

## **Dowry Practices and Gendered Space in Urban Patna/India**

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### **Abstract:**

In arranged marriages, bride-givers and bride-takers participate in the transactional space with different intentions during marriage solemnization. Hypergamy along with caste-endogamy restricts the options for brides' fathers in the selection of grooms leading to dowry competitiveness while grooms' families feel justified in demanding dowry as a return for the investment in their son. Raised lifestyles and more disposable income due to modernization in Indian cities have aggravated the phenomenon further. This article investigates how dowry practices create and sustain a highly gendered space in urban Patna/Bihar. The representational space of the social practice of dowry is analyzed in 16 unstructured in-depth interviews with fathers of brides and women of the Hindu Kushwaha caste in West Patna and old Patna city. To examine how transactional space is created, groom's family factors and bride-giving family factors that encourage dowry practices are identified. Furthermore, the discriminatory spaces in the brides' parental and marital homes as well as strategies and attitudes to deal with dowry are investigated.

1 North India is considered as the patriarchal heartland of India, as here patriarchy creates a highly gendered space (Datta 127). The patriarchal system leads to the institutional establishment of gendered practices that reinforce the subordinate position of women and girls in society; it is particularly the latter group who has minimal decision-making power. This becomes evident, for instance, in dowry as one such gendered practice. Dowry refers to the property that is given, at the time of marriage, by the bride's parents to the groom or his parents under duress, coercion or pressure (Teja 94), through the transactional space created by the grooms' families. This article investigates how dowry as a social practice creates and sustains a highly gendered and utterly discriminatory space in urban Patna, Bihar.

2 In contemporary India, the totality of dowry assets in marital arrangements can be divided into three parts. First, there is a property transfer, called *streedhan*, as a form of pre-mortem bequest from the parents to their daughter upon her marriage, over which she has, however, no legal control (Goody and Tambiah 85). Second, gifts are part of a ritual exchange between the families of the bride and the groom to symbolize their union. Third, cash is given as "marriage payment" with the explicit understanding that without it the marriage contract will be voided (Sen 78). Strictly speaking, only the last item can be categorized as dowry, which then is not a freewill gift of money or property, but has a coercive element attached to it (Sen 78).

3 Marriage practices in societies with dowries are typically monogamous, patrilineal (i.e., class status follows from the husband's status), and endogamous (Anderson 271). Endogamy is referring to marriages of men and women of equal status or of the same caste. This caste monogamy preserves caste purity. Furthermore, societies with dowries exhibit substantial socio-economic differentiation and class stratification. According to Kodoth (5), the caste system and its related traditions of hypergamy as well as endogamy are responsible for the dowry system to a great extent in India. Hypergamy is a way for women's upward mobility in the social hierarchy, because they marry men of the same or higher social status. Teja (16) states that when the endogamous restrictions became rigid and prestige solely determined by social hierarchy, hypergamy became the widely accepted form of marriage.

4 From a historical perspective, Srinivas (12) traces the origins of dowry to the prevailing ideology of kinship structure, which enforces the caste system as well as hypergamous marriage. In earlier times, only upper castes, such as Rajputs and Brahmins, practiced dowry customs, but with modernization in cities it has now spread to all other groups including scheduled castes, Muslims and also Christians (Sheel 26) and introduces its inherent gender relations into these social groups. In the Hindu lower castes (in this study the Kushwaha caste), men have begun to emulate upper caste customs, which include female feticide, infanticide and the neglect of the girl child that enables them to tap into upper caste economic networks and further upward mobility. Also, with regard to dowry, the earlier concept of *streedhan* (the Hindi term for women's property, Gandhi & Shah 52) of primitive societies has taken the vulgarized form of dowry due to the secondary status of women in society. Dowries were paid in accordance with one's means and almost always constituted a one-time payment (gift) at the time of marital celebrations. Though hegemonic assertions of the past do not persist anymore, their by-product still persists through socialization in North India (Srinivas 13).

5 In India, grooms and brides are usually matched in such a way that men marry younger women. An exogenous increase of the population growth rate causes the entry of surplus women from the younger cohort into the marriage circle. Consequently, the average age of potential brides decreases, while their numbers increase. As there are thus very few desirable grooms compared to the large number of brides available due to the age cohort, this results in fiercer competition for scarce grooms and induces an additional upward shift in dowry demands, the so-called "marriage squeeze" (Rao 669). This scenario leads to space for dowry demands among grooms' families, within the marriage circle, where desire for dowry is used by grooms' families to create a transactional space, through which they negotiate

about the amount of dowry to be paid with the brides' families. This space is finally used to transfer the dowry property from bride givers to bride takers. Though grooms' families create this space the bride's families are drawn into it, as they have to participate in it willingly or unwillingly due to the fear that their daughter might stay unmarried.

