



Traditional Assamese Marriage and Challenges of Dowry System in Assamese Society

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Abstract

In ancient times, marriages have been celebrated as dignified occasions, just like the religious festivals, wherein a number of rituals and ethnicity are followed. In Assamese language marriage is called 'Biya'. The traditional wedding song is known as 'Biya naam'. Uruli is another traditional culture of Assamese marriage.

In present times due to modernization many of the customs have gradually been replaced by some modern/untraditional practices. The Biya naam, Uruli have been replaced by Sangeet, Disco Dance, DJ party etc.

In ancient Assamese society, there was no practice of dowry as a part of marriage. But in the post-independence era, the evil of dowry system has silently been invading into Assamese society.

Present study was undertaken to see the factors which affected the indigenous customs of Assamese Marriage. For this study 100 male and female college students from Darrang and Morigaon district of Assam were interviewed. The data was analysed using non statistics such as frequencies/percentages, and ANOVA followed by graphic representation.

Key words: Bia naam, Uruli, Biya, Sangeet, Dowry System, Assamese Society, students.

Introduction:

In Assamese society, position of women is still inferior to men although better than in the rest of the country. This is seen in the field of literacy, educational status, health, administration, work participation, etc. As the difference in the male/female literacy rates has decreased, it is expected that other social changes have also probably occurred. However, the changes seen in the traditional marriage is retrogressive rather than progressive.

Women are still fixed firmly with restraints to traditions, customs, age, old superstitions and beliefs. Dowry system, early marriage, widowhood are still a negative aspect of women in Assamese society. They remain suppressed by their husbands, in-laws, spend most of their time in household tasks and remain economically dependent throughout the life and viewed as inferior. A partial lift is visible through Social Marriage Act 1954, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and Succession Act, 1956. In spite of the Marriage Act, 30.8 % rural girls are married below 18 years (DLHS-III,2015- 2016). The age of marriage is still a great challenge in Assamese Society.

What is Marriage:

The popular belief of marriage is that marriage is made in heaven and celebrated on earth. To a great extent it is true, because it is a special bond shared between two souls, who tie the wedding knot after promising to be companions for a lifetime. It is the physical, mental and spiritual union of two souls. It brings significant stability to human relationships. It plays a crucial role in transferring the culture and civilization from one generation to the other, so that the human race flourish. While the concept of marriage remains the same across the globe, the way of solemnizing is differ. Since the ancient time, marriages have been celebrated as courteous occasions, just like the religious festivals, wherein a number of rituals and customs were followed.

A number of ceremonies are observed before, during and after wedding in Assamese society. The Assamese marriage is the wedding ceremony which takes place in the state of Assam and between Assamese people. Assamese wedding is based on Vedic traditions and rituals. In Assamese Language it is called as 'Biya'.

Marriage involves social sanction generally in the form of civil and religious ceremony authorizing two persons of opposite sexes to engage in sexual and other subsequent and co-related socio-economic relations with one another (Madan and Majumder). So, it is a more or less permanent association of one male with one female for the purpose of giving social sanction to descendants, satisfaction of biological and social needs and fulfilment of dharma(religion).

ASSAMESE MARRIAGE SYSTEM:

An Assamese marriage is the wedding ceremony which takes place in the state of Assam or between Assamese people. In Assamese language, the ceremony is known as Biya. Just like other Hindu wedding, an Assamese wedding also has pre wedding and post wedding rituals.

One of the unique and essential characteristics of the wedding is the traditional song in Assamese which is called '*biya naam*'.

Some distinctive characteristics of traditional Assamese marriage system are:

. Pre Wedding Rituals:

The pre wedding rituals include *Jooran* ceremony, *Tel Diya* custom, *Pani Tola & Nuani* tradition. In *Jooran* ceremony, the groom's mother visits the house of the bride. The bride's mother warmly greets the groom's mother along with relatives and welcome with a *xhorai* (bell-metal plate with a stem) covered by *Gamocha* and containing *tamul-pan*(two pairs of battle nut and betel leaves).

In Tel Diya custom, the groom's mother puts a ring and betel on her daughter-in-law's hair parting. Over this she pours oil three times followed by applying *sindoor* and gives the wedding trousseau, the personal possessions of bride. It includes *mekhla chadar*, the traditional Assamese dress for women and Assamese traditional jewellery, such as *gol pota*, *jon biri*, *bena*, *gaam kharu*, *loka paro*, *thuria*, etc.

