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The Dynamics of Live-in Relationships in Indian Society: Societal Trends and Perspectives from Hindu and Other Religious Standpoints

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ABSTRACT

Live-in relationships have emerged as a significant societal phenomenon in contemporary India, challenging traditional notions of marriage and family structures. This article explores the evolving trends of live-in relationships in Indian society and delves into the perspectives offered by Hinduism and other major religions practiced in the country. Historically, India has been known for its conservative attitudes towards relationships, with arranged marriage being the prevalent norm. However, globalization, urbanization, and changing social norms have led to a gradual acceptance of alternative relationship models, including live-in arrangements. Empirical studies indicate a growing prevalence of live-in relationships, particularly among urban, educated youth, reflecting a shift towards more individualistic values and personal autonomy. Within the context of Hinduism, the predominant religion in India, diverse perspectives exist regarding relationships and marriage. While traditional Hindu scriptures uphold the sanctity of marriage as a sacrament, they also acknowledge the concept of "gandharva vivaha" or informal unions based on mutual consent. Modern Hindu thinkers interpret these scriptures to advocate for the freedom of individuals to choose their partners and relationship structures, including live-in arrangements, as long as they uphold principles of righteousness and mutual respect. Other religious frameworks present in India, such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, offer varying perspectives on live-in relationships. While some adhere to conservative values emphasizing marital sanctity, others adopt more liberal interpretations that prioritize love, companionship, and consent. Understanding these diverse viewpoints is essential for fostering dialogue and promoting social cohesion in a multicultural society like India. The legal status of live-in relationships in India has undergone significant evolution, with courts recognizing the rights and obligations of cohabiting partners in recent years. However, the absence of specific legislation governing such unions has

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resulted in ambiguity and disparities in legal protection, particularly concerning property rights, inheritance, and social security benefits.

The rise of live-in relationships has implications for various aspects of Indian society, including family dynamics, gender roles, and generational conflicts. While proponents argue that such arrangements promote individual autonomy, equality, and emotional fulfillment, critics express concerns about moral values, social stability, and the well-being of children raised in non-traditional households. live-in relationships represent a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in Indian society, reflecting broader shifts in cultural norms, individual aspirations, and legal frameworks. By examining the societal trends and religious perspectives surrounding this issue, we gain insights into the challenges and opportunities for fostering inclusivity, diversity, and mutual respect in the fabric of Indian social life. Embracing dialogue, empathy, and ethical engagement is essential for navigating the evolving dynamics of relationships in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: *Live-in relationships, Societal Trends, religion, India, Indian society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Live-in relationships, characterized by cohabitation between partners without formal marriage, have become increasingly prevalent in India, reflecting shifting attitudes towards love, marriage, and personal autonomy. This article investigates the societal implications of this trend and examines how it intersects with religious beliefs, particularly within the context of Hinduism and other major religions practiced in India.

Historically, India has been known for its conservative attitudes towards relationships, with arranged marriage being the prevalent norm. (Anjali 12)³ However, globalization, urbanization, and changing social norms have led to a gradual acceptance of alternative relationship models, including live-in arrangements. Empirical studies indicate a growing prevalence of live-in relationships, particularly among urban, educated youth, reflecting a shift towards more individualistic values and personal autonomy. Within the context of Hinduism, the predominant religion in India, diverse perspectives exist regarding relationships and marriage. While traditional Hindu scriptures uphold the sanctity of marriage as a sacrament, they also acknowledge the concept of "gandharva vivaha" or informal unions based on mutual consent. Modern Hindu thinkers interpret these scriptures to advocate for the freedom of individuals to choose their partners and relationship structures, including live-in arrangements, as long as they

³ Anjali Agarwal, Live in Relationships and its Impact on the Institution of Marriage in India, Westminster Law Review, Volume 3 Issue 1, September 2012.

uphold principles of righteousness and mutual respect. (Anjali 12)⁴

Other religious frameworks present in India, such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, offer varying perspectives on live-in relationships. While some adhere to conservative values emphasizing marital sanctity, others adopt more liberal interpretations that prioritize love, companionship, and consent. Understanding these diverse viewpoints is essential for fostering dialogue and promoting social cohesion in a multicultural society like India.

The legal status of live-in relationships in India has undergone significant evolution, with courts recognizing the rights and obligations of cohabiting partners in recent years. However, the absence of specific legislation governing such unions has resulted in ambiguity and disparities in legal protection, particularly concerning property rights, inheritance, and social security benefits.

The rise of live-in relationships has implications for various aspects of Indian society, including family dynamics, gender roles, and generational conflicts. While proponents argue that such arrangements promote individual autonomy, equality, and emotional fulfillment, critics express concerns about moral values, social stability, and the well-being of children raised in non-traditional households.

Live-in relationships represent a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in Indian society, reflecting broader shifts in cultural norms, individual aspirations, and legal frameworks. By examining the societal trends and religious perspectives surrounding this issue, we gain insights into the challenges and opportunities for fostering inclusivity, diversity, and mutual respect in the fabric of Indian social life. Embracing dialogue, empathy, and ethical engagement is essential for navigating the evolving dynamics of relationships in a rapidly changing world. (Gaur 29)⁵

II. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

To understand the contemporary landscape of live-in relationships in India, it is crucial to examine the historical and cultural factors that have shaped attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation. Traditional Indian society has been predominantly conservative regarding premarital relationships, emphasizing arranged marriages and familial harmony. The institution of marriage has long been regarded as sacred, with societal norms dictating adherence to marital

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gaur, Sanjay. *Live-in-Relationship*. Delhi: Y. King Books. 2011.

vows and family duties.