6 Dowry as a social practice creates a transactional space within the marriage circle, in which both bride and groom parties interact to negotiate and, eventually, to transact. According to Floysand (4), social practices can be defined as interactions between two or more agents that are characterized by overlapping processes of transaction and signification or as the interchange of goods and signs (s. figure 1). An agent is synonymous with a social person (Floysand 4). The purpose of such interaction can be to interchange goods and signs that confirm the agents' gender identity, professional identity, political or economic position, etc.

7 Henri Lefebvre, in his book, *The Production of Space*, outlines the correlations between social practices and space in more detail. According to Lefebvre (233), social space, here the transactional space established by dowry practices within the marriage circle, can be described and explained, at least partially, in terms of an intentional signifying process. The intentions of the grooms' families are to accumulate wealth, whereas those of the brides' families are to compete amongst each other to procure the best match for their daughters to marry. According to Teja (95), the groom's family may use dowry to assert their superior position over that of the bride's at the time of marriage negotiations. Dowry is both the origin and the result of such assertions. Marriage is often used as a tool by the groom's family to enhance their financial status. In the process, they directly or indirectly demand dowry from the bride's family (Srinivas 935). Thus, dowry plays its role as goods or signs in creating a new transactional space within the marriage circle where both bride and groom parties negotiate and transact.

8 Lefebvre (33) further argues that space is not an inert, neutral, and pre-existing given, but rather an on-going production of spatial relations. Spatial practice refers to the production and reproduction of spatial relations between objects and products. It also ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. The emphasis on the production of space firmly situates Lefebvre's work in a post-structuralist or post-modern critical discourse. He states:

'familiar' everyday practice is constantly referring from representations of space (maps and plans, different social systems, information conveyed by images and signs of earlier generations) to representational space of lived emotions and experiences. The social control of space weighs heavy indeed upon all those people who fail to reject the familiarity of everyday life. (Lefebvre 233)

Lefebvre sees the prospect of emerging new spaces—differential spaces—that serve as sites of resistance to the forces of homogenization present in what he calls abstract space. As such, in the contemporary moment, Lefebvre shows the dialectical conflict between this abstract space and its antagonist, differential space.

9 Furthermore, in his book *Production of Space*, Lefebvre discusses that anthropology has shown us how the space occupied by any particular ‘primitive’ group (for instance men in the patriarchal societal space) corresponds to the hierarchical classification of the group’s members, and how it serves to render that order always actual and present. The members (all men and women) of archaic society obey social norms without realizing it. They rather live them spatially: they are not ignorant of them, nor do they misapprehend them, but they live them immediately. The underlying continuity does not exist solely in spatial reality, but also at the representational level (i.e. at an emotional and experiential level). Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements but also representational spaces and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives- i.e. so called “cultural models” (Lefebvre 229).

10 This study analyzes familiar everyday practices related to dowry referring to norms and values from representations of space of the patriarchal society to representational space, the emotionally lived space of women and the bride-giving families. There is social control of the patriarchal society over the life of women, and those who do not comply sufficiently have to pay a huge price, be it directly or indirectly. Women have to bear the consequences of not fulfilling the grooms’ families’ demands. A direct consequence is that the bride would not be accepted before marriage and indirect experiences would be after marriage harassments, be it physical or mental, thus victimizing the women due to lack of sufficient dowry. This depicts the highly gendered nature of the Indian society in general and a highly discriminatory gendered space established by dowry practices in particular.

11 Bihar lies in the patriarchal heartland of North India. This becomes especially visible at the time of marriage when the grooms demand a high dowry price to tie the conjugal knot. Bihar ranks second (behind Uttar Pradesh) in dowry deaths and dowry-related crimes against women (Choudhury 2012). Though the government of Bihar passed the *Bihar State Prohibition of Dowry, Rules 2003* in an attempt to dissuade the practice of dowry in the state, there is only slight improvement. In Bihar, 918 dowry deaths were reported in the year 2010, as compared to 1,210 in the year 2008 (peopleofbihar.com).

