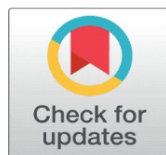
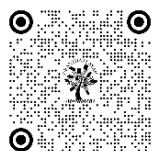


# CHALLENGES OF BRIDE BUYING WOMEN (MOLKI) IN HARYANA

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## ABSTRACT

Bride buying, a controversial practice prevalent in certain regions of India, particularly in Haryana, raises significant ethical and social concerns. This paper explores the challenges faced by women who are bought as brides, including social stigma, lack of autonomy, economic dependence, and psychological issues. By examining the cultural and socio-economic context of Haryana, this paper aims to highlight the challenges faced by women purchased for marriage purpose and to understand the impact on the society at large. In the end, some suggestions are also given to provide better living for purchased brides. Bride buying, a practice rooted in socio-economic and cultural complexities, has significant implications for women in Haryana, India. This study explores the multifaceted challenges faced by women who become brides through this transactional system. Central to these challenges are issues of autonomy and agency, as many women are treated as commodities rather than individuals with rights and desires. Economic burdens placed on families often lead to financial exploitation, further ingrained poverty and limiting educational and career opportunities for these women. Additionally, the psychological impacts of bride buying, including feelings of worthlessness and depression, are profound, as societal norms perpetuate stigma and isolation. Legal frameworks aimed at addressing dowry-related practices often fall short, leaving women vulnerable and unprotected. This paper underscores the urgent need for inclusive policy interventions and community awareness programs not only to encounter the challenge of bride buying in Haryana but also promote gender equality and empower women in Haryana.

**Keywords:** Bride Buying, Challenge, Psychological, Haryana, Cultural

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of bride buying, known locally as "Molki," poses significant challenges for women in Haryana, reflecting a disturbing intersection of tradition, gender inequality, and socio-economic disparity. Molki involves the purchase of brides, often from marginalized communities, and is rooted in deep-seated patriarchal norms that prioritize male lineage and economic status over the rights and autonomy of women. This introduction reviews relevant literature to highlight the complexities surrounding this practice and its impact on the lives of these women. A study by Kumar and Rani (2018) highlights that Molki is prevalent primarily in rural areas of Haryana, where traditional practices are more deeply entrenched. The authors note that families often resort to bride buying due to a skewed sex ratio—Haryana has one of the lowest female-to-male ratios in India, with 834 females for every 1,000 males as per the 2011 Census. This demographic imbalance exacerbates the demand for brides and perpetuates the cycle of exploitation, as women are commodified and traded like goods. Singh (2019) underscores the socio-economic vulnerabilities that drive families to engage in Molki, particularly among lower-income groups. The study reveals that many

families view purchasing a bride as a solution to ensure their sons' marriages, thereby alleviating the social stigma associated with being unmarried. However, this practice often leads to dire consequences for the women involved, including emotional and physical abuse, isolation, and a lack of agency within their households. Maheshwari and Sharma (2020) further document that the women bought through this practice are frequently denied basic rights, such as education and healthcare, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. Legal frameworks addressing these issues remain inadequate. According to Bansal (2021), while trafficking laws exist, enforcement is weak, and the socio-cultural acceptance of bride buying complicates efforts to combat it. The study argues for a multi-faceted approach to address the root causes, including legal reforms, community education, and empowerment programs aimed at enhancing women's status in society.

The challenges faced by bride-buying women in Haryana are thus multidimensional, intertwining issues of gender inequality, economic hardship, and cultural norms. This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of these challenges, drawing from existing literature to propose informed strategies for advocacy and reform that can support the rights and well-being of Molki women.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The practice of bride buying in Haryana is a complex phenomenon that has emerged from a confluence of historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors. Haryana, a state located in northern India, has long been characterized by a patriarchal social structure that places a premium on male offspring. This preference for sons has led to a skewed sex ratio, exacerbated by practices such as female infanticide and sex-selective abortions. According to the 2011 Census, Haryana recorded a sex ratio of only 879 females for every 1,000 males, significantly below the national average. This imbalance has created a pressing demand for brides, driving some families to resort to bride buying as a means to secure matrimonial alliances.

Bride buying is often viewed as a response to societal pressures and economic vulnerabilities. Families facing financial constraints may perceive the purchase of a bride as a way to fulfill societal expectations of marriage while also addressing the challenges posed by a shortage of available women. In this context, women become commodities exchanged for financial gain, often devoid of agency or autonomy. This transactional nature of marriage not only undermines the dignity of women but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Moreover, the socio-cultural fabric of Haryana is interwoven with rigid gender roles and expectations that dictate the behavior and opportunities available to women. From a young age, girls are socialized to prioritize marriage and family over personal aspirations and education. As a result, many women enter into bride-buying arrangements with limited educational backgrounds and few employment prospects, further entrenching their subservient status. The financial demands associated with bride buying often place an immense burden on both the women and their families, leading to heightened stress, mental health challenges, and strained family dynamics. Legal frameworks in India, such as the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, aim to address the issues surrounding bride buying and dowry practices. However, these laws are frequently undermined by societal norms and the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. Women caught in bride-buying

arrangements often find themselves without legal protection or support, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Understanding the challenges faced by bride-buying women in Haryana requires an examination of the intersections of gender, culture, and economy. This background highlights the urgent need to address the systemic issues surrounding bride buying, emphasizing the importance of empowering women through education, legal awareness, and social change. By examining these challenges, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on gender equality and women's rights in Haryana, ultimately advocating for a more just and equitable society.

