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“Let Only Your Corpse Come Out of that House”¹

An Analysis of Contemporary Dowry Discourses in Indian Newspapers

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¹ Mandelbaum, Paul, ‘*Dowry Deaths in India*’, retrieved from: <http://www.paulmandelbaum.com/bio.htm>

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to examine the complex social and cultural practice of dowry, and violence related to dowry, in India. The dowry system may at first appear to be an old-fashioned and traditional institution that in face of modernization would slowly fade away. The economic and social changes in the Indian society after Independence in 1947, particularly since the economic reforms of 1991 have on the contrary showed another direction. The practice of dowry appears to have become more widely noticeable. In the footsteps of these practices have also a wide range of social problems followed, not the least harassment and violence directed towards women which in extreme cases have led to torturing and killing of wives and daughters-in-laws when women's parents are unable to fulfil dowry requirements. This essay firstly provides a brief an overview of traditional and contemporary dowry systems in India based on secondary sources, and identify some of the factors behind dowry related violence against women. The second part analyzes newspaper coverage of dowry in two English daily international newspapers in India – *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* - during two weeks of May 2011. The study examines how news items on dowry and dowry-related crimes are covered by these newspapers and how the underlying factors of dowry-related violence and the circumstances under which crimes against women are interpreted. From a human rights perspective, the analysis of these news items can provide a broader cultural understanding of how Indian media present to the wider society the factors behind and remedies for discrimination against women in India.

Keywords: Dowry; Dowry deaths; Dowry suicides; Women; India; Modernization; Marriage; Domestic violence; Media content; Frames; Journalists' frames

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	2
Acronyms	3
1 Introduction	4
1.1 Research question	5
1.2 Theoretical and methodological issues	5
1.3 Definitions and limitations	10
2 An overview of dowry systems in India	13
2.1 Traditional and contemporary dowry systems in India	14
2.2 Social and economic factors behind dowry-related violence	16
2.3 Health reports on dowry deaths and suicides	19
2.4 Legal actions to protect women from violence	20
3 An analysis of news items on dowry in Indian newspapers	22
3.1 Dowry deaths and dowry suicides	22
3.1.1 Dowry related harassments	23
3.1.2 Time place and offenders	23
3.2 Legal actions	24
3.3 Dowry discussions in newspapers	25
4 Conclusion	27
5 References	30
Additional material	30

Acronyms

IPC	Indian Panel Code
TOI	Times of India
AIDWA	All India Democratic Women's Association
CID	Criminal investigation department
SCW	State commission of Women
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research, India
SWAF	Status of Women and Fertility
NGO	Non Governmental Organization

1 Introduction

“The most severe in ‘bride burning’, the burning of women whose dowries was not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. This abuse can escalate to the point where the husband or his family burns the bride, often by pouring kerosene on her and lighting it, usually killing her. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. 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 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.”²

The above quotation seems to indicate that the cultural custom of giving and taking dowry and related abuses have increased in India, despite legal intervention and the prohibition of dowry through the Indian Dowry Act of 1961. According to National Crime Records Bureau the reported dowry murders have increased during the past twenty years, from 2,209 women in 1988 to 8,303 women in 2009.³ Estimations, like the one in the quotation above, suggest that every twelfth hour a woman dies or is murdered in India because of conflicts over dowry. Dowry-related violence usually occurs when the dowry given at the time of marriage is not considered sufficient by the bride’s husband or the in-laws, who may harass and abuse the woman both mentally and physically, and in the worst scenario take her life.

This essay will provide a brief overview of the traditional and contemporary practices of dowry and mention some of the social and economic factors underlying dowry-related violence. The primary aim of the study is to examine how two English newspaper in India – *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* - are representing and framing the issue of dowry at the present. This will be done by a content-analysis of 34 news items that in different ways dealt with the issue of dowry and were published between May 1 and 15, 2011. The study shows that most of the news items on dowry in the two newspapers during the chosen period were reports of specific crimes committed against women, and only a small number of the stories brought attention to larger

² *Indiachild.com*, ‘Dowry in India’, retrieved from: http://www.indiachild.com/dowry_in_india.htm

³ See Borah, Porismita, ‘Examining media content: A case study of newspaper coverage of dowry in India, 1999-2006’, 18: 4 *Asian Journal of Communication* (2008) pp. 379-395.; National Crime Records Bureau, “*Crime in India 2009*” (2010) available at: <http://ncrb.nic.in>.

social problems in the Indian society. The reason for this selection is perhaps that dowry is not considered an attractive topic unless it has newsworthiness and journalists and newspaper editors are using specific “frames” when addressing dowry. The crime reports, however, sometimes provide detailed information about the contexts of dowry-related violence and will be described in detail.

1.1 Research question

- 1) How is the issue of dowry represented in Indian English newspapers today?
 - a) What kind of stories are published and in which way by the newspapers?
 - b) What information is given in new items on dowry-related crimes in India today?
- 2) What kind of frames are the journalists using to address the public on dowry-related issues?
 - a) Can there be specific reasons why journalists are using certain frames before others when reporting on dowry?

1.2 Theoretical and methodological issues

The academic study on dowry in India is today a vast field and a wide range of research reports and literatures dealing with the social and economic factors behind dowry related violence are available.⁴ For the present study, however, there are particularly two studies that are especially interesting and should be presented more in detail, primarily because they form the bases for the paper.

The first study of relevance for this paper is Devi Prasad case study, which was published in 1994 and presented the results from her content analysis of newspaper items in three Indian English papers (*The Indian Express, the Hindu and Deccan Chronicle*). She compared these news items with six regional Telugu language newspapers during the period from January 1981 to December 1988.⁵ Her study showed that, according to newspapers items, the victims of dowry deaths were young women in the age between 18 and 30 years old and the incidents of violence occurred are 2 to 7 years of marriage. The women exposed to dowry-related violence were usually less educated and highly dependent on their husbands or in-laws. Most of them were

⁴ See for example: Bhattacharya, Rinki, (ed.), *Behind Closed Doors, Domestic Violence in India*, Sage Publications; New Delhi 2004. ; Badal, Sangeeta B., *Gender, Social Structure and Empowerment, Status Report of Women in India*, Rawat Publications; New Delhi 2009. ; Bradely, Tamsin., Tomalin, Emma. and Mangala Subramaniam., (eds.), *Dowry, Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice*, Raj Press; New Delhi 2009.

