

## Deciphering the Psyche of Modern Romantic Relationships: A Critical Analysis of Selective Short Stories of *The Nine-Chambered Heart* by Janice Pariat

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of romantic relationships and simultaneously ongoing turbulence and frustration of modern young educated students as portrayed in the short story collection *The Nine-Chambered Heart* by Janice Pariat. The book is about nine characters and their experience of romantic relationships with nine young women and side by side ongoing obstacles, irritation, nightmare, crisis, depression, responsibility, love, hatred, betrayal, incomplete and fragile romantic same-sex relationships, social pressure and difficulty of fulfilling societal expectations among young educated youths. Female sexuality that has been traditionally silenced as a taboo by raising questions on a moral basis is also discussed to broaden the perspective of sexuality. In addition, how parental expectation impacts on youth's mental health regarding their proper engagement in work, is also discussed here. This paper also extends the analysis of modern young University students' mental and physical fickleness and lack of patience, fluctuation of thinking and desperate situations, and different faces of romantic relationships through selective short stories. Moreover, this paper also observes the role of communication between students, lovers, and couples and the condition of marital life in a technology-driven modern era.*

**KEYWORDS:** Modern relationship, Psychic condition, Sexual drive, Frustration, Trauma, Mental health, Communication.

### Introduction

Janice Pariat is a notable writer of India who develops her literary career by exploring the ecological destruction, identity crisis and a fragmented human relationship in her works namely *Everything that Light Touches*, *Boats on Land*, etc. Apart from that, *The Nine-Chambered Heart* explores the romantic relationship between youth, couples, friends and simultaneously ongoing crisis, depression, frustration, and the trauma of being diverted

from societal expectations. The psychic condition of modern youths is very traumatic regarding their job, income, academic pressure, family responsibilities, and maintaining a healthy relationship.

“The new generation's psychology is different. They think, learn and differently because they live in a world occupied with digital information” (Melibaevna 80).

As the new generation faces diverse challenges in varied fields, it impacts on their mental and physical health. The mental and

physical health of youth are also fragmented and chaos. They are disconnected from family and pressurized by parental expectations. Hence, the paper seeks to explore the diversity of modern romantic relationships and various challenges they have explored as depicted in the short story collection of Janice Pariat's *The Nine-Chambered Heart*.

#### Aims and scope of the study:

1. To examine the emotional, psychological and social challenges experienced by modern young educated youth as depicted in Janice Pariat's short story collections *The Nine-Chambered Heart*.
2. To explore the complexity of love, sex, social expectations among young youth that leads to traumatic condition.
3. To examine the diversity of female sexuality as it is shown as taboo for society.
4. To explore the role of communication and impact of technology in shaping modern romantic relationships.
5. The scope of the study is confined to the thematic and textual analysis of selected short stories of the short story collection *The Nine-Chambered Heart*. The study interprets the representation of the various dimensions of modern romantic relationships and social realities as depicted in the text.

#### Methodology

The study employs a qualitative and interpretative textual analysis based on close reading.

The study adopts the thematic and critical approach to facilitate in-depth analysis of youth' Psychic condition.

#### Core Discussion

##### Diversity of Sexuality among Youths

Without using any particular name of places and characters, the narrator builds an ambiguous storyline and using one or nine mysterious women with fragmented characterization gives a realistic depiction of modern relationships which is pervaded by lust, hatred, intimacy, and nightmares. Not depicted as perfect idealized traditional women rather breaking the stereotype of suppression of female sexuality by showing the cooperation of sexual desires through the young women of the short story "The Professor", in where the narrator describes his erotic and sexual drive by saying

"but I don't feel in this strange way for you until I see you almost naked...your hair is wet,...you've wrapped a towel...suddenly I cannot breathe" (Pariat 89).

It doesn't show only male sexuality but also female sexuality, which is traditionally depicted as taboo, which is subverted through her cooperation that she knows why he is there,

"for a moment we're both transfixed" (90).

Barry McCarthy and Emily J. McCarthy in the book *New Approaches Female Sexuality*

and *Desire* analyze the diversity of female sexuality.

“Female sexuality is first class, not inferior to male sexuality...women and men function best when they accept each other as intimate and erotic friends” (18).

The narrator tries to depict the mutual contribution of youth's sexual life rather than silencing it where questions are raised on a moral basis. Sexual intercourse and intimacy between youths are traditionally seen by society as taboo and not a topic for open discussion. But, in reality, it is the natural urge of youths to engage in sexual and erotic pleasure. Pariat tries to break the stereotype and also depicts it as natural through the narrator's sexual drive. The narrator depicts how sometimes sexual suppression can be a factor of mental and physical imbalance. To give a broader perspective, the narrator frankly elaborates his desire.

