

Walking on Eggshells: Intimacy Rules are Failing - Anand – 18 March 2026

In India, the popularity of drama series has subtly redefined romantic expectations, encouraging unrealistic fantasies in relationships, particularly among youth. Girls and women are the most affected, often imagining romance as portrayed in these dramas. Not surprisingly, even older women are affected, attempting to emulate or compare their married lives with what they see on digital platforms.

The hard fact remains: our only choice is to embrace today's realities without losing sight of our shared identity as Indians.

Since 2018, India has witnessed a steep rise in divorce rates and intimate partner violence alongside increasing marriage and relationship breakdowns. The pandemic has made matters more difficult, but sociologists argue that this reflects progress in social development. This is a sign that women are breaking free from patriarchal and medieval ways of thinking.

In response, we undertook an in-depth study to understand the underlying reasons behind the profound failures of marriages and live-in relationships.

The lack of workable solutions for sustaining these relationships often stems from the incompetence and diminishing skills of therapists, alongside factually misleading narratives and the complex interplay between narcissistic personality disorder and borderline personality disorder.

A close, micro-level reading of this content reveals important insights into how partners can navigate relational challenges by accepting realities. It is an eye-opener for men who are often undermined as the problem creators in relationships and marriages.

Many men and boys feel emotionally drained, with some driven to despair as they confront false accusations of rape or domestic violence. In certain cases, false charges are even filed against them under laws such as POCSO or POSH.

To their understanding, the message is evident: women are also seen as culpable and female partners are regarded as equally, if not more, accountable for failed marriages and relationships.

It is undeniable that many false and outdated narratives about relationship and marriage have been passed down from older generations and continue to shape the views of the younger ones.

Too often, we fall into the trap of generalizing based on social conditioning and patriarchal traditions—frameworks that no longer fit the transformed times we live in.

Older generations may have handed down these narratives, but the truth is that many of us keep reinforcing them, even in the face of changing realities.

In this piece, we aim to challenge common myths and stereotypes surrounding relationships and marriages. These reflections are based on my own experiences(14y-49y), as well as those of friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and extended family across four generations, combined with insights from conversations with psychotherapists, relationship coaches, and behavioural medicine experts.

I encourage everyone, regardless of age, to adopt a forward-looking mindset—staying in tune with the times. Do not restrict your vision to what is immediately around you or assume that the wider world has remained unchanged.

It is essential that we confront and dismantle the persistent myths surrounding intimacy, sexuality, and marriage, reframing them through the lens of today and tomorrow. The time has come to break free from outdated cycles and embrace new realities shaped by our nation's evolving social landscape.

MYTH -Sex education should place greater emphasis on girls, as they often experience more pronounced bodily and emotional changes during puberty compared to boys.

REALITY -Sex education must be co-educational. It is essential that boys receive early guidance on puberty and sexual hygiene to foster healthy understanding and responsible sexual behaviour.

MYTH-Sexual compatibility doesn't play a significant role in any intimate relationship, including marriage. Historically, women have often been portrayed as lacking sexual pleasure, desire and fantasies, a misconception that distorts the reality of women's sexuality.

REALITY-Sexual compatibility plays a crucial role in intimate relationships, including marriage. In reality, women's sexuality is complex, vibrant, and deeply significant to relationship fulfilment. Pornography, online dating, and hookup culture must not become the yardstick for defining sexual desires and fantasies in enduring intimate partnerships.

MYTH-The financial responsibility rests entirely with men, while women's role is centred on maintaining the household, managing the kitchen, and handling domestic chores. A man's earnings serve as the primary source of expenditure, whereas a woman's income is reserved exclusively for her personal savings and use.

REALITY-Financial transparency in relationships requires equal accountability and a fair sharing of financial responsibilities. Joint bank accounts are not essential for financial transparency. Openness and trust in relationships don't depend on joint accounts. It's a choice that should reflect the comfort and values of the partners involved. Many young men handle domestic duties, including cooking and household tasks, reasonably well.

Discuss career and business plans openly to prevent potential disagreements in the future.

MYTH-It is often perceived that physical intimacy with male partners has no connection to women's physical, emotional, or mental health. This is a blatantly false and misleading narrative.

REALITY- Several studies indicate that sexual intimacy with a male partner can provide significant physical, mental, and emotional health benefits for women, when it occurs within a healthy, consensual, and fulfilling relationship.

MYTH-Sex is often viewed solely as a means of procreation, with sexual intimacy reduced to the act of intercourse. Open discussions between partners about having children or adoption are not relevant before entering into marriage or a long-term committed relationship.

REALITY -Sex is a basic human need. It is a natural human urge that can strengthen interpersonal bonds, fostering psychological satisfaction and well-being of partners.

Sexual intimacy goes beyond intercourse—it includes foreplay, cuddling, touch, kissing, and other forms of closeness. It is an ongoing process through which couples deepen their bond and strengthen their connection.

For a relationship to flourish over the long term, partners must engage in open dialogue and reach mutual agreement on the question of having children or adoption—ideally before making major commitments such as marriage or cohabitation.

