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And the I was a Bride: Ana analysis of Incidence of Child Brides across India- A District Level Study

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**AND THEN I WAS A BRIDE: AN
ANALYSIS OF
INCIDENCE OF CHILD BRIDES ACROSS
INDIA
-A DISTRICT LEVEL STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

One of the grave issues predominant in India for centuries is the problem of child marriage. Earlier treated as a virtuous act it has been looked upon as a vice by many. In spite of this transformation of the views child marriage still prevails in many places throughout the nation. The current study based on the census data includes the analysis of the incidence of child brides over different districts across the religions in India. It also involves the plotting of heat maps of India that show differences in the proportion of child brides across religions throughout the nation. It also involves the generation of a new comparative statistic that eases the comparison of the incidence of child brides across religion. This study was helpful in discovering new facts regarding child marriage in India. There is a higher incidence of child brides as a proportion of the total women in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Various districts in the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan have a higher concentration of child brides. The comparative statistic has revealed a result that shows the incidence of Buddhists and Muslims higher in the urban areas, and the Buddhists surpassing the Hindus in the same.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“She’s a child herself, why burden her with another child?” This question carries a great importance with regards to India where 6% of child brides (below the age of 15 years) have given birth to their first child. A study of Census 2011 by Chowdhury (2016) reveals an alarming rampancy of child marriage in India. According to the study 78.5 lakh girls (2.3% of the total women) were married before the age of 10 and 30.2% were married before they attained the age 18, the legal age for marriage in India according to the Child Marriage Restraint Act (amended)-1978.

Surprisingly though India does not rank first in the world with regards to the percentage of Child Marriage across the nation. Child marriages are observed on a large scale in Niger (74.5%), Chad (71.5%), Mali (70.6%), Bangladesh (66.6%), Guinea (63.1%) and Central African Republic (57%). India has though relatively lesser but still a larger prevalence of child marriages of 45%.

According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development’s National Strategy Document on Prevention of Child Marriage, “The practice of child marriage is an impediment to every possible developmental goal: eradication of hunger and poverty, attainment of primary education at the universal level, protecting the lives of children and improving health conditions of women. A child is repudiated of the basic rights of education, nutrition and health. Evidence indicates the vulnerability of child brides to abuse, exploitation and violence. There is a strong psychological, emotional and intellectual impact of marriage on both the boys and the girls, restraining them from availing the opportunities for education and enhancing personal growth.”

2 BACKGROUND

Child marriage in India since ages is not something which is unheard of. Probably one of the good things granted to the Indian colony by the British, after the railways, is enforcing strict norms on child marriage. Child marriage is intensely woven within the very fabric of the Indian society and even in the 21st century, remains an integral part of it. But the Indians have changed their perspectives towards child marriage from being followers to disapprovers. Roy (1888) supports the act of child marriage with the backing of its importance in the Hindu religion and the importance of morality among both the sexes and avoiding them from falling

into the vices after they hit puberty. He has also referred to the Manu Dharmasutras for the same.

But the child marriages in India began to decline since the dawn of the 20th century not only because the British imposed stricter policies on the Indians like the Prevention of Child Marriage (Sarda) Act, 1929 but also because there was a gradual sense of realization among the Indian society as its ill effects were apprehended by many locals. Previous attempts were also made in the form of the Christian Marriage Act, 1872 which were successful as can be seen from the higher mean age at marriage among the Christians across various studies.

Many initiatives were launched against child marriage by the newly elected Indian republic government after the independence. The Special Marriages Act (1954), the Hindu Marriage Act (1955) were the initial steps being taken by the government of India to spread awareness against the child marriage and to curb it. There was a further amendment in the Sarda Act in the year 1978, where the legal age for marriage increased from 14 to 18 years for girls and 18 to 21 years for boys. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 was a complement to its predecessors in providing a larger impetus to tackle this vice.

