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**A STUDY ON THE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR
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A Study on the Factors Responsible For Dowry System and Its Impact on Indian Society

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Abstract – Today, Indian society is surrounded with many problems such as unemployment, illiteracy, population growth, terrorism etc. Among these problems, a problem which is deep rooted in Indian Society is the problem of dowry system. It has become the everyday news item, no day passes away when we don't hear news relating to dowry death or dowry harassment. The irony lies in the fact that the women in India are worshipped in the form of Shakti; she is burned and harassed by her in-laws every day in one part of the nation or the other. Dowry refers to money, gifts, goods or estate that wife brings to her husband in marriage.

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INTRODUCTION

The dowry has a long history in Europe, South Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. The system of dowry is deep rooted in the Indian society since the early days of the history. This system prevailed in ancient Indian society. In ancient period, dowry was the part of the ritual of kanyadan which was very different from modern – dowry. Among the eight types of marriages recognized by smritis, it was only in the Brahma marriage that father gave away his daughter, with such gifts and presents as he could afford, to a man of superior character. In the medieval period, the dowry, which was earlier regarded as dakshina, became an evil, father in order to marry her daughter had to offer money demanded by groom's family. In medieval times, the dowry system had engulfed the society at alarming rate, though it was practiced in the aristocratic and royal families.

Dowry is derived from the ancient Hindu customs of "Kanyadan" and "stridhan". In "kanyadan", the father of the bride offers the father of the groom money or property etc. whereas for "stridhan", the bride herself gets jewelry and clothes at the time of her marriage, usually from her relatives or friends. In "Varadakshina", the father of the bride presents the groom cash or kind. All of these could be done voluntarily and out of affection and love.

The Hindu marriage system is sacramental. According to system, a marriage is forever and there is no scope for a separation. Among the various ceremonies previously practiced, the ceremony in front of a "godly" fire has taken over, the antiquated system of "marrying a wife by capture". This form of marriage began the practice of dowry, where originally, the family of the bride would accept gifts and money from the groom's family as an alternative to bloodshed during the capture of the bride. A later modification of this system

has paved away for the present dowry system primarily practiced by the society.

The dowry system continues to rule society. In majority of Indian families, the boy has inheritance rights while the girl is given a hefty sum at the time of her marriage in lieu of the Government regulated equal rights for girls in parental property. The evil of the dowry system has spread its tentacles in almost all parts of the country and sections of society. There are several reasons for the prevalence of the dowry system, but main one is that it is a necessary precondition for marriage. "No dowry, no marriage" is a wide-spread fear. There has also been an emergence of a feudal mindset with a materialistic attitude in a new globalized economy. The price tag for the groom is now bigger and bolder. The emergence of an affluent middle class, the torch-bearer of social change in modern India, is the main factor for the perpetuation of the dowry system. Families arrange the most marriages and a man who does not marry for love, learns he can marry for possessions. For this man and his family, a woman becomes the ticket to shortcut riches through the system of dowry. There are a number of things people desire to have in their own houses but cannot afford; they use the opportunity of a son's marriage to get them. The girl's parents do not protest against the blatant extra-vaganza, as they regard the alliance as a stepping – stone towards higher social status and better matches for the remaining children. Dowry as a phenomenon has gone beyond the ritual of marriage. Pregnancy, childbirth and all kinds of religious and family functions are occasions when such demands are made. A more sophisticated public image of an extended gifting session has replaced the old system. Now, there is demand for receptions in marriage places. The trousseau includes designer wear for the bride and groom's family. Chefs are flown in for multi – cuisine wedding dinners. The bride's family usually

pays for all this. The rich revel in the exchange of their black money, but this in turn exerts pressure on the other classes to ape them with serious social consequences. The women have become a kind of commodity. It is them who are the worst sufferers because dowry is the most often a monetary agreement between two men – the bride's father and the groom. Caste – based practices have only added fuel to the fire. Marriages in political families are arranged to consolidate the caste base for support in electoral politics, so they do not challenge the dowry system. Dowry rituals have now spread even to communities where they were unknown. It has gone to different castes, crossed the boundaries of provinces and education and religion. Muslims and Christians, such as the Syrian Christians of Kerala and the Roman Catholics of Mangalore have started demanding dowry.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Traditionally, the custom of Dowry, long entrenched in male dominated society has attained alarming proportions over the last few decades. According to Goody, "Dowry can be seen as a type of pre- mortem inheritance to the bride." Thambiah defines Dowry as "Wealth given to a daughter at her marriage for the couple to use as the nucleus of their conjugal estate, by and large we can say that dowry in India and Ceylon." Sri Lanka, the notion of female property which technically is and in her own Control through the husband usually has rights of management".

