



## Child Marriage In India: Its Causes And Prevention

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### ABSTRACT

Child marriage in India continues to pose a significant challenge to social development, gender equality, and the realization of fundamental human rights. Despite the enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), which sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys, the practice persists, particularly in rural, economically disadvantaged, and socially marginalized communities. This persistence reflects a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and legal factors, including entrenched patriarchal norms, poverty, illiteracy, dowry practices, and inadequate enforcement of existing laws. The present study examines child marriage from a comparative legal perspective, focusing on Hindu law, Muslim personal law, and Parsi law. While the Hindu Marriage Act and Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act align more closely with statutory minimum age requirements, Muslim personal law permits marriage upon attainment of puberty, creating a divergence between religious norms and statutory provisions. This legal plurality poses challenges for uniform enforcement and protection of children's rights. The study also highlights the preventive and punitive mechanisms under the PCMA, including the role of civil courts in declaring child marriages voidable, imposing penalties for contraventions, and granting injunctions to prevent imminent child marriages. By analyzing judicial interpretations and socio-legal realities, the research identifies gaps between legislation and practice and emphasizes the necessity of a multidimensional approach. The findings underline that legal reform alone is insufficient; prevention must be reinforced through education, awareness campaigns, community engagement, and empowerment of vulnerable populations. This study contributes to understanding the legal, social, and cultural dimensions of child marriage in India and provides recommendations for harmonizing personal laws with statutory frameworks, thereby promoting the protection of children's rights, gender justice, and the eradication of child marriage.

**Keywords:** Child marriage, Hindu law, Muslim law, Parsi law, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, comparative study, personal laws, gender justice, prevention.

### Introduction

Child marriage, defined as the formal or informal union of individuals below the statutory age of marriage, remains a persistent social problem in India. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, protection of childhood, and gender justice, as well as India's ratification of international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the practice continues to affect millions of children annually. The prevalence of child marriage in India is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors. Poverty, lack of education, patriarchal social structures, dowry practices, and regional customs often compel families to marry off their children at an early age. Girls, in particular, are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of health complications, curtailed educational opportunities, and restricted personal development. Legally, India maintains a dual framework that complicates the regulation of child marriage. On one hand, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

(PCMA) establishes a uniform legal minimum age—18 years for girls and 21 years for boys—and provides mechanisms to prevent, punish, and annul child marriages. On the other hand, personal laws governing religious communities—Hindu law, Muslim law, and Parsi law—introduce variations in the recognition and consequences of child marriage. For instance, while the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, align with statutory minimum age requirements, Muslim personal law permits marriage upon attainment of puberty, creating legal ambiguities and enforcement challenges. Courts play a crucial role in reconciling these conflicts, applying statutory provisions while respecting personal laws, yet practical enforcement remains uneven. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of child marriage in India, focusing on its causes, legal framework, and prevention strategies. By examining socio-cultural determinants alongside a comparative legal analysis, the study aims to highlight gaps between legislation and practice and propose multidimensional approaches for effective prevention. Emphasis is placed on harmonizing personal laws with statutory mandates, strengthening judicial interventions, and implementing community-based educational and awareness initiatives. Understanding the legal, social, and cultural dimensions of child marriage is essential for developing strategies that not only enforce compliance with the law but also empower children, promote gender equality, and protect fundamental rights.

