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## The clash between materialism and idealism in Professor Vikas Sharma's novel *Honey Trap*

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### Abstract

Professor Vikas Sharma is an established writer in contemporary India. In the majority of his novels, he has addressed multiple sensitive themes that prevail in our society. As a social writer, he has also presented his philosophy regarding many important developments in modern society. His novel, *Honey Trap*, presents the clash between idealism and materialism in today's world. Through his protagonist, Mangesh, the author attempts to explore the struggles of an idealist who feels stuck in today's materialistic society. He highlights the conflict between principles and social status. Mangesh starts his life as an idealist and serves society. However, he soon succumbs to materialistic pleasures as his idealism is constantly challenged. Professor Vikas Sharma uses the character of Kuntal to highlight how pervasive materialist values often break idealists. The title of the novel itself is a metaphor for the effects of materialism. This novel is not the personal story of the protagonist; it is a commentary on the broader social structure of modern Indian society that values corruption, consumerism, and ambition over idealism, moral integrity, and principles. This research paper aims to present an analysis of the themes of idealism and materialism in this novel. It explores the central theme of the novel through the experience of the protagonist and highlights the philosophical question raised by the author. The aim of this paper is to depict a clash between materialism and idealism in Professor Vikas Sharma's novel *Honey Trap*.

**Keywords:** materialism, principles, ethics, luxuries, values, status, wealth

### Introduction

Professor Vikas Sharma is a renowned name among writers in the contemporary era. Over the years, he has established himself as an accomplished writer who has touched upon major themes in Indian society. As a professor and academician, Professor Vikas Sharma is deeply connected to society and people. Owing to his family history and cultural heritage, he understands the unique fabric of Indian society very well. The same is also evident in all of his novels. Over the span of his career, he has authored over a dozen novels. In these novels, he has addressed many important themes like poverty, class distinction, spiritualism, science fiction, historical development of Indian society, idealism, corruption, women's rights, and many more. His latest creation, *Honey Trap* (2025), also talks about some sensitive issues prevailing in our society. The novel starts from the time of independence and stretches to the modern day. Covering the lives of over three generations, Professor Vikas Sharma uses the timeline to trace the development of our society, which is characterized by increased materialism and ambition.

### Analysis and Discussion

The conflict between idealism and materialism has always occupied a very important position in multiple philosophical debates. While idealism focuses on the importance of principles, ethics, and higher values, linking one's life to selflessness and spiritual duties, materialism is the complete opposite.

It glorifies ambition and the pursuit of wealth and power. It sees no wrong in the sacrifice of human relations and ethics in an attempt to succeed. The clash of these two views is not just a personal conflict; it reflects the wider situation of our society. This novel highlights the deterioration of idealism in modern society. Through the character of the protagonist, Dr. Mangesh, Professor Vikas Sharma presents before his readers a character who is dedicated to selfless service but fails to keep his idealism intact in a world of material ambition and corruption.

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Professor Vikas Sharma has time and again addressed many philosophical questions in his novels. For instance, in his novel, *Sana*, he talks about the loss of ethics and principles in the present generation. He highlights how this has become the reason for their downfall. Through other major works as well, he has often talked about the struggle of Indian society between ethical duty and material progress. This novel also continues on the same trajectory and presents a moral allegory in the medical profession. This profession is characterized by the need for selfless service. However, despite this, it continues to be highly commercialized. The novel does not just address the personal struggles of a character; it touches upon the larger question and debate between moralism and idealism. It also presents a critique of modern India's social as well as moral landscape, where materialist temptations seem to have taken over idealism. Kamal Kant Sharma writes in his book about how Professor Vikas Sharma touches upon realistic themes of materialism and ambition in today's life:

*"Realism is the biggest factor of his writing. He portrays life as it is, without exaggeration of any sort. He never idealizes the characters and events he portrays. His novels show the struggles of everyday existence and discuss how ambition, power, and materialism drive human actions. He does not provide any romanticized depiction of love and justice. Instead, he presents relationships and social structures in their most unfiltered form. His characters make compromises, face ethical dilemmas, and navigate a world where survival often takes precedence over ideals. Through this approach, he challenges readers to confront reality rather than escape into illusion."*