There has been a declining trend in the child marriages across India and it has been observed since the early 1900s. Agarwala (1957) while studying the age at marriage across different regions and religions observes a declining trend in the child marriages in India since 1911, and predominantly after the implementation of the Sarda Act, 1929. Bhagat (2016) has similar observations though the study does not pertain to differentiation through religions.

3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Factors affecting Child Marriage:

Child Marriage is a disease which has plagued not only India but a majority of developing and under developed nations in the world. Lal (2013) has analysed various factors that motivate child marriage, some of them being avoidance of expenditure on female education, minimizing expenditure on the marriage, avoiding share in the ancestral property, poverty of the family, social insecurity etc.

Response to the economic incentives is considered to be yet another important factor for the parents to choose grooms for their daughters (Greenhalgh, 1985). Their studies on different Asian nations have led them to conclude that wage work for women is a crucial factor for a higher age at marriage.

A study on Assamese women in Kamrup district (Haloi and Limbu, 2013) shows a negative correlation between the age at marriage and the type of a family, a larger family size implying lower mean age at marriage. The age at marriage is found higher in the households with higher maternal education and household income.

A study by Bhagat (2016) concludes that in smaller castes and tribes, apart from the religions customs and traditions play a crucial role in influencing the age at marriage.

3.2 Consequences of Child Marriage:

A report by UNICEF (2013) highlights the vulnerability of child brides to STD's, infections etc. as they receive less medical care.

The consequences of child marriage and their impact especially on the rural women are studied in detail by Burns, 1988; High birth rates, high illiteracy and infant mortality, malnutrition and low life expectancy being a few among them.

Agrawal and Mehra (2004) point out that the risk of child marriage is borne by the new born of the child bride due to early pregnancy. One in 15 children in India dies before their first birthday as compared to 1 in 200 children across the industrialized world.

At an individual level child brides are deprived of basic human rights and it also marks an abrupt end of their childhood, forcing them to take the responsibilities before they are developmentally ready. (UNICEF, 2001)

3.3 Trends in Child Marriages in India:

There is an increasing trend in the age at marriage for males since 1916 and females since 1921. However, only a minor change is observed in the mean and the median age at marriage according to the study by Goyal, 1988.

Agarwala(1957) has found an increase in the mean age at marriage after the implementation of Sarda Act (1929). A slight tendency towards increased child marriage among males was observed during the period of study, i.e., 1881-1951.

Bhagat (2016) who has conducted an exhaustive analysis on the mean age at marriage segregates the marriage pattern into European and Non-European, based on higher and lower mean age at marriage. He has observed an increase in the spousal age gap in Kerala from 5.5 years in 1991 to 7 years in 2011.

Incidence of child brides has been conceived a problem bigger than child marriage (Bhagat, 2016). The study has shown a drastic decline in the incidence of child brides in Rajasthan from 13% in 2001 to 8% in 2011.

3.4 Religion and Age at Marriage:

The age at marriage is high in Christianity as it encourages celibacy and late marriage by attaching purity and sanctity to unmarried life (Bhagat and Unisa, 2000). Hindus and Christians consider marriage to be a sacrosanct act whereas it is a contract according to Islam.

A study of a Hindu village in the state of Rajasthan on structural and cultural patterns of Hindu society and marriage life by Gupta(1972) has a conclusion regarding the beliefs that early marriages generally safeguard a family from impoverishing fortunes.

3.5 District-wise study of Child Marriage:

A report published from a collaborative study by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and UNICEF (2015) analyses in detail the practice of child marriage prevailing in India across different districts. Their study reveals that a significantly large number of girls still continue to get married between the age group of 15-17 years. Trends in some districts show a higher percentage of younger cohorts of women marrying before the age of 18 years. Another finding by them shows a low mean age at marriage for the people belonging to OBC and SC irrespective of their locality, level of education and economic background.

4 DATA & METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on the data taken from Indian Census 2011. The data in the current study is the district-wise survey of total currently married women, total women their last year birth orders segregated by age, area of residence (rural and urban) and religion.

