

An Ethnographic Account on the Dimensions of Early Marriage among the Muslim Women of Geondab, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that **SRI. SK. MAINUDDIN**, University Roll. **1126116** No. **200006**, Registration No. **1160493** (Session: 2020-2021) a student of the Department of Anthropology of this College did his compulsory fieldwork of B.Sc. (Hons.) Semester-VI, Subject- Anthropology, Paper-DSE-4 and prepared this report entitled As ☐ ***An Ethnographic Account on the Dimensions of Early Marriage among the Muslim Women of Geondab, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.*** ☐ under the guidance and supervision by the undersigned.

He was very sincere and dutiful during the fieldwork and preparation of the report. I wish his every success in life.

09.08.2023

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INTRODUCTION:

Ethnography is life as text. It is not part of ethnographic procedure to manipulate or experimentally induce certain human behavior. Rather, anthropologists work in natural communities. Ethnography, the study of people in a natural setting, provides an opportunity for researchers to conduct a detailed study of a group of people while being immersed in the culture of that group. Ethnography (*ethno*, "people" or "folk," and *graphy*, "to describe something") involves the study of people or an organization through face-to-face interactions in a real-life social setting. There is no deductive hypothesis to follow or any statistical formula. Over time, this interaction yields a rich and detailed account of the culture, history, and characteristics of a social phenomenon. Ethnographers not only describe the facts but also explain them, they want to know why such rituals, customs, beliefs present there. Because- "An explanation is an answer to a WHY question." The ethnographer is ultimately interested in the processes and circumstances that produce that culture. Appropriately analysis of these products can tell us about ideas, languages, gender relations, economics, and so on. Ethnography not only focuses ideas and symbols but also on material objects that surround the informant and researcher.

Early marriage or child marriage refers to marriages before the age of 18 (UNICEF 2016). Early marriage which is also referred to as child marriage is common all over the globe and has inflicted dangerous and devastating effects on young children (especially females) who are compelled to tie the knot in most cases. Although marriage at an early age for girls had been in practice long before the British era, such practice became more common among Muslims and lower-caste Hindus in the mid nineteenth century (Ahmed 1986). The Present study tries to explore different dimensions related to early marriage among the Muslim women in a rural settlement of Geondab of Purba Medinipur, West Bengal. The study is entirely grounded by ethnographic approach and methods with the intensive intention to contribute a deeper knowledge for academic enhancement and for better policy making for the concerned issue as well.

THE OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the present study is-

1. to explore the perception of marriage among the women of the community under study, and,
2. to identify the dimensions associated with early marriage of the women under study and to contribute in-depth knowledge for better policy and action.

METHODOLOGY:

The present research is grounded by the ethnographic approach and methods, which become the principal pathway for collecting, sorting and interpreting data and in which an ethnographer senses to be applicable as the exploration progresses (Murchison, 2010). Methodologically this research is further subdivided into the following categories-

The Area and the People under Study

The ethnographer purposively selects the rural setting of Geondab, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal to conduct the fieldwork among five (05) married Muslim women of the concerned locality.

Sampling

Convenient sampling is the principle sampling method through which participants has been selected for in-depth semi structured interviews. The ethnographer himself purposively selects the married Muslim women to better understand their cognitive categories regarding early marriage.

Techniques of Data Collection

The study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews as the major technique of data collection for the present study.

The Transcription, Categorization of Themes, and Interpretation of the Findings

After collecting the rich data set, it has been transcribed verbatim to get a deep insight of the issues concerned. The transcribed data helped to emerge specific findings that are contextual to the objectives of the research. The interpretation of the data has been done by using narrative data analysis method.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY:

The issues of early pregnancies, experiencing negative consequences in pregnancies and childbirth, issues of poverty, domestic violence, and emotive isolations are the major effects of early marriages in different communities across India and at the same time these issues are vibrant in contemporary anthropological researches since years. In this context the present study can add and can contribute a deeper ethnographic knowledge about significant dimensions of early marital practices in Muslim community with the effect of cousin marriages in the setting of Geondab, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.

