

## Introduction and Review of Literature

The landscape of young adulthood in India has undergone significant transformations due to a confluence of global influences. Factors such as globalization, urbanization, the nuclearization of families, reduced gender gap in education and varied career options (Pais, 2006), have led to an increased opportunities for interaction between men and women. These societal shifts have not only led to the postponement of traditional adults roles, such as marriage and child bearing, but have also created opportunities for young adults in India to explore non-arranged romantic relationships (Alexander et al., 2006). In response to these numerous factors, “emerging adulthood” as a developmental phase proposed by Arnett (2000, 2014), has become evident in many urban parts of the Indian society (Kapadia et al., 2007). Arnett’s framework aligns with the Hindu model of human development of *Dharma Theory*. The second stage of *asrama* theory, *grihastha* is identified with realization of *Artha* (material gratification) and *Kama* (sensual sexual gratification) (Kakar, 1968). Similarly, in the context of Arnett's emerging adulthood, there is an emphasis on exploration in both work and relationship domains. The delay in achieving adulthood is reflected in the restructuring of identity exploration during emerging adulthood, similar to Erikson's concept of young adulthood marked by the need for intimacy and resolution of identity conflicts (Erikson, 1950). It is a stage of identity development wherein individuals resolve the conflict between intimacy and isolation and resulting virtue us "love", which surpasses mutually shared eroticism to include shared regulation of work and recreation as well (Kakar, 1968).

Romantic relationship formation is an important developmental milestone of emerging adulthood because it is in this phase of life when an individual seeks long term commitment with romantic relationships often prioritizing over other close relationships

(Young et al., 2011). As individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood, they deal with newfound increasing independence, identity formation and forming meaningful romantic connection. The establishment of intimate romantic relationships is a crucial developmental task and a fundamental aspect of identity formation during the phase of emerging adulthood (Gala & Kapadia, 2014).

The fundamental nature of love encompasses emotional dependence as an intrinsic element within romantic relationships. Emotional dependency involves a deep dilemma carrying both the potential for profound human connection as well the risk of losing oneself in the relationship. Cultural influences, primarily conveyed through the media, depict love as an idealized concept, suggesting that being overly obsessed or depending too much on a partner is seen as normal behavior (Sussman, 2010). Emotional dependency creates a persistent fear of losing one's identity and become a mere shadow of the partner.

As a foundational aspect of societal structure, gender role stereotypes affect individuals' expectations and actions. Cultural norms also play a role in shaping of relational dynamics. Understanding how these factors interact with emotional dependency is essential for unraveling the complex factors that contribute to the emotional aspects of romantic relationships. In a universal context, India is commonly regarded as a collectivistic culture. However, as argued by Sinha and Tripathi (1994), Indian society is characterized by coexistence of both collectivist and individualistic orientation due to its "highly complex" social structure (p.124). Within the Indian cultural context, the sense of group belonging and individual position depends on who is interacting with whom and in what context (Chaudhary & Sriram, 2020). Within this fascinating cultural context of continuity and change, emerging adults with their own sets of transition and challenges, must navigate the

complexities of romantic relationships. The situation becomes more complex for women in the Indian cultural scenario. Although in the contemporary scenario, the societal norms are changing gradually, providing women with more autonomy and decision-making power, the overall cultural milieu places the burden of maintaining relationships and family honour on the shoulders of a woman.

This study seeks to examine the dynamic interplay between gender role beliefs, cultural factors, emotional dependency, relationship satisfaction, relationship conflict and their subsequent influence on the well-being of individuals engaged in romantic relationships. The following section delves into the literature review, emphasizing the Indian cultural context.

### **Globalization and Emerging Adulthood in India**

Globalization, rising economy, education and better opportunities have faded the practice of caste based occupations and provided individuals with a chance to explore various vocational options (Nugent, 2006; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Boost in the economy has provided more professional opportunities, especially for the middle class (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). The sociocultural impact of globalization has led to a restructuring of the cultural norms. There is a delay in the age when an individual becomes financially stable and gets married. This leads to delay in other roles such as parenthood, career and job allowing a bigger window of freedom to explore and try out new ways of living before giving into any long-term commitments (Arnett, 2006).

Globalization has changed the social fabric of India in terms of changes in life style and perception of people; it has also caused a significant alteration in realization of one's identity (Chopra, 2014). Nuclearization of families as a result of urbanization has changed

the traditional family structure and led to changes in the lifestyle of young Indian population (Singh 2004, 2010). Avoidance of marriage has become common within the Indian context owing to the strong aspiration for autonomy, while adopting an individualistic approach in terms of career and financial matters (Gala, 2012).

Additionally, there has been an increase in the social status of women. Women are in favor of delaying the marriageable age for professional pursuits and the desire to find a compatible future husband. Individuals use this phase of “non-marriage” to experience multiple romantic rendezvous, hence associating this phase of life with individualism, autonomy and liberty (Bhandari, 2017a). These prospects to avail varied employment and educational opportunities have led to a considerable delay in the attainment of adulthood.

Seiter and Nelson (2011) in a study conducted on youth aged 18-26 years from Tamil Nadu, India generalized that emerging adulthood may exist for a segment of Indian population but there is a great variation in experience of the same due to gender and social class variation. Women may consider marital roles necessary for adulthood whereas men may see career achievements and providing for family as vital for achieving adulthood status (Arnett, 2000). There are different expectations from men and women with regard to age at marriage in the Indian society where women are under pressure to get married as soon as possible (Bhandari, 2017a).

Ethnographic work (e.g., Donner, 2016; Twamley, 2014) has unveiled that “love” is seen as a powerful tool to assert identity in a globalizing world. It also provides an understanding about the gradual shift of Indian contemporary values post-liberal economy towards “individualism” (Gooptu, 2013). Arnett (2000) anticipated that it is more plausible for urban youth from developing countries to experience emerging adulthood in comparison

to their rural counterparts as their context supports delayed marriage, childbirth with an emphasis on educational and occupational contexts. A recent trend has been observed in Southeast Asian societies where young adults (aged 24-31) are postponing the marriage age to 28-29 years essentially for professional advancement (Jones, 2007). Exploring intimate relationships, work responsibilities and developing world views independent to those of family are the three mandates of identity formation during emerging adulthood. This exploration phase introduces a sense of instability as individuals explore and experiment with various career options and engage in romantic relationships (Arnett, 2006). Forming romantic relationships is identified as a pivotal developmental milestone in emerging adulthood, intricately woven into the fabric of identity formation (Arnett, 2014).

The influence of culture on romantic relationships further shapes the dynamics of emerging adulthood. Cultural norms, values, and expectations play a significant role in how individuals navigate and experience romantic connections. The following section discusses the significance of cultural influence on romantic relationships.

### **Influence of Culture on Romantic Relationships**

Romantic love is conceptualized as a universal emotional phenomenon, existing in various historical eras and across the entire world's culture. It is experienced by majority of people but manifested and expressed in different ways, having various meanings in different cultures, and sometimes expressed in multiple forms by people belonging to the same culture. Anthropologists Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) also advocated for romantic love being a panhuman trait that expands across all cultures. They conducted an analysis based on folklores, ethnographies etc. and found explicit proof of the existence of romantic love in 147 out of 166 cultures studied, with only one report that love did not exist in a particular culture.

Culture acts as a lens which influences an individual's idea of love and hence, the associated thoughts, feelings and behavior in a romantic relationship (Karandashev, 2015; Schäfer, 2008). Norms of romantic relationships are dictated by cultural settings and have an influence on the development and sustenance of the relationship. The extent to which "love" is valued by a specific culture, its importance in the institution of marriage and the traditional narratives associated with it seems to vary greatly across cultures (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2003).