“In that darkness and our proximity, I think you might kiss me. What a foolish foolish wish...you reach for my arm. Your touch is warm, warmer than a leaf in the sun” (Pariat 96).

Freud discusses the three conditions of the human mind, which are Id, ego and superego; where Id struggles between Ego and Superego. Accordingly, basic desires, needs, and sensations are suppressed. As Sigmund Freud analyses in the book *The Ego and the Id*,

“Ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to mobility that is,

to the discharge of excitations into the external world” (Freud 16).

#### Parental Pressure and Employability Issues:

In the story “The Professor”, the young woman, a postgraduate student and the narrator, who has applied to a university to study physics, discuss their mutual relationship as well as shares their responsibility by residing in the same house of one host, how the narrator's father left him and mother suffers paranoia, his loneliness.

“It's not much fun going home. That part of the world is dull and grey” (Pariat 86).

In the story, the young man is diverted from a love relationship for family pressure is confessed before her,

“Let me tell you that I've never had time for girls before. I attend an all-boys school, I work hard” (87).

Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler in the article

“Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education?”

discusses perpetuate one side motive of parent's involvement in children life.

“Parents with a higher sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed will tend to see themselves as capable in this domain; thus, they are likely to believe that their involvement will make a positive difference for their children” (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 19).

Consequently, it gives pressure among youths. Maintaining study time, sometimes drunken, enjoying parties, fulfilling sexual

nightmares, the young woman investing her time in a dissertation, sometimes discussing controversial topics that depict what is going on in the youth's mind. The frustration of youth and the intellectual gap between generations, protesting mindset, and open mindset about the sexuality of modern youths who are mentally disconnected and physically suppressed and it impacts on their mental health, are depicted in the story.

Many young people become disappointed not being able to involve their minds according to their interests.

“Majority of the cases the fathers of the younger generations while taking decision had not consulted or given importance to the needs of the younger generations” (Sahay 52).

Despite obeying students' duties, the way youths stay in confusion and feel pressured by society regarding their job, income and whether they are on the right path or not, is portrayed when hosts advise,

“is you do what you feel is right for you now, at this point...” ‘I can't believe they want me to find a job...any job...’ ‘Not any job, surely’ (Pariat 93).

The young people feel disconnected and uncomfortable from family and it creates a gap between them and engages them in a friends circle that implies how it impacts on mental happiness of students being segregated from their parents and the way they are traumatized, is revealed when the narrator says that he is happy

by spending his midterm break in his host's house with his friends.

The frustration of youths who are stuck on family pressure comes out as a manifestation by showing anger towards parents, which is revealed through the discussion between the host and the narrator,

“they've spent all this money for me to study here...and it would be a waste to leave and go back...we all anger our parents” (Pariat 93-94).

As the narrator reveals his condition while he stays in his room, he witnesses a beast, bat, furry creature with wings. These are not only physical entities but also work as symbols to show the dark side of his psyche,

“Mostly I'm a restless sleeper, but one night it's worse because earlier that in the evening I found a beast in my room...I screamed. I thought it was a ghost for certain ...Somehow a bat had flown into the house. I'd scared of the dark. And the fears return. I hear wings and strange flutters” (Pariat 94).

The words such as ‘restless sleeper’ ‘fear return’, ‘I screamed’, and ‘scared of the dark’ are manifestations of the trauma of the unconscious mind and repressed anxieties. Instability of thinking, fluctuations of mind, instant sexual drive, and nightmares are depicted through the narrator's point of view, the way he immediately transfers his mind from fear to erotic pleasure.

“I imagine you on your back, your head turned on the pillow, the blanket up to your chest,

the rise and fall of your breath. Instead, you are sitting up in bed” (Pariat 95).

The dream is a factor of the human psyche that acts as a symbol to show the darkest side of the human mind. The loneliness that the narrator feels after his father's demise is linked to his dreams, which he shares with the young women.

“I used to have many bad dreams too...Especially after my dad left” (Pariat 96).

The psychic condition of the narrator is revealed, while they are lying for intimate moments; the narrator fears touching her, his body betrayed, and felt nervousness. To avoid his strange condition, he changes the literary meaning of strangeness and leads towards the definition of physics. The condition that the narrator faces while having erotic pleasure is not that he encounters it for the first time, but it reveals his deep frustration and his disconnect between physical and mental shelves. The narrator's anxiety and nervousness before her indicate his past traumatic situation. His sudden change of sentiment from physical needs to realization of life problems reflects his mental voidness,

“I have never been happier. I have never been sadder” (Pariat 97).