⁵ Prasad, B D., ‘Dowry-Related Violence: Content Analysis of News in Selected Newspapers’, 25 *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* (1994) pp. 71-89.

killed by burning (some relative poured kerosene over them), through accidents in kitchen, or suicide. Devi Prasad made a content analysis of these newspapers and examined dowry-related news stories in order to see if there were certain characteristics and similarities between the occurrences of dowry deaths and women abuses related to dowry demanding.

She compared her national and regional newspaper for the purpose of understanding the nature and the variety of dowry- related cases reflected in different newspapers. In total, Devi Prasad collected 125 dowry related articles which she used for her analysis and put into a sample. She divided the articles into four different types of news items (or frames) which reflected strategies of journalists to convey news related to dowry cases: “The news story”, “A human interest story”, “Editorial story”, and “Others” which were characterized as follows:

Figure 1

The news story	A human interest story
Focus on objective and factual report such as (who, what, where, when and how).	Go beyond the factual report and adding human and emotional appeal.
Editorial story	Others
Particularly based on newspaper opinion and view point such as(policy, program and event)	Includes news photo or letter to editor, may answer one the basic question, covered by the news story.

Source: Prasad, ‘Dowry-related Violence: Content Analysis of News in Selected Newspapers’

Her results showed that a large part of the news items fall in the first category: Out of 125 stories, 104 were the news story, 19 human interests’ stories, while there was only 1 editorial story and 1 news item classified as “others” in her sample.⁶ The analysis illustrated that news items mentioned the background of the victim and the victim’s husband and in-laws, including age, religion, education, occupation and class. It also showed that in 80 percent of the cases of dowry deaths, the victim was in her twenties and a housewife who depended upon her husband or in-laws.

The sample in Devi Prasad’s analysis showed that in most cases the victim’s husband belonged to the Hindu religion and the lower middle class, and was unemployed or had lower-level income job. The dowry-related violence against women usually happened after two year of marriage and took place in the in-laws’ home where the women were living in a joint family. Her study also illustrated that not only husbands committed the crime of killing or using violence against the women, but often he was assisted by other family members, such as the mother,

⁶ Prasad, op.cit., p. 76.

brother or the brother's wife. Only in a few cases did the groom's father participate in dowry deaths.⁷

What Devi Prasad's committed study also observed was the many different types of violent acts used against women by the husbands or in-laws for dowry demands, such as beating, torturing by giving electric shock, branding, disfiguring or refusing the woman food etc. Cases of grave harassment, humiliation and helplessness sometime lead women to commit suicide. Prasad's study revealed 40 news items in which the women were reported to have committed suicide by pouring kerosene over themselves and setting fire and in some cases by hanging or drowning. In 41 reported cases of dowry deaths, on the other hand, the husband and in-laws were involved, and kerosene⁸ was a frequently used means for killing the woman. However, when authorities investigated these accidents, or claimed suicide cases, further they turned out to be murder cases. According to Prasad's study, crime cases were reported to the police station mostly by the victim's father (20, 8 percent), her brother (12 percent), and the neighbors (9, 8 percent), but 50, 6 percent of the cases did not lead to a police arrest. Only 30.7 percent of the cases led to police arrest and half of them (14, 9 percent) led to a charge criminal.⁹

The second case study of relevance for this paper is Porismita Borah's content analysis of newspaper coverage of dowry related violence in India between 1999 and 2006.¹⁰ For this study two national newspapers - *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* - and the top two regional newspapers in terms of circulation - *The Tribune* and *The Telegraph* - were selected. Borah collected 4058 dowry-related stories from all four newspapers to examine how dowry was represented in the press and found four salient frames that were employed by journalists when reporting on dowry related news.

According to Borah, a content analysis of the media can be done by using three methods: The first is to study patterns of media coverage during so-called 'peak periods' and investigate different events that are associated with a certain issue in the setting of agendas in the media. Agenda setting, in this case, can be more broadly defined as the 'study of how public issues gain

⁷ Prasad, op.cit., p. 79.

⁸ Kerosene is available in most Indian households and is used for cooking food. As many women at the time of Prasad's study was working as housewives and spend much of their time in the kitchen it is perhaps not surprising that the spouses and in-laws covered up the burning incidents and claimed they were accidents or suicides.

⁹ Prasad, op.cit., p. 82.

¹⁰ Borah, Porismita, 'Examining Media Content: A Case Study of Newspaper Coverage of Dowry in India, 1999-2006', 18:4 *Asian Journal of Communication* (2008) pp. 379-395.

or lose importance relative to other issues over time'.¹¹ In a similar way, dowry-related issues can be exposed to media agenda- setting during different times, for example in connection with events like anti-dowry campaigns by women organisation or when high profile in the society, like a political leader, a rich businessman or women, etc., bring up in dowry-related issues. During such peak periods dowry-related issues get more attention by the media and more in-depth coverage as well.

Borah's second method of media content analysis is to collect a sample of articles that are studied and examined, with particular attention to the prominent frames used by the newspapers to interpret the issue. The study of frames not only helps to interpret events into something meaningful, but also assists the understanding of how journalists organize massive amounts of information and pack them effectively for their audiences. Framing can also be defined as a strategy to create a more salient communicating text, to promote a particular problem definition and make a newspaper items more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to the audience. When identifying salient frames that are used by journalists to cover dowry-related stories, Borah finds in all the four newspapers four prominent frames which she categorizes as (1) episodic vs. (2) thematic (3) ethical vs. (4) material (see Figure 2).¹²

Figure 2

Episodic vs. Thematic frames	Ethical vs. Material
<p>Episodic (focused on specific events cases), event-oriented report, revolving around concrete instances. Thematic (focused on a broader context) provides contextual background, directed at general outcomes and conditions; events integrate into an overarching issue and provide background knowledge about the issue.</p>	<p>Ethical interpretation: human rights, civil rights, religious morals, or personal ethics. Material frame represents economics, expedience, and practicality.</p>

Source: Borah, 'Examining Media Content: A Case Study of Newspaper Coverage of Dowry in India, 1999-2006'

Analysing the issue of dowry and its social relevance, she considered both episodic and thematic frames significant to observe and examine in order to understand how Indian media reported dowry as a crime event or gave it a more in-depth coverage. The other two frames were important to examine since the concept of dowry was related to both ethical and material aspects, involving money and property. Within the ethical framework dowry was perceived as a human

¹¹ Borah, op.cit., pp. 383-384.

¹² Ibid., pp. 386-387.

rights issue that was linked with international women's rights issues. The result of Borah's analysis of 4058 articles related to dowry in the four Indian newspapers illustrated that the 'peak period' of this issue was in 2000 and in 2003 when high profiled people got involved and dowry became a public concern. The large part of the news stories are coded as episodic (71 percent) rather than thematic (29 percent) and focus on specific events and cases. Most are also categorized as material news items (76 percent) while less are ethical stories (24 percent) that bring up larger human rights issues.