Romantic involvement before marriage is considered improper in Eastern cultures (Manohar, 2008). Cultures that are primarily individualistic, stress "love" as a reason for marriage compared to cultures with relative collectivistic orientation, especially Eastern and South Asian cultures (Levine et al., 2004). Schmitt et al. (2009) investigated 15,234 participants from 48 countries to understand the cross-cultural emotional investment as a dimension of love. The study claimed that North American participants (United States, Slovenia and Cyprus) demonstrated significantly higher emotional investment than those in all the other parts of the world. East Asian participants (Tanzania, Hong Kong and Japan) had significantly lower level of emotional investment than those in all other regions of the world. Gao (2001) has reported that European-Americans sometimes experience more intense passionate love than Chinese Americans.

Middle class Koreans have experienced being in love (mean of 3 times) and dating (mean of 3.61 partners). This points to the importance of courtship as the means of selecting marriage partners, further suggesting romantic love as a criterion, if not a prerequisite, for marriage. Sacrifice as a virtue of love is emphasized in Korean and Chinese Folklores. Unlike their American counterparts, Korean and Chinese respondents did not accept the idea

that love is merely concealed lust, all the while agreeing with Eastern Europeans that sex should be exclusively related to love and financial stability is important in order for romantic love to have a positive result. Agreeing with the American participants, Chinese and Korean respondents viewed love as being capable of turning into something which can last forever (Nelson & Yon, 2019).

Psychologists Dion and Dion (1991, p.31) stated that individuals with a more collectivistic orientation might be less inclined to acknowledge the development of romantic relationships. This could be attributed to prevalence of strong emotional connection within family and friends, rather than just one specific romantic partner of the opposite sex. Marriage is the only acceptable form of initiating closeness and establishing sexual relationships with the loved partner in eastern cultures (Sherif-Trask, 2003).

Children growing up in cultures with collectivistic orientation are socialized to internalize and honor the prevailing family's tradition and respect elders. As they grow older with the likelihood of marriage increasing, it is expected from them to follow a more familial benefit inclined approach to relationship (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). Elders in the family may subtly suppress the beliefs of youth regarding love and romance if they seem to threaten the existing familial or cultural duties (Medora et al., 2002). Parents believe that strict supervision of children would prevent romantic involvements (Sodhi et al., 2008). In premarital relationships, approval of family members (MacDonald et al., 2012) and parents' influence is a deciding factor in determining the level of commitment as the relationship is illegitimate in accordance to the culturally ascribed sanctions (Bejanyan et al., 2015). Spending time with the opposite sex is not encouraged in traditional cultures because it goes against many customary practices (Myers et al., 2005; Netting, 2006).

## **India: Regional and Cultural Diversity**

India is recognized as one of the nations with a collectivist cultural orientation (Kanth & Indumathy, 2022). Interdependence is a cultural value and the sense of self is intertwined with relationships, where individuals feel responsible for each other (Mascolo et al., 2004). India is celebrated for its diversity of natural resources and geography, people of varied castes, cultures and religion with different customs, traditions and language spread across different socio-economic classes, poor-rich and rural-urban divide (Kaul, 2015). There is economic, caste, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversities (Stern, 2003). Thus, recognition of India as a single culture could give a very wrong comprehensive picture of the country (Hofstede et al., 2007 as cited in Cheema, 2011). Regional, geographical and cultural differences translate into varied sociocultural mentalities. Social structures, kinship composition, extended family system, religion, caste as function of regional differences conceptualize and comprehend the culture profile to a great extent (Cheema, 2011).

India is a country dominated by patriarchy. Participation of girls in schooling and labor market is lower in North India compared to the Southern states of India (Kambhampati & Rajan, 2005). High per capita income states such as Punjab and Haryana have high gender inequality. Child mortality is high for girls than boys in these states. The southern and western regions of the country have low gender inequality compared to the northern region of the country. Low income states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar have higher gender inequality. Gender inequality exists both in health and education (Arora, 2012). Woman in northern India particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are less likely to have attended school. The autonomy of woman in the north is regulated through joint families and arranged

marriage. In joint families, collective decision making and shared responsibilities within the household impact women's daily life choices. Arranged marriages, further play a role in shaping women's autonomy as there is family involvement in partner selection impacting their life decisions. Thus, these traditional practices play a significant role in defining and regulating the autonomy of women in northern regions. North Indian parents educate their daughters, but mainly to increase the prospect of marriage, not work outside home (Evans, 2020).

Contemporary democratic India and its legislation advocates for equality of men and women. However, the deep rooted traditions and customs hampers the practical implementations of norms favoring gender equality (Klingorova & Havlíček, 2015) in the areas of education, work-force participation, health care, decision making, power etc. According to Agnihotri et al. (1998) status of women in north India has declined with an increase in the income level which is indicated by change in male/female ratios. The social status accorded to women varies from state to state.

### **Indian Cultural Context**

The subsequent section discusses in different aspects of the Indian cultural context.

#### ***Indian Families***

Indian society is a blend of hierarchical and patriarchal philosophies. This blend can be observed within the caste system, family ties and kinship patterns. Familial hierarchy is evident in the sense that a daughter-in-law would show obedience to her in-laws or a younger brother would obey an elder one. Patriarchy is evident in the form that mostly the education of a younger brother is focused upon more than that of an elder sister, especially in traditional households. Indian families value family integrity, family loyalty (Sachdeva &

Misra, 2008), group cohesion, respect for elders and strong interdependent links within the members, with marriage being viewed as a carrier of such values (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008; Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Interdependence is a very prominent characteristic of an Indian family where conservative compliance is encouraged (Segal, 1991). Filial bonds are given importance over conjugal ties within an Indian household. A person low in hierarchy within the family is expected to be passive and submissive. In exchange, they become the recipient of attention and nurturance from elders. Individual growth takes second place to family integrity (Kakar & Kakar, 2007).

In India, emerging adults perceive adulthood as the capability to take care of ill parents, ensuring family's safety and the other activities reflective of the collectivistic culture of India, which throws light on the importance placed on familial relationships placed in India (Seiter & Nelson, 2011). Family is given supreme importance in Indian culture and is believed to have a strong influence on the psychosocial experience of young people (Verma, 2000). Children are viewed as a gift from God in the Hindu-Indian culture. It is the central moral and religious duty of the parents to protect the children from all the "wrongs" of the world. Hierarchical authority is immensely deep rooted in Indian family structures. This power structure is infused with moral obligation for parents and children. Parents act as anchors for the child by taking responsibility to protect and guide the child. All the while, children are in the subordinate position with an expectation to show obedience and respect to the elders in the family (Kapadia, 2017). In traditional India, family and parents played an important part in deciding one's career and life partner. The decision of life partner was taken by the parents based on the caste system. Individualism in such decisions was restricted and parents' wishes were followed to keep the family values intact (Singh, 2004). As observed by

Kapadia (1998), romantic love is acceptable in India only if it culminates into marriage with the mate from an appropriate class, caste and religion. It is not uncommon to hear of boy and girl eloping to get married due to parents' disapproval of the relationship in India. Honor of family is associated with that of the children in the family, especially daughters. Parents pressure the children to be practical and repress any romantic feeling for their partner (Hamid et al., 2011).

