



# **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS



*"In my opinion love is in need of help today, and we aren't going to fix it by keeping quiet about it."* Claude Steiner.

Romantic love has shaped the nature of human intelligence and interpersonal relationships, and has been a motivational force in achieving the loftiest ideals of culture and civilization (Förster, Epstude & Ozelsel, 2009; Pederson, 2004; Miller, 2001; Bartels & Zeki, 2000; Fisher, 1994). The study reveals important concepts pertaining to love and close relationships and also how people process this social information to make sense of what is going on around them. The findings are discussed by integrating this socio-cognitive perspective with the socio-cultural and evolutionary perspectives, thus, integrating the memetic and the genetic, that is, the cultural/ideological and the biological replicators responsible for human evolution.

This chapter begins with discussion of the conceptualization of romantic love by the emerging adults and the middle adults, the experiences of emerging adults engaged in a romantic relationship and its developmental outcomes. It also discusses the viewpoints of middle adults to highlight the parental and societal perspectives on the phenomenon. Gender issues pertaining to relationship experiences and societal norms are also discussed. The last section assesses the scope of the present study and ends with implications and recommendations for further studies .

### Conceptualizations of Romantic Relationships

*“ ... lovers experience a state of utopia. It is by virtue of this feeling that poets and lovers find ordinary elements such as tress and birds extraordinary ... it is a journey entailing experience of heaven in carefree bliss” (boy).*

Buoyant, vibrant and succulent words are chosen to describe the meaning of romantic love. For all participants, across age and gender, romantic love is a sentiment that demands the energies from all levels of existence, that is, physical, cognitive and affective. Madness, magic, play, passion, thrill and excitement are necessary components of romantic love, and commitment is the core. These experienced and intuitive reports by the participants are in sync with findings by scientists conducting brain researches to understand the neural basis of romantic love. Bartels and Zeki (2000) show that “a unique set of interconnected areas [in the brain] becomes active” to create the “richest experience of mankind” (p.3833).

The research reveals that both emerging adults and middle adults viewed romantic relationships as special, natural, and having a positive potential for people engaged in them. This was true for both the genders across generations. The myriad conceptualization of romantic love, which is all inclusive and even appears paradoxical at times, reveals the profoundness of viewing romantic relationships in the given cultural context. Even today, the “voices” echo the supremacy of love as reflected in the socio-cultural context of the Indian ideology. These patterns in conceptualizations are common across the globe and have been shared by several societies across centuries (Bartels & Zeki, 2000; Fisher, 2008; Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu, & Acevedo, 2010; Smith, 2011).

Despite upholding the ‘romantic’, consistently reflected as ‘ideals’ through time and space, reaching these ideals has been equally elusive for societies all over the world. To understand this gap between the ideals reported and the experiences lived out, it may be useful to understand what love is *not*. While the participants have accentuated the positive potentials and experiences of romantic relationships, this chapter devotes some space for discussing the ‘de-emphasized’ aspects of romantic experiences. The promising ideas about love turn into dangerous pitfalls, when the undesirable aspects are overlooked.

### **Is romantic an antonym of practicable?**

Romantic love by definition is not an emotion but a myriad of emotions, with specialized neural centers, encompassing many paradoxes (Shand, 2011; Bartels & Zeki, 2000; Fisher, 2006). Paradoxes are acceptable, but contradictions need re-examination, as, unlike contradictions, paradoxes are seemingly contradictory statements which may be true. An example of paradox in romantic relationships could be that one enters it by free will and at the same time one cannot start it or stop it by volition. And an illustration of contradiction would be when one expects to be loved for what one is without examining what one really is! Paradoxes are not a problem, they can co-exist in reality but contradictions cannot exist in reality. Such inconsistencies are discussed in this segment drawing examples from intimacy, transparency and freedom, the central features defining romantic love.

### *How open are close relationships?*

Subjective interpretations and uses of various terms need to be examined as they are different from the scientific definitions. For example, according to Gore, Cross and

Morris (2006) “[Intimate] Emotional self-disclosures also reveal centrally important aspects of the self, allowing the partner to verify and validate these self-views” (p. 83). This means acceding to tremendous vulnerability in the micro-climate of a warm and loving relationship; it also implies willingness to change one’s own concepts about oneself and this demands courage for growth and development. But, the prevalent view of intimacy amongst the emerging adults may limit their chances of experiencing truly open relationships, conducive to freedom and growth. Although intimacy was defined in terms of openness and freedom to share completely, further probing revealed that sharing frankly was more often equated to talking about personal likes and dislikes and problems, and closeness was associated with how often these needs are met. For example, *“I told her before itself that after marriage she should stay at home only, not roaming around much with her friends ... she should wear salwar suits and sarees only, if I decide then she can do a job otherwise sit at home. She should do house-hold work. She can continue to sit at home and study”*. This comment appears to be a significant departure from individual freedom in everyday life.

