

# Marriage Payments as the Important Part of Marriage

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**ABSTRACT:** - Marriage is a legitimate union between a man and a woman, who decide to live together in an intimate relationship for the major portion of their lives. It is the most personal and close form of human relationship. Marriage is defined as a relatively permanent sexual union employing a number of inter-relating roles and statuses. Marriage is associated with marriage payments, which is the most essential part of it. Payments which are given in consideration of marriage either by bride's kin and/or groom's kin to the groom's kin and/or bride's kin respectively are called marriage payments. The exchange of such payments may be seen in almost all known societies of the world. The paper deals with an important aspect of social structure called marriage payments. The present paper focuses on the practice of marriage payments as the important dimension of marriage. Marriage is one of the universal social institutions. It is preeminent for different reasons that have many biological, psychological, and social bases. Among the various reasons of its importance, one of the factors stabilizing the significance of marriage in society is marriage payment. Marriage payments form an important part of every society. They do not exist in vacuum. They are related to other institutions. According to the functionalist perspective, no practice can survive in society if it does not fulfill the needs of the society. Therefore, it is important to know about the institutional linkages or social anatomy of marriage payments and the kind of functions and dysfunctions they perform. The present paper focuses on the practice of marriage payments as the important dimension of marriage. The paper deals with an important aspect of social structure called marriage payments. Marriage is traditionally conceived to be a legally recognized relationship between an adult male and female that carries certain rights and obligations (Marshall, 1994: 388). Marriage involves exchange of gifts between bride's kin and groom's kin and these gifts are called marriage payments. These payments form an important part of marriage, without which, hardly any marriage is solemnized particularly in Indian context. Sociologists and social anthropologists have studied marriage payments in different regions and cultures and have defined the mode of payments differently. Indian society is a mosaic of many cultures. Infact there are cultures within a culture. Cultural regions can be identified by some cultural traits and by the people themselves. Different cultures show different ways of social practices, so is the case with marriage payments. Tambiah defines marriage payments as "comprising an elaborate series of payments back and forth between the marrying families. The series of gifts extends over a long period of time and persists after marriage", e.g. in the form of mother's brother's obligation to his sister's children (Tambiah, 1973: 92). Comaroff is of the view that "Marriage payment is not to be understood by the cross cultural comparison of their surface manifestations and their general social correlates, but by first establishing their relations to other organizational elements within encompassing systems" (Comaroff, 1980: 33). This means that marriage payments are interlinked with other elements of the society and, without the involvement of these elements e.g. affinity, descent, sex, age, devolution and rank, ceremonial exchange etc., it is hard to understand the meaning of marriage payments. These elements of society together constitute social structure. Thus marriage payments in a nutshell may be defined as gifts associated with marriage. The mode of giving and receiving of the gifts depends on the type of payment.

**Keywords:** MARRIAGE PAYMENTS

## **TYPES OF MARRIAGE PAYMENTS**

Spiro distinguishes four types of payments. These are dowry, dower, bride wealth and groom wealth. Generally these four payments have been conflated in two broad types; dowry and bride wealth or bride price. He has defined dowry as those gifts which are given to bride or groom by the family of bride on marriage. Gifts given, therefore, become a sort of conjugal fund. Dower is the payment given by the groom to her bride. Bride wealth is the amount or some other things, which are paid by the family of groom to the family of bride. The main difference between bride wealth and dower is that former means gift from groom to bride's parents and latter means gift to bride only. Groom wealth is just opposite of bride wealth in which gifts are given by the family of bride to the family of groom (Comaroff, 1980: 4). William J Goody opines that both dowry and bride wealth have their economic functions and they should be viewed in that light. "Dowry can be seen as a type of pre-mortem inheritance to the bride, bride wealth as a transaction between the kin of groom and the kin of bride." (Goody, 1973: 1).