THE CASES AS FINDINGS:

The followings are the cases that have been collected from the individual respondents by using semi-structured interviews.

Case-I

Name of the Respondent: Masiya Bibi

Sex: Female

Age: 35 years

Age at Marriage: 17 years

Community: Muslim

I asked what is your perception about marriage, she said, "Marriage is something that every girl has to do. And it's good to do it. Every parent doesn't keep a girl. And it's not good to have a virgin. So marriage is a necessity. It is good to do. And I also thought that many people suffer when they get married, but by the grace of God, I did not have anything like that." Then I asked, was the marriage done by the will of the family or you? She said that she got married because of his family's wish, but not under any pressure. He also said that she did not study much (class 4), because girls did not study much in that village. So she also did housework after class 4, then she saw the house and got married." Have any physical or mental effects? She said, "No, by the grace of Allah, I have not had any physical or mental problems till date. I will marry off the baby as soon as possible. I have only one daughter, I will marry her off when she passes 12. I can marry her off even before that." I asked why. Why only 12? She said, "When you get older, the size of your face gets worse. I think then

the boys don't like the girls. It's better to marry a girl or a boy at a proper age." I asked, what is the age you think as 'proper'? Said "18 years ". I asked, what do you think about the employment of girls? She said, "oh, the girls of the Muslim house will work ? and they will go to the world to caress. And does the Muslim get a job, I think not . And most of the time the girls are not allowed to do so from their father-in-law's house " I asked, what advice would you like to give to all Muslim girls about marriage? She said, "It is not good to marry girls at a young age. Now the girls do not understand and run away and get married. What should we do? Is it the parent's fault? They should understand as well."

Case-II

Name of the Respondent: Lalmani Bibi

Sex: Female

Age: 38 years

Age at Marriage: 17 years

Community: Muslim

What do you think about marriage? She said that "I didn't know anything about marriage. What will happen after marriage or not. And how long will you keep your daughter, one day you have to get married. That's it." Whose wish was the marriage? She said that, "Marriage has been seen from the family. I agree to wherever my parents give me, I have no objection. But there was no pressure on me. The girls in the neighborhood used to say that girls must get married one day. So, my family told me to be and i accept. And I think it's good. Because by the grace of Allah, I got a good husband." As a result of marriage, what is the physical or mental or other impact? She said, "There was no effect(bad). The financial problems were a bit family-related before, but there is happiness even in that trouble. And everything is good. For example, the husband is good, the house is good, there is no problem, everything is fine. (She said with a smile)". I asked, what do you think about marriage of your girls? Said "now there will be no marriage under the age of 18 as per rule. And, I told the girls, they can study as far as they want ,then we will see. We want to teach as far as they read". When I asked about the girls' jobs, she said, "In our Muslim religion, we cannot keep girls for too long as vergin. After giving the Madhyamik, I will send them to a Madrash for a few years. Then when they turn 18, I will marry them". I asked, why will you study in the Madrasa? She said,

"Because, you have to learn manners. You have to learn Dua, Darud, Namaz, and Fasting. You have to learn how to walk on the streets, how to talk to adults and children, you have to learn them." I asked, are these not taught in school? She said, "Many things are not taught in school. For example, covering head, these are not taught in school. Then there are other problems, such as have to go to school events, these are not allowed in Islam." Then I asked, Want to give some advice to all Muslim girls? She said, "All girls are better off getting married at 18 years old. Because she hasn't learned to take care of herself already, and if she has a baby, it's more of a problem." Then she said something by herself, "Look, these days college-going girls don't get preferred for marriage. Says, it is thought that, in college they have done something wrong. A defect arises against them and becomes difficult to get married. So it is better to get married after the age of 18 years".

