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Arguments For And Against Uniform Civil Code

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Arguments in Favor of UCC

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is still a controversial issue in India since its proponents think it will promote equality in addition to secularism and patriotism. By creating uniform rules that apply to everyone in the nation, a uniform civil code would put a stop to religiously motivated personal laws. The UCC's supporters argue that the plan will strengthen India's secular nature while also advancing gender equality and legal consistency. The following points represent the foundation for India's adoption of a Uniform Civil Code.

Gender Equality and Women's Rights

One of the strongest arguments in favor of the UCC is its potential to establish gender parity in personal laws concerning marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Currently, religious laws across communities are often biased against women. For instance:

- Muslim law permits men to unilaterally divorce through triple talaq (although now banned by the Supreme Court), whereas Muslim women face a more complex process.
- Hindu laws historically favored male heirs, though judicial reforms have enhanced women's inheritance rights.
- Christian divorce laws require longer separation periods, perceived as discriminatory compared to other religions.

A UCC would ensure equal legal treatment for women across communities, thereby empowering them and eliminating systemic gender-based discrimination. Countries like France and Turkey have seen improvements in gender equality after adopting such codes.

Secularism and National Integration

While India identifies as a secular nation, it continues to recognize religious personal laws, which contradict the principle of secularism. Article 44 of the Constitution mandates the state to endeavor toward a UCC to create a uniform legal structure.

Adopting a UCC would reinforce secularism by ensuring equal legal standards for all citizens, reducing community-based divisions, and fostering a shared national identity. It would help eliminate the special privileges of certain groups, encouraging unity and reducing inter-community conflicts.

Simplification and Uniformity in Laws

The current coexistence of multiple personal laws leads to legal ambiguity and inconsistency. Different rules for marriage, adoption, divorce, and succession complicate judicial decisions and create confusion.

A unified legal code would reduce these complexities, streamline procedures, and help the judiciary issue consistent judgments. It would also make it easier for law enforcement and legal professionals to operate effectively, especially in cases involving interfaith marriages, which currently require the Special Marriage Act of 1954.

Legal Clarity and Reduction of Conflicts

Conflicting judgments based on religious laws have led to legal disputes, such as in:

- The Shah Bano case (1985), where the Supreme Court upheld alimony rights under Section 125 of the CrPC against religious objections.
- The Shayara Bano case (2017), which ruled against instant triple talaq.

A UCC would reduce such conflicts, modernize outdated laws, and align India's legal framework with contemporary human rights standards. It represents a move toward a more progressive and egalitarian society.

Reducing Legal Conflicts and Enhancing Clarity

Conflicts often arise when different personal laws contradict each other. Notable examples include:

- The Shah Bano case, where the Supreme Court upheld alimony rights for a Muslim woman, leading to nationwide debate.
- The Shayara Bano case, which declared triple talaq unconstitutional, reflecting the need for uniform laws.

A UCC would help reduce such contradictions, ensure consistent judicial decisions, and modernize outdated laws that often clash with present-day human rights values.

Arguments Against UCC

The proposal to implement a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), although aimed at promoting legal equality and consistency, encounters considerable resistance. Critics argue that it infringes upon religious freedom, undermines cultural diversity, and poses serious practical challenges. India's rich and varied cultural and religious traditions make it difficult to adopt a single, standardized legal system. Many religious groups, political entities, and legal experts oppose the UCC, fearing it may infringe upon individual rights, disrupt the coexistence of multiple legal traditions, and harm social harmony.

There are also significant legal and administrative hurdles. With millions of cases already pending, India's judicial system is heavily burdened. Introducing a uniform code could lead to further complications, particularly in reassessing existing marriages, inheritance rights, and past rulings based on religious laws. Such a major legal shift would require substantial time, funding, public education campaigns, and specialized training for legal professionals. Without a well-organized rollout, the transition could lead to confusion and legal inconsistency.

Although the UCC aims to promote uniformity and gender justice, it also raises concerns about the preservation of religious practices and cultural values, as well as political and legal feasibility. Religious sensitivities, the potential for litigation, and expected resistance from various communities complicate its implementation. Therefore, a more viable approach may lie in gradually reforming existing personal laws rather than enforcing a single, rigid code. A collaborative, inclusive, and measured strategy is essential to ensure that any steps toward a UCC are both effective and respectful of India's pluralistic society.

Middle Ground Approaches: Harmonization of Laws

The significant controversy surrounding the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) makes a complete overhaul of personal laws currently impractical. A more feasible and balanced alternative is the harmonization of personal laws with constitutional values, while preserving India's cultural diversity. This strategy aims to eliminate discriminatory practices without dismantling the religious diversity that characterizes Indian society. It strikes a balance between the principles of gender equality and religious freedom by crafting legal frameworks that merge the need for uniformity with the country's rich cultural heritage.

