

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**
[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 8 | Issue 2

2025

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Uniform Civil Code and the Directive Principles of State Policy: Analysing Article 44 Of the Constitution

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ABSTRACT

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC), articulated in Article 44 of the Indian Constitution within the Directive Principles of State Policy, aims to establish a unified set of civil rules applicable to all individuals, regardless of religion, caste, or community. Although it is a constitutional obligation, the execution of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) has persisted as a contentious matter in India, owing to the existence of various personal laws regulating marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption among different religious communities.

This research study conducts a critical analysis of Article 44, considering its constitutional purpose, judicial interpretation, and socio-legal ramifications. It analyzes the intricate relationship between the Directive Principles and Fundamental Rights, including Articles 25 and 26, which ensure the freedom of religion. This article examines, via a comprehensive analysis of significant judicial rulings and Law Commission reports, whether the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is essential for realizing the constitutional objectives of equality and secularism, or if it compromises the cultural and religious liberty of many populations.

The report examines comparative perspectives from other countries and assesses current legal and political developments related to the UCC in India. The analysis aims to reconcile the concepts of uniformity and pluralism, proposing a measured approach to legal reform that honors both constitutional morality and India's multicultural essence.

Keywords: - Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Article 44, Gender Justice, Triple Talaq.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country distinguished by exceptional religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. This heterogeneity has led to the presence of many personal laws, each regulating civil issues like as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption among distinct religious communities. Although criminal laws are consistently enforced nationwide, personal laws are diverse, frequently resulting in gaps and inequities in civil rights³. In this context, the notion of a Uniform Civil

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³ Tahir Mahmood, Uniform Civil Code: Fictions and Facts, 45 (Eastern Book Company, 2018).

Code (UCC) gains substantial constitutional and socio-legal significance.

The architects of the Constitution, acknowledging the necessity for consistency in civil legislation, included Article 44 in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The State shall strive to establish a uniform civil code for all citizens across the territory of India⁴. Despite being non-justiciable, Directive Principles are essential for governance and are designed to direct the State in enacting laws that seek to create a just social order.

The discourse on the UCC has been both persistent and divisive. Advocates contend that a standardized code is vital for achieving gender justice, legal equality, and national cohesion⁵, but detractors perceive it as a menace to religious liberty and cultural independence, particularly for minority groups. The tension between Fundamental Rights in Articles 25 and 26 and Directive Principles in Article 44 is a fundamental concern in this discussion⁶.

Numerous significant rulings, such as *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* (1985), *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India* (1995)⁷, and *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017), have rekindled public and legal interest in the enforcement of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The Law Commission of India has underscored the problems and opportunities for legal change in this area through its different findings.

This research study aims to conduct a constitutional and jurisprudential analysis of Article 44 and the concept of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It examines the historical context, judicial rulings, legislative advancements, and current discussions related to this provision. The aim is to evaluate the desirability and feasibility of implementing a UCC within the Indian environment, as well as to identify a framework that reconciles legal uniformity with respect for diversity and constitutional principles.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Indian Constitution uniquely combines enforceable rights with non-enforceable ideals. Fundamental Rights guarantee individual freedoms, whilst the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) aim to create a foundation for a just and equitable society. Article 44 of the Constitution, which addresses the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), is located under Part IV and is hence non-justiciable by courts. Nevertheless, it establishes a vital constitutional objective focused on integrating and secularizing the nation's civil laws.

⁴ Constitution of India, Article 44, Directive Principles of State Policy

⁵ K.M.S. Venkat, "The Uniform Civil Code in India: A Constitutional Ideal or a Social Dilemma?", *The Academic*, Jan. 2025, pp. 84–92

⁶ Faizan Mustafa, "UCC and the Indian Constitution: A Conflict of Rights?", *Indian Express*, July 17, 2017.

⁷ *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India*, AIR 1995 SC 1531.