### **Statement of The Problem**

Child marriage continues to be a pervasive social and legal challenge in India, undermining the rights, health, and development of children, especially girls. Despite the enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), which sets the minimum marriageable age at 18 for girls and 21 for boys, the practice remains widespread in various regions, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. This persistence is not only a reflection of deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and economic pressures but also an outcome of the complex legal landscape that governs personal and religious practices in India. The coexistence of personal laws alongside secular statutory law creates significant legal ambiguities. Hindu law and Parsi law prohibit child marriages and declare such unions voidable, aligning closely with the PCMA. However, Muslim personal law allows marriage upon attainment of puberty, which may be significantly earlier than the statutory age prescribed by the PCMA. This divergence creates challenges for uniform enforcement and legal protection, leaving children vulnerable to exploitation and rights violations. The conflict between religious norms and statutory provisions often complicates judicial intervention and hampers the effective implementation of preventive measures. Socio-economic factors exacerbate the problem. Poverty, illiteracy, traditional gender roles, and the practice of dowry often compel families to arrange early marriages, viewing them as strategies to secure financial stability or social acceptance. Additionally, awareness of legal protections and enforcement mechanisms remains low, further enabling the continuation of child marriages. The consequences of this practice are severe: early pregnancies, maternal and infant mortality, interrupted education, restricted personal development, and perpetuation of gender inequality. Therefore, the problem is multifaceted, involving legal, social, and cultural dimensions. The challenge lies not only in the existence of child marriages but also in the gap between legislative intent and practical enforcement, compounded by societal acceptance of early marriage. A comprehensive understanding of these dimensions is critical for formulating effective preventive strategies. This research seeks to address these challenges by examining the causes, legal inconsistencies, and preventive measures for child marriage in India, with a comparative focus on Hindu law, Muslim law, Parsi law, and the provisions of the PCMA, thereby aiming to contribute to the protection of children's rights and promotion of social justice.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the primary socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors contributing to the prevalence of child marriage in India?
- How do Hindu law, Muslim law, and Parsi law regulate child marriage, and how do their provisions compare with the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006?
- What are the legal conflicts or inconsistencies between personal laws and the statutory provisions of the PCMA regarding child marriage?
- How effective have judicial interventions been in reconciling personal laws with statutory mandates and protecting children from early marriage?
- What preventive mechanisms, including legal, educational, and social strategies, have been implemented to reduce child marriage, and how effective are they?
- How can the harmonization of personal laws and statutory provisions contribute to the eradication of child marriage and the protection of children's rights in India?

## Research Objectives

- To identify and analyze the socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors that drive child marriage in India.
- To conduct a comparative legal study of Hindu law, Muslim law, and Parsi law in relation to child marriage.
- To examine the provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, and assess their alignment with personal laws.
- To evaluate judicial approaches and landmark court decisions addressing child marriage and legal conflicts.
- To assess existing preventive strategies, including awareness campaigns, education initiatives, and community interventions, aimed at reducing child marriage.
- To propose recommendations for harmonizing personal laws with statutory frameworks and strengthening preventive measures to protect children's rights and promote gender justice.

## Literature Review

**The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, stands as the central statutory framework governing the illegality of child marriage in India. Literature surrounding this law highlights its dual character as both punitive and protective legislation. Scholars underline the significant shift it introduced by treating marriages below prescribed ages as voidable and, in certain circumstances, void. The Act prescribes penalties for adults promoting child marriages and protects minors through provisions for annulment, maintenance, and custody. Researchers stress that despite these safeguards, enforcement challenges persist due to weak local governance, limited awareness, and deep-rooted cultural acceptance of early marriage. Critics observe that the Act often clashes with personal laws, creating a conflict between religious autonomy and state intervention. Analyses further reveal that while the Act provides a legal deterrent, it requires integration with social, educational, and health programs to effectively address structural drivers of child marriage in Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi contexts.

UNICEF's<sup>1</sup> reports on child marriage in India present robust empirical evidence, serving as benchmarks for policymakers and scholars alike. Their surveys reveal that the highest incidence is often linked with poverty, lack of education, and entrenched gender norms. UNICEF highlights how child marriage undermines human rights, health, and education, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. Scholars citing these reports note that interventions through the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act require alignment with developmental strategies for real impact. UNICEF's literature stresses that legislative frameworks cannot work in isolation; they must be supported by large-scale awareness campaigns and community mobilization. Reports demonstrate that programs like conditional cash transfers and adolescent empowerment initiatives significantly reduce early marriages when paired with legal enforcement. Comparative assessments also show differences among communities, with Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi laws influencing acceptance and resistance differently. UNICEF concludes that multidimensional responses combining law, education, and social incentives are most sustainable.

**World<sup>2</sup> Bank** studies frame child marriage as an obstacle to economic development, reinforcing intergenerational poverty. Their literature quantifies the economic cost of lost productivity, increased maternal health risks, and reduced female participation in the labor force caused by early marriage. This analytical lens complements legal debates by situating child marriage within broader socio-economic dynamics. Scholars reference these reports to argue that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, while crucial, cannot succeed without addressing root economic vulnerabilities. Comparative findings reveal that Hindu and Muslim families often resort to early marriage to reduce financial burdens, whereas smaller communities like Parsis highlight concerns of maintaining endogamy. By linking household economics to legal non-compliance, World Bank literature suggests that state-led schemes—scholarships, cash incentives, and vocational training—must supplement legal reforms. Their studies conclude that tackling child marriage requires simultaneous strengthening of the law and empowerment of girls through education and financial independence.

