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# Dowry in India: A Continuing Violation of International Commitments under CEDAW and Human Rights Law

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper closely analyzes India's modest success in eradicating the custom of dowry through the framework of international law. Despite the existence of domestic law, namely the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, along with constitutional guarantees of equality, dowry violence and discrimination continue to take place at alarming rates. Selecting provisions of international law, including India's obligations stated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and associated United Nations resolutions, this paper illustrates that India has made primarily symbolic rather than substantive efforts in these regards. Through doctrinal analysis, the paper discusses dowry as a form of gender-based violence embedded in structural inequality and elaborates on the state's duty to pursue transformative measures beyond punitive avenues. It illuminates the shortcomings of national systems and demonstrates the necessity of integrating global standards into national enforcement strategies. Finally, the article advocates for India to adopt a multi-faceted reform agenda that reflects legal, educational, and socio-economic dimensions of CEDAW General Recommendations No. 19 and 35. Moving the gap between the global obligation and local implementation will provide an opportunity for India to achieve its commitments to ensure real gender justice and to eliminate the structures that maintain dowry.*

## KEYWORDS

*Dowry, CEDAW, Inequality, Compliance, Reform.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The dowry system in India continues to endure as one of the most deep-rooted harmful practices, despite decades of prohibition by law. Originally seen as a voluntarily offered gift to the bride, dowry has

become a practice of coercive demand, often followed by harassment, cruelty and, in the most extreme cases, death. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has reported more than 6,500 dowry deaths in 2022, which demonstrates the disturbing persistence of this practice in modern Indian society<sup>1</sup>.

The dowry system is a violation of women's rights, recognized in international law as among the category of "harmful traditional practices." Although dowry is not directly mentioned in any treaty, treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>2</sup>, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>3</sup>, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>4</sup> (which was enacted to ensure respect for the principles of equality and eliminate discrimination) require States (as a party to the treaty) to eliminate discriminatory practices (such as dowry) and also ensure equality with respect to marriage and family relations. The CEDAW Committee, in its concluding observations on India, has consistently highlighted its concern with dowry and the violence surrounding it<sup>5</sup>.

While India has ratified CEDAW and other significant treaties, enshrined laws such as the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, and included provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) concerning cruelty and dowry death, legislative and regulatory efforts have not been effective in stopping the practice. This paper argues that India has not met meaningful international obligations in this area. While the legal regime exists on paper, underlying problems of tenuous enforcement, underreporting of dowry deaths, and conflicting judicial attitudes point to a continuing discrepancy between commitment to law and practice.

## 2. GLOBAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK AGAINST DOWRY AND HARMFUL PRACTICES

While there is no binding international treaty that mentions dowry, the practice is still caught within the scope of instruments prohibiting gender discrimination, harmful traditional practices, and violence against women.

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<sup>1</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2022: Statistics* (Ministry of Home Affairs 2023) Vol 1, 194.

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNGA Res 217 A (III), UN Doc A/810 (10 December 1948) art 16.

<sup>3</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, art 23.

<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13, arts 5 and 16.

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of India' (2 July 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/IND/CO/4-5, paras 21-22.

These instruments create binding and persuasive obligations on India to eliminate practices that infringe on women's rights and dignity.

### ***2.1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)***

Although the UDHR is not binding it is now custom international law and is the basis of the international human rights regime. Article 16 states marriage will be entered into "only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses"<sup>6</sup>. Dowry practices encourage marriage to become an economic transaction which is inconsistent with this requirement, because they empower families to deter from consent due to economic and social pressures.

### ***2.2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)***

India signed the ICCPR in 1979 so is committed to its obligations contained in Article 23 (3) "free and full consent" requirement for marriage<sup>7</sup>. Where dowry demands place social and financial pressure on the bride's family, the consent to marry cannot be said to be voluntary. In this sense dowry acts as a structural barrier to the fulfilment of ICCPR rights.

### ***2.3. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)***

CEDAW provides the most pertinent legal basis. Article 5(a) states that States must "modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct" that lead to inequality<sup>8</sup>, and Article 16 states that respectively state parties must guarantee equal rights in marriage and in family relations. The CEDAW Committee, in its General Recommendation No 19 on violence against women, recognized that the phenomena of violence against women includes acts of violence stemming from social norms like dowry<sup>9</sup>. In the most recent General Recommendation No 35 the CEDAW Committee reaffirmed that such harmful conduct from patriarchal cultural traditions, such as dowry, also violate women's human rights<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> UDHR (n 2) art 16.

