

# THE DOWRY SYSTEM OR THE CURSE OF DOWRY

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Essay No. 01

'Dowry' according to the dictionary, means the property which a woman brings to her husband at the time of her marriage. Originally, it must have meant property represented by the voluntary gifts given to the girl by her parents, relatives and friends out of love and affection, at the time of her marriage. May be these gifts were given to the girl in order to enable her to set up a new home out of a sense of social responsibility. The system of dowry must be as old as the institution of marriage itself. It must also have been a universal practice. Every father wants to give some presents to his daughter when she is leaving his home for good and starting life afresh. There is nothing unusual, bad abnormal about it.

But as time passed, the system degenerated into an evil custom. It came to be looked upon as an evil and a curse. The dowry became an all-important and a primary factor in marriage. It became necessary for the parents of the girl to give a good dowry to her whether they could afford it or not. Worse still, the married life of a girl came to depend upon dowry. Marriage became impossible in the absence of a handsome dowry. Several girls, whose parents could not afford a good dowry, had to commit suicide as their greedy in-laws made their lives miserable. Newspapers are full of reports carrying harrowing tales of brides being burnt to death or driven to hang themselves because of constant nagging by their in laws. Some of the step-daughters of fortune choose the hangman's noose while others consume poison or jump down the multi-storeyed buildings to deliver themselves from the clutches of the inhuman dowry seekers.

It is really tragic that in the progressive world of today, the evil of dowry continues to exist in all its horrid forms. Many homes are broken and several families are driven to ruin only because they are too poor to afford a rich dowry. Previously, in the selection of a bride, her family background, education and her intrinsic worth used to be the primary consideration. Now, dowry is the first and the only consideration in a majority of the matrimonial alliances. As a result, dowry, which was at one time a token of love and affection, has become a cause of oppression and exploitation of the worst order.

Some parents have to incur heavy debts for giving dowry. At times, they remain under debt for the whole of their life. Sometimes, the girl's parents fail to raise the necessary funds for marriage. They are compelled to commit suicide in disgust and despair. No wonder, therefore, that the birth of a daughter is looked upon as a bolt from the blue.

In the recent past, the Government of India and many states have taken some anti-dowry steps. In some states, dowry has been made a cognizable offence. But legal steps are not enough. We have to create a social climate which does not favour giving and taking of dowry. Dowry seekers must be singled out and condemned. The Government should implement the anti-dowry bill strictly in the right spirit. Nobody, however highly placed, should be allowed to violate the law. Expenses at the marriage celebrations should be cut down. Needy married couples should be given loans and grants to help them set up their homes. They can be asked to refund these loans in easy installments. Voluntary social service organizations and religious heads should encourage dowry less marriages in large numbers. Girls should come forward to raise a banner of revolt against the dowry seekers. They should refuse to marry such boys as expect a dowry.

There is another dimension to the anti-dowry act promulgated by the government. This law is being exploited by some girls or their parents to blackmail the boys or their families after marriage. On threat of charge of prosecution for asking for dowry, husbands are being forced to shell out huge sums of money to get a divorce. This practice must be looked into and steps should be taken to see that no family is unnecessarily harassed or exploited. Divorce should be made easier to obtain. Boys and girls should both be given equal rights in the matter of obtaining a divorce.

In order to root out the evil of dowry from the society, we shall have to build up a strong public opinion against it. Boys and girls in schools and colleges should be made to take a pledge that they would neither seek nor give dowry. They should be educated through films, television plays and talks, slides camps, lectures and radio talks. Such boys as refuse to accept dowry in their marriages should be honoured in public. If we succeed in removing the evil of dowry, it will be really a praiseworthy achievement.

Essay No. 02

### **Dowry System**

The dowry system is an age-old system and a peculiar phenomenon of the Indian society. It is, as today, a curse to the society.

Dowry is the name given to all that, the parents of a girl give to her when she gets married. At the face of it, the system seems quite appropriate, healthy and logical, for in this simple way, the parents of the girl help her in setting a new home. So far, so good and, originally also the purpose of dowry was very justified and understandable.