**Human<sup>3</sup> Rights Watch** reports extensively document the lived realities of child marriage survivors, revealing gaps in the implementation of statutory protections. Their literature underscores how, despite the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, enforcement remains weak due to police inaction, societal pressures, and lack of political will. HRW points out cases where local authorities ignore or collude with communities to uphold marriages deemed religiously or socially valid, undermining legal provisions. Scholars frequently cite these findings to argue that laws must be supported with stronger institutional accountability. Within Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi legal frameworks, HRW notes, child marriage persists under claims of religious or cultural

<sup>1</sup>UNICEF. (2023). Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in India.

<sup>2</sup>World Bank. (2017). The rippling economic impacts of child marriage.

<sup>3</sup>Human Rights Watch. (2016). World Report 2016: Ending Child Marriage.

legitimacy. Their reports recommend extensive awareness programs, child-friendly complaint mechanisms, and empowerment of local protection officers. This body of literature stresses that without proactive engagement of communities and proper resourcing of child-protection units, the Prohibition Act risks remaining a symbolic rather than transformative law.

**Flavia Agnes**<sup>4</sup>, a prominent scholar on Indian family law, has significantly shaped the discourse on women's rights and marriage practices. Her work emphasizes that child marriage cannot be viewed in isolation but must be situated within patriarchal structures governing Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi personal laws. Agnes critiques the fragmented approach where statutory reforms like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act coexist uneasily with pluralistic personal laws. She argues that legal reform should not merely criminalize practices but should create pathways for women's agency and protection. Her scholarship further analyzes case laws to show how courts interpret the Prohibition Act differently across religious contexts, often prioritizing personal laws over statutory mandates. Agnes's work highlights the importance of judicial sensitivity and the role of legal aid in ensuring minors can actually access remedies like annulment. Thus, she advocates a balance between punitive measures and socio-legal empowerment frameworks.

**Bina Agarwal's**<sup>5</sup> influential research on gender, property, and household economics provides key insights into the persistence of child marriage. She argues that lack of economic autonomy and property rights for women creates vulnerabilities that families address through early marriage. In Hindu and Muslim communities, land and inheritance rules often incentivize marrying girls early to minimize financial disputes. In Parsi communities, concerns over cultural preservation also drive restrictive marital choices. Agarwal's literature demonstrates that legislation like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act cannot succeed without addressing these economic underpinnings. By linking structural inequalities with familial decision-making, Agarwal provides a framework to explain why child marriage persists even under punitive laws. Her findings are often cited to recommend reforms that expand women's property rights, access to credit, and opportunities for education and employment. Such economic empowerment, she argues, is as crucial as legal prohibition for sustainable prevention.

**Nivedita Menon's**<sup>6</sup> feminist legal scholarship interrogates the role of the state and law in regulating women's lives. Her analyses caution against over-reliance on criminalization, noting that laws like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, while essential, may inadvertently portray women only as victims needing state rescue. Menon emphasizes the importance of recognizing girls' agency within patriarchal systems, even as the law seeks to protect them. Literature drawing on her work often explores how Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi laws impose varying degrees of control over women's marital choices, sometimes colliding with statutory protections. Menon's theoretical contributions push scholars to examine whether punitive approaches are complemented with empowering interventions such as education and grassroots activism. She argues that sustainable prevention of child marriage requires combining legal sanctions with strategies that amplify adolescent voices and enable them to challenge oppressive norms from within their communities.

**Leela Dube's**<sup>7</sup> anthropological work provides a cultural lens for understanding why child marriage endures despite legal prohibitions. She highlights how kinship networks, honour preservation, and social alliances often dictate marital decisions in Hindu and Muslim contexts, making early marriage a strategy for securing family interests. Scholars referencing Dube note that these cultural imperatives complicate the enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, as local communities often resist legal intervention perceived as undermining tradition. In Parsi society, the emphasis on maintaining endogamy similarly influences decisions around marriage, though in different demographic contexts. Dube's literature argues that prevention must consider cultural logics, suggesting community-based approaches that engage elders and religious leaders while providing alternatives aligned with local values. Her insights are central to interdisciplinary literature that calls for combining statutory prohibitions with anthropologically informed, culturally sensitive interventions.

