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CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN RELATIONSHIPS: INDIAN TRADITIONS AND WESTERN MODERNITY

NEHA KAUSHIK*[1], DR SAKSHI KAUL[2]

[1]PHD SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, IILM UNIVERSITY, GURUGRAM, INDIA, EMAIL:
Neha.kaushik.phd22@iilm.edu
[2]PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, IILM UNIVERSITY, GURUGRAM, INDIA

Abstract: We are in the 21st Century, where everything is highly influenced by Western culture, especially countries (like the USA, Canada, etc) that have an impact all over the world. This influence has also begun to impact relationship patterns and society at large. However, despite the strong influence Western society has had on India, there are many things that are here to stay for years to come in the traditional ways, as they have been embedded in the culture. Individualistic and collectivistic societies view relationships very differently, as there is a significant distinction between the relationship patterns, the way relationships exist, and are experienced, which signifies that there are many factors in Western societies in romantic relationships that do not align well with the Indian or any collectivistic society. This research paper aims to develop an in-depth understanding of cultural differences in the context of romantic relationships between India and Western societies. The study is a review paper that encompasses relevant research from 2000 to 2025. It consists of cultural differences based on factors like how relationships are viewed in both cultures, how dating phases are perceived, the involvement of family members, gender roles, conflict resolution, and much more, from the perspective of both cultures. Developing an in-depth understanding of both cultural perspectives can bring valuable insights into understanding differences in cultures.
Keywords: culture, romantic relationships, Indian perspective, western perspective, cultural differences

INTRODUCTION

Today's India is a blend of traditional and modern culture (Damodaran, 2023).
The influence of traditionality and modernity impacts many aspects of life, as it is deeply rooted in our values, norms, cultures, expectations, etc. (Sharma, 2024). Over the years, a shift has been noticed in Indian culture for various reasons like globalization, urbanization, technological advancements, and much more (Ronad, 2024). However, our deeply rooted traditions do not easily disappear. The mix of both modernity and tradition contributes to new changes, like new gender roles where both partners manage household chores and play a considerable role in managing the house, or variations in family size (Chandra, 2024). Despite the blend of both cultures in India today, cultural differences cannot be ignored (Bhardwaj et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2023). Concerning relationships, such disparities influence aspects like the idea of love and romance (Cionea et al., 2019; Bejanyan et al., 2014), the role of family and culture in a relationship partner selection for marriage (Uberoi, 2006), the ultimate of a relationship, etc. Such differences are visible in both Indian and Western cultures. India is a collective society, where decisions are often influenced by family, friends, and society (Zhang and Kline, 2009). In comparison, Western society is an individualistic society, where enough focus has been extended to the individual's choice of mate selection, and relationships are viewed as an exclusive bond (MacDonald and Jessica, 2006). These differences in culture often influence many aspects of our lives (Sorensen and Oyserman, 2009), which can include relationships. Similarly, people from both cultures perceive relationships differently.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A few cultural differences in romantic relationships in Indian and Western cultures consist of the following.
1) **Attitude toward a romantic relationship**
Every society has a unique way of looking at relationships amongst all kinds of relationships, like in Eastern collectives, which view relationships as a sacred institution (Marshall, 2008). In eastern countries like India and China, romantic relationships hold the utmost significance as they substantially influence an individual's life. Family and other significant relationships influence romantic relationships (Myers et al., 2005).
Recent studies indicate a shift in the relationship, like increasing preference for romantic relationships before marriage among young adults in India (Dhariwal & Connolly, 2013; Kanth et al., 2022). Marriage holds significant importance in an individual's life. Moreover, after globalization and exposure to Western culture, the idea of romantic love before marriage has gained significant acceptance in India (Hindin & Hindin, 2009). It shows that the blend of modernity has significantly started to change the perspective of the individual in the context of romantic relationships, as some individuals have started to look at relationships not from a marriage perspective but for personal happiness (Teoh et al., 2023).

In Western culture, relationships are often considered a way to achieve happiness (Londero et al, 2021), companionship (Luscher et al., 2022), growth (Overall et al., 2010), and love (Teoh, 2024). Also, the relationship is considered a personal matter for a couple, and the decision to be with someone has to be made by the person (MacDonald et al., 2012). Moreover, the opinion of family members is respected and valued, but it is not the only deciding factor in a relationship for a couple. In Western culture, romantic love becomes the basis of marriage (Sprecher & Hatfield, 2017; Myers et al., 2005) with the expectation of love and faithfulness (Kline et al., 2012).

