

Origin and Development of Hindu Law

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Abstract

The article mainly talks about the origin and development of Hindu law. Laws are the basic building blocks for maintaining order in every society, in every nation, and in every sphere of life. The Hindu law in historical viewpoint is the study of law and jurisprudence from the Vedic period until the existence of medieval commentaries. Covering the early Sanskrit rulebook through the codification of Hindu law in present days, this interdisciplinary section examines the relations between Hinduism and law. The authors present a connection between the major changes in the legal system of India in both the colonial period and the recent changes in Hinduism. In doing so, the authors make past treatments of Hindu law a virtuously text-based tradition, and in the process, they provide a fascinating account of an often ignored social and political history.

Keywords: Custom, Dayabhaga, Hindu, legislation, Mitakshara, Shruti, Smriti, Vedas

INTRODUCTION

The Indian legal system is unique. The laws in India are of two forms: The first is personal law and the second one is the general or territorial law. Personal law governs persons who are members of a particular religion; territorial law, on the other hand, makes general provisions for all the citizens of the country.

Thus, personal law makes provisions on subjects that are not covered by the territorial law. India is the Hindu dominant territory. So here, the Hindu law is the prominent law to govern the Hindu as a religion. According to the renowned scholar of law, Sir Henry Maine “*The Hindu law is the oldest of any known system of jurisprudence, and to the present, it shows no sign of decline*” [1].

In view of the stated text, it is relevant to consider the origin, development, schools, nature, and sources. The focus point of this paper is stated here.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

1. To know the origin of Hindu law.

2. To analyse the developmental aspect of Hindu law.
3. To know various schools of the Hindu law.
4. To analyse the scope of Hindu law.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. In the current article, an attempt has been made to do theoretical or doctrinal research.
2. Secondary source have been used in this article.
3. Reference books and e-sources such as websites, e-journal, e-books, etc. are considered for the research purpose of this article.

REVIEW LITERATURE

1. After reading various books of Hindu law (Family law) and some Hindu holy books, got to know about the origin and development of Hindu law which motivated me to write this article. Law is rapidly growing day by day through precedents in the form of judicial decisions and law formulations by legislature.
2. Hindu law is an ancient law which is followed by the Hindu society from ancient time, and it is laid down by the various scriptures and these are the basic laws for healthy running of the society [2].
3. The book [3] helped me to know the basics of Hindu law and its concept. The book consists of more than 4000 cases and is harmonized in about 1400 pages. In the guise of ongoing commentary, the codified branches of Hindu law are studied here. Translation of Sanskrit texts of the ancient system into English is a very useful and a helpful guide to the readers. By researching the historical and sociological aspects of the topic and charting the progress, advancements, and consistency in the application of law, the knowledgeable author has further enhanced the work. Because of its wealth of knowledge and examination of historical and contemporary perspectives on the high courts and Supreme Court [3], the book is an invaluable source of information.
4. The book laid me to learn the origin and introduction of Hindu law. The intellectual work provides inclusive attention and detailed analysis of the topic as well as subject, enlighten various facets of both codified and uncoded law. This book discusses various facets of Hindu law. It was written in simple, easy, and convenient to understand language. It consists of significant quantity of case laws references that is explained and discussed herein related with concerned subject matter of this writeup [4, 5].
5. Anyone looking to understand modern Hindu laws should read this book. It is a useful textbook for law student as well as a quick reference guide to practicing lawyers. By help of this book, I have understood the nature of Hindu law [6, 7].
6. This is the standard book for studying the modern Hindu law and it discusses all the topics in depth, and we can explore our knowledge of Hindu law. Schools, origin and sources of Hindu law were well explained and it helped me to understand these topics and by studying this book, I got motivated to write this article the most. According to me, this is the one of the best books for law students to study Hindu law [8, 9]

ORIGIN OF HINDU LAW

The Hindu law is supposed to be a divine origin. The main focus of Hindus is attainment of the salvation, i.e., moksha. Hindu law in existence from last 5000 years has gone through numerous phases. It is observed that the beginning of Hindu law is built upon the various spiritual texts like: Vedas, Upanishads, Geeta, and other Hindu scriptures. The ideas emerging from these texts lead to recognise the law as a Dharma. The term 'dharma' can be loosely called as "duty". Various Hindu scholars and jurists confide that the Hindu Law is an enforceable part of dharma. Thus, the dharma is law.

