

# Perception and effects of dowry on women rights in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

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**Abstract-** The practice of paying dowry is widespread throughout Jammu & Kashmir, especially in the district of Srinagar. Daughters became a curse and a liability for their parents, which resulted in severe repercussions. In India, the practice is banned or limited by the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, which was extended to the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. Even though the law protects it, the tradition has grown. Dowry appears to be increasing as a result of changes in lifestyle and social trends. To find out what men and women think about dowry, how it affects people, why it's important, and how it affects women's rights and, in the long run, their freedom. A qualitative study was carried out. Men and women, including social activists, economists, and married couples, were asked about wedding costs, demands, social pressure, men's support, and how they felt about dowry, especially in terms of women's rights in unstructured interviews. The study found that a large dowry, especially in the form of furniture, electronics, kitchenware, a car, a fully furnished house, and cash, was strongly linked to women's growth and rights. The widespread belief among individuals is that the practice of paying a dowry is no longer considered to be a custom or tradition. It's just a trend, but many are following it as a sign of respect for women and mothers in particular.

## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of paying a dowry (dahej) is very old in India. The dowry system is a social evil widespread throughout India and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the world. Many old traditions have died out in India, but dowry has survived and thrived. No one has a unified or consistent opinion about the dowry system's continued prevalence in today's society. Many educated people in society may oppose the practice in principle, but they may still support it because they believe it serves a larger social or cultural purpose. The practice of dowry before marriage has grown into a dangerous epidemic in modern times. The unequal

treatment of the sexes begins from birth when a male child is regarded as more valuable and educated accordingly according to the societal image of "males as assets." In contrast, a girl child is viewed as a liability due to dowry. Gender inequality begins at birth. This has the potential to produce a significant power imbalance between the sexes, which will mostly have a negative impact on women.

In present-day India, women who have received an education now play crucial roles in their homes, both economically and socially. These responsibilities help families strive for excellence and optimism, which in turn helps eliminate poverty and other domestic concerns. Issues such as violence against women, divorces, separations, suicides, and murders due to dowry point to multiple causes, such as poverty, a lower level of education among males, ways of thinking, ignorance of the law, the implementation of protection laws, moral values, traditions, etc., among other possible causes. For this reason, a study was carried out with the objectives of investigating how dowries are perceived in society, how they impact the rights of women, and how they shape the social and professional lives of women.

## DOWRY IN KASHMIR

In Kashmir, a primarily Muslim society, dowry is universally regarded as a societal ill. Nonetheless, it has been incorporated into the framework of marriage. Even before the wedding vows are exchanged, the dowry is determined within the two families, which helps to ensure the relationship's permanence. It can include anything from cash to jewellery, electronic devices, clothing, household appliances, automobiles etc.

Dowry in Kashmir is not limited to a particular form or dimension; rather, it can take the form of anything

with a monetary value. It is not to say that it is not rejected in certain segments of society; however, in general, it has permeated society gradually. It is commonly done under the guise of giving gifts. Even weddings have become an ordeal in Kashmir in recent years. Simply put, it has been reduced to a parade of ostentatious displays of wealth and lavishness of desire. In Kashmir, the despicable trend of serving more than twenty different dishes at a single meal, the extravagant wedding ceremonies, the exchange of freebies, and the unusual tapestries all fuel the fire. It strengthened the dowry custom and made women more susceptible to being mistreated by their in-laws, a common occurrence in this culture.

The dowry system in Kashmir is unbelievably perverse. It's a symbol of the oppression of single women, whose value is placed on the monetary value of their assets. It's a shocking example of greed and utter stupidity, and the parents, who are from the lower working class, suffer the most for it. It's because of this that some people get angry and depressed when they hear that a new baby is a girl. Restricting this custom, a major source of anxiety for parents of young girls, is an Islamic demonstration in favour of a happier life.

#### METHODS AND MATERIAL

With the help of the self-made interview guide, qualitative data was gathered. Respondents came from joint families belonging to the lower, middle and upper classes. The majority of the respondents were less educated and illiterate, and a few were highly educated. Some were married, some were unmarried, and some were planning to marry soon; they lived in Harwan Srinagar's rural areas (Dara, Theed, Faqeer Gojri) and the urban areas of Nishat and Shalimar. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 45. The strategy of purposive sampling was used to conduct 31 interviews with both males and females. The interviews were transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis to identify emerging and significant topics.

