



Maintenance Under Hindu Law: An Analysis

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| ARTICLE DETAILS | ABSTRACT |
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| Research Paper | This paper deals with Maintenance of wife under Hindu Marriage Act. |
| Keywords : | The concept of maintenance aims at putting the wife back to the same position of comfort and lifestyle as she was at the time when her marriage existed. There is no fixed amount of maintenance that the husband is liable to pay to his wife, and it is upon the discretion of a family court to fix the amount of maintenance that the husband needs to pay either on a monthly basis or in form of a lump sum. Maintenance to wife is a very complicated issue under Hindu Marriage Act. It is often stated as a mean to exploit the husband by asking alimony for life. Section 24 of Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 (The Act) states that either husband or wife may claim maintenance pendent lite i.e. maintenance till the proceedings are in process. Further, section 25 of the Act states the grounds for permanent alimony. Maintenance to wife refers to the payments, which a husband, under certain circumstances is under an obligation to pay. Obligation of payment of maintenance can either during the subsistence of the marriage or after the dissolution of the marriage. The most important aspect of maintenance is that the party which relies on maintenance has no independent source of income to support himself/herself. The quantum of maintenance and the expenses of the proceedings have not been specified in any of the Indian Matrimonial statutes except the Divorce Act. |
| <i>Maintenance, alimony, spouse, grounds, discretion, permanent.</i> | |



Introduction

The whole concept of maintenance was initiated in order to see that if there is a spouse who is not independent economically than the other spouse should help him/her in order to make the living of the other person possible and independent. The maintenance may be in a gross sum or on periodical or monthly basis. In no case, the maintenance shall be owed beyond the life of the non-Applicant. The income and property of the non-Applicant shall be considered while determining the permanent alimony. The interim maintenance is payable from the date of presentation of the petition till the date of dismissal of the suit or passing of the decree. Interim maintenance is supposed to meet the instant needs of the petitioner. The aim of the study in this research to analysis whether women really needs maintenance

Objectives:

- To study the maintenance under Hindu Marriage Act
- To analyse whether women get satisfying maintenance
- To examine whether women really need maintenance

Hypothesis:

Ho: There is no significant change in maintenance under Hindu Marriage Act.

Ha: There is significant change in maintenance under Hindu Marriage Act.

Sources and study method

The study is doctrinal in nature and the sources are secondary sources which includes books, articles, journals and internet sources.

Research Question

Problem: Whether all women get maintenance from their spouse after divorce? Intervention: Hindu Marriage Act

Comparison: On Hindu and Muslim Law



Concept of Maintenance:

The right to claim maintenance is a right recognised under different laws in India, each one is different from other in main and another particulars. The child, wife, aged parents, divorced wife, other near relations must obtain some subsistence for themselves. Maintenance in most cases is due to the fact of marriage. Family tie and family obligations of more or less pressing type, call for the need of maintenance. Litigations to obtain maintenance take the shape of legal battles in various countries, so also in India Government tries to solve the problem by way of certain Acts passed in the legislature. Statutory enactments try to solve the problem for mitigating the hardships of unemployed wife, children, old and infirm parents who are unable to maintain themselves, obviously, for the reason that they have no income of their own. The anti-vagrancy measures adopted by government of India can be better utilized at the initiative of victims and for this, people in general should be legally conscious and active to obtain their statutory benefits. Maintenance provisions among various communities in India are enshrined mainly (a) in the **personal laws of Hindu and Muslims** who constitute the bulk population in India and also (b) in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

Maintenance under various laws:

- (a) Maintenance under Hindu Law.
- (b) Maintenance under Muslim Law.
- (c) Maintenance under Christian Law.
- (d) Maintenance under Parsi Law.
- (e) Maintenance under Code of Criminal Procedure 1973.
- (f) Maintenance under Protection of women from Domestic violence Act, 2005.
- (g) The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior citizens Act, 2007.

Persons entitled to receive maintenance:

Maintenance may be allotted to dependent children, parents and legally wedded wives, counting but not limited to a divorced spouse, mistress, illegitimate children, etc.



In certain cases under personal law, the Indian courts have adopted a lenient view and granted the husband the right to receive maintenance. Such right however, is conditional and typically conferred upon the husband, only if he is incapacitated due to some accident or disease and rendered incapable of earning a livelihood. Such an entitlement is not available to an able person, doing nothing for a living or a “wastrel”.