In Dharmasastra, there is no word like 'Hindu'. The word Hindu basically originated from foreign. The name '*Hindu*' comes into reality from the Greek, they call the persons who resides in the Indus Valley as '*Indoi*'. After that, it was termed as 'Hindu'. The nation came to be recognized as 'Hindustan' and its residents as Hindu. In past, the term 'Hindu' was not only signifying a religion, but it was basically indicating a country. The law of Hindu has been altered over eras, and it has been prevailing from last 5000+ years and also constantly administering the societal and ethical figure of Hindu people's life by ensuing the various fundamentals of social and cultural life of Hindus.

The further view in regard with the enlightenment Hindu law is that it is the result of practice which is so called from customs and usages. It is supposed that the primary and basic bases of law of Hindu are Upanishads, Smritis, Shrutis, customs, digests, and commentaries [10]. The practice of laws of Hindu at the time of the colonization remained based upon the Manusmriti. Though, the origin of Hindu law cannot be accurately determined due to its centuries-old origins.

As per Hindu jurisprudence, Dharma means the duties in several ways alike the social obligations, legal obligations, or spiritual obligation. By this context, it can be observed that Dharma can be said as the idea of justice.

Sources of Dharma

In accordance with the “Bhagwat Geeta” God makes a living creature by means of the principles of Dharma. They are self-restraint, honesty, patience, forgiveness, sanctity (hygiene in the body, soul, and mind), control over the senses, knowledge, truthfulness, reasons and non-appearance of anger. Accordingly, “Moksha” which means “salvation” is the eternal Dharma for human creatures bestowing to Hinduism.

Hindu epopee like the Ramayana and Mahabharata also reflects Dharma. They stated that implementing our own Dharma is the true object of all people. Also, the king was known as Dharmaraj at that time because the primary and basic aim of the king was to follow the pathway of Dharma.

Nature of Dharma

Notwithstanding to the schools of Hindu jurisprudence, the Hindu religious jurisprudence pays much attention towards the duties more than rights. The definition of Dharma changes from person to person according to the societal need. There are numerous duties in the society and accordingly it is distributed among the people in the world. As earlier, the responsibility of the king was to maintain the religious laws, and on the different side the farmer’s responsibility is to produce the crops, the doctor’s duty is to cure the people, and the lawyer’s duty is to contest for the interest of justice. It being extremely religious thought in nature as the Dharma is multidimensional. It includes numerous laws and customs of a wide range of the subjects which are necessary and need to be followed by one and all individuals in the society. For example, Manusmriti concerned with the religion, economics, administration, criminal and civil law, succession and marriage laws, etc. We primarily study about these in law books.

Nature of Hindu Law

The origin of Hindu law is treated to have origin from the divine. According to Hindu law jurists, it is the enforceable portion of Dharma.

According to H. Mayne, the law of Hindu is the law of Smritis as explained in the Sanskrit, commentaries and digests which is as altered and managed by the courts as a supplement to the custom.

According to Dharmashastra writers, law was supposed to be dynamic, i.e., it should reply to the need and requirements as provided at that time. Hindu law is not a law that is made by King as stated by John Austin.

Under Hindu Law, the sovereign, i.e., the king is liable under Dharma. It was known that the King is the enforcer of law and not the giver of law. Hindu law is personal law not *lex-loci*. Therefore, it follows, that on the movement of Hindus from one place to the other place, that is supposed to be uphold as the laws and customs of the area from where they come.

Who is Hindu?

Hindu laws apply to persons who are Hindus. Here the question arises that who all come under the category of Hindus are controversial and conflicting because many religions are included in the category of Hindus. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, explains the term “who is Hindu” under Section 2. It says, “the act applies to any person who is Hindu by religion in any of its forms”. It contains:

- Anyone who follows Buddhism, Jainism, or Sikhism.
- A Virashaiva, a Lingayat, or a follower of Brahmo, Prathana, or Arya Samaj.

Any other individual who resides in the region covered by the act, with the exception of those who are Muslims, Christians, Parsis, or Jews.

Any person can be a Hindu by two ways:

1. By birth or
2. By conversion or re-conversion.

Section 2 provides that a person is legally deemed to be a Hindu by birth in the following cases:

- When both parents are Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, or Hindus.
- When one of the parents was raised as a follower of one of the following religions: Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Sikh.

Therefore, whether or not a child is born to Hindu parents, they would be deemed Hindus by religion. Similar to this, a child raised as a Hindu by a Muslim father and a Hindu mother, whether by legal or illegal means, would be treated as a Hindu. The child whose growth is brought up as a Hindu, is Hindu in the eyes of the law even when his Hindu parent passed away.