In *Pani Tola* tradition, the mothers of the bride and the groom gather holy water from pond for the ceremonial bath of the bride. According to *Nuani* tradition, the bride is given a bath to prepare her for the wedding.

Wedding Rituals:

The wedding rituals begin with the ceremonial bath of the bride and the groom with holy water in their respective home. After this the wedding reception takes place, wherein food is served to the guests, with fish and meat as the highlights. In earlier days *Dai* (curd), *Chira*, *Gur* (Jiggery) and Sweet were served in both the reception parties. This is followed by the procession of the groom to the bride's place. When he finally reaches the venue located in bride's house, the bride's family members and friends enjoyed with fun activities, which is popularly known as *Ninda* (Teasing songs from both sides)

The groom's procession is given entry into the bride's home only after they pay an amount of cash demanded by the young boys. Of course, no hard and fast rule for this demand, but an indication of bride's status in the society and bride has value and importance in the society. Subsequently, the bride's mother welcomes groom with traditional *aarati*, while the bride's sister washes his feet. It is varied from community to community. In some community groom's feet is washed by bride's mother also.

Next, the brother of the bride lifts grooms and proceeds to the wedding hall. The groom is usually dressed in dhoti, kurta and silk shawl. The bride is given *panchamrit*, before going to the wedding hall. It is a mixture of ghee, curd, honey, sugar and raw milk (healthy and nutritious food). This is followed by a remarkable entry of the bride on the shoulders of her maternal uncle. In wedding hall the bride sit on the left side of groom, then the wedding ceremony takes place in front of the *Hoome* (sacred fire). The couple now move around the fire for seven times, which is called *Xoptopodi*. Next the bride keeps her right foot on the seven betel leaves available near the sacred fire. Then the couple exchange garlands and takes vows amidst chanting mantras. After exchanging the garlands, the ceremony of *konyadaan* takes place wherein the groom, the bride and both their fathers participate.

After this, conch shells are blown and the groom puts *Sindoor* (vermillion) in bride's forehead. Friends and relatives then step forward to bless the newlywed couple. Now the couple move to the groom's house, where they are welcomed by the groom's mother, with traditional aarti.

Post-Wedding Rituals:

The newlyweds are welcomed warmly by the groom's mother at the entry. The bride's feet is washed and she is made to enter into her new home by breaking a *saaki* (an earthen lamp), *coloh*(earthen pitcher) and finding a ring from a pitcher full of water. She is taken to the prayer room where she seeks the Almighty's blessings. She is then given a round of the house, fed a little curd and then escorted back to her own house by her brother and friends. This ritual is known as *Ghor gosoka*

The ritual *Khuba khubuni* takes place the next morning, the bride and groom have to listen to the tale of two gods Khuba and Khubuni (Shiv-Parwati) from the priest. The couple takes the blessings from the gods for a successful married life..

Aathmongola is the last wedding ritual which celebrated on the 8th day after marriage. This ritual marks the newlyweds' first visit to the parent's home of bride. A lavish lunch, comprising of eight dishes is served to the couple along with gifts on the day of athmongala.

Thus, Assamese marriage the simple, glorious ceremony is successfully completed, where there is no question of dowry, and where the bride's position is very high in the ritual. The *tel -dia* and *sindur dia* by the mother of groom, *ghar gasaka* the washing of bride's feet by the sister of groom, indicate the regard offered to bride or woman. But now a days, the position of bride has gradually deteriorated in the marriage system. It has been observed that the new generation are not much aware about these customs such as teldia, sindurdia, ghar gasaka etc. They may know the activities but not sure about the traditional terminology of the ritual. Also they are very much interested to perform the marriage ceremony more expensive, modern and fashionable by imitating other culture and tradition.

Attitude of Youth Toward Marriage:

Research finding clearly shows that values towards marriage in general have not changed much among the present college youth. They are still in agreement with the conventional values (Reeta Sonawa :2001).

ECONOMIC VALUE OF MARRIAGE:

Marriage fulfils various needs of individuals. However, fulfilling the needs depends upon the economic sources that each partner brings to marriage. Study shows that among girls, one of the strong feelings that it is their duty to economically support their husband (Reeta Sonawa : 2001).

