

# Exploring Family Ties in Preeti Shenoy's *A Hundred Little Flames*

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### ABSTRACT

*Even though family relationships have always been beneficial to people of any age, changes in the world have created a split between the younger and the older generations. While the elderly can use their experiences to guide, provide insight, and support the young, the young can be helpful to their elders. If the benefits of close inter-generational relationships are well understood, there is a lot for each individual in society. That the relationships need to be further continued based on mutual aid, understanding and belief of gain for both need to be done is an essential aspect. Using Preeti Shenoy's novel, A Hundred Little Flames as a significant source, this study takes an approach to analyse intergenerational interactions. It discusses issues like how important traditions and customs are, open and healthy relations between generations, and the way modernisation affects old ways of living. It discusses aspects like open communication, respect and understanding, adjustment, spending quality time, love and support and personal growth and development. The only person who truly understood and respected Gopal Shanker was his grandson, Ayan. Both of them became closer as a result of their experiences and understanding. Gopal Shanker was Ayan's mentor and wise confidant, who guided him to overcome all obstacles in life and taught him valuable lessons in life. Jairaj, however, was a self-centered person with a few hidden agendas and was only worried about selling the ancestral property. After his grandfather's sudden death, Ayan boldly cuts off ties with his father and settles in the ancestral home. Being a city bred individual and accustomed to the fast urban life, Ayan adapted to the serene rural life and started a new phase of his life in the ancestral home. This study analyses the intergenerational relationships and conflicts from a Social Action perspective.*

**Keywords:** Family, respect, love, conflicts, Preeti Shenoy

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

An intergenerational relationship is a network of connections that extends from grandparents to adult children and their offspring. This dynamic involves sharing happy and trying moments, collaborating, communicating, growing closer, spending quality time together, and exchanging advice. Each member of the family provides unique contributions that benefit all the generations involved. The intergenerational bonds exhibit reciprocal flow of love, care, and support among family members. Early social skills development and improvement in stability in the life of children and adolescents could help them avoid negative influences and succeed in life. Conversely, older adults who sustain strong ties with their children and grandchildren tend to become happier, healthier, and more active in the community. Traditionally, family structures were designed so that older generations could pass on their knowledge and experiences to the younger ones while establishing the family's values and norms. However, due to social and economic changes, family structures have evolved from being straightforward to becoming more complexly interconnected. Many families have relocated to urban areas with better job opportunities to meet their financial needs and improve their quality of life. As a result of these changes, the two generations often live apart from one another and miss out on critical

life connections that could enhance the well-being of each of the generations. Global family changes have led to a differences in relationships between the generations all of these ages and split them. As much as the elder relatives may be able to give younger family members guidance, wisdom, and support with regard to their experiences, so is the case in reverse. Beyond the unconditional love, support, and motivation that younger family members can give to older relatives, they can also share contemporary social and technological insights. If this mutual benefit is fully appreciated, bridging the generational gap can positively impact society as a whole. Supportive relationships should be fostered between generations, both of whom should feel that they have something of value to offer and benefit from one another.

Being amongst the top five bestselling modern Indian writers, Preeti Shenoy is also renowned as a blogger, a motivational speaker, and an artist. One of India's most celebrated novelist, she has impacted much of the literary world for several captivating stories. Often, her characters face trials and transformation in their lives. Preeti Shenoy has won several awards for her literary works and they have been published in many regional languages. She is also on Forbes' long list of Indian personalities. She started writing by publishing her first novel, *34 Bubblegums and Candies* (2008). It became a bestseller, and she soon found herself as a budding new voice in the literary world. Since then, Preeti Shenoy has written many best-selling novels. In *The Hundred Little Flames*, it is said, "The old ways and the new ways can coexist beautifully if only we make an effort to understand each other. "There is wisdom in the past, just as there is progress in the present" (Shenoy, 2017, p. 256) [1].

## 2. OBJECTIVES:

The objectives are as follows:

- (1) To study the intergenerational relationships in the novel.
- (2) To understand the different aspects of healthy relationships.
- (3) To analyse the significance of tradition and values in the novel.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE/RELATED WORKS:

M. Sivasubramanian & Antony A. (2024) in their article discuss the recurring themes, character development, and socio-cultural contexts that define Shenoy's major literary works. This paper establishes the significance of Shenoy's literary accomplishments and her contribution to the way people understand personal and social issues [2].

Pandeewari, D., Hariharasudan, A., & Nawaz, N. (2021) in their article discuss postmodern metanarrative elements in selected works of Shenoy. The study results show that the writings of Shenoy depict postmodern metanarrative elements such as hero narration, nostalgia narration, knowledge narration, and dialect narration [3].

