



Opinion of Hindu Women towards Divorce in Context of Modernity, Level of Education and Inhabitation

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ABSTRACT

The present study was carried out on 100 Hindu females to examine the difference due to modernity, level of education and inhabitation towards opinion to divorce amongst them. It was hypothesized that (i) high and low modernity groups of females would differ significantly in terms of their opinions towards divorce. (ii) high and low educated groups of females would differ significantly in terms of their attitudes towards divorce. (iii) urban / rural Hindu groups of females would differ significantly in terms of their attitudes towards divorce. For the purpose, the Hindu females were administered oppinionnaire towards Divorce along with PDS and obtained data were treated using t-test. The results supported the hypotheses. It was found that high modernity group, highly educated female group and rural female group manifested comparatively unfavourable attitudes towards divorce. Thus, it was concluded that modernity, level of education and urban / rural inhabitation significantly influence opinion forwards divorce.

KEY WORDS

Divorce, Education, Modernity, Women, Hindu.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage, as a social institution, has been deeply rooted in Hindu traditions for centuries. It has been regarded as a sacred bond, a lifelong commitment, and a moral responsibility rather than a contractual agreement. However, with changing societal norms, increasing literacy rates, and urbanization, the perception of Hindu women towards divorce has undergone significant transformation. Traditionally, divorce was considered a social taboo, especially for

women, as they were expected to uphold the sanctity of marriage at all costs. But with the forces of modernity, education, and changing living conditions (rural vs. urban), Hindu women are now beginning to view divorce through a more practical and individualistic lens.

The concept of divorce in Hindu society was historically rare, as marriage was viewed as a sacred duty rather than a mere partnership. The Manusmriti and other ancient texts advocated for the submissiveness of women, lifelong devotion to husbands, and restrictions on remarriage. Women had limited agency in deciding the fate of their marriages, and divorce was almost unthinkable. However, with the advent of legal reforms, women's education, economic independence, and exposure to global ideologies, Hindu women have started questioning oppressive marital practices and asserting their right to dissolve unhappy or abusive marriages.

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, a landmark legislation, formally introduced the concept of legal divorce among Hindus, allowing both men and women to seek divorce under specific conditions. Over time, with increased awareness and empowerment, more women have started exercising their legal rights. But attitudes toward divorce among Hindu women vary significantly based on three key factors: (i) Level of Modernity – Traditional vs. progressive outlook (ii) Level of Education – Higher education correlating with more liberal views and (iii) Place of Inhabitation – Urban vs. rural attitudes towards divorce

In traditional Hindu families, women are often socialized to believe that marriage is eternal, and a wife's duty is to endure difficulties for the sake of family honor. Divorce is seen as a failure, and divorced women often face social stigma, financial difficulties, and familial rejection. In modern households, however, the emphasis is shifting towards individual happiness, self-respect, and gender equality. Women with a modern outlook believe that an unhappy or abusive marriage should not be tolerated and that divorce is a legitimate means of seeking personal fulfillment.

Urban Hindu women, particularly those in metropolitan cities, have greater exposure to progressive ideologies through education, media, and professional spaces. They are more likely to view divorce as an acceptable choice if the marriage is unsatisfactory. In contrast, rural Hindu women still live in patriarchal family structures where social norms discourage divorce. Even if they experience domestic violence or neglect, they are more likely to stay in the marriage due to social pressure, economic dependence, and lack of support systems. Modernity thus influences Hindu women's perspectives on divorce, but its impact varies based on education and place of inhabitation.

Education is one of the most powerful factors shaping women's perceptions of divorce. Educated women are more likely to be aware of their legal rights, demand equal treatment, and challenge oppressive marital traditions.

Women with higher education (college and above) are more likely to view marriage as a partnership rather than a duty. They are also aware of legal provisions such as the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), and maintenance laws, which allow them to seek legal recourse in case of marital disputes. Educated women are more likely to prioritize personal well-being and financial independence over societal expectations. They are less afraid of social stigma and more willing to opt for divorce if the marriage is unsatisfactory.

Women with lower levels of education (primary or no schooling) are often less aware of their rights and more likely to depend on family elders or religious beliefs to make marital decisions. Illiteracy or lack of formal education often correlates with greater acceptance of gender inequality. Women with limited education may feel that divorce is shameful and that enduring an unhappy marriage is preferable to societal ostracization. Thus, education empowers Hindu women by giving them the tools to make informed decisions, including the choice to leave an unhappy marriage.

