

Dowry: A Tradition that Killed Thousands

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Abstract

Dowry is a social evil that is deeply rooted in Indian customs since medieval times. It is now the cause of death for thousands of married women every year. India currently ranks first in violence and deaths relating to dowry. In 2020, nearly 7,000 brides died due to domestic violence related to dowry. It means that more than 19 women died every day last year because of dowries. Even though India is developing technologically, dowry deaths and bride burning still seem to be common occurrences in Indian society, especially in the backward villages, which do not have a swift connection with modern cities and societies. India prohibited dowry demands in 1961, but even after six decades, dowry demands are common, due to which women suffer both physical and mental violence. Even though the laws relating to dowry demand and dowry death are as strict as they can get, it seems like these laws are inadequate in stopping such crimes. This research article gives the reader an insight into the gravity of dowry death in detail through various case laws and other facts and data. This article sheds light on the history of the dowry demand as well as the current scenario regarding violence relating to dowry. This article focuses on the current issues relating to dowry death as well as providing probable solutions and the author's opinion on the said issues. The authors used analytical research methodology for this article to provide a clear and detailed understanding of why domestic violence and other offences relating to dowry are still prevailing in current modern Indian society and why Indian laws relating to them are failing.

Keywords: Bride burning, dowry, dowry death, harassment, domestic violence

INTRODUCTION

Dowry demand is not something new to Indian society; it is now considered a social obligation for the bride's father to give things in cash and/or kind to the groom in his daughter's marriage. India is one of the very few countries that is still struggling with crimes related to dowry, such as domestic violence, mental and physical harassment by the husband, or worse, death. Dowry death is not an uncommon occurrence in Indian society. The study showed that in 2020, nearly 7000 women died due to failure to comply with the dowry demand of their in-laws [1]. India holds the top position in crimes relating to dowry deaths with Pakistan being 2nd and Bangladesh being 3rd. Dowry demand and dowry deaths are very common occurrences in the villages, which don't have any social contact with the developed cities. The problems of dowry and dowry-related crimes are so common that if there is a wedding without a dowry, the bride's family is considered either poor or cheap.

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Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equality to both men and women; it also includes gender equality [2]. The dowry-system is against gender justice as it puts men on a higher pedestal than women. The Parliament of India tackled this problem early on and passed the first act prohibiting dowry in 1961. The act in itself was inadequate, but it is considered to be the first step in making dowry

demand illegal as well as a social taboo. Since 1961, several amendments have been made relating to the dowry and dowry death. Even after six decades, there are not many changes in the legislation to stop crimes relating to dowry, but it is evolving slowly.

Lives lost to the dowry system in India are higher than lives lost to terrorism; this fact alone makes it a grave issue for the legislature and judiciary to tackle. Since 1961, there have been several landmark cases that developed the law relating to dowry demand and death. The legislature enacted laws to curb dowry from every direction, but it failed to change the mentality of the people of India. There are still many people who consider dowry demands to be their right. The cases of dowry demand and dowry death have declined since 2014, but many women are still suffering every day because of their husbands or in-laws.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIA SINCE ANCIENT INDIA

Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations in the world. It gave birth to many cultures, heritages, and traditions. In ancient India, women were considered to be on the same pedestal as men. Women in Vedic civilizations and Indus Valley Civilization were worshipped as divine forces, people in Hinduism still worship goddess Laxmi for wealth, goddess Saraswati for knowledge, and goddess Durga and Kali for warding off evil powers. There are no texts in ancient India that show that women were considered inferior to men. Even in great texts like the “Mahabharata” and “Ramayana,” there is no instance of women’s inequality. But many centuries later, the position of women was reduced from that of a goddess to that of a mere object. The ideology of people changes with the change ruler.

India was ruled by many dynasties, like the Mauryas, Cholas, Guptas, Mughals, Marathas, and Britishers. A Greek historian in the 3rd century, Megasthenes, agreed that ancient people did not care about the fortune of their better half. Dowry was not practiced in ancient India; a marriage match was made by evaluating each other’s characters. The position of women started to degrade in the medieval era. The exchange of dowries became a common practice during British rule. Now, Indian society has made it a preconceived notion that if there is marriage, then there must be some gifts given to the husband. It is hard to believe that the position of women is more pitiful in modern India than in ancient India.

