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Evils of Dowry System in India: An Analysis of Cause & Effect

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Abstract

The custom of dower has been transformed into a social evil that undermines the idea of equality in married relationships. Furthermore, the custom questions women's human dignity. The worst harmed are women who lack sufficient wealth or assets. The majority of them are not allowed to find a suitable partner or live in married life. Women are denied justice, while men benefit from conventions. Dowry and dowry deaths translated the feminist claim that the personal is political, changing the nature and quality of activity. The nation was shocked and deeply incensed by the fatalities, horrors, and harassment that took place behind the four walls of private property and were exposed to the public. It was a pivotal time in the history of the women's movement when a broad coalition of women's organizations came together to form the boarded platform Dahej Virodhi Chetna Manch. In the 1980s, dowry protests took an unusual form: demonstrators shamed the harassers by going face-to-face with them.

Keywords: Dowry, Harassment, Feminist, Justice, Human Dignity, Women

“The conscience of the society needs to be fully awakened to the evil of dowry system so that the demand for dowry itself, lead to loss the fact in the society for those who demanded it. We also hope that over educated young males would refuse to be sold in the marriage market and come forward to choose their partners in life in a fair manner.”

...Mr. Justice P.K. Bala Subramanayam

Introduction

The divergent views on dowries must be based on the reality that, in the modern era, dowries—which include gifts to the bride, groom, in-laws, and his relatives—are more akin to an investment made by the bride's family in order to forge strong relationships and increase career opportunities. If a daughter marries into a well-established family that both requires and accepts dowry, her birth family may benefit from upward mobility. The bride's trousseau may be the only item in the dowry that still reflects traditional "Stridhan" customs. Jewels, gold, household items, and whatever property that her parents might assign to her.

The magnitude and amount of dowry now depend on the groom's family's status, income, and connections; the higher the income, the stronger the connections, and the higher the demand for dowry. The groom's family views dowry as a means of recouping the financial investments they have made in their son's education. Greater upward mobility among educated middle-class and upper-class individuals has been made possible by liberalization, which has opened up new employment opportunities. An additional motivator is the fear that the son, after his marriage, may not be able to provide for them in old life. Due to their rapidly increasing income, the bride's family is highly selective when it comes to grooms since they want to marry into families with a greater social status than their own. As academics and activists have noted, societal pressure to outlaw dowries in marriages and the criminalization of giving and receiving dowries are only half of the solution. Rather, considerations of property, labor, and the essentials of marriage must be made in addition to the dowry issue. Payment in the form of dowry is not exclusive to India. Anthropologists have proposed that one method civilizations extend social bonds throughout communities through gift-giving is through marriage payments. Additional explanations include the fact that marriages give chances for social status displays or that their costs aid in securing work rights. Believing that females are a burden, committing female feticide, infanticide, and entering into unequal marriages are all methods to cause marital discord.

The dowry system is largely to blame for the decline in women's social standing since many women are slain, remain single, or commit suicide each year as a result of it. Recent research has also demonstrated that marriages arranged for the purpose of receiving a dowry do not always result in a happy and tranquil union.

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The dowry system has led to an excessive number of unethical actions; the parents of the bride incur significant debt in order to provide dowries for their daughters. While other parents are compelled to use unfair tactics in order to satisfy certain demands made by the groom.

It is so terrible that the immorality of dowries still exists in today's progressive world. Due of their inability to pay for a dowry, several families have destroyed their homes and caused other problems. In the past, a bride's intrinsic value, family history, and level of education were taken into account while choosing her husband. However, these days, dowries are frequently the sole factor taken into account in marriages. In most of the married partnerships. Consequently, what was once a sign of love and affection—the dowry became a vehicle for the worst kind of exploitation and oppression.

To eradicate the detrimental effects of the dowry system from society, a strong public opinion against it must be developed. The law of gender equality is breached by the corrupt dowry system; although it is illegal to offer or receive a dowry, this legislation is often broken. The destructive nature of the dowry system frequently brings about deadly misfortunes in married life, which either end in the happy marriage or result in the bride's murder.

The ill of India's dowry system turns into an evil that diminishes women's respect and standing in society. A huge insult to females is the dower.

“Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood³.”

Mahatma Gandhi”

Causes of Dowry System

- 1. Greed factor:** Dowry demands are frequently a prime example of society's general greed. A crucial aspect of Indian marriages is the extortion of the groom in the guise of social standing to make up for the expense of his schooling and his financial security. Claims are made without hesitation and are anticipated to be addressed with silence. Part of the agreed-upon amount is frequently requested prior to the ceremony, and threats of rescinding the proposal would be placed on the head of the bride's family at the risk of losing face in the community.
- 2. Society Structure-** The patriarchal structure of Indian society, where men are viewed as having greater physical and cerebral capabilities than women, is partly reflected in the dowry system. In light of this social system, women are frequently viewed as second-class citizens who should only be employed in household tasks. These views are frequently linked to the idea that they are first and foremost seen as an economic burden by their father and secondly by their husband. This sentiment is exacerbated by the dowry system, which feeds the notion that a girl child could be a financial burden on the family.
- 3. Religious Dictates-** The dowry system is partly a result of socially enforced religious restrictions on marital practices, particularly with regard to the suitability of the groom. These restrictions forbid marriages between different religious groups or even between different religions, and they require that a prospective groom come from the same religious background. The quantity of appropriate matches is restricted by these rules. Boys who meet certain requirements and are of marrying age are prized, which promotes the custom of the highest bidder catching the catch.