### **3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS**

#### **3.1. POVERTY AND ECONOMIC DISPARITIES**

Poverty is a significant driver of bride buying practices. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-20), approximately 30% of families in Haryana live below the poverty line. Economic hardship compels families, particularly those in rural areas, to view daughters as financial burdens rather than individuals with rights. Selling a daughter into marriage can sometimes be seen as a means of economic relief, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation (Bhat, 2013).

#### **3.2. EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT**

Education plays a critical role in empowering women and reducing vulnerability to exploitation. The 2011 Census reported a literacy rate of 66.8% for women in Haryana, significantly lower than the male literacy rate of 82.1%. Limited educational opportunities hinder women's awareness of their rights and available resources, making them more susceptible to practices like bride buying (Mishra & Mirdha, 2020).

Furthermore, the gendered nature of education in Haryana often prioritizes boys' education, reinforcing traditional roles that view women primarily as homemakers. This educational disparity limits women's economic opportunities and agency, perpetuating dependence on male family members.

#### **3.3. CULTURAL NORMS AND SOCIETAL PRESSURE**

Cultural norms play a pivotal role in sustaining the practice of bride buying. In many communities, societal pressure to marry off sons and fulfill familial expectations leads to the commodification of women. The expectation to maintain family honor through marriage often results in families resorting to bride buying, viewing it as a pragmatic solution to societal pressures (Kaur, 2018).

### **4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES**

#### **4.1. EXISTING LAWS AND PROTECTIONS**

India has enacted various laws aimed at protecting women and preventing human trafficking, including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005). However, these laws often lack the specificity required to address the nuances of bride buying.

According to the National Commission for Women (NCW, 2019), the existing legal framework does not adequately protect Molki women, and many cases of bride buying go unreported due to a lack of awareness and fear of stigmatization.

Furthermore, legal provisions do not specifically target the socio-economic conditions that lead to bride buying, limiting their effectiveness.

## **4.2. CORRUPTION AND INEFFECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Corruption within law enforcement agencies significantly hampers the enforcement of laws aimed at protecting women. Studies indicate that police inaction, influenced by societal norms and corruption, leads to a lack of accountability for individuals involved in bride buying (Chaudhary, 2016). Many women who seek justice often encounter indifference or hostility from law enforcement, discouraging them from reporting abuses.

## **4.3. STIGMA AND FEAR OF REPORTING**

The stigma associated with being a Molki woman further complicates legal recourse. Many women fear societal backlash and ostracism, leading to a culture of silence around the issue. Research indicates that women who experience bride buying often internalize feelings of shame, which prevents them from seeking help or support (Sharma et al., 2021).

# **5. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON MOLKI WOMEN**

## **5.1. MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES**

The psychological impact on Molki women can be severe, leading to various mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. A qualitative study conducted by Sharma et al. (2021) found that many Molki women reported feelings of worthlessness and despair due to their circumstances. The trauma associated with being treated as a commodity often results in long-term psychological effects.

## **5.2. ISOLATION AND LACK OF SUPPORT**

Molki women frequently experience social isolation and a lack of support networks. Many are cut off from their families and communities, limiting their access to resources and assistance. The absence of supportive relationships exacerbates feelings of loneliness and helplessness, further impacting their mental well-being (Kaur, 2018).

## **5.3. COPING MECHANISMS AND RESILIENCE**

Despite the challenges, many Molki women develop coping mechanisms to navigate their circumstances. Research indicates that some women find strength in solidarity with other women in similar situations, creating informal support networks that provide emotional and practical assistance (Mishra & Mirdha, 2020). However, these coping strategies often remain insufficient in addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate bride buying.

# **6. SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS**

## **6.1. GENDER ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS**

Cultural dynamics in Haryana perpetuate rigid gender roles that view women primarily as caregivers and homemakers. The expectation for women to fulfill domestic responsibilities often limits their opportunities for education and

employment, reinforcing their economic dependency on men. This systemic gender bias plays a critical role in the continuation of bride buying practices.

## 6.2. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AND RESISTANCE

Community perceptions of bride buying vary, with some viewing it as a necessary solution to the marriage crisis, while others recognize its exploitative nature. Efforts to challenge the normalization of bride buying often face resistance due to deeply entrenched cultural norms. Community awareness programs are essential to shift perceptions and promote gender equality (Chaudhary, 2016).