DEFINITION OF DOWRY

Dowry means any valuable gifts given in cash or kind, or property or estate of any kind given to the groom’s side by the bride’s side as a condition to a marriage. It may be considered as a payment given to the groom’s side by the bride’s side. Section 2 of the Dowry Prohibition Act defines the term “dowry” in similar language.

The definition of dowry was expanded from time to time by the Judicial courts of India. In *Bachni Devi v. the State of Haryana* [3], the Apex Court held that a demand for any valuable property having a nexus with marriage constitutes a dowry demand irrespective of its cause or reason. In the case of the *State of Madhya Pradesh v. Jogendra and anr* [4], the Supreme Court yet again decided to expand the scope of “dowry.” The Supreme Court held that even contributing money for the construction of a house shall be considered a dowry demand.

DOWRY PRACTICE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

England

The dowry system was introduced in England in the 12th century by the Normans. Prior to this, there was a ritual in medieval England where a groom gave a morning gift to his wife. Further, the groom generally gives dowry in front of the church gate in front of all the present public. In England, nobles marry off their daughters with other nobles to gain political ties [5]. In medieval England, The daughters were treated as a commodity that could be traded for personal advantages.

Russia

In Russia, the daughter's mother finds a compatible husband for her, and the father has to financially arrange everything for her marriage. Even the church remained silent on this matter. The family of a bride gives a large sum of money to her at her wedding. Since the wife in Russia is considered to be a housemaker, that money gives control to the wife and makes her independent in controlling the home.

China

There is a Chinese tradition where both the groom and bride gift each other something. In the first 3 months before the wedding, the groom gives gifts known as betrothal gifts, and it is a customary to give such a gift on this auspicious occasion. Giving such a gift is considered a symbol of prosperity and good luck. Later, the husband also bestows the bride with a dowry, which consists of the gifts that are considered necessary for supporting her in her wedlock.

DOWRY PRACTICES IN OTHER RELIGIOUS CULTURES

Dowry Practices Under Islam

There is no direct account of dowry practices in any ancient Islamic texts, but even the Mohammedan people exchange dowry within the context of arranged marriage. It is presumed that there is no concept of dowry in a Mohammedan wedding, but there is a concept of dower practiced by Muslims. The law of dower, also known as "Mehr" means money or property that the wife is entitled to receive from the husband for her maintenance after being separated or divorced. Muslims practice dowry, but just because it is a local custom and practice. Generally, in a Muslim wedding, there are no dowry demands, and all the gifts are given by the bride's family purely out of love and care. In the Quran, verse 4:4 (Ayah an- Nisa) states that "husband must pay dower to his wife with a good heart."

Dowry Practices Under Christianity

In the religion of Christianity, there is nothing written in the Bible about dowry. There is something about the bride price in "Exodus 22:16-17," which states that if a person has sexual intercourse with the virgin before marriage, he must marry her and pay her the money equal to the bride price for virgins. Even though there is no such mention of dowry in the Bible, Christians in India practice the customs of dowry because it is practiced for hundreds of years in Indian society. In 2021, the payment of dowries by Christians increased drastically.

Dowry Practices Under Judaism

There is a mention of dowry in Judaism, but like the above religious practices, the groom gives gifts to the bride and is called "nedunyah." In Judaism, it is considered that during the marriage, the husband bought his wife from her father. Gradually the practice of "nedunyah" was suppressed by the "ketubah" custom in which the husband merely has to take the responsibility of compensation to his wife. But by Talmudic time, the father of the bride gave her some dowry since she was excluded from paternal inheritance.

The customs of "nedunyah" prevailed until modern times, especially among Jews of Eastern Europe. In modern Israel, the practice of "mohar" as well as "nedunyah," tend to disappear slowly from their customary practices.

Dowry Practices Under Sikhism

In Sikhism, the custom of dowry is called "dahej." In Sikhism, it started off as the exchange of spiritual dowry. It means a woman should carry the name of their Lord while starting her marital life. But because of the influence of society, gradually the meaning of "dehaji" changed. Now it is somewhat similar to the dowry practiced in Hinduism. Now in the modern world, all the greed and show of social status completely ruined the true and pure meaning of "dehaji."

In other religions, it is considered that the husband should give dowry to the wife because it is the wife who is leaving her paternal house to live with the husband. A husband must take care of his wife.

