

# **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]**

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 4 | Issue 3 [June, 2026] | Page 268 – 277

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# UCC ERA UNLOCKED: ASSAM SLAYING POLYGAMY, LIVE-INS & INHERITANCE DRAMA IN 2026 – THE FAMILY LAW GLOW-UP INDIA NEEDED

- Ishika Goyal<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In an initiative that's quite literally beginning a new chapter in Indian family law, Assam dropped the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Assam, 2026 — making it the third state after Uttarakhand and Gujarat, and the first in the Northeast, to adopt uniform rules on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and live-in relationships. This research will explore in detail the ways in which Assam's UCC is sweeping aside old fashioned personal law by outlawing polygamy, mandating registration of marriages and live-ins, promoting gender-equal inheritance, and giving live-in partners some real protection through the law—including maintenance rights and legitimacy for their children.

From the elimination of toxic tradition to dealing with current issues such as more frequent live-in relationships and women's freedoms of action, the Bill provides an overdue flash of enlightenment rooted in Article 44 of the Constitution. But at the same time, it introduces new drama on cultural exemptions (especially for Scheduled Tribes), implementation challenges, federalism, and potential ripple effects in states as diverse as Punjab. An evaluation of key provisions, comparative insights with other state UCCs, and judicial trends, this article assesses whether Assam's bold experiment is the progressive reset India needs — or whether it risks failing to consider deep-seated realities in the name of uniformity.

## INTRODUCTION

With Indian family law shifting rapidly, Assam has just made a game-changer. The state of Assam has ushered in a new era with the passage of The Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Assam, 2026 on 27 May 2026 — the first state in the Northeast and the third in the country (after Uttarakhand and Gujarat)

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<sup>1</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Amity University Punjab

to introduce a seamless uniform framework for personal laws. This is more than another bill; this is a full-on glow-up designed to kill out stagnant personal laws steeped in religion and custom with regular rules governing marriage, divorce, live-in relationships, inheritance and succession. The concept of a Uniform Civil Code is nothing new. For decades, the Indian Constitution, Article 44 of which is the Directive Principle of State Policy, has directed the State to “endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.” Personal laws governing Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis have often resulted in patchwork rights and limits for decades — frequently exposing women and children to discrimination when it comes to marriage, maintenance and property. Assam’s recent UCC 2026 makes a bold push into this same space — banning polygamy, requiring marriages and live-in relationships to be registered and common grounds for divorce and gender-equal inheritance rules, and allowing Scheduled Tribes to be free to practice as their elders see fit in respecting tribal customs. This comes amid massive social changes in India — more people living together, more women in the workforce, more divorcing in cities and greater calls for justice in the area of gender. The Bill also codifies modern realities of “good” living that traditional personal laws sometimes overlook by including legal protections for unmarried, live-in partners — including maintenance rights and legitimacy for children — and imposing penalties for polygamy of up to seven years. □ But it has also raised intense conflicts over multiculturalism, federalism, implementation challenges and the necessity of broader stakeholder engagement. This article analyzes Assam’s UCC 2026 as an experiment on the transformational journey of family law reform. It considers its key provisions and their relationship to matters of marriage, divorce, live-ins and inheritance as well as their wider implications for Punjab and all the other states with widely varied cultural and religious fabric. To that end, the paper compared state UCCs and judicial trends and considers whether this “family law glow-up” truly provides progressive uniformity or overlooks the realities of the ground in favour of a universal code. The upcoming sections also unpack the legal framework and drama it is trying to resolve, address the issues before and after, as well as give some ideas for an equitable national rollout. In a country still struggling across its long struggle to reconcile tradition and change, Assam’s brave move might be the ideal model India needs.

## **THE UCC GLOW-UP: KEY PROVISIONS UNLOCKED**

<sup>2</sup>Assam's UCC (Assam 2026) also means a complete overhaul for personal laws and replaces some religion based customs with a common scheme for marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance and live-in couples. <sup>3</sup>On May 27, 2026, the Assam Legislative Assembly passed the Bill making Assam the third state (after Uttarakhand and Gujarat) and the first in the Northeast to adopt such legislation.

### **1. POLYGAMY AND BIGAMY**

<sup>4</sup>It is an offence, being proscribed under Section 82 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023; up to seven years' imprisonment if you violate Section 82. Existing polygamous marriages solemnized before the law's enforcement remain protected. It directly addresses the practice allowed under the provisions, and provides for the purpose of gender equality and gender justice in these personal laws.

