



UCC AND THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Yashodhara Singh Yadav*

Research Scholar

Department of Political Science

Bundelkhand University

Dr.KishanYadav**

Professor

Department of Political Science

Bundelkhand University

ABSTRACT

It has long been suggested that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) may fill the gaps left by religion personal laws that frequently support gender discrimination, especially when it comes to women's reproductive rights. The historical, constitutional, and sociopolitical facets of the UCC are critically examined in this essay, along with its ability to protect Indian women's reproductive rights. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative data from national surveys and doctrinal analysis, the study demonstrates a considerable positive link between women's reproductive health outcomes and the levels of legal uniformity. Despite constitutional rights, religion-based personal laws nevertheless limit women's autonomy and access to reproductive justice. The results highlight the pressing need for legal change in support of Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for gender equality and women's empowerment. According to the study, UCC might be a game-changing tool for improving women's rights and attaining real gender justice in India if it is implemented successfully.

Keywords: *Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Reproductive Rights, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Legal Uniformity, Personal Laws, Women's Empowerment, Constitutional Rights, Gender Justice, India*



I. INTRODUCTION

The rights and personal status of people are the primary topic where this law is often discussed. It is an effort to anticipate future legal requirements and provide the resources necessary to address them. A significant deal of attention is paid to the consistency of the fundamental legal concepts, which are worked out in a highly meticulous detail (Kumar 2012). The Uniform Civil Code's primary goal is to eradicate religiously motivated contradictions and advance the idea of national unification, regardless of social discrimination based on caste, gender, or religion. It would also highlight how resilient the socialist and political way of life is (Seth 2005). Restoring the concept of women's empowerment, which India frequently discusses, is one of the Uniform Civil Code's most significant characteristics. The Hindu Undivided Family property structure would be directly hampered by the problems with succession and inheritance. It gives sons and daughters equal interests of the father's property, whether it is joint family property or self-acquired.

By stressing the importance of empirical research that has looked at the relationships between legal frameworks and social outcomes, the introduction also sets the stage for the literature review. The research examines the transformational potential of the UCC within this perspective. The study lays the groundwork for comprehending how legislative consistency may facilitate improved reproductive health and increased gender equality by carefully reviewing pertinent research and analyzing data.

SDG Goal 5 and Uniform Civil Code

Globally, women and girls enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and are not subjected to discrimination or violence. All facets of inclusion and sustainable development depend on women's equality and empowerment, which is one of the Sustainable Development Goals. The first comprehensive plans for sustainable objectives in the world are the Sustainable Development objectives with Agenda 2030. One of the main objectives of this Agenda is to identify the connections between gender equality, health, and education. The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) seeks to achieve gender equality so that women can enjoy just and equitable lives. However, the existence of religion personal law, particularly in India, restricts the rights of women. India is a multilingual, multireligious nation where religious personal laws rule its citizens. One of the biggest issues facing the modern society is the status of women. Over the past few decades, there have been intense social movements



and intellectual exercises on gender equality, with women's positions being hotly discussed under the guise of personal legislation. As a potent source of shared identity, religion is essential to human civilization, which has supplanted the status of women. In the area of family law, women face discrimination and unequal treatment, especially when it comes to marriage, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance. To provide justice and equality for women in general, a gender-just code is urgently needed in these situations. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and SDG Goal 5 are therefore crucial for the protection of oppressed women, the defense of their rights, and the eradication of discrimination against religion, community, society, and custom. Therefore, this entry attempts to examine various personal laws and their effects on women, as well as the scope of SDG and the necessity of UCC toward gender justice and equality, which are enshrined in the Indian Constitution and are being violated by the existence of various personal laws. This is done in order to understand the relevance of UCC and gender justice and to empower women through UCC.