DOWRY IN ASSAMESE SOCIETY:

The "Status of Indian Women Report 2005-20201" revealed that the crime rate against women is higher than the all-India average. The number of dowry deaths decreased from 8000 (2014) to 6000(2020). According to the data published by the Assam Government to the State Legislative Assembly in July 2008, dowry-related registered cases increased nearly threefold in Assam between 2001-2007, indicating challenges for women in Assam in the present times. The culture followed by most of the diverse Hindu communities in India is that the woman's family has to give dowry to the man's family. In Assamese traditions, the groom's family gives the trousseau to the bride before the wedding. It includes jewellery, clothes, accessories, shoes and household items, everything the bride would require in her new house. Unfortunately it has been seen that at present this glorious system gradually deteriorated. Some of the grooms family expecting the trousseau for grooms from bride's family, which is invaded to the Assamese marriage system from other neighbouring state of India.

PRESENT SCENARIO:

It has been seen in Assamese society, groom gives required things to bride during the marriage. There was no demand of dowry in marriage. Needful things were given along with daughter by her parents and relatives. But in post independence there is a silent competition going on among the families to show their wealth and status by giving dowry.

It was published in Sentinel Digital Desk(20 Feb, 2019) that though Assamese people claimed that there is no dowry in Assamese Society , during 2017-2018 the total 316 dowry related death cases were reported in Assam. The district wise break-up reflected during these times, 47 in Barpeta, 14 in Guwahati in Assamese Family. The incident rate in South Salmara, Cachar, Lakhimpur, Kamrup and Sonitpur are also frightening.

Report says that dowry registration case very high in Guwahati. Total dowry registration case in Guwahati alone is higher(1,544) than the abduction, sexual harassment (457) and rape case(1543)

OBJECTIVE:

1. Present study was undertaken to see the factors which affected the indigenous customs of Assamese Marriage.
2. To study the awareness level of young generation regarding traditional system of Assamese marriages.
3. To study the awareness level of young generation regarding dowry system.

METHOD:

A comparative approach was followed in which 100 male & female college students were interviewed. The information gathered was analysed using non parametric methods considering data such as frequencies/percentages.

HYPOTHESIS:

No hypotheses were formed in this study as it is an exploratory kind of research.

SAMPLE:

A total sample of 100 Assamese college students were interviewed for this study. One simple questionnaire containing 24 items was used for this study to know how many of the young generation are aware and concerned about the traditional Assamese marriage system and dowry related problems.

ANALYSIS:

The gathered information was analyzed using non parametric methods considering data as frequencies and percentage and parametric method ANOVA followed by graphic representation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The total sample of 100 subjects, comprising of college students, were interviewed with a simple questionnaire regards to traditional Assamese marriage and invasion of dowry system in Assamese Marriage.

The responses of selected items of the data sheet were analysed by using the test of independent X^2 . It was applied to find out the significant differences between male and female student.

The results of obtained data through the non- parametric test, X^2 , are discussed below.

Table 1: Shows the X^2 values in terms of Importance of Marriage, Purpose of Dowry, Traditional System of Marriage, Importance of working woman, to say no dowry, Dowry rights and Awareness of Dowry system among the college students

S.N	Item	X^2 value	
		Calculated Value	Tabulated Value
1	Importance of Marriage	2.0112	7.815
2	Purpose of Dowry	6.78	7.815
3	Traditional System of Marriage	4.014**	3.84
4	Importance of working woman for marriage	3.756	7.815
5	To say no dowry	1.826	3.84
6	Right to get dowry for male	0.7332	3.84
7	Awareness of Dowry	7.975*	6.635

* significant at .01 level ** Significant at .05 level

Result shows that the value of X^2 is significant. [$X^2(2) = 4.014$] at .05 level and [$X^2(2) = 7.975$] at .01 level regarding traditional system and awareness of dowry among student. The X^2 values in terms of Importance of Marriage, Purpose of Dowry, Traditional System of Marriage, Importance of working woman, to say no dowry, Dowry and right and Awareness of Dowry system among the student of college were tested. The X^2 in terms of importance of marriage, purpose of dowry, importance of working woman for marriage, to say no dowry, right to boy to get dowry are not significant. For continuing the Traditional system of marriage and regarding Assam as dowry free state are significant at .01 and .05 level.

