



The Rebellion of Modern Womanhood: Challenging Patriarchal Expectations in the Novel SANA

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Abstract

"Frailty, thy name is woman!"

-William Shakespeare'

Hamlet, Act-I Scene-II

The rebellion of modern women in the post-modern novelist Vikas Sharma's novel SANA is critically examined in this research paper, with particular attention paid to how the protagonist, Sana, defies patriarchal expectations. The protagonist of the novel, Sana, represents a kind of resistance against the inflexible, oppressive systems imposed by a patriarchal culture through her adulterous affair and rejection of customary duties. Sana's character, which is divided between her responsibilities as a wife and her pursuit of personal fulfillment, is examined in depth in this research. The paper illustrates the emergence of female autonomy and agency by drawing comparisons between the protagonist's experiences and those of women portrayed in classical Indian literature. In order to uncover underlying prejudices and the difficulties in portraying contemporary womanhood, the author's narrative techniques—such as the sexualization of female characters and the representation of patriarchal motherhood—are closely examined. In the end, this research contends that although SANA presents a progressive picture of women's insurrection, it still solidifies some stereotypes, indicating the ongoing fight for gender equality in modern literature.

Keywords: Modern Womanhood, Patriarchal Expectations, Feminism, Female Autonomy, Extramarital Affair, Gender Roles, Patriarchal Motherhood, SANA

Introduction



Each woman defines her own womanhood; no man or society can dictate what it should be. Womanhood is personal and diverse, shaped by individual interpretation and experience.

The belief that women are "rebellious" when they speak out for themselves or demand their rights is frequently a result of deeply ingrained masculinity standards that see women's strength as a threat to established gender roles. This phenomenon is a reflection of attitudes in society that, given the historical dominance of masculine ideals, view any departure from gender norms as disruptive or rebellious. The ability to exert dominance, control, and the ability to influence social norms are characteristics that have come to define masculinity in numerous cultures. Women may be misconstrued as rebelling against these ingrained conventions when they assert their autonomy, speak out against unfair acts, or support gender equality. A basic misapprehension of gender dynamics and societal power structures is highlighted by this misconception. In addition, the portrayal of women's assertiveness as rebellion exposes hidden fears toward masculinity in general. Men's fragile sense of masculinity, which depends on women's submission for validation, is reflected in the concern that women standing up for themselves somehow threatens male authority or superiority. Women who express themselves are seen as disruptive or frightening, and this anxiety frequently materializes as resistance to attempts toward gender equality. Women who stand up for their rights are actually fighting against oppressive and unequal structures that have historically kept them on the margins, not men in general. Instead of wanting to subvert masculinity, their efforts are motivated by the goal of justice, equality, and dignity. Realizing the advantages of gender equality is crucial because it promotes a more inclusive society by questioning traditional gender stereotypes. Thus, it is imperative to question outmoded ideas of masculinity and advance a broader view of gender equality as a community ambition rather than a danger to male identity in order to address the perception that women are rebellious when they exercise their rights. By doing this, we can take steps toward a more equal future in which men and women can prosper together, free from the limitations imposed by antiquated gender norms.

The story of the novel SANA offers a sophisticated examination of contemporary womanhood, exploring the difficulties of female autonomy within a patriarchal framework. The protagonist of the novel personifies the conflict between modern aspirations for freedom and self-fulfillment and conventional gender norms. This paper critically analyzes Sana's journey of resistance against patriarchal expectations, emphasizing both its progressive and



regressive aspects. This research offers a thorough examination of the novel's portrayal of female autonomy and the enduring influence of patriarchy, drawing on feminist theory and literary analysis.

Literature Review

Over the past few decades, cultural changes, feminist movements, and changing societal conventions have all had a substantial impact on the concept of contemporary womanhood. This critical research explores the opportunities, challenges, and complications that modern women encounter as they navigate the complex and diverse nature of modern femininity. It does this by using updated literature references.