Rathika, B. (2019) concludes that each person should be aware of their obligation to preserve a solid, expectation-free relationship. Regardless of age disparities, people should avoid being selfish in order to bridge the gap between generations. The way to hide the conflicts among postmodern people is the emanation of self-realization to bring the family members together and close the widening divide [4].

Sona, A. (2020) observes that the characters are able to reject passion and embrace virtue because of Seth's preference for morality. At the forefront of music, the story depicts the equality and balance of human relationships. The note of reconciliation is deeply ingrained in Michael's feelings of extreme serenity and joy [5].

In order to resolve all issues within families and communities with love and return to a life of commonality, He Yuqin (2024) comes to the conclusion that families should enhance communication between members of different generations and that everyone must take on responsibilities within families [6].

Bhandari, N. B. (2019) concludes that the two-generation immigrant characters' alternate between the cultural settings of their home and host nations. Also, immigrant parents and kids have a tendency to reconcile their generational divide when they are in the same cultural area, whether it is their home culture or the culture they are negotiating in their new country. They engage in a continuous process of conflict and harmony in their cultural negotiation in the diaspora since these goals are transient and subject to ongoing change. [7]

Sari, Y. & Itafarida (2015) discuss characterisation of Rothko and Ken along with the story's plot, concluding that it is a story in which the plot revolves around changes in the relationships among lives [8].

Chai Xian (2020) depicts the timeline of various intergenerational relationships that exist between the English-born Scottish immigrants by using the context of colonial cultural heritage in North America. It reveals how social circumstances among different generations impact an individual and makes known the universality and inevitability of intergenerational conflict in multiple historical and cultural contexts [9].

#### 4. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The intergenerational relationship in the novel *A Hundred Little Flames* is examined in this exploratory study using qualitative analysis. Using Google Scholar, scholarly articles, peer-reviewed publications, and relevant literature review were found.

#### 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

There is a noticeable gap in the comprehensive exploration of the intergenerational dynamics among Gopal Shanker, Jairaj, and Ayan in this novel, which this paper aims to address. A review of the plot and character analysis in the novel reveals a deep understanding of the bond shared by the father, son, and grandson from the point of view of Max Weber's Social Action theory.

##### 5.1. Bridging the Generational Gap

At the core of the novel is a touching exploration of the changing relationship between Ayan, a young urban professional, and his grandfather, Gopal Shankar, who is deeply rooted in traditional values. Their journey highlights the emotional and ideological gaps that often exist between generations, yet it evolves into a powerful story of connection, empathy, and transformation. Ayan's initial hesitance to connect with his grandfather gradually transforms into a deep bond that redefines his sense of identity and his understanding of family, legacy, and self.

##### 5.1.1. A Relationship Defined by Necessity

Ayan comes to Kerala not out of choice, but out of compulsion. After losing his job and under pressure from his father, Jairaj, Ayan finds himself at *Thekke Madom*, the ancestral home where he feels isolated and burdened. His early relationships with Gopal Shankar mirror this reluctance. Ayan sees his grandfather as a relic of the old days, who was deep into values and traditions, irrelevant to his modern urban life. Generational and experiential gaps lie in between them. Ayan represents the disillusionment of a fast-paced success-oriented world, and Gopal Shankar represents the steadiness of a life guided by principles and resilience. But even in those early days, seeds of transformation are sown. Even while maintaining his distance at first, Ayan becomes acutely aware of the silent dignity that his grandfather undergoes as he tackles his battles with old age and loneliness. Gopal Shankar's simple daily rituals, his commitment to his tradition, and the significance he derives from little deeds gradually start breaking down the wall of prejudices that has erected Ayan. Physical proximity eventually opens them to an emotional journey for both that they did not even know existed.

##### 5.1.2. Affective Actions and Emotional Transformation

As the days roll into weeks, the walls Ayan had built to contain himself begin to crumble. Protectiveness toward Gopal Shankar emerges from deepening affection and loyalty. He now comes to appreciate his grandfather not only for his resilience but also for wisdom and the grace he brings into the adversities of life. This newfound insight is beautifully rendered in Ayan's dramatic rescue of Gopal Shankar from a mental hospital—their relationship has turned over now. It's not an act of rebellion or family loyalty; it is a final expression of all Ayan's affective desires. He is deeply and irrationally moralised with a great deal of feeling for his grandfather, to whose vulnerability and strength he now feels deep affection. The rescue is an image of Ayan transforming from a passive observer to an active protector, symbolizing the great emotional change that has found its root within him. It is through this action that Ayan finds

himself in the role of caretaker and advocate, crossing the generational gap by actions driven by empathy and love.