Critical value of X^2 is 2.0112 and tabulated value at .05 is 7.815 and .01 is 11.345 which is higher than calculated value indicating that there is no significant difference between male and female regarding the importance of marriage in life.

Table 2: Percentage of responses of students on importance of marriage in life

Sex	Biological Needs	Social needs	To cont Human Race	New life
Male	3.95%	19.74%	14.47%	19.73%
Female	1.31%	21.05%	9.21%	11.84%

N=100

Table: 2 shows the responses of main four objectives of marriage. Few numbers of students (1.95%- 3.95%) are stating biological needs as important for marriage. Highest number of students (male: 19.74%, female:21.05%) responded as social needs followed by needs for new life (male:19.73%, female:11.84%) and to continue the human race (Male:14.47 %, female: 9.21%)

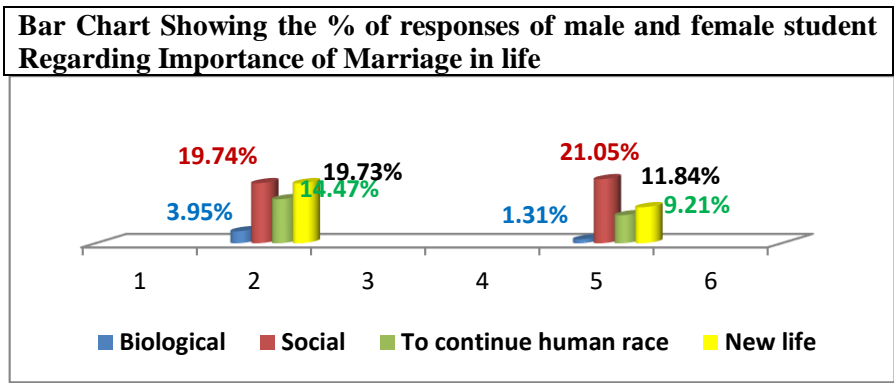


Fig. 1

Critical value of X^2 is 6.74 and tabulated value at .05 is 7.815 and .01 is 11.345 which is higher than calculated value indicating again that there is no significant difference between male and female regarding the purpose of dowry in marriage.

Table 3: Percentage of responses of students on purpose of dowry in marriage.

Sex	For financial support	For smooth married life	To make bride self-sufficient	To maintain the social status	Total
Male	6.25%	12.5%	21.87%	9.37%	50%
Female	9.37%	25%	3.12%	12.5%	50%
N=					100%

With regards to purpose of dowry, the highest number of male student(21.87%) responded to make bride self sufficient but least number of female student (3.12%) responded on this purpose. On the other hand highest number of female student (25%) expressed the purpose for smooth married life. There is a little bit of differences of responses on other two purposes.

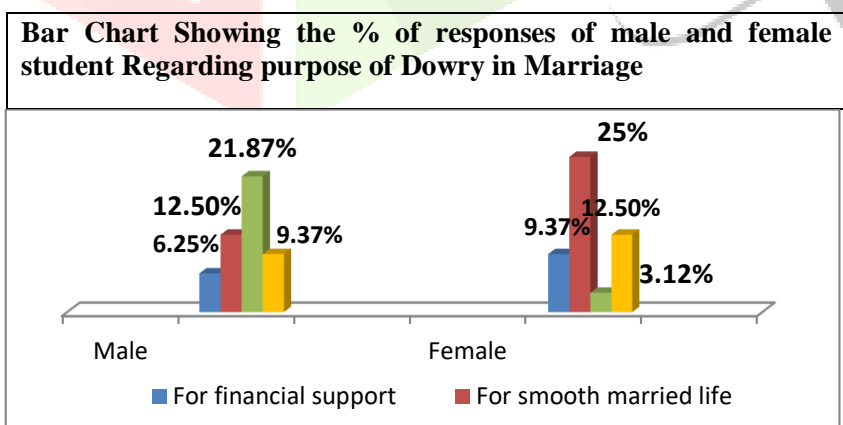


Fig. 2

Critical value of X^2 is 4.014 and tabulated value at .05 level is 3.84 and .01 is 6.635. Result shows that there is a significant difference between male and female at .05 level regarding continuation of traditional system in marriage.

