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With the recent judgment penalising a man for not marrying his live-in partner despite promising to do so, is the face of this relationship changing ?

The Domestic Violence Act, which was passed last year, has drawn its first blood. A Delhi court ordered a man to pay Rs 1.5 lakh to his live-in partner after he failed to marry her after a three-year-old relationship. The man had promised marriage to the woman. And while women are terming this ruling as a revolutionary step, men are a worried lot right now. CT explores whether the ruling will change the face of a relationship that till now was ruled by free will...

'A woman in a live-in won't be blamed'
Says minister, Renuka Chowdhury, who is a great advocate of this law, "Normally, we blame women in such relationships, but this will change now." Echoing her point of view is Pamela Lumba, vice president of the National Federation for Indian Women, "This ruling recognises and gives legal sanctity to live-in relationships."

However, most of the women in such relationships offer a more guarded opinion. Says TV actor Jaya Bhattacharya who separated from her live-in partner sometime ago, "A relationship is between two adults and such a ruling can't make any difference."

Men, meanwhile, are advising caution. Says actor Gaurav Chopraa, "If the woman was emotionally abused to meet selfish ends, then the compensation is legitimate. But if that wasn't the case, it was unfair to the man, who actually lost the relationship and also had to pay Rs 1.5 lakh." And he also has a few women on his side. As TV actor Achint Kaur, who has been in a live-in relationship for many years now, says, "As far as this case is concerned, three years is a long time to decide whether you want to get married or not. Why did the woman continue to live with this man for all these years?"

'Why introduce law in this relationship?'
What does this judgment predict for the future of live-in relationships? After all, it is a bond based on the free will of two adults and the chances of a man or a woman being forced into it are bleak. "There are always ways and means of abusing women even in such relationships," says Chowdhury while disagreeing with this view, "For every one woman who misuses the law, there are a hundred who need it. Does that mean we do away with the law completely?" But most of the people in such relationships feel that there is no place for the judiciary here. "You take the decision to live-in yourself. You can walk out if you think things are not going right. So, where is the place for enforcing a law here?" asks Jaya.

'It is a mindset change'
Where do we go from here, what will the next step be? Sociologist Patricia Oberoi feels that this law will not change society much. She says that all over the world, it is being accepted that people in live-in relationships have the same rights as married people. "And this is being recognised in India too now," she says.

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