

Dowry Harassments and Dowry Deaths: A Study at Muthi Domana and Talab Tillo in Jammu

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"When men are oppressed, it is a tragedy and when women are oppressed it is a tradition".

This paper deals with the harassment related to the demand of dowry from the bride and her parents. Sometimes such harassment leads to the death of the girl known as 'dowry death'. The dowry related violence is probed in the two areas, Talab Tillo and Muthi Domana of Jammu district. The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed on 20th May, 1961. In 1986 The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act was passed which made the imprisonment for 5 years and Rs. 15,000 as fine or the value of dowry whichever is more. Though this Act was made, still give and take of dowry was in practice and a lot of brides were harassed by the in-laws for bringing more dowry. However, awareness about the extent and nature of these issues came to the forefront during 1970s in USA as a result of the National Family Violence Surveys. In India, it was only during the early 1980s, in the wake of dowry and related problems, that crimes against women came to be recognized as an important social problem. This problem is like an infectious disease which has spread in Jammu to a large extent.

Historically, dowry has been an integral institutionalized part of Hindu marriage system. It ideally and customarily denoted the gifts voluntarily presented to the bride, groom and his family in marriage. The concept of *kanyadana* (gift of daughter) with gifts ranging from ornaments and other precious items finds references from ancient to modern texts on customs and rituals.

But today, every day in the news paper the news in connection with dowry is seen. The headlines say it all: '*Woman suffers 90% burns; mother-in-law, sister-in-law held*' (Himalayan Mail, 08.10.2005), '*Andhra Minister in dowry harassment case*' (Hindustan Times, 02.07.2007), '*Dowry is an evil to be eradicated anyhow*' (Greater Kashmir, 27.08.2007. News in Daily Excelsior, 7 May 2008, entitled "*Dowry claims life of young house-wife*".

Thus from these news reports it is seen that dowry-related harassment, sometimes resulting in so-called 'dowry death' or 'bride burning', become an increasing burden faced by women from all castes and classes in India. Moreover, there is some perception that the size of dowries has grown in recent decades putting increased pressure on families to prefer sons to daughters, thereby exacerbating an existing tendency towards son preference. The impact of this upon the 'reversed sex-ratio' in India is well documented with the numbers of 'missing' females due to sex selective abortion and female infanticide on the increase in many regions (Tommalin, 2009:1).

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According to the report of Crime in India, during 2007, in dowry death cases the total incidences including all the states were 7950, rate of crime was 0.7 (i.e. total no of incidence in states /total population of states, $7950/11167.97=0.7$). Uttar Pradesh has maximum cases of dowry deaths i.e. 2076 followed by Bihar 1172. No cases of dowry deaths were reported in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim. If the union territories are also included then all India figures of dowry deaths incidence were 8093, rate of crime was 0.7. No case of dowry death was reported in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep. In case of Jammu and Kashmir, dowry deaths incidents were 9, rate of crime was 0.1 and percentage share was 0.1 (no. of case of dowry in J&K/total no. of cases of dowry in India* 100 i.e. $9/8093*100=0.1$).

The National Crime Record Bureau (2002) of The Government of India has report as:

- 7,895 women were murdered due to dowry.
- In every 66 minutes 1 woman is murdered due to dowry.
- 12,134 were driven to commit suicide due to dowry.

Defining dowry-related violence

Nominally, violence can be defined as an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person. The hurt may be emotional injury or even material deprivation. This definition also includes harassment, cruelty as well as death caused by such behaviour. Thus persistent demands for dowry, even though unintentional, against the woman or her kin, leading to the oppressive conduct by the spouse and /or by the in-laws toward the woman resulting in her harassment, death, or in commission of suicide by her can be termed as dowry related violence (Jha and Piyari, 1996: 253).

In Jammu also the harassments related to dowry take place day to day. A total of 12 cases related to the dowry registered in the Police Station Crime Branch, Jammu from 1993 to November 2010.

