

Socio-economic Dimensions of Dowry in Rural Bangladesh: Is It a Matrimonial Function?

S.M. Zobayer Enamul Karim⁺
Bentul Mawa^{*}
Niaz Md. Farhat Rahman[!]

Abstract

Dowry is the most common unpleasant custom especially in rural areas of Bangladesh. Women are not only the victims of cruelty and torture for dowry, but also the bride's children, family members and other in-laws are badly affected. Keeping in mind the above problems, the paper explores the existing practices and provisions of dowry, its nature, forms, causes and consequences in some part of rural Bangladesh. An empirical study was undertaken in the three selected union parishads namely Nizra, Ulpur and Durgapur of Gopalganj Sadar Upazilla, Gopalganj.

Based on the research findings, the amount of dowry given ranged from Tk. 15000 to Tk. 45000. Though most of the bride and groom in rural Bangladesh are fully aware of the malpractice and even do not give consent to a dowry involved marriage, they are forced to accept the proposal. All groups of the respondents mentioned that loan from relatives, friends and others is the first method of mobilising money for dowry and the money of dowry is usually used by the groom for purchasing land, house and other properties; paying back loans; investment in small business; deposited for future; buying household articles and bribe for job security; etc. Besides these, parents of bride and groom, young men and local people's justification for demanding dowry had been identified as 'to set up a life of bride grooms' and 'to follow the tradition of the society' respectively. On the other hand, young women identified the reason behind demanding dowry was 'due to greed of bride's share in parental property'. The article concludes that strict implementation of existing laws and rules and empowering women through education are the best measures of dowry prevention. This paper also suggests some ways and means to improve the overall situation of this bad practice-dowry.

⁺ Deputy Director, Management Information System, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Savar, Dhaka.

^{*} Assistant Professor, Graduate Training Institute, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202

[!] Post-Graduate Student, Department of Agricultural Statistics, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202

Introduction

Violence against women is a common occurrence in most societies whether the violence is physical or mental. In South Asia it is a daily and often deadly fact of life for millions of women and girls. As a South Asian country, Bangladesh is no different from its neighbours. South Asian women suffer multiple forms of violence including domestic violence, rape, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, suicide, forced marriage, trafficking and other psychological and financial oppression. Violence against women has become one of the most visible social issues in this region. Although women in Bangladesh constitute half of the population, various indicators reveal that the status of women is much lower than that of men. Their literacy rate is only 43.2 percent, much lower than that of men 61.0 (Farouk, 2005). Excessive mortality among women due to discrimination has resulted in a sex ratio in the population of 105 men to every 100 women¹. Violence against women is amongst the most serious threats to overall development and progress in Bangladesh (ibid, 2005). The practice of dowry demand, one form of violence, has emerged as a major social evil in recent years in Bengali Muslim tradition (Luciana *et al.*, 2004) and most of the women in the rural areas become the victim of it. Women are in a vulnerable position in terms of marriage and they contribute a lot to the society but enjoy fewer benefits. Degradation of social value system and poverty caused a lot of pressure to the poorer parents of adult girls regarding marriage in Bangladesh. A good number of people in the society are practicing dowry by ignoring social and religious values and obligations. Among Muslim majority countries, marriage transfers from the bride's side are only commonly observed in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In this aspect Tertilt (2005) states that dowry participation has raised dramatically in both countries. Usually, most Muslim marriages involve the negotiation of a *mahr* provision as part of a marriage contract (Carroll, 1986). Added to *mahr*, the practice of dowry or joutuk, demands made by the husband's side to the bride's side, have in the last few decades become a widespread practice supported neither by state law nor personal laws, but apparently designed to strengthen traditional patriarchal assumptions (Huda, 2006).

However, illiteracy, narrow mentality, negative attitude to the women, dependence on husband and living on their income, social corruption, lack of social awareness, lack of implementation of existing laws and rules and business attitudes of the groom party etc. are some of the general causes of dowry in our society (Islam, 2008). In Bangladesh dowry increases in tandem with girl's age, puts pressure on parents to marry their daughters early. Islam and Mahmud (1996) view that the

¹ Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 2005

bride suffers from other disadvantages such as lower social status or darker skin tone in the marriage market. The bride's physical characteristics can also play a role. Light skinned girls, who are in high demand, get married relatively early and with very little dowry. Wealthier families and families of older brides tend to pay greater payments. On the other hand, dowry is likely to be less important if a bride marries into a family of equal status (Jansen, 1986).

