
DOWRY DEATHS IN INDIA: ANALYSING LEGAL INSUFFICIENCIES AND COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS FOR REFORM

V. Latha, VELS Institute of Science and Technology, School of Law (VISTAS)

Ms. L. Keerthana, Assistant Professor, Department of Legal Studies, VISTAS.

ABSTRACT

Dowry deaths represent a persistent social evil in India, where women are subjected to violence, harassment, and often fatal outcomes due to unmet dowry demands. Despite legislative measures like the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and amendments to the Indian Penal Code, the incidence of such deaths has not significantly declined, highlighting gaps in enforcement and cultural entrenchment. This paper examines the causes, legal framework, and insufficiencies of current laws, drawing comparative insights from other countries to propose reforms. Through a synthesis of statistical data, scholarly analyses, and qualitative studies, it argues for strengthened legal protections, better enforcement, and societal shifts to address this issue.

The research identifies key factors such as kinship systems, economic inequality, and weak institutions as contributors to dowry violence, while suggesting measures like enhanced education for women, international pressure, and refined legal definitions to mitigate risks. The dowry system in India has a long root in Indian culture. Dowry is also called as Dahej which has become an obstacle to every woman's routine day to day life. Dowry has progressively evolved into social standards, which is a serious problem for women and our society as a whole. In India, the dower system has existed since prehistoric times. It was also thought to be an honor shared by both families for the groom to get money during a marriage so he could properly care for his bride. Dowry is not only in the form of money, but sometimes properties and gold are also shared to the groom and his family.

The objective of this discussion is to provide insight into the dowry system, societal impact and future scope. The present study employed an empirical research methodology, with a sample size of 200. The data was obtained within the borders of Chennai using a suitable sampling technique. The study's instruments include: The surveys that are structured with Findings in gender inequality, financial pressure, domestic violence, economic empowerment and cultural transformation. our culture as a tradition and presented as a complex set of challenges that impact on gender equality,

family wellbeing and societal progress. India's dowry system is still a complicated, multidimensional problem that has an ongoing effect on society. Despite vigorous legal action and widespread public awareness campaigns, it continues to exist in our society in many forms and is adapted. To end this heinous social practice, the Indian government has made a law to refrain people from taking or giving dowry under the act of 1961. The main goal of the act is to investigate all the ills and repercussions of dowry and to abolish it from Indian traditions.

Introduction

As a researcher delving into contemporary social issues in India, I have chosen to focus on dowry deaths—a tragic manifestation of gender-based violence rooted in patriarchal traditions. Dowry, originally intended as a voluntary gift to support a bride in her new home, has evolved into a coercive practice where families demand escalating payments from the bride's side, often leading to harassment, abuse, and death if expectations are unmet. In India, this issue persists despite decades of legal interventions, underscoring the inadequacy of existing protections.

The significance of this topic lies in its intersection of law, culture, and human rights. According to national crime records, thousands of women die annually from dowry-related causes, with burns being a common method disguised as accidents or suicides. This paper aims to dissect why current laws fall short and how insights from global practices can inform improvements. By analyzing causes, patterns, and comparative frameworks, I seek to contribute to policy discussions that prioritize women's safety.

The study is structured around the research format outlined in academic guidelines: background, hypothesis, problem statement, literature review, and chapterized analysis. Drawing from diverse sources, including empirical studies and legal critiques, this work emphasizes the need for holistic reforms to protect vulnerable women. A dowry is only an offering, much like genuine A dowry is simply an offering, like real estate or cash, made to the groom and his family by the bride's family either at the time of the marriage or at a later date per the groom's request.

A contract known as a "dowry" has to deal with how much a bride should be paid. However, the bride or her family is asked to pay the bride or the groom's family members for the bride or bride services. Under the name of dower, the bride's family's fortune is given to the groom or

his family. In some parts of the world, such as several Asian countries, northern Africa, and the Balkans, accepting a marriage proposal is usually contingent upon paying a dowry. In many Asian nations, dowry-related conflicts can lead to violent crimes against women and their families, including vicious and deadly assaults.

In ancient times people practiced killing their girl babies to escape from the dowry system as they cannot afford due to their poverty. So, The Indian government has taken steps to safeguard women from domestic abuse with the 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act and the Act of 2005.