However, globalization, urbanization, and changes in social norms have led to a gradual acceptance of alternative relationship models, including live-in arrangements. The influence of Western culture, advancements in communication technology, and exposure to diverse lifestyles through media platforms have contributed to a shift in attitudes towards romantic partnerships. Younger generations, in particular, are increasingly questioning traditional norms and seeking greater autonomy in their personal lives.

The rise of live-in relationships in India can also be attributed to socioeconomic factors, such as increased education levels, financial independence, and urban migration. As more individuals pursue higher education and employment opportunities in urban centers, they encounter diverse cultural influences and alternative lifestyle choices. This exposure fosters a sense of independence and self-discovery, prompting individuals to reevaluate traditional marriage norms. (Sanjeeva Rao 16)⁶

Moreover, changes in family structures and dynamics have contributed to the acceptance of live-in relationships in India. Nuclear families, urbanization, and the erosion of extended kinship networks have created spaces for individuals to explore alternative relationship models outside the confines of traditional patriarchal structures. Additionally, the delay in age of marriage and increasing rates of divorce have led to a growing population of unmarried individuals seeking companionship and intimacy.

Religious and cultural diversity further shapes attitudes towards live-in relationships in India. While Hinduism, the predominant religion, emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and family values, it also accommodates diverse interpretations and practices regarding relationships. Similarly, other religious communities in India, such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists, exhibit varying degrees of acceptance and resistance towards non-marital cohabitation. (Prativa 6)⁷ The portrayal of live-in relationships in popular culture and media has played a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes. Bollywood films, television series, and digital platforms often depict modern relationships characterized by love, passion, and companionship, regardless of marital status. This normalization of non-traditional relationship dynamics contributes to the destigmatization of live-in arrangements and encourages greater acceptance among audiences.

⁶ Sanjeeva Rao, M. An analysis of live-in-relationship and legal tangles in India, *Legal News and Views*, September 2014.

⁷ Prativa Panda, *The Status of Live-in-Relationship in India: A Legal and Judicial Approach*, *IJR*, Vol. 5 Issue 3, 2016.

The historical and cultural context of India underscores the complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and globalization in shaping attitudes towards live-in relationships. While traditional norms continue to exert influence, changing social dynamics, economic realities, and cultural influences have facilitated the gradual acceptance of alternative relationship models, reflecting the evolving nature of Indian society.

III. SOCIETAL TRENDS: URBANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

India is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by urbanization and modernization, significantly impacting societal attitudes and lifestyles. One of the noticeable shifts is the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships, especially in urban centers like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore. This article explores how urbanization and modernization have influenced these changes, focusing on the role of education, economic independence, and global cultural exposure in shaping new social norms. (Kalpana 12)⁸ Urbanization in India has led to the growth of major metropolitan areas, which have become hubs of economic activity, cultural exchange, and social change. As people migrate from rural areas to cities in search of better opportunities, they encounter diverse lifestyles and ideas, leading to a more liberal and inclusive social environment.

Urban centers attract a diverse population, including young professionals, students, and expatriates. This demographic shift brings together people from various backgrounds and cultures, fostering an environment of openness and acceptance. The anonymity and freedom of urban life allow individuals to explore and adopt lifestyles that might be frowned upon in more traditional rural settings. Cities offer greater economic opportunities, which in turn contribute to changing social norms. The rise of industries such as information technology, finance, and services has created a new class of young professionals who are financially independent and less reliant on traditional family structures. This economic independence empowers individuals to make personal choices regarding their relationships and lifestyles.

Urban centers are also educational hubs, housing some of the country's premier universities and colleges. Higher education exposes students to diverse viewpoints and encourages critical thinking. As a result, young adults in urban areas are more likely to question traditional norms and embrace alternative relationship models, such as live-in relationships. (Singh 18)⁹ Modernization, characterized by technological advancement, globalization, and changing social values, has further accelerated the acceptance of live-in relationships.

⁸ Kalpana V. Jawale, *Live-in Relationship: Recent Development and Challenges in India*, SSRN, 2012.

⁹ Singh, Rakesh Kumar, *Modern Hindu Law*. Thomson Reuters, 2022.

The advent of the internet and digital communication has played a crucial role in modernizing Indian society. Access to global information and social media platforms has exposed individuals to different cultures and lifestyles, breaking down traditional barriers. Online forums, dating apps, and social networks provide platforms for people to connect, share experiences, and find support for non-traditional relationship choices.

Western media and entertainment have significantly impacted Indian cultural norms. Movies, television shows, and online content often depict live-in relationships as normal and acceptable, challenging the traditional notion of marriage as the only legitimate form of partnership. Young Indians, especially in urban areas, consume this media and are influenced by these portrayals, leading to a more liberal outlook on relationships. Modernization has also led to a shift in social values, with a growing emphasis on individualism, personal autonomy, and emotional fulfillment. Unlike previous generations, who often prioritized family expectations and societal norms, today's young adults value personal happiness and compatibility in their relationships. (Singh 19)¹⁰ This shift is evident in the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships, which allow couples to prioritize their needs and desires without the immediate pressures of marriage. To understand the impact of urbanization and modernization on live-in relationships, it is essential to examine specific urban centers where these trends are most pronounced.