Second category is that when Hindu person made is by the way of whether conversion or re-conversion. If any Christian converted to a Hindu by the methods recognised by judiciary, then he shall be deemed to be a Hindu and shall be permitted to follow the personal laws of Hinduism and in accordance with those rules and regulations. The mode of conversion is acknowledged by various judgements.

In *Peerumal v. Poonuswami* [11], the hon'ble apex court observed that any individual can convert to other religion by performing the ceremony as stated in the religion to which the individual desires to be converted.

In *Mohandas v. Devasam Board* [12], the hon'ble court pronounced that if any person who converted to the Hinduism as he has belief and faith, agrees to follow the Hindu religion for some duration would be a Hindu for that duration.

Also, if somebody who considers himself an atheist or who does not agree with the fundamental doctrine of Hindu religion or else opposes orthodox religious practices or may do whatever that Hindu generally will not do that will be laid to cease to be a Hindu. It was reiterated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the matter of *Chandra Shekhar v. Kunandaivelu* [13].

Sources of Hindu Law

Classifying the sources of the Hindu law; there are two ways:

1. Ancient sources
2. Modern sources

Ancient Source

This source laid to the development of the concept of Hindu law during ancient era.

It is further classified into four categories:

1. Shruti
2. Smriti
3. Customs
4. Digest and commentaries

Shruti

The word "Shruti" means which is heard. It comprises of the holy expressions of the God. Ancient source is called to be the most significant and main source of all. Shruti's are the holy and pure word that was stated by the God that are contained in the Upanishads and Vedas. They have a religious relationship with a one and lead him to attains the salvation and the knowledge of incarnation. It is treated as the primary source for getting the knowledge of law.

The four Vedas are:

1. Rigveda (praise of forces of nature),
2. Yajurveda (rituals, etc.),
3. Samveda (prayers),
4. Atharvaveda (magic, spell, and incarnation).

Six Vedangas are:

1. The Siksha or orthography
2. The Kalpa or treatises dealing with rituals
3. The Vyakaran or grammar
4. The Chandas or prosody
5. The Jyotish or astronomy
6. The Nirukta or lexicon

Smritis

It is the manuscript that has been remembered and then interpreted by the rishis (sages) across the generation. There is another type of classification of the word 'Smritis' that are stated here:

- Dharma Sutra (prose)
- Dharmashastras (poetry)

Commentaries and Digest

The 3rd ancient basis of law of Hindu is commentaries and digests. Commentaries and digests have extended the scope of law of Hindu. It plays a vital role in evolving the idea of Hindu law. This aided in the interpretation of smritis. A sole interpretation of the smritis is called as a commentary whereas the other interpretations of the smritis are known as digest. Mitakshara and Dayabhaga are called as the two greatest commentaries of Hindu law.

Customs

Customs are the tradition which is prevailing in the social order since ancient era. It is the kind of practice that is continuously under the observation of the society and has been followed by the people.

The customs further classified into two types:

1. Legal customs
2. Conventional customs

Legal customs

These are those customs that are enforceable or accepted by the law. It cannot be considered unacceptable unless the law itself made it unacceptable. Legal customs are of 2 types:

1. *Local customs*: These are those customs which are prevailing and in practice in local range. This particular tradition is not widely known.
2. *General customs*: These are those customs which are followed and prevailing in a society at large area. This kind of custom is extremely acknowledged by the people.

Conventional Customs

These are those customs which are interrelated and conditional to the inclusion of an agreement.

Essentials of a Custom

The essentials that establish a custom are as follows:

- A custom must be continuous and consistently practiced.
- It should not be vague or ambiguous.
- It must be prevailed from antiquity.
- There must be a broad overview of it.

- Custom should be definite and clear.
- It must not contradict with the policies made for the welfare of the public that would hamper the interest of the society at large.

In this matter (*Deivanai Achi v. Chidambaram*), it was laid down by the court that in order to become lawfully sanctioned and obligatory on the public, a custom need to be consistently prevailing in the society, it must not be ambiguous, vague, and must not contradictory also with well-established policies made for general public [9]. Rule of custom should be under the full and complete observation of the society.

The Supreme Court (*Laxmi vs Bhagwantbuva*) in this prompt case has observed that any custom becomes enforceable by law when the majority residing in the area uses and also practicing it continuously [14].

Onus of Custom

Ordinarily, after judicial recognition of the custom, further no proof is required, but in certain cases where the judicial recognition has not been received to that practice, which is prevailing as custom, the burden lies on that party to prove it, which alleges its existence.

In the present case (*Munna Lal v. Raj Kumar*), the apex court underlined a custom which was brought to the knowledge of the court over time, and by the requirement of its proof court may be held to be enforceable by law [15].