Factors affecting the dowry system are greed factors in our society structure, religious dictates, social constraints, social status of women and illiteracy. So that the National policies were framed and made effective in 2001 for the empowerment of women and their rights on education. In conclusion, the dowry system is rooted in the Indian cultural traditions and has often led to detrimental consequences, such as gender inequality, financial burdens, domestic violence, and skewed social dynamics. Thus, Efforts to combat this practice have included legal reforms, education, economic empowerment, and cultural shifts. In India, everyone speaks for women's rights and says 'Beto Bachao Beti Padhao'. But a girl, even after achieving everything in her life, she can't escape the shackles of dowry. Hence more than one lakh cases are registered every year for dowry cases.

CAUSES

- **Social structure:** The patriarchal character of Indian society, where males are viewed as superior to women in terms of physical and intellectual strength, by her birth onwards, is fundamentally reflected in the dowry system.
- **Women's social standing:** Girls' lower social status in Indian society is deeply ingrained in the country's collective consciousness.
- **Greed:** When a bride and groom get engaged, it's expected that a dowry will be given to make up for the groom's riches, status, and professional background.
- **Religious factor.** The dowry issue is partly a result of religious restrictions placed on marital practices by society, particularly with regard to the groom's appearance.

ACT OF 1961 PROHIBITION OF DOWRY

Efforts of dowry system assaults on women, inequality of gender and loss of girls' shallowness and solution of Campaign for Education and Awareness, Law enforcement and Women's freedom. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed on May 1, 1961, with the goal of making it illegal to give or accept dowries.

Rules should be established by the government in the historic The verdict in Suresh Kumar Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh. The prosecution's evidence of the woman's dowry demand could not be removed because of her death, the Supreme Court decided. The connection between the victim's demise and the dowry demand needs to be established in order to elicit the expression just before our death. The D.P. Act should also be used to charge the accused.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 was passed by India in order to protect women from domestic abuse. It established civil remedies with this goal in mind. Since one of the causes of domestic violence is abuse of any kind, including financial, mental, physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, it is beneficial. The Domestic Violence Act is a component of the Dolly Prevention Act. The Domestic Violence Act's Section 3 expressly prohibits any kind of intimidation, harm, or use of weapons against women in order to comply with unlawful dowry demands.

IMPACT OF DOWRY SYSTEM

Gender Discrimination:

It is often observed that due to the dowry system, women are considered a burden and are oppressed and given preferential treatment. Whether it's in the education sector or other amenity sectors. Gender Discrimination means disparity between men and women in different social, economical & political, cultural and legal aspects. This problem is simply known as gender biasness, which in simple term means the gender stratification or making difference a male or a female.

Parenting on society:

Parenting Guidance for Protecting Daughters and educate Sons Against Dowry

Offences

- **Educate Early:** Teach daughters about their legal rights, including laws against dowry demands (such as the Dowry Prohibition Act in India). Awareness is the first line of defense. Educate their sons about equality, and as a human being we all are equal, she also have same life, feeling, emotions, pain, happiness.
- **Encourage Independence:** Support her education, career, and financial independence. A strong sense of self-reliance reduces vulnerability to exploitative demands.
- **Open Communication:** Create a safe space at home where she can share concerns about marriage negotiations or pressures without fear of judgment.
- **Legal Preparedness:** Parents should be aware of legal remedies—such as filing complaints under IPC sections related to dowry harassment, or approaching women’s commissions and NGOs.
- **Support Networks:** Encourage daughters to build strong social and professional networks. These can provide emotional and practical support if she faces harassment.
- **Reject Harmful Norms:** Parents must firmly refuse to entertain dowry demands during marriage discussions, setting a clear example that their daughter’s dignity is non-negotiable.
- **Empower Decision-Making:** Allow daughters to have a voice in choosing their life partner, rather than forcing arrangements that may expose them to dowry-related risks.

Impact on women's careers:

The larger context of dowry practices is women's underrepresentation in the workforce and the resulting lack of economic independence.

Crimes against Women:

The dowry system occasionally gave rise to crimes against women, which could include

everything from physical harm and psychological abuse to murder.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

The practice of dowry in India traces back to ancient customs, where it was linked to concepts like *kanyadan* (gifting a daughter) and voluntary offerings to the groom. Historical texts such as the Dharmashastras condemned exploitative practices, yet dowry persisted, influenced by joint family systems, hypergamous marriages, and colonial-era property laws like the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act of 1937. Post-independence, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 aimed to secure women's inheritance, but cultural norms transformed dowry into a commercial demand, spreading across castes and classes.