A. Comprehending Article 44 and Its Scope

Text and Analysis of Article 44:

Article 44 of the Constitution stipulates: "The State shall strive to ensure a uniform civil code for all citizens across the territory of India."⁸

This provision signifies a constitutional desire rather than an obligation. The Constitution's founders, during discussions on Article 44, anticipated that India would eventually develop a legal framework in which all people, regardless of faith, would be subject to uniform civil laws concerning marriage, divorce, adoption, succession, and inheritance.⁹

The Role of Directive Principles in Constitutional governing (Article 37): Article 37 stipulates that the laws in Part IV are not enforceable by any court; yet, they remain "fundamental in the governance of the country." Consequently, although non-justiciable, the Directive Principles, encompassing Article 44, impose a constitutional duty on the State to implement them in legislative processes. Courts have consistently emphasized that the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) cannot be disregarded and should be reconciled with Fundamental Rights whenever feasible.¹⁰

B. Interconnection Between Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles

Debate on Conflict and Harmony:

The relationship between Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles has resulted in considerable legal discussion. In *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), the Supreme Court determined that although Parliament may amend Fundamental Rights to implement Directive Principles of State Policy, it cannot modify the Constitution's basic framework. In *Minerva Mills v. Union of India* (1980), the Court underscored the necessity of reconciling Fundamental Rights with Directive Principles, noting that a balance must be preserved, and neither set of rules can supersede the other.

Significance of the UCC in relation to Religious Freedom (Articles 25 and 26):

Articles 25 and 26 ensure that every individual possesses the freedom to freely profess, practice, and disseminate religion, as well as to oversee religious affairs. Nonetheless, these rights are contingent upon public order, morality, health, and other stipulations of Part III. The Supreme Court has stated in different judgments that personal laws, sometimes viewed as an extension

⁸ Constitution of India, Article 44, Part IV – Directive Principles of State Policy.

⁹ Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, 23 November 1948, speech by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

¹⁰ Constitution of India, Article 37.

of religious activities, do not reside only within the realm of religious freedom. The application of UCC can be lawfully valid if it aims to promote equality and does not violate fundamental religious traditions.

C. UCC in Additional Constitutional Provisions and Judicial Trends

Additional Pertinent Articles:

In addition to Article 44, numerous other constitutional articles uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

- Article 15 bans discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- Articles 25 and 26 ensure religious freedom, subject to reasonable constraints.
- Article 29 safeguards the rights of minorities to preserve their culture, language, and script.

These clauses must be construed in conjunction with Article 44 to guarantee that legal uniformity does not compromise religious freedom and cultural autonomy.

Judicial Interpretation Supporting UCC:

The judiciary has significantly contributed to the discourse on the UCC through its interpretations.

- In *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* (1985), the Supreme Court affirmed a Muslim woman's entitlement to maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC, highlighting the necessity for a Uniform Civil Code to guarantee gender justice.
- In *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India* (1995), the Court denounced the practice of religious conversion for polygamy and fervently supported the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).¹¹
- In *John Vallamattom v. Union of India* (2003), the Supreme Court invalidated Section 118 of the Indian Succession Act, noting that the provision was discriminatory towards Christians and reinforced the constitutional principle of a uniform civil code.¹²

These judicial rulings reflect a persistent emphasis on equality, non-discrimination, and legal consistency in civil issues. They affirm that, while honoring religious diversity, the Indian legal system must uphold the ideals of justice and constitutional morality without compromise.

¹¹ *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India*, AIR 1995 SC 1531.

¹² *John Vallamattom v. Union of India*, (2003) 6 SCC 611.

III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEGISLATIVE DISCOURSE

The concept of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India necessitates an examination of its historical and socio-political development. The evolution of the UCC from a constitutional aspiration to a difficult topic of legislative and judicial debate illustrates the intrinsic conflict between the principles of legal uniformity and the realities of India's religious and cultural diversity.¹³

A. Developments Prior to the Constitution

The origins of legal plurality in India were established during the British colonial period. Prior to British domination, several religious communities administered themselves according to their individual personal rules derived from religious texts and customary traditions. Nonetheless, the formation of British legal institutions necessitated the standardization of laws for administrative efficiency.

The British implemented a policy of non-interference in religious affairs, particularly with personal law, to prevent alienating the indigenous populace. Consequently, although criminal laws and many civil laws, including contract, property, and tort, were progressively codified by legislation (e.g., Indian Penal Code, Indian Contract Act), personal laws were intentionally maintained in a fragmented state. The colonial authority commenced the implementation of Anglo-Hindu and Anglo-Mohammedan laws concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession, utilizing religious texts interpreted by British judges and indigenous legal officials. The institutionalization of personal laws strengthened legal diversity in civil affairs.

B. UCC and the Debates of the Constituent Assembly

The discourse over a uniform civil code acquired constitutional importance during the sessions of the Constituent Assembly in 1948–49. The Draft Constitution contained Article 35 (now Article 44), which formed a component of the Directive Principles of State Policy. It asserted that "The State shall strive to ensure a uniform civil code for all citizens across the territory of India."

