

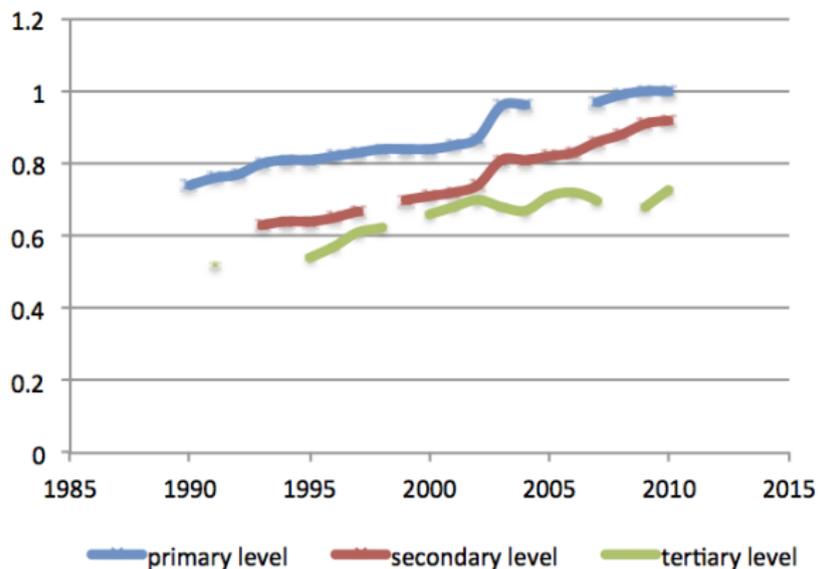
# The Persistence of Dowry in Modern India

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# Background

- Dowry: Cash, assets and gifts paid by the bride's side to groom's side before, during and after marriage.
- Continues to escape legal prohibitions enacted since 1960s.
- Became more widespread and inflationary during the last two decades (Rao 2002, Siwan 2007).
  - ① upto 6 times of a family's annual income (Rao 2002)
- The problem of dowry is intertwined with overall gender inequality.
- Persists despite contrasting outcomes predicted by modernization theories.

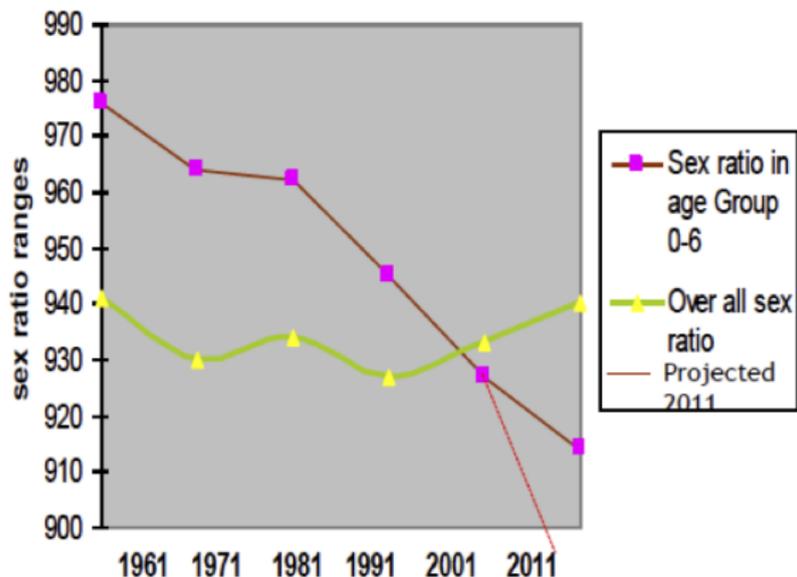
# Gender Parity Index for education enrollment



Source: UN data. Millennium Development Goals dataset

# Sex Ratio

Child Sex Ratio 0-6 and over all sex ratio India  
1961-2011



Source: Census of India

# Question

- Why does dowry still persist in India?

# Literature

- The economic literature on dowry can be grouped into three strands.
- Groom-price model (Becker 1991).
  - ① Demographic theories (marriage market squeeze)
  - ② Status based/caste based theories
- Bequest models (Zhang and Chan 1999, Botticini and Siow 2003)
  - ① Transfer of property to daughters.
- Hybrid models.
  - ① Arunachalam and Logan (2008).
  - ② Anderson (2010).