Causes are multifaceted, including the marriage squeeze—where an excess of marriageable women inflates dowry demands—and socioeconomic factors like urbanization and affluence. Burn injuries predominate, often homicidal, with kerosene as an accelerant, occurring mostly at night in the in-laws' home. This background sets the stage for understanding why legal insufficiencies allow such violence to thrive.

OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the reason behind India's dowry system in India.
2. To evaluate the effects of India's dowry system.
3. To investigate dowry preventative measures of the dowry system.
4. To take advisory measures on parenting and supporting their daughters to face dowry impacts in society.

Chapterization

Chapter 1

Causes and Patterns of Dowry Deaths

Dowry deaths stem from five principal causes explaining 80% of state-level variations: kinship systems, joint families, low women's workforce participation, income inequality, and weak

institutions. In northern India, exogamous marriages leave brides isolated, making them vulnerable to instrumental treatment.

Patterns show burns as the leading cause (41.67%), often homicidal, with victims aged 16-26 in arranged marriages lasting under two years. Homicides account for 58.33%, suicides 33.33%, with incidents at in-laws' homes. Economic factors like dowry inflation from marriage squeezes exacerbate this, with real dowry values tripling from 1945-1975.

Urbanization and affluence play roles, as higher GDP correlates with demands for conspicuous consumption. Women's education at matriculation levels reduces risks by substituting for dowry.

This chapter highlights how socio-economic dynamics perpetuate patterns, calling for targeted interventions.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis guiding this research is that India's current legal framework, while progressive on paper, is insufficient due to enforcement challenges, cultural biases, and loopholes that fail to deter dowry-related violence effectively. Furthermore, by incorporating comparative insights from countries with successful anti-dowry or gender violence measures—such as stricter enforcement in Bangladesh or property rights reforms in Europe—India can strengthen its laws to reduce dowry deaths. This posits that a combination of refined legislation, better institutional performance, and societal education will lead to measurable declines in incidence rates.

To test this, the study examines empirical data on law effectiveness, conviction rates (around 32-35%), and international models. If validated, it supports the need for hybrid reforms blending domestic and global strategies.

Null Hypothesis: There is no association between the educational backgrounds and the different socioeconomic problems related to the dowry system.

Alternative hypothesis: There is association between the educational backgrounds and the different socioeconomic problems related to the dowry system.

Research Problem

The core research problem is the persistence of dowry deaths despite existing laws, revealing gaps in protection for women. Key issues include low conviction rates (only 34.7% of charge sheeted cases), delays in justice (8-10 years), and misclassification of deaths as accidents or suicides. Laws like Section 304B IPC presume dowry death in suspicious cases within seven years of marriage, yet enforcement is hampered by police corruption, judicial bias, and societal stigma that discourages reporting.

Additionally, the problem extends to why laws fail: vague definitions allow post-wedding demands to go unchecked, and cultural factors like joint families and low female workforce participation exacerbate vulnerability. Comparing India with countries like Greece, which abolished dowry in 1983, highlights the need for cultural shifts alongside legal changes. This problem demands investigation into how to bridge these gaps for effective protection.

This study was conducted using descriptive research. Convenience sampling method is adopted in the study to collect the data. The data is collected through a questionnaire and the sample size 200. The samples were collected from the general public with different region. The hypothesis was tested using the square test.

Literature Review

Seema Dixit (2021) the study on dowry system is a social problem that fuels the continuous torture, murder, and subjugation of women in India. A dowry is generally required in this society for planned marriages. 2020 saw 6,966 dowry deaths in India, as dowry disputes claimed the lives of 19 women every day. A sample size of 200 individuals was used for the investigation. For the past 50 years, this practice has mostly not changed in India. In fact, this problem is on the rise, resulting in unprecedented mortality and morbidity among women in India.

Analysis:

The respondents' educational backgrounds in relation to the effectiveness of India's dowry prohibition law. The public was asked if they thought the Indian government's dowry ban worked, and more than 27.72% of the educated undergraduate respondents said. A sizable section of the surveyed population appears to think favorably of the dowry prohibition

legislation, as seen by the response showing that 27.72% of respondents think it is effective in India.