As a lot of dowry related harassments are seen in the news papers day to day, the cases reported here seem to be far lesser than they actually take place. It is due to the reason that either the parties hush up the matter or compromise it.

Table 1
Statement of complaints and disposal of cases registered in Women Cell, Jammu

Type of Proceedings	Year			
	2007	2008	2009	2010 (till October)
Total complaints	758	540	1165	896
FIR (cases registered)	42	43	42	48
Advice to court	40	42	53	5
Compromise	676	367	1070	715
Total balance	-	88	-	128

Source: Women Cell, Jammu

From the Table above, it can be analysed that maximum complaints, 1165 were registered in 2009 and thus maximum compromises 1070 (91.84 %) were also done in this year. On the other hand, minimum cases were registered in the year 2008 i.e. 540 and minimum compromises were done in this year 367 (67.96%). It does not consist the dowry cases separately but it is seen that most of the FIR's registered are related to the dowry cases.

Compulsory marriage, compulsory dowry and pauperization

Those in public sector employment took loans against their Provident and Pension Funds or opted for 'voluntary retirement' to obtain the linked annuity, though it meant that after the wedding they would have neither income nor savings. Some poor families went door-to-door to collect money and/or requested clubs and mass organizations for assistance. With dowry, the cycle of poverty and debt is renewed as families lose their productive assets, maybe even their homes. It adds to the assets not only of those who receive dowry, but the local elite who encourage the practice and from whom the poor takes loan against their own assets, including land. It leads to the pauperization of poor classes. Many times it becomes difficult for the parents to arrange dowry themselves, so they have to take help of the relatives also. The relatives give the dowry items as gifts. It has been seen in the present study how respondents managed dowry for their daughters. The graph below depicts the same.

Out of 100 respondents each in Talab Tillo and Muthi-Domana, 22 respondents in Talab Tillo and 35 respondents in Muthi-Domana answered that they managed dowry easily, 15 respondents in Talab Tillo and 28 respondents in Muthi-Domana answered their relatives helped to give dowry, 21 respondents in Talab Tillo and 24 respondents in Muthi-Domana said they took money on credit to give dowry in marriage, 30 respondents in Talab Tillo and 10 respondents in Muthi-Domana did not give dowry and 12 respondents in Talab Tillo and 3 respondents in Muthi-Domana were unmarried. Thus this shows that majority of respondents who took money from others i.e. from relatives and on credit put together are more than who managed to give dowry easily i.e. 36% in Talab Tillo and 52% in Muthi Domana.

Wife beating for dowry

Wife beating is in fact one of the most accepted crimes committed against women. Wives are beaten for the want of dowry. It exists most in slums and amongst working class. In fact, now it is gradually creeping amongst middle class and rich families (Sharma, 1998: 592). In the present research, in a case, **Moni** wife of Jai, a resident of Talab Tillo got married in Nov' 2008. After few days Jai started beating, abusing, harassing and torturing Moni. After two months, in-laws told her clearly that she has not brought dowry i.e. the luxury items like washing machine, air-conditioner, fridge etc. In Dec'09, Jai beat Moni trashed her from his house and asked her to bring rupees two lacks from her father otherwise he will burn her alive as he is not afraid of any offence because he has close links with Inspector General of Police (IGP), Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), *gundas* of Jammu city as well as with militants of Kashmir. Jai took Rs. 85,000 in total from Moni's parents time to time. Then Moni went to the Women Cell for seeking help. Thus it is seen how the women are beaten for the want of more dowry.

Non reporting of the dowry harassment

It is pertinent to note here that in most cases neither the woman nor her family report the violence to the police or took legal action against the demand for dowry which is a punishable offence. Why do victims and their families fail to report dowry demands and violence that precedes death? It is possible that there is insufficient awareness of the Dowry Prohibition Act and its subsequent amendments. Moreover, the Act itself deters families from reporting because it makes the givers of dowry offenders too.

