



**Short Communication**

# The Evil: Dowry System in India

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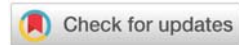
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**Received:** 26 July, 2021  
**Accepted:** 07 August, 2024  
**Published:** 08 August, 2024

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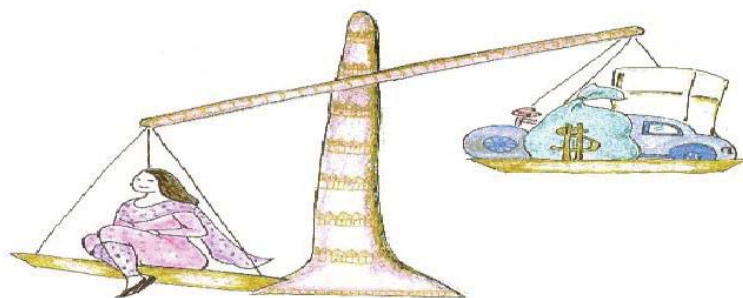
## Abstract

This article examines the dowry system in India, tracing its origins from ancient customs like 'Kanyadan' and 'Stridhan' to its current form as a harmful social practice. Initially acts of generosity, these traditions have evolved into compulsory and often abusive expectations, causing immense suffering for many women. The article explores the dowry system's persistence in modern society and the legal measures designed to combat it, highlighting the challenges of enforcement due to entrenched societal attitudes and a sluggish judicial system.

The focus is not solely on identifying the problem but also on proposing solutions. It advocates for a holistic approach, including education, financial empowerment of women, raising awareness about legal rights, and public campaigns to shift cultural norms. The goal is to foster a culture of gender equality and create a supportive environment for those affected by dowry-related violence.

Communities are urged to actively participate in this fight, supporting a more equitable society for women. By examining recent statistics and events, the article emphasizes the urgent need to address the dowry system directly. It calls for collective action to work towards eradicating this practice and achieving a future where dowry is a thing of the past.

## DOWRY-THE CANCER OF SOCIETY



## Introduction

In India, the dowry system is a deeply ingrained social evil that has endured for generations. 'Kanyadan' and 'Stridhan', two ancient Hindu practices, are the source of this behavior that has extended throughout society and frequently has negative

effects on women. "Stridhan" refers to presents of jewelry and clothing given to the bride by her family and friends, whereas "Kanyadan" refers to the bride's father donating money or property to the groom's family. 'Varadakshina' also entails the groom's father giving him money or presents. Even while these customs were first meant to be loving and kind deeds,

they have eventually turned into predatory ones. This article explores the background, prevalence today, legal structure, and steps required to end the dowry system in India.

### Historical and cultural context

Hindu customs from long ago are the source of the dowry system. As part of the marriage ceremony, the bride's father presents gifts to the groom's family in an old custom known as "Kanyadan," which literally translates to "the giving away of a virgin daughter" [1]. "Stridhan," which translates to "women's wealth," describes the presents presented to the bride with the intention of securing her financial future [2]. These optional customs eventually became required obligations, which paved the way for marriage's commercialization.

Hindu society traditionally views marriage as an indissoluble and sacred union. There was no divorce law in place historically, and views today are still shaped by the idea that marriage is a lifelong partnership [3]. In many Indian households, women are not granted equal inheritance rights but instead receive a dowry upon marriage from their husbands. The dowry system is a deeply ingrained social issue that has been sustained across regions and socioeconomic classes by this cultural norm.

### Dowry in modern society

The dowry system still exists in contemporary India for a number of socioeconomic reasons. It frequently influences the decisions made by families and individuals since it is perceived as a requirement for marriage. As consumerism and materialistic attitudes have grown in an increasingly globalized economy, so too has the demand for dowries [4]. Families see dowries as a chance to purchase luxuries that they would not otherwise be able to afford, and the bride's parents frequently cooperate in order to improve their own social standing and the marriage chances of their daughters.

Beyond the wedding ceremony, dowry demands have been seen in numerous religious and family rites, pregnancy, and childbirth. Due to this growth, dowries have become more common in communities—including Muslims and Christians—that did not previously observe them [5]. Official figures show an increase in crimes tied to dowries. The gravity of the problem was demonstrated by the 7,115 dowry fatalities that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) documented in 2019 [6].

