

From Tradition to Modernity: The Role of Mehar in the Empowerment of Women in Contemporary Islamic Marriages

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Abstract

This study investigates how *Mehar* contributes to women's empowerment in modern Islamic marriages. In contrast to *Jahez* (dowry), which includes gifts from the bride's family, *Mehar* refers to the required monetary gift given by the groom to the bride under Islamic law. The study explores *Mehar's* historical, theological, sociocultural, and economic dimensions of *Mehar* and analyses relationship with women's rights and empowerment. Employing a qualitative review-based approach, the study utilizes secondary data collected from academic books, scholarly publications, and peer-reviewed journal articles about Islamic marriage, women's rights, gender equality. The results show that when *Mehar* is carried out in accordance with Islamic principles, it can enhance women's financial stability, autonomy, negotiating power, and social recognition. The study concludes that *Mehar* possesses significant potential to promote gender equality when practiced in accordance with Islamic values of justice dignity and mutual respect. To reinforce women's rights in contemporary Islamic societies, the study recommends promoting legal awareness, educational reforms, and the adoption of moderate and realistic *Mehar* practices.

Keywords: Muslim societies, Islamic law, Islamic marriage, Women's empowerment, Gender equality, Mehar and financial security

Introduction

Marriage in Islam is not just a social institution but it is also a legal and religious agreement which defines the rights and responsibilities of both men and women. One of the basic aspects of Islam, and of marriage in particular, is that of *Mehar* (Mehar) which is a monetary obligation that the groom must pay to the bride at the marriage. According to Islamic beliefs, *Mehar* is the privilege and right of the bride and is a sign of respect, dedication and financial security (Wani, 2001).

Unlike Jahez (dowry), which is a gift or property that is passed on to the bride's family, *Mehar* is meant to safeguard the dignity, independence and economic well-being of women. Islamic law clearly distinguishes between a dowry system that places financial hardship on the bride's family and *Mehar*. The Holy Quran has made it clear that *Mehar* belongs only to the bride, because it is written, "*Mehar* belongs to the wife", which translates to "*Mehar* is the wife's right".

“And give the women [upon marriage] their bridal gifts graciously” (Quran 4:4)

Traditional times, *Mehar* has been used as a protection for the rights of women when they marry. Islamic law has recognized the ownership and management of women over *Mehar*, and provided them with the right to do whatever they wish with it. Existing research indicates that *Mehar* provides married women with a feeling of financial independence and social acceptance (Ali, 2008).

Rehman (2025) evaluated that *Mehar* was structurally engineered as an unconditional, absolute financial obligation (Wajib) emphasizing that Islamic marital law is extremely protective of this female asset that the right of *Mehar* persists if it is openly omitted or supposedly given up at the inception of the marriage contract.

In contemporary Muslim states, however, the idea and practice of *Mehar* have undergone a significant change in the light of the development of gender roles, urbanization, globalization and changing socioeconomic conditions and the reasons. Some scholars believe that *Mehar* can serve as an empowering instrument that enhances the economic status and bargaining power of women, while others argue that overly rigid interpretations of *Mehar* and its expectations could reinforce social inequalities and patriarchal systems (Okumuş & Gümüş, 2025).

Consequently, the relationship between *Mehar* and women's empowerment remains a subject of intense academic debate. While *Mehar* inherently serves as a mechanism for social standing, legal protection, and financial security, its liberating potential is increasingly undermined by the commercialization of marriage customs and exorbitant material expectations.

Integrating historical, religious, socio-economic perspectives, this work provides a critical analysis of *Mehar*'s significance in advancing women's empowerment in contemporary Islamic contexts.

Background History

Mehar is an integral part of the Islamic marriage from early days of Islamic jurisprudence. Before the advent of Islam, money was paid to the bride's guardian, not to the bride herself, as was customary in many Arab communities. Islam has changed this custom by declaring that *Mehar* is the only right and property of a woman.

Islamic thinkers believe that *Mehar* is not a sale, but rather an expression of respect, accountability and protection. The Quran and Hadiths give the female the absolute right to her *Mehar*, and it may not be taken by anyone, even her husband or family, without her consent (Amini, 2012).

