

Prevalence of Child Marriage and the Role of Education

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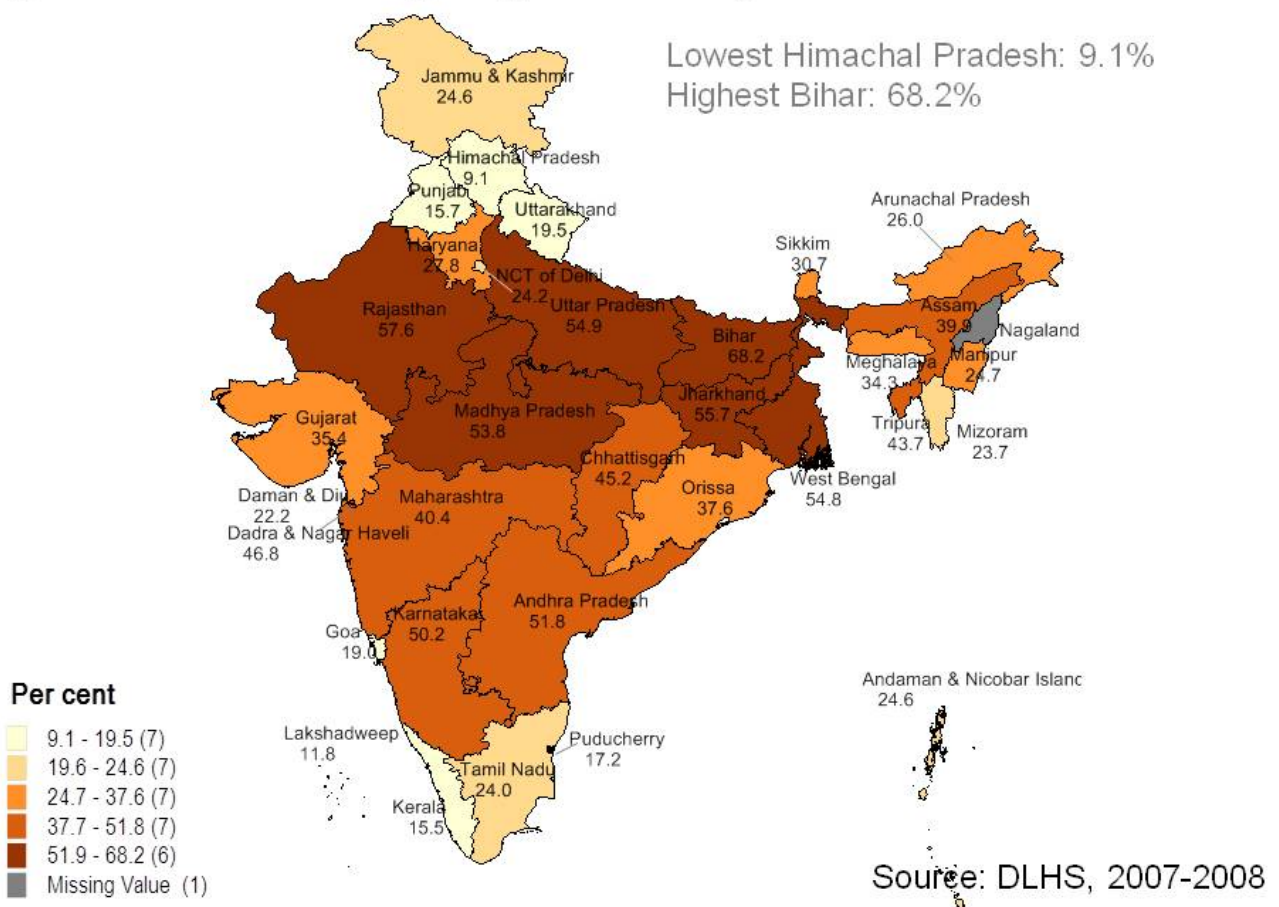
Context - When the Assam government launched a massive crackdown on child marriage, social activists pointed out that the root of the problem, i.e., limited access to education among women, is not being sufficiently addressed. National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data show that higher education levels could play a greater role than wealth in delaying a woman's marriage.

