



Prevalence of ‘ Live-in Relationship’ Among Indigenous Tribes of India in Contrast to Preference for ‘ Marriage’ in the Indian Mainstream Society : A Study Based on People’s Perspectives

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Abstract. The concept of marriage has been of paramount importance in Indian society. Marital relationship is the only socially accepted relationship between a man and a woman. That’s why if a man and a woman want to cohabit, they have to marry one another. Physical relationship between a man and a woman is considered appropriate only after the holy wedlock. However, another living arrangement has emerged and is gradually gaining Preference, under which a man and a woman can live together without getting married. This kind of cohabitation is known as Live-in Relationship. Today’s youngsters, though not all, prefer this as an alternative to marriage as they can live like a married couple, under the same roof, without any commitments and responsibilities. They are free to walk out of the relationship whenever they want. As marriage is a lifelong relationship, they try to test the compatibility before entering marital relationship. In India live-in relationship is not illegal. However, there is no specific law for the regulation and protection of couples in such relationship. In contrast to this marriage is a more stable and secured relationship with social validation. In Indian society, there exists a dichotomy in the respectability between a married couple and a couple in live in relationship. At this juncture, Indian society seems to be divided. Some people strongly favour marriage whereas for some live in relationship is a better option.

The present paper is based on the perspectives of people regarding the tussle between marriage and live in relationship. There has been an attempt to analyse and understand the perceptions of people towards the aforementioned issue through their responses to a questionnaire. The respondents are males and females of diversified age groups. An attempt has also been made to study the significance of marriage as well as the current socio legal status of live-in relationship. Moreover, the researchers have tried to explore the practice of live-in relationship among the tribal communities of India.

Keywords: First Keyword, Second Keyword, Third Keyword.

1 Introduction

The institution of marriage holds a remarkable place among the social institutions of the civilised world. Through marriage a man and a woman get social recognition to live together. In India, marriage is not merely limited to the relationship between two individuals as it affects the entire family and consequently the society. Since time immemorial marriage has been considered inevitable for the complete fulfilment of one's life. According to Hinduism, there are four purposes of human existence. They are Dharma (religious duty), Artha (economic activity), Kama (sexual gratification) and Moksha (salvation). As per the Hindu view of life a man and a woman can make their lives complete by achieving these four purposes through the institution of marriage. That's why marriage is very significant in Hindu culture and marriage ceremony is an elaborate religious ceremony in which the couple takes a vow for life long companionship and commitments. Just like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and other religions have their own traditional concepts regarding marriage. For Indians, irrespective of their religious beliefs, marriage is profoundly significant. After getting married the couple get social sanction to cohabit. Besides cohabitation, the married couples try to successfully carry out their familial and Social responsibilities. Consequently they get social recognition and lead a dignified life. In India, marriage is regarded as the only safe, sound, legitimate and long term relationship between a man and a woman. However, due to the effect of globalisation and influence of western culture, people are shirking to be in a life long relationship. First of all marital relationship doesn't assure everlasting happiness. There are a lot of restrictions in marital life . Moreover, one has to shoulder various duties and responsibilities . As people of today have become highly individualistic and prioritise personal freedom , for them marital alliance seems to be a bondage. In the Contemporary society cases of marital incompatibility and divorce are on the rise. Emergence of live-in relationship, as an alternative living arrangement is a case in point . Male – female couple prefer to cohabit without getting married. They live just like married couples, under the same roof, to test their compatibility with each other before tying the knot . If they feel that a harmonious relationship is not possible between them they break up. Owing to this many people, specially the youngsters prefer live in relationship. Akin to this, live-in relationship has been widely practised among the tribal communities of India. There are several indigenous groups and tribes where live-in relationship is accepted as a way of life.