So far as the prevalence of dowry and bride wealth is concerned, dowry is characteristic of Euro-Asian societies and bride wealth is a feature of African societies (Goody, 1973: 23). African societies are egalitarian in nature i.e. less stratified while as Eurasian societies are complex and stratified. This is the main reason why the nature of payment differs in these two societies. The mode of payment in consideration of marriage is directly linked with the type of society i.e. egalitarian or stratified. The type of payment prevailing in a particular society has its own function. The function of bridewealth in African societies could be explained by comparing bridewealth marriage (*kukwa*) with marriage, which took place without bridewealth (*kubula*). In *kukwa*, children have right to inherit from their father and also husband has absolute control over his wife. Thus husband has both uxorial and genitricial rights. He is entitled to compensation in case of adultery and has complete right to receive or pay

bridewealth of his sons and daughters. In case of *kubula*, husband has no genitricial rights and only limited uxorial ones. Children of such marriage have no rights to inherit from father and only take a major share of their mother's brother's property if he has no bridewealth children of his own. Thus non-payment of bridewealth means less conjugal bond and more consanguinal control over the bride. Weak conjugal bond often leads to adultery and husband in such a case is not entitled to compensation. Also it is the maternal kin who have rights and obligations regarding the bride wealth of such children (Goody, 1973: 16). In Eurasian societies, the presence of dowry is sustained by the essential social function it serves. Girls are generally denied of inheritance rights in parental property according to the traditional laws. So dowry functions as a sort of compensation to them. On the other hand, in African societies, one of the explanations for the non payment of dowry could be linked with the homoparental inheritance system which means female inherit females and male from males. Apart from these two distinctions, another form of marriage transaction, which is characteristic of a Muslim society, is *mehr* or dower. Dower refers to those gifts, which are given by groom to bride.

In India, both dowry and bride wealth payments existed till 19<sup>th</sup> century. But now it is dowry, which is practiced by large number of Indians, even by those who earlier practiced bride wealth. So far dower is concerned; it is practiced by the Muslim community.

## **DOWRY, BRIDE WEALTH AND DOWER**

**(a) BRIDE WEALTH:** The transmission of goods and services in consideration of marriage is an important feature of marriage practices of all known societies of the world. These marriage payments have received substantial attention in the sociological and anthropological literature. Of the two major types of marriage payments - dowry and bride price, latter involves transaction of gifts from groom to bride's kin at the time of marriage. Bride price technically goes to the bride's kin and not to

the bride exclusively. It is a sort of compensation to the bride's family (Klaas, 1972: 46).

As already stated bride wealth is the feature of less stratified African societies. In these societies, girls are economic assets for their families and bride wealth payments are given for the compensation of that loss. At the same time, bride wealth received by parents of the bride is used to obtain a wife for a brother or even for father. Thus, this means that the fund does not remain confined to one place. It circulates at different times and hence also called as circulating fund. This means that in African societies bride price has an economic value (Goody, 1973: 7). Tambiah defines bride wealth as the goods, which the bride groom's family and kin transfer to the bride's family and kin in return for which certain rights in the bride are transferred to the bride (Tambiah, 1973: 61). However, Goody has defined bride wealth in most of the Eurasian societies as those gifts, which are received by bride's parents and are ultimately given back to bride and becomes a sort of indirect dowry (Goody, 1973: 1-2). But at the same time he has emphasized that the size of bride price payments depend on the quantum of rights transferred to bride (Goody, 1973: 3).

Coming to the Indian context, the bride wealth was prevalent in south India. All caste groups practice it (Srinivas, 1983: 10). But at the onset of the British rule, this practice of brideprice was replaced by dowry payment, to which the upper castes responded first, because brideprice payments were equated with the "sale of girl" which means inferior form of marriage so far as the religious text is concerned. So Britishers legitimized "brahma" form of marriage (dowry marriage) for upper castes and "asura" form of marriage (brideprice marriage) for lower castes (Srinivasan, Padma and Gary, n.d). Thus the custom of bride price, which was universal among south Indian castes, took a new shape i.e. bridewealth was replaced by dowry which became the prevalent practice thereafter.