The provision incited vigorous debate among the Assembly members. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, ardently advocated for the Uniform Civil Code, contending that the presence of distinct personal laws was antithetical to the principles of equality and national cohesion. He contended that religion ought not to govern civil affairs and that consistency in civil law is necessary in a secular democratic society.

¹³ Tahir Mahmood, *Uniform Civil Code: Fictions and Facts*, 10 (Eastern Book Company, 2018)

Nonetheless, his perspective encountered significant resistance, especially from representatives of religious minorities. Mohammad Ismail Sahib, Naziruddin Ahmad, and Pocker Saheb Bahadur contended that personal laws are essential to the religious freedom protected by Article 25, asserting that the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code would constitute a majoritarian imposition on minority populations. They pursued either the abrogation of Article 44 or its attenuation to protect minority rights.

Ambedkar elucidated that Article 44 was merely an aspirational clause, not immediately enforceable, and would be enacted when the nation was prepared. This resulted in the incorporation of the UCC in Part IV of the Constitution as a Directive Principle, embodying the constitutional compromise between the aspiration for uniformity and the actuality of diversity.

C. Legislative Reforms Post-Independence

Following independence, the initial significant legislative initiatives aimed at the codification of personal laws were focused on the Hindu population. Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership and Dr. Ambedkar's suggestion, a series of reforms were implemented via the Hindu Code Bills:

- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
- The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
- The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956

These legislations collected and codified the personal laws pertinent to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs. They implemented progressive reforms, including equal inheritance rights for women and rights pertaining to adoption and guardianship. Nonetheless, analogous amendments were not implemented for Muslim or Christian personal laws, mostly due to socio-political sensitivities and concerns of communal repercussions. The hesitation to amend non-Hindu personal laws initiated a selective and fragmented strategy for civil law reform in India.¹⁴

D. Judicial Activism and the Increasing Demand for UCC

In the lack of extensive legislative measures, the judiciary progressively became a prominent advocate for UCC. The Indian judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, has emphasized the necessity of a uniform civil code in several key rulings to attain gender equity and constitutional

¹⁴ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Speech in the Constituent Assembly, Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII

equality.¹⁵

In *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* (1985), the Supreme Court awarded maintenance to a divorced Muslim lady pursuant to Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, applicable to all citizens irrespective of faith. The Court condemned the government's hesitance to enforce the consistent Civil Code and underscored that a consistent civil code would facilitate national integration and eliminate gender discrimination. Nevertheless, in response to pressure from conservative factions within the Muslim community, Parliament approved the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which undermined the verdict. This constituted a considerable impediment to the UCC discourse and exposed the political obstacles to the implementation of universal civil laws.

In *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court denounced the practice of converting to Islam primarily to facilitate a second marriage and evade monogamy under Hindu law. The Court fervently supported a UCC and scrutinized the rationale behind permitting religion to supersede secular law duties.

In *John Vallamattom v. Union of India* (2003), the Court invalidated Section 118 of the Indian Succession Act, which prohibited Christians from bequeathing property for religious or charitable reasons, as it contravened Article 14. The ruling supported the fundamental principle of consistency and equality in civil legislation.

The judiciary has consistently pushed the legislature to honor the constitutional commitment of Article 44 through similar rulings. Judicial rulings alone cannot achieve legal uniformity without accompanying legislative intent and popular agreement.

E. Law Commission Reports and Legislative Dialogue

The matter of UCC has been analyzed by multiple Law Commission Reports and discussed in Parliament, albeit with minimal legislative results.

The 21st Law Commission Report (1961) and the 185th Report (2001) advocated for incremental revisions and underscored the necessity of eschewing the sudden implementation of a universal law.

The Law Commission's 2018 Consultation Paper on Family Law Reform articulated a nuanced position, asserting that "UCC is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage." It advocated for the modification of personal laws to guarantee gender justice within individual communities

¹⁵ Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, 23 November 1948 (Statements by Mohammad Ismail, Naziruddin Ahmad, and Pocker Saheb).

instead of implementing a uniform code across all communities. The Commission emphasized the significance of honoring religious diversity while eradicating discriminatory practices via focused reforms.

The UCC has frequently been a topic of ideological debate in Parliament. Certain members have championed its adoption for the sake of gender fairness and constitutional integrity, but others fear that the enforcement of a UCC could marginalize minority communities and disrupt the secular framework of the nation. The matter continues to be politically delicate and legally unsettled, despite being included in the constitutional mandate for more than seventy years.

