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# Dowry Prohibition Act

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problems have resulted in virtually no diminution of either dowry or violence against women.” The rate of education and employment among girls has been steadily increasing during the past few decades, and attitudes toward dowry are becoming more negative. For example, studies are increasingly showing a highly negative perception of the dowry system among high school and college students in India.

*Raghu N. Singh and J. Douglas Dailey*

*See also* Arranged Marriages; Sati

### Further Readings

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## DOWRY PROHIBITION ACT

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The Dowry Prohibition Act enacted on July 1, 1961, in India prohibits the giving or receiving of a dowry. The law defines a dowry as property or valuable security given by either party to the marriage, or by the parents of either party, or by anyone else, in connection with the marriage. The original text of the Dowry Prohibition Act was found to be ineffective in curbing the practice of dowry. In addition specific forms of violence against women, linked to a failure to meet dowry demands, created a need for more stringent prohibitions than those available under existing law. As a result, legislative advocacy changes were made to the language of the Dowry Prohibition Act and other important sections of the Indian Penal Code to protect female victims of dowry-related violence. Despite these laws, the practice of dowry persists in India today and can be found in varying degrees within several communities and socioeconomic groups.

The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 applies to people of all religions in India. Under the law, a distinction is made between *dowry*, which refers to property that is obtained by force or coercion as part of a

marital agreement, and *stridhan*, or property that a woman's family gives her voluntarily at the time of her marriage. Stridhan can also include the separate property a woman brings to a marriage. A 1984 amendment to the act specifies that presents given to a bride or groom at the time of a wedding are allowed but the law requires that a list be maintained describing each gift, its value, the identity of the person giving it, and the person's relation to either party to the marriage. The original language of the act prohibited only dowry given “in consideration of marriage,” which was limited in scope and left unregulated a range of dowry-related transactions. In 1984, the language was amended to prohibit dowry given “in connection with the marriage,” with the hope that the change would encompass a broader range of agreements. Revisions of the original act also established minimum and maximum punishments for giving and receiving dowry and created a penalty for demanding dowry or advertising offers of money or property in connection with a marriage. The Indian Penal Code was also modified in 1983 to establish specific crimes of dowry-related cruelty, dowry death, and abetment of suicide. These enactments punish violence against women by their husbands or their relatives when proof of dowry demands or dowry harassment can be shown.

*Sharmila Lodhia*

*See also* Arranged Marriages; Domestic Violence; Dowry/Daaj; Femicide

### Further Readings

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## DRAG KING

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Drag kings are (usually) female performers who parody masculinity in a variety of theatrical acts. Drag kings and their performances are mostly found in venues within the gay and lesbian subculture because these spaces provide safe environments for gender play and have maintained historical traditions of queer