2) Role of family in a relationship

Human beings are social primates, which means they live in a structured social group where they communicate, interact, and coordinate with each other (Sakman, 2021). A few factors, like family support and positive viewpoint of society, play a major role in essential aspects of life, including marital bliss. In southern asian countries like India and China, family support and approval become one of the most crucial steps in important decisions, especially when it is concerned with marriage (Diwan et al., 2011).

Children in collectivistic societies involve their parents from the beginning of the relationship (MacDonald et al., 2012; Muramoto, 2016) and it is quite a common practice in India (Netting, 2010; Bovet et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2017). Also, in South asian countries like India, marriage is considered a partnership between two families, not limited to two individuals (Ingoldsby, 2006). Furthermore, the concept of arranged marriage is quite prevalent in India, where the elderly in the family or parents suggest or approve the partner for marriage (Singh and Pandey, 2023; Kapadia et al., 2005). In many south asian countries, it's a common practice where parents identify a compatible spouse for their adult children based on their religion, caste, socioeconomic status, astrological compatibility, family background, values, and expectations of each other (Allendrof, 2025), and love plays a less important role in the selection of a partner in collective societies (Sprecher and Toro-Mono, 2002). However, the current trend suggests that people have started to self-select their partner based on their personal preferences, and then, they take blessings from their parents, which indicates, to some extent, parental approval is still required in India (Kanth et al., 2024).

In Western societies, the role a family plays in a relationship is very distinct from a collectivist society like India. In an individualistic society, having personal choices (Medora et al., 2002), especially in relationships, holds the utmost importance; even more importance than parental opinions. They respect and value family opinions, but they do not majorly influence the decision of an individual, and families are quite comfortable with the decisions of their children. The individual is responsible for finding a suitable partner based on their preference on criteria like personal happiness, love, compatibility, satisfaction, mutual respect, and other relevant factors in a relationship (Skowronski et al., 2014; Perel, 2000). Western societies look at marital relationships as a union of two individuals, not necessarily two families (Ingoldsby, 2006). In addition to this, to check the compatibility with their partner, they evaluate their relationship based on emotional, psychological, and other compatibility factors (Buss and Schmitt, 2019). Furthermore, marriage is not considered the ultimate goal of Western society.

3) Social Dynamics of Dating

The dating phase is a relationship stage in which two people try to engage in mutual activities to begin to understand one another before getting into a more committed relationship (August et al., 2016). Empirical evidence suggests that dating in a relationship helps in getting clarity on their relationship on various essential aspects. When partners are involved with each other, they spend time together to build a strong connection, which also gives them clarity about their compatibility with their partner (Finkel et al., 2012). Dating has always been viewed differently in individualistic and collectivist societies. Western countries have always viewed dating positively, and this attitude is now starting to spread to South Asian countries. People in South Asian countries have started to accept dating, particularly in urban cities. It has become a common practice in urban India, especially when a partner comes from the same caste and religion (Aengst, 2014; Dhar, 2013). However, it is a newer concept in some asian countries. Dating is not viewed in a positive light in some parts of India, mainly rural India. Conservative families have not shown acceptance (Aengst, 2014) and often create a negative impact on the reputation of an individual, especially if it is a woman (David, 2013). People often date to get married later to the same person if everything fits well and is appropriate before any long-term commitment and social norms, which involve criteria like class, caste, and religion, and other essential factors as per the culture's needs (Kanth et al., 2024). Moreover, individuals who prefer love marriage over arranged marriage encounter social stigma if their partner belongs to a different caste or religion (Chowdhary, 2010). When people get into a relationship, most of the time their intention is to get married at some point in time.

In contrast to this, Western society looks at the dating phase as a crucial one.

People do not take the pressure of getting married as the final goal of dating when they find a suitable partner (Cherline, 2004). The first step of a relationship in a Western country is dating. Then the next step is often cohabitation, not necessarily marriage, depending on how the couple decides to take the relationship further. Also, they emphasize physical attraction as an important component before any relationship commitment, and it is often associated with marital satisfaction among men and women (Meltzer et al., 2014). In addition to this, acceptance of a breakup can also be seen in Western countries before finding a suitable partner. Dating and cohabitation help them figure out what works for them in a relationship. The practice of dating and cohabitation is now prevalent in urban India, and it has become a common practice in South Asian countries.

However, it is more common in Western cultures.

