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DOWRY IN INDIA BEYOND THE BNS, LEGAL PROHIBITIONS, SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE, AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN SUSTAINING A HISTORICAL EVIL

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I. ABSTRACT

Despite all the legal reforms, criminalization, and reforms in social and economic conditions, dowry remains a deeply rooted and complex social issue in India. While the BNS has restructured criminal laws, the problem extends far beyond the legal framework. This paper investigates the history of dowry, the stress between social acceptance and legal prohibitions, and how dowry practices happen despite attempts to eliminate them. It discusses how patriarchal norms, weak enforcement, and underreporting of incidents limit the effectiveness of the Dowry Prohibition Act, BNS, and court decisions in preventing dowry-related violence. The paper talks about how traditional and digital media can change how people think, keep cultural norms, and sometimes make dowries look good through films, TV shows, music, and social media. While investigative journalism and campaigns to raise awareness about dowry crimes bring attention to these crimes, mainstream entertainment often promotes subtle acceptance of dowry. The study contends that the persistent issue of dowries pertains more to cultural and communicative factors than merely legal considerations. To combat real change, a multifaceted strategy is required that combines legislation, social reform, media accountability, and gender-sensitive education.

II. KEYWORDS

Dowry, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Dowry Prohibition Act, Gender Violence, Social Reforms, Media Influence.

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III. INTRODUCTION

Dowry in India remains a significant social and legal issue, creating a striking contradiction as it is illegal yet recognized as a “socially accepted and rational speculation” in the current marriage market. Legally, dowry refers to any property or valuable security offered by one party to a marriage to the other party (or by the parents of either party) “in connection with the marriage,” as defined by the Dowry Prohibition Act (DPA), 1961. This law acknowledges that demands can arise even after the marriage ceremony. Despite serious punishments imposed by these laws, they have not stopped systemic violence such as intimidation and death. This shows disconnection between the intention of the legislation and the truth of society.

Dowries are still expected and required as a condition for marriage proposals in some regions, particularly in parts of Asia, Northern Africa, and the Balkans. In certain Asian countries, dowry sometimes led to violence against women, including murder, acid attacks. The dowry system is most prevalent in cultures that emphasize patrilineal lineage and expect women to live with or close to their husband's family. Dowries have a long-standing history in Europe, South Asia, Africa, and other areas.

The objective of this research is to examine the practice of dowry in India beyond what is provided under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and ascertain the effectiveness of prohibitions established by law. Additionally, the research seeks to look into the reasons that have provided for the continuing acceptance of dowry within society and provide an analysis of how the media contributes to sustaining and normalizing such a practice, despite being illegal.

This research is looking to address questions such as the reasons for the continued presence of dowry despite the existence of laws prohibiting it; whether the current legal framework sufficiently meets the needs of those affected by dowry-related offences; and how social customs and representations made in the media, affect public perceptions of dowry.

The research adopts the doctrinal form of research through the analysis of primary and secondary legal sources. Primary sources include the relevant statutes and judicial decisions; secondary sources include books, journals, and legal materials found online. The research is analytical and descriptive, using a socio-legal method.

The research is organized around the following queries:

1. What law provisions for dowry currently exist in India, excluding Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita?
2. Why do people in India still accept dowry as an acceptable form of social conduct in spite of its penalization?
3. In what ways does the media reinforce or normalize dowry practices?
4. Are there any other Social/Institutional measures which, together with Legal Prohibition, would aid in addressing the issue of dowry effectively?

IV. THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF DOWRY

Dowry, or Dahej, is price in cash given by the bride's family to the groom's family, along with the act of giving away the bride (known as Kanyadaan) in Indian marriage. Kanyadanam is a crucial aspect of Hindu marriage. "Kanya" means daughter, and "Dana" implies giving. A dowry consists of cash, items, or property that a woman presents to her husband at her marriage. This differs from the bride's price paid to the bride's parents and daughter, which are possessions owned by the bride herself given by the groom at marriage. Both dowry and bride prices have historically coexisted. Dowry is an ancient custom, and its roots can precede any recorded information about its practice.

