

CHILD MARRIAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON GIRLS EDUCATION: A Developmental Challenge in Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the issue of early marriage in Rajasthan. It sheds light specifically on reason behind its perpetuation, its harmful consequences, shows how it constitutes a barrier to education and how it further threatens the development of a state. The findings from an extensive reading of materials related to early marriage suggest that early marriage is due to various factors including among others, the search for economic survival, protection of young girls, peer group and family pressure, controlling female behavior and sexuality, wars and civil conflicts and socio-cultural & religious values. It is a violation of girl's rights as it deprives her from freedom, opportunity for personal development. It is also a developmental challenge for population pressure, literacy rate, sex ratio, health care costs and lost opportunities of human development. It is barrier to girls' education as young girls drop out from school to get married which impacts negatively on the community as a whole and on the wellbeing of future generation. Early marriage increases poverty, health problems and maternal mortality rate. To deal with the problem, a number of strategies have been suggested mainly providing economic opportunities to young girls, promoting education of girls and using mass media to increase the awareness of the whole community about the consequences of early marriage on girls themselves, their family and on the community as a whole. Educating girls seems to be the ideal solution since, if sufficiently prolonged; it helps to delay age of marriage and confers other benefits as well. However, sending children to school costs money and where money is scarce, it is unlikely to be spent on girls. Even where education is highly subsidized or even free, poor parents have to pay for some of the costs of school attendance for their children, such as various fees, books, and school uniforms. In this case, government should provide support needed for girls' education such as free books, uniforms, scholarship and so on.

Key Words:

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important demographic processes as birth takes place within marriages in most of the societies of the developing world. As developing countries also face high population growth along with high poverty and environment degradation, the study of the process of marriage acquires even more importance. In the context of India, the study has special significance because child marriages have been practiced widely in the past and even now. The timings of marriage is also crucial for woman's health and ultimately for the wellbeing of the family. (Bhagat, 2002)

The term early marriage is used to refer to both formal marriages and informal unions in which a girl lives with a partner as if married before age 18 (UNICEF 2005). For UNIFPA 2006, Early Marriage, also known as child marriage, is defined as "any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and child bearing". Child marriage on the other hand, involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place with or without formal registration, and under civil, religious and customary law.

Statistically, one in seven girls in the developing world marries before 15 (Population Council, 2006). If not checked effectively, in ten years, about half of the 331 million girls- or 25,000 more girls every day- will become child brides. (Bruce and Clark 2004). Region-wise, the highest incidence of early marriage are found in South Asia, where 70-75% girls are married by age of 18; followed by West Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, with the incidence of 50-60% (Jenson & Thornton, 2003) and slightly less in Central/ Eastern Asia, Eastern/ Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Central America (Lloyd, 2005). Surprisingly, despite the policy and program discourses against early marriage, the scourge has increased significantly over the last decade in different countries including India, substantial proportions of young women (and to lesser extent, men) continue to marry in adolescence. (Gupta and Pande, 2008)

In many parts of the world especially underdeveloped countries, parents give consent to early marriage hoping that it would benefit the girl both economically and socially. This practice is especially

common in rural areas and amongst economically backward families. "This is because rural households tend to have more entrenched traditional attitudes and customs, are less affected by external influences, and have fewer livelihood options for young women". The daughter is married off at a young age to relieve the family towards her economic responsibilities.

Unfortunately, marriage before attaining adulthood is a reality for women, across the world. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), "More than 40% of the world's child marriages take place in India. Worldwide, more than 60 million women between the ages 20 - 24 were married before they turned 18.

Objectives

1. To identify the reasons of early marriage.
2. To inspect the consequences of early marriage
3. To evaluate the effect of early marriage on girls' education.
4. To comprehend early marriage as a developmental challenge in Rajasthan.

Methodology

Collection of Secondary Data by:

- Annual Health Survey (AHS)
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS) - I, II and III
- District Level Household Survey (DLHS): (2007-2008)
- Census of India (1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011)
- Village Directory

Selection of Indicators

- Demographic Indicators
- Social Indicators
- Economic Indicators

By selecting major indicators, 10 Districts have been selected where prevalence of Early Marriage is high and inspected the reason behind it and evaluating its impact on Education.