The understanding and practice of *Mehar* among the Muslim civilizations evolved over time. In this way, the role of *Mehar* in providing financial security for women in the face of divorce or widowhood was reserved, and it was in this sense that it continued its empowering role in some societies. In other circumstances, however, a high aspiration of *Mehar* rendered marriage an expensive affair. *Mehar* is a historical concept that, as contemporary researchers believe, which must be viewed in the broader context of the discussion on women rights in Muslim communities, Islamic law reform, and gender justice.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine historical and religious foundations of *Mehar* within the framework of Islamic marriage.
2. To explore the role of *Mehar* in promoting women's social and economic empowerment.
3. To investigate the contemporary debates, practices and challenges surrounding *Mehar* in Muslim societies.

Significance of the Research

This work builds on the existing literature by critically analyzing the linkages between *Mehar* and women's empowerment in the present-day Islamic communities. The study helps to shed light on *Mehar's* role in contributing to gender equality, financial security and autonomy and analyzing its impact from a sociological, theological and gender perspective. It also highlights existing problematic matters, misrepresentation with regards to Islamic marriage traditions and policy implications.

Methodology

In order to investigate the role of *Mehar* in the empowerment of women in modern Islamic marriages, this study used a qualitative review-based research approach with secondary data. Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic publications about Islamic marital customs, women's rights, gender equality, and Islamic family law were the sources of pertinent literature.

The databases searched were Google Scholar, JSTOR, Research Gate, and University repositories using keywords such as *Mehar*, Mehar, Islamic marriage, women empowerment, gender equality, and Muslim family law. Pertinent scholarly materials were searched initially using database search. Relevant, reliable, and thematically suitable sources were screened and fifteen were selected for in-depth study and analysis for their relevance to the study purpose. Five monographs, books, and theological and philosophical literature and ten peer reviewed journal articles were used to extract the historical development of Islamic family law, state level policy formation, and feminist theoretical critique and ground the study's definitions within foundational Islamic jurisprudence frameworks.

These studies were selected as they explicitly addressed link of *Mehar*, Islamic marital custom and empowerment of women in Muslim societies in the modern world.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and academic publications in English language published from 2000–2025. Relevant literature regarding Islamic marriage, right of women, equality of men and women, and *Mehar* were chosen for the review and analysis. The study did not include non-scholarly blogs and webpages, duplicate studies, irrelevant studies, and non-academic sources. In order to find recurring themes with

respect to women's financial security, autonomy, legal rights, socio-cultural practices, and patriarchal structures in the contemporary Islamic marriage, a thematic analysis approach was used. Following theoretical perspectives were used for the analysis:

Table 1*Major Theoretical Perspectives on Mehar*

Perspective	Main Focus	Influence on Women
Feminist Theory	Gender inequality and patriarchy	Can empower or commodify women
Islamic Legal Perspective	Women's legal and financial rights	Protects women's economic security
Sociological Perspective	Cultural and social practices	Influenced by social class and norms
Economic Empowerment Model	Financial independence	Strengthens autonomy and agency

Source: Prepared by author (2026)

Results***Mehar* as Source of Women Empowerment**

The concept of *Mehar* is a significant aspect in the context of women's empowerment in Islamic marriages. *Mehar* in Islamic teachings is not only a ceremonial contribution but an essential legal and economic right that aims to give women with dignity, acknowledgment and financial security. *Mehar* plays a role in many Muslim communities as a socio-economic consideration and can impact upon women's autonomy, bargaining power and social status in marriage relations. The liberative potential of *Mehar*, however, lies in other, more overarching

cultural, legal and patriarchal settings, which vary between countries and historical periods. Recent academic discourse present divergent perspectives regarding the importance of *Mehar* to women's rights and gender equality (Tucker, 2008).

***Mehar* as a Financial Protection**

One of the greatest roles of *Mehar* in Islamic marriage is financial protection of women. As per Islamic law, the *Mehar* is the right of wife and in the hands of her she has full authority and ownership over the *Mehar* irrespective of her marital status (Wani, 2001). Though it may be different from the cultural dowry that can cause financial troubles for the bride's family, *Mehar* should be a means of protection for the woman in marriage, giving her own financial security. Islamic scholars state that this is an extension of the bigger Islamic concept of the respect and monetary privileges of women (Amini, 2012).