### **2. UNIFORM MARRIAGE AGE AND REGISTRATION**

<sup>5</sup>The minimum legal age for marriage is 21 years for men and 18 years for women. Any marriage or divorce will have to be registered by the sub-registrar, compulsorily, within 60 days after the date of solemnization or decree. Religious ceremonies may remain valid. Nevertheless, in order for legal recognition of this, you must formally register. Not registering can get you in hot water, including fines.

### **3. REGULATION OF LIVE-IN RELATIONSHIPS**

<sup>6</sup>Live-in relationships are finally legal in Assam. Couples who register within thirty days of commencement of their relationship must do so. Kids born out of registered live-in relationships are considered legitimate. Registered partners accrue the rights to maintenance, protection orders (like domestic violence protection), as well as other civil remedies. Non-registration can result in fines (up to ₹10,000) or other penalties.

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<sup>2</sup> The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026 (Assam Legislative Assembly, introduced 25 May 2026, passed 27 May 2026).

<sup>3</sup> The Hindu, "Assam Assembly Passes Uniform Civil Code Bill" (28 May 2026).

<sup>4</sup> The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Act No. 45 of 2023), s.82

<sup>5</sup> VisionIAS, "Uniform Civil Code Bill 2026 Introduced in Assam Assembly" (26 May 2026).

<sup>6</sup> The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026, cl. 12-15 (Live-in Relationship Registration).

#### **4. GENDER-EQUAL INHERITANCE AND SUCCESSION**

<sup>7</sup>The Bill establishes a common structure of preference for intestate succession among Class-I heirs, ensuring equal rights for sons and daughters. The deceased's spouse, children and parents are equally included, without prejudice and regardless of their religious beliefs, overriding discriminatory custom or religious practice in most personal laws. It bolsters women's ownership over property and cross-generational equity.

#### **5. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES**

- Maintenance provisions (food, clothes, housing, schooling, medical care).
- Child custody issues (e.g., children under 5 typically with the mother).
- Penalties for child marriage and other offences.

Taken together, these provisions are designed to simplify family law, minimize litigation and achieve coherence with constitutional values of equality established in Articles 14, 15 and 44. Nonetheless, the delivery of them will be contingent on successful implementation, awareness raising and interconnection of such provisions with existing laws including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and BNS.

### **CHALLENGES & THE REALITY CHECK**

With Indian family law shifting rapidly, Assam has just made a game-changer. <sup>8</sup>The state of Assam has ushered in a new era with the passage of The Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Assam, 2026 on 27 May 2026 — the first state in the Northeast and the third in the country (after Uttarakhand and Gujarat) to introduce a seamless uniform framework for personal laws. This is more than another bill; this is a full-on glow-up designed to kill out stagnant personal laws steeped in religion and custom with regular rules governing marriage, divorce, live-in relationships, inheritance and succession. The concept of a Uniform Civil Code is nothing new. <sup>9</sup>For decades, the Indian Constitution, Article 44 of which is the Directive Principle of State Policy, has directed the State to “endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.” Personal laws governing Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis have often resulted in patchwork rights and limits for decades — frequently

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<sup>7</sup> The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026, cl. 12-15 (Assam Legislative Assembly, introduced 25 May 2026, passed 27 May 2026).

<sup>8</sup> The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026, cl. 12-15 (Assam Legislative Assembly, introduced 25 May 2026, passed 27 May 2026).

<sup>9</sup> K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1

exposing women and children to discrimination when it comes to marriage, maintenance and property. Assam's recent UCC 2026 makes a bold push into this same space — banning polygamy, requiring marriages and live-in relationships to be registered and common grounds for divorce and gender-equal inheritance rules, and allowing Scheduled Tribes to be free to practice as their elders see fit in respecting tribal customs. This comes amid massive social changes in India — more people living together, more women in the workforce, more divorcing in cities and greater calls for justice in the area of gender. The Bill also codifies modern realities of “good” living that traditional personal laws sometimes overlook by including legal protections for unmarried, live-in partners — including maintenance rights and legitimacy for children — and imposing penalties for polygamy of up to seven years. But it has also raised intense conflicts over multiculturalism, federalism, implementation challenges and the necessity of broader stakeholder engagement. This article analyzes Assam's UCC 2026 as an experiment on the transformational journey of family law reform. It considers its key provisions and their relationship to matters of marriage, divorce, live-ins and inheritance as well as their wider implications for Punjab and all the other states with widely varied cultural and religious fabric. To that end, the paper compared state UCCs and judicial trends and considers whether this “family law glow-up” truly provides progressive uniformity or overlooks the realities of the ground in favour of a universal code. The upcoming sections also unpack the legal framework and drama it is trying to resolve, address the issues before and after, as well as give some ideas for an equitable national rollout. In a country still struggling across its long struggle to reconcile tradition and change, Assam's brave move might be the ideal model India needs.