The Reasons for Early Marriages

The reasons for Early Marriages are many and various. The most common ones are described as under:

- **Poverty:** The economic status of the family plays a key role in child marriage. Poverty is one of the major factors underpinning this practice. It is a cause as well as an effect of this evil custom. Where poverty is acute, the people adopt even illegal means to tide over poverty. Thus daughters are given in marriage at a very tender age solely for the purpose of shifting the liability of the girls to another family. Sometimes the marriage of young girl to much older man for bride price is also adopted as a strategy for the economic survival of the family. (R.D Naik, 1996)
- **Gender Discrimination:** Early marriage is a product of cultures that devalue women and girls and discriminate against them. The discrimination often manifests itself in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, and deprivation of food, lack of access to information, education, health care etc.
- **Control over sexuality:** Protecting girls against dishonor such as pregnancy outside of marriage is a frequently cited reason for child and early marriages, as a bride's worth is linked to her virginity in many cultures.
- **Customs and Traditions:** Where child marriage is prevalent there is a strong social pressure on families to either conform or face ridicule, disapproval of family shame. Local perceptions regarding an ideal age of marriage are tied to economic factors such as dowries, bride price etc.

Consequences of Early Marriage

Early marriage has harmful consequences which include lack of freedom and decreased opportunities of education. Because of the early and often closely timed pregnancies before their bodies are able to handle the stress of pregnancy, adolescent mothers give birth prematurely or to low weight babies. The health of these children and mothers are at risk and often they do not survive. Child marriage also makes girls more vulnerable to domestic violence, sexual abuse and inability to complete primary education. It is also found that infant mortality rates are higher than the national average in the states where child marriage is highly prevalent. (Myles & Margarate, 2009)

The pregnancy rate for teenagers fell 40 percent during the years 1990-2012, to 69.8 per 1,000

women aged 15–19. The rate declined continuously except for a brief upturn from 2005 (70.2 per1000) to 2006 (72.1 per 1000), but the pace of decline slowed in themid-2000s. The teenage pregnancy rate in 2008 was the lowest reported since 1976. (Barker and David, 1983).Child brides are more likely to die at a younger age than unmarried girls, suffer from health problems, live in poverty and remain illiterate.

Consequences of Early Marriage of Girls

Consequences of early marriages explained as under fall into two categories, such as:Complications during childbirth: As girls aged ten to fifteen years have small pelvises and are not ready for childbearing, childbirth causes a major threat to their health and life expectancy. Two million women worldwide suffer from obstetric fistula, a debilitating complication of childbirth especially common among physically immature girls.

- **Maternal Mortality:** Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for girls aged fifteen to nineteen worldwide. Mothers in this age group face a 20 to 200 percent greater chance of dying in pregnancy than women aged 20 to 24. Those under age fifteen are five times as likely to die as women in their twenties. (Safe Motherhood Factsheet,2000)
- **Infant Mortality:** Mortality rates for babies born to mothers under age twenty are almost 75% higher than for children born to older mothers. The children that survive are more likely to be premature, have a low birth weight, and are more at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS.
- **Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome(HIV/AIDS):** Teenage girls are more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases causing infertility (UNICEF,1999). In the case of HIV positive, there are premature mortality, reported incidents of the virus being transmitted to foetus. The younger the age at sexual intercourse and the first pregnancy, the higher the incidence of HIV infections. (UNICEF,1994)
- **Mental Health:** Child brides are more likely to experience domestic abuse, and violence than their peers who marry later. Violence and abuse can lead to post-traumatic stress and subsequently depression. Women who married at youngage suffer from mental disorders throughout their lifetime, the commonest being the major depressive disorder.
- **Lack of Decision Making Power:** Girls who are married before eighteen have less decision making power than girls whose marriage is delayed until adulthood. They don't have ability to make decisions on their own health care, contraception, household budget, daily household purchase, visit to family friends, etc.
- **Illiteracy:** Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory period before marriage or at the point of union and transfer to the marital home, which affects their ability to access the benefits of education. Early marriage of girls was considered the main barrier to achieve universal primary education (Millennium Development Goal 2) and promoting gender equality (Millennium Development Goal 3) for girls and boys in rural communities. (Plan Egypt,2010).
- **Abuse and Violence:** There is a higher incidence of domestic violence and abuse among the child brides. Young married girls have little power in relation to their husband and in-laws. They are,therefore, extremely vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse. Violence may include physical, sexual or psychological abuse.(Heise, Pitanguy& Germain,1994). Girls who marry before eighteen are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later. For example, in Peru, where more than half of women report having experienced physical or sexual violence. Child Marriage has been found to increase girls' chances of being abused. (Flake,2005)
- **Isolation and Abandonment:** Child brides are often isolated from their peers and abandoned especially when they develop health problems like fistula. Besides this, the difference in age between the couple augments the problem, husbands are usually much older and therefore there is very little in common with them. This leads to a feeling of rejection and isolation.
- **Not a 'social mix':** The child bride because of her age does not and cannotparticipate fully in the life of the family, the community and the society which results in her social segregation and pushes the girl into the pool of serious problems. Early marriage prevents girl as well as the society from realizing their full potential and benefit.
- Not only individual, but society too pays a huge cost for allowing this obnoxious, outdated practice to remain in place and allowing the scourges of deprivation,discrimination, dishonor and injustice to its child citizens.