MYTH- In marriages and intimate relationships, it is often assumed that only women experience domestic violence, while men are believed to be free from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

REALITY -This perception is flawed, as it ignores the reality that men, too, can be victims of domestic and intimate partner violence—whether physical, emotional, or sexual.

MYTHS- It is considered acceptable for women to express their emotions, mood swings, and unresolved traumas within relationships. In contrast, men are often expected to suppress their egos, emotions, and struggles, enduring them in silence.

REALITY-For a relationship to endure, both partners must learn to manage emotions and mood swings. If a woman constantly vents toxic emotions, the man may either push back or withdraw, neglecting her emotionally and sexually leading to an unsustainable relationship.

MYTH-Couples who remain married for 30, 40, or even 50 years are living proof of an emotionally fulfilling, sexually healthy, and happily-ever-after marital life.

REALITY-Longevity in marriage does not always equal emotional or sexual bond. Many couples stay together into their 50s, 60s, and 70s out of fear—driven by social pressure, financial dependence, poor health, or societal judgment-rather than genuine love or fulfillment, leaving the relationship hollow and unsustainable.

MYTH-Intimate relationships often collapse when toxic men, driven by narcissistic behaviour, become the source of conflict and disruption within the family. Men are labelled with disorders such as narcissistic personality disorder and framing them as the source of marital conflict.

REALITY-Studies suggest women can be comparatively more toxic than men in relationships, with NPD and Borderline Personality Disorder driving emotional volatility, spiritual bypassing, victim-playing, and blame-shifting—often leading to irreparable breakdowns in marriages and live-in relationships.

MYTH-Marital infertility is often viewed as a women-centric issue, with the assumption that men face little risk of infertility or impotence. It is also widely believed that conditions like Genophobia and Gamophobia affect only women. Sexual wellness and hygiene are likewise viewed as concerns exclusive to women.

It is not necessary for partners to openly disclose detailed information about their medical, sexual and reproductive health, or psychological conditions before entering into a relationship.

REALITY- Male infertility and impotence are increasingly recognized as major health concerns in India. Studies indicate that male factors contribute to roughly 40-50% of all infertility cases in the country. Men also experience Genophobia, Gamophobia and even Gynophobia, which can undermine healthy intimate relationships.

Partners must openly disclose, with supporting proof, detailed information about their medical, sexual, reproductive, and psychological health before entering a relationship. Male sexual wellness and hygiene are of vital importance throughout life, beginning in childhood and continuing into old age.

MYTH-Parents, siblings, and extended family are the best people to help resolve marital disputes. Traditionally, remaining legally bound in an irreparably broken marriage has been viewed as preferable to seeking mutual divorce or separation. Couples are often discouraged from separating for the sake of their children, and in some cases, to avoid parents' fear of community ostracization.

REALITY-When cracks begin to appear; couples should sit down together and attempt to resolve issues through open dialogue without external involvement. Open communication and active listening in a non-judgmental, private setting are crucial for partners, and creating a three-month timeline to review progress can offer valuable structure and direction.

Couples may benefit from taking a brief sabbatical to focus on quality time together and address any challenges in their intimate connection. A getaway to the nearby countryside, where they can share leisurely meals, engage in heartfelt conversations, and nurture closeness, can create a supportive environment for reflection and renewed bonding.

Such experiences help evaluate whether external professional support is needed. If no improvement is seen, professional support from a seasoned relationship therapist should be sought, while avoiding intervention from parents, extended family, or friends, as biased approaches often complicate matters and trigger further conflict.

MYTH -Male partners are responsible for infidelity in relationships and for engaging in extramarital affairs- a narrative shaped largely by the social status and position of women during those times. Women only engage in sexual intimacy only when they feel emotionally connected to their partner.

REALITY-Indian women engage in infidelity and extramarital affairs in numbers comparable to their male counterparts across socio-economic groups. Yet this reality is often ignored, with the role of the woman involved conveniently overlooked. It is a false generalization to claim that women engage in sexual intimacy only when emotionally connected. It is a reality that many married urban Indian women consensually engage in one-night stands, casual encounters, and open relationships. Some affluent urban married women also travel with male escorts during business trips. It is a misconception that men's brains are wired to engage in sex with any woman at any time or place, unlike women.

A survey by a global company in February 2020 reported that 53% of married Indian women admitted to having an intimate relationship outside marriage.

As humans, it is natural to have multiple sexual partners. We must also acknowledge the growing number of adolescents—some as young as 14—openly discussing their intimate experiences, with a few even live-streaming intimate acts online with peer groups. Partner-swapping culture and polyamory are gaining increasing popularity in major urban centres.

Research in anthropology, evolutionary psychology, and sociology shows that humans are not strictly monogamous, and sexual relationships with multiple partners—sequential or simultaneous—are common across cultures and history.

MYTH-Dating, whether in person or online, is often stigmatized as sinful in some societies, with girls and women unfairly branded as having loose character—while boys and men are permitted to date without similar judgment.

REALITY - Men and women of all ages date both in person and online, and this is perfectly normal. It is also common for some partners to pursue dating outside marriage or committed relationships—sometimes with their partner's consent, and sometimes without. However, when dating becomes excessive or addictive, it can undermine and damage marriages and intimate bonds.