The woman's immediate neighbours, her family and local residents are important bystanders and could minimize such victimization. The question is why haven't they done so? Again looking at the literature it is clear that bystanders don't intervene if they perceive the situation as not serious enough. The neighbors may dismiss her screams as simply a family quarrel.

Dowry Deaths

The most dramatic form that violence against women has taken is what the Indian media labeled 'bride-burning' until in 1978 or so, feminists cut out the alliterative fuzz by redesignating it as 'dowry murder'. The record in *Headquarters of Crime and Railways J&K*, Jammu reveals that the dowry deaths registered in 2001 were 13, in 2002 these were 18, in 2003, 2004 and 2005 these were 16, 12 and 5 respectively.

During the 1980s, urban north India has seen a growing number of murders of married women, variously called dowry murders or bride burnings. The dowry deaths are regarded as crime.

It has been visioned that the dowry deaths take place in Jammu also. The Table below reflects the total number of deaths that took place in Jammu province registered in Police Station Crime Branch Jammu:

Table 2

Dowry Deaths registered in Police Station Crime Branch Jammu

Year	No. of cases	Reference
1995	1	47/95
1998	1	35/98
2003	2	145/03, 373/03
2004-2006	-	-
2007	1	55/07
2008	-	-
2009	-	-
2010	No case till November	-
Total No.	5	-

Source: Police Station Crime Branch Jammu

In the above Table 1 case was registered in 1995 and 1998 each, 2 cases were registered in 2003, only 1 case was registered in 2007 and after 2007 no case of dowry death is reported in this Police station. Thus the Table tells about the dowry deaths but in news paper more deaths are seen than reported. The authorities say that people do not report such cases.

Increase in the amount of dowry

Earlier the dowry given was lesser in value than now a days. The amount of dowry has increased with the passage of time. In the present study, it is seen that in Talab Tillo, 30% respondents did not give/take dowry in their own marriage but as far as the marriage of their children is concerned 10% children fall in this category but in Muthi-Domana 3% respondents did not give/take dowry in their own marriage and 9% of their children fall in this category. This is given in the Table below:

Table 3
Variation in the amount of dowry in parents and their children's marriage

Cost of dowry (in Rs.)	Talab-Tillo				Muthi-Domana			
	No. of R who gave took Dowry	%	Dowry given/ taken to children of R	%	No. of R who gave took Dowry	%	Dowry given/ taken to children of R	%
Till 1000	-	0%	-	0%	4	4%	-	0%
1000-5000	-	0%	-	0%	10	10%	-	0%
5000-10,000	-	0%	-	0%	13	13%	10	10%
10,000-20,000	16	16%	1	1%	10	10%	-	0%
20,000-50,000	15	15%	17	17%	30	30%	16	16%
50,000-1,00000	10	10%	20	20%	12	12%	15	15%
1,00000-2,00000	8	8%	6	6%	5	5%	12	12%
2,00000-3,00000	5	5%	-	0%	-	0%	-	0%
3,00000-4,00000	1	1%	3	3%	-	0%	2	2%
4,00000-5,00000	1	1%	2	2%	-	0%	1	1%
Above 5,00000	2	2%	1	1%	3	3%	-	0%
Unmarried	12	12%	40	40%	10	10%	35	35%
Dowry not given/ taken	30	30%	10	10%	3	3%	99%	
Total	100	100	100	100%	100	100%	100	100%

Source: Data collected from the field

In the Table above, the contrast is drawn between the giving and taking of dowry by the respondents and their children both in Talab Tillo and Muthi-Domana. In the case of Talab Tillo there was no respondent or their children who gave/took dowry till Rs. 10,000, 16% respondents gave between 10,000-20,000 while 1% of their children fall in this category; maximum respondents 15% and 17% their children gave from 20,000-50,000. 10% respondents gave between Rs. 50,000-1,00000 while the number doubled in time of their children to 20%.

