



Dowry related violence in Balasore district of Odisha

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Prof.(Dr) Shyam
Sundar Acharya**ABSTRACT**

Violence against women is a very sensitive issue in contemporary era. It violates the human rights and dignity of women. Dowry is one such evil which affects the marital life of women and makes her life wretched. Dowry is considered a major reason for increasing violence against women. The tradition of dowry is deeply rooted in Indian socio-cultural system. This paper is based on the field study related to dowry violence conducted in the district of Balasore and data collected till 2012 in this regard. The district of Balasore in the state of Odisha which is the area of the empirical study topped the list in the dowry related violence against women from (2009-2012). Dowry related crimes have been grouped into three categories like dowry homicide, dowry suicide and dowry death. The major reasons which can be attributed to the incidence of dowry related crimes are alcoholism, greed for more pecuniary benefits and more often than not the death of the victim. Besides strict implementation of dowry prohibition laws the improvement in the educational and economic status of women is necessary to deal with such menace.

KEYWORDS : Women, Dowry, Violence,**Introduction**

Violence against women is a global problem. It is one of the greatest human rights violations of women. Women almost in all regions whether developed or developing ones face different types of violence. Dowry related violence is one of them. Dowry is one of the social evils in India. It can be said that the custom of giving and taking dowry is deeply rooted in our society from time immemorial. The dowry system directly perpetuates gender specific violence. In India, it is estimated that more than 5,000 women are killed each year because their in-laws consider their dowries inadequate and torture them. A tiny percentage of their murderers are brought to justice. (UN: targeted violence against women, 2010) According to a UNIFEM report, more than 12 women die every day as a result of being burnt alive by their husbands or in-laws due to dowry disputes. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burnings or suicides. Dowry in fact can be regarded as social cancer in India. (WHO, 2008)

Definition of dowry

Lexically dowry means "money, goods or estate that a woman brings to her husband at marriage". (Webster dictionary) It also refers to in some societies, 'an amount of money or property that a woman's parents give to the man she marries'. (Cambridge dictionary)

'Dowry' is defined as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given directly or indirectly (a) by one party to the other party for marriage or (b) by parents of either party to the marriage or by any other person to either party or to any other person at or before or at any time after the marriage in connection with the marriage of said partners. (Dowry Act, 1961) Dowry torture may take the extreme form of homicide or murder. The victim may also attempt suicide. More often than not it leads to death.

A dowry death can be described as the unnatural death of a woman caused by burns or body injury occurring within the first seven years of marriage, if it can be shown that the woman was subjected to cruelty by her husband or her husband's relatives shortly before death in connection with a demand of dowry. (Rao, 2011)

Violence against women

Violence against women means any act of gender- based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". (The U.N. Declaration, 1993) Domestic violence can be said to take place when one adult in a relationship misuses his power

to control another. It is establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. Domestic violence may take many forms like physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse and emotional and psychological abuse. Dowry death is considered one of the many categories of violence against women, alongside rape, bride burning, eve-teasing, and acid-throwing. Dowry violence can be considered as the main contributor to domestic violence in India.

Dowry violence in India

According to National Crime Record Bureau India has the highest number of dowry related deaths in the world. In 2012, 8233 dowry death cases were reported across India. This reveals a bride was burned every 90 minutes, or dowry issues cause 1.4 deaths per year per 100,000 women in India. (NCRB, 2012) In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi said that 8233, 8083 and 8455 cases were registered under section 304B of the Indian Penal Code in the country in 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively. Uttar Pradesh is followed by Bihar and Madhya Pradesh with 3830 and 2252 deaths during the same period. (July, 2015, New Delhi, PTI) These states are also bastions of patriarchy and the crime chart.

According to NCRB report, 19,088 cases of cognizable offence have been reported in Odisha in 2014, out of which 1450 are murder cases and of those 413 are dowry death cases which is 28% of the figure. According to a report published by National Crime Record Bureau for the years 2009-2012, the district of Balasore scored top position in dowry related violence, whereas the Mayurbhanj district is top in rape cases. According to the report the number of dowry cases registered is 46, 40, 43, and 49 for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 respectively. (NCRB, 2012)

Table-1 Dowry related cases in Odisha from 2007-2011

Year	Dowry murder	Dowry suicide	Dowry torture	Non-dowry torture	Total
2007	599	34	1755	728	3116
2008	561	36	1964	815	3376
2009	600	38	2128	748	3514
2010	571	46	2378	836	3831
2011	482	127	2501	975	4085

(Source: State Crime Record Bureau, Odisha)

The table reveals the incidences of dowry related cases in Odisha. It

can be observed that year after year the number of cases has increased. The table shows that each year the cases of dowry murder far outnumbered the cases of dowry suicide.

Table-2 Incidence of Crime against Women in the District of Balasore

Sl. No	Incidence of crime against women	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage variation in 2012 over 2011
1	Dowry homicide	31	35	27	46	40	37	39	5.4
2	Dowry Suicide	22	6	6	11	09	08	4	-5
3	Dowry torture	160	159	172	193	202	202	205	1.4
4	Non Dowry torture	27	38	45	51	46	77	102	32.4
5	Immoral Trafficking	2	2	2	2	5	2	3	.5
6	Murder of Women	46	14	18	14	28	38	37	-2.6
7	Kidnapping of women	46	42	44	55	45	61	27	-55.7
8	Molestation	145	113	76	124	188	217	242	11.5
9	Eve teasing	26	23	24	22	29	90	20	-77.7
10	Offence committed by the Women	134	80	88	40	13	26	11	-57.6
11	Abduction of women	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	23	36	103	186.1
	Total	639	510	502	558	628	794	793	-0.12

(Source: Superintendent of Police, Balasore)

The district of Balasore accounting for nearly 5.5% of state's population has accounted for 6.2% of total incidents of crime against women in the state by reporting 4257 cases. It may be pointed out that Balasore as a district is witnessing increasing industrialization in the form of expansion of industries like Ispat, Emami, Birla Tyres etc. The economic aspirations of the people of Balasore have gone up during globalization. Correspondingly dowry related crimes have also gone up as per records.