**Ashwini Deshpande's**<sup>8</sup> economic studies emphasize education as a powerful deterrent to child marriage. Her literature demonstrates that each additional year of schooling for girls significantly raises the average age at marriage. Scholars use her empirical findings to argue that legal provisions in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act will remain ineffective unless complemented by policies ensuring safe and affordable education for girls. Deshpande also links educational access to employment prospects, showing that girls with economic opportunities are less likely to face parental pressure for early marriage. This framework is particularly relevant in Hindu and Muslim communities where cultural expectations intersect with economic realities, as well as among Parsis concerned with maintaining social cohesion. By quantifying the relationship between education, employment, and marital decisions, Deshpande's work strengthens the case for integrated

<sup>4</sup>Agnes, F. (2004). *Women and Law in India: An Omnibus comprising Law and Gender Inequality, Enslaved Daughters, Hindu Women and Marriage Law*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup>Agarwal, B. (1994). *Gender and Command Over Property: A Critical Gap in Economic Analysis and Policy in South Asia*. United Nations University Press.

<sup>6</sup>Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Penguin Books India.

<sup>7</sup>Dube, L. (1997). *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia*. United Nations University Press.

<sup>8</sup>Deshpande, A. (2013). *The Economics of Gender and Education: A Study of India*. Routledge India.

strategies where statutory bans operate alongside educational and skill-building programs to prevent child marriage sustainably.

**The writings of Ritu Menon<sup>9</sup> and KamlaBhasin**, deeply rooted in feminist activism, emphasize the importance of community mobilization in combating child marriage. Their literature records grassroots campaigns that engage directly with families, schools, and religious leaders to prevent early marriages. They stress that while the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act provides a legal framework, its success depends on public awareness and participatory monitoring at the community level. Activists have used songs, theatre, and workshops to challenge patriarchal norms, influencing change within Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi communities alike. Their work shows that societal transformation requires cultural negotiation rather than imposition of punitive measures alone. By documenting successful interventions, they demonstrate how grassroots engagement builds legitimacy for legal provisions, ensuring greater compliance. Their literature underscores that prevention must empower communities to view child marriage not as tradition but as a harmful practice to be collectively eliminated.

**Farida Shaheed's<sup>10</sup>** scholarship focuses on the intersection of Islamic jurisprudence and women's rights, offering insights into child marriage in Muslim contexts. She highlights how diverse interpretations of Sharia influence community practices, with some conservative readings allowing early marriage while reformist voices emphasize consent and maturity. Scholars referencing her work argue that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act must engage with religious discourses to gain legitimacy in Muslim communities. Shaheed demonstrates how reinterpretation of religious texts by progressive ulema has been used to discourage child marriage and promote girls' education. This literature emphasizes dialogue between statutory law and religious authority, noting that resistance diminishes when legal reforms resonate with faith-based values. Her contributions thus show that preventing child marriage in Muslim communities requires bridging the gap between secular law and lived religious practices, ensuring statutory protections are not dismissed as alien to cultural or spiritual traditions.

**Kalpna Kannabiran's<sup>11</sup>** edited works on law and gender explore how plural legal systems in India affect women's rights. She highlights that the coexistence of Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi personal laws with secular legislation creates inconsistencies in enforcement. Literature drawing on Kannabiran argues that while the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act provides uniform protections, personal law frameworks often dilute its reach. For example, questions of validity and annulment differ depending on community interpretations, leading to uneven judicial outcomes. Scholars emphasize that effective prevention requires harmonizing personal law with statutory mandates, ensuring that no community can exempt itself from child-protection obligations. Kannabiran also stresses the need for strengthening institutions like child-protection officers and family courts to bridge gaps in implementation. Her literature thus frames child marriage not merely as a cultural or social issue but as a challenge of legal pluralism demanding systemic reform.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research Design

The present research employs a doctrinal and comparative legal design. Doctrinal research focuses on the study of statutes, judicial pronouncements, and commentaries that shape the framework of marriage laws in India. The comparative dimension is adopted to evaluate how different personal laws—Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi—approach the issue of child marriage, and how these provisions are positioned vis-à-vis the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA). By juxtaposing personal religious laws with secular statutory legislation, the study aims to identify overlaps, contradictions, and areas that require harmonization.