IV. UCC AND PERSONAL LAWS – A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

The notion of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is closely associated with personal laws in India, which are predominantly regulated by people's religious connections. The personal laws encompass essential civil matters including marriage, divorce, support, inheritance, guardianship, and adoption. In the absence of a common legal framework, India persists with a pluralistic legal system, wherein distinct communities are regulated by their respective personal laws. This legal plurality, although honoring religious variety, frequently engenders significant apprehensions over equality, gender justice, and national cohesion.

A. Hindu Personal Legislation and Reform

The Hindu community was the first to experience extensive codification and revision of its personal laws following independence. The legislative measures enacted from 1955 to 1956, known as the Hindu Code¹⁶, instituted substantial reforms:

- Legal acknowledgment of divorce and maintenance,
- Equitable property rights for women,
- Codification of adoption and guardianship statutes.

These reforms established a degree of homogeneity within the Hindu community, encompassing Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs under a singular legal framework. Nonetheless, despite the existence of these codified regulations, many customary practices continue to endure, resulting in contradictions. Nevertheless, the amendments were a courageous endeavor to harmonize personal laws with constitutional principles, particularly gender equality as stipulated in Articles 14 and 15.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; Hindu Succession Act, 1956; Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956; Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956.

¹⁷ Constitution of India, Articles 14 and 15

B. Islamic Personal Jurisprudence and Associated Challenges

The Shariat largely governs Muslim personal law in India, as interpreted by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937. It governs marriage (nikah), divorce (talaq), maintenance (nafqah), inheritance (mirath), and guardianship. In contrast to Hindu laws, Muslim laws have not been codified after independence, leading to ongoing reliance on religious scriptures and interpretations by religious authorities.

A primary issue in Muslim personal law has been gender fairness. The Shah Bano case (1985) underscored the inadequacies of Muslim personal law in safeguarding the rights of divorced Muslim women. The Supreme Court's provision of maintenance under the secular CrPC prompted a backlash that resulted in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which significantly restricted a woman's entitlement to maintenance.

Subsequent reforms emerged solely following vigorous judicial and social advocacy. The Supreme Court deemed the practice of triple talaq unlawful in *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017), ruling it as arbitrary and in violation of Article 14¹⁸. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, subsequently criminalized triple talaq. Nevertheless, comprehensive codification and consistency in Muslim personal law continue to be unattainable.

C. Christian and Parsi Personal Legislation

Christian personal law in India is regulated by statutes including the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872, the Indian Divorce Act of 1869, Indian Succession Act of 1925.

Although these laws are primarily codified, some portions have been contested on the basis of gender discrimination. Before its revision in 2001, Section 10 of the Indian Divorce Act established more stringent criteria for Christian women to obtain a divorce, which the courts subsequently invalidated for contravening Article 14.

Likewise, Parsis are regulated under the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1936, which has undergone court examination and modification. Codification exists but has not been sufficiently revised to reflect modern gender rights and family dynamics.

D. Secular Legislation and Special Marriage Act

The Special Marriage Act of 1954 was established to offer a secular alternative to community-specific personal laws. It permits any two individuals, regardless of faith or caste, to formalize

¹⁸ *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017)

a legal marriage. The Act includes stipulations about divorce, alimony, and inheritance.

Nevertheless, the Act encounters pragmatic constraints. Interfaith couples frequently encounter societal opposition, governmental obstacles such as obligatory notice periods, and potential threats of violence. This has deterred many from choosing it, constraining its efficacy as a measure toward homogeneity.

Additionally, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the Guardians and Wards Act, 1890, exemplify secular civil legislation that applies universally, specifically with adoption and guardianship. However, the coexistence of these statutes with community-specific personal laws results in overlap and ambiguity.

E. Gender Justice, Equality, and the Necessity for Reform

A fundamental constitutional reason for a UCC arises from the concept of equality and non-discrimination, especially concerning sex (Article 15). Numerous personal laws have been criticized for sustaining patriarchal practices and denying women equal rights in marriage, inheritance, and divorce.

- The case of *Githa Hariharan v. Reserve Bank of India* (1999) underscored the importance of gender equality in guardianship legislation.
- The case of *Mary Roy v. State of Kerala* (1986) resulted in the establishment of equal inheritance rights for Syrian Christian women.

Notwithstanding these progressive rulings, the overarching issue endures: changes are disjointed and tailored to specific communities, failing to establish a consistent standard of justice for all individuals.