EFFECT OF EARLY MARRIAGE ON GIRLS' EDUCATION

The school is the most important institution outside the family involved in socializing young people into all dimensions of adult roles and responsibilities. More years of schooling have been associated with many positive outcomes, including later ages of marriage, lower fertility, and healthier and better educated children, economic development. However, early marriage inevitably denies children of school age their right to the education they need for their personal development their preparation for adulthood, and their effective contribution to the future wellbeing of their family and society. Indeed, married girls who would like to continue schooling may be both practically and legally excluded from doing so. The essence of the rights to education and to health is that they facilitate and ensure the effective enjoyment of other human rights.

For a number of poorer families, the potential rewards of educating daughters are too far off and, therefore, their education is not recognized as an investment. Families perceive that a girl's education will only benefit her husband's household, and not her parents. Additionally, some parents believe that girls do not need an education for their roles as wives and mothers, that education undermines cultural practices, and it teaches the girl to reject tradition.

However, there is a saying that when you educate a woman you educate a nation. Education, even at a basic level, is not only about livelihood and technical skills but more importantly provides social 'connectedness' or aptitude which enables one to access key resources to alleviate poverty. By interacting with others, individuals acquire the social skills and personal capacities needed to access resources and opportunities, and to form social networks for support and assistance when required in the future. Individuals can also develop their self-esteem and confidence to voice their opinions and to take control over their own actions, lives and bodies. Other positive benefits of education are linked to improved reproductive health and child survival and welfare (NaanaOtoo-Oyortey and SonitaPobi, 2003).

Educated women are more likely to have a say in decision-making regarding the size of their families and the spacing of their children. They are also likely to be more informed and knowledgeable about contraception and the healthcare needs of their children. Adolescent girls who marry outside their communities tend to lose the close friendships they had formed in their parental homes, and often become quiet and subdued. This means that even where girls have developed social networks they are unable to access them from their marital community.

The universal right to education has been affirmed by the world's governments for more than 50 years, most recently by the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the 191 member states of the United Nations in 2000. However, some 115 million children—among them 62million girls—are still denied this right. According to data from UNICEF(2004),outside of the developed world, only 76 percent of all boys and 70 percent of all girls attend primary school.

While marriage does not have to mean that a girl's or boy's education finishes, the attitudes of parents, schools and spouses in many societies mean that it often does. Husbands of young wives are often older men, who expect their wives to follow tradition, stay home and undertake household and childcare duties. A girl may be unable to go against her husband's wishes and the husband's family may refuse to invest their scarce resources in the wife's continued schooling.