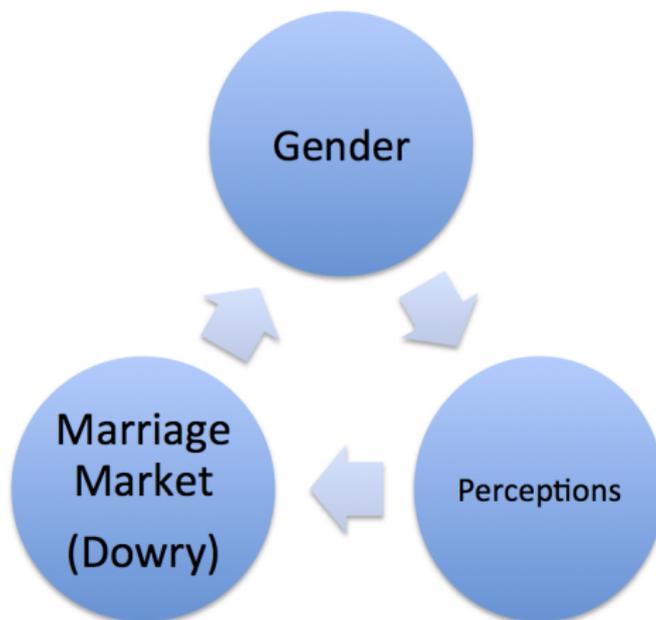
# Motivation

- The theories of groom-price and pre-mortem bequest models have been critiqued in other disciplines (Kishwar 1990, Sheel 1999, Oldenberg 2002, Majumdar 2004)
- The question of motives is an empirical one that requires qualitative data.
- Each agent could have heterogeneous motives, and there may be heterogeneity of motives among agents.

# Larger Theoretical framework

- Institutions are the laws, informal rules, norms and conventions. (Bowles 2004)
- Institutions and individual preferences and beliefs coevolve.(Bowles 2004)
- Gender as an institution.

# Co-evolution



# Hypothesis

- Is gender (as a social construct) a necessary condition for dowry to exist ?
- Corollary: Is dowry a necessary condition for the maintenance of existing gender relations?

# Data and Methodology

- 3 Urban + 3 Rural sites in India (North-South)
- 150 households
- 405 individuals
- Snowball Sample stratified by:
  - ① religion, caste, class
- Survey questionnaire for HH + Individual data
- Open ended Interviews for individuals



# Initial Impressions

- Following things are negotiated upon/demanded
  - 1 Cash
  - 2 Gold jewelry
  - 3 Property
  - 4 Consumer goods
  - 5 Vehicle
  - 6 Furniture
  - 7 Kitchenware
  - 8 Venue for marriage
  - 9 Menu and food quality for marriage
  - 10 Welcome gifts for the groom side
  - 11 Gifts for the groom side for various ceremonies and rituals.
  - 12 Number of clothes for family and friends of groom.