#### *Transparency in romantic relationships.*

Some of the undesirable behaviors though reported were downplayed by the study participants. For example, a girl would ‘put up’ with her boyfriend’s compulsive lies about little matters, because he was ‘otherwise good at heart’. Cole (2001) and DePaulo (2004) suggest that some lies have an altruistic motive in the context of close relationships. For example, one girl in the study said that at times she does not tell her boyfriend (errors of omission) the whole story because she feels that it is better to

wait and help the person be prepared to process the truth. It prevents misunderstanding. The purpose here is to enhance intimacy.

However, lying is also to avoid intimacy by keeping the partner at a comfortable distance (Cole, 2001). For example, hiding the habit of smoking tobacco in order to please a girl, to live up to the image that one may have portrayed during the period of 'impressing the partner'. Some lies are considered harmless. Compared to boys, more girls reported dissatisfaction due to lying behaviors of their partners. Interestingly, a relationship which has trust as its defining feature has been ascertained to be a 'hotbed' for lies by DePaulo (2004).

It is natural that an individual would like to make an impression on one's romantic interest. The no-impact state which says 'love me for what I am' does not focus on self-reflection and improvement. On the other hand traditional ways of impacting which call upon feigning reality are destined for a catastrophe, because these ways are designed to avoid sharing of real thoughts and feelings, in the here and now (Bach & Deutsch, 1970). Intimacy was rarely defined as an opportunity to be free and explore self in a 'game-free' relationship.

#### *Freedom in romantic relationships.*

Berne (1964) explains games as repetitive behavior patterns between two people (sometimes more), with a hidden agenda, and the payoff generally is avoiding autonomy and intimacy. For instance, a relationship pattern that describes a girl who decides that she will not get angry with her partner for not spending more time with her, but fails to remain calm. She then feels bad about not giving him enough space

but the pattern repeats, the dialogues do not change and neither the consequences of nagging and the cycle of guilt.

Apparently benign forms of control are prevalent and also accepted as a part of 'human nature'. A middle adult man explains, "*It's the basic instinct to feel bad when we see our loved ones happy with someone other*". At times, both boys and girls were not allowed to mingle with their best-friends if the friend belonged to the opposite-sex. Also, one girl revealed that as an individual, she had become more serious and less spontaneous than before, and both boys and girls reported that their other friendships suffered. Possessiveness was viewed as a 'normal' part of the relationship and it became a mutual loop of restrictions, like, "*If I cannot talk to the boys then you too cannot talk to the girls*". The freedom with which the two start out a relationship disappears because in order to restrict another person one has to first forego one's own freedom. These aspects were overlooked when assessing the satisfaction levels in the relationship.

### **Gender and romantic relationships**

Similarly, even though respondents felt that 'mutual understanding' brought them close to their partners, contradictions were observed. Ten percent girls complained that, they were at times, forced to get involved at a physical level with their partners for which they were not yet ready. This gives a glimpse of the vulnerability which the partners experience and a probability of violating individual rights, which may lead to violence within relationships.

This point is exemplified by Prescott (2002) who observes the contrast between the human societies and the bonobo chimp societies. He questions what has made the

human primate the most violent primate on the face of the earth, while the bonobo chimps who share 99.1 % of our genetic matter are the most peaceful and loving primates. Based on theoretical and scientific research he reveals that lack of experiences in 'love' is a single developmental factor that can be associated with violence at personal level as well as global level. Prescott talks about deprivation of physical contact during infancy and adolescence in the American society which is otherwise presumed to be a 'permissive' society. A middle adult man succinctly explains, *"If you really go into cross-section of other countries also, you will find similar dogmas [virginity issues], social rules which are for or against romantic relationships, you will find there also ... so it's too generic and stereotypical to say West vis-a-vis India ... I am talking about say New York, London, Tokyo, Bombay ... can you say Bombay is not in India or New York represents America? No. there are layers of these values and contexts within contexts"*.