Although dowry-related violence is more common in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, it is also a problem in big cities like Bangalore. For example, Bangalore, the fastest-growing city in India, reports an alarming rise in killings and harassment linked to dowries; four women are apparently slain every day as a result of dowry-related incidents [7]. Data from the NCRB [6] show that 32.4% of all crimes against women in India are related to dower harassment.

### Legal framework

On July 1, 1961, the Indian government passed the Dowry Prohibition Act in an effort to curb the threat of dowries. The Act

[8] makes it illegal to give, take, or demand a dowry. Penalties include fines and jail time. The dowry system persisted after it was passed, despite this, leading to more changes and legislation.

A government group suggested changing the Act in 1980, adding family courts, a National Commission for Women (NCW), and broadening the concept of dowry [2]. Further modifications in 1983, 1984, and 1986 increased the scope of the law and imposed heavier penalties. In order to deter abuse by spouses or their relatives and facilitate the prosecution of harassment linked to dowries, Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 198-A of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were inserted [9,10].

Anyone engaged in dowry transactions faces fines and a maximum five-year prison sentence under the Dowry Prohibition Act. It also requires a thorough record of wedding presents, signed by the parents of both parties, that includes the names and relationships of those who gave the gifts to the newlyweds. The practice is nevertheless commonplace in spite of these laws. The 1986 amendments gave state governments the authority to designate officers charged with preventing dowry transactions and gathering evidence against violators [8].

### Challenges in enforcement

Even with the extensive legislative structure, dowry prohibition rules are difficult to execute. Many women and families are discouraged from pursuing legal action due to the societal acceptability of dowries and the stigma attached to disclosing dowry demands. Furthermore, victims are discouraged from seeking justice because the court system is frequently drawn out and difficult to navigate [11].

The problem is made more difficult by law enforcement authorities' insensitivity and corruption. Low conviction rates are caused by the fact that many dowry harassment and violence instances are either unreported or are not thoroughly investigated. For example, the conviction rate for instances involving dowries in 2019 was only 34.7%, demonstrating the inadequacy of the judicial system in giving victims justice [6].

### Measures to eradicate dowry

The dowry system must be abolished through a multifaceted strategy that includes social, legal, and educational efforts. Here are a few actions to deal with this widespread problem:

- 1. Education:** One of the main reasons why dowries persist is a lack of knowledge. The practice of dowries can be abolished in part by informing people about its detrimental effects and encouraging reasoned thought. To promote a culture of respect and equality from an early age, schools and colleges should incorporate gender equality and women's rights into their curricula [12].
- 2. Financial independence for women:** Women can become self-sufficient and less dependent on dowries as



a security precaution by investing in their education and professional development. Women who have economic empowerment will be able to refuse dowry demands and make wise decisions for their lives [13].

3. **Legal rights awareness:** Women need to be made aware of their legal rights as well as safeguards against abuse stemming from dowries. To educate families and communities about the legal ramifications of participating in dowry transactions, public awareness programs had to be launched [1].
4. **Gender equality:** Raising awareness of gender equality from a young age might influence how society views dowries. Youngsters should be taught that women and men are on an equal footing and should have the same chances and rights. Traditional gender norms and prejudices need to be contested and changed [3].
5. **Public awareness campaigns:** To inform the public about the issue of dowries and the legal ramifications of participating in them, both governmental and non-governmental groups should start awareness campaigns. The media can be quite effective in influencing public opinion and drawing attention to the negative aspects of dowries [12].
6. **Stricter law enforcement:** To ensure that criminals are held accountable and that the dowry system is abolished, the government should police current laws with greater severity. To effectively manage issues involving dowries, specialized courts, and expedited procedures had to be instituted [11].
7. **Community involvement:** Local leaders and communities ought to be part of the fight against dowries. Community-based initiatives can support gender equality and discourage dowry customs by influencing attitudes and actions [13].
8. **Support system for victims:** Establishing support networks for victims of violence and harassment related to dowries is essential. In order to offer impacted women both short-term relief and long-term support, helplines, shelters, and counseling services must be made available [7].

## Conclusion

In India, the dowry system is a pervasive social ill that keeps undermining women's equality and rights. The practice is nevertheless commonplace in spite of a strong legal framework, government initiatives, and civil society involvement. A multifaceted strategy including legislative changes, community involvement, education, and awareness campaigns is needed to address this issue. In order to eradicate dowries and guarantee a more just society, it is imperative that women are given more economic and social authority. India can progress toward doing away with the dowry system and ensuring a better future for its women by promoting a culture of equality and respect.

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