12 According to the census report of Bihar 2011, Patna district (including rural and urban Patna), the capital of Bihar with a population of 5.7 million, has the lowest sex ratio in the state (873/1000) while India’s average sex ratio is 933/1000. Bihar ranked fourth in the index

(24.5) of son preference in India in 1990 (Patel 14). An increasingly important factor in son preference is the desire to accumulate wealth (Mallik 1). Sev'er (68) states that there is relation between dowry and sex ratio. This as well as the male literacy rate of 80.28 % and female literacy rate of 63.72 % clearly reflects gender discrimination to be especially pronounced in urban Patna.

13 In recent years, urban areas in Bihar show a new and contradictory trend, as cities have higher female literacy rates in comparison to rural areas, while gender discrimination is more prevalent in these urban areas. For example, urban Patna has 78 % female literacy rate while that of rural Patna is just 52 %, but the sex ratio of rural Patna is 899 in comparison to urban Patna of 883. Comparing rural and urban Patna, work participation rate, too, shows a gender gap. The gender gap of the work participation rate of 30 % in the rural part and 36 % in the urban area manifests that higher female literacy in urban Patna is mainly a prerequisite for better marriage prospects, and not of increased inclusion in the work force.

14 Escalating dowry cases in the news, high sex differences in wages, low female education and few economic opportunities for women in Bihar reveal that the status of women is relatively lower than the status of men. In Bihar, the situation has gotten so bad that grooms are regularly put on display and brokers negotiate the best dowry from would-be bridal families (Sev'er 61).

15 The selected Kushwaha caste is divided into two sub-socio-cultural spaces within urban Patna. One is old Patna city in the east and the other is new West Patna. The older part of the city has been inhabited by original residents for many generations, and newer West Patna is settled by migrants from other districts of Bihar who have been residing there only for one or two generations. Residents of modern West Patna are mainly absorbed in tertiary sector jobs with more disposable income while old Patna city residents are engaged in the primary sector and businesses. This stratification allows examining similarities and differences between the dowry practices of native residents and migrant residents of the same caste in the two parts of the city.

16 This study examines spatial factors and processes of dowry practices by utilizing spatially disaggregated community knowledge of members of the Kushwaha caste. To understand how dowry creates a highly gendered space and sustains it, an explorative qualitative case-study research design was chosen. An equal number of households were chosen from two different socio-cultural spaces, old Patna city and West Patna (16 in total). Selected households had at least a daughter and a son of marriageable age. The main members of the households above the age of 30 were selected as respondents. Methods used

include in-depth unstructured interviews and focus group discussions, field observations and field notes. At first, two reliable key-informants, one from Patna city and the other from Patna West were selected. With their help, households were mapped and further interview partners contacted. Then, in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with selected respondents from each stratified group from both study areas. As a last step, a group discussion on dowry as a spatial practice was conducted with members of the Kushwaha caste of the Sakarma Organisation, an organization for the intellectual development of Kushwaha caste people. This organization was selected as it is one of the literary organizations run for and by the local Kushwaha caste people in the study area and as it actively participates in the discussion and problem solving issues of the caste. Analytic methods used were narrative and thematic analysis and graphical representations through flow diagrams.

17 The transactional space within the marriage circle lays the foundation for the gendered space created by dowry practices in urban Patna. Marriage is the principal source of social security for women in India (Kodoth 8). This perception encourages the grooms' families to demand high dowry of the bride-giving families. Grooms with jobs are in particularly high demand in the marriage market in Bihar. Such desirable grooms are scarce in the Kushwaha caste, however, because their ancestral occupation is vegetable farming. This is the economic explanation for dowry inflation that recognizes dowry payments as a price that increases with a scarcity of grooms (Anderson 6). Grooms' families invest in their sons' quality education, intending to get such investment back at the time of their son's marriage. Thus, many grooms' families feel justified in demanding dowry as a return for their investment in their son: The groom's education expenses are supposed to be born by the bride's family. Also, the amount of the dowry has become an indication of the status of the groom's family. Increasing materialism in urban Patna is reflected in the attempt to accumulate free surplus wealth at one go during the wedding arrangement. Grooms' families are especially interested in obtaining valuable land from bride-giving families in old Patna city. Moreover, dowry acceptance is a necessary proof of the groom's potency, too. Respondents expressed that if no dowry is demanded from the groom's side, then the brides' families get confused about his potency and underrate him so that, ultimately, he would not get good marriage proposals.

