

Exploring the Legal and Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Marriage Dissolution: A Comparative Analysis of Hindu and Muslim Personal Laws

Dhnanjy Gupta

Student, Pursuing BA.LLB (Hons.), United World School of Law, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, India

Abstract:

This research study explores the legal and socio-cultural aspects of marriage dissolution in India, focusing on a comparative comparison of Hindu and Muslim personal laws. The research centres on the five primary grounds for divorce in India, including adultery, cruelty, desertion, conversion to another religion, and incurable mental illness. The study presents a comparative examination of Hindu and Muslim personal laws, emphasizing the disparities in divorce legislation and the influence of religious convictions on divorce laws. The study also examines the socio-cultural determinants of marriage breakdown in India, encompassing gender roles, socio-economic issues, and cultural attitudes towards divorce. The study reveals that gender norms and societal perspectives on divorce have a substantial impact on divorce rates in India, with women encountering greater obstacles in seeking a divorce compared to males. The article finishes by providing recommendations for policy and practice, highlighting the necessity for increased adaptability in divorce legislation and the significance of tackling gender disparity and cultural perspectives on divorce. The research also emphasises the significance, especially within the context of the evolving socio-cultural environment of India. The study emphasises the necessity for a more sophisticated comprehension of the elements that impact the termination of marriages in India, including examining gender roles, socio-economic issues, and cultural perspectives on divorce. The research highlights the need of tackling gender disparity and cultural perspectives on divorce as a means to enhance the adaptability and equity of divorce legislation in India.

Keywords: Marriage dissolution, Hindu Personal Law, Muslim Personal Law, Socio economic factors, cultural perspective

1. Definition of Marriage dissolution:

Marriage dissolution in India is the legal procedure for ending a marriage, generally referred to as divorce. The divorce procedure for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains is regulated by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, whereas the divorce process for Christians is regulated by the Indian Divorce Act, 1869. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, outlines the specific reasons that allow women to seek a divorce within the Muslim faith. The Special Marriage Act, 1956, regulates civil marriages as well as inter-community marriages and divorces¹.

In India, the criteria for divorce are more restricted in comparison to Western countries. The five primary justifications commonly acknowledged as adequate grounds for divorce are adultery, cruelty, desertion, conversion to a different religion, and irreversible mental illness. Adultery is recognised as a legitimate reason for divorce for both men and women, but, women who commit adultery are subjected to more severe judgement compared to males. In Hindu law, divorce can be granted if either the husband or wife is found to have committed infidelity. However, according to Christian law, it has traditionally been more difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce purely based on adultery¹.

The divorce system in India is shaped by religious tenets, historical circumstances, and socio-cultural influences. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, was established to establish a consistent legal framework for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains, while also acknowledging the variations in customs and traditions among these faiths. The Indian Divorce Act, 1869, was established under British colonial authority and is applicable to Christians. On the other hand, the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, outlines the reasons by which women can seek a divorce within the Muslim community.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, acknowledges the notion of irreparable breakdown of marriage as a valid reason for divorce, although it is not considered as an independent reason in itself. The petitioner is obligated to provide evidence that the marriage has irreversibly deteriorated because to the respondent's acts of adultery, cruelty, desertion, or other valid reasons. The Indian Divorce Act of 1869 allows for divorce based on the grounds of adultery, cruelty, desertion, and apostasy. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939, outlines the specific reasons that allow women in the Muslim community to seek a divorce. These reasons include the husband's inability to engage in sexual intercourse, the husband's failure to offer financial support to his wife, and the husband's abusive behavior².

The divorce proceedings in India are protracted and intricate, encompassing a multitude of procedural formalities and appearances before the court. Both parties must submit a formal request for divorce, known as a petition, which is then delivered to the other party. Upon receiving the petition, the opposing party is given the chance to provide a response, after which the case is presented before a judge for consideration. If the petitioner can substantiate the grounds for divorce, the judge has the authority to grant the divorce. Alternatively, the case may be postponed for more proceedings. The divorce proceedings might last over multiple years, during which the involved parties may be mandated to engage in mediation or counselling in an attempt to reconcile their disagreements.