In case of Muthi-Domana 27% respondents and 10% their children who gave/took dowry from 1,000 to 10,000; 10% respondents gave till 10,000-20,000 while 0% of their children fall in this category; in the category of 1,00000-2,00000 5% respondents fall and this number became

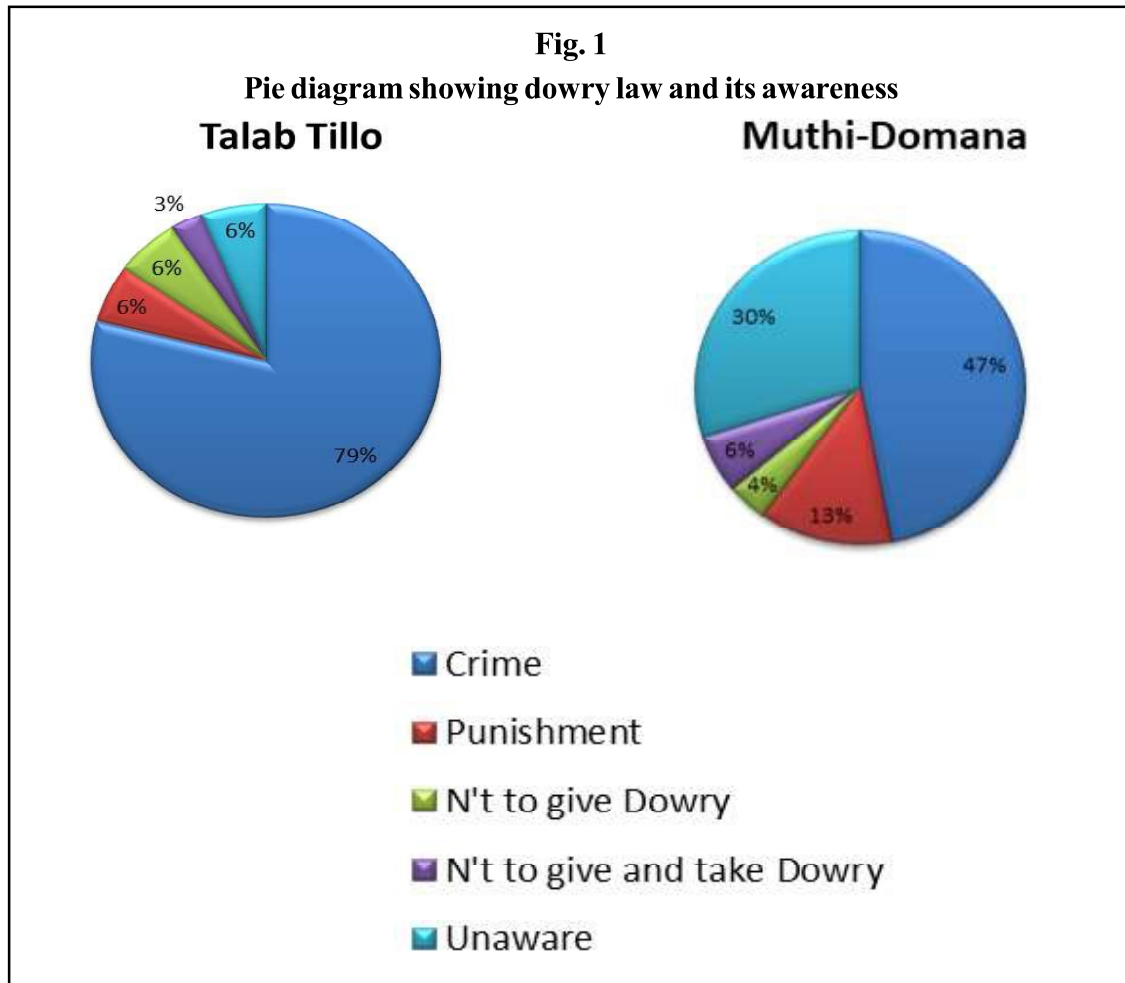
more than double i.e. 12% in their children's marriage. No respondent and 3% their children gave dowry worth Rs. 3,00,000-5,00,000.