Apart from these, the rich parents of bride become interested to have an established groom even at the cost of sufficient money, valuable goods and articles. Besides, the unexpected attitudes of the parents of groom also help to extend the practice of dowry in our society. To have a happy and peaceful future of the daughter, the parents provide dowry to the groom in the form of liquid cash and items at the cost of their tangible and intangible assets. Farouk (2005) states, when the bride's family fails to meet the demand, her husband and in-laws verbally and physically abuse her to compel her family to pay. In many cases the abuse become severe in nature, for example, the woman has acid throw on her face, is burnt, severely beaten, and in some cases even murdered. The above mentioned situation strongly prevails in rural society. In addition, the relation between dowry and abuse is highly level-specific: respondents who paid small dowries report much higher levels of abuse than who paid large dowries. Recent studies suggest a link between domestic violence and dowry demand. The rate of wife abuse has found to be higher when a husband and/or his family believe dowry payments are inadequate (Banerjee, 1999; Bloch and Rao, 2002). Thus, physical torture, acid throwing, burning in fire, provocation to suicide, separation and divorce, etc. remind the vulnerable position of women in our society.

Table-1 Violence against Women 1990-1997

Types of Violence	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	Growth over' 90 in %
Rape	407	982	749	526	285	651	1415	2224	546
Acid Throwing	21	20	29	39	19	51	83	117	557
Murder	1904	1500	1879	2269	806	1787	1839	2426	127
Physical Torture	258	300	217	350	469	808	1664	2029	786
Abduction	30	28	18	17	19	49	138	245	816
Trafficking	12	18	32	23	28	55	85	72	600
Total	2714	2927	3025	3358	1748	3668	5818	7901	254

Source: Women Support Program, Project Report 1997

The data furnished in Table 1 demonstrate a panicking picture of serious violence against women in our country. Between 1990 and 1997, crimes against women have increased by 254 percent. The growth of physical torture is also alarming. In 1997, violence against women accounted for 31 percent of all offences of the year. However, this increased rate may also be very well caused by the increased reporting of the incidents, not the incidents themselves. In that case it is a positive social and administrative change (Jahan, 2007).

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) also documented already 4 fatwa related cases of violence, 126 incidents of rape including 10 deaths and 2 suicides during January and March 2007. There also occurred 67 dowry related violence which caused 34 deaths, 4 suicides and cases of acid burns were 28 during that period². Such heinous crimes against women infringe basic human rights and freedom of women as citizens. That is why the aim of this study is to explore the existing problem of rural girl's marriage with special reference to dowry. It also examines the consequences of dowry of the rural areas of Bangladesh since no significant research work has so far been reported on the dowry practice in rural Bangladesh, which can play a vital role to diminish this malpractice from the society. In section one some of the conceptual issues have been discussed such as dowry, dower, different forms of marriage in religious perspective, etc. Section two presents methods and approach of the research. Section three critically analyses the results of the research and includes a discussion of the findings from three selected union parishads at Gopalganj Sadar Upazilla. Finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations.

Conceptual Issues

Concept of Marriage under different Religion

In rural Bangladesh, the poor parents face several problems to marry off their adult girls and most of the problems are related to dowry. The poor parents of our country often bound to meet the demand of the groom party for settling their girl's marriage. In the above context, dowry has been approved as an integral component of marriage. According to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act-2000, dowry has been given an extended meaning 'whatever is presented whether before of after marriage under demand, compulsion or pressure as consideration for

² Ain o Salish Kendra: Violence Against Women, Bangladesh and CEDAW
http://www.basug.nl/files/VAW/Sultana%20Kamal_Violence%20Against%20Women.pdf

the marriage can be said to be dowry' (cited in Farouk, 2005). It is paid in the form of cash, furniture, jewellery, property etc. But delayed payment of dowry raises the problem of abuse against women. This practice is carried out both in urban and rural areas of Bangladesh in different manners, depending on their educational, occupational, cultural and regional backgrounds. In rural areas reflection of dowry is more severe and in course of time; dowry has become a practice from custom.