Mahr functions as a direct material endorsement of a woman's independent legal and social dignity, establishing her as an autonomous economic actor from day one of her marriage (Rehman 2025).

In the past, *Mehar* was a monetary guarantee for women during marital discord, spousal abandonment, divorce, or widowhood. *Mehar* can be used as a temporary solution to the economic insecurity of women, and aid in reducing risk of social or marital instability in circumstances where women are dependent on men for their livelihood or have few economic alternatives (Ali, 2008). Tucker (2008) takes the view that according to Islamic Family law women's rights to *Mehar* are legal, and cannot be denied or taken without consent. This legal protection contrasts with many of the traditional marriage practices in which women do not have much ownership over marital property.

New studies have shown that women who keep the ownership and management of their *Mehar* are also more economically confident and have the power to make decisions within the home. *Mehar* may also help women to become financially independent and they may invest in education, healthcare, entrepreneurship or personal investment. This way, women can improve their socio-economic status in society and family (Islahi, 2020). In different Muslim countries, women use the amount of *Mehar* as they save money, as a relief in monetary difficulties or they use the amount of *Mehar* as a capital for investment and thereby achieve greater financial safety.

However, the role of *Mehar* in the economy is very different across cultures and geographies. In some societies the amounts of *Mehar* are symbolic and small, and thus don't have much of an impact on women's economic autonomy. At times, rigorous and unattainable requirements of *Mehar* can make marriage an economic strain and cause hardship on socio-economic conditions of families (Jamatia, 2022). This can undermine the empowerment goal of *Mehar* and instead focus on affordability and social status for the goods instead of caring and protecting women.

Feminist academics argue, for instance, that *Mehar* can help women gain access to financial resources but that for women to be empowered by it, they must be able to assert control over their financial rights. Women might be pressured to waive or misappropriate their *Mehar* by their spouse or family members in a patriarchy where they lose the benefits of their *Mehar* that they had envisioned (Mahmood, 2005). Therefore, relationship of *Mehar* with financial empowerment must be comprehended in the context of the wider issue of gender relations and legal protection and women's access to economic resources.

Women's Bargaining Power and Autonomy

Besides financial security, *Mehar* can also have a significant role in women's independence and negotiating power in marriage. Gender studies and Islamic law scholars assert that women can be more involved in the process of decisions at home and more capable to negotiate a marriage relationship if they have their own income (Islahi, 2020). Since *Mehar* is kind of the wife's property, it may help to make her more feel she has control of part of her life and reduce her overall economic reliance on the husband or extended family.

Economically, empowerment is believed to be enhanced by the provision of financial resources, which can increase the decision-making power of an individual or group in their personal and social lives. Therefore, *Mehar* provides a bargaining power for women in the context of Islamic marriage to have more influence over issues relating to home finances, children education, healthcare decisions, and personal mobility (Nurnazli et al., 2024). Women who have their own money have greater capacity to endure exploitation, and are better able to assert their legal and social rights in marriage.

Others believe *Mehar* is significant symbolically because it accepts the legal status of women and their social significance in the context of Islamic marriage contracts, which is the essence of marriage (Zulaikha, 2024). Gender equality in land rights offsets traditional practices where women did not have the right to own land and participate in the economy. In this aspect, *Mehar* can help to bring about not just economic empowerment, but also psychological empowerment for women by increasing their confidence, social recognition and sense of dignity.

But the uplifting results of *Mehar* are not uniform and might vary with regard to social standing and education, legal system and traditions. Under a patriarchal system legal recognition of *Mehar* may not necessarily lead to women's access to and control over *Mehar*. In some

instances, women may have to settle for symbolic *Mehar* and in others they may not even know that they have a legal claim to unpaid *Mehar* if there is any problem or divorce in the marriage (Okumuş & Gümüş, 2025). But 'mere legal rights' do not ensure empowerment without social awareness, education and institutional protection.