It indicates that in Talab Tillo the children of respondents have given more dowry than their parents at their time than in the region of Muthi Domana. The jewellery and other small gifts in kind were the most common earlier but now the big items like motorbike, air conditioner, fridge, car etc. are common.

Dowry law and its unawareness

In this study 36 (18%) respondents out of 200 are unaware about the dowry law. No doubt 126 respondents said they know about such laws that dowry is crime but still they do not know about what sort of crime it is? The details about it are shown in Fig. 1.

In the pie diagram above, this represents awareness of the people regarding laws of dowry. 79% respondents in Talab Tillo and 47% respondents in Muthi-Domana believe that laws consider dowry as a crime indicates that 32% respondents more in Talab Tillo than in Muthi-Domana know what the dowry laws mean still they are unaware what the law actually is. Thus regarding the



unawareness about the dowry laws it can be said that respondents in Muthi Domana (30%) are more unaware than respondents in Talab Tillo (6%). Maximum respondents said dowry is a crime but still they do not know how it is considered a crime.

Two case studies related to the dowry harassment cases which were collected during the field work are discussed as below:

Shalini got married with Rinku Singh a resident of Chinore. Unfortunately and to her great surprise this fellow turned to be a totally different person what he posed before engagement and marriage.

Rinku started using very rough and abusive language for her and even for her parents within the first week of the marriage. He used to torture her mentally and physically. He used to beat her a lot and kick dowry items saying what third class and below standard dowry Shalini's father had sent to his house. Even rubbish remarks were given for the gold chain given to him. Thereby expressing an in direct dowry demand of highly expensive items. Although they had inquired from him before engagement to let them know about his any particular demand and whether they can meet it or not but he had replied that he had not demanded anything from his father till date then what to talk of Shalini's father. He also said he is a self made person. But right after Shalini got into his clutches after marriage he started showing his real face in the shape of violence, greed and cruelty.

He often used to talk loose with girls on cell phone but Shalini was not allowed to talk with her parents even. He had taken away her mobile without her knowledge and disconnected the landline phone also. Shalini was not allowed to go to her parents' home to know about their well being and was kept there as kitchen servant and slave only. He had never shown any sign of care or responsibility towards her. She was never given even a single penny by him rather he took away her purse along with Rs.8500/- without her knowledge, which Shalini's father had given her. He also man handled Shalini. He sold her brand new TV and washing machine even after her constant resentment.

A strange sort of fear and insecurity had been created by Rinku's aggressive, harsh and violent behaviour. Once he threatened Shalini by saying that her photograph is already on the wall now only a garland is to be put over it. She felt it as a direct threat to her life.

All this made Shalini mentally and physically pressurized and compelled her to come to her parent's house where he telephonically conveyed Shalini to tell her father to engage a lawyer for mutual separation as he would remain as he is. His behaviour is not going to change.

Shalini lodged a complaint against Rinku in Women Cell & requested SHO to get back all her dowry items, clothes and gold items and restore alimony before signing the papers for separation.

On the other hand Rinku wrote to the incharge Women Cell that Mr. Shri Ram (father of Shalini) keep changing his stand repeatedly and puts false allegation, it is difficult to believe him on any other platform except in front of competent court of law. Kindly direct Shri Ram to stop threatening call on his cell phone through SMS.

Shalini under undue influence of her father and medical history had left the house twice along with jewellery given by them also, and now she is staying with her parents without his concern.

Rinku further requested Incharge Women Cell to find the mutual divorce deed copy, deed of compromise for gifts exchange and the list of their gold jewellery gifts items. He was pleased to intimate her the date when Shalini along with her father will be ready for execution of the said deeds in the competent court of law. Thus it is seen that how Rinku beat Shalini for the want of dowry which made Shalini to go to court.