### **5.1.3. Value-Rational Motivations and Identity Formation**

Beyond the emotional connection they share, Ayan's relationship with Gopal Shankar also reconfigures his sense of identity and place in the family. What initially serves as a source of alienation for Ayan—the crumbling ancestral home, seemingly tying him to a past he does not understand or value—ultimately transforms into a healing sanctuary and a place of connection as he spends more time in Kerala. Gopal Shankar teaches Ayan some of the most important lessons in life, love, and loss, gently making him question his priorities and outlook on life. Through the conversations and experiences shared with him, Ayan learns the importance of staying true to oneself and paying homage to those who paved the way. As a chasm, the generational divide becomes a bridge when Ayan learns how to integrate his grandfather's wisdom into his life. And he finds strength in those values that Gopal Shankar embodies. This extends beyond Ayan's relationship with his grandfather to the larger understanding of family and self. Gopal Shankar's lessons give Ayan a purpose and belonging. He starts to embrace his life as a successor to the legacy of his family. Initial detachment makes way for a great appreciation of the long-enduring strength of bonds among family members, and he grows into one who acts to preserve the values and traditions that define his lineage.

### **5.1.4. Empathy and Respect**

The relationship between Ayan and Gopal Shankar has been an illustration of the transformative power that empathy and mutual respect create in breaking the generational division. A reluctant sharing has turned into a significant partnership with understanding and common purpose. The novel develops the thought that though difference in generation may look hard to conquer, it turns out to be an inspiration for growth and a new connection. This is perhaps well-reflected in the change in Ayan, who gradually progresses from a mere witness in his family's tale to an active preserver of his grandfather's heritage. His growing sense of duty and identity marks a living testament to the continuity of values and familial relationships Gopal Shankar's life inspires. The novel reminds us that, regardless of the difference in age, experience, and perspective, it is the relationships that define us that can heal, inspire, and connect. The generational gap is bridged by Ayan and Gopal Shankar in such a way that reflects timeless strength through love, respect, and shared humanity.

## **5.2 Tradition and Modernity**

The microcosm between Jairaj and Gopal Shankar about father-son relationships also reveals the general societal tension regarding tradition versus modernity. Their respective values and priorities, clashing as they are, make them confront the very challenge of resolving generational conflicts. In this light, Jairaj exemplifies the modern and utilitarian approach focused on progress and efficiency, whereas Gopal Shankar embodies the stiff commitment towards heritage and family traditions. Seen from the perspective of social action theory, their relation represents a conflict between the type of instrumental-rational action and value-rational actions, which reflect all emotional and ideological conflicts inside the intergenerational bond.

### **5.2.1. Instrumental-Rational Actions and the Quest for Modernity**

Jairaj's life is characterised by instrumental-rational actions, which emphasize practicality, efficiency, and control. Social action theory, as conceptualized by Max Weber, describes instrumental-rationality as behaviour guided by calculated means to achieve specific ends. For Jairaj, progress and modernization supersede emotional ties or cultural heritage, which leads to decisions that reflect his utilitarian worldview. One of the greatest actions Jairaj undertakes is attempting to sell *Thekke Madom*, the ancestral home. For Jairaj, the house is a liability—an old structure that demands upkeep and serves no practical purpose in the streamlined, modern world that he envisions. In this decision, he best demonstrates his focus on the elimination of obstacles to the new, more efficient and rational future that he foresees. Similarly, his decision to send Gopal Shankar to a mental hospital is also a result of the same pragmatic thinking. Jairaj perceives his father's inability to change as not an articulation of strong



values but as a annoyance to be dealt with. These decisions, although sensible in Jairaj's worldview, ignore the emotional and symbolic importance of the house and his father's self. They show his tendency to demote intangible aspects of family life—such as memory, connection, and legacy—in favour of tangible outcomes that align with his vision of progress.

