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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# Rights in Her Lifetime: On Recognising the Homemaker's Economic Stake

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**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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# Rights in Her Lifetime: On Recognising the Homemaker's Economic Stake

 **The Indian Express** 20 June 2026 **GS1**

Source: [ujyari.com](http://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"If a homemaker's labour is economically valuable, why does the law recognise it generously only after her death and rarely during her marriage?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Indian courts increasingly acknowledge that a homemaker's unpaid labour has real economic value. But this recognition arrives most generously in compensation awards, that is, when calculating damages for her death. While she lives and remains married, a homemaker often has no legal claim to the home or the assets her labour helped sustain. The gap between posthumous valuation and lifetime invisibility is the heart of an overdue debate on matrimonial-property rights.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

The law puts a price on a homemaker's work mainly after she dies, through compensation. During marriage she usually has no legal stake in assets held in her husband's name, however much she contributed. India lacks a matrimonial-property regime, so a wife can leave a marriage with nothing. The reform is to grant her an economic stake within her lifetime.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Posthumous valuation	Damages for a homemaker's death	Recognises worth only after life ends
Lifetime invisibility	No claim to marital assets while married	Leaves homemaker economically dependent
Title-based ownership	Asset belongs to whoever's name is on it	Ignores the unpaid contribution to the home
Matrimonial property	Joint ownership of marital assets	Treats marriage as an economic partnership
Community of property	Deferred or shared ownership model	Global template for lifetime recognition

## THE ANALYSIS: VALUING THE LIVING, NOT JUST THE DEAD

- 1 Compensation law leads the recognition.** When courts compute damages for a homemaker's death, they assign a monetary value to her domestic and care work. This affirms dignity, but it is recognition triggered by death.
- 2 Marriage offers no equivalent stake.** While the marriage subsists, the homemaker typically cannot claim the house or savings registered in her husband's name, even after decades of unpaid labour that made his earning possible.
- 3 Ownership follows the deed, not the partnership.** Indian law has no general matrimonial-property regime. Assets belong to the titleholder, so the joint enterprise of building a household leaves no legal trace for the non-earning spouse.
- 4 The reform is structural, not charitable.** A community-of-property or deferred-sharing model treats assets acquired during marriage as jointly owned, giving the homemaker a real-time stake rather than a sympathetic payout after death.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*Courts assign notional value to a homemaker's unpaid work when computing damages, recognising the economic worth of domestic labour.*

*India has no general regime; ownership follows title, unlike many jurisdictions with community-of-property rules.*

*A model under which assets acquired during marriage are jointly owned regardless of the name on the title.*

*Article 14 (equality), Article 15 (non-discrimination), Article 39 of the Directive Principles (equal pay and economic justice).*

## THE DEBATE

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**The argument for** a lifetime stake is that marriage is an economic partnership, and a homemaker's unpaid labour is what allows the household and the earning spouse to function. Justice requires recognising that contribution while she lives, not only when she dies.

**The argument against** is that a **statutory** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/statutory/>) community-of-property regime could complicate ownership, spark litigation, and collide with diverse personal laws governing marriage and succession.

**The balanced verdict:** the difficulties are real but surmountable. A carefully designed matrimonial-property framework, with safeguards and a deferred-sharing approach, can deliver lifetime recognition without dismantling existing succession law.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*Notice when a right is recognised only at the moment of loss. Compensation for a homemaker's death values her work, but valuing something only when it disappears is a weak form of recognition. Robust justice secures the entitlement (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/entitlement/>) during the life of the relationship, not as an afterthought. Ask of any social right: is it granted in real time, or only retrospectively when it is too late to enjoy?*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Homemaker's unpaid labour -> Recognised only as death compensation -> No stake during marriage -> Matrimonial-property reform -> Economic stake within her lifetime

## THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Legislate a matrimonial-property framework** recognising a wife's economic stake in assets acquired during marriage.
- ② **Adopt a deferred-sharing model** to balance recognition with workable ownership during the marriage.
- ③ **Harmonise with personal laws** on marriage and succession to avoid conflict.
- ④ **Provide clear rules on separation** so the homemaker's contribution is quantified fairly.
- ⑤ **Pair reform with awareness** so women know and can assert these rights.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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*Use for gender justice, the economic value of unpaid care work, and matrimonial-property reform.*

*“Valuing a homemaker only in a death certificate is a thin form of justice.”*

*Community of property, matrimonial property, Article 14, Article 15, Article 39 Directive Principles.*

*Recognising unpaid care work tests how a society values labour that the market never prices, and whether justice waits until loss to act.*

*Connects to past questions on women’s economic empowerment and the social-justice content of the Directive Principles.*

*Gender equality, family law reform, unpaid care economy, and constitutional directives on economic justice.*

**Sources:** *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/editorials/>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

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Source: Rights in Her Lifetime: On Recognising the Homemaker's Economic Stake — [Ujivari.com](https://ujivari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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**Indian law mostly recognises a homemaker's economic contribution posthumously through compensation awards, rather than granting real-time statutory property rights during her marriage.**


**SUPPORTING**

- Motor-accident and compensation jurisprudence values unpaid domestic labour only when computing damages after death.
- During marriage a homemaker typically has no legal claim to assets bought in her husband's name despite her contribution.
- The absence of matrimonial-property rights leaves homemakers economically dependent and vulnerable on separation.


**COUNTER**

A statutory community-of-property regime could complicate ownership, invite litigation, and clash with personal laws governing succession and marriage.


**WAY FORWARD**

Legislate recognition of a wife's economic stake in the matrimonial household during marriage, drawing on community-of-property models with suitable safeguards.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*'Indian law recognises the economic value of a homemaker largely posthumously. Discuss the case for statutory recognition of a wife's economic stake in the matrimonial household during marriage. (250 words).'*

**INTRODUCTION**

Indian courts have grown eloquent about the economic worth of a homemaker, but almost always when calculating compensation after her death. The harder reform is to recognise that worth while she is alive and married.

**BODY**

Compensation jurisprudence, particularly under motor-accident law, now routinely assigns a monetary value to a homemaker's unpaid labour when computing damages for her death. This is welcome as a matter of dignity, yet it is a posthumous recognition.

During the marriage itself, a homemaker who contributes years of unpaid domestic and care work usually has no legal claim to the home or assets purchased in her husband's name. Indian law has no general matrimonial-property regime: ownership follows the title deed, not the joint enterprise of running a household.

The result is that a woman who has enabled her family's economic life may walk away from a marriage with nothing, her contribution invisible because it never carried a price. The reform debated globally is a community-of-property or deferred-sharing model, under which assets acquired during marriage are treated as jointly owned regardless of whose name they bear.

This recognises the household as a partnership and gives the homemaker a real-time economic stake, not a sympathy payout after death.

**CONCLUSION**

Valuing a homemaker only in a death certificate is a thin form of justice. The law must move to recognise her economic stake within her lifetime, through a matrimonial-property framework that treats marriage as the partnership it is.


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## Bharat Choudhary

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/rights-in-her-lifetime-homemaker-economic-stake/>

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