Hence, there is a pressure (social, mental and physical) on emerging adults, especially women, to perceive marriage as the ultimate goal of life. Any open talk regarding relationship before marriage, let alone about one's own relationship with family is difficult. Involvement in relationship before marriage is potentially considered as a means to bring a blot to the reputation of family. These circumstances coerce an individual to hide the relationship from family and society. In a study on Asian American's dating and sexual activity by Lau et al. (2009), it was revealed that 70% of the participants kept their relationship secret from their parents. Manohar (2008) found that Indian-American adolescents did everything possible to keep their romantic life hidden from their parents. Generally, children date in secrecy until they are ready to get married and reveal the same to their families (Luo, 2008; Netting, 2006). Young adults in India keep their relationships a secret from their families because they fear that revealing the truth might break their parents' trust. They also fear that the parents might arrange their marriage somewhere else which they will not be able to refuse owing to the family's pressure and honor (Medora, 2007). In general, the culturally prescribed expectations from an individual are towards obligation to parents and fulfillment of duty toward family rather than focusing on personal desires and satisfaction. Gender difference is prevalent in romantic relationships. Girls are more inclined

to be secretive about their romantic involvements because any such association might become a hindrance in her marriage, thereby affecting the social status of the family (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Gender plays a significant intervening role in this domain.

### ***Gender in the Indian Society***

Young Indian men and women are brought up in a male dominated society. The preference for sons is as old as Indian society itself. Vedic verses pray that sons will be followed by still more male offspring, never by females. A prayer in the *Atharva Veda* states: 'The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere, here grant a son'. The birth of a son is announced by blowing conch-shells in few parts of the country, while no such celebrations are observed in the birth of a daughter. Besides carrying forward the family lineage, parents' death rituals and economic reasons (dowry) are the reasons for the strong fondness of male successors (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Boys are also considered support for old age as girls get married and assume the responsibilities of the husband's home (Dasgupta et al., 2003). As observed by Dube (1988), the desirability to have a boy child and unwantedness of the girl counterpart is made stronger and reinforced by outsiders with statements like, "Four daughters? Each one will take thousands of rupees and walk out of the house...bringing up a daughter is like pouring water in sand" (p. 11).

Family in India is considered an ideal homogenous unit which is the primary source of early socialization of the child. This close knit unit is responsible for the inculcation and transference of values like respecting and obeying elders, understanding rituals, and be able to differentiate between right and wrong to fit in the society (Kapadia, 2008; Sonawat, 2001). As an individual grows, different social institutions overlap to reinforce and strengthen the beliefs regarding gender roles which are reflected in the differences of men and women

exhibited in salary, profession, clothes, color preferences, emotional expression, language, leisure activities, beliefs regarding sex etc. (Lindsey, 2011). Beginning from infancy, boys are taught to express differently than girls in the way which supports the stereotypical beliefs (Hussain et al., 2015). Conventionally, boys are raised to assume major family responsibilities when they grow up. The most important among these are providing economic support to the family, protecting the honor of female family members, and arranging for their marriage (Verma & Mahendra, 2005). There are discriminatory practices based on gender within Indian households wherein sons are preferred in terms of education, mobility and household responsibilities. This leads to women youth facing greater barriers in terms of independence as they are less likely to be involved in independent decision making in their daily lives, faces greater restriction in their mobility and the lack in access of money (Ram et al., 2014). A boy's wishes supersede those of girls' in Indian households (Laungani, 2005). On the other hand, in traditional India, the other women of the family play the role of a teacher for transference of mandatory household skills to the young girl (Kakar, 2002).

Gender belief also plays a role in molding the view of young boys and girls towards marriage, partner, sex and premarital sex. Social and cultural norms that dictate male and female sexuality are inflicted and absorbed in early years of life with very visible differences in the practices of socialization. In keeping with the traditional Indian spirit, male sexuality is perceived liberally, whereas female sexuality is defined by the institution of marriage and considered subordinate to male (husband's) sexuality (Abraham, 2002). The obsession over women's virginity is deep-rooted by rituals of Hindu marriage such as *kanyadaan* (gift of a virgin) and different social conditioning processes which decides the suitability of a girl. An Indian woman's sexuality is controlled by means of various socialization processes within

and outside the four walls of home (Dube, 1988; Fruzetti, 1982). A family's honor is associated with that of the woman in the family. Any change in woman's autonomy is believed to alter and risk the hierarchical structure of the family, a supposedly highly valued order system (Jain & Bannerjee, 2008).

Customs and practices like *Durga puja* in Bengal and *Gauri puja* in Karnataka makes the girl realize the inevitability of her marriage and transference to a stranger's home (Dube, 1988). The importance of marriage is imbibed in the mind of little girls from very beginning and strengthened during adolescence (Abraham, 2002). A middle class Indian girl entering puberty comes to understand that the desired "virtues" out of her are submission and docility in her husband's home, and pleasing the future husband's family is made the primary goal of her life. Onset of puberty places certain restrictions on girls' mobility (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Girls are not allowed to mingle with opposite sex in traditional India. The choice of women's clothes is governed by the traditionally set up stereotypes. A girl is expected to walk softly so that she is not audible to others. Supposedly masculine behaviors like jumping, running, rushing are repeatedly disapproved of. These restrictions work as a social agent to mold the girl's ideology, behavior and encounters with men (Dube, 1988).

It is very common among Indian parents to wed their daughters once they achieve menarche. Preventing premarital relationship of girls is one of the reasons of restrictions imposed on girls and their early marriage (Abraham, 2002). An Indian girl comes to realize that she has to relentlessly protect her virtue and maintain modesty in public spaces, no matter the social class she belongs to. Unlike boys, girls publicly displaying even slight sexual interest become an easy recipient of sexual harassment along with the risk of bringing "disgrace" upon herself (and her family).

The ever going conflict between social interest and personal needs result in the formation of an ambivalent attitude towards sexual identity and its physical expression. Premarital sexual contact is often accompanied with continuous notion of guilt and shame (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Culture also provides a social control to check whether the norms prescribing socially imposed “acceptable” behavior of men and women are being fulfilled or not. Different social control mechanisms like ridicule, exclusion from peers and social settings, loss of family and friends’ support on deviating from the apparently accepted behavior are very powerful means to ensure the compliance of stereotypical behavior norms (Lindsey, 2011).

### ***Marriage in the Indian context***

Indian society is a complex, multifarious combination of individualistic and collectivistic values (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994) with very fluid boundaries between the two. From childhood onwards, the relationship between the self and social world aligns with the expected social customs and norms (Saraswathi et al., 2011). Marriage is a very holy union in India with well-defined customs and strict cultural penalties for not abiding with those unwritten norms (Netting, 2010). Marriage is viewed as the benchmark of a successful romantic relationship (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). This union leads to the formation of new bonds to expand family and integrate in-laws and children. Marriage in India is not an alliance between two individuals, but between two families (Aura, 2008; Joshi et al., 2017). It is viewed as a source of strengthening social standing and confirming the continuity of family.

Indians are socialized to seek for group well-being over personal interest. In line with this perspective, the choice of partner is mostly done by families. Thus, the selection of

marriage partner ceases to be a personal affair and extends to the involvement of family members to find a suitable partner, unlike in the west where individuals take personal control while selecting partner (Morgan et al., 2010). This is reflected in a study conducted by Twamley (2014) on Indians in Gujarat and second generation Gujarati Indians in the UK which suggested that the two sets of youth had differing opinions regarding love and intimacy, but both considered parental approval a major deciding factor on their choice of spouse. A similar study in Kolkata by Donner (2016) revealed that although the participants claimed love and choice in marriage important in order to assert a modern self, but the approval and involvement of family remains very important. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) in their study on Tamil Nadu sample stated that middle class youth desires to have a partner with interpersonal compatibility; though this want of choice is practiced within the realm of caste endogamy. Similar results conforming to familial values were obtained in a study of middle class youth in Kathmandu by Leitchy (2003). The results declared that participants value modern beliefs but at the same time also seeks for parental approval in spouse selection. The same is termed as “family oriented individualism” by Titzmann (2013) which means that desires of both the family and the person himself is fulfilled during the spouse-selection process.

