

Dowry Act-scared parents disown sons

Raman Mohan
Tribune News Service

Rohtak: The fear of dowry cases is driving parents to disown their sons before their marriage as a precautionary measure should marital bliss turn into nightmare.

A large number of public notices published in newspapers testify to the fears of the misuse of the Prohibition of Dowry Act. The local Tribune office books 10 or 15 such public notices every month. Inquiries from other nearby towns and local dailies show a similar trend. Advertising agencies estimate that about 3500 such public notices appear annually in various newspapers all over Haryana.

Dilawar Singh of Kilo village, near here, issued a public notice last week disowning his son, Rajinder Singh, who is due to marry a girl from a family in Putthu village on the Delhi-Haryana border next month. He said the notice was a mere formality. "Should trouble arise, all my family members, except the son, would be safe. Otherwise, the 'bahu' could name the entire family in her complaint", he added.

Another father with similar fears is Gaje Singh, a resident of Chikenwas village in Hisar.

He said he had gone a step further by getting the name of his son struck off the ration card. "This will strengthen my case. I will raise a temporary wall in the compound and allot a room to the newly weds till they have settled down to my satisfaction.

Otherwise, my son will remain a member of the household for all practical purposes", he said.

Inquiries from a cross section of the rural society show that the Dowry Act is generally viewed as a draconian law, which is being misused. Parents say the law itself is now the cause of trouble in family.

Newly wed daughters-in-law, they say, are taking shelter behind the law to have their way. Boys' parents are, therefore, keen to safeguard their interests.

Kailasho of Gugheri village, near here, who has two sons, said she was lucky that neither of her two daughters-in-law had given her any trouble. "My neighbour's newly wed daughter-in-law is, however, different. A few days ago, her mother-in-law objected to her going around the village without covering her head. The daughter-in-law told her to mind her own business.

When the mother-in-law raised the issue in the presence of family elders, the daughter-in-law threatened to lodge a complaint with the police on the pretext of harassment for dowry. That silenced the entire family. Nobody dares question the daughter-in-law now", she added.

Lawyers, however, say disowning a son before marriage does not by itself provide parents immunity from the law. Mr P.K. Sandhir, a Hisar-based lawyer, said, "Disowning without sufficient grounds does not carry any legal sanctity. The parents must be able to prove that the son had been wayward for long. Besides, circumstantial evidence in a dowry case must establish the non-involvement of parents if they are to prove their innocence". He was of the view that such notices serve no purpose.

Mr Bharat Bhushan Batra, a local advocate, agreed with Mr Sandhir, but added that such a notice could be relevant in certain cases. "A public notice is meant for everybody. If a notice has been published before marriage, the girl's family is expected to be aware of the fact that the boy stands disowned. This can strengthen the parents' plea of innocence should such an eventuality arise. However, circumstantial evidence will still hold the key," he said.

The number of dowry cases registered in Haryana reflect the fears in the mind of parents. According to Mr A. S. Ahlawat, SP, Hisar, an average of six cases are registered every month in the district.

Between October and December last year, 18 cases were registered. Mr Ahlawat agreed that the law was being misused. "There are instances where a case is registered 10 years after marriage. Obviously, dowry is not the root cause. But the police has to take cognizance and probe all allegations", he added.



Girl restored to parents in child marriage case

Kiran Deep

Panipat, January 31

The Child Marriage Restraint Act is being violated with impunity in Bihar. The fact came to light when an 11-year-old girl was found from a factory in Kacha camp here today. The girl, hailing from Bihar, had been forced to marry a youth by her parents due to abject poverty three years ago. She had been staying with a 24-year-old youth, Vinod, in a hut on the factory premises for over two years.

Some persons staying on the premises of an other factory became suspicious when they found that Vinod always locked her in a hut before leaving. They informed the matter to a local Crime Prevention Society. When a team of the NGO visited the hut and asked the girl about her whereabouts, she started weeping and expressed her desire to go to her parents' house. The matter was reported to the police.

The police took Vinod into custody. He said he had married the girl with her parents' consent. He was not aware of any law in this regard, he added. Giving reason for the marriage Vinod said his parents had died and so, he had to marry as early as possible.

However, when the girl was asked about her marriage she expressed ignorance. The police then contacted her father in Jalandhar. He works as a gatekeeper there.

He confirmed the marriage and expressed ignorance regarding any law. He added that child marriages in Bihar were a routine. Later, the police released Vinod after questioning him for more than an hour. The girl was sent to her parents' house.