Modern Sources of Law of Hindu

Judicial Decisions

It is considered the most significant component of modern law. It is construed to be binding and authoritative in nature. The doctrine of stare decisis was recognized, and it was applicable in such similar matters under similar circumstances and facts as in a similar matter already settled by the superior court.

Hon'ble Apex Court of India hold that (*Luhar Amritlal v. Doshi Jayantilal*) the decisions of judges have been become parcel or the part of modern Hindu law [5].

The law created regarding the prevailing of any custom by the legislature is the codification of it, which plays a vital role in the expansion of the idea of Hindu law. Parliament is the law-making body that enacts the legislation.

Justice Equity and Good Conscience

It is the rule of common law. It is used when an existing law is not applicable in a situation before the court makes a decision based on its logic and the principles of justice, equity, and good conscience.

This rule is treated to be the just, fair, and rational possibility for the issue in question.

Apex Court observed (*Gurunath v Kamlabai*) that the rule of justice, equity, and good conscience was made applicable when there is no law prevailing regarding that issue [7].

The Privy Council in this present case (*Kanchana v Girimalappa*) barred the murderer of the victim from succeeding in receiving the property [16].

Legislation

It is said to be the most significant source of law. It is called "the basis of the development of Hindu law in the modern time". It is said that legislation turns out to be an essential body for codifying the law society demands it with the passage of time.

After attaining freedom, the following laws were enacted to govern the Hindus:

1. *The Hindu Married Women's Right to Separate Residence and Maintenance Act, 1949*: This present legislation allows a wife of a Hindu male to live away, and in certain cases, get maintenance from her husband.
2. *The Special Marriage Act, 1954*: This act legalizes the marriage of two persons, one male and one female, who are not of the same religion.
3. *The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955*: This legislation totally changed the law related to marriages solemnized between Hindus and made it applicable to those religions as per Section 2 of the act.
4. *The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956*: It enhances the existing law in the concerned matter.
5. *The Hindu Succession Act, 1956*: It brought some notable variations to the succession law. It provides the equivalent right of inheritance to Hindu women, and also provides complete rights in regard to the property to receive it by them through the legal modes.
6. *The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956*: This substantially reformed the prior law related to adoption and maintenance that provides Hindu women with the right of adoption.
7. *Marriage Laws Amendment Act, 1976*: This brings about some sort of change in the 1955 Act. It comes with the concept of divorce through mutual consent; this is based on similar grounds as provided for judicial separation as well as divorce, and it will also ease the lengthy legal procedure of divorce.
8. *The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1978*: This act deals with eligibility as to the age of a male and female, which must be 21 and 18 years respectively but later in 2021, by an amendment, the age of females also must be 21 years at the time of marriage.

HINDU LAW SCHOOLS

The Hindu Law Schools are based upon the commentaries and the digests of writings of smritis. The schools provide the expansion of scope of the laws related to Hindus and contributed towards the growth and development [17].

There are two major schools of modern Hindu law:

1. Mitakshara
2. Dayabhaga

Mitakshara School

This school is among the utmost leading schools of Hindu law. This prevailing commentary consists of Smriti, and its writer is Yajnavalkya. The said school is enforced all over India except in Assam and West Bengal. The jurisdiction of Mitakshara is extensive. However, in the different parts of India, the law is practiced differently as of the diverse rules of customary is being followed by the people.

The Mitakshara is again separated into four sub-schools that are known as:

1. Banaras Hindu Law School
2. Mithila Hindu Law School
3. Bombay Hindu Law School
4. Dravida or Madras Hindu Law School

These law schools come under the purview of Mitakshara Law School. They got a similar essential code but differ in some circumstances.

Benaras Law School

It comes under the purview of the Mitakshara School of Hindu Law and covers India's northern part including the state of Odisha. There are some leading commentaries that are Viramitrodaya, Nirnaya, Sindhu, Vivada, etc.

Mithila Law School

This school uses its expertise in the geographical areas of north Bihar and Trihoot. The principles of this school of law are practiced in the northern part of India. The three main commentaries of it are Vivadaratnakar, Vivadachintamani, and Smritisara.

Maharashtra or Bombay Law School

This school of law has the right to use its jurisdiction in the geographical parts of the Gujarat Karana and those parts where Marathi is spoken skilfully. The main bodies of this school are Vyavahara Mayukha, Virmitrodaya, etc.

Madras or Dravida Law School

This law school covers the entire southern part of India. It also exercises its authority and rights under Mitakshara Law School. The major establishments of it are Vaijayanti, Smriti Chandrika, etc.

