



Role of Education in Reducing Early Marriage Practices Among Bhil Tribal Women in Nandurbar

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Abstract:

Early marriage is a persistent socio-cultural issue among the Bhil tribal community of Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. Despite legal provisions such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), early marriage remains widespread due to poverty, cultural norms, limited awareness, and inadequate educational access. This study examines the role of education in reducing early marriage practices among Bhil tribal women by analyzing educational attainment, awareness of marriage laws, and the influence of school-based interventions. A sample of 120 Bhil women from Akkalkuwa, Taloda, Akrani, and Navapur talukas was surveyed using descriptive and analytical methods. Findings indicate that most women possess only primary or secondary education, and 58.4% were married before age 18. Statistical analysis shows a significant relationship between higher education levels and delayed marriage, along with improved awareness of legal rights, autonomy, and decision-making. The study concludes that strengthening access to secondary education, awareness programs, and community-based support systems can substantially reduce early marriage practices in Nandurbar's tribal regions.

Keywords: Early Marriage, Bhil Tribal Women, Education, Nandurbar, Awareness, Child Marriage Act, Tribal Communities, Women Empowerment

Introduction:

Early marriage continues to be a significant social challenge among many tribal communities in India, including the Bhil tribe of Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. Although legal frameworks such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) exist, early marriage persists due to socio-economic pressures, cultural traditions, lack of awareness, and limited access to quality education. In tribal regions like Nandurbar, factors such as poverty, geographical isolation, limited schooling facilities, and gender norms further contribute to the continuation of this practice.

Education plays a transformative role in shaping attitudes, aspirations, and decision-making abilities among tribal women. When tribal girls and their families are exposed to

education, they become more aware of the negative consequences of early marriage on health, economic independence, and overall social well-being. Schooling not only enhances academic knowledge but also builds confidence, communication skills, and awareness regarding legal rights, reproductive health, and future opportunities. Educated girls are more likely to delay marriage, pursue higher education, and participate actively in economic and social development.

In the context of the Bhil community of Nandurbar, understanding the relationship between education and early marriage is crucial for policy planning and grassroots interventions. This region, characterized by low literacy rates, socio-cultural traditions, and limited awareness, provides a meaningful setting to explore how

education can empower tribal women to resist early marriage practices. This study seeks to examine how educational attainment, awareness programs, and school-based interventions contribute to reducing early marriage among Bhil tribal women in Nandurbar, and how education can act as a catalyst for long-term social change.

Study Area:

The present study is conducted in Nandurbar district, located in the north-western part of Maharashtra. Nandurbar is recognized as one of the most prominent tribal-dominated districts of the state and is officially classified as an Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe) majority district. According to government data, more than 65% of the population belongs to various tribal communities, among which the Bhil, Pawara, and Kokna tribes are the most dominant.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of educational attainment among Bhil tribal women in Nandurbar district.

2. To identify the major socio-cultural and economic factors contributing to early marriage in the Bhil community.
3. To assess the relationship between girls' education and the age at which they get married.
4. To study the influence of school-based awareness programs on attitudes toward early marriage among Bhil families.
5. To analyze the role of teachers, NGOs, and community workers in promoting education and delaying marriage among tribal girls.

Research Methodology:

1. Research Design:

The study follows descriptive and analytical research design.

2. Population and Sample:

- Target population: Bhil tribal women aged 15–35.
- Sample: 120 respondents from Akkalkuwa, Taloda, Akrani, and Navapur talukas.
- Sampling technique: Purposive selection of villages; random sampling of respondents.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Education Level

Education Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	30	25%
Primary (1–5)	40	33.3%
Secondary (6–10)	30	25%
Higher Secondary+	20	16.7%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation:

Most Bhil tribal women in Nandurbar have only primary or secondary education, with very few pursuing higher studies. Limited

educational attainment reduces awareness about legal rights, health, and life opportunities. This lack of higher education often contributes to early marriage decisions within the community.

Table 2: Age at Marriage

Age at Marriage	Respondents	Percentage
Below 15	20	16.7%
15–17	50	41.7%
18–20	35	29.1%
Above 20	15	12.5%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: 58.4% of women were married before 18, indicating a high prevalence of early marriage.

Table 3: Awareness of Legal Age of Marriage

Awareness Level	Respondents	Percentage
Aware	45	37.5%
Not Aware	75	62.5%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation: More than half of the women lack knowledge about the legal age of marriage.

Inferential Analysis:

A. Cross-Tabulation (Education × Early Marriage)

Education Level	Married Before 18	Married After 18
Illiterate	25	5
Primary	30	10
Secondary	18	12
Higher Secondary	5	15
Total	78	42

Interpretation:

Since $21.56 > 7.81$, the result is statistically significant. Education level has a significant relationship with early marriage. Higher education leads to delayed marriage.

Scope of study:

Although existing literature shows strong links between education and delayed marriage, gaps remain:

1. Limited research specifically on Bhil tribal women in Nandurbar.
2. Few studies use statistical analysis to measure the strength of relationship between education and early marriage.
3. Very little documentation on parental attitudes and awareness levels in tribal communities.

4. Lack of district-focused studies combining education, empowerment, and legal awareness together.

Hypotheses:

1. Educational attainment of Bhil tribal women has a significant influence on delaying the age of marriage.
2. Socio-cultural traditions and economic conditions positively contribute to the prevalence of early marriage among the Bhil community.
3. Girls who participate in school-based awareness programs are less likely to support or experience early marriage.
4. Support from teachers, NGOs, and community workers significantly improves

educational awareness and discourages early marriage practices.