**(b) Dowry:** The term dowry has been defined differently by different social scientists. It may be

defined as those payments which are being given or promised to be given by the kin of bride to the bride, bride groom and his kin in consideration of marriage. The dowry system dates back to at least the ancient Greco-Roman world. It was particularly prevalent in medieval and early Europe and is presently widespread in south Asia. In India, dowry first developed in the Vedic and post-Vedic period in different forms. It was a payment for a hypergamous marriage or a gift to the new couple to get started (Chetty, 2006).

The development of the institution of dowry in the Indian sub-continent is not uniform. Dowry developed in different castes and regions of India in several ways. Commenting on the growth of the institution of dowry in India, Srinivas observes that it is the product of various socio-economic factors like the monetization of economy, growth of education, hypergamy, lesser female work participation, emulation of higher caste practices by lower caste, etc. He has constructed two well accepted modes of dowry: (i) Traditional Dowry and (ii) Modern Dowry.

### **TRADITIONAL DOWRY**

In Ancient times, marriage was considered to be a ritual sacrifice in which a bride was given to groom along with some gifts called *dakshina*. This practice was seen mostly among Brahmins and other high castes. Dowry was a natural gift given out of affection to the girl who was parting with her parents and the basic intention of the gifts so given was to help the young couple in running a household. These natural gifts were intended as a small sum of capital and goods (kitchen vessels, basic furniture, household items etc.) that would enable the couple to start their new household (Chetty, 2006). While discussing traditional dowry, two important rites, *stridhan* and *vardakshina*, needs to be discussed. *Stridhan* usually refers to the gifts given to a woman by her natal kin or by her husband at or after the wedding and *dakshina* is a subsidiary gift given to the groom by the parents of bride at marriage. The women's property complex i.e. *stridhan* can be defined in terms of technical

*stridhan* and non-technical *stridhan*. Technical *stridhan* includes gifts, which a woman receives from her natal family, husband, relatives, friends etc. It is this *stridhan* that a woman exercises dominion independently of her husband. While as non-technical *stridhan* is the property acquired by a woman through the exercise of her labour. Woman has no authority to donate, sell or enjoy independently this part of *stridhan*. According to a Hindu belief, the marriage associated with the ritual of *stridhanam* is considered to be superior because it involves gifting to a virgin. But *dakshina* and *stridhan*, according to Srinivas, cannot be mixed up with the dowry practice because the latter is integrated with bargain or force, which is not the case with the religious rites (Srinivas, 1983: 12).

Traditional dowry also throws light on the concept of hypergamy. Hypergamy means marriage between a man from the higher social status and a girl from lower status but from same caste or *jati* resulting in asymmetrical flow of gifts from wife givers to wife takers (Klaas, 1972: 98). Kokali Banarjee while defining the features of traditional dowry links it with the event of a marriage between women of inferior rank to a man of superior social rank (Banarjee, 1999: 650). Thus, status is achieved by wife-givers by paying dowry to wife receivers. It is therefore the ethical social and economic reasons, which serve as major instruments in making the custom of dowry rigid in pre-colonial India.

### MODERN DOWRY

Modern dowry is the product of forces let loose by the British rule e.g. education, monetization and introduction to organized sector (Srinivas, 1983: 13). The transition from traditional dowry to modern dowry involves two basic elements.

1. The diminishing use of bride price due to emulation of higher caste practices by lower.
2. Shift from a true dowry to the much more costly groom price.

The traditional dowry varies from modern dowry. The latter is characterized by large sums of cash frequently amounting to a few lakhs of rupees,

which is transferred along with furniture, gadgetry, costly clothing and jewellery from the bride's kin to the groom's kin (Srinivas, 1983: 11). Modern dowry plays a role of money with which one purchases a groom. The groom's parents instead of demanding jewellery, clothes, domestic utensils, demand for electronic goods, car or cash. In post-colonial India, dowry has become a mechanism for parents to make money by selling their sons at fairly high price. Srinivas notes "Young men, who had salaried jobs and careers in the profession, were sought after as bridegrooms. They were scarce commodities. The parents of the lucky youth demanded cash and such goods as cycles, woolen suits etc. as part of the wedding agreement" (Srinivas, 1983: 11).