In India, the divorce rate is comparatively lower in comparison to Western nations. In Indian society, the institution of marriage is highly esteemed, and divorce is typically considered as a final option due to the prevailing social and cultural standards. The social disapproval linked to divorce continues to be widespread in Indian society, leading numerous couples to opt for enduring unpleasant marriages rather than pursuing a divorce. Nevertheless, there is a shift in the pattern, and the rate of divorce is steadily rising, especially in metropolitan regions.

2. Historical development of Hindu and Muslim personal laws:

The evolution of Hindu and Muslim personal laws in India has been influenced by a range of elements, such as religious scriptures, cultural customs, and the period of colonial governance.

¹ Brette Sember JD, "What Is a Dissolution of Marriage?" (LegalZoom, January 25, 2023) <<https://www.legalzoom.com/articles/what-is-a-dissolution-of-marriage>>.

² "Divorce in India – Postcolonial Studies" (June 20, 2014) <<https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/20/divorce-in-india/>>.

Ancient Indian culture followed the Manusmriti for Hinduism, whereas Islamic law was derived from the Quran, Hadith, Qiyas, and Ijma³. These personal laws regulated diverse areas of individuals' lives, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and guardianship. During the colonial era, the British Raj implemented a range of codified rules to govern personal affairs for different religious sects⁴. Although this resulted in a certain level of consistency, it also continued certain prejudiced actions and intensified dissatisfaction among different factions.

The colonial period witnessed a surge in the implementation of pre-Independence reforms, led by influential reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule. These reformers advocated for societal changes and the elimination of backward traditions. The fight for equal rights and fairness in personal laws gained strength throughout the colonial era, with influential social reformers and women activists like as Pandita Ramabai, Sarojini Naidu, and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain playing crucial roles in promoting women's rights and education. Following independence, the issue of implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) gained significant attention and became a popular subject of debate⁵. The UCC advocates for the consolidation of personal laws among different religious communities, with the goal of establishing a comprehensive and standardised legal structure that promotes inclusivity. Nevertheless, the adoption of the UCC has faced opposition, primarily from religious communities concerned about potential infringements on their personal laws and religious liberties.

3. Comparative analysis of Hindu and Muslim personal laws:

The Hindu and Muslim personal laws in India possess a lengthy and intricate historical background, each distinguished by its distinct attributes and qualities. An examination of these laws demonstrates various distinctions and resemblances in the legal structures that regulate marriage, divorce, and maintenance.

In Hindu law, monogamy is the prevailing practice, and both the husband and wife possess equal entitlements to seek divorce. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 establishes the regulations governing marriage and divorce within the Hindu community. The legislation allows for the official recording of marriages, and individuals have the option to pursue divorce based on several reasons, such as adultery, abandonment, mistreatment, and mental illness. The legislation also includes provisions for the financial support of the spouse and children upon the dissolution of the marriage⁶.

According to Islamic law, the husband is granted the privilege of marrying up to four women, whereas the wife alone possesses the authority to initiate divorce proceedings under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939⁷. The legislation stipulates various reasons for divorce, such as the husband's negligence in supporting his wife, his continuous absence for a period of two years, and his acts of cruelty⁸.

³ Lekshmi Parameswaran, "History of Personal Laws in India" (2020) <https://www.ipf.org.in/encyc/2020/11/13/2_02_27_53_History-of-Personal-Laws-in-India-Papers_1.pdf>.

⁴ "PERSONAL LAWS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM on JSTOR" www.jstor.org <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43950450>>.

⁵ Raya Hazarika, "Should India Have a Uniform Civil Code?" [2010] Social Science Research Network <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1697580>.

