

‘Men-Women Relationship’ In Anita Nair And Namita Gokhale Novels

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In the novels of Namita Gokhale and Anita Nair, man-woman relationships are explored with deep emotional complexity, highlighting the power dynamics, personal struggles, and societal pressures that shape these connections. Both authors delve into how these relationships influence identity, desire, and freedom, often set against cultural traditions and expectations. In "God's Graves and Grandmother", Gokhale examines the conflict between familial duties and personal desires, portraying relationships as spaces where independence and emotional struggles intertwine. In "Paro: Dreams of Passion", Gokhale presents a woman who challenges societal norms and attempts to assert her autonomy within a patriarchal framework. Through her characters, Gokhale focuses on the emotional complexities of women reconciling their aspirations with the roles they are expected to play in traditional relationships. In "Mistress", Nair explores themes of love, infidelity, and personal transformation, questioning the conventional boundaries of fidelity and marriage. "Ladies Coupe" reflects on the relationships between women and men through a lens of female empowerment and self-discovery, revealing the emotional toll of unfulfilled expectations and the struggle for independence. Nair's portrayal emphasizes women's journeys toward autonomy and self-worth within societal constraints. Both authors offer nuanced portrayals of man-woman relationships, emphasizing emotional depth, personal growth, and the ways in which societal norms influence individual desires and choices. Gokhale and Nair's works provide rich, layered insights into the complex dynamics of love, identity, and personal freedom within the framework of cultural and traditional expectations.

Key Words: man woman relationship, pre marital relationship, post marital relationship

Introduction

Anita Nair is a well-known Indian author who has gained international recognition for her novels, including Ladies Coupe, The Better Man, and Mistress. Nair's writing explores the emotional complexities of human relationships, with a particular focus on women's struggles

with societal expectations, identity, and self-empowerment. She delves into themes of love, marriage, and the search for personal freedom within the confines of traditional roles. Namita Gokhale is another celebrated Indian writer, noted for works like *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *The Book of Shadows*. Gokhale's writing explores love, sexuality, and personal identity, often challenging traditional cultural norms. Her novels feature characters that grapple with the tension between individual desires and societal expectations, particularly focusing on women's emotional journeys. In their novels, both authors explore the theme of man-woman relationships with a focus on the internal and external conflicts that arise from these dynamics. Nair emphasizes emotional depth, power struggles, and self-realization, portraying relationships as sites of both emotional growth and personal conflict. Gokhale, on the other hand, examines the bold, passionate aspects of love and sexuality, often critiquing societal taboos. Both authors aim to challenge societal norms, offering a nuanced perspective on relationships and empowering women to explore their desires and independence.

In *God's Graves* and *Grandmother*, Namita Gokhale explores man-woman relationships through the lens of exploitation, power, and resilience. Gudiya, the protagonist, faces manipulation and abuse from her husband Kalki, who uses her for wealth and beauty. Gokhale highlights the emotional and physical toll women endure in such relationships within a patriarchal society. "I missed him, but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss. I loved Kalki, but love is not life" (Gokhale, 224). However, Gudiya's journey towards self-realization and empowerment shows her reclaiming control over her life. Gudiya falls for a boy who is a member of the Shiv Mahan Band Party. Pandit Kailash Shastri gives him the name Kalki. After exploiting Gudiya sexually, Kalki loses interest in her. Their marriage is arranged quickly when it is discovered that Gudiya is four months pregnant. Before marriage, Kalki rapes her, leading to her pregnancy. Indian society and its culture do not encourage pre-marital relationships, so Gudiya needs a legal father for her child, which is fulfilled by the marriage. The social system does not accept the birth of a child before marriage, considering it unacceptable. Under pressure from Sundar Pahalwan, Kalki marries Gudiya. However, their relationship is hardly compatible, and Kalki treats her badly due to his gambling and drinking habits. Gudiya is unhappy and depressed.

