



The Menace Of Dowry And Media Awareness: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving away of the bride (called Kanyadaan) in Indian marriage. It is a social stigma in our society. Though it is an offence for both the giver and receiver, yet it is prevalent enormously in our society. This system puts financial burden on the bride's family. Sometime this practice leads to crimes against woman. A number of initiative, implementation of law and social awareness drive have been implemented over the years to overcome this social menace. But still our Indian society have not been able to come out of it successfully. Media have always played an important role in the betterment of the society, overcoming superstition and social stigma.

This paper tries to study and conclude the role played by the media to bring our society out of this social evil. How much positive consciousness it have been able to imbibe in the minds of common people. Whether it could portray the system of dowry as social stigma in the minds of common people and encourage



them enough to say no to it. The paper also studies the coverage of dowry related news in media to understand its style of coverage and presentation. Whether efforts have been made to not only cover the news but also to project it as social stigma which can bring a change in common mindset.

KEYWORDS: Dowry, Society, Law, Media, Coverage, Social consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Human life is impossible to imagine without a society. No individual can exist in an island, alone in complete and permanent isolation from other individuals. Society is the place, where individuals interact with each other. Society moulds individuals' beliefs, moral values, personality, ideals etc. An individual acquires different social qualities by social interaction from birth to death. Different societies have different cultures, beliefs, traditions and values. These are preserved and transmitted to those in the next generation.

Every society faces different social problems. Those social problems prevent human development and national development. A country like India is beset with many social problems, like dowry, gender inequality, child marriage or abuse, caste system etc. These social problems are based on traditional beliefs of Indian society and customs. This is compounded by the lack of proper education. Illiterate and semiliterate people tend to blindly follow social traditions and succumb to the problematic issues that beset our society. Contemporary social issues like dowry, gender difference, child marriage, corruption are some of the main obstacles to development and progress of India.



This can only be countered through appropriate education where mass media plays an important role.

In the above backdrop, the moot question is whether the Indian mass media is able to impart the required messages among the young people or young generation in India, so that they can be free of debilitating customs and lead better lives.

THE DOWRY SYSTEM IN INDIA

Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving away of the bride (called Kanyadaan) in Indian marriage Dowry is an offence for both the giver and receiver. This system puts financial burden on the bride's family. The lack of dowry often results in Indian Brides tolerating mental and physical harassment and various kinds of pressure tactics being adopted in the in-laws house. Sometime this practice leads to crimes against woman.

Various reasons have been suggested for the prevalence of the dowry system in India. One of the major reasons for this practice is social tradition and customs. Indian society believes dowry is important to a daughter's marriage. But research studies show that a high percentage of youths responded that dowry is not important to marriage, but at the same time their parents' expect dowry at the time of marriage (Krishnaswamy, Saroja. 1995). The National Crime



Records Bureau Statistic (2012) shows that nearly 20,000,000 people including 47,951 women (from grooms' families) were arrested in regard to dowry related offences in 2012. Other studies show that dowry result in domestic violence and wife beating. (Karlekar 2005). The Government has taken several measures for stopping dowry. However in Indian society, till date, this social crime keeps creeping on in spite of strict anti-dowry laws.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF DOWRY SYSTEM

Several Laws have been enacted in India for prevention of dowry. Which are given below:

The Indian courts have banned the practice of Dowry since 1961. Pursuant to Dowry Prohibition Act, 'dowry' means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly-

(a) By one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or

(b) By the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person; at or before or any time after the marriage in connection with the marriage of said parties but does not include



dower in the case of persons to whom the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat applies.)

In the year 1961, the **Dowry Prohibition Act** was enacted to eradicate the practice of dowry. It consists of 10 sections. The penalty for giving and taking dowry is incorporated in Section 3 of the Act. The **Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act of 1986** prescribes a minimum punishment of two years imprisonment and fine to anyone demanding dowry. Because of this Dowry Prohibition Act, a person who gives or takes, or helps in the giving or taking of dowry can be sentenced to jail for 5 years and fined Rs.15000/- or the amount of the value of dowry, whichever is more.

The Act prohibits to give or to agree to give, directly or indirectly, any property or valuable security, in connection with a marriage. The giving of or agreeing to the giving of any amount either in cash or kind, jewelry, articles, properties, etc. in respect of a marriage is absolutely prohibited by the Dowry prohibition Act. The making of a demand for dowry is also prohibited and is punishable with imprisonment of 5 years and a fine of Rs.10000/-

In order to provide more teeth to dowry prevention laws, the Government has decided to make it mandatory for couples to make list of gifts exchanged during the ceremonies of marriage. The **Dowry Prohibition (Maintenance of List of present to the Bride and Bridegroom) Rules** were introduced in 1985 in pursuance of the same purpose. It clearly stated that the list of gifts, in form of a sworn affidavit, has to be notarised, signed by a protection officer or a dowry prohibition officer and kept by both the parties. Failing this can invite heavy penalty including a three-year term in jail for not only bride and groom but also their parents. However, this law is usually ignored by the majority of people.



