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Child Marriage in India

Prevalence of Child Marriages

- A recent study reveals that three child marriages occur every minute in India.
- Despite this alarming rate, only three cases related to child marriage are registered daily.
- Data from the 2011 Census, National Crime Records Bureau, and National Family Health Surveys form the basis of these findings.

Global and National Statistics

- India ranks as the country with the highest number of child marriages globally.
- 45% of child marriages worldwide occur in South Asia, and 34% of these are in India.

Legal Definition

- Indian law sets the minimum marriageable age as 18 for women and 21 for men.
- Marriages involving individuals below these ages are considered child marriages.

State-wise Prevalence

- Among women aged 20-24, the states with the highest rates of child marriage include:
- West Bengal (42%), Bihar (41%), Tripura (40%), Jharkhand (32%), and Assam (31%) (NFHS-5, 2019–2021).
- States with lower rates include Nagaland (6%), Himachal Pradesh (5%), Jammu & Kashmir (5%), Ladakh (3%), and Lakshadweep (1%).
- In Tamil Nadu, an average of 10 child marriages occur daily, according to the state's Social Welfare and Women's Rights Department.

Causes of Child Marriage

- Poverty: Financial insecurity often leads families to marry off daughters at an early age.
- Education Barriers: Lack of access to education, coupled with economic constraints, contributes to the rise in child marriages.
- Unemployment: Parents seeking livelihoods in other districts often marry off daughters early to ensure their perceived "safety."
- Rural areas report higher prevalence (27%) compared to urban areas (15%).

Consequences of Child Marriage

- Disruption of Education: Girls are often deprived of education, leading to lifelong dependence on family members.
- Health Issues: Over 60% of underage brides in India suffer from anemia, increasing the likelihood of undernourished offspring and child mortality during childbirth.

Legal Framework and Initiatives

- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) imposes penalties of up to 2 years imprisonment or a fine of Rs.1 lakh, or both, on those involved in conducting or facilitating child marriages.
- If an accused proves ignorance of the child's age, they may escape punishment.
- Some states, like Himachal Pradesh, have raised the legal marriage age for women to 21 years to deter child marriages.
- A national helpline, 1098, has been set up for reporting child marriages.

Notable Interventions

- Assam serves as a model state, achieving an 81% reduction in child marriages across 1,132 villages in 20 districts between 2021 and 2024 (NFHS data).

UNICEF Estimates

- In 2006, 47% of women aged 20-24 in India had been married as children.
- By 2019-2021, this figure dropped to 23%, yet some states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Telangana, Tripura, and West Bengal still exceed the national average.
- UNICEF predicts that while child marriages in South Asia may decline, eliminating them entirely may take 55 years.

Increasing Himalayan Glacier Lakes

- Rising global temperatures have led to a 10.81% increase in the number of glacier lakes over 13 years.
- The surface area of glacier lakes in India has expanded by 33.7%, particularly in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Implications

- Larger glacier lakes pose a significant risk of flooding, threatening infrastructure and biodiversity in these regions.
- These developments highlight potential violations of environmental laws, including the Biodiversity Act, Water Pollution Control Act, and Environment Protection Act.