Let us now analyze how and why this system took birth at all? In the earlier times of Indian society, the daughter had no share in the father's property so, by way of dowry the girl would get at least some portion of her share. Besides this, in those days, the girls were not educated so, this dowry could serve the girl as a backup support system in case of any emergency after her marriage. Seeing this as the ground reality and the reason for the system for having taken birth, no right-thinking people would call the system wrong or unjustified. However, with the passage of time this same fine system has taken the ugly shape of begging for dowry, bargaining for dowry, auctioning the boy to the highest bidder and finally suicides. This is because, taking advantage of the system, the parents of the boys, have Started demanding dowry. This was never done in the original shape of the system. The girl's parents would give whatever they could and, there would be NO – yes, No demands from the boy's side. Besides demanding items of dowry, now parents of the boy's family keep items of the dowry for their own use. This was also not in the original system for, whatever was given was for the girl only- and never for the boy's family. These two additions in the original system have converted the blessing for the girl into a curse for her. The parents who cannot afford to meet the demands of the boy's family are forced either into taking loans that they can never return, or use unfair means of corruption to make money to meet the demanded expenses In turn, this has led to even committing suicides by the girls murders of girls by the in-laws. At times even before the marriage, the girl is led to kill herself to save her parents from the trauma of collecting money for her marriage.

Thus, we see that, a system that was at one time very wise and discreet, has taken an ugly shape just because of the deed of men and women in today's world. This system of dowry has become a slur on the Indian society. Besides being a shame, in today's scenario, the system as it was even in the initial stages of its existence, has become quite irrelevant. This is because, both the reasons for its birth are now not in vogue. These days, girls are usually educated and can earn a livelihood if need arises, and, they now also have a share, an equal share as the brothers have in the father's property. That means the necessity of the girl having an amount to reach out in the days of crisis or emergency does not hold good any more. So, when the very basis of the system does not exist, the system should be

scrapped altogether. This is because; the system instead of bringing solace, only generates greed and even crime in several cases

My view is that, the system as it exists should be put to an end and all those who indulge in it should be punished severely.

Essay No. 03

### **The Evil of Dowry System**

It is one of the tragedies of modern times that despite the spread of education, change in traditional beliefs, customs and manners, the condition women remains largely unchanged. Despite the promulgation of several laws designed to ameliorate the lot of women, evils such as dowry continue causing havoc in the lives of parents and the young girls.

The custom of dowry was started by our forefathers with a practical purpose. The girl was given gifts and jewellery at the time- of her marriage so that she could start life afresh without feeling weighed down by everyday needs of life. Another reason for giving away part of the possessions was that the girls were not entitled to any share in the property by right. Only the boys could be the legal heirs to the wealth and property left by the parents.

But over the years, the custom of dowry has degenerated. Marriage has become like a business transaction, where the terms are dictated by the boy's parents. The financial terms are settled much in advance of the actual marriage ceremony. Even if the girl's parents do everything in accordance with the wishes of the groom and his parents, there is no guarantee of a happy future for their daughter. Every day the newspaper headlines bring this fact home that the evil of dowry is playing havoc with the lives of young girls. The suicide pact of sisters in Kanpur some time back is still fresh in public memory. The girls, unable to agony of their parents, took the fatal step and ended their lives. Such incidents should shake the public out of its apathy, but it is sad that after a little noise by women activists, social workers, etc. the controversy died a natural death.

The custom is widely prevalent in the country among the rich, middle class, as well as the poor. Almost all communities practice this custom. The custom is inseparably connected with the institution of arranged marriages. An overwhelming majority among young girls, are brought up to believe that their final destination is marriage. Lately, many girls are opting for careers. But it is at best a secondary aim, which might be

pursued in conjunction with and not to the exclusion of marriage. The law that Manu, the ancient Hindu law-giver, once laid down; that a woman must remain subject to her father in childhood, to her husband in youth and to her sons when she becomes a widow, holds good as well today & it did thousands of years ago.