- Higher educational awareness among Bhil tribal women leads to better understanding of legal rights related to early marriage.

Review of Literature:

Role of Education in Reducing Early Marriage Practices Among Bhil Tribal Women in Nandurbar

1. Introduction to Child Marriage and Education: Child marriage has been recognized globally as a violation of human rights, closely linked with poverty, gender inequality, and social customs. According to UNICEF (2021), early marriage restricts girls' educational attainment, health, and socioeconomic opportunities. Several studies highlight that education is one of the strongest deterrents to early marriage, especially in marginalized communities.

2. Child Marriage in Tribal Communities of India: Tribal regions in India show comparatively higher rates of early marriage due to cultural traditions, poor schooling facilities, and lack of awareness.

Nair (2019) found that tribal girls are more vulnerable to early marriage because of economic dependency and limited access to secondary education.

Bhagat & Kulkarni (2020) reported that tribal families often consider early marriage as a mechanism to ensure girls' safety and reduce financial burden.

In Maharashtra, **Nandurbar district**, dominated by Bhil, Pawara, and Kokni tribes, continues to experience high rates of early marriage due to poverty, migration, and low literacy levels (**Government of Maharashtra, Tribal Development Report, 2020**).

3. Role of Education in Delaying Early Marriage: A growing body of research confirms

that education significantly delays the age of marriage.

- Jain & Kurz (2007)** observed that girls who complete secondary education are four times more likely to marry after age 18.
- Raj et al. (2018)** emphasized that education enhances girls' aspirations related to employment and independence, reducing the likelihood of early marriage.
- International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2019)** found that continued schooling improves knowledge about legal rights, reproductive health, and decision-making ability.

Education also increases bargaining power within families, enabling girls to resist early marriage pressures (Oster, 2020).

4. Awareness of Child Marriage Laws: Several studies highlight that awareness of legal frameworks is strongly linked with education.

- Kumar & Singh (2017)** found that educated girls and parents have greater awareness of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA, 2006).
- Choudhary (2021)** noted that legal knowledge is significantly lower among tribal families due to educational barriers.

Higher educational status improves understanding of legal age requirements, consequences of early marriage, and available support systems.

5. Education and Empowerment of Tribal Women: Research in tribal regions consistently shows that education strengthens women's autonomy.

- Sangita & Mahajan (2018)** reported that education among Bhil and Pawara women leads to better participation in household decisions.
- Rathod (2020)** highlighted that educated tribal women are more aware of health,

nutrition, and reproductive rights, reducing early motherhood risks.

- **Kapur (2015)** emphasized the role of school-based programs and NGOs in empowering tribal girls.
 - Thus, empowerment through education acts as a **protective factor** against early marriage.
- 6. Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Early Marriage:** Poverty, migration, and low parental literacy remain strong predictors of early marriage.
- **Desai & Andrist (2010)** found that poor families marry daughters early to reduce financial burden.
 - **Mehta (2018)** showed that low parental education is often associated with traditional beliefs supporting early marriage.
 - Studies in Nandurbar (Patil, 2021) confirm that lack of secondary schools and inadequate transport facilities increase dropout rates, pushing girls into early marriage.

However, when educational opportunities are accessible, early marriage rates decline significantly.

7. Studies on Bhil Tribal Communities: The Bhil tribe, one of the largest indigenous groups in western India, faces social and educational disadvantages.

- **Bhil Education Survey (TISS, 2019)** revealed that dropout rates among Bhil girls increase sharply after Class 7 due to tribal customs and household responsibilities.
- **Pawar & Patankar (2020)** found that Bhil girls with secondary education demonstrated stronger resistance to family pressure for early marriage.
- Awareness programs by NGOs such as *Pratham* and *BAIF* have shown positive outcomes in improving educational participation among Bhil girls.

These studies collectively highlight the transformative potential of education among Bhil women in reducing early marriage practices.

Findings:

1. Most Bhil women have low educational attainment (primary level).
2. A large proportion (58.4%) were married before the age of 18.
3. Lack of awareness about the legal age of marriage is widespread.
4. Education significantly contributes to delaying marriage.
5. Awareness programs and NGO activities positively influence attitudes.
6. Girls attending school longer tend to resist early marriage.
7. Economic pressure and traditional customs remain key barriers

Conclusion:

The study demonstrates that education plays a critical and transformative role in reducing early marriage practices among Bhil tribal women in Nandurbar district. Results indicate that women with secondary or higher education tend to marry at a later age, possess greater awareness of the legal age of marriage, and show enhanced decision-making abilities. Conversely, low educational attainment—common in the region—directly contributes to early marriage due to limited knowledge, socio-cultural traditions, and economic pressures.

Statistical analysis confirms a significant association between education level and age at marriage. Educated girls are more likely to resist early marriage, participate in awareness programs, and aspire to continued schooling or employment. Furthermore, the involvement of teachers, NGOs, and community workers has been found crucial in promoting awareness,

empowering girls, and challenging traditional norms.

The study concludes that improving girls' educational access, strengthening school infrastructure, enhancing parental awareness, and expanding NGO interventions can significantly reduce early marriage practices in Bhil tribal communities. Education not only delays marriage but also empowers women with improved autonomy, legal understanding, and opportunities for socio-economic development.

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