⁶ Alamgir Muhammad Serajuddin, "A Comparative Survey of Muslim Personal Law in South Asian Countries," Oxford University Press eBooks (2015) <<https://academic.oup.com/book/27315/chapter-abstract/197000963?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false>>.

⁷ Krishnangi Manrai, Quazi Amiruddin and Vanamala Srinivas, "Personal Laws of Hindus and Muslims" (2023) 8 International Journal of Novel Research and Development <<https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2305817.pdf>>.

⁸ Vinod Kumar and International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT), "Comparative Study of Matrimonial Laws of Hindu and Muslim," vol 10 (2022) journal-article <<https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2208465.pdf>>.

The legislation also includes provisions for the financial support of the spouse and offspring upon the dissolution of the marriage.

According to Hindu law, the husband has a legal duty to financially support his wife both throughout their marriage and after it ends. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, establishes the guidelines for maintenance, encompassing provisions for sustenance, attire, housing, education, and medical care. Likewise, according to Islamic law, the husband has a legal duty to financially support his wife during the duration of their marriage. Nevertheless, the wife has the right to request maintenance pendente lite and interim maintenance under the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. However, Muslim law does not provide any provision for maintenance pendente lite and interim maintenance.

The inclusion of a provision for perpetual maintenance is a common feature in all personal laws and is essentially same. Nevertheless, there exist certain distinctions among the personal laws. Under Hindu law, maintenance encompasses the provision of food, clothes, residence, education, and medical care and treatment. In contrast, under Muslim law, maintenance is referred to as Nafaq and specifically covers food, daily expenses, and accommodation. The evolution of Hindu and Muslim personal laws in India has been shaped by religious scriptures, cultural customs, and colonial governance.

4. Legal framework for marriage dissolution of Hindu and Muslim:

Hindu marriage Act, 1955:

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, is a consequential statute that regulates the institution of marriage and dissolution of marriage for individuals belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain religions in India. The Act establishes a legal structure for overseeing and upholding Hindu marriages, as well as safeguarding the rights of Hindu women within the institution of marriage. The Act is inclusive of all individuals who identify as Hindus, including those who practise Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, outlines the procedures and requirements for Hindu marriages, including the registration process, the rights and obligations of married couples, legal separation, annulment, divorce, financial support, and spousal maintenance. The primary objective of the Act is to establish a comprehensive legal structure for the oversight and upkeep of Hindu weddings, while also safeguarding the rights of Hindu women within the institution of marriage⁹.

According to the Hindu Marriage Act, divorce is the legal termination of a marriage and can only be requested by a spouse based on the specific reasons stated in the Act. The legislation explicitly states that the choice to terminate a marriage is a significant issue. Thus, it offers other options to divorce, including the restoration of marital rights, legal separation, and marriages that are considered void or voidable¹⁰.

According to the Act, if a ceremony occurs but the necessary conditions are not fulfilled, the marriage is either automatically invalid or can be declared invalid. A marriage can be deemed null and void if it violates any of the following:

Either parties are underage.

Either party is not of a hindu religion

Either parties are already married.

⁹ Tripaksha Litigation, “Grounds of Divorce under Hindu Marriage Act,1955” (Tripaksha Litigation, April 8, 2024) <<https://tripakshalitigation.com/grounds-of-divorce-under-hindu-marriage-act-1955/>>.

¹⁰ Net Lawman, “Hindu Marriage Act 1955” (Net Lawman, December 4, 2020) <<https://www.netlawman.co.in/ia/hindu-marriage-act-1955>>.

The Hindu Marriage Act also includes provisions for divorce by mutual consent, which allows both parties to opt to terminate the marriage. According to the Act, the spouses must be married for a minimum of one year before they are eligible to initiate divorce proceedings, unless there are instances of adultery or cruelty. The legislation also includes provisions for the financial support of the spouse and children upon the dissolution of the marriage.