This presupposes that in a woman's life marriage is as inevitable as birth and death. First because she needs physical protection at all stages in her life and secondly because she is economically less productive than man. The accepted popular notion that the ultimate destiny of a girl is marriage, is symbolic of her inferior status in a male dominated society. The girl if, first educated and then pushed into a marriage. She is expected to surrender totally and completely forget her identity. In some communities in face: the girls are given a new name to remind them of their new life. Parents out of social pressures, try to marry off their daughters as early as possible. But a young educated girl inwardly rebels at the prospect of entering a home where her sole qualification is the dowry that she brings with her. The girls have not been able to show courage to defy these traditions. The Centre for Social Science Research has found after a study that 91 per cent of dowry victims were educated young girls.

Today, dowry .has cut all barriers of caste, colour and creed. Growing materialism is responsible for the custom of dowry becoming moil widespread. People have become more materialistic. Values have changed Money has become the yardstick to judge a man. Human greed has become limitless. Human life is sacrificed at the altar of greed without any qualms.

In recent years there has been a lot of agitation against this evil social practice. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961. It was again amended in 1986. The Bill to amend Dowry Prohibition Act made dowry offences non-boilable; raised minimum punishment for taking dowry Id. five years; imposed ban on any advertisement in any newspaper etc. offering, share of property in consideration of marriage. However, these legislation efforts of social workers and woman activists seem to have been largely ineffective in exorcising the ghost whose shadow darkens the lives of many, young girls.

It is said that law is a poor instrument of social reform. Efforts to arouse collective conscience of the community against the evil have to be made. There is hope for change only if there is a social awakening and the crusade against dowry crystallizes into a public movement, a social protest. Above all, what is needed is a change in social attitude towards

women. The education should inculcate among them a sense of dignity and self-respect. It should create self-confidence in them and equip them so that they can become economically independent. Marriage should not be their ultimate, inevitable goal. More employment opportunities should be made available to them.

Education is a very powerful instrument of social change. Efforts should be made to educate the young from an early age about such evil practices, their origin and need for change, etc. in the present context.

The media too plays a very crucial role in molding public opinion. In fact advertising industry must realize its social obligation and not encourage advertisements which have an unhealthy effect on the society.

Joint efforts by the government, women's organizations, socially enlightened people are likely to yield results. Of course, the change will come slowly. It will be long before the evil can be completely stamped out. But once a collective effort is made, there is hope of the social evil being wiped out. Indeed, the crusade against dowry needs to be crystallized into a public movement and a massive social protest.

Essay No. 04

### **Dowry System**

Dowry system is one of the greatest evils of our society. The sacred institution of marriage is reduced to a business transaction. In fact, the whole affair has assumed the proportion of a scandal. It is the system which lowers the dignity of women. The parents of the girl are made to pay not only huge amounts of cash but also give luxury items like television sets, refrigerators, scooters, etc., all in the name of dowry. Poor parents borrow huge sums of money on high rates of interest to provide dowry. Many girls have to face a lot of trouble, and some of them even commit suicide.

The system has been in practice in India from times immemorial. As the Hindu law in the past did not give the girl the right to property, the father gave away a part of his property to the daughter in the form of dowry. It was also thought to be a sort of help to the young couple to set up a new home. The custom became an evil as

the greed of bridegroom's parents mounted. Thus from a grace it became a shame of our society.

Today girls are educated and some of them are employed and are economically independent. They are in no way inferior to the boys. The argument that since bride's parents are very particular about boy's income, qualification, etc., does not hold weight. Giving of dowry is no problem for the rich. In order to enhance their false social prestige, they give maximum dowry. The poor try to imitate the rich and in the process ruin themselves.

This inhuman practice must be put to an end. Law cannot produce any desirable results. The Dowry Prohibition Act, first passed in 1961, remained ineffective and the Amendment Bills of 1976 and 1985, which declared taking and giving of dowry as a punishable offence, have brought little respite to the people. The evil of dowry is grinning at us as never before.