18 For bride-giving families, the major factors for participating in the transactional space are hypergamic and caste endogamic social factors, gender role factors, raised life styles and more disposable income in urban Patna (see Fig. 2). Hypergamy along with caste-endogamy is the most important factor that restricts the options for a bride's father in selecting a groom

and, consequently, leads to the practice of dowry competitiveness. Dowry competitiveness means bride givers compete in the marriage market by paying the maximum amount of dowry to procure a groom for their daughters. As one of the participants from West Patna City expressed: “Every one wants to marry one’s daughter in a better family, who wants to marry her in a lower status family. In the process dowry has to be given” (Case 1). This shows hypergamy as the norm in society, enforcing bride-giving families to compete among each other. Dowry is an essential part of hypergamy among high status families who use arranged marriage to consolidate or enhance their social status. Parents want to procure relatively high earning grooms, preferably with government jobs, to make their daughters’ future safe. But there are very few such grooms available due to limited education in the traditionally agrarian Kushwaha caste and also due to uneven development through modernization. Anderson states that modernization has meant not only an increase in average wealth, but also an increase in within-caste heterogeneity of incomes (s. figure 2). He explains:

Since dowry can be viewed as an offer that a bride's family makes for a groom of certain market value, an increase in the relative heterogeneity of grooms will increase the spread of dowries. (Anderson 3)

19 Gender role factors include the compensation for physical and educational qualification of a bride. If the bride is not very beautiful or if she is not well educated, the bride’s family has to pay more dowry to get the desired groom. The compulsion of marrying one's daughter within the marriageable age of 18 to 25 years also compels anxious fathers to compete with dowry for desirable grooms. Otherwise, older brides have to contest with younger brides in the age cohort by paying even more dowry, leading to extra financial burden on the family. People in the field shared that keeping daughters unmarried spells dishonor. This mentality compels bride-givers to pay large amounts of dowry to marry off their daughters and, in turn, inspires bride-takers to demand increasing amounts of dowry, too.

20 Even if a woman is educated, her education is mainly for matrimonial qualification, as women usually do not work and earn their own living. Instead, they have to get into nurturing roles. So minimum education is imparted to them because as educated mothers, they can better nurture their children and assist them in their schoolwork than illiterate mothers. For men, on the contrary, education is the first priority, as they have to fit into the earning roles, depicting the stereotyped gender roles of most of the families in India. Kodoth (8) argues that working class people in agricultural labor and traditional industries invest inordinately in

marriage payments in order to attract men who would shelter their daughters from the harshness of capitalist labor. There are different kinds of investments for boys and girls to fit them into socially accepted gender roles. A woman from east Patna city shared “without dowry, the girl would not get married, so when it comes to education, her guardian think of dowry first; we have to give 2 lakh Rupees dowry to get her married” (Case 13). 2 lakh are 200,000 Rupees, which equals about 2600 Euros.

21 Parents often see daughters as a liability for whom they have to find a financially stable groom to provide throughout her whole life, due to the stereotyped gender roles within the family. From the point of view of woman’s parents, they have to spend a lot of money to procure her a husband. Women themselves take no part in the decision-making about their life, the kind of life they want to live or the way they would want their parents to spend money for their development to make them independent individuals. The decision is taken and imposed upon them. This shows that women are often regarded as commodities rather than independent human beings.

22 Women married at a young age are not given enough time and opportunity to be financially independent. Therefore, women are not able to earn social status and value for themselves. Dowry property is handed over to the groom and his family at the time of marriage; therefore women have no legal share of dowry property. Furthermore, brides’ families get anxious to get their daughters married off as soon as possible because the older the bride, the more dowry needs to be given to procure a match for her, putting extra financial burden on the family. This has a negative effect on the emotional well-being of women.

23 Raised lifestyles and more disposable income due to modernization have aggravated the phenomenon further. According to Anderson, modernization involves two components: “Increasing average wealth and increasing wealth dispersion within status (or caste) groups. In caste-based societies, the increases in wealth dispersion that accompany modernization necessarily lead to increases in dowry payments” (269). Increased income for West Patna Kushwahas who are the educated elite group absorbed in the service sector stems from an increase in black money (bribes). For the majority of east Patna city Kushwahas however, income is generated through sales of high value urban land or dowry. Middle and lower income groups are dragged into dowry competition.

