

## *Child Marriage in India: A review*

- **Child marriage** is a normal practice in many developing countries around the world, however it is especially common India, where more than **one third** of all child brides live.
- 47% of girls are married by 18 years of age, and 18% are married by 15 years of age.
- The highest rates are seen particularly in the rural states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.
- UNICEF defines child marriage as a formal marriage or union (typically forced) before 18 years of age.
- Child Marriage has its roots in India from outdated, pre-British Raj policies, including political troubles, the caste system, and ancient kingdom alliances.
- The Child Marriage Restraint Act, also called the Sarda Act, was a law to restrict the practice of child marriage, enacted in 1929.
- This act defined a minor as a child of either sex 18 years or younger. The punishment for a male between 18 and 21 years marrying a child became imprisonment of up to 15 days and a 1,000 INR fine. A male above 21 marrying a child would be imprisoned for a possible three months.
- Recently, in 2007, the the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) was created to improve the Child Marriage Restraint Act.
- The PCMA created the following regulations, giving all those forced into child marriages the option of voiding their marriage up to two years after reaching adulthood. However, all valuables, money, and gifts (dowry) must be returned if the marriage is nullified so it is very rare to nullify child marriages.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) says all women, as well as men, have the right to choose their spouse, and states that child marriage should not have a legal effect. India signed the bill in 1980, but was not able to register and track all marriages. Thus, this was also no use.
- Main reasons families choose child marriage
  - to make child's future better (especially in case of poor people)
  - to protect her from conflict in the family or the community
  - Gain economic benefit of marriage (dowry, property,)
- Problems with Child Marriage
  - Early pregnancy related death
  - 75% increase in risk of HIV/AIDS
  - Infants born to mothers under the age of 18 are 60% more likely to die in their first year than mothers who are 20 and up

- Young married girls do not have access to schooling and increased income opportunities
- Girls in a child marriage are twice as more likely to experience violence in their marriages as opposed to older women
- If present trends continue, 100 million girls will marry over the next decade. Meaning, 25,000 girls will be married every day for the next 10 years.
- Taken together, the problems of this practice are too many to be ignored. Not only are the lives of children at stake, but the power of India's females is being wasted, not being educated or able to contribute to the economy.
- Child marriage goes against both UNICEF Rights of a Child, and UN Human Rights doctrine.

*This practice must be stopped!*

*Report prepared by Harshavardhan Ramesh, 15yrs, Student Intern from USA*