### (C) DOWER

Dower is practiced in almost all the Muslim societies of the world as an economic security available to the bride. People sometimes confuse the word dower with bride price. This confusion arises due to the fact that in both the cases the payment giver is the same i.e. groom's side. Dower should not be confused with bride price. Dower is the amount of money or other things, which a bridegroom or his family agrees to pay to the bride under specific conditions. The payment of bride price goes to bride's parents and not to the bride. This distinction between dower and bride price is well defined by Korson. According to him, bride price is considered to be a payment of purchase price for a bride and its payment goes to father of the bride for the expenses he had taken for her upbringing. This is normally found in those societies where girls are economic asset for their families and their loss is compensated by bride price. Dower, on the other hand, is a sum of money the bride groom and /or his family agrees to pay the bride either at the time of marriage or at a later date, depending on the conditions of the contract (Korson, 1967: 527-528).

The Arabic word for dower is *mehr* or *sadaq*. It is mandatory for every Muslim to pay the amount and/or other things of *mehr* to their wives in their

lifetime. Allah commands: in the Holy Quran: “And give them (the women that you marry) their compensation as an obligation” (Pirzada, 1996: 256 [Verse 24]). As already mentioned, *mehr* is not bride price as it is usually mistaken. It is based upon mutual agreement between a groom and his bride. The Quran stipulates that *mehr* should be offered as a gift that is out of good will and with the intention that it is her right. Allah commands: “And give the women (upon marriage) their dower as a free gift and if they of their own sweet will, remit any portion of it to you, you may enjoy it with pleasure and satisfaction” (Pirzada, 1996: 236 [Verse 4]).

There was no concept of *mehr* at the time of *jahiliyah* period (the period before the time of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)). Wives were obtained either by capture or by paying bride price. Women had no security and were relegated to a lower status. Prophet (S.A.W) gave new light to these distressed women by making the system of marriage a contract in which a specified amount of *mehr* was made due on bridegroom. This system of *mehr* payment elevated the status of women (Levy, 1962: 95).

According to Henry Korson, the amount of *mehr* can be paid in various ways. These are as follows

1. Prompt *mehr* means the sum of money, which is to be paid right at the time of marriage ceremony when the contract is made.
2. Deferred *mehr* is the sum of money, which is to be paid in case of separation or divorce.
3. One- half prompt, One-half deferred is the case in which part of *mehr* is paid at the time of marriage, and part of it is deferred.
4. On demand *mehr* in which the wife can impose a demand for the total sum at any time (Korson, 1967: 529).

The amount of *mehr* is not fixed. It may vary from few rupees to even lakhs. According to Fyzee, the social position of the bride’s family as well as her own personal qualifications is important guide in determining the amount of *mehr* that her family will expect (quoted in Korson, 1968: 696). The sum of

money fixed by prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), which is also called *Rasooli mehr*, is approximately 32 rupees and it is of great significance in Muslim societies. This form of *mehr* is based on a religious tradition which holds that when the Prophet’s daughter Fatima (A.S) married, Ali (A.S), the bridegroom, pledged the equivalent of Rs 32/ (Korson, 1968: 698).

Although there are various marriage payments seen in different societies of India but dowry is considered to be widely accepted. So, the paper would highlight the major cause for the institutionalization of dowry payment in India despite being a social evil. Dowry is so complex phenomenon that it is very difficult to assign its perseverance in the society to a single factor. Its explanations vary from certain religious injunctions in support of the practice to the socio-economic changes generated in the society. Some of the causes, which have rendered the menace of dowry to exist even today are described below