24 There is an obvious link between grooms’ practices and bride-giving families’ practices, which together delineate the transactional space within the marriage circle. All marriage and dowry negotiations take place in this transactional space. Thus, it can be said



that dowry practices create this transactional space within the marriage circle among Kushwaha caste people in urban Patna.

25 Obviously, though, the bride-giving families and the grooms' families do not experience this transactional space in the same way. Brides' families use this space to compete in the marriage circle for procuring a better match for their daughters, while grooms and their families use this space to acquire and accumulate more wealth. During the field investigation it was found that the transactional space within the marriage circle is normalized: as a consequence, it is hard to believe for all participants, but especially for parents, that dowry transactions simultaneously create and sustain a highly gendered space. A woman from old Patna city explains how a woman is restricted to a subordinate position for the rest of her life: "the girl has to get married and dowry needs to be paid, so her education gets compromised, while a boy is encouraged to study and prosper because he would not need dowry" (Case 13).

26 Dowry practice is loaded with conflicts and tensions between women and their families of orientation as well as families of procreation (Sev'er 61). Hegde points out "raising a daughter is like watering a neighbour's plant [...] for fulfillment, many sons, for the sake of beauty, one daughter [...] a son spells rewards, a daughter expense" (512). Such mentality restricts bride-givers from investing in the girl's quality education to make them financially independent and thus maintaining their subordinate position in society. Dowry practices have further added to the already existing gender discrimination in parental homes that is reflected in the declining sex ratio, the lower literacy rate or the neglect of the girl child. As the payment of large dowries is both the ideal and actual practice, many daughters are indeed a serious threat to the prosperity as well as to the economic and social upward mobility of the household. Such a situation causes discrimination in favor of boys and against girls.

27 The discrimination is thus only acknowledged by women who are victimized in their marital home for more dowry. Women shared that the money saved for dowry giving could be invested in their education and individual development instead. One woman (Case 13) asserted that she got discriminated due to dowry, which according to her should be "socially" abolished at practical levels, so that women can utilize the resources to develop themselves and become economically independent through education and work. The reason women receive minimum education is that the more educated the woman, the more dowry is required to procure a match suiting her standard. In the study group, marriage is prioritized over education for women, since marriage is seen as an institution through which people become

part of their society. These practices are so much internalized that the women's parents contested that they discriminate against their daughters. They feel that it is their duty as parents to get their daughters married. If they fail to do so, it will be seen as their failure as parents. Moreover, they fear that their daughters might be socially punished, since single women are stigmatized in their society. The threat of social criticism compels them to abide by the norms and values of the patriarchal society rather than taking their individual decisions to educate their daughters and make them financially independent. If the family does not get their daughters married off, they are looked down upon especially by fathers, brothers and other men in the community.

28 Apart from the discrimination experienced in the parental home, young brides and women face discrimination in their marital home as well. So-called dowry aggressiveness takes place when the groom's family is demanding more dowry in form of money or land after the marriage out of greed. Victims of dowry aggressiveness were mostly from east Patna city and reported that expensive land property and less education makes them more vulnerable to dowry abuses as greedy grooms torture them verbally and physically to get land from their parents.

29 A significant finding of the field investigations is the great difference in the experienced forms of dowry practices between Kushwahas in old Patna city and new West Patna. West Patna people are educated elites who are mostly influenced by modernization and who work mainly in the service sector. Therefore, there is higher dowry competitiveness before marriage in West Patna, while dowry aggressiveness in the marital homes has become a characteristic feature of Patna city in the east. Sev'er (59) states that due to inadequate political action and lack of political will to interfere in the private affairs of marriage, dowry continues to be a deadly business. Although there have been many dowry suicide and murder cases in Patna city, the community bonding among them is strong and people support each other in covering up the crime. In West Patna, the degree of dowry aggression is milder and the number of dowry death cases is less, as the brides' educated elite families are politically stronger to protect their daughters. Furthermore, the absence of valuable land properties makes brides in West Patna less vulnerable to dowry abuses.

30 Coping strategies adopted by brides' families in regard to dowry practices can be categorized in two types. At first, brides' families have coping strategies for dowry competitiveness and secondly, they develop coping strategies to deal with post-marriage dowry demands in the form of dowry aggressiveness, if such takes place. Women may be less respected if the bride's father could not afford to pay at the time of marriage. In contrast,

women whose fathers pay a substantial dowry to procure grooms for them are more likely to be in a better position. A guardian from West Patna asserted, “dowry is also given to fetch value and respect for the daughter in her husband’s house” (Case 10).

