



Nanhe Soch, Bade Vichar

Nanhi Chhaan
National School Essay
Contest, 2014

*Dowry is illegal
and immoral*





Message from the Chairman

Dear Friends,

Hearing twelve young girls and boys debating and discussing the ills of Dowry at the final of the Nanhi Chhaan National School Essay Contest held on the 19th of Sept in Delhi left many in the audience both surprised and inspired. The quality of points raised, the insights provided and the passion to make the change left many of us relieved that the future of the country was in good hands. Clearly the young of India were engaged and determined. At Nanhi Chhaan our view that India's young need platforms to air their views stood further reinforced. Let's however, reflect for a moment on the backdrop of this year's essay topic.

If he were to see the status of women in India today, a group that together represents 8.5% of the global citizenry, we should be appalled. In 2011, while we had a women President and 4 women Chief Ministers, a report by the Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked India as the 4th most dangerous place in the world for women – worse than war-torn Somalia and only marginally better than Afghanistan and Congo. High incidences of female foeticide, infanticide, human trafficking and a deep imbalance nurtured by an entrenched patriarchal society has made India a country where women continue to have little say over their lives. It was not always thus. Even our religious scriptures attest to the fact that in ancient India, women enjoyed equality in most aspects of life. Educated from an early age, free to choose their own life partners and holding prominent places in public life, their importance can be judged from the iconic female figures that adorn our religious texts. As the great law-giver Manu said,

“WHERE WOMEN ARE HONOURED, THERE RESIDE THE GODS.”

But a lot has changed since the time of our illustrious predecessors. The onset of patriarchal society in India was built on the subjugation and repression of women in almost all spheres of social life. From 500 B.C. onwards, women continued to lose their prominence driven further by social influences of cultures that arrived from outside of Indian shores. Independence may have come for a nation, but only half the country enjoyed its fruits. The other half, women, continued to bear the yoke of traditions such as dowry, child marriage and discrimination that accursed a girl child even before she was born, if, she was allowed to be born. Appalling institutionalized traditions like dowry may have been legally banned but continued to exist in de facto.

When the Nanhi Chhaan Foundation first took up “save the girl child” as one of its guiding mottos, debate on the issue was strangely muted across the country. The constitution of our country is based on the premise that one person equals one vote equals same rights. In reality however, women in our country (and even in many other societies outside) are mistreated every day both inside and outside their homes. While 67% of the world's work is done by women according to UNDP, they earn only 10% of global income and own less than 1% of global property. Less than half the girls in India complete their schooling. The economic and social restrictions put on women early in their lives and in some cases even before birth result in them battling inequalities all their lives. Nanhi Chhaan is glad to have played a part in bringing this issue to the fore of the consciousness of the national audience. That protecting and promoting the girl child figured in the speech delivered by the Prime minister this year from the Red Fort bears testimony to how much the national psyche is now being invoked to make amends.

It is for this reason that when we envisaged the first Nanhi Chhaan National School Essay Contest as a platform for the youth of the country to engage and advocate on some fundamental issues facing the Indian society, this was in the forefront of our thoughts. Hence, we decided to keep the topic of the inaugural essay competition –



“DOWRY IS ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL”.

Dowry is one of the most pernicious realities of Indian society, placing an unbearable burden on families and undermines the very existence of the girl child. What started in ancient times as a bequeathing of gifts to the bride has today warped into a custom that has degenerated the holy communion of marriage to crass transactions. 8,223 young women are reported to have been killed for dowry in India in 2012 and more than 100,000 were targets of cruelty. And these are just reported figures likely to be the tip of the iceberg – multiple more women across the country bear their pain and humility in silence because of her or her family’s inability to meet the in-law’s extravagant demands. Every hour a girl in India dies due to the burdensome demand of dowry. While evil in itself, dowry also stands as the symbol for a host of social evils that sprout in its wake – adverse gender ratio, female infanticide, foeticide and human trafficking. While laws have been implemented, implementation remains a problem. A majority of the cases are never reported. Even when reported less than 35% of dowry murders and less than 15% of dowry violence cases result in convictions. As a result progress remains dismal.

