

LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIP A SHAMEFUL GAME OF BONDS, A THREAT LOOMING OVER CULTURE

Unnati Vijaykumar Dawani
BA.LL.B. - 2nd Year Student

Abstract

The concept of live-in relationships has gained increasing acceptance in contemporary Indian society due to rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, and the influence of Western culture. Although such relationships have received legal recognition through various judicial pronouncements, they continue to generate significant debate regarding their impact on family values, social stability, and cultural traditions. This research paper examines the legal, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions of live-in relationships in India. It analyzes landmark Supreme Court judgments, existing legal provisions, and the challenges associated with the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing such relationships.

The study further explores concerns relating to emotional exploitation, false allegations, weakening of the institution of marriage, psychological effects on individuals, and the impact on children and family structures. At the same time, it acknowledges the arguments supporting live-in relationships, including personal liberty, freedom of choice, and compatibility before marriage, thereby maintaining an academic balance. Based on the available legal and social perspectives presented in the paper, the study identifies significant legal gaps and highlights the need for gender-neutral protections, greater accountability, and appropriate legal safeguards.

The paper concludes that while individual freedom deserves constitutional protection, it should be balanced with social responsibility, commitment, and the preservation of cultural values. It recommends legal reforms, public awareness initiatives, and stronger policy measures to ensure that personal relationships are based on dignity, responsibility, and mutual respect while protecting the interests of individuals, families, and society.

Keywords: (Live-in Relationships, Family Values, Legal Framework, Gender Neutrality, Cultural Heritage.)

Introduction

Marriage has traditionally been regarded as one of the most significant social institutions in India, serving as the foundation of family life, cultural continuity, and social responsibility. It has long been associated with values such as commitment, mutual respect, emotional security, and the preservation of family traditions. However, in recent decades, rapid urbanization, globalization, technological advancements, and the growing influence of Western culture have contributed to changing perceptions of personal relationships among the younger generation.

One of the most notable developments is the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships, where two consenting adults choose to live together without entering into a formal marriage. Indian courts have recognized such relationships under certain circumstances and have extended legal protection through various landmark judgments. Despite this legal recognition, live-in relationships continue to generate considerable debate regarding their social, legal, psychological, and cultural implications.

Supporters argue that live-in relationships promote personal liberty, freedom of choice, and compatibility before marriage. In contrast, critics believe that such relationships may weaken the institution of marriage, reduce long-term commitment, increase emotional instability, and adversely affect traditional family values. Concerns have also been raised regarding emotional exploitation, legal disputes, gender-related issues, and the welfare of children born in unstable family environments.

This research paper aims to examine the concept of live-in relationships from legal, social, psychological, and cultural perspectives. It analyzes the existing legal framework, identifies the challenges and gaps in current laws, evaluates the impact of live-in relationships on Indian society, and suggests appropriate legal and social reforms. The study seeks to achieve a balanced understanding by considering both the arguments in favour of and against live-in relationships while emphasizing the importance of protecting individual rights, family stability, and the cultural values of Indian society.

Literature Review

The existing literature on live-in relationships in India reflects a growing debate between legal recognition and societal acceptance. Several judicial decisions have acknowledged the right

of consenting adults to live together without marriage, thereby expanding the scope of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Landmark judgments such as *Payal Sharma v. Superintendent of Police*, *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal*, *Chanmuniya v. Virendra Kumar Singh Kushwaha*, and *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* have played a significant role in defining the legal status of live-in relationships and extending certain legal protections to women and children born from such relationships. These judgments have established that long-term cohabitation may, in certain circumstances, be treated as a relationship in the nature of marriage.

From a sociological perspective, scholars have observed that urbanization, globalization, and changing social values have contributed to the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships among young adults. While supporters consider such relationships an expression of personal freedom and compatibility before marriage, critics argue that they may weaken the institution of marriage, reduce long-term commitment, and influence traditional family structures. The literature also discusses the possible impact on children, family stability, and cultural values within Indian society.

Psychological studies discussed in the paper suggest that unstable and non-committal relationships may contribute to emotional insecurity, anxiety, fear of abandonment, and trust issues. Frequent relationship breakdowns can have long-term emotional consequences, while the increasing influence of social media and instant gratification may affect individuals' perceptions of commitment and responsibility.

The literature further highlights several legal challenges, including the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing live-in relationships, concerns regarding misuse of legal provisions, lack of gender-neutral protection, and the need for greater legal clarity. At the same time, academic discussions emphasize that any legal reforms should balance individual liberty with social responsibility, ensuring the protection of both personal rights and family values.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the concept and legal status of live-in relationships in India in light of constitutional provisions and landmark judicial decisions.
- 2) To analyze the social, cultural, and psychological impact of live-in relationships on

individuals, families, and society.