31 Strategies adopted by the bride-giving families in women’s parental home add to the discriminatory space in the marital home of the women. They depend on the amount of dowry money the bride-giving families can afford and the kind of challenges faced by them. Before marriage, this can be financial challenge, physical attributes challenge, and status challenge. After marriage, challenges are dowry demands by the groom’s family and dowry aggressiveness.

32 Strategies before marriage adopted by the bride-giving families are for example that the family has to cut down their expenditure to save money for dowry. Certain families, who are not able to earn surplus money, are left with the only solution to cut down the educational expenditure that could be spent on women. Another strategy practiced by those bride’s families who are not able to afford large sums of money at one go, but who do not want to compromise with the quality of the grooms, is to negotiate the marriage by paying some amount before marriage and the rest of the dowry in installments. In case they fail to pay the installments, women might experience dowry aggression in form of taunts and abuses, as she would not be respected as long as her father failed to keep his promise.

33 To give land to the groom to settle and set up business in Patna is the characteristic of Patna city people only, as they have extensive and expensive land properties. This can be perceived as one father from east Patna city shares his experience of arranging his daughter’s marriage: “groom’s demand was that he wants land to settle in Patna as he was from out of Patna” (Case 6).

34 Hypergamy can be compromised if a groom with poor present qualities is accepted. Depending on the amount of money they can afford, brides’ families go in the marriage market to see which category of groom would be available within their limitations. Otherwise, there are few cases in which the bride’s parents try to procure a groom who is to get a job in the near future. Before entering the job, the groom’s market value is less, and, in fact, he has not officially entered the marriage market yet. Other women are getting married to grooms who cannot sustain them. Families with the attitude of saving the property for the sons to inherit discriminate between sons and daughters by depriving the daughter from her minimal share, by getting her married to a groom who is incapable to sustain her, simply to free themselves from their responsibilities and preserve their property for their sons.

35 Other marriages are arranged by negotiating with the groom's family that the bride's father will fetch a government job for the groom assuring them that he has some connections along with the money. The groom's family gets tempted by the offer and agrees to fix the marriage with them. Sometimes the bride's father is able to fulfill his promise, but this cannot be guaranteed. In that case the bride pays the price for her father's coping strategy by bearing with the taunts and abuses for the rest of her life.

36 In Patna city and West Patna, it was found that people living in city areas do not mind marrying their daughters to grooms settled in a village, if they cannot afford to procure a groom settled in the city. Comparatively, there is less dowry demands in village areas. The same category of groom can therefore be fetched at a lesser price. Such a coping strategy can be problematic as girls born and brought up in the city may find it difficult to adjust to village life.

37 Coping strategies differ in old Patna city and West Patna, in that old Patna city respondents indicated to give valuable land to the groom to negotiate marriage for their daughters, whereas in West Patna a limited number of girls are educated with the intention that their financial independence can serve as compensation for dowry.

38 After marriage, coping strategies adopted by bride-giving families are needed in case dowry aggressiveness develops. When a woman goes to her husband's (in-law's) house after marriage and her in-laws feel that the amount of dowry brought by the bride does not meet their expectations, she starts receiving taunts and abuses. These are aimed at pushing her to ask her parents to fulfill her in-law's expectations. In such a situation most insecure parents who are looking forward to settling their daughter in a specific family try to fulfill their demands as much as possible to prevent the woman from being abandoned by her husband and prevent her from physical and mental harassment.

39 In cases where the bride's parents are not rich enough to fulfill after-marriage demands, they have no choice than to wait and hope for the situation to improve. Some parents try to negotiate with the in-laws expressing their inability to provide anything further. In such a situation, they are at the mercy of the in-laws who might do them a favor by pitying them and stop making future demands, but who can also pressurize them to fulfill the demands.

40 In extreme cases where the bride's parents feel they cannot afford to fulfill the demands, families fear that their daughter would be tortured to death or suicide. Then the woman is brought back to her natal family without caring about the social taboo of keeping the daughter. Yet, not every woman is fortunate enough to be taken back by her natal family

in such a situation. If parents refuse to take their daughters back, woman is compelled to submit herself to her fate and take all the tortures and abuses for the rest of her life. The wife cannot leave her husband's house on her own initiative because it is a social taboo. Also, she cannot opt for divorce because options for divorced women's remarriage are very limited and old parents cannot afford to provide her lifetime security. In such situations the coping strategy for dowry translates the dowry aggression into domestic violence for the rest of woman's life.

