

Aliva Programme to Eradicate Child Marriage

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Topic- Social Justice [GS Paper-2]

Context- With the aim of eradicating child marriage, Nayagarh district of Odisha has adopted a unique initiative by meticulously recording information on all adolescent girls in the district.

Key Highlights

- As per the child marriage prevention goals of Odisha, the State aims to eradicate child marriage by 2030.
- The Aliva programme was launched in January, 2022.
- Anganwadi workers are asked to keep records of every adolescent girl in their jurisdiction.
- The record includes details about adolescent girls- birth registration date, Aadhaar, family details, skill training, etc., in registers named Aliva available in the Aanganwadi centres of the district.
- The age of the girl needs to be approved by the local school head master, father, supervisor and Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO).
- As per the current records, the district has registered information of 48,642 adolescent girls in the Aliva registers.
- When there will be any warning about child marriages, district administration and the police refer to registers for ascertaining proof of girls' age.

- The district has planned to maintain the record for a period of 10 years-2020 to 2030.

Significance of the programme

- The Aliva registers are so far the most comprehensive ones that keep records on girls' lives for 10 years.
- The register plays a vital role for law enforcement agencies, as parents attempt to lie about the age of their girls to escape punishment.
- Though the register was conceptualised to prevent child marriages, it has also been very important for tracking the health of girls especially if they are anaemic.

Child Marriages in India

- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) records suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million minor girls get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world accounting for one third of the global total.
- According to National Family Health Survey-5, 23.3% women surveyed got married before attaining the legal age of 18 years, less than that of 26.8% reported in NFHS-4.
- Whereas the figure for underage marriage among men is 17.7% (NFHS-5) and 20.3% (NFHS-4).
- States like West Bengal and Bihar, with around 41% such women each, had the highest prevalence of girl child marriage.
- Child marriages are lowest in certain states like J&K, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Nagaland, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, according to NFHS-5.
- The maximum decline in the proportion of underage marriages was observed in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana.

Government Laws and Initiatives to Prevent Child Marriage

- As per the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, sets 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for the bride and 21 years as the minimum age for the groom.
- In Muslim laws, the marriage of a minor who has attained puberty is considered valid.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1954 also mentions 18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage for women and men respectively.
- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 replaced the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 which was enacted during the British era, defines a child to mean a male below 21 years and female below 18 years.
- However, if the consent is taken by fraud, deceit or if the child is enticed away from his/her lawful guardians, and if the sole purpose is to use the child for trafficking or other immoral purposes, marriage would be void.
- The law envisages preventing child marriage with punishments of rigorous imprisonment for two years and/ or fine of Rs. 1 lakh.
- The Act also provides for the appointment of CPMO whose duties are to prevent child marriages and spread awareness regarding it.
- Now the government of India is thinking of raising the age of marriage for women in India from 18 to 21 years, describing the potential for huge public health rewards and real advantages at both the individual and societal levels, in the form of ending or

reducing child marriage, if marriage is postponed.