Feminist criticisms also highlight how some understandings of *Mehar* may inadvertently reinforce gender hierarchies when marriage is primarily understood as a monetary transaction. It has been argued by the critics that women empowerment is not limited to the payment of cash to the wives but it should also be reflected in other values of equality, participation and social justice (Mahmood, 2005). Hence, the empowering role of *Mehar* still can be seen as an integral part of wider socio-cultural contexts and gender relations in society.

Socio-Cultural Issues

While in Islamic tradition *Mehar* is an empowering practice for women, in the current Muslim societies this practice is distorted socially and culturally leading to the goal or purpose of empowerment being potentially compromised. In many communities, *Mehar* has increasingly become associated with social status, class distinctions, and inter-family conflict rather than its original purpose of safeguarding women's welfare and financial protection (Jamatia, 2022). Marriage has increasingly become an economically burdensome institution for individuals and families, driven by escalating societal expectations, conspicuous displays of wealth, and the commercialization of cultural customs.

A serious problem is the growing tendency to associate high *Mehar* values with social status, family honour and education and professional status of the bride. When a girl's expectations are unrealistic, it delays her wedding, puts a financial burden on men and increases economic inequalities in certain societies (Nurnazli et al., 2024). Scholars argue that these

customs may put obstacles in the way of young people looking to get married and go against the Islamic precept of simplicity and moderation in marriage.

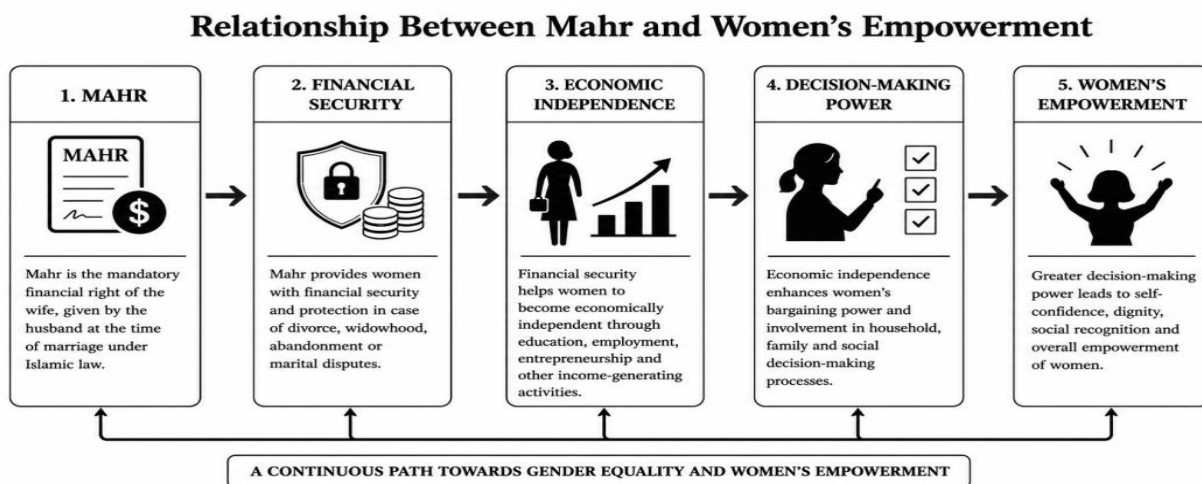
Another critical concern is the shifting role of Mehar in modern marriages, where it is frequently reduced to a nominal or purely symbolic gesture. In certain cultural contexts, a token Mehar fails to provide women with substantive economic security or long-term financial independence, with scholars warning that such minimal arrangements can compromise female empowerment (Ali, 2008). Conversely, in other regional contexts, exorbitant demands for Mehar run the risk of commercializing matrimonial traditions and fostering a highly transactional view of women and marriage.

The patriarchal cultural norms also hinder women's ability to secure the full benefits of *Mehar*. In some cases, the family expectations, social stigma or concerns about the threat of marital conflict can cause women to feel coerced to return, surrender to their husband, or deny their rights of *Mehar* (Mahmood, 2005). These actions are limiting *Mehar's* empowering role in marriage and are in violation of women's rights as per law. In addition, many women may not be able to recover unpaid *Mehar* in a divorce/separation successful, due to a lack of legal knowledge and limited access to family courts. These challenges have led some Muslim communities and reformist academics to advocate for moderate and symbolic *Mehar* practices with women's rights, ethics and mutual respect taking precedence over material competition. Increasingly, educational campaigns and legislative changes, alongside an interpretation of Islamic family law that respects women's dignity, have made it more important to restore the original purpose of *Mehar* as a tool of justice, dignity and financial protection for women. Educational awareness building, legal changes and the interpretation of Islamic family law,

which takes into account the dignity of women, have made the re-establishment of the original purpose of *Mehar* as a tool for justice, dignity and financial security for women more important.