41 It was also found that people generally avoid taking help from state institutions in the case of dowry aggressiveness. They do not avail law or approach police to cope up with dowry abuses, as most of the dowry cases that are taken to court finally lead to terminating the marriage, which is to be prevented to avoid social ostracism.

42 Interviewees also expressed that the anti-dowry legislation can only be implemented if dowry taking is apparent. Dowry is generally given and taken underhand or off the record. Grooms' families take cash instead of cheques to avoid any proof of such a transaction. For brides' families, it is a choiceless situation because if they do not follow the terms and conditions of the groom, they would refuse to tie the nuptial knot. People also acknowledged that filing a case is an economically exhausting and time-consuming process without any certainty of justice for the victim. If the bride sues the groom and his family, it terminates the marriage. Since unmarried and divorced daughters are stigmatized in society, people do not necessarily take the help of the law. This shows why this practice is sustained in the private space. State interventions are not able to modify the practice as it can only operate in public space where anti-dowry legislation is supposed to be utilized by the citizen, but this happens only in cases of dowry murders.

43 There is a strong discrepancy in the attitude of bride-giving guardians, groom's guardians and women interviewed. While bride-giving families felt dowry giving a compulsion to get their daughters married, grooms' families felt justified to assert their right to demand dowry because of the desire of wealth accumulation. Moreover, they openly acknowledged that, since they have to give dowry to get their own daughters married, they expect their son to bring back this dowry expense spent on his sister's marriage. This balancing act between bride-giving and bride-taking serves to prevent the family from getting economically exhausted.

44 Interviewees agreed that dowry is a social evil, but the majority of guardians of the bride-giving families did not agree that they are discriminating their daughters due to dowry practices. For them, the social structure is such that the marriage becomes the most important

affair in a woman's life. Practices of marrying them at an early age, getting a groom at a lower price according to their affordability, compromising on the daughters' education to save money for their dowry are not perceived as discriminating. Parents rather feel it is their first and foremost responsibility to get their daughters married. The acknowledgement of this predicament in itself is an important insight of this study.

45 When women were asked whether they get discriminated due to dowry practices, they gave a firm reply "yes". This shows that family and society decides the parameters of a women's well being. Women's choices of their well being are not taken into consideration. Still, women accept that they get discriminated in regard to their education that is compromised at the cost of their marriage, which according to society is the most important need for their social well being. Female participants who were victims of dowry aggression and who experienced discrimination due to dowry and whose well being was hampered believed that dowry should be socially abolished at practical levels. The women further shared that the money saved from dowry-giving could be invested in their education, their individual development and their financial independence. Since women are in subordinate position in the patriarchal system, their views hardly get taken into consideration. Since this space is particularly experienced by women, men, whether as fathers, brothers or husbands can hardly empathize with the lived experiences of women. Men's achievements are considered to be the priority in the family, because a family's status in the patriarchal society gets evaluated on the parameters of men's accomplishments. Hence the well being of women gets sacrificed and compromised for the overall family honor and status in society.

46 The discussed data show how dowry as a social practice creates and sustains a highly gendered discriminatory space amongst members of the Kushwaha caste in urban Patna, Bihar. The grooms' families create a transactional space in the marriage circle by demanding dowry directly or indirectly and by insisting on their superior position vis-à-vis the bride-giving families. Bride-giving families willingly or unwillingly are drawn into this transactional space due to the fear that their daughters might not get the desired groom or stay unmarried, contradicting the social norms of hypergamy and of marriage as a social necessity for women. In the process of arranging and saving money for the dowry of their daughters, parents discriminate against their daughters by compromising on their education and other means that would otherwise help women to become more independent individuals and to enhance their position in society on their own.

47 This study related experiences of women and their families, and gives a detailed account of causes and effects of dowry practice by a methodology based on thoughts,

attitudes and individual reasoning about people's behavior. In sum, it can be said that even though dowry is considered to be a social evil by outsiders as well as insiders, the social structure is such that the brides' families have no choice than to practice dowry. Although Bihar has an anti-dowry legislation law, it is hardly implemented. Grooms' families justify their act, by their obligation to give dowry for their own daughters. The individual well beings of women keep on getting sacrificed in the name of family honor and responsibility for their social acceptance.

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