F. The Necessity for Harmonization

The discourse around UCC is not primarily focused on standardizing laws, but rather on guaranteeing that all citizens had equal rights and protections, regardless of their faith. The objective must be the alignment of personal legislation with constitutional principles, specifically equality, secularism, and dignity.

Certain legal scholars and commissioners advocate for a unified minimum civil code that honors religious pluralism while abolishing discriminatory practices. The objective is not to eradicate cultural identity, but to update personal laws to conform with constitutional morality, as referenced in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) and *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (2019).

V. JUDICIAL RULINGS AND THEIR IMPACT ON UCC DISCOURSE

The Indian judiciary has significantly influenced the discussion around the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The courts have resolved the conflict between personal laws and constitutional principles, including equality, non-discrimination, and secularism, through a succession of major rulings. The judiciary has frequently reiterated the State's constitutional duty under Article 44 and has underscored the necessity to align personal legislation with the principles of the Constitution.

A. Shah Bano Case (Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum, 1985)

The Shah Bano case represents a pivotal judicial intervention in the discourse around the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The Supreme Court affirmed the entitlement of a divorced Muslim lady to seek maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, notwithstanding the conflicting stipulations of Muslim personal law.

The Court noted that: "A uniform civil code will advance national integration by eliminating divergent allegiances to laws that embody conflicting ideologies."

This case underscored the necessity of achieving gender justice and served as a robust judicial affirmation for the enforcement of Article 44. Nonetheless, the political reaction was regressive, marked by the implementation of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which undermined the Court's progressive interpretation.

B. Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India, (1995)

This case addressed the matter of bigamy involving Hindu men who converted to Islam to formalize a second marriage without terminating their first. The Supreme Court determined that such conversions were executed to evade the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, rendering the second marriage unlawful under Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code.

The Court stated: "With over 80% of citizens already subject to codified personal laws, there is no rationale for delaying the implementation of a uniform civil code for all citizens."

This ruling underscored the necessity of a Uniform Civil Code while cautioning against the exploitation of religious conversions to undermine the principles of secularism and equality.

C. John Vallamattom v. Union of India, (2003)

The constitutional legality of Section 118 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, which put limitations on Christians regarding the bequest of property for religious or charitable reasons, was contested. The Supreme Court invalidated the clause, deeming it discriminatory and in

violation of Article 14.

The Court asserted: “Article 44 is predicated on the assumption that there exists no requisite link between religion and personal law in a civilized society.”

This judgment reinforced the constitutional foundation for UCC and emphasized that religious freedom under Articles 25 and 26 is not absolute, necessitating adherence to constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination.

D. Danial Latifi v. Union of India, (2001)

This case contested the legitimacy of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, following the backlash against the Shah Bano ruling and the subsequent 1986 legislation. The Court affirmed the Act while interpreting it to safeguard the entitlement of Muslim women to a just and adequate maintenance support beyond the iddat term.

This ruling exemplified the judiciary's endeavor to reconcile religious sensitivities with gender equity and constitutional principles.

E. Shayara Bano v. Union of India, 2017

The Supreme Court ruled that the practice of triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) is unlawful and infringes upon Article 14. The Court noted that quick triple talaq was capricious and devoid of legal endorsement according to Quranic principles.

This ruling rekindled the UCC discourse, since it confirmed the supremacy of constitutional morality over personal laws. The ruling was succeeded by legislative measures through the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, which rendered the practice criminal.

F. Contemporary Trends and Judicial Observations

The judiciary has persistently voiced apprehension regarding the lack of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Significantly:

- In the case of *Jose Paulo Coutinho v. Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira* (2019), the Supreme Court noted that Goa exemplified the effective execution of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC).
- In *ABC v. State (NCT of Delhi)*, (2015), the Court affirmed the rights of an unwed Christian mother to serve as the sole guardian of her child, demonstrating progressive thought that transcends religious conventions.

These rulings indicate a steady progression towards strengthening constitutional principles in

personal law issues, while concurrently urging the legislature to execute its obligations under Article 44.

VI. UCC IN APPLICATION - COMPARATIVE VIEWPOINTS

To assess the practical viability of instituting a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India, it is essential to examine the legal frameworks of other jurisdictions where uniform civil laws have been effectively implemented, particularly in multicultural and heterogeneous societies. These comparative viewpoints offer significant insights into the harmonization of personal laws with civil rights and underscore how societies balance individual liberties with constitutional equality.