The path may then well be to educate, to debate, to raise awareness and to enable the decision makers of today and tomorrow to engage on this issue. By creating The Nanhi Chhaan National Essay Contest, we have created a platform where voices on issues such as this reach a pitch and volume that cannot be ignored. This year more than 1,500 students from across 18 states introspected, debated, wrote and hopefully championed the illegality and immorality of dowry. We provide you three of the winning essays hoping that you like us, will be reassured and energized to pursue actions to end this unacceptable reality (Dowry) in our society. Can we also urge you to take the Nanhi Chhaan Anti Dowry pledge and encourage others to do the same?

As we increase our reach in coming years, we hope to multiply the resonance to a point that enables us to push the agenda on social issues to levels where society is compelled to make the changes we all desire. We will continue to seek your support as we lay the building blocks for what we believe will be an institution (The annual national Nanhi Chhaan school Essay Contest) loved and revered by the youth of the nation and one that will continue to shed light and provoke action on critical social issues of national and global importance.

With warm regards,

Harpal Singh

Chairman – Nanhi Chhaan Foundation



About Nanhi Chhaan

The **Nanhi Chhaan Foundation** (“*Nanhi*” is how little girls are endearingly referred to and “*Chhaan*” is shade/protection) is a not-for-profit organization, set up with the objective of addressing three important issues on the social agenda of the country namely, the adverse gender ratio (and women’s empowerment), preservation of trees (and environment protection) and lack of inter-faith harmony (promote secularism and saving humanity). The Foundation’s aim is to evoke action at a national level by raising awareness and undertaking advocacy activities on the above mentioned issues.

In support of this agenda, the Foundation launched the first edition of the National School Essay Contest in 2014, to encourage thinking and debate amongst school children on important and emerging social issues.

About the National School Essay Contest (NSEC)

The Nanhi Chhaan National School Essay Contest (NSEC) is a national competition envisaged to be convened on an annual basis - a first of its kind initiative by Nanhi Chhaan. It is an advocacy platform with the aim of spreading awareness on important social issues amongst relevant audiences. Within this larger ambit the objective of the programme is:

- * To be the leading ‘social’ competence platform for schools in India
- * To be scalable in format and allow for maximum participation in a fair, transparent and competitive atmosphere
- * To be sustainable in terms of its ability to extend its reach with audiences on a continued basis
- * To have current relevance of ‘topics’ being discussed
- * To have financial viability based on collaboration and self-sustenance
- * To be outcome oriented in outlook

The scope of the essay’s are to be defined by addressing matters around some of the important issues on the social agenda of the country, some of them being (a) protecting & empowering girls and women, (b) tackling environmental degradation and (c) for promoting inter-faith harmony. For the first year, the topic selected was “Dowry is illegal and immoral”.

NSEC 2014 has elicited a tremendous response from the Indian schooling network in its first year, with an outreach to more than 400 schools across every state in the country and has achieved a national exposure for students and schools that entered the final round. The chronology of the NSEC calendar for 2014 was as below:





Written Round for
Grade 10/11 students:
2 entries per school &
evaluation of 400+
entries

Final Round for top
10 finalists at the
Vasant Valley
School : "on-the-
spot" written round

Extempore-cum-
Debate round at
the Maneckshaw
Centre, Delhi
Cantt

Summation of the
weighted scores to
decide winners



30 best essay
authors invited for
Personality
Development
Programme at the
NIIT University in
Rajasthan

Triple Evaluation
of the final round
entries (weightage
of 80%)

Judges scoring of
the contestant's
responses (20%
weightage)



The esteemed panelists for the final round comprised of three luminaries from the education / sociology / consulting sectors, viz. Mrs. Rekha Purie, Mrs. Bharti Ramola Gupta, Dr. Dipankar Gupta.

- * Dr Dipankar Gupta is renowned Indian sociologist. He is currently Distinguished Professor at Shiv Nadar University and Director, Centre for Public Affairs and Critical Theory. He is a regular columnist with leading dailies, such as The Times of India, The Hindu and also serves on the board of institutions like the Reserve Bank of India, the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) and Max India.
- * Ms Bharti Ramola Gupta is the Markets Leader for PwC - India. She has over 30 years of experience with PwC India and has held various leadership roles during this period, including the India Deals Leader. In her personal capacity, Bharti serves on the boards of Basix and PRADAN, two of India's leading non-government organisations engaged in microfinance and livelihood promotion initiatives.
- * Ms. Rekha Purie is the Chair of the board of Vasant Valley school one of the most prominent educational institutes in the city. An avid sociologist-cum-educationist, she is a strong advocator of holistic lifeskill education of students as future citizens of the country.





