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# Justice in Time: Allahabad High Court Orders Six-Month Limit on Maintenance Cases

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## Introduction

In a landmark ruling reinforcing the urgency of financial relief for deserted wives, the Allahabad High Court in Smt. Anjali Singh vs. State of U.P. and Another (Application U/S 529 BNSS No. 1887 of 2025) directed the Family Court, Gautam Budh Nagar, to conclude a pending maintenance case within six months. Justice Nalin Kumar Srivastava, who presided over the matter, stressed that cases under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C.) must be decided swiftly, particularly given the economic hardship often faced by women abandoned or neglected by their husbands.

The order not only sets a precedent for strict timelines in maintenance litigation but also reflects a broader judicial trend of holding all actors in the justice delivery system judges, court staff, police, and advocates accountable for unnecessary delays. In an era where access to justice is being redefined through procedural reforms and technology, this case marks a decisive step toward ensuring timely relief for vulnerable litigants, especially women.

## What Is Maintenance Under Indian Law?

Maintenance in Indian law refers to the legally enforceable financial support that a person must provide to their spouse, minor children, or dependent parents who are unable to maintain themselves. Section 125 Cr.P.C. is a secular provision that allows individuals irrespective of religion to seek such relief. The primary objective of the provision is to prevent destitution and vagrancy by ensuring a minimum level of sustenance.

To claim maintenance under this section, a wife must demonstrate that her husband has sufficient means but has neglected or refused to maintain her. The term “wife” includes legally wedded wives, and in certain contexts, divorced women who have not remarried. The provision also enables courts to grant interim maintenance i.e., temporary financial support during the pendency of the case along with litigation expenses, ensuring the applicant is not financially burdened while pursuing the claim.

Apart from the Cr.P.C., maintenance can also be claimed under personal laws and special legislations such as the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956; Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986; and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Each of these laws has its scope, but the overriding intent remains consistent: to secure the livelihood and dignity of dependents, particularly women who are financially vulnerable.

## Factual Background of the Case

In the present matter, Anjali Singh filed Maintenance Case No. 68 of 2025 (Old No. 367 of 2023) under Section 125 Cr.P.C. in the Family Court of Gautam Budh Nagar. The petitioner, described as a poor and aggrieved woman, contended that the respondent, her husband, had adopted delaying tactics that led to significant procedural stalling of the case. Despite her dire financial situation, the proceedings had lingered for over a year without resolution.

Her counsel argued before the High Court that the repeated adjournments and non-cooperation by the husband amounted to judicial harassment. The plea sought urgent intervention to direct the trial court to expedite the matter, as justice delayed in such cases results in prolonged suffering and economic hardship for the applicant. It was also highlighted that the applicant had no independent source of income and was entirely dependent on the outcome of the litigation.

## Court’s Observations

Justice Nalin Kumar Srivastava delivered a strongly worded judgment emphasizing the urgency and sensitivity required in handling maintenance matters. The Court observed that Section 125 Cr.P.C. cases are unique in that they directly concern the dignity, survival, and well-being of women and children, who are often left financially and emotionally abandoned. The Court stated that such matters cannot be treated as routine litigation and require the judiciary to respond with compassion and urgency.

Crucially, the Court underscored that the Presiding Officer is not the only party responsible for delays. The entire legal ecosystem including court staff, counsels, parties involved, police, and administrative authorities must work in tandem to ensure expeditious disposal. Responsibility therefore shifts from the judge alone to the system as a whole.

The Court further noted that undue delays in maintenance matters amount to a denial of justice. The sufferer, in almost all such cases, is a woman who is already dealing with emotional distress, social stigma, and financial instability. Therefore, delays

amplify her hardship and defeat the very purpose of Section 125 Cr.P.C.

## Judgment and Relief

Taking into account the facts and the continuing hardship faced by the applicant, the High Court issued a clear and binding directive. The Family Court was ordered to decide the maintenance case within six months from the date of receiving the certified copy of the High Court's order. The

Court added that no unnecessary adjournments should be granted to either party and made it clear that the direction was conditional upon the full cooperation of the applicant.

In disposing of the application, the Court reiterated that the objective of Section 125 Cr.P.C. is to safeguard the basic rights and dignity of deserted dependents, especially women. The judgment is a template for similar cases where applicants are stuck in prolonged litigation without any substantive relief.

## Recent Trends in Maintenance Law in India

Recent developments in Indian maintenance law reflect a growing judicial recognition of the financial precarity faced by separated or divorced women. Increasingly, High Courts and even the Supreme Court are directing time-bound resolution of such matters to prevent prolonged injustice.

One trend is the insistence on time-bound disposal, with many courts capping the timeline for maintenance cases to six to twelve months. Another development is the proactive use of interim maintenance orders, allowing applicants to receive temporary financial relief during litigation. Courts have also started to view maintenance more progressively, occasionally recognizing claims made by husbands in cases where they are unable to work due to illness or disability.

To ensure enforcement, courts are now using stronger measures such as salary attachment, property seizure, and non-bailable warrants against defaulting spouses. The rise of digital courtrooms and virtual hearings post-COVID has further helped reduce pendency and improved access for litigants in remote or underserved areas.

Courts have clarified that women can simultaneously pursue maintenance under multiple legal frameworks such as Section 125 Cr.P.C., the Domestic Violence Act, and Section 24 of the Hindu Marriage Act as long as the total awarded amount does not result in double recovery. Additionally, there is an emerging jurisprudence around maintenance rights in live-in relationships, especially in cases of long-term cohabitation where the woman is economically dependent.

## Why This Judgment Matters

This judgment is a reminder that maintenance litigation is about restoring dignity, stability, and fairness to relationships where power dynamics are skewed. By mandating a six-month deadline, the Court has offered relief to Anjali Singh and set a binding precedent that could help thousands of similarly situated women across the country.

More importantly, the verdict expands the idea of judicial responsibility to include all stakeholders in the justice system. It recognizes that prolonged court procedures can act as a form of secondary victimization, especially in matters where the aggrieved party is already suffering emotional, social, and economic harm.

This case ensures that women's hardships are legally recognized, promotes a culture of judicial accountability, and is a reference point for systemic reforms in family law litigation. It also sends a powerful message: financial abandonment can no longer be shielded by procedural loopholes.

## Conclusion

Anjali Singh v. State of U.P. is a pivotal judgment in India's family law jurisprudence. It reaffirms the judiciary's role as both arbiter and protector of the vulnerable. With its strong language, strict timelines, and broader systemic accountability, the ruling aligns with India's growing legal commitment to gender justice and access to timely remedies.

As courts continue to modernize and adopt a more empathetic approach, this case shows how legal mechanisms, implemented efficiently, can uphold the spirit of the Constitution and ensure that no woman is left to suffer in silence.

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