A. Goa — India's Sole UCC Model

India presents a distinctive instance of an operational Uniform Civil Code inside its territory—the State of Goa. The Portuguese Civil Code of 1867, which remains in effect after emancipation, uniformly regulates personal concerns for all communities in Goa, with minor deviations¹⁹.

Key aspects of the Goan civil code include:

- Equitable rights for both genders concerning inheritance and property.
- Mandatory registration of marriages and divorces.
- Monogamy for all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation.
- Civil marriages take precedence over religious ceremonies in legal matters.

In *Jose Paulo Coutinho v. Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira* (2019), the Supreme Court commended Goa for upholding a unified civil code and said that it may serve as a paradigm for the entire nation.

Goa's UCC has encountered criticism for its selective exemptions for particular communities, such as Domicile Goans of Hindu faith, who benefit from specific provisions under Mitakshara law, prompting inquiries into its genuine uniformity. Nevertheless, it constitutes a notable domestic instance.

B. France - Civil Code and Secularism

France possesses a deep-rooted heritage of *laïcité* (state secularism) and a civil code (Code Napoléon) that is uniformly applicable to all citizens, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

¹⁹ D.D. Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 25th ed., LexisNexis, 2021.

Religious personal laws lack legal acknowledgment in civil issues such as marriage, divorce, or inheritance. The French legal system completely separates religion from state matters.

This approach demonstrates that robust secularism can result in legislative uniformity while permitting freedom of religious expression in the private domain. Critics contend that stringent secularism may inhibit cultural identity and religious traditions.

C. Turkey - Elimination of Religious Courts

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk instituted extensive reforms in Turkey throughout the 1920s, dismantling Sharia courts and substituting them with a civil law modeled after the Swiss system. The reforms:

- Abolished religious authority over family law.
- Established gender equality in civil affairs.
- Instituted secular education and courts as standard practice.

Turkey's approach illustrates how a decisive political and legal transformation can create a cohesive legal framework. Nonetheless, the authoritarian methodology and the socio-political repercussions it encountered highlight the necessity for sensitivity and consensus within a heterogeneous society.

D. Tunisia – Advancements in Personal Law Reform

Tunisia exemplifies a model of gradual and rights-oriented reform instead than total uniformity. The Personal Status Code (1956):

- Prohibited polygamy.
- Judicial oversight of divorce is mandated.
- Granted women augmented rights in matrimony and guardianship.

This paradigm is frequently commended for reconciling Islamic beliefs with contemporary human rights principles. It underscores that reforms within religious frameworks can align with constitutional ideals while preserving religious identity.

E. Malaysia and Indonesia - Dual Legal Frameworks

In Malaysia and Indonesia, dual legal systems exist wherein:

- Muslims are regulated by Sharia courts for personal law issues.
- Non-Muslims are governed by civil regulations.

This pluralistic model embraces religious diversity but has led to legal anomalies, particularly

regarding child custody, divorce, and inheritance, and has been criticism for contravening principles of equality.

These systems resemble India's existing structure and exemplify the challenges of administering justice within concurrent legal regimes.

F. Insights for India

The comparative analysis of civil code frameworks across jurisdictions provides the following insights for India:

- Gradualism rather than sudden transformation: Similar to Tunisia, reforms may be implemented progressively and attuned to community sentiments.
- Secular legal frameworks: France and Turkey underscore the advantages of civil adjudication over religious arbitration, however vigilance is necessary to prevent cultural alienation.
- Domestic models can thrive: Goa exemplifies that the Uniform Civil Code is not an extraneous notion in India, but rather one that can function inside the constitutional framework.
- Political will and public consensus: Uniformity cannot be attained solely by legislation; it necessitates democratic discourse, awareness, and institutional backing.

VII. SOCIO-POLITICAL OBSTACLES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UCC

The enactment of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India persists as one of the most controversial and delicate matters within the constitutional and political sphere. Although it is a directive principle under Article 44 of the Constitution, successive governments have been reluctant to implement a Uniform Civil Code due to several socio-political, cultural, and legal obstacles. The challenges arise from both the varied and diversified nature of Indian society and from entrenched concerns on religious autonomy and minority rights.

A. Religious and Cultural Pluralism

India is a nation characterized by significant religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Each community—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and others—has developed distinct personal laws regulating marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance, and guardianship. These personal rules are intricately connected to the religious identity and customary practices of the respective communities.

- Muslim Personal Law, mostly derived from the Shariat, is seen as divinely mandated.