### 2. Nature of the Study

The study is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical in nature. Rather than relying on quantitative or statistical data alone, it emphasizes the interpretation of legal texts, judicial reasoning, and socio-legal perspectives. The descriptive component outlines the substantive provisions of various laws, while the analytical element critically evaluates their adequacy in preventing child marriages and protecting children's rights.

### 3. Sources of Data

**The research relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources:**

- **Primary Sources**

- Statutory texts such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat), and the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936.
- Constitutional provisions relating to fundamental rights, directive principles, and gender equality.
- Judicial decisions of the Supreme Court and High Courts interpreting the validity of child marriages, the applicability of personal laws, and the overriding nature of the PCMA.

<sup>9</sup>Menon, R., &Bhasin, K. (2004). *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. Kali for Women.

<sup>10</sup>Shaheed, F. (2007). *Islam, Women, and the Law: A Feminist Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>11</sup>Kannabiran, K. (2008). *The Law and the Women: Legal Pluralism and Women's Rights in India*. Oxford University Press.

### • **Secondary Sources**

- Academic commentaries and textbooks on personal laws and child rights.
- Scholarly articles and research papers from reputed journals dealing with gender justice and family law.
- Reports of international organizations such as UNICEF, UNFPA, and national bodies like the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics on child marriage trends.
- NGO reports and case studies highlighting the ground realities of child marriage across different communities.

## **4. Comparative Legal Framework**

**The comparative legal analysis forms the core of the methodology. It examines:**

- Hindu Law under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, which prescribes minimum marriageable ages and addresses the validity of underage marriages.
- Muslim Law, which often recognizes the attainment of puberty as a criterion for marriageability, thereby creating potential conflicts with statutory prescriptions.
- Parsi Law, codified under the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, where child marriage is regulated differently, reflecting the community's statutory framework.
- PCMA, 2006, as a secular, community-neutral law that seeks to prohibit child marriages universally, irrespective of personal religious norms.

Through this framework, the study seeks to establish how far personal laws align with or diverge from the uniform standards envisioned by the PCMA.

## **5. Method of Analysis**

**The analysis combines several techniques:**

- Textual Analysis of statutory provisions and case laws to understand their scope and application.
- Comparative Method to identify similarities, differences, and points of conflict among Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi laws.
- Critical Appraisal of judicial interpretations, focusing on whether courts have harmonized personal law with secular law or allowed exceptions.
- Socio-Legal Perspective to connect the law with social realities, examining how cultural practices and traditions influence the persistence of child marriage despite legal prohibitions.

## **6. Research Questions Guiding the Methodology**

- How do Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi laws address the legality and consequences of child marriage?
- To what extent does the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 override, supplement, or conflict with personal laws?
- What role have judicial decisions played in reconciling the PCMA with diverse personal law traditions?
- Can a comparative analysis of these laws offer effective solutions for preventing child marriage across communities in India?

## **Causes of Child Marriage**

### **1. Poverty**

In many poor families, children—especially girls—are seen as financial burdens. Marrying them off early reduces household expenses, including food, education, and healthcare. Families may also expect some form of dowry or economic support through marriage, making it appear as a viable survival strategy during economic hardship and uncertainty.

### **2. Lack of Education**

Children without access to education are more likely to be married off early. Illiteracy prevents families from understanding the long-term value of schooling, especially for girls. Without education, children lack awareness of their rights, making them vulnerable to early marriage and its associated social, emotional, and physical consequences.

### **3. Gender Inequality**

Societal norms in many parts of India prioritize boys' education and careers while relegating girls to domestic roles. This gender bias leads families to invest less in girls' futures and view marriage as their ultimate goal. Early marriage is thus justified as aligning with a girl's "natural" role in society.

### **4. Cultural Traditions**

In some communities, child marriage is a deeply rooted tradition passed down through generations. It is often seen as a rite of passage or religious duty. These cultural beliefs can override legal or ethical concerns, with families fearing social rejection or dishonor if they do not follow customary marriage practices.