But giving dowry to the wife's father or to the bride itself was considered as a price of the wife. Even some religious texts state it as the price of a bride. In the medieval period, a woman was treated as an object which is just as cruel as the dowry system. This custom is almost eradicated from developed countries, and now these practices were considered a thing of the past. Women in modern Christianity and Judaism are now considered to be men's equals.

HISTORY OF DOWRY IN INDIA

Dowry is a custom practiced by Indian Society since time immemorial. In ancient times giving dowry was upon the bride's family. Not everyone gave dowries in ancient India, only rich Brahmin family gives dowry to only to exhibit their wealth. Dowry was mentioned in the ancient texts of Manu-Smriti. Dowry was prevailing since the Vedic period when the parents and relatives of the bride gave gifts, jewels, and so on, which were considered to be women's wealth known as "stridhan." It was given as a contingency plan in case she needs to maintain herself and her children in the case of absence of her husband.

Dowry slowly changed from a status symbol to a custom. The medieval period is considered to be the origin point of dowry demand. During the medieval period, it was customary for Indian families to give valuable gifts and properties to their daughters. During the British rule in 1793, Lord Cornwallis enabled the privatization of land in India and prohibited women to own land or any kind of Estate. This law forced the parents of the bride to give the land and other gifts to the husband. After a century, the groom's family considered their right to demand dowry and it was considered to be a duty of the bride's family to fulfill those demands. In modern India, the concept of dowry took a turn for the worst. Now it is common in the lower or middle-class section of Indian society to harass or use violence on a woman because of dowry. In some unfortunate cases, a woman either kills herself or succumbs to her injury.

DOWRY DEATH IN THE MODERN INDIA

A death caused due to the violence, physical or mental, instigated by the husband or his family on the bride, with a motive of extorting dowry is considered to be a dowry death. Even though India is on developing and leaving traditional values for modernization, the practice of dowry demand is still prevailing. Marriage is considered to be an auspicious knot between two souls, but many families burn this knot by dowry death. Since 2010, an average of 7798 deaths and suicides recorded [6]. Brides are killed every day by physical violence, poisoning, or burning alive. These kinds of gruesome crimes are happening in India since before independence. In the past few decades, Indian society has witnessed some extreme crimes resulting in the death of the bride, just to extort dowry. These crimes include Bride Burning, beating her to death, mutilating the body parts of the bride, constant harassment and humiliation which forces her to suicide, and many more. Even the 3 pillars of democracy—legislative, Judiciary, and executive failed to abolish this social evil.

Current Scenario of Dowry and Dowry Deaths in India

People in India are still infested with old thinking that taking dowry is not just a custom, but a right vested upon them by their elders. This is the main reason why women become victims of domestic violence. In 2020, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of deaths with over 2000 FIRs registered relating to "Dowry Death" followed by Bihar (1046) and Madhya Pradesh (608). Whereas, according to the world bank, Kerala showed a sharp increase in the dowry exchange and became a leading state in the dowry exchange seconded by Haryana [7]. In 2022, about 30,865 more women reached National Commission for Women. The complaints were 26% more than the previous year, which means that the crimes against women increased instead of decreasing with time.

EVOLUTION OF LAW RELATING TO THE PROHIBITION OF DOWRY AND DOWRY DEATH IN INDIA

Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

The first-ever act enacted to curb the dowry system was the Dowry prohibition act of 1961. It was an ineffective attempt by the legislature to prohibit the dowry system at that time, but it still laid down a

set of preventive and punitive measures regarding the above issue. The act failed miserably at that time as the dowry system was deeply rooted within Indian society. There were several loopholes in the 1961 act, which caused indirect dowry death to go unnoticed. The act was amended constantly to keep up with the crimes related to the dowry system. Many crimes like constant mental harassment and bride burning were not even considered dowry death instead, they were treated as regular crimes. But due to many protests from the organizations like Mahila Dakshata Samiti and Stri Sangharsh in the late 1970s, the government was forced to amend the act to make it wider and stricter.

Section 2 of the dowry prohibition act, 1961 defines “dowry” as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly, either by the one party to a marriage to another or by the parents of either party to a marriage to another; at or before or after the commencement of the marriage [8]. “Valuable security” in the aforementioned definition means any document through which any legal right is created, transferred, extended, extinguished, or released upon another person [9]. Earlier the definition of dowry only included gifts given as consideration for the marriage. This scope was widened in *Inder Sain v. the State of Punjab* [10] in 1973.

