



Raising the age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years – Pros & Cons

Description

Theme:

- The government of India decided to increase the minimum legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years.

Background:

- At present, the minimum legal age of marriage for girls is 18 years and for boys, it's 21 years.
- The bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on 21st December 2021. But after protests from the opposition, it was sent to the parliamentary panel for further analysis.
- Once it becomes a law, it will override all the religious personal laws. So, the legal age of marriage will be increased for all females irrespective of their religion.
- In 1978, the Indian government increased the minimum legal age for marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years, and for boys from 18 to 21 years.

Pros:

- At present, many girls are forced to drop out of studies for marriage. So, making the minimum legal age for marriage as 21 will allow them to continue their studies. Thereby, many more women will go for higher education.
- Teenage pregnancies increase the risk of high blood pressure, anaemia and several other health problems. It can also lead to the death of the mother due to pregnancy complications. So, raising the age of marriage for girls can reduce the chance of maternal mortality.
- Early marriages result in several mental health issues in many girls. So, this move can eliminate this problem.
- This move can be stated as a step towards gender neutrality because it will make the minimum legal age for marriage the same for both girls and boys.

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- As several girls are being married at 18 years, they are not having financial independence. This is resulting in the dependence of their husbands for survival. The dependence will force them to stay in the relationship even if it is abusive. So, raising the minimum legal age for marriage can empower women and can help them in achieving financial independence before marriage.

Cons:

- At present, child marriages are happening throughout India even after having 'The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006'. As per the National Family Health Survey (2019-2021), 1/4th of the women aged 20-24 years were married before attaining the age of 18 years. After the pandemic, the number of child marriages increased significantly. So, the problem lies in the implementation. Hence the law alone cannot bring a change in society without the proper implementation. Root causes should be addressed before bringing a law.
- Several girls are being forced into marriages due to the patriarchal mindset of their families. Until now, many girls of such families rebelled against such forced marriages and married the person of their choice after attaining 18 years with the help of legal support. But now, they have to wait till attaining 21 years. This will be misused by patriarchal families to threaten and control them.
- The age of 18 years is considered a legal adult in India. They have voting rights too. But not giving them the right to marry the partner of their choice may work against their rights. In 2018, the Law Commission recommended lowering the minimum legal age of men from 21 to 18 years and suggested keeping both the genders' minimum legal age for marriage as 18 years.
- As per the government data of 2017, the average age of marriage for women is increased to 22.1 years. So, the change is voluntary. The change was mainly due to the improving education among women. In general, women of urban areas have an advantage over women of rural areas. So, the solution lies in encouraging education for girls, conducting awareness programs on the importance of education, financial independence and the consequences of teenage pregnancies should be conducted instead of passing a law to bring a real change in society. In general, girls of poor families are forced into child marriages. So, providing financial support for girls to continue their studies can voluntarily raise the legal age of marriage.

Conclusion:

Raising the minimum legal age for marriage for girls is a good move. But a mere law cannot bring change in society. Widespread awareness programs on the importance of girls' education, raising the legal age for marriage should be conducted. The government should increase its spending on education and healthcare. Moreover, the girls' right to the life of their choice after becoming a legal adult at 18 years should be protected.

Your Turn...

Do you think raising the age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years is a good move? Express your thoughts through the comment section below. And subscribe to our blog to read

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References:

- [Age and marriage: On raising the age of marriage for women](#)
 - [Opinion: Centre's Hypocrisy In Raising Marrying Age For Women To 21](#)
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