A chance to question parents’ choice of partner is delineated to individuals in modern Indian families, but with understated gender prejudices. The consultation with daughter is often more superficial than with sons. Even in upper middle class families valuing the education of daughter, marriage of the daughter remains the treasured goal of the parents wherein education is viewed as the means to find her an educated and economically affluent suitable match (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). Caste, religion, socio-economic status, individual’s

character etc., are important factors for marital consideration in the Indian context. Practical qualities like economic resources, social status, religious inclination, relationship between the families are favored over romantic connection between the individuals (Myers et al., 2005).

In such a context, love marriages are frowned upon because they are expected to interfere with the highly valued traditional family values. Love marriages in India have a reputation of generally not working out well. This may be ascribed to the social pressure that marriages are put upon in our culture (Kakar & Kakar, 2007).

### **Romantic Relationships: Indian Perspective**

Hindu scriptures dated between 200 B.C. to 900 A.D. specify eight types of marriages namely *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsha*, *Prajapatya*, *Asura*, *Gandharva*, *Rakshasa* and *Paisacha*. Out of the eight, *Gandharva* marriage refers to marriage by mutual choice. There are mixed opinions regarding this type of marriage as per the Hindu law. It spans from being considered the best mode of marriage to being a stigma on moral and religious grounds. *Gandharva* marriage is nearest to what we may term as “romantic”, “free choice” or “love” marriage (Gupta, 1976).

Terminologies like *sneh* (affection), *prem* or *muhabbat* conveying different meanings are used to refer to what we commonly call “love” in English. *Prem* is an umbrella term signifying love with god, nation, people, family, neighbor, lover or beloved while *sneh* is non-sensual love. *Ishque haqiqi* meaning love with the lover or beloved is used to refer to love relationships in Urdu literature. “*Madhurya* is the honey-flavored love of lovers, risking and ecstatic, like the love of Krishna and the *gopis* who met him in the groves to dance” (Greenberg, 2007, pg. xxiv). It is believed that humans achieve the ultimate goal of being in love with god through the love they celebrate among themselves (Gupta, 1976).

Vanita (2004) makes a claim that although most Hindu text justifies sexual activity only for the purpose of procreation, *Kamasutra* by Vatsayana emphasizes pleasure and joy of sex. Several texts represent god of love and desire, *Kama*, as a universal principle of attraction (Madathil & Sandhu, 2008). The Hindu philosopher, Vatsayana (India, 3rd century CE), the author of the *Kamasutra*, advised men and women to marry for love (Karandashev, 2015).

Depiction of entangled bodies of men and women in blissful sexual positions on the walls of ancient Khajuraho temple tells about the sociocultural and religious practices of medieval India. In Khajuraho sculptors, women appear as *mithunas* (amorous couples) and *maithunas* (men and women engaged in coitus). Historians advocates that the depiction of sexual congress in such a sacred vicinity can be interpreted as a symbol of union of *Purusha* (man) and *Prakriti* (nature) to realize the eternal bliss (*moksha*). The strong curves in the sculptors emphasize the sexuality of woman, assigning more power to woman's sexuality (Saini, 2012).

The love tale of *Radha* and *Krishna* defies every conventional rule as *Radha*, an older married woman was in love with *Krishna*. Their love for centuries has been safeguarded through thousands of paintings depicting separation and union, Indian classical music, *bhakti* songs and poems by devotional saints. Epics such as *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* showcase love as straightforward desire and gratification. Women were used as a mean to obtain pleasure and gratification of the senses. Marriage as an institution have been idealized but primarily as a social and religious act (Kakar, 1985).The portrayal of classical love in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* talks about the secret marriage, separation and reconciliation of immortal love of *Dushyanta* and *Shakuntala*. The love drama is based on the Indian

philosophy, “true love is immortal” (Asharudeen & Florence, 2016). Roy (1976) points out that Kalidasa, always stressed upon the purity of love as an emotion, as love as the result of physical infatuations cannot last long. A love affair resulting in sexual intercourse is a commonly documented occurrence in Vedic anecdotes and epics such as *Mahabharata* and *Ramanyana*. He further points to the fact that sex was neither neglected nor disdained in early Indian civilization.

Indian epics and mythology have an extravagant treasury of anecdotes and folktales that illustrated the glory of love as well as its dangers and tragedies (Punja, 1992, as cited in Gala & Kapadia, 2013). The conceptualization of romantic themes is impressive in its description and diversity. Thus, it is evident that love is a celebrated, powerful and honored emotion in our epics and Puranas.

### **Contemporary Indian Society**

The Indian society is in a process of transformation with globalization acting as the flag bearer of different socio-economic changes. Rapid urbanization and exposure to western media has changed the societal norms for youth in India and their relationships (Hindin & Hindin, 2009). With increasing focus on education, especially for women and youth from lower castes, migration of youth to urban areas (Verma, 2000), growing awareness on prohibition of child marriage and socio-economic-political changes in India, age of marriage is increasing (Ghule et al., 2007) and gradually curbing the traditional mentality among modern middle class population.

Mitra and Arnett (2021) conducted a study aimed at comprehending the significant life tasks identified by emerging adults in India. The dimension of family responsibility garnered a mean score of 3.33, indicating its foremost influence on the life choices of

emerging adults. This finding reflects that an individual's personal decisions need not impede their ability to fulfill familial obligations. This underscores the considerable dedication and accountability that emerging adults in India hold towards their families. Furthermore, the research outcomes underscored the notable emphasis placed by Indian emerging adults on self-exploration and achieving self-sufficiency. Autonomy was highly valued and integrated into pivotal life choices. This juxtaposition of valuing familial obligation alongside the desire of autonomy addresses the concept of “unresolved dualism” (Kapp, 1963, p.18). This sheds light on the intricate blend of collectivistic and individualistic traits within Indian cultural orientation (Mitra & Arnett, 2021).

The discrimination against women is less in urban middle class families compared to their rural traditional counterparts, with a marked difference in the area of education (Kakar & Kakar, 2007). This change leads to more time spent outside home in educational settings hence, wider social circles, and technological advancement like internet results in the increased opposite sex peer interactions (Larson et al., 2002). Internet creates a space providing varied choices for formation and maintenance of various social networks by young individuals (Mortimer & Larson, 2002), thus facilitating formation of romantic relationships. More so ever Indian media, specifically Bollywood movies, for instance, *Break k Baad*, 2010, *Shudh Desi Romance*, 2013, *Ye Jawani hai Deewani*, 2013 and *Tamasha*, 2015 have talked about pre-marital and romance, break-ups, live-in relationships, and struggle to find the self, amidst the chaos of profession, money and love. Bollywood cinemas have brought topics such as the kind of premarital relationships among Indian audience which have made the occurrence of terms as “girlfriends” and “boyfriends” common in intergenerational communications (Bhandari, 2017a, 2017b).

While parents endorse arranged marriages for their children, young Indians are increasingly interested in romantic autonomy and marriages of choice (Ganth, 2017). One of the most striking noticeable changes that Indian families are witnessing is the desire of the modern youth to break away from the arranged marriages ritual and search the life partner on their own. Young Indian men and women want their voice to be heard in whom, when and the type of family they want to get married into. The rituals and traditions related to Indian weddings have caused ideological friction between parents and children. Many individuals are dating without their families' knowledge while some of them have fallen in love and are in long term commitment relationships with person of different religion, caste and sub-caste (Medora, 2007). Huang (2005) states that Asian countries such as India have observed a trending shift towards "individualism" and "romantic love". Dhariwal and Connolly (2013) found that Indian youth exposed to western context like studying in co-education schools or western media reported higher autonomy from their parents in decisions regarding partner choice and romantic activities in comparison to youth living in more traditional context. The shift to earlier attainment of puberty and increasing age of marriage have opened up a wider window for youth to get engaged in non- arranged romantic and pre-marital relationships (Alexander et al., 2007). Premarital relationships which were once considered taboo are becoming more visible in the present times with considerable increase in the adolescent dating culture in the country (Varma & Mathur, 2015) as young people are exposed to better opportunities and hence more informed about their rights and decisions.