The Results

The total prize purse for this competition was INR 8 lacs.

- * The First Prize - cash prize of Rs. 3 Lakhs for the school, Rs. 1 Lakh for the student and Rs. 1 Lakh to a cause (registered NGO) of the student's choice was awarded to **Ms Ramya Mishra, DPS Vasant Kunj Delhi**. Ramya decided to support Goonj - a NGO engaged in mass movement among the rural and urban masses mobilizing cloth and repositioning it as an important resource of India rather than wastage fit only for charity.
- * The Second Prize - cash prize of Rs. 1 Lakhs for the school, Rs. 50,000 for the student and Rs. 50,000 to a cause (registered NGO) of the student's choice was awarded to **Ms Kanupriya Rathore, Mayo College, Ajmer**. Kanupriya decided to gift her award to **Umang**. Umang is an initiative that strives for an inclusive society that provides equal opportunity for all, by enhancing the quality of life of individuals with various disabilities.
- * The Third Prize - cash prize of Rs. 50,000 for the school, Rs. 25,000 for the student and Rs. 25,000 to a cause (registered NGO) of the student's choice) was awarded to **Ms Ankita Nagraj, Sharada Mandir School, Goa**. Ankita selected **Caritas-Goa**, which is a charitable Society/Organization of the Archdiocese of Goa. The Society strives to serve the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the differently abled, people living with HIV/AIDS, the marginalized and the victims of natural and manmade calamities. It takes up issues and addresses concerns related to the welfare and the upliftment of the downtrodden, social outcasts, etc.

The programme ended with the award ceremony for the winners, being presided over by the three patrons – Mr Harpal Singh, Ms Isher Judge Ahluwalia and Ms Rekha Purie. Ms Ahluwalia then administered the 'Anti-Dowry Pledge' to the gathering and the programme came to an end with the rendering of the National Anthem.





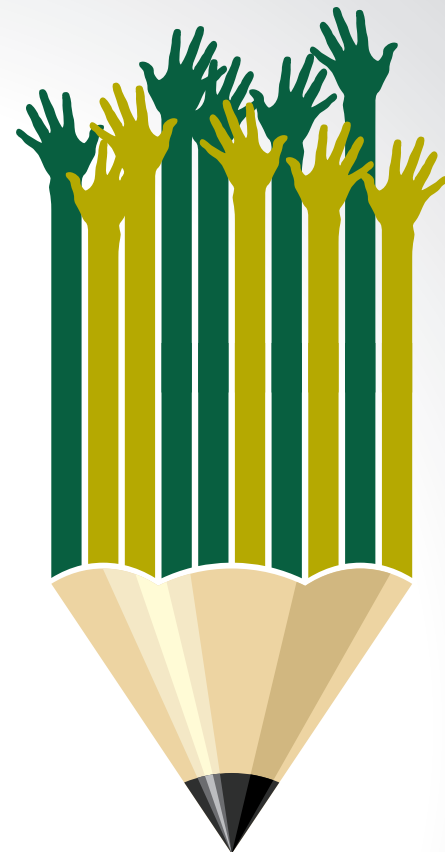
1st - Ramya Mishra
DPS Vasant Kunj Delhi



Winners



1st runners up -
Kanupriya Rathore
MayoCollege Ajmer



2nd runners up -
Ankita Nagaraj
Sharada Mandir School Goa

The winning essay entries

DOWRY IS ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL



Dowry.

A five letter, two syllable word that kills a married woman every hour in India.

In India, marriage holds a reverential place in the hearts of men and women. ‘The Big Fat Indian Wedding’ is a notorious celebration of the union of man and woman; the regal groom arrives on a horse surrounded by dancing kinsfolks while the bride, decked in a beautiful trousseau, make up and perfume is brought to the groom under a blanket of flowers. To any bystander, Indian weddings are simply beautiful, elegant and timelessly classy. However, the contract of a marriage is besmirched by ‘terms and conditions applied’.

