

Educated, and yet dying dowry deaths

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The recent dowry murder of Divya, a chartered account in Tamil Nadu, has stirred up a storm.

Another recent event was the suicide of the IIT-Delhi research scholar Manjula Davak. Her father was quoted as saying, "It was a mistake to educate my daughter and send her to IIT. I should have saved all the money for her dowry."

These, and many such women, were educated and capable of earning their living. They could have taken legal help to fight the dowry demands. Still, dowry became the reason for their deaths.

Undoubtedly, we have seen changes in the status of women with education and economic independence. However, stories like Manjula's and Divya's make us rethink the role of academic education in empowering women and handling social evils like domestic violence and dowry.

The question is, what stops women from coming out bravely about such harassment? What stops them from taking professional help in such cases?

What typically goes on in an educated girl's mind when she thinks about moving out of social sanctions and systems?

Relational self

Feminist psychologists talk about women's perspective as 'relational self' as opposed to 'rational self' in men. Because women have 'relational self', family ties and societal networks become the basis of their priorities and decision-making.

Even when they are educated, their context continuously informs them about their priorities. Our societal network glamourises certain ways of feeling and being.

Although this is a culturally conditioned psychological behaviour, women survive injustice and violence for the sake of family, and relationships in general.

Thus, although there are exceptions, we find a number of women caught in dilemmas over family and relationships.

Most educated girls in our society grow up with the huge emotional and social baggage of keeping the

honour of their families. This 'obligatory due' is paid off by complying with their families and in-laws.

Since they are educated, they are expected to be much more liable to pay this due. Therefore, even if they are undergoing torture and humiliation within their families, they tell themselves that they have to survive that.

Unfortunately, they survive it in the name of love and honour. It is difficult for them to decide at what point to stop doing that.

The dowry deaths of these educated women are classic examples of this failure in education.

Emotionally uneducated

The fact is that our education, which is largely a response to global and economic forces, prepares engineers, doctors, CAs, teachers, scientists and so on.

However, there is no education about handling our psychological and emotional dilemmas. Because handling your emotions and feelings is not considered a part of any economically productive skill, it is largely ignored.

Inability to deal with emotional conflicts is equally true for both men and women. While there are a hundred different ways in which we feel in a variety of situations, when asked to describe how we feel, we cannot even begin to do so.

Our education curriculum and syllabi do not empower men and women to understand their own mental and emotional turmoil.

We do learn about our bodies and surroundings, but exploring our minds and emotions are left largely to ourselves and our haphazard experiences. We don't know what is right and wrong when it comes to our feelings.

As a part of education, we should definitely learn about the way the external world works through various disciplines of study, but we should also learn the ways of our internal world.

It is not very difficult to add this component structurally into education. We can have interactive, experience-based sessions where students talk and reflect about their life and their emotions. This can be done at all levels and forms of education.

We should understand that a death or a suicide is not just a reflection of a dysfunctional social structure,

it also shows that we have failed to take informed measures to construct a better education and a better social structure.

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