Thus, India seems to be adapting a more flexible attitude towards "love", specifically in the urban areas (Gala & Kapadia, 2014). Netting (2010) reveals that upper class Indian youth creatively overcome the apparent dichotomy by evaluating the 'ideoscapes of

individualism and romantic love through the lens of their Indian heritage' (p. 722). The results of a study conducted by Dharnidharka (2014) provides evidence that the romantic partner selection criteria by the Indian urban youth is based on personality characteristics and compatibility rather than criteria held ideal by family members such as family background. There has been a shift within the context of arranged marriages as individuals are becoming more involved in choosing their spouse. This change can be attributed to the fusion of western and Indian customs in the realm of Indian marriages (Allendorf & Pandian, 2016).

Therefore, it is quite evident that Indian culture is under a gradual transition of adapting the “modern” and yet holding fast to the conventional traditions and customs. The change and adaptation is relatively easier for the younger generation in urban areas compared to their older co-equal. Family, peers, economic growth, social restrictions, media, individual factors, generation differences, geographical differences and many such variables within the larger Indian cultural context shape the expression of romantic relationships.

### **Romantic Relationships: Satisfaction and Conflict**

Personal relationship formation is central to the existence of humans and is an innate component of human behavior (Guerrero et al., 2011). Romantic relationships and experiences gained from them works as a primary source of emotional bond and helps in the development of a high self-concept and social integration (Meier & Allen, 2008; Montgomery, 2005). Individuals enter into a relationship looking for a companion, emotional security, love and intimacy till they reach a stage where they might be ready to make long-term commitment like marriage or cohabitation (Simon & Barrett, 2010). The quality of romantic relationships is a significant source of happiness (Diener et al., 2000). Love as a virtue is most closely related to personal happiness (Blanca et al., 2018; Park et al., 2004),

which is further associated with higher self-esteem, feeling safe, life satisfaction, achievement of personal and relational goals (Davila et al., 2017; Dush & Amato, 2005). Since romantic relationships are considered as being very intense, they have strong influence on individuals. Having potentially positive effects on individual, it sometimes also tends to move towards dissatisfaction and even depression, violence and suicide (Gala & Kapadia, 2013). Relationship quality is highly correlated with relationship satisfaction, making relationship satisfaction an important determinant of relationship quality (Simpson et al., 2016).

### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Relationship satisfaction, in general, refers to feelings, thoughts, or behaviors within a relationship associated with sexual attitudes, professed feelings of love, commitment, self-disclosure, and relationship investment (Hendrick, 1988 as cited in Demirtas & Tezer, 2012, p. 2543). Romantic relationship satisfaction is the individual's perception about his/her relationship (Avivi et al., 2009). It is accepted that satisfaction is a very subjective and relative entity and what may satisfy one couple might not work in the same way for the other (DeGenova, 2011). Consequently, there is not a single definition to define the term as each relationship has its own dynamics and indicators of satisfaction (Özdemir & Demir, 2019).

Rusbult et al. (1998) referred to relationship satisfaction as the negative or positive feelings that individuals express towards their relationship. It has been proposed that individuals form an overarching evaluative attitude towards their romantic relationship, positioning the relationship on a continuum of good and bad. This evaluation influences perceptions of relationship satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2000).

Romantic love is a universal concept (Nelson & Yon, 2019), however the expectations for specific characteristics desired in a romantic relationship vary widely. As an example, Cionea et al. (2019) conducted a study which compared the romantic expectations of individuals living in India and the United States. The results of the study revealed that the romantic expectation of the American participants fell along the lines of emotional support, emotional security and equality, whereas the Indian participants expected their romantic partners to be submissive (i.e., a partner who willingly listens and complies with requests) and concerns regarding the status of partner.

As cited in Nelson and Yon (2019), other researchers have also reported that in contrast to certain Eastern countries such as Korea, China, Lithuania and Russia, individuals in the United States are less likely to include financial factors when forming their romantic expectations. Furthermore, according to the findings of Karandshev et al. (2020), individuals from countries with stronger individualistic orientation and egalitarian values preferred romantic partners who were more expressive in their facial expressions and verbal expressiveness. A study was conducted to understand the traits of romantic partner that would make a relationship satisfactory among Indian women. The study revealed that failure to meet one's needs and standards can lead to mistrust, reluctance to share, concerns about the relationship suitability, ultimately leading to disappointment and dissatisfaction in the relationship. When a partner is unable to fulfill the essential needs of the other, it leads to tension, frustration, and ultimately diminishes satisfaction in the relationship (Gerdvilyte & Abhyankar, 2010).

Perceptions of relationship satisfaction could be related to feeling lonely in a romantic relationship as loneliness is not equated to physical solitude. Therefore, individuals in

romantic relationships may also experience a feeling of loneliness (Fülöp et al., 2020). To illustrate this point, there was a study conducted by Hawkley et al. (2008) to investigate the factors influencing perceptions of relationship quality and experiences of loneliness. They found that lower levels of loneliness were associated with higher satisfaction within one's marriage. Further, they noted that when the spouse was not a good communication partner, loneliness ceased to be solely related to marital status, but a result of potential communication problems which may lead to reduced levels of relationship quality and relationship satisfaction. Related to trust within a relationship, Ladd (2007) found that couples who exhibited greater trust on their partners possibly tended to display stronger commitment levels, consequently resulting in higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

A romantically satisfying relationship contributes to better physical and mental health (Robles et al., 2014). People generally dislike uncertainty and high levels of uncertainty often lead to dissatisfaction in relationships (Guerrero et al., 2011). Low relationship satisfaction is linked to more depressive behaviors, academic difficulties and anxiety when compared to those couples having higher levels of romantic relationship satisfaction (Davila et al., 2017). Investigating relationship satisfaction and gender, Acitelli (2001) found that both men and women believed that investing time together, thinking and talking about the relationship increases satisfaction. The difference lies in the fact that women worry about the emotions and working of the relationship, whereas men are concerned with the existence of the same.

### ***Relationship Conflict***

Two individuals in a relationship are bound to have differences in perception and opinion. When arguing over differences turns into a regular occurrence, the health of the relationship may suffer. Conflict can be defined as “an interpersonal process that occurs

whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another” (Peterson, 1983, as cited in Zacchilli et al., 2009, p. 365). Relationship conflict arises when partners having conflicting views, and perceiving that a partner is unable to understand one’s thoughts and feelings is likely to create a sense of opposition and disagreement (Cramer & Jowett, 2010).

Relationship conflict has a stronger correlation with conflict style and unresolved conflict than conflict per se. Arguments over same recurring issues, unresolved arguments, knowing the result of arguments even before they end, partners feeling unsatisfied after the argument as a result of not getting a fair hearing are few signs of conflict (Cramer, 2000). Knobloch (2007) gave a relational turbulence model which suggests that uncertainty regarding the future of the relationship is associated with negative assessment of the partner, jealousy and difficulty in communicating with each other. Individuals likely become unsure about the future of their relationship if they believe that repeated heated arguments might eventually lead to relationship dissolution (Campbell et al., 2005).

### **Emotional Dependency**

Romantic relationships during emerging adulthood provide an opportunity for self-discovery and exploration (Gala & Kapadia, 2014). People develop attachments and get bonded romantically seeking support, developing emotional bonds requiring commitment, trust, understanding, awareness of one’s own self and the other, and sharing of feelings with their partner (Varma & Mathur, 2015). In the past few years, scholars have acknowledged the fact that individuals from the years 18 to late 20s experience challenges and opportunities (Cohen et al., 2003; Roisman et al., 2004). Decisions regarding opportunities in career and education are a major developmental task of emerging adulthood and coordinating these life plans with romantic relationships is a challenge associated with it (Shulman & Connolly,

2013). A new relationship along with feelings of intimacy brings its own set of challenges. One such challenge is to maintain a sense of self-identity and independence from the partner. It requires understanding one's own as well as partners need so that the relationship grows strong (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Dealing with the unavoidable dependence associated with close interpersonal relationships is one of the challenges individuals face as they enter in a romantic relationship (Murray et al., 2006).