To stop the offences of cruelty by husband or his relatives on wife, Section 498-A has been added in the **Indian Penal Code**, and Section 198-A has been added in the **Criminal Procedure Code** since the year 1983. Sec. 113-A Indian Evidence Act was introduced in the year 1983 whereby, in the case of suicide by a married woman, within 7 years from the date of her marriage, the Court may presume that such suicide has been abetted and encouraged by her husband or his relatives.

Sec.304-B **Indian Penal Code** deals with Dowry Death. It states that where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise than under normal circumstances within seven years of her marriage 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 for, 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.

Clause(2) of Sec.304-B I.P. Code states that, whoever commits dowry death shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than seven years but which may extend to imprisonment for life.

Recently for the Protection of women from Domestic Violence an Act is enacted in the year 2005 which is called as the **Domestic Violence Act**. The main objective of the Act is to eradicate the domestic violence against women and to provide protection to women from the domestic violence. Some measures were taken by the international community for eradication of domestic violence against women, and 25th November was declared as the International day to prevent violence against women.

A STUDY

Methodology: In view of the above discussion a case study was undertaken by the author to find out how far our media system influences perceptions of dowry.

The sample consisted of in Kolkata and its suburbs and sample was purposively selected. It was as follows:

Category	Men	Women	Total
Educated	07	13	20
Not Educated	04	07	11

- The 'educated' group consisted of students enrolled in the first year of undergraduate college in the age group 17-25 years.
- The 'not educated group' consisted of people employed in manual labourer like factory workers, housewives, char ladies etc. (age group 17-30 years), who had not studied beyond elementary school.

Tools:

1) Interview Schedule: An interview schedule consisting of open ended leading questions was constructed, and validated by three experts. The lead questions were translated from Bengali to English, and are shown below:

- Do you support the system of dowry in our country?

- Do you think the media can play a changing role against the dowry custom in our country?
- Do you think the media is fulfilling its social responsibility role in fighting against the dowry system in our country?
- Do you think it is enough to bring the change?

Participants in the case studies were interviewed individually with the help of the interview schedule, and the responses were noted in detail responses from the interviews were subjected to content analysis.

2) Media Analysis: A media analysis was conducted consisting of broad areas of observation of the media to study its role to the drive of educating masses against dowry system. To find answers to the form of coverage of dowry related news in media, the researcher analysed two national daily newspaper and television channel for a period of three months (January 2018-March 2018). The two newspapers being The Times of India and The Statesman and the two news channel being Times Now and Headlines Today (total 28 news items collected for analysis)

Result: The findings showed that the students were ambivalent about the issue of dowry where media have indeed played an important role. They mouthed the expected responses about the evils of dowry, further intrusive queries however revealed that their may not have a deep impact on their psyche regarding this issue. Some students had not given this issue any thought at all. Others were innately dependent on their parental supervision regardless of their adulthood.

The workers were found to be much attached to social conventions and traditions, irrespective of their legality or rectitude. They were either ignorant of the laws quoted above or did not give much credence to them. Their main



justification for the giving of dowry in their daughter's marriages was to ensure respect and stability for the daughters in their marital homes. Equalisation, to them, occurred through the taking of dowry in the sons' marriage. They thought social messages about dowry given in the mass media were more relevant for higher income group and mass media was oblivion of their situation that demanded them to encourage dowry.

Thus it may be seen that dowry remains a prevalent practice in spite media's effort to negatively portray it. This brings us to question the impact of media as a reforming agency. Consequently, may it be necessary to bring in changes in the message whereby it can bring in awareness among people about societal practices that go by the name of tradition.

Reporting and discussion of dowry related harassment, death and other issues is expected to be an important news for newspapers and other television. It is not only a hard news item but also has human emotions involved making it human interest stories. These news are in the form of dowry related harassments, dowry related deaths or suicides and follow ups.

The researcher here tries to study the report and its form of presentation in media. It also tries to find out whether the news were reported as crime stories or the reporting had social responsibility in it. Trying to bring in changes in the mindset of the readers and in the process the society as a whole.

From the 28 news items that was analyzed, it was found out that a large part of the news items that appeared in this sample were crime reports (76%) were dowry-related cases treated as crime reporting. In these reports the journalists approached in informing how the crime was committed. Focus were put more



on the crime scene, victim and nature of the crime. Only few news (24%) dealt with in-depth analysis of the incident.

The study can well indicate that an important social issue like dowry is not always taken seriously by the media, but is addressed for market interests rather than for the purpose of influencing the general public. Social responsibility of news media are often given a back seat. News are unnecessarily sensationalised to make it attractive. Media rarely take up the responsibility to educate the mass of the ill effects of dowry system in our society or take up initiative to encourage them to overcome it.

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