



From Sneh to Samvaad: The Interplay of Hindu Values and Romantic Relationships Across Religious Orientations

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Abstract: The study explores the impacts of Hindu religious values like trust (vishwas), commitment (nishtha), selflessness (tyaag), loyalty (sneh), and other values on romantic relationships among four groups: atheists, spirituals, the religious, and agnostics. This study employs qualitative phenomenological research methodology, focusing on the impact of religion on romantic relationships and inter-Hindu communication. Participants were interviewed and asked semi structured questions based on their communication patterns, conflict resolution, partner choice, and their religious upbringing. Thematic analysis showed that religious values significantly shaped romantic relationships among young adults, revealing differing dynamics. Key themes included religious orientation and partner choice, conflict resolution styles, relationship emotional expression, and perceptions of gender roles. The results show an increase in the difference between certain beliefs and the traditional expectations of gender and an evolution in trust, commitment and emotional security in relationships. The project will improve the academic discourse by providing information about relationship counselling, intercultural relations, and changing the concept of Hindu love and partnership.

Keywords: *Hindu Religious Values, Romantic Relationships, Religious Orientation, Gender Roles, Communication.*

1. Introduction

Religion is widely recognized as a powerful and multifaceted factor that significantly influences human values, behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics across cultures. In relationship research, Christianity's impact on romantic partnerships has been thoroughly examined through numerous empirical studies and theoretical frameworks (Johnson et al., 2019). However, despite Hinduism being one of the world's oldest religions with rich philosophical traditions, the influence of Hindu religious values on romantic relationships has received comparatively less scholarly attention (Johnson et al., 2019; Smith, 2020). This research gap is particularly significant given Hinduism's complex value system and its profound impact on social structures in countries where it predominates. This study addresses this gap by investigating how four distinct religious orientations—Atheist, Spiritual, Religious, and Agnostic—shape perceptions and expressions of romantic relationships through the lens of fundamental Hindu values including trust (vishwas), commitment (nishtha), selflessness (tyaag), and loyalty (sneh).

Hindu traditions emphasize duty (dharma), selfless service, and emotional connection as essential for meaningful relationships. However, these values are interpreted differently based on religious orientation: religious individuals may follow scriptural guidance, spiritual people might prioritize self-realization, while atheists and agnostics often adopt secular approaches.

With India's predominantly Hindu population, this research addresses two key questions:

1. How do modern influences affect romantic relationships rooted in Hindu values?
2. How do religious orientations influence perceptions of love, commitment, and conflict?

Using social identity theory and attachment theory, this study examines how Hindu values integrate into a changing society, providing insights for relationship counselors, religious authorities, and individuals navigating relationships within different belief systems.

1.1 Defining Values

Values are deeply held beliefs guiding behavior, choices, and interactions. In romantic relationships, they determine how partners interact, resolve conflicts, express emotions, and build trust. This study explores Hindu-derived values as lived experiences in relationship

dynamics across different religious orientations, revealing tensions between tradition and modernity.

TRUST (vishwas): Trust forms the foundation of romantic relationships, enabling vulnerability, open communication, and emotional intimacy. In Hindu principles, trust (*vishwas*) serves as both personal necessity and spiritual ideal, maintaining relationship integrity. It facilitates conflict resolution, emotional closeness, and long-term stability.

LOYALTY (sneh): Loyalty represents a personal commitment to remain steadfast through challenges and successes. It builds emotional security, encourages vulnerability, and deepens belonging. In Hindu context, *sneh* (affectionate loyalty) expresses unwavering love that weaves trust, intimacy, and connection into relationships.

SELFLESSNESS (tyaag): Selflessness involves prioritizing a partner's needs and well-being, deepening connection through compassion and generosity. In healthy relationships, it fosters emotional intimacy and cooperation. However, true selflessness differs from self-neglect. In Hindu ethics, *tyaag* (renunciation/generosity) enhances relationship harmony when based on mutual respect and reciprocity.