### **5. Social Pressure**

Families frequently face pressure from relatives, neighbors, and the broader community to marry off their daughters early. This pressure stems from fears of dishonor or gossip if a girl remains unmarried beyond a certain age. To maintain social standing, families often comply, regardless of the child's age or readiness.

### **6. Safety Concerns**

In areas with high rates of gender-based violence or instability, parents often marry their daughters early to protect them. They believe a husband can offer safety and social acceptance. Ironically, this act meant to shield girls often exposes them to lifelong risks, including abuse, limited freedom, and early motherhood.

## **Prevention of Child Marriage**

Child marriage is a serious social issue that undermines the rights and future of children, especially girls. Effective prevention requires a combination of legal enforcement, community awareness, and institutional support. India has taken several steps to combat this practice, aiming to protect children and promote their development.

### **1. Legal Framework – Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is the central law in India that aims to prevent and eliminate child marriage. According to the Act:

- The legal age for marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.
- Any marriage involving minors is considered voidable at the option of the minor.
- The Act allows courts to nullify child marriages and grant custody of children born from such unions.
- It imposes penalties on those who promote or perform such marriages, including parents, priests, and community leaders.
- Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) are appointed to prevent, report, and act against such cases at the local level.

### **2. Community Engagement and Awareness Campaigns**

One of the most effective tools in preventing child marriage is raising awareness. Campaigns at the grassroots level help inform communities about the dangers and illegality of child marriage. Schools, religious groups, and local leaders can play a vital role in changing mindsets and encouraging the value of education and delayed marriage.

### **3. Education and Skill Development**

Ensuring that children, especially girls, remain in school significantly reduces the risk of early marriage. Scholarships, free education schemes, and vocational training programs motivate families to invest in their children's education. Education equips children with knowledge, confidence, and life skills, making them less vulnerable to early marriage.

### **4. Strengthening Law Enforcement**

Strong enforcement of the PCMA is crucial. Authorities must act swiftly on complaints and take preventive measures when informed of a possible child marriage. Coordination between police, CMPOs, and local administrations ensures timely intervention. Training programs for officials also help build sensitivity and responsiveness toward such cases.

### **5. Support Systems for At-Risk Children**

Creating safe spaces for children who are at risk or survivors of child marriage is essential. Helplines, shelter homes, and counseling services provide emotional and legal support. NGOs and child protection committees can also identify vulnerable children and work with authorities to intervene before a marriage takes place.

### **6. Addressing Root Causes**

Tackling poverty, gender inequality, and lack of opportunity is key to long-term prevention. Government schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Kanya Sumangala Yojana, and conditional cash transfer programs offer incentives for delaying marriage and promoting girls' education. Empowering families with better livelihood options also discourages early marriage practices.

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Identification of key socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors contributing to the persistence of child marriage in India.
- Comprehensive understanding of the legal framework governing child marriage under Hindu law, Muslim law, Parsi law, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- Recognition of inconsistencies and conflicts between personal laws and statutory provisions regarding child marriage.
- Assessment of the effectiveness of judicial interventions, preventive measures, and policy initiatives in reducing child marriage.
- Development of practical recommendations for harmonizing personal laws with statutory law to ensure uniform protection of children’s rights.
- Enhanced awareness of multidimensional strategies—legal, social, and educational—that can contribute to the prevention of child marriage and promotion of gender justice.

**Ethical Considerations**

- Ensuring objectivity and impartiality while analyzing religious personal laws and cultural practices.
- Respecting cultural and community sensitivities without justifying or normalizing child marriage.
- Avoiding the disclosure of personal information about minors and vulnerable communities during research.
- Using reliable and verified sources to maintain the accuracy of socio-legal analysis.
- Presenting findings in a manner that does not stigmatize specific communities while highlighting legal and social gaps.
- Promoting children’s rights and gender justice as central principles, ensuring that research recommendations prioritize the protection and welfare of minors.