The curse of dowry is the outcome of various forms of marriage in different communities in this sub-continent. While dealing with the various aspects of dowry some sort of glimpse on the different forms of marriage with their basic concept under different religion is shown to understand how the evils of dowry ingresses into the limbs of the society. Muslim marriage is a contract of civil nature with proposal (Ijab) and acceptance of the proposal (Qabul) of which *mahr* or dower is the consideration³. Bakar (1980) states that Islam has enjoined honourable status of women almost equal to man in proportionate and dignified way. It expelled out the ancient cruel attitude to woman and placed them in a position of honour and dignity. Marriage is a right of every adult man and woman. This is a holistic religious and social approach to lead the society to achieve desired goals. Mustafa (2004) defines marriage as a contract of duties and responsibilities between two partners who have given their full and free consent to marry each other. The relationship of a husband and wife is viewed as complementary, reflecting their differing characteristics, capacities and dispositions. Besides legal provisions, Islam prescribed a whole range of ethical directives pertaining to the relationship between men and women.

Hindu marriage is viewed as a sacrament, which is a union of a man and woman for the whole life with no provision for separation from each other. This concept of marriage as such induced the widow to die with the husband in the same pyre known as "*Satidaha*". This cruel practice has been abolished and stopped by the Regulation number XVII of 1929. The condition of women was perhaps the worst of its type under the Hinduism. How the womanhood was being dealt with under the Hindu faith would be understood in the following verse of Manu (Bakar, 1983: 6-7).

"In childhood a female must be subjected to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent" (Manu V.140).

³ The Islamic Marriage Contract, <http://islam.about.com/od/marriage/a/contract.htm>

Under the Buddhism attachment with women by way of wedlock has been very strongly denounced with much abhorrence, which is considered to be the impediments on the way of salvation. Judaism also does not recognise any honourable status of women, while under Christianity women are considered to be the root of all evils (Bakar, 1980).

Concept of Dowry and Dower

According to section 2 of The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980 “unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context, “dowry” means any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly-

- (a) by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or
- (b) by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person to either party to the marriage or to any other person; at the time of marriage or at any time before or after the marriage as consideration for the marriage of the said parties but does not include dower or *Mahr* in the case of persons to whom the Muslim personal law (*shariat*) applies”.

Although the two terms ‘dower’ and ‘dowry’ appear to be synonymous, these are different from each other. ‘Dower’ means ‘*Mahr*’ which is paid by a Muslim husband to his wife at the time of marriage as a consideration of the marriage, which is given as a token of respect for the wife. It is also not to be understood as the purchase value of the wife. It should be borne in mind that the term ‘dowry’ used in this Act is distinctly different from dower and these two terms should not be confounded for the same meaning.

Mahr is an Islamic requirement and also serves as an economic protection for the wife. So dowry (marriage gift) demanded by grooms from bride’s side is simply non-Islamic. In our rural culture, bride’s parents often try to get a specific groom by offering higher market-wise competitive dowry to the groom’s side. Any gift given by anyone or any solicitation has no Islamic validity and vigorous education is needed in this regard to disseminate this information to the people of the society.

Methods and Approach

An intensive study has been made to explore the real situation of dowry. The information, findings and analysis throughout the research paper are the compilation of the contribution of the respondents. The respondents

including 60 parents of bride and grooms (aged between 30 to 70 years), 60 young men (15-49 yrs), 30 young women (15-39 yrs) and 60 local people (local representatives/ members of the civil society, imams, teachers and others) were interviewed. Four different sets of questionnaires were prepared to collect the views/opinions and information from parents of bride and grooms, brides, grooms, and local people regarding various dimensions and consequences of dowry and its inherent barriers. To collect primary data from different levels of respondents both random and purposive sampling methods have been applied. Purposive sampling was applied in collecting secondary information. Data through interview schedules and checklist have been collected from three union parishads namely Nizra, Ulpur and Durgapur of Gopalganj sadar upazila, Gopalganj during November 2006 to February 2007. All the young men and women were married. The total number of respondents was 210. It may be noted that most of the young men, women and parents were the victim of and associated with dowry but some of them were not necessarily linked with this affair.

Results and Discussion

Findings of the study have been arranged into two different categories. These are (I) demographic characteristics of the respondents (II) general opinions of the respondents, which include (i) extent of payment, perception and components of dowry, (ii) methods of mobilizing money of dowry and pattern of spending money received as dowry, (iii) consequences of non-payment of dowry, a bride, family face.

I. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

An attempt has been made to highlight the demographic characteristic of the respondents shown in Table 2. Respondents' age range between 15 to 70 years and following indicators age, education, occupation etc have been studied. The highest percentage (55.71%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 26-49 years followed by the respondents of the above 50 years (22.38%) and 18-25 (16.20%) years of age group. The findings revealed that 11(18%) young men married at the age of less than 20 years, and for the young women this figure was 8(26.67%), which is a direct violation of the existing government acts and rules, where the permitted age of marriage for man and women is 21 and 18 years respectively.

Table-2 Demographic characteristic of the Respondents

Characteristics	Range	Categories	Respondents				Grand Total Percent (%)
			Number (N=210)	Young Men (N=60)	Young Women (N=30)	Others	
Age (Years)	15-70	15-17	12	4	8	-	5.71
		18-20	17	7	10	-	8.10
		21-25	17	10	7	-	8.10
		26-49	117	39	5	73	55.71
		50 and Above	47	-	-	47	22.38
Level of Education (Year of schooling)	0- 12	No education	16	3	2	9	8.11
		Can sign only	20	4	3	13	9.52
		Primary	30	6	5	19	14.28
		Junior High school	43	10	4	29	20.48
		Secondary	46	19	8	19	21.90
		Higher Secondary	31	12	5	14	14.76
		Bachelor Degree	14	5	1	8	6.67
		No Response	10	1	2	7	4.76
Characteristics	Range	Categories	Respondents				
Occupation	Employed- Unemployed	Employed	75	49	26	83.33	
		Unemployed	10	8	2	11.11	
		No Response	5	3	2	5.55	
Annual income (Tk.)	1,000-10,000	Low (up to 3,000)	23	7	16	25.56	
		Medium (3,001-6,000)	39	33	6	43.33	
		High (6001-10,000)	15	15	-	16.67	
		No Response	13	5	8	14.44	

Sources: Field Survey

Majority of the respondents (52.39%) belonged to the illiterate, primary and junior high school level of education followed by secondary and bachelor degree comprising 36.66% and 6.67% respectively. It was revealed that a significant number of young men and women not even crossed the secondary level of education. In respect of the occupation respondents occupation includes agriculture, farming, agriculture day-labour, construction labour, rickshaw/van pulling, small business etc. Young women (33.33%) mostly acted as housewife and 10% of them did not make any reply in this connection, 8 (13.33%) of the young men were unemployed. It is evident from Table 2 that more than one-third of the young women had no notable income (<Tk. 2000/-). On the other hand, around 33(55%) young men had the income between Tk. 3001/-to 6000/-.

II. General Opinions of the Respondents

a. Extent of Payment, Perception and Components of Dowry

Table 3 shows that 38.33% young men received dowry amounting Tk. 15000/- followed by 30% and 28.33% receiving Tk. 20000/- and 30000/- respectively. None of the young women respondents endorsed the view of men that the initial slab of dowry was Tk. 15000 and 16.67% of the bride informed that Tk. 45000 was given as dowry to the groom, which was not acknowledged by any of the counterpart. It is depicted from the Table 3 that dowry has been approved as an essential component of marriage. However, different people have different approaches towards dowry. Some may demand liquid cash, while others in ornament and household articles etc. Overwhelming majority of the young men (93.33%) and 90% of young women viewed that cash treated as good provision of dowry, while 93.33% young women, 88.33% young men considered gold as equally important as a form of dowry. Besides, dowry was also taken to buy household articles, clothes for relatives and bride, to bear marriage expenses, to buy agricultural land and cow for cultivation etc. The opinions of parents, young men and local peoples' justifications for demanding dowry were to set up a life of bride grooms and to follow the tradition of the society, etc. But the young women identified brides share in parental property as top justification of dowry. The respondents also identified 'to get back what was lost during the marriage of groom's sister', to maintain regular expenses of their first life', etc as the justification of dowry.