Grounds for divorce:

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, is the principal statute that regulates the institution of marriage and dissolution of marriage for individuals belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain religions in India. The legislation encompasses multiple justifications for divorce, such as infidelity, abuse, abandonment, religious conversion, mental illness, leprosy, and sexually transmitted diseases¹¹.

Adultery is the act of engaging in any form of sexual interaction, including sexual intercourse, outside of the confines of marriage. Engaging in such behaviour is deemed a criminal offence, and it necessitates compelling evidence to substantiate the claim. In 1976, a legal modification stipulated that a petitioner can obtain a divorce based on a single instance of adultery.

Cruelty is the act of one spouse inflicting emotional and physical harm on the other, resulting in bodily hurt and damage to their well-being. Acts of mental torture, which are intangible in nature, are not evaluated based on a single occurrence but rather on a sequence of events. Behaviours such as the refusal of food, ongoing mistreatment, and the use of maltreatment to obtain dowry, as well as engaging in bizarre sexual behaviours, are all considered forms of cruelty.

Desertion is the act of one spouse willingly leaving their mate for a minimum duration of two years. The forsaken spouse has the right to initiate divorce proceedings based on the grounds of desertion.

Conversion is the act of an individual adopting a different religion. The other spouse has the option to initiate a divorce case on this basis.

A mental disorder can be considered as a valid reason for seeking a divorce if the spouse of the person filing the petition is afflicted with a mental disease. However, this is only applicable if the other spouse was uninformed of this condition at the time of marriage. Additionally, the divorce must be initiated within three years after the marriage.

If the spouse of the petitioner is afflicted with a severe and untreatable type of leprosy, it can be considered as a valid reason for requesting a divorce.

Venereal sickness is considered a valid reason for seeking a divorce if one of the spouses is afflicted with a highly contagious and severe illness. Sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, are classified as venereal diseases.

Renunciation is a legal basis for filing for divorce when one spouse gives up all worldly matters by joining a religious order.

The term "Not Heard Alive" refers to a legal basis for initiating a divorce when an individual has not been observed or heard from by individuals who would typically have knowledge of their whereabouts for a period of seven years or longer. If one spouse wishes to remarry, they must petition for divorce.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, also includes provisions for divorce with mutual consent, if both parties mutually agree to terminate the marriage. According to the Act, the spouses must be married for a minimum of one year before they are eligible to initiate divorce proceedings, unless there are instances of

¹¹ <https://www.lexisnexis.in/blogs/divorce-under-hindu-marriage-act/>

adultery or cruelty. The Act also stipulates provisions for the financial support of the wife and children upon the dissolution of the marriage.

There have been proposals in recent years to include the concept of irretrievable collapse of marriage in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. This provision would permit divorce on the basis of the marriage being irreparably damaged and the spouses having lived separately for a specified duration, such as five or ten years. This premise is already acknowledged in the legislation of numerous nations and is regarded as a valid basis for divorce.

Procedure for divorce:

The process of obtaining a divorce under the Hindu Marriage Act include submitting a petition in a court of law by either spouse, specifying the reasons for wanting a divorce. Subsequently, the court will deliver a summons to the other spouse, who is required to provide a response to the petition within a designated period of time. In the event that the parties are unable to reach a resolution through mutual negotiation, the court has the authority to mandate their participation in mediation sessions facilitated by an impartial mediator. If the parties are unable to reach a resolution through mediation, the case will move to a hearing where the issues will be disputed. During the contested hearing, both parties will present their evidence and arguments to the court. The court will subsequently render a verdict by evaluating the evidence and arguments put forth by both sides. If the court rules in favour of the petitioner, it will issue a conclusive judgement of divorce¹². The ultimate divorce decree will dissolve the marriage and resolve matters such as child custody, child support, spousal support, and distribution of assets.