Certain dependence is considered normal in a relationship but couples sometimes come across situations wherein one person experiences higher dependency, incapable of exerting balanced control. Such dependence leads the dependent partner to display blind trustworthiness, reliance and care. It is also important to understand that vulnerability of dependence is most strongly experienced when the actions of the less dependent partner demonstrate lack of care and no regard for the other individual's feelings and desires, ultimately causing negative personal consequences (Murray et al., 2006). Literature on young adults' dependent behavior revealed that dependent people establish strong ties with "substitute caregivers" (Miller, 2003). During adulthood, dependency cravings are most likely to be directed to romantic partners (Priel & Besser, 2000). Therefore, at times, the emotional closeness which is required for a healthy relationship runs the risk of taking the form of a toxic transaction which many researchers have termed as "Emotional Dependency".

Apart from "Emotional Dependence", nomenclatures like interpersonal dependence, Dependent Personality Disorder, loving dependence, pathological love, obsessive love and dependence in relationships are used by authors to define different dependence in intimate

relationships. The authors have defined emotional dependence as the disorder in which an individual needs other for emotional stability (Bution & Wechsler, 2016).

Emotional Dependency can be defined as a persistent pattern of unsatisfied emotional needs that the individual tries to fulfill maladaptively through other people (Blasco, 2000), and emanates behavior such as manipulation (Del Castillo et al., 2015), loss of identity (Schaeffer, 2012), low self-esteem (Castello, 2005; Estévez et al., 2017), and sacrifices and a deteriorated quality of life (Ferreya et al., 2004) for the sole purpose of not losing the affection of their partner. Emotionally dependent individuals have greater tendency to tolerate violence and abuse in the relationship and still remain in that relationship (Charkow & Nelson, 2000; Kane et al., 2000). They are more prone to eating disorders, anxiety disorders (Arntz, 2005; Bornstein, 2012) and self-destructive behavior often leading them to commit suicide which mostly occur in an attempt to prevent abandonment from the partner (Bornstein, 2012). Emotionally dependent individuals show submissive behavior, absence of decision taking capability, emotional emptiness, fear of loneliness, boredom, low frustration tolerance, negative feelings, unawareness about their problems, identity conflicts, self-neglect, excessive focus on others and excessive need to help the partner with desire to solve all problems (Moral & Sirvent, 2009).

Several researchers (Bornstein, 1995, 1998; Cross et al., 2000) have distinguished between destructive and healthy dependency. Destructive dependency is characterized by maladaptive, inflexible dependency. On the contrary, healthy dependency is marked by adaptability, flexibility, help and support seeking. Over dependent individuals exhibit insecure clingy behavior that detaches the potential provider and the person is not able to form lasting relationships (Pincus & Gurtman, 1995). On the other side of the coin,

individuals with healthy dependency exhibit flexible behavior with the ability to forego short-term indulgences to build better lasting relationships (Bornstein & Languirand, 2003).

Sussman (2010) has identified cultural selection as one of the factors responsible for the development of emotional dependence. The cultural factor is mainly associated with media, the exposure to the kind of media which idealizes love, normalizing obsession and exaggerated dependence. Early childhood trauma and experiences, resentment against parents (Castello, 2005), unsatisfied emotional needs by attachment figures (Barroso, 2014), insecure childhood attachment (Dutton, 1995), parent-child relationship (Bornstein, 1993 as cited in Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2002) and gender (Bornstein et al., 1996) have been identified as determinants of emotional dependency.

### **Gender Differences in Emotional Dependency**

Dependency needs during adulthood are experienced by both men and women but apply differently to each. A woman in need is considered as being needy and dependent whereas men are perceived as being entitled to services provided to them by women (Siegel, 1988). Emotional distancing in men is considered as normal and expected by society. Women are expected to show more empathy and closeness in relationships whereas men are envisaged to demonstrate autonomy and independent self-image from early years. Such gender differences can also be traced to biological variances in hormonal patterns and emotional reactivity. These innate differences also provide an explanation for more pronounced need for emotional closeness in women than men (Taylor et al., 2000).

Alonso-Arbiol et al. (2002) in their study to understand the function of gender roles in emotional dependency reported that emotional dependency is negatively correlated with masculinity. They further stated that psychological masculinity and femininity mediates the

relationship between gender and emotional dependency. The two gender role variables affect emotional dependency more strongly than gender alone per se. They also suggested sex-role socialization as one of the causes of emotional dependency in women. Women have the tendency to feel empathy and maintain affective ties as a result of different socialization practices in addition to interpersonal factors. On the other hand, men are more likely to detach themselves from any emotional bond (González-Jiménez & Hernández-Romera, 2014). Gender role socialization and cultural practices makes it easier for a woman to express emotions whereas men learn to exclude their emotions and the expression of emotions is more difficult for men (Brody, 1993). Female identity is characterized by emotional dependency, empathy and care whereas emotional control, rationality, control over violence, competitiveness are categorized as the characteristics of male identity (Benlloch et al., 2008). Thus, dependency is identified more as a characteristic of women is mostly due to gender role stereotypes than actual gender role differences (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2002).

Schafer (2008) in a qualitative study to understand the woman's experience of romantic love in heterosexual relationships found that few participants felt incomplete without their partner. It was also observed that women felt a danger of losing friends and giving up their interests while absolutely focusing on their partner. It was a common narrative that in a society which favors men, it becomes difficult for women to not adopt the ideologies of the male partner. Along the similar lines, Cranny-Francis et al. (2003) states that women also "risk a subtle subsuming of identity which can inhibit their own development in a range of ways" (p. 235).

Bution and Wechsler (2016) in their review study observed that emotional dependence can have significant consequences for both suffering from it and those around

them, most commonly observed in the form of domestic violence. A dependent man when perceives his relationship to be in danger tends to become violent and abuses women.

Whereas women, generally identified as the victim of the abuse, have difficulty in ending such relationship because of the fear of being alone and abandoned, and feeling of being tied and belonging to the relationship (Moral & Sirvent, 2009).

Bornstein et al. (2003) assessed gender differences across different subscales of Relationship Profile Test, that is, destructive overdependence (DO), healthy dependence (HD) and destructive detachment (DD) which revealed that women obtained significantly higher scores in DO and HD subscales than men whereas no gender differences were found on DD. In a similar study conducted by Abuín and de Rivera (2015), a significant difference was found on DD subscale, with men having higher mean score than women. Women scored significantly higher on DO, anxiety, depression and interpersonal sensitivity subscale. It is also possible that a person might behave differently in different situations, that is, over dependent around friends and detached from romantic partner. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), situation- appropriate help-seeking, an important characteristic of healthy dependency is more strongly encouraged in girls than boys in most western societies.

Myers et al. (2007) established an association between emotional dependence, jealousy and shyness in women. Franco and Aragon (2008) found jealousy to be higher in men along with anger, pain, fear and distrust. Alonso–Arbiol et al. (2002) proposed that women had higher emotional dependence compared to men. Whereas, Jaramillo and Hoyos (2009) did not find any significant link between gender and dependence.

Overall, there is no clear conclusive evidence about the behavior of men and women in studies on gender differences in emotional dependency.

