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REVIEW ARTICLE

EVILS OF DOWRY SYSTEM IN INDIA

Evils of Dowry System in India

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DOWRY SYSTEM

The Hindu Society is full of a number of evils practices and bad customs such as Dowry has become a major social evil against women today it is difficult to say how and why this evil custom started ? Perhaps it might have originated from the parents desire to give their daughter a share of her parental property in the form of Dowry. Everyday we see how women have to suffer for the sake of Dowry. Day in & day out we read the news of one or another young women being burnt to death because she could not bring dowry with her. Torture of young bride's because of their failure to bring dowry is even more prevalent and they are forced to commit suicide. The result is that the parents of a girl have to make themselves paupers in order to arrange her marriage.

A girl may be educated. She may be a doctor, a professor or even an I.A.S. Officer. Her parents must give dowry. The parents have to arrange for dowries so that their daughters may get respect from their in-laws. These who cannot do this must suffer their daughter to remain unmarried. On other hand, wealthy parents manage to buy suitable bridegroom's for their daughter. All this call for stringent steps to enforce the ban of dowry. It is true that both the giving and receiving of dowry are illegal but these law is honored more in preach than observance.

Really, a dowry system is an evil. It is spreading fast like Cancer. There are anti dowry laws. The police have been instructed to take a serious view of 'Dowry-deaths'. But it generally seen that crimes done for the sake of dowries are not punished. These cases fail in the courts of law.

So, law alone cannot help much in this respect. Social efforts are needed to end this evil young men should pledge that they would not accept dowry. Anyone demanding dowry should be put to shame. He should be socially boycotted.

THE DOWRY SYSTEM IN INDIA

No doubt, women are at the helm of life and enjoy equal rights with men in every sphere of life yet there is an under current of the feeling of aversion towards

them. In spite of the fact that they enjoy the prestigious position in government offices, education institution, business organizations, the armed forces etc. they are the victims of many evil practices of the society. One of them is the dowry system which is of cancerous type. Although legislative measures have been taken by the Central Government and the state Governments yet it persists in our society, eating away the very tissues of social life like a canker.

When a female child is born in a Hindu family, particularly in Northern India, the faces of all the members of the family fall. The very expression of joy disappears from their visage. It looks as if they had come under the ellipse of sorrows and miseries. Even the mother who has given birth to the child looks sullen and sometimes becomes the object of taunts and ironical remark of her in-laws.

Do you know why it happens so ? It is because of the dowry system prevalent in our society. The very moment a female child is born, the picture of dowry with the demand of a huge amount of money in cash or kind comes before their eyes.

Now people have gone a step further to avoid this unhappy situation. They go to nursing homes for pre-natal determination of the sex of the unborn child, resulting in undesirable practices. Whether a woman wills or not and she has to follow the dictates of her in-laws.

All these things are happening simply because of the dowry system which is a stigma on the fair name of the Indian society and a curse for women. The parents of the girls have to provide a substantial amount of money to the parents of marriage talks. If they do not accede to their demands, the marriage talk receives a great setback. And if they agree under the force of circumstances and fail to pay it, their daughter is taunted, humiliated and subjected to cruel treatment. As a result, she begins to feel that her life is worthless, there is no meaning in living alive and she feels obliged to commit suicide. On the contrary, if she is taunt-proof, she is burnt alive by her in-laws.

This is the fate of our women in a country where luminous figures like Tagore, Gandhi, Swami

Dayanand Saraswati, Raja Ram Mohan Roy etc. were born and raised their voice against the dowry system.

Despite the statutory measures of the government, it is continuing prominence in certain parts of the country like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh etc. In such a case, there is no other alternative left except to mobilize the public opinion against the system of selling boys. On a war scale, this system is to be fought against by all political parties and the press. The dowry seekers are to be black-listed and publicly boycotted. The youths of today have to take a pledge not to allow themselves to be sold to the parents of the girl. They have to come forward and decide their own fate instead of being a puppet in the hands of their parents. The black marketers are to be eliminated because if they could promote such a system by offering rich dowries in the marriage of their daughters. If this is done, there is every hope of eliminating the dowry system from India.