<sup>7</sup> ICCPR (n 3) art 23(3).

<sup>8</sup> CEDAW (n 4) arts 5(a), 16.

<sup>9</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendation No 19: Violence against women' (29 January 1992) UN Doc A/47/38.

<sup>10</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'General Recommendation No 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No 19' (14 July 2017) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/35.

India ratified CEDAW in 1993 but made reservations to Article 5(a) and Article 16(1) which deal with the change of cultural practice and equality in family law. These reservations diminish India's obligation to address the dowry system, no matter how many times the CEDAW Committee has called on India to withdraw them<sup>11</sup>.

#### ***2.4. UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW, 1993) and Beijing Platform for Action (1995)***

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) acknowledges that violence against women includes "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family" (United Nations, 1993)<sup>12</sup>. This is inclusive of crimes related to dowry, including harassment, cruelty, and deaths. Similarly, the Beijing Platform for Action recognizes violence associated with dowry as a form of violence based on gender that States are to outlaw<sup>13</sup>.

#### ***2.5. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015–2030)***

Goal 5 of the SDGs require States to put an end to harmful practices including child marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls<sup>14</sup>. Although the SDG does not explicitly mention dowry, UN agency, including UN Women, affirm that dowry is harmful traditional practice inconsistent with achieving gender equality.

These instruments articulate for a matrix of obligations – or binding and soft law – that necessitate India to implement preventative, protective, and punitive measures to prevent dowry. Therefore, the prevalence of dowry-related violence is not simply a domestic law enforcement failure. It is a failure of commitments made at the international level.

### **3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON DOWRY IN INDIA**

India has legally condemned dowry to be a practice and has identified both giving and taking dowry as a crime through the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961<sup>15</sup>. The Act was amended following a large uptick in various forms of violence and other related issues due to dowry systems. Significantly, the amendments in 1984 and 1986 increased the penalties for dowry offences and extended the reach of the law. Through all this, the category of dowry violence persists to expose the rift between the law and law enforcement; in other words, legal measures are meaningless, without enforcement of the legislation. Similarly,

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<sup>11</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of India' (n 5) paras 13–14.

<sup>12</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, UNGA Res 48/104 (20 December 1993) art 2(a).

<sup>13</sup> Fourth World Conference on Women, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' (15 September 1995) UN Doc A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, para 118.

<sup>14</sup> UN General Assembly, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (25 September 2015) UN Doc A/RES/70/1, Goal 5.

<sup>15</sup> Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, s 3.

the Indian Penal Code (IPC) contains a provision for dowry harassment in Section 304B (dowry death) and another addressing cruelty (in the form of dowry violence) by a husband or his relatives in Section 498A<sup>16</sup>. All of this demonstrates a recognition by the Indian State that dowry is a pervasive social evil that can be remedied through criminal sanction.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of these measures is questionable. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports unending figures of dowry deaths rates in alarming height, with thousands of cases registered every year<sup>17</sup>. The judicial system is aware of the severity of dowry deaths crimes, but, realities such as evidentiary problems, the slow pace of trials, and misuse of anti-dowry clauses act against the deterrent effect. For instance, in *Kans Raj v State of Punjab* (2000), the Supreme Court recognized that, while Section 304B IPC was enacted to prevent dowry deaths, the courts must apply the evidentiary presumptions in such a way as to protect women instead of doing so subtly by technicalities<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, India's legal system, while it officially forbids dowry, has been unable to dismantle its socio-cultural legitimacy. Dowry lives on in rural and urban settings, which shows that law alone can not remove deeply entrenched customs, especially in cases where state institutions do not intervene. This legal-institutional gap is, indeed, what international monitoring bodies, including the CEDAW Committee, have repeatedly called-out and urged India to convert its formal commitments into protections for women<sup>19</sup>.