## **Relationship Satisfaction, Relationship Conflict and Emotional Dependency**

Dependency plays a considerably important role in close relationships, with high dependency level yielding positive results in certain situations and negative in others (Bornstein, 2012). On the positive side, dependency is associated with increased sensitivity to interpersonal cues (Masling et al., 1982), high commitment and loyalty in romantic relationships (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). It is also associated with jealousy, possessiveness and insecurity (Bornstein, 2006).

Blatt (2004) has described formation of a stable mutually satisfying interpersonal relationship and achievement of a different, essentially positive identity as two mandates of personality development from a psychodynamic perspective. Individuals developing a dependent personality have high need to be loved and cared for, fearing abandonment and loss of love (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). Fisher et al. (2005) have suggested that love feelings involve the same neurological mechanism as psychoactive substances; love activates the brain's reward system and generates characteristics of dependence similar to addiction. Terms like "addiction to feeling" (Moral & Sirvent, 2009) and "relationship dependence" (Sirvent, 2000) has been used to describe the same and he has identified "relationship dependence" as addictive behaviors involved in interpersonal relationships.

The desire to belong is so high in dependent individuals that they pursue close protecting relationships at the cost of self-concept development (Blatt, 2004). Dependence is a strong predictor of relationship commitment and stability (Attridge et al., 1998). In healthy relationships, satisfaction from the relationship is one of the reasons of dependence on the partner. Relationship satisfaction has important implications for relationship success and stability (Meeks et al., 1998).

The long lasting emotional and behavioral impact of romantic relationship has been repeatedly reported by researchers (e.g., Collins, 2003). But at the same time, investigators have continually focused on the fact that romantic relationship involvement is also associated with negative outcomes. Romantic involvement is also likely to manifest various forms of violence (Fernández-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010; Viejo, 2014), depression or anxiety (Boyle & O'Sullivan, 2013; Miller, 2017) or poor psychosocial functioning (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2001). Regardless, it is possible for some people to remain in an unsatisfactory relationship because of high dependency (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992).

This high dependence of partners on each other in close intimate relationships makes romantic relationships very much liable to conflicts (Cupach & Canary, 2000).

Interdependence is a primary essential of any ongoing relationship (Kelley et al., 2003), and it has important consequences in conflicted relationships. Studies conducted on Spanish adolescents show that women have higher involvement in serious relationship. Along with increasing the relationship satisfaction, higher involvement also increased conflict in the relationship (Méndez & Hernández, 2001; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007),

Intimate conflict situations elicit different emotional responses from men and women. Dependency and the emotional reactions to conflict are predictors of how couples manage disagreements in the relationship (Valor-Segura et al., 2014).

### **Influence of Romantic Relationships on Well-Being**

Romantic relationships among individuals are based on mutual trust, which stems from series of earlier experiences, shared beliefs and values. This trust provides a sense of security, reliance and emotional support. Romantic partners are a source of personal satisfaction, emotional needs fulfillment, validation, support, encouragement, and happiness,

which contributes to the quality of the relationship (Janardhana & Manjula, 2018). Close relationships are key to overall well-being, including happiness, mental health, physical health, and even longevity (Hills & Argyle, 2001; Myers, 2000). A sustained romantic relationship over time leads to formation of a stronger attachment bond. The quality of relationship, shared experiences, attachment, and the beliefs formed from the whole experience have been identified as traits affecting the well-being of couples (Eryilmaz & Dogan, 2013; Frye & Trinitapoli, 2015).

Neuroscience studies provide a strong biological foundation for romantic relationship promoting happiness and well-being. Bartels and Zeki (2004) interviewed youth equally distributed by gender from 11 countries belonging to multiple ethnic groups who claimed to be “truly, deeply and madly” in love. Later, brain imaging techniques were used to discern corresponding activities in the brain. It was found that passionate love increases activity in the brain areas responsible for euphoria and reward, all the while decreasing the activities level in the brain associated with distress and depression. It was also concluded that love lowers the activity levels in the brain areas assigned to critical thinking. Hormones and monoamines release “feel good chemicals” such as oxytocin and vasopressin which induces a sense of well-being among individuals in romantic relationship (Fisher et al., 2006).

Romantic love has been identified as a crucial element in determining quality of life in general. It can be the source of both, the ultimate happiness and some greatest problems including but not limited to depression, rage, stalking, suicide, and homicide (Ellis & Malamuth, 2000). In a study using mixed methods design, Gala and Kapadia (2014), interviewed 30 young adults to understand their experienced realities in the context of romantic relationships and its consequent developmental outcomes. The results revealed that

emerging adults found romantic relationships more satisfying than dissatisfying. It was also found that romantic relationships have significant and lasting impact on an individual's development. Participants from both the gender reported a positive change in the quality of life, which included positive feelings of happiness and reducing negative states such as anger and sadness. A study was conducted to explore challenges among emerging adults in romantic relationships. Understanding, trust, honesty, willingness to work towards the relationship, and maintaining a sense of individuality came up to be the crucial elements required in a happy relationship. The study also revealed that their relationship contributed positively to different aspects of their life with respect to addressing past issues, positive impact on work life, changing certain habits and their approach to life. In sum, all the participants revealed how their relationship had a positive impact on different areas of their life with respect to their personal concerns, other relationships as well as academic and work-related issues (Dougall et al., 2022). Uncertainty about the future, due to the chances of converting their relationship into a long-distance relationship and family pressures are the some challenges highlighted in romantic relationship in research from India (Dharnidharka, 2014).

Most studies in the western context have revealed that individuals not having a stable romantic relationship reported lower self-esteem, less life satisfaction, less happiness, and more distress (e.g. Dush & Amato, 2005). Soons and Liefbroer (2008) have also suggested that people who are not in a relationship receives less instrumental and emotional support than those in one. It leads to unmet physical and psychological needs which are linked to a poorer well-being. Schulenberg et al. (2004) revealed that emerging adults reported stronger link between well-being and successfully finding a romantic partner than between well-being

and attaining other developmental tasks of emerging adulthood such as maintaining close friendships, educational achievements and financial independence. Partner is seen as someone influencing well-being more than parents or friends (Demir, 2010). Relationships that enhance well-being generally have high quality levels; partners who help develop potential, individual and shared goals attainment and a secure attachment style (Gómez-López et al., 2019). They also revealed that emerging adults in romantic relationships showed higher of well-being than those who weren't. High quality in the relationship was linked to positive well-being and vice-versa. Jin et al. (2017) revealed that higher is the intensity of love towards someone, the deeper is the hate also, particularly in the context related to relationship insecurities and betrayal. Romantic jealousy sometimes gives rise to hatred which is rooted both at cognitive and emotional level (Gala & Kapadia, 2013).

Importance of close social relationships in psychological and subjective well-being makes people sensitive to the likelihood of the potential end of such relations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; DeSteno et al., 2006). Scientific literature in the last two decades has witnessed a growing interest in interpersonal dependency, owing to its significance in close relationships and individual well-being (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2002). Birtchnell (1988) has described abnormally dependent person as one who exhibits extreme dependency towards others in the way that spoils close relationships and harms individual well-being. He further stated that Overdependence may lead to excessive demands on the social group members, damaging the relationships and consequently affecting the well-being too. Overly dependent persons involved in an intimate relationship might not benefit as much from their relationship because of the unrealistic interpersonal goals set by them and resulting frustration when those are left unmet; these frustrations might lead to depression (Gardner & Helmes, 2006;

Whiffen et al., 2000). A measure developed by Ryan et al. (2005) to assess the willingness to rely on others for emotional support (similar to “healthy dependency”) was associated with high well-being among college students. As suggested by Fiori et al. (2008) different characteristics of dependency may have diverging effects on psychological and physical well-being of adults.