Dowry is an old social practice in India. Actually it has become an evil degrading the status and respect of women in society. Dowry is given at the time of marriage of a daughter by the father.

The evil of dowry is a great insult to womanhood. It is a symbol of male superiority and woman's degradation. Due to this evil, the birth of a daughter is looked down upon with from woman becomes a burden.

Dowry seekers demanding a heavy dowry, have made the life of the parents and girls really hellish. Naked and shameful display of wealth encourages dowry. The dowry hunters are responsible for the deaths and burning of many bridges.

Dowry has been made a legal offence punishable by law, according to the dowry prohibition Act. The punishment can go up to six months imprisonment and a fine up to Rs. 5,000. However, the evil of dowry lies in the greed and exploitation of women. We have to fight against it socially and culturally.

THE DOWRY SYSTEM IN DELHI

Dowry system is prevalent in almost all section of Indian society. Dowry is what parents give to their daughter at the time of marriage. It is a kind of help given to the newly married couple from bride's parents to establish a new home. This custom is very old. It was not bad in the past because it was a voluntary affair but these days it has become a necessary evil.

Dowry system has eaten into the bones of our society. The birth of a daughter is no occasion of joy for the parents. A girl when become young is a burden on her parents. They have to face great difficulties in finding out a suitable match for their daughter. It is a problem to get her married in a rich and respectable family without a decent dowry. Daughter of poor parents however beautiful and well education cannot be

married to a richmen's son. Many girls commit suicide to save their parents from the evil of dowry.

This custom is the root cause of many other evils. Parents collect money by fair and foul means to satisfy the greed of the bridegrooms.

Our Government has decided to root out this evil from Indian society. Laws are being made to put an end to this big evil. Youngmen are also coming forward to raise their voice against this curse. People should take a pledge to fight this great evil at all costs. It is a slur on the fair name of this great country. Men should also try to wash off this dirty stigma.

WED Trust - Public Hearing on atrocities against women by Dowry System On the 25th November 2006, Saturday morning, the Seelaikariamman Temple Auditorium, Chellampatti was packed with women from the villages around. These women were there to participate in the 'Public Hearing' on the Atrocities against Women by Dowry System organized by Women's Emancipation and Development (WED) Trust. It was a different approach by the WED Trust, making the women themselves to expose their experiences at the public stage on the dowry, seer and lavish spending on functions. Illiterate women from remote villages boldly came to the dais and made eloquent speeches in their own native language and their own approach.

This innovative programme was presided over by Mr. P.T.R. Anbalagan, the religious Priest of Seelaikariamman Temple, and Chellampatti. Mrs. J. Cecily, the Coordinator of WED Trust welcomed the audience in her pleasant language. Mr. P.S. Dharmaneethi, Administrative Director of WED Trust explained the purpose of the programme; the evils of dowry system and the seer and lavish spending on family functions. He mentioned that the female infanticide of our area was just due to this dowry and seer systems we have been adopting for ages and added that in his experience, he came across hundreds of families suffered due to these social evils. Women are made victims of this evil and are directly attacked by the atrocities of the husband, in laws and others. Awareness education on this subject should be given to all concerned, the husband, wife, in-laws and others of the family. He said such sessions will help the victims to expose their experiences to educate their neighbours on these evil activities and to motivate stopping them. He requested the men and women leaders participated in the session that they should involve in series of discussions to find ways and means to reduce these evil practices of dowry systems to be practiced at the village level.

Then continued the President of Muram Women's Federation Mrs. Peyammal and Secretary Mrs. Saraswathi explained their own experiences. They boldly assured that all the women assembled here

should fight against the atrocities against them and claim their rights equal to the men in getting shares on family properties and other benefits.