Mumbai, India's financial capital, is a melting pot of cultures and ideas. The city's fast-paced lifestyle, diverse population, and cosmopolitan nature make it a conducive environment for alternative relationship models. Young professionals in Mumbai often choose live-in relationships as a practical solution to balance their careers and personal lives. The high cost of living and demanding work schedules also make cohabitation a convenient and financially viable option.

Delhi, the national capital, embodies the blend of tradition and modernity. While certain parts of the city remain conservative, the influence of prestigious educational institutions and a growing expatriate community has led to a more progressive attitude towards live-in relationships. In Delhi, young adults, particularly those associated with universities and multinational corporations, view live-in relationships as a step towards understanding compatibility before committing to marriage.

Bangalore, known as the Silicon Valley of India, has a young and dynamic population driven by the tech industry. The city's emphasis on innovation and forward-thinking extends to social norms, including relationships. The tech-savvy youth of Bangalore are open to experimenting

¹⁰ Ibid

with their personal lives, viewing live-in relationships as a means to ensure compatibility and mutual understanding in a fast-evolving professional environment. (Arundhati 6)¹¹

Education is a critical factor in shaping attitudes towards live-in relationships. Higher education levels correlate with more liberal views on personal relationships. Universities and colleges provide an environment where young adults are exposed to diverse perspectives and encouraged to think critically about societal norms. This educational exposure fosters acceptance of alternative relationship models, including live-in arrangements.

Economic independence, particularly among women, has been transformative. Financially independent individuals are less likely to conform to traditional expectations and more likely to prioritize personal happiness and fulfillment. For many, live-in relationships represent a way to maintain autonomy while exploring romantic partnerships. Western media has a significant influence on young Indians, especially in urban areas. The portrayal of live-in relationships in Western films, television shows, and digital content normalizes these arrangements and presents them as viable alternatives to marriage. This exposure helps to erode traditional taboos and encourages acceptance of diverse relationship models.

The cosmopolitan nature of urban centers fosters an inclusive and accepting atmosphere. Cities with a diverse population and a culture of openness provide the social support needed for individuals in live-in relationships. This environment contrasts with rural areas, where traditional norms and community scrutiny often prevail. Despite the growing acceptance of live-in relationships in urban areas, challenges and resistance remain.

Live-in relationships still face societal stigma, particularly from older generations and conservative sections of society. Couples in live-in arrangements may encounter judgment, discrimination, and pressure to conform to traditional marriage norms. This stigma can lead to social ostracism and strain family relationships. While the legal recognition of live-in relationships in India has improved, social protections for individuals in these arrangements are still evolving. Issues such as inheritance rights, domestic violence protections, and social security benefits need further clarification and enforcement to ensure the well-being of individuals in live-in relationships. (Anjali 22)¹² Balancing the desire for modern, liberal lifestyles with respect for traditional values is a challenge for many young Indians. Navigating the expectations of family and society while pursuing personal autonomy requires careful

¹¹ Arundhati Dahiya, Live in relationship – An Indian perspective, *Golden Research Thoughts*, Vol. 3, Issue 9, March 2014.

¹² Anjani Kant, *Women and the Law*. Delhi: APH Publishers, 2003.

negotiation and often compromises.

The dynamics of live-in relationships in India are intricately linked to the processes of urbanization and modernization. Urban centers like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore serve as microcosms of this transformation, showcasing how education, economic independence, and exposure to global media are reshaping societal attitudes. While challenges remain, the trend towards greater acceptance of live-in relationships reflects a broader shift towards individualism and personal fulfillment in contemporary Indian society. As India continues to modernize, the acceptance of diverse relationship models is likely to increase, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic social landscape.

IV. RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Hinduism, one of the oldest religions in the world, deeply influences the social fabric and cultural practices of India. Central to Hindu life is the institution of marriage, or "vivaha," which is considered a sacred duty (dharma) and a critical pillar for societal stability. The traditional views on marriage are deeply embedded in Hindu culture and religious practice, often standing in contrast to the modern interpretations emerging in urban and younger demographics. This article delves into the traditional and modern perspectives on live-in relationships within the Hindu context, examining how these views are evolving in contemporary Indian society. (Diwan 34)¹³

In Hinduism, marriage is not merely a social contract but a sacred duty and a rite of passage. It is seen as essential for the continuation of family lineage, societal stability, and the fulfillment of religious duties. The "vivaha" ceremony is a significant religious sacrament, involving intricate rituals and the invocation of deities to bless the union. Marriage is often considered a lifelong bond that not only unites two individuals but also their families. Traditional Hindu society places a strong emphasis on familial honor and collective well-being. Marriages are often arranged, with families playing a crucial role in selecting partners. The success of a marriage is seen as a reflection of the family's honor and standing in the community. Consequently, deviations from this norm, such as live-in relationships, are frequently viewed with disapproval and stigma. These relationships are perceived as undermining the sanctity of marriage and the social order.

