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# Alimony Laws: Weapon or Shield

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SATAKSHI GUPTA<sup>1</sup> AND DR. MANISH BHARADWAJ<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Alimony is a controversial financial safeguard for dependant partners after a divorce in modern-day India. The system's efficiency and impartiality are questioned in light of its propensity for abuse and adaptability to changing circumstances in society and the economy. Alimony tries to give monetary stability to the partners who undertook such sacrifices in order to lessen the income gap that results from divorce, especially when one partner gave up job prospects for the benefit of their family. The article explores the crucial impact that court decisions have on the continuous evolution and implementation of alimony laws. We may look at how authorities have construed and improved the support for spouse's legal structure by examining seminal rulings. In addition to shedding information on the existing status of maintenance in India, this article will identify possible areas for future judicial declarations for enhancement. We can work to make sure alimony continues to be a fair and useful tool for providing worthy partners with financial stability after divorce by keeping an eye on the changing legal environment.*

**Keywords:** *alimony, divorce, financial stability, spouse, weapon, shield.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Alimony is a monetary award given by a court following a divorce. It is sometimes referred to as parental support or maintenance. Its main goals are to divide marital assets fairly and equally and to support the spouse who might be less fortunate financially following the divorce. A number of circumstances, including the span of the wedding, the partner's role in parenting and household duties, and the difference in potential earnings between the spouses, might lead to this disadvantageous position. The interpretation and implementation of alimony rules are, nevertheless, far from simple. In recent times, maintenance has become a contentious issue, especially in India. Some see it as an essential safety net, shielding financially precarious spouses—frequently women—who might have given up on their ability to grow in their careers or increase their income during the marriage. According to this viewpoint, alimony keeps the reliant spouse's level of living similar to what it was during the marriage and keeps them out of financial difficulties.

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a student at Law Collage Dehradun, Uttranchal University, Dehradun, India.

<sup>2</sup> Author is an Assistant Professor at Law Collage Dehradun, Uttranchal University, Dehradun, India.

However, there are worries that alimony laws might be applied improperly. The paying spouse may be unduly burdened by the system, according to critics, especially if a wedding was short-term or if the recipient partner is thought to be capable of supporting themselves. In addition, some allege that alimony rules are manipulated for financial advantage and that they are used for personal advantage, citing "fake cases" as evidence. Although designed to act as a safety net for dependent spouses, its efficacy and fairness are seriously questioned given the possibility of abuse and the dynamic nature of the social and economic sphere.

## II. PURPOSE OF ALIMONY

Though regrettably, not all connections endure forever, marriage is one of them. The legal disintegration of a marriage is symbolised by a divorce, the financial effects might continue even when the promises are broken. Spousal support, sometimes referred to as alimony, is intended to compensate for the income inequality that may occur after a divorce, especially in cases where one spouse gave up professional possibilities to support the family.

Wives were generally expected to take care of the family and raise the kids, postponing their professions in the process. When a divorce finally comes, there is usually a sizable financial disparity because spouses prioritised their professional advancement in the meantime. The goal of alimony is to close this disparity by acknowledging the unpaid work that each person in the marriage contributed. A divorce settlement should take into account the important contributions of childcare, housekeeping, and emotional assistance.

Marital equity is the fundamental tenet of alimony. Both partners make contributions to the common life of a marriage, both materially and non-materially. Income from a job, assets accumulated throughout a marriage, and the unseen work of running a home and raising kids might all fall under this category. In the event of a divorce, alimony is intended to make up for the partner who may have given up on earning an income by being at home, freeing up the other partner to concentrate on their job.

There are various grounds for alimony awards, including:

- a. Spousal Rehabilitation:** This gives the sponsored spouse the money they need to go back to school, get training, or start working again after a protracted leave. They can have obsolete abilities or a hole in their resume due to the time they spent running the home or raising children. They can make investments in themselves and achieve financial independence with the help of alimony.
- b. Need – Basic Support:** This guarantees that the partner with less income or resources

will be able to support herself following the divorce. Alimony makes ensuring that each party maintains a minimal level of living after a divorce, which can cause substantial financial hardship.

- c. **Compensatory support:** This honours the non-cash contributions made by the partner who may have taken care of the family, brought up the kids, or encouraged the other partner to pursue their job. Even though they are not typically recognised, their efforts are crucial to a happy marriage, and alimony recognises this.
- d. **Marriage period:** Alimony can recognise the gradual development of financial reliance in long-term relationships. After a divorce, someone who has relied on the other person financially for a long time could need more time to adjust.

### III. TYPES OF ALIMONY

- (i) **Temporary Alimony-** A brief monetary award given during the divorce process is known as temporary alimony. Ensuring that both parties have access to the money they need to pay for their daily needs and legal costs while the agreement to divorce is being finalised is its goal. Until a definitive settlement is achieved, this helps keep both parties' standards of living relatively comparable.