4) Lifelong Partnership

Marriage holds significance in most cultures and societies around the world (Myers et al., 2005; Kamal et al., 2015). In India, marriage is often viewed as a

milestone in an individual's life (Kanth et al., 2024). Marriage is often viewed as a lifelong partnership between two people, and it is often viewed as a sacred institution (Marshall, 2008). It consists of a long-term commitment between a couple; emphasis has been given to duty (Dharma) and sacrifice (Samarpan). Moreover, if a couple decides to split their relationship, then the person ends up facing many challenges since there is a social stigma around divorce (Uru & Dirimese, 2023). Indian cultural values

do not support divorce (Yeung et al., 2018). People suffer in their marriage but do not seek divorce due to the social stigma attached to divorce or separation. However, people have started to show acceptance for separation or divorce, and many people have started to consider these options rather than staying in a toxic or abusive marriage (Dutta, 2013).

Contrary to this, in Western society, marriage is viewed as a partnership between two individuals. When partners experience turbulence in a relationship, they often reach out to a counselor or a relationship education program to strengthen their bond, which typically involves working on communication and satisfaction (Markman & Rhoades, 2012; Wadsworth & Markman, 2012). If a relationship does not improve by counselling or a relationship education program, then they call off their relationship, keeping divorce as an option. Also, divorce is common and acceptable in Western countries, as half of the marriages end up in divorce or separation due to various issues (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Kreider & Field, 2002). Also, people tend to find another partner after a breakup.

4) Evaluating relationship fit

Compatibility is an essential element in a relationship (Sadoudi, 2024). High compatibility between both partners can help in maintaining a long-lasting relationship. Every culture has its way of assessing compatibility between partners to eliminate the chance of choosing the wrong partner. Indian culture emphasizes various factors (Allendrof & Pandian, 2016) like strong family background and status, values, caste and religion, expectations, and Vedic astrological matchmaking, which includes the matching of 36 Gunas, i.e., compatibility points (Vadhavkar, 2017; Netting, 2010).

There are 36 Gunas considered to check the compatibility of a couple after marriage.

The minimum number of ganas required for a couple to be eligible to get married is 18; fewer than 18 is not considered auspicious and healthy for the relationship, leading to the disapproval or rejection of a marriage proposal. All 36 gunnas are divided into eight major categories, which consist of a few factors essential for marriage. Factors like work (Varna), dominance (Vashya), destiny (Tara), mentality (Yoni), friendliness (Grahmaitri), temperament (Gana), love (Bhakoot), and health (Nadi) are included in this. A higher Guna score represents a higher level of compatibility between both partners after marriage (Dhawan, 2020). This practice of Gana Milan has been quite prevalent in India, and despite the evolution in the relationship patterns, it is still common and highly considered by Indian families.

Quite opposite to this, Western culture has a different way of checking the compatibility of a couple. People in the West date each other for a certain amount of time to know each other and assess their relationship compatibility based on the interaction couples have (Finkel et al., 2012). They consider the comparison based on several key factors, including emotional bond and attachment, financial compatibility, sexual chemistry (Sprecher, 2002), conflict resolution, and family (Gottman et al., 2019), to avoid selecting the wrong partner. They assess compatibility through open communication in the dating phase of the relationship (Morgan et al., 2010). When they find high compatibility, they take the next step by cohabiting or marrying each other, and choosing a partner is their individual decision.

6) Expectations around gender

Our childhood experiences shape our attitudes, including gender-related attitudes and beliefs, which can significantly impact behavioral patterns in relationships that may contain cultural aspects too (Sindhura, 2025). Over the years, gender roles

have evolved; women have started to go out of their traditional roles at home and have started to flourish in their careers and are highly educated (Lin et al., 2020). Similarly, males have begun to take charge of household responsibilities as women do. Both partners have started to contribute equally to the household chores (Pitt & Borland, 2008). Studies suggest that unequal and unfair division of household chores can negatively impact the marital satisfaction of couples (Barnes, 2010; Hsiao & Hammons, 2007). In such cases, it becomes essential to divide household chores equally, as we increasingly see dual-career couples nowadays.

Gender roles have begun to evolve globally, with both genders increasingly taking on the roles of breadwinners and homemakers, or switching their traditional roles. However, in south asian countries like India, traditional gender roles are still embedded in culture and here to stay for a long time because in some parts of the country, women are still expected to focus on the home and children. At the same time, men are considered the breadwinners and providers. In countries where traditional roles are still prevalent, it has been reported that couples who try to reverse the roles tend to experience adverse outcomes like marital dissatisfaction (Bertrand et al., 2015; Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Zhang, 2015). Although people have started to show acceptance for new gender roles, we cannot ignore that a large part of our society is still stuck with

traditional roles.

Compared to Western culture, which is quite comfortable with gender-fluid roles where both partners play an important role and come with equal responsibilities (Binanchi et al., 2005), this also includes financial independence of both partners.