2 Status of Live-In Relationship Among Indigenous Tribes of India

The term “ live – in relationship” is reckoned western. However, the idea is not at all new to Indians . Gandharva Marriage, one of the eight types of Hindu Marriage is almost similar to live - in relationship . The eight types of marriage are : Brahma marriage, Daivamarriage, Arsha marriage, Prajapatayamarriage, Gandharva marriage, Asura marriage, Rakshasa marriage and Paishacha marriage. In Gandharva

marriage, the couple used to live together before marriage. The marriage of king Dushyanta and Shakuntala is an example of this kind of marriage. The marriage ceremony didn't include any rituals and the couple didn't seek the parents' approval. That's why we can say that live-in relationship had existed in the Vedic period. The practice of live-in relationship is prevalent among some tribal communities of India. Live in relationship is an age-old practice among the members of Garasia tribe in Rajasthan. Shahnawaz Akhtar has mentioned in his news article, "live in relationship is a norm for the members of Garasia tribe in the north-western state of Rajasthan. They have been living together without getting married since ages. This system of living arrangement is called *dapa*". The Garasia tribe allows women to select their mate during a fair. The women select their partners, the couples elope and live together without opting for conventional marriage. (Akhtar, 2014). According to the report of Shweta Sengar, in Jharkhand a tribal marriage system existed, known as 'dhuku marriage'. In that marriage system the couples got approval for cohabitation without marriage. The tribal people preferred live-in relationship because they couldn't afford to organise wedding parties. (Sengar, 2021). As per Sudhir Kumar Mishra, Dhuku system is prevalent among the Korwa and a few other tribes. As per their custom, a couple had to hold a lavish feast for the entire Village if it ties the knot. (Mishra, 2022). Similarly, in a news article Law Kumar Mishra has mentioned that live-in relationship or 'pethu' is very popular among the tribal people of Bastar in Chhattisgarh. This kind of practice has social approval there. As per the report a lot of couples get married after the birth of their children. (Mishra, 2003). According to Murlidhar Sharma, the Khasi tribe in Meghalaya, the Muria tribe in Chhattisgarh and the Nair community in Kerala have been practising live-in relationship. These indigenous groups have accepted and welcomed live-in relationship without sticking to traditional wedding. (Sharma, 2012). Other than these tribal regions, live-in relationship also existed in the state of Gujarat. In Gujarat there used to be a friendship contract or *MaitriKarar*, that legitimised the live-in relationship of a man and a woman for a certain duration of time. *MaitriKarar*, now illegal, came into existence when polygamy was banned in the year 1956. Mostly some affluent married men used this to legalise relationships with women other than their married wives. This custom allowed men and women to live with their *maitries* or friends without marriage.

3 Legal Status of Live-In Relationship In India

In India live-in relationship is legal. The legitimacy of live-in relationship is linked with Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Article 21 deals with the Protection of right to life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court of India as well as several High Courts have supported live in relationship in a series of judgements. According to an article by Jheelum Basu and Madhur Sharma, "In 1978, the Supreme Court in *Badri Prasad VS Board of Consolidators* ruled that a presumption of marriage arises if a man and a woman have lived as husband and wife for a long time. In 2001, the Allahabad High Court in *Payal Sharma VS Nari Niketan* proclaimed that it is not

illegal for a man and a woman to live together. In 2006, the Supreme Court in *Lata Singh VS State of UP* declared that two persons of opposite sex living together are not doing anything illegal. In 2010, the apex court in *S. Khushboo VS Kanniammal & Another* ruled that the woman partner in live-in relationship is protected under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005. In June 2022, the Supreme Court in *KattukandiEdathil Krishna & Another VS KattukandiEdathilValsan & others* ruled that children born out partners in live-in relationship can be considered legitimate provided the relationship is a long term relationship” . (Basu, et.al, 2022). These are some examples of the apex court’s backing on live-in relationship. However, there is no specific law for the regulation and protection of couples in such relationship. Due to absence of any regulatory law for retribution, there is little security of the live-in partners. People throughout India panicked after the heinous murders of two young women by their live-in partners in Delhi. In February 2023, a man named Sahil Gehlot strangled his live-in partner Nikki Yadav to death and atored her dead body in a refrigerator. Sahil killed Nikki and married another girl on the same day .(The Tribune, Feb 15). In a similar case , as reported by Mukesh Singh, to ND TV, in April 2023 a man identified as Vineet strangled his live-in partner Rohina and dumped her body 12 km away outside a home .Vineet killed Rohina as she was forcing him for marriage (Singh, April 2023) . In a similar case 27 years old Shraddha Walker was brutally murdered by her 28 years old live-in partner Aaftab Amin Poonawala in Delhi . Poonawala strangled Shraddha over an argument, ripped her body into 35 pieces and used a 300 litre refrigerator to store her body parts. He disposed the body parts individually in the forest of Chhatarpur forest over a period of 18 days at around 2 A.M everyday. The case came to light nearly six months after the murder (en.m.wikipedia.org) .Live-in partners also remain alienated due to social unacceptance and disapproval of family members. In contrast to this marriage is a more stable and secured relationship with social validation. In Indian society there is difference in the respectability between married couple and a couple in live-in relationship. Indian society is still conservative and maximum people strongly support marriage where as for some people live-in relationship is the better option. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to understand the perspectives of people towards the aforementioned issue. Based on the perceptions of the people through their responses to a questionnaire, conclusion has been drawn over the issue: whether marriage is believed to be inevitable or live-in relationship can challenge the institution of marriage as an alternative living arrangement.