### **5.2.2. Value-Rational Resistance and the Preservation of Heritage**

Unlike the latter, the behaviour of Gopal Shankar reflects the aspect of value-rationality as another prime point of Weber's theory on social action. Value-rationality is such actions undertaken because of value-related motivations or intrinsic principles of living that are adhered to without any reference to possible consequences. In short, *Thekke Madom*, for Gopal Shankar, is a dwelling full of family history and family memory and, most of all, the epitome of the family. His resistance to the plans Jairaj proposes for him is rooted deep within the belief in tradition, cultural heritage, and the value of family culture. Gopal Shankar's insistence on not letting Jairaj sell the ancestral house or put him in some kind of institution is certainly not from obstinacy or ignorance but from the understanding that *Thekke Madom* embodies. To him, the house is a living testament to the values and stories of the generations that came before. Selling it would sever the family's connection to its roots, erasing the emotional and cultural significance it holds. Similarly, his rejection of Jairaj's utilitarian approach underscores his belief that relationships and values should not be sacrificed at the altar of modern efficiency. Through his value-rational actions, Gopal Shankar is a contrast to Jairaj's instrumentalism, embodying that emotional authenticity and reverence for tradition that are usually swept aside in a world which is obsessed with progress. His tenacity throws the emotional weight and moral urgency of preserving heritage into strong relief against the crushing forces that seek to enforce uniformity with modernity.

### **5.2.3. The Emotional and Ideological Battles of Intergenerational Relationship**

The bond of Jairaj and Gopal Shankar embodies the emotional and ideological conflicts that arise in conflict between tradition and modernity. The instrumental-rational worldview of Jairaj prevents him from realising the significance of emotions coming from his father, while the value-rational activity of Gopal Shankar seems impractical and obsolete to his son. Their battle is not only an individual affair but rather one of broader social discussion: how to find change without being estranged from the cultural and familial sense. It also creates more complication in the context of a generational conflict where both view success and happiness differently. Progress for Jairaj involves material and practical success—which, among other things, is found in being sound and efficient financially. For Gopal Shankar, fulfillment comes through the preservation of values and emotional connections that give life meaning. These two opposing worldviews present a poignant commentary on the difficulties of reconciling tradition with the demands of a rapidly changing world. But in their struggle, there also lies the potential for understanding and reconciliation. Gopal Shankar's resistance reminds one that tradition is not necessarily incompatible with progress but can exist together as a guiding force that can orient modernity into the direction of continuity and identity. In a move apparently contemptuous of heritage, Jairaj's actions show the pressure to adapt in a world where success has come to be equated with the abandonment of the past. This struggle underlines the necessity to find a balance between paying tribute to the wisdom of tradition and embracing the opportunities of modernity.

### **5.2.4. Reconciling Tradition and Modernity**

It is therefore the relationship between Jairaj and Gopal Shankar that highlights the necessity of dialogue and empathy in transcending generational divides. Differences in their approaches to *Thekke Madom* - for one, it was a burden; for the other, it was a beacon of identity - represent the societal challenge of reconciling the imperatives of modernization with tradition. We come to understand the motivation and values behind their choices by looking at their actions in the framework of social action theory, and we get insight into the emotional and ideological complexities of their relationship. In the final analysis, the conflict between Jairaj and Gopal Shankar is not just a conflict between two opposing forces but a reflection of the human struggle to harmonize the past and the present. Their story is a reminder that progress does not have to be bought at the price of identity and that tradition is, far from being an impediment, a possible base upon which to build a meaningful and connected future. The conflict

through which they come into the novel encourages the reader to reflect on their own relationships with heritage, progress, and the lasting ties of family.

### **5.3 Authority and Rebellion: Jairaj and Ayan**

The father-son relationship between Jairaj and Ayan symbolizes the conflict between patriarchal authority and the demand for individual autonomy.

Jairaj's authoritative parenting, as influenced by traditional family norms, contrasts with Ayan's demand for individualism and emotional truth. The relationship is thus depicted within the social action theory to reflect the societal battle between the traditional hierarchy and the developing need for individualism. Jairaj's confluence with patriarchal norms and Ayan's fight against them are examples of the interactions between traditional actions, instrumental-rationality, and value-rationality within a family setup.

#### **5.3.1. Traditional Actions and the Exercise of Patriarchal Authority**

Jairaj has been quite influenced by traditional actions characterized by Max Weber as behaviors motivated by deeply ingrained customs and societal norms. Therefore, because he is in charge, Jairaj acts out the role of authoritarian head in whose decisions are made as well as according to longstanding beliefs about paternal responsibilities that are expected towards their offspring. It's not merely a practical move to make Ayan appear before a GRS Exports job interview interviewee; it is, rather an exercise in patriarchal power. Jairaj perceives himself as the caretaker of his family's stability and success, and this role binds him to impose traditional measures of success, like a stable career and family responsibility. Ayan is sent off to Kerala to stay with his grandfather because the decision is made based on the need for strict discipline and order rather than the desire to understand Ayan's aspirations. Jairaj acts on the assumption that his authority is not only natural but also necessary for Ayan's survival, even at the expense of his son's own desires. From a social action theory point of view, Jairaj's traditional behaviour is a reflection of internalising the societal expectations that he has imbibed. His actions are directed by the cultural norms that favor obedience and filial duty in the hierarchy of family. Jairaj not being able to identify with Ayan's individuality is not a personal weakness but a part of the larger societal structure that has given more importance to patriarchal control than emotional attachment and personal liberty.