Table. 4. Percentage of responses of students for continuation of

Traditional system in marriage system

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	47.36%	10.52%	57.89%
Female	40.79%	1.32%	42.10%
N=			100

Regarding continuation of traditional system in marriage 10.52% male students are against the continuation of the traditional system and only 1.32% female students are saying no to continue the traditional system in marriage. Male student are more interested (47.36%) to continue the system in comparison of female student (40.79%). However both groups are interested as a whole to continue the traditional system in marriage.

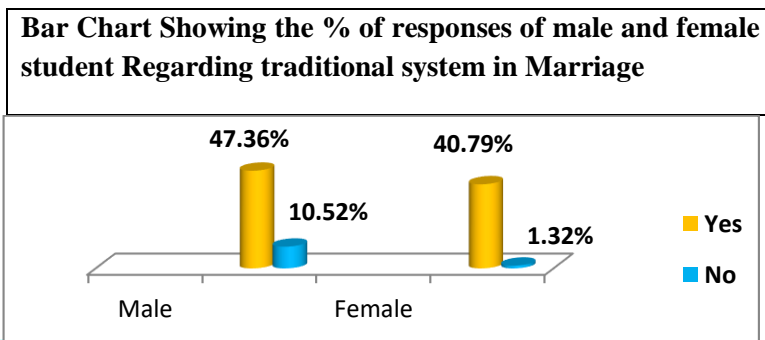


Fig: 3

Critical value of X^2 is 3.756 and tabulated value at .05 is 7.815 and .01 is 11.345. So, there is no significant difference between male and female student about the working woman in marriage as partner.

Table 4: The percentage of data responded by Student about working woman in marriage as partner.

Sex	Slightly agree	Agree	Slightly disagree	disagree	Total
Male	18.67%	13.33%	11.14%	11.14%	58.66%
Female	5.33%	9.34%	14.67%	12%	41.34%
N=					100

With regards to importance of working woman for marriage male student are more interested (13.67% - 18.67%) and female students are less interested (5.33% - 9.34%).

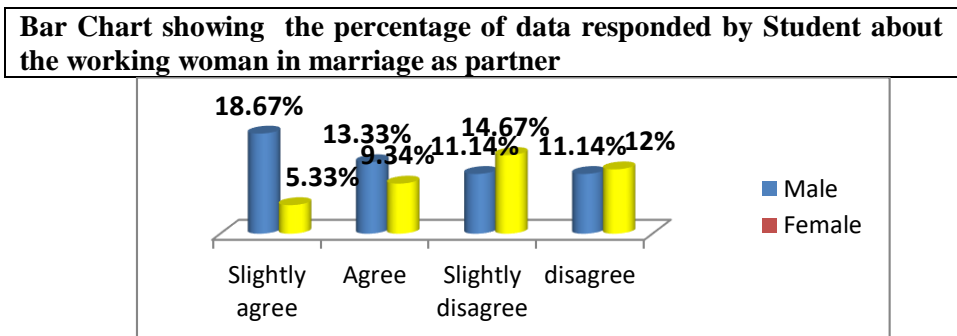


Fig: 4

Critical value of X^2 is 1.826 and tabulated value at .05 is 3.84 and .01 is 6.635. So, there is no significant difference between male and female student about the importance of giving goods with girl in marriage

Table 5: The percentage of responses about the Importance of giving goods with girl in marriage

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	25.33%	34.666%	58.90%
Female	10.66%	29.33%	41.10%
N=			100

In regards of giving goods with bride both group of student are against this system. In comparison of female (10.66%) student more male student responded as yes (25.33%) on this system.

Bar Chart shows the percentage og responses about giving goods with bride in marriage

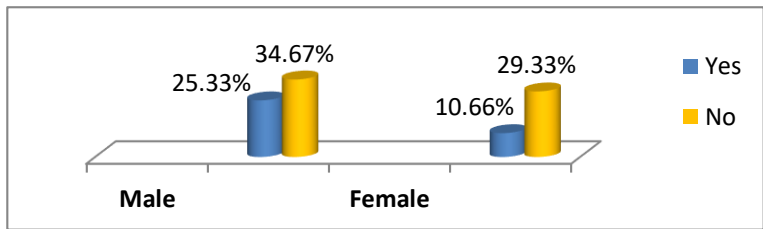


Fig: 5

Critical value of X^2 is 0.7332 and tabulated value at .05 is 3.84 and .01 is 6.635. There is no significant difference between male and female students about the right of boy to get dowry.