The third method used by Borah is to interview journalists in order to examine the underlying factors and influences for certain frames. Her interviews with 38 journalists from the four Indian newspapers shows that 96 percent of the answered that their newspaper aimed to cause awareness of dowry as a social issue. One editor from *The Times of India*, for example, said:

It is indeed possible that some of the editors and journalists might practice dowry but as far as the newspaper is concerned, they would always write against dowry and hence cause awareness.¹³

Borah's study shows that most journalists perceived dowry-related stories just like any other story for the day and publish them based on the 'newsworthiness' and immediacy. A large part of the journalists (78 percent) said that dowry stories usually get 'framed' as crime stories and only if the story became big they covered it in-depth. Another important issue Borah highlights is that journalists agree that many factors influence the nature of coverage on dowry cases, such as "political correctness" and that dowry is traditionally tied to Indian marriages. The following quotation by her seems to indicate that journalists follow a public opinion and market interests when selecting news stories:

Dowry-related stories are not considered 'market friendly'. They claimed people do not like to read about dowry related stories, which they consider as reflecting the 'ugly truth' about Indian society.¹⁴

The dominance of episodic frames indicates that dowry is primarily reported as a crime story while in-depth stories are included only they are considered newsworthy and involve important and well-known people in the society, such as a religious leader, a politician, an actor and the like. Thus Borah argues that the driving force behind news coverage is marketability and 'newsworthiness' which is reflected in the overall coverage as well as in the responses of

¹³ Borah, op.cit., p. 389.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 390.

journalists. Her analysis illustrates that there can be many factors that influence the ways in which journalists may frame dowry-related issue. As she concludes, the media is an important and visible part of mass communication process with power to expose many invisible phenomena, such as domestic violence or dowry related suicide issue. The journalists' normative and social responsibility to address more ethical dimensions of dowry-related issues, however, is spurred only occasionally by 'newsworthy' events and for other social, culture and financial reasons.¹⁵

Based on methodological and theoretical ideas derived from Borah and Prasad the present study will make a content-analysis of 34 collected news items from the selected Indian newspapers and examine how the newspapers frame stories on dowry in order to create certain interpretations. The analysis will examine the nature and characteristics of the dowry-related newspaper stories and, drawing on X's model, see if stories can be categorized as either episodic, thematic, ethical or material

1.3 Definitions and limitations

As a concept and practice, the English word dowry is difficult to define since there are many indigenous words in India that signify dowry and these also bear several connotations that have changed over time. According to the English version of the Hindu succession law of 1950¹⁶ dowry was defined as:

...female property or female right to property which is transferred at a women's marriage as a sort of pre-mortem inheritance.¹⁷

Here dowry is seen as a social method to compensate the woman her right to inheritance at the time of marriage when she moves to her in-laws. As I will discuss further below, this voluntary practice of giving the woman her inheritance in advance was transformed over time and dowry came to be viewed as a demand and device for financial gains that placed the women in a vulnerable situation. The Law Commission, in its report, gave a less idealistic definition of dowry;

¹⁵ Borah, op.cit., pp. 391-392.

¹⁶ Under the Hindu law reforms of the 1950's, Hindu males own family property at birth, while females can now inherit it. See (Dalmia, Sonia and Lawrence, Pareena G., 'The Institution of Dowry in India: Why It Continues To Prevail', 38:2 *The Journal of Developing Areas* (2005) pp. 71-93.

¹⁷ Rudd, J., 'Dowry-murder: An Example of Violence against Women', 24:5 *Journal of Women's Studies International Forum* (2001) p. 516.

Dowry means money, or other things estimable in terms of money, demanded from the wife or her parents or other relatives by the husband or his parents or other relatives, where such a demand is not properly referable to any legally recognized claim and is related only to the wife's having married into the husband's family.¹⁸

To make a distinction between law and tradition and make clear that giving dowry is punishable according to law; the Law Commission further defines dowry death as follows:

...where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise under normal circumstances within five years of her marriage and it is shown that soon before her death she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any relative of her husband, for, or in connection with, any demand for dowry, such death shall be called 'dowry death' and such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death.¹⁹

Dowry harassment is another level of crime when women are ill-treated and exposed to violence by her husband and in-law.

The present study has several limitations which do not permit any broader conclusions from the analysis. Firstly, only two English newspapers have been selected from a large number of other newspapers available in English and in many local vernaculars in India. *The Hindu* and the *The Times of India* are two of the largest newspapers with national and global distribution. For this study the newspapers online editions have been used due to lack access their paper editions. Secondly, the chosen time period during which news items were collected is very short. The choice of this timeframe was made because I wished to review recent news item and collect a material that was possible to analyse within the time given for this assignment.

This limitation certainly has consequences for the analysis as one can presume that the two newspapers are publishing different articles on dowry at different times. In order to investigate specific patterns by which the newspapers present and frame stories on dowry the time period of the study should be longer and the material more extensive. Thirdly, dowry as a concept and practice is a very complex phenomenon in the Indian society related to many social, cultural and economic factors that in this essay are only briefly mentioned in order to provide the broad picture. A more comprehensive study of dowry and various dowry-related issues would make it possible to address, for example, cultural constructions of gender and female roles in

¹⁸91st Report on Dowry Deaths and Law Reforms, Law Commission of India. No. F 2(9) /83-L.G, 18 August 1983, P.9-10. Chapter 3, 3:3 <http://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/51-100/Report91.pdf>

¹⁹Ibid., P.13. Chapter 5, 5:2.

Indian society. Many factors behind the practice of dowry have been left out in this study in order to keep the focus on coverage by Indian English newspapers during a limited time period.

2 An overview of dowry systems in India

The practice of exchanging gifts at the time of marriage, whether in the form of dowry or bride wealth,²⁰ can be found in almost every culture and has a long history. In Europe, for example, dowry systems can be traced back to the ancient Greek and the Romans,²¹ and from the medieval time and onwards became a common practice among most social and economic groups. Under the colonial period in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, dowry payments were widespread as a family law in Mexico and Brazil under the Spanish and Portuguese rule.²²

As Basu observes, lineage and descent is the central for kinship and through marriage different groups are able to establish and strength their connections and cooperation. The women and the bride wealth are significant for the exchange of gifts between cultural groups. In the 563 societies that are mentioned in *Atlas of World Culture* 24 are associated with dowry custom, 226 with bride wealth, and 63 with bride service²³. These numbers may indicate how widespread the practices of exchanging gifts at the time of marriage are. The practice of bride wealth (bride price is often used synonymously with bride wealth) exists in cultures of Northwest Coast American Indians, in Israel and in Hong Kong. This custom is connected with the higher status of women as marriage implicated the loss of woman and her labor in the native family.