What are these terms and conditions? None other than dowry– Money, goods or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage. In harmony with the globalisation of the country, the quality of dowry demands have also escalated. The bridegroom’s family often burdens the bride’s kin with exigencies of luxurious cars, household appliances, jewellery and grand cheques. Talks of dowry are nothing new in India. Regardless of the increase in the literacy of Indians, heedless of the augmentation in the standards of living, dowry continues to be a cursed tradition in the realm of Indian marriages.

In its origins, dowry was one of the few indigenous, women-centred institutions in an overwhelmingly patriarchal and agrarian society. Historically, it was an index of the ‘appreciation’ bestowed upon a daughter in her natal village, and not a groom’s prerogative to make demands on the girl’s family. The British Raj, with its harsh laws and aim to ‘civilise’ India elicited the exclusion of females from their rights. Their revenue laws, put the land property into male hands and held the man of the house responsible for the revenue. Another stride forward for the domination of man over woman, and for the masculinization of the economy. The texture of the lives of women changed completely. With men regarded as the trailblazers, women were considered nothing but child bearers. As a consequence dowry came to be seen as a customary cultural practice. In fear of dowry, parents began to kill their infant daughters. Dowry, which in itself is a crime, has amplified not one but a multitude of other crimes against women, it has led to a torrent of female infanticides and female foeticides across the country.

The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry, “as consideration for the marriage” where dowry is defined as a pre-condition for a marriage. But this is India. India, where



culture prevails over logic, over science and even over one's right to live. In India, the bride's family is expected to pay for all the wedding celebrations, and hope it pleases the groom's family. Displeased with the dowry they received, in laws are known to subject brides to backbreaking menial tasks. *A waterfall of kerosene, a lit matchstick, a sharp intake of breath, ignored pleas for mercy, unheeded screams, and silent observers of a family she married into- a woman dies as swathes and ribbons of fire wrap around her exhausted, wilted body.* "Bride burning" has become a commonplace. In 2012, 8233 dowry deaths were reported in our nation. Eighty per cent of bank loans are reported to be taken by the bride's family, directly or indirectly, to meet dowry demands. The 'Bhagavad Gita' advocates the practice of dowry. However in this holy book, dowry can be just a fruit and a flower.

Are women nothing but a source of some hard cash or a big cheque? Are women really mere observers in this seemingly everlasting patriarchal phase of society? India is a land of strange customs and myths. We refuse cross the road when we see a black cat, we don't buy metal on Thursdays and we don't cut our nails on Tuesdays. But this ancient praxis of 'dowry' crosses the line. It's ironic to note that while Indians worship Goddess Lakshmi for prosperity, they burn their brides for wealth.

Time immemorial, women are cogitated less than men. The bible preaches "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." (Timothy 2:11-12). But over the sands of time, women have left their footprints, - be it Jhansi ki Rani, Madam Curie or Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Kiran Bedi, Mary Kom- each woman is her own. She is no longer a mere shadow of her father, brother or husband. The Dowry system degrades women to a source of money, to an effigy to inflict violence upon. A man abuses his wife, milks her family dry for money. Paradoxically, it is both funny and miserable to note how this same money may be used to buy idols of goddesses. What is the point of worshipping them, if we can't treat our own women right? The immorality of the status quo is disconcerting. The commercialisation of our minds and our lives have had a negative impact on all, but the worst hit are the women who are murdered and abused, both mentally and physically, in the name of customary cultural traditions such as dowry.

Welcome to 2014. Today, women are the equals of men, financially, mentally and socially. As Charlotte Bronte so eloquently said in *Jane Eyre*, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." Women are liberated of reliance on anyone for survival. No woman today will stand quietly and witness dowry, bride burning or murder. Women are the heroines of their lives, not the victims. The act or demand is considered greedy, shameless, debauched and foolish.

Dowry is illegal, immoral and inhumane.

The winning essay entries

LET THEM BE



The sky turned the color of a fading bruise. She clenched her fists with the curtain stuffed in it as she stood by the window. She looked at her father with cold, empty eyes. Her chest puffed out and her jaw set firm. She mustered as much strength as she could to feign that pride.