4. **Social Constraints-** *The age-old belief that daughters' marriages are a required religious and moral obligation of their parents remains intact, despite social and economic changes. In addition to shared religious origins, social rank and the caste system also impose restrictions. When setting up a marriage, customs like caste endogamy and clan exogamy must be taken into consideration. Preferred matches do not have the same caste, clan, or social status; once more, these restrictions significantly reduce the number of eligible males for marriage, which has comparable effects to requiring a dowry.*
5. **Social status of women-** *When marriage is seen as the pinnacle of women's accomplishments, the bad practice of dowries becomes more entrenched in the society. The lower social status of women in Indian society is so deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the country that treating them like commodities is accepted without question, not only by the family but even by the women themselves.*
6. **Illiteracy-** *An further factor contributing to the dowry system's prevalence is illiteracy. In fact, a lot of women are purposefully kept out of school because of various superstitions or the idea that teaching girls will make them less suitable to be good wives.*
7. **Propulsions towards adhering to customs-** *Indians have a strong sense of traditionalism and rarely challenge accepted wisdom. They heedlessly adhere to customs and provide dowries since it is the custom passed down through the ages.*

8. Urge to show off-

In our nation, dower is frequently used as a way to flaunt one's social standing. In society, one's value is frequently determined by the amount of money spent on their daughter's wedding or the amount of gold they gift her. This viewpoint provides strong justification for the custom of dowry demands. The amount of dowry the boy's now-wife brings in, which is a measure of how desirable their boy was in the marriage market, elevates the boy's family to new social heights.

Effects of Dowry system-

Injustice towards girls:

The bride's family has a significant financial burden when it comes to the dower. Consequently, a girl kid is perceived as a potential financial burden on the family. In the areas of schooling where boys in the family are given primacy, girls are frequently marginalized. In the interest of family honor, they are subjected to a number of limitations and forced within. Due to the widespread belief that age is a sign of purity, child weddings continue to occur. The tradition is further supported by the notion that younger females are better suited for family roles than older ones, and that the amount of dowry grows with the age of the girl.

a. Violence against women:

In contrast to optimistic parents, dowries are frequently not a one-time payment. The girl's family is viewed as an endless supply of money by the husband's family, who make constant demands. The girl's family's incapacity frequently results in verbal abuse, interpersonal violence, and even fatalities. It's not unusual for in-laws to set their brides on fire in this nation. Sustained mental and physical abuse pushes women into despair and suicide.

b. Economic burden:

Indian parents often link marriage with large sums of money since the groom's family may make overt or covert dowry demands.

c. Gender imbalance:

The deplorable practices of killing girl babies and aborting female fetuses have led to an abnormally high kid sex ratio in India. This might therefore result in an upsurge in aggression against women and strange behaviors like polyandry.

d. Loss of self-esteem in women:

It is extremely difficult for women to retain a high degree of self-respect in a nation that has endured centuries of subjugation toward women. Consequently, women themselves get ensnared in the notion that they are unable to make any contributions to society, their self-worth plummets, and they are more frequently the targets of injustice.

e. Status of Women:

Social ills like as dowries have a significant negative impact on the advancement of women's social position in India. The dowry demands have repeatedly reinforced the idea that women are inferior in the eyes of the country.

Solutions to Dowry system-

Law:

Numerous laws have been passed to outlaw the practice of dowries and the unfair treatment of women that results from them. The goal of the 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act is to completely outlaw this immoral practice. The Act forbids not just the custom of taking dowries but also the payment of them. This includes property, valued security, and other items. Demanding dowry carries a minimum 5-year prison sentence and a minimum fine of Rs. 15000/-. Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code and section 198-A of the Criminal Procedure Code both address instances of cruelty committed by a husband or his family against a wife. Additionally, Section 113A of The Indian Evidence Act, 1872 permits the bride's family to accuse the husband's family of encouraging their daughter's suicide within seven years of the marriage.

Enforcement:

To combat social evil, it is never sufficient to merely establish acts and change some sections. This necessitates the severe and uncompromising enforcement of laws that are currently lacking in many respects. The government of the law through continuous alterations, even while the authorities take such allegations very seriously, frequently allows the accused to escape punishment due to improper investigative procedures.

Social Awareness

The first important step in ending the dowry system is raising public awareness of its drawbacks. Campaigns should be geared on addressing the most fundamental issues facing society and disseminating information regarding the laws prohibiting dowries. It's also important to advocate for the importance of educating young girls.

Education and Self dependence of women:

Getting an education is not the only way to discover your calling in life. In order to combat pervasive evil, it is imperative that you open your eyes and ears to a world beyond the one you can see right away. This is why it is so crucial for all of us to prioritize educating girls. When individuals are aware of their rights, they can speak out against the dowry system and further marginalization. They can also work toward independence and stop seeing marriage as the sole path to happiness.

Overhaul of Mindsets:

India as a nation needs to drastically change its current perspectives in order to combat the evil tradition of dowries. They must acknowledge that women in modern society are more than capable of doing whatever that men can. Women themselves must abandon the idea that women are less valuable than males and that they must rely on men to take care of them.

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