Section 3 of the act prohibits giving as well as taking Dowry with imprisonment of a minimum of 5 years as well as a fine up to rupees 15000 or the estimated value of dowry taken whichever is more. Whereas section 4 prohibits “dowry demand,” its definition was changed by an amendment in 1984 [11].

Section 7 enables the aggrieved person, parent, or relative of the aggrieved person, police or, any recognized welfare institution, or organization the power to initiate proceedings against any dowry demand. Section 8 of the act makes the offence of dowry demand cognizable and non-bailable. Further, Section 8-A [12] was added through amendment act number 43 of 1986. It states that the burden of proof lies upon the accused to prove that he is innocent.

This act alone was not enough for the prohibition of the dowry system. The judicial system of India was also concerned about this social atrocity. In the case of *Sanjay Kumar Jain v. The State of Delhi* [13], the court referred to the dowry system as a curse on Indian society. Even the court was astonished after seeing how frequent dowry deaths are in India, even in modern society.

Indian Penal Code, 1860

After 22 years, the Legislature understood that a single act alone will not stop dowry or violence related to dowry. So, in 1983, section 498A was added to the Indian Penal Code, which made cruelty, both physical and mental, a non-bailable offence [14]. After multiple huge protests by women in India and backlashes by the judicial courts, section 498A was introduced in the Indian Penal Code in 1983 which penalizes cruelty inflicted upon the woman by her husband or his relatives. The main objective of this section is to prevent the torture of a woman by her husband or his relatives [15]. In *Pavan Kumar v. The State of Haryana* [16], the court held that even taunting a woman on her looks and also taunting her to bring dowry is considered to be cruelty under section 498A.

This section does not deal with death, but only with mental and physical violence which made this section prone to misuse. The same concern was also discussed in the Malimath Committee Report, 2003, which was established to reform the criminal justice system. In 2014, the Hon’ble Supreme Court gave certain directions to the police officers not to arrest the accused unnecessarily. They must first investigate the matter themselves and that arrest is necessary under section 41 of the CrPC. Only after that the police should arrest the accused. The court in *Arnesh Kumar v. the State of Bihar* [17], the court held that there is a phenomenal increase in the matrimonial dispute in recent years. The fact that section 498A is a cognizable and non-bailable offence became a weapon a woman now uses against their husband and his family to take her revenge. The apex court further decided in *Kahkashan Kausar @ Sonam and other v. State of Bihar and others* [18] held that if there is no prima facie case made out against any relative, the FIR alleging the general allegations should be quashed against the accused

relatives as general allegations do not indicate the specific role of the person in the case. There were many times when the constitutional validity of section 498A was questioned. In 2005, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of this section. The court further stated that the administration should be careful and completely sure while arresting anyone under this section [19]. This section was inserted into the legal framework for protecting women from cruelty, harassment, and other offences which may be committed by their husbands. But the frequent misuse of this section reduces its credibility. Even the Supreme Court expressed its concern regarding this and declared it “legal terrorism.”

Later in 1896, section 304B was added to the IPC which penalizes the dowry death of a woman caused by burns or bodily injury within 7 years of the marriage, either by the husband or his Relative [20]. The term “relative” is defined in the case of *the State of Punjab v. Gurmeet Singh* [21], the term “relative” means a person who is a relative of the husband by blood, adoption, or marriage. The period of 7 years would be considered as a cut period for a reason that each year will denote a *phera* around the sacred fire (each *phera* denotes a vow of both the spouses) [22].

Several essential ingredients that have to be fulfilled to establish dowry death are as follows:

1. Death must be caused by burns or bodily injury or it must occur otherwise than in normal circumstances;
2. Death must occur within 7 years of marriage;
3. It must be shown that soon before her death, the woman was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or his relatives;
4. Such cruelty or harassment must be for or connected with any demand of dowry [23].

The apex court in *Satbir Singh v. the State of Haryana* [24] held that if the prosecution successfully establishes the ingredients of the section, the burden of proving innocence shifts on the defense. “Soon before death” did not have a definite period of time. The court interpreted the word “soon before death” means that the time difference between the cruelty concerned and the death of the said woman [25].