Some schools often have a policy of refusing to allow married or pregnant girls or girls with babies to return. They may believe that it will set a bad example to other pupils or that other parents will be angry to see the school go against the traditional beliefs. Even if they do permit girls to return, the school environment - rules, timetables and physical conditions - can make it too difficult for a girl to attend school and perform her duties as wife and mother at the same time. Bullying and abuse by teachers, pupils and other parents can further reduce girls' self-confidence and sense of security, forcing them to give up on schooling.

Early Marriage in India

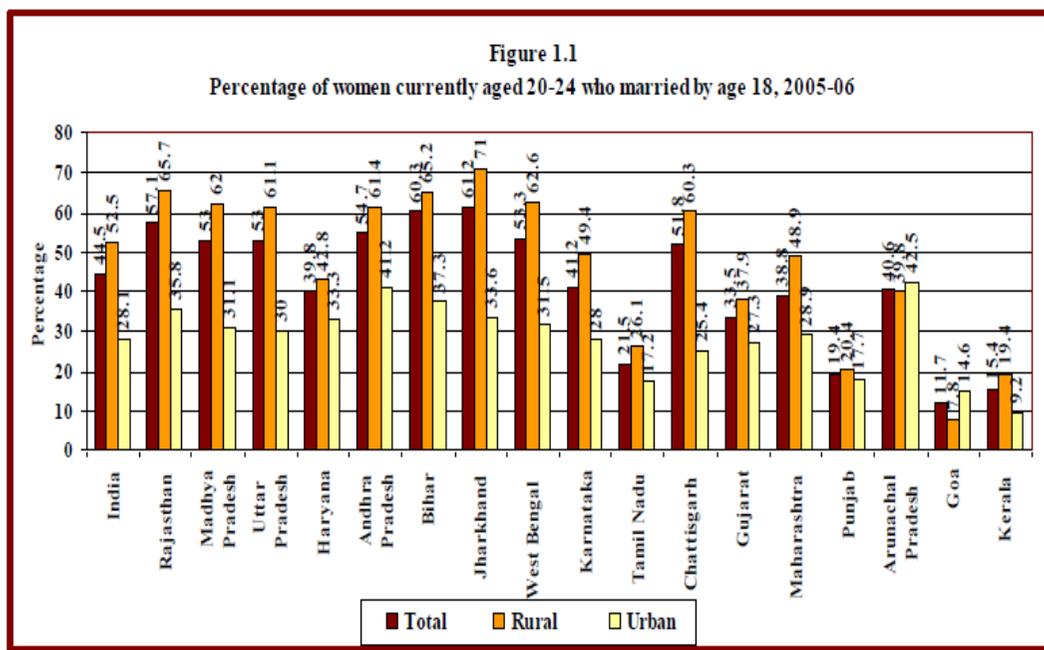
Early Marriage is a very common practice in India, especially amongst the uneducated sections of the society, which actually forms a large chunk of the population. In India, it is estimated that several thousand early marriages are solemnized each year, but the exact number is difficult to calculate, since many of the marriages are not recorded or registered.(Kumar, Krishan, Asha & Rajlakshmi, 2005).According to the Union Health Ministry's Family Welfare Statistics 2011, compiled by the Registrar General of India, for every single woman aged below eighteen, getting married in urban centers, three women are doing so in rural areas. In percentage-wise decline, Jammu and Kashmir has seen the largest dip in under-aged brides in the recorded five years at (83%), followed by Chhattisgarh -78%, Andhra Pradesh -71%, Haryana -70% and Madhya Pradesh - 69%,Maharashtra has seen a (57%) decline in under-aged brides, Delhi-53%, Bihar -

55%, Odessa - 48%, Karnataka- 44% and Punjab -46%. States with lowest percentage of decline since 2005 include West Bengal- 14%, Rajasthan- 23%, Jharkhand- 27%, Tamil Nadu- 29%, Gujarat - 33% and Uttar Pradesh - 38%. Child marriage is prohibited by law in India, with the minimum age of marriage being eighteen for girls and twenty one for boys. However, the latest available survey found that 48% of women were married or in union before eighteen years, and almost one in five were married or in union before fifteen years.(Sinha,2012)

According to UNICEF’s “State of the World’s Children – 2009” report, 47% of the India’s women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. The government has taken several steps to eradicate this practice, However, it is still being practiced all over the country. There are legislations for prohibition of early marriage such as Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

However, the status of girl child in India, particularly with reference to early marriages, remains dismal. It has shown little inclination to abate and has decreased only marginally.