4 Literature Review

For the purpose of study, several research papers related to the topic were explored . A few are as follows:

Deokar (2016) has emphasised that live-in relationship is an individualistic approach. In western countries it may be prevalent but in India marriage is preferred by most of the people. However, this doesn’t mean that live-in partners should be prohibited.

The judiciary's efforts to safeguard the interest of such couples is definitely a welcome step.

Dave (2019) has opined that live-in relationship should be granted legal status but the partners should have spent considerable period of cohabitation. He feels that live-in relationship is an intentional rejection of the institution of marriage. According to him live-in couples should be legally recognised without hampering the institution of marriage.

Sepaha (2021) has mentioned that live-in relationship appears to be stress free without any legal restrictions, but in reality it has a lot of complications. She has stressed on the need for making a separate, secular and gender sensitive law for the live-in partners.

Narayanet.al, (2021) have argued that if two consenting live-in partners live for an extended period, the relationship is deemed as "in the nature of marriage" under the prevention of Domestic Violence Act, 2005. They have asserted that all citizens, including women have the right to freedom of speech, expression as well as to live with dignity.

Shriyanshi(2022) has focused on the rise of live-in relationship. According to her today's youth is independent minded and there must be some legislature for the people who wish to break the orthodoxy of the society.

Most of the papers have focused on the socio-legal status of live-in relationship. The present paper tries to explore the Preference of people regarding marriage and live-in relationship with the following objectives:

5 Objectives

- To understand the perspectives of people regarding marriage
- To study People's Perspectives on live-in relationship
- To analyse which is the most preferred relationship between marriage and live-in relationship
- To observe whether live-in relationship has become a substitute for marriage in Indian society
- To explore the prevalence of live-in relationship among indigenous tribes of India

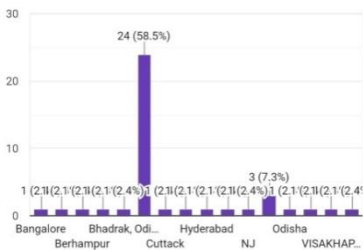
6 Methodology

A questionnaire was prepared to assess the perspectives of people towards marriage and live-in relationship. The questionnaire asked for basic demographic details of the respondents like name, place, gender, age, marital status and educational qualification. The questionnaire incorporated some statements in favour of marriage and some in favour of live-in relationship for a true examination of the respondents' perspectives. The sample consisted of 41 people of diversified age groups. The respondents were requested to provide their honest opinions. The anonymity of the respondents has been maintained throughout the study. Based on their responses an analysis has been made to understand the perceptions of people towards the conflict

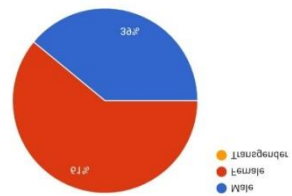
between marriage and live-in relationship. In addition to this, several news reports were studied to understand why some of the indigenous tribes prefer live-in relationship without getting married.