The culture of dowry on the other hand, is associated with a lower status of women as they are seen as economic liabilities rather than resources.²⁴ Anderson has argued that cultural practices of giving bride price seem to exist more frequently in tribal and nomadic societies, while societies with more complex social structures have developed dowry practices. In Greece and Rome, for example, the use of dowry was an important demarcation of the transition to more complex social structures in the Greco-Roman civilization.²⁵ What all these practices do have in

²⁰ 'Refer to transfer of goods, valuables and sometimes cash from the kin group of the groom to that the bride'. See, Basu, Srimati, (ed.) *Dowry and Inheritance* (2005) p. 33.

²¹ Dowry was obligatory under the Roman law, and this practice transferred to many parts of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century. See, Anderson, Siwan, 'The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice', 21:4 *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2007) p. 153.

²² Ibid., pp. 153-154.

²³ 'Defined as a period during which prospective groom provides labour service to the family of the bride in order to marry' (Basu, op.cit., p. 33.)

²⁴ Basu, op.cit., p. 8.

²⁵ Anderson, op.cit., pp. 153-155.

common, however, is that they work from a patriarchal structure according to which women are evaluated as having low or high status in relation to male-dominated norms.

2.1 Traditional and contemporary dowry system in India

The cultural practice of dowry in India is often traced to the Hindu text “Laws of Manu”, also known as Manava-Dharmashastra, which was written sometime between 200 BCE and 200 CE. According to this text, dowry was a form of inheritance for women, which was called ‘streedhan’, and was given to the woman from her natal home at the time of marriage.²⁶ As this practice presumed patrilineal practices and that the women move to the house of her husband’s and in-laws after marriage, dowry was a type of security for women in case of misfortunes. In the Indian context, the ritual status of dowry was the highest form of a Brahmin marriage, associated with ideas about *dakshina* or gifts and *kanyadan* or the gifting of virgin daughter that to groom’s family.²⁷

This was supposed to be a voluntary practice on part of the bride’s family. Some scholars have suggested that up to the nineteenth century, dowry implied a collection of clothes, household items, furniture, and cattle that were voluntarily given to the bride by her father at the time of marriage. These items were collected over time, and family and neighbours made contributions to it. Although the system was based on patriarchal power structures, dowry was not necessarily seen as a burden and in the pre-colonial time there is no historical evidence to support conflicts over dowry, such as the groom’s family bargained for a dowry or made dowry demands.²⁸

Many contemporary scholars believe that the roots of contemporary dowry practice can be found in the colonial India under British rule, when the colonizers introduced tax systems for agriculture which in turn increased the gap between rich and poor and slowly transformed peasants into capitalists.²⁹ Over time parents became more eager to marry their daughters into richer families, in attempt to raise their status. Families of boys took advantage of these status-climbing attempts and slowly a voluntary practice transformed into an obligatory practice when the bride’s family were expected to please the groom’s family by giving gifts of cash, jewels and

²⁶ Borah, op.cit., p. 380.

²⁷ Basu, op.cit., p. 13.

²⁸ Borah, op.cit., p. 380.

²⁹ Ibid.

consumer goods.³⁰ This transformation turned out to create the most serious social problems in the Indian society and life threatening effects on women.

At the present, the practice of giving dowry is widespread and deep-rooted in the Indian society. Paying dowry at the time of marriage is almost considered to be universal rule and dowry demands are rising. According to two surveys for the years 1960-95 and 1970-94,³¹ between 93 to 94 percent of people in rural India pay dowry in connection with marriages.³² Dowries in the form of money have increased by 15 percent annually between the years 1921- 1984, from 3,998 rupees to 500,000 to 1 million rupees³³. The traditional custom of giving the bride a gift from her natal home (*streedhan*) has transformed into a modern-day groom price, and if a bride and her relatives are unable to provide such a payment she is unlikely to be married as the monetary exchange is considered highly contractual and obligatory.³⁴

This transformation of marriage practices also happened in a time when significant social changes occurred in the Indian society, and opened up for a new economic and political mobility. According to Anderson, dowry payments rise with a modernization process when individuals of similar inherited status started to have different income levels. Along with this, dowry caused a more socially stratified Indian society. Women who are bound to traditional roles have a relatively small productive role and did not directly gain the benefits of modernization as mostly men are the primary recipients of the new economic opportunities. Under these circumstances, however, women and dowry could be used as strategies to increase the families' wealth and social status in the society, and consequently dowry became an issue for negotiation between both groups.³⁵

In modern India, the issue of dowry has been debated from different approaches. Feminists, who have focused on the woman's equal right to inheritance,³⁶ have presented arguments that dowry can be seen as the woman's inheritance and through this practice the woman will get receive at least something rather than nothing. Srimati Basu, on the other hand,

³⁰ Borah, op.cit., p. 381.

³¹ The two surveys are done by National Council of Applied Economic Research, India (NCAER) and (Survey on the Status of Women and Fertility (SWAF)) by the Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania. See: (Anderson, op.cit., p. 154.)

³² Ibid.

³³ 45.04 INR are equivalent to one USD as of May 2011, retrieved from: www.xe.com/ucc

³⁴ Anderson, op.cit., p. 163.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Basu, op.cit., p. 3.

argues that the feminist debate over dowry and women's right to inheritance in India has created slippery definition and obscured real social problem related to dowry.³⁷

2.2 Social and economic factors behind dowry-related violence

The majority of marriages contracted in India today are arranged marriages where parents ensure a suitable match for their daughter and son with considerations to class³⁸ and caste³⁹. Even if dowry is legally prohibited by the government under the Indian penal code act of 1961, dowry practices are vastly socially and culturally approved. In fact, dowry practices seem to be socially and culturally embedded in the Indian society, to such an extent that even women have become strongly associate with the material things which she brings with her into the home of her husband and in-laws before, under and after marriage. This gift-giving is not one time occurrence but a continuing process during which the parents of the bride are expected to give gifts to the family of the groom before and under the marriage ceremonies and after when the families are visiting each other. During festivals and different life-stage rituals, such as at the time of child-birth, the family is also supposed to provide other gifts.