Indian studies focusing on pre-marital relationships among youth belonging to lower income group reveal that young men use both physical force as well as psychological pressure in order to 'make love' (Jaya & Hindin, 2009). There is a belief that having sexual intercourse with a girl almost serves as a stamp of possession by the man. Apart from the biological urge, the need for such security may drive men to demand sex as a proof of loyalty and commitment. Sujay (2009) reveals gender double standards among boys who want to have pre-marital sex and at the same time think that a girl who approves of premarital sex is not worth marrying. Girls understand this and avoid sexual intercourse because they are unsure about the future. The idea of virginity is a societal expectation so deeply ingrained that a girl losing virginity will amount to losing everything, even the relationship. These disturbing cultural memes are reinforced in Bollywood films very often. The worst form of this meme is when a



rapist is ‘punished’ by law to marry the victim. An example of such a movie is *Raja Ki Aayegi Baarat (King’s Marriage Procession Will Arrive)*.

However, findings from the present study deviate from the gender stereotypes that girls experience intimacy more profoundly than boys. Other studies (e.g., Reeder, 2003) comparing genders on dimensions of intimacy have revealed that girls score higher on intimacy, when intimacy is measured in term of level of self-disclosure. The present study shows that when trust, acceptance, understanding, satisfaction, passion and commitment dimensions are considered while assessing relationship quality and wellbeing, boys show stronger correlations between happiness and relationship quality dimensions. This result from the quantitative analysis also deviates from the perceptions about gender differences reported in the qualitative interviews of this study, on impact of romantic relationships on boys and girls. Most believed that girls are more sensitive biologically and also more vulnerable socially and hence the positive and negative impacts would be stronger for girls.

### **Romantic Love, Commitment and Marriage**

The construal of love on the basis of commitment has various shades. The reports of respondents regarding the increased visibility of romantic relationships in the Indian context and the attribution of the cause to globalization correspond with the ideas proposed by many scholars including Arnett (2000; 2004) and Netting (2010). Yet, love without awareness about one’s own self, love without sincerity, love without the foresight of long term consequences and love without commitment does not mean much to emerging adults and middle adults in the urban Indian context. On the other hand, the emerging adults who were currently engaged in a romantic bond or had experienced one in the past, believed that romantic relationship is a process of self-

discovery. Security is not a value in itself, but love is. For some emerging adults, experimenting in the contexts of romantic relationships meant finding a 'right partner' to live their entire life with. Therefore, even though the process does not begin with commitment, the process has to end, if long term commitment seems impossible. The reasons could be personal or societal.

However, to the Indian mind, whether it is of an emerging adult or a middle adult, frivolous approach to these relationships is very disturbing. While the respondents hold globalization as responsible for making the contemporary Indian society more conducive to form romantic bonds, many feel that impulsive relationship choices based on sexual attraction is a product of the westernization of 'our' culture. The stereotypes of "*hooking up culture*" which stands for indiscriminate involvement associated with emerging adult's sexual relationships in the West (Lefkowitz, Gillen & Vasilenko, 2011) are also evident from the responses in the present study.

Lefkowitz et al. (2011) suggest that empirical research on sexual behavior occurring in the context of romantic relationships is amiss. They opine that research on romantic relationships rather than on sexual behavior would better accomplish the task of applying theory to understand a developmental phase. In the Indian context too, researches that focus on the nature and quality of romantic relationships and prevalent cultural memes would reveal more about overall well-being of young individuals.

The middle adults as well as emerging adults felt that the romance is missing from the ever increasing number of romantic pair bonds. When they viewed the emerging adults' romantic relationships just as a way of experimenting sexually or to fill their empty materialistic lives with poor alternatives such as 'cheap' sex, with no concern for the partner involved, they felt that 'romance' is getting a bad name. This concern

is in line with Abraham (2002) who has identified platonic '*bhai-behen*' ('brother-sister like'), romantic 'true love', and transitory and sexual 'time-pass' relationships amongst unmarried youth from a low socio economic background in an Indian metropolis. The term "time-pass" meaning insincere and frivolous relationships is along the lines of the Western prototype of "hooking up culture" that no longer reflect the intensity or depth associated with intimate relationships. The respondents feel that this is neither "romantic" nor is it a part of the Indian culture.

Indian emerging adults are, however, catching up with this materialistic approach, also voiced as a concern by the respondents. A finding that contrasts an earlier study by Levine, Sato, Hashimoto and Verma (1995) is that love was regarded as a prerequisite for marriage by most emerging adults in the current study, whereas earlier it was revealed that Indian respondents assigned least importance to love as a prerequisite for marriage compared to the U.S. and even other developed nations of the East like Japan and Hong Kong. Nevertheless, a substantial number of emerging adults reported that they would opt for an arranged marriage. This is because in the Indian context love is positively associated with time. This is peculiar to the Indian context and in contrast to the West where it is believed that time generally destroys romantic love (Reik as cited in Acevedo & Aron, 2009). The problem that individuals experience in the West is that a cohabiting or married couple would find it difficult to say that "we do not love each other"; yet in cultures such as India and Japan, couples can say that "we do not love, but we are together" (Jamison & Ganong, 2011).