The Hindu Marriage Act also includes provisions for divorce by mutual consent, which allows both parties to opt to terminate the marriage. The legislation stipulates a mandatory interval of 1.5 years between the submission of the joint petition and the official approval of the divorce. The waiting period is mandated by Sections 13B (1) and 13B (2) of the Hindu Marriage Act. Divorce applications cannot be considered until one year has passed since the marriage, unless there are circumstances of bigamy or if the permission of the spouse was obtained through deceit, fraud, undue influence, or similar factors. If the marriage is dissolved and no spouse files any further petitions against the court's order, both spouses are free to remarry.

Muslim personal law:

Muslim Personal Law is based on the fundamental teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah. The Quran is the sacred scripture of Islam, comprising the divine revelations bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad by God¹³. The Hadith consist of the utterances and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, which function as a moral compass for Muslims in their day-to-day existence. The Sunnah encompasses the teachings, practices, and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, serving as a mandated way of life.

Forms for divorce:

Within the framework of Muslim Personal Law, there exist three distinct types of divorce: Talaq, Khula, and Faskh. Talaq is the predominant method of divorce, typically instigated by the spouse. He has the ability to articulate the word "Talaq" on three separate occasions, with a specified interval of time between each utterance. Khula is a type of divorce when the wife initiates the process and agrees to return her dowry to the husband in exchange for the divorce. Faskh is a judicially initiated kind of divorce employed in situations where the marriage has irreparably deteriorated and reconciliation is unattainable.

¹² Nyaaya, "Divorce for Hindus - Nyaaya" (Nyaaya, January 4, 2022) <<https://nyaaya.org/legal-explainers/family-and-marriage/divorce/divorce-for-hindus/>>.

¹³ <https://www.islamicity.org/topics/hadith-and-sunnah/>

Procedure for divorce:

The legal procedures and methodologies for divorce in Muslim Personal Law differ based on the nation and the particular school of thought. Typically, the husband is required to utter the word "Talaq" in the presence of two witnesses, and the wife must be notified of the termination of their marriage. The interval between each declaration of Talaq is referred to as the Iddah, and its purpose is to provide the couple with a length of time to attempt reconciliation. Once the couple fails to reconcile, the divorce is officially concluded at the end of the Iddah period.

In instances of Khula, the dissolution of marriage is instigated by the wife, who is required to restore her dowry to the husband. The husband has the choice to either accept or decline the offer. If he agrees, the divorce will be concluded. If he declines the proposal, the couple has the option to either continue living together or pursue a Faskh divorce.

When dealing with instances of Faskh, the judge will carefully evaluate the specific circumstances of the case and render a verdict based on the fundamental tenets of Islamic law. The judge has the authority to grant a divorce in cases when there is a significant deterioration of the marriage, prolonged absence of the husband, or the husband's inability to financially support his wife.

5. Social stigma face after divorce:

Divorce in India is accompanied with a notable societal stigma, especially for women, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Hindu and Muslim women encounter comparable difficulties during the period following divorce, encompassing financial, health, and emotional issues, particularly if they assume the role of sole carers. Divorced women typically encounter higher levels of despair, loneliness, and social interaction anxiety in comparison to married women. Divorce is frequently regarded as one of the most severe forms of trauma. Nevertheless, the societal disapproval surrounding divorce continues to pose a substantial obstacle for Hindu and Muslim women alike.

Divorce under Muslim Personal Law is regulated by the principles derived from the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah¹⁴. There are three types of divorce recognised under Muslim Personal Law: Talaq, Khula, and Faskh. Nevertheless, the societal disapproval surrounding divorce continues to provide a substantial obstacle for Muslim women who desire to end their marriages. Consequently, these women frequently encounter social ostracism and encounter challenges in securing appropriate marriage proposals¹⁵.

The social stigma surrounding divorce in India is firmly rooted in cultural and religious conventions, impacting Hindu and Muslim women alike. Divorced women frequently face blame, judgement, and discrimination, being labelled as 'manhoos' (unlucky), 'awara' (wayward), 'besabri' (impatient), and 'nakam' (unsuccessful). Furthermore, their children are also impacted by these situations.