Thus, while *Mehar* has tremendous potential to promote the empowerment of women, it will have a strong impact on women's empowerment in the social, cultural, legal and economic setting in which it is practiced. To assess the relevance of *Mehar* in today's Muslim nations one needs to understand these issues.

Figure 1



Source: Prepared by author (2026)

Contemporary Disputes

The role of *Mehar* in modern Islamic marriages has been discussed extensively by scholars of Islamic studies, sociologists, gender scholars, feminist scholars in the fields of family law. The current debate on *Mehar* has focused on the question whether *Mehar* truly promotes the empowerment of women or some cultural practices associated with *Mehar* continue to uphold patriarchal traditions and gender inequalities. Since the advent of globalization, modernization, legal changes, women's education and changing gender roles in Muslim countries, these conversations have taken greater significance (Mahmood, 2005).

From a current point of view, one of the main considerations in the studies is that of the importance of *Mehar* as a means of protecting the legal and financial rights of women. Those who are proponents of this view emphasize that in Islamic law, women have the right to own *Mehar* independently and thus treat women as autonomous players in marriage (Tucker, 2008). *Mehar* is believed to provide financial security and social recognition and bargaining power particularly to women in societies where women can access inheritance and secure jobs or independent income is limited (Islahi, 2020). In this regard, *Mehar* elevates the economy of women in the family because they are provided with personal funds that can be used for education, health services, business or protection if there are difficulties with their spouse.

Furthermore, it is argued that the empowering interpretation of *Mehar* represents broader Islamic values such as justice, dignity, and responsibility towards women. In the Islamic perspective, *Mehar* is not a business transaction, but an acknowledgement of women's rights and value in marriage (Amini, 2012). More modern Islamic legal scholars have thus recommended that *Mehar* was originally a system of financial protection for women, challenging the patriarchal system of the past that did not recognize women as owners or as having financial rights (Ali, 2008). In many Muslim societies, the payment of the *Mehar* is still a means of economic assistance and social security, particularly for divorced or widowed women.

However, critics say this concept of *Mehar* is not always being implemented as it was meant in the original Islamic law in many modern states. According to feminist scholars and sociologists, the cultural misinterpretation, commercialization of marriage and patriarchal social systems have turned the concept of *Mehar* into an institution that could be detrimental to the empowerment of women and cause a sense of economic burden (Jamatia, 2022). In certain tribes such an expectation of a very high *Mehar* is associated with social standing, honour of the

family, or class standing, which makes marriage an economic transaction based on material competition, rather than respect and equality. Moreover, critics argue that playing up the *Mehar* requirement could put financial pressure on men and families, and cause marital relationships to be strained, along with creating social tensions (Nurnazli et al., 2024). In certain situations, however, *Mehar* conversations are very commercialized, and reflect social hierarchy, thereby deflating the moral and spiritual dimensions of Islamic marriage. The financial valuation of women in marriage rituals is a concern raised by the feminist scholars as it may reinforce patriarchal ideologies and result in women being perceived as financial commodities as opposed to marriage partners (Mahmood, 2005).

Ultimately, one must consider whether treating *Mehar* as a symbolic formality actively harms women's long-term financial independence. In some modern metros, symbolic *Mehar* is growing, with small sums of money and/or religious tokens being used. Proponents argue that symbolic *Mehar* encourages simplicity, relieves economic constraints and is in keeping with Islamic beliefs that urge moderation in marriage ceremonies. However, others contend that the symbolic *Mehar* might compromise the economic independence of women, as it may limit the economic protection provided for women by Islamic law (Okumuş & Gümüş, 2025). Modern feminist scholars also request that *Mehar* be read in "new ways", with a focus on the autonomy, equality and mutual cooperation of the spouses in marriage, and not only in terms of financial obligations. Women empowerment should not only be about monetary compensation, according to these experts, it should be about other aspects like education, legal awareness, political engagement and equal decision making in the family structure (Mahmood, 2005). Modern feminist readings attempt, therefore, to work out a compromise between Islamic principles and

contemporary feminist discourses of 'human rights' with the help of sensitive reinterpretations of marriage and family law.

