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# DOWRY: Introduction, History of Dowry and Dowry in Today'S Times

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### Consider the following statements:

- Newlywed bride burnt alive due to inability to fulfil dowry demands
- Asha, a 28-year-old highly educated girl cannot get married because of her financial background

## Introduction

- Charles Winick- “valuables that the relatives of either party to a marriage contribute to the marriage.”
- “The property that is given to a woman at the time of her marriage.” – Britannica Encyclopedia
- Pre-defined amount according to the man’s salary and status
- Money, goods, gifts, etc. wife brings to husband in a marriage
- McKim Marriott holds that the feeling behind this is that one’s daughter and sister at marriage become the helpless possession of an alien kinship group and to secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality must be offered to her in-laws from time to time.

## History of Dowry

- Positive evil
- Ancient times – kanyadaan – voluntary gifts out of love
- Medieval times -To send off the daughter early – father was ready to pay a price
- During British rule- High rate of grooms with jobs in ‘marriage market.’
- 20<sup>th</sup> century – high price paid to obtain grooms from high strata

## Dowry in Today’S Times

- Doctors, engineers, Bureaucrats- attractive and preferable son in laws
- High demand and rates in marriage market

- Gifts continue on occasions even after marriage
- Unidirectional flow
- Financial profit – scandalous proportion
- Daughters – liability

## **Reasons**

- The desire of most parents to marry their daughter in a higher and a rich family
- Social custom
- Generational practice or tradition
- Restriction in mate selection
- To flaunt economic status in society
- To get back the amount of dowry spent on daughters and sister's weddings – vicious cycle.

## **Problems Associated with Dowry**

- Spinsterhood
- Harassment and humiliation of women
- Women's family seeks for opportunities to accumulate wealth by illegal means to fulfil dowry demands by her in laws
- Conflict between individuals, family, and society
- Emotional trauma
- Challenges status of women
- Child marriage
- Dowry deaths
- Female feticide

## **Way Ahead**

- Awareness
- Education
- Youth participation
- Public enlightenment
- Inter caste marriage

- Freedom to choose spouse
- Strict implementation of laws
- Govt. schemes, Laws like The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 and Sec 498 of IPC, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, etc.

## Shah Bano case

In 1985, the Supreme Court of India ruled in favor of Muslim divorcee Shah Bano, declaring that her husband should give her alimony. Muslim fundamentalists in India treated it as an encroachment in Muslim Personal Law and protested against it. Gandhi agreed to their demands.



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## MCQ

Q. 1. Given below are two statements – Assertion (A) and Reason (R) . Pick the right answer from the codes:

Assertion: Practice of dowry has increased among the educated middle class in India.

Reason: With the spread of education the number of professionals in the middle class today has increased.

(A) Both (A) and (R) are false.

(B) (A) is true, but (R) is false.

(C) Both (A) and (R) are true and (R) is not correct explanation of (A) .

(D) (A) is true and (R) is correct explanation of (A) .

Ans: D

Q. 2. Given below are two statements – Assertion (A) and Reason (R) . Pick the right answer from the codes:

Assertion (A) : The problem of 'dowry deaths' is typically prevalent among the 'emergent urban middle class' in India.

Reason (R) : The law of inheritance is discriminatory against women in India.

(A) Both (A) and (R) are false.

(B) (A) is true, but (R) is false.

(C) Both (A) and (R) are true and (R) is not correct explanation of (A) .

(D) (A) is true and (R) is correct explanation of (A) .

Answer: (C)

#SocioCulturalIssues

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-Manishika

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