

“VISITING DAYANAND SARASWATI: HIS ROLES IN CHILD MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL UPLIFTMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage as a concept can be defined as the formal or an informal union between two individuals before attaining the age of eighteen years. United nation should be seen as an abuse of human rights since this is one form of a forced marriage. As per the law of India, a child marriage is one in which the girls below the age of eighteen years and the boys is below twenty one years.

Though parents are of the opinion that they involve their children in such rituals because it is an age old custom and it will also secure the future of their children but the reality is not so. Though in some cases parents believe in such superstitions and dogmas in other cases greed is the most significant factor.

How can a girl's future become secured if she gets married to a man who is 30-50 years of age while the girl herself is barely 14 or 15?

Opposed child marriage – For an educated man needs an educated woman.

Arya Samaj under the leadership of Swami Dayanand Saraswati opposed the practice of child marriage. This objective was achieved through the opening of new schools and making society aware about the benefits of education system. Can you imagine kids as young as 10-12 years getting married? Yes, that's what happened some hundred years ago in India. It was bad.

Dayanand said that ‘an educated man needs an educated wife’. This message slowly found its roots in the society and child marriage was started to be considered as an evil.

Keywords: *Childhood, illiteracy, economic condition, early mental deaths, making society.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the union of two mature and conscious souls or minds. But when one or two of the immature souls get united in the cobweb of marriage, it is called child marriage. In many societies children get married at

such a juncture of life when they are supposed to play with toys, to make house out of dust. Hence the blooming butts are sure to be destroyed. One who has no knowledge of self, no knowledge of social relation, will have to be united in the marriage. This cruel custom is nothing but child marriage.

My area of discussion is not the definition of child marriage in the context of religion, laws, nationality. Rather I would like to discuss the general meaning of child marriage, its nature social effects and way to prevent it by applying the philosophy of Dayanand Saraswati.

In this regard I undertake to discuss the identity of child, the definition of marriage, child marriage, the effect of child marriage on society and overall role of Dayanand Saraswati in preventing the child marriage and the upliftment of society as the result.

Child marriage as a concept can be defined as the formal or an informal union between two individuals before attaining the age of eighteen years. UNO sees this as an abuse on human rights since this is one form of a forced marriage. As per the law of India, a child marriage is one in which the girls below the age of eighteen years and the boys below twenty one years, are married.

CHILD:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines *child* as "a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier"

Biologically, a child is generally anyone between birth and puberty. Some English definitions of the word *child* include the fetus (sometimes termed *the unborn*). In many cultures, a child is considered an adult after undergoing a rite of passage, which may or may not correspond to the time of puberty.

Children generally have fewer rights than adults and are defined as unable to make serious decisions, and legally must always be under the care of a responsible adult or child custody, whether their parents' divorce or not. Recognition of childhood from adulthood began to emerge in the 16th and 17th centuries. Society began to relate to the child not as a miniature adult but as a person of a lower level of maturity needing adult protection, love and nurturing. This change can be traced in paintings: In the Middle Age, children were portrayed in art as miniature adults with no childlike characteristics. In the 16th century, images of children began to acquire a distinct childlike appearance. From the late 17th century onwards, children were shown playing with toys and later literature for children also began to develop at this time.

AGE RANGES OF CHILDHOOD:

The term *childhood* is non-specific and can imply a varying range of years in human development. Developmentally and biologically, it refers to the period between infancy and adulthood. In common terms, childhood is considerably to starts at birth. Some consider childhood as a concept of play and innocence which ends at adolescence. In the legal systems of many countries, there is an age of majority when childhood officially ends and a person legally becomes an adult. The age ranges anywhere from 15 to 21, with 18 being the most common.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH:

Further information: Childhood obesity, childhood immunizations, and List of childhood diseases. Children's health includes the physical, mental and social well-being of children. Maintaining children's health implies offering them healthy foods, ensuring enough sleep and exercise, and protecting their safety. Children in certain parts of the world often suffer from malnutrition, which is often associated with other conditions, such diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS:

Children's rights are the human rights of children, with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care to minors, and provision of basic necessities. Children's rights are not respected in all countries. Globally, millions of children are subjected to exploitation, including deprivation of education, child labour, forced military service, or imprisonment in institutions or detention centre's where they endure poor conditions and violence.

Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989 defines a child as any human person who has not reached the age of eighteen years. Children's rights includes their right to association with both parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for physical protection, food, universal state-paid education, health care, and criminal laws appropriate for the age and development of the child, equal protection of the child's civil rights, and freedom from discrimination on the basis of the child's race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion ,disability ,color, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the

enforcement of children being physically, mentally and emotionally free from abuse, though what constitutes "abuse" is a matter of debate. Other definitions include the rights to care and nurturing.

"A child is any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." There are no definitions of other terms used to describe young people such as "adolescents", "teenagers," or "youth" in international, but the children's rights movement is considered distinct from the youth rights movement.

MARRIAGE:

Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them, between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. When defined broadly, marriage is considered a cultural practice.

Individuals may marry for several reasons, including legal, social, libidinal, emotional, financial, spiritual, and religious purposes. Whom they marry may be influenced by socially determined rules of incest, prescriptive marriage rules, parental choice and individual desire. In some areas of the world, arranged marriage, child marriage, polygamy, and sometimes forced marriage, may be practiced as a cultural tradition. Conversely, such practices may be outlawed and penalized in parts of the world out of concerns for women's rights and because of international law. In developed parts of the world, there has been a general trend towards ensuring equal rights within marriage for women and legally recognizing the marriages of interfaith or interracial, and same couples. These trends coincide with the broader human rights movement.

Marriage can be recognized by a state, an organization, a religious authority, a tribal group, a local community or peers. It is often viewed as a contract. Civil marriage, which does not exist in some countries, is marriage without religious content carried out by a government institution in accordance with the marriage laws of the jurisdiction, and recognized as creating the rights and obligations intrinsic to matrimony. Marriages can be performed in a secular civil ceremony or in a religious setting via a wedding ceremony. The act of marriage usually creates normative or legal obligations between the individuals involved, and any offspring they may produce. In terms of legal recognition, most sovereign states and other jurisdictions limit marriage to opposite-sex couples and a diminishing number of these permit polygamy, child marriage, and forced marriage. Over the

twentieth century, a growing number of countries and other jurisdictions have lifted bans on and have established legal recognition for interracial marriage, interfaith marriage, and most recently, same-sex marriage. Some cultures allow the dissolution of marriage through divorce or annulment. In some areas, child marriages and polygamy may occur in spite of national laws against the practice.

Since the late twentieth century, major social changes in Western countries have led to changes in the demographics of marriage, with the age of first marriage increasing, fewer people marrying, and more couples choosing to cohabit rather than marry.

CHILD MARRIAGE:

Though parents are of the opinion that they involve their children in such rituals because it is an age old custom and it will also secure the future of their children but the reality is not so. Though in some cases parents believe in such superstitions and dogmas in other cases greed is the most significant factor. How can a girl's future become secured if she gets married to a man who is 30-50 years of age while the girl herself is barely 14 or 15?

Parents of the child entering into a child marriage are often poor and use the marriage as a way to make her future, especially in areas with little economic opportunities. Dowry is a practice in India where the bride's family transfers wealth to the groom, in many cases; it is a demand and condition of marriage from the groom's family. Dowry is found among all religious faiths in India, and the amount of dowry demanded and given by the bride's family has been correlated to the age of girl.

Poverty in India has been cited as a cause of early marriage. Child marriage of girls is happened out of desperate economic condition, and often this is way to reduce the expenses of the poor family.

EARLY MATERNAL DEATHS

Girls who marry earlier in life are less likely to be informed about reproductive issues and because of this, pregnancy- related deaths are known to be the leading cause of mortality among married girls between 15 and 19 years of age. These girls are twice more likely to die in childbirth then girls between 20 and 24 years of age. Girls younger than 15 years of age are 5 times more likely to die in childbirth.