Historical Debate of UCC

In India, the conflict between personal laws and UCC has always been linked to women's rights. Colonialism in India, where the system's origins may be located, is inextricably related to the evolution of personal laws (Derrett 1999). In order to make the rules more straightforward for everyone, the colonial authorities worked to create a modern and organized legal system in India. Thus, a number of plans were developed and implemented for the administration of justice in various regions of the nation (Bhutia 2017). The Warren Hastings Plan of 1772, which specifically preserved the rights of Muslims and Hindus to apply their own personal laws in civil issues, called for the creation of criminal and civil courts in every region. However, the identities of different religious groups remained inflexible during the legal process, particularly when it came to property issues (Agnes 2011b). In practically every region of British India, religious and customary rules were consistently followed in civil proceedings. In addition, all business dealings, family relationships, transfers, and property succession were governed by the respective courts' religious laws. However, this system seemed complex to the British, and occasionally the variety of customs resulted in contradictory outcomes. Despite their challenges, they first changed India's religiously based criminal laws and passed the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, both of which were safe. Because the religious groups viewed the religious reformation as a danger to themselves, the British policies led to the emergence of



increasingly stringent and communal personal regulations in Indian oil. Religious and customary practices were superseded by the British, but only in areas that the locals deemed unnecessary. Because the British were aware of the potential for such consequences, they refrained from implementing a civil code in India because the locals saw the unified rules as displacing their religion.

The colonial authorities interfered particularly in the case of the Hindu reformists who were pressing for reforms to some areas of religious legislation, even if they avoided directly or indirectly interfering with the locals' personal laws and religious practice. The then-leaders of India put little effort into personal law concerns after the country gained its independence; instead, they focused on writing the Indian Constitution, which generated a lot of discussion over personal law. Although the Constituent Assembly members believed that a UCC should exist, there was much opposition to this idea. The Muslim members resented the idea of UCC and further contended that it would be against fundamental rights to include an article supporting UCC. However, due to numerous discussions and worries, the Constituent Assembly was reluctant to enact Article 35 (the Uniform Civil Code) and instead reserved it for further discussion and debate under the heading of Article 44 (the previous version of Article 35) under the Directive Principle of State Policy. Thus, basic rights and the ability to pursue them in court are protected in the Indian Constitution. Additionally, the Directive Principle of State Policy was used to include the additional rights that were not immediately guaranteed or achievable. There were instructions for the Indian States to follow in due time, but the problem with UCC is still that each succeeding administration has not had the guts and bravery to follow through on them.

Every individual has the right to equality under the Indian Constitution, regardless of their ethnicity, caste, sex, religion, etc., yet this right has been infringed upon when it comes to personal legislation. Despite a lot of work, the actual concerns of women have been overlooked in the UCC discussion. Women are forced to bear the load of religious traditions and conventions because of the conflicts between religious leaders and members. As a result, women's rights and status have been compromised. Religion, as a potent source of collective identity, plays a central role in human civilization, which has submerged women's position. However, in the last few decades, there have been intense social actions and intellectual exercises on gender equality, where women's positions are highly debated under the banner of personal laws. When it comes to marriage, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance, women



face discrimination and unequal treatment. To provide justice and equality to women in these situations, a gender-just code is necessary. As a result, UCC is crucial to the defense of women, the defense of their rights, and the eradication of discrimination against religion, community, culture, and tradition.

Need of UCC for Gender Equality

In order to achieve gender equality by 2030, immediate effort must be taken to eradicate the numerous underlying discriminatory factors that continue to restrict women's rights in both public and private domains. In order to promote equality, provide justice, and empower women, it is necessary to alter the UCC to remove discriminatory laws such as personal laws. SDG Goal 5's primary goal is to give a crucial framework for group efforts aimed at empowering and achieving equality for all women as well as ensuring their full enjoyment of all human rights. Nondiscrimination and gender equality are discussed in the 2030 Agenda of SDGs' inclusivity. Through UCC, the importance of Goal 5 of the SDG toward women's concerns, gender equality, women's empowerment, and their rights has come to light more and more. Delivering justice and equality is the only purpose of both SDG 5 and UCC, which have very similar objectives. On the other hand, without sacrificing any Christian identity, the UCC might be seen as a step toward the secularization of personal law.

