ALGORITHMS OVER ALTARS: TECH-DRIVEN SHIFT FROM RITUAL MARRIAGE TO LIVE-IN UNIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In this modern era, India is also undergoing rapid development. This new development in India has changed the oldest institution of marriage. Marriage, which used to be indissoluble and considered a sacrament, is no longer indissoluble today. Thanks to the technology that alters the norms of relationships in India and transforms traditional ways of matchmaking, dating apps in particular have contributed to this trend. With the aid of the Internet and these apps, live-in relationships that would have been socially unacceptable can now be accepted as normal affairs within society. Nevertheless, the change also brings issues of privacy, data privacy, and moral policing, both online and offline. The convergence of technology, personal freedom, and constitutional morality remains the focus of the debate on the validity and viability of live-in relationships under the socio-legal system of India. This direct involvement in fragrant social practices, especially among the married state, does not violate **Article 19(1)(a)** and **Article 21** of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee freedom of expression and protect life and personal liberty, but also can, of itself, claim to realize these two goals.

This paper examines how online dating applications are reshaping the traditional institution of marriage in India, and critically evaluates their socio-cultural implications and emerging challenges**.** The re-specified intimacy and partnership and the necessity of developing the legal and moral systems of relations in the digital era are also explored in this paper.

"As social norms of legitimacy change in every society, including ours, that which was formerly illegal may be lawful nowadays" - Honourable Justice A.K. Ganguly in Revanasiddappa v. Mallikarjun.

Keywords: Marriages, families, and relations, dating applications, social change and modernization, technology and society.

Introduction:

Traditionally, marriage in India is not confined to the union of two individuals; it's a union of families and communities through the assistance of sacred ceremonies, the meaning of which is to hold them together, preserve the bloodline, and facilitate the value system of the community. The tradition is also directly connected with the concepts of continuity, honor, and devotion since it is directly related to the religious and social philosophies.

While live-in relationships are the new trend among the modern variations, this is a consequence of the general liberation of social norms. Individuals are free to be involved in such a relationship without being locked up in a marriage. Such relations are not usually institutional or religious and are a manifestation of the broader trends of greater autonomy and decision-making in dating and relationships, particularly among the youth in urban centres.

Over the last few decades, Digital technologies have simplified communication, made information available, and made connectivity easier, but at the same time, it brought complexities and trappings in the marriage landscape. It redefines the parameters of relationship formation to couples beginning their relationship and other relationships entering their non-marital world; thus, technology can no longer be confined to marriage only. The increasing popularity of internet dating and matchmaking and the shift in social norms about love and marriage are spurring more extensive sociopolitical and economic change.

Objectives of the Research Problem:

Indian marriage is traditionally based on the ceremonies, caste structures, kinship, and religious standards, and is established as a personal union and as a socio-legal institution. Nevertheless, the rise in cohabiting relationships, which are frequently supported by both urbanization and digital technologies and evolving social values, serves as an indicator of a cultural and technological transformation between conventional marriage and more adaptable and individualized relationships. Though this has changed, Indian law and public policy have failed to keep pace.

Although this has evolved, Indian law and public policy have not kept pace. There is a pendulum swing between courts recognizing relationships of a matrimonial nature (to grant benefits under The DV Act) and denying legitimacy to others, especially married partners,

short-term cohabitation, or relationships not accepted by society. This leads to legal ambiguities, inconsistency in judicial practice, and insufficient protection for people in non-traditional unions.

Research Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative and analytical methodology grounded in doctrinal legal research and jurisprudential analysis. It is interdisciplinary research making use of established principles of legal theory.

Historical and Cultural Background:

Hindu civilization in the Indian subcontinent dates back to over 4000 years, and we have had recorded evidence since the Vedic age (2000BC to 600BC) of different practices of marriages and family setup. The individualistic needs and aspirations are less important, and family relations and social harmony are prioritized over the vertical collectivistic culture that has dominated most of the history of most Indian communities **(Kanth et al., 2024).** Therefore, marriages in India were continuously grounded on family and community roles like child rearing, safety, group integrity, and alliances.

The tradition of arranged marriage in India has been in existence, and its limits were further delineated along ethnic, regional, and religious categories during the period of Mughal and Colonialism. During the medieval period (600AD to 1600AD), due to the influence of Islamic invasion and culture, including the age of women at marriage decreasing, and more financial transactions being made to marry. **(Paranthaman et al., 2019; Kanth et al., 2024).** The romantic and sexual aspects of premarital relationships have always been taboo and highly impractical, and even enforced during most parts of Indian history **(Manohar, 2008; Bhandari, 2017; Mody, 2002).**

The British empires tried to civilize the several marriage practices in India during the colonial period (1600AD to 1947AD) through the enactment of common laws (like the Child Marriage Prevention Act of 1929 and the Civil Marriage Act of 1872) and banning of unjustified marriage practices, such as the bride price, which would be followed by the development of dowry system **(Chitnis and Wright, 2007)**. However, despite several attempts to modernize marriages in India, it was a societal practice who's patriarchal, and class stratification persisted

at the beginning of the modern post-independence period (**Prajwal, 2018**). Subjects like divorce and desertion had also never existed in India until this time; no state-approved processes and laws exist to regulate them. (**Dommaraju, 2016**).

