The Millennial Girls Embarrassing the Age Cap: Shifting Stratum of Marriage Age in India

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Abstract

The phenomenon of late marriage among Indian girls has gained prominence in recent years, reflecting a shift in societal norms and individual aspirations. Traditionally, early marriage was the norm in India, driven by cultural and familial factors. However, this trend has experienced a noteworthy transformation. Contemporary Indian girls are increasingly opting for delayed marriages, seeking higher education, career opportunities, and personal growth.

Factors contributing to the trend of late marriage among Indian girls are multifaceted. Enhanced access to education has empowered them with knowledge, and skills and encouraged them to prioritize self-development before marital commitments. Economic independence and evolving gender roles have reshaped perceptions of marriage, prompting a desire for equitable partnerships. Understanding the dynamics of late marriage among Indian girls requires a holistic approach, considering socio-economic, cultural, and individual influences. As this trend continues to reshape matrimonial landscapes, it underscores the evolving agency of Indian girls, who are asserting their right to choose the timing and context of their unions based on personal aspirations and societal progress.

Keywords: Marriage; Indian Girls; Divorcee; Women Empowerment; Women Education

"People are not postponing marriage because they care about marriage less, but because they care about marriage more", said Benjamin Karney.

Introduction

Marriage in the realms of India is held as a sacred tether uniting two souls, gracing a significant dais amidst the tapestry of social establishments within the cultured sphere of the world. It is not merely a social contract but a religious sacrament. A marriage in India can be defined as a religious tradition in which a couple is bound in a permanent relationship for physical, social, and spiritual purposes of dharma, and procreation. Marriage is all about love, trust, commitment, loyalty, communication, and understand-ing [1]. India, a nation steeped in tradition, has long witnessed marriage as a cornerstone of societal norms. The pattern of marriage is currently experiencing discernible changes globally. This paper tries to understand how the marriage age is changing for girls. Even though it's hard to make definite conclusions in a diverse country like India with various sections of the female population in differently featured states.

Discussion

Ever sixty years ago, Indian women would marry a man without a specific premarital glance at their future life partner. Since India's independence from the British in 1947, there have been significant changes within the marriage institution, particularly in the

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demands and expectations put on Indian women [2]. This change stands as evidence of the resolute efforts made by Indian women to liberate themselves from traditional limitations and establish their autonomy.

In some cases, such as marriage "the timing of an event may be more consequential than its occurrence" (Elder 1995:114). The evolving landscape of marriage in India reflects a progressive nation, embracing a new era where girls are confidently defining their destinies on their terms [3].

Ideas of self-respect and equality encouraged young Indian women to go beyond their traditional roles of wife and mother to focus on their education and career and find aspirations and goals outside of marriage. Contrasting Western ideologies have challenged India's ancient traditional values and beliefs that have existed for centuries, such as early marriage.

In the new millennium, women are more liberal about opting to lead an unmarried life or postponing marriage. This is a reflection of a strong change in the attitude and perception of Indian women about selecting a marriage partner, the shift in the stability of marital relationships, and the changing aspirations [4]. With the widening scope of education opportunities, the reinforcement of economic empowerment, and the evolution of societal norms, opting for marriage at later stages has become progressively common.

Late or delayed marriage refers to a situation when a person who has reached the state of maturity in every facet of life (mentally, spiritually, financially, and physically) is not married probably as a result of the unavailability of a suitable spouse or some other factors [5].

In other words, late or delayed marriage is getting married at an age that's considered older or later than what is usual or expected in a specific society.

This pattern of delayed marriages varies at the state level. It's hard to make clear conclusions about the states because each state has different social and economic situations. Some Indian states are rich and moving forward, while others have gotten better in important social areas. Certain people follow traditional ways, while in others, they've embraced new lifestyles while keeping their traditions [6].

Early-age marriage background in India

Early marriage refers to the practice of marrying individuals, usually girls before they reach the legal age of marriage.[7] Can also be explained as early marriage refers to getting married at a young age, typically before reaching the age that is considered mature or appropriate for marriage in a particular society or culture.

Historically, early marriage was the norm for girls, with social, cultural, and economic factors influencing this practice in India. The majority of girls used to get married before 18 years of age. Early-age marriages have deep-rooted historical origins in India. Traditionally, girls were married off at a young age, often during their teenage years or even before puberty [8].

These practices were influenced by various factors, including societal norms, economic considerations, and cultural beliefs. The concept of child marriage was ingrained in the fabric of Indian society and was seen as a way to ensure social stability, uphold caste purity, and strengthen familial ties.