Dowry normally means gifts given during the marriage to the son – in – law or his parents either in cash or kind. From the point of view of women's status, however, dowry has to be looked at as constituting what is given to the bride and is often settled before hand and announced openly or discreetly. The gift, though given to the bride may not be regarded as exclusively her property, but includes what is given to the bridegroom before and after marriage; and what is presented to the in-laws of the girl. The practice of giving dowry was meant to assist a newly wed couple to start their life together with ease. However, now it has degenerated into a sordid commercial transaction in which monetary considerations receive priority over the personal merits of the bride. The Dowry system has always given rise to innumerable socio- economic problems of far reaching consequences and wide ranging ramifications. Of late , numerous incidents of bride burning, harassment and physical torture of the young brides and various kinds of pressure tactics being adopted by the husbands / in –laws pressuring for more dowry have compelled the social reformers and the intelligent to give serious thought to the various aspects connected with the very institution of dowry . Legislation by itself can not normally solve deep – rooted social problems. Nonetheless, legislation is necessary to exercise educative impact besides providing legal sanctions against this social evil of devastating consequences.

It is in this context that while the Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted in 1961, the Dowry prohibition Act, 1984 was passed to further plug some of the loopholes in the original Act. It came into force 2nd October, 1985, requiring that lists shall be maintained in writing and shall contain a brief description of each present, and whether the person giving the present is related to the bride or bridegroom. The Dowry give and take phenomenon is practiced widely throughout India irrespective of caste and class. In spite of the legal sanctions women have been victims of Dowry harassment and victims of violence due to insufficient dowry given by the bride's family to the groom's family. In India, averages of five women in a day are burned in dowry related disputes and many cases are never reported. This can be attributed to an internalization of prevailing attitudes , which view women as inferior and see them as having only themselves to blame for their predicament. It seldom sees them as victims a form of oppression or of socially prevalent biases.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine factors responsible for dowry system and its impact on Indian Society and provide suggestions to abolish ill effects of this system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Ethnographic Atlas is a database on 1,268 societies coded by George P. Murdock and published in successive installments in the journal *Ethnology*, 1962-1980. It gives ethnographic codes and geographical coordinates for all these societies. The complete version of this data was published in *World Cultures Journal*, Vol 15 and No 2. This data set is the biggest cross country data set that has roughly comparable anthropological data on societies. It is widely used in anthropology for a wide range of topics to conduct cross country analysis. Thesis like (Harrell and Dickey 1985), (Goody 1973), (Shenk 2007) and references therein have used it to specially check for society wide characteristics that are correlated with the presence of dowry in a society. Economists (for example (Botticini and Siow 2003), (Nunn 2005), (Anderson 2007a) and references therein) looking for factors correlated with dowry have used tabulations from versions of this Atlas.

This data set only has information on the direction of marriage payments and not on the recipient. It also does not have any information on the average size of marriage transfers. There are data sets available on the magnitude of bride price/dowry payments for families/regions in particular societies, but these are difficult to get into a form that can be comparable across countries. Since the concern is with predicting the presence of dowry a cross country data set like this with information on the social characteristics is particularly useful even without a sense of average payments or whether they are increasing or decreasing in type.

The goal of the analysis is to identify the societal characteristics that lead to dowry or bride price. The dependent variable dowry is measured with an indicator that takes the value 1 if the society has dowry and 0 if there is anything else. The variable bride price the value 1 if the society has bride price or bride service or token bride price. The other possible categories are absence of any consideration, sister or female exchange and reciprocal gift exchange. Indirect dowry could possibly fall in these categories but it is impossible to identify precisely.

The independent variables are the factors that would influence the presence of dowry in a society. The complex variable is an indicator variable that takes the value 0 if societies are homogenous or are divided into at most two socio-economic classes. A more complex differentiation into classes correlated in large measure with extensive differentiation of occupational statuses is given a value of 1: This variable is meant to capture the inequality (stratification) in a society and is equivalent to an increase in the range of types in society that is the length of [L; H] in the model. The analysis in the model holds the level of stratification fixed and does not have any predictions as to whether stratification increases or decreases the likelihood of dowry. As (Goody 1973) for example argues, a higher level of stratification will be positively correlated with dowry as stratification makes parents more likely to give their daughters a dowry to ensure that their household has a status at least as high as that of her natal household.

The presence of polygyny in a society is captured by the variable polygyny. It is an indicator variable that takes the value 1 when marriages in a society are polygynous and 0 if they are monogamous. This is used to capture the supply and demand for bride argument as a determinant of the price of a bride. The literature should predict that it is a negative predictor of dowry. This channel is not present in the model and is controlled.

CONCLUSION

The act of female feticide is intrinsically linked to the 'Dowry System', to bring an end to abortions of female fetuses it is essential for Indian communities to bring an end to the ritual of Dowry.

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