### **SOCIAL STATUS AND DOWRY**

Dowry is a status symbol. Men who do not practice dowry are sometimes devalued in the society (Majumdar, 2001: 399). The very fact that dowry has become a status symbol indicates that it no longer has any productive use. Instead, it is a peculiar manner of conspicuous consumption (Chetty, 2006). Dowry, as we know, is a social evil and should be eradicated from its roots. But it persists in society and is practiced by majority of the people. Even poor of the poorest are in the grip of dowry system. Among the various reasons of its existence, one of the reasons is social status. The practice of dowry has become quite entrenched in the Indian marriage system. It appears that primarily dowry sustains because of the competition among potential brides and their families for gaining scarce eligible grooms. The mate selection system in most parts of India has long been characterized by hypergamy, with women from lower status families marrying higher status men within the same caste (Klaas, 1972: 96). Since marriages are traditionally hypergamous in nature, dowry becomes a vehicle

by means of which bride's families make status claims. The size of the dowry provides the bride give an opportunity for social advancement by attracting a groom from a higher position in the status hierarchy. In turn, the groom's family may select the economically desirable bride from among a pool of eligible brides. Trautmann notes that dowry is intricately connected with hypergamy, non-reciprocity between wife givers and wife takers, and the unidirectional flow of gifts (Sheel, 1997: 1711). According to Roulet, "Dowry is not merely an institution confined to valorization of marriage, but serves more importantly as a central institution to define social prestige and status and thus becomes an important dimension of people's representation of themselves and others" (Roulet, 1996: 91). Rajaraman agrees with the view that dowry and social prestige are closely associated. According to him it is this status and prestige, which encourages people to participate in its practice (Rajaraman, 1983: 277). The transition of dowry involves a series of negotiations between families over their relative status and wealth that is given public acknowledgement, most notably during marriage ceremonies (Caplan, 1984: 220-21). In addition, bride's parents are likely to believe that a generous dowry is essential to ensure that their daughter is treated well in her new home. Again Srinivas notes "the change over to the system of dowry will be attributed to the increased wealth which enables people to spend more lavishly on weddings in their struggle for social recognition" (Srinivas, 1983: 21). Madan observes that in India, dowry is publicly and ideologically and morally validated, and bride price is considered to be degraded and immoral form as the former is measured in terms of social status and it is for this reason that the latter is always under pressure to be converted into dowry (Miller, 1980: 95). Thus when lower caste begin to *sanskritize* their rituals and practices, they began to shift from bride price to dowry marriage to demonstrate their upgradation in the social ladder.

## **FEMALE PROPERTY RIGHTS AND DOWRY**

Many theories have been put forward to explain the occurrence of dowry. One of the hypothesis links dowry to the rights held by women and explains it as a premortem bequest made to daughters. Before discussing the bequest theory, it is imperative to know the schools of law among Hindus explaining the inheritance rights of sons and daughters in parental property. There are two laws

1. Mitakshara law
2. Dayabhaga law

The majority of the Hindus, all over India, follow the Mitakshara School whereas Dayabhaga School of law is followed by the Hindus of Bengal. In Mitakshara law, property is distributed in a group of coparceners which can minimally include two persons and maximally some four generations of male who have joint rights to corporate property but need not to be co-resident, while female members are entitled to maintenance which includes residence, food, clothing, medical attention, education etc. (Caroll, 1991: 793). These rights, however, cannot be denied on the grounds that a woman may possess her separate *stridhan* property. Women are not members of the coparacenary under Hindu Mitakshara law and, therefore, they are not entitled to claim rights in coparacenary property (Caroll, 1991: 806). It is this Mitakshara law, which is followed by majority of Indians. However, in Dayabhaga law, interests in and rights over joint property differ radically from Mitakshara law. In Dayabhaga law, no coparacenary exists between a man and his son: the son acquires no interest at birth in the ancestral property held by his father. He acquires an interest in this property only on the death of his father. The rule of survivorship has no application in Dayabhaga law. The absence of a rule of survivorship in Dayabhaga law meant that a daughter might well figure as an heir to her father's joint family property (Caroll, 1991: 804).