#### **5.3.2. Rebellion and Value-Rational Choices**

On the other hand, his rebellion against Jairaj is a break with traditional and instrumental-rational thinking that characterises the entire action of his father. Ayan's choice follows value-rationality because Max Weber defined this in terms of actions directed for their own sake through inherent values and moral considerations, apart from utilitarian goals. His loyalty to his granddad, Gopal Shankar, and his ultimate confrontation with Jairaj reflect his attachment to emotional authenticity and ethical integrity. The act of rejecting the job interview at GRS Exports and turning down the possibility of submitting to Jairaj's expectations is Ayan's way of expressing his rebellion against the denial of autonomy. These are not just impulsive acts of rebellion but rather very deliberate acts of choice for wanting to lead a life of their choice, values being one. Ayan's relationship with Gopal Shankar finally catalyses this transition because his grandfather's stern commitment to tradition and virtues makes Ayan look at life in a new light by questioning his priorities. And the final expression of rebellion for Ayan is renouncing Jairaj and thus indicating that he rejects traditional family stratification and exercises personal choice over his life. By choosing his emotional commitment over the call of external society, Ayan deposes the hegemony in which Jairaj so comfortably sits in the home. His motivational value points toward the sense of inner truth and personal courage while in conflict in generations.

#### **5.3.3. Intergenerational conflict as a microcosm of societal change**

The relationship between Jairaj and Ayan forms a microcosm of the larger conflict in society, that of tradition versus modernity, authority versus individuality. The former's adherence to patriarchal norms is an expression of the continued prevalence of structures based on hierarchy and control, whereas the latter's rebellion embodies the emergent concern with emotional authenticity and self-determination.

Their interaction demonstrates the conflict of coexisting these disparate worldviews within the framework of family. Jairaj's intent is to save his child from the uncertainty of changing times, but his pursuit of authority makes him neglect Ayan's need to be independent and express himself. In the same vein, Ayan's revolt, though necessary for personal growth, also underlines the pain and disruption that is often a part of rejections of traditional norms. Their conflict is not just a clash of personalities but also a reflection of the tensions that prevail in society due to younger generations trying to create their identities in a world dominated by entrenched expectations.

#### 5.3.4. Authority, Individuality, and Emotional Authenticity

At its core, the conflict between Jairaj and Ayan presents the idea of a family finding the balance between authority and individuality. Though Jairaj's methods are supported by society, he never considers the emotional and moral aspects of a parent and instead makes it all about control and conforming. This leads to a gulf that ends up estranging Ayan from the family. In contrast, Ayan's revolt is an ultimate affirmation of the necessity to be true to oneself from an emotional point of view and one's personal belief. His journey illustrates well the transformation possible in society by disowning tyrannical traditions and aligning his life with principle. With loyalty to Gopal Shankar and confrontation with Jairaj at the helm, Ayan establishes that it is essential to overcome oppressive order over rigid structure and challenge traditional patriarchal power. From a social action theory perspective, the father-son dynamic between Jairaj and Ayan reveals how, within the family, issues of authority and rebellion could be navigated. On one hand, there are Jairaj's traditional actions and instrumental-rational motivations in conflict with Ayan's value-rational choices, and on the other, a poignant study in intergenerational conflict is shown. The relationship also works as a commentary on reconciling tradition with individuality and on the changing nature of the bonds within the family. Ultimately, Ayan's rebellion speaks to the timeless relevance of emotional authenticity and moral courage in redefining the roles and relationships that define our lives.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Through social action theory, the changing dynamics of Ayan and Jairaj's relationship depict a deep conflict between instrumental-rational and value-rational actions. Jairaj's machinations, such as sending Ayan to Kerala for the sake of familial duty but with the intent of taking over the ancestral land, is an example of instrumental-rational action, which is motivated by the calculated means of gaining material rewards. This transactional mentality, based on patriarchal authority, has no regard for emotional bonds and focuses on control. Whereas, the ultimate rejection of his father's moral framework and his decision to cut off are based on value-rational motives as he seeks true relations and intrinsic values over what is expected by society. Thus, in choosing to stay in Kerala and protect *Thekke Madom*, Ayan takes control of his own self and recreates himself. His actions represent a rebellion against his father's utilitarian view of the world, embracing emotional authenticity and moral integrity as guiding principles for his life, thus rewriting the intergenerational family narrative.

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