

Marriage Extravagance Posing Serious Socio-Economic Problem in Kerala: An Analytical Study of Thalapalam Gram Panchayat

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Abstract

Marriage is an important social institution. Nowadays, this sacred institution is being commercialised due to the changing trends in weddings. On the one hand people spend lakhs/crores for a wedding, whereas, on the other side there are families who struggle to conduct their daughter's marriage.

Kerala is a state, known for its extravagant wedding especially the use of gold.

A daughter's marriage is a costly event in the life of an Indian family, often driving parents into severe debt at interest rates of over 200 percentages. These expenses, which amount to more than six times a family's annual income, can force a family in the destitution and bonded labour especially when there are several daughters to be married. The economic burden of a daughter's marriage has been identified as a major cause of gender discrimination and domestic violence in the Indian subcontinent. Marriage a norm in most parts of the country. Indian wedding have always been special occasions, celebrated with zest, enthusiasm, and in the case of the wealthy, elaborate setting and food. But as a growing economy pumps new wealth in to the country, weddings have turned into veritable showpieces. Times have changed the festive spirit, and have taken on a more ostentatious flavor as weddings become occasions for India's rapidly growing affluent classes to show off their wealth. There are many factors that contribute towards the system of dowry.

Keywords: Sky-rocketing • Ostentatious • Bonded labour

Introduction

Wedding celebrations in India are getting increasingly lavish and their costs are now almost as large as groom prices. But the economics of wedding celebrations are rather different. This is because it is not a transfer from one family to another, but a symbolic expense that mainly serves a signalling function. The primary motive is social status, but the mechanism driving is rather different. Signalling has to serve the function of transmitting information. There is no point showing off if no one is watching.

Indian wedding also known as "Vivaah means superior dedication is the ancient custom that represents majesty, ritual, colours then decorative celebrations connected through the sacred occasion.

The study talks, about the poor and the middle classes who spend money they don't have. As the girl's side bears the burden, the high expenditure on weddings fuels female foeticide, infanticide, poverty,

malnutrition, illiteracy and even suicides. Marriage involves certain right and responsibilities which are performed by the entering parties. Though the biological function of mating plays a dominant role, side by side sociological functions such as care of children, maintenance of household are equally important. Therefore, marriages are not only a union of the male and female but it also involves a social sanction in the form of social and religious ceremony in which both parties are authorised to engage in sexual and other economic relations with one another.

In India wedding is celebrated as the ritual where a strong and secure union between two souls combining into one. Marriage not only denotes the foundation of two bonds between them, but also the bonding of two families and their relation as well. The bride's side has a lot more on their hands since they have to make the dowry and buy gifts for the groom's family. The main wedding dress, a lehenga, is of utmost importance. These days designer wear has become a status symbol and that's why people flock to the designers like moths to a fly, to get the trousseau made. A good designer lehenga starts

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Received: 29 July, 2021; **Accepted:** 12 August, 2021; **Published:** 19 August, 2021.

from Rs.80, 000 and will be as expensive as 1.5 lakhs rupee. Bridal jewellery has to be made, as there is the persistent search for new designs starts. The costs are sky-rocketing. Shoes, purses, handbags, cosmetics, accessories and such items have to be bought as well. Preparations are to be made for several functions that will take place before the wedding. A wedding card has to be unique, artistic and creative. People come up with innovative ideas to send invitations for a wedding. Some even send wedding cards on a platter, to each guest's house, covered with a piece of silk, accompanied by an assortment of sweets. The guest list has to be exclusive, and people feel proud if they can get powerful people (like politicians or business tycoons and celebrities).

"Big fat wedding" are a norm in most parts of the country and one such state known for its extravagant wedding, especially use of the gold jewellery is kerala. Brevity was the soul of Kerala weddings. The refreshingly short weddings of long ago are gone, when the ceremony got over almost as soon as it began and guests who missed the bus or were delayed by a sneezing fit were escorted, to their great delight, straight to the dining hall. The other recommending feature of a Malayali marriage was the simplicity of the participants in the function. The last half century has seen the shift from the unostentatious bride, clad in an elegant cream silk sari and wearing a few ornaments on her person to set off her beauty, to the gold-armoured avatar of today. Not to be found wanting, the groom too has undergone an image makeover. The trademark dhoti and the plain off-white shirt are now passé; he's in silk too – a garish silk kurta and a shiny expensive dhoti.