The major variables of focus in the current study are total currently married women and total women especially belonging to the age groups- “Less than 15 years” and “15-19 years” across different religions and classified by rural, urban and total across all the districts.

Since the main objective of the study is analysis of the incidence of child brides across India the methodology used for this study includes the analysis of data using the basic summary statistics of the same, focussing primarily on the age groups below 19 years. It also involves plotting of various graphs (pie diagrams, bar charts and histograms) depicting a pictorial representation of the diversity of the prevalence of child brides across religions and regions.

A new comparative statistic has been generated in order to study the incidence of child brides across regions and religions in a more distinctive way. It is given as follows:

$$\mu = \frac{\text{Total Currently Married Women in religion} / \text{Total Women in the religion}}{\text{Total Currently Married Women in all religions} / \text{Total Women in all religions}}$$

The μ value is calculated for the girls less than 19 years of age showing a religion specific picture across all districts of India. It shows how the proportion of child marriage for a particular religion compares with the proportion of child marriage for all religions, in a particular district.

: Proportion of Child Brides in Religion X is more (less) than the proportion of child brides in all religions, in the given district

This study also includes plotting of heat maps for India comparing the incidence of child brides across various districts. India maps are also plotted using the comparative statistic (μ) mentioned above for the religions Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs and for Rural, Urban and Total.

5 SUMMARY STATISTICS

The age at marriage for girls plays a very crucial role in India and has a high level of heterogeneity across religions. Currently there are 5.42% child brides in India, most of them from the Hindu religion (5.56%). The least population of the child brides is observed among the Christians. 3.39% of Christian women below the age of 19 years are currently married. The disparity between the rural areas and overall is minimal in context of these statistics. But when it comes to the urban areas, Buddhists have the highest proportion of child brides among all the religions (5.38%).

Table1: Percentage of Child Brides across religions and regions

religion	total	rural	urban
All religious communities	5.41996	5.67365	4.77905
Buddhist	5.23898	5.1427	5.38215
Christian	3.39165	3.47272	3.24069
Hindu	5.56745	5.79639	4.85517
Jain	3.70504	4.72153	3.41521
Muslim	5.27234	5.55072	4.79288
Sikh	3.64619	3.69056	3.51815

The concentration of child brides in absolute as well as in the relative sense is observed to a higher extent in the western parts of India. Districts of Maharashtra and Rajasthan have very high incidence of child brides followed by the districts in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Murshidabad district has maximum number of girls married below the age of 19 (1,42,066). Among the proportion of the currently married women out of the total women below the age of 19 years, Bhilwara (15.40%), Chittaurgarh (14.19%), Tonk (12.14%), Rajsamand (11.73%), Ajmer (11.40%) and Jhalawar (11.23%) districts, all from Rajasthan tops the chart way above the national average of 5.30%.

Jaipur is the contributor for the highest number of Hindu child brides (88,644) closely followed by Pune district (86,045) which is then succeeded by Thane, Bardhaman, Paschim Medinipur and North 24 Parganas. In relative terms, the same ranking holds as was for all religions.

Districts of Mizoram (like Lawngtlai, Mamit), Arunachal Pradesh (Anjaw, Papum Pare), West Bengal (Kooch Bihar, North 24 Parganas, Nadia) ranks among the highest in the percentage of child brides in India amongst Muslim population.