The practice of dowry and dowry-related violence are intimately connected with patriarchal values and views of women's status in the Indian society. When a woman is married off and move into the home of her in-laws she usually has no control over her property and the cash she brings with her. In many cases of in dowry-related crime the husband and the in-laws misuse the money or property given by the bride's side and demand for more. Stone claims that women in the dowry system can be seen as 'vehicles of property transmission' and not as

³⁷ Basu, op.cit., p. 3.

³⁸ Broadly we can speak of three classes in India: the upper class population is owners of large properties, include industrialists, former maharajas, and top executives. The middle class: farmers, trades people, artisans, and workers. At the bottom is lower class of the economic scale is the poor who live in inadequate homes without adequate food, work for pittances.

³⁹ This definition highlights some of the characteristics of caste: its hereditary nature, the pursuit of traditional occupations, hierarchical rank, endogamy, and the practice of pollution rites. According to the Vedas four *Varnas* make up the Hindu system of caste; these are the Brahmins (primarily priests); Kshatriyas (warriors); Vaishyas (businessmen) and Shudras (lowest caste, mainly artisans and manual labourers). (Vaid, Divya., 'Caste and Class in India – An Analysis', *Paper for CIQLE Workshop* (2007) pp. 1-32.

inheritors.⁴⁰ This argument goes against the feminist justifications for dowry as a method to compensate her for the lost inheritance.⁴¹

Several scholarly studies have paid attention to the social and economic factors behind women abuses and observed a correlation between dowry practices and women's low economic status. Gender inequalities and the woman's economically dependence on her husband and in-laws may lead to spouse abuse. Women are in this context considered to be unproductive human beings for whom the dowry is a cost and compensation. These studies also claim that dowry demands in cash are increasing and dowry is for some men and their kinfolk seen as a legitimate means for acquiring luxury items, clearing family debts and moving upwards on the social ladder.

The causes for violence against women and wife abuse in the domestic sphere have been described from different perspectives. The first and perhaps foundational base is patriarchal social structures and a cultural environment that conditions certain ideological roles of men and women in the home and in the society. According to Babu, for example, the occurrence of dowry deaths and dowry suicides is intimately related to demographic and socio-economic variables and are rooted in some fundamental patriarchal norms. Women have limited access to the market economy and the society at large and depend on their husbands and in-laws. A women's primary role in the patriarchal society is to be a daughter, a housewife, and a mother. In the cases of marriage conflict or dowry -related violence the woman has practically not possibility to ask for divorce and she is often denied inheritance rights.⁴²

Other scholars have pointed out that stress and violence exposure at home and during childhood as well as cultural attitudes and norms about violence and gender relations in the society at large may be some causes behind women abuse.⁴³ According to Prasad, for example, the underlying factors of dowry-related violence are childhood abuse, low social and economic status, social stress and personality problem. A woman is from this perspective seen by the husband and the in-laws as an object or vehicle for pursuing more money by using violence. In more extreme cases this may lead to killing of the wife if the woman's family is unable to meet the husband's and in-laws' demands. As Mandelbaum describes, the bride's parents have for long stressed that a married daughter should refrain from returning home as she is considered to belong to the new

⁴⁰ Stone, L and James, C., 'Dowry, Bride-Burning, and Female Power in India', 18:2 *Women's Studies International Forum* (1995) p. 126.

⁴¹ Borah, op.cit., p. 381.

⁴² Babu, G R. and Babu, B V., 'Dowry deaths: A Neglected Public Health Issue in India', 3 *International Health* (2011) p. 35.

⁴³ Prasad, op.cit., p. 72.

family. This idea is reflected in a quotation of a traditional Hindu family parting with their newlywed daughter:

We are sending your bridal palanquin today. Let only your corpse come out of that house.⁴⁴

Afraid of the social consequences, the bride's parents may be especially reluctant to allow her back to the native home if, for example, there are younger sisters to be married, as a return might give the family a bad reputation in the society. Mandelbaum observes how this concern for social reputation can trap the newly wedded woman even in cases when there are clear indications of violence:

The girl has gone to her parents repeatedly and says she wants to come back, but the parents refuse to take responsibility for her.⁴⁵

Even in cases when the woman has been killed the family may search for another wife and remarry their son in order to secure more assets to the family. This systematic use of dowry practices for financial gains can go on until the family is either caught by police or the woman's family launch a case against them.

The patriarchal foundation presupposes that a woman is not considered an equal in relation to men and needs to be protected, firstly by her father and later by her husband, who has the power to take decision and control her social space. Because of the dowry system girls are considered a parental burden and that has also resulted in the rise of female infanticide/foeticide in Indian society.⁴⁶ In cases when dowry abuses and violence are involved the in-married woman is often seen as merely a means for financial gains by the grooms' side. The use of violence against the woman becomes a means for emotional and social blackmail of the bride's family. Paradoxically the women exposed to violence can get support from the society and authorities, but sadly it is the women themselves who are involved in dowry exchanges as brides, mothers, mothers in law, and sisters in law in both the giving and the taking of dowry.⁴⁷

Scholars have also observed that dowry-related violence is connected with increasing consumption culture in the broader society and increasing demands of especially the urban lower

⁴⁴ Mandelbaum, Paul. *'Dowry Deaths in India'*, retrieved from: <http://www.paulmandelbaum.com/bio.htm>. (Undated)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Borah, op.cit., p. 381.

⁴⁷ Basu, op.cit., p. 29.

and middle class. This, it has been argued, has lowered the level of tolerance for violence against women and encouraged the groom and his family to take advantage of the woman's inferior situation by demanding dowry from her natal parents.

Modernization process in the Indian society has increased the desire for consumption and led to demands for dowry as a means to obtain goods. The girl's parents give dowry to the in-laws to ensure that their daughter is treated well and, at the same time, display one's social status in the society. Violence can from this perspective be seen as a product of different socially and economically constructed factors in the society, such as unemployment, social class and financial deprivation and is not merely the result of some pathological problems on the individual level.⁴⁸

2.3 Health reports on dowry deaths and suicides

Many studies have observed that dowry related violence is an extremely complicated issue to investigate since it occurs behind the closed doors and is not always reported to the media, the police, women organizations, NGOs and the like. There are, however, reports from hospitals and international health surveys that identify dowry-related violence as a major social problem in India. For a better understanding of the complexities and causes behind this violence it may be worthy to observe some of the health reports.