Nevertheless, several emerging adults felt that having a romantic relationship before marriage helps in being better prepared for marriage. They were ready to view relationships as contexts for learning and discovering and in the process, finding a

suitable mate. For example, *“According to me the more relationships you have before marriage the better experiences you have and also you have a good tendency to select perfect life partner for you. Otherwise if you just sit in a marriage the relationship will end in a divorce only, I think. I feel one must have a past before marriage”*, said a girl currently engaged in a romantic relationship. These findings echo Karney, Beckett, Collins and Shaw’s (2007) results that experiences of premarital romantic relationships can serve as precursors for healthy marital relationships.

The strong preference for arranged marriage, apart from demonstrating a desire to adhere to cultural practices, many a times, may indicate a fear of intensity of romantic relationship or at times hurting parental wishes. The idea about fulfilling parent’s expectations and the desire of not wanting to ‘hurt’ them, without examining the correctness of such expectations is a concern for both parent-child relationships as well as romantic relationships.

### **Parental Approval and Romantic Relationships**

*“In short, they [my parents] do a very fine balancing act between psycho/over-bearing parents and ... , we couldn’t care less types”* (girl).

Emerging adults’ perceptions about parents’ attitude towards opposite-sex friendships and even romantic relationships was more positive than negative. Emerging adults felt that if they made a ‘right’ choice and were financially independent then their parents will support their decisions. These respondents felt that caste, and even religion may not matter much. This finding is in contrast to several other studies on marriage partner selection that lay importance on caste more than money and education (e.g.,

Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak & Lafortune, 2009). Emerging adults who perceived that their parents will understand them expressed appreciation for their parents.

However, 10% of emerging adults, not currently engaged in a romantic relationship, reported that although they personally would wish to fall in love, 'knowing' that their parents would never support them, they would rather "control" themselves and not hurt their parents. The reasons for their parents' discouragement for a romantic relationship ranged from a plausible distraction in career and other responsibilities, caste, horoscope, religion, status, and societal disapproval to doubting the emerging adult's ability to make a mature choice. Many emerging adults and middle adults believed that romantic relationships affect career and academic trajectories. However, romantically involved emerging adults believed their partner to be a motivating force in improving academic performance and strengthening career aspirations. All the same, presently uninvolved emerging adults believed that romantic relationships can play havoc with academic goals. These views align with the findings of Manning, Giordano, Longmore and Hocevar (2011) that romantic partnerships have both positive and negative influences on education and work trajectories. Middle adults also shared similar concerns. While, romantically involved emerging adults recognized this plausible threat to academics, they expressed that their desire to be with their romantic partner helps them to work towards financial independence so that they can earn their right to put forth their decision to their parents.

Interestingly, the emerging adults expressed empathy with their parents' concerns and interpreted these controls as parental intent to 'protect' them from societal censor and other emotional trauma resulting from a romantic relationship. Empathy, however, did not surmount to agreement; yet, many found it difficult to take a stand for what they

thought was right. They said they would avoid a romantic relationship. These responses may arise from the idea of respecting parents, a dominant meme in the Indian culture (see Kapadia, 2008; Kapadia & Miller, 2005). Yet, parental disapproval and respect for parents could serve as an excuse for emerging adults to avoid intimate relationships or take responsibility per se. Parental refusal is given as a legitimate reason for breaking commitments. Further they report feeling good about obeying one's own parents.

Extremely negative perceptions of parents' attitude were met with absolute disagreement from the emerging adults who reported conflicts with parents when latter acted 'over-protecting'. Comparatively more girls also emerged stronger in taking a stance when it came to choosing their romantic partner, even when confronted with problems.

Among middle adults, the opinions toward emerging adults engaging in romantic relationships were largely positive. This was true for both genders. While talking about their own children, majority of them expressed that they would be supportive if they perceive it to be a good decision by their child. Parents were aware and accepting of what may ensue in a romantic relationship. On the other hand, more men also reported autocratic responses and declared that if they found the match to be unacceptable, they would even use coercive methods to impose their decisions. Women expressed that they would try to understand their children's point of view.