In case of **Miller v/s Miller (1980)**, After taking into account the husband's substantially greater earnings and the wife's need to keep up the marital residence for the couple's children, a Virginia court granted the woman temporary alimony.

- (ii) **Permanent Alimony-** For a long-term economic award known as permanent alimony is given to a spouse who can show that they will continue to need financial support following their divorce. When determining whether to provide permanent alimony, a number of factors are taken into account, such as the duration of the wedding, the difference in income among the partners, the parties' ages and health, and the receiving spouse's capacity to support themselves. This kind of alimony is usually given in long-term unions in which one partner may have given up job progress to take care of kids or assist the other partner in furthering their education or profession.

In case of **Mcdougald v/s Mcdougald (2004)**, After thirty years of marriage, a Florida court granted the woman perpetual alimony. Due to her responsibilities as a housewife and the children's primary carer, the wife had no professional experience. The husband made a lot more money because he was a successful lawyer. The wife's requirement for ongoing financial

support to sustain a level of living similar to that which she experienced throughout the marriage was determined by the court.

- (iii) **Rehabilitative Alimony**- A short-term financial award known as "rehabilitative alimony" is intended to help the receiving spouse pursue the education, training, or other endeavours that will enable them to support themselves. The goal of this kind of alimony is to close the disparity in salary between a spouse's anticipated future earnings and their current earning capabilities. The length of time and the sum of award are decided by estimating how long it will take the spouse to become self-sufficient.

In case of **Brown v/s Brown (1990)**, The spouse, who had quit her job to raise their children, was given rehabilitative alimony by a New York court. The spouse received monetary assistance from the alimony while she finished her college education and found a full-time job.

- (iv) **Reimbursement Alimony** - Less frequently, this award is granted under certain conditions. It acts as compensation to one spouse for monetary gifts given throughout the wedding that particularly aided in the other spouse's pursuit of higher education or professional success. In addition to trying to provide an equal financial settlement following a divorce, this kind of alimony acknowledges the compromises done by the supporting spouse.

In case of **Davis v/s Davis (1995)**, A Californian court granted the wife reimbursement maintenance. The woman had supported her husband financially during his medical school studies by using her estate. The woman was entitled to reimbursement for some of the cash used for her husband's schooling, according to the court's ruling regarding her contribution.

- (v) **Spousal Maintenance** - The conditions "spousal maintenance" and "alimony" are interchangeable under certain legal systems. But it might also include more extensive forms of financial assistance than just cash transfers. This could involve paying for children's schooling, providing health insurance, or allocating jointly owned property in a way that meets the receiving spouse's ongoing requirements.

#### **IV. ALIMONY STATUS IN INDIA**

Alimony is typically awarded when a partner is unable to provide for their basic needs. Though alimony can be awarded to any partner in accordance with Indian statutes, it is typically given to a wife by her spouse. Even though the preceding laws serve as the foundation of India's legal

structure for alimony awards, more research is necessary to fully comprehend them:

1. **The Code of criminal procedure (CRPC), 1973-** Section 25 of the act say that for spouses who are experiencing sudden financial difficulties, this clause is essential. It gives needy parents, daughters who are not married, widowed or separated daughters, wives, disabled partners, as well as kids the ability to demand maintenance from the required spouse. The petitioner's financial demands, the couple's level of living throughout their marriage, the husband's income (whether employed or not), and any additional sources of revenue that that the petitioner may have are all taken into account by the court. This clause crosses religious lines and is gender-neutral.
2. **The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** – The laws governing alimony in Hindu, Jains, Buddhist, Sikhs marriage are governed by this act. Both Temporary and Permanent alimony are permitted. Section 24 and 25 of this act deals with the maintenance.
  - **Temporary alimony-** This is a provisional ruling made while the divorce is still pending. While the divorce process is pending, it assists the spouse who is requesting maintenance in meeting their urgent requirements.
  - **Permanent alimony-** This long-term monetary compensation was decided upon following the divorce decree. The length of the wedding, the spouse's age and wellness, her capability to become independent, her husband's earning potential, and the way of life led during a wedding are all taken into account by the court.
- i. **The Special Marriage Act, 1954** - Marriages not formally consummated by any other type of personal law (such as Christian, Muslim, or Hindu law) are governed by this legislation. Like the HMA, it provides procedures for both temporary and permanent alimony, guaranteeing both partners equitable financial support following the divorce.
- ii. **The Protection Of Women From Domestic Violence Act, 2005** - This act provides broader financially aid to women who are victims of domestic abuse, which goes beyond the idea of alimony. Courts may award financial compensation under Section 20 to the resentful partner (women or man) to cover a range of costs resulting from the abuse, such as as childcare, medical bills, and legal fees. Additionally, it permits payment for any damages incurred, including lost wages or damage to property.