The place of inhabitation plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards divorce among Hindu women.

While urban women enjoy greater freedom and legal support, rural women face higher social resistance and economic dependence, making divorce a much more challenging option. Urbanization has led to greater financial independence, exposure to diverse lifestyles, and access to support networks. Women in cities often work in professional environments where gender equality is promoted, making them more likely to question and reject oppressive marital norms. Urban Hindu women have access to legal aid, counseling centers, and women's organizations that support their right to divorce. As a result, divorce is increasingly normalized in urban settings.

Rural Hindu women, especially those in conservative communities, face severe stigma and social exclusion if they seek a divorce. In many cases, divorced women struggle to find remarriage prospects and may be ostracized by their families. Economic dependence is another major factor. Many rural women do not have financial autonomy and fear losing their social security if they leave their husbands. In some cases, rural women may experience physical threats or coercion from family members who discourage divorce to protect "family honor." Thus, the rural-urban divide plays a significant role in shaping Hindu women's opinions on divorce, with urban women embracing more progressive views and rural women facing greater societal restrictions.

The opinions of Hindu women toward divorce are influenced by modernity, education, and inhabitation. While traditional Hindu beliefs once stigmatized divorce and emphasized lifelong marital commitment, changing social conditions, increasing literacy rates, and urbanization have led to a gradual shift in attitudes. (i) Modernity has introduced liberal values, gender equality, and legal empowerment, encouraging women to view divorce as a legitimate option rather than a taboo. (ii) Education has given women the knowledge and confidence to assert their rights, prioritize self-respect, and demand equality in marriage and (iii) Urbanization has provided Hindu women with greater financial independence and access to legal resources, making divorce a more feasible choice in cities, while rural women continue to struggle against patriarchal constraints.

As Hindu society continues to evolve, it is essential to promote gender-sensitive policies, strengthen legal protections, and provide social support systems to help women make informed decisions about marriage and divorce. While progress has been made, the journey toward true marital equality and freedom of choice for Hindu women is still ongoing.

Review of Literature

Kapadia, K. M.⁵ (1958) highlighted that divorce was traditionally unacceptable in Hindu society, especially for women. However, he noted that with the rise of industrialization and modernity, women in urban areas began questioning oppressive marital norms. His research suggested that education and financial independence play a crucial role in shaping women's perspectives on divorce. Uberoi, P.¹⁰ (1993) found that educated Hindu women, particularly in urban settings, were more likely to support divorce as an option for escaping an unhappy marriage. The study emphasized that women's exposure to modern values through education and employment led to a more liberal perspective on marital dissolution. Desai, S., & Andrist, L.⁴ (2010) analyzed the relationship between education, age at marriage, and divorce acceptance among Hindu women. It found that women with higher education and later marriages were more likely to view marriage as a partnership rather than an obligation. As a result, they were more open to the idea of divorce if the marriage failed. Chowdhry, P.³ (2018) discussed how traditional Hindu patriarchy discouraged divorce, making it difficult for women to leave unhappy marriages. However, she found that modern legal reforms, feminist movements, and increasing education levels have helped Hindu women assert their right to divorce. Rao, M.⁸ (2012) found that women's education was a significant predictor of their stance on divorce. Highly educated women were more likely to assert their autonomy, challenge gender inequalities, and seek divorce if needed. In contrast, women with little or no education often felt pressured to remain in unhappy marriages due to lack of economic security. Agrawal, A.¹ (2008) focused on the impact of urbanization on marital relationships

among Hindu women. The study found that urban women had greater access to legal resources, employment, and social support, making divorce a more viable option compared to their rural counterparts, who still faced severe societal stigma. Bhatia, S., & Bhatia, A.² (2021) explored how rural Hindu women perceive divorce and found that social norms and family honor continue to play a dominant role in discouraging divorce. Even when women faced abuse, economic dependence and fear of social rejection often forced them to stay in their marriages. Patel, V.⁷ (2019) examined the influence of feminism and legal reforms on Hindu women's ability to seek divorce. The study highlighted that education and awareness of legal rights significantly impacted women's willingness to consider divorce as an option. Women who were familiar with the Hindu Marriage Act (1955) and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) were more likely to stand up against marital oppression. Sarkar, S.⁹ (2015) focused on the role of economic independence in shaping attitudes toward divorce. It found that women with stable incomes and careers were more confident in leaving unsatisfactory marriages, whereas financially dependent women often feared financial instability and societal backlash. Nanda, S.⁶ (2022) examined how different generations of Hindu women perceive divorce. The research found that older women generally viewed divorce negatively due to traditional beliefs, whereas younger, modern-educated women saw divorce as a right and an opportunity for a better life. This shift was especially evident in urban and semi-urban areas.