IMPACT ON SOCIETY:

Once married, the girl child is forced to leave her home and inhabit another place altogether wherein she is forced to take up roles that she isn't mentally prepared for. Huge responsibilities like that of mother and a daughter-in-law are too much for minor girls. It eventually leads to isolation and depression. As the result, they sometimes take extreme step to get rid of this burden at such tender age.

Childhood is lost and the freedom to play and learn is also snatched in the process. Early marriages also carry with them excessive risk factors. There is a greater risk of contracting sexual diseases. Also, girls who marry early are less likely to be updated about pregnancy and related subjects. Infants born to such mothers are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, low birth weights etc.

In India child marriages are still prevalent in state of Kerala, the state with the highest literacy rates. According to a UNICEF report, in India there were more child marriages in rural areas than urban. Bihar has the highest incident of child marriage at 68 percent while Himachal Pradesh with around nine percent has the lowest percent incident as per the report.

CHILD MARRIAGE HAS FATAL CONSEQUENCES:

1. The girl who gets married as a child is confined in the four walls of the household even before she enters puberty. In almost all the cases, the married girl child gains no further education thus increasing the illiteracy rate in India.
2. Some child marriages are conducted between a girl child and an old man. Though this is astonishing this is true. As a result these, girls get widowed by the time they attain adulthood and most of the society do not allow widows to remarry. A girl child has to live the life of a widow for no fault of hers.
3. As a result of child marriage, the girl child is considered merely as an object of pleasure in her husband and other members of the family.
4. It is common for girls who have been married off at such a young age to become pregnant well before their bodies have fully developed. This is bad news for both the mothers as well as new born child.
5. Many studies suggest that when girls become pregnant before puberty it can cause various defects in the child and can also lead to untimely death of the mother.
6. In many parts of the country due to illiteracy and unemployment the husbands have been known to torture their child brides. Beating girls, use of abusive language and in many cases marital rape has become common

features in the case of child marriage. With groom's families supporting this kind of shocking behavior, the child is left with no option but to endure this pain for the rest of life.

SOCIAL AWARENESS REGARDING CHILD MARRIAGE:

1. Children need to be made aware of their human rights and must be taught to refuse and speak up once such an incident is taking place or is about to take place.
2. Its needs to be understood that poverty and lack of education are the major factors that undermine the efforts to end the menace.

OPPOSED CHILD MARRIAGE – FOR AN EDUCATED MAN NEEDS AN EDUCATED WOMAN

Sanyasi, Dayananda had a sensitive and compassionate heart that melted at the sufferings of the poor. 'To love the creation of God is to love God Himself' - so he taught people.

To awaken people from lethargy, the Swamiji travelled all over India. Wherever he went, he roundly condemned the caste system, idol worship, child marriage and other harmful customs and traditions. He preached that women should have equal rights with men and laid stress on pure conduct in life. He laid particular emphasis on the equality of women. He used to say that India had fallen to such a miserable condition precisely because women were not given education but were kept in ignorance. As long as women were prisoners of foolish customs like the purdah, progress was beyond reach like the reflection of a bundle of jewels in a mirror. They should throw away their purdahs. Seetha and Savithri are remembered not because they were behind the purdah, but because of their chastity and virtue. So he went on preaching.

Dayananda was fully convinced that the nation cannot prosper unless education spreads. But our education system should not be a mere carbon copy of the western type of education. There should be a law to compel the parents to send every boy or girl who is eight years old to school. Every boy and every girl should be sent to Gurukulas where they stay with their gurus. There should be separate Gurukulas for boys and girls. The King's son and the farmer's son should be equals in a Gurukula. They should all be made to work alike. The Gurukula should be situated far from the town and the city, and should enjoy calm and serenity. Our culture and our great books like the Vedas should be introduced to our students. Side by side, mathematics, geology, astronomy and other sciences which are important in modern life should also be taught. Swamy Dayananda founded gurukulas at various places to fulfill these objects. Among them Kangadi is famous even to this day.