The relation between absence / lack of inheritance rights in parental property and dowry has been examined by various anthropologists. While

comparing the African and Eurasian societies, William J. Goody and Tambiah attribute the existence of dowry system to the absence of female rights in immovable parental property in traditional laws in Eurasian societies. Parents therefore think to compensate their daughter in the form of dowry. Thus dowry is seen as payments in lieu of women's rights on parental property (Tambiah, 1973: 17). Modern dowry has its roots in traditional system of inheritance laws. In Mitakshara law, which is followed by the majority population of India, women are not the members of coparcenary property. Lucy Carroll explains such exclusion of rights as the main precursor that led to the creation of socially pernicious dowry system with its diverse social evils (Carroll, 1991: 806). Despite the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, which gave equal rights of inheritance to the daughter along with the son, daughters are denied of this right.

Modern Indian dowry system has its roots in traditional system of gift giving like *kanyadhan* (gift of the virgin), *vardakshina* (voluntary gifts given by the bride's father to the groom) and *stridhan* (voluntary gifts given by relatives and friends to the bride) (Klaas, 1972: 37). While relating property rights of female with dowry, the concept of *stridhan* should be focused. Some of the important Hindu sources, which, besides other things, throw light on the women's right to property or *stridhan* which literally means property of wife. The oldest extant statement on *stridhanam* in dharmashastric works is that of Manu. According to Manu, the Hindu law-giver, *stridhan* has been presented as "what was given before nuptial fire (*adhyagni*), what was given on the bridal procession, what was given in token of love and what was received from a brother, a mother or a father, are considered as the six fold (separate) property of a (married) woman (Tambiah, 1973: 85). Tambiah has linked daughter's rights of inheritance or pre mortem inheritance with *stridhan*. "The *stridhan* is a woman's exclusive property and may be regarded as a substitute for the right of inheritance. Her, husband and relative-in-

law acquire no interest therein" (Tambiah, 1973: 71).

Thus from the above explanations, it is clear that dowry has its link with the traditional system of inheritance laws. Despite the Hindu succession Act of 1956 in which both sons and daughters are equal share-holders in parental property, daughters are denied of their rights.

### **HYPERGAMY AND DOWRY**

The term hypergamy was introduced by Ibbetson in the 1881 Census report of Punjab. Ibbetson defines hypergamy as the rule, which compels a man to wed his daughter with a member of tribe (a group), which shall be actually superior in rank to his own. Hypergamous marriage is characterized by asymmetrical flow of gifts from bride to groom's side. This asymmetry is supported by further evidence, which shows that the relations between affines are restricted after marriage and could be described as avoidance (Klaas, 1973: 98). According to Blunt, as per the rule of hypergamy, no man may take a bride from any family to which his own family has given a bride within the memory of man (quoted in Tambiah, 1973: 94).

There is a well-defined relationship between hypergamy and dowry as is explained by various sociologists and social anthropologists. Srinivas expresses his views in terms of status asymmetry as the important feature of hypergamy, in which bride being inferior to groom. This is balanced by gift giving from bride's side on marriage (Srinivas, 1983: 9). In pre-colonial period, hypergamy was confined to higher castes and north India, and isogamous marriage was confined to south India even among Brahmins. Former is associated with dowry and latter with bride price. Due to the impact of colonialism as discussed already, shift from bride price to dowry payments resulted in overall shift from isogamous marriages to hypergamous marriages. The main reason behind this change is status achievement, which is directly or indirectly linked with the dowry practice in the society. T.N.Madan points out that the difference in the

economic status and social standing is an important feature of two affinal groups in which bride's parents are always in fond of marrying their daughter to a person who is status wise superior to them (Madan, 1975: 232). The relationship between hypergamy and dowry has also been discussed by Louis Dumont. In hypergamous marriages, a lower status girl marries a high status boy. These marriages are accompanied by high dowry payment because lower status families always try to elevate their status through such marriages. The result is that there is always a low number of high status boys and a greater number of lower status boys. Since higher status boys want to marry hypergamously so that they can demand more dowries, this makes difficult for high status families to find a suitable match for their girls. The result is that there is an accumulation of high status girls in the marriage market and their marriage becomes a financial burden for their families (Klaas, 1972: 102).