Case-III

Name of the Respondent: Sahamin Bibi

Sex: Female

Age: 19 years

Age at Marriage: 14 years

Community: Muslim

What do you think about marriage? She said, "I thought, as I am a virgin, I will remain like that after marriage. But where else? After marriage, worries about the family, did not allow me to leave the house much. I said I would read, but I did not allow. Saying, what will happen after I read? Then there is sometimes chaos in the family. All this". I asked, was the marriage done by myself or by the will of the family? She said, "Father, uncles have taken care of everything. Then what can be done to them. I had my own wish and that of the family. Now I think it would be better if I got married at a little older age. I think at the age of 18 -20 years". When asked the reason, she said, "Then atleast Madhyamik would have been given. And from such a young age, my mother-in-law did not let me mingle with any girlfriend. I missed them a lot. I used to cry alone. Then this child (pointing to his son) would born , then I spend my time with him. Otherwise, it would have been really difficult then". I asked, what effect did marriage have on you? She said, " My mother-in-law didn't let me mix with anyone, she told me to stay alone. She didn't let me live well. There was trouble in the family. There was trouble. But there was no bad effect from having a child." If you had a daughter, what would you think about her? She said, "Since I get married at a young age, should I not allow my daughter to be happy as well? If Allah gives me a daughter, I will teach her as far as I can. Then I will marry her. I got married at a young age because my

parents made me to marry. Does that mean I will ruin my daughter's future too?" I asked, if your daughter wants to do a job or business, what will you do? She said, "No. No matter what the girls work or do, they have to come to that house and shake the khunti. But if she wants to do it, can do. It's on her choice."

Case-IV

Name of the Respondent: Majeda Bibi

Sex: Female

Age: 38 years

Age at Marriage: 17 years

Community: Muslim

I asked, was the marriage done by wish of yourself or family? She said, "As per the wishes of the family. I was studying at class 9 at school then. I have no father. My mother, grandmother, uncle took care of me and got me married. But I did not see my husband before marriage. I did not see him on the day of marriage, I saw him after marriage". I asked the reason for marrying at a young age? She said, "That girl has grown up, she has to get married. Then running away, all these fears. But I had no desire for all that." What are the effects of early marriage? She said, "There was no physical effect. And there was no problem in the family at the beginning of the marriage. There was a joint family. There was more or less income. There was peace in the family. Now he has started consuming alcohol with bad friends, there is no income, this is problem. The daughter is also growing up. She also has to get married, I am a little stressed about this." What are your plans for your daughter's marriage? Said, "Girls should be married at a suitable age. Like 18-19 years. So, if the girl is educated and then turns 18, she can study if she wants, and if she runs away, what will we do?" Talking about her daughter's income, she said, "What else will she do? Some kind of pass in every class. What else will she do?" When asked to give advice to every Muslim girl, she said, "Marrying at a young age is absolutely not recommended. When a girl is of schooling age, then marry her."

Case-V

Name of the Respondent: Saida Bibi

Sex: Female

Age: 36 years

Age at Marriage: 17 years

Community: Muslim

What is marriage to you? She said, " I used to think that what is marriage? And I will get married, have a family, live well. That's it. And my parents wanted me to get married in a better house. But I fell into a poor house. But he(her husband) might be poor but have a very good heart." Is the marriage your family's will? She said, "I don't have a father, my mother and uncle got me married. I lived at home from childhood. I went to school in class 1. I didn't like to go and study, so everyone moved on, so I didn't go. I used to stay at home, my father used to weave towels, I used to help there. I used to go for fuel, hang out with friends, do housework, and go to the fields with goats ". What has been the effect of marrying young? She said, "No, there is no effect. There are only gas ,acid as like others, that's it, and nothing else. And there are many worries about the family. How will I teach all the children? The income of the family is not good, just worry about these things. There is no more worry." Then I asked, if you had a daughter, what would you think about her? She said, "If I had a daughter, I would have kept her well, fed her, educated her, then married her at the age of 18-19. Because you can't get married at a younger age now." I asked, if there were no such rules, then? She said, "The girls of the present era cannot be kept for long. Because when they grow up, they will all run away and get married. That's the problem." What advice do you have for all Muslim girls? She said "The girl should study, then get married. It is not good to get married at a young age".

INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS:

The data sets reflect a multifold perception of marriages at early or very young age among the respondents under study. It is very common among them that almost every respondent got married when they have a very little knowledge of what marriage actually is? It is the fact in all of the cases the parents and other caretakers of the family like- paternal uncle (in most of the cases) arrange or negotiate marriage for them. Some of them are just passed the

primary school education, some are dropped from school, and some are in the continuation of their secondary classes. Masiya Bibi is of opinion that- *Marriage is something that every girl has to do. And it's good to do it. Every parent doesn't keep a girl. And it's not good to have a virgin. So, marriage is a necessity. It is good to do. And I also thought that many people suffer when they get married, but by the grace of God, I did not have anything like that.* While, Lalmani Bibi opined that- *I didn't know anything about marriage-What will happen after marriage? One day you have to get married. That's it.* Being not enough conscious about what marriage would really offers to them in immediate and far future, they generally tends to agreed with parental decisions to be early married. Though some emotional resistances are there but that ultimately lead an attitude of conformity to the common consensus that one must marry early to live a better livelihood. It sounds some resistance when Sahamin Bibi argues-*I thought, as I am a virgin, I will remain like that after marriage. But where else? After marriage, worries about the family, did not allow me to leave the house much, I said I would read, but I did not allow. Saying, what will happen after I read? Then there is sometimes chaos in the family-All this.*

Another significant factor about the perception of marriage among them that they add a flavor of spirituality with their virtue of marriage and they act according their social and moral self. While describing some common physical irritability after marriage, and in their statement of lack of education while marriage, the use of the term *Allah* in repeats somehow portray their spiritual belief and conceptual dependence of their future after having early marriages.

All of the respondents under study have a general inclination towards better education for their children before marriage. They also think about the liberty their child must have to choose their carrier. Marriage and household activities to them for a girl child is a responsibility but not the destiny. Lalmani Bibi opined that- *now there will be no marriage under the age of 18 as per rule. And, I told the girls, they can study as far as they want, then we will see. We want to teach as far as they read.* Contrastingly, Majeda Bibi replied- *Girls should be married at a suitable age. Like 18-19 years. So, if the girl is educated and then turns 18, she can study if she wants, and if she runs away, what will we do.* Another important fact is that some of the respondents are now aware enough that marriage within the age of 18 years is a

punishable offence in India. They want to marry their child after the age of 18 years and if the children want to continue their education and carrier, the respondents are willing to promote the suitable environment for that in spite of hurrying for early marriages. In this context Sajda Bibi opined that- *If I had a daughter, I would have kept her well, fed her, educated her, then married her at the age of 18-19. Because you can't get married at a younger age now.*

In some cases the post marital life of the respondents under study goes wrong as their expectation did not match with the real scenario. After the early marriage, they think they would live a life as it was before marriage, but their perception severely threatens by the different cultural and emotive responses from the persons of in-laws family. Sahamin Bibi in this context replied that- *Then at least Madhyamik would have been given. And from such a young age, my mother-in-law did not let me mingle with any girlfriend. I missed them a lot. I used to cry alone. Then this child (pointing to his son) would born, then I spend my time with him. Otherwise, it would have been really difficult then.*

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION:

In observation as conclusion it is seemed to me that the women who generally gone through early marriages in Muslim community at the locality under study have a quite less prepare about their marital responsibilities. Constant encouragement, family support, suitable peer groups, social campaign and different training and awareness programme is needed to the Muslim community specially the women as teenagers. It is evident from the current study that poverty is not only the reasons for early marriage among the Muslim women across India; there are some other dimensions of early marriage like-spirituality, education, economic independence and social security.

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THE APPENDIX

Interview Guide

Case Number-
Name-
Age-
Sex-
community-
Age at Marriage-
Date of Interview-
Place of Interview-

1. What is your perception about marriage before and after getting married ? Is it same or not ? If not , Why ?
2. What are the reasons behind getting early married ?
3. How do you see the decision ?
4. What are the impacts you face due to early married ?
5. If you had a daughter, then what would be your planning regarding her marriage ?
6. Do you like to give some advices to the teen muslim girl ? If yes, then what ?