## 6.3. ROLE OF NGOS AND ACTIVISM

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by Molki women. Many NGOs focus on raising awareness about the legal rights of women, providing counseling services, and advocating for policy reforms. Activism is essential in challenging the cultural norms that perpetuate bride buying and promoting gender equality (Kaur, 2018).

## 7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Focussed group discussion, observations techniques and other methods of participatory research have been used to understand the concept of bride buying in Haryana. For this purpose, five purchased bribes from the five villages who fall in the vicinity of the B P S Women's University, Haryana, India, the first state women's university were taken for this paper. Written based secondary material was also used for this paper.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the challenges faced by women involved in bride buying requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses legal, educational, economic, and social initiatives. The following recommendations aim to empower these women and promote gender equality in Haryana:

### 1) Legal Reforms and Enforcement

- **Strengthening Laws Against Bride Buying:** The government should enact and enforce stricter laws to combat bride buying and related practices. This includes ensuring effective implementation of the Dowry Prohibition Act and introducing specific legislation addressing the issues of bride buying as a violation of women's rights.
- **Legal Awareness Programs:** Conduct awareness campaigns to educate women about their legal rights and protections. Providing accessible legal resources and support services can empower women to advocate for themselves and seek justice when their rights are violated.

### 2) Education and Skill Development

- **Access to Education:** Implement programs that encourage and facilitate girls' education, focusing on removing barriers to schooling for girls in rural areas. This can include scholarships, transportation assistance, and community awareness campaigns to promote the value of girls' education.



- **Vocational Training Programs:** Establish vocational training centers that offer skill development programs tailored to the local job market. Equipping women with marketable skills can enhance their employability and economic independence, reducing reliance on bride buying arrangements.

### 3) Economic Empowerment Initiatives

- **Microfinance and Entrepreneurship Support:** Provide access to microfinance and entrepreneurship programs specifically designed for women. Offering financial literacy training, business development support, and mentorship can help women start their own businesses and achieve economic autonomy.
- **Job Placement Services:** Collaborate with local businesses and organizations to create job placement programs that connect women with employment opportunities. Providing resources for resume writing, interview preparation, and workplace skills can increase their chances of securing jobs.

### 4) Community Awareness and Advocacy

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch community awareness campaigns to challenge the societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate bride buying and gender discrimination. Engaging community leaders, influencers, and media can help shift perceptions and promote gender equality.
- **Support Networks and Peer Groups:** Encourage the formation of support groups and networks for women who have experienced bride buying. These groups can provide emotional support, share resources, and empower women to advocate for their rights collectively.

### 5) Mental Health Support Services

- **Access to Counseling and Mental Health Services:** Establish community-based mental health programs that provide counseling and support services for women affected by bride buying. Training local healthcare providers to recognize and address the mental health needs of these women is crucial.
- **Empowerment Programs:** Implement empowerment programs that focus on building self-esteem, resilience, and coping strategies. Workshops on assertiveness, self-advocacy, and mental well-being can help women regain their sense of agency and identity.

### 6) Engagement of Men and Boys

- **Involve Men and Boys in Awareness Campaigns:** Engage men and boys in discussions about gender equality and the negative impacts of bride buying. Promoting healthy relationships and challenging toxic masculinity can help foster a culture of respect and equality.
- **Educational Programs for Male Youth:** Implement educational programs in schools that promote gender equality, consent, and the value of mutual respect in relationships. Empowering boys to reject harmful practices can lead to long-term societal change.

### 7) Collaboration with NGOs and Community Organizations

- **Partnerships with NGOs:** Collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on women's rights and empowerment. These organizations can provide valuable resources, expertise, and

support for implementing programs aimed at improving the lives of bride-buying women.

- **Community Development Initiatives:** Support community development projects that address the root causes of bride buying, such as poverty and lack of education. Comprehensive approaches that involve community members in the planning and execution of programs can lead to sustainable change.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The practice of bride buying in Haryana presents significant challenges that impact the lives of women and perpetuate cycles of gender inequality. Women caught in this system face a multitude of obstacles, including social stigma, lack of autonomy, economic dependency, and profound psychological distress. These issues are deeply intertwined with cultural norms and socio-economic factors that continue to reinforce the commodification of women in marriage. Addressing the plight of bride-buying women requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Legal reforms, educational initiatives, and economic empowerment programs are essential to dismantling the structures that perpetuate bride buying and to fostering an environment where women can thrive as independent individuals. Additionally, community awareness campaigns and the involvement of men and boys in discussions about gender equality are crucial for creating lasting change.

Empowering women through education, skill development, and mental health support can help them reclaim their autonomy and redefine their identities beyond the confines of traditional roles. By promoting gender equality and challenging societal norms, we can create a more equitable society that values women as individuals with rights, aspirations, and contributions. Ultimately, the journey toward eradicating bride buying and its associated challenges requires collective effort—from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and society as a whole. Only through collaborative action can we hope to create a future where all women, regardless of their circumstances, can enjoy dignity, respect, and the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives free from the constraints of bride buying.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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