Table 6: Percentage of respondents regarding right of boy to get dowry

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	4.28%	54.28%	58.57%
Female	1.42%	40%	41.42%
N=			100

Both male (54.28%) and female (40%) students are saying there is no right of boy to get dowry. Only 4.28% male student and 1.42% female students are saying that boy has the right to get dowry.

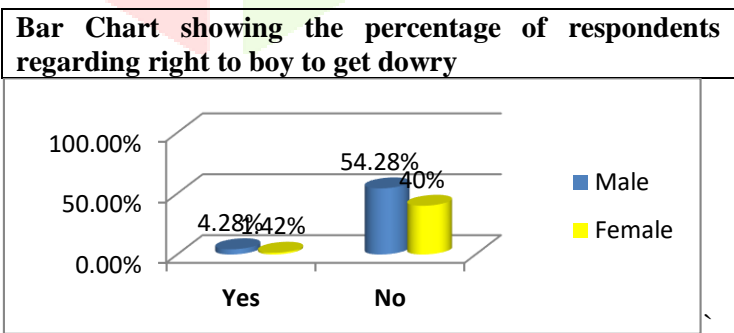


Fig: 6

Critical value of X^2 is 7.975 and tabulated value at .05 is 3.84 and .01 is 6.635 indicating that there is a significant difference between male and female student about the awareness of dowry in Assamese marriage system among boys and girls.

Table 7. Percentage of awareness of dowry free system in Traditional Assamese Marriage

Sex	Yes	No	Total
Male	13.51%	43.24%	56.75%
Female	27.02%	16.23%	43.25%
N=			100

That Assam was a dowry free state, only 13.51% male students are aware about this glorious custom and 43.24% male student are not aware about this custom. Female student are little aware (27.02%) about this custom, But 16.23% female students are unaware about this.

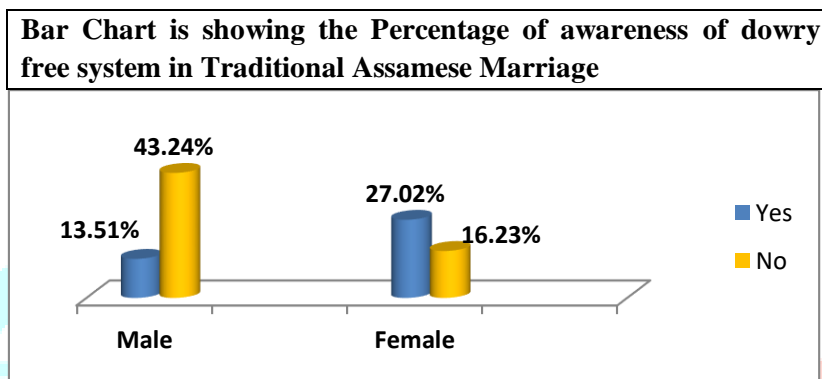


Fig: 7

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion it may be stated that there is no significant difference between male and female students regarding the importance of marriage, the purpose of the dowry system, and the right of a boy to get a dowry. On the other hand, it is stated that there is a significant difference between male and female students regarding dowry. Though male students are less concerned regarding the traditional system of marriage, they are against dowry, the great enemy of society, which is a very good sign to reduce or remove the dowry system from Assamese society.

Although the younger generations say they do not support dowry while responding to the questionnaire, their expressed view may not match with their action when faced with the situation of giving/taking dowry, this has been found by many researchers. Also, in post-independence, there is a silent competition among families to show their wealth and status in society by giving dowry.

Although they do not know about the tradition of Assamese Society of giving dowry in marriage, yet they do not support the dowry system.

It may be suggested to meet the challenges and to protect the traditional Assamese custom from modern fashion and practices as follows:

1. To teach about Traditional Assamese custom to the younger generations
2. Make younger generations aware of the dowry-related problems.
3. Make parents/guardians aware of the ill effects of dowry such as abuse of wives, domestic violence, divorce, ill treatment and murder or dowry death.

4. To organize some workshop among parents/guardians to trained how to encourage their children to be independent.
5. To organize some workshop among parents/guardians to orient about marriage act and impacts on married couple. .
6. To motivate younger generation to learn how to be independent economically, socially and emotionally.
7. To organize some life skill development training programme among young generation at college level to become psychologically and emotionally strong and stable.

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