6 STYLIZED FACTS

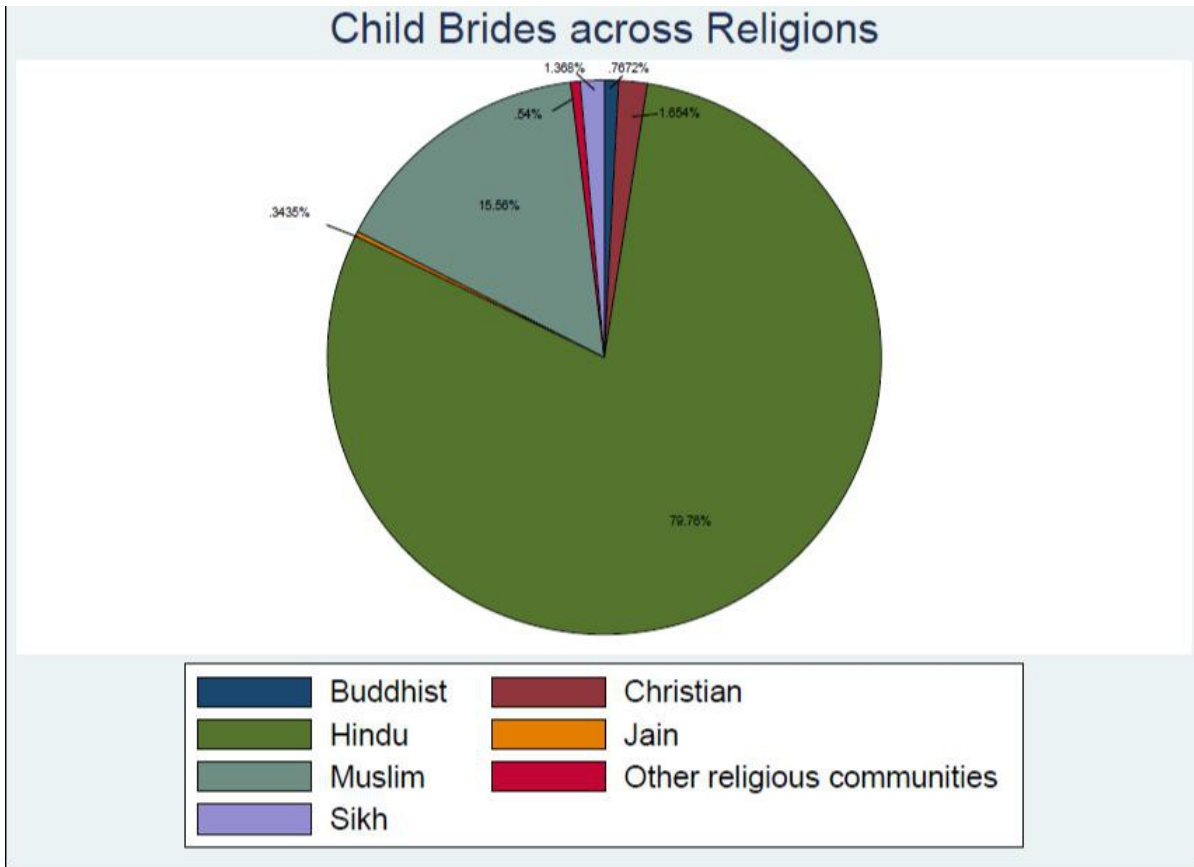
The current study carried out has been successful in uncovering some facts with regards to the child marriages and child brides in India. They are:

- The incidence of child brides is higher in the rural areas in absolute terms but as a percentage of the total women in the same age group, it is higher in the urban areas across India.
- Districts in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and West Bengal have a large concentration of child brides. This similar result is also quoted in the report by the ICRW and UNICEF in the year 2015. This report by Padmavathi et al has been prepared on the district level study conducted by them on child marriage.
- Christians have the lowest percentage of child brides across India. Though a very well-known fact, this has been empirically tested by many viz. Agarwala (1957), Bhagat (2016).
- Buddhists have the highest percentage of child brides in the urban areas surpassing the Hindus.
- The seven sisters of the north east have a very low concentration of child brides as compared to the rest of the nation. This fact is in sync with the finding published in a report by HAQ: the Centre for Child Rights (2013). Tripura emerges as an outlier among the seven sisters of the North East having a higher percentage of child brides unlike the other six.
- The percentage of currently married women to the total women has been seen on a decline after the age group of 40-44 years.