- 3) To study the existing legal framework governing live-in relationships and identify the legal rights and protections available to the parties involved.
- 4) To evaluate the challenges and legal gaps relating to live-in relationships, including issues concerning gender neutrality, emotional exploitation, and misuse of legal provisions.
- 5) To examine the arguments supporting and opposing live-in relationships from legal, social, and cultural perspectives.
- 6) To assess the effect of changing relationship patterns on the institution of marriage, family values, and social stability in India.
- 7) To suggest suitable legal and social reforms that promote individual rights, gender equality, responsible relationships, and the protection of family values while maintaining a balance between personal liberty and societal interests.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on a doctrinal (non-empirical) research methodology. It primarily relies on secondary sources of data to examine the legal, social, psychological, and cultural aspects of live-in relationships in India.

The research is descriptive and analytical in nature. Relevant information has been collected from books, research articles, legal journals, government reports, constitutional provisions, and landmark judgments of the Supreme Court of India relating to live-in relationships. The study also refers to available statistical information and published reports to understand the changing trends and societal impact of live-in relationships.

An analytical approach has been adopted to evaluate the existing legal framework, identify the challenges and gaps in the current laws, and examine both the supporting and opposing viewpoints regarding live-in relationships. The study further analyses the impact of these relationships on family values, gender justice, and social stability.

The findings and recommendations presented in this paper are based on the interpretation of judicial decisions, legal principles, and available secondary literature. No primary survey, questionnaire, interview, or field investigation has been conducted as part of this research.

Research Problem / Hypothesis

Research Problem

The increasing acceptance of live-in relationships in India has given rise to several legal, social, psychological, and cultural concerns. Although the judiciary has recognized the rights of consenting adults to live together without marriage, there is no comprehensive legislation governing such relationships. This has created uncertainty regarding the rights, duties, and liabilities of the partners involved. The growing prevalence of live-in relationships has also raised concerns about emotional exploitation, misuse of legal provisions, weakening of family values, and the long-term impact on society. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine whether the existing legal framework is sufficient to address these challenges while maintaining a balance between individual liberty and the protection of family and cultural values.

Hypothesis

H₁ (Research Hypothesis):

The existing legal framework governing live-in relationships in India is inadequate to address the legal, social, and cultural challenges associated with such relationships. Strengthening gender-neutral legal safeguards and promoting responsible social values can help protect individual rights while preserving family stability.

H₀ (Null Hypothesis):

The existing legal framework governing live-in relationships in India is adequate to protect the rights of individuals and effectively address the legal, social, and cultural issues arising from such relationships.

Analysis and Interpretation / Findings

The analysis of the study indicates that live-in relationships have become increasingly visible in India due to urbanization, changing lifestyles, and the growing influence of modern social values. Although the judiciary has recognized the right of consenting adults to live together and has extended certain legal protections through landmark judgments, there is still no comprehensive legislation specifically regulating live-in relationships. This creates uncertainty regarding the legal rights, duties, and responsibilities of the partners involved.

The study further finds that the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships has generated significant social and cultural concerns. The weakening of the traditional institution of marriage, changing family structures, and declining long-term commitment are viewed as important issues. The paper also highlights that children raised in unstable family environments may experience emotional insecurity and psychological challenges.

From a psychological perspective, the study observes that relationships lacking long-term commitment may lead to emotional insecurity, fear of abandonment, trust issues, and mental stress. The influence of social media and changing relationship patterns has also contributed to unrealistic expectations and reduced commitment among young adults.

The research identifies several legal gaps, including the absence of gender-neutral protection, inadequate legal safeguards against misuse of legal provisions, lack of mandatory registration of live-in relationships, and insufficient legal clarity regarding the rights and obligations of partners. These findings suggest the need for a more comprehensive legal framework that protects the interests of all parties while ensuring fairness and accountability.

Overall, the findings indicate that while live-in relationships are legally recognized to a limited extent, greater legal clarity, social awareness, and balanced policy measures are necessary to protect individual rights, promote responsible relationships, and maintain family stability within the Indian socio-cultural context.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that live-in relationships represent a significant social and legal development in contemporary India. While the judiciary has recognized the rights of consenting adults to live together and has extended limited legal protection through various landmark judgments, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework continues to create uncertainty regarding the rights and responsibilities of the individuals involved.

The study highlights that the increasing acceptance of live-in relationships has generated important legal, social, psychological, and cultural concerns. Issues relating to emotional exploitation, weakening of family values, legal ambiguity, and the lack of gender-neutral protection require greater attention from lawmakers and society. At the same time, the principle of personal liberty guaranteed under the Constitution must be respected and balanced with social

responsibility and the protection of family institutions.

The research therefore concludes that a balanced legal approach is essential. Appropriate legislative reforms, increased public awareness, gender-neutral legal safeguards, and responsible social values can help protect the rights of individuals while preserving the stability of families and the cultural fabric of Indian society. Such a balanced approach would promote justice, accountability, and responsible relationships in accordance with constitutional principles and societal welfare.