A state wise analysis done by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2005-2006) in this regard is given in figures shown below. The recent survey shows the present reality in terms of currently married women who were married by the age of 18 years.



According to NFHS-III survey, 47.3% of women aged 20-24 were married by the age of 18. Of these, 2.6 percent were married before they turned 13 years; 22.6 percent were married before they were 16 years, and 44.5 percent were married when they were between sixteen and seventeen years of age. In some states, the percentage is quite high: Rajasthan (65.2%), Uttar Pradesh (58.6%), Madhya Pradesh (57.3%), Jharkhand (63.2%), Chhattisgarh (55%), Bihar (69%) and Andhra Pradesh (54.8%). The states where prevalence is low are Himachal Pradesh (12.3%), Punjab (19.7%), and Karnataka (15.4%).

Over the last one and half decade, there has been a 10 percent decline in the proportion of early marriage in India. The situation is similar in almost all the states in India, with exception in West Bengal and Punjab.

According to 2001 census, there are 1.5 million girls, in India, under the age of fifteen years who are already married. Of these, 20% or approximately 300,000 are mothers with at least one child. The 2001 census also estimated that the average age of marriage has risen to 18.3 years for females. The male average is 22.6 years. But child marriage is still widespread across the nation. States like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh still have average age of marriage below the legal age of eighteen for females.

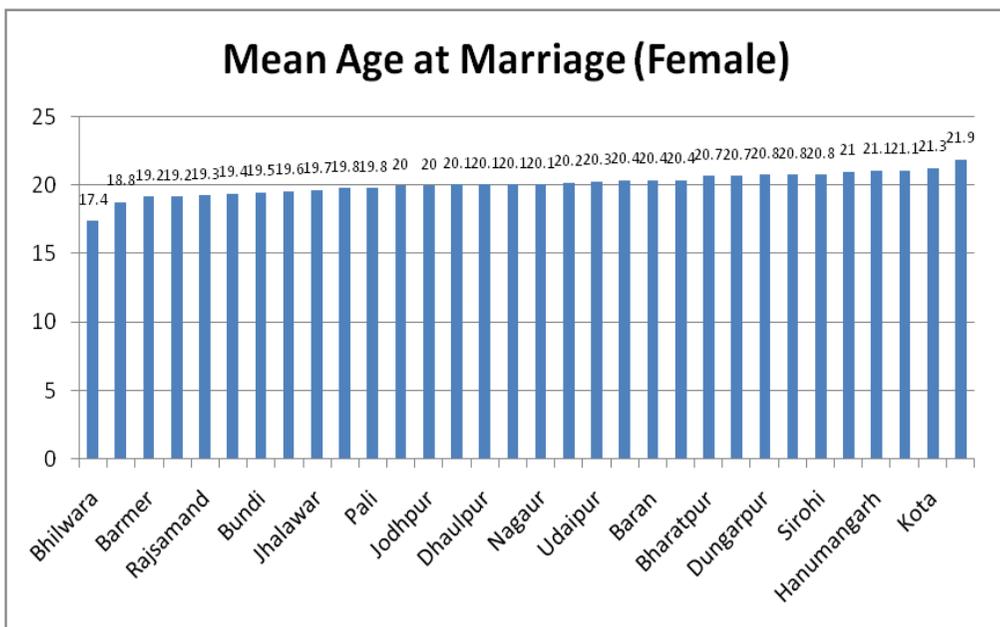
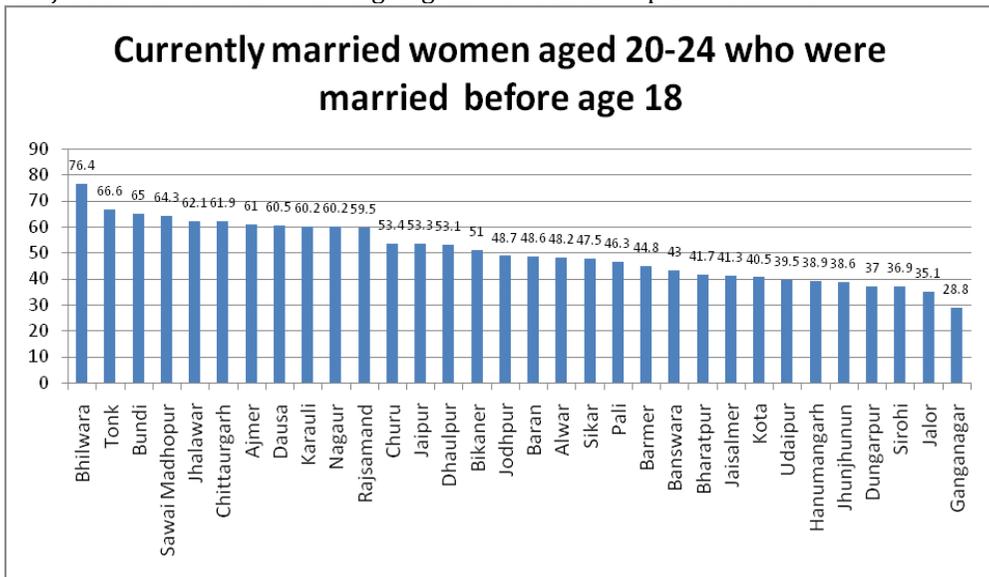
EARLY MARRIAGE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGE IN RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan is the only state in the country where mean age at marriage for boys and girls is lower than the legal age at marriage. Acknowledging the deep rooted custom of child marriages in the state, the