Furthermore, the legal reforms in some Muslim-majority countries have raised concerns over the regulation and enforcement of *Mehar* rights. Divorce and marital disagreements were the subject of some of the changes brought in by certain governments and legal systems to safeguard the rights of women to receive *Mehar*. However, the effectiveness of such changes relies heavily on the legal frameworks, cultural practices and availability of legal professionals and legal aid services, such as family courts, to women (Tucker, 2008).

The modern debate over *Mehar* is just a continuation of the bigger issues of tradition and modernity, religion and culture, and patriarchy and gender equality in Muslim countries. Numerous researchers do not yet view *Mehar* as an instrument of women empowerment, but others contend that the actual impact of *Mehar* depends heavily on the social, cultural, economic and legal context in which it is set. Thus, the most effective way to understand *Mehar* is to view it from a complex angle that recognizes its potential to empower, but also that it is limited in its utility in the present society, where inequities in structure and position may limit its utility.

Naz and Jahangir (2024) identify that the systemic subversion of *Mehar* stems from widespread legal illiteracy and a lack of state oversight. Their policy framework advocates for the mandatory standardization of clauses within the marriage contract (*Nikah Nama*) and state-enforced premarital counseling.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the meaning and implications of *Mehar* in the empowerment of women in the current Islamic marriage from various perspectives of history, theology, social, cultural and economic aspects. The results reveal that *Mehar* holds great

significance for the Islamic family law, and has enormous potential to function as an institution for women which ensures financial rights, dignity, autonomy and social respect. *Mehar* is an expected right of the woman, and a means to guarantee financial stability and security in marriage, as per Islamic beliefs (Tucker, 2008).

The results of the study indicate that *Mehar*, if conducted as an Islamic ritual, can have a positive impact on women empowerment by enhancing their finances, negotiation power and involvement in the household decision-making. Women having marital status of independent financial sources can go for education, entrepreneurship, health and development and at the same time minimize their dependence on their husband's economy (Islahi, 2020). Therefore, *Mehar* can play a dual role as an economic institution but also a symbol of recognition of women's legal status and social worth in Muslim nations.

However, the study also highlights the fact that there are larger cultural, patriarchal and socio-economic institutions at play which may limit the empowering potential of the use of *Mehar*. In many societies, it is seen that *Mehar* has been turned into an economic burden and social distortion due to commercialization of marriage customs, over-demanding of *Mehar*, struggle for social prestige and patriarchal interpretations (Jamatia, 2022). These misunderstandings might weaken the moral foundation of Islamic marriage and cause a lack of gender equality rather than empowerment of women.

The data also suggest that the meaning and role of *Mehar* varies widely between Muslim societies with respect to legal systems, social organization, education and cultural traditions and gender norms. In some modern Muslim societies for instance, *Mehar* is linked with moderate and symbolic forms which are focused on equality and respect, while in other societies, it remains linked with material status and patriarchal authority. So, the concept of empowerment of the

Mehar has to be viewed within its social context. This study also identifies several important gaps in the current literature, such as the absence of comparative studies, the absence of psychological studies, absence of interdisciplinary analysis and the absence of study on urban-rural differences on *Mehar* practices. The gaps highlight the need for further empirical and theoretical research on the relationship between *Mehar* and women's autonomy, gender justice, and gender social change in today's Muslim countries.

The study suggests that *Mehar* can be a positive institution which can champion the women's rights, economic security and social empowerment, if handled in an Islamic manner of justice, dignity and equality. But this liberating potential can only be realized through a broader knowledge of the law, reform of education and a gender-based interpretation of the Quranic family law and social engagement, in order to unmask the distortions of marriage customs in Islam that are rooted in a patriarchy. The future of *Mehar* in modern-day Islamic societies will ultimately depend on the capacity of the legal institutions, religious scholars, policy makers and communities to maintain the original ethical purpose of *Mehar* while at the same time adjusting it to the social and modern realities, and contemporary understanding of gender equality.

