

Cruelty and the Breakdown of Marriage: A Critical Examination

Arpan Singh¹ and Dr. Ajit Kumar Gond²

Research Scholar, Department of Law¹

Assistant Professor, Department of Law²

YBN University, Ranchi, India.

Abstract: *Marriage has traditionally been regarded as a social, moral, and legal institution founded on companionship, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities. However, when cruelty enters the marital relationship, it strikes at the very foundation of marriage and may ultimately lead to its breakdown. This study critically examines cruelty as a ground for divorce under Indian matrimonial law, with special reference to how cruelty contributes to the legal breakdown of marriage, how courts interpret physical and mental cruelty, and whether the existing legal framework adequately protects spouses suffering from such conduct. The study is doctrinal in nature and is based on secondary sources, including constitutional provisions, statutory enactments, judicial decisions, law commission reports, legal commentaries, books, and journal articles. It analyzes the legal framework governing cruelty under statutes such as the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Special Marriage Act, 1954, and other allied laws, while also considering the role of constitutional values such as dignity, equality, and personal liberty in shaping matrimonial jurisprudence. The research further examines the evolving judicial approach toward cruelty, particularly the recognition of mental cruelty, cumulative conduct, and changing social realities in matrimonial disputes. The study finds that although Indian law provides important remedies for spouses suffering from cruelty, the legal framework still faces challenges in terms of definitional ambiguity, evidentiary difficulties, procedural delays, and practical enforcement. It concludes that while the law has made significant progress in addressing cruelty within marriage, there remains a need for clearer standards, stronger implementation, and a more responsive legal approach to ensure effective justice and protection for affected spouses.*

Keywords: Marriage, Cruelty, Divorce, Matrimonial Law, Physical Cruelty, Mental Cruelty, Breakdown of Marriage, Judicial Interpretation, Indian Law, Legal Framework