Modern attitudes have also permeated through reforms of post-colonial periods, as well as liberalization forces, privatization, and globalization forces, among the urban and educated groups. These developments notwithstanding, it is the traditional aspects like arranged marriages, dowry payments, and patriarchy that dominate in several Indian societies.

Emergence of Live-in Relationship:

The family is firmly embedded in the cultural context of India, and it has always been a key institution determining the culture, the society, and the social order in India. Marriage is the core element that has been traditionally dominated by customs, rituals, and community rules; however, new arrangements like live-in relationships have been introduced. Such relations are not novel to the Indian society, although this is usually considered a Western notion. The equivalent arrangements can be traced to the Vedic era, especially in Gandharva marriage, when the couples agreed to engage in a physical relationship before marriage. Such relations had similar responsibilities to that of the normal marriages.

The concept of live-in relationships in India is characterized by two adults who decide to cohabit without legal marriage formalities, where there is more freedom of not being surveilled by outside forces, people, and families can make their own decisions, and urbanization has lessened stigma and made romantic decisions easier. Such shifts in the views on privacy, postponed marriage, and monetary self-sufficiency have assisted youngsters to consider cohabitation as a natural aspect of their existence. The fact that the number of couples living in urban India has increased indicates that there is a larger cultural change towards the aspects of more freedom and equality, so that human relationships can be redefined beyond marriage.

Role of Technology and Algorithms:

The fast growth of inexpensive smartphones and broadband in India has redefined the romantic relationship environment in a significant way because it has introduced virtual connection to a large number of individuals with relatively easy access (**Yakushima, 2023**). Online dating websites have become a popular way of establishing romantic relationships, which is a sharp

turn from the old-fashioned source of introductions to dating with the use of technology (**Tong et al., 2016**). Texting, calling, and social media through digital interactions encourage emotional intimacy and allow couples to be effective ways of showing their feelings and keeping in touch with each other despite the distance (**Kwok and Wescott, 2020**).

Smart gadgets have eased traditional gender roles, and men and women are now able to engage actively and aggressively in relationships, frequently disregarding the criticism of families and society (**Khunou, 2012**). The anxiety of rejection is minimized in this digital setting, and people have an increased amount of freedom to start and seek romantic relationships their own way (**Khunou, 2012**). Lack of non-verbal communication in online communication may cause misunderstanding and loss of a genuine emotional bond (**Haz et al., 2019**). The open nature of posting personal information online has enhanced the level of trust between couples, but they have also become victims of misbehaviours like lying, cheating, and online bullying (**Nayar and Koul, 2020; Dar and Nagrath, 2022).**

On the societal level, such technological transformations are also raising alarm over the fact that the traditional units of the Indian family are gradually becoming weaker, as manifested by the late marriages, casual dating, and an increased divorce rate that questions the longevity and the traditionally valued (**Kanth et al, 2024**). Nevertheless, the love of arranged marriages and stable family relations remains, with the issue of the continuity of the traditional Indian family values in the face of the digital transformation (**Agrawal, 2015; Rukmini, 2021**)

Comparative Analysis of Traditional Marriages and Algorithmic Partner Selection:

In India, marriage is an organization of family decisions, which are not related to personal decisions; their parents (or extended families) decide with whom they are to marry under strict social orders, which focus on caste, religion, and economic status. It is a social phenomenon that secures the order in society and unity in families, which often suppresses the freedom of choice and independence.

Nevertheless, the paradigm of algorithmized dating and matchmaking services is beginning to alter this. Algorithms have rendered compatibility and pair people according to online profiles, likes, and dislikes. Families have less influence on the final decision-making process than before, making it a relationship of individual agency rather than collective control. Even as urban families become increasingly malleable, many semi-urban and rural groups still hold that

they are able to satisfy stringent standards of acceptability. Marriage remains a socially sanctioned and religiously endorsed norm, codified and rectified by law and celebrated universally.

Despite the judiciary's continuous effort to legitimize live-in relationships, it remains stigmatized in society. In landmark judgement, ***S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal (2010)*** and ***Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)***, affirmed that consensual cohabitation is still within a person's personal liberty and is protected under the Domestic Violence Act when akin to marriage. However, its acceptance in society is severely limited. Thus, while digital partner choice promotes freedom of choice and questions traditional controls, the evolving acceptance of live-in relationships draws attention to the fact that modern autonomy cannot be inherently surpassed by a culture that has been moulded by tradition in India.

Finding and Suggestion:

Technology, in the form of digital communications, social media, and online platforms, has played a pivotal role in changing the relationship panorama in India, from conventional marriage rituals to live-in relationships. The adoption of the Internet and mobile applications has aligned people with globalised conventions, wider partner choices, and the right to autonomy in the choices of being partners, especially for our urban youth. Live-in relationships are also increasingly seen as acts of personal freedom, wherein couples value compatibility, understanding, and independent life objectives more than any formality and familial responsibilities of a traditional marriage.