7 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The current study was instrumental in deriving a majority of good results with the help of the basic summary statistics.

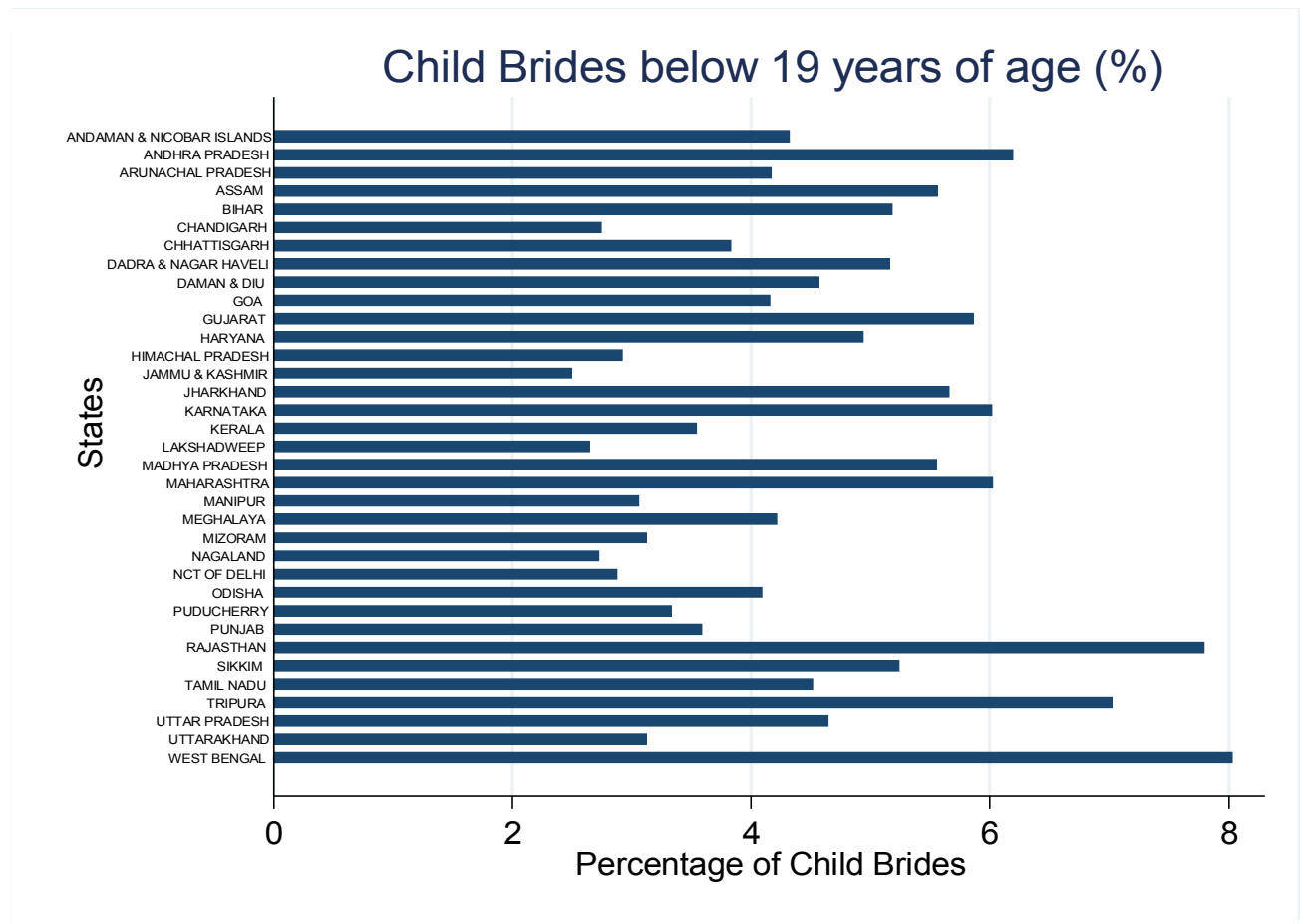
Figure 1



The pie chart above displays the contribution of each religion to the total population of child brides. Hindus contribute up to almost 80% of the total child brides in India. Next in the order are Muslims who contribute 15.5% of the total child brides. An interesting finding discovered here is that the Christians, who have least percentage of girls married below the legal age rank 3rd in relative terms after the Hindus and Muslims with 1.6% of child brides of the total.

