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**Child Marriage: Its Causes and Worse Impacts in Indian society.****Pankaj Kumar Das,**Assistant Professor, South Calcutta Girls' College  
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**Abstract:-**Child Marriage is a human rights violation. Now child marriage is a curse in the global society. Child marriage is a burning problem around the world including India. It is especially prevalent in India, where more than one third of child brides live. According to UNICEF, 47% of girls are married by 18 years of age & 18% are married by 15 years of age. Majority of girls who were married below 18 years are from poor & below poverty line families. These marriages are often performed without the consent of the girls involved in the marriage. Indian law has made child marriage illegal, but it is still widely practiced across the nation. The highest rates are seen particularly in the rural states in India. In most cases young girls get married off to older men, when they are still children. Child marriages must be viewed within a context of force & coercion, involving pressure & children's lack of choice or capacity to give their full consent. Child marriage is common practice in India, Niger, Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Africa & Nepal, Where mostly girls are married below the age of 18. Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality, culture & tradition, poverty & insecurity. Child marriage has worse effect on the young girls, society and her children's health. It has severe negative health consequences of girls are often not psychologically, physically & sexually mature. It is resulting in death, health problems, poverty, violence & lack of education.

**Keywords:-** Child marriage, history, factors, consequences, remedies, suggestions.

**Introduction: -**Child marriage is one of the burning problems of Indian society. Generally child marriage means a marriage of individuals who marry before the minimum legal age, which 18 years for girls & 21 years for boys. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) refers to child marriage is a marriage of a child younger than 18 years old. Child marriage occurs particularly in developing countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, Latin America, and South & South-East Asia. Almost half of the child marriages occur globally in South Asia. India is one of the countries in this region where girl child marriage is an unbending social problem. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2005-06) a slight improvement occurs during last two decades in the prevalence on child marriage in India but the fact is that the improvement occurs mainly in urban areas, the situation in rural India remains as it was. The incidence of child marriage in rural areas is alarming as it stands 52%, when compared to urban areas 28%. Data shows, child marriage is common in India prevalence highest in Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, UP, MP, Chhattisgarh, AP & West Bengal (NFHS-3).

Child marriage has been practicing since ancient time. Its root was very deep in Indian society. The evil practice is higher in rural areas. The socio-economic, cultural & educational factors are responsible for child marriage. The lack of awareness & inadequacy of laws are also encouraging this evil practice. Child marriage put worst effect on society. It is a violation of children's rights where it deprives them to the basic right to health, nutrition, education & freedom. Consequently, they are hardly suffering from violation, abuse & exploitation. Young married girls are often getting harassment physically, mentally & emotionally. The government of India has taken various steps to prohibit child marriage. In spite of, child marriage is practicing continuously in India. One third of girls around the world become brides before the age of 18 and one in nine is married under age of 15. The UN estimated that nearly 70 million women aged 20-24 around the world had been married before 18 years. If present trends continue, 150 million girls will be married before the age of 18 over

the next decade (ICRW). According to a report by UNICEF(2005), almost 50% women aged 20-24 are married by 18 years in India.

Objectives of the study: -1.To understands about child marriage 2.To identify the factors influence the child marriages 3.To examine the implications of the child marriage 4.To find out the consequences of child marriage 5.To analyze the measures against child marriage.

Methodology: -The study based on mainly secondary data. The data has been collected from Article, journal, book, newspaper, internet etc.

What is Child marriage? : -Generally marriage is the union of a man & a woman who makes a permanent & exclusive commitment to each other. It takes responsibility of each other for mutual benefit & fulfilled by bearing & rearing children together. It is the process of reproduction and it binds a man and a woman in social relation & gives them to fulfill their mental & physical desires those are socially acceptable (JBM&SSR, 2015). That is why marriage is considered to be a significant part of human life.Child marriage is generally understood to mean marriages that take place before the age of 18. The legal age for marriage in India is 18 years for girls & 21 for boys. But for many girls marriage occurs much earlier. It occurs mainly for strong social opinion & harmful cultural norm and practice, which has been a debilitating impact on the lives of girls. In some countries, girls as young as 7 or 8 are forced by their families to marry much older men. The parents believe that through marriage, they are protecting their daughters & increasing economic opportunities. However, child marriage exposes girls to increase health problems, violence, and poverty & gender inequality (iwhc.org).

