

DOWRY: A Possible Impediment to Happy Marriage

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Payment of Dowry as a condition for legitimization of marriage is a common practice in many societies and is central to the ways in which the institution of marriage is understood and inserted in diverse African traditions. In most African societies, it is taken for granted that the groom has a responsibility to pay, usually livestock, to the bridal family in return for her hand in marriage. However, issues arise concerning the social construction of dowry payment and the implications for the woman whose worth is quantified in terms of livestock, on the one hand, and marriage as a social institution that inherently entails and predetermines power relations in partnership. This paper casts attention to the implications of dowry as legitimisation of marriage and the dynamics of the relations between the wife and husband/in-laws in a context where her worth is quantified and monetized. Using interviews with prospective and actual couples, this paper examines the meanings that those involved discern from this institution with specific reference to the African milieu, its current status and its relevance in contemporary society. This paper concludes that the contemporary socio-political consciousness demands a radical revision of the understanding and practice of marriage to demonstrate awareness of the shifting consciousness that interrogates the traditional concept of power relations that legitimizes dowry payment.

Keywords: Dowry, marriage, society, tradition.