university. He was the one who initiated the protests against him, even though he wasn't the only one. (Sharma 31)

Social Outlook of Viren and Inder:

Inder Kumar's interactions with colleagues and pupils provide more insight into his social perspective. By supporting him throughout his interview for the Assistant Professor position and acting as his mentor, Ph.D. supervisor, and well-wisher, Professor Varun Kumar significantly contributed to Inder's professional growth. Despite this support, when Ashi, the daughter of Professor Varun Kumar,

comes to him for academic advice, Inder does not feel the same way. While Viren steps up to encourage her, he declines to assist her. When it comes to pupils, this difference becomes much more important. Students are linked to Inder's attempts to undermine or harm Viren's professional reputation at several times in the novel. However, Inder does not always give these pupils the help they need when they need professional or academic support. On the other hand, Viren is frequently seen to be eager to help students, even if they have been involved in disputes with him. These incidents show how the two professors differ from one another: Viren's behavior demonstrates better cooperation, professional responsibility, and eagerness to assist others, whereas Inder's relationships are often shaped by rivalry and personal interests.

Inder Kumar's critical attitude of the prevailing cultural and religious traditions of society also reflects his social outlook. He challenges the beliefs that, in his opinion, uphold social inequity and examines the cultural institutions he links to Brahminical domination. His critique of the Ramayana and the persona of Lord Rama is one instance. He contends:

He used to remark, "How can he be the Lord if he abandoned Sita, his wife, based on social whispering?" His entire demeanor gave the impression that he was attempting to seem more and more logical in order to refute the spiritual concept that underpins Brahmin society. (Sharma, 34)

His statement demonstrates his effort to look at conventional religious beliefs from a critical and logical standpoint. Sharma contends, however, that Inder's resistance to the prevailing culture is intimately linked to his ambition to become influential within the current social structure. As a result, his criticism becomes a part of his larger fight for acceptance and authority.

Inder Kumar and the Concept of Double Consciousness:

One interpretation of Inder's divided identity is offered by W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. This idea is specifically applied to Inder by Kamal Kant Sharma, who contends that he is aware of both his own identity and the social gaze that he feels privileged groups use to view him. Despite becoming a professor, Inder's psychological connection to his past is still unresolved. In *"Performing Victimhood, Practising Domination: A Critical Study of Inder's Character in Vikas Sharma's All Her Fires,"* **Kamal Kant Sharma** writes:

This is where Du Bois's idea of Double Consciousness is relevant. He is mindful of the consciousness that is deep within him, offering the oppressor's viewpoint on him and how he perceives him, in addition to his own consciousness, which fights against the tyranny of eons. (Sharma, 126)

Theoretically, his career success should lead to social mobility, but he nevertheless interprets specific situations in light of his previous social standing. This

leads to a paradox. Although he tries to break free from his caste-based identity, he also depends on it at difficult times. He portrays himself as the victim of a caste-based plot after his contentious chat with a female is made public.

Inder's Social Strategy and Strategic Essentialism

The idea of strategic essentialism put forward by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak can also shed light on Inder's actions. According to the provided source, strategic essentialism is the transient exploitation of collective identity by marginalized groups for social or political ends. However, in Inder's example, personal conflict is frequently linked to the group identity. In opposition to Viren, he mobilizes academics and students around caste identity. Therefore, the novel investigates how past grievance might be employed in current institutional problems rather than just whether caste discrimination exists. Viren and Inder diverge significantly at this point. While Inder often views the university as a war of social identities, Viren attempts to see it as a professional community.

Misconduct, Professional Boundaries, and FIR episode

Through his unprofessional WhatsApp chat with student Meghna, Vikas Sharma further discloses a significant facet of Inder Kumar's nature. The dialog is presented by the novelist as follows:

'Who wouldn't want to be friends with such a beautiful girl as you?'

'Beautiful rose - beautiful girl.'

'You should lose some weight.'

'Though you look good being chubby as well.'

'Change your DP.'

'A long nose makes someone attractive.'

'You are very caring.' (Sharma 43).

Meghna asked Inder for academic advice about the M.Phil entrance exam, but he saw this innocent request as a chance to get over his long-standing loneliness:

Meghna, a young girl, reached out to Inder in February 2021 to request assistance with her M.Phil entrance exam preparation. Meghna was unaware of the consequences this innocuous request would have on her. Why would a student get in touch with a professor, teacher, or guru? Of course, to obtain advice! However, Inder saw it as a chance to bridge the gap left by his long-standing loneliness. (Sharma 43) Rather than limiting his communication to academic advice, he made remarks about Meghna's beauty and character. Thus, the story calls into question the ethical obligations and professional bounds that are required of a university professor. Sharma utilizes this episode to highlight Inder's lack of self-control and how his connection with a female student is influenced by his personal needs.

After that, when a formal complaint is filed against Inder in relation to the issue, the situation gets more dire. Even though he does not get along with Inder, Viren steps forward to support him in this trying time. The two professors Arvind Rana and Atul Goyal become significantly different as a result of this experience. Viren shows

humanity, compassion, and forgiveness by helping Inder when he needs it, even though his actions put him in a challenging legal and professional position. As a result, the novel portrays Viren as someone who is prepared to assist people with whom he has significant personal disagreements.