COMMITMENT (nishtha): Commitment represents the enduring intention to maintain and invest in partnerships beyond verbal promises. It creates emotional security through perseverance and collaboration. In Hindu philosophy, *nishtha* embodies loyalty, dedication, and constancy, emphasizing both love's endurance and ethical fidelity despite modern relationship uncertainties.

CELIBACY (brahmacharya): In Hindu philosophy, celibacy (*brahmacharya*) extends beyond abstinence to represent self-restraint and impulse management. In relationships, it translates to thoughtful intimacy focusing on emotional connection and conscious physical expression. Some individuals, particularly spiritual or religious ones, practice celibacy temporarily or conditionally to maintain emotional clarity and align relationships with higher moral goals.

SATISFACTION (santosh): Satisfaction encompasses emotional contentment from having relationship needs meaningfully addressed. It emerges from balanced mutual respect, trust, and shared values. The Hindu concept of *santosh* aligns with gratitude for present circumstances

rather than endless striving, promoting emotional stability and closer bonds through appreciation of partners.

COMMUNICATION: Communication transcends information exchange to express feelings, intentions, and expectations. Clear communication enables vulnerability, navigates differences respectfully, and creates shared meaning. Hindu ethical principles like Ahimsa and Satya guide honest, introspective communication that prevents emotional harm and fosters trust.

This study ultimately examines how Hindu religious values interact with diverse belief systems to shape romantic relationships. By exploring fundamental principles within qualitative research and theoretical frameworks, it illuminates interactions between tradition and modernity in creating meaningful romantic connections in an evolving world.

2. Review Of Literature

Religion significantly influences human values and relationships, yet while Christianity's impact has been extensively studied, Hindu religious values in romantic relationships remain under-examined (Johnson et al., 2019; Smith, 2020). This study investigates how four religious orientations—Atheist, Spiritual, Religious, and Agnostic—affect romantic relationships through Hindu values like trust (vishwas), commitment (nishtha), selflessness (tyaag), and loyalty (sneh).

Hindu traditions emphasize duty (dharma), selfless service, and emotional connection for meaningful relationships, but interpretations vary by religious orientation. Religious individuals often follow scriptural guidance, spiritual people prioritize self-realization, while atheists and agnostics typically adopt secular approaches. In India's predominantly Hindu context, this research examines how modern influences affect traditional relationships and how religious orientations shape perceptions of love and commitment, using social identity and attachment theories as frameworks.

Values guide behavior and determine how partners interact, resolve conflicts, express emotions, and build trust. In Hindu principles, trust (vishwas) serves as both personal necessity and spiritual ideal, facilitating emotional intimacy and stability. Loyalty (sneh) represents

steadfast commitment through challenges, building emotional security and deepening belonging. Selflessness (tyaag) involves prioritizing a partner's needs, fostering connection through compassion while maintaining healthy boundaries. Commitment (nishtha) embodies dedication and constancy beyond verbal promises, creating emotional security despite modern uncertainties.

Other key values include celibacy (brahmacharya), representing thoughtful intimacy rather than mere abstinence; satisfaction (santosh), cultivating gratitude for present circumstances rather than endless striving; and communication guided by principles of non-harm (Ahimsa) and truthfulness (Satya) that create shared meaning.

Historically, Hindu matrimonial practices followed religious homogamy through religion, caste, and astrology (Kundali) (Allendorf, 2017). Many families still value astrology's role in compatibility, believing it aligns partners at karmic and temperamental levels. Families traditionally served as guardians of dharma, with marriage representing sacramental duty preserving family honor rather than personal fulfillment (Seymour, 2020). Partner selection was considered a shared responsibility for universal harmony rather than individual choice (Mankekar & Gupta, 2021).