- Christian and Parsi personal laws have distinct codified legislation.
- Hindu personal law, although codified, retains customs and practices that differ among areas and sects.

The introduction of a UCC is viewed by many as an endeavor to standardize personal laws, thereby jeopardizing their distinct cultural and religious identities. This viewpoint frequently incites resistance from religious organizations, particularly minorities, who regard the UCC as a possible instrument for majoritarian supremacy.

B. Rights of Minorities and Communal Sensitivities

A major problem in implementing UCC is reconciling constitutional secularism with the safeguarding of minority rights as outlined in Articles 25 to 30. Numerous minority communities apprehend that the UCC may encroach upon their constitutionally safeguarded right to practice and disseminate religion.

The apprehension of cultural homogenization and the diminishment of religious autonomy has rendered UCC a politically contentious matter. The Muslim community has articulated apprehension that the UCC may supersede Islamic personal law, resulting in demonstrations and political mobilization.

Political parties frequently avoid adopting a definitive position on the UCC due to the possible repercussions from voter demographics and the communal discord it may incite. Consequently, the matter has persisted unsolved for decades, notwithstanding court and intellectual lobbying.

C. Gender Justice vs Religious Freedom

A primary purpose of advocating for a UCC is the eradication of gender-based discrimination embedded in personal laws. Examples include:

- Triple talaq, polygamy, and inequitable inheritance rights under Muslim personal law.
- Patriarchal traditions within Hindu joint family structures.
- Insufficient rights for Christian women regarding succession and divorce (prior to recent reforms).

Nonetheless, attempts to amend these regulations frequently encounter opposition based on the principle of religious liberty. The tension between gender justice and religious autonomy constitutes a significant obstacle to reaching agreement on a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Feminist and human rights advocates contend that religious practices cannot supersede the constitutional principle of equality; nonetheless, the difficulty resides in converting these values

into a legally viable and socially sustainable framework.

D. Political Resolve and Legislative Inactivity

Although included in the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 44 has not been enacted owing to insufficient political resolve. Most governments have opted to refrain from commencing discussions on the UCC to circumvent political turmoil and societal divisiveness.

The lack of widespread political consensus and the belief that UCC is a majoritarian imposition have resulted in futile legislative efforts. Despite the judiciary's stated concerns regarding the delay in the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code through numerous rulings, there has been no substantial legislative advancement.

E. Insufficient Public Awareness and Misunderstandings

A significant difficulty is the ambiguity and lack of information among the general populace concerning the specifics of the UCC. A prevalent fallacy exists that UCC would enforce a uniform religion code or disrupt religious traditions, which is erroneous. The UCC seeks to define and unite civil statutes, rather than religious doctrines.

The lack of public discourse, education, and participatory conversations has led to disinformation, fear, and distrust, thus exacerbating resistance. An educated and aware public is crucial for launching significant reform in this domain.

F. Apprehension Regarding Judicial Overreach

Concerns exist around the court encroaching upon the legislative sphere by vigorously promoting UCC in its rulings. Critics contend that although the judge may voice concerns or interpret constitutional provisions, the implementation of a UCC is solely the responsibility of the government. Perceptions of judicial overreach may jeopardize democratic processes and exacerbate communal divisions.

VIII. THE PATH AHEAD - HARMONIZING UNIFORMITY AND DIVERSITY

The discourse on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India has frequently been characterized as a dichotomy between uniformity and religious liberty. A more productive strategy should aim to resolve these conflicting interests by fostering tolerance, advancing gender equity, and reinforcing constitutional ideals while preserving India's rich cultural plurality. The way forward necessitates a sophisticated, inclusive, and incremental approach that maintains constitutional integrity while honoring communal identities.

A. Implementing a Progressive and Collaborative Methodology

A phased and consultative methodology should be utilized instead of implementing a UCC through a singular legislative action. The government ought to:

- Initiate reforms in domains with widespread agreement, including inheritance rights, marriage age, and guardianship legislation.
- Establish expert committees comprising representatives from all principal religious communities, legal scholars, gender rights advocates, and jurists to foster trust and mutual comprehension.
- Implement extensive consultations and awareness initiatives to combat disinformation and promote discourse.
- This gradual strategy would mitigate resistance and allow society to adapt progressively to the changes without experiencing coercion.

B. Codification and Reform of Personal Laws

Instead of complete eradication of personal laws, reforms should initially concentrate on codifying and standardizing the current personal laws within each religion to guarantee gender justice and adherence to constitutional principles. Numerous personal laws are rooted in uncoded norms and practices, frequently resulting in conflicting judicial interpretations and capricious decisions.

