

Issues of Child Marriages in Assam

written by iasexam.com | 06/02/2023



Context - The [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) call for global action to end human rights violations by 2030.

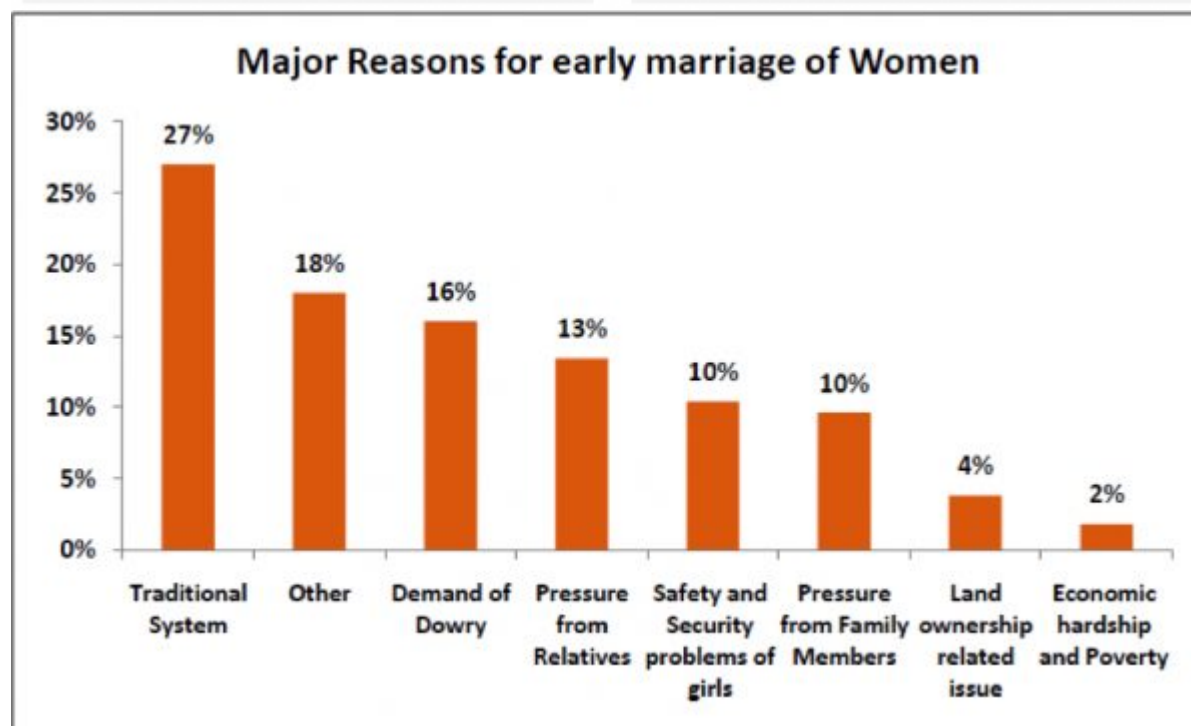
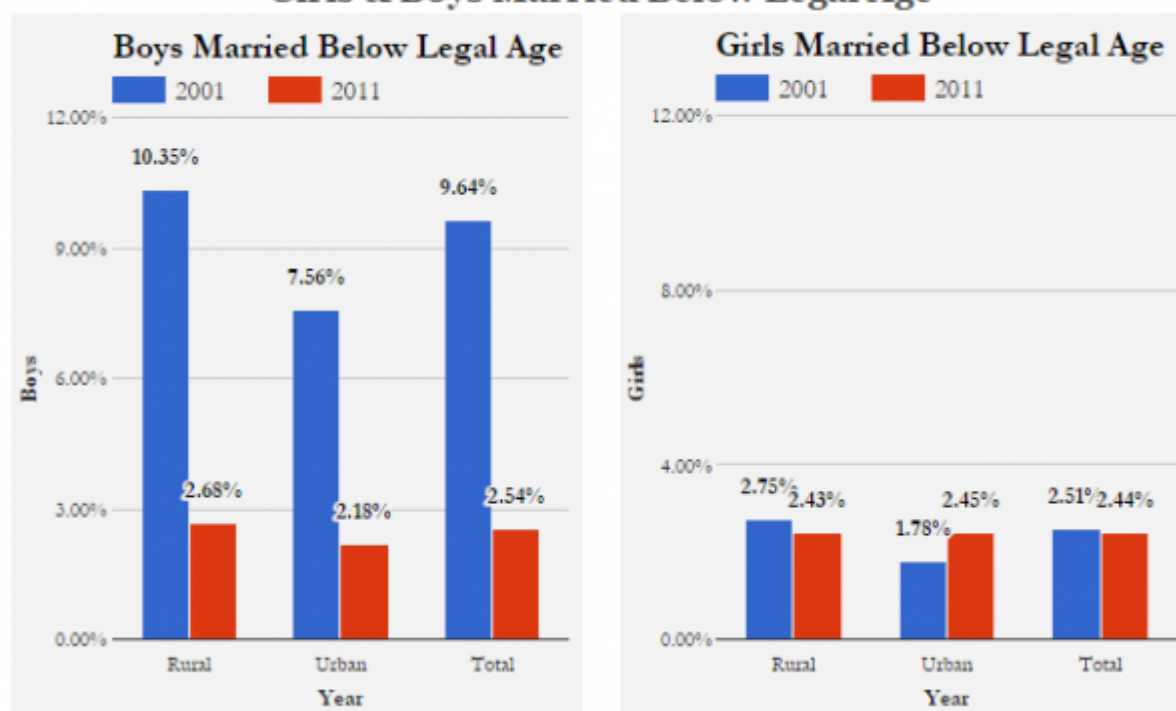
There has been tremendous development in India on that front, as seen, for example, in the decline in child marriage from 47.4 per cent in 2005 to 23.3 per cent in 2021. The year 2021 also marked a 50 per cent decline in [child marriage in South Asia](#).