Beyond domesticity and childcare, women are now defined in broader ways. Intersectionality, a theory made popular by Kimberlé Crenshaw, looks at how overlapping social identities, such as race, class, and gender, contribute to systematic oppression and discrimination. It has a significant impact on the plethora of experiences and identities that make up modern womanhood (Crenshaw, 1989). To fully comprehend the many realities of contemporary women, it is imperative to grasp the intersectional framework. Contemporary discourse surrounding women is significantly shaped by feminist philosophy, which remains relevant. Gender performativity theory by Judith Butler questions the binary conception of gender and encourages a more flexible and inclusive definition of femininity. Butler (1990) contends that gender is produced via repeated behaviors and social conventions. Feminist literature and action of today increasingly adopt this viewpoint. More complex and varied depictions of women have been seen in modern literature. Bernardine Evaristo delves into the lives of twelve characters in her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, most of whom are women of African or Caribbean heritage living in the UK. The work offers a diverse range of experiences that underscore the intricacies of contemporary womanhood (Evaristo, 2019). The book's many characters and nonlinear storyline capture the diversity and intersectionality that come with being a modern woman. Comparably, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the experiences of a Nigerian woman negotiating race, identity, and love in both Nigeria and the United States. Adichie (2013) offers important insights into the difficulties encountered by modern women in a globalized environment through her investigation of transnational identity and the junction of race and gender. For many modern women, striking a balance between family obligations and career aspirations continues to be a major issue. These issues have been made worse by the COVID-19 epidemic since women have been disproportionately burdened with unpaid caregiving and have experienced job



failures. The essay "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" by Anne-Marie Slaughter (2012) generated a lot of discussion regarding the structural obstacles that keep women from attaining work-life balance. Sheryl Sandberg encourages women to take up leadership roles and make an impact in the workplace in her book *Lean In Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Sandberg also calls for systemic changes to foster gender equality (Sandberg, 2013). Although Sandberg's message has been widely accepted, it has also come under fire for emphasizing individual responsibility above tackling systemic injustices. Intersectionality and inclusivity are becoming more and more important in today's feminist debate. In mainstream feminist narratives, women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities are acknowledging and incorporating their experiences. Mikki Kendall makes the case in *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot* that mainstream feminism frequently ignores the concerns and voices of oppressed women. She advocates for an approach to feminist activity that is more inclusive and intersectional (Kendall, 2020).

The novel *SANA* interrogates the uprising of contemporary femininity against a backdrop of a robust corpus of feminist literature and patriarchal critiques via its portrayal of the protagonist. For an assessment of Sana's journey, it is imperative to examine related works that tackle issues of female autonomy, gender roles, and the patriarchal structures that shape women's lives. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topics addressed in *SANA*, this literature study draws on a variety of sources, including feminist theory, contemporary literary critiques, and classical Indian epics.

Delicate Dance of Duality in Sana's Persona

The novel *SANA* is part of a literary tradition that frequently addresses the expectations and roles that are imposed on women. Authors like Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, as well as classic Indian literature like the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, have long portrayed women in strictly defined positions of sacrifice and virtue. These writings reinforce patriarchal notions that limit the identity of women by portraying women as the epitome of purity and devotion. But in the twenty-first century, writers like Vikas Sharma have worked to provide readers with more refined and relatable female characters. By giving a protagonist who deliberately rejects the duties that are placed upon her and pursues happiness outside of marriage, *SANA* aims to upend conventional storylines. A deep dualism characterizes Sana. As a devout and obedient wife, she epitomizes conventional qualities. Conversely, she defies the core assumptions of patriarchy by pursuing fulfillment through an extramarital affair. Sana's first representation is consistent with what