The data also reflect wide variations between the marital age of rural and urban women, and Dalit and upper-caste women.

Role played by Marriage in India

- **Most significant institution:** It is considered the most significant institution for daughters as it fulfills the family's responsibility towards them. For sons, the responsibility is to settle them in a job, which will hopefully lead to marriage.
- **Social identity:** Marriage is crucial for social identity, and a woman who remains single is an anomaly because almost everyone gets married.
- **Sexual respectability:** marriage is essential for sexual respectability as those who wish to have social respect have sexual relationships within marriage.
- **Legitimate children:** Marriage provides the option to have children, and having a child without a husband is completely unacceptable in the Indian context.

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



Causes of Child Marriage in India

- **Lack of education:** A big determinant of the age of marriage is education. Around 45% of women with no education and 40% with primary education married before the age of 18, according to [NFHS-4](#).
- **Seen as a Burden:** Economically, child marriages work as mechanisms that are quick income earners. A girl child is seen as a leeway to a large dowry, to be given to her family upon her marriage.
- **Poverty:** In terms of economic status, women from poor households tend to marry earlier. While more than 30% of women from the lowest two wealth quintiles were married by the age of 18, the corresponding figure in the richest quintile was 8%.
- **Social background:** [Child marriages](#) are more prevalent in rural areas and among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Trafficking:** Poor families are tempted to sell their girls not just into marriage, but into prostitution, as the transaction enables large sums of money to benefit the girl's family and harms the girl. There is apathy towards their girls and the money by selling their girls is used for the benefit of their sons.
- **Dowry:** This dowry can be a significant financial burden for families, and getting their daughters married early may be seen as a way to reduce this expense. The more educated a girl, the more the boy has to be educated too and the higher the dowry.

- **Transfer of responsibility:** Families feel there is the responsibility of protecting her sexually before marriage. And that responsibility gets transferred to the boy's family. After marriage, the girl goes to live with her husband's family, so why spend on her education?
- **Maintenance of caste and community lines:** In some cultures, marrying within one's own caste and community is essential to maintain social status and cultural traditions. Early marriage may be seen as a way to ensure that women are married within their caste and community and preserve cultural practices.

Effects of Women Education

- **Advantages of Women's Access to Education:**

1. Education provides women with knowledge and skills that lead to greater empowerment and the ability to make informed decisions about their lives.
2. Educated women are more likely to participate in the workforce, earn higher wages, and have better health outcomes.
3. Access to education can challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, creating new opportunities for women and girls.
4. Education can increase women's bargaining power within their families and communities, allowing them to negotiate for better living conditions, higher earnings, and greater autonomy.

- **Challenges in Women's Employment:**

1. The female labor force participation rate is low at 25%, and job losses have been especially harmful to women.
2. Despite increased access to education, there is a high proportion of educated but unemployed women.
3. Women who enter the corporate sector often face hostility or are unable to balance domestic expectations with work demands.
4. The conjugal contract between men and women remains largely unchanged, with women assuming the majority of domestic burdens and men often having power over family decisions.

- **Impact of Age of Marriage**

1. Increasing the age of marriage may not automatically lead to greater empowerment, autonomy, or freedom for women.
2. While delaying marriage may provide women with more opportunities to pursue education and careers, there is still a significant gender gap in employment and earnings.
3. Low and declining employment rates may also result in a greater burden on marriage as a means of economic security.

Way Forward

The issue of **child marriage in India** is complex and deeply rooted in societal norms, poverty, and caste systems. Despite the progress in education and women's empowerment, there are still challenges. The issue of child marriage requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying societal and economic factors that perpetuate the practice.