The dowry system in India is often traced back to ancient Hindu traditions that aimed to provide women with some financial security and independence. During early Vedic and post-Vedic times, Kanyadan and Stridhan served as the primary means of wealth transfer in marriage. Stridhan, which means "woman's wealth," included voluntary gifts of jewelry, clothing, and movable property given to the bride by her family and relatives. This was fundamentally different from the current understanding of dowry, as these assets were meant to remain under the bride's control, acting as a pre-mortem inheritance in a society where women historically could not own

immovable family property.

The region's social history has undergone a dramatic change from voluntary acts of kindness to obligations that are often abusive. The “giving away of a virgin daughter,” or Kanyadan ritual, became more closely associated over time with Varadakshina, a gift to the groom's family that changed from being an optional sign of respect to a negotiated requirement for marriage. This evolution was not simple; it was impacted by “Sanskritization,” in which lower castes mimicked upper caste marriage customs as a symbol of social mobility. By the middle of the 20th century, what had once been a way to give women financial stability had become a commercialised transaction that viewed brides as commodities and their families as sources of income for the groom's household.

V. SOCIETAL ACCEPTANCE OF DOWRY

Despite being prohibited, dowries are still common in India due in large part to societal acceptance. Due to its deep roots in marriage customs and social norms, dowry is still widely used. In many communities, dowries which are frequently passed off as gifts, stridhan, or wedding expenses are accepted as a standard expectation rather than an unlawful demand. Families can continue the practice while avoiding its moral and legal ramifications thanks to this cultural framing.

The patriarchal structure of Indian society, which frequently sees marriage as the primary path to social and economic security for women, is a major factor in this acceptance. Dowries are viewed as a replacement for property rights because women are typically barred from inheritance and financial independence, even though this goes against the equality promises made in Articles 14

and 15 of the Indian Constitution.

Dowry demands are further reinforced by social pressure and status considerations. According to studies, dowry amounts typically increase in proportion to the groom's income, occupation, and level of education, effectively making marriage a status-

driven transaction. Particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, families frequently worry about social rejection or reputational harm if they refuse the dowry. As a result, rather than being a matter of personal preference, compliance becomes a question of social conformity.

Dowry offences are also frequently underreported. Many cases remain unreported despite laws like the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961³ and Section 498A⁴ of the IPC (now reflected in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) because of concerns about marital disruption, economic dependence, elder pressure, and drawn-out legal procedures. Because of this underreporting, the practice is normalized, and the visible enforcement of the law is diminished. Finally, societal acceptance is reinforced through the transfer of traditions between generations. Elders often justify dowry practices as cultural norms, making resistance challenging for younger generations. This continuity reveals how dowry has shifted from a voluntary act in limited contexts to a broad social expectation.

VI. CAUSES OF DOWRY

- **Economic Factors**

Economic factors are important to the continued practice of dowry in India. The financial burden of marriage is typically viewed as a cost for the bride's family, and it is their responsibility to pay for most or all the wedding ceremony, gifts, and post-marital living expenses. This economic pressure has led to a view of dowry as something that must be given by the bride's family for her to be married and therefore the norm. In addition, in many cultures, dowry has become a means of supporting a groom who is unemployed or has a low-paying job, which allows the groom's family to use the dowry to further his potential for future earnings.

Over the years, both grooms and their families have increasingly viewed dowry as a way to gain material wealth through cash, property, vehicles, and luxury item gifts. The amount of dowry also reflects the groom's income and education levels, with

higher dowries being paid for men who are highly educated, have high-paying jobs, or who reside abroad. This has made marriage a financial agreement.