In 1929, a law was introduced by the British-ruled govt. called the Child Marriage Restraint Act, also known as the Sarda Act. This law said that women couldn't get married before they turned 14, and men couldn't get married before they turned 18. Later on, in 1949 and 1978, the rules for women changed significantly and the legal age for women to get married was increased to 18 years. For men, the legal age to get married was 21 years. In the earlier years of 1992-93, about two-thirds of women got married before they turned 18. However, in the more recent years of 2019-21, only a bit fewer than one-fourth of women aged 20-24 got married before they were legally allowed to [9]. Marriage has historically been universal and remains so while the age at marriage has risen slowly. At the same time, India also shows substantial diversity in age at marriage, but this change hasn't happened very quickly [10].

With the widening scope of education opportunities, the reinforcement of economic empowerment, and the evolution of societal norms, opting for marriage at later stages has become progressively common. The dynamic change in the age at which girls in India are getting married reflects a significant shift in Indian society. However, in the past three to four decades a remarkable transformation has been unfolding these conventions, opting for a shift in the stratum of marriage age [6].

Age of marriage and Women's health

In many traditional societies, women's age at marriage acts simultaneously as a gateway to new family roles and the likelihood of producing offspring. Marriage age also plays an important role in the fertility rate from the biological maximum. However, inadequate attention has previously been given to the broader health and social implications of variability in women's marriage age for public health. Getting married at a younger age can mean starting a family earlier in life might align with a woman's peak fertility years, potentially reducing the risk of fertility-related challenges. On the other hand, younger couples might also be emotionally and financially unprepared to handle the responsibilities of raising a family [11]. Biologically, fertility tends to decrease with age, especially for women. Increasing age has a higher risk of fertility issues, including decreased egg quality and quantity.

Factors contributing to delayed marriage among Indian women include

It›s important to note that factors affecting late marriage can vary based on region, culture, socioeconomic status, and individual preferences. The trend of late marriage reflects the changing landscape of women›s roles and choices in Indian society.

Educational empowerment

Modern education has changed the nation's social environment and caused the objective of marriage to shift the emphasis to companionship rather than progeny. Other changes in the marriage institution include a rise in the marriage age of women. One of the most prominent factors propelling the change in marriage age is the increasing educational empowerment of Indian girls [12]. Over the past few decades; there has been a substantial rise in the enrollment of girls in educational institutions across the country. As they pursue higher education and professional careers, they are embracing the idea of marrying later in life, focusing on personal development and self-reliance. Education has become a priority for many young girls today as they prepare themselves for a career, economic independence, and financial security.

Financial self-sufficiency and emphasis on professional growth and ambitions

The aspirations of millennial girls have expanded beyond the confines of the domestic sphere. Many young women are driven by ambitious career goals and are unwilling to compromise their professional pursuits for early marriage. Striving to achieve their dreams, they are willing to wait for the right time to embark on marital commitments.

Early marriage prevents women from attaining their rightful education, accessing employment and training opportunities, developing social relationships with peers, and participating in civic life. The parallel surge in economic opportunities for women has been a pivotal catalyst in reshaping the Indian matrimonial landscape. Millennial girls are seeking financial independence and stability before considering marriage. As women become financially self-sufficient, they gain the freedom to make autonomous decisions about their personal lives, including when and whom to marry. Consequently, Indian women have found the freedom to make their own choices, achieve financial independence, and voice their opinions about prospective marriage partners [13].

Changing societal norms

Changing societal norms are reshaping the narrative around marriage, emphasizing individual agency, personal growth, and partnership equality. As a result, many individuals are opting for delayed marriage to align their life choices with their evolving values and aspirations. The traditional Indian societal structure has been gradually evolving, influenced by globalization, urbanization, and exposure to different cultures. This has led to more liberal and progressive attitudes towards marriage. Young girls and their families are increasingly accepting the concept of delayed marriage.

Dominatingly Indian girls are acknowledging the importance of personal growth and emotional preparedness before taking such a significant life step. Delayed marriage is closely intertwined with changing societal norms, reflecting shifts in how individuals and societies view relationships, personal aspirations, and traditional roles.

Evolving notions of compatibility

In traditional Indian societies, marriage was often an arrangement between families, with limited input from the individuals involved. However, modern millennial girls value compatibility and emotional bonding as essential aspects of a successful marriage. They are more willing to wait for a partner with whom they share

mutual understanding and shared values. They advocate for a more deliberate and mindful approach to relationships, to create lasting and meaningful partnerships. It's a response to the fast-paced nature of modern life and the desire for more genuine and lasting connections in a world that often encourages quick fixes and instant gratification.