7 Results And Discussion

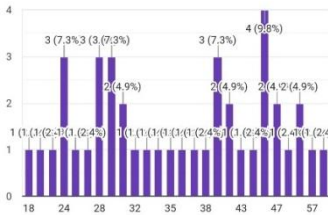
Total number of 41 people provided their opinions. The respondents belong to different places of Odisha, Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru and one of the respondents is an NRI established in New Jersey. (Refer to Fig.1) . Out of the total respondents 61% are female where as 39% are male (Refer to Fig.2) . The respondents belong to various age groups ranging from 18 years to 76 years (Refer to Fig 3) . Out of the total respondents 73.2 % are married and 26.8 %are unmarried (Refer to Fig 4)



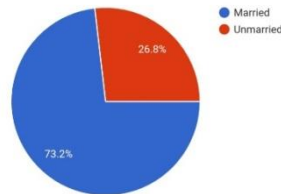
(Fig.1 : Place of the respondents)



(Fig.2 : Gender of the respondents)

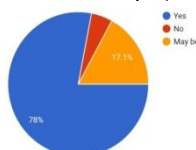


(Fig. 3 : Age of the respondents)



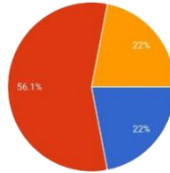
(Fig.4 : Marital Status of the respondents)

From the collected data it can be seen that 78 % of the respondents opine that these days Preference for live- in relationship is soaring. 17.1 % of the respondents couldn't say anything where as 4.9 % respondents believe that there has not been any rise in the Preference for live-in relationship. (Refer to Fig 5)



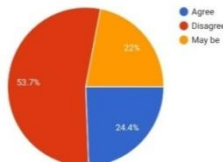
(Fig .5 : The number of people in live-in relationship is increasing these days)

Live-in relationship is legal in India. When the respondents were asked whether they support this or not . Only 22% of them supported this where as 56.1 % opined that live-in relationship should not be legalised. Perhaps they feel that legal backing is an encouragement for preferring live-in relationship. They appear to be strong supporters of marriage. Where as 22 % supported this perhaps because they feel that nobody should be deprived of his / her personal liberty. The remaining 22% of the respondents preferred to remain neutral. (Refer to Fig 6)



(Fig 6. Live-in relationship is legal in India. Do you support this ?)

One of the principal reasons behind the rising Preference for live- in relationship before marriage is that it provides scope to the partners to test their compatibility. During live-in relationship the couple gets an opportunity to know each other better. Dating does not provide such scope. When the respondents were asked whether living together before marriage is essential for a better understanding between partners or not . If they are compatible with one another, they will opt for marriage. 24.4 % of the respondents agreed to this. Where as 53.7 % disagreed and 22 % respondents thought living together before marriage may be essential. They were not sure about it . As majority of the respondents disagreed, it can be concluded that maximum people believe that married couple can lead a harmonious relationship; living together before marriage is not necessary. (Refer to Fig 7.)



(Fig.7 : Living together before marriage is essential for a better understanding between partners)

Marital relationship involves a lot of responsibilities. A married person is some how bound to shoulder duties and responsibilities of the family. Where as in live-in relationship there is no such responsibility. When the respondents were asked to give their opinions on whether live-in relationship is better than marriage as there is lesser responsibilities. Only 12.2 % of the respondents agreed. 7.3 % remained neutral where as 80.5 % disagreed. In spite of the duties and responsibilities they think that marriage is better than live- in relationship. (Refer to Fig 8)

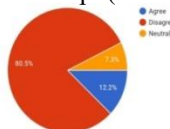
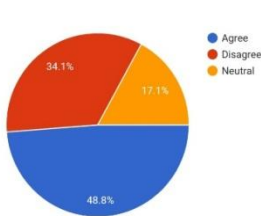
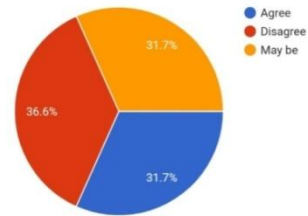


Fig. 8 : Marital relationship involves a lot of responsibilities where as Live-in relationship has no responsibilities.