- **Social Influences**

Many social influences help to keep dowry systems active. There is a great deal of social pressure on families to meet the demands of dowries for fear of being socially excluded or damaging the family's reputation if they refuse to offer a dowry. The dowry has evolved into a status symbol or mark of social prestige, especially among the middle and upper classes, who use large dowries to indicate social status and honour. Since the marriage process is viewed not just as a joining of two people but also as an alliance of families and communities, social involvement from extended family members increases family expectations regarding what is offered as a dowry, resulting in stronger social pressure to conform to traditional dowry practices, which makes it very difficult for an individual to reject the demands of the potential bride's family.

- **Cultural Factors**

Cultural beliefs and practices underpin and provide legitimacy to the custom of dowry. The widespread belief that dowry is an ancient traditional practice, and with many citizens of the West erroneously perceiving dowry as a form of stridhan (also a customary practice), means that many people view dowry as a traditional practice and are unable to clearly differentiate between the concepts. Due to this confusion, many people misrepresent the concept of dowry as a form of "gift" to the bride, and thus the implications of the concept of dowry are often lost or misinterpreted when viewed through a Western lens. Through celebrated and ritualised ceremonies and events, gift exchanges with the bride and groom, and elaborate celebrations, dowry becomes customary and socially accepted. Cultural practices also create a blurring of the line between gifting in the sense of gift giving, and gifting in terms of dowry, creating an overall perception of social acceptance of a practice that is in violation of existing laws.

- **Lack of Adequate Investigation and Slow Response to Dowry Deaths**

Of the approximately 7,000 dowry deaths that happen in India each year, only around 4,500 result in charge sheets filed against perpetrators. The remaining 2,500 dowry death cases do not proceed to charge sheet stage either because of delays and poor handling of the investigation or because the case was disposed of as “caused by insufficient evidence” or was filed as a false complaint. For example, about two-thirds of the dowry death investigations conducted in India during 2022 were still open more than six months after the investigation began. This suggests that there are systemic problems with how dowry death cases are processed in India.⁵

- **Judicial Backlog**

After charge sheets are filed in dowry death cases, it is very common in India for there to be a lengthy time interval (typically years) between when the case is filed and when the offender is convicted. As a result, the lack of convictions (approximately 100 per year) prevents law enforcement from having an effective deterrent against future dowry death offenders.

- **Lack of Coordination between Police and Courts**

In many small towns and villages in India, when a woman seeks justice regarding dowry, the police often try to “resolve” the matter using mediation between the parties rather than pursue criminal charges. In addition, in dowry death cases, due to the slow pace of charge sheet filings (around 70% are filed more than two months after the filing of the police complaint) and the delay in the judicial process, the justice system results in victims getting a delayed response to their legal issue(s) or in some cases, being denied due process.

- **Underreporting and Victim-Blaming**

A significant number of dowry deaths in India go unreported because the victims fear being socially ostracized, do not understand their legal rights, and face social and family pressures not to pursue criminal justice. In many cases, victims are disowned

by their families, and in tight-knit communities, the family of the victim often faces pressure to not pursue justice.

VII. IMPACT OF DOWRY

A. Effects on Female Population

- **Abuse/Violence in the Home:** Abuse against women occurs frequently due to abuse/violence related to dowries
- **Death by Dowry:** Death caused by repeat harassment for dowry through murder or suicide.
- **Loss of Dignity and Control:** Women viewed as financial costs; therefore, they have little value and have little power in making decision.
- **Mental Health:** Stress, harassment, depression, anxiety, and trauma.
- Between 2017 and 2022, dowry was the main motive in over 6,100 murders across India.
- Over 60% occurred in West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar. Together with Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana, these States accounted for 80% of all dowry death cases during this period.
- This lack of awareness and ineffective implementation of laws makes it harder for women to break free from abusive relationships.

B. Impact on Families

- **The Financial Destruction of the Bride's Family to pay the Dowry**

For most families, when dowry payments must be paid to the groom's family, they go into debt, sell property, and even spend their savings to pay the dowry.