However, contemporary Hindu communities show evolving attitudes. Younger Hindus increasingly emphasize compassion (karuṇā), truthfulness (satya), and non-violence (ahimsa) in relationships (Mankekar, 2020; Warriar, 2021). Many now identify as "spiritual Hindus" rather than "religious Hindus," creating space for egalitarian perspectives while maintaining ancestral connections. Interfaith relationships add further complexity, particularly in diasporic communities where couples often merge distinct spiritual practices to create shared meaning (Gupta, 2022).

This study examined how Hindu religious values interact with diverse belief systems to shape romantic relationships, illuminating the dynamic tensions between tradition and modernity in creating meaningful connections in an evolving world.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

A phenomenological research to study the influence of religious values on romantic relationship and communication amongst different religious orientations in Hindus.

3.2 Objective

- a) To identify common themes in the way religious values influence relationship expectations, conflict resolution and emotional intimacy.
- b) To compare the relationship experiences of Hindus with different religious orientation.
- c) To recognize how individuals experience the impact of their religious background on their romantic relationships and partner choices.

3.3 Sample

The study was conducted in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The study was conducted on 30 participants. Each age consisted of male and female participants. Hence, the sample size is 50% male and 50% female. The participation was voluntary.

Through the use of purposive sampling, participants were chosen to ensure diversity in terms of gender, relationship status (married, engaged, dating, or recently in a relationship), and religious beliefs. As part of the inclusion criteria, participants had to:

- 1) Identify as Hindu (religious, spiritual, agnostic, or atheist).
- 2) Currently be in a romantic relationship or have recently been in one.
- 3) Be between 21 and 35 years old.

3.4 Variable

The study examines the effect of religious orientation on interpersonal relationships and communication with romantic partners. Participants are categorized as atheists (non-believers), agnostics (uncertain about religion), spiritualists (spiritual but non-religious), and religious individuals (followers of organized religion).

The study explores how religious values shape expectations regarding partner selection, relationship dynamics, conflict resolution, and emotional communication. It also examines how religious beliefs influence decision-making and conflict expression within romantic relationships. Additionally, the study considers participants' perceptions of the role religion plays in shaping their romantic choices, alongside the influence of family and societal religious expectations.

Contextual factors such as cultural stereotypes within Hindu society and family upbringing, ranging from conservative to relatively liberal, are acknowledged as moderators that may impact communication and conflict resolution styles. Together, these elements aim to provide a deeper understanding of how religious orientation interacts with romantic relationship dynamics and communication patterns.

Research Design

This research employs qualitative phenomenology to assess the effects of religion on romantic relationships and communication among Hindus. The lived experiences of atheist, agnostic, spiritual, and religious subjects are captured by phenomenology, and they disclose common themes. Participants have been interviewed using a semi-structured format on the topics of communication, conflict resolution, partner selection, and religious upbringing.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify, organize, and interpret key patterns (themes). The process involved (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

4. Results

Themes	Subthemes	Quotations	Theory
Religious Orientation	Influence of family and culture	My family is very religious and ritual-oriented... (Spiritual, 23)	Socialization Theory (Berger & Luckmann)
	Evolution of beliefs	During the lockdown, I started exploring religious texts... (Spiritual/Religious, 26)	Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger)

	Skepticism towards norms	After a loved one's death, I stopped believing in divine rewards... (Atheist, 32)	Secularization Theory (Berger)
Partner Preference	Preference for similar beliefs	I can't see myself dating someone very religious... (Agnostic, 22)	Homophily Theory (McPherson et al.)
	Growth-centered love	True intimacy is freeing, not binding... (Spiritual, 24)	Self-Expansion Theory (Aron & Aron)
Communication & Emotional Expression	Mindful communication	Spirituality has made me more mindful in communication... (Spiritual, 24)	Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer)
	Transparency and emotional vulnerability	I realized spirituality doesn't make one immune to hurting others... (Spiritual, 25)	Attachment Theory (Bowlby)
Conflict Resolution	Mindful and non-violent communication	Instead of reacting impulsively, I reflect and respond mindfully. (Spiritual, 33)	-
	Active listening and empathy	I used to avoid confrontation, now	-