Empowerment and self-determination of women

"Late marriages here have multiple reasons not just one, but three reasons are most prominent in Indian culture. Women these days prefer to be independent financially, for that they prefer higher studies and then look for jobs before they think about marriage. These are completion of education, unemployment, and marriage preparation in a financial context.

Women's empowerment and autonomy are closely linked to the trend of delayed marriage. As women gain more control over their lives, choices, and opportunities, they often opt to delay marriage for various reasons [14]. Delayed marriage, in this context, becomes a natural outcome of women's increased agency in shaping their own lives.

Evolution of marriage perspectives among Indian girls

In recent years there has been observed a shift in the attitude of Indians regarding the age of first marriage. Furthermore, adults tend to postpone marriage and in some cases relationships altogether, in exchange for freedom, independence, and more attention given to education and a focus on their careers within society and to fulfill their own needs as individuals before entering into marriage. This is because they want to take care of themselves before being in a marriage. Even young women are thinking differently about marriage. Men don't want to be the only ones working to support the family. They think their wives should also be educated and have good jobs.

Slow Love : Understanding the dynamics of delayed marriages and marital stability

It has been observed that the millennial are commitment-phobic due to several reasons such as lack of a solid economic foundation, taking things slow, fear of divorce, and trust issues.

They're adopting the idea of ‹slow love›, a new trend. People are really worried about divorce, so they want to be very sure about who they'll marry before actually getting married. This is one big reason why marriages are happening later. Before deciding to spend their whole lives with someone, they spend a lot of time together. This makes sure they're fully ready to commit for the long run. This approach not only makes marriages stronger but also leads to more effort being put into the marriage. It brings happiness and reduces the chances of looking for something else, partly because of how mature they've become. Slow Love advocates for a more deliberate and mindful approach to romantic relationships, to create lasting and meaningful partnerships.

Delayed marriages and their impact on marital stability

The stability of a marriage, whether early or late, depends on the commitment, communication, compatibility, and effort invested by both partners. While late marriage can bring certain advantages in terms of emotional maturity and financial stability, couples need to address potential challenges, communicate openly, and work together to build a strong and lasting partnership [15].

Numerous studies show that individuals who marry at a young age tend to be at a high risk of marital dissolution. Early marriages are notorious for their relatively low survival rates. Marriages contracted during the teens are known to be highly unstable, a result that has been interpreted as a "maturity effect". There is a greater likelihood of mistaken expectations in the case of such marriages [16]. If someone wants to avoid divorce they might wait longer before getting married to right person.

Mental health and age of marriage

A well-known saying is that "Just being married doesn't automatically make you mentally healthier. Instead, people who are already feeling mentally good are more likely to decide to get married". If you get married when you're young, like in your teens or early 20s, you might not feel as much better in your mind as if you waited longer. Early marriage can lead to repeated childbirth within less than 24-month intervals, multiple unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy terminations, and sterilization.

The trend of getting married at a young age is changing in India. According to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16, the number of marriages happening before the legal age of 18 is 27%, compared to 46% before. Similarly, for guys, getting married before the legal age of 21 has gone down from 29% to 20% [17].

Late marriage and peer interaction

Some women might feel a bit lonely when their friends are getting married earlier. They could miss out on doing things together, like going to weddings or starting families at the same time. This might make them feel like they're not as connected to their friends and they have to work extra hard to keep their friendships strong. Surprisingly, getting married later in life has both good and not-so-good things. These days, both men and women prefer to get married later because they want to be financially strong [18].

As far as we could find out, there are no official writings in the educational literature about studies that have tried to look at both how long a marriage lasts and how good it is while considering the age at which people get married. But two writings are not from schools or experts, and they talk about efforts like this. They both used different sets of information and found that getting married at a later age, up until the mid-twenties, tends to lead to more successful marriages [19].

Conclusion

Research on marriage in developing countries has been somewhat narrow in scope because of both conceptual and data limitations. While little is known about the processes through which this relationship operates.

It paves the way for arguing that the spread of education does contribute to delaying marriages at least in the case of females belonging to the 20-24 age groups. Culture may be the prime explanatory factor at a later stage, maybe for women belonging to the 25-29 age group.

Another observation is when people have more education and their families have more money, they usually get married at a later age. Different parts of India have different ages at which people tend to marry. In central India, people usually marry at a younger age on average. On the other hand, in the North-Eastern part of the country, people tend to marry later on average.

Late marriages may become the main cause of "waywardness" in society and inevitably attack its moral fabric. Marriages are delayed at a young age when one swims with wheels and walks with air, rides with the wind, and sleeps in the clouds. This is the age of real stress and storm.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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