But the curtain in her hena stained fists.... He saw it. A father saw his little girl, a woman, holding on to that piece of cloth like it was all that kept her grounded to the earth. He saw her lips tremble just a moment before she let the words out. "Let them be then"

Father and daughter exchanged one last glance before she stormed out. Both found the same thing in each other's eyes... a broken heart.

The father sat alone then. His graying hair and sagging face...And of course, the sad eyes made him look way beyond his years. The in-laws had called, as he knew they would. They had called him over the telephone and informed him that the dowry given was half the expected amount. They gave him a day, one cruel day to deliver the rest. Otherwise he could keep his daughter back they threatened. But how does a man take his daughter back after she has been wedded and bedded? How does a woman leave a man she has been married to over the past week?

'Let them be then', she said. But how could he? He sat there and pondering over the issue and wondered what would undo it.

Dowry originated as a simple act of gifting. Parents, while parting from their daughter as she left for another home, presented her with commodities that would enable her to settle down and start a family of her own. From utensils, quilts and curtains to cash and gold, parents from different strata of society bid farewell to their child with this token of affection. Sadly enough, man's greed ruined matters for everybody. The simple voluntary act of dowry became a compulsion. The beautiful bond between a man and a woman turned into a business deal.

Embarrassing as it is, a girl, a human being with a family unwilling to pay dowry found it impossible to find a match. Social pressure became such that few could escape from it. It is amazing how 'bharat' becomes 'republic of India', literacy rates rise, society successfully combats social evils, dowry system not only continues, but flourishes in this country.

The big question obviously is, 'why?'

Simply because women, who are held in high esteem in the realm of religion, literature and culture, are actually considered no more than a commodity to be traded. Instead of feeling honored when a woman leaves her home to make one for you, some people of disgustingly low morals think they deserve material wealth as well. They shroud their logic in whimsical superiority and feel the girl and her family owe them something.

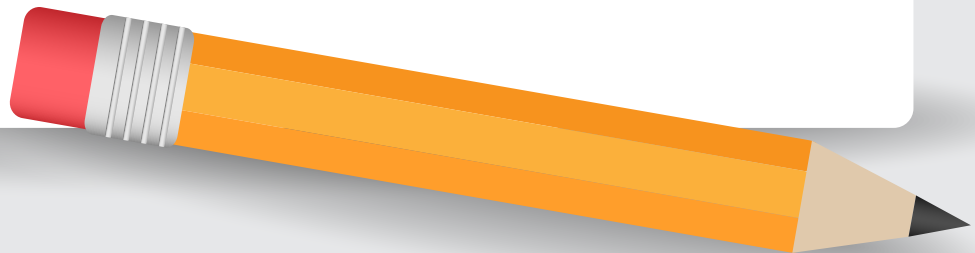
Not only is dowry an undeniable crime in itself, it also propagates all injustice done to women in this country. A girl child's life is snuffed out before she can even live as one day a price will be demanded. Hence, the girl child becomes a burden. Almost every day a rape, a murder, a case of domestic violence or an acid attack for dowry disputes is reported in the newspapers.

Education, awareness campaigns and government support should help resolve the issue. But the old man with the broken heart was educated and made aware, so were his in-laws...yet they made that phone call. It is crucial to know what happens in that story, because I believe, that is the answer we are all looking for.

The sky bled a deep black as night came. The old man snapped out of his thoughts as he heard the sound of tires over gravel. There was excited chatter outside as his son-in-law came in, beaming. He presented his wife with flowers and his father in law with a bottle of vintage wine. He asked his wife whether she had enjoyed herself with her parents and if she wished to return home anytime soon. His smile faltered when silence responded. Gradually the stunned husband was informed about the phone call his family had made. He folded his hands before his wife's father and apologized. He took her home then, and nobody breathed a word about that phone call. She was treated with the love and respect she deserved. He did not see her as a woman, but a partner to take on the world with. They considered one another human beings and not man and woman.

And most importantly, they contributed to the cause against dowry by instilling in their children the same values by bringing up both son and daughter as equals.