Study Limitations

The research is qualitative and examines the existing literature on *Mehar* and women empowerment in light of the current state of Islamic marriages and secondary analysis of such data. The results are constrained by the availability and extent of existing academic sources that are relevant to the study, as 12 academic sources were selected for detailed analysis.. The primary sources of data are not from the field, but from interviews or survey answers from women in different Muslim societies. Further, differences in how *Mehar* is practiced in other cultures, legal systems and regions could affect the applicability of the results to all Muslim

groups. Future study should include empirical and comparative study on the relationship of *Mehar* and women empowerment in various socio-cultural context.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, some suggestions are forwarded which will improve the positive role of *Mehar* in supporting women's empowerment and gender equality in modern marital relations.

Governments, educational institutions, religious organizations and civil society should take all possible measures to increase the awareness of the public about the original purpose of *Mehar* in Islam. Many of the cultural misunderstandings and distortions of *Mehar* are due to lack of knowledge and understanding of legal and religious matters among families and within the community. Thus, it is important that educational campaigns, seminars, media programs and community work emphasize the fact that *Mehar* is not to be used as a means of economic competition or social prestige but to ensure women's dignity, security and legal rights (Amini, 2012).

Secondly, there is a need to encourage moderate and symbolic *Mehar* practices, in line with the simple and impartial notions of Islam, by the government and religious authorities. Sometimes high expectations of marriage can result in economic pressures, postponement of marriage and increased social inequity. Ethical and spiritual relevance of *Mehar* traditions can be maintained and the commercialization of marriage can be reduced by promoting balanced and reasonable *Mehar* traditions (Jamatia, 2022).

Thirdly, more legal safeguards need to be provided for women's financial rights when it comes to the *Mehar*. In Muslim-majority societies, the unpaid *Mehar* along with the *Mehar* system in the family laws and court systems of these societies should be accessible for women at

divorce, separation, and marital conflict without any barriers or obstacles. Legal reforms should also involve toughening up enforcement measures and making it easier for women to use family courts and legal assistance services (Tucker, 2008).

Fourthly, on the more general level, governments and development agencies must encourage women's education, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and economic autonomy. While *Mehar* can lead to financial security for women, empowerment is ultimately about access to long-term educational and economic opportunities which increase women's autonomy and their participation in society (Islahi, 2020). Policies aiming at enhancing women's literacy, vocational training and financial inclusion can increase the overall empowering impacts of *Mehar* in marriage.

Fifthly, the Islamic legal scholars and reformers need to advocate for gender-sensitive interpretation of the Islamic family laws which focus on equality, partnership, justice and autonomy of the woman in marriage. It is important to note that contemporary interpretations of *Mehar* should not be confined to a transactional interpretation but should focus on mutual respect, ethical responsibility and women's human dignity (Mahmood, 2005). These reinterpretations could help to reconcile Islamic law with contemporary interpretations of gender equality and human rights.

Sixthly, more comparative and interdisciplinary studies need to be conducted to explore the diverse experiences of *Mehar* in various Muslim countries. Future research should study psychological, political, economic and sociological aspects of *Mehar* considering differences of class, ethnicity, rural-urban and legal systems. Specifically, there is a need to carry out more empirical research on the experiences of women seeking *Mehar* rights in the family court and legal institutions.

Lastly, there must be collaboration between community leaders, legislators, educators and religious bodies in combating against the culture of patriarchy that is affecting the rights of women in marriage. Such social reforms should focus on gender equality, legal awareness and women's participation in decision making processes to restore the original Islamic aim of *Mehar* as a means of dignity, protection and empowerment of women in current Muslim cultures.

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Conflict of Interest: Author (s) declared no conflict of interest

Citation: Munaf, S., Iqbal, S., & Tahir, M. (2026). From tradition to modernity: The role of *Mehar* in the empowerment of women in contemporary Islamic marriages. *Journal of Social Practices*, 2(1) 31-52.

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