		I address it within days. (Spiritual, 21)	
Commitment and Detachment	Commitment as conscious choice	Commitment isn't about never doubting, but about choosing daily. (Spiritual, 29)	Relational Dialectics Theory (Baxter & Montgomery)
	Investment and emotional openness	Trust isn't about suppressing doubts but facing them openly. (Agnostic, 28)	Investment Model (Rusbult)
Selflessness and Boundaries	Boundary setting	I learned to create boundaries instead of being overly flexible. (Spiritual, 23)	Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al.)
	Self-neglect and learning	I prioritized my partner over myself and lost my individuality. (Spiritual, 21)	-
Relationship Growth	Conflict as growth opportunity	Earlier, I saw fights as threats; now I see them as chances to grow. (Agnostic, 31)	Transformative Conflict Theory (Deutsch)
Contentment and Emotional Security	Present-moment appreciation	Satisfaction comes from presence, not permanence. (Spiritual, 29)	Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi)

	Acceptance of imperfections	True love is about growing together, not losing yourself. (Spiritual, 29)	-
Gender Roles	Emotional expression differences	Society assigns different roles to men and women, but I separate myself from them. (Agnostic, 23)	Gender Role Theory (Eagly)
Physical Intimacy	Emotional bonds over physical encounters	Physical intimacy should be rooted in emotional and spiritual connection. (Spiritual, 33)	Triangular Theory of Love (Sternberg)
Trust, Loyalty and Temptations	Trust as personal responsibility	Trust is my responsibility; I trust based on my intuition. (Agnostic, 30)	Trust Theory (Rousseau et al.)

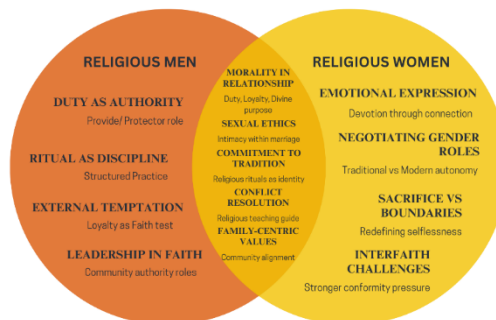


Figure 1: Comparison between religious men and religious women

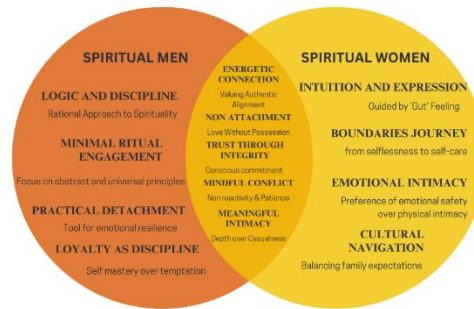


Figure 2: Comparison between spiritual men and spiritual women

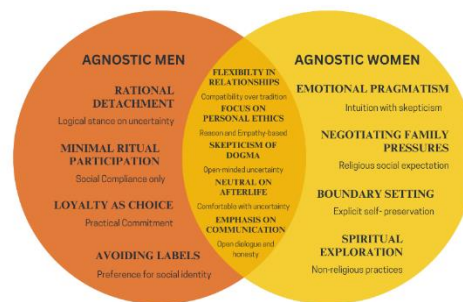


Figure 3: Comparison between agnostic men and agnostic women

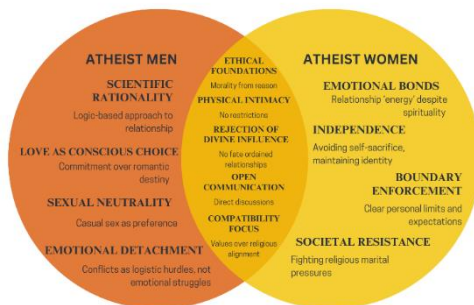


Figure 4: Comparison between atheist men and atheist women

5. DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the study revealed the complex interplay between religious orientation and various aspects of romantic relationships among young adults. The major themes identified include religious orientation and partner preference, conflict resolution strategies, emotional expression in relationships, and gender roles. These themes provide insight into how individuals with different religious orientations—atheist, agnostic, spiritual, and religious—navigate their romantic relationships, particularly regarding communication,