History of child marriage: -Child marriage is a widely practice in India & its root was very deep in society. Child marriage has been practicing continuously since ancient period.

Ancient period: some writers think child marriage was not prevalent in ancient India. Jaya Sagade (2005), a famous writer explores the history of child marriage during Vedic period (1500-600 BC) marriage were performed when the couples attained puberty. A girl had freedom to choose her life partner & her consent was always sought. Various types of marriages like Gandharva vivaha, Asura vivaha were prevalent in ancient period but BAL Vivaha was absent. A.S. Altekar (1962) told that 'marriage in the Vedic age took place when the parties fully grownup'. The Ric Veda mentioned that a girl could be married only when she was fully developed, both physically & mentally. On the other hand, some scholars think that child marriage was prevalent in ancient India. In 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, a patriarchal social structure had been encouraging early marriage for a girl. Manu Smriti expressed that bride should be much younger than bridegroom.

Medieval period: The custom of child marriage originated during the medieval period, when arbitrary powers were concentrated in the hand of hierarchy. At that time, parents would want to remove responsibilities of their daughters by getting them married before of puberty. The parents seek to protect their girls from sexual exploitation& abuse. The caste system became more rigid in this period. Therefore, parents & community leaders preferred child marriage to protect hereditary caste system.

Colonial period: Child marriage continuously practiced during colonial period. The evil practice encouraged by the hereditary caste system & rigid social customs. At that time society was dominated by the patriarchal thoughts that deprived the basic rights of girls. Parents had forced to get their daughters married at early age by social pressure. If parent failed to marry their daughter within maximum age he must excluded from the society. The Western education introduced in India. The educated people strongly protested against social evils like child marriage, Sati system & female infanticide etc. (IJAR, 2015).

Causes or factors of child marriage: -Child marriage is a serious human rights crisis. The child marriage occurs more frequently among girls who are the least education, poorest and living in rural areas (UNFPA). Early marriage & pregnancy is one of the major causes of maternal mortality in India (Yadav, 2006).

There are many factors that are responsible for child marriage:

1. Gender inequality: Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality & the belief that girls are inferior to boys. In many communities girls are seen as a burden on their family. Families closely guard their daughter’s sexuality & protect the family honour.

2. Culture & Tradition: child marriage is a traditional practice & it happened for generations. In some communities, when girls start to mature they become women in the eyes of the community. Marriage is the next step to giving a girl her status as a wife & mother. People feel that the traditions & norms are stronger than the law which leads child marriage.

3. Poverty: More than half of girls from the poorest families in the developing countries are married as children. Where believe that marriage will be a solution to secure girls future. Giving a daughter in marriage allows parents to reduce family expenses. Female children are often denied equal access to common resources & victimized by poverty of the family.

4. Insecurity: It is general perception that a married woman is safer against offenses than unmarried women. Many parents marry their daughters early because they feel her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of harassment & physical or sexual assault. To be secure from offences, assaults, parents are in a hasty to give away girl in marriage soon after she attains puberty or earlier.

5. Education: In all developing countries female receive less education and they are treated as burden on the family economy. Due to this discrimination, girls are given less or no priority. If girl is educated groom should be more educated than bride then more dowries are required. Educated girls are increasing marriage expenditure. So people think it is easier to get marriage of girl soon after attaining puberty or even before at the age of 13 or 14 than to educate her.

6. Avoiding share in Ancestral property: Right of female to share ancestral property is also one of the factors responsible for encouraging child marriages to some extent. If marriage of girl is done at early age she as a child would not demand for her share. Poor families resort to child marriage to avoid all sorts of burden of female child (IJSR, 2015).

