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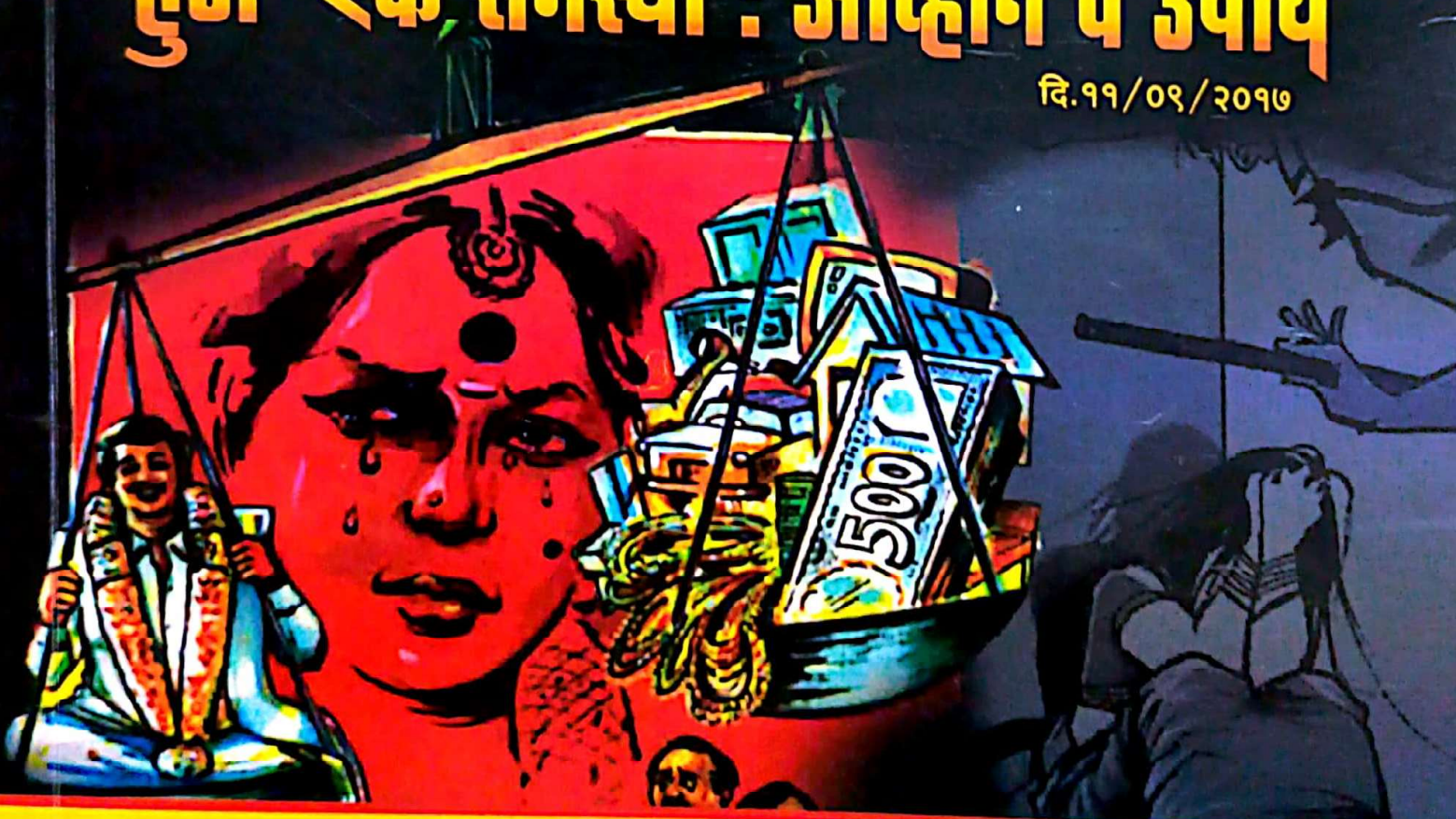
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हुंडा-एक समस्या : आव्हाने व उपाय

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Dowry System: Causes, Effects & Its Solutions

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Introduction:

Dowry (*Dahej*) is one of the most ancient practices of India. The dowry system is a social evil, prevalent in all parts of India and almost in all the countries of the world. In India many of the traditional customs have been given up, but the custom of dowry has not only continued, but flourished over the years. The attitude of society towards the prevalence of dowry custom is neither uniform nor consistent. Theoretically a majority among the educated in the society disfavors it, but in actual practice, it upholds the custom under the fold of certain social and cultural justification.¹ Today dowry has become a widespread evil and it has now assumed menacing proportions.

Marriage is an integral part of society, a source of joy and festivities as well as of new beginnings. Yet, one of the longest standing evils associated with marriage from a woman's point of view in the Indian society is the Dowry system. Despite a lot being said and done against the custom, it is still prevalent in the 21st century, in both subtle and obvious ways. The root of a host of social atrocities against women, the custom of presenting dowry is the crudest expression of the male-dominance in the society. It is most often the mandatory custom of a girl's parents having to provide a considerable amount of cash, gold in the form of jewelry, electronic equipment, movable or immovable properties, to the groom and his family, at the time of marriage. Although the origin of the custom lies with parents trying to assure financial stability for their daughters, in current perspective it has translated into parents paying up for the assurance of well-being of their daughters. The jewelry and cash that a bride brings with her from her parents' house is often referred to as "Streedhan" and in theory is the property of the girl, but in reality it is often treated as their rightful due by the groom's family.² The sum to be paid as dowry has no set standard, the yardstick greatly depends on the groom's profession/social standing and is often perceived as the groom's family as the compensation of efforts they have made to educate their boy. In a more subtle perspective, one may define this custom as the unquestioned idea that the girl's family is inferior in standing with the boy's family, no matter what her qualities are. Thus they need to be on their best behavior and offer lavish "gifts" to please the boy's family. This ideal is so ingrained in the psyche of a large number of Indians, they either practically ruin themselves financially in order to pay for the appropriate price of the chosen groom, or make a bid to eradicate the prospect of this financial burden by selective gender-based abortion or female infanticide. This exploitative system that has turned the custom of giving gifts and well wishes into a compulsory demand for money, respect and subjugation, is the one of the major contributing factors hindering the growth of the Indian society where being a woman is still viewed synonymous to being a burden.

History of Dowry:

Originally, the purpose of a dowry was to provide "seed money" or property for the establishment of a new household, to help a husband feed and protect his family, and to give the wife and children some support if he were to die.³ A husband thus had certain property rights in his wife's dowry. In addition, the wife might bring to the marriage property of her own, which was not included in the dowry and which was, as a result, hers alone. This property was "beyond