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## Grooms pay dowry for French brides

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PUDUCHERRY: [Marry](#) in Puducherry, honeymoon for the rest of your life in Paris. But first, dish out. In this exotic former French colony, young men are making a beeline for French belles, with starry eyes, pounding hearts - and bulging wallets.

But marital bliss doesn't come cheap. The brides, Indian-origin French citizens, demand and get dowries between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 50 lakh.

"This is the trend in Puducherry for the last few decades. Families here want French daughters-in-law so that their sons can get French nationality and become rich.

Newly wed men could earn a fortune in France and enjoy a slew of welfare measures extended by the government there," said a 60-year-old Indian-born French citizen settled in Puducherry. The man, who did not wish to reveal his identity, himself got a hefty dowry for his daughter.

"We sought Rs 50 lakh from the groom's family for the marriage. They offered an advance of Rs 10 lakh and promised to pay the rest in instalments. The marriage took place two years ago and the couple is settled happily in France," he added. Former French MP (Mousier le Conseiller) and retired Lt Col H Mouhamad Moustafa says it is quite common for

eligible bachelors in this Union territory to pay fat dowries to brides, depending on "socio-economic status" and job prospects awaiting them in France. For good measure, grooms throw in perks like taking on the marriage expenses.

A Regis, who works for a private company in Puducherry, says there are several instances of older or divorced women with French nationality marrying relatively younger men from economically weaker sections.

"Last year, my 25-year-old cousin [married](#) a 36-year-old divorcee who has a teenage daughter from her first marriage, just to get a French nationality," he said.

Where there's booming business, can brokers be far behind? Brokers collect details of Indian-born French national families in the territory and lure the [bride's](#) parents with promises of a big dowry. They are well-rewarded for their efforts. Some brokers have reportedly received commissions of up to Rs 2 lakh.

But not everyone approves. Says marriage broker Rajammal, "It is a pity that parents sell their own daughters. They want to exploit the demand for French [brides](#) and get lakhs of rupees for giving their daughters in marriage. I was furious when the father of a potential bride demanded Rs 2 lakh when I approached him to seek his daughter's hand for a good Tamil groom."

The French consulate too is coming down hard on 'marriages for gain'. The consulate has been putting newly-wed couples seeking visas through the wringer to ensure that the marriages are not just a means of obtaining French citizenships.

With officials keenly scrutinising the 'marriages of convenience' and grilling the couples, it has become more difficult to register such marriages now.

Newly-wed couples even stand the risk of their marriages getting cancelled.

French consulate public relations officer R Ananth said the consulate works in close coordination with the local government in effectively carrying out its various functions, including registration of [marriages](#) and issuing visas for those wanting to study, invest or holiday in France.

The French consulate here has registered about 2,500 marriages in the last four years. About 50 to 60 marriages are waiting for clearance under French civil law.

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