Technology alters the dimensions of communication in relationships, allowing intimacy among people separated by distance, but at the cost of constant distraction due to technology. Newer forms of relationships allow partners to define their responsibilities independently and are more lenient. In contrast, duties are clearly specified in marriage. Nevertheless, this trend is more prevalent in cities, while traditional values are still upheld across the country.

Suggestions:

1. A law should be enacted to protect the rights of individuals who are in a live-in relationship equally, without infringing their right to privacy.

2. Couples should be digitally aware to understand the beneficial and adverse impacts that

technology and social media can have on their relationships.

3. Raise public awareness about privacy in the digital world so that everyone can manage their online privacy and decide what they want to share on social media.

4. Develop guidelines for digital ethics and establish a framework for the responsible use of technology in society.

These frameworks would balance the rights of individuals by making an effort to carve an outline into the technological transformation of ritual to aid those who are transitioning to live-in relationships in Indian society.

Challenges and Criticism:

The rise of technological relationships in India has been a point of contention. Traditional families are apprehensive about interference in long-standing family relationships and fear that it will affect their belief that the erosion of arranged marriages undermines the basis of cultural stability. Live-in relationships and algorithmic partners disturb conventional behaviours, which heighten moral concerns and social opposition. Generally, families fear loss of community acceptance, caste cohesion, and age-related rights. Autonomy enabled by technology poses a threat to this fragile relationship that has presided over most marital connections. Cohabitation and robotic partners challenge conventional practices, provoking ethical concerns, social reactions, and unrestrained hostility in other areas.

There is another reason: that relationships are commodified. The way of choosing a partner on an online platform is usually a marketplace that involves the optimization of one's profile along with the sorting algorithms in order to speed up and make a more appropriate decision, and swiping through partners. This may turn human relations into crude data, making transactions shallow. This does raise concern over compatibility and commitment in the long run. Temporary relationships cause instability, especially for children whose parents are not yet married, and those who have been brought up in blended relationships might have legal uncertainty in relation to custody, guardianship, and inheritance. Women's rights issues are the main point of contention as they may be harassed or stalked, especially by families, exploitation, or forceful relationships, which are shrouded under the cloak of anonymity on the web.

The judicial system corrected these shortcomings through the landmark case *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)* that laid down laws to protect women's rights in a live-in relationship, but without giving any standard of conduct. However, change is multilayered. New forms of relationship bring freedom and hope of self-expression. At the same time, they question cultural norms and stability.

Future Trends and Implications:

Technology is changing the norms of relationships in India through digital media; creating and maintaining relationships has now gone beyond regional and cultural boundaries. Apps and social networks not only democratise the way people obtain information, but also help make an individual's choice of partner gradually more independent. There are still tensions between old ways of thinking and acting, arranged marriage, and family honor; however, these issues can make it possible for singles to meet each other at a later time in their life course. Simultaneously, regulations and laws are changing at an extremely slow pace.

The Supreme Court of India, in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018),* decriminalized homosexuality as a life aspect and validated live-in partnerships, *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013),* indicating that this is a move towards an inclusive mode of life and the protection of individual preferences. Such developments reflect the acceptance of mixed partnerships and non-traditional family forms, built on increased technological interaction. This is the problem in India: how to reconcile these two conflicting desires, the right and modern law, and cultural commonness? Therefore, the relationship between tradition and modernity will probably be more dramatic, with technology functioning as a cause for change and a flashpoint in generational and ideological negotiation. In the next few years, technology will also contribute to new arguments around digital freedom, cyberbullying, and data protection. Regulations will also need to shift to address issues such as cyberbullying, deepfakes, and consent in digital partnerships, prompting the judiciary to settle disputes and strike a balance between rights without disturbing identity.

Conclusion:

In India, there have been significant shifts in social norms, individual freedom, and legislative reforms from conventional marriage rites to live-in relationships made possible by technology. The use of technology has shifted the nature of relationships- communication has become more

enhanced, the partner choice has become wider, and the traditional expectations in terms of commitment and social approval have been challenged. Social networking sites and digital connectivity have created new opportunities to help individuals develop and to establish relationships outside the conventional marriage, which provides new opportunities to learn more about each other and their compatibility. However, there are other problems with dating apps, such as temporal interactions, commitment issues, and security. The marriages in India that will happen in the future will be a blend of the culture and the new autonomy in relationships.

The Indian judiciary has acknowledged these relationships involving personal autonomy in ***S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal (2010***). However, there is a significant disparity between the legal and societal acceptance. Therefore, even while progress is stagnant, social attitudes may also gradually change as urban youth embrace technologically assisted relationships as the norm and shift toward more equal and normalized gender roles within families.

Finally, the technological change has not merely altered the way in which Indians approach intimacy, but also triggered a wider revaluation of culture and legality. The delimiting nature of ritual and rationality in Indian relationships will be an ongoing change as algorithms and digital tools keep shaping personal preferences and, therefore, requires further discussions and legal adjustments to ensure autonomy, fairness, and cultural purity.

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