- **Long-lasting Family Relationships**

Disputes about payment of dowry have created tension between families that result in many broken marriages.

- **Delay or Refusal to Marry**

Low-income families may delay or refuse to marry their daughters if they can't pay a dowry.

C. Economic Impact Resource allocation issues

- The funds that families dedicated to pay for a dowry could have been used for education, health care, or starting a business.
- Inter-generational poverty
- The money that is spent on a dowry leads to long-term poverty and continues through future generations.

D. Impact on institutions and the legal system

- More pressure is being put on the courts and police due to the high volume of cases filed that fall under the category of dowry related crimes.
- People have reported that the perceived misuse of the Dowry Acts has created a distrust of people in general and created a decrease in the seriousness of the offenses.
- The NCRB data is conservative, as many dowry deaths go unreported, underscoring the extent of the issue.
- A World Bank study covering 40,000 marriages in rural India from 1960 to 2008 revealed that dowry was paid in 95% of marriages. This shows how deep-rooted the practice remains.
- As per information received from NCRB, the number of cases registered under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 during 2018, 2019 and 2020 are 12826, 13307 and 10366 respectively. Further, the cases registered under Dowry Deaths during these years are 7167, 7141, and 6966 respectively. The data shows a decline in number of cases both under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and Dowry Deaths in the year 2020 over the years 2018 and

2019.

VIII. LAWS PERTAINING TO DOWRY

A. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (DPA)

The DPA is the primary statute regarding the issue of dowry, and it specifically states that giving, taking or requesting a dowry is unlawful.

- **Section 2 - Dowry Defined**

Dowry is defined to include all property or items of value given to another person, either directly or indirectly, before, during, or after marriage. This definition covers an extremely wide range of property, and therefore includes items such as cash, gifts and services that would otherwise qualify as “dowry.

- **Section 3 - Penalty for Giving or Taking Dowry**

Individuals who give or take dowries are liable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding

five years and a fine of not more than ₹15,000.

- **Section 4 - Penalty for Demanding a Dowry**

It makes it an offence to demand a dowry either expressly or implicitly from the bride or her family

- **Section 6 - Use of Dowry for the Benefit of the Wife**

It requires that dowry received by a bride shall be used for her benefit; if it is diverted, the offender shall be liable for punishment

B. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS)

BNS expands on existing IPC laws regarding anti-dowry:

- **Section 85 - Cruelty by Husband or Relatives**

It is an offence for husbands or their relatives to commit cruelty against their

wives through either physical, mental or emotional forms of harassment) caused in any way by being asked to provide dowry.

- **Section 80 - Dowry Death**

If a woman has died under suspicious circumstances within 7 years after marrying, then the law presumes that she has been killed as a result of dowry harassment. But if it can be proven that there has been a history of such harassment prior to the woman's death, then the law assumes the husband has killed his wife.

The presumption of innocence shifts in favor of the victim of the crime.

C. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

- This statute offers immediate protection and relief from dowry harassment for women:
- All forms of dowry-related cruelty are considered Domestic Violence under the Domestic Violence Act.
- The Domestic Violence Act provides protection of orders, housing rights, monetary relief, and legal aid.
- The Domestic Violence Act focuses primarily on rehabilitation and social support for women.

D. Hindu Marriage Act, 1955¹²

Under this Act there are Matrimonial Remedies:

- **Section 13 - Cruelty Grounds for Divorce**

Abuse related to Dowries is classified as cruelty, which creates a legal right to divorce under these circumstances.

- **Sections 24 & 25 - Maintenance**

If a woman is financially reliant on her husband for support, these provisions

guarantee that she will receive sufficient financial assistance from her husband; even if the Dowry was extorted from her.

E. Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023

It provides procedural methods for arrest, investigation, and trial of dowry-related crimes.

F. Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023

The BNSS complements BNS by focusing on procedures, evidence, and victim protection.