A comparative study of the percentage of child brides across states is portrayed in the graph below.

Figure 2



The bar graph displayed above shows West Bengal topping the chart with highest percentage of child brides of about 8% which is more than 2.5% higher than the national average. Rajasthan closely follows West Bengal with around 7.8% which is then follows by Tripura and Andhra Pradesh. Tripura emerges as an outlier among the seven sisters of the North East having a higher percentage of child brides unlike the other six. Jammu & Kashmir has least percentage of child brides with around 2.5% closely followed by Lakshadweep and Chandigarh.

The distribution of the child brides across various states and districts is seen through the histogram plots. Two histograms, one showing the distribution across states and the other , across districts are given below.

Figure 3

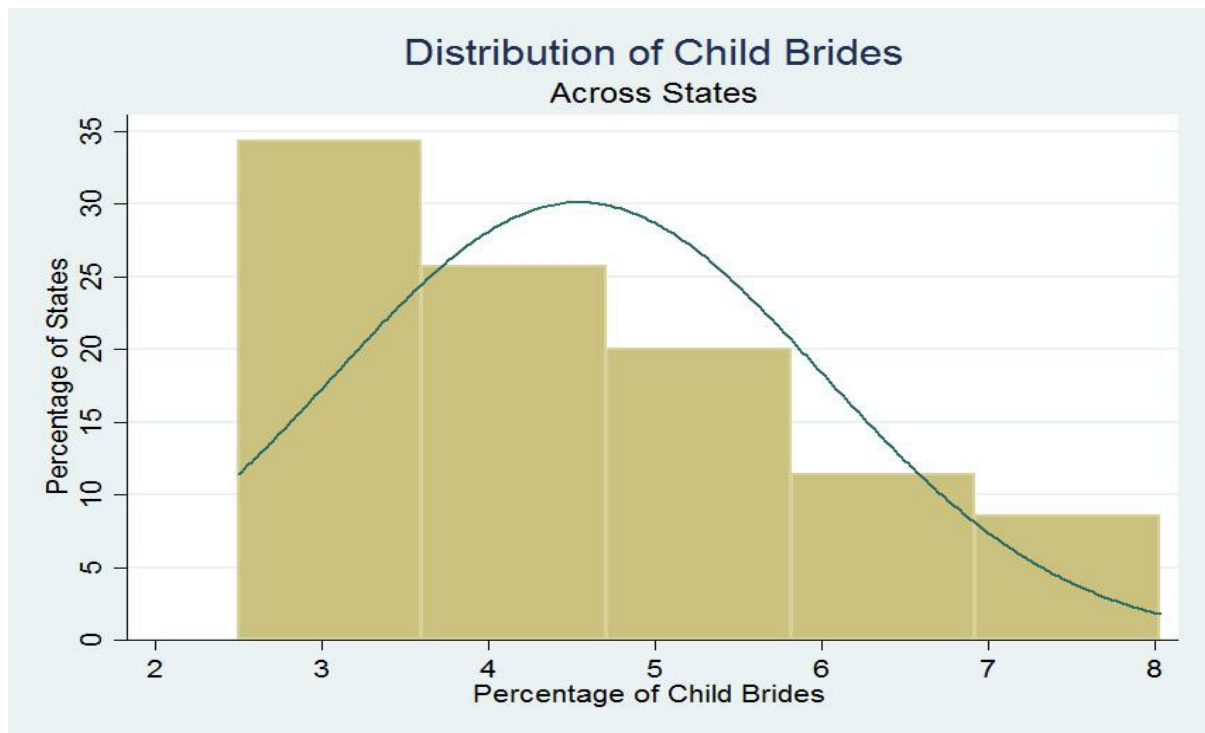
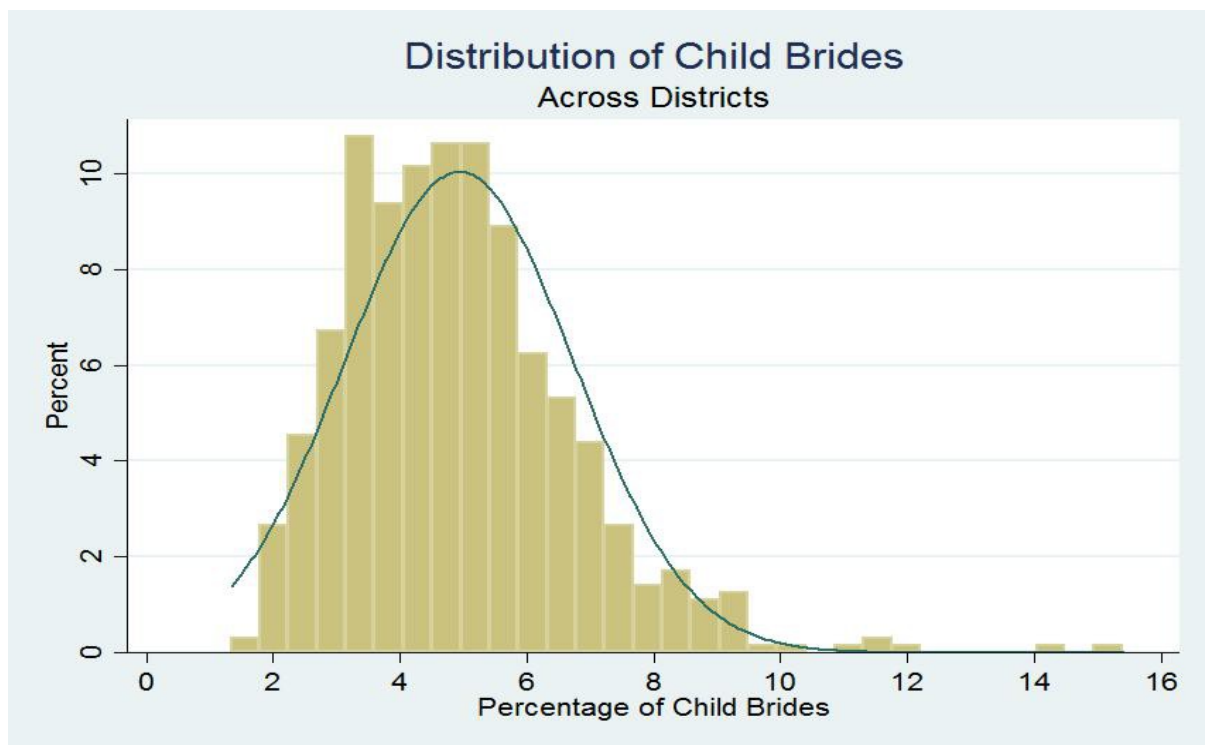


Figure 4



The two histogram plots above show that the percentage of child brides in India follows a near normal distribution, both district wise and state wise. A majority of the states, around 60% of them, have the percentage of child brides below 5%. For the districts, around 50% of them lie in the interval of 3-6%, i.e. around 50% of the districts have the child brides of 3-6% of their total women.

The introduction and application of the new comparative statistic (μ) has also brought to light some new results. The following table shows the statistic across religions for total rural and urban population.