The cultural notion that parents have the right to decide for their emerging adults and emerging adults' idea about fulfilling parent's expectations and the desire of not wanting to 'hurt' them, without examining the correctness of such expectations is a concern for both parent-child relationships as well as romantic relationships. Similar

issues have been discussed in Netting (2010), where the young individuals forced by parents to leave their romantic partners, feel that it would have been better had they stood by their own choices rather than allowing their parents to make them feel guilty and thus control their lives. This finding also has implication on the cultural ideas about “being loyal to parents” and “respecting elders”. Kapadia’s (2011) study on identity anchors of emerging adult girls also reveals these struggles with parents and other adults. The sense of “owning” a person in a close relationship, whether it is a romantic partner or one’s own child, takes individuals farther away from experiencing acceptance, trust and intimacy that form the core of close relationships.

In general, neither emerging adults nor middle adults reported instances of different treatments to boys and girls pertaining to forming and maintaining romantic relationships. The same strict or liberal norms applied to both the genders. But, while describing the general scenario they revealed that societal norms were more binding for girls than boys, a finding confirmed by Kapadia (2011) and Sujay (2009).

### **Societal attitudes**

*“India was a liberal land, it was a land of the kamasutra, but that liberal stance was obliterated by nearly eight centuries of Muslim rule and two centuries of British rule, especially, the Victorian age. So there was a complete shift in the cultural ethos which continues till this date. And since you are referring to the middle class which is the vanguard of morality” (boy).*

The emerging adult boy who made the preceding comment is expressing his views about the societal scenario and clearly does not agree with such ‘vanguards of morality’. Only 2 % of the total respondents upheld these standards of morality and

'Indianness'. News describing prosecution of romantic couples in the name of morality by law the 'civilians' as well as the police, threats to individuals who celebrate Valentine's day by vigilante groups such as Sri Ram Sena (Farmer, 2009) under the façade of protecting the Indian culture, serve as examples for the attitude of a section of the society, but are unjustly generalized on Indian society as a whole. These groups also assume a violent stance, if girls are not dressed 'traditionally', that is, they would like to boycott jeans. The act of threatening individual expressions of love is invariably aimed at suppressing individual freedom, and this subjugation begins by controlling behavior of the women first. Incidentally, in the Western context, historically, the denim revolution has stood for and endorsed values of democracy and individual freedom (see Ferguson, 2011). Can any society which deserves to be called civilized, be against democracy?

*Evolution of romantic mating vis-a-vis cultural norms.*

Emerging adults engaged in romantic relationships revealed that usually people were amiable; yet, there were a good number of people who gave disapproving glances to young couples. This experience of emerging adults is in line with the opinions expressed by the participants of phase 1. Emerging adults, who were not currently involved in a romantic bond, as well as middle adults affirmed that a romantic relationship is equal to a blessing, yet 10 % of them also added that public display of affection (PDA) is disturbing.

Why does PDA disturb the human mind? For some respondents, the simple answer was that "it is not 'our' culture", with little effort to question culture. Romantic relationships potentially challenge everything that is believed to be a convention in this context, from hierarchical subjugation of the young by the old and of women by



the men to marriage patterns and customs. Few others believed that public display of affection is a proof of frivolous relationships based only on physical attraction and hence, they find it disturbing.

Section 294 of The Indian Penal Code (1860) maintains PDA as a crime deserving imprisonment up to three months and/or even a fine. However, charges against a certain kissing couple (married) were dismissed by Delhi high court as the judge wondered “How can an expression of love by a young married couple attract an obscenity charge?” (India couple's kiss, 2009). It is strange that only few wonder about such questions. Policemen, lower courts and other proponents of ‘Indian culture’ give up ethics for morality! It is ironical that the ‘proponents’ of Indian culture, a culture that has led individuals historically, to the path of non-violence, humanity and love, should use coercive methods to control specific behavior in the name of culture, religion and righteousness. Where is the ‘culture’ (Indian or any other) in beating up young individuals who wear jeans or celebrate Valentine’s Day?

Middle adults, being aware of strong reactions in some pockets of the society, were concerned about the emerging adults in love in light of the context. They felt that emerging adults must be aware of their context and prevalent attitudes and norms in order to avoid unnecessary pain. Middle adults also disclose that educational institutions, parents and society at large need to let emerging adults explore and understand relationships, at the same time, supporting them in case they encounter heart breaks and rejection.

The next segment discusses the implications of the study by highlighting the possible developmental consequences of engaging in romantic relationships in the given context.

## **Romantic Relationships and Development Outcomes**

Romantic relationships entail overwhelming engagement of the involved individual at all levels of one's existence. Positive outcomes include discovering aspects of one's own self, experiencing meaning and purpose in life, improving temperament, enhancing pro-social skills and accepting more responsibility in work and life.