*(Vikas Sharma and His Literary Works: Defictionalising the Reality, 202)*

### **Dr. Mangesh's Idealism**

The protagonist of this novel is a doctor named Mangesh. He is an idealist physician. He started his career in the backdrop of a newly independent India. In the beginning of his career, he is shown as a man with great morals and principles. Despite coming from a feudal background, Mangesh does not take anything for granted or indulge in privilege. He takes his profession very seriously and understands the importance of compassion and selflessness. He makes sure that he is able to serve society in one way or another. He understands the plight of the poor villagers and refuses to exploit them. He treats poor patients for free and makes sure that he prescribes them the most affordable medicines instead of forcing them to buy costly alternatives that would benefit him. He does not compromise on his morals or ethics. He chooses to side with his idealistic approach even when he knows that it would be easier to just focus on material gains. Dr. Mangesh also has a very secular outlook. During a very challenging time of communal riots, he does not think twice before going to a Muslim locality to treat a patient. He realises that it is his duty to serve people and treat them with all his knowledge and skill. He does not even care about his own life when it comes to his principles and ethics. This highlights his commitment to humanistic values above social and religious considerations. His professional simplicity is also reflective of his idealism. When he starts his career as a young medical professional,

he struggles financially. He has not inherited any feudal privileges from his father due to the abolition of the feudal system. He is not able to afford any luxuries like good clothes, expensive food, a better clinic, etc. Despite all this, he remained determined to stick to his ways of idealism. He never parts ways with his idealistic values and principles. He aspires to be rich and successful, but he does not want to take any wrong path to achieve this goal. He never even thinks about doing something wrong to be successful in life. He wants to make his life better for himself and his family, but he does not rely on unethical means to do so. He knows that his duty as a doctor comes before profit. He realizes that the medical profession is a noble calling.

However, this commitment does not come without any hurdles. He faces multiple challenges as he tries to live a life of idealistic values in a world that only values materialism. He tries to maintain a decent standard in his personal and professional life. However, gradually, he fails to do so, and his idealism gets eroded under the pressures of materialistic demands. The cost of living an idealistic life in the modern world soon starts weighing on him. His professional life does not go according to his plans. He faces humiliation from senior doctors and exploitation from big industrialists who do not value his skill or knowledge and hire him cheaply. His patients are also unwilling to trust such a young physician who is not as experienced. Because of his financial struggles, he finds himself in a position where he has to borrow money and take insurance-related commissions. He compromises his integrity and freedom for a more stable financial base. He feels the need to buy a car in an attempt to fit into the materialistic standards of society. He tries to become successful, and he measures his success in terms of worldly gains. The car that he purchases also becomes a metaphor for the 'white elephant' burden of materialism. Professor Vikas Sharma writes:

*"Our ambitions make us work and often we invite excessive work for the fulfilment of our worldly desires and then a life of tension begins."*

*(Honey Trap, 13)*

It is true that Mangesh is an idealistic man. His vision is influenced by the principles and ethics of Indian philosophy. He tries his best to lead a life that is principled and idealistic. However, it is not long before his vision collapses under domestic tension and societal pressure. He soon realises that he can never completely get rid of materialistic wants and desires. This is a part of his everyday life. His wife and children require material stability. He needs money for his children's education and also to maintain his home and office. Idealism soon seems like a distant concept and idea. He falls deeper into the honey trap of temptation when he rekindles his romance with his old lover, Dr. Kuntal. This extramarital relationship is characterized by both sexual and material entrapment. While Dr. Mangesh starts his life as an ethical man, he finds himself in situations where he is repeatedly making compromises. He accepts "gifts" from people, succumbs to extramarital intimacy, and enjoys luxuries that are well beyond his means. His experience is an example of how it is almost impossible to lead an idealistic life and sustain one's morals and ethical principles in a society that is characterized by corruption and consumerism. His journey illustrates how people often

become vulnerable in today's materialistic world. While his moral integrity is truly admirable, it is not long-lasting or strong enough to sustain the pressure of ambition, temptation, and family responsibilities.

### **Dr. Kuntal's Involvement with Materialism**

Dr. Kuntal is a talented woman who has faced a lot of difficulties in her life. After losing her husband at a young age, she does not get detached from worldly desires and pleasures; instead, she feels the need to acquire more wealth and power to sustain herself in this world. She is highly ambitious and aspirational. In fact, she is the embodiment of materialist ambition in the novel. She is unapologetic about her aspirations and focuses on what is best for her. From the very beginning, she is nothing like Dr. Mangesh, who had sacrificed his ambitions to serve society. For Kuntal, love, ethics, and idealism are secondary to wealth, power, and upward mobility. Her ambitions are not confined to gaining personal security. She aspires to be an acclaimed professional known for her revolutionary work. She plans to build a school, a nursing home, and a medical college on her own. This points towards her insatiable desire for institutional power. She also drags Mangesh towards materialism by persuading him to get involved in her ventures. She convinces him to become a member of the Lions Club, which is nothing but a way for her to gain social prestige.