Section 118 BSA 2023¹³, which states: “When the question is whether a person has committed the dowry death of a woman and it is shown that soon before her death such woman had been subjected to cruelty or harassment by such person for, or in connection with, any demand for dowry, the Court shall presume that such person had caused the dowry death.”

Together, BNS and BNSS create a strong legal framework that criminalizes dowry harassment and deaths while protecting women's rights, providing safeguards for procedures, and improving judicial efficiency. They also recognize the accountability of extended family members and, by assuming guilt, make anti-dowry laws more practical.

G. Constitutional Safeguards

Constitutional Rights Supporting Anti-Dowry Laws

- Equal protection and equal treatment are guaranteed by Article 14, Equal Protection Of
- Laws.
- Article 15(3) allows for the establishment of laws for the protection and safety of women.
- Article 21, Right to Live with Dignity and Not Experience Harassment.

- Article 51A(e) encourages respect for women by discouraging exploitative behaviours
- through dowries.

IX. JUDICIAL INTERPRETATIONS AND LANDMARK CASES

1. **Shanti v. State of Haryana (1991) SCC (1) 371** ¹⁴

Shanti v/s. State of Haryana (1991) Supreme Court Case on Dowry Death (a) The offence of Section 304B IPC can be established by showing that the woman died an unnatural death within 7 years of marriage and she has suffered cruelty/harassment for dowry shortly before death. The expression shortly before means there must be close and continuous link between dowry-related cruelty and death. If this element is proven, the presumption in Section 113B Evidence Act applies against the accused.

This ruling bolsters the presumption of guilt found in section 113B of the Evidence Act by shifting to the accused the burden of proof when all necessary facts have been demonstrated. The ruling also made clear that courts could impose harsher penalties and hold both husbands and their families accountable for causing dowry deaths.

The Court stated that Dowry Harassment was a form of Cruelty defined as per section 85 BNS and should therefore be strictly enforced by authority. The Court also pointed to the fact that the delay by authorities in taking action will cause delays for the victims of Dowry Harassment.

2. **Shobha Rani v. Madhukar Reddi (1988)**

The Supreme Court of India decided on a divorce case brought by a wife who had accused her husband of mental and physical abuse due to him demanding a dowry from her. The Supreme Court found that cruelty associated with demands for dowry falls under the definition of cruelty found in Section 13 of

the Hindu Marriage Act and that both forms of cruelty (mental/physical) resulting from dowry demands would justify the granting of a divorce. This decision is important because it has established “dowry harassment” as another area under the definition of matrimonial cruelty, thus providing greater protection to married people who experience this type of abuse and holding them liable for providing such relief.

3. State of Maharashtra v. Chandrabhan Tale (1983)

This is a case where constant dowry harassment led to the death of a bride. The Court ruled that in cases where a woman has been subjected to continuing dowry harassment and has subsequently experienced unexplained or unnatural death, the courts shall presume that a causal relationship exists between the harassment and the death, even in the absence of any direct evidence. The importance of this ruling is that it has reinforced the legal principle of presumed guilty in dowry death cases and, thus, provides a powerful deterrent against dowry-related abuse and provides additional protection to married women from such abuses.

4. Ravi Kumar v. Julmi Devi (2010) 4 SCC 476

In this situation, the woman was subjected to repeated intimidation and threats regarding dowry demands. The Court reiterated that under both the DPA (Dowry Prohibition Act) and applicable sections of IPC (Indian Penal Code), women are entitled to receive protection from their husbands and relatives who are engaged in either acts of harassment or threatening behaviour related to dowry demands. The importance of the ruling was to stress that family members of individuals committing dowry-related offences may also be held accountable; this is further supported through legislative provisions that provide protective measures under the DPA against abusive behaviour towards women.