Women are equally involved in important decisions as well as household decisions (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Additionally, Western societies are more encouraging of the idea of career-driven women and stay-at-home dads. To encourage such practices, some countries have started to provide parental leave to new parents (both father and mother), as both partners share equal responsibility for a child. Partnership in Western society is based on mutual growth and is not limited to any specific gender rules.

7) Expressing Affection

In India, love is frequently conveyed through actions rather than verbal communication. People of most age groups consider action in the form of caring, small gestures, spending quality time together, etc. Saying 'I love you' is still a very uncommon practice in some traditional families in India. Also, public displays of affection (PDA) are not encouraged in rural and urban areas, especially in traditional families (Netting, 2010). Togetherness is evident in people when they invest time with their family during festivities and family functions, or when they support each other in challenging times, which is considered a form of love (Xia et al., 2024). Sometimes, the sacrifice from a partner's side is perceived as a form of love. However, something has started to evolve in Indian culture, such as the use of verbal expressions of love, like 'I love you' or 'I care for you,' which can be seen in some Indian couples.

Western culture is quite open and verbal when it comes to the expression of love. They frequently express their love to their partner through verbal expressions. It starts from the beginning of the relationship stage itself, then dating or co-living. In addition to this, Public display of affection (PDA) such as kissing or hugging is quite widely accepted in Western society. Nowadays, in a relationship in Western culture, touch is a primary love language for many couples (Sorokowska et al., 2023). Helping each other in each other's career growth and in the household is considered an act of service toward loved ones.

8) Resolving Differences

Every couple faces conflicts in their relationship since no relationship is perfect.

They are often a result of unmet needs, desires, goals, and interests (Straus, 2005; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). However, how well a couple manages a conflict makes the difference. A well-managed conflict in a relationship can strengthen the bond of a couple (Gottman et al., 2019). It can improve couple identity, which ultimately leads to a higher commitment level in a relationship (Emery et al., 2021). Unfortunately, some fail to resolve the conflict, which makes them fall apart. Either way, effective conflict resolution plays a vital role. In India, relationship matters are treated as private and are not discussed so openly (Stephens & Eaton, 2020), and when they are discussed for conflict resolution purposes, the family gets involved. Family involves and intervenes to encourage the couple to find common ground to adjust and compromise to make the relationship work, especially in the context of marriage (Singh & Shanbhag, 2025). To avoid conflict, the family tends to intervene (Singh & Pandey, 2023). Elders' spiritual gurus hold a special place in resolving couple issues among Indian families.

Discussion about psychological challenges is regular in Western society. There is no stigma or taboo attached to mental health in Western society. It is pretty standard to see that when a couple gets into a conflict, they tend to seek therapy (Markman & Rhoades, 2012) to learn conflict resolution techniques and make the relationship work. Also, open and effective communication (Siahaan & Wulan, 2024) about everything can be seen among Western couples more than in Indian couples. It has been noted that the divorce rate is high in Western countries because scenarios of separation or divorce are considered an option and acceptable (Fucik, 2020) if the relationship does not work out, as there is no stigma attached to a breakup or divorce.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication skills, listening skills (Gottman et al, 2019), self- control, accompanying each other (Vagni & Widmer, 2018), appropriate emotional expression, willingness to put in efforts to make the relationship work (Shafer et al., 2014), etc., may aid couples in enhancing their relationship satisfaction and live blissful lives together.

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APPENDIX B (FIRST-LEVEL HEADING)
This is where you might place a correlation matrix.

AUTHOR NOTE
Both authors contributed to all stages of the development of the current research paper. Ms. Neha played a lead role in data collection, methodology, writing, and editing of the paper. Prof. Sakshi Kaul played a major role by adding her valuable inputs to the paper, specifically in the methodology section, and has played a major role in the editing of the paper.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY
Ms. Neha Kaushik is a PhD scholar at the Department of Psychology in IILM University, India. She is currently also a research associate at IILM University. Her PhD work revolves around romantic relationships of Indian couples. She has presented her research work on various topics at national and international conferences. Her research interest lies in romantic relationships, positive psychology, counselling, and other contemporary areas of psychology. For further details about the research, you can contact Ms Neha at Neha.kaushik.phd22@iilm.edu

Prof. (Dr.) Sakshi Kaul is a professor and Head of Department at the Department of Psychology in IILM University, India. She has an extensive academic background with 18 years of experience in teaching in academia and industry. Her research focuses mainly on intervention plans, counselling psychology, relationship management, positive psychology, and other contemporary areas in psychology. She has published research papers, articles, book chapters, and edited books in the field of psychology.