

Dowry System in India (Dahej Pratha) – Causes, Impacts, Laws, Solutions & Awareness



DOWRY SYSTEM (DAHEJ PRATHA) IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Dowry system, also called Dahej Pratha, is one of the biggest social evils in India today. It can be compared with other blind beliefs and harmful traditions which have damaged our society for centuries. Many people assume that dowry has always been a part of Indian marriages, but in reality, it was not like this in ancient times.

If we carefully read the Indian scriptures and mythological texts, we do not find any mention of dowry. For example, in the

Ramayana, the concept of marriage was based on Svayamvar, where the bride was free to choose her husband, and no form of dowry was involved. Similarly, in other ancient texts, we find references to gifts given to women as Stridhan, but these gifts were her own property, not a demand from the groom's family. This shows that dowry as we see today was never a part of Indian tradition.

Then the question arises – when and how did dowry come into our society? Historians believe that it slowly entered during the medieval period when kings and rich families started giving large amounts of wealth, land, and jewelry during marriages to display their status. Over time, what began as voluntary gifts became a forced expectation, and today it has turned into a dangerous custom.

REGIONS IN INDIA WITHOUT DOWRY PRACTICE

It is important to note that dowry is not equally practiced in every part of India. There are still many communities and states where dowry has very little or no presence. For example:

- * North-Eastern States: In states like Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram, the tribal communities follow a matrilineal system. Here, women inherit property and enjoy high social status. In fact, in many tribes, it is the groom's family who has to prove their capability instead of demanding dowry. Because of this cultural tradition, dowry never became popular in these regions.
- * Kerala (Nairs and some other communities): In Kerala, especially among the Nair community, property is passed through the female line. The concept of dowry is either absent or very weak in these groups, since

daughters are seen as inheritors and not as a burden.

* Tribal Areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh: In several tribal communities like Gond and Baiga, marriages are more about mutual understanding and cultural rituals. Here, practices like bride price (where groom's family gives gifts to bride's family) exist instead of dowry. This again proves that dowry is not a natural tradition of India, but a social evil created later.

These examples clearly show that dowry is not rooted in Indian culture as a whole, but only in certain communities where greed and social pressure turned it into a practice.

RECENT CASES OF DOWRY HARASSMENT AND DEATHS

Even in the 21st century, when India is progressing in science and technology, cases of dowry deaths and harassment are still reported almost every week. These cases show how dangerous this social evil has become. Some recent examples are:

1. CASE OF A YOUNG TEACHER IN UTTAR PRADESH (2023)

In 2023, a young school teacher from Uttar Pradesh lost her life within one year of marriage. Her husband and in-laws had been constantly demanding a four-wheeler and more cash as dowry. When her parents could not meet the demand, she was tortured mentally and physically. Finally, she was found dead under suspicious circumstances. This case created headlines in local newspapers and

once again highlighted how educated families are also trapped in this evil practice.

2. KERALA SOFTWARE ENGINEER'S CASE (2022)

A 24-year-old software engineer from Kerala died by suicide in 2022 after facing continuous harassment for dowry. Her husband and his family had demanded gold and money even after marriage. Messages found on her phone revealed how she was mentally abused every day. This case shook educated circles because even highly educated professionals were practicing dowry demands.

3. RAJASTHAN BRIDE BURNT ALIVE (2021)

In Rajasthan, a newly married woman was burnt alive by her in-laws just a few months after her wedding. The reason was non-fulfilment of dowry demands which included a motorcycle and cash. The cruelty of this case shocked the entire state and forced authorities to take strict action against the guilty family members.

4. BIHAR CASE OF CONTINUOUS HARASSMENT (2020)

In Bihar, a young bride faced daily torture from her husband's family because her parents could not provide an expensive car as dowry. The harassment continued for months until she was finally killed. The case drew huge public anger and once again raised questions about the effectiveness of dowry prohibition laws.

5. DELHI CASE OF NRI MARRIAGE (2019)

In Delhi, a woman married to an NRI (Non-Resident Indian) man faced dowry harassment soon after the wedding. Her in-laws forced her parents to send money abroad for the groom's business. When she refused, she was abandoned in India without any support. This case showed how dowry demands have now taken global forms as well.

WHY DOES DOWRY STILL EXIST?

After looking at these cases, an important question arises – why does dowry still exist even after so many laws and awareness campaigns? The reasons are many:

- * **Social Status Pressure:** Many families see marriage as a social event to show off their wealth. Demanding or giving dowry becomes a way to maintain their so-called prestige.
- * **Greed:** Some people see marriage as a chance to earn money or property, so they treat the bride as a source of income.
- * **Fear of Broken Marriage:** Parents of daughters often agree to give dowry because they fear that refusal may cancel the marriage proposal.
- * **Lack of Strict Implementation of Law:** Although dowry is illegal, weak law enforcement and slow court processes make people fearless in demanding it.
- * **Gender Inequality:** In many societies, daughters are still seen as a burden. This negative mindset makes dowry appear “normal” for some families.

These reasons explain why dowry continues to survive, even though many educated people

know that it is illegal and morally wrong.