*"Dr. Kuntal aspired to be the chancellor of a university, the director of a medical college, and then the president of the Lions Club. With her suggestions, Dr. Sangam, Dr. Tunisha, Dr. Kapeesh Gupta, Dr. Alpesh Mathur, Mr. Chandra Naveen, Dr. Kapila Manav, Ms. Yesha Parveen and others joined Lions Club in Aurangabad. They organized their weekly meetings on Sunday at 7:30 pm in the Hotel New Angels. There were thirty-nine members (22 males and 17 females) in this club, all hailing from well-to-do families."*

*(Honey Trap, 16)*

She is entangled in materialistic desires. Through her character, Professor Vikas Sharma shows us how materialistic people often chase flattery, social status, and wealth. Kuntal is not a woman who gives up. Despite multiple tragic incidents like the loss of her husband and her own victimization abroad, she does not take a moment to step back and reflect on her life and choices. Instead, she chooses to fill this void created by pain and tragedy in materialistic ways. She goes into full action mode and increases her efforts manifold. She is very determined to build her medical college. While ambition helps a person move forward, it must be guided by the correct purpose. Kuntal does not aspire to build a college to help people. She does it as a way of acquiring power and status.

Her worldview is entirely based on materialistic symbols of success. She measures happiness and success through imported champagne, diamond rings, expensive vacations, and high-end medical equipment. She likes running in elite circles where philanthropy is not as much about selfless social service as it is about prestige. She uses her titles like doctor, president, chancellor, etc. as a form of validation in a society that is highly competitive. The glamour of her materialism attracts people like Mangesh. Despite being an

idealist, he finds it impossible to resist the temptation of her wealth and beauty. Professor Vikas Sharma has created Kuntal in a way that she symbolises the honey trap. She is the symbol of the irresistible pull of luxury, status, and desire that tempts the people who seek a principled life. However, this does not mean that Professor Vikas Sharma has created her in an unsympathetic tone. Kuntal is not privileged, and she has worked very hard for whatever she has. She is intelligent and capable. It can be said that tragic events in her life shaped her into a person who is blinded by ambition and the pull of materialism.

### **The Title of the Novel as a Metaphor for Materialist Temptations**

The phrase "*honey trap*", in common parlance, refers to the act of luring a person into danger under the guise of pleasure. In this novel, the sweet trap is created by materialism. The phrase can be divided into two words: honey and trap. On its own, Honey symbolises sweetness, attractiveness, and harmlessness. In the modern world, it can be used as a metaphor for luxuries, comforts, and pleasures of life. On the other hand, the word trap is used to refer to a hidden cost. Once a person tastes the sweetness of honey, they get trapped in the obligations and moral decline attached to it. The downfall of Mangesh is a very good example to understand this. Despite being married, he gets attracted to Kuntal, who shows him a world of success, wealth, power, pleasure, and social status. This is exactly like a honey trap. In the beginning, all Mangesh sees is the good parts. He is completely blindsided and has no knowledge of the consequences. His relationship with Kuntal starts with admiration and flattery. She makes him a part of her life and introduces him to the pleasure of wealth and status. However, this soon turns into dependence and moral corruption. The trap that is hidden behind this outward appearance is not only sexual but also economic and social. He gets used to leading a life of luxury. Soon, he is so far away from his original idealism that it is impossible for him to return.

Through this novel, Professor Vikas Sharma has shown us that the temptation of materialism becomes the cause of the downfall of many idealists. It does not do so in one single blow; instead, it operates gradually and takes over their life. This is what happens with Mangesh as well. In the beginning, the compromises that he makes are not life-changing; they seem very minor and trivial. Taking gifts from people or purchasing a car through loans does not make him feel like he is moving away from his idealism. All of these decisions appear to be a part of life. They are practical everyday choices that are not strong enough on their own to change the character of a man. However, with the passage of time, their combined effect makes Mangesh's ethical vision rather blurry. His moral compass starts deflecting, and he is not able to understand what is actually causing him to compromise his moral integrity. The entrapment of Mangesh is increased manifold with the involvement of Kuntal, who pushes him towards materialistic ambitions and desires. Being with Kuntal gives Mangesh a sense of worth. She appreciates his knowledge and skills and shows him a world of luxuries and comfort that he has never seen before. These luxuries are something that Mangesh is incapable of affording on his own. So, being with Kuntal allows him a few days in a life that he had always wanted but never got. However, what he fails to

see is that this pleasure does not come without any obligations. Through his involvement with Kuntal, he gets tied by an invisible chain of financial burden, professional collaboration, and physical intimacy. The economic enjoyment and the erotic pleasure that Mangesh receives from his arrangement with Kuntal form the essence of the honey trap that he eventually falls into without even realizing it.