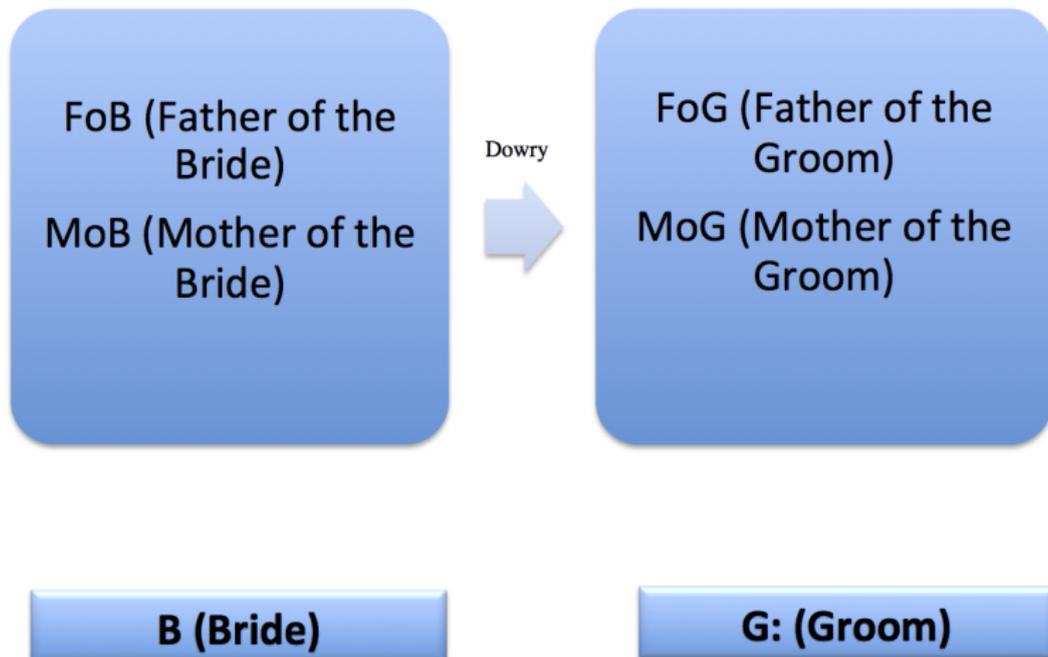
## Who makes the decision

- FoB (Father of the Bride): "The decision about groom's profile and financial negotiations is in the hands of parents and the decision about looks can be made by the daughter."
- MoB (Mother of the Bride): "For a girl it is important that we find the groom from the same class and culture because she has to go and live with the new family. So we prefer grooms from the same caste and same financial status."
- B (Bride): "Since the parents are getting you married and they are doing everything in their power to make you happy it is appropriate not to be involved in the financial decisions as they know the best. Also it is expected modesty on the part of the bride-to-be not to say what she wants for her marriage."

# Who makes the decision

- MoG (Mother of the Groom): "A good son always leaves the decision of choosing a wife to his mother."
- G (Groom): "The question of financial give and take is discussed among the elders of the family, but I go get involved in choosing the girl. However it is best that everyone agrees with my choice because it is important that my wife and the rest of the family gets along."

# Actors in the Marriage Market



# Motives

- FoB: "We have to show respect to the groom's family because we are indebted to them for they are not only going to provide for my daughter but will protect her and give her their family name."
- MoB: "A girls has to be gotten married as soon as we can. The day a daughter is born we know she is here with us as someone else's wealth (paraya dhan). We are trustees until she is married off."
- B: "It is always better that your parents arrange a marriage for you, even when you like someone it is better that the match is formally arranged as you have to face less social sanctions and life is much easier for you."

# Motives

- FoG: "The first criterion which is seen in a girl is that she must have a strong sense of modesty (sharam/haya) which helps her behave appropriately. A girl who does not know what is appropriate behavior in front of elders, is not good marriage material."
- MoG: "We want someone as a daughter-in-law who is educated and might work if the requirement arises. But she should not compromise her responsibility of doing housework and care work even when she is working."

# Motives

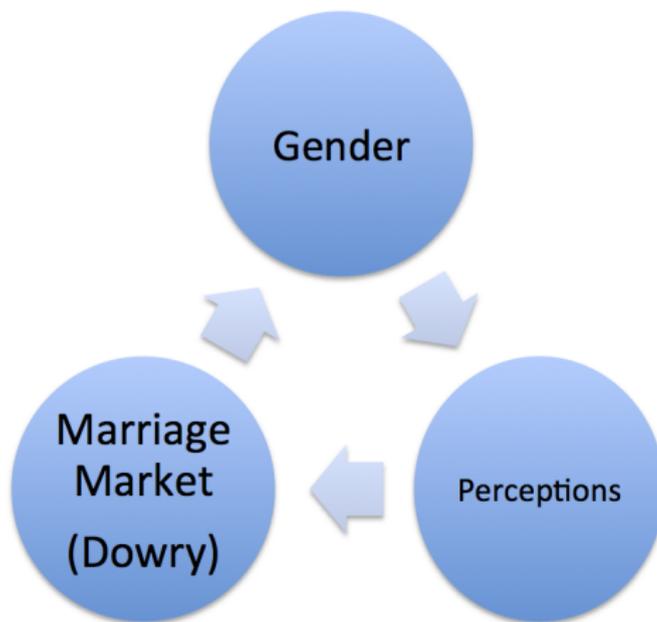
- G : "What really matters in the long term is that the girl should be able to adjust within my family. The rest does not matter much."
- G: "She should definitely be adept at managing the house and being capable of working outside is certainly a plus."

# Motives of Actors in the Marriage Market

Actor	Motivations
FoB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Financial Security</li><li>- Social Security</li><li>- Sexual Security</li></ul>
MoB	
B	Additionally risk-averse

Actor	Motivations
FoG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Household labor</li><li>- Reproductive labor</li><li>- Maintaining Household status</li><li>- Economic gain</li></ul>
MoG	
G	

# Co-evolution



## Perceptions about roles

- FoB: "The girl sees her mother and follows what she sees. A girl should be made well adept in housework. The girls who do not learn all this face lot of difficulties after marriage as it is the primary responsibility of a girl to take care of the house and raise children."
- MoB: "Education is a fall back option. It is the prerogative of the groom and his family whether they want her to work or not. Employment is not a must but options of employment adds to the fall back options in case she faces any difficulties later on in life."
- B: "It is assumed that after marriage the girl will take full responsibility of the household whether she is career oriented or a house wife. It is how things have been so we do not question it."