#### 4. PERSISTENT REALITY: EMPIRICAL DATA

Even with a strong legal framework, dowry violence continues to be an enduring issue in India. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data indicates that 6,450 dowry deaths were recorded in India in 2022, a very little reduction over ten years, and the prevalence of dowry violence is not going to endure<sup>20</sup>. In addition, there were 122,993 dowry deaths in 2022 for cruelty by husband or relatives, which often overlaps dowry harassment, the most reported forms of crimes against women<sup>21</sup>. The data indicates that the presence of law alone will not curtail dowry violence.

Under-reporting remains an issue. Sociocultural pressures, fears about stigma, and the domestic nature of domestic violence make complainants in families reluctant to registration of a complaint<sup>22</sup>. Consequently, official data is likely undervalued. Studies by United Nations (UN) agencies and agencies have also shown that the extent of dowry violence is likely higher than the NCRB

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<sup>16</sup> Indian Penal Code 1860, ss 304B, 498A.

<sup>17</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2021* (NCRB, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> *Kans Raj v State of Punjab* (2000) 5 SCC 207.

<sup>19</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of India' (24 July 2014) CEDAW/C/IND/CO/4-5, para 23.

<sup>20</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2022: Statistics* (Ministry of Home Affairs 2023) Vol 1, 194.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* 198.

<sup>22</sup> UN Women, 'Dowry-related violence and deaths' (UN Women, 2020) <https://www.unwomen.org>

registration figures<sup>23</sup>.

The international community has consistently highlighted India's shortcomings. In its 2014 concluding observations, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the persisting of harmful practices such as dowry, noting that these practices are directly involved in violence against women and impede women's access to rights<sup>24</sup>. The Committee also recommended that India strengthen enforcement mechanisms, improve data collection, and pursue public awareness efforts aimed at undermining ingrained social norms supporting dowry<sup>25</sup>.

The empirical reality shows while India has taken formal steps to criminalise dowry, there still exists a big gap between the law and what happens in practice. High rates of dowry deaths, even with under-reporting and subsequent lack of consistent enforcement, illustrates that the State does not fulfil its international obligations under CEDAW, ICCPR, and other legal documents on human rights.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION GAPS - THE DIVIDE BETWEEN LEGAL FORMALITY AND SOCIAL REALITY

In India, while there are progressive laws in place meant to address dowry, the continued prevalence of dowry violence reveals an enormous gap between legal intention and reality of implementation. The challenge here is not the absence of legal provision, rather it lies in the weak implementation of those provisions and an almost universal acceptance of dowry as the social norm.

First, law enforcement is often indifferent or biased when handling dowry disputes. Police who handle domestic disputes do not often treat dowry related violence as a criminal matter<sup>26</sup>. Victims and/or their families are discouraged from pursuing justice. The investigation of cases is also hampered by lack of training, lack of gender sensitization, and corruption in the law enforcement professional. The Justice J.S. Verma Committee Report of 2013 noted that laws failing to be implemented by law enforcement and a culture of societal tolerance contribute to the culture of violence against women and therefore dowry deaths<sup>27</sup>.

Second, the judicial process continues to be cumbersome. Trials governed by Sections 304B and 498A IPC often take years, which diminishes the deterrent function of these laws<sup>28</sup>. The high acquittal rates in dowry death cases – due in

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<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, *Child Marriage, Early and Forced Marriage, and Dowry in India: Trends and Statistics* (UNICEF, 2021) 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of India' (n 5) paras 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid para 23.

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, *Treated with Indifference: The Failure to Protect Women from Violence in India* (Amnesty International 2020) 22.

<sup>27</sup> Justice J.S. Verma Committee, *Report of the Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law* (Government of India 2013) 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2022: Statistics* (n 1) Vol 2, 214.

part to inadequate evidence collection and/or hostile witnesses – also diminish public faith in the judicial system. As noted in the Law Commission of India's 243rd Report (2012), "Section 498A was introduced to provide immediate protection of women, but shortcomings in judicial procedure and misuse have meant that the role of the statute, including material that is inadmissible and procedural inefficiency, has watered down the statute's usefulness"<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, state policies have yet to move from sanctioning behaviour as a preferred response over prevention. Legal deterrence, by itself, cannot uproot the underlying social legitimacy of dowry practices; such systemic change requires a wider reform process that involves education on violence against women, community awareness and engagement, and empowering women economically. The CEDAW Committee, in its review of India in 2014, specifically noted the lack of sustained state intervention in dealing with the underlying causes of dowry-related violence in its recommendations<sup>30</sup>.