Kalki is not concerned about the coming child, nor does he bother to look after his pregnant wife. Gudiya is once again left with no one to share her problems with. She realizes that her husband Kalki is not a permanent or lifelong support for her. She understands that he is attached to her only for physical pleasure and her wealth. So she decided to send him his ownway and says to him, "Why don't you try your luck in Bombay again, Kalki?" But when Kalki says, "I don't have the funds," she immediately takes off her thick gold necklace and other gold ornaments and gives them to him, saying, "I'll sell my Stridhan for you" (Gokhale, 219). Gudiya arranges everything for her husband's welfare, gaining greater confidence and a clear perception of life. She realizes that Kalki is merely a shadow and that this shadow will serve no purpose in her life. The only reason behind their marriage was to give a name to her child, which is important in Indian society. She expresses Kalki's departure as, She reflects,

“I often dream about my mother, but she is elusive even there. Grandmother is dead, Roxanne is dead, Sundar is dead. Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight” (Gokhale, 240).

After fulfilling this purpose, she does not need the presence of a husband who has never cared for her or their child. The absence of Kalki does not bother Gudiya. She says, **“Kalki was gone, but I could still not admit, not even to myself, that I was glad to be alone again. My mother had never had a husband. Neither, as far as I knew, had my grandmother. I had never known a father. There had been no models of masculinity to teach me the lessons of dependence as a woman” (Gokhale, 224).** Gudiya's hardships continued when she married Kalki, who cheated, raped, and tortured her, even during her pregnancy. She faced numerous challenges, including her uncle's suicide and the death of her supportive teacher. Despite these struggles, Gudiya's resilience shone through as she decided to live for her child, demonstrating her determination and strength.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita Gokhale presents a vivid exploration of a woman's emotional and sexual liberation within the confines of societal norms. Through the character of Paro, Gokhale delves into the complexities of relationships, love, and the intricacies of desire. Paro is portrayed as a bold, independent woman, unapologetically exploring her sexual autonomy and navigating the power dynamics between men and women. Gokhale challenges conventional views on women's roles in relationships, offering a critique of both male and female behaviour while addressing themes of identity, passion, and societal judgment. Priya, comes from a middle-class family with typical cultural backgrounds where there are many rules of dos and don'ts. She is madly in love with B.R., the sewing-machine magnate, as she herself reminisces. Priya, like many other girls, opts for an arranged marriage as it is seen as the only institution that can provide socio-economic and emotional security within a traditional society. Simone de Beauvoir aptly commented that marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. Most women are married, have been, plan to be, or suffer from not being married. The celibate woman is defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or indifferent to the institution. Priya and Suresh become alienated from each other, with their love and attachment gradually disappearing.

The warmth between them turns into cold feelings, and harmony develops into discord. Suresh's work keeps him away from Priya for long hours, and he often reaches home late at night, causing Priya to feel that her married life is falling apart. Priya's attempt to ensure stability, position, and luxury through her marriage to Delhi-based lawyer Suresh fails miserably. She believes that her life with Suresh is predetermined to be loveless and sterile. Suresh, a lonely man, is always busy with his aspirations, and Priya finds him constantly calculating the value of everything in terms of cases, airfares, property prices, and other means of exchange. In Priya's social class, morality is equated with virginity, and brides are expected to give their virginity to their husbands as a wedding gift. However, Priya had already lost her virginity before getting engaged and was unconcerned that her spouse might learn about it. She describes how she subverted the male-dominated society's value structure, stating that her marriage was like any other middle-class marriage, and her husband did not notice that she

was not a virgin. Despite her marriage, Priya's affection for B.R. endures. She misses him greatly and feels safe, loved, treasured, and complete when he is around. B.R., the owner of Sita sewing machine and the son of a Raibhadur during the British period, has a grand office attended by several female employees whom he treats well. His office is like a temple for his women workers. B.R. has a romantic, passionate, and captivating personality. He romances Priya and then Anita, using sex to shut out thought, emotion, and feeling. B.R. promotes Priya to his office secretary after marrying Paro, and Priya is overcome with gratitude for his compassion. She honestly informs Paro that B.R. has loved her for a long time, even before he knew Paro. Priya suffers from loneliness the most. When B.R. is around, she is content.