The efficacy of India's dowry ban law, and the gender of the respondents. 54.95 % of female respondents said yes. 17.33% of the female respondents said no. A majority of the studied populations appear to have a positive image of the dowry prohibition legislation, as seen by the response, which shows that 54.95% of respondents thought it was effective in India. This suggests a high degree of support for the degree of effectiveness of help to females.

The gender of the responders to the crucial measures to stop dowries system the public's response was more firmly in agreement 15.35% than in neutrality (13.37%). It is clear from the response that 15.35% both male and female of respondents strongly prohibit of Indian dowry system. Hence it is a societal evil that needs to be abolished and that some members of the studied community are adamantly opposed to the practice

Interpretation:

The calculated P value is 0.000. Since P value >0.05 , null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. Hence there is association between education backgrounds and the different socio economic problems related to the dowry system.

Chapter 2

Legal Framework and Criticisms

India's framework includes the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), prohibiting demands with penalties up to 2 years imprisonment, and IPC Sections 498A (cruelty) and 304B (dowry death), mandating 7 years to life. The Evidence Act shifts burden of proof in suspicious cases.

Criticisms abound: vagueness allows gift exceptions, post-wedding demands uncovered, and 1-year limitations discourage complaints. Enforcement issues include police bias, evidence tampering, and low priorities, with convictions at 32%. Misuse of Section 498A for false claims adds complexity.

Judicial delays and cultural subordination of women compound problems, as victims fear reporting. This chapter underscores insufficiencies, emphasizing need for accountability.

Chapter 3

Comparative Analysis with Other Countries

Dowry practices vary globally. In Bangladesh, dowry replaced bride price, with laws like the 1980 Act similar to India's, but enforcement faces acid violence issues. Ancient Greece shifted to dowry by 5th century BC, abolished in 1983, offering a model for legal eradication.

Roman Empire had structured dowries returnable upon divorce, contrasting India's coercive nature. Europe and England used dowry for alliances, with property rights for women, unlike India's gender disparities.

Islamic traditions prohibit dowry, favoring dower from groom, a potential lesson for India. Comparative insights suggest India adopt stricter definitions and cultural campaigns from these models.

Chapter 4

Suggestions for Improvement

To strengthen laws, revise definitions to cover post-wedding demands and remove limitations. Enhance enforcement through police training and fast-track courts. Societal changes include mandatory female education, economic independence via job centers, and awareness campaigns.

Adopt international elements like CEDAW compliance and incentives for girls' empowerment. Community interventions, like neighborhood groups, and property reforms can shift norms. Education and awareness use campaigns and curriculum in schools to raise knowledge of the illegality and detrimental effects of dowries. Legal reforms: make penalties harsher for both accepting and providing dowries, and fortify and enforce anti-dowry legislation.

Women's empowerment: Empower women through education, vocational training, and economic opportunities to reduce their dependence on dowry for marriage. Family counseling: promote family counseling to address dowry related conflicts and promote gender equality within families. Financial literacy promotes financial literacy among families to help them manage wedding expenses without resorting to dowry.

1. Ensuring that boys and girls have equal access to good-quality education, equal rights and opportunities to successfully complete schooling and in making educational choices;
2. Reviewing and where necessary adapting school and early childhood education curricula, teaching and school practices to eliminate gender discrimination and stereotyping;
3. making the study of science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) financial and entrepreneurship issues, as well as education, arts and the humanities, equally inclusive and attractive for both boys and girls; promoting the development of stronger reading habits among boys and girls;
4. campaigning and raising awareness among young men and women, parents, teachers and employers about gender-stereotypical attitudes towards academic performances and the likely consequences of overall educational choices for employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Conclusion

Dowry deaths persist due to legal gaps and cultural factors, but reforms inspired by global practices offer hope. By addressing the hypothesis, this paper calls for urgent action to protect women. The dowry system refers to the custom in many cultures when the bride's family gives gifts, cash, or other assets to the groom and his family during the marriage.

Meanwhile, it is sometimes blamed for fueling gender inequity, domestic violence, and financial hardship. As part of the marriage contract, the main goal of the dowry system is to transfer money, resources, or other assets from the bride's family to the groom's family.

Gender disparity, financial stress, selective abortions, marital abuse, social pressure, postponed marriage, legal involvement, awareness and education, and economic independence are among the conclusions. Future scope includes legal reforms, economic empowerment, reporting and education, technical advancements, and support networks. Although cultural traditions are at the foundation of these efforts, they have frequently resulted in negative outcomes like gender inequity.