In addition to basic demographic information such as age, level of education, number of years spent married, family status, family structure, and occupation, data were collected to investigate people's perceptions of dowry, the factors that contribute to it, and the ways in which it impacts women's rights. The perceptions of

both males and females were recorded in order to investigate gender disparities and the impact these variations have on the rights and autonomy of women. The responses of married respondents were recorded regarding their experiences with the treatment of in-laws and how other women in authority treated them in their new homes.

The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 45 years old. Seven were between the ages of (18-25), eight were between the ages of (26-33), seven were between the ages of (34-40) and nine were between the ages of (40-45). Four respondents were college graduates, three sociologists, one was an advocate; one female lecturer was from Women's College Srinagar; two were female members of the medical field; and the remaining were uneducated, including four domestic workers who supported their families.

#### DOWRY PERCEPTION

The majority of the respondents held the opinions that "dowry is offering riches, luxuries, furniture, vehicles, assets, business or money to the groom's family" and that "dowry is a list of demands which must be completed before the wedding or on the day of the wedding." Some people have suggested that "dowry" is a present that brides' parents give to their daughters for the homes they start building together. The practice of paying dowry has been described by one of the participants as "an illness with no treatment; this illness can be treated a little but cannot be eliminated from society." Many regarded it as a cultural practice. They did not consider it a fundamental factor contributing to women's rights or other societal issues. They stated that "dowry is not something that should be demanded but rather something that should be chosen."

#### MALE AND FEMALE PERSPECTIVES

The opinions of the men who participated in the survey indicated that "dowry should not be demanded but should be an option for the bride's family if they can afford it." In a nutshell, they defend it using a variety of grounds, such as the fact that it is a tradition and "it's a general trend that never stops."

Female respondents stated that "dowry shouldn't be a requirement or something that has to be given at every wedding." Some female participants noted that

"modernization has the greatest impact on dowry in terms of price and technology." According to them, the cost of a wedding went from a single to double in terms of its demands. A few male respondents said, "it is a hardship on the bride's parents. "We will not demand dowry; it will be up to the bride's parents."

A few participants expressed a desire to "not take any dowry, but due to society, we may have to offer dowry on our sisters' or daughters' time." Only three people, two women and one man, out of the total participants, stated that "we will not take or offer dowry at any cost."

A small number of people believed that "unnecessary trends, extravagance, and demands" were having a greater impact on the economy than they had in the tradition and that such things "should not be performed in Islamic culture." They went on to say that "dowry is becoming an integral aspect of our weddings—a ritual in which both families show off their gifts to the bride, particularly the bride side has to be the winner to bring respect to her bride." dowry is a matter of respect in their subculture of Nishat and Shalimar," stated the Advocate, who is from Nishat.

Some of the respondents in the survey mentioned that pushing out of the house is usual if the in-laws are not content with a dowry. Therefore, it is up to the bride's family to make as many preparations as possible for the dowry. The larger the dowry, the more desirable the bride will be. "Dowry is a disease and it is a valuation of girls based on materialistic items," said five of the respondents who were women. They believed that the practice of valuing women with worldly possessions was offensive. A young woman who is currently employed provided the following response: "If we look at diseases like cancer, Aids, and many more like that, dowry is much more harmful than any of them." If someone has diabetes, for example, and this condition causes injury to the patient's body internally, then the person is said to have diabetes.

While interviewing, a doctor stated, "As far as I am concerned, I am opposed to the dowry system. Such antiquated traditions and practices are no longer relevant, and it is pointless or irrational to support or promote such non-productive trends. In the past, these habits were introduced by our elderly or our parents, who were less educated and unaware of their effects; however, people are today changing their thoughts and revolting against these disgusting practices. The attitudes of respondents regarding dowry were

extremely diverse and varied based on their experiences.