During a visit to Bombay, Priya meets her ex-boss, B.R., and their earlier liaison is reestablished. Priya enjoys every moment of it without any guilt. When she returns to Delhi, Suresh hesitantly tells her that he heard some gossip about her and B.R. during her absence. Priya accepts that she has never loved Suresh and honestly tells him that she never had any real sentiment for him. Suresh persuades Priya to abandon writing a confessional diary in which she had been expressing every aspect of her life and the people around her. The diary contains matters related to Paro and her illicit relations, Suresh and his personality, and B.R. and Priya's sexual relations. Priya tries to hide her relationship with B.R. from her husband but cannot hide her longing for B.R.'s company. She continuously indulges in a double strategy, keeping both men enwrapped in a relationship with her. For materialistic prosperity, she needs Suresh, and for sexual satisfaction, she needs B.R. When Suresh reads Priya's diary, the truth is revealed to him. In desperation, Priya tries to move away from wedlock but returns, confessing that her only weapon in an indifferent world is Suresh, and she decides to groom him patiently until her efforts bear dividends. Priya says and realize herself **"I am an Indian woman I told myself and for me my husband is my God"** (PDP 92) Finally, she comes to the painful realization that she is an Indian woman and that her husband is her God.

In the novel, Paro is portrayed as a real individual with the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman; she is free and becomes a symbol of emancipation and individuality. Paro declares, **"I am myself, I depend on nobody. I am my own person."** She considers money to be very important in life and is an economically independent woman. Paro has a deep appreciation for art and painting. Her art teacher, Marcus, raped her during the Dussehra holidays, but Paro does not consider it rape and continues the romantic activity off and on. As a result, she was expelled from school, and her romance was mentioned in the newspaper. Ironically, Paro accepts that she enjoyed her art teacher's sexual advances and refuses to term it as rape. At times, Paro behaves like Cleopatra and becomes a symbol of lust. Paro married a man named BR, and initially, they were happy together. However, over time, their differences in nature began to surface, and they started to grow apart. Their once harmonious relationship was strained by disputes, misunderstandings, and conflicting personalities. Eventually, the growing divide between them became too wide to bridge, leading to a separation.

After breaking up her relationship with B.R., Paro starts living with test cricketer Bucky Bhandpur. Her relationships with men are all for the purpose of achieving money and success,

not for emotional gratification. Independent, free-spirited, and rebellious, Paro states that she lives her own life free from obligations and societal and moral norms. She seeks self-awareness, self-expression, and self-fulfillment. Paro believes that in every relationship codified by men, women have only sex as their weapon to gain power. Paro has affairs with a series of men, including Bubu (B.R.), Bucky Bhandpur, Lenin (the son of a Marxist Cabinet Minister), Shambu Nath Mishra (a fat and ugly creature), Loukas Leoros (a homosexual), and Suresh (the husband of Priya). In the end, Paro commits suicide. Her death suggests that immense freedom, when not managed for meaningful purpose and wasted in unbridled passion, can lead to destruction. The novel depicts the value of the equivalence of power and exposes the cruelty and ugliness of all the relationships Paro had with various men, leading her to become self-destructive.

In *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair explores complex man-woman relationships, highlighting power dynamics, societal expectations, and personal struggles. Through the stories of the women in the train compartment, Nair examines different facets of love, marriage, and intimacy. Characters like Akhila, who sacrifices her desires for family obligations, and Mariakolanthu, who finds independence after suffering, reveal the emotional toll of traditional gender roles. Nair critiques societal pressures, illustrating how women often seek freedom and fulfillment beyond conventional relationships. The novel portrays women's journeys toward self-discovery, showing that true liberation comes from within, challenging the restrictive norms of patriarchy.

