

## **Dowry: A Custom or Sin?**

*A testimonial By Sunishchit Ghimire*

*Major Paper: 2*

I was born in a Country with strong superstitious beliefs. People engage in bizarre customs, such as demanding dowry, in the name of religion. Dowry is a tradition in which the bride's parents offer necessary items at the time of their daughter's wedding in order for her to have a happy marriage. This custom has been around for generations. But in today's financial circumstances, dowries have become not a gift but mandatory for everyone. Regardless of financial situation, families must provide a dowry for their daughter's wedding. The practice of dowries is unfortunately still alive and growing.

I was raised in the Bardiya district which is located in the western part of Nepal, there were many superstitious people where I lived. It was mandatory for people to pay their future in-laws dowries in the form of items like furniture, houses, expensive gifts, cars, gold, silver, etc in exchange for them caring for their bride for the rest of their lives. Growing up, I had a friend named Abhishek, whom I had known since we were young. Laxmi, one of his sisters, was the finest girl I had ever met when I was a child. She had a beautiful face with long hair. She will turn 20 in a few months. Her parents think she is totally qualified to get married, and they and the rest of the bride's family will soon begin looking for the ideal in-laws.

Like all Nepali parents, Laxmi's parents want their daughter to marry into a wealthy household. Laxmi had no other option, she had to go with her parent's decision. They want to find a man with a successful business, employment, or other sources of income. Now Laxmi's father Ram discovers a young man on an equal level with them, with a similar social and economic status, or even above them.

Everything relating to the marriage, including the rites that make up the marriage ceremony, has already been confirmed. The negotiating phase is finally entered when the bridegroom makes significant requests regarding the marriage. Since Laxmi's parents are not from a wealthy family, they are a little concerned about the dowry that would be demanded of them. After hearing the bridegroom's family request a 5-seater

SUV, Laxmi's parents were silent for a moment. Because their in-laws had a better social and economic status than Laxmi herself, Laxmi's family was unable to reject this offer, even though they were now burdened financially and would have to obtain a sizable loan from friends or family members. The marriage will be canceled if they are unable to satisfy the requirements of the bride and groom.

There is now tension because this marriage put a lot of pressure on Laxmi and she cannot go against her parents. She is educated and aware that this is a bad practice, but she is powerless to change it because her forefathers have been following this tradition for many years. Laxmi is in difficulties because she cannot break the marriage and is also under social pressure. She doesn't want to lower the social standing of her family.

Nor is Laxmi's case uncommon. Dowry demands have created a serious problem in society and made it difficult for women to get married in many households. This dowry system has had a severely negative impact on our society. Finding partners has proven to be exceedingly difficult for the daughters of low-income parents. Many parents decide to save money for their daughter's wedding rather than pay for her education.

I discovered further instances of women unable to support themselves financially and who frequently experience violence and threats from their husbands after being married. When young women are unable to provide their groom with the dowry goods that were demanded, the groom's family often tortures both the families of the women and the women themselves. Depression and other health issues affect a lot of these women. In extreme cases, they ultimately hurt themselves by killing themselves. Domestic violence and abuse are common in our nation.

In one case, the girl's in-laws requested a house as dowry, but when she was unable to pay for this house after getting married, her husband killed her by chopping her into pieces. I've also heard about a woman named Sita whose husband set her ablaze because she was unable to pay the dowry required by their family. Similarly, Kalpana was the victim of domestic violence, and Sushma was the victim of sexual assault as all of them were unable to pay dowry after their marriage.

To stop these abuses, the government of Nepal had taken a number of actions. The Evil Social Customs and Practices Abolition Act, which outlawed dowry, was passed by Nepal in 2009. However, dowry-related violence against women continues as a result of the Act's weak implementation.

There are several strategies to stop these activities, and numerous awareness campaigns should be launched to highlight their negative aspects. Because if people are educated and can explain the negative effects on society, the lives of the bride's

family, and the bridegroom's family as well, awareness initiatives will be beneficial. The government should also devote a substantial chapter to explaining the meaning, consequences, and flaws of the dowry system in school textbooks so that people can know the consequences of these evil practices.

If Nepalese society does not understand the problem thoroughly, the dowry system will still be in use there. The dowry system would get worse if Nepalese society did not see dowry as a social crime. The dowry system won't be abolished if the entire Nepalese society does not oppose the demand for dowry.

Hi Sunischit, I see you're already here accepting my suggestions! The drafting process has definitely helped a lot here -- really like the transition from Laxmi's specific story, to other examples across the country, to the "big picture" political argument about what it would really take to transform society. My main feedback is to avoid unnecessary repetition and get a bit more specific with your examples when the situation calls for it. Nice work!