Another case study reveals, **Tripta Nanda** a resident of Domana, an employee in the LIC office, was married to Ajay. Ajay saw her in the marriage of her brother which took place on 20.10.2006. From that day he started seeing Tripta and continued to do so for three years. The parents of Tripta did not want to get her married to him but later on she said Ajay is a good boy. Ajay's father told them that he will make Ajay a permanent employee in the Police department. Later on they agreed and the holy wedlock took place. In dowry Tripta brought washing machine, T.V, cooler, fridge, VCR, almirah, motor cycle worth Rs. 50,000, clothes worth Rs. 2,00,000, gold of Rs. 2,00,000 but no furniture was given. Tripta got to know that Ajay is not in police but cleans utensils in a banquet hall and his father plays cards with him the whole day.

After fifteen days of their marriage, Ajay started beating her as he wanted money for furniture which Tripta had not brought with her. He also wanted that the nomination of the LIC policy of Tripta which was of Rs. 5 lacks in the name of her father should be made in his name. One day Ajay beat Tripta and took her to R.S Pura i.e. to her natal home to take Rs. 2, 00,000 for the furniture, she stayed there for 3 days. As Ajay had told Tripta to come back so on 1.05.2010 her brother dropped her till the bus stand. No sooner did Tripta reached home than Ajay slapped her. Then she went in veranda he again slapped her, he searched Tripta's purse to check if she had brought money that he had asked her to bring. Tripta's brother rang her to confirm if she had reached in her in-laws house safely, Ajay switched on Tripta's phone so that her brother could listen whatever was happening with Tripta. Then both Tripta's brother and mother took Rs. 10,000 with them and went to Tripta's house. As soon as they reached her home then Tripta's mother-in-law took a rod and blew on Tripta's brother and then on her mother too. Her brother and mother fell down. Her mother-in-law locked the room and was about to go to the police station to register a case against Tripta's mother and brother that they came to her house to kill them. But the elder sister of Tripta who was also married in the same locality was told by the neighbours that Tripta's mother-in-law is going to police station. So she went to Tripta's house unlocked the door and all of them went to the police station to file case against Tripta's husband and in-laws. The Station House Officer provided them with police jepsy to take her to the hospital then she was admitted in Sarwal Hospital.

After few days, Tripta was released from the hospital and her parents took her in their house. She started to go to LIC office whenever she had work as she was its agent. In July, Tripta went to the Sarwal hospital for her medical checkup as she was pregnant. Somehow Ajay saw her when she was going back after her checkup; he met Tripta and told her to sit on the bike as he would help her to board the bus to go to R.S Pura. Tripta sat on bike, Ajay first went to Vikram

Chowk and then changed his route to his house, she told him that she would jump from the bike but Ajay told her he would also jump into the river and die, it would end three lives at the same time i.e the life of baby in the womb too, so she remained quite.

Tripta is living there now, her sister told she was beaten once but Tripta did not say anything about this. She says she has to live there in his house, only death can separate her from there. But Tripta's parents are scare as to what will happen to their daughter?

Conclusion

Thus it is brought out in this paper that how brides are harassed as well as burnt for the want of more and more dowry in our society. In such situation parents and neighbours become helpless to save the women from the clutches of in-laws and even their husbands. Marriage without dowry is not possible as in the present work 58% of the respondents in Talab Tillo and 87% of the respondents in Muthi-Domana took/gave dowry. The laws related to dowry are made still more persons are unaware of such laws in Muthi-Domana than in Talab Tillo as the research reveals that 6% respondents in Talab Tillo and 30% respondents in Muthi-Domana are unaware about these laws. The case studies mentioned here reveal the voracious nature of the in-laws of the victims for getting dowry and to what extent they can go just for some trivial items. It is also seen that the cases reported in the police stations seem to be far lesser than they actually take place, the reason being the parties do not want to disclose the matter outside the home so solve it themselves. The role of institutions like Women Cell, Police stations and courts can help the victims to get rid of such situations. The burden of tradition, a prevailing ideology of male superiority, an insensitive police force, an archaic judicial system and a society that condone violence creates a chamber of horrors where even angels would fear to tread. Only when dowry itself is attacked in all its forms and manifestations in our own homes and personal lives, it is there that the real struggle begins.

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