In rural areas and among older demographics, conservative views on marriage and live-in relationships are more pronounced. The social fabric in these regions is tightly knit, with

¹³ Diwan, Paras. *Modern Hindu Law*. Allahabad Law Agency, 20th edition, 2009.

collective opinions often outweighing individual choices. Live-in relationships are seen as a threat to traditional values and are typically met with strong resistance. The fear of social ostracism and the desire to uphold family honor contribute to the negative perception of such arrangements. Urbanization and modernization have led to more liberal interpretations of Hinduism among younger and urban populations. In these contexts, individuals are increasingly prioritizing personal autonomy, emotional fulfillment, and mutual consent over traditional norms. (Poonam 8)¹⁴ This shift is evident in the growing acceptance of live-in relationships, especially among educated and economically independent young adults.

Some progressive Hindu thinkers and scholars argue that the essence of Hindu philosophy is its adaptability and ability to evolve with changing times. They emphasize the principles of love, respect, and mutual consent as central to any relationship, including live-in arrangements. These thinkers highlight that Hindu scriptures and teachings are not rigid but open to interpretation in the context of contemporary societal changes. Modern interpretations of Hinduism suggest that while marriage remains a valued institution, live-in relationships can also align with Hindu values if they are based on mutual respect, love, and commitment. The adaptability of Hinduism allows for the incorporation of new social norms, provided they uphold the ethical and moral principles that form the core of Hindu philosophy.

Although these modern views remain relatively niche compared to the dominant traditional perspectives, they are gaining traction, particularly in metropolitan areas. The rise of nuclear families, increased mobility, and exposure to global cultures contribute to the acceptance of live-in relationships. Educational institutions, media, and popular culture also play significant roles in shaping these evolving attitudes. In urban settings like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, the acceptance of live-in relationships is part of a broader trend towards liberal social norms. Young professionals in these cities often view live-in arrangements as practical and compatible with their lifestyles. (Amrita 3)¹⁵ The emphasis on career development, financial independence, and personal compatibility makes live-in relationships an attractive option.

In contrast, rural settings uphold traditional values more strictly. The influence of elders, community scrutiny, and limited exposure to alternative lifestyles reinforce conservative views. In these areas, live-in relationships are often seen as taboo, and individuals engaging in such arrangements may face significant social and familial backlash. The legal recognition of live-in relationships in India has evolved over time. The Supreme Court of India has recognized the

¹⁴ Poonam Pradhan Saxena, *Family Law Lectures*; Edition III; 2011; LexisNexis Butterworth Wadhwa

¹⁵ Amrita Ghosh & Pratyusha Kar, *Pre-nuptial Agreement in India: An Analysis of Law and Society*, *NUJS Law Review*, 12 *NUJS L. Rev.* 2 April-June (2019)

rights of individuals in live-in relationships under the right to life and personal liberty, protected by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Legal precedents have extended certain rights, particularly concerning property and protection against domestic violence, to partners in live-in relationships. Despite legal advancements, social perceptions are slower to change. Many couples in live-in relationships face societal stigma and familial pressures, reflecting the deep-rooted traditional values that still dominate much of Indian society. Efforts to bridge the gap between legal recognition and social acceptance are crucial for fostering a more inclusive environment.

Higher education plays a critical role in shaping liberal attitudes towards live-in relationships. Educational institutions expose students to diverse perspectives, encourage critical thinking, and promote individual autonomy. As a result, young adults with higher education levels are more likely to challenge traditional norms and embrace alternative relationship models. Economic independence, particularly among women, is a significant factor in the changing dynamics of relationships.^(Rajesh 17)¹⁶ Financially independent individuals are better positioned to make personal choices without being constrained by traditional expectations. Economic empowerment enables individuals to prioritize their happiness and compatibility in relationships.

Exposure to global cultures through media, travel, and digital communication has introduced Indians to diverse relationship models. Western media, in particular, plays a role in normalizing live-in relationships by portraying them as acceptable and viable alternatives to marriage. This cultural exposure helps young Indians to adopt more liberal views on personal relationships. The urban environment itself fosters a more open and accepting atmosphere. Cities provide anonymity, a diverse population, and access to supportive networks, making it easier for individuals to explore and adopt non-traditional lifestyles. The cosmopolitan nature of urban centers encourages the acceptance of live-in relationships as part of the evolving social fabric.

Despite growing acceptance in urban areas, societal stigma remains a significant challenge. Live-in relationships are often viewed through the lens of traditional morality, leading to judgment and discrimination. Couples in live-in arrangements may face social ostracism and pressures to conform to conventional marital norms. Navigating the balance between tradition and modernity is complex.^(Mohit 10)¹⁷ Many young Indians strive to honor their cultural heritage while seeking personal autonomy and fulfillment. This balancing act requires careful

¹⁶ Rajesh Dave, Legal Status of Live in Relationship in India, 9 Indian Journal of Applied Research (2019)

¹⁷ Mohit Chhibber & Aditya Singh, Live-in relationships: An ethical and a moral dilemma, IJAR, Vol.1 Issue 8, 2015.

negotiation and often involves compromising between individual desires and familial expectations.

Hinduism's perspectives on live-in relationships reflect the broader tensions between tradition and modernity in Indian society. While traditional views emphasize the sanctity of marriage and familial honor, modern interpretations, particularly among urban and younger populations, advocate for personal autonomy, mutual respect, and adaptability. The increasing acceptance of live-in relationships in urban centers highlights the dynamic nature of societal norms and the influence of education, economic independence, and global cultural exposure. As India continues to modernize, the dialogue between traditional values and contemporary lifestyles will shape the future of personal relationships, fostering a more inclusive and diverse social landscape.