The remedy under Section 125 is prompt and inexpensive, as compared to personal laws. The provision relating to maintenance under any personal law is however, distinct and separate from Section 125. There is no conflict between both the legal provisions. A person is entitled to maintenance under Section 125 despite having obtained an order under the applicable personal law. The Act predict certain positions in which it may become unbearable for a wife to continue to reside and cohabit with the husband but she may not want to break the matrimonial tie for various reasons ranging from growing children to social stigma. There is a misapprehension that a working woman is not entitled to profess maintenance as she is earning and is thus able to maintain herself. The Indian courts have recognised the right of maintenance of a working woman and held that an estranged woman can claim maintenance from her husband even is she earns a monthly income, which is not enough for her to maintain herself. Thus, earning wife is entitled to maintenance under maintenance law for wife in India. The issue of right to maintenance to the second wife has been faced by various High Courts as well as the Supreme Court, and the courts have given different views depending upon the facts and situations of each case, thus giving diverse interpretation to the expression “wife” under Section 125 of the Code of **Criminal Procedure**. The interim maintenance is payable from the date of presentation of the petition till the date of dismissal of the suit or passing of the decree. Interim maintenance is supposed to meet the immediate needs of the petitioner.

Types of maintenance under Hindu Laws:

Under the Hindu maintenance laws, there are 2 types of maintenance that can be claimed by the wife. When the wife files a maintenance petition through her **divorce attorney**, the burden to declare his income shifts to the husband, who has the right to defend the maintenance petition.

The types of maintenance under Hindu laws are as follows:



1. Interim Maintenance:

When the wife files a maintenance petition, the court may award her interim maintenance that the husband must pay from the date on which the application was filed by the wife till the date of dismissal through her **divorce law advocate**. It is also known as Maintenance Pendente Lite and is paid so that the wife can pay for the legal expenses incurred by her.

Interim maintenance is awarded by the court if the wife has absolutely no source of income to maintain herself. There are no laws that lay down the amount of this type of maintenance and it is completely upon the discretion of the court to determine how much maintenance is sufficient for the wife to sustain during the proceedings.

Section 24 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 lays down that both the husband and wife can file an application for interim maintenance through their divorce advocate.

2. Permanent Maintenance:

Permanent maintenance is paid by the husband to his wife in case of divorce, and the amount is determined through a maintenance petition filed through a **divorce law lawyer in India**. Section 25 of the Act states that the court can order the husband to pay maintenance to his wife in form of a lump sum or monthly amount for her lifetime. However, the wife may not be eligible for maintenance if there are any changes in her circumstances.

Under Section 18 of the **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956**, a wife has the right to live separately from her husband without affecting her right to claim maintenance. Under this law, a wife can live separately from her husband in the following cases:

- The husband has deserted the wife without any reasonable cause.
- The husband has subjected the wife to cruelty.
- The husband is suffering from leprosy of virulent form.
- The husband has extra-marital affairs.
- The husband has converted to another religion.



However, the wife is not entitled to claim maintenance in the following circumstances:

- She has ceased to be a Hindu by converting to another religion.
- She is guilty of adultery i.e. she is unchaste and indulged in physical relations with another man.
- She has remarried after the divorce.

Calculation of Maintenance under Hindu Laws

The amount of maintenance to paid depends upon different factors. The courts rely on the provision of Section 23 of the Act while asserting the total maintenance that the husband needs to pay to his wife. The provision lays down the following factors that must be considered to fix a maintenance amount:

- The position and status of the husband and wife,
- Whether the wife has an actual claim for maintenance.
- If the wife is living separately, whether the reason to do so is justified.
- The wife's total property and income.
- The husband's total property, income generated from this property, and his other income.
- The total number dependents and their expenses borne by the husband.
- The personal expenses of the husband.