6. Impact on women and children of divorce:

The consequences of divorce on women and children in India are substantial. Divorced women frequently experience significant levels of stress as a result of the negative social perception they face, feelings of isolation, financial hardship, and the uncertainty surrounding their own and their children's prospects¹⁶.

¹⁴ "Law and Religion: The Divorce Systems of India" Digital Commons <<https://digitalcommons.law.utulsa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1094&context=tjcil>>.

¹⁵ "Muslim Women Seeking Divorce: An Analysis on Socio-Religious Practice" Dergi Park <<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/1712482>>.

¹⁶ "The Impact of Divorce on Men and Women in India and the United States on JSTOR" www.jstor.org <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41602321>>.

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 governs divorce for Hindus, while the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 governs divorce for Muslims. These rules establish the reasons for divorce, yet, the enduring social disapproval and difficulties encountered by women and children after divorce continue to be substantial.

The effect of divorce on children is as substantial. Offspring of divorced parents frequently have emotional and psychological difficulties, such as sensations of desertion, uncertainty, and distress¹⁷. In addition, individuals from single-parent households may also encounter social stigma and discrimination.

7. Socio-economic factors affecting divorce:

Marriage and divorce rates are greatly influenced by socio-economic factors. Factors such as the country's economic conditions, levels of unemployment, housing costs, and government laws can all impact the socioeconomic standing of persons who are getting married or going through a divorce¹⁸. The divorce industry, comprising legal professionals and judicial institutions, can exert an economic influence on the process of divorce.

Children also have a socioeconomic influence on marriage and divorce. Single parents experience lower levels of income and notably greater rates of poverty compared to parents who are married. The discrepancy in social mobility rates for children of single parents can be attributed to a combination of educational, socioeconomic, and social variables.

Marital satisfaction can also be influenced by socioeconomic status. Contrary to popular belief, recent research demonstrates that marital contentment tends to decline as time goes on¹⁹. However, this study reveals that socioeconomic position can unexpectedly influence both satisfaction levels and the probability of divorce. Women are more significantly impacted by lower socioeconomic position compared to men, particularly those who report lower levels of happiness at the start of marriage.

8. Cultural attitude towards divorce:

The cultural perspectives on divorce among Hindu and Muslim groups are shaped by religious doctrines, societal conventions, and customary traditions.

Within the Hindu community, divorce is perceived as a societal disgrace, especially for women. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 allows for divorce based on many grounds including adultery, cruelty, desertion, conversion, mental condition, leprosy, and venereal disease. Nevertheless, the societal disapproval surrounding divorce continues to pose a substantial obstacle for Hindu and Muslim women alike²⁰.

Divorce in the Muslim community is regulated by the principles derived from the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah. There are three types of divorce recognised under Muslim Personal Law: Talaq, Khula, and Faskh. Nevertheless, Muslim women who desire a divorce have a substantial obstacle in the form of societal shame, which leads to social exclusion and impedes their ability to locate suitable marriage prospects.

¹⁷ Paul R Amato, "The Impact of Divorce on Men and Women in India and the United States" (1994) 25 *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 207 <<https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.25.2.207>>.

¹⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8179854/>

¹⁹ "The Impact of Divorce on Men and Women in India and the United States on JSTOR" www.jstor.org <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41602321>>.

²⁰ John Nachlinger, "Cultural Issues in Divorce and How to Overcome Them. - Netsquire" (Netsquire, January 24, 2024) <<https://www.centraljerseyfamilylaw.com/cultural-issues-in-divorce-and-how-to-overcome-t/>>.

The cultural perspectives on divorce among Hindu and Muslim groups are shaped by religious doctrines, societal conventions, and customary traditions. Divorce in both societies is accompanied by a notable social shame, especially for women²¹. Women who pursue a divorce may encounter social ostracism, economic challenges, and psychological distress. Offspring of divorced parents may also encounter social ostracism and prejudice.