(A) Other Religious Standpoints

Islamic teachings emphasize the sanctity of marriage, viewing it as both a legal and spiritual contract between a man and a woman. This contract is integral to the moral and social fabric of the Muslim community, providing a framework for lawful relationships and family life. Live-in relationships, where couples cohabit without formal marriage, generally stand in contrast to Islamic principles.^(Bhumika 5)¹⁸ However, there are ongoing discussions within the Muslim community about how to address contemporary social realities with compassion and understanding. This article explores the traditional Islamic views on live-in relationships, the challenges posed by modern social dynamics, and the evolving perspectives within the Muslim community.

In Islam, marriage (nikah) is considered a sacred covenant. It is not merely a social agreement but a religious duty that fulfills a fundamental aspect of the faith. The Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) provide detailed guidance on the roles, rights, and responsibilities of spouses within a marriage.^(Deepali 8)¹⁹ The union is intended to foster love, compassion, and mutual respect, creating a stable environment for raising children and contributing to the moral fabric of society. Islamic teachings explicitly prohibit extra-marital relationships. The Quran and Hadith stress the importance of maintaining chastity and moral conduct, viewing any form of sexual relationship outside of marriage as sinful (zina). Live-in relationships, which imply cohabitation and possibly sexual relations without marriage, are thus generally

¹⁸ Bhumika Sharma Live in Relationships: The Indian Perspective, ILJ, Vol. 2 issue 2, 2009.

¹⁹ Deepali Sharma & Shikha Rajpurohit, Legal & Social Aspects of Live In Relationship, International Referred Research Journal, Vol. III, Issue 28, Jan. 2012.

considered haram (forbidden).

The concept of family honor and community reputation is deeply ingrained in traditional Islamic societies. Marriage is seen as a way to protect and uphold this honor. Live-in relationships, by deviating from the accepted norm of marriage, can be perceived as dishonorable and damaging to the reputation of the individuals involved and their families. Urbanization and modernization have brought about significant changes in lifestyles, even within Muslim communities. Young Muslims in urban centers are exposed to diverse cultural norms and values, often leading to a questioning of traditional practices. The pressures of modern life, including career demands and the desire for personal autonomy, have led some to consider live-in relationships as a practical arrangement. Increased access to education and economic opportunities has empowered many young Muslims, particularly women. This empowerment has led to a re-examination of traditional roles and relationships. (Khalid 92)²⁰ Economic independence allows individuals to make personal choices about their lives, including their relationships. However, these choices can sometimes conflict with traditional Islamic values.

Global media, including movies, television shows, and social media, expose young Muslims to different lifestyles and relationship models. These portrayals can influence perceptions and lead to a greater acceptance of live-in relationships. However, this influence often clashes with the conservative teachings they have grown up with, creating internal and community conflicts. Some Muslim scholars and community leaders advocate for a more compassionate and understanding approach to contemporary social issues, including live-in relationships. They argue that the core principles of Islam—mercy, compassion, and justice—should guide the community's response to modern challenges. These leaders emphasize the importance of addressing the underlying reasons why young Muslims might choose live-in relationships, such as economic pressures and the desire for mutual understanding before marriage.

There is an ongoing dialogue within the Muslim community about how to balance traditional Islamic values with modern social realities. Some progressive voices call for reinterpretation (ijtihad) of certain aspects of Islamic law to better align with contemporary life while still upholding the fundamental principles of the faith. (Mahmood 9)²¹ These discussions often focus on finding ways to support young Muslims in making ethical and religiously compliant choices. Many young Muslims seek to reconcile their faith with their desire for modern, liberal lifestyles. They may support live-in relationships as a means to understand compatibility with a partner

²⁰ Khalid Rashid. *Muslim Law*. Eastern Book Company. Lucknow: 4th Ed., 2008.

²¹ Mahmood, T. *Introduction to Muslim Law*. Universal law Publication, 2013.

before committing to marriage. This perspective, while still relatively uncommon and controversial, highlights the generational shift in attitudes towards personal relationships.

In rural and traditional settings, the resistance to live-in relationships remains strong. These communities adhere closely to conservative interpretations of Islamic teachings, emphasizing the importance of marriage and chastity. The social structures in these areas are often rigid, with a high value placed on family honor and community reputation. Live-in relationships are seen as a direct challenge to these values and are typically met with severe disapproval. Individuals in live-in relationships, especially in conservative communities, may face significant social stigma and ostracism. (Mahmood 10)²² The fear of judgment and exclusion can deter many from considering such arrangements, even if they personally view them as more practical or desirable.

In many Muslim-majority countries, the legal framework is heavily influenced by Islamic law (Sharia). These laws strictly regulate marriage, divorce, and sexual conduct, leaving little room for acceptance of live-in relationships. In India, while the personal laws of Muslims are not directly governed by Sharia, societal attitudes often reflect these traditional values. The lack of social support systems for individuals in live-in relationships can also be a significant deterrent. Unlike married couples, those in live-in arrangements may not have access to the same legal protections and social services. This lack of support can lead to increased vulnerability and insecurity.

Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on the sanctity of marriage, viewing it as a fundamental aspect of moral and social order. Live-in relationships, by deviating from this established norm, generally face significant resistance within the Muslim community. However, the realities of modern life, including urbanization, economic independence, and global cultural exposure, are leading to ongoing discussions about how to address these issues with compassion and understanding. (Mathur 12)²³ While the prevailing view remains conservative, particularly in rural and traditional settings, there is a growing call among some scholars and community leaders for a more nuanced approach that balances tradition with contemporary social dynamics. This evolving dialogue is crucial for navigating the complexities of modern relationships within the framework of Islamic values.

Christian perspectives on live-in relationships are diverse, reflecting a spectrum of theological interpretations and cultural influences. While many conservative Christian denominations

²² Ibid

²³ Mathur, Vivek. *Live in Relationship. Sex and Beyond*, Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2011.

uphold marriage as the sole acceptable context for romantic relationships, viewing live-in arrangements as morally questionable, more liberal denominations may adopt a more inclusive approach that emphasizes love, commitment, and mutual respect. This article explores the varied Christian viewpoints on live-in relationships, examining how these views are influenced by denominational beliefs, cultural contexts, and generational changes.

For many conservative Christians, marriage is considered a sacred institution ordained by God. Scriptural references, such as those found in Genesis 2:24 and Hebrews 13:4, emphasize the sanctity of marriage and the importance of sexual purity. These denominations often view cohabitation outside of marriage as a violation of biblical teachings and a threat to the moral and social order. (Andrew 16)²⁴

Conservative Christians often raise moral and ethical concerns regarding live-in relationships. They argue that cohabitation without marriage undermines the commitment and covenantal nature of marriage. This perspective is rooted in the belief that marriage is a covenant that provides a stable foundation for family life and society. Sexual relations outside this covenant are seen as sinful and detrimental to personal and communal well-being. Tradition plays a significant role in shaping conservative Christian views on relationships. (Andrew 17)²⁵ Many conservative denominations adhere to long-standing teachings that emphasize the importance of marriage and family. These traditions are often reinforced through church teachings, pastoral guidance, and community expectations, creating a strong cultural norm against live-in relationships.

Conservative views on live-in relationships are more pronounced in rural areas and among older demographics. These communities tend to maintain traditional values and are less influenced by modern, liberal perspectives. The social fabric in these areas often emphasizes collective opinions and the preservation of long-standing moral standards.

Liberal Christian denominations adopt a more inclusive approach to relationships, emphasizing the principles of love, commitment, and mutual respect. These denominations argue that the essence of Christian teaching is to uphold love and compassion in all relationships. For them, the moral value of a relationship is determined by the presence of genuine love and commitment, rather than the formal status of marriage.

Liberal Christians often engage in a contextual interpretation of scripture, recognizing the

²⁴ Andrew M. Riggsby. *Roman Law and the Legal world of the Romans*. Cambridge University Press, 1st ed., 2010.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

historical and cultural contexts in which biblical texts were written. They argue that the core message of Christianity is one of love and acceptance, which can be applied to contemporary social realities. This approach allows for a more flexible understanding of relationships, including live-in arrangements. (Altkar 8)²⁶ Liberal Christian views on live-in relationships are more common in urban areas and among younger generations. Urban centers are characterized by greater diversity and exposure to different cultural norms, leading to more liberal social attitudes. Younger Christians, in particular, tend to prioritize personal autonomy and emotional fulfillment, reflecting broader societal trends towards individualism and inclusivity.

Some liberal Christian communities provide pastoral support and guidance for couples in live-in relationships, focusing on the health and well-being of the relationship rather than its formal status. These communities emphasize open dialogue, mutual support, and the nurturing of healthy, loving relationships. The Roman Catholic Church holds a conservative stance on marriage and cohabitation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explicitly states that sexual relations outside of marriage are sinful. (Rajesh 7)²⁷ The Church emphasizes the sacramental nature of marriage and views cohabitation as undermining the sanctity of this sacrament. However, some Catholic communities and individuals may adopt a more pastoral approach, seeking to accompany and support couples while encouraging them towards marriage.

Protestant denominations exhibit a wide range of views on live-in relationships. Evangelical and fundamentalist denominations tend to uphold traditional views on marriage, often viewing cohabitation as incompatible with Christian teachings. Mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church, may adopt more liberal stances, focusing on the principles of love and mutual respect. These denominations are more likely to accept live-in relationships, particularly in progressive and urban congregations. The Eastern Orthodox Church maintains a conservative view on marriage, considering it a sacred union blessed by God. Cohabitation outside of marriage is generally discouraged, and the Church emphasizes the importance of the sacramental and covenantal aspects of marriage. However, pastoral care and guidance are provided to individuals and couples, with an emphasis on leading them towards a sacramental marriage.

Secularization has a significant impact on Christian perspectives on live-in relationships. In increasingly secular societies, religious adherence and the influence of traditional religious teachings may decline. This trend leads to more liberal attitudes towards relationships, including

²⁶ Altkar, A.S. *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasisdass, 2nd Reprint edn., 1987.