Indian Evidence Act, 1872

The 1980s was considered to be the golden period for the prohibition of the dowry system. There were some major reforms in the mid-1980s regarding the prohibition of dowry. Section 113B was among such reforms. Section 113A and 113B [26] were added to the Indian Evidence Act in 1986. All the sections in IPC (section 304B and 498A) and evidence act (113A and 113B) were added after the recommendation by the 91st Report of the Law Commission in 1983 on “Dowry Death and Law Reform.”

Section 113 A talks about the abatement to suicide by a married woman. This section clarifies whether the suicide of a married woman was abetted by the husband or his relatives. If the prosecution successfully proves that:

1. The woman committed suicide due to the cruelty which was subjected to her by his husband or any of his relatives, and
2. That the woman committed suicide within 7 years of the commencement of the marriage.

Section 113B talks about the Presumption as to dowry death, it states that if a woman dies soon after she is subjected to cruelty or harassment for, or in connection with any demand for dowry, it shall be considered as dowry death. Dowry death in this section has the same meaning as under section 304B of the Indian Penal Code. In the case of *Mustafa Shahadal Shaikh v. the State of Maharashtra*, the word “soon before death” was interpreted by the Supreme court of India.

What ingredients are to be satisfied for attracting the provisions of Section 113A of the Indian Evidence Act are stated by the Supreme court of India in the recent judgement of *Gumansinh @ lalo @ Rajubhikbhai Chauhan v the State of Punjab* [27].

1. The woman has committed suicide,

2. Such suicide has committed within the period of 7 years from the commencement of her marriage,
3. The accused had subjected her to cruelty.

FAMOUS MOVEMENTS AGAINST DOWRY IN INDIA

The law in itself is a complicated thing and drafting law is far more complicated, that is the reason why the Parliament generally does not change the laws related to private affairs. For changing these laws, the government have to be pressurized by either the judiciary or the people. Article 19(1)(c) gives people a right to peaceful protest against the government policy and actions taken by the government. Whereas article 19(1)(a) provides a right to express their opinion on any topic. Even though these two fundamental rights are limited to a certain extent, it is due to these two fundamental rights many significant changes came into effect through both legislation and the judiciary. These changes cannot be seen immediately. To see these changes, we have to compare the current laws with the law as they were the 1950s when India recently gained its independence.

Similarly, after being fed up with keeping quiet for centuries women in our country stood up. There were a number of movements and protests against dowry that forced the Indian parliament to make several amendments in multiple acts to protect women from domestic violence and harassment. Even though there are many small movements like the “Shahada movement” (1972) that were initiated to eradicate dowry from Indian society. The movement against dowry and dowry-related crimes came to its peak in the mid-1970s. These movements showed the hardships and violence faced by women to force them to give in to the dowry demand. The women who suffered at the hands of their husbands or in-laws generally stay with them because of the lack of independence and no other alternative. Even in this modern society, a girl is considered to be “*Paraya dhan*” (borrowed wealth), this is the reason why it is considered to be morally wrong for wife to leave her husband’s house to live with her parents. Indian society still treats a married woman who lives with her parents as a social outcast.

Before these movements, death by burning is considered to be suicide even if the victim lived long enough to incriminate her husband and domestic violence was passed as a house injury. These instances were proof that Indian society and law were treating women as sub-human species. It was after all the efforts of the activists that bring up a positive change in society. It was after these movements, women in the country knew that they were not alone in the society who were facing domestic violence and harassment because of dowry demands. These women united against dowry and crimes related to it.

In the 1980s, when dowry deaths were routinely passed off as an accident, Satya Rani Chadha was the one who launched the anti-dowry movement across India. Even though today’s generation doesn’t know her, she was the soul of the 1980s movement. She started this movement because of her daughter. Her daughter was barely 20 when she was married. After 10 months she died after being burnt by the kerosene, she was 6 months pregnant at the time of the death. At that time, the police passed it off as a kitchen accident. A scooter was demanded by her husband after the commencement of the marriage, and according to law dowry was defined as the “consideration to marriage.” Since the demand was made after the marriage, the Supreme Court acquitted the husband. Satya Rani Chadha was not satisfied with the judgement so she approached the Supreme Court and it also upheld the decision of the lower court. This infuriated Satya Rani Chadha, which motivated her to start a revolution against the dowry laws prevailing in the country [28]. Through her hard work, in the 1980s, the government brought several significant changes in the Definition and the scope of Dowry and the Dowry act, 1961.