A recently published paper on international health shows that dowry deaths are a neglected public health problem in India. Based on data collected from different authorities, such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the third National Family Health Survey 2005-06, the Planning Commission of India, and the Census of India 2001, this paper observes that between 1995 and 2007 the number of dowry deaths and suicides increased with 74 percent, and the cases reported to authorities increased with 31 percent⁴⁹. The NCRB report shows that there has been a surge of dowry-related deaths, from about 400 cases in the 1980s to about 6000 cases a year in the 1990s. An another homicidal deaths study conducted on postmortem examinations shows that in cases of female homicide incident victims they were usually between 21 and 30 years old and in 84.6 percent of the cases the crime occurred at home. Given these two variables the study claimed that the homicide cases were in reality dowry related deaths. Some postmortem cases also showed that the women had fatal injuries and in some incidents the woman died with

⁴⁸ Prasad, op.cit., p. 72.

⁴⁹ Babu and Babu, op.cit., p. 35.

multiple injuries. In this study most of the victims were illiterate and had a rural background in a low income joint family.⁵⁰

The international health report reveals that between 1995 and 2007 the cases of dowry deaths in 15 Indian states increased from 4648 to 8093 (i.e.74 percent). Dowry related suicide cases between the same years raised from 2407 to 3148 (i.e. 31 percent). The results from this study also indicated that some women are more victimized than others because of abilities, resources and experiences. A lower number of dowry deaths were found among educated women and those with employment and more exposure to media. In states where women did not have these resources, on the contrary, the dowry deaths and dowry-related suicides were extremely higher.⁵¹ Literacy, employment, and regularly exposed to the media did not only change the women's status, but made them aware of patriarchal norms and conservative thinking, which they challenged and protested against, including the traditional practice of dowry.

2.4 Legal actions to protect women from violence

The feminists played a significant role to protect women from violence with nationwide Anti-dowry demonstrations and protests in the 1970s and the 1980s. Dowry was key issue for the Indian women's movement and women organizations like AIDWA supported by several political parties augmented social awareness of the issue. In search for information they also conducted many surveys and found that contributing factors were traditional family values, lack of legal knowledge among women, and a general inclination to underplay dowry-related problems.⁵² Public awareness of dowry-related violence as social problem seems to be fundamental. The media can play an influential role by causing awareness, report cases of dowry crimes, but also provide in-depth analyses of causes, consequences, and possible solutions.

Another and more obvious important means to prevent dowry-related crimes is the legal system, by implementing stricter laws as well as educate citizens and create public awareness of the laws. The Indian criminal law was designed to protect women against dowry-related

⁵⁰ Homicidal study on postmortem examination was conducted during a period of 4 years, from 1st January 1998 to 31st December 2001 in the department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at Berhampur (Orissa). See, Mohanty, M K., Panigrahi, M K., Mohanty, S. and Das, S K., 'Victimologic Study of Female Homicide', 6:3 *Journal of Legal Medicine* (2004) pp. 151-156.

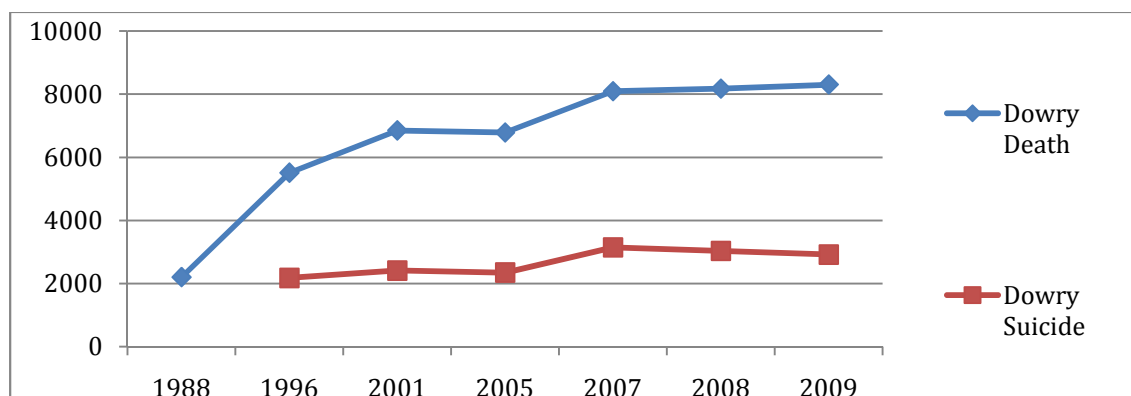
⁵¹ Babu and Babu, op.cit., pp. 36–38.

⁵² All India Democratic Women's Association, 'Expanding Dimensions of Dowry', AIDWA 17 August 2003. http://aidwaonline.org/content/issues_of_concern/across_sections.php

atrocities, but state desired to mediate on this issue only to a limited extent. The first anti- dowry act of 1961 was framed in such a way that it was hard to prove that dowry had been given as an incentive, reason or reward for the marriage, which in reality often made it impossible to implement the law. Further modifications led to a new legal reform in 1984 and in 1986 by pressure from feminists, women organizations and media coverage of dowry related issue.

All these factors led to considerable improvements in the legal protection of women, but still the delicate line between dowry and gifts remained blurred in the law.⁵³ Palkar actually claims that the criminal laws and anti- dowry act are inefficient strategies to influence the giving and taking dowry. According to her, the lawmakers have failed as the legal restrains to control domestic violence have not succeeded in protecting women effectively from violence and murder in the name of dowry.⁵⁴ Even the government’s own statistics of dowry deaths and dowry suicides from the National Crime Records Bureau for the past 21 years seem to support this argument (see Figure 3). The state has also failed to implement laws related to structural inequalities, such women’s equal rights to property and inheritance.

Figure 3



Source: National Crime Records Bureau. *Crime in India 2009*

⁵³ Agnihotri, Indu, ‘The Expanding Dimensions of Dowry’, 10:307 *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* (2003) p. 310.

⁵⁴ Palkar, Vineeta, ‘Failing Gender Justice in Anti-Dowry Law’, 23:2 *Journal of South Asia Research* (2003) p. 181.

3 An analysis of news items on dowry in Indian newspapers

Previous research has shown that newspapers are using different frames when presenting and interpreting news items on dowry and the ways in which journalists cover the subject are influenced by several factors, such as organizational pressures, social norms and the ideological and political orientations of journalists. Journalists are also considered to have normative responsibilities for their coverage of news and work from the framework of expectations and interests of the public.⁵⁵ This implies that ideally they do not merely have a duty to report news events, but should also serve the society and cover an issue thoroughly. In an attempt to understand how Indian newspapers present the issue of dowry and the approaches journalists and newspapers are using, I will examine how two Indian newspapers present news items on dowry during two weeks of May 2011.

