



Child Marriage- A Social crime, in the context of Madhya Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Among the sixteen rituals in Indian culture, marriage rituals have special importance. Seeing the evils of child marriage, social reformers from time to time took measures to create public awareness. The Government of India has made a strict law in this regard and has legally prohibited marriage of girls below the age of eighteen years and boys below the age of twenty-one years. Yet child marriages are continuing to take place. Child marriage violates the rights of children and puts them at risk of violence, exploitation and sexual abuse. A girl who gets married at an early age reduces her ability to earn and contribute to the community. She is at increased risk of becoming a victim of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS.

This evil practice is more prevalent in villages rather than cities. Marrying at a young age reduces the cost of marriage and does not have to pay dowry. The belief that the elderly will attain heaven by seeing their granddaughter's marriage while they are alive are also major obstacles in stopping this practice. In today's time, when love marriage is more popular, child marriages taking place at a young age later become the cause of discord and conflicts in marital life. Many times the problem of divorce arises. Due to child marriage, we are suffering its consequences today in the form of deterioration in women's health, hindrance in balanced development and increase in maternal and child mortality. Basically, illiteracy in the society. And due to lack of awareness, child marriage has made deep roots in the society. Even today, people with medieval thinking consider daughters as someone else's wealth or a burden. To eradicate this curse from our society, everyone will have to become aware and end this evil.

INTRODUCTION-;

Child marriage has been prevalent in India for centuries and it is not a particular religion but is a long-running practice in all religions, communities and classes. At present this practice is seen more in rural areas. The main reasons behind child marriage are factors like poverty, illiteracy, patriarchy.

Child marriage means that marriage when the boy or the girl or both are below the prescribed age for marriage. At present the age limit for boys is 21 years and for girls it is 18 years. If any person marries before this prescribed age then it will be termed as child marriage. Child marriages are largely arranged by the family, where consent has no place. But child marriage done with consent is also not legally valid. At present, child marriage can be declared void or voided by any one person.

Madhya Pradesh is the first state in the country in which Lado campaign was started in 2013 for the prevention of child marriage. The main objective of Lado campaign is to end the practice of child marriage with community participation along with positive change in the mentality of the people. The report of the Center in which The data sent by the state was compiled. It was revealed that in the last 3 years, 8966 child marriages were performed in Tamil Nadu followed by 8348 in Karnataka, 8324 in West Bengal, 4440 in Telangana, 3416 in Assam, 3316 in Maharashtra, 2048 in Orissa, 1206 and 1206 in Kerala.

Let us tell you that in the last two-three years, girls themselves have been giving information about child marriage to Child Line. to a figure, 228 cases were reported in the year 2021. No matter how strict the government should make laws and run public awareness campaigns regarding child marriage, but Due to lack of awareness and social conditions, the process of child marriage is not stopping.

Key Word- Child Marriage, communities, Madhya Pradesh, Akshaya Tritiya

Review of Literature-

There are many studies available on child marriage. Most of them are demographic in nature looking at the mean age at marriage as a proxy of child marriage and going into its correlates such as economic and educational backwardness of certain communities or families and some of their social and cultural characteristics. These studies do not go beyond simple associations or correlations with a view to discover the basic causes of child marriage. As a result, we do not have adequate knowledge of the conditions under which child marriages came into vogue.

According to Saraswat (2006), 'Child Marriages exist in feudal societies where the Nagnika concept was prevalent. Parents were made to believe that if they did not get their daughters married before puberty, they would go to hell. Indian tradition places a high premium on virginity before marriage.

A number of social, health and economic disadvantages are associated with early marriage. While existing data do not draw conclusions regarding whether early marriage alone causes these adverse outcomes, it is likely that the links between early marriage, poverty, low educational attainment and other variables in diverse settings have found that married girls are likely to have frequent unprotected sexual relationships. According to Miller and Lester, 2003, 'Marriage dramatically increases the likelihood and pressures of childbearing. The first-time mothers below 16, in addition to the normal risks and responsibilities of childbearing, face an increased risk of maternal and infant mortality' **(Miller and Lester, 2003)**

Madhya Pradesh-

Despite the formulation of various laws and legislations to check child marriages, it is continuing unabated in the tribal belts of Shajapur and Bhopal districts of Madhya Pradesh. The departments responsible for ensuring prevention of child marriage, such as the District Probation Office and police officials, have had a limited effect. Besides, politicians of the concerned districts, in particular those belonging to the tribal communities, do not effectively engage themselves with the prevention of child marriages, primarily due to their own vested electoral gains. However, despite these setbacks, the MP Home Ministry has intervened in numerous child marriages and has successfully stopped them Madhya Pradesh, 10 villages were selected from two districts, Bhopal and Shajapur.

These were Misrode, Neelbar, Ratibar, Barkhera Nathu and Berkheri from the Bhopal district, and Beraksha, Mullakheri, Tilawat Govind, Sunera, and Sundarari from Shajapur district. The overall literacy rate in the State of Madhya Pradesh as compared to other states was low, and men were more literate than women. As per the religious orientation of the villagers, 90% were Hindu, 9.6% Muslims and the remaining 0.4% followed other religions. Roughly 34.4% of the villagers belonged to the SC/ST category, 41.6% were OBCs and the remaining 2.4% belonged to other categories.