This social evil needs a treatment at the social level. The social organizations carry out intensive anti-dowry propaganda. To combat the evil, young boys and girls should come forward and resolve not to give consent to such marriage which involves dowry. Marriages should be performed in the presence of some legal authority. The services of a government employee demanding dowry should be terminated. Above all, if more and more girls are educated and made to enter employment through various competitive examinations, the evil can be eradicated. Inter-caste marriages should be encouraged. The question of marriage should not be tackled by the old who lack constructive vision. The young should have more say in the matter. Thus, the most heinous of the social evils can be fought in our country.

Essay No. 05

### **The Dowry System**

At times, even the noblest of intentions leads to the most vicious results. Wisdom and virtuosity in such cases are drained off with time and use. Like the caste system, the issue of dowry is one such ideal which went awry; which, as a result, has been causing confusion and coercion within the society.

The concept of dowry or 'sthridhan', quite paradoxically, traces its origins to the high status and esteem that women enjoyed in ancient times. It is an indication of

the respect and regard commanded by women in those days, that they had rights over material wealth as men. But since women could not match their privilege of wealth with their ability to protect it, without the help of men, their privilege, in due course, turned to be a cause for their exploitation and misery. Men saw dowry as a ransom or fee they could exact for the protection that women sought' from them. This transformation of a boon into a curse 'is similar to that of caste practice. The caste system,, created as a mechanism to ensure division of labour, eventually became a tool for social exploitation.

As the world has progressed to the levels of materialism we see now, the prevalence of the dowry system and the evil practices associated with it, are more than ever before. Marriages, from being sacred commitments to lead healthy and happy family lives, have now degraded to being opportunities to amass wealth and privilege. The greed for wealth, which plays havoc with the sanctity of human relationships, is among the more important causes of social instability. Hence, even though the victims of crimes linked to dowry are invariably women, the issue of dowry, more than being a women's problem, is now very much a social problem. If in some cases, the viciousness caused by dowry disputes, results in the death of the victims, in others, the victims are forced to lead a life of absolute misery and despair. The atmosphere of malice that prevails in such families will have an undesirable impact on the children growing up in them. Since society is actually an extension of the family, the malady of hatred and desperation will spread to it also.

By considering the dowry issue as a social problem, it may be possible to garner support and commitment to solve it. However, with the materialistic mentality that prevails in society, solving the problem of dowry may not be easy. Nevertheless, an awareness of the evils of the system may be created in society, by suitably educating and enlightening the public. Moreover, encouraging changes in the people's outlook to their personal relationships, and to society, will help restore self-respect in women, as well as create a sense of confidence in them. These changes will greatly benefit society. Such changes have come about in advanced countries, where, even though wealth is sought and coveted, dowry is not common. However, women should not push the ideals of independence and autonomy too far, lest the sanctity and integrity of family lives should collapse. A realization, that rather than money, education, self-respect and character are more valuable to happiness and well-being, may, over a period of time, act as a catalyst in solving the problem.

Essay No. 06

**Evils of Dowry**

Dowry system is one of the major evils afflicting India. It is really a great curse and a blot on our nation and society. It is discriminatory against women in general and unmarried girls in particular. It reflects man's domination and superiority over the women, which is really shocking and condemn able. It is really sad that outdated and orthodox systems like dowry still prevail in Indian society. It reduces the bridegroom and his parents to the status of beggars and exploiters, and the bride's parents to that of helpless victims. It is high time that the evils of dowry are eliminated forever. Let us stop it before it becomes more and more menacing with the ever-increasing demands of greedy and evil-minded parents and relatives of a would-be bridegroom. There is no limit to greed and accumulation of wealth by such dirty means as demanding dowry from the parents and guardians of young, unmarried girls.