As per The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 both to receive and to give dowry are offences and hence are punishable. The punishment could be imprisonment for a term not less than 5 years and a fine not less than 15,000 or the value of the dowry received, whichever is higher. (DP Act, 1961) Section 304B of Indian Penal Code made dowry death a specific offence punishable with a minimum sentence of imprisonment for 7 years and a maximum imprisonment for life. But in spite of the existence of a number of laws to prevent dowry it continues unabated.

Case studies

This paper is the outcome of an intensive doctoral research and in-depth fieldwork conducted in the district of Balasore. The following are the account of the cases of some of the victims of dowry.

Case Study- No.1- There was a Muslim woman who suffered domestic violence only after seven months of her marriage. She was married to a person who was a mason by profession. He was also an alcohol addicted person. He used to spend a lot of money on consumption of alcohol, and put pressure on his wife to bring more dowry in cash from her father. When she expressed her father's incapability to give the said dowry, one day being intoxicated he threw acid on her belly and absconded. The ill fated woman then was hospitalized for necessary treatment in Govt. hospital.

Case Study- No.2- It is a case of a young woman's love story which had a tragic end. A beautiful woman of 19 years fell in love with a man who was a driver. They got married by absconding from home. After three months of their marriage her husband developed bad habits of alcohol and drug addiction with his bad companions. He always used to put pressure upon her to bring a motor cycle on dowry from her father. The father of the woman was a milkman who had a small dairy farm. Since the concerned woman married of her own will and brought down the prestige of parents in society, the father refused to give dowry. As a result the husband tortured the woman physically, psychologically and financially. Amid a disturbed family life, the woman was blessed with a son.

One fine morning around 3 a. m. the mother of the victim got a phone call from her daughter about some family disturbance and sent her son to enquire about the development. The brother of the victim went to her house and found the house locked from outside. Then he took the help of neighbors and broke open the door and found her sister hanging with a saree from a fan point in bedroom.

The case was reported to police who sent the dead body for post-mortem. The findings of post-mortem revealed that the woman was murdered by squeezing her throat (neck). After the incident the ill fated nine month old son is now staying under his grand parent's care.

Case study no-3- Keeping silent and tolerating violence is not the solution to the problem of violence against women was reflected in the case of a woman who was tortured for ten years. The woman married to a man who was the only son of his family with five sisters. The three sisters were married and two were unmarried. The victimized woman was an ideal housewife who took care of everyone in her in-laws' house without any complain. The dominant nature of her husband along with interference of her sister in-laws, kept her silent in spite of all sorts of torture applied against her. They neither allowed her to talk to her parents on phone, nor to go to their house. Whenever her parents came to in-laws house, they didn't provide them privacy for conversation with their daughter.

The husband continued to torture her brutally for about ten years. One day the husband with his sisters planned a conspiracy and murdered her. Then they threw the dead body near a railway track to prove the case as a suicide. When the police recovered the victim's dead body the husband and his eight year old son didn't recognize the body. But the father of the victim claimed the dead body and completed the funerals and lodged a murder case against the husband.

Findings

The rise of dowry torture indicates the increasing materialist and consumerist way of life. Women belonging to SC category found to be major victims.. Women blame husbands as they tortured them most. In the study area 19.16% of SC women in Bhograi block, 23.35% in Sadar block and 24.55% in Balasore municipal area are found to be the dowry victims. More age gap between partners more victimization of women is noticeable. From the study conducted till 2012 it is found that in case of the gap in the age of the husband and wife being 11 years the incidence of dowry crime is 51.49%. As the case studies show alcoholism or drug addiction on the part of the husbands is the major reason for dowry violence.

Efforts by police and Courts

The study shows that the police officials cooperate with the victimized women while dealing with the cases of dowry related domestic violence. They have handled these cases carefully and tried to dispose of the cases. At times they threaten the perpetrators not to torture their wives. At the same time the people who appeal in the court for justice also get justice. But justice is sought to be done after dowry death has already taken place. At times dowry deaths go unreported and the victim's relatives do not get justice.

Remedial measures and Suggestions

Social scientists and intellectuals opine that education can solve the problem of dowry system. But it is ironical that the educated people are more involved in this system. To improve the status of women strategic laws are needed and they need to be strictly implemented. It is the women themselves who will have to exert pressure to get their rights denied to them in the past. The people should be more aware and should not promote giving and taking dowry. Proper employment of women can free them from the clutches of dowry system. They need to be gainfully employed. Through micro-finance the position of poor women can be improved. Women should be trained in different vocational courses like handlooms and textiles, poultry farms, fish farming etc. Their hand some earning capacity can give a check to dowry. Women need to be aware of the laws which intend to protect them against domestic violence in general and dowry related violence in particular. So the awareness training programme needs to be arranged from time to time.

Conclusion

Dowry prohibition laws need to be effectively implemented. As we know, laws are dead letters unless life is breathed into it. Apart from the police and court the civil society including the NGOs needs to be very alert. All these measures can go a long way in checking the menace of dowry. Institutional measures along with awareness generation programme among women can go a long way in improving the situation.

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