My mother had once said, 'let them be then', and these four words are the reason I write this essay today. My mother had boldly declared, someone not capable of standing on his own two feet didn't deserve her or any other woman. And she was right. So do not bend your knee before those who demand dowry and have the dignity to never ask for it. The world will definitely become a better place to live in.



The winning essay entries

DOWRY IS IMMORAL AND ILLEGAL



A little girl entered the world with a bright future ahead of her. She smiled, she laughed, she dreamed. She was a happy little thing, with no worries in the world. She got through school with grades higher than the stars in the night sky. She made it through graduation, and became a star employee in her dream job.

She has a home, a job, money and happiness, yet her parents wish for her to 'settle' down. A marriage was arranged. The boy's family was delighted to take in a daughter-in-law, who was so well off. The families distributed sweets and began with the plans for the big, fat Indian wedding, but there was a clause. With the soon-to-be-bride, they would require a certain amount of money and valuables. The girl, immediately refused to take part in the wedding, but her parents pleaded that she go on with it, as it would be a disgrace to the reputation of the family, if the relationship was called off. The girl finally agreed to go through, only if the dowry was cut off. There was an outburst, a flight, and quite a lot of swearing. So what is dowry? Why does the groom's family wish for the dowry? Why is dowry so prominent in the Indian society? Once upon a time, when life was simple, the complicated word dowry never existed. When newly-wed brides were originally introduced to their spouses family, a token known as a gift, would be offered to the male's family from female's family. Overtime, the greed for wealth and riches has made the world spin on a needle, waiting to topple over the minute a fresh bill falls from the sky.

Nowadays, especially in rural areas, dowry is a prevalent problem. The simple object of dowry is the main cause of certain aspects of domestic violence towards women. Dowry is also prevalent in urban areas, but due to laws being passed, that state the immorality of dowry, it has gone down. Mistaken by many, dowry does not only consist of giving cash, but also jewelry, electronics and almost any object of value.



So, if asked my views on dowry, I would begin a bombarding speech on how wrong the whole idea is. Giving the girl, a parent would have brought up with so much love, is itself a great thing. One reason, I commonly heard about for acceptance and requirement of dowry, is that for taking care of the brides need after marriage, money would be required. How true this statement is, I don't know, but if you feel you would require an amount of riches to take the girl in, than why even go to the institution of matrimony. Instead, it would be a whole lot easier to live a burden- free life.

The materialistic world and evil thoughts that fill up the mind make each one of us want to be the best. If one owns a luxury car, than others need it too. It's all in your status and wealth factor. Dowry on the whole, will probably take a couple

more decades to completely be abolished. Although, the future isn't too bright with the dowry system, we must only hope for the best.

The girl would not accept the fact that she had to pay a certain sum to get married, and continued to refuse the relationship. The parent's pleas continued as their reputation was at stake. The ai stood against all, her fkmily, the society, the world, and never went through the process of the wedding. Till today, she still may not be married, but at least she is not living with the thought that she is a weight on someone's shoulders.

Dowry is immoral and illegal. Dowry is wrong and unjustified. Dowry is not the solution of any problem. Dowry is not the binding between two families. Dowry is dowry, and it must go. A woman is a beautiful creature, and no one has the right to attach a price to her.

The winning essay entries

DOWRY IS ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL

“We’ve begun to raise daughters more like sons... but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.”- Gloria Steinem



Gender based inequality is no foreign topic of discussion even in the modern world. Centuries have passed since the first human step and all we have to face now is, injustice. As quoted by one of the most inspirational female leaders of the world, Gloria Steinem, that in the ever transforming society, we are inclined towards bringing out the man’ in our daughters and less ‘woman’ in our sons. A racist, old fashioned belief envelopes our rational minds that the words ‘male’ and ‘female’ are more adjectives to describe the attributes associated with one rather than the proper ‘common nouns’.

Marriage is a virtuous and pious collaboration of not just two families or two people but a collaboration of two souls. It is a beautiful sacrament that completes our lives and makes us believe in the virtue of ‘two is better than one’. From the stories of the bible to the legends of the Gita, matrimony has been described as a joyous occasion that ties the hearts of two individuals. In the old testament of the Bible, it is written that God created a woman and a man according to his will, to make them live for each other and die for each other. He wanted the proud human race to flourish by the grace of these two. He knew the role of both beings was important for the sustenance of life on earth. The question that piques my curiosity this is day is that, if God did not see any difference in them then who are the mere humans to draw a line between them?