Plausible negative outcomes such as choosing a 'wrong' partner, overwhelming emotions making one incapacitated to do anything else and turbulent breakup with its aftermath are some serious concerns for romantically involved individuals. Also, because romantic love inherently has a quality of madness that appears impudent to the society and is perceived as having disruptive ramifications on societal norms, challenging the prevalent norms per se can lead to negative outcomes in romantic relationships. Since, romantic relationships provide a context for freedom and making choices between the two possibilities of desirable and undesirable developmental outcomes, these choices have to be made carefully.

Close relationships cannot be taken for granted, even though, we as a species, are hard-wired to form them. As is evident from the experiences of the emerging adults and the concerns of the middle adults, a level of awareness about oneself, one's own desires, expectations and actions as well as a level of empathy and understanding towards others, needs to be consciously fostered. Traits like possessiveness and the tendency to protect one's 'territory' are equally innate to human beings as it comes from the most primitive part of our triune brain (Steiner, 2000) and therefore, it is important to be aware of the processes which can hamper positive developmental outcomes. Human beings also have the more evolved neo-cortex and the ability to reason, and so, it is important that for structuring society in an evolved manner, one

has to let the primitive instincts pass through the screen of reason instead of allowing the instincts to sabotage reason. Moreover, one's hierarchy of values is crucial for the quality of any relationship. This kind of self-assessment and appraisal is important in order to be able to relate with someone and thereby, induce positive developmental outcomes.

*Towards desirable developmental outcomes.*

Cultural and contextual factors impinge upon development, yet, much more depends on the understanding and skill of the individuals involved. The ability to form and sustain romantic relationship is a developmental task for emerging adults. It demands dexterity equal to walking a tight rope or a razor's edge, because it demands personal discipline and willingness to confront one's own vulnerabilities and weaknesses. It requires ability to trust and be trusted, and prior to that it requires the ability to identify the trustworthy. Although all study participants asserted positive impacts of romantic relationships, none denied the plausible pitfalls. This is expressed in folk lore and poetry, for example, the following famous lines from an Urdu poetry by *Jigar Moradabadi*,

*"Yeah ishq nahi aasaan, itnaa samaj lijiye, Ek aag ka dariyaa hai aur doob ke jaana hai."*

Meaning, 'love is not that simple; please understand it is like crossing a sea of fire'.

Fire is a symbol for purifying impurities.

Or in devotional poetry as *Kabir Saheb* sings, "*Kabir yeh to ghar hai prem kaa, Khaala ka ghar naahi, Sheesh utaare Bhumi dhare, so paithe ghar maahin.*" This means

“Kabir, this is the abode of love  
 Not the house of an aunt  
 Only that one can enter here  
 Who has relinquished all pride”

Romantic ideals are very close to devotional ideals in the oriental culture. *Bhajans* are love songs addressed to the entire existence or any form (deity) which symbolizes existence to the devotee. Sufi poetry always addresses the Supreme Being as feminine, a woman sweetheart. However, the popular boyfriend-girlfriend dynamics are different. There are power struggles, dating violence and flippancy as revealed by review of several studies.

In the present study also, middle adults were concerned that today young people do not know what ‘romance’ means, they do not have the time, sensibility and aesthetics required to be romantic. They are too busy with pomp and show rather than experiencing themselves and their partner. Having romantic experiences before entering a long term committed relationship may be valuable, but how reasonable is it to avoid intimacy and depth in present relationship feigning ‘exploration’? Levine and Cureton pointed out that many emerging adults in the USA aspire for a single happy marriage, but feel that they lack the efficacy for achieving this goal (as cited in Fincham, Stanley & Rhoades, 2011). Fincham et al. (2011), thus make a case for the relevance of relationship education during emerging adulthood.

In fact, some respondents suggested that something needs to be done for these emerging adults, so that they can be in tune with themselves first, and consequently with their partners and others around them. Inculcating values through education, helping them learn certain life skills for better communication, decision making, and giving them ample space for experimentation is essential for forming relationships