Additionally, India is only partially compliant and responsive to its international obligations under CEDAW and the ICCPR. Though obligated to submit periodic reports, India does not comply with or follow up on the Committee's recommendations in making national statistics available that can give robust insights into incident rates of dowry-related violence<sup>31</sup>. These delays and lack of response contribute to a normalization of the laws in practice – the existence of laws in text but not in practice, which is a process that international legal scholars have termed "normative dissonance" – an acceptance of international norms, but not an internalized acceptance of those norms into the social structures of India<sup>32</sup>.

At the end, the gap between India's formal commitment to gender equality and women's lived realities is evidence of a failure in substantive compliance. It is not until mechanisms for accountability, institutional response, and gendered community attitudes are all behaving in tandem, that the promise of international law can be realized for the millions of Indian women still living in violation of gender equality.

## 6. INTERNATIONAL LAW EVALUATION - RESPONSIBILITY, COUNTERARGUMENTS, AND REBUTTALS

From an international law perspective, India's ongoing occurrence of dowry-related violence constitutes a failure to comply with obligations under several treaties, including Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) plus the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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<sup>29</sup> Law Commission of India, *243rd Report on Section 498A IPC (2012)* paras 4.1–4.3.

<sup>30</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of India' (n 5) para 23.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Sixth Periodic Report of India to the CEDAW Committee (2021)* 18–19.

<sup>32</sup> Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (University of Chicago Press 2006) 42.

(UDHR). Each of these documents requires State parties to protect women's right to life, dignity, and equality before the law<sup>33</sup>.

Under Article 2(f) of CEDAW and Article 5(a) of CEDAW, States must adopt all appropriate measures to modify or abolish customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women<sup>34</sup>. Dowry as a harmful traditional practice directly negates these obligations as it is based on gender-type subordination, which legitimizes violence in marriage<sup>35</sup>. The CEDAW Committee has stated on numerous occasions that the tolerance of dowry-related crimes constitutes a violation of Articles 2 and 16 of the Convention, even if there is domestic legislation in place to address dowry-related crimes<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, General Recommendation No. 19 and No. 35 consider dowry-related violence to be a form of gender-based violence that States are obligated to take due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish<sup>37</sup>.

### *Counterarguments -*

The Indian government frequently argues that it has fulfilled its international obligations by enacting significant domestic legislation, such as the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Section 304B IPC, and Section 498A IPC<sup>38</sup>. It further asserts that the continuation of dowry is not symptomatic of government inertia, but rather the result of entrenched socio-cultural customs that will be eliminated in due course and cannot be instantly dissolved<sup>39</sup>. India's periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee declare awareness campaigns, women's helplines, and reservation schemes as a collective body of activities that comply with its treaty obligations<sup>40</sup>.

Another counterargument involves claims of misuse of anti-dowry legislation. Specifically, opponents argue that provisions like Section 498A IPC are excessive and have been used to victimise husbands and their families, prompting calls for reform or dilution of those provisions<sup>41</sup>. In fact, the Supreme Court, in *Rajesh Sharma v State of Uttar Pradesh* (2017), created safeguards for victims of anti-dowry statutes by calling for Family Welfare Committees to be

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<sup>33</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217 A(III), arts 3–7; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, arts 2, 3, 6.

<sup>34</sup> CEDAW (adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981) 1249 UNTS 13, arts 2(f), 5(a).

<sup>35</sup> Rashida Manjoo, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women* (UN Doc A/HRC/23/49, 2013) para 31.

<sup>36</sup> CEDAW Committee, 'Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of India' (n 5) paras 21–23.

<sup>37</sup> CEDAW Committee, *General Recommendation No. 35 on Gender-Based Violence Against Women* (2017) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/35, paras 15–18.

<sup>38</sup> Dowry Prohibition Act 1961; Indian Penal Code 1860, ss 304B, 498A.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Sixth Periodic Report of India to the CEDAW Committee* (n 6) 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* 21–22.

<sup>41</sup> Law Commission of India, *243rd Report on Section 498A IPC* (2012) para 3.5.

appointed to review complaints prior to arrest<sup>42</sup>.