Table-3 The Amount of Dowry received and given by the Respondents and Components of Dowry

Dowry (In Tk)	No of Respondents		Components of Dowry	Respondents (%)	
	Groom received dowry	Bride given dowry		Groom's perception	Bride's perception
15000	23 (38.33)	0 (00.00)	Liquid Cash	93.33	90.00
20000	18 (30.00)	7 (23.33)	Ornaments	88.33	93.33
30000	17 (28.33)	8 (26.67)	Marriage Expenses	63.33	60.00
35000	1 (1.67)	6 (20.00)	Household articles, Khat, TV, Fridge etc	66.67	73.33
40000	1 (1.67)	5 (16.67)	Cloths for relatives and bride	50.00	56.67
45000	-	5 (16.67)	Agricultural land/property	50.00	36.67
Total	60 (100)	30 (100)	Cow for cultivation	56.67	43.33

Sources: Field Survey

b. Methods of Mobilizing Money of Dowry and Pattern of Spending Money Received as Dowry

All groups of respondents preferred to ‘loan from relatives/friends and others as the first method of mobilizing money of dowry’. Around 62.5% and 52.07% of respondents took loan against interest (non institutional), sold their assets like livestock/ poultry and gold etc to mobilize the money. Data furnished in Table 4 shows that eighty percent of the young men viewed that money received as dowry was used for ‘purchase of land, house and other properties’; 70% of the young women and 66.67% of local people also endorsed the similar views. Money of dowry was used for ‘paying back loans’ was replied by 75% young men. However, only 30% young women endorsed their views regarding paying back loans. According to young women, men and local people, the dowry amount is also used to ‘meeting marriage expenditure’, ‘purchase vehicles’, ‘investment in small business’, ‘deposited for future’, ‘buy household articles’, and ‘buy ornaments for bride’, bribe for job security etc.

Table-4 Methods of mobilizing money of dowry and pattern of spending money received as dowry

Methods	Parents of Bride N=30	Young Men (Groom) N=60	Young Women (Bride) N=30	Local People N=60
Self deposited money	16.65	11.67	10.00	18.33
Loan from relatives/friends and others	70.03	68.33	73.33	68.33
Loan against land	19.99	20.00	20.00	23.33
Loan against interest(non institutional)	66.70	63.33	60.00	61.67
Loan against interest (institutional)	16.65	15.00	10.00	20.00
Sales of assets(livestock/poultry)and gold etc	56.61	51.67	46.67	53.33
Corruption/ theft and other unlawful means	6.67	5.00	6.67	11.67
Land selling	10.00	6.67	3.33	13.33
Spending Pattern	Young Men (Groom) N=60		Young Women (Bride) N=30	Local People N=60
Pay back loans	75.00		30.00	60.00
Buy ornaments for bride	38.3		36.67	33.33
Purchase land, house and other properties	80.0		70.00	66.67
Investment in small business	51.67		40.00	40.00
Deposited for future	45.00		33.33	45.00
Purchase vehicles	61.67		53.33	53.33
Buy household articles	40.00		43.33	45.00
Meeting marriage expenditure	65.00		66.67	53.33
Bribe for job security	48.33		40.00	35.00

Sources: Field Survey

c. Consequences of Non-Payment of Dowry, a Bride, Family face

The researchers tried to explore the probable consequences where dowry is not paid. In reality, the women, their parents/guardians are not in a position to cope with the amount promised/agreed upon to pay as dowry. If the promised amount was not given in full, or the money was delayed or deferred, in such cases, a question was asked, 'what could be the fate of the bride if promised dowry is not paid?' In such situations, respondents told that divorce, staying in the parent's house till demands are met, physical and mental torture, threats of desertion, neglect in the family, use of abusive language, etc might be the outcome which had to face by the bride. The young women strongly endorsed most of these consequences like the views of parents and local people. In Table 5, around 70% young women expressed that they were subject to deprivation from groom's love and affection, physical torture, overloading of household work, neglect by family members in case of non-payment of dowry. More than 76.66 % of the bride opined that 'threat of desertion and divorce' is the frequent consequences for non-payment of dowry. About 70 % parents of bride, 63.33% young women, and 61.67% local people told that 'stay in the parent's house till demand is met' is one of the worst consequences of the brides generally face in case of non-payment of dowry. Despite constitutional guarantees⁴ of gender equality and legislative and other affirmative interventions, the status of Bangladeshi women is on the whole dismal. Women are subjected to discrimination and violence within the household, at the workplace and in the society. From their childhood, women are forced to live in a culture, which tolerates and permits inhuman treatment to them (Farouk, 2005).