Marital alliance is believed to be a long lasting relationship. People of India take the case of legal separation or divorce very seriously. Married couples try their best to keep their relationship intact even if they are incompatible to one another. However, in live-in relationship, it is very easy to split up without the tension of being levelled as a divorcee. When the respondents were asked to give their opinions regarding this, 48.8 % of them agreed, 34.1 % of the respondents disagreed and 17.1 % of them remained neutral. Though 48.8 % of the respondents opine that live-in relationship is better in this regard, 34.1 % are in favour of marriage. (Refer to Fig.9). Similarly there was mixed response on the statement, " live-in relationship is hassle free compared to marriage as there are no legal restrictions". 31.7 % respondents agreed to this. Where as 36.6 % showed their favour to marriage. The rest 31.7 % remained undecided. They thought the proposition may be true. From the responses it is obvious that a sizeable number of respondents are in favour of marriage, ignoring the advantages of live-in relationship. (Refer to Fig.10)

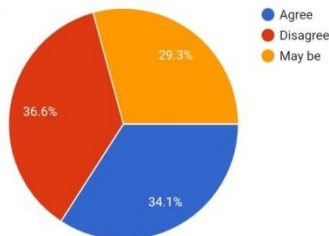


(Fig.9 : In marriage one has to compromise with an incompatible partner where as in live-in relationship one can easily split up)



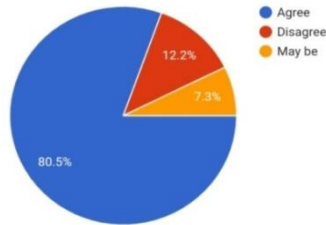
(Fig.10 : Live-in relationship is hassle free compared to marriage as there are no legal restrictions)

One of the factors behind marital disagreement is interference of parents, in-laws and relatives. Due to the consistent interference of these people, marital relationship becomes bitter and sometimes gets spoilt. But in live-in relationship this does not happen as it is purely based on personal choice. 34.1 % of the respondents agreed that there is less pressure in live-in relationship due to non interference of the parents, in-laws and relatives. Where as 36.6 % disagreed. They don't feel that marital life is stressful compared to live-in relationship due to the aforementioned reason. 29.3 % of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. They could not provide any concrete response. (Refer to Fig.11)



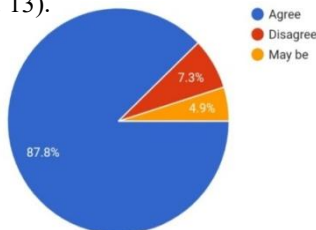
(Fig.11 Live-in relationship has less pressure as there's no interference of parents, in - laws and relatives .)

Marital relationship is the only relationship between a man and a woman to have acquired social sanction. The married couples get respect in the society. The live-in partners are always shown sour faces. When the respondents were asked to give their views on “ Marriage is better than live-in relationship as it has social approval” , maximum people I.e80.5% of the respondents agreed. According to them marital relationship has social acceptance. Whereas 12.2 % people disagreed. They may not have any aversion towards live-in relationship. From this it can be assumed that a small section of our society doesn’t have any problem with live-in relationship. The remaining 7.3 % of the respondents remained doubtful. That’s why they opined the statement may be true. (Refer to Fig.12).



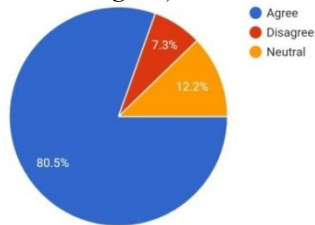
(Fig . 12 :Marriage is better than Live-in relationship as it has social approval”)

Live-in relationship is not regulated by any law. Moreover, the couples do not enter the relationship after religious rituals. That’s why they do not have any fear or compulsion to stick to the relationship. Owing to this , the relationship is considered a “ Walk in , Walk out ” relationship. The live-in couples can break up without the fear of social criticism or legal hassles. In contrast to this , marriage, specially in Indian context, is not merely a relationship it is a bond having sacrosanctity. The Indians believe that the relationship continues up to seven births. Majority of the people conceive that marriages are *mafe* in heaven. That’s why people take the relationship very seriously and they are apprehensive of break up. In addition to this there is fear of legal formalities. If the married couples wish to dissolve their marriage legally, it can be a long and onerous process. It is worth mentioning that divorce is still rare in India compared to other countries . That’s why marriage is obviously a stable relationship compared to live- in relationship. When opinions of people on “ marriage is a more stable relationship compared to live- in relationship” was collected through the questionnaire. Majority of the respondents, I.e 87.8 % of the respondents were in favour of the statement. Where as 7.3 % respondents did not consider marriage to be a stable relationship compared to marriage. 4.9 % respondents remained undecided. For maximum people, marriage is a stable relationship. (Refer to Fig. 13).