The village Sunera is situated 15 kms away from Shajapur and was mainly Muslim-dominated with the presence of Dalits and backward people

Methodology-

Child marriage is prevalent in the villages around Chhindwara Jabalpur in Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. While living in Indore, I have observed that child marriage is done in a traditional manner and it has also been observed that most of the families do so due to poverty and discrimination in education and girl child. Apart from Indore, cases of child marriage are also seen in Bhopal, Ujjain and Dewas

Qualitative research methods were used in some districts of MP namely Balaghat, chhindwara, jabalpur, indore Dhar, dewas to examine social norms, positive role models, community engagement, and government level schemes related to child marriage. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, state level stakeholder meetings, and key informant interviews were used to explore specific themes with a variety of participants. The primary data collection is supplemented with secondary analysis to provide the historical, economic, and political contexts at the district level

Study objectives-

The purpose of the study was to unpack social norms and understand

- 1) Fears of fathers, uncles, and mothers who marry their daughters early,
- 2) Motives of fathers, uncles, and mothers who delay marriage of their daughters,
- 3) Attitudes of religious and other key opinion leaders on the issue,
- 4) To identify role models in the community who have changed norms, their motivation and responses from the community,
- 5) To understand community response to legislation and policies on delaying marriage,
- 6) To capture experiences and opinions of administrative representatives implementing legislation and policies,
- 7) To identify organisations, networks, and platforms which can be leveraged for catalysing change, and
- 8) To understand the viable alternatives to marriage that already exist as well as what communities consider viable alternatives.

Conclusion & Analysis-

The practice of child marriage in the study areas is characterized by the fact that both the bride and the groom are underage, sometimes as young as five or six years old. This aspect of early marriages is unlike that in some other parts of India and the world where a huge age difference exists between the two, with the girl usually being the child. Existing laws and awareness campaigns taken up periodically against the practice of child marriage have failed to diminish the fervor of the communities even in the 21st century. In some states, particularly in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan on the occasion of Akha Teej, (which in some other parts of the country is also known as Akshaya Tritiya) a day considered auspicious for solemnizing marriages, child marriages are solemnized in large groups openly with little or no resistance from the community leaders. Child marriage, then, in some cases survives owing to the passivity, apathy and even support of members of society. The causes could broadly be divided into four categories, viz. historical, social, cultural and economic.

In Rajasthan, most of the villagers and the local level elected representatives are aware of legal provisions that bar child marriages. But few among them adopt a proactive role to stop child marriages. On the other hand, in UP and MP, most of the villagers and panchayat members displayed a lack of awareness about the illegality of child marriages. Very few took initiatives to curb the practice.

In Madhya pradesh, the favoured age for marriage as identified in the study areas was below 21

years for boys and below 18 for girls. Interestingly, the villagers do not consider these as cases of child marriage. For them, child marriage is marriage of infants or an adolescent in the age group of 10-14 years. In MP, though most of the villagers prefer marriage of both the sexes at the legal age, at the same time there were some who wanted boys and girls to be married when they were much below the legal age of marriage.

The practice of registration of marriages is not a norm but an exception. MP most of the people are not aware of it. In practice, a very small percentage of people get their marriages registered. Generally, only those who wish to go abroad, where marriages performed by religious rituals are not recognized, apply for registration.

The role of the NGOs so far has been in spreading awareness about the ill effects of child marriage. Social workers and NGOs are the main sources of information about child marriages occurring in the districts. The NGOs reported the hurdles they faced while trying to stop child marriages. The general feeling among them is that the law against child marriage is not efficient in preventing child marriage, although they could not pinpoint any loopholes in it.

Promoting the Education of Girls: In a society largely governed by beliefs, rituals and a desire to follow the cultural ethos as prescribed, education is perhaps the only potent weapon that could combat undesirable practices embedded in the system. Legislation, laws and enforcement can only assist in this endeavour. The problem of the abysmal educational level in the state studied needs to be addressed and education up to the school level must be made compulsory. Women should also be provided legal literacy to be informed, so that a sense of self-confidence and self-belief is instilled in them. Universalization of education is thus a primary requirement if child marriage is to be eradicated

Income-Generation Programmes and Policies: In the study area, one factor that was repeatedly mentioned as a causative factor for child marriage was poverty. Though a number of poverty alleviation programmes and employment generation programmes have been put in place, more than 220 million people are still Below the Poverty Line (BPL). Women and children are traditionally most affected by poverty. There is, therefore, an urgent need to seriously address the issue of poverty in these affected areas

Awareness Generation Programmes: The problem of combating child marriage is not a burning issue that invites the individual attention of the administrators and law enforcers. It is treated as a minor misdemeanour that attracts little or no punishment even within the statute. Though amendments have been made in the law to strengthen the penal provision that would book and prosecute the offenders, the legal system carries a backlog of millions of cases. While the law does exist, as it should exist to curb child marriage, experience has shown that the law by itself cannot solve social ills. The public needs to be educated in a concerted manner on all aspects of the ills of child marriage. It would require sustained campaigning by the administration and NGOs to spread the social message in the affected states. Assistance from opinion makers and religious heads of communities could be elicited. How to end child marriage. Ending child marriage is the need of the hour. To end this social evil, everyone from individuals to world leaders must challenge traditional norms. Furthermore, we must remove ideas that reinforce that girls are inferior to boys.

We need to empower children, especially girls, so that they can become agents of change. To do this they should get quality education and allow them to complete their studies so that they can live independent lives later.

Safe spaces are important for children to express themselves and have their voices heard. Therefore, it is necessary to remove all forms of gender discrimination to ensure that everyone is given equal value and protection.

The percentage of girls getting married under the age of eighteen in various states is alarming-

- Madhya Pradesh – 73 %
- Rajasthan – 68 %
- Uttar Pradesh – 64 %
- Andhra Pradesh – 71 %
- Bihar – 67 %

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