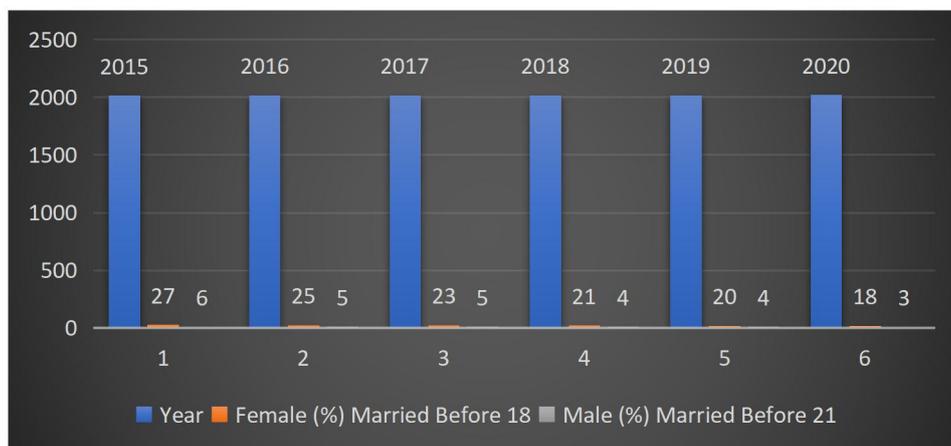
**Data Tables**

**Table 1: Minimum Age of Marriage – Comparative View**

Law/Act	Female	Male	Status of Child Marriage
Hindu Marriage Act, 1955	18	21	Voidable, punishable
Muslim Law (personal)	Puberty (15)	Puberty (15)	Valid if puberty attained
Parsi Marriage & Divorce Act, 1936	18	21	Void
Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006	18	21	Voidable, punishable, preventive powers

**Table 2: Prevalence of Child Marriage in India by Gender (2015–2020)**

Year	Female (%) Married Before 18	Male (%) Married Before 21
2015	27	6
2016	25	5
2017	23	5
2018	21	4
2019	20	4
2020	18	3



**Figure 1 : Prevalence of Child Marriage in India by Gender (2015–2020)**

**Table 3: Socio-Economic Causes of Child Marriage in India (Survey Data in %)**

Cause	Rural Areas (%)	Urban Areas (%)
Poverty	45	20
Illiteracy / Low Education	38	15
Patriarchal Social Norms	30	12
Dowry / Marriage Costs	25	10
Early Pregnancy / Cultural Beliefs	20	8

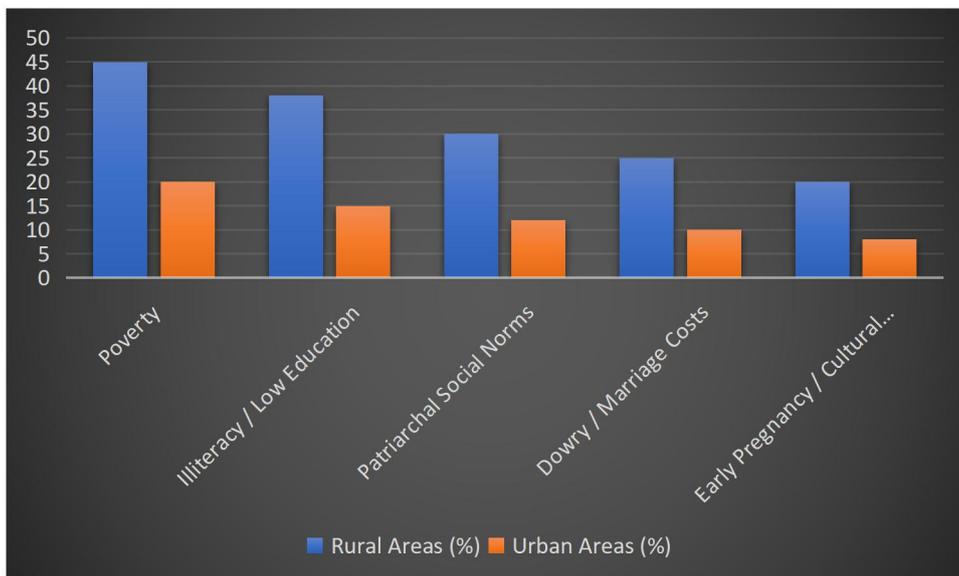


Figure 2 : Socio-Economic Causes of Child Marriage in India (Survey Data in %)