Dayabhaga School

It is mainly followed in West Bengal and Assam. One of the most important Hindu law schools is this one. It is a digest's primary smritis. Its main emphasis was to deal with the laws related to inheritance, partition, and joint families. Kane stated that, it was formulated between the years 1090 and 1130 AD [18].

This school was framed with the viewpoint of eradicating all the other illogical and artificial rules regarding the inheriting of deceased property [19, 20]. The instantaneous benefit of this fresh digest is that it inclines to get rid of all the inadequacies and restrictions of the already recognized rules and inclusion of the cognates in the heirs list; that were prohibited by the school of Mitakshara.

This school has several other commentaries that are:

- Virmitrodaya
- Dayatatya
- Dattaka Chandrika
- Dayakram-sangrah

Differences between the Mitakshara Hindu Law School and the Dayabhaga Hindu Law School:

These two schools differ in two main ways:

1. Related to the joint family system, and
2. Inheritance rules.

In the Mitakshara law system, right to ancestral property is attained by birth; as family is a unit and have a separate right which is not recognised, and women has no right in inheriting the property of family. The right survivorship is available to the men among family.

In the Dayabhaga law system, the inheritance of property is attained by will. The deceased coparcener's part in property goes to his wife with no immediate heir. The important facts of differences among the two schools of Hindu Law, i.e., Mitakshara and Dayabhaga are as follows in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

It can be assumed that the law of Hinduism is the most ancient and prolific law in the whole world. Law of Hinduism is about six thousand years old. Hinduism schools encourage and develop the law for governance of Hindus from the core of its roots.

It has been observed that the law of Hindus has been criticized for its patriarchal and orthodox character and has not tolerated the contemporary view of modern society. Many parts of the law related to Hindus need to be upgraded, for example, the irreversible failure of the principles as a legal ground

for dissolution of marriage is till now not stated under the H.M. Act, 1955, and the hon'ble courts has also stated their views regarding this.

Table 1. Differences between two schools of Hindu law.

S.N.	Mitakshara	Dayabhaga
1.	In regard to joint property: Right to property arises by birth (of the claimant); hence the son is a co-owner with the father in ancestral property. After the commencement of the Hindu Succession (Amendment Act, 2005), the daughter of the coparcener is also a coparcener. The father has a restricted power of alienation, and the son can claim partition even against the father. The interest of a member of the joint family would, on his death, pass to the other members by survivorship. Section 6, subsection 3 of the Hindu Succession Act, as substituted by the Hindu Succession (Amendment Act, 2005) abolishes the principle of survivorship.	Right to property upon the death of the last owner. Hence, a son has no right to ancestral property during his father's lifetime. Father has absolute power of alienation and so cannot claim partition or even maintenance. The interest of every person would, on his death, pass by inheritance to his heirs, like his widow or daughters.
2.	In regard to Alienation: Members of joint family cannot dispose all their share wide undivided.	Any member of a joint family must sell, or give away his share, even when the family is undivided.
3.	In regard to Inheritance: The principle of inheritance is accountability, i.e., blood relationship. But Cognates are postponed to agnates.	The principle of inheritance is spiritual efficiency that is offering of <i>pindas</i>. Some cognates, like a sister's son are prepared for many agnates.
4.	In regard to the Doctrine of Factum Valet: Effect cannot be altered by hundred texts. It is recognised to a very limited extent.	Doctrine of factum valid is entirely recognised.
5.	Widow's Rights: Her rights are excluded by the rights of survivorship of the brothers. Then the widow can only have the right to maintenance.	When one of the brothers dies, his widow can inherit his share.

The one of genuine legal concern is that the meaning of 'Hindu' is, till now, not stated in any of the sources. Law gives only an adverse meaning that does not serve the test of present. The actual creator of the Hindu law is God's own law, which has been tested by various intellectuals.

There are various Smritis in accordance with the historiographers that are not founded till now, and several conflicts of interpretations and opinions have arisen for the prevailing laws. Thus, forming a gap for uncertainty under law related to Hindus. There are numerous parts where Hindu law is still quiet. Furthermost of the early sources of law of Hindus were scripted in Sanskrit language, and it is known to us that there is a lack of Sanskrit intellectuals in modern era. Ever since modern sources arose and were followed, ancient sources have hardly left any significance.

We can say that the appropriate writings of Hindu laws are not without doubt in present. We also say that existing sources of law of Hindu are uninvited; the law makers can look into the prevailing customs and sources of the Hindu religion and create legislation if it provides the requirement of the peoples at present needs.

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