²⁷ Rajesh Dave, *Legal Status of Live in Relationship in India*, 9 *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 2019.

greater acceptance of cohabitation outside of marriage.(Bhargava 12)²⁸ Media and popular culture play a crucial role in shaping societal norms and attitudes towards relationships. Television shows, movies, and social media often depict live-in relationships as normal and acceptable. These portrayals influence public perceptions and contribute to the liberalization of attitudes among Christians, particularly younger generations. Despite the liberalization of attitudes among some Christians, community and family expectations can still pose significant challenges. Individuals in live-in relationships may face judgment and pressure from more conservative family members and church communities. Balancing personal choices with the desire to maintain familial and community relationships can be difficult. Many Christians struggle to balance traditional teachings with modern social realities. (Dalbir 18)²⁹ While some embrace more inclusive interpretations of scripture and relationships, others remain committed to upholding traditional values. This tension can lead to internal conflicts and diverse practices within the same denomination or community.

Christian perspectives on live-in relationships vary widely, influenced by denominational beliefs, cultural contexts, and generational changes. Conservative Christians typically uphold marriage as the only acceptable context for romantic relationships, viewing live-in arrangements as morally questionable. In contrast, more liberal denominations emphasize love, commitment, and mutual respect, often adopting a more inclusive approach to relationships. These liberal views are more prevalent in urban areas and among younger generations. As societal norms continue to evolve, the dialogue within Christian communities about the nature of relationships and the interpretation of biblical teachings will likely continue, reflecting the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity.

Sikhism, a monotheistic religion founded in the 15th century in the Punjab region of India, places a strong emphasis on the sanctity of marriage. The Sikh wedding ceremony, known as Anand Karaj, is considered a significant religious sacrament, symbolizing the union of two souls in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the central religious scripture of Sikhism. (Swarupa 26)³⁰ However, Sikh teachings also stress the importance of equality, compassion, and respect in all relationships. This article explores traditional and modern Sikh views on marriage and live-in relationships, examining how these perspectives are evolving in contemporary society.

In Sikhism, marriage is viewed as a sacred bond that goes beyond a social contract. The Anand

²⁸ Bhargava, M.L. *Lawmann's Guide to matrimonial laws*. Kamal Publishers, 3 rd ed., 2019.

²⁹ Dalbir Bharati, *Women and Law*. Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2008.

³⁰ Swarupa N. Dholam. "Socio-legal dimensions of live-In relationship in India", RGO, 2015.

Karaj ceremony involves four hymns (Laavaan) that guide the couple towards spiritual unity and mutual support. Marriage is not only a personal commitment but also a spiritual journey that involves the guidance and blessings of the Guru Granth Sahib. (Swarupa 27)³¹ The Anand Karaj ceremony holds profound spiritual significance, marking the couple's intention to live a life of righteousness, mutual support, and spiritual growth. It is considered essential for Sikhs to marry within the faith to maintain religious continuity and community integrity. The ceremony emphasizes equality, with both partners taking equal steps towards a shared spiritual and personal life.

Traditional Sikh views place a strong emphasis on family and community values. Marriage is seen as a means to strengthen the social fabric and ensure the continuation of cultural and religious traditions. Families often play a significant role in arranging marriages, and the collective well-being of the family and community is prioritized over individual desires.(Swarupa 27)³² As society modernizes and globalizes, Sikh communities, particularly in urban areas, are experiencing shifts in attitudes towards relationships. Increased exposure to different cultures and lifestyles, higher education levels, and economic independence are contributing to more liberal views on personal relationships, including live-in arrangements.

Sikh teachings emphasize the principles of equality, compassion, and respect in all relationships. These values can extend to live-in relationships, provided they are based on mutual consent and ethical principles. The core tenets of Sikhism advocate for fairness and respect, which can accommodate non-traditional relationship models if they align with these values. While formal marriage remains highly encouraged within Sikhism, there is a recognition that individuals may form loving and committed relationships outside of marriage. The key consideration is that these relationships should uphold ethical principles, mutual respect, and consent. This modern interpretation allows for a more flexible understanding of relationships in line with contemporary social realities. In urban settings, Sikh attitudes towards live-in relationships are more liberal. Younger generations in cities like Chandigarh, Delhi, and overseas Sikh communities are increasingly prioritizing personal autonomy and emotional fulfillment. These individuals are more open to live-in relationships, viewing them as a way to understand compatibility and build a strong foundation before formalizing the union through marriage.

In contrast, rural and more traditional Sikh communities tend to adhere to conservative views.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

These areas prioritize collective opinions, family honor, and adherence to established customs. Live-in relationships in such settings are often met with disapproval and can be seen as deviating from religious and cultural norms. The strong emphasis on familial and community integrity makes acceptance of non-traditional relationships challenging. The evolving perspectives on live-in relationships within the Sikh community highlight the need for intergenerational dialogue. Younger Sikhs seek to balance their desire for personal autonomy with respect for their cultural and religious heritage. Open discussions within families and communities can foster understanding and help bridge the gap between traditional values and contemporary lifestyles.

Sikhism's perspectives on live-in relationships reflect a balance between deeply rooted traditional values and the evolving dynamics of contemporary society. While marriage through the Anand Karaj ceremony remains a sacred and highly encouraged practice, there is a growing recognition of the importance of equality, compassion, and respect in all relationships. As Sikh communities continue to navigate the complexities of modern life, open dialogue and a focus on core ethical principles can help bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. This approach allows for a more inclusive understanding of relationships, fostering mutual respect and support within the community.