Professor Vikas Sharma also comments on how idealism has turned so fragile in today's materialist society. Mangesh is very clear about his morals in the beginning. He portrays a man with a strong ethical base who is committed to his principles. He makes it very clear that for him, what matters the most is his commitment to idealism. He appears to be someone who is not bothered or attracted by material possessions. However, the picture shifts very quickly as we see that the temptation of wealth and prestige proves stronger than his commitment to idealism. Through his example, Professor Vikas Sharma highlights how the idealist loses his integrity in a materialistic world in no time, as soon as he tastes the comfort and luxury of materialism for the first time. Hence, it can be said that Professor Vikas Sharma's *Honey Trap* is an allegorical critique of modern society, characterised by materialism, where even noble professions like medicine are plagued by corruption and commercialization. This metaphor highlights how even the most dedicated idealist can break under the pressure of ambition and desire and fall prey to the trap of materialism.

### Psychological Turmoil of Dr. Mangesh

Professor Vikas Sharma shows the psychological conflict of Dr. Mangesh as he tries to navigate in a society where only ambition and desire is rewarded. He soon realises that it is not possible for him to continue his journey as an idealist. When he starts his life as a professional, he is committed to serving society and his medical practice is modest. All he cares about is remaining professional and ethical. As discussed above, he does not act in a greedy manner and prescribes affordable medicines to poor patients and even provides free treatment to people. However, it is not long before he falls prey to the system around him. The medical profession in today's world, like all other professions, is highly corrupt and commercialised. Pharmaceutical companies often try to force patients to buy expensive drugs, and industrialists treat doctors like Mangesh as instruments to generate revenue. At the same time, society also has certain expectations of a person who is a professional doctor. Everyone expects doctors to maintain a certain social status. Even the family of Mangesh feels that he should raise their standard of living since he is a doctor. He feels torn between his values and this pressure. This creates a psychological unease in him. On one hand, he is aware that the medical profession should be only concerned with serving society and helping people. He does not want to put a blotch on this noble profession. However, on the other hand, he envies other doctors who are rich and have a higher status than him despite having the same profession. He feels humiliated because of his poor financial situation and gets mocked by his seniors. Some of his patients also prefer doctors who are wealthier and more established. He soon starts feeling left behind. His thoughts regarding this problem reflect the duality of life. While he dreams of living comfortably and having certain luxuries in his life, he also feels the need to remain an idealist and tries to suppress

these desires by calling himself a misfit in a materialistic world.

There is a gap between his ideals and the real world. While it is much easier to be an idealist in his mind, it becomes intensely hard to do the same in the real world. It is not possible for him to completely mute his emotions or feelings about how other people treat him or view him. He feels the desire to be seen and heard as a respectable member of society. But he also feels that he should remain an idealist and respect the nobility of his profession. As he tries to become more like his fellow doctors, he feels like he is betraying the values of his profession and his own inner principles. He feels like a hypocrite for wanting the same things that he once discarded as materialistic. He feels conflicted between living as an idealist and being respected in society.

### Conclusion

Hence, we can conclude that Professor Vikas Sharma raises the age-old question of the philosophical struggle and battle between principles and temptation, ethics and ambition, idealism and materialism. Mangesh starts his life as a committed idealist and wants to serve society. However, he soon gets pulled into a web of material desires characterized by wealth, ambition, and sensual pleasures. His downfall is not immediate or massive; instead, it takes place in small and gradual steps. He feels the need to live a life like that of the other doctors. He soon finds himself engaging in materialistic pleasures that he cannot really afford. The metaphor contained in the title conveys how materialism gradually lays down the trap of temptation and seduction and breaks the idealists. Once they enter this trap, it is not possible for them to escape. Mangesh is very confused between his moral duty and worldly desires. This confusion is representative of the tragedy of an individual who wants to lead a life of idealism but gets caught in a society where materialism dominates every aspect of life. Hence, this novel operates as a cautionary tale as well as a mirror and urges the readers to reflect on their own negotiations and struggles between ethical conviction and material temptation in contemporary life.

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