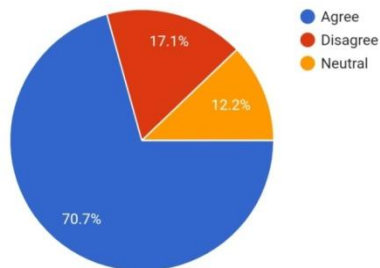
(Fig. 13 : Marriage is a more stable relationship compared to live-in relationship)

One of the major disadvantages of live-in relationship is the lack of support from the family members. As live-in relationship is still like a taboo, family members do not approve of it. When a couple resorts to such relationship, there's disintegration in family bond. Decision of marriage normally doesn't create rift in the family. In marriage there is family support and involvement. When the respondents were asked to give their opinions on this, 80.5 % of them agreed that in marriage one gets family support but in live-in relationship it doesn't happen. 7.3 % respondents disagreed. Perhaps they believe that married couples do not always get family support. Some of them might have thought it is not applicable to all families. 12.2 % respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. (Refer to **Fig.14.**)



(**Fig. 14.** “ In marriage one gets family support but Live-in relationship disintegrates familial bond)

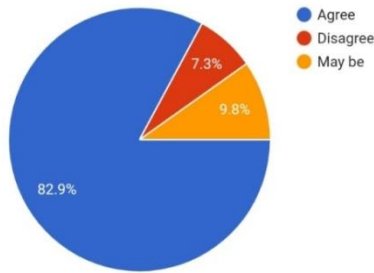
Live-in partners have to live in isolation due to lack of support from family as well as the whole society. That's why they remain stressed. As their relationship is put of their personal choice there must be an inner compulsion to make their relationship work. When the opinions of the respondents was sought regarding the issue 70.7 % of them agreed that live-in partners are always under pressure to make their relationship work. 17.1 % people felt that there may not be such pressure. 12.2 % respondents remained neutral. (Refer to **Fig.15.**)



(Fig . 15: “Live-in partners are always under pressure to make their relationship work due to parental disapproval and Social rejection)

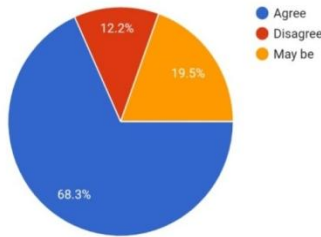
Marital relationship is a secured relationship, as it involves commitments. A married couple publicly takes a vow to stay with one another and they are also legally bound. So, marriage is a long term relationship in which the couples share each other's responsibilities. Unlike marriage, live-in relationship is not a committed long-term relationship. The live-in partners do not have any obligation to support one another. 82.9 % respondents agreed that in live-in relationship there is no security as

there is no commitment. 73 % respondents did not favour the statement. 9.8 % respondents thought that the statement might be true . (Refer to Fig.16)



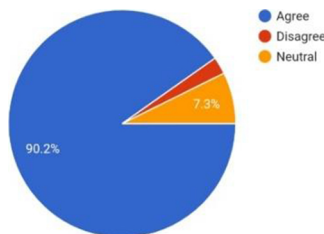
(Fig . 16 : In live-in relationship there is no security as there's no commitment)

Due to a sense of security and stability in the relationship, the married couple remain healthy both mentally and physically. With the support of the family members and members of the society they lead a blissful life . Where as live- in partners always bear mental agonies due to social censure and alienation from family. There always the tension of insecurity and instability in the relationship. Owing to this consistent stress factors they are less happy and healthy compared to their married counterparts. 68.3 % respondents supported the above where as 12.2 % disagreed. Perhaps they thought that married couples are not always happy and healthy. Their mental and physical health may not be better compared to the live -in partners. 19 % respondents were not sure about providing ant opinion, they told the statement might be correct. (Refer to Fig. 17)



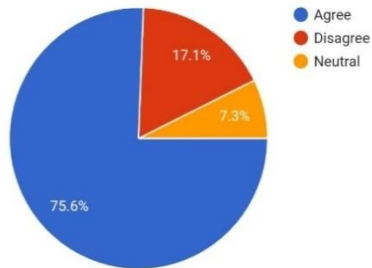
(Fig. 17 : Married couples have better mental and Physical health compared to live-in partners)