## Perceptions about roles

- FoG: "Now as more girls want to go out and work they find it difficult to juggle their dual responsibility. This causes a lot of problems in a joint household."
- MoG: "A wife should work outside home only when the family is facing economic hardships, otherwise her employment will disrupt the family structure."
- G: "She should definitely be adept at managing the house and being capable of working outside is certainly a plus."

## Perceptions about roles

- FoB: "The more we get our girl educated, the better the groom has to be. We have to look for a groom who matches her education and we have to arrange for more money accordingly. This is because the amount we spend on the weddings is determined by the groom's qualifications and income."
- FoG: "The boy should not be married before he is employed. He should be in a position to provide for his family."
- G: "A man gets married only after he get established financially."

# Perceptions about abilities

- FoB: "It is very difficult for a girl to lead an independent life she always needs a life partner."
- FoB: "Even when our daughter is educated and employed it is imperative for us to get her married"
- FoG: "It is for the man to provide and protect his family and that is how we bring up our sons to be."

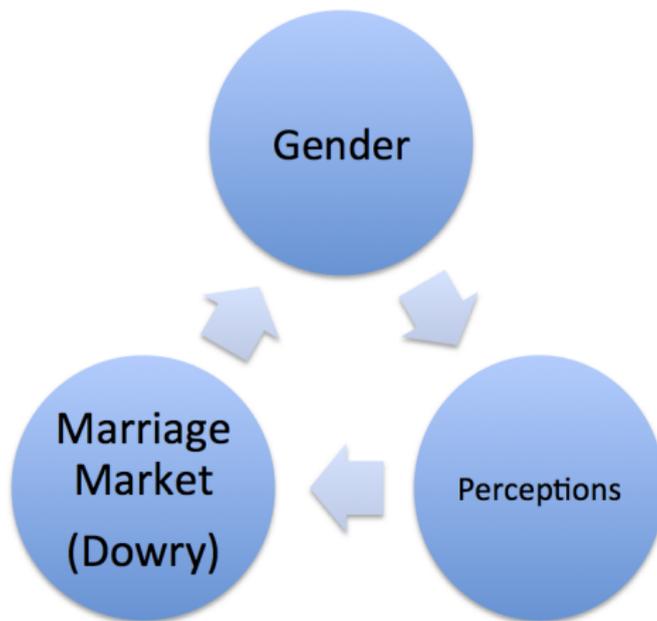
## Perceptions about property ownership

- FoB: "The daughter who is well-bred ('sanskari') never demands any share in property. She does have a legal right but no fundamental one."
- B: "We do have a legal right to the property but we are socialized into believing that we have no right over our parental property and it is not good behavior to think otherwise. In any case it is going only to our brothers and we should not resent that."

# Role of perceptions

- Social 'perceptions' about roles and abilities
  - 1 Primary role of male as a bread winner/provider
  - 2 Primary role of female as a house maker/care giver/responsible for maintaining household status
  - 3 Female as incapable of surviving as an independent person both financially and socially
  - 4 Male as capable of providing financial, social and sexual security

# Co-evolution



## 'Power' in Marriage Market

- FoB: "The prerogative to say the final yes lies with the groom's family. A good daughter never says yes or no directly."
- MoB: "The girl's side is always at the receiving end. Our daughter is going to live in their house so we have to behave in a way appropriate to our position."
- MoB: "Giving to a daughter and her matrimonial family is a lifelong process. We always have to show respect to the groom's family as their social status ('pad') is ranked higher than a bride's family."

## 'Power' in Marraige market structure

- FoG: "The age difference should be 4-5 years because if they are of the same age that will lead to a lot of tussles."
- MoG: "We have invested a lot in bringing up our son and he is going to provide for their daughter for the rest of her life. That is why the bride's side shows us respect."

# Marriage Market

- What is valued as what and by whom.
- Devaluation of one kind roles and abilities.
- One side gets market power.

# Initial Impressions

- Marriage Market
- Male as a commodity
  - ① has use value
  - ② has exchange value
- Female cannot become a commodity
  - ① has only use value

## Testing for the corollary

- FoB: "The girl is considered a burden as we have to pay a dowry for her."

# Next Steps

- Find a strategy for empirically testing my hypothesis.
- Customize a suitable model.