## **THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS – MAKING THE GLOW-UP ACTUALLY WORK**

Assam's Uniform Civil Code, 2026 provides a hopeful roadmap for reforming family law but its effectiveness is predicated upon the above challenges being taken into consideration during the execution and phased application with stakeholders involved as well as the phased introduction of changes.<sup>10</sup> The next recommendations seek to harmonise consistency, gender equity and India's pluralism, and are consistent with constitutional principles enshrined in Articles 14, 15, 25 and 44.

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<sup>10</sup> K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1

## **1. EXTENSIVE AWARENESS AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION**

Prior to the full rollout, the Assam government needs to engage in meaningful dialogues with religious leaders, minority groups, tribal representatives (despite exemptions), women's organisations and law specialists. While some elements of the law may indeed require amendments, they should be understood as a universal safeguard, not a matter of "one size fits all".<sup>11</sup> Public awareness campaigns in regional languages, on registration processes, rights under the Code, and gender equality provisions (e.g. public service announcements) are required to minimise resistance and to ensure compliance.

## **2. STRONG IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK AND ARCHITECTURE**

Create distinct offices dedicated to registration complete with digital portals for marriage/live-in registration to reduce administrative burden. Train the judicial officers, police and sub-registrars on the new protections especially in live-in protection and maintenance rights. Combine the UCC with current laws, e.g. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and<sup>12</sup> Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 for consistent and smooth implementation.

## **3. PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES**

While exempting Scheduled Tribes, if possible, voluntary opt-in mechanisms or alternative reforms would address gender imbalances in tribal customary laws. Particular provisions regarding protection of women in inter-community or live-in relationships as well as checks on child custody/maintenance cases and monitoring can prevent unintended vulnerabilities.

## **4. SUPPORT FROM THE SUPREME COURT AND LEGISLATORS FOR NATIONAL ALIGNMENT**

Assam ought to also share best practices with others in order to offer a national UCC framework, and to work together to guide the central government in developing a comprehensive system of UCC.<sup>13</sup> Courts should also be urged to interpret provisions incrementally, adopting some of the lead from the Supreme Court on live-in partnerships and gender justice. A review after 2-3 years will help in identifying gaps in the process.

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<sup>11</sup> VisionIAS, "Uniform Civil Code Bill 2026 Introduced in Assam Assembly" (26 May 2026).

<sup>12</sup> The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Act No. 45 of 2023)

<sup>13</sup> Drishti IAS, "Uniform Civil Code – Promise of Equality, Challenge of Pluralism" (19 December 2025)

## **5. GENDER JUSTICE, AND DATA-DRIVEN MONITORING FOR WOMEN**

Emphasise the development of capability for women in legal aid, along with fast track family courts. Set up a monitoring committee to monitor measures like registration numbers, polygamy cases declining, inheritance disputes and divorce outcomes. The UCC can be adjusted by future revisions with this information so that the UCC achieves real empowerment, not symbolic homogeneity.

These steps can turn Assam's UCC from a state-level test case into a model serving constitutional targets while ensuring cultural pluralism. And the real winner here is to consider family law reform not as a piece of legislation which can be rolled out but as a process of continuous inclusive transformation.

## **IMPACT ON GENDER JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS – THE REAL GLOW-UP FOR WOMEN?**

<sup>14</sup>Assam's Uniform Civil Code, 2026 has the power to transform gender justice by breaking down discriminatory practices embedded in religion-based personal laws. But its potential effect on the real lives of women will depend on effective implementation and societal acceptance.

### **1. ENHANCING WOMEN'S CONTROL OF THE RIGHT TO PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE OF THEIR OWN PROPERTY AND OF FAMILY OWNERSHIP**

<sup>15</sup>UCC will thereby challenge patriarchal customs of men's dominance by ensuring equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters in intestate succession in many areas of personal laws. This provision can be an economic engine for women, decrease dependency and develop intergenerational justice in rural and semi-urban Assam.