The highest prevalence of child marriage is concentrated in Western & Sub-Saharan African countries. These countries Rank are given below:

	Country	Percentage of girl married before 18
1.	Niger	75
2.	Chad	68
3.	Central African Republic	68
4.	Bangladesh	66
5.	Guinea	63
6.	Mozambique	56
7.	Mali	55
8.	Burkina Faso	52
9.	South Sudan	52
10.	Malawi	50
11.	Madagascar	48

12.	Eritrea	47
13.	India	47
14.	Somalia	45
15.	Sierra Leone	44
16.	Zambia	42
17.	Dominican Republic	41
18.	Ethiopia	41
19.	Nepal	41
20.	Nicaragua	41

Source: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).

The Indian states which child marriage prevalent more than 50%.

Name of the state	Percentage (%)
Bihar	64
Rajasthan	58
Jharkhand	60
Madhya Pradesh	53
Uttar Pradesh	52
Chhattisgarh	51
Andhra Pradesh	56
West Bengal	53

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-III.

Consequences of child marriage: -Child marriage is still widespread in India which is home to a third of the world’s child brides. About half of Indian women were married before they turned 18. It has a negative impact on physical growth, health, mental & emotional development, education opportunities. It also affects society as a whole since child marriage reinforces a cycle of poverty & perpetuates gender discrimination, illiteracy & malnutrition as well as high infant and maternal mortality rates. There are some impacts of child marriage in society. These are

- School dropout: Child marriage threatens girl’s lives, health and it limits their future prospects. child marriage leads to girls dropping out of school, which limits their scope of future development. Illiteracy has increased among the girls who get married at the early age. About 59% married women in the age group of 15-19 years are illiterate. While 42% are illiterate in the age group of 20-24 years (NFHS).

- Child & maternal ill-health & mortality: Child marriage is one of the deterrent factors which hamper the progress of maternal & child health, it leads to high maternal & infant deaths & malnutrition among children. Young girls might have severe health problems like pregnancy & child birth. Girls pressed into child marriage often become pregnant while still adolescents, increasing the risk of complications in pregnancy or childbirth. These complications are a leading cause of death among older adolescents in developing countries.

- Early pregnancy: Early pregnancy is result of early marriage of girls. Young married brides are forced to setup sexual intercourse with their husbands without contraception. Premature pregnancy & motherhood are an inevitable consequence of child marriage. An estimated 14 million adolescents between 15-19 years give birth each year. Child marriage effectively ends a girl’s

childhood, curtails education, minimizes economic opportunities & increases high risk pregnancy. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s. Children of child brides are 60% more likely to die in the first year of life than those born to mothers older than 19 & families of child brides are probably to be poor & unhealthy.

■ Psychological disadvantage: The loss of adolescent, forced sexual relations & the denial of freedom & personal development attendant on early marriage have profound psychological & emotional stress. Indian researchers on child marriage point out that inadequate socialization, discontinuation of education, repeated pregnancies devastate these girls at very early age (Early M, 2001).

■ Girl brides are involved in early childhood care. Maturity levels become an issue for the little girl who is engaged to play the role of a mother. Child marriage is responsible for higher maternal mortality. Young married girls get pregnant in the early age when they are not fully physically or mentally mature. They have inability to plan or manage families and limited decision making power at home. The girl gets marriage at early age cannot bring up her children properly and also cannot give proper guidance.

■ Girls have been suffering badly from various complications related to pregnancy. Married girls forced to engage in unprotected sexual intercourse, as a result, they are physically more prone to contracting HIV/AIDS & other sexually transmitted diseases.

■ Girls children are still vulnerable; they can be subject to the domestic violence, abuse & abandonment. Nearly 13% of married girls 15-19 years' experience sexual violence.