Even though she lost her daughter, nearly 34 years later she saved thousands of other daughters from facing the same demise. She gave her life to these movements and even was successful to pressurize the government to amend the laws relating to dowry. It was because of the hard work of this woman, thousands of weak women joined together to raise a strong voice against the dowry system.

WHY INDIAN MEDIA AND DOWRY

Media is considered to be the 4th pillar of Indian Democracy. A reporter risks his life to report the truth. There are several instances where a reporter died just because he is telling a truth. In 2021 alone,

four journalists were murdered for their work and one died in Afghanistan while reporting the dangerous situation after Afghanistan was taken over by the Taliban. A 25 years ago, dowry was a burning issue and the proper attention was given to it by the media. It was a hot topic during the 1990s and 2000s. Dowry death and domestic violence regularly appeared in the newspaper and on Television. Such stories no longer appear in the media, earlier, the media was laced with crimes related to dowry. The strict punitive and preventive laws against dowry and offences related to dowry might be the reason why these issues need not be publicized. The law alone is not effective against these crimes, there are still thousands of brides dying because of the physical and mental violence inflicted upon them to make them submit to their dowry demand.

What could be the reason that neither Indian nor International media reports on crimes related to dowry? The problem is that dowry is old news now, and most readers do not read such news. The so-called 4th pillar of democracy is just showing news that is beneficial to them. They don't care about the magnitude of the crime or any humanitarian interest in the victim if it does not concern the wealthy people. The best example of this is the 2008 Mumbai Attack, where the terrorists in Pakistan were getting every minute detail about the defense forces outside the hotel and were conveying the details to the terrorists in the "Taj Hotel." The news channels put their TRP above the life of the hostages and the defense personnel [29]. Even in today's modern world, a celebrity breakup is a piece of bigger news than that of a rape or murder news let alone news related to dowry.

Media Ignores the majority of the population and showcases crimes that are shocking, sudden, and sizzling. To curb the crime against women, the media may work as an ultimate weapon. It has a vast reach; it can sway people's opinion and it did this from time to time. Even a protest cannot reach the general public without the support of the media. There are several cases that were highlighted by the media, and due to public attention, those cases were resolved faster and without any bias.

REASONS WHY THESE LAWS MADE SUCH A SMALL IMPACT

The laws explained above are considered to be very strict and are some of the rarest laws where the burden of proving innocence lies upon the accused. Then why are these laws fail in stopping the dowry system? Some of the reasons are as follows:

It is a Centuries-Old Custom

Many Indian families still give and take dowry because it is considered to be an old custom that was followed by their predecessors. It is one of the major reasons why the government and judiciary failed to curb the dowry system.

A Matter of Reputation

Even in the 21st century, exhibiting money in front of society is considered to be the best method for showing their reputation in society. Because of this, people spend millions and millions of rupees on wedding functions. An average wedding costs around 20 lakh rupees in India. And giving expensive gifts and property to the groom's side is considered to be a way of displaying their wealth and their position in society.

Lack of Knowledge

People in India follow any custom without knowing the actual reason for why the custom is being followed. The same is the case with the dowry, a majority of Indians don't know what is the reason behind giving dowry. They are just blindly following it as a custom even if it imposes a financial burden on the bride's family.

These are some of the major reasons why The Indian Government and Judiciary failed to stop the still ongoing tradition of the Dowry system.

IMPEDIMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A LAW

The Indian legal system is said to be the harshest when it comes to the protection of women. But, what good law is if it can't be implemented. In 2021, India ranked 85th among 180 countries in the international corruption index which is lower than the last year. There are many more reasons for the failure of implementation of the law, some of those are as follows:

Social Factors

Administration of justice in the case of civil and criminal cases is a hard job to perform in itself and it becomes tougher when there is no support given by the common people to the authorities. To these people, a civil servant is just a corrupt person who would not work without a bribe. To further increase the difficulty in solving a crime against the dowry system is that generally there are no witnesses to verify the harassment and violence against the women. There are several reasons why a person doesn't want to be a witness in a dowry-related case. It might be due to family pressure, threats, or harassment, a bride or her family does not file a complaint. The neighbors generally do not file a complaint against the culprits just so that their relationship does not spoil with them.