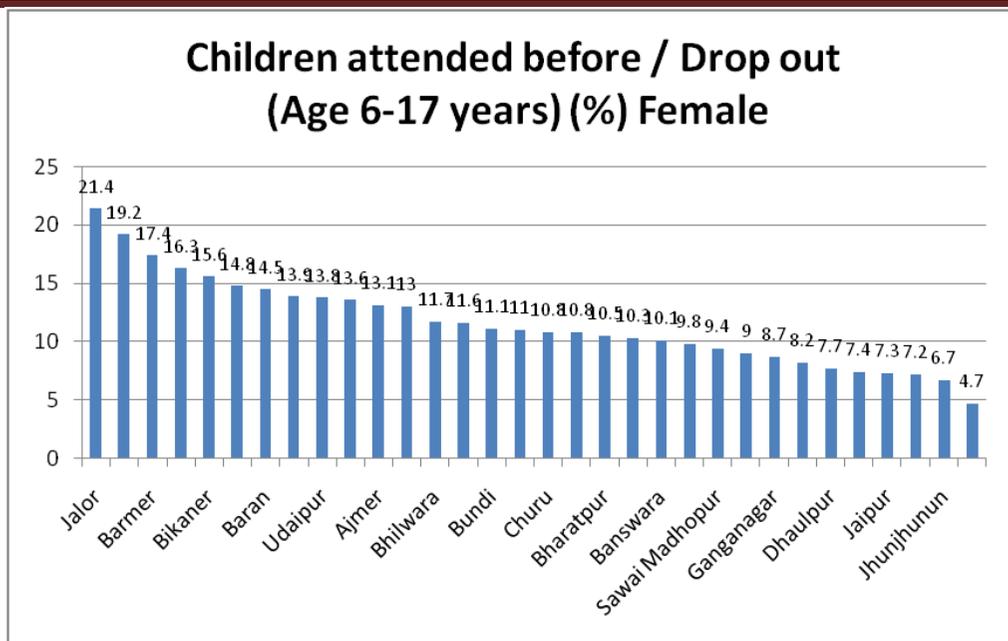
latest data of annual health survey (AHS) indicate that nearly one-fourth of girls are getting married before reaching the age of eighteen years, whereas average age for boys stand at 20.7 years.