that are intimate and fulfilling. Needless suffering, in the name of social norms, customs and morality, can be avoided by reexamining values and memes about love and relationships existing in the culture. This is true, not only for societies that repress natural expressions of romantic love, but also for 'liberal' societies. Both emerging adults and middle adults have reported that norms, which are neither too stringent nor too liberal, are the most ideal for young individuals to develop healthy and mature relationships with opposite-sex partners. Indiscriminate sexual encounters or non-relationship sex does not generally serve the purpose of finding a 'soul mate'. Ethologists and brain researchers (see Morris, 1969; 1971; Fisher, 2006) forewarn against accidental imprinting on both or one partner. Another concern is that if true intimacy is avoided, it leads to a cycle of loneliness, depression, antidepressants; using antidepressants lead to further loneliness because these drugs interfere with natural chemicals that are responsible for bonding (Fisher, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The glory of romantic love is sung by the Indian middle adults and emerging adults alike, as evident in the responses. Trust, openness and freedom are the most important values in a romantic relationship and it is the only relationship among 'close relationships' which is considered as integrating all aspects in an individual, such as mental, emotional and physical. It is also considered as the most intense of the relationships and, therefore, its impact on an individual is equally strong. Exploration in the domain of love needs to lead towards readiness for experiencing depth and intimacy, because long-term relationship experiences bring happiness and well-being. Yet, an 'ostrich mentality' is prevalent while dealing with romantic relationships

outside the context of marriage. There is a discomfort in accepting romantic relationships in the 'full sense' of the term.

Even though romantic relationships before marriage are acceptable in the contemporary Indian society. There is an emphasis on commitment at the cost of exploration and understanding of oneself through the medium of relationships. Love is regarded as the fruit of marriage and marriage is regarded as the logical end for any romantic relationship. Yet, it is noteworthy that romantic love and marriage are not as closely linked as they are in the West. It is not mandatory for an emerging adult in India to find his/her 'soul mate' all by himself/herself. Commitment can either precede or succeed the love relationship in the Indian context.

The emerging adults showed empathy for their parental concerns and, so did several parents for their emerging adult. Especially mothers demonstrated a desire to understand the need of the emerging adult and also to provide support. Yet, parents and emerging adults avoid direct references to these experiences. Communication takes the form of making sarcastic comments, teasing or joking, and, in extreme cases, reprimanding by parents. Although, society believes that having a romantic relationship is a beautiful experience, at the same time, it is hesitant in forthrightly endorsing these relationships for the young.

Romantic relationships have very high potential for emerging adults' development and all respondents have vouched in favor of positive influences of romantic experiences in an individual's life. The nature of impact, however, depends on several factors, such as, the characteristics of the individuals involved and their romantic partners, the attitudes of the parents and community, the availability of support and personal space, and the cultural ideas about love and relationships. Opportunities for

exploring relationship alternatives need to be upheld as a right of an emerging adult. Yet, limiting conceptualization of emerging adulthood as a phase of “many choices and no commitment”, especially, in the context of romantic relationships can be detrimental for development of long term relationships (Lefkowitz et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2011).

The concept of commitment in India, from a socio-historical perspective is more about commitment to the self in doing that which is right and good, not only for oneself but for significant others, especially parents. Therefore, commitment is desirable and valued as it serves functional purposes in a relationship and the society; however, it need not become dysfunctional to individuals, by expecting them to commit undiscerningly. Happiness would result when there is a “win-win” situation between the individual goals and the collective goals.

It is important that love is viewed as an integrated experience rather than fragmenting love into self-love vis-à-vis partner-love or spiritual love vis-à-vis sexual love. For romantic love can contribute to well-being only when it is experienced as a whole, because fragments would lead to conflicting experiences which cannot lead to happiness. Therefore, understanding the Indian thought pertaining to non-duality between body and consciousness may be revived from the ancient Indian philosophy so that undue attention is not focused upon the physical aspects of affection.

Interestingly, ascetics have little to do with repression. Ramakrishna, an Indian sage, proclaimed that the ascetics are the real hedonists and that he was one of the greatest hedonists. Mahadevan explains this apparent contradiction, “It is not only the pleasure of the moment, sense-pleasure, or the greatest amount of pleasure in this life that we desire, but everlasting happiness” (as cited in Goodwin, 1955) or as Riencourt

comments “The profound wisdom of a religious system [culture] which affirmed everything and denied nothing paid tremendous dividends [in the evolution of the civilization]” (1960, p.220).

In conclusion, reexamining the current progressive trends of society, in the domain of empowerment and freedom to individuals at large, and thus, in the domains of explorations in love and relationships, it would be apt to quote Fisher (2006), a biological anthropologist, “we are really moving forward, to the past” (para. 18).

### **Appraisals, Reflections and Further Recommendations**

The present study was conducted in Baroda, which is a peculiar Indian context. It is situated in Gujarat, one of the most progressive states in India. The city is known for its culture, cosmopolitan crowd, freedom and safety of women, economic development and the Gujarati community is also known as being tolerant and peace loving. Therefore, all findings may not be generalized to other Indian contexts.