Live-in relationship has always been an unsafe relationship. The gruesome murder cases by live- in partners create apprehension as well as suspicion in the mind of people regarding the relationships other than matrimony. Ghastly murder cases of Rohina, Nikki Yadav, Sraddha Walker ,to name a few , are glaring examples arise question over the safety of live-in partners, especially the women partners. When the safety issue of the live-in partners was put forth before the respondents, 90.2% supported the statement, “ safety in live-in relationship is a matter of concern today”. 7.3 % of them remained neutral. Only 2.5% disagreed. (Refer to Fig.18)



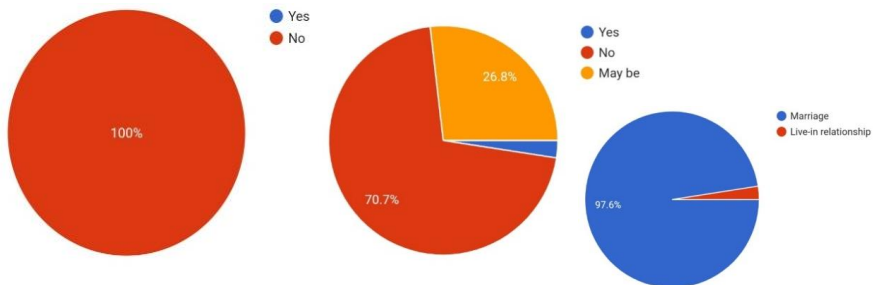
(Fig .18 : “ Safety in live-in relationship is a matter of concern today”.

Marriage seems to be the only moral way of family formation. Married life is considered ethical and the children born out of marital relationship are legitimate. Both the parents and the children get recognition, live and support in the society. According to a Supreme Court verdict , any child born from a long term live-in relationship should be considered legitimate. However, these children are not wholeheartedly accepted in the society. When the respondents were asked to give their opinions on it , 70 6 % supported the statement, 17.1 % respondents didn't agree, they were in favour of live-in relationship. 7 3 % respondents remained neutral. (Refer to Fig .19)



(Fig.19 : “ Marriage is the only moral way of family formation)

When the respondents were asked whether they have ever been in live-in relationship, 100 % of them gave negative answer. None of them have ever been in live-in relationship. (Refer to Fig.20). When they were asked, “ If given a choice, which one of the following would you support ?” , 97.6 % supported marriage where as 2.4 % supported live-in relationship. (Refer to Fig. 21) . To the question , “ Can live-in relationship be a substitute for marriage ?” , 70. 7 % answered negatively. They don't agree that live-in relationship can be an alternative for marriage. Where as 26.8% replied positively. They think live-in relationship can be a substitute for marriage. The remaining 2.5 % didn't give any concrete reply . (Refer to Fig.22).



(Fig .20 : “ Have you ever been in a live -in relationship?”)

(Fig.21: “If given a choice, which one of the two relationships would

you support?) (Fig 22. Can live-in relationship be a substitute of marriage??”

8 Conclusion

In view of the above results and discussion it can be concluded that though live-in relationship is gradually becoming popular as an alternative way to avoid the restrictions of marriage, majority of people in our society reprobate this living arrangement. Marriage provides safety, security, social sanction, emotional succour, which the live-in relationship in no way can offer. Moreover, marriage involves commitments, duties and responsibilities. It is a stable relationship. The present study has provided an insight into the perspectives of people towards marriage and live-in relationship. Indians, to what ever age group they belong, where ever they stay, strongly support marriage. Conflicts and separation in marriage happens but in comparison to live-in relationship, marriage is preferred. Only a negligible portion of the society is in favour of live-in relationship. Adherence to the deep rooted Indian values and absence of any law for the regulation, safety and protection of live-in partners may be the underlying factors for this kind of repulsion towards live-in relationship. Considering the key findings of the present study, it can be proclaimed that in India, marriage is still inevitable, live-in relationship can't be a replacement for marriage. In contrast to this, some tribal communities of India have undermined the concept of matrimony since ages. They have been embracing live-in relationship without any inhibitions, defying the traditional matrimonial alliance.

9 Limitation of the Study

The study is based on the perspectives of 41 respondents. An effective generalization may not be derived owing to the small sample size. Besides, the perspectives of tribal people have not been taken into consideration.

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