The members of Muram Women's Federation, who have already been rejecting the seer and lavish spendings, spoke about their experiences:

- Mrs. Karuppayee, Munduvelampatti - donated cash and not giving any seer for the function organised by her daughter.
- Mrs. Rani, Munduvelampatti - got married with 7 sovereigns of ornaments 32 years ago and didn't ask for any dowry for her son.

Mrs. Pandiammal, Pulithevanpatti - got married 10 years, not organized any function at home so that her parents donated 25 cents of land for house and agriculture purpose for her. She herself attending functions by not giving any

- Donation.
- Mrs. Saratha, Munduvelampatti - Her parents avoided seer etc. and donated Rs.20, 000/- cash for her house warming function.
- Mrs. Selvarani, President of Ambattayampatti Sangam - married 10 years, she didn't organise any function and her parents donated Rs.40, 000/- for her family development.
- Mrs. Pushpam, President of Paloothupatti Sangam - organised a function at home and announced of avoiding seer etc. and so received donations as cash, used for family development.

Mrs. Muthupetchi, Othappatti - One of her 3 sons had twins female children and she was looking after one of them from the child and married with 5 sovereigns of ornaments. Unfortunately, the husband demanded more dowry and she made a case at WED Trust Legal Aid Centre and the case is going on.

- Mrs. Indirani, Ambattayampatti - they two sisters married in one family and living happily for 10 years, not organised any functions, but the parents donated Rs.40,000/- each for their family development.

Apart from the village women, representatives of other organizations also shared their points at this session:

i) Mrs. Gunasundari, President of Democratic Women's Sangam - explained the family life in her own approach which is good for family pleasure Wealth or Love and concluded that Love is the pleasure. She appreciated WED Trust for educating the women on

stopping dowry, seer and lavish spending and advised all the women to follow the principle.

ii) Mrs. Rajathi, SACRED, Madurai - both the givers and receivers of dowry are affected and the ornaments received are not kept long but wasted for lavish spending. Received donations through functions will have to be returned and there are sufferings and advised to stop spending lavishly on functions.

Mr. Manickam, Legal Advisor of WED Trust explained the practical problems women meet due to the dowry and seer systems existing in our society. He gave samples of cases coming to the WED Trust legal Aid Centre every Saturday. He mentioned that seer and lavish spending is not only at the happy occasions but also at unhappy ones like death ceremonies. He called all to join together to fight for this social evil and try to achieve the percentage of allotment for women in all scores for their overall development.

Mr. Panneer Selvam, Youth Association of Manalpatti explained the debates they conducted in 50 villages on the evils of dowry system. He was the judge of the debate programme and mentioned the outcome from the villages that all are able to realize the evils of dowry system and in due course, they will try to stop it by providing higher education, giving asset to female children and controlling systems developed by the village.

Mr. Jeyakodi, Mother Therasa Trust, Usilampatti mentioned about the evils of dowry that brides immediately after marriage commit suicide. He explained the atrocities females meet right from the childhood to their death, not allowed for higher education, make them child labours and child trafficking etc. They are considered as sub human beings. He requested the women assembled to fight against the atrocities and the authorities to support them.

Mr. Antony Sebastin, Consultant explained that dowry and seer system exist everywhere as an epidemic and we all should join together to fight against them.

Mr. Anbalagam, the President of this session delivered his valuable speech, appreciating the WED Trust and the Muram Women's Federation for organizing such useful programmes to encourage women to fight against the violations. He gave his valuable experience on dowry system that parents should select partners for their children at their own family status to stop violence. He also mentioned that he is against the dowry system and personally practice in his life for the past 10 years.

The MLA of Usilampatti Constituency Mr. E. Mahendran, B.Com. spared his valuable time among his tight schedules of that day and appeared at the

dais. He handed over prizes for seven women who stopped dowry and seer in their family functions. He congratulated the WED Trust Management and the Women's Sangams for their courageous attempt of organizing such Public Hearing on the atrocities against women. He mentioned that due to social custom of our area, dowry is a known evil and we are all victims. He said the donations in the functions started as helping the one who organised it and now it is changed into a social custom, which should be stopped. He used the proverb - 'Poor don't have special days and even Sundays are working day for women'. Women are crushed by her own family and then the family she got married and they work round the clock and all through the seven days with out rest and even then, they are not appreciated by her own family people. He requested all the audience to take the oath of not demanding or giving dowry to stop this evil.

