

**What is Dowry ?**

Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom' s family along with the giving away of the bride ( called Kanyadaan) in Indian marriage . Kanyadanam is an important part of Hindu marital rites. Kanya means daughter, and dana means gift.

Dowry originated in upper caste families as the wedding gift to the bride from her family. The dowry was later given to help with marriage expenses and became a form of insurance in the case that her in-laws mistreated her. Although the dowry was legally prohibited in 1961, it continues to be highly institutionalized. The groom often demands a dowry consisting of a large sum of money, farm animals, furniture, and electronics

The practice of dowry abuse is rising in India. The most severe in “bride burning”, the burning of women whose dowries were not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. It is evident that there exist deep rooted prejudices against women in India. Cultural practices such as the payment of dowry tend to subordinate women in Indian society.

Though prohibited by law in 1961, the extraction of DOWRY from the bride's family prior to marriage still occurs. When the dowry amount is not considered sufficient or is not forthcoming, the bride is often harassed, abused and made miserable. This abuse can escalate to the point where the husband or his family burn the bride, often by pouring kerosene on her and lighting it, usually killing her. The official records of these incidents are low because they are often reported as accidents or suicides by the family. In Delhi, a woman is burned to death almost every twelve hours . The number of dowry murders is increasing. In 1988, 2,209 women were killed in dowry related incidents and in 1990, 4,835 were killed . It is important to reiterate that these are official records, which are immensely under reported. The lack of official registration of this crime is apparent in Delhi, where ninety percent of cases of women burnt were recorded as accidents, five percent as suicide and only the remaining five percent were shown as murder .

According to Government figures there were a total of 5,377 dowry deaths in 1993, an increase of 12% from 1992. Despite the existence of rigorous laws to prevent dowry-deaths under a 1986 amendment to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), convictions are rare, and judges (usually men) are often uninterested and susceptible to bribery. Recent newspaper reports have focused on the alarming rate of deaths of married women in Hamirpur, Mandi and Bilaspur districts in the state of Himachal Pradesh.