The evils of this major social sin are many and too apparent. Because of this evil, hundreds of deaths and incidents of bride-burnings are reported every year in our country. Many more cases of this nature do not come to light at all. When they fail to bring in sufficient dowry, in cash or kind, young brides are harassed, tortured, burned alive and humiliated by their unscrupulous in-laws. Such an evil is to be found nowhere else in the world. It is a matter of great concern and shame to all of us that marriages are being settled on the basis of the value of the goods and money offered by the parents of brides, in the form of jewellery, costly clothes, T.V., car, scooter, furniture, and refrigerator, etc. and hard cash.

This immoral and vile system has generated black money, corruption, greed and many financial malpractices, besides various psychological complexes. The unprincipled and unconscientious parents of a would-be groom try to justify dowry on the false presumptions that the newly married couple be given dowry to set up a new home and to begin a new venture. Such people do, however, condemn dowry in no uncertain terms when they have daughters to marry. This is nothing but a double standard. No doubt, dowry system is very old in India, and is perhaps as old as the institution of marriage itself but, certainly now it has lost all relevance, both social and religious. As such, the sooner it is eradicated the better.

In ancient days a girl did not inherit any property. Therefore, to compensate this loss, she was given several gifts in cash and kind by her parents, relatives, friends and well-wishers in dowry. These gifts ensured a sort of future security to the newly married girl. But now the situation has totally changed. Now women have equal rights. They have equal rights of succession and inherit property from their parents and ancestors. Now giving or receiving of dowry is a cognisable offence under the Dowry Prohibition Act. According to this Act, if any person who gives, takes or abets in the giving or taking of dowry shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to 6 months, or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees, or both. Now, apart from the parents and relatives of the bride, the police and

registered social organisations can also lodge a complaint against the party demanding dowry. Moreover, there is no time limit for lodging such complaints.

The laws enacted in recent years against the dowry system are very powerful and specific and yet they are not enough. They are being violated with impunity. There are thousands of cases of dowry every year but very few offenders are actually punished. In spite of these laws, the cases of dowry deaths are on the increase. Besides these legislative measures, we need other meaningful and effective social measures. All our efforts should be made to generate an effective public opinion against dowry system. More and more people, organisations, social institutions, leaders, religious heads and elders in the communities should be involved in the movement against this evil. The movement should be taken to villages and far flung areas of the country. The social and women's organisations should organized agitations against the parties indulging in demanding dowry. Social boycott and demonstrations against the offending parents and-relatives of the boy can prove a powerful weapon in checking this evil. Moreover, the laws against dowry must be made more stringent so that the offenders may not get off scot-free.

To curb this evil, registration of marriage should be made compulsory, where both the parties are required to declare that they have neither taken nor given any dowry. Group and community marriages can also help in removing this evil to a great extent. Such marriage ceremonies can be solemnised in a community function in the presence of elders. In such marriages, there is no room for demand of a dowry.

Young women themselves should come forward and take the lead in this movement. They should never feel weak, helpless and feeble. They should recognise their strength, rights and potential. The weak is always exploited by the strong. They should refuse to marry when dowry is demanded. They should revolt and expose such anti-social elements. They should learn to stand on their own feet and try to improve their economic status in the society. It is heartening to know that there is a lot of awakening among the women folk of the country in the matter, but this is just the beginning. They should fight against all sorts of discrimination and unjust male domination. The young boys should also be made aware of the evils of dowry. They should reject their parents' plea of seeking dowry. What is needed is that the menace is fought both on the levels of law, and society.

Essay No. 07

### **The Dowry System**

Look at the rich people! They have been able to amass immense wealth. Some of them have earned through unfair means. They give that ill-gotten money to their daughters by way of dowry. Even in the modern times, lakhs of rupees are given by way of dowry by them to their daughters. The bridegroom sometimes charges all the expenses of education with a scooter, a car and many other luxuries. Thus a custom has been going on to give something to the daughters who establish their own homes in the new environments.

Women were honoured in our country since olden times. They were good fighters and administrators. Women saints were in India and they preached all that they knew. We find their references in the ancient scriptures. No Yajna could be complete without the presence of women. In Lord Rama's times, the golden image of Sita was prepared for taking part in the Yajna.

Thus we notice that in our country, women have been honoured since history began its march on this sacred soil.