Why in the News?

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has launched a state-wide crackdown against child marriage. Booking men marrying girls below 14 years of age under the [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences](#) (POCSO) Act, and those marrying girls aged 14-18 under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

The CM has also announced that the police will retrospectively book people who participated in child marriage in the last seven years.

Girls & Boys Married Below Legal Age



Background of the Issue in Assam

- **Maternal mortality rate in Assam** - According to data given by the Registrar General of India in 2022, Assam has the highest maternal mortality rate in the nation, with 195 fatalities per one lakh live births in the years 2018 to 2020.
- **Infant mortality rate in Assam** - With 32 newborn deaths for every 1,000 live births, Assam has the third highest infant mortality rate, according to the National Family Health Survey-5.
- **Government's aim to address the issue** - The Assam government has declared that its aim is to confront the high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates in the state, which it has linked to early motherhood.

Child Marriage - Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult and another child. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, fixes 21 years as the marriageable age for women.

According to estimates by **UNICEF**, 10 million more girls were at risk of becoming child brides globally because of the pandemic, affecting the prosperity and growth of communities and nations for generations. India has been working to ensure it doesn't lose the momentum gained in dealing with the scourge of child marriage.

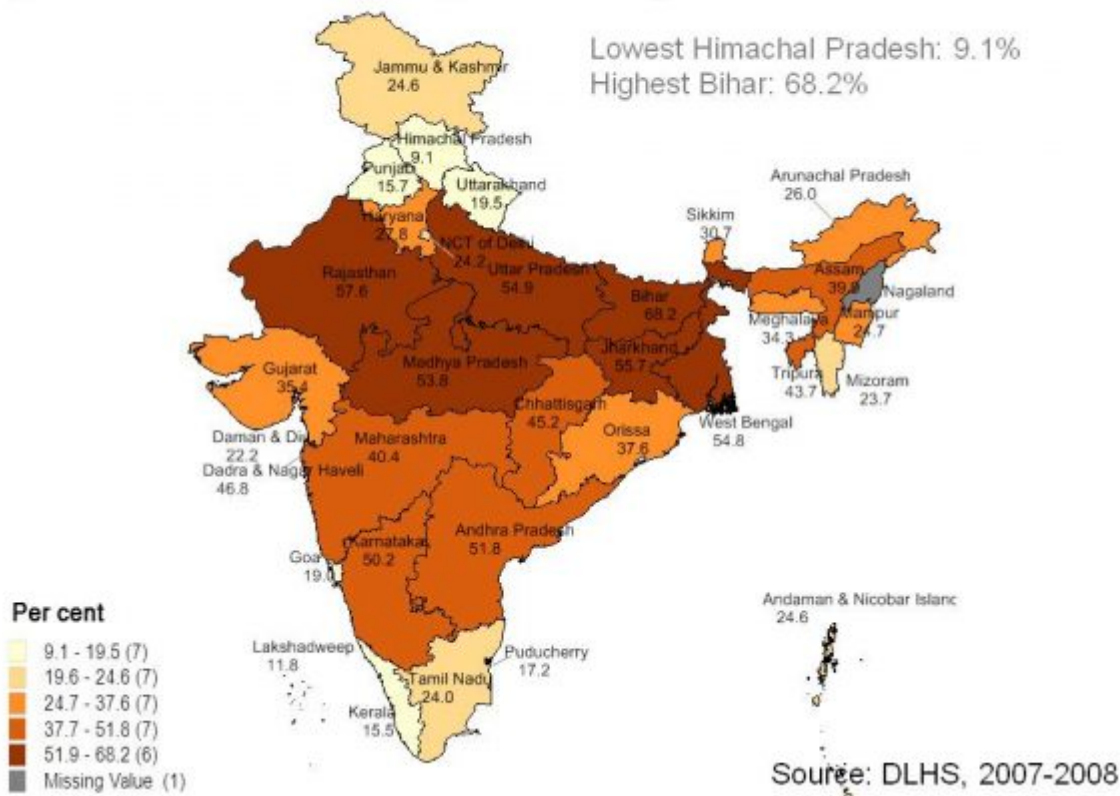
Relation between Child Marriage and National Development

- **Impact on basic rights** - Child marriages deny a child his/her basic right to education, health, and the freedom to build full, thriving lives.
- **Increased susceptibility to abuse and violence** - There is overwhelming evidence that child marriage renders girls more susceptible to abuse, violence, and exploitation.
- **Gender Inequality** - Child marriage is a gendered form of violence a cause and effect of gender inequality and discrimination and is a significant challenge facing girls and their families throughout the developing world.
- **Disturbed childhood** - Child marriage conclusively devastates a girl's childhood, saddling her with adult responsibilities before she is physically and mentally mature.
- **Increased risk of forced pregnancy and maternal mortality** - With little bodily autonomy, child brides are more likely to undergo forced pregnancy, increasing the likelihood of maternal and infant mortality.
