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Marriage Is Driving Tribal Families Into Debt In MP. These Activists Are Trying To Change That.

These activists are working with tribes people of Madhya Pradesh to cap marriage expenditures and prevent families from plunging into debt or having to sell off their lands to pay for their children's weddings.

In villages across Western Madhya Pradesh a group of tribal activists are campaigning with influential members to cap high-spending on weddings that's pushing rural families into debt.

Influences from non-tribal cultures and traditions as well as the growing practice of one-upmanship in marriages are some of the factors that are contributing to increasing costs of weddings in villages in the area. Instead of it being a special occasion that families look forward to, marriages are

becoming a huge burden to families as they simply cannot afford them.

Today, a typical marriage for these tribes-people can cost close to Rs. 5 lakh, an amount that for most is just too high.



In response to the issue, tribal activists associated with three organisations, Khedut Mazdoor Chetana Sangath (KMCS), Adivasi Ekta Parishad and Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti, have launched a campaign to cap spending

lavishly on weddings in an attempt to drive down the unaffordable costs burdening tribal families.

Families are taking on the huge pressure of financing weddings that they simply can't afford. Many are in pursuit of weddings that are bigger, have more food, more guests and more expensive outfits and are taking out loans with very high interests, which they are unable to pay, or selling off their land.

“Marriage is becoming a millstone on the neck of grooms, and it has become a sort of competition between tribal over who has the ‘most expensive bride’. This should end as it is ruining the tribal” social activist Tapan Bhattacharya told The Hindustan Times.

The campaign comes after Ranjeet Ranjan, the Congress MP from Supaul in Bihar, introduced a bill in Parliament aiming to cap the lavishness of Indian weddings. The proposed Marriages (Simple Solemnisation,

Compulsory Registration and Prevention of Wastage of Food Items) Bill, 2016 aims to 'prohibit extravagant and wasteful expenditure and show of wealth on marriages' on all marriages performed in the country and to prevent the wastage of food.

Amongst other things, the bill aims to cap wedding expenditures to Rs 5 lakh each for the bride and groom's family, make food wastage a criminal offence, limit the number of guests in attendance and the dishes served, and set up a welfare fund to which families spending over Rs 5 lakh will have to contribute to the wedding of girls from poor families. The penalties include imprisonment and fines.

The bill comes in recognition of how the growing 'trend or craze' to splurge on lavish weddings is causing the country's poor majority to take on high loans in pursuit of the same luxury, driving them **into**

overwhelming debt.



Weddings in rural India are becoming bigger and more lavish.

The group of activists has been working with key individuals in the tribal districts of Jhabua, Dhar, Alirajpur and Barwani in an attempt to come up with a consensus on the issue. A major meeting has been called for April 5 in Bhavra town of Alirajpur district to move the campaign forward.

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