



Dowry System in India

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This article is based on “**Breaking the chain**” which was published in The Indian Express on 02/07/2021. It talks about the menace of dowry in India.

Dowry is a social evil in society that has caused unimaginable tortures and crimes towards women and polluted the Indian marital system. Dowry is payment made in cash or kind to a bride’s in-laws at the time of her marriage.

Today the government has come up with many laws (**The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961**) and reforms, not only to eradicate the dowry system, but also to uplift the status of the girl child by bringing in many schemes.

However, owing to the social nature of this problem, the legislation has failed to produce the desired results in our society.

In order to get rid of this problem, appealing to the social and moral consciousness of the people, providing education and economic independence for women, and effective enforcement of legislation against the dowry system, can help.

Impact of Dowry System

- **Gender Discrimination:** Due to the dowry system, many a times it has been seen that women are seen as a liability and are often subjected to subjugation and are given second hand treatment may it be in education or other amenities.
- **Affecting Career of Women:** The larger context for the practice of dowry is the poor presence of women in the workforce, and their consequent lack of financial independence.
 - The Poorer sections of society who send their daughters out to work and earn some money, to help them save up for her dowry.
 - The regular middle and upper class backgrounds do send their daughters to school, but don't emphasize career options.

- **Many Women End Up Being Unmarried:** An uncountable number of girls in the country, despite being educated and professionally competent, remain endlessly unmarried because their parents cannot fulfil the demand for pre-marriage dowry.
- **Objectification of Women:** Contemporary dowry is more like an investment by the bride's family for plugging into powerful connections and money making opportunities.
This renders women as merely articles of commerce.
- **Crime Against Women:** In some cases, the dowry system leads to crime against women, ranging from emotional abuse and injury to even deaths.

Way Forward

- **Recognizing Limitations of Political Solution to Social Problem:** No law can be enforced without the wholehearted cooperation of the people.
 - Enacting a law no doubt sets a pattern of behaviour, activates social conscience and renders some assistance towards the efforts of social reformers in getting it abolished.
 - However, social evil like dowry cannot eradicate itself unless the people carry the philosophy behind the law much further.
- **Educating Girls:** Education and independence is one powerful and valuable gift that parents can give to their daughter.
 - This will in turn help her to be financially sound and be a contributing member of the family, giving her respect and right status in the family.
 - So providing the daughters with a solid education, and encouraging her to pursue a career of her choice is the best dowry any parent can ever give their daughter.
- **Creating Social Stigma Around Dowry:** Accepting dowry should be made a social stigma, and all generations should be addressed. For this, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. In this context:
 - The Union and State governments must take effective steps for stepping up 'anti-dowry literacy' among people through Lok Adalats, radio broadcasts, television and newspapers on a 'continuing' basis.
 - Youths are the only ray of hope to effectively combat the menace of the dowry system. They must be given moral value based education to broaden their minds and widen their outlook.
- **Multi Stakeholder Approach:** Dowry is not a standalone problem, thus society should take every step to bring gender parity. In this context,
 - States should look at gender-disaggregated data across the life cycle – birth, early childhood, education, nutrition, livelihood, access to healthcare, etc – to address gender inequality.
 - There is a need to expand childcare and safe public transport, reduce discrimination in hiring, and create affirming workplace environments.
 - At home, men should share domestic work and care responsibilities.

Conclusion

The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, the conscience of society needs to be fully awakened to the evils of the dowry system so that the demand for dowry itself should lead to 'loss of face' in society for those who demand it.

Drishti Mains Question

The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. Comment.