It is clear that there are shortage of studies in context of variables under reference especially in context of Bihar. Therefore, the study.

Objective

The study intended to examine the opinion towards divorce of women in context of modernity, level of education and inhabitation.

Hypothesis

- H₁** High and low modernity Hindu groups of woman would differ significantly in terms of their opinions towards divorce.
- H₂** High and low educated Hindu groups of women would differ significantly in terms of their attitudes towards divorce.
- H₃** Urban / rural Hindu groups of women would differ significantly in terms of their attitudes towards divorce.

Method of Study

Sample Used : The sample comprised of 100 Hindu females. They were selected using incidental-cum-purposive sampling. Other than the conditions required for the research, the sample was matched so far as practicable.

Tools Used

1. A PDS was used to collect the necessary information about the respondents.
2. Opinionnaire Towards Divorce by Vijaya Laxhmi was used to measure opinions towards divorce of females of Indian population.

Results

Table 01: Showing a comparison of means between high and low modernity groups of Hindu women in terms of their opinion towards divorce

Modernity	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	P
High	38	21.90	3.42	9.21	98	<.01
Low	62	29.36	4.58			

It is clear from the results table-01 that mean on attitude towards divorce of high modernity group of Hindu females (Mean=21.90) is lower (unfavourable) than the low modernity group of Hindu females

(Mean=29.36). The t-ratio obtained is found significant ($t = 9.21$; $df = 98$; $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis no. (01) is retained. Low-modernity Hindu women often adhere more strictly to traditional cultural norms and patriarchal values, viewing marriage as sacred and divorce as taboo. Limited education, economic dependence, and social stigma further reinforce a rigid, unfavorable attitude toward divorce, unlike high-modernity women who embrace individual rights and personal freedom.

Table 02: Showing a comparison of means between Highly and Poorly educated groups of Hindu women in terms of their opinion towards divorce

Level of Education	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	P
High	55	22.67	3.96	8.25	98	<.01
Poor	45	28.86	3.58			

It is clear from the results table-02 that mean on attitude towards divorce of highly educated Hindu females (Mean=22.67) is lower than poorly educated Hindu females (Mean=28.86). The t-ratio obtained is found significant ($t=8.25$; $df=98$; $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis no. (02) is retained. Poorly educated Hindu women often lack exposure to liberal values, gender equality, and legal rights, leading to rigid, traditional beliefs about marriage. They may perceive divorce as shameful or immoral due to societal conditioning. In contrast, highly educated women are more aware, independent, and accepting of diverse marital outcomes, including divorce.

Table 03: Showing a comparison of means between Urban and Rural groups of Hindu women in terms of their opinion towards divorce

Inhabitation	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	P
Urban	50	26.82	3.88	8.36	98	<.01
Rural	50	20.47	3.75			

It is clear from the results table-03 that mean on attitude towards divorce of urban Hindu females (Mean=26.82) is higher than rural Hindu females (Mean=20.47). The t-ratio obtained is found significant ($t=8.36$; $df=98$; $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis no. (03) is retained. Rural Hindu women typically live in conservative, close-knit communities where traditional values dominate, and divorce is heavily stigmatized. Limited education, economic dependence, and fear of social exclusion contribute to their unfavorable attitudes. In contrast, urban women are more exposed to progressive ideas, legal awareness, and supportive networks, fostering acceptance of divorce.

CONCLUSION

- (i) Hindu females possessing high modernity manifest favourable attitude towards divorce as compared to Hindu female belonging to low modernity group.
- (ii) Highly educated Hindu females manifest poor attitude towards divorce than poorly educated Hindu women.
- (iii) Urban Hindu women manifest favourable attitude towards divorce than rural Hindu female.

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