Hyderabad

Swayamvaram: I don't want dowry. I want a bride!!

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On Sunday, an auspicious day, when thousands of couples tied the knot and exchanged vows and their families exchanged notes running into crores of

rupees, a group of unmarried people gathered at the Birla Science Centre auditorium for a different kind of Swayamvaram – a meeting to share their views, experiences on dowry and find a soulmate.

They were all members of idontwantdowry.com – a website dedicated to those opposing the practice. An annual event, Swayamvaram, attracted over 90 men and 30 women. When Satya Naresh, an entrepreneur from the city, launched idontwantdowry.com, he was clear about the huge business opportunities and challenges that stood ahead of him but what drove him towards his goal was social responsibility and lessons learnt at school. After trying his hand in various professions, he had decided to launch his web services company along with a friend and later the website idontwantdowry.com.

"Giving or taking dowry is a crime, which is why no matrimonial website talks about dowry. In reality, dowry is part of the system. I found that nobody was willing to speak against dowry," he said adding that his fight against the tradition-turned-social evil was tough.

Six years into existence, the website has a membership of over 14,500 members with a majority enrollment of men. Though registration is free, if a member wants to contact other members, he/she has to pay a sum of `500 for six months to find his/her soulmate.

31-year-old Vijayanaga Chandrika, who works as an Inspector with the Central Excise and Customs department, joined the website a week ago. "If parents can afford to pay dowry, well and good but it should never be the thumb rule in the name of tradition," she said. She has paid the price for her stance against dowry and remains unmarried still. She opined that dowry is considered to be a way in which parents can collect back all the expenditure incurred on their son's education. "The more the education for the boy, the more is the demand for dowry. Whereas, a woman well educated, well earning, and holding a good position in the society also needs to pay dowry," she said.

According to her, dowry is also indirectly asked from the bride's family in the name of wedding expenditure. "It is also believed that if the groom says no to dowry, there must be something wrong with him," she said.

Kishore Mohan, another participant, pointed out, "With more educated women around, issues are coming up. There is a lot of activism required to eradicate dowry system. Youngsters, especially school students need to be made aware and work towards complete eradication of this social evil," he said.

Another participant, 30-year-old Srinu Rajanna, has a different story to tell for why he does not want dowry. "I have faced lots of financial problems while getting my two sisters married. It is impossible to get girls married without paying dowry," he said. According to him, a lot of women are not able to get married, especially in rural areas, because of dowry system. He however believes that a change is happening at the moment but points out that lasting change is possible only if men decide to change.

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