### **Association Between Conflict, Satisfaction and Well-Being**

Romantic relationships during emerging adulthood have been linked to encompass a strong effect on well-being and relationship satisfaction (Collibee & Furman, 2015). As referenced in Fülöp et al. (2020), relationship satisfaction is linked with different constructs such as well-being (Davison et al. 2009), and loneliness (Hawkley et al., 2008; Mellor et al., 2008) in a romantic relationship. Relationship conflict is linked to decrease in relationship satisfaction (Caughlin et al., 2006), poor health (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005), is a precursor of domestic violence, ineffective parenting and break-up (Stith et al., 2004).

Relationship quality is a significant predictor of subjective well-being, happiness and life satisfaction (Diener & Lucas, 2000, as cited in De Andrade et al., 2015). Studies suggest that romantic relationship quality and satisfaction is associated with subjective well-being and happiness across the life span (Dush & Amato, 2005; Gere & Schimmack, 2013).

Relationships are considered critical to subjective well-being (Stutzer & Frey, 2006).

Individuals in relationship who feel they are understood by their partner are less likely to find themselves involved in a conflict (Gordon et al., 2013). Frequent negative interactions are linked to relationship culmination (Shulman et al., 2006) and may erode well-being (Mackinnon et al., 2012). As pointed out by Holmes and Murray (1996), the conflict strategy used by couples is more important for relationship satisfaction than the

frequency of conflicts. Likewise, Cramer (2004) suggested that conflict strategy is one of the strongest indicators of relationship satisfaction. The way partners manage conflict is a better predictor of relationship satisfaction, than the experience of the conflict itself (Guerrero et al., 2011). However, dissatisfied couples experience conflicts more frequently than dissatisfied ones (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). Conflict resolution and communication have been linked to have a considerable effect on well-being (Gómez-López et al., 2019).

Romantic relationship satisfaction predicted life satisfaction of 391 fourth-year undergraduate students of the five faculties of Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey (Demirtas & Tezer, 2012). High conflict and hostile relationships are linked to poor mental health reflected in greater rates of depression, anxiety, aggression, and substance abuse (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Whisman, 2007). Relationship satisfaction and relationship conflict have an influence on life satisfaction of an individual which in turn affects well-being. Dissatisfaction in relationship has been linked closely with opinion differences and negative conflict styles (Cramer, 1998).

### **Highlights: Review of Literature**

- Globalization has propelled opportunities in the area of work and education, delaying roles such as marriage, parenthood as a result of which “emerging adulthood” as a developmental phase had become prominent in many urban parts of the India.
- Emerging adulthood involve identity development through exploration in the areas of work, love and romance.
- Markers and experience of emerging adulthood is varied for different section of Indian population due to prevalence patriarchy and hence stark gender differences, social class, access to resources, rural-urban dichotomy, caste etc.

- “Love” is seen as a powerful means to express identity in the rapidly changing globalized world by youth.
- Romantic relationship formation is an important developmental task of Emerging Adulthood and has important implications for individual’s well-being and behavioral adjustment.
- Love is a pan-human emotional trait that surpasses all cultures but manifested and experienced in different ways, having different meanings in different culture. Norms of romantic relationship are dictated by culture and have an influence on the development and sustenance of the relationship.
- Honor of family is associated with that of children in the Indian families, especially daughters. Elders in the family pressure children to suppress any romantic feeling for their partner.
- Indian young adults date in secrecy, apprehensive of the fact that their parent’s trust will be betrayed. Girls are more inclined to hide their relationship as it might become hindrance in her marriage and bring bad name to her family.
- Indian families are characterized by family integrity, family loyalty, and strong interdependent links with marriage being viewed as the carrier of such values. Such familial orientation has a strong influence on psycho-social experience of youngsters.
- Selection of life partner is mostly taken care of by elders in the family in traditional Indian households.
- Young Indian men and women are brought up in a male dominated society. Family is the primary agent of gender role socialization. Men are raised to become providers and women are raised to become nurturers.

- Women's sexuality is regulated by external agents in control of men. Desired virtues from a woman are submission and docility in her husband's home and pleasing the future husband's family is made the primary goal of her life.
- Marriage is viewed as a benchmark of a successful romantic relationship. Marriage in India is an alliance just not between two individuals, but two families.
- "Family oriented individualism" – desires of both the family and the person himself is fulfilled during the spouse-selection process.
- Parents educate their daughters in upper middle class families valuing the education of the daughter but marriage remains the treasured goal and education is viewed as a means to find suitable match.
- However, religious Hindu text, archaeological sites such as entangled bodies of men and women of the walls of Khajuraho temple, love tales of Radha and Krishna, Indian classical music, folklores, poems of Kabir das, epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata, bhakti songs by religious saints, Kamasutra provides evidence that love is a celebrated, powerful and honoured emotion in Indian epics and puranas.
- Globalization, urbanization and exposure to western media have gradually changed the societal norms for youth in India and their relationships. There is less discrimination against women in urban middle class families. Indian media and Bollywood movie have facilitated intergenerational conversation about pre-marital relationship, romance, break-ups, "boyfriends" and "girlfriends".
- Young Indians are becoming increasingly interested in romantic autonomy and marriages of choice. There is a desire of the youth to break away from the arranged marriages ritual and search the life partner on their own.

- India seems to be adapting a more flexible attitude towards “love”, particularly in the urban areas. Premarital relationships are becoming more visible in the present scenario with an increase in the adolescent dating culture.
- Family, peers, economic growth, social restrictions, media, individual factors, generation differences, geographical differences and many such variables within the larger Indian cultural context shape the expression of romantic relationships.
- Quality of romantic relationship is a significant source of happiness. It has strong influence on individuals. It is associated with higher self-esteem, feeling safe, life satisfaction along with potentially positive effects; it sometimes also tends to move towards dissatisfaction, depression, violence, and poor psycho-social functioning. .
- Relationship quality is highly correlated with relationship satisfaction, making it an important determinant of relationship quality.
- Close relationships are liable to conflicts because couple develops interdependence on each other. Conflicts can be harmful if followed by derogatory behavior otherwise, conflicts can be constructive if characterized by positive behaviors.
- Romantic relationships bring along with it the challenge to maintain individuality and certain independence from the partner.
- Certain dependence is normal in a relationship but sometimes the emotional closeness which is required for a healthy relationship turns to a toxic transaction which many researchers have termed as “emotional dependency”.
- Emotional dependency is unsatisfied emotional needs that an individual tries to maladaptively fulfill through their partner.

- Emotionally dependent individuals have greater tendency to tolerate violence, abuse and still remain in that relationship. They exhibit manipulative behavior, submission, fear of loneliness and abandonment, identity issues, low self-concept and self-esteem, inability to take decisions, excessive desire to please the partner and many such characteristics.
- Early childhood trauma, unsatisfied emotional needs, insecure childhood attachment, parent-child relationship and gender have been identified as determiners of emotional dependency.
- Dependency plays a considerably important role in close relationships, with high dependency level yielding positive results in certain situations and negative in others
- Emotional distancing in men is considered as normal and expected by society. Women are expected to show more empathy and closeness whereas men are envisaged to demonstrate autonomy and independent self-image from early years.
- Gender role socialization and cultural practices makes it easier for a woman to express emotions whereas men learn to exclude their emotions and the expression of emotions is more difficult for men. There is no clear evidence about the behavior of men and women in studies on gender differences in emotional dependency
- Psychological masculinity and femininity mediates relationship between gender and emotional dependency. Gender Role behavior affects emotional dependency more strongly than gender alone per se.
- Close relationships are key to overall well-being, including happiness, mental health, physical health, and even longevity. High quality in the relationship is linked to positive well-being and vice-versa.

- Abnormally dependent person exhibits extreme dependency in a way that spoils close relationships and harms individual well-being. Overdependence may lead to excessive demands on the social group members, damaging the relationships and consequently affecting the well-being too.

The next chapter describes the detailed methodology of the study.