Firstly, Janaki, an elderly woman, openly expresses her dissatisfaction with the way she has lived her life so far. Despite having everything she needed, she feels trapped in a patriarchal society and believes she has lost her identity in a masculine world. She becomes weary of her reality as a weak creature, dependent on others for everything. Ultimately, she loses her identity in her attempt to be the perfect wife. She says, **"My home ceased to interest me; none of the beliefs I had built my life around had any meaning. I thought if I were to lose it all, I would manage perfectly. I was quite confident about that. I think I was tired of being this fragile creature"** (LC 23).

Secondly, Prabha Devi, the perfect daughter and obedient wife, realizes after her fortieth birthday that she has lost her identity. Dissatisfied with the way she has grown, she seeks freedom and liberty. She finds a sense of freedom and identity as a wife and mother by using a swimsuit and indulging in swimming. She also desires to break free from the bondage in which she feels tightly imprisoned.

Thirdly, Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher, faces suppression and domination in her married life. Her husband interferes in all her activities, dominating her with his ego-centric behavior. He forces her to have an abortion and imposes his supremacy over her, deciding her higher studies, career, and even simple things like her choice of food and hairstyle. In her remorse, she says, **"I Hate Him. I Hate My Husband. I Hate Ebenezer Paulraj. I Hate Him. Hate Him.** I waited for a clap of roar, a hurling meteor, a hurricane, a dust tempest for some super

Phenomenon that is usually meant to accompany such momentous and perhaps sacrilegious revelation. Although she considers divorce, she does not dare to do so because she fears society. Instead, she decides to take revenge on her husband by making him clumsy. She carefully selects food to make him gain weight, causing him to lose his ego and become more dependent on her. This unique approach helps Margaret regain her place in society and changes her parents' outlook and her husband's attitude.

Fourthly, Sheela, a fourteen-year-old girl, is portrayed as more mature than her parents and understands people's inner urges. Unlike other characters, the importance of the relationship between children and their grandmothers is emphasized through Sheela. She loves her grandmother's practical advice and experiences, which prepare her to gain boldness and achieve emancipation. Sheela dresses her grandmother's dead body in a good costume with her jewels, thinking of her grandmother's words: she remembers her grandmother words that **"The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy"** (LC 67).

Lastly, Marikolanthu is depicted as the most pitiable, poor, and deprived woman in the story. She faces poverty, alienation, deprivation, and caste discrimination. Her mother, a cook in a rich Chettiars' house, one day Mariakolanthu is raped, and she receives no justice for it. Nair portrays such women as indicators of their despondent loss of identity. After giving birth to an illicit child, Marikolanthu decides to take revenge on those responsible. She remains unmarried, caring for her son and mother. Despite the cruelty of fate, Marikolanthu emerges as a strong, self-determining woman trying to find stability in her chaotic life. She engages in conversations with other women about their lives, struggles, and how they have handled their problems. The story of Mariakolanthu, an independent woman who has faced significant hardships, profoundly influences Akhila. Mariakolanthu's story inspires Akhila to take control of her life and prioritize her own happiness and fulfillment. Both Gudiya and Akhila realize their worth and are ready to face the challenges in their lives. The support from Phoolwati to Gudiya and Mariakolanthu to Akhila plays a crucial role in helping them restart their lives and find meaning and purpose.

In "Mistress," Anita Nair explores the complexities of man-woman relationships through the lives of her characters. The novel delves into themes of love, betrayal, and self-discovery. The novel portrays the struggles of women seeking identity and fulfillment in a patriarchal society, highlighting the conflicts between societal expectations and personal desires. In this novel one of the main characters Saadiya comes from a very orthodox and conservative family. When her parents discover her love for Sethu, a Hindu boy, they expel her from the house. She joins Sethu, and they lead a happy life. Eventually, Saadiya gives birth to a son. The couple argues about performing 'Khitani' on their newborn. Sethu tries to convince her not to, but she disagrees. He then asks her to leave their son and return to her parents. This disagreement drives Saadiya to commit suicide, leaving Sethu alone to raise their child. Struggling to bring up the child without a mother, Sethu decides to remarry. He does not inform his new wife, Devayani, about his previous marriage or child.