### **Role of Homosexual Relationship among Youths:**

The story “The Undertaker” is about the narrator's conversation with a young woman and they share a kitchen with six students from

different corners of the world. While meeting the woman, the narrator builds a relationship of love as well as shares their respective past relationships. The writer frankly leads the conversation of both by revealing the narrator's same-sex relationship. The writer tries to depict a picture of the way homosexual relationships are bound by societal taboos, but it is natural, and despite being aware of taboos, it is going on among students; nonetheless, in the end, the relationship doesn't get fulfilled. It stays as an incomplete relationship. The narrator unravels his past unfulfilled same-sex relationships with a photographer very casually. The way he mentions his emotion about his dead lover is as “You don't comprehend, of course. Who died, who is he, was or what he means, to me” (Pariat 73).

The mentioning of his death many times doesn't only imply the physical death but also the metaphorical death a same-sex relationship has to face due to societal pressure. As a writer of the twentieth century, Janice Pariat can go through the reality of modern relationships that the way a few relationships get fulfilled by questioning against norms, but the writer gives the reader a realistic picture that many relationships get separated.

“Youth have different dating strategies, the ways of committing to a relationship have also different and most youth experience mental strain in romantic relationships” (Gangurde and Mehetre 1697).

The writer not only allows the narrator to unravel his relationship but also allows him to frankly extend the conversation with the young woman. Rather than asking about her boyfriend only, he casually asks,

“I wonder if you have kissed a girl before... ‘do you have a boyfriend?’ I ask finally. ‘Girlfriend?’ I casually add (Pariat 66-67).

The writer gives a perspective on how a same-sex relationship should be continued among students rather than a matter of shame.

“LGBTQ community faces equal to a high or high amount of intimate partner violence as compared to heterosexuals. These people face barriers to getting help due to their unique sexual orientation or gender identity” (Alex 186).

The writer allows the reader to think about the condition of mental health, how they are traumatized and frustrated living between desires and taboos. The narrative of the protagonist also depicts what is going on while maintaining a homosexual relationship that is indicated indirectly.

“I went home with this South African man, to his place far to the south of the river, but I backed out and left his flat in the middle of the night. He wasn't pleased, and he never called me again” (Pariat 69).

Questions have been raised as to why he left in the middle of the night or whether it was a one-sided or both-sided relationship because the man was not pleased. The narrator also shares his experience with his photographer. Despite

being engaged in mutual attraction, how their relationships turn into quarrels constantly,

“he liked my quietness, he told me, and I loved his joy, his ability to meet each day with the same amount of untiring enthusiasm as the last. It seemed boundless. But there were times when we were out of sync, his energy and mine. The last time, we fought” (Pariat 73).

### **Role of Communication among Youths:**

Communication is an important factor in sustaining a healthy relationship. Modern technology, such as email and messages also impact in building an understanding relationship. The digital connections between couples give them less chance to understand each other. The value of face-to-face conversation is concretized by easily available instruments. The young woman mentions how her husband gives email only to give his statement casually. The way she describes his nature of sending emails gives an idea of how much value he gives a relationship.

“I got an email...from this guy...one of many, actually....”

‘Many guys?’

You laugh. ‘No, emails.’

I say there is only one reason why people write emails any more. Apart from work, that is.

Which is?’

‘To break up with someone.’

‘Or to try and make up?’

‘which one is it?’

...he's the one who broke up with me” (Pariat 70).

It depicts the impact of modern technology which makes the relationships more concrete and passionless. The value of bonding between couples and friends is being objectified in the name of trust issues. In the article

“The Impact of Social Media on Modern Relationships”, the writer Kakembo Aisha Annet discusses as “Partner interaction through social media can give insights into the quality of the relationships, as we see high correlations between one partner’s perception of the other’s commitment, the future of the relationship, and somewhat also cheating and the way they interact with social media” (Kakembo 67).

Family support, emotional bonding and communication between parents and children also play an important role in youths maintaining a productive academic life as well as other problems of students’ lives such as maintaining a healthy love relationship or a job, etc.

“Family is the first contact of socialization for children” (Bankole et al. 186).

The way an academically busy student becomes disheartened by segregating from family bonding that has been expressed by the young woman before the narrator.

“You ask if I’m close to my parents. I am. And you? You are not. At first, I think you don't speak of this with much difficulty, but I notice that when you tell me about them, it sounds almost rehearsed. Like a speech you’ve prepared in your head. ‘i’ve grown up away from them...they were part-time parents if there's such a thing...I love them and all that...but I guess I

don't know them. And they don't know me at all” (Pariat 69).