Ms Logamani, Director of WED Trust explained the purpose of this Session and mentioned about the female infanticide of our area and these are all due to the dowry and seer system falling the prey on female. She requested the participants to cooperate with the mission of WED Trust to stop the dowry and seer system of our area by giving share in family property to women and fighting up to the government to pass Special Law for this.

At the end of the session, the WED Trust Management and the Muram Women's Federation handed over a Memorandum to the MLA to represent their requests to the State Assembly. The points mentioned are:

- a) Take necessary action to stop female foeticide, infanticide and violence against women through effective monitoring systems.
- b) Represent at the Assembly to strictly implement the Equal property rights of women.
- c) Create awareness with the Village Panchayats on the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2005.

The useful session ended at 2.00 p.m. and delicious lunch was served to all the participants and they all enjoyed it. Not only the attendants, all women but also the public outside listened through audio also appreciated the programme as very useful.

Mrs. P. Amsavalli, Secretary of Muram Women's Federation delivered the vote of thanks.

Press people attended the session and released news in their dailies the next day and WIN TV telecasted the program in their evening news.

Bride-burning is a form of domestic violence practiced in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and other countries located on or around the Indian subcontinent. A category of dowry death, bride-burning

occurs when a young woman is murdered by her husband or his family for her family's refusal to pay additional dowry. The wife is typically doused with kerosene, gasoline, or other flammable liquid, and set alight, leading to death by fire.^[1]

Virendra Kumar and Sarita Kanth point out that bride burning has been recognized as an important public health problem in India.^[2] They say that it is a historical and cultural issue accounting for around 600-750 deaths per year in India alone.^[2]

In 1995 Time Magazine reported that dowry deaths in India increased from around 400 a year in the early 1980s to around 5,800 a year by the middle of the 1990s.^[3]

A year later CNN ran a story saying that every year police receive more than 2,500 reports of bride burning.^[4]

Ashley K. Jutla MD, and Dr. David Heimbach MD, describe bride burning by saying that "the husband and/or in-laws have determined that the dowry, a gift given from the daughter's parents to the husband, was inadequate and therefore attempt to murder the new bride to make the husband available to remarry or to punish the bride and her family."^[5]

In 1961, the Government of India passed the Dowry Prohibition Act, making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal.^[6]

In 1986, the Indian Parliament added "dowry deaths" as a new domestic violence crime. According to the new section 304-B of the Indian Penal Code, where a bride, "within 7 years of her marriage is killed and it is shown that soon before her death, she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband, or any relative of her husband. or in connection with any demand for dowry, such death shall be called 'dowry death' and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death."^[6]

The offenders can be sentenced for any period from a minimum of 7 years in prison to a maximum of life.^[7]

However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. A 1997 report claimed that at least 5,000 women die each year because of dowry deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional.^[8]

Suggestions to prevent bride burning are being developed, including:

an increase in the standard of education for women, which will encourage economic and emotional independence; proper implementation of existing laws along with new, stricter legislation to abolish dowry related crimes; and the establishment of

voluntary associations to decrease the importance of dowries in general. Community-level programs are essential, and must include doctors, who bear special responsibilities to help change the social milieu in which this phenomenon occurs.^[2]

The BBC reports that in Pakistan the Progressive Women's Association say that "three-hundred Pakistani women are burned to death each year by their husband's families" and that bride-burning incidents are sometimes disguised as accidents such as an 'exploding stove'.^[9] They also report that according to the Association Doctors say that victims presenting from these accidents have injuries inconsistent with stove burns.^[9] According to an Amnesty International report in 1999, though 1,600 "bride-burning" were reported, sixty were prosecuted but only two resulted in convictions.^[10] Many such crimes are also labelled as Honour Killings.^[citation needed]

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