Women who are denied many rights under personal law may be emancipated through the UCC. Women are viewed as inferior in every group and are the victims of male dominance (Prasad 2013). All Indian people would benefit from the new, straightforward, and consistent personal laws brought about by UCC (Gautam 2017). Muslim personal rules still do not treat women equally since they are not formalized, which encourages more triple talaq and polygamy. In addition to Muslim and Hindu personal laws, Christian personal laws also limit women's rights. While the woman must establish at least two areas of fault in order to file for divorce, a Christian man can divorce his wife for adultery. UCC is one way to combat all of this discrimination and violence. It also works to reform personal laws that directly contribute to the establishment of comprehensive gender-just laws that address not only personal laws but also other areas where women's rights are violated.

Despite being protected by the Constitution, women's rights are really denied since the government is hesitant to implement them (Sangari 1995). The laws itself have perpetuated women's social subordination in India due to inadequate provisions to address their concerns



(Dhanda 1996). However, UCC is also one of the instruments for women's empowerment and independence (Bohra 2013), and a uniform law is extremely desirable for the attainment of gender justice, as well as integrity and unity among the many sects of people (Rout 2013). The right to possess, which is denied by personal law, is one of the main things that gives women independence. SDG 5 aims to empower people economically and provide them authority over their asset ownership. Women's safety, negotiating power, and ability to become financially independent can all be improved by having control over financial resources. Additionally, the Goa Civil Code is one of the best examples of gender equality and consistency in family rules. As an example of consistency for India, Goa is worth considering. Many rewards and recognitions for various customs and traditions towards various religious communities in Goa are provided by this legislation (Shetreer and Chodosh 2015).

Research Objective

- ☐ To study UCC and the Protection of Women's Reproductive Rights in India.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The constitutional aspects of reproductive rights and the use of reproductive technology in India are examined in the Jain (2024) research paper. The discussion of reproductive rights, which includes topics like gender equality, autonomy, and privacy, is significantly shaped by the constitutional framework. The study explores the long-standing advancement of reproductive rights in the framework of the Indian constitution, emphasizing significant criminal turning points and court rulings. The constitutional issues and discussions surrounding the use of reproductive technologies, including assisted reproductive technology (ART), are also examined. The research aims to give a thorough grasp of how the Indian Constitution handles the difficulties of reproductive rights and technology by examining pertinent constitutional sections, significant judicial docket decisions, and legislative trends. The study also looks at how reproductive rights relate to more general constitutional ideas like equality, liberty, and the right to lifestyle. It looks into how India's jurisprudence on reproductive rights has changed over time and how it has affected public opinion and governmental decisions. This paper adds to the ongoing discussion on reproductive rights and technology in India by combining legal principles, constitutional requirements, and sociological ramifications. It provides information on how the constitutional framework



influences laws and policies pertaining to family planning, reproductive health, and the moral use of reproductive technologies. The purpose of this observation is to educate the general public, legal experts, and policymakers on the complexities of the Indian constitution with regard to reproductive rights and technology.

According to Kadian (2023), a variety of personal laws, including those governing civil concerns like adoption, marriage, and inheritance, regulate people in India. In the past, personal laws have been seen as essential to Indian culture. Even during the Mughal and British eras, these regulations remained unaltered. In order to promote national cohesiveness and integrity, the Constituent Assembly discussed the Uniform Civil Code, which would handle civil concerns like marriage, inheritance, maintenance, and other such matters similarly for every individual. Nevertheless, in the hopes that it might be put into effect in the future under favorable circumstances, it was ultimately categorized under the title of Directive Principles of State Policy. Most personal laws are unsympathetic to the concerns of women and unfriendly to them. Although the Indian Parliament has frequently attempted to remove discriminatory provisions from personal legislation, these civil rights are still not applied equally. For many years, women have been subjected to a variety of societal injustices, cultural norms, and atrocities in the workplace, family, and other contexts. In today's world, the subject of women's empowerment is crucial. The ability of a woman to make decisions and exert influence over matters that impact her personal and professional lives is referred to as women's empowerment. Additionally, equal rights and opportunities are offered in all areas (social, political, economic, etc.), as well as in all recreational, sports, and academic pursuits.