Police and Law Enforcement

In a country, the job of a police officer is to protect the people as well as the law of a country. Its job is to protect society from mischievous elements. In India, a policeman is seen as something to be afraid of. Poor people and people of the lower middle class are so afraid of the police that in many cases they don't even bother filing a complaint. There are several allegations people made against the police of them being lazy; many times, they don't file an FIR for multiple illegitimate reasons; for conducting an improper investigation in the case of violence and death. Police officer generally treats violence against women as a family matter. It can be said that police failed to prevent many cases of dowry death which can be averted by early police intervention. Even the judiciary stated in the case of *Bhagwant Singh vs Commissioner of Police, Delhi* [30] that the incidents of unnatural death are much higher than the police report. And the frequency of the investigation officer being changed badly affects and delays the investigation.

Police in many cases gives an unsatisfactory excuse for delay in investigation and inadequate evidence. The forensics experts also stated that the credibility of DNA evidence corrodes with time. It is important to bring the evidence for forensic examination as fast as it can be possible to maintain its credibility.

The Judiciary

The Supreme Court, in a number of cases, expressed its concerns and anguish view regarding the deaths of young brides. The court, in the case of *Virbhan Singh vs the State of U.P.* [31], conveyed that drastic crimes like bride killing are rising at an alarming rate and must be deterred. For preventing these crimes, a strict punishment must be imposed upon the convicted. From time to time, the court repeatedly stressed upon the victims who fail to reach the police officers or judicial courts due to a lack of information and knowledge. The Judiciary is still powerless and its procedure is slow. Many times, a court gives its decision after the death of either the accused or the appellant which needs to be changed.

HOW CAN THESE PROBLEMS BE TACKLED

There are several solutions for these kinds of problems that can be implemented by the government to abolish the tradition of dowry in India. Some of them are as follows:

Nation-wide Campaign

The Central and State government can run a nationwide campaign against the dowry system and can also educate the illiterate population of the Nation regarding the strict rules regarding the prohibition of demanding dowry and other laws regarding domestic violence. The schools must have these social issues and how to tackle these issues in their syllabus. NGOs like Azad Foundation and Bhartiya Gramin Mahila Sangh should take more initiative to abolish the dowry system.

Strict Executive Action

The Nation needs to have a special task force to tackle such cases regarding dowry demand and domestic violence. The duty of this task force should be to spread awareness regarding the prohibition of dowry demand and the consequence of domestic violence and death due to dowry demand. There should be at least 1 officer in each village who have expertise knowledge of the laws relating to dowry and domestic violence. There should be a semi-annual check in every village regarding the missing women or violence inflicted upon married women.

Strict Judicial Action

The court must provide a speedy trial in cases relating to dowry and domestic violence. There should be a court to settle cases against women in every district so that it can be reachable by every citizen of India. There should be adequate judges in these kinds of courts so that the matters relating to dowry and dowry deaths can be resolved quickly. The court should issue directions to the police to investigate these kinds of cases within the prescribed time limit.

Responsibility of an individual

Just like in the 1800s, a single man named Raja Ram Mohan Roy took the initiative of abolishing the “sati pratha.” With his constant efforts, people start joining this movement and in 1829, Lord William Bentinck abolished the “sati pratha.” Due to his efforts, there is no case of “sati” in the modern world. India needs another Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who has the willpower to abolish the dowry system. It can be anyone even a common citizen like you and me.

CONCLUSION

The Dowry system and deaths related to dowry are burning issues in Indian Society. This social evil is a reason behind the loss of tens of thousands of beautiful lives. There are many laws prohibiting and punishing the dowry demand and other crimes related to dowry, but these laws are impossible to implement if the people implementing those laws are part of a problem. This issue cannot be resolved without resolving it at an interpersonal level. Children should be educated on these social issues to show them the current problems in the society they are living. The tradition of dowry and death due to dowry demand is a social problem like COVID-19, it spreads fast, kills a lot of people, and is hard to cure.

The Indian government is trying its best to abolish this social evil, but a government can do so much alone. This evil can be abolished only if people leave their greed and unite against this social atrocity. Just like “sati” being abolished in 1829, somebody needs to take charge against this social evil. It is said that marriages are made in heaven, that is why marriages are considered to be the bond of 2 souls. One should not make it a means for quenching their greed for money. A marital bond is pure and should remain the same. I would like to conclude this article by quoting Mahatma Gandhi, who said that “any young man, who makes dowry a condition to a marriage, discredits his education and his country and dishonors womanhood.”

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