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# Indians rebel against notorious dowry system

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DESPITE billions of rupees and decades of efforts, at least 20 young women still die every day in India over dowry demands.

Most are tortured first by their husband and in-laws, over months and years. Then comes the convenient "accident". The in-laws tell the police the loose-flowing end of her sari caught fire as she was cooking. In fact, they doused her with kerosene and set her alight.

The giving and taking of dowry is a crime in India but it remains ineradicable.

But some young Indians are drawing a line in the sand by registering with a matrimonial website called [idontwantdowry.com](http://idontwantdowry.com).

In every other respect, the website is a traditional Indian matrimonial site in

that it lists men and women by religion and caste. But the big difference is the "no dowry" statement they have chosen to make.

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A Hyderabad-based website consultant, Satya Naresh, set up [idontwantdowry.com](http://idontwantdowry.com) out of disgust at the age-old custom, which has caused a shortage of women in north India.

Put off by having to produce a hefty dowry for daughters, Indians increasingly resort to abortions when it's known the foetus is female. The result is a skewed male-female sex ratio.

Mr Naresh, 34, and unmarried, personally witnessed the humiliation that women suffer. At a friend's wedding recently the bride's family had already spent 120,000 rupees (\$A3380) on the dowry. As the ceremony was about to begin, the groom's parents threatened to call it off unless a shortfall of 10,000 rupees that was still "due" was handed over.

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"My friends and I hastily collected the money the bride needed and handed it over," he said. "The ceremony went ahead. But I felt for her. She had been demeaned. A woman has no intrinsic value as a human being."

Dowry is deeply rooted in Indian society. Without a dowry, parents cannot hope to find a husband for their daughters. Rich or poor, they go along with it, knowing that an unmarried woman is considered a freak.

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But the matter does not end there. After the wedding, more demands from the husband's side start streaming in — for a car, home theatre, scooter, washing machine, DVD player, cash, jewellery.

If the demands are not met, the woman can be murdered. Afterwards, the husband takes a second wife, with a second dowry.

Appalled at such inhumanity, more than 6000 idealistic people, largely professionals, have registered with [idontwantdowry](#). It's a decision that has dismayed their parents who, having conceived and raised sons, had been looking forward to a windfall.

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"Parents think that if their son says he doesn't want a dowry, people will think there is something wrong with him, that he has a shady history or a health problem," said Mr Naresh.

With an MBA and a well-paid job, Santosh Kumar, 24, could command a hefty dowry from his bride-to-be, but he has registered on the site instead.

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"A woman is not a product or a service to be bought," he says. "The

relationship between husband and wife is sacred. If I can earn my own living, why should I demand things from my wife's family?" Mr Kumar says his parents are thoroughly disappointed with such high-mindedness.

Like other parents, they tend to feel that dowry is a bad custom, but let others start forsaking it first.

Mr Naresh's dream is to make dowry a dirty, five-letter word by 2020. He wants his movement to grow in leaps and bounds, like mobile phones.

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At first, only a handful of affluent Indians had a mobile. Now, even carpenters and plumbers have one, and every month sees 5 million new subscribers.

"I believe that once educated Indians start abandoning dowry, the masses, who take their cue from those who are richer and more powerful, will follow suit," he says.

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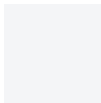
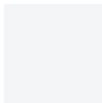
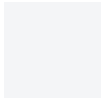
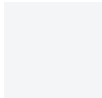
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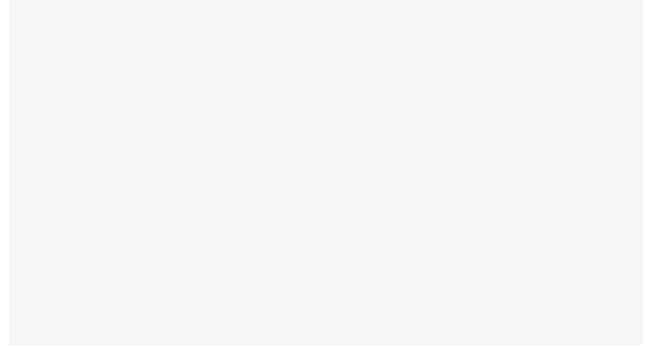
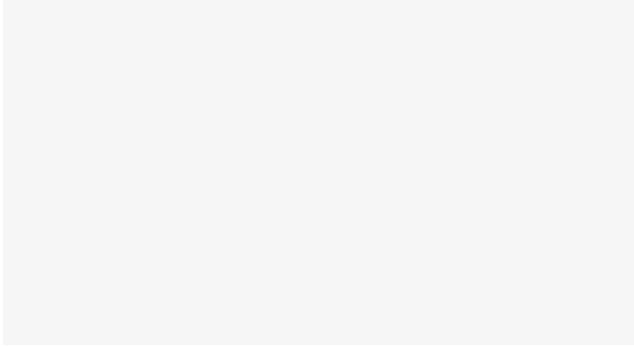
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