A content analysis of these news items may shed some light on how international Indian press is addressing the serious social problem of dowry. For this study I have selected two international English newspapers, *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* and the primary reason for this is their broad circulation, not only in Indian but globally. To limit the study I went through the on-line editions of the newspapers during period May 1 to May 15, 2011, and collected totally 34 news items which in different ways dealt with the issue of dowry. Out of these were 24 items related to dowry violence and 10 were stories about dowry discussions in the Indian society.

3.1 Dowry deaths and dowry suicides

The 24 news items on dowry violence included 8 stories about dowry deaths and murder in which women had been burnt to death (in three cases), strangled to death (in two cases), and man had cut the throat of a woman (in one case). In two cases of the dowry deaths the journalists chose to not mention the methods by which the women had been killed.

The 24 news items also included 6 news items on dowry suicide when the women had been mentally and physical harassed, tortured by their husbands and in-laws which eventually led to the suicides. The methods for suicides were mentioned in all but one of these news items: In three cases the women burnt themselves to death and one woman poisoned herself. Particularly

⁵⁵ Borah, op.cit., p. 380.

one story paid attention to suspected murder by the husband and in-laws even if the woman's death at first looked like suicide as she jumped from a three storied house. In this case the woman's family filed a case for dowry murder and demanded a murder investigation because according to their statements the woman had been exposed to dowry harassments for four year.

Of the totally 14 newspaper stories about dowry deaths (8) and dowry suicides (6) the women's native families were in 10 cases helping the victims to file cases against the husbands and other relatives involved in the crimes. In some cases other relatives or neighbours reported the crimes to the police. Some of these news items also reported the occupation of victims: Five of the women who died dowry deaths and four of the women who committed suicide were housewives and only one had an occupation and worked as a lecturer.

3.1.1 Dowry-related harassments

The 24 news items also included 10 stories about dowry-related harassments. In these cases the husbands and the in-laws were demanding more money and goods from the women's families by pressuring the women through battering, mental harassments, and in some cases by not giving the women proper food or money for personal expenses. One story concerned bride price and related how a tribal group used violence against another group, which led to the killing of the groom's brother. This news item reflected another tradition among some tribal communities in India according to which the groom's family is expected to pay dowry to the bride's family. It is interesting to note that in the 10 stories on dowry harassments, the female victims reported the crimes to the police and demanded justice, and in three cases the women's native families and relatives supported with reports to the police and helped in court procedures. Only one news item of dowry harassment mentioned that the victim had worked as an engineer.

3.1.2 Time, place and offenders

The 24 collected news items of dowry-related violence in this study shows that most of the crimes took place in the house of the in-laws. In 19 cases the women were exposed to harassment and violence at the in-laws' places, in four cases at the women's native homes or some other places. All of the offenders belonged to the women's' in-law family: In 20 cases the husband and other in-laws were involved in the crime and two news items specified the offenders as the husband's brother and sister. This study may also indicate that dowry harassments usually occur during the first years of marriage. 15 of the collected news items reported that the harassments against women took place between the first and the fourth year of marriage, and in

four cases between the fifth and the ninth year of marriage, while five stories did not mention at which stage in the marriage violence began. The age of the women were noted in 11 news items which reported that the victims were between 20 and 26 years old, while the remaining stories kept the women's age unmentioned.

Surprisingly not a single story in the two newspapers report about the victims' and the offenders' social and religious affiliation, such as caste and class,⁵⁶ and age of accused was largely unmentioned. What seems to be considered more important to report is the occupation of the accused: In eleven news items the occupation of the offender was reported, and most were low income earners. Only in two cases of dowry harassment the husband was a professional and in one murder/suicide case a rich businessman was accused for killing their daughter in-law for dowry demanding purposes.

Particularly two cases show how men who were already married entered relationships and married other women in order to more systematically use dowry practices for financial gains. The women's complaints to the in-laws, when she got to know about the fraud, did not help them but led to even more violence. In some cases, that the men had married women with high economic status only for the purpose of gaining dowry. These men continuously harassed their wives for more dowries and when unable to fulfill the demands the women were killed.

3.2 Legal actions

According the news item collected for this study it seems like it is generally the victim or the victim's family that takes legal action and report a case to the police and the court after a crime has been committed. In 12 news items the police made arrests and in 3 stories the police registered a case under the paragraphs 498A⁵⁷ and 304B⁵⁸ (IPC). In four cases the victim or the

⁵⁶ Even if the names of the victims and the accused are often mentioned and the readers can thereby guess their caste and religious identity.

⁵⁷ 498-A defines: "Cruelty of husband or relatives of husband" (a) any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or death (whether mental or physical) of women; or (b) harassment of the woman where such harassment is with the view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security or is on account of failure by her or any other person related to her to meet such demands." (Palkar, op.cit., p. 186.)

⁵⁸ 304-B define: "Where the death of a woman is caused by any burns or bodily injury or occurs otherwise than under normal circumstances within seven years of her marriage and it is shown that soon before her death, she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any of the relatives of her husband for or in connection with

victim's family filed a complaint to the police under dowry harassments, and in one case the victim's death declaration at the hospital led the police to charge the accused under IPC 498A. Three news items also mentioned the legal consequences when the accused had been sentenced for a crime. In one case of dowry harassment the accused man got two years of imprisonment and a fine of 2000 rupees. In a second case of harassment the court avoided imprisonment and instead charged the husband with a compensation of 1 *lakh* rupees (100,000 rupees) which he should pay to his wife. In the third case of dowry violence the women were burnt and remitted to hospital with 83 percent burn injuries but later died. Her death declaration at hospital and other evidence presented during the court procedures gave her 62-year-old mother-in-law life imprisonment for murdering the daughter-in-law for dowry.

Two cases of dowry harassment also involved other authorities, the Criminal investigation department (CID) and Interpol and State Commission of Women (SCW), to investigate into the matter thoroughly as larger crimes were suspected. For example, a married man remarried a woman and then began to demand dowry and harass her, but when the woman complained to the police the man had left the country. In another case a man sold his own wife to a pimp for prostitution in order to get money as a compensation for dowry. In four cases the dowry-related violence occurred after the woman had given birth to girl who was missing, and thus the police suspected child killing.

The news items during the month of May 2011 thus inform that most women are living the with in-laws but when exposed to dowry-related violence they do take action and report to the police and go to court for justice. Both newspapers reported the victim's courage to report the dowry-related violence, which shows new trend and result of women right awareness.