Arya Samaj under the leadership of Swami Dayanand Saraswati opposed the practice of child marriage. This objective was achieved through the opening of new schools and making society aware about the benefits of education system. Can you imagine kids as young as 10-12 years of age getting married? Yes, that's what happened some hundred years ago in India. It is practical.

Dayanand said that 'an educated man needs an educated wife'. This message slowly found its roots in the society and child marriage was started to be considered as an evil.

Children need to be aware of their human rights and must be taught to refuse and speak up of such incident is taking place or is about to take place. The media also needs to adopt a more proactive role in generating awareness towards this heinous ritual.

I do not talk much about Dayanand's work directly, but from the work of the Arya Samaj that he founded – regardless of the many debates which took place before women's education could be finally advanced – we can reasonably conclude that Dayanand's ideas must have been instrumental in promoting woman's education among woman in north India. True, this is not the kind of freedom we find in today's feminist literature, but given the conditions of the mid-19th century, the work of the Arya Samaj was not inconsiderable.

In a situation where men were rapidly taking British education, the reformers argued that an educated man needed an educated wife. They argued that if women remained illiterate, they would indulge in foolish talk and unnecessary squabbles which would destroy the harmony of the family and encourage men to look for companionship outside the house. Hence, men took to visiting brothels and courtesans. Education for women was advocated primarily as a means to bridge the mental gap between husbands and wives, mothers and sons. The conditions of seclusion under which these upper caste women lived meant that for the most part they lived in a world of their own. Enjoying very limited contact even with their husbands, they had been largely left to themselves to devise their own outlets within the repressive culture of the zenana. In the process, their thinking had become inaccessible to men. But this extreme form of seclusion no longer suited the new needs of the men. It became necessary for women to adapt their lives and attitudes to the men's requirements.'

With regard to motherhood, Sanajists that an illiterate woman could not be entrusted with the care of the next generation .Yet, they were wary of exposing women to missionary schools for fear of conversion and undue westernization.

Social reformers must by now have realized that it is our woman who stands in the way of reformation and progress and it would be their education and that alone will smooth the path of social reformation. They talked much of the plight of the man is married to an uneducated woman. Girls education may be looked at from two standpoints of view; firstly from the educated husband's point of view and secondly from the view of reformers of influenced by Vedic learning. If these points are followed in proper way marriage with learned bride or groom and imitation of Vedic culture, then the curse of child marriage may be curbed.

The educated husband requires only to be taken into confidence and he will point to you the gloomy, dark and miserable life and show you the record of pure ideas that you entertain and the deeds that you have done! On this basis they disagreed with the view of their opponents that woman's education would cause "domestic aberration", "physical deterioration" of woman, and hence ultimately, the annihilation of the race itself!

While the debate was going on, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya (KMY) was founded and began to make progress. The Mukhya Sabha (the managing committee), a registered society which was established in 1896 to control KMY, stated its purposes thus:

1. To establish at Jalandhar City an institution, for the education of females called Kanya Mahavidyalaya, with following purposes:
 - a) To impart physical, mental and religious education.
 - b) To give instruction in handicrafts such as needlework, plain sewing, etc.
 - c) To give instruction in household works, such as cooking, etc.
 - d) To give instruction in hygiene and elementary rules of health.
 - e) Training of females as school mistresses.
2. To encourage and produce literature in Hindi and Sanskrit for the use of females.

From the beginning many woman devoted their efforts to promoting the school. Students become fund raisers, workers and, later, teachers, facilitating its growth. This process demonstrated vividly that woman could in fact do many things which certain sections of the society had doubted their ability or willingness to do. Thus the institution developed into more than a school. It becomes a catalyst for various kinds of change relating to woman in Punjab.

Therefore, the major factors behind the child marriage are – 1.lack of education. 2. Weak Socio-economic background. 3. Religions tradition. And4. Misconception about women that they are burden on the shoulder of guardian. So to them, to get their daughter married means to unburden their load. In the remote areas, the custom of child marriage is rampant due the poverty, conservative mentality and illiteracy.

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