#### THE EFFECTS OF DOWRY

##### Financial

A dowry is a burden on one's finances. According to one of the participants, in order to make the necessary financial arrangements for loans and services, "they contacted various banks, companies, and shops supplying loans and payments for dowry." Various insurance companies in India have been marketing their products with the tagline "Personal Loan for Wedding." Because of the strain on their finances, parents and guardians often resort to taking out loans or selling their possessions. One mother went on to say, "We have to do something that is not desirable in any way or get a loan."

The participant comes from an affluent household; she shared her personal experience that her in-laws are pressuring her to buy a new model of an expensive car. Failing to do so, her in-laws have told her that she give up her job and become a housewife, which has a negative impact on her professional career. As a direct result of modernity, new styles and fashions are continuously making their way into people's everyday lives in the form of novel concepts such as home appliances, luxuries, jewellery, and automobiles. This imposes an additional burden that is not essential. A little less than half of the people who participated in the study agreed with the statement that "dowry is a key obstacle in weddings that causes a delay in marriages, particularly for a female." When women marry later, the groom's family typically requests larger dowries. It takes a very long time to accumulate a big dowry.

##### Social

The bride and her family are expected to shoulder the societal burden of the dowry. But besides the fact that many individuals do not demand dowry, but society makes them do it, one respondent from a rural background stated that "peer pressure is among the significant causes of high demands from groom's family." Most parents on the bride's side, on the other hand, could not afford dowry but still paid it out of social pressure.

Others thought that dowry was an important part of a person's character after marriage because it was the main reason why women in rural areas were beaten

and blamed for having no character. Most important relationships for women begin when they get married, when two families with different ideas come together and establish a new relationship. Because this is the time when women begin a new life with new relationships, dowry is a good way to demonstrate how important she is to her in-laws. A social activist said that it is not strange for a patriarchal society to overvalue the groom and undervalue the bride. This is done in the name of dowry.

Two people said, "After a woman gets married, her survival is directly related to her dowry." Three people said that the lofty hopes of society regarding dowry are leading to more "late marriages, divorces, and unhappy marriages." At the weddings, the people who had been through hard times told real-life incidents about how dowry affects women. In our society, the dowry is an important part of getting married.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL

Dowry demands hurt not only the women, but also the mental health of their parents or guardians who can't pay the dowry. It makes them feel stressed, sad, anxious, and under constant threat. A respondent from the medical profession said, "It's a reason for illness, depressed mood, and anxiety in young girls, which makes them stay at home for life, hurts their spirits, kills their emotions, and makes it hard or impossible for them to start a married life."

Some participants from low-income families who were getting married said, "As daughters, we see how hard it is for our parents when dowry demands come up." We are always sad and think of ourselves as a curse on our families. Also, they said, "We've seen our parents save money and buy things for our wedding, and they've cut back on their own spending to save for ours."

#### WHY THE DOWRY IS SO IMPORTANT FOR MARRIAGE

One respondent said, "It helps me to understand how important women are in our society." Some participants said, "It's a custom." "We don't want to jeopardize our daughters or sisters, so dowry is a necessary part of our wedding." One person explained, "I'm not ready to take dowry for myself, but I don't want to put my sister and daughter in danger, so I have

to do something,". Most women who took part said their in-laws would make their lives miserable and mock them if they did not receive enough money as dowry. One participant said, "Educated middle-class girls have trouble getting married as they are well aware that dowry is a curse. Parents are forced to give their daughters dowries so that they can be happy in their marriages and not feel like they're not good enough.

A few women and men participants said, "Some brides are pressured by their husbands or in-laws by asking for loans, a house, a business share, a car, or money even after they get the dowry." Parents are also threatened by their in-laws with violence, anger, and threats. One participant said, "We've seen people blame their wives or daughters-in-law's bad behavior to get rid of them or to make up for not giving them enough dowries."

#### COMPETITION BETWEEN BRIDES FOR GREATER RESPECT

Two men and one woman stated, "A dowry can never guarantee a bride's happiness since there is always competition among brides within a family." For instance, if there are three brides in one home and those who bring more dowry or stuff are favoured. This competition generates unending expectations, which result in continuous uneasiness and lifelong suffering.

#### PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Nearly all participants cite dowry as a protection against domestic violence, including physical and verbal abuse. One participant stated, "In his lifetime, he has witnessed numerous instances of women being abused or mistreated by their in-laws due to an insufficient or inadequate dowry." The "dowry" was cited by three respondents as the root cause of violence against women. They were from lower-middle-class households that received dowries at the time of marriage; yet, even after the wedding, in-laws ridiculed the daughter-in-law for receiving a smaller dowry. In another instance, the violence began because the family of the bride did not provide the dowry requested by her in-laws.

Several incidents were mentioned in which "brides were beaten by their husbands or in-laws because of

dowry."Violence against brides includes beatings, and physical torture, committed by husbands, in-laws, or relatives.

#### DOWRY AS A PREVENTIVE MEASURE AGAINST DIVORCE

Participants said that large dowries prevent marriage dissolution. They attributed divorces to small dowries, claiming that "in small dowries, in-laws were sent back to their parent's home." Relationships between the couple and their in-laws are negatively impacted by daily quarrels or demands. "Disputable lives always end in separation or divorce."

#### GENDER DISCRIMINATION

A small number of interviewees mentioned that gender discrimination began when they came to this world. "Sons are always given priority in terms of schooling, nutrition, freedom, extracurricular activities, and sports; nonetheless, they often report feeling discriminated against in their social lives. When compared to sons, daughters are given fewer possibilities in life and are regarded as guests from the moment they are born because their parents have already begun saving for their dowry.

#### DISCUSSION

The debate over whether or not dowering constitutes a social evil in our society continues. The dowry was seen by the parents as a symbol or insurance policy for a successful marriage they made preparations, with the best of intentions, to provide their girls with a better and more secure future. Unfortunately, contrary to this, the vast majority of respondents claimed that dowry never works as a shield. It has become a curse, a source of greed, or a way to gain status. The frightening situations are becoming increasingly apparent, as seen by the rising numbers of cases involving brides' deaths, burnings, and suicides. It is time to take actionable steps to tackle the issues.

Women's status in society can be improved by educating and empowering them. By continually working to improve the educational level of young people, one can eventually bring about a shift in how people think. Awareness of dowry issues and giving women more power will speed up the process of

change and lessen the bad effects of these kinds of traditions. When young boys and girls speak out against dowry, it gives society a healthy social life. The increased awareness of the sensitivity of dowry concerns and the crimes that fall under its umbrella will aid in the identification of a viable solution, which is how to live a dignified life free from undesirable social constraints. The participation of men is essential to the advancement of women's rights and to the promotion of a lifestyle in which women are empowered to take charge of their own lives, rather than one in which they are forced to depend helplessly on others.

#### CONCLUSION

The study shows the facts, perceptions, and opinions of the general public, which knew and accepted that the dowry system was bad. Dowry is not a good way to make progress and move forward. If someone wanted to move up the social ladder, they now had to do other things that are morally and ethically acceptable in society. Education of any kind (formal, religious, technical, etc.) opens doors and shows the right way to earn respect. To live a happy, successful life, you must think and make decisions positively. The best way to stop the dowry evil in its tracks is to keep things simple. As people who participated in the study said, it solves all problems very easily. A dowry does not guarantee a happy life. As people learn more and become more aware, the social fabric of every society is changing. There are now legal protections that were not there before. The study found that getting a big dowry, especially in the form of furniture, electronics, kitchenware, a car, a fully furnished house, and cash, has a big effect on a woman's life as a wife, her growth, and her rights. The widespread belief among individuals in Kashmir is that the practice of paying a dowry is no longer considered to be a custom or tradition. The public and private masses need to work together to help everyone realize how serious the problems are and accept them. Education and engaging in the appropriate behaviors are essential. The facts, facts on the ground, situations, causes, and how they affect marriages and relationships in the middle class and poor class change how people think and bring about changes in society. Although altering mindsets is weak, it is expanding and becoming more widespread, particularly in literate classes. It is only the fashion to flaunt one's wealth.

Those who adhere to it as a sign of respect for their mothers, fathers, and families, as well as women, have a responsibility to comprehend the gravity of the situation. To rid yourself of this menace, you will need to make efforts that are constant and consistent.

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