V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

India's legal framework has evolved significantly to recognize and provide certain protections to individuals in live-in relationships. The Supreme Court of India has played a pivotal role in affirming that live-in relationships fall under the ambit of the right to life and personal liberty, protected by Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. This article explores the legal recognition and rights of live-in partners in India, alongside the continuing challenges related to social acceptance. The Supreme Court of India has been instrumental in shaping the legal landscape for live-in relationships. In several landmark judgments, the Court has recognized live-in relationships as a part of an individual's right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. This recognition implies that individuals in live-in relationships are entitled to protection and legal rights similar to those available to married couples. (Hemraj 27)³³

One of the significant rulings was in the case of *S. Khushboo vs. Kanniammal & Anr* (2010), where the Supreme Court held that live-in relationships are permissible and that adults have the right to live together without societal interference. This judgment underscored that live-in relationships cannot be considered illegal or immoral if they involve consenting adults. The

³³ Hemraj Singh, Live-in legally valid, culturally endorsed, Lawyers update, Volume xvi, part 5, May 2010. 8

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, extends its protection to women in live-in relationships. (Sonali 24)³⁴ The Act recognizes "relationship in the nature of marriage," thus offering legal recourse to women facing domestic violence within such relationships. This provision ensures that women in live-in relationships can seek protection orders, maintenance, and other legal remedies similar to those available to married women.

While the legal framework for live-in relationships has progressed, property rights and inheritance remain complex areas. The Supreme Court, in several judgments, has indicated that if a live-in relationship resembles a marriage, the woman partner can claim maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). However, clear guidelines regarding property division and inheritance for live-in partners are still evolving, often requiring case-by-case judicial interpretation.

Children born out of live-in relationships are considered legitimate and have the same rights as those born to married couples. The Supreme Court, in *Tulsa & Ors vs. Durghatiya & Ors* (2008), ruled that children born out of prolonged live-in relationships are legitimate and can inherit their parents' property. This ruling ensures that children from live-in relationships are not discriminated against regarding inheritance and other legal rights. Despite the legal recognition and protections provided to live-in relationships, social acceptance in India remains limited. Deep-rooted cultural and traditional values often stigmatize live-in relationships, viewing them as contrary to societal norms. This stigma is more pronounced in rural areas and among older generations, where traditional views on marriage and family dominate.

Cultural and societal barriers pose significant challenges for individuals in live-in relationships. Couples may face ostracism, family pressure, and social ostracism. The societal perception of live-in relationships as a deviation from moral and cultural standards creates a hostile environment for many couples, leading to emotional and psychological stress. Urban areas, influenced by modernization and globalization, tend to exhibit more liberal attitudes towards live-in relationships. (Vijender 9)³⁵ Younger generations in cities are more likely to accept and engage in live-in arrangements, prioritizing personal autonomy and mutual understanding. In contrast, rural areas cling to conservative views, making live-in relationships less accepted and more challenging to sustain.

The legal framework in India has progressively recognized and provided protections for individuals in live-in relationships, particularly through Supreme Court rulings and legislative

³⁴ Sonali Abhang, *Judicial Approach to "Live- In-Relationship" In India- Its Impact on Other Related Statutes*, 28-38, *IOSR-JHSS*, Vol.19, Issue 12, (2014)

³⁵ Vijender Kumar, *Live- In Relationship: Impact on Marriage and Family Institutions*, 4 SCC J- 19, 2012.

measures like the Domestic Violence Act, 2005. (Agarwal 12)³⁶ These legal advancements ensure that live-in partners, especially women, have access to rights and protections similar to those available to married couples. However, social acceptance of live-in relationships lags behind legal recognition, constrained by deep-rooted cultural and traditional values. As societal attitudes continue to evolve, increased awareness and acceptance of diverse relationship models will be crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for all individuals.

VI. CONCLUSION

Live-in relationships represent a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in Indian society, reflecting broader shifts in cultural norms, individual aspirations, and legal frameworks. Through our exploration of the societal trends and religious perspectives surrounding this issue, we gain valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for fostering inclusivity, diversity, and mutual respect in the fabric of Indian social life.

The acceptance and prevalence of live-in relationships underscore the evolving dynamics of relationships and marriage in India, driven by factors such as urbanization, globalization, and changing attitudes towards personal autonomy and fulfillment. While these shifts have led to greater freedom and choice for individuals in forming intimate partnerships, they have also sparked debates and concerns about moral values, social stability, and familial relationships.

By engaging in dialogue, empathy, and ethical engagement, Indian society can navigate the complexities of live-in relationships with sensitivity and understanding. Recognizing the diverse perspectives and experiences within religious and cultural frameworks is crucial for promoting tolerance and acceptance, while also upholding core values of respect, dignity, and social cohesion. Embracing diversity does not mean abandoning traditional values or norms but rather evolving them to be more inclusive and adaptive to the needs of a changing society. By fostering open communication, education, and awareness about different relationship models, Indian society can create an environment that values personal freedoms while also recognizing the importance of social responsibilities and ethical principles.

In conclusion, navigating the complexities of live-in relationships requires a nuanced understanding of societal trends, religious perspectives, and individual experiences. By embracing dialogue, empathy, and ethical engagement, Indian society can strive towards a more inclusive and respectful approach to relationships, enriching the tapestry of cultural diversity that defines the nation's social fabric.

³⁶ Agarwal, S.N. *The Law on Maintenance*. Ludhiana: M/s Roop Publishers, 1988.

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