- The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 could be revised to guarantee equitable rights in divorce, maintenance, and inheritance.
- The Hindu Succession Act of 1956, despite undergoing reforms, continues to preserve remnants of patriarchal inheritance systems, such as coparcenary privileges in specific circumstances.
- The personal laws of Christians and Parsis may be amended to guarantee equality in matrimonial rights and inheritance.
- These intra-community reforms could facilitate the eventual establishment of a unified civil framework.

C. Advocating for Gender Justice as an Imperative Principle

The UCC discourse fundamentally centers on the constitutional pledge to gender equality as articulated in Articles 14, 15, and 21. All legislation, both secular and religious, must adhere to this fundamental obligation. The State must guarantee that no personal law infringes upon a

woman's right to live with dignity, freedom, and equality.²⁰

The reform narrative should prioritize universal human rights and gender justice instead of focusing on specific communities, underscoring the necessity of addressing discriminatory practices across all communities to achieve a more equitable society.

D. Promoting Consistency with an Optional Civil Code

The State may facilitate the establishment of an optional civil code as a transitional step, akin to the Special Marriage Act of 1954, which offers a secular alternative for marriage and divorce. By enhancing this legal structure and rendering it more accessible and appealing, the government may illustrate the advantages of unified civil laws.²¹

This will enable citizens to willingly engage in a secular system of personal law without perceiving a danger to their religious identity.

E. Enhancing Constitutional Morality and Legal Literacy

The Indian Supreme Court has frequently underscored the significance of constitutional morality, which pertains to the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity embedded in the Constitution. The execution of UCC must be consistent with these principles and not influenced by political agendas.

Simultaneously, there should be an initiative to enhance legal literacy among individuals, particularly women and underprivileged communities, enabling them to comprehend their rights and the justification for civil law reform. Legal awareness is crucial for facilitating informed engagement in discussions and for alleviating worries rooted in misconceptions.

F. Function of the Judiciary and Civil Society

The judiciary must persist in its constructive role of interpreting personal laws in a gender-sensitive and constitutionally acceptable fashion. Progressive rulings such as *Shah Bano*, *Sarla Mudgal*, and *Joseph Shine* have established a basis for legal reform by upholding the primacy of fundamental rights.

- Civil society must also engage positively by facilitating interfaith discourse.
- Implementing grassroots legal literacy initiatives.
- Establishing forums for community-driven reform.
- A cooperative endeavor among the State, judiciary, academics, and civil society is

²⁰ Constitution of India, Articles 14, 15, and 21. See also: *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*, AIR 1978 SC 597.

²¹ Special Marriage Act, 1954

essential to address this intricate issue.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Uniform Civil Code, articulated in Article 44 of the Constitution of India, embodies the concept of a standardized set of civil laws applicable to all citizens, regardless of religion, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. The transition from constitutional ideals to practical application has been complicated by the complexity inherent in India's multicultural society, religious sensitivities, and political factors.

This research has examined the complex relationship between Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Rights, with a specific focus on the scope and provisions of Article 44. The evolution of jurisprudence through pivotal rulings like *Minerva Mills*, *Kesavananda Bharati*, *Shah Bano*, *Sarla Mudgal*, and *John Vallamattom* demonstrates the judiciary's ongoing focus on reconciling individual rights with the constitutional objective of social reform. These judgments highlight that uniformity in civil legislation is not opposed to secularism, but is, in fact, crucial for fulfilling the constitutional guarantees of equality and justice.

However, the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code demands more than judicial declarations—it requires a deliberate, comprehensive, and democratic approach to legal reform. The challenges—spanning religious and cultural diversity to political hesitance—are significant, yet not insurmountable. Research indicates that the transition to UCC should be incremental, inclusive, and founded on consensus rather than force.

The path ahead involves public education, reforming discriminatory practices in current personal laws, enhancing secular alternatives, and ensuring that all reforms are grounded in the constitutional principles of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity. A Uniform Civil Code that embodies these principles, while honoring India's multicultural ethos, can serve as a genuine instrument of national integration and social justice.

In conclusion, the Uniform Civil Code represents not only a legislative change but also a constitutional need that embodies India's dedication to a cohesive yet varied society. The State faces the problem of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between uniformity and heterogeneity, ensuring that the essence of Article 44 is preserved despite socio-political stagnation.

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