

# Dowry, an investment system

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The Dowry system is when the bride's family gives goods, money, or estate to her husband and his family during the marriage. This practice is most common in South Asia, specifically the Indian culture. On the other hand is the practice of bride price system which is where the husband gives cattle, land, or goods in exchange for a woman's hand in marriage. This is mostly practiced in Africa among traditional households, where it is a price for the economic services and children a woman adds to another family. Dowry and bride price are mostly practiced in exchange for the bride's well being. There is a strong possibility that a wife might be mistreated if the dowry was not enough or satisfying for the groom's family. Most times if the husband leaves or mistreats his wife the dowry is to be returned to her. It is also used as a means to discharge a husband of his duties to provide well for his wife, this is most common in marriages where two young people are wedded. Although the practice of dowry from the bride's family to the grooms is a norm in the Indian culture it the opposite of the African culture. Whereas in Africa a groom's family gives the bride price to the bride's family. These practices seen in the context of their culture are completely normal, but seen from a modern perspective are primitive and inhumane since they resemble a system of slave exchange. This is due to the overturn in practice in the twentieth century.

In South Asian culture dowries have been demanded and paid to the groom's family conjugating the term " groom price". In India, it is evident that there is great inflation in dowry practice. There was also an evident increase in violence against brides who were unable to fulfill the dowry payment demanded. This was against the fact that in 1961 there was a Dowry

Prohibition Act which made it illegal to give dowries. This has flamed many women's rights issues due to many cases of mistreatment of brides in India. It is also criticized because it is not to provide for the bride in unforeseen circumstances but to appease the groom's family's greed. For example, it was reported by the Vancouver Sun that a bride had died and her 13-month old daughter had suffered severe burns after the bride's family started a fire after being dissatisfied with the dowry. The article also highlighted that such dowry dissatisfaction causes for deaths of up to 8, 000 women in India each year.

Therefore, even though there is awareness of the cause of such mistreatment against women in India it is still a norm to practice dowry which can possibly put a daughter's life in danger. Whereas in the African culture the system of bride price is most practiced. Here bride payments are mostly interpreted as the wealth received by the bride's family which compensates for the daughter that will be of economic use and will bear children for another family. Among the Dani of New Guinea, there are 3 occasions where a groom must give a bride's family valuables, such a cattle or shells. First, when the groom marries the bride and she starts working on his farm; second, when the groom has sexual rights to the bride and consummates the marriage; third, when his wife bears a child. In the Igbo culture of South Africa, bride price is considered as the payment to have a fertile woman and if the bride is not fertile or chooses to leave the marriage before producing children she must return the wealth given to her family by the groom. With such cases of bride price, many men choose to marry many women and it is usually the older man that marries before the young.

This is due to the fact that older men have had the time to accumulate more wealth and the necessary resources to pay for a bride. Such practices have also raised cases where the brides have been divorced or are infertile so the families of the bride have to return the price paid to the groom. For example, in the Zulu culture in South Africa, there is an exchange of cattle among the groom and the bride's father or brother. This exchange is called lobola and has to be returned if the bride is divorced or cannot bear children. Also, in such cultures when a son receives his first lobola from his daughter's marriage he must give it to his father as repayment for his marriage. These practices observed by outsiders would resemble much to slave exchange; morally this is wrong yet it is normally practiced in South Africa because of its wide acceptance in the culture. In conclusion, from an anthropological point of view, there is a cultural norm set by traditions and human greed which causes such immoral practices of dowry and bride price. Although these practices are considered a norm in these cultures, an outsider observing would be very shocked to see such inhumane treatment of women. This is a type of degradation which is still to this day present even with government laws that prohibit it. In order for such practices to become a rarity and not a norm, a strong education system for women is important this is a suggestion and an observation an anthropologist would make with moral leniency.

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