One day, Koman arrives at his father's house, disturbing Devayani. Sethu believes time will resolve the issues. Koman's father discovers his son's interest in Kathakali, and Koman begins teaching dance. Angela, a student learning Kathakali under the dance guru Aashan, comes to Koman for her dissertation work. She joins Koman's dance institute and starts admiring him, feeling more than just a student. Koman and Angela begin an affair and live together as husband and wife without being married. They move to London and are happy for a while, but problems arise. Koman becomes financially and emotionally dependent on Angela, causing friction between them. His male ego is hurt, and he decides to leave Angela's house, feeling like a parasite. During his stay in Delhi, he meets Maya and finds peace in her company. Shyam, a self-made entrepreneur, is humiliated by his uncle, Radha's father. His uncle proposes marriage between Shyam and Radha, despite her premarital relationship. His uncle comes with a proposal of marriage with his daughter: **'What is wrong? Shyam asked as gently as he could. She has been involved with a man. So why don't you get her married?'**(MS 121). Shyam, in love with Radha, agrees, and his mother approves the marriage. Despite his sister's protest, Shyam marries Radha.

On their wedding night, Radha says **'I am not a virgin' she said. 'Did my father offer you money to marry me?' I looked at her carefully. 'You are insulting me', he said quietly. 'Do not you know how beautiful you are?'**(MS 123). Radha reveals she is not a virgin and questions if her father offered Shyam money to marry her. Shyam feels insulted but reassures her of her beauty. Shyam is an ambitious businessman in Kerala, striving to become rich. Despite being married for eight years, Shyam and Radha do not have children. Radha is unhappy with the marriage due to Shyam's behavior. She knows it is wrong to pursue another man, Chris, a writer-journalist interested in music. Shyam suspects Radha's attraction to Chris and her secret visits to him, causing Shyam to worry. Despite his hardships, Shyam never speaks harshly to Radha. He believes lasting pleasure comes from mutual understanding and commitment in a relationship. It is surprising that, Shyam, throughout his life, even during the worst days of hardship and suffering, never says harsh words to his wife, Radha.

she fails to restore her life after marrying Shyam. As a wife, she should protect her husband's reputation, but she neglects this and seeks satisfaction with Chris. She forgets that Shyam gave her a new life when her own was in ruins. Shyam feels deceived but continues to love her. In Anita Nair's *Mistress*, the relationships between characters like Sethu and Saadya, Koman and Angela, and Radha and Shyam reflect this imbalance. These relationships, initially filled with excitement, ultimately become compromised and lack true fulfillment, illustrating the complexities and challenges in man-woman dynamics.

Conclusion

Nair's intention in dealing with this theme is to provide an honest portrayal of the challenges women face in relationships with men, whether in the context of marriage, love, or societal expectations. She aims to create a space for women's voices and experiences, particularly their emotional journeys toward self-empowerment and independence. Gokhale's aim is to explore

the complexities of modern relationships and to highlight the contradictions inherent in the evolving roles of men and women. Through her works, she challenges societal taboos around sexuality, gender, and love, and her intention is to portray women as individuals with desires, aspirations, and agency in their relationships with men. Many novels and movies explore pre-marital, post-marital, and marital relationships, offering valuable insights into human emotions and interactions. When these novel stories are adapted into films, they have a greater impact on audiences, raising awareness and influencing viewers in ways that novels alone might not. As people increasingly turn to films rather than reading, these adaptations help spread important stories to a wider audience. Additionally, authors gain international recognition and a broader reputation when their popular works are made into films. Such adaptations allow people to connect with meaningful narratives, which may inspire reflection and help improve their own lives. Both Anita Nair and Namita Gokhale use the theme of man-woman relationships to explore the intricacies of love, desire, societal expectations, and personal freedom. While Nair's works focus on the emotional and psychological dimensions of relationships and the journey toward self-realization, Gokhale's novels engage with the external dynamics of love and sexuality, emphasizing the tension between individual agency and social norms. Both authors seek to give voice to women's experiences and challenge traditional views of relationships, encouraging a deeper reflection on the complexities of intimacy, power, and personal growth.

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