### ***Rebuttals -***

While there are domestic laws, formal compliance does not equate to substantive compliance under international law. The existence of domestic laws does not relieve the State from responsibility when those laws are either ineffectively enforced or socially neutralised. As the Human Rights Committee explained in its General Comment No. 31, a State party's duty under the ICCPR is more than simply passing legislation; it requires ensuring the effective protection of rights in practice<sup>43</sup>. Ultimately, continued dowry-related violence is a failure of due diligence.

The contention that misuse of anti-dowry laws provides a basis for watering down women's protections also fails on an international level. As set out by the principle of non-retrogression, international human rights law prohibits States from alleviating existing legal protections<sup>44</sup>. Additionally, CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 33 on Access to Justice reiterates that claims of misuse should not inhibit women from accessing effective judicial redress<sup>45</sup>. The Rajesh Sharma guidelines were subsequently critiqued and amended in Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar v Union of India (2018), where the Supreme Court explicitly repeated the need to protect women from domestic violence<sup>46</sup>.

Ultimately, the reliance on sociocultural gradualism, which asserts that dowry is a cultural issue that will take time to fix, does not take into account the immediate obligation of non-discrimination under the CEDAW<sup>47</sup>. International law does not accept cultural relativism, which is why States cannot justify the continued harm of gender based violence. The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly stated that States cannot use culture, tradition, or religion as an excuse not to implement treaty obligations<sup>48</sup>.

While India's own legal framework appears legally compliant under the framework of international law, it does not meet standards of substantive compliance under international law. Violence relating to dowry continues with inadequate enforcement, while prioritising sociocultural inertia over gender justice demonstrates a fundamental failure of compliance, in breach of CEDAW and customary international human rights law commitment.

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<sup>42</sup> *Rajesh Sharma v State of Uttar Pradesh* (2017) 8 SCC 821.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 31 on the Nature of the General Legal Obligation on States Parties to the Covenant* (2004) UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para 15.

<sup>44</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 3 on the Nature of States Parties' Obligations* (1990) UN Doc E/1991/23, para 9.

<sup>45</sup> CEDAW Committee, *General Recommendation No. 33 on Women's Access to Justice* (2015) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/33, para 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar v Union of India* (2018) 10 SCC 443.

<sup>47</sup> CEDAW Committee, *General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties* (2010) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/28, para 29.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* para 30.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Despite the presence of national laws and international obligations, India's dowry culture persists, highlighting a disconnect between legal obligations and social practice. The dowry system exists even though it is a crime according to India's Dowry Prohibition Act 1961. The continued prevalence of dowry and dowry-related violence is due to a combination of entrenched patriarchal structures, a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate state accountability. From an international law perspective, India's obligations to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) require not only compliance with legislation, but also to dismantle the cultural norms which maintain discriminatory practices and gender violence related to dowry. As such, the state's failure to provide substantive equality constitutes not only a failure in domestic policy, but an ongoing violation of its international obligations to provide gender justice.

From the standpoint of an international lawyer, constructing a meaningful response to dowry must shift from punitive legalism to genuine legal reform. International best practices demonstrate that when legal frameworks are combined with structural shifts like gender-sensitive education, community engagement, and women's socio-economic empowerment programmes, the legal framework works best. The Indian Government should establish a national integrated mechanism to support monitoring gender-based violence in connection with dowry consistent with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19 and No. 35 and reporting their findings to the CEDAW Committee. Training for the judiciary and police should engage with India's international obligations to prevent the identity of women's rights being diminished in domestic adjudication and enforcement processes.

Ultimately, India's partial adherence to international norms is a reflection of deeper resistance to gender equality in the fabric of its society. With its status as an emerging global power and a party to several human rights treaties, India's legitimacy in the international legal order is contingent on its willingness to implement normative commitments into real protections for women. The elimination of dowry as a practice should not just be seen as a national issue that is purely about domestic change, but rather part of India's larger obligation to realize its international human rights obligations. A long-term partnership between state institutions, civil society, and international organizations is required to dismantle both structural and cultural conditions that enable dowry practices, ensuring that dowry migration moves from symbolic to substantive compliance with international practices of gender equality.