The female mean age at marriage in Rajasthan is 17.7 years, and every fourth girl in rural areas is getting married before attaining the age of 18 years. "If we look at the statistics and compare it to the previous years, it has fallen down drastically. From 58.4% in the last decade, we have come down to almost 22%. But there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. According to a senior official from UNICEF, Rajasthan still figures among the top ranks in child marriage.

Despite several attempts of the state government, the evil practice is widely prevalent in the state. Among all the districts, the percentage of child marriage in Bhilwara (54%), Rajasmand (42%) , Bundi(38.4%) Jhalawar(36.6%)and Dausa (34.6%) are the highest in the state. Experts claim that dominant caste politics is a major reason for such wedlock going unabated in these parts of the state.



SOURCE- AHS (2012-13)



SOURCE-AHS(2012-13)

“Caste Panchayats are quite strong in Rajasthan and constitute a large vote base for the politicians. It plays a major role in child marriages, especially in rural areas. If leaders decide that child marriage will take place, then it becomes very difficult for the administration to stop it.”

When young girls get married, they generally are little informed about their situation; these vulnerabilities render them unable to question their parents. Soon after marriage, the child bride usually stays at her parental home until she turns eighteen years and is sent to her husband’s house after *gauna*, that is, after she attains puberty. The proponents of early marriage, therefore, see no conflict between child marriage and legal age of marriage for girls. But in reality, there can be no link between the legal age of marriage and the period of *gauna*, as the girl can attain puberty before the age of eighteen, at which she is sent to her husband’s family. As per the state (Rajasthan) Women and Child Development reports, nearly 30% of girls were married off at the age of thirteen and 50% were mothers by the time when they were fifteen years of age. Thus, the *gauna system* cannot be the solution to the problems that arise from early marriages.

According to DFID (2005), educating girls is one of the most important investments that a country can make in its own future. Education has a profound effect on girls and women’s ability to claim other rights and achieve status in society, such as economic independence and political representation. Having an education can make an enormous difference to woman’s chances of finding well paid, raising a healthy family and preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

UNICEF (1994) argues that it is not only the girls that pay for early marriage but that society also pays. Population pressure, health care costs and lost opportunities of human development are just a few of the growing burdens that society should enbecause of early marriage. Girls’ education is one of the means to address poverty and developmental problems. With education, girls are given the chance to choose their own future and not one chosen by their parents and guardians.

Conclusions

- The proportion of the married girls is significant in 10 districts. Of these, Tonk, Bundi, Bhilwara have sizeable tribal population, while the rest of the districts lie outside the traditional tribal territories.
- In Tonk, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Ajmer and Bhilwara districts of Rajasthan, in-expensive mass marriages of children are held each year on Akha-Teej (Akshay Tritiya) a Hindu festival.
- Despite several attempts of the state government, the evil practice is widely prevalent in the state. Among all the districts, the percentage of child marriage in Bhilwara(54) Rajsamand(42), Bundi(38.4), Jhalawar (36.6) and Dausa(34.6) are the highest in the state. Experts claim that dominant caste politics is a major reason for such wedlock’s going unabated in these parts of the state.
- Child brides are rarely allowed to go to school. Many are expected to bear and raise children and carry out domestic work for their in-laws.

- Girls from poor families are nearly twice as likely to marry before 18 years than girls from wealthier families.
- Census data show that the sex ratio has increased from 962 in 2001 to 973 in 2011 in Bhilwara district.
- The literacy rate for men and women has increased since 2001. However, a noticeable disparity is seen between male and female literacy rates, which is 47.2% for females as compared to 75.3% for males in Bhilwara district (Census of India, 2011)
- Currently married women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18 by literacy (DLHS, 2007-08) is 77% in Bhilwara & 70% in Rajasthan are illiterate. Whereas 52% in Bhilwara & 44% in Rajasthan are literate.
- The prevalence of child marriage in Bhilwara is mainly concentrated in poor, illiterate, SC/ST and OBC population.
- Status of women in Bhilwara district is poor as compared to men. A high disparity is seen in literacy rate between male and female and school dropout among girl children is very high as compared to their counterpart.
- School drop-out rates are particularly high among girl children touching their teenage.

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