But in the medieval times, the conditions became worse and the dowry system, child marriage, parda system etc., made the position of the women worse than it had been in early times of history.

But modern India has been trying again to raise her status in the society. India has got millions of poor people. India is a rural country and more than 80 per cent people belong to the rural areas. Therefore the poor people cannot follow this custom in the strictest sense. The demand of dowry is an extra burden on the parents of girls. The parents have to arrange for education and marriages of their children and therefore they have to arrange for more money for that purpose with a great difficulty.

The poor men cannot afford much money. They cannot even pass their time comfortably and have two course meals a day. They have to pass their time somehow. They have to follow the rich man's customs. They have no option but to follow those traditions. They get loan and thus arrange their daughter's marriage. They remain under the burden of debt all through their lives. In the past this resulted in the system of bonded labour, which has been legally abolished in the country recently.

Swami Daya Nand Saraswati, Raja Rammohan Roy and many other great reformers have been preaching against the curse of Dowry system. To oppose this The Arya Samaj arranges marriages without dowry. The Government too is alive to this problem. Under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Government had tried to enact certain laws against the dowry system.

If India wishes to raise the status of women, she shall have to do away with this cursed custom. This custom has already caused misery to the people of the country. The parents should be free to give what they want to give to their daughters, but there should be no compulsion. Moreover, the amount to be spent on marriages should be limited by law. The fact is that mere framing of laws cannot solve the problem permanently. The movement of the people to solve the problem alone can end this system. Undoubtedly, the dowry system is a great hindrance in the development of rural India.

Now the women have got equal rights with men. They get employment as the men-folk do. Therefore, the need of the hour is that the dowry system should be banned altogether. But the rich parents may be allowed to give something to their daughters if they like. Anyhow a limit to the marriage expenditure is necessary.

If the people agree to abolish the dowry system and the bridegrooms do not insist upon dowries, India will become more prosperous and the status of women will rise higher and higher. With the increase in demand for dowry, the bridegroom becomes a precious commodity. It is a blot on the fair name of our sacred land.

Therefore, this system must be abolished root and branch and it is the crying need of the hour to do so. The earlier the better.

Essay No. 08

### **Dowry System**

The dowry means the goods and money paid by the bride's parents to the groom's family. In India, it is as old as the institution of marriage. In olden days, it was a token of affection and respect. Usually the goods given were the things of domestic utility and were helpful for a young couple to start the family life. Gradually the real spirit of the system was lost. It became a compulsion for the bride's parents. It is openly demanded and becomes a pre-condition for the marriage. It has now become an evil in the society.

The craze for dowry has been responsible for a number of murders and suicides. Several brides are burnt brutally. This is the brutal crime against humanity. This demands social awakening of the society. The dowry must not be a compulsion on the part of the parents.

The former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi cautioned the society, "We shall have to wipe out the remains of this custom. We shall have to create a mass awakening against the evil effects of this custom. The Government will introduce laws but social awakening is necessary for its success."

There is no doubt about the fact that unless legal steps are taken for banning dowry, we shall not be able to overcome this problem. It is true that if the law is not supported by a mass movement, the real objective cannot be achieved. It can be abolished when the masses are mentally prepared to discard dowry. If the youths and their parents are not firm, we cannot help them or protect them by enactment of a law.

There are other aspect of the problem. The economic status of women in our society is not high. Recently the demand and offering of dowry have been banned legally. Certain amendments have also been made which give more powers to the police for the investigation of a bride burning case on account of dowry.

The tendency to look upon girls as property and sex objects cannot be changed simply by educating the masses. In some advanced countries, women are paid less than men for the same job, In India, women are becoming aware of their equal rights. They receive equally good salary and achieve high position in administration, management and politics. The decade 1991-2000 was celebrated by the SAARC nations as the decade of the girl child. The object was to draw the attention of the world to the importance of the girl child. The dowry system requires complete brainwash.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the evil of dowry can be eliminated through the combined efforts of the state, society and the law enforcing agencies.