



ILE

FAMILY & PRIVATE LAW REVIEW

VOLUME 3 AND ISSUE 1 OF 2025

INSTITUTE OF LEGAL EDUCATION



ILE FAMILY & PRIVATE LAW REVIEW

(OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL)

Journal's Home Page – <https://fplr.ilededu.in/>

Journal's Editorial Page – <https://fplr.ilededu.in/editorial-board/>

Volume 1 and Issue 1 (Access Full Issue on – <https://fplr.ilededu.in/category/volume-1-and-issue-1-of-2023/>)

Publisher

Prasanna S,

Chairman of Institute of Legal Education

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Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

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NRI MARRIAGES AND THE LAW: UNVEILING THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES OF INDIAN WOMEN

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BEST CITATION – MRS. REENA RAI & DR. REKHA PAHUJA, NRI MARRIAGES AND THE LAW: UNVEILING THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES OF INDIAN WOMEN, *ILE FAMILY & PRIVATE LAW REVIEW*, 3 (1) OF 2025, PG. 01-04, APIS - 3920-0022 | ISSN - 2583-8164.

ABSTRACT

"You can take the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."

– Jawaharlal Nehru

This research paper explores the issues and challenges that Indian women face in NRI marriages. The first section defines the term "NRI" (Non-Resident Indian), followed by an overview of the rise of such marriages. The core of the paper focuses on the marital difficulties encountered by women in NRI marriages, including deception, abandonment, emotional manipulation, and struggles related to adjustment, employment, and legal recourse. The paper also evaluates the current legal framework in India and proposes solutions to safeguard the rights of NRI married women.

Keywords: NRI, marriage, women, problems, challenges, rights

INTRODUCTION

India has long held women in high regard, often portraying them as symbols of spirituality and tradition. Yet, in contemporary society, Indian women face numerous societal challenges, including gender discrimination, dowry-related harassment, and limited access to education. These challenges extend beyond the domestic sphere, particularly affecting Indian women married to NRIs. The increasing number of complaints from women in such marriages highlights the severity of issues like dowry demands, marital discord, ex-parte divorces, abandonment, and custody disputes. This paper investigates these challenges and examines the legal landscape aimed at protecting these women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To highlight the emerging trends that entrap Indian women in NRI marriages, focusing on the emotional, financial, and legal hardships faced by them.
2. To propose practical solutions to protect these women's rights and strengthen the legal mechanisms available to them.

HYPOTHESIS

This research hypothesizes that while NRI marriages offer the potential for improved social status and financial security, they often become a source of exploitation, emotional distress, and legal complications for Indian women. A lack of legal protection, social awareness, and support structures exacerbates the vulnerabilities faced by women in these marriages.

THE CONCEPT OF NRI MARRIAGES

The term "NRI" refers to a person of Indian origin who resides outside India, typically for work or study, and may or may not hold citizenship in a foreign country. In the context of marriage, an NRI marriage refers to a union between an Indian woman and a man who is either an Indian citizen residing abroad or a Person of Indian Origin (PIO) or Overseas Citizen of India (OCI). These marriages can take various forms, such as:

1. **NRI male and Indian female marriage**
2. **NRI female and Indian male marriage**
3. **Indian couple who migrates post-marriage**
4. **Marriage between an Indian citizen and a foreigner under Indian or foreign law**

REASONS FOR THE RISE OF NRI MARRIAGES

Several factors contribute to the increasing number of NRI marriages in India, including:

1. **Cultural and Social Pressure:** Women often feel compelled by their families to marry an NRI due to perceived financial stability and social prestige.
2. **Lack of Information:** Many women are unaware of the true nature of their partner's background, intentions, or financial status before marriage.
3. **Emotional Manipulation:** Emotional promises of a better life abroad are often used to manipulate women into marriage.
4. **Financial Dependency:** The financial dependency of women on their NRI husbands makes it harder for them to leave abusive relationships.
5. **Language Barriers:** Communication difficulties in a foreign country can isolate women, making it difficult to seek help or express dissatisfaction.
6. **Visa and Migration Issues:** Women may face visa-related issues that make it difficult to leave their husbands or return to India.

7. **Lack of Support Systems:** Many women do not have access to local legal or social support systems that could assist them in navigating marital difficulties.
8. **Societal Expectations:** There is societal pressure to conform to traditional roles, which may prevent women from asserting their rights.
9. **Limited Resources:** Women often have limited access to education, employment, and healthcare in foreign countries, increasing their vulnerability.
10. **Unawareness of Rights:** Many women are unaware of their legal rights and the mechanisms in place to protect them.

Struggles and Hurdles Faced by Indian Women in NRI Marriages

While NRI marriages can appear as an ideal union, they often lead to significant problems for women. The challenges they face range from emotional to legal difficulties. Key issues include:

1. **Maintenance Issues:** NRI married women often struggle to obtain financial support, with many facing abandonment or failure of husbands to provide maintenance.
2. **Dowry and Streedhan:** The return of dowry and personal belongings (Streedhan) is a major issue, with many women not being able to recover their property after abandonment.
3. **Child Custody:** Custody battles become complex, especially when one spouse resides abroad, complicating legal jurisdiction and enforcement of court orders.
4. **Divorce Issues:** Many NRI married women face issues with divorce proceedings, including the problem of ex-parte divorces granted in foreign countries without the woman's knowledge or consent.

5. **Enforcement of Court Orders:** Executing Indian court orders, such as those related to maintenance or custody, in foreign countries is often difficult and time-consuming.
6. **Domestic Violence:** Instances of physical and emotional abuse in NRI marriages are prevalent, but women may find it difficult to report such incidents due to legal and cultural barriers.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

India's legal framework for protecting the rights of women in NRI marriages is complex. There are various laws and provisions under Indian law, but they often fail to offer adequate support or recourse for women in these situations. Key legislative provisions include:

1. **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**
2. **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**
3. **The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955** (for Hindus)
4. **The Foreign Marriage Act, 1969**
5. **The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007**

However, enforcement of these laws across borders remains a challenge. Lack of international cooperation and legal mechanisms complicates the process of securing justice for women trapped in NRI marriages.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issues faced by NRI married women, the following measures could be implemented:

1. **Enhanced Awareness Programs:** Increasing public awareness regarding the rights of women and available legal protections could empower women to take action when necessary.

2. **International Legal Cooperation:** Strengthening international agreements and conventions, such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), could help in resolving jurisdictional issues and provide a legal framework for cross-border disputes.
3. **Support and Counseling Services:** Establishing accessible counseling and legal aid services for women could assist them in dealing with marital issues and legal processes.
4. **Streamlined Legal Procedures:** Creating specialized legal frameworks that deal with NRI marriages could help expedite the resolution of disputes and provide more efficient access to justice for affected women.

CONCLUSION

The increasing number of NRI marriages necessitates urgent reforms to protect women who become victims of exploitation, abandonment, and legal injustices. A combination of legal reforms, societal awareness, and support structures is required to address these challenges effectively. Empowering women through education, legal assistance, and awareness about their rights will help them navigate the complexities of such marriages and ensure their protection.

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