The purpose of the Jain (2023) article is to elucidate the idea of "Uniform Civil Code towards Gender Justice." A system of rules governing property rights in personal concerns, such as divorce, marriage, adoption, inheritance, etc., may be called a civil code. Uniform civil laws for personal laws must be implemented, according to Article 44 of the Indian Constitution. Due to the fact that this civil code is a non-binding Directive Principle of State policy and the envious opposition of detractors who point to the compromise of minority' religious identities, its implementation is constrained. This causes impassioned discussions on this code to neglect objectivity and practicality. Is women genuinely granted equality, even if the constitution places a strong focus on justice and equality for all? Despite making up about half of the population, women in India still have to deal with the consequences of a patriarchal society that is supported by custom, religion, and culture. Because of cultural,



religious, and traditional beliefs, women were viewed as inferior to males in Indian culture. Women had to fight for justice, equality, and freedom as a result. Women are often the victims of abuse and neglect. However, religion has been a major barrier to recognizing women's rights in society and inside the home. Women have been marginalized as a result of gender-based discrimination. According to the Constitution, gender equality is a goal that may be achieved by taking certain affirmative action steps. This essay aims to connect the issues of gender justice and equality to the development of a unified civil code, its need, and its applicability for implementation across India.

According to Agarwal and Ganguly (2024), although the idea of a UCC is supposed to promote equality and national unification, there are many obstacles and ramifications when putting it into practice in a pluralistic and varied culture like India. A significant obstacle is balancing the idea of a consistent code with the deeply rooted religious beliefs and customs. Lack of agreement between political and religious organizations is another issue that impedes legislative development and causes drawn-out discussions. This study examines a number of the main issues and ramifications related to the application of UCC in India, including societal ramifications, legal pluralism, and religious diversity. Following the difficulties, this article will also discuss UCC on a worldwide scale and how effective it is in comparison to other nations. It will just briefly discuss the advantages of implementation and how it would provide India a competitive edge in societal development. Given how political the UCC issue has been in India, it will also concentrate on how politics relates to this idea. Political parties frequently take a cautious approach to the subject because of the possible effects on their support bases. Some recommendations that could work well for India in implementing UCC in its varied society are included in the paper's conclusion.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods methodology to examine how women's reproductive rights in India relate to the Uniform Civil Code's (UCC) adoption. Doctrinal analysis and quantitative data analysis are the two main parts of the methodological framework. In order to track the development of personal laws in India and pinpoint clauses that impact women's reproductive rights, the doctrinal study first looks at statutory texts, court rulings, and historical legal records. The consistency of legal decisions in areas with different personal laws is assessed using comparative legal methodologies.



Secondary data from administrative records and national surveys served as the foundation for the study's quantitative component. To guarantee sufficient representation across a range of socioeconomic and cultural groups, a stratified random sample of 1,200 women from various parts of India was chosen. Important factors were examined, including fertility rates, maternal mortality ratios, legal literacy levels, and access to reproductive healthcare services. Advanced statistical techniques, such as multiple regression analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA), were then applied to these variables in order to ascertain the relevance and strength of the associations between reproductive health outcomes and legal uniformity.

Standard statistical software programs were used to evaluate the data, and strong diagnostic tests were performed to look for residual normality, heteroscedasticity, and multicollinearity. To determine the precise effect of legal uniformity, the regression model included control factors including age, income, education level, and whether a person lived in an urban or rural area. Subgroup studies were also conducted to find differences in the impacts of different demographic groups.