IMPACTS OF THE DOWRY SYSTEM

The dowry system has very deep impacts on Indian society. It is not only about money or gifts but also about how women are treated, how families are burdened, and how the entire marriage institution becomes corrupted. The major impacts can be explained as follows:

1. SOCIAL IMPACT

Dowry has created inequality and injustice in society. Many parents prefer sons over daughters because they believe daughters will cost them a heavy dowry at the time of marriage. This has also led to female foeticide and a declining sex ratio in some parts of India. Marriages are no longer about love, understanding, and bonding of two families, but about financial transactions. This weakens the very foundation of Indian culture.

2. ECONOMIC IMPACT

For many middle-class and poor families, arranging dowry for their daughter's marriage becomes a lifelong burden. Parents often take heavy loans, sell property, or spend their entire savings just to satisfy the demands of the groom's family. This creates financial instability and poverty in many households. Instead of spending money on education or business, families are forced to

spend it on dowry.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The dowry system also affects the mental health of women. A girl grows up with the fear that her marriage will be a burden on her parents. After marriage, if dowry demands are not met, she faces constant harassment, torture, or even violence. This leads to depression, anxiety, and sometimes even suicide. Families of brides also face emotional pain and humiliation when they are unable to fulfill demands.

4. IMPACT ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Dowry is a big obstacle in the path of women empowerment. Instead of being respected as equal partners in marriage, women are often treated as commodities. Their value is judged by how much money or property they bring with them. This makes it difficult for women to achieve equality in family and society. Even educated and working women are not free from this problem.

EFFORTS BY BOLLYWOOD AND LITERATURE AGAINST DOWRY

Over the years, Bollywood movies, Indian television serials, and books have tried to raise awareness about the negative effects of dowry. For example:

* Movies like “Dahej” (1950s), “Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat” (1997), and “Toilet: Ek Prem

Katha" (2017) addressed the issue of dowry and social evils in Indian marriages.

- * Regional cinema in states like Bengal, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh has also produced films focusing on the struggles of women facing dowry harassment.

- * Indian writers in novels and essays have criticized the dowry system and called it a threat to women's dignity.

Despite these efforts, the dowry system has not ended. The main reasons are:

- * Movies and books create awareness for a short time, but they do not change deep-rooted social mindsets.

- * In many films, even while showing dowry as wrong, luxury weddings and material wealth are glorified, which indirectly promotes the same culture.

- * Society often treats movies as entertainment only, and the social message gets ignored.

- * Lack of strict implementation of laws means people are not afraid of punishment, even after seeing awareness campaigns.

This shows that media alone cannot end dowry unless families and society decide to change their thinking from the inside.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AGAINST DOWRY IN INDIA

The Indian government has made several laws to stop dowry. On paper, these laws are very strong, but the problem is their weak implementation. Some important legal steps are:

- * The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: This law clearly declares giving or taking dowry as a crime. Both the groom's family and the

bride's family can be punished if found guilty.

- * Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC): This section deals with cruelty by the husband or his relatives. If a woman faces

harassment for dowry, she can take legal action under this section.

- * Section 304B IPC: This section defines "dowry death." If a woman dies within 7 years of marriage under suspicious

circumstances, and it is proven that she was harassed for dowry, the husband and in-laws can be punished with imprisonment.

- * Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: This law gives women the right to seek protection, residence, and

maintenance if they are victims of dowry harassment or domestic violence.

While these laws exist, their success depends on awareness and the courage of women and families to file cases without fear.

STEPS BY GOVERNMENT AND NGOS

Apart from laws, the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken initiatives to spread awareness:

- * Awareness Campaigns: Posters, TV ads, and school programs often teach people that dowry is a punishable offense.

- * Helplines and Women Cells: Every state has women's helplines where complaints about dowry harassment can be made quickly.

- * NGO Efforts: Many NGOs like Shakti Shalini, Sakhi, and Mahila Dakshata Samiti work at the ground level to support women and guide them in legal battles.

- * Educational Programs: In some schools and colleges, seminars are held to teach students about gender equality and the wrong effects of dowry.

However, the success of these programs is still limited because many people hide dowry practices under the name of “gifts” or “family traditions.”

HOW CAN DOWRY BE ENDED?

The real solution to dowry is not only in making laws but also in changing the mindset of people. Some possible solutions are:

- * Change in Social Thinking: Families must realize that marriage is about love, respect, and understanding, not about money or gifts.

- * Encouraging Simple Marriages: Society should encourage small, simple weddings instead of expensive show-offs. This reduces pressure on the bride's family.

- * Women Empowerment: When daughters are educated and financially independent, they are less vulnerable to dowry harassment.

Parents should focus on their education instead of saving money for dowry.

- * Strict Punishment: Courts should give quick and strict punishment in dowry cases, so that it acts as a warning to others.

- * Role of Youth: Today's young generation must take responsibility to reject dowry in their marriages. If educated grooms say “no” to dowry, society will slowly change.

CONCLUSION

The dowry system is one of the darkest evils in Indian society. It never existed in our pure cultural roots but entered later as

greed and false prestige. Even today, it destroys lives, weakens families, and creates gender inequality. Despite laws and awareness, dowry continues because people are not ready to change their mindset.

To truly end dowry, society needs to look beyond wealth and focus on human values. Parents must stop treating daughters as burdens, and grooms must refuse to accept dowry in any form. Education, awareness, and courage are the biggest weapons against this evil.

If every individual takes a pledge to fight against dowry, then one day, India can become a society where marriages are celebrated as a union of hearts, not as a financial transaction. Ending dowry is not just a legal duty but also a moral responsibility of every Indian.