However, the major contention of the present thesis is that cultural ideas, definitions and memes about love guide developmental trajectories, a theoretical postulate generalizable to other contexts. For example, there is a reason to believe that societies that perpetuate honor-killings would be devoid of experiences in romantic relationships that lead to egalitarian and game-free partnerships as well as resultant happiness.

The present study fathoms the conceptualization, attitudes and beliefs about romantic relationships and its developmental outcomes in a particular section of the society. Similar studies in other cultural contexts and societal segments would add to our understanding of what are the lived experiences of romantic relationships of emerging

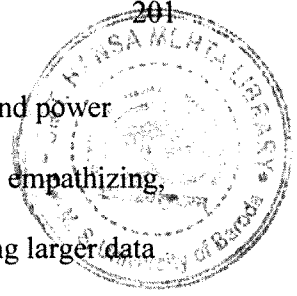


adults and what developmental inputs would help and support positive, growth-oriented experiences.

The qualitative phenomenography captures the voices of the respondents which give insights into their romantic aspirations, ideals as well as dissatisfactions. It also reveals internal conflicts and contradictions experienced by both the emerging adults as well as the parent figures. This information is indispensable for developmentalists interested in fostering positive developmental outcomes for emerging adults through relationships and life skills education.

Action researches in this area would require processing the theoretical postulates offered by the present study. Human societies across the globe have ample evidences demonstrating the negative consequences (suicides, murders, rapes, depression) of a 'loveless' society. There is a need to redefine human loving, a need to put physical intimacy back into the context of romantic relationships, a need to encourage emerging adults to value intimacy and autonomy, to be responsible and make the choices with awareness. The study also illuminates various aspects of parent-child relationships, such as expectations, conflicts, subjugation, and betrayal. Therefore, it has implications on parenting outcomes desired by the Indian parents and validating these outcomes against developmental consequences. For example, would parents like to teach emotional manipulation as a way of commanding obedience or demonstrating love?

These questions lead to broader examination of memes related to interpersonal relationships per se. Therefore, relationship education need not remain limited to marital or premarital education, sex education or remedial education but include efficacy leading to positive developmental outcomes, such as ability to identify and



share one's feelings, thoughts, respect each other beyond gender roles and power struggles, listening without 'mind-reading', learning perspective taking, empathizing, conflict resolution and above all, loving and accepting oneself. Gathering larger data sets covering cross-sections of societies would be essential to help the government see the health and economic benefits of investing in relationship education of emerging adults. Psychiatrist, R.D. Laing playfully summarizes the serious issues in romantic relationships explaining the need for efficacy based relationship education in the following delightful poem.

### **Do you love me?**

"SHE do you love me?

HE yes I love you

SHE best of all?

HE yes best of all

SHE more than the whole world?

HE yes more than the whole world

SHE do you like me?

HE yes I like you

SHE do you like being near me?

HE yes I like being near you

SHE do you like to look at me?

HE yes I like to look at you

SHE do you think I'm stupid?

HE no I don't think you're stupid?

SHE do you think I'm attractive?

HE yes I think you're attractive

SHE do I bore you?

HE no you don't bore me

SHE do you like my eyebrows?  
HE yes I like your eyebrows  
SHE very much?  
HE very much  
SHE which one do you like the most?  
HE if I say one the other will be jealous  
SHE you have to say  
HE they are both exquisite  
SHE honest?  
HE honest  
SHE have I got nice eyelashes?  
HE yes nice nice eyelashes  
SHE do you like to smell me?  
HE yes I like to smell you  
SHE do you like my perfume?  
HE yes I like your perfume  
SHE do you think I've good taste?  
HE yes I think you have good taste  
SHE do you think I'm talented?  
HE yes I think you're talented  
SHE you don't think I'm lazy?  
HE no I don't think you're lazy  
SHE do you like to touch me?  
HE yes I like to touch you  
SHE do you think I'm funny?  
HE only in a nice way  
SHE are you laughing at me?  
HE no I'm not laughing at you

SHE do you really love me?

HE yes I really love you

SHE say "I love you"

HE I love you

SHE do you want to hug me?

HE yes I want to hug you, and cuddle you,  
and bill and coo with you

SHE is it all right?

HE yes it's all right

SHE swear you will never leave me?

HE I swear I'll never ever leave you, cross my heart  
and hope to die if I tell a lie

(pause)

SHE do you *really* love me?" (1976, p.64).