is typically expected of women in a patriarchal society. Despite their emotional distance and her feelings of loneliness, she respects her husband, Pt. Brij Vrat. The cultural norms that value women's subservience and devotion are the foundation of this regard. But as her discontent increases, so does her determination to find happiness outside of these limitations. The fact that Sana had an affair with Pandit Revati Prasad is a notable act of rebellion. She opposes the patriarchal idea that a woman may only find fulfillment in marriage by having an adulterous relationship. Cheating in a relationship can never be justified under any circumstance, but the pursuit of finding happiness outside of marriage can be a valid choice. In addition to expressing her autonomy and rejecting the notion that her identity is only determined by her marital status, this act is also about fulfilling her need for physical gratification. Dr. Rajan Lal writes in his research entitled "Vikas Sharma's Sana as an Ironical and Erotic Study" that "Sana does not fail to project herself as an opportunist because she seems to be Machiavellian. She believes in utter consumerism by using and throwing whosoever happens to come her way. She traps Pandit Revati Prasad by projecting herself as an utterly devastated lady. She shows herself to him how her high qualification is going to waste." In essence, the statement suggests that, despite its dubious morality, Sana's self-serving actions subvert gender norms and highlight the shortcomings of toxic masculinity. Sana's actions demonstrate how opportunistic she is, taking advantage of people and circumstances to further her own agenda. Even if this behavior is morally questionable, it highlights her assertiveness and agency—qualities that are typically associated with men. Sana's assertiveness and strategic thinking are portrayed as strong points against toxic masculinity, which is defined by aggressive dominance and emotional suppression. The idea that strength comes only from conventionally masculine attributes is undermined by her behavior. Through her actions, Sana challenges gender norms by proving that characteristics that are typically associated with women—such as manipulation and emotional intelligence—can be used effectively and powerfully. This questions the inflexible limits of gender norms. Ultimately, Sana's persona challenges toxic masculinity by showcasing the strength and agency that come with stereotypically feminine characteristics, even in the face of her shortcomings.

It is crucial to use feminist theory in order to evaluate Sana's revolt critically. In her ground-breaking book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argues that women have historically been characterized as "the Other," to be understood in relation to males rather than as unique persons (de Beauvoir, 1949). This idea is demonstrated in *SANA*, where Sana's



original identity is strongly connected to her spouse. One way to see Sana's quest for autonomy is as an effort to overcome this othering. She challenges the patriarchal system that aims to limit her by having an affair and claiming her autonomy. The idea of performativity put forward by Judith Butler (1990)—which holds that gender is created by repeatedly engaging in acceptable behaviors—applies in this situation as well. Sana's decision to withdraw from these performances is an expression of her disapproval of conventional gender roles. Even though Sana rebels, there are issues with how she is portrayed in the book. In order to maintain the masculine perspective, the novelist Vikas Sharma's story frequently sexualizes female characters. Details about Sana's physical attributes are described in great detail, which objectifies her. The male gaze theory developed by Laura Mulvey (1975) can be used to analyze this part of SANA since it asserts that women are frequently portrayed as objects of male desire in literature and film.

The author writes, "As Pandit Rewati Prasad sat on the sofa, he observed her beauty as usual: well dressed, long hair, bright eyes, smooth, tightened breasts, rosy lips, nice, beautiful hands, hips that of Shakuntala, and gait of Menaka. She noticed that she had impressed him totally, yet she left for the kitchen to bring a glass of water. As she offered him the glass of water, he could have a short view of her bosom and cleavage and felt interested in her further." The objectification of Sana, the female protagonist, by the male gaze, is highlighted in this passage, which mirrors how Sharma presents women in his story. It emphasizes how the novel examines patriarchal structures' male-female power dynamics, as well as conventional ideas of femininity. The way that women are portrayed in historical works by writers such as D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway—as objects of male desire or as vehicles for the self-discovery of male protagonists—has drawn criticism. Lawrence's books frequently show women in relation to the ambitions and difficulties of men, but Hemingway's spare, masculine language occasionally reduces female characters to stereotypes or symbols rather than fully realized, sentient beings. Contemporary literature, on the other hand, aims to question and undermine these conventional images in light of feminist criticisms and changing social standards. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in "Americanah," and Arundhati Roy, in "The God of Small Things," are two writers who provide nuanced depictions of women recovering agency and voice in their narratives by traversing difficult social and personal settings.

Patriarchal Motherhood



The conventional view that a woman's primary function is that of a mother and caregiver is the foundation of patriarchal motherhood. This ideology frequently imposes rigid roles and responsibilities on women, which restricts their autonomy and perpetuates gender inequality. Feminist literature has critically analyzed the idea of patriarchal motherhood, demonstrating how it upholds gender norms and expectations.