Efforts have been made in recent years to confront the societal stigma associated with divorce in India. The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 specifies the reasons a Muslim wife can use to seek a divorce, but the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 allows divorce based on different grounds, including mutual agreement. Nevertheless, the societal disapproval surrounding divorce continues to provide a substantial obstacle, necessitating heightened awareness and education to confront cultural and religious conventions that uphold this disapproval.

9. Legal Reforms and Implications:

Legal reforms and policy consequences are essential for tackling the socio-cultural obstacles to divorce, specifically among Hindu and Muslim groups. Legal reforms can effectively combat the societal disapproval associated with divorce, especially for women, and enhance the dissemination of knowledge and education regarding the legal entitlements and laws related to divorce.

Legal reform encompasses both procedural and substantive changes, and is frequently interchangeable with economic reform. Economic policies are mostly enacted through legislation and regulations, with policymakers relying on economic analysis to inform the development of these laws and regulations²². Legal reform encompasses both procedural and substantive aspects, distinguishing it from economic policy. In every market economy, the legal process serves numerous important purposes. These include establishing legal norms, carrying out and ensuring compliance with these norms, resolving conflicts, and restraining the authority of the state in relation to the private sector.

Legal reforms in the context of divorce can effectively overcome socio-cultural obstacles that hinder individuals, especially women, from pursuing divorce. Legal changes can effectively combat the social stigma associated with divorce by fostering increased awareness and education regarding the legal rights and laws pertaining to divorce. Additionally, these reforms can offer enhanced assistance to women who are seeking to dissolve their marriages.

Policy consequences may encompass the pursuit of legal reforms, strategic litigation, and the promotion of legal empowerment²³. Law reform, sometimes known as legal reform, is the examination of existing laws and the promotion and implementation of modifications in a legal system, typically with the goal of

²¹ Chloe Lee, "The Role of Culture on Divorce, and Its Impacts on How a Divorce Proceeding Is Handled. - Asia Law Network Blog" (Asia Law Network Blog, July 12, 2021) <<https://learn.asialawnetwork.com/2021/07/12/role-culture-divorce-impacts-divorce-proceeding-handled/>>.

²² Alina Pomaza-Ponomarenko and others, "Legal Reform and Change: Research on Legal Reform Processes and Their Impact on Society. Analysis of Factors That Facilitate or Hinder Legal Change, Including Political, Social, and Economic Factors" (2023) 11 Journal of Law and Sustainable Development e1854 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375131460_Legal_Reform_and_Change_Research_on_Legal_Reform_Processes_and_their_Impact_on_Society_Analysis_of_Factors_that_Facilitate_or_Hinder_Legal_Change_Including_Political_Social_and_Economic_Factors>.

²³ Cheryl W Gray a US national, "Reforming Legal Systems in Developing and Transition Countries" [1997] Finance & Development <<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1997/09/pdf/gray.pdf>>.

improving fairness or effectiveness²⁴. Advocating for legal reforms in the field of law can effectively tackle the socio-cultural obstacles to divorce. This can be achieved by fostering more knowledge and education regarding the legal rights and provisions pertaining to divorce, fighting the societal prejudice associated with divorce, and offering enhanced assistance to women who desire to end their marriages. Strategic litigation can serve as a powerful means to foster accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strategic litigation can compel the government to provide justifications for its decisions, adopt certain measures, or develop a system of oversight that promotes accountability. Legal empowerment is crucial for achieving responsibility for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Legal empowerment is enhancing the ability of individuals or groups to effectively exercise their rights. Possible methods for promoting legal empowerment may encompass legal education, dissemination of information, advocacy efforts, community organisation, and mediation.

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²⁴ Gani Aldashev, Jean-Philippe Platteau and Zaki Wahhaj, “Legal Reform in the Presence of a Living Custom: An Economic Approach” (2011) 108 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 21320 <<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1017139108>>.

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