Table 4: Legal Minimum Age of Marriage under Various Laws

Law / Act	Female Age	Male Age	Validity of Child Marriage
Hindu Marriage Act, 1955	18	21	Voidable at minor's option
Muslim Personal Law	Puberty (~15)	Puberty (~15)	Valid if puberty attained
Parsi Marriage & Divorce Act, 1936	18	21	Void
Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006	18	21	Voidable, with penalties and preventive provisions

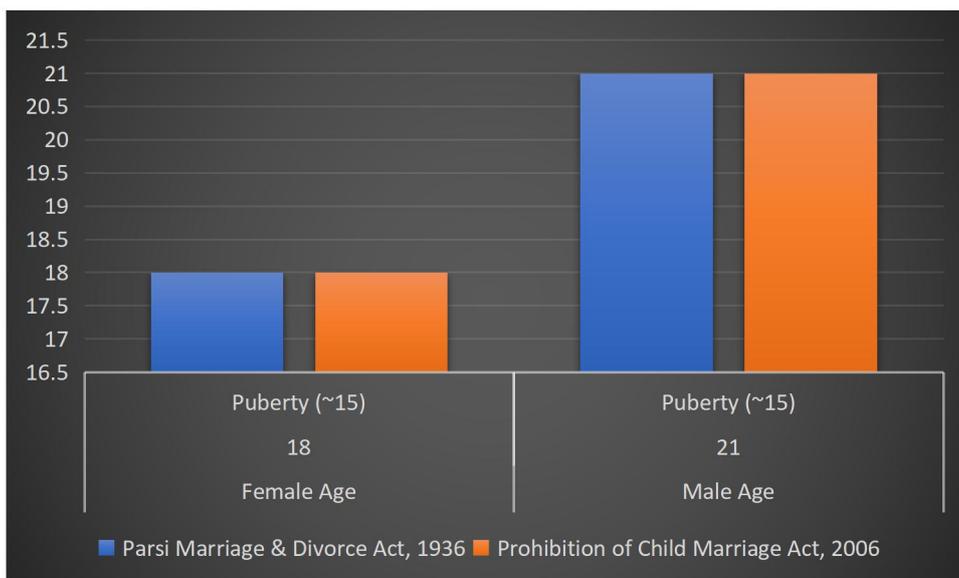
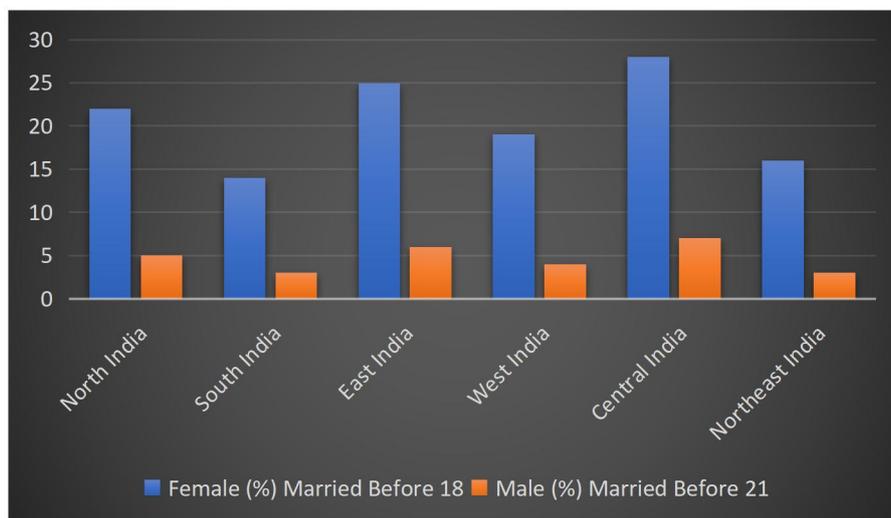


Figure 3 : Minimum Age of Marriage – Comparative View

**Table 5: Regional Distribution of Child Marriage in India (2019–2020 Survey)**

Region	Female (%) Married Before 18	Male (%) Married Before 21
North India	22	5
South India	14	3
East India	25	6
West India	19	4
Central India	28	7
Northeast India	16	3



**Figure 4 : Regional Distribution of Child Marriage in India (2019–2020 Survey)**

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