It was found in the study areas that both the girls and parents were telling same thing with same intensity of concern through out the study. The family faces lots of problems and hardship for providing dowry. Economic condition of the family became worse and they face financial bankruptcy and its adverse consequences viewed by 76.67%-85% of the four categories of respondents due to dowry which is shown in Table 5. In this regard, loss of land, property and other assets, loss of honour in the

⁴ All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of the law (Article 27 of the Constitution), The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 28(1), Women have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life (Article 28(2)).

society and negative impact on future generation etc were also opined by the majority of the respondents.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Now-a-days dowry is a common practice that went beyond the ritual of marriage. It was revealed that the lowest income groups of the society became the worst victim of it. Dowry in cash and gold (ornaments) occupy either first or second priority for all sections of society. Due to its bad consequences all sections of people must escape from this malpractice. Based on the above analysis, the following recommendations are made:

Table-5 Consequences of non-payment of Dowry, a Bride, Family face

Consequences faced by Bride	Parents of Bride (N=30)	Young Women (N=30)		Local People (N=60)
Divorce	53.29	53.33		50.00
Leaves bride to their parents house till demand are met	70.00	63.33		61.67
Physical torture	63.35	70.00		56.67
Overloading of household work to bride	60.00	66.67		51.67
Mental torture	50.02	56.67		50.00
Murder	26.65	46.67		30.00
Non cooperation from family members	30.00	60.00		40.00
Deprives from groom's love and affection	56.69	73.33		55.00
Can't express opinion in the family affairs	56.69	66.67		60.00
Neglected by groom's family members and relatives	50.02	70.00		51.67
Threat of desertion and divorce	66.69	76.66		71.67
Consequences faced by Family	Parents (N=60)	Young Men (N=60)	Young Women (N=30)	Local People (N=60)
Lost of land, property and other assets	65.00	56.67	76.67	70.00
Economic condition become worse, financial bankruptcy, and its consequences	85.00	76.67	83.33	80.00
Negative consequences on future younger generation	75.00	61.67	73.33	81.67
Disharmony in the brides family	61.67	43.33	66.67	50.00
Disharmony in the grooms family	36.67	35.00	30.00	40.00
Loss of social status	43.33	46.67	63.34	58.33
Loss the honour in the society	61.67	53.33	70.00	65.00
Emotional stress and its consequences	73.33	68.33	76.67	80.00

Source: Field survey

- i. Awareness creation: It is necessary to create social awareness among all sections of people. Young persons should strongly feel that dowry is not relevant to marriage, massive publicity of dowry related laws and regulations among citizens, empowerment of women through education may be important tools for increasing awareness against dowry in the society. In fact, a significant number of respondents in this study supported about ‘social isolation of the family who gives/takes dowry’ in the society.
- ii. Birth certificates should be obligatory during marriage: The concerned department of the government specially the local bodies should strictly maintain and supervise the minimum age requirement for marriage. And in this connection, producing birth certificates both for bride and groom should be an obligation during marriage registration.
- iii. Education for girls: Every girl should be educated so that they may understand the meaning of life through awareness generation. Anti-dowry campaign should be made as a part of school curriculum. Girls should be given at least secondary level of education before marriage, so that they can understand the real meaning of marriage and conjugal life. Both the bride and groom should ethically and morally be well educated in terms of religion and existing education of marriage. This will help to protect the practice of dowry.
- iv. Role of religious leaders: Religious groups and leaders must devote themselves and take steps for the awareness building and motivate people against dowry. They should also take interest to spread the lessons/teachings of evil of dowry in the light of religious books. The imams of the mosque should pursue to expand the campaign against dowry and may preach the people that *mahr* is a must for legalizing marriage. Dowry is strictly prohibited in this regard; it is fully non- Islamic concept.
- v. Recognition of bride’s share in parental property: The people of the society should recognise that ‘brides share in parental property as her right’ and this right should be offered by the family members as general practice and norm. Concerned girls and every body else should have clear idea of how much she would be entitled to receive. During this period, from the date of her marriage to the date of the transfer of the property in her name, she should be entitled to the income from the property, if so applicable. It will help to reduce the mentality of groom’s family to hanker after dowry.