In the story ‘the Sailor’, the writer also tries to broaden the perspective of accepting extramarital affairs according to societal norms as immoral and unfair, but through the conversation between them, she subverts it and takes the side of natural human relationships and their ongoing hatred, unfulfilled desire and makes the readers think deeply which lead to them to engage in extramarital affairs in the modern world. Not to examine it as illegal but to go through a deeper psychological perspective of what factors dominate in one’s mind and how happy they are both physically and mentally.

Staying in the same hotel and sharing the same room, “the night you come to stay” (Pariat 187) and the narrator’s idea of a relationship that constantly changes the women,

“by the time you return a month later, I've met someone else...I don't think too much about what brushes past me” (189)

and the loneliness he feels by isolated from his wife; in addition, the confusion he faces while having sexual intercourse with the young women,

“then we wake in the afternoon and kiss and do not get out of bed. We do everything else, but I donot fuck you. Yet, Even though you plead, and I like to hear those words fall out of that mouth. *Please. Please*” (188).

All these factors indicate what happened to modern relationships and also lead towards a deeper understanding of how it impacts mental

irritation. Being tired from responsibility and societal norms to take temporary happiness engage themselves in lustful activities. The writer B. Bradford Brown in the article “Adolescents’ Relationships With Peers” discusses as

“The daily dynamics of relationship processes and intergroup interactions are essential components of the peer social context” (385).

The condition of the narrator can be seen through the three positions of the human psyche that is Id, ego and superego. Lacks of bother about people’s comments, focusing more on ‘Id’ rather than ‘Ego’, are portrayed through the narrative.

“And who wouldn't think we're together? Except the people at the restaurant have seen me often, with different women by my side, and so they probably don't notice” (Pariat 188).

It depicts the way sexuality is exercised in modern relationships as a fulfilment of physical and mental lust rather than as productive things. The way communication matters in a relationship and the bonding that is built between them makes the relationship productive. As the young woman shares about her temporary relationship with her husband, the way the narrator easily goes through the conversation is portrayed as,

“but when we do start talking, I'm surprised by how easy it is. Maybe because we both write?” (190).

The mental satisfaction and comfort they have gained through their understanding show how they are adjusted, and side by side, it also indicates their unhappiness with a socially bounded relationship. Though they are engaged in an understandable situation, ignoring societal norms, somehow they also hesitate about their relationship,

“you say you've been with married men. I have to admit I haven't told anyone else these things, and neither you say, have you” (191).

To depict a realistic picture of modern relationships, the writer uses the fragmented personality of a character. Not presenting as a perfect husband, parent, student and ideal lover, the writer frankly allows the narrator to confess each other's past relationships as normal things. The reason behind seeking a company for emotional support of the narrator's is his psychological condition after losing his wife in an accident. His deep traumatic situation is presented by how much he is threatened with losing someone. As the writer portrays,

“but I cannot bear to lose you even for a short time like this, because I cannot live with loss. It's as though it was all used up when I lost my wife in that accident. A lifetime's capacity for loss taken away overnight. Which is why I just let things be until they run their course, until they shrivel. Because I cannot take the decision to leave, the only choice is to stay” (Pariat 198).

The trauma, the loneliness he gets by losing his wife and his seeking for a company to

get emotional support are pointed out in these lines.

### Conclusion:

The above-mentioned analysis gives an insight into the condition of modern relationships. The dilemma they face is staying between physical needs and social and family pressure, which makes their life traumatic and impacts their mental health. The analysis also helps to understand, what are the issues that married men and women face and why they are bound to engage in extramarital affairs. The prevailing stereotypes regarding same-sex relationships impact youth's mental health, and the troubles they have faced have been focused on in this paper. Getting an insight into the various relationships of youths, from love and marital to same-sex relationships, the paper can show that the youth's life is not smooth. Rather, it is encompassed with lots of problems, struggles, trauma, frustration, etc. Dissecting the youth life into varied factors such as love, sex, job, family, and the paper gives an in-depth critical understanding that youth life is fragmented, dynamic and filled with chaos and diverse challenges. As the study seeks to investigate the female sexuality that is depicted in the story 'The Professor' the way narrator explicitly expressed sexual desire. The story also depicts the parental pressure a youth faced in home; as a result they avoid family connection. The story 'The Undertaker' depicts the exploration of homosexual relationship and the way youth take sexuality as a space for relief of mental fatigue

and frustration. In the story 'The Sailor', the narrator also goes beyond the traditional concept of marital relationship by depicting why married couples maintain extra-marital relationship for emotional support and to seek unfulfilled desire. The story also depicts the way modern technology such as email, message, phone call create a distance between relationships and how it impacts on the growth of productive relationship.

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