### **2. PROTECTIONS IN LIVE-IN RELATIONS AND MAINTENANCE RIGHTS**

A compulsory registration of live-in relationships guarantees legal recognition, rights to maintenance as well as protection orders similar to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, for women (and children). It's another way to confront the fragility of women in nonmarital

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<sup>14</sup> The Uniform Civil Code, Assam, 2026, cl. 12-15 (Assam Legislative Assembly, introduced 25 May 2026, passed 27 May 2026).

<sup>15</sup> Drishti IAS, "Uniform Civil Code – Promise of Equality, Challenge of Pluralism" (19 December 2025)

relationships with a response which remedies them from desertion or abuse (the sort of protection they deserve) — really progressive given the current environment.

### **3. BAN OF POLYGAMY AND CHILD MARRIAGE**

The criminalisation of polygamy and increased penalties for child marriage are anticipated to improve women’s health and outcomes, deter domestic violence, and sustain monogamous, consensual relationships. <sup>16</sup>Under Article 14 and Article 15 these reforms comply with constitutional equality.

### **4. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN**

<sup>17</sup>Even with progressive laws, some complain that compulsory registration and cultural norms may drive minority and conservative women to social ostracism, honour-based backlash, or more legal action. Although tribal women (exempted by the Bill) will still face unequal customary practices to protect them in different communities.

### **5. A WIDER BROADER SOCIAL-LEGAL SPECTRUM**

If successful, the UCC could help avoid family court backlogs by standardising divorce, maintenance, and custody procedures. It may also promote women’s increased economic participation in employment and education through more concrete legal protections. Long-term data monitoring will be key to measure real empowerment, rather than any unintended fallout.

So overall the potential for Assam’s UCC is promising for women’s empowerment in terms of women as a ‘glow-up’, but whether it is really a “glow-up” for gender justice is not 100% guaranteed, as it is dependent on proactive assistance systems or availability of the support networks, accessibility of legal aid and an ongoing monitoring system.

## **CONCLUSION: UCC ERA UNLOCKED – A GLOW-UP THAT INDIA CAN’T IGNORE**

In the context of family law, Assam's The Uniform Civil Code, 2026 represents a novel and important aspect of Indian family law. As the state that is the third after Uttarakhand and Gujarat and the first law in the Northeast, Assam has opened up a new chapter which is going to directly challenge archaic personal laws with the principles of equality, justice, modernity.

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<sup>16</sup> Drishti IAS, “Uniform Civil Code – Promise of Equality, Challenge of Pluralism” (19 December 2025)

<sup>17</sup> The Print, “Uttarakhand, Gujarat, now Assam: How the 3 states’ UCC models compare” (29 May 2026)

From prohibiting polygamy with stiff penalties under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, to requiring marriages (within 60 days) and live-in relationships (within 30 days) to be registered, the Code provides the legal acknowledgement necessary in new age partnerships. Equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters, legal standing for children born in live-in marriages, and simplified provisions for divorce and maintenance all make it feel as if gender justice is getting a real boost to look forward. Changes in these respects could empower women economically, protect from falling into non-marital relationships, and unite family law in line with the constitutional values of Articles 14, 15, and 44.

But this glow-up is not without its shadows. The requirement for mandatory registration may raise some legitimate privacy issues in light of the K.S. Puttaswamy judgment and while the Scheduled Tribes exemption leaves some states at a disadvantage, critics say it promotes selective uniformity that undermines the purpose of a common code itself. Cultural dissent, federalism strains, implementation difficulties across a diverse state and social backlash risks against women from minority and conservative communities remain profound reality checks.

Approaching the comparative analysis against Uttarakhand and Gujarat, the model developed in Assam appears more aggressive, particularly towards the criminalization of polygamy which not only can work as effective deterrent but also gives way to more legal in addition to social backlash. And the real test is at the ground level -- whether the UCC works: strong awareness campaigns, digital infrastructure, legal assistance for women and the periodic monitoring mechanisms — or if it only works symbolically. With India's rise in live-in couples, urban divorce rates and calls for gender parity all on the rise, Assam's experience provides valuable insights for others, including Punjab with its unique cultural and land related dynamics. A phased, consultative model of a national UCC is the best way forward — one which values pluralism while promoting equality. Ultimately, Assam's UCC 2026 is not just a piece of legislation; it is an anthem of change. Applied wisely and compassionately, it can truly eliminate toxic traditions and finally move the country to an age when family law functions as an equal obligation for every citizen. The glow-up has begun — the question is whether India is ready to enjoy it at full force.

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