compatibility, and conflict resolution. One of the key findings of the study is that religious participants tend to be strongly devoted to partners who share similar religious beliefs. This tendency is consistent with the theory of homophily (McPherson et al., 2017), which suggests that people with common beliefs tend to connect. In contrast, spiritual and agnostic participants base their partner preferences more on personal values rather than religious identity. Spiritual individuals view relationships as a process of mutual growth and transformation, while agnostics prioritize emotional and intellectual depth, often reinterpreting or questioning traditional structures. Atheists, meanwhile, prioritize ethical and intellectual compatibility over religious considerations. This suggests a divergence: while religious individuals see shared belief systems as essential to relationship stability, non-religious individuals appreciate a broader ideological alignment. Identity Theory (Stryker) supports these findings, showing that individuals integrate traditions while freely diverging from rigid customs as part of personal growth.

The study also found that religious orientation significantly impacts communication styles. Religious participants often communicate more subtly, viewing silence as emotional self-restraint that fosters patience and longevity in relationships. Non-religious participants—spiritual, agnostic, and atheist—tend to be more emotionally expressive, openly discussing feelings and valuing vulnerability. While all participants emphasized the importance of communication for relationship longevity, spiritual individuals particularly valued mindful, nonviolent communication, focusing on balanced conflict resolution. Atheists and agnostics approached conflicts rationally and directly, emphasizing individual responsibility. Religious individuals often preferred mediated conflict resolution, involving friends, family, or therapists for guidance.

Age and religious orientation further influenced commitment and emotional detachment within relationships. The Relational Dialectics Theory and Investment Model support the findings that spiritually inclined individuals balance emotional attachment with acceptance of outcomes, maintaining commitment through mindful communication. Agnostics prioritize self-improvement and personal responsibility, while atheists pragmatically evaluate commitment. Religious individuals view commitment as a moral obligation shaped by upbringing, enhancing relational stability. Participants aged 21–26 often struggled with

balancing intimacy and independence, while those older than 26 demonstrated greater emotional stability and maturity in commitment.

Self-sacrifice and selflessness were valued differently across groups. Religious participants viewed self-sacrifice as essential to relationships, often placing obligations above personal needs. In contrast, spiritual individuals emphasized setting healthy boundaries to maintain self-identity and connection, aligning with boundary theory. Agnostics and atheists adopted a middle-ground approach, practicing selflessness without compromising core principles. Across all groups, participants recognized the importance of boundaries, reflecting an awareness of past experiences with self-neglect. Spiritual individuals, in particular, prioritized contentment and presence in relationships, valuing inner peace over external validation—a perspective supported by Flow Theory. Acceptance of imperfections contributed to stable and harmonious dynamics, contrasting with orientations that emphasized external measures of relational success.

Trust and loyalty were perceived differently depending on religious orientation. Religious participants saw trust and loyalty as moral and religious obligations, reinforcing the bond through duty rather than personal choice. Spiritual individuals viewed loyalty as a personal virtue, showing greater tolerance toward partner choices, including infidelity. Agnostics and atheists considered trust and loyalty personal ethical choices, guided by logic and intuition rather than religious doctrine. Although both genders valued trust and loyalty, men tended to hold more rigid expectations, while women demonstrated greater flexibility.

Gender roles in relationships aligned with Gender Theory, illustrating how socialization shapes relationship behaviors. Women expressed emotions more openly and viewed relationship values as responsibilities, often expecting to make greater sacrifices than men. Men adhered more rigidly to provider roles, emotionally and financially, reinforcing traditional gender norms. Women, however, were more willing to accept partners' choices, reflecting slightly more flexible relationship expectations.