Court rulings have significantly influenced how India's alimony rules are interpreted and applied. Here is an in-depth look at a few significant cases and how they affected the development of alimony:

- **Vinny Parmvir Parmar v/s Parmar (2011)** has created a more equitable system for alimony awards that is permanent in India. The husband's ability to pay (taking into account his earnings, potential for earnings, and current financial obligations) and the attainable requirements of the partner looking for alimony (such as their standard way of life throughout a wedding and capacity to develop into independent) are the three factors that the Supreme Court established as being taken into account by courts. This method moved the emphasis from gender-based awards that were determined automatically to a more sophisticated evaluation of every party's economic circumstances.
- **Kusum Sharma v/s Mahinder Kumar Sharma (2020)** in this case the Court created a more impartial formula for settlement calculations. The system takes into account various factors such as the woman's material wants (essentials, healthcare costs, and age/health-related requirements), the spouse's ability to pay (revenue, potential for earnings, and current money responsibilities), the woman's qualifications and ability to achieve independent (job expertise, academic achievement), the duration of the wedding (longer weddings where the wife gave up career opportunities may result in higher awards), and the standard way of life throughout the relationship (with a goal to provide an equal way of life for both partners looking for alimony).
- **Rajnesh v/s Neha (2020)** This case made clear how crucial it is for alimony processes to be transparent. The supreme court underlined that it is the duty of both partners to completely reveal their wealth and obligations. This enables the court to decide on the correct amount of alimony after taking into account the actual financial situation of both parties. This decision demonstrated the need of fairness and forbade the falsification of financial data in alimony cases.
- **Shah Bano Begum v/s Mohammed Ahmed Khan (1985)** This important case continues to signify a turning point in the struggle for equal pay for equal work in marriage. Following their divorce, Miss Bano, not given alimony by her husband. A nationwide discussion over the function of personal religion laws and their possible inconsistency with the Constitution's assurance equal treatment was initiated by the Supreme Court's decision to preserve a woman's entitlement for alimony pursuant to neutral regarding gender CrPC Section 125.

## V. THE DILEMMA REGARDING ALIMONY

The discussion surrounding alimony laws is complex and involves a number of moral, practical,

and legal issues. Some who oppose it contend that maintenance is subject to abused as a means of financial gain, especially when one partner feels unjustly forced to pay continuous maintenance. Conversely, advocates of spousal maintenance underscore its function in furnishing economic stability to those who have made concessions for the betterment of the union.

1. **Gender Dynamics** - The gender-based factors at play in the alimony discussion are among the main points of contention. In the past, women were typically granted alimony, which was a reflection of both economic inequality and traditional gender norms. Nonetheless, there is an increasing focus on applying alimony rules in a gender-neutral manner as a result of changing social standards.
2. **Financial Consequences** – The payment and getting spouses' financial security may be significantly impacted by the financial ramifications of alimony. This has prompted demands for change and a review of the standards by which maintenance awards are decided.

## VI. ALIMONY AS SHIELD AND WEAPON

### 1. AS SHIELD

- **Financial safety-** Both wife as well as husband's financial balance may be upset by a divorce. By guaranteeing their safety and averting monetary difficulties, alimony assists the partner with lesser income or no income in maintaining a minimal level of living.
- **Transition support-** Frequently, a partner forgoes school or professional experience in order to assist the family, therefore jeopardising career growth. Maintenance offers them short-term financial assistance so they can go after higher education, training, or employment.
- **Protecting Living Conditions** - The goal of maintenance is to preserve a reasonable level of living for both parties in relationships where there is a large income gap. This aids in the initial phase of emotional recovery following a divorce.

### 2. AS WEAPON

- **Abuse of power:** Sadly, some people might consider receiving alimony as a way to make money. They might fabricate a necessity or purposefully postpone going back to work in order to receive a larger compensation.



- **Legal fights:** Deciding on the amount and period of alimony can be an expensive procedure that results in drawn-out and costly court disputes. Both parties may have to spend a lot of money and emotional energy on this.
- **Ridiculous Requirements:** Giving spouses may experience severe financial hardship as a result of excessive maintenance demands, making it more difficult for them to fulfil their own responsibilities and needs.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In the monetary and administrative context of divorce, alimony has a complicated function. Although meant to serve as an insurance policy for partners who endured monetary compromises during their marriage, the possibility of abuse and the changing socioeconomic landscape cast doubt on its efficacy. On the one hand, alimony helps people reconstruct their personal lives after divorce by providing much-needed financial stability to individuals who might have sacrificed professional possibilities for the sake of the family. Court decisions have highlighted a more equitable strategy that takes into account variables other than gender to guarantee an equitable division of marital property. Going ahead, the goal of maintenance change talks should be striking a balance between protecting the weaker partner and avoiding monetary abuse and unnecessary stress for the paying partner. It is crucial to periodically assess and amend maintenance laws in order to ensure that this monetary instrument continues to fulfil its original purpose of assisting a more equal and seamless transition for everyone concerned. Maintenance laws are subject to change in response to the evolving circumstances of divorce and marriage.

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