5. Satbir Singh v. State of Haryana, 2021

The case of *Satbir Singh v. State of Haryana* (2021) in the Supreme Court involved a case of dowry death involving a married woman who died from burn injuries less than one year into her marriage. Evidence indicated that, prior to her death, the victim's husband and in-laws had continually harassed her for the payment of dowry (i.e. a scooter). The trial court found the defendant guilty of Section 304B IPC (dowry death), and that conviction was confirmed by the Haryana High Court. Following the conviction being upheld by the Haryana High Court, Satbir Singh filed an appeal with the Supreme Court regarding whether the requirement of cruelty and or harassment "soon before the death" had been met. The Supreme Court found that "soon before" does not mean immediately before death but requires a close, direct link between acts of dowry-related cruelty and the woman's death. The Supreme Court also upheld the conviction of the defendant under Section 304B IPC but reversed the defendant's conviction for abetting suicide. This judgement is an important and significant clarification of the application of the provisions relating to dowry death, and the strengthening of the presumption under Section 113B of the Indian Evidence Act to facilitate successful prosecutions for dowry deaths.

6. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Cases

While not always specifically labeled as "dowry" cases, courts have identified that dowry harassment constitutes domestic violence. This allows for relief under PWDVA 2005, including rights to housing, protection orders, and financial support. Example:

S.R. Batra v. Taruna Batra (2007) – The Supreme Court acknowledged harassment related to property or dowry as domestic violence.

Main Points from Landmark Cases

1. Presumption of Dowry Death: Courts may assume guilt if a woman dies

within seven years of marriage due to harassment.

2. Dowry Harassment as Cruelty: Dowry-related cruelty is a valid basis for divorce.
3. Family Members' Liability: In-laws and husbands can face criminal charges.
4. Protective Relief & Enforcement: Court decisions underline the importance of law enforcement and protective measures for women.

X. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT

A. Societal Challenges

- **Deep-Rooted Patriarchal Norms**

Dowry is supported by gender inequality and the belief that women are financial liabilities.

- **Cultural Legitimization of Dowry**

Dowry is often seen as “gifts” or “traditions,” which diminishes social opposition.

- **Collective Silence**

Society generally views dowry violence as a private family issue rather than a significant social crime.

B. Challenges within the Legal System

Delay in Justice

Dowry-related cases suffer from slow investigations, overburdened courts, and procedural delays, leading to decreased trust in the justice system.

Concerns Regarding Misuse of Laws

Accusations of misuse of Section 498A IPC (now Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) have resulted in judicial caution, occasionally undermining protections for real victims.

Lack of Sensitization of Authorities

- a. Police and judicial officers may lack gender-sensitive training, leading to improper handling of complaints.

Compromise and Withdrawal of Cases

- b. Social pressure often forces victims to withdraw cases or settle disputes informally, undermining legal accountability.

XI. MEASURES TO ERADICATE DOWRY

A. Enforcement of Existing Laws

Strict enforcement of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and relevant provisions in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita of 2023 such as Section 85 on Cruelty is very necessary to enforce “existing laws”.

- **Enforce and Convict**

It is not enough just to have laws; proper investigation and conviction must be provided.

- **Timely Trial and Judicial Efficiency**

Fast Track Courts for Dowry Related Offenses are needed to reduce any delay, thus providing timely justice.

- **Focus on the Victim**

Encouraging women to report dowry-related offenses will also require simplification of complaint mechanisms, offering protection orders for women, and providing Legal Aid Service will encourage these women to come forward.

- **Balance to Prevent Misuse**

In addition, creating safe guards to prevent false complaints from being made and ensuring genuine victims are not discouraged from seeking justice should

be a priority.

B. Education/Awareness

- **Legal Literacy**

Educational campaigns to educate women and their families as to the laws regarding dowry and their rights regarding Dowry and the Remedies Available to Them must be implemented.

- **Gender Sensitive Education**

Schools and Colleges must include Curriculum covering Gender Equity, Constitutional Values, and Anti-Dowry subjects must be included in their Curricula.

- **Economic Empowerment of Women**

Increasing women's education, employment, and financial independence will help reduce

Women's Vulnerability to Dowry demands.

