



## Homes as graves: Why outrage never ends violence

Domestic violence, dowry, and oppressive marriages are symptoms of a deeper poverty — absence of inner clarity. They thrive because society at large runs on fear, desire, and unexamined habits. Outrage after each tragedy has become a ritual, but that cannot cure the blindness of the mind

**FIRST Column**



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Every few months, the nation gets shaken by a horrifying report of a young woman's death in her marital home. Police investigations may cite accident, suicide, or homicide, with reasons ranging from dowry harassment to alleged infidelity. Social media erupts, families accuse, lawyers argue. Yet beneath all the noise, one fact refuses to go away: such incidents unsettle us because they feel very familiar. They are not rare exceptions. They reveal what many homes quietly hide: the reality of how relationships often play out.

### The Ordinary Face of Violence

Contrary to the stereotype, most domestic violence cases do not originate in criminal settings. They emerge in households that otherwise appear respectable: middle-class families with jobs, education, and social standing. Violence is often hidden under the surface until it bursts into tragedy.

Why does this happen? The answer lies in the manner in which marriage usually takes place in our society. Often, marriage is pushed upon young people long before they are emotionally ready. By their twenties, marriage is treated like an ultimatum. Love, spoken of in lofty terms, remains unexplained and is usually reduced to attraction, duty, or calculation. Parents, with relief, often remark: "My daughter is married: one responsibility less."

When marriage begins from such a place, it rarely becomes a union of two free individuals. It becomes an arrangement, a transaction between families. Transactions rarely generate trust; they sow seeds for obligations and resentment. What should have been a conscious partnership becomes a quiet marketplace of duties and demands, and that is a fragile foundation on which to build a lifetime together.

### The Endless Shadow of Dowry

Dowry was outlawed more than six decades ago, but its grip remains. The National Crime Records Bureau reported 6,450 dowry deaths in 2022, around 18 women every single day. Uttar Pradesh, where the most recent incident occurred, also tops this list with 2,218 deaths. When greed becomes tradition, no law



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can restrain it.

Behind these numbers lie homes where women face harassment and coercion. And what follows after an FIR is filed? More than 60,000 dowry-death cases were pending in courts in 2022, and the conviction rate hovered around 33 per cent.

The tradition of dowry is one of the clearest signs of society's values falling apart. How can marriage, which is supposed to bring two lives together, be turned into a financial bargain? How can love or respect for each other grow when a relationship starts with money and demands? Dowry is not just greed; it is woven into families even before birth. Sons are celebrated as "investments," daughters treated as "liabilities," leading even to female foeticide. In such homes, violence is not an accident. It is the logical outcome of values sown generations earlier.

### Violence Normalised as Silence

India flaunts its low divorce rates. But what hides beneath the pride? A culture where individuals endure humiliating, sometimes violent relationships. Women are told to put up with things "for the sake of the children." But a home where fear and violence are common can never provide a healthy environment. Children's well-being depends on dignity and safety, not

appearances of unity. A broken home can still raise healthy children; a violent home never can. NFHS-5 (2019-21) found that 29 per cent of married women aged 18-49 have faced physical or sexual violence. Many of these injuries are explained away as "accidents." To endure in silence is not strength; it is slavery stretched over decades. Silence does not prevent violence; it feeds it.

### The Practice of Courage

Courage cannot be conjured in a single moment. When smaller humiliations - taunts, restrictions, slaps - are tolerated for years, resistance withers. Real protection comes from everyday strength: refusing what demeans, and building the muscle to walk away from wrong in its small forms.

### A Trap for Both Genders

Women, of course, continue to endure the harshest consequences of domestic abuse and dowry. But men, too, often face suffering. Sometimes, protection laws are exploited and misused, which can lead to false allegations that cause shame, financial ruin, and even self-harm. According to NCRB data of 2021, more than 70 per cent of suicide victims in India were male.

The lesson here is not to set one gender against the other. Just as men have histor-

ically misused power, women, too, can misuse it if empowerment is given without wisdom. The solution is not a tug-of-war between sexes but the recognition that both men and women must be raised as conscious beings: neither trapped in the role of controller, nor reduced to that of victim.

### Beyond Tradition: Questioning Marriage Itself

Some of the most pointed critiques strike at the root of tradition. Why must marriage mean that a woman leaves her parents' home? Why can't a husband live with his wife's family, or both maintain their own spaces? These customs were born in an age when men's physical labour sustained families. Today, when both genders can earn equally, why should old arrangements continue?

The tragedy is that society clings to these outdated structures. Girls grow up in ecosystems that see them as *parayadhan* — someone else's property. She bears the alienation of being raised as transferable, a possession to be handed over. By adulthood, marriage is presented not as a choice but as a cut-off point, like a hotel checkout time. Parents push daughters out by 22 or 24, as if their time has expired. If daughters are so loved, why are families in such haste to send them away?

### The Way Forward

What then can stop the next tragic headline? Laws and police action are vital, but they cannot reach the core of the problem. Real change has to start much earlier, within the individual.

**Education in dignity and courage:** Children must not only pass exams but also learn to recognise society's illusions and stand up to injustice.

**Economic independence:** Without some measure of self-reliance, women and men alike remain vulnerable to dependence and exploitation.

**Support systems:** Counselling and safe spaces can assist, but they must guide individuals not just toward escape from pain, but toward self-understanding.

**Rethinking traditions:** Customs like dowry or the expectation that a woman must leave her home after marriage are not sacred truths but relics of another age. They must be questioned and, where detrimental, rejected.

**Inner empowerment:** The deepest solution does not come from outside. Courage is cultivated, not as a one-day miracle, but as the fruit of inner clarity. This clarity grows as we see through conditioning, question fears and illusions, and live from a centre of self-knowledge. Without that, laws are paper, and traditions only shift form.

### A Culture of Consciousness

Domestic violence, dowry, and oppressive marriages are symptoms of a deeper poverty: absence of inner clarity. They do not thrive because of a few 'bad families,' but because society at large runs on fear, desire, and unexamined habits. Outrage after each tragedy has become a ritual, but rituals cannot cure the blindness of the mind. That blindness can be dispelled only by clarity. When men and women see themselves not as roles or possessions but as conscious beings, the basis of exploitation dissolves. Empowerment without wisdom only changes who holds the whip; empowerment with wisdom ensures no whip is ever raised.

Liberation does not begin with outer reform but with seeing rightly. Without clarity, there can be no love; without love, greed is the default, and violence is inevitable. Dowry deaths are gross violence; mental trauma, wasted potential, and ill-raised children are subtle violence. With every new headline, let us be reminded that what shocks us has always been waiting beneath our silence.