### **CONSEQUENCES OF DOWRY**

Indian society is patriarchal in which the position of women is inferior to men. The status of women in India has shown many ups and downs in different periods. In the Vedic age 1500-1000 BC, they were worshipped as Goddesses. In the Muslim age 1026-1756 AD, their status suffered a sharp decline and in the British regime, they were looked down upon as 'slaves of slaves' (Sachadeva, 1998: 285). There are many causes which has lowered the status of women in the society. One of the major causes is the prevalent practice of dowry.

Dowry exists in both fact and design. By fact, it means dowry exists empirically; whereas by design, it exists in our mind values. The modern phenomenon of dowry has become a crude institution resulting in female foeticide, infanticide and bride burning. It has become a monstrous problem to which M.N. Srinivas has referred as "The sati of twentieth century" (Srinivas, 1983: 29).

According to Basu the word dowry is almost synonymous with Indian women's oppression under

patriarchal systems (Goel, 2004: 273). Dowry is multifaceted, deep rooted gender issue with social, economic and health consequences. Dowry has become a tradition and norm even for those whose religion does not allow them to practice it. The implications of dowry start from the womb of mother. Various techniques of sex determination and pre-selection have been developed during the last fifteen years. These techniques are fonography, fetoscopy the popular amniocentesis. These techniques are used to detect sex of the foetus. Prenatal sex determination and the abortion of female foetuses create an imbalance in the sex ratio with unprecedented consequences. Census data shows that in India, the sex ratio for the total population has increased from 927 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 933 in 2001. However the sex ratio for the population of female children up to 6 years has declined from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. This decline shows the abuse of sex determination techniques to get rid of the unwanted female child.

In Indian society, sons are prized while daughters are devalued. A baby girl born in first issue is considered to be a bad luck, second issue as disaster and in third as a catastrophe. This social preference of son leads therefore to abortion of girl child. Daughters are considered to be burden in every respect. The problem of dowry is the major factor which makes a daughter a burden on her parents. Thus infanticide and foeticide is directly linked with the dowry practice in Indian society. People in order to get rid of future extravagant expenditure prefer to abort the female child.

Dowry has many ill effects in the society. It lowers the status of women. It gives rise to many socio-economic problems, which results in bride burning, harassment and physical torture of the young brides and various kinds of pressure tactics being adopted by the husband and/or in-laws for an inadequate supply of dowry. Despite the Dowry Prohibition Act enacted in 1961, and the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act 1984, dowry is practiced in the society in all its manifestations. The issues of dowry have become complex that it is difficult to eradicate



and infact it keeps reinventing itself. The more people are becoming aware of the evils of dowry, the more the payments took place.

From the above discussion it is clear that dowry shows its functions in many aspects and dysfunctions are associated with it. In this light, I have made an attempt to correlate R.K.Merton's structural functional approach with the present study.

Merton defines "social function as observable objective consequences, and not as subjective dispositions (aims, motives, purposes)" (Merton, 1957:24). Thus, he regards function as those observed consequences, which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system. However, there is a clear ideological bias when one only thinks of adaptation or adjustment, for they are always positive consequences. Merton had cleared this point by giving another concept called "dysfunction" (Ritzer, 2003:244). Dysfunctions, according to Merton, are those observed consequences, which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system. Just as structures or institutions could contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the social system, they also could have negative consequences for them. He thinks that some things may have consequences that are generally dysfunctional or which are dysfunctional for some and functional for others. Merton also introduced the concept of manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those that are intended and latent functions are unintended. Manifest functions are the consequences that people observe or expect. It is explicitly stated and understood by the participants in the relevant action. On the other hand, latent functions are neither recognized nor intended. A latent function is not

### **Functions and Dysfunctions of dowry**

explicitly stated, recognized by the people involved. Dysfunctions can also be manifest and latent. While functions are manifest/latent and have positive effect on society, dysfunctions are manifest/latent and have a negative effect on society.

R.K.Merton's account of structural functional approach seems to fit with the prevalent and preferred practice of dowry in Indian society. Dowry shows its functions as well as dysfunctions. Functions may be manifest or latent.

#### **Manifest functions of dowry**

- A. Maintenance of social status.
- B. Getting eligible groom.
- C. Economic stability.