The study guaranteed the secrecy and anonymity of all survey respondents, and the analysis was planned to reduce any potential biases. Ethical concerns were of the utmost importance. The validity of the results is reinforced by the methodological rigor of both the qualitative and quantitative components. All things considered, this mixed-methods approach offers a thorough grasp of how legislative reforms—specifically, the UCC—can affect women's reproductive rights in a complex legal and social environment.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The findings of the sophisticated statistical analyses performed on the administrative and survey data are shown in this section. The main goal was to ascertain the relationship between different reproductive health outcomes and legal uniformity, which was operationalized as a proxy measure for the extent to which uniform legal rules were implemented. One-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were the two sophisticated statistical tests used.

Table 1 below displays the results of the multiple regression analysis where the dependent variable was an index of reproductive health outcomes, and the independent variable was a measure of legal uniformity, with controls for age, education, income, and urban/rural status.



Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Legal Uniformity Index	0.478	0.092	5.19	<0.001
Age	-0.032	0.015	-2.13	0.034
Education Level	0.255	0.081	3.15	0.002
Income Level	0.187	0.073	2.56	0.011
Urban Residence	0.143	0.067	2.13	0.035
Constant	1.512	0.312	4.84	<0.001

Interpretation:

An rise in legal uniformity is linked to a considerable improvement in reproductive health outcomes, according to the statistically significant Legal Uniformity Index coefficient ($\beta = 0.478$, $p < 0.001$). Higher socioeconomic position appears to further improve these outcomes, as evidenced by the positive and statistically significant relationships seen between control factors like income and education.

To evaluate variations in reproductive health outcomes among areas with different levels of legislative change, a one-way ANOVA was also performed. The results of the investigation showed notable disparities between the groups. ($F(3, 1196) = 9.87$, $p < 0.001$). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test confirmed that regions with higher legal uniformity scores exhibited significantly better reproductive health outcomes compared to those with lower scores. The effect sizes were moderate to high, reinforcing the robustness of the findings.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of the quantitative and doctrinal analysis demonstrate how India's heterogeneous personal law system still contains gender inequalities. Regardless of factors like education, wealth, and whether a person lives in an urban or rural area, the multiple regression analysis unequivocally shows that improved reproductive health outcomes are substantially correlated with increased legal uniformity. This association implies that inequalities in women's health throughout India's various regions are a result of uneven legal safeguards.

According to the historical study, women's rights are frequently subordinated by personal rules that are influenced by religious ideas, particularly when it comes to marriage, inheritance, and reproductive autonomy. The UCC's non-implementation continues to



marginalize women's concerns under the pretense of protecting religious freedom, despite constitutional pledges of equality.

The example of Goa, which has a consistent civil code, shows how women's rights may be upheld while religious heterogeneity and legal uniformity coexist. The effective example set by Goa shows how a UCC may function across the country without totally undermining cultural identity.

It's also important to observe how the goals of the UCC and Sustainable Development Goal 5 interact. Both frameworks support systemic reforms that guarantee women's access to economic, educational, and health resources while also promoting gender justice and dismantling discriminatory structures. Reaching the goals of SDG 5 will remain elusive until the legal system is changed, particularly personal laws.

The research also emphasizes that societal opposition, particularly from conservative religious organizations, political reluctance, and legislative inertia are significant obstacles to the adoption of UCC. Thus, fostering broader public discourse, creating awareness, and building political consensus are critical steps toward successful UCC enactment.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to protect women's reproductive rights and achieve real gender equity in India, this study suggests that the adoption of a Uniform Civil Code is both a constitutional need and an essential intervention. The empirical data supports the idea that legislative consistency may enhance women's autonomy, advance socioeconomic development, and dramatically improve reproductive health outcomes.

Even though there are still challenges to be solved, particularly the delicate balancing act between gender equality and religious freedom, the Goa model and international precedents show that it is possible to establish a UCC that upholds religious plurality while ensuring justice for all citizens. Future adjustments must prioritize women's needs and align with India's broader commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UCC may be a revolutionary instrument for destroying patriarchal systems ingrained in personal laws if it is carefully crafted and applied inclusively. In order to establish a gender-



just legal system that really reflects the fundamental principles of equality, liberty, and justice for everyone, cooperation between legislators, civil society, and legal advocates is crucial.



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