MYTH -Even in modern societies, it is often assumed that men are superior decision-makers, planners, and possess stronger cognitive and analytical abilities than women.

REALITY-Women are equally capable of decision-making and, in some cases, possess superior cognitive and analytical skills. In such situations, men should acknowledge this reality, while women should avoid acting superior or attempting to dominate their partner. Toxic male ego and insecurities are major disruptors in intimate relationships and marriages.

MYTH-When you enter a serious relationship or marriage —friendships should take a backseat—especially with close friends of the opposite sex.

REALITY-Even after marriage, friendships matter—regardless of gender—as long as personal boundaries are respected. Obsession, constant doubts, and invading a partner's privacy through devices or online stalking are toxic behaviours that, if unchecked, can destroy a relationship.

MYTH- Before entering a relationship, some believe it is acceptable to enhance or even alter aspects of their physical appearance—such as skin tone, hair, body shape, height, or even age—in order to impress a potential partner.

REALITY- Faking your looks may create a strong first impression, but only authenticity and confidence can sustain a relationship. Faking your appearance or age before marriage can lead to feelings of betrayal, widening gaps, and eventual breakdown.

MYTH - Parents often decide when and whom their children should marry, and after marriage they may advise on matters such as intimacy, family planning, and the number of children—drawing on their experience and knowledge.

REALITY- Parents should never decide or force their children's marriage choices. It is a misconception that parents are competent to advise on sensitive matters like sex and family planning after marriage. Partners must ensure they do not encourage parental interference in these decisions, which rightly belong within the relationship.

MYTH- Constantly giving gifts to please your partner can be seen as a sign of a strong bond. Social narratives often portray gift-giving and impressing the female partner as the male's responsibility for sustaining relationships and marriage.

REALITY - Expecting gifts only from a male partner is a red flag in any relationship or marriage. Occasional, mutual gifting within one's means—without financial strain—is a healthy practice. Before entering into a serious, long-term relationship, there should be clear mutual understanding regarding each partner's faith, spiritual views, and even superstitious beliefs.

MYTH- In India, it is socially ingrained that after marriage the couple will reside in the husband's parental home, often with his parents and extended family if present.

REALITY- There is no law in our country that requires couples to live only in the husband's parental home after marriage.

Couples should mutually decide before marriage to live independently, away from both parental homes. Occasional joint visits during festivals—ideally not exceeding two days—are healthy, but boundaries must be respected.

After marriage, the female partner should avoid sharing or updating her mother about marital life, as many mothers tend to become overly anxious, curious, or even controlling, often advising their daughters on how to manage their husbands—which amounts to unhealthy interference and reflects traits of aging narcissism.

MYTH-It is a misconception that only men smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs, and that once married or in a relationship, the female partner will be able to control or change these habits.

REALITY-Many women also smoke, consume alcohol, and even use drugs. Addiction to smoking, alcohol, or drugs can ultimately destroy relationships.

At first glance, this content may seem male-centric, but I feel compelled—having lived long enough to witness certain realities—to speak plainly about the struggles men and boys endure. Many suffer in silence, uncertain where to seek support. With no real coping mechanisms available, and fearing judgment or being branded as weak, they often cannot even pursue legal recourse.

If some hyper-feminists or pseudo-feminist men interpret this as casting women in a negative light, I want to clarify that my intention is not to diminish women but to highlight overlooked truths.

I also wish to emphasize that, from birth to the present, I have continually been surrounded by environments where girls and women were present in equal or greater proportions.

We must acknowledge the shifting expectations of the modern generation, particularly in matters of intimacy and marriage, and encourage them to adapt to these changes with openness and honesty. My motivation to write this comes from the exponential rise in conversations and portrayals of outdated stereotypes across everyday life and digital platforms.

These narratives are creating widespread confusion and stress—especially among vulnerable youth—while pressuring them to conform to outdated stereotypes that no longer hold relevance.

My role concludes here. From here on, it is a shared responsibility to acknowledge and embrace the generational shift in relationships and marriage.

Ultimately, it is up to today's younger generation to decide which intimacy framework best suits them—whether that's the 2-2-2 rule, 3-3-3 rule, 7-7-7 rule or something entirely different.

Finally, I must express my heartfelt gratitude to Atul, Deepika, Shonee, and Madhumitha for their invaluable contributions, guidance, and support in bringing this work to life. I am truly indebted to each of you and sincerely wish you continued success and happiness in the journey ahead.

Anand

Note –This content is suitable for readers across ages 14 to 70. The ideal beneficiaries are children aged 14–18 and young adults aged 19–23. It is also recommended for young adults in intimate relationships and newly married couples aged 24–28.

At times, I worked on this while traveling, so a few errors may have slipped through. It took me considerable effort to consolidate the content into a comprehensive form. Even after a thorough review for duplication, grammar, and spelling errors, occasional mistakes may still remain.

I welcome your help in rectifying them. You may add, delete, or modify the content as needed so that it aligns with the current realities and the ever-evolving generational expectations surrounding intimate partner relationships. Feel free to agree to disagree without being disagreeable.

- Anand – 18 March 2026