C. Social and Cultural Change

- **Community Response Interventions**

Community leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, community groups, and local government officials must take an active stance against the dowry.

- **Changing Marriage Norms**

Low-cost, simple weddings should be celebrated rather than viewed as a means to achieve social status or style through Dowry payments.

- **Social Accountability as a Group**

Families that ask for or accept Dowry payments can be socially boycotted to deter illegal activities beyond traditional legal punishment.

D. The Role of the Media and Digital Outlets

The ways that media and digital platforms can influence expectations of dowry are measurable. Social media and digital platforms create social norms surrounding marriage and consumption. They portray weddings in mainstream cinema and television shows with large amounts of money spent to buy cars, jewellery, cash, furniture, etc., without being viewed as illegal but as being a normal practice or celebration; therefore, the exchange of valuable items during marriages is portrayed as normal and does not take into consideration the legal consequences of the transaction. The proliferation of high-cost weddings and luxury consumption in wedding-oriented reality and lifestyle television programmes maximise the impact of this portrayal through research showing that aspirational spending and social comparisons have increased due to media portrayal of high-cost weddings, thus creating greater pressure among families to meet the same level of expectation for their own families. The advertising associated with the wedding economy is a part of the problem of the perception that success in marriage is based on the amount of money spent on items such as jewellery, cars, real estate and consumer products.

The impact of social media on this dynamic is to further increase this dynamic through the amplification of curated wedding posts by algorithms, advertising and influencers, etc., creating viral videos that highlight wealth and glamor, re-establishing the implicit expectation to pay some form of dowry. However, while the social media world provides the opportunity for counter-mobilisation through government public service announcements and social media campaigns, the problem of leveraging media to counter an expectation of dowry remains a significant challenge for the government.

XII. CONCLUSION

Although the dowry system is illegal according to Indian Law, it remains embedded in the very fabric of Indian culture and society. There are numerous reasons for its continued existence including financial pressures, sexism, and common cultural

traditions. The pressures on continuing the practice of dowry arise from a number of social and economic factors, such as sexism and financial difficulties, as well as long-standing cultural customs. The Government of India has made some attempts to address this problem through the enactment of laws such as the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Act of 2023, but even today, there continue to be many cases of harassment, assault and/or murder that occur as a result of dowries. These examples highlight the gap between the intent of these laws and their actual effectiveness within society.

Dowry should not only be viewed as a legal issue but rather as a broader social and economic issue affecting women, families and society, as well as the justice system itself. Laws prohibiting dowry do provide some protections against personal harm; however, these protections are diminished due to a lack of reported cases, the pressure placed on women to remain silent, drug addictions and the slow implementation of justice associated with gender discrimination. By implementing policies that address other underlying causes of dowry-related violence, the judiciary has aided with interpretation and enforcement of anti-dowry legislation, yet anti-dowry legislation and enforcement alone is not sufficient to eradicate a culturally entrenched practice such as this.

To ultimately end the dowry system in India, a concerted effort(s) through coordinated efforts on a continuous basis will be necessary. While dowries are abolished through an ongoing and collaborative approach, that approach should consist of legal reforms on top of education; economic empowerment for women; community rejection of dowries as culturally acceptable; and responsible media reporting. There must also be a shift in public perception away from viewing dowries as an issue between families (private) and more towards seeing dowries as violations against dignity and equality as protected by the constitution. In other words, only through combined efforts (government & civil society & media & the individual) will we, as a society, have true equality, justice, and dignity for women.

Abolishing dowry is not simply a matter of legality; it is a responsibility under both our constitutional and ethical frameworks for humans. Any society that is interested in obtaining equality and dignity for all (regardless of gender) cannot allow a practice which treats marriage as a monetary contract and results in violence against women. The only true measure of success for anti-dowry legislation will come when our social perceptions and attitudes change and when we create an environment where marriage is not based on financial exchange, but on mutual respect.

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