- vi. Execution of dowry prohibition act: There is a doubt about the eradication and elimination of dowry through proper legislative procedures, since every such step is interfered by different influential sections of the society. Government should take necessary steps to enforce the Dowry Prohibition Act effectively and efficiently. Physical tortures, assaults, separation, mental torture, threats, suicide, negligence in the family, hard work, abusive language, starvation etc may be treated as severe criminal offence under this act. 'Strict implementation of existing laws and rules' is a mandate and punishment must be enforced.
- vii. Role of media: Media should take initiatives against the consequences of giving and taking dowry. Special programmes against dowry may be launched on television and radio to motivate the young generation and thus it may bring the changes and improvements in society.
- viii. Provide legal and financial assistance: The petitioner (bride) should be given legal and financial assistance to run the case. Because it is evident that most of the cases are withdrawn from the court for bilateral disposal at the time of final verdict and cases are ultimately settled by arbitration, in spite of the merit of the cases. In most of the cases, economic insolvency, poor status and position, the petitioners ultimately agreed to withdraw the cases. Hence, to overcome this unexpected and unwilling behaviour of the bride, government should come forward to assist them in terms of legal (appointing government lawyer without fee) and financial support, so that proper justice could be ensured in this regard. Moreover, motivational program should be launched by union parishads to reduce this bad practice.

Given the critical analysis it may be concluded and recommended that awareness building, strong publicity against dowry, female education and empowerment, role of religious leaders, execution of the related laws and rules etc are needed as a matter of urgency and should be a mandate to come out from this evil.

References

1. Ain o Salish Kendra (n.d.) 'Violence Against women, Bangladesh and CEDAW'
2. http://www.basug.nl/files/VAW/Sultana%20Kamal_Violence%20Against%20Women.pdf
3. Bakar, K. M. (1980) A Hand book on the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980 and The Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance, 1983, pp.5-7.
4. Banerjee, K. (1999) 'Gender stratification and the marriage market in India', *Journal of Family Issues*, 20(5): 648-676.
5. Bangladesh, G. O. (1997) Women Support Program, Project Report, M. o. W. a. C. A., Directorate of Women Affairs, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs .
6. BBS (2005) Statistical Yearbook 2005, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Annual Publication, Ministry of Planning, Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.
7. Bloch, F. and Rao, V. (2002) 'Terror as a bargaining instrument: A case study of dowry violence in Rural India', *The American Economic Review*, 92(4): 1029-1043.
8. Carroll, L. (1986) 'Fatima in the House of Lords', *The Modern Law Review*, 49, pp. 776-781.
9. Farouk, A. S. (2005) 'Violence against women: A Statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them', Expert Group Meeting held on 11-14 April 2005, Geneva, Switzerland. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005/docs/expert-papers/Farouk.pdf>
10. Government of Bangladesh (GOB). 1972. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
11. Huda, S. (2006) 'Dowry in Bangladesh: Compromising Women's Rights', *South Asia Research*, Vol.26, No.3, pp. 249-268.
12. Islam, N. (2008) 'Bangladesh from our view: Dowry system in Bangladesh', <http://narijibon.blogspot.com/2008/01/dowry-system-in-bangladesh.html>
13. Islam, M. M. and Mahmud, M. (1996) 'Marriage patterns and some issues related to adolescent marriage in Bangladesh', *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 11(3): 27-42.
14. Jahan, F. (2007) 'Acid Violence Against Women: Is the State Doing Enough?', *Society and Change*, vol. 1, NO. 2, pp. 7-29.
15. Jansen, E. G. (1986) *Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources*, Oslo: Norwegian University Press.
16. Luciana, S. et al., (2004) 'Does Dowry Improve Life for Brides? A Test of the quest Theory of Dowry in Rural Bangladesh'. A Policy Paper of Bangladesh Population Council.
17. Mustafa, B. (2004) 'Muslim Families in the Capital—Challenges and Opportunities', A seminar presentation, 11th December 2004, The Chamber, City Hall, London. <http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/marriageandislam.pdf>
18. Tertilt, M. (2005) 'Polygamy, Fertility, and Savings', *Journal of Political Economy*, 113, pp. 1341-1371.
19. The Islamic Marriage Contract, <http://islam.about.com/od/marriage/a/contract.htm> (Accessed on 25 April, 2009).