Regarding sexual attitudes, most participants—regardless of religious orientation—expressed comfort with casual sex, indicating the influence of a modern, Westernized worldview. Religious and spiritual individuals, however, often regarded sex as sacred and voluntarily chose celibacy. Some respondents saw sex without affection as emotional

avoidance, while agnostics and atheists framed sex as a means to assess physical compatibility, prioritizing open conversation to differentiate between lust and love. This aligns with Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, with atheists emphasizing intimacy and passion as prerequisites to sexual relationships.

Differences in how participants approached the balance between relationship growth and personal development were evident across religious orientations. Agnostics prioritized problem-solving and personal growth during disagreements, spiritual individuals emphasized mindful self-responsibility to avoid relational stagnation, and religious participants sometimes struggled to prioritize themselves while valuing both relational and personal growth. Atheists emphasized maintaining balance for mutual development. Age also influenced this balance, with older participants combining relational and personal growth more easily than younger participants, who often struggled with self-prioritization.

Overall, the study provides valuable insight into the ways religious orientation influences interpersonal relationships and communication styles among young adults. It elaborates on established theories such as Self-Expansion Theory, Attachment Theory, and Socialization Theory, showing how perceptions of conflict resolution, commitment, and intimacy differ among individuals of various religious orientations. While religious individuals tend to prioritize obedience and moral commitment, spiritual individuals promote mindful communication and personal growth. Agnostics and atheists emphasize autonomy and logical conflict resolution, consistent with Relational Dialectics Theory and Transformative Conflict Theory. The study further explores how religious orientation impacts emotional security, trust, and commitment, challenging traditional gender norms and emphasizing the importance of emotional expression and self-boundaries in maintaining relationships.

The study's qualitative approach captured the rich emotional and psychological dynamics of participants categorized as religious, spiritual, agnostic, or atheist. It also addressed generational differences, highlighting how age influences relationship priorities. The urban, educated, predominantly Hindu sample adds cultural specificity to the understanding of modern relationships in India. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The narrow age range (21–35 years), small sample size, and reliance on self-reported data limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the religious orientation categories may oversimplify participant beliefs, and the study did not systematically examine socio-economic,

educational, or regional factors that could influence views. The focus on an urban Hindu population further restricts the applicability to rural or non-Hindu populations. Moreover, the study emphasized family influence on religious orientation, overlooking the roles of media and peer groups.

Nonetheless, this research lays a foundation for future studies exploring the interplay between religious orientation and romantic relationships. It offers valuable insights for relationship therapists and counsellors to develop culturally sensitive conflict resolution and emotional intimacy strategies. As societal perceptions of relationships evolve, future research can build on these findings by analysing generational shifts and creating quantitative studies to test emerging hypotheses. The study enriches our understanding of how religious beliefs, personal growth, emotional security, and evolving social norms intersect in shaping modern romantic relationships.

6. CONCLUSION

This research explores how religious values impact romantic relationships and communication among Hindu young adults, focusing on belief systems — atheist, agnostic, spiritual, and religious — rather than caste. Religious individuals prioritized commitment, family involvement, and long-term stability, while atheists and agnostics emphasized personal autonomy and flexible relationship norms. Even spiritual and non-religious participants encountered cultural and familial expectations rooted in Hindu traditions, highlighting the enduring influence of heritage.

The findings reveal that romantic relationships among Hindu youth are not purely emotional but spaces where inherited values and individual agency negotiate meaning. Participants neither blindly follow religious doctrines nor wholly reject them; instead, they reinterpret tradition through personal truth. The tension between dharma and desire, collectivism and individualism, reflects not a rejection of culture but its transformation.

Future research should explore generational shifts in belief patterns and globalization's influence on relationship norms, offering valuable insights for relationship counseling, intercultural communication, and evolving discourses on love within Hindu societies.

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