Professional Dignity and Romantic Relationships

The complicated depiction of Inder Kumar's personality is partly influenced by his frequent sexual encounters with his young female research scholars and students. A number of ladies who came into his life with love and respect are described in the novel, "There were others too – Shraddha, Aastha, Anjali, Nimica, Pallavi." A hand on his arm in the library, a confidant's grin, or the cautious compliments of someone who appeared to admire him were all gentle introductions into his life." (Sharma 154). After reaching their academic or professional goals, their connections with Inder seem to give him emotional fulfillment, but they eventually fade away, "But when the chapters were finished, the jobs secured, the degrees in hand, they all receded" (Sharma 154-155).

A university professor's professional dignity may be impacted by frequent close ties with students or academically dependent people, raising questions regarding the proper use of academic influence. Inder develops personal expectations from the connection when Chhaya becomes his research scholar. Their relationship shifts once she finishes her degree, leaving Inder feeling taken advantage of and rejected. Viren Sharma, on the other hand, is portrayed as being more regulated and accountable in his interactions with colleagues and students. More than Inder Kumar has love affairs with his female students also that is not good for a teacher. Professor Vikas sharma writes:

He had had love affairs in the past, but none of them could turn into marriage. Now, the shenanigans. These 'shenanigans' came about due to the lack of a real emotional connection in his life. His desperation to get some type of emotional connection and a feeling of affection can be aptly guessed by the fact that he had affairs with three of his research scholars at different times, a liberty he could enjoy only when he pulled all the shots in the department. (Sharma 33)

Politics, Power, and Institutional Ambition:

A broader institutional fight is also reflected in the disagreement between Viren and Inder. Inder does not function on its own. He makes connections with other members of the academic community. According to the novel, he participates in departmental political networks and receives backing from V.C. Professor K. N. Aneja. This implies that systemic corruption is not portrayed in the novel as the product of a single person. When institutional networks promote personal ambition, it can become effective. However, Viren is frequently positioned against these networks. Generally speaking, his approach is to carry on with his professional task and take appropriate action instead of creating a similar conspiracy.

The Letter from Viren to Inder

Viren's letter to Inder is one of the novel's most illuminating scenes. Viren tries to get his opponent to think about his behavior rather than just insulting him. Viren receives the following insight from the novel:

Respected Professor Inder Kumar, Greetings, I hope this letter finds you well and busy as ever, orchestrating your ongoing plots against me. I am writing in Hindi because, as you have often reminded me, my command of English is limited.

Indeed, you are right—I come from a simple, poor, and barely educated family, while you have received an education from prestigious institutions like Oxford and Cambridge. Your privilege and my struggle. (Sharma 276).

Because it questions the oversimplified dichotomy between privilege and suffering, the statement is important. In contrast to Inder's caste background, Viren's social standing may be privileged, but Viren's own description adds another level of comparison. More significantly, Viren's letter is more of a dialogue than a conspiracy. He closes by pleading with Inder to take care of himself and manage his duties.

Conclusion:

In Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires*, the moral dilemmas of modern academic life are explored via the opposing characters of Viren Sharma and Inder Kumar. Despite being influential and ambitious professors, their attitudes and professional behavior are very different. While Inder is shaped by ambition, animosity, caste consciousness, insecurity, and the desire to exert institutional power, Viren is characterized as sincere, diligent, patient, helpful, and forgiving. But Inder is more than just a bad character. His personality has been profoundly impacted by his experiences with poverty and caste prejudice, and these events still have an impact on his relationships and goals. When personal competition and the desire for power combine with prior experiences of injustice, his struggle becomes complicated. In contrast, Viren continues to have a more compassionate outlook. Despite personal issues, he shows the ability to forgive and continues to help students and coworkers. Sharma examines how moral ideals and interpersonal relationships are impacted by education, ambition, social mobility, and professional standing through their comparison.

Works Cited

Dixit, Satya. "Wanting Too Much, Feeling Too Little: Hyper-Realism, Ethical Crisis, and Social Texture of Prof. Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires*." *International Journal of Latest Technology in Engineering, Management & Applied Science*, vol. 15, no. 8, 2026, pp. 773–75.

- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. 2nd ed., A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903. *Internet Archive*.
- Eger, Edith Eva. *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*. Scribner, 2017.
- 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.
- Pathak, Divya Bala, and Priyanka. "All Her Fires as an Autobiographical Novel and a Mirror of Contemporary Indian Society: A Critical Study." *International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories*, vol. 2, no. 7, 2026.
- Redhu, Vishal. "Alienation, Identity, and Moral Conflict in *All Her Fires* by Prof. Vikas Sharma." *Research Journal of English*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2026.
- Sharma, Kamal Kant. "Performing Victimhood, Practising Domination: A Critical Study of Inder's Character in Vikas Sharma's *All Her Fires*." *Integral Research*, vol. 3, no. 8, Aug. 2026, pp. 126–32.
- Sharma, Vandana. "The Depiction of Gen Z in 'All Her Fires' by Professor Vikas Sharma." *International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation*, vol. 11, no. 6, 2026, pp. A776–A781.
- Sharma, Vikas. *All Her Fires: Every Flame She Lit Had a Cost*. Ukiyoto Publishing, 2026.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Oxford UP, 1988, pp. 3–32.
- Vimal, M. S. "Character Analysis of Professor Inder Kumar in Vikas Sharma's Novel *All Her Fires*." *Knowledgeable Research: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2026, pp. 121–33.