Literature Review

Methodology and source of data

In the present study an attempt has been made to analyse the money expenditure of marriage and to measure the extent of burden of marriage expenditure among different households in Thalappalam panchayat of Kottayam district on the basis of socio-economic variables. The study is mainly based on primary data and secondary data. Random Sampling is used to collect primary data from 60 samples were collected. The collected data was classified according to income, wealth, education, family size, and social aspects to help realisation of the objectives of the study. Secondary data was collected from books and journals.

Area profile of thalappalam gram panchayat

According to Census 2011 information the location code or village code of Thalappalam village is 628123. Thalappalam village is located in Meenachil Tehsil of Kottayam district in Kerala, India. It is situated 10km away from sub-district headquarter Palai and 38km away from district headquarter Kottayam (Table 1).

Category	Number respondents	Percentage
High class	30	50
Middle class	17	28.3
Lower class	13	21.6
Total	60	100

Table 1. Categorisation of respondents based on their annual income.

Results

Implication of marriage extravaganza on family budget

The table shows the income category mainly classified in to three, high class, middle class and lower class. 50% of the respondents belong to the high class family, 28.3% of them belong to the middle class and lower class 21.6% respectively. Out of the respondents interviewed, 50% of the families fall in the high class category, 28.3% belong to the middle class families, and 21.6% fall in the category of lower class category (Figure 1).

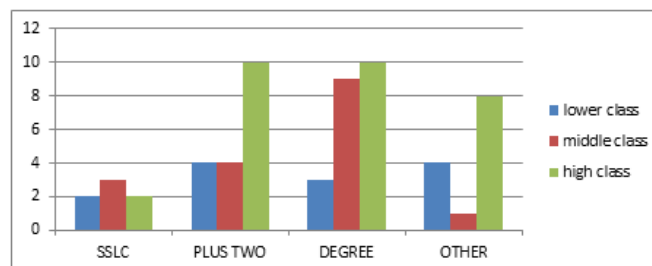


Figure 1. Educational qualification.

The data displayed in the graph clearly depicts that majority of the girl have basic qualification of graduation, which is a good sign. The SSLC qualified girls are 11.6% and plus two qualified girls are 30% and others include 21.6% respectively (Figure 2).

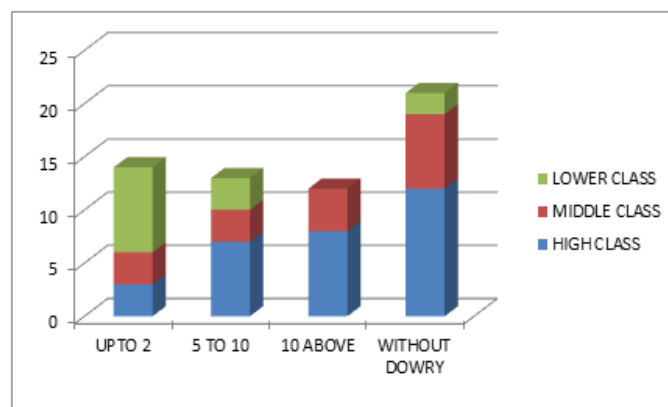


Figure 2. Class wise analysis of expenditure on dowry.

Analysis of extent of marriage expense

Class wise analysis of expenditure on dowry: The above Figure reveals that out of the total 13 low class families, 8% have given upto 2 lakhs for dowry, 3% have given between 5-10 lakhs of rupees, and only a meagre of 15.3% haven't given dowry (Table 2).

Category	Lower class	Middle class	High class	Total
Affordable	—	9(36)	16(64)	25
Non-affordable	13(100)	8(22.8)	14(46.6)	35
Total	13(21.7)	17(28.3)	30(50)	60

Table 2. Relation between annual income and affordability.