Maintenance of Wife

The right of maintenance under Hindu law is very ancient and it was one of the primary necessities of the joint family system. According to my understanding the maintenance of the women in the joint family system was an important system and this was followed as a tradition which governed the families. It was the responsibility of the head of the family (karta) to look after the women of the family i.e. their wives and their daughters until they were married. Latter when the women grew older it was the duty of their children to mother and other old women of the family. The unchastity on part of the women excluded them to maintenance. Their remarriage ended the claim and the amount of maintenance depended upon various factors like the status of the family, necessary requirements, wants, age, etc. Section 24 of Hindu



Marriage Act, (HMA) 1955 allocates for maintenance. Under this Act also, only a wife has a right to claim maintenance. The Hindu husband has a legal obligation to maintain his wife during his lifetime. However, if a wife ceases to be Hindu or lives individually under no legal grounds she loses the right to claim maintenance too. Also, a Hindu wife under this act shall not be entitled to separate accommodation and maintenance from her husband if she is unchaste or converts to another religion. Wife can claim separate residence only if husband remarries and the other wife stays in the same house. Under this act (Section 19), a (Hindu) wife after the death of her husband is entitled to be maintained by her Father-in-law, if she has no means of her own earnings. However, the right cannot be enforced if her Father-in-law does not have means to do so and if the wife remarries. The liabilities of a Hindu to maintain others are personal liability and liability dependant on possession of property where the former arises from mere relationship between the parties and the latter arises due to possession of property.

Maintenance of Wife under Section 18, the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956

Under the section 18(1) of the HAMA, 1956 wife is entitled to maintenance by her spouse for lifetime i.e. she will be given maintenance until she dies or her husband dies. Under section 18 of this Act a Hindu wife is entitled to live separately from her husband without cancelling her right to claim maintenance. The grounds under which she can live separately are:-

1. Husband is guilty of desertion
2. The Husband has treated her with cruelty
3. The husband is agonizing from a virulent form of leprosy
4. The husband has any other wife living.
5. The husband keeps a concubine elsewhere
6. The Husband has halted to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion and
7. if there is any other cause justifying living separately

But there are two bars which will prevent a wife from claiming maintenance from her husband i.e. (i) if she is unchaste or (ii) if she halts to be a Hindu by conversion to another religion.



In determining the amount of maintenance the following has to be considered;

- The net value of the estate of the deceased after providing for payment of debts.
- The provision, if any made under a will of the deceased.
- Degree of relationship with the dependant.
- Reasonable wants of dependant.
- No. of dependants.

The claim of a dependant for maintenance does not impose any change on the estate of deceased unless a will mandates the same. **Under Section 24 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** relief may be provided by way of maintenance and litigation expenses to either of the spouse if he/she is unable to maintain herself during the pendency of proceedings. Under Section 25 of the Act, 1955 both husband and wife may be granted maintenance and permanent alimony after passing a decree of restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation, divorce and annulment of marriage under the said Act, if the husband or wife is unable to maintain himself/ herself.

Quantum of maintenance

Maintenance covers not merely food, clothing and shelter, but also includes other necessities. The quantum and type of necessities covered within the scope of maintenance may vary, depending on the status, financial position and number of dependents, etc and is at the discretion of the court. Antecedent to passing an order under Section 125, the court does take cognizance of the amount of maintenance already ordered under the personal law. The reasoning is based on the premise that the wife is entitled to live as per the standard and status of her husband.

Judicial Precedents

There is a spate of judicial precedents on the concern of maintenance. Until recently, the term ‘wife’ was interpreted in a narrow manner, since the intention of the judiciary was to protect destitute and harassed women. The Indian courts held that only a lawfully wedded woman was entitled to claim maintenance.



The change in perception vis-à-vis social relationships and the growing trend of live-in relationships has influenced the Indian mindset. This is apparent from a recent case decided by the Delhi High Court, in a personal law matter, wherein the couple had lived like a married couple for 14 years and the man had concealed the fact that he was already married. Furthermore, the woman had taken the responsibility of running the household as a housewife, treated the man as her husband and had borne and bred two of his children. The view taken by the court was that on account of the nature of the relationship and the aforementioned facts, the woman should not be deprived of her right to maintenance, under the personal law relevant to Hindus (which constitutes almost 80 per cent of Indians). The court further expressed that denial of maintenance under such circumstances would amount to putting a premium on or rewarding the man for defrauding the woman by concealing his first marriage. It was further recorded that for the purpose of granting maintenance under the personal law, women placed in the position of second wife, can be treated as legally wedded wives and are entitled to maintenance.

In a case decided on 14 November 2008, the Apex Court has recently ruled that maintenance necessarily encompasses a provision for residence and has therefore ordered that the woman be provided with a residential facility similar to that which she had been accustomed in the past.

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