Table 2: Comparative statistic of child brides below 19 years of age

religion	total	rural	urban
buddhist	.969	.91	1.127
christian	.627	.615	.679
hindu	1.0268	1.0235	1.017
jain	.686	.835	.716
muslim	.975	.983	1.003
sikh	.674	.53	.737

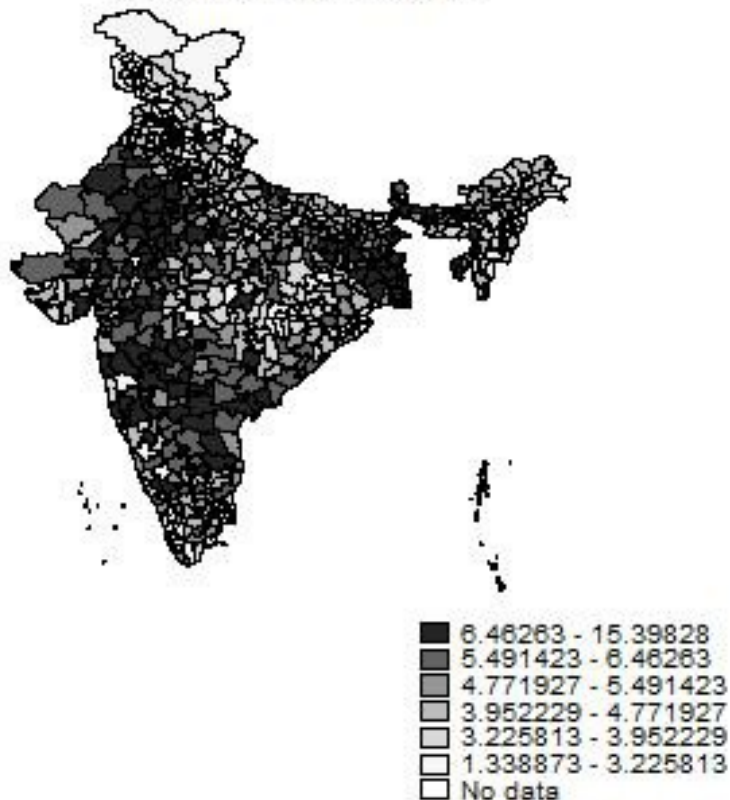
The table clearly shows that prevalence of child brides among the Hindus is greater than the child brides among all the religions. For the rest of the religions, the incidence of child brides is lesser as compared to the overall average, except for Muslims and Buddhists in the urban areas. An interesting finding here is that the Buddhists rank the highest in comparative statistic, surpassing the Hindus as well.

The heat maps showing the different densities of the percentage of child brides across all the districts in India have also been plotted for the current analysis.

Figure 5

Spatial Distribution of Child Brides in India

Districtwise- percentage



The maps clearly show the very high concentration of child brides in the districts of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. A few districts in Tripura and Uttar Pradesh show a high prevalence of child brides. The percentage of child brides is very low in the districts of Jammu & Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Heat maps are also plotted using the comparative statistic (μ) as a measure of disparity. They are plotted for the religions of Hindu and Muslims across total, rural and urban. The results yielded by these maps coincide with those attained from table 2 which shows that the Muslim child brides are larger in the urban areas as compared to the rural areas in a relative sense.

8 DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given India's young age structure, there are a large number of girls below the age of 19 years at the risk of child marriage and motherhood. It is therefore imperative from social, economic, health and development perspectives that child marriage and early childbirth receive greater research and policy priority. The current study has made an attempt to study child marriage from a purely quantitative approach. There is a further scope of study in this area in an extensive manner with the inclusion of qualitative factors as well.

With a further step beyond the empirical analysis, there is a need to effectively tackle the issue of child marriage with a stricter intervention by the governments and various other governing bodies. There is need to educate people regarding the ill effects of the same and the adverse repercussions that can be faced by the girls marrying early. One way can be to increase the overall level of literacy, especially for the girls. Thus, there are a lot of steps that need to be taken to tackle the issue of child marriage successfully

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