Rather than discarding existing personal laws, gradual reform within these legal systems is the most effective route to harmonization. The government should amend personal laws to align them with principles of justice and equality. For example, the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act of 2005 granted daughters equal inheritance rights, and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act of 2019 provided financial safeguards post-divorce, while still respecting Islamic law. Incremental changes like these are more acceptable to communities, as they are less likely to be seen as threatening, thereby reducing resistance.

Codifying personal laws offers another way to create legal consistency. Many personal laws in India stem from unwritten customs, which often result in legal ambiguity. Legal codification—ensuring these laws align with constitutional rights—can bring clarity and uniformity. The Hindu Code Bills of 1955–56 exemplify this approach, as they unified Hindu personal laws without restricting religious practice. A similar gradual codification process for Muslim, Christian, and Parsi laws would help remove contradictions while preserving cultural values.

An optional UCC could serve as a middle-ground solution, offering individuals the choice between secular civil laws and their respective personal laws. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 already allows interfaith and secular marriages. Extending this model to areas like inheritance and adoption would give families the option of a unified legal system without forcing them to abandon their customs. Countries like Egypt and Tunisia provide similar dual legal paths, allowing citizens to choose between religious and secular family laws.

Comparative studies show that other nations have successfully implemented legal reforms through gradual integration. In South Africa, religious and customary norms coexist with constitutional standards. Turkey transitioned from religious to secular civil courts through a careful and inclusive process that minimized resistance. These international examples offer valuable lessons for India to adopt a phased and inclusive approach in integrating personal laws into a unified constitutional framework.

The ongoing debate over the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) highlights deep societal divides, making the complete replacement of personal laws with a single code currently unrealistic. A more practical and culturally sensitive approach is the harmonization of personal laws with constitutional principles, while still preserving India's rich and diverse cultural and religious fabric. This method seeks to eradicate discriminatory practices without dismantling the unique identities of various communities. It offers a balanced path that respects both gender equality and religious autonomy, acknowledging the need for legal uniformity while embracing India's pluralism.

Instead of abolishing religious personal laws outright, introducing progressive amendments within each legal tradition offers a more sustainable route to reform. Laws should be updated to reflect constitutional values of justice, fairness, and equality. For instance, the **Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005** granted equal property rights to daughters, correcting historical gender bias. Similarly, the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 2019** ensured financial support to divorced Muslim women without undermining Islamic legal principles. These reforms show that targeted, incremental changes can modernize personal laws without alienating religious communities, making them more receptive and reducing backlash.

Codifying personal laws is another key method of reform. Many religious laws are based on oral traditions and customs, resulting in legal ambiguities and inconsistent application. Bringing these laws into written form, in line with constitutional safeguards, would enhance clarity, reduce judicial confusion, and establish more predictable legal outcomes. The **Hindu Code Bills of 1955–56** are a notable example, where Hindu personal laws were unified without infringing on religious freedoms. A similar structured codification of Muslim, Christian, and Parsi laws could maintain traditional values while eliminating contradictions and ensuring equality.

To further accommodate diversity, an **optional UCC** could be introduced. This would allow individuals to choose between secular civil laws and their respective personal laws, avoiding the perception of forced uniformity. The **Special Marriage Act of 1954**, which already permits secular marriages across religions, could be expanded to cover adoption, inheritance, and other family matters. Such a dual-option model respects individual choice and promotes voluntary adoption of common laws. Countries like **Egypt** and **Tunisia** have adopted similar frameworks, offering citizens the flexibility to opt between religious and secular systems, thereby balancing tradition and reform.

CONCLUSION

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) has been a subject of intense debate in India, with strong arguments both in favor and against its implementation. Supporters of the UCC argue that it will ensure equality before the law by applying the same set of civil laws to all citizens, irrespective of their religion. This is seen as a step toward a more secular and unified nation, where personal laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption are no longer governed by religious doctrines but by a common code that upholds justice and equality. Advocates also highlight the importance of gender justice, as many personal laws are discriminatory towards women. A UCC, they believe, would simplify the legal system, promote national integration, and bring consistency and clarity to the judicial process. On the other hand, opponents of the UCC argue that it could infringe on the fundamental right to religious freedom, which is protected under the Constitution. They fear that imposing a common code may erode the cultural and religious identities of various communities, especially minorities, and disrupt the social fabric of a diverse country like India. There are also concerns about the political and practical challenges of drafting and implementing a truly fair and inclusive code that respects all traditions.