Government strategy to prevent child marriage: National Government: - The National Ministry of Women & Child Development, as the nodal agency for women & children has developed a convergent national strategy & a plan of action on child marriage to guide all states to prevent the problem. Key components of the action plan include: law enforcement, quality education, social norms, empowering adolescents, sharing knowledge & monitoring. The government of India is also implementing national programmes aimed at protecting & promoting the development of child, while states are supporting these initiatives through states level schemes. Many of the programmes focus on cash transfer schemes to keep girls in school (UNICEF). The "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" scheme was launched by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on 22nd January 2015. It is a social campaign of the Government of India that aims to generate awareness & improve the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls.

**State Governments:** - Many states government have launched conditional cash transfer scheme to hold girls child in school for delaying their marriageable age. Rajasthan government lunched, 'Raj Lakshmi Scheme' in 1992. Haryana initiated 'Apni Beti Apni Dhan' in 1994. This was the first conditional cash transfer scheme which provides Rs 500/- to the mother on the birth of a girls to cover her post-delivery needs. Further the government invests Rs 2500/- in the girls name that can be cashed Rs 25000/- when she reached in 18 years. Karnataka lunched the 'Bhagyaxmi scheme' in 2004. Delhi introduced 'Ladli Yojana' & Madhya Pradesh introduced 'Ladli Laxmi Yojana'.

The government of West Bengal lunched 'Kanyashree Prakalpa' a conditional cash transfer scheme for girls' students. It provides Rs 500/- per students per year from class viii to xii & provides Rs 25000/- one time for the girls students at the age of 18. Only unmarried girls can get benefits of this scheme. Above all the schemes has been delayed the age of marriage for girls to prevent early marriages (K. guideline, 2013).



**Remedies of child marriage:** -Various preventing acts & regulatory steps have been taken to prevent child marriage, that is, Sarada Act 1978, Child Marriage Restraint Act 2006 and compulsory marriage registration is a tool of the preventing child marriage. The Supreme Court of India has given Judgment 2006; marriages of all citizens of India, respective of their religion have to be compulsory registered in the states. It is a major step to prevent child marriage and it is mandatory to give age at the time of marriage registration. In spite of, various initiatives both legal and mandatory policy and programme, the condition of girl child remains thinking matters in our country (MSPI,2012). UNFPA promotes legislation & programmes designed to end child marriage. It also supports evidence-based, girl-centered investments that empower girls with the information, skills & services they need to be healthy, educated & safe. The governments & society is doing much to abolish child marriage through campaigns, laws, policies & individual support of people. UNICEF is working alongside the Government of India in its efforts to prevent child marriage, which includes: Law enforcement, Girls empowerment, Community mobilization & promoting convergence of sectors at all levels mainly with education, social protection schemes.

**Suggestions: -**

- informs parents, community members & youth about the negative impacts of child marriage.
- create a supporting network of leaders & teachers who can empower girls & their parents.
- expand training for health workers on the dangers of early marriage.
- establish community networks & partnerships among girls, teachers, elders, women, youth groups & religious leaders etc. jointly work to ending child marriage.
- strengthen the role of the administration on enforcement of the law against early marriage.
- develop strong support to keep girls in school.
- at last, above all the factors motivating child marriages, all efforts should aim at change the gender biased attitudes of parents & society by imparting proper education & eradicating poverty.

**Conclusions:** -Child marriage is one of the worst practices that put evil effects on the society. The government of India has taken various constitutional & legal policies to prevent child marriage. Partnerships with government and civil society are a crucial part of these efforts but much more can be done. Any marriage below legal age is banned & punishable in India under the prohibition of child marriage Act, 2006. Therefore, child marriage still prevalent in India that puts worst effects on lives & future of youth. Today, large numbers of girls are getting married before the age of 18 years. They are depriving their basic rights to health nutrition, education, freedom, victimizing by several violence & abuse. Therefore, the strong initiatives of the civil societies, NGOs are essential to remove child marriage in India. If there is no reduction in child marriage, the global number of child-brides will reach 1.2 billion girls by 2050, with devastating consequences for girls, families & their countries.

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