

DIVORCE UNDER HINDU LAW

Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains are governed by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. If either spouse finds that continuing the marital relationship is impossible due to irretrievable breakdown, they may file for divorce on the following grounds:

GROUND FOR DIVORCE

A spouse may present a petition for divorce on these grounds:

Adultery – voluntary sexual intercourse by the other party with a third person after marriage.

Cruelty – physical or mental cruelty making cohabitation intolerable.

Desertion – continuous desertion for not less than two years immediately before filing the petition.

Conversion – spouse renounces Hinduism by converting to another religion.

Unsound Mind – incurable unsoundness of mind or mental disorder preventing cohabitation.

Venereal Disease – suffering from a communicable venereal disease.

Renunciation – spouse renounces worldly life by entering a religious order.

Presumption of Death – spouse not heard of for seven years or more by those naturally expected to have heard of them.

Additional grounds for a wife include:

Bigamy – if the husband married another woman during the subsistence of the first marriage.

Rape, sodomy, or bestiality by the husband after marriage.

Child Marriage repudiation – if the marriage was solemnized before the wife attained 15 and repudiated after attaining 15 but before 18 years of age.

NO PETITION WITHIN ONE YEAR OF MARRIAGE

Neither party can file for divorce within one year of solemnization as per Section 14 of the Act.

FILING JURISDICTION

The divorce petition is filed in the District Court or Family Court having jurisdiction where:

The marriage was solemnized; or

The other party resides at the time of filing; or

The parties last resided together; or

If the other party is residing outside the Act's jurisdiction or has not been heard of for 7 years or more, where the petitioner resides.

DIVORCE BY MUTUAL CONSENT

The law allows couples to divorce amicably if both mutually agree. Recent 2025 parliamentary amendments and judicial rulings, including from the Madras High Court, have waived the mandatory six-month waiting period after filing the mutual consent divorce petition. This makes the process faster, saving time, expenditure, and emotional distress.

Mutual consent divorce requires the couple to live separately for at least one year (except where waived by courts), agree on alimony, child custody, and property division. The process avoids protracted litigation thus reducing trauma.

This modern approach balances legal finality with compassion for parties seeking to dissolve marriage consensually.

Recent Case Law on Cruelty and Divorce:

Definition and Scope of Cruelty:

The Supreme Court and Family Courts reaffirm that cruelty can be physical or mental (psychological), and includes any conduct that causes reasonable apprehension of harm or makes cohabitation intolerable.

Mental cruelty is evaluated cumulatively, considering frequency, severity, and impact on the spouse's well-being. It can include verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, neglect, harassment, social isolation, and denial of basic rights.

Key cases clarifying cruelty under Hindu Marriage Act:

Samar Ghosh v. Jaya Ghosh (2007): Both physical and mental cruelty warrant divorce; nature and impact are vital for determination.

Shobha Rani v. Madhukar Reddi (1988): Cruelty must make living together impossible to expect.

Naveen Kohli v. Neelu Kohli (2006): False accusations and mental cruelty amount grounds.

K. Srinivas Rao v. D.A. Deepa (2013): Consistent behavior pattern needed; occasional outbursts insufficient.

Recent (2025) Madhya Pradesh High Court ruling recognized mental cruelty where wife attempted self-immolation as valid ground for divorce.

Rani Narasimha Sastry v. Rani Suneela Rani (2020): Mere filing of complaints is not cruelty unless proven otherwise.

Courts emphasize "grave and weighty" conduct, measuring cruelty beyond ordinary married life tensions, respecting social context and expectations.

Mutual Consent Divorce Developments:

The Parliament and courts have waived the mandatory six-month cooling-off period after the first motion in mutual consent divorce cases for 2024–2025, enabling faster divorce finalization in mutual cases.

For example, Madras High Court in 2025 allowed waiver of one-year living apart condition to alleviate undue hardship.

Courts continue to require clear agreement on alimony, custody, and property matters before granting decree.

The Supreme Court under Article 142 has empowered expedited divorce in irretrievable marriage breakdown cases.

Procedural and Jurisdictional Updates:

Family courts have clarified jurisdiction rules remain as per traditional location criteria (marriage solemnization, residence of spouse, last residence together).

Cases reaffirmed that unregistered Hindu marriages are valid for divorce petitions.

Relevant recent judgments ensure protection of vulnerable parties alongside expediting amicable dissolutions.

BY

VINOD KUMAR M

ADVOCATE, BANGALORE

09845463842