This table analyses that the lower class 100% are included in the category of non-affordable, and the middle class 22.8% falls under the category of non-affordables and 46.6% of the high class fall in the category of the non-affordables owing to the ostentatious wedding celebration (Figure 3).

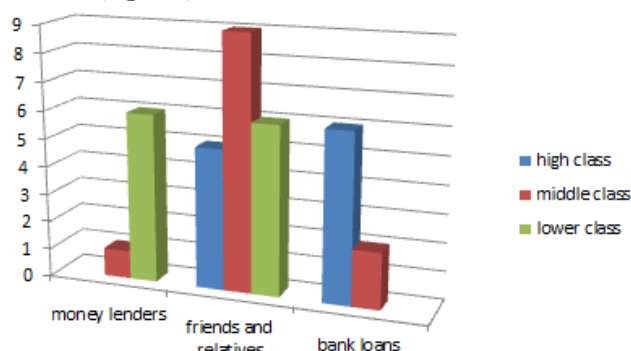


Figure 3. Relation between annual income and affordability.

From the figure we can infer that out of 35 non-affordable household's 45.5% high class depending upon friends and relatives, 41% of households depend on the banks.

Findings

- The study conducted revealed that 26.6% of the Christians and about 30% of the Muslims households interviewed spent above 20 lakh rupees on gold with regard to the marriage.
- Only 6.6% of the Christians got married without dowry, while 10% of the Muslims and 20% of the Hindu got married without dowry.
- The income wise analysis of the household on dowry revealed that 61.5% of the lower income groups spent upto 2 lakhs towards dowry.
- The study also found that majority (30%) of the high class spent between 4 to 5 lakhs on "SADYA".
- 10% of the respondents field the non-affordability of marriage expenses due to the higher family size 5 to 6 members.
- Occupation wise analysis of affordability of marriage expenses revealed that all respondents except the government employees were not able to afford marriage expenses.
- All the households in the affordable category belong to those having an annual income of Rs. 2-5 lakhs. Majority of the non-affordable respondents have only upto 2 lakh rupees as annual income.
- 100% of the brides who are SSLC qualified got married with dowry.
- It is observed that as the qualification of the bride goes up, the percentage of the dowry declines, 61.5% of the brides qualified with other higher courses got married without dowry and 77.7% of the degree qualified brides got married with dowry.
- There is an inverse relationship between educational qualification and dowry.
- 69.2% of the households have debts after marriage.
- 90% of the lower class respondents have debts in relation to marriage of their daughters.
- Majority of the lower class households depended on money lenders, friends and relatives for their daughter's marriage.

- Dowry system is dominated among households belong to lower castes family
- The extent of marriage expenditure is largely unaffordable for the lower class people.
- As the size of the family members increases, the ability of the family to meet the expenditure decreases

Suggestions

- An anti-dowry awareness campaign should be organised in villages and rural areas by the Women's Commission.
- Measures in the form of penalty or tax should be initiated by the local bodies like Panchayat to limit the amount to be spent on marriages.
- Consumerism should be reduced to its minimum.
- Ostentatious celebration needs to be prohibited.
- Demand of dowry should be taken as an offence.
- Fixing a maximum limit of expenditure on marriage ceremonies is advisable and necessary.

Conclusion

Marriage is a legally sanctioned contract between a man and a woman. Entering into a marriage contract changes the legal status of parties giving husband and wife new rights and obligations. Public policy is strongly in favour of marriage based on the belief that it preserves the family unit. Traditionally, marriage has been viewed as vital to the preservation of morals and civilization.

Dowry system is dominated among the lower class households. Upper class households spent money for the purpose other than dowry i.e. for sadya, gold, dress, party etc. The extent of expenditure is unaffordable largely for the lower class people. Thus the burden of marriage expenditure is always there. It forces the whole family to lead a tiresome life. There is always pressure on family budget. To conclude, "Often a wedding ensures father of the bride to remain in debt for the rest of his life."

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How to cite this article: George, Sherin. "Marriage Extravagance Posing Serious Socio-Economic Problem in Kerala: An Analytical Study of Thalapalam Gram Panchayat." *Int J Econ Manag Sci*10 (2021): 15542