In countries like India, the archaic tradition of demanding dowry for a man’s marriage prevails even to this very day. The notions of purity and peace in a marriage has lost its importance. Even now, half of the Indian population is oppressed under the cavernous weight of the dowry system.

And we say that India is independent.

A country where a father starts losing his sanity at the point where he is told that his child is girl, has been declared independent for 67 years!

And we say that we are free.

Indians boast about the discovery of Raman effect to the diversity in their culture, but have they missed out on the overwhelming truth that almost 30% of Indian brides are massacred within months of their married life because they could not ‘pay’ the price of their husbands.

Is this truth worth being boasted about?

The fault is not in our stars but in the intake of the untrue twaddle that make us inhumane every day. Redemption is when we believe that the world is not segregated into the powerful males and the docile females but it is one as ‘humans’. In our lust for money and supremacy we forget that the child we abort or the woman we burn for quenching this thirst is also someone’s daughter. It gives us no right to kill someone for satisfying our sexist beliefs. There is a special place in hell reserved for women who aid their families in torturing their daughter in-laws for dowry.

The government of India has declared dowry as illegal since time immemorial but the majority of citizens following the law are slim to none. It has been 53 years since the Dowry Act and still the bride's family is harassed to receive dowry because they think that no voice will be raised against this evil. And every second man surrenders to this crime and is further suppressed even further under this vile demand.

The male chauvinist presumptions of females being inferior to men have retained in our minds buried under novel socialist ideas and modern scientific discoveries. We have to understand that most differences between the two sexes are more societal than biological.

The year 2001 was declared as the International Women's Empowerment year. It has been 13 years since this declaration and yet there are more than 13,000 women that are both emotionally and physically abused for this predominant genocide.

Several myths that lead to this prevalent sin is that we believe that patriotism means aggression, age means wisdom and women mean submission. We have all heard about the sacrifices made for India's independence by a man's point of view but have any of us been taught that Rani Lakshmi Bai took her last breath balling the East India Company officials with her child on her back? The respect for women leader declined in the post-independence era. The world knows about the Guerilla warfare but not about the rulers like Cleopatra. We believe that every summit of success a woman reaches has been 'given' to her in a whimsical benevolent fashion.

We must learn to appreciate our heroes as well as our she-roes because the desperation of a woman's struggle is no less than a man's and she is struggling, even till this day.

It should be a woman's decision that she does not want to pay a man to marry her. A woman's liberation from the shackles of dowry should be a man's liberation from asking for one. A sense of pleasant contentment should fill us that someday our own daughter will grow up to be someone's wife and we will not want the same tragedy thrust on her.

Apart from the prudential reasons of dowry being a crime, there are also moral reasons behind it. Before an equalist or a feminist we are all humanists. Dowry is immoral and unethical because it is not only a legal crime but a brutal slaughter of a woman's life. Physical murder may not be a story of every household but an execution of the emotional state is the story of every woman being subjected to dowry cases.

If nothing, humanity and love should be the deciding factor that should pull our hands and subdue the monster inside of us. Salvation for the human race begins when you rise up and fight for the motions once introduced by leaders like Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Maya Angelou. An evil like dowry must be eradicated from our holy land because it ceases our chance of developing as a human.

If you want to see the future women flourish, if you want to see a twinkle of happiness in our daughter's eyes, if you want to see the human race move forward with an essence of equality, if you want to see morality in the world you have to change now.

Dowry is a sin, there is no justification for it but there is room for change.