3.3 Dowry discussions in newspapers

The collected articles published in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* during the two weeks of May 2011 also included more in-depth discussions on dowry-related issue that aimed to bring awareness of larger social problems in the society. There are some differences between two newspapers in how they address dowry. In *The Times of India* there are only 3 articles that discuss women's status in the society and one story that deals with marriage problems which young woman are facing. The latter article was based on a study made by on Washington- based

any demand for dowry, such death shall be called 'dowry death'. And such husband or relative shall be deemed to have caused her death." (Palkar, op.cit., p. 187.)

population reference bureau and informed that 47 percent of all women in India are married off between the age 20 and 24.⁵⁹

The Hindu, on the other hand, published 7 articles related to women's problem, dowry and broader social problems, such as the Census of 2011 which shows that the child sex ratio have dropped from 927 to 914 in some parts of the country.⁶⁰ These articles included information about NGOs which are helping the victims exposed to dowry-related harassment and domestic violence and how women organizations demand equal rights for women and special measure for women empowerment. Both the *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* were thus writing dowry-related news items as general crime story, but based on the in-depth articles found during this limited period only *The Hindu* seemed to have a more open agenda to write articles that may up-lift the women's status and create awareness of social problems in the Indian society.

A brief content analysis of the above 34 selected newspapers items shows that journalists are more often presenting episodic stories on dowry-related issues and report crime stories. In this study 70 percent of the stories were crime reports, in which the journalist explained the objectives and factual causes of particular events. Only a few of these news items were in-depth stories because they involved high profile person or public concerns and therefore were considered of 'newsworthy'. In one fourth of news items (25 percent) the journalists used a material framework by, for example, mentioning the amount of money that had been paid or demanded by the victim's husband or the in-laws.

This small content analysis may show that journalists sometimes are lifting some matters to the forefront by reporting about the crime place, the cause and type of crime, the persons involved in crime, and so on. Only a smaller amount of the articles (30 percent) in the two newspapers used an ethical framework and discussed larger social, economic and cultural aspects of larger problems related to women's status, including dowry. This may indicate that reporters are selective when choosing frameworks for representing social issues in Indian society to a national and international audience.

⁵⁹ *Times of India*, 'Girl Interrupted', 12 May 2011. Retrieved from: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-12/edit-page/29532702_1_laws-against-child-marriage-early-marriages-girl-children

⁶⁰ *The Hindu*, 'NGOs Express Concern over Declining Sex Ratio', 02 May 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.hindu.com/2011/05/02/stories/2011050262360700.htm>

4 Conclusion

This study has examined how dowry and dowry-related violence are presented in two Indian newspapers during two weeks in May 2011. By selecting a sample of 34 news items that appeared in *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* the study has analyzed the content and the frames of these stories. A large part of the news items that appeared in this sample were crime reports (83 percent) on dowry-related violence. In these reports the journalists more briefly explained the crime committed with particular focus on the victims, the place and nature of the crime, the persons involved, and the police's contribution. Only a small part of the dowry-related news items that were published in the two Indian newspapers (13 percent) were in-depth stories that discussed dowry in the context of other social problems in the Indian society. The media certainly has power to influence and create awareness of social issues like dowry in the Indian society and may highlight certain problems to policy-makers on the national and international level. Although this study is very limited and it would require a much larger sample to draw any conclusion about newspapers attitudes to dowry-related issues, it may still indicate that journalists employ certain frames when constructing stories about dowry and informing the public about dowry issue in the Indian society.

The aim for choosing certain frames, such as the many crime reports and only a few in-depth stories in this sample, may simply be motivated by agendas of newsworthiness. Deeper discussions on dowry as a social and economic problem in the Indian society may not be considered of interest to the public or good for marketability, while crime reports have a more sensational value. The small number of in-depth stories of dowry became newsworthy when they involved the involvement of a high profile in the society or addressed larger public concerns. Although a more comprehensive study of how Indian newspapers select and frame dowry-related is needed, the small sample of this study may indicate that an important social issue like dowry is not always taken seriously by the media, but is addressed for market interests rather than for the purpose of influencing politicians and the general public.

The content analysis of the news items in the two newspapers shows that Indian journalists often provide detailed information about the contexts of dowry-related crimes. Almost all crime reports (92 percent) informed that the victim and/or the victim's parents filed a case against the offender, which in most cases were the husband and the in-laws. It is important to note that the incidents of dowry-related violence which reach the media have often been reported

to the police and the journalists are merely informing about news they have in their turn received from authorities. What is not paid attention to by the newspapers and is difficult to find information about are dowry-related crimes that are conducted in the private sphere and never reported to the police. The high number of cases that are reported to the police and taken to court in this sample may not be representative of a social reality in the Indian society but merely reflect that newspapers merely report on crimes that are already in the hands of legal authorities. Still one can presume that changing female roles in the society, women's entrance into the labor market and the public awareness and work created by feminist organizations, NGOs, women's groups, social workers and the like, have made Indian women more aware of their legal rights and given them courage to report crimes.

What consequences these legal actions actually will have in a country marked by a complex bureaucracy is however another problem. The crime reports on dowry-related violence in the newspapers of this sample shows that most crimes (83 percent) involved the police and the accused were immediately arrested. The study also shows that a small part (12 percent) of the news items mentioned that the crimes involved court procedures and only a few informed about the penalty of the accused. Given this meager information about the legal consequences of the crimes it is not possible to draw any general conclusion on which role Indian authorities play in the combat of dowry-related violence.

The content analysis of the news items, however, seems to indicate that dowry-related violence against women is rooted in complex social and economic factors. This sample shows that still many of the Indian women who have been exposed to violence are bound to patriarchal and patrilineal traditions with weak economic power and lower opportunities in comparison to their men. Even if most crime reports (71 percent) did not detail the economic status of the women, the descriptions of the contexts of the crimes indicate that the women have been in a socially and economically inferior position, dependant on the in-laws or their parents. Some news items mentioned that the woman had access to some economic resources (13 percent) or clarified (17 percent of the crime reports) that the woman was fully dependant on the husband or other relatives.

With regard to the economic factors, it is also interesting that half of the news items (54 percent) mentioned the occupation of the men who had committed a dowry-related crime and they were low-income workers. In all crime reports, however, the husband or the husband's in-laws were demanding dowry in the form of money and for the purpose of improving their social status. Based on this sample, financial gains seem thus to be the primary cause behind dowry-

related violence. The present study may show an existing dilemma of addressing violence against women in the Indian press and the larger society which need reforms. The state has implemented stricter laws in attempts to protect women as individuals with equal citizen's rights. On the other hand there are traditions and practices based on a patriarchal structure of the society in which women have a lower status than men. Dowry and dowry-related violence against women are one example and result of gender inequalities in the patriarchal society.

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