#### **Latent functions of dowry**

- A. Secure married life.
- B. Cordial familial relations.

Dysfunctions of dowry may also be manifest and latent.

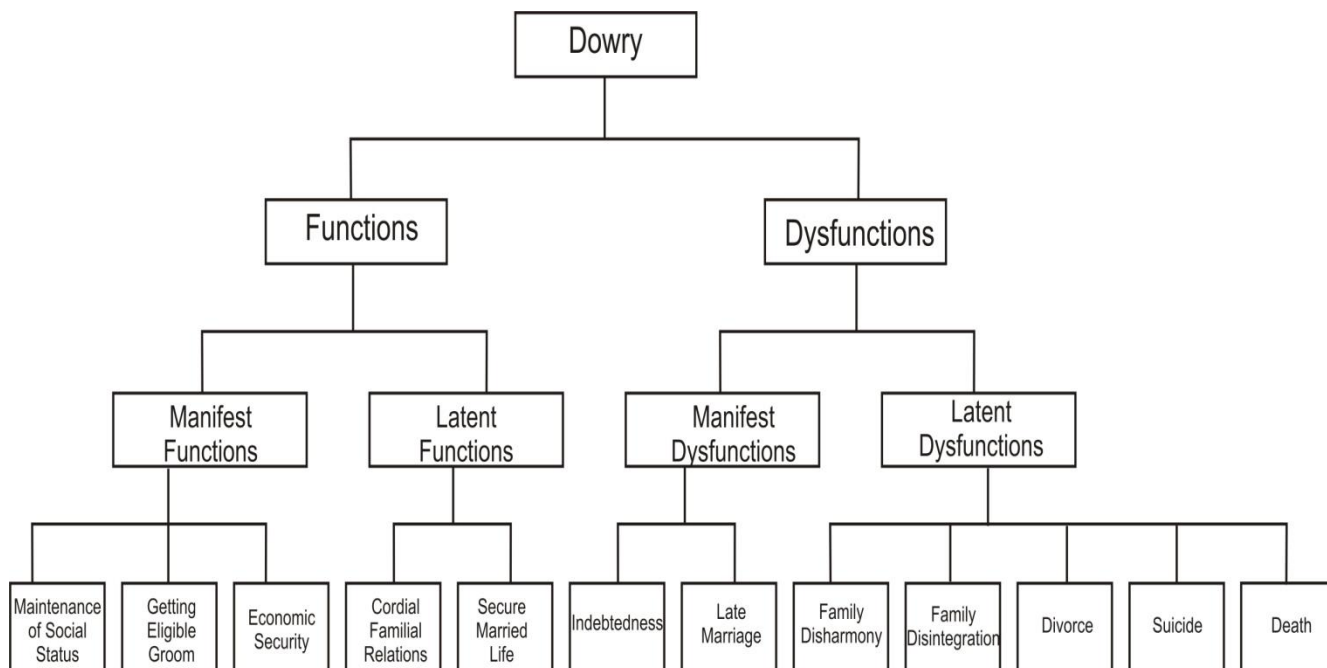
#### **Manifest dysfunctions of dowry**

- A. Indebtedness.
- B. Late marriage.

#### **Latent dysfunctions of dowry**

- A. Family disharmony.
- B. Family disintegration.
- C. Divorce.
- D. Suicide.
- E. Death.

An illustration of functions and dysfunctions (manifest and latent) is also shown in figure



**Conclusion:-**

Dowry exists in both fact and design. By fact, it means dowry exists empirically; whereas by design, it exists in our mind values. The modern phenomenon of dowry has become a crude institution resulting in female foeticide, infanticide and bride burning. It has become a monstrous problem to which M.N. Srinivas has referred as “The sati of twentieth century”. Dowry is a serious problem which needs not to be looked down by the people rather it should be eradicated from its roots. It is necessary to change the social and economic roots of son preference. The major change in this regard lies in improving the status of women. By improving the status of women, she no longer would be considered as a burden on her family. The only way to improve the status of women is to educate them.

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