Beloved by Toni Morrison offers a thorough examination of parenting while facing racial and patriarchal oppression. The main character, Sethe, personifies the difficulties associated with mother sacrifice in a system that dehumanizes Black women. The connection between race and gender within the setting of patriarchal parenting is highlighted by her extreme act of killing her child in order to free herself from servitude (Morrison, 1987). Morrison's story emphasizes the psychological and emotional costs associated with being a mother in a patriarchal culture, where a mother's value is frequently based on her capacity to care for and protect her children against overwhelming obstacles.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood depicts a future society in which an oppressive government controls women's bodies and the ability to procreate. Offred's journey through a society that values and takes advantage of motherhood highlights the extremes of patriarchal control over women's identities and bodies (Atwood, 1985). The book highlights the oppressive aspects of patriarchal parenting and criticizes the marketing of motherhood and the reduction of women to their reproductive roles. Furthermore, Bell Hooks explores the interaction of gender, race, and class in the context of motherhood in her feminist theory: *From Margin to Center*. Hooks criticizes the idealization of motherhood as well as the excessive demands and obligations patriarchal society places on women—especially women of color (hooks, 1984). Her analysis urges a more intersectional and inclusive method of comprehending and resolving the problems associated with patriarchal motherhood. The way the book portrays patriarchal parenting is among its most important contributions to the conversation on patriarchy. Sana's mother, Kavya Nishchal, embodies a woman's fundamental identity as a nurturer and caregiver. This is a traditional view of womanhood. The generational struggle between conventional and new values is emphasized by this representation. The conflict between generations that arises when traditional women give way to modern womanhood is exemplified by the tension that exists between Sana and her mother. Sana aims to redefine her identity beyond these limitations, whilst her mother, Kavya, represents the selfless, self-sacrificing mother. Younger generations of women are



increasingly questioning the responsibilities that are placed upon them, which is reflected in this conflict and broader cultural changes.

There are important socio-cultural ramifications for the novel's examination of extramarital affairs and female sovereignty. Talks about adultery and women's independence are still divisive in modern Indian society. Sana's activities make others think critically about the stigmatization of women who look for fulfillment in relationships other than marriage. The adulterous affair of Sana is perceived through a stigmatized lens of society. Women who don't fit into the norms frequently experience rejection and severe criticism. The novel exposes the patriarchal civilizations' double standards and criticizes this stigmatization. Similar-behaving men are frequently pardoned or even praised, whereas women are demonized. The novel SANA also examines the psychological and emotional fallout from the protagonist's uprising. Her affair reflects the difficult reality of breaking well-set societal standards, bringing with it both liberation and turmoil. This contradiction highlights the challenge of attaining full autonomy within a patriarchal context.

Nonlinear Storytelling

The author uses a range of storytelling devices to illustrate the complexity of Sana's personality as well as her rebellion. The novel's complexity and depth are enhanced by the employment of intricate character descriptions, intertextual references, and nonlinear storytelling. The story's nonlinear style makes it possible to delve deeper into Sana's motivations and inner issues. The novelist presents a multi-layered picture of Sana's journey by interlacing the past and present and emphasizing the way her disobedience developed over time. Sana's contemporary rebellion is juxtaposed with conventional tales through intertextual allusions to old Indian literature. The novel's reflection on the evolving roles of women and the endurance of patriarchal traditions is enhanced by these allusions.

Conclusion

Similar to art, womanhood is a subjective and individual experience, and any attempt to define it universally would be to lessen its depth and richness. In Vikas Sharma's SANA, the struggle against patriarchal norms is explored through a captivating and nuanced representation of modern women. The novel explores the conflicts between conventional roles and modern aspirations for fulfillment and autonomy via the character of Sana. The story questions patriarchal conventions, but it also reinforces some preconceptions, which is indicative of the continuous fight for gender equality. This article emphasizes the complex relationship between female agency and patriarchy in modern literature by critically analyzing



the novel using feminist theory and literary analysis. At last, the harsh fact that not just men but women as well consistently fuelling in patriarchy persists through their role in defaming, judging, and dragging other women down. This cycle of sabotage must end; solidarity among women is essential for progress.

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