Lighting of the lamp by Mr. Harpal Singh, Chairman - Nanhi Chhaan Foundation, in the presence of the judges - Dr. Dipankar Gupta, Ms. Bharti Gupta Ramola and Ms. Rekha Purie (standing, from R to L)



Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia, Patron - Nanhi Chhaan Foundation, administering the Anti-Dowry Pledge to school students at the event



The Nanhi Chhaan patrons with the NSEC 2014 winners : Ms. Kanupriya Rathore (Mayo College - 1st runner up), Ms. Ramya Mishra (DPS - winner), Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia, Mr. Harpal Singh, Mrs. Mishra, Ms. Rekha Purie and Ms. Ankita Nagaraj (Sharada Mandir - 2nd runner up): (standing, from R to L)



Mr. Harpal Singh - Chairman, Nanhi Chhaan Foundation,, addressing the audience at the Maneckshaw Centre, New Delhi



Divya Jyoti, the event's lamp - helping remove our ignorance and illuminating our inner selves

Sponsors

LUMAX - 'As a family and as a company, we have always considered helping society as an important objective in which helping the girl child was a particular focus. We adopted the programme, 'Lumax ki Nanhi Chhaan' in 2009 and are happy to report the distribution of 136 saplings and providing other support to girl children born to our employees till date. We remain committed and passionate towards this programme and are proud to be associated with the Inaugural Nanhi Chhaan School Essay Contest, 2014. It is an excellent opportunity to engage with India's youth and to positively impact the social agenda of the country'.

Mr. D. K. Jain, Group Chairman, Lumax Industries



"An integral part of Impact's vision is to have a robust and sustainable corporate social responsibility programme, for which, Nanhi Chhaan was started in the year 2008. Protecting girls and honouring our women has taken a special urgency today. We must find proactive ways to engage more citizens and lead us to make the change that society needs for protecting girls and empowering women. As one of its key objectives, Nanhi Chhaan seeks to propel that change through advocacy, actions and programmes. The School Essay Contest is one such programme that creates a platform of opportunity to raise awareness around socially relevant issues in schools across India. It brings students together for championing social causes and to foster discussion and debate on issues of national importance. Impact projects remains committed to supporting such initiatives."

Mr. Ajay Cheema, Director, Impact Projects Pvt. Ltd.



JCB - "As part of a construction machinery manufacturing company, our support to Nanhi Chhaan is part of our overall principle to empower women. Nanhi Chhaan's focus at this essay competition was on the malpractice of dowry – one of the worst forms of discrimination against women. And Nanhi Chhaan's larger focus on environment and the girl child highlights the increasing risks and vulnerability that a deteriorating environment has on women and girls – the primary fuel & water gatherers and the bearers of the next generation. We remain committed to our principles of business and social ethics and in our support to the work groups like Nanhi Chhaan are doing on the ground.

Mr. Vipin Sondhi, MD & CEO, JCB India



PI Industries - "The discussions and interaction by the young students on Dowry and it's ills was most inspiring and impressive. Witnessing what I did at the Nanhi Chhaan Essay Contest, I have all the hope and faith in this generation, and I wish all of them God Speed."

Mr. Salil Singhal, Chairman, PI Industries



"We, at UTC India, are pleased to be a part of the Nanhi Chhaan National Essay Contest. Education is one of the key areas of social responsibility for us and we strongly believe that moulding young minds at an early stage will have a lasting impact on the kind of citizens they will grow up to be. This contest is the perfect platform to raise awareness around socially relevant issues. I would like to commend Nanhi Chhaan and the schools associated for taking this initiative to the national level. Congratulations to the winners and all the children who participated".

Mr. Zubin Irani, President,
UTC Building & Industrial Systems (India)



Knowledge
Management



Event
Partner



Host
School



We request all of you - students, teachers, their families to join us in taking this pledge...



Save Environment, Save Girl Child, Save Humanity

Anti-Dowry Pledge

I promise never to give or take dowry and pledge that

- I will not accept dowry or extravagant wedding gifts or favours even if they are offered to me or my family.

- I will not give any dowry or wedding gifts that are demanded of me and my family and I will not associate with any family that makes such a demand.

- I will not marry/marry my daughters in to a family that gives or takes dowry in any form.

- I will not attend or support any weddings where I am aware that dowry and/or extravagant gifts have been demanded and given.

I take this pledge of my free will and seek internal strength to live up to my commitment.

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We envisage a larger interest and participation of schools as the competition enters the second year. We look forward to your participation in the Nanhi Chhaan National School Essay Contest, 2015

In case of any queries please contact the following:

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