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Dowry System

a social evil.....

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DOWRY SYSTEM

Dowry system is one of the major problems afflicting¹ Pakistan. It is really a great evil and a blot² on our nation and society. It is discriminating³ against women in general and unmarried girls in particular. It surely reflects man's domination⁴ and superiority over women. It is really a shocking and condemnable⁵ phenomenon⁶. It is a matter of great concern that outdated and evil system of dowry still prevails in our society. It reduces the bridegroom and his parents to the status of beggars and exploiters⁷, and the bride's parents to that of helpless victims⁸.

It is high time that the evils of dowry should be recognised⁹ and eliminated¹⁰ forever. Let us stop it before it becomes more and more painful social malady with the ever increasing demands of greedy and evil-minded parents. Here is no limit to greed and accumulation¹¹ of wealth by such dirty means as demanding dowry from the parents of young and unmarried girls.

Which brings me to the issue of the dowry system....yes, folks it still exists. Now before you make that grimace of distaste, let me tell you a little about it. The dowry system has been in place since before the written record and it has been used by parents in every country imaginable, including America in older times. The point of the dowry system was to provide for the bride should something unfortunate occur with her husband such as death or divorce. As you can probably imagine, daughters can be extremely expensive offspring. Parents had/have to make a mad scramble to get enough wealth and material goods together to see their daughter well taken care of by the time she is of marriageable age. In Northern India, today this age can vary from 18-25 though exceptions do apply depending on socio-economic factors.

As you can see, the dowry system was something originally honorable in intention and provided for the independent wealth of the bride in a time when she was unlikely to work outside of the home. Like many customs and traditions, time can alter their original meaning and purpose. While the dowry system is still in place, it has become more of a "bride-price" system. The parents of a baby girl must come up with a respectable dowry (the term respectable is arbitrary, respectable dowry can be anything from \$50 worth of material goods to \$50,000 or more worth of material goods depending on the family's standing in society). If a good dowry is not made, the girl is unlikely to have a "good" match. This again, is mostly arbitrary. A good match for a very poor family might be marriage of their daughter into a slightly better financed family or a good match for a middle income family might be finding a husband that is a doctor or engineer. As you have probably guessed, there are very few brides who actually retain their dowry after marriage. In the most honorable of families the bride is allowed to keep certain items for her own use such as the bed and cooking pots she is suppose to bring with her and some of the jewelry. She is also allowed control over how the rest of the dowry is kept, spent etc. This situation is a very modern one and in place in very educated households.

The most common form of use of the dowry is not meant to be dishonorable and is far more practical for many families. More often than not, the bride's dowry gets absorbed into the household for the greater good of the entire family. Perhaps a bride's dowry may help provide food for the entire family over a lifetime, or allow the purchase of a refrigerator. For many families, they do not see anything wrong in this sort of dowry absorption simply because it aids the bride as well. Furthermore, if the groom's family is better due to the dowry, the bride will enjoy a better life than perhaps her own mother did.

Of course, there is always that dark side. While these situations are becoming rarer, they still occur often enough to warrant some discussion on them. There are those families who will use the bride's dowry as their own. Often in these situations, the bride's dowry will be recycled for the groom's sisters' dowry. Sometimes, the groom's family uses the bride's dowry entirely for their own means and the bride does not benefit from it all. There have been horrible, true stories of the groom's family agreeing to one dowry and after the bride is married (and I might add, no longer a virgin) demanding more from the bride's parents. Threats of divorce are often used to entice the bride's parents to give more dowry. In a country where shame is brought down on the divorcee, parents of the bride will do whatever they can to save their daughters this shame. Occasionally, the threat of physical violence is used. There really is no way these type situations can end happily. Even if the bride's parents are able to scrape together more dowry, they will not

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- The dowry system has put the bride in a very sensitive situation because she is viewed as an asset that will help the groom's family amass more wealth and also this means she is a liability for her own family.
- The whole system of dowry basically is suppressing women and reducing them to nothing.
- This system then allows for a lot of domestic violence and this goes unreported throughout the nation.



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