- **Negative effect on education** - A girl's education is less likely to be valued evidence is clear that girls with less education are more likely to marry young, and child marriage typically ends a girl's education.
- **Support systems Decline** - The lack of education and isolation from peers further shrink a child bride's support systems. Without skills or mobility, her ability to overcome poverty for herself and her children is hindered.
- **Negative impact on community and national development** - These social and economic vulnerabilities that child brides live with impinge on their ability to contribute to their community's and country's growth and development.
- **Intergenerational consequences** - They are also more likely to experience intimate partner violence and have worse economic and health outcomes than their single peers, which eventually trickles down to their own offspring, placing further strain on the nation's ability to offer quality healthcare and education.

Prevalence of Child Marriage in India

- Though legislation prohibiting child marriage in India has been in place since 1929, the majority of child brides in the world 223 million of them, or one-third of the total live in India.
- Despite it being illegal for girls under the age of 18, and for boys under the age of 21, to marry in India under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the UNFPA-UNICEF estimates indicate that at least 1.5 million underage girls get married annually here.
- Ending the practice of child marriage is crucial to address the several human rights violations that stand in the way of gender equality for girls.

One in two women (age 20-24 years) in six states continue to get married before legal age of marriage



Key Drivers of Child Marriage

- **Common reasons** - While the origins of the practice differ across nations and cultures, it is perpetuated by poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and limited access to healthcare.
- **Financial burden** - Some families choose to marry off their daughters in order to reduce their financial burden. Other reasons cited are shrinking living spaces and increasing concerns about adolescent girls' safety.
- **Mentality of securing daughter's future** - Families also act in this manner because they think it will protect their daughters' futures. The practice is also supported by gender roles and marriage-age norms, stereotypes, and the socioeconomic risks of unmarried pregnancies.

Conclusion

Though legal protections and their strict implementation are important, they form only one part of the solution. To end child marriages, state and non-state actors alike must put girls, across the diverse spectrum of society and marginality, at the centre of the solution. The state can penalise and criminalize the act, but society at large has the important role to play.