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Mains Practice Questions

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According to a report that was published in the major daily newspaper, two school girls who got married after completing their Class X were denied admission in government girls' higher secondary school.

The reasons cited by the school Headmistress for denial of admission to them in Class XI was that the admission to Class XI was not automatic and that the presence of married girls in the school would distract the other school girls from their studies and adversely affect their academic performance.

You are a newly appointed District Magistrate of that area and come across this information through local newspapers. On investigation it was found that the marriage of the minor girls was a common phenomenon in certain communities of that region and here school going girls often get married immediately after completing Standard X.

The parents of the girls are reluctant to file complaints under the fear of penal action for having solemnised the marriage of minor girls.

- a. Identify the stakeholders and ethical dilemmas involved in the case.
- b. What would be the best course of action taken by you as a District Magistrate to manage the situation?

24 Jul, 2020 GS Paper 4 Case Studies

Approach

- o Briefly highlight the grave situation in the present case.
- o In the first part of the answer, identify the stakeholders involved and ethical values pertaining to the case.
- o Also, elaborate the ethical dilemmas involved in the case.
- o In the second part, write the best course of action to be taken by you to resolve the given problems.

Introduction

This case study presents a grim picture of acceptance of issues like patriarchy, lack of women empowerment and prevalence of the rudimentary religious practices. However in this context, it is imperative to reiterate that the right to education is a basic human right and the state should ensure the effective realization of this right.

Body

a) Stakeholders, ethical Values and ethical dilemmas involved in the case:

Stakeholders in the case	Ethical values involved in the case
School girls and their family	Objectivity and rationality

Headmistress and School Management	Accountability, Responsibility and Impartiality
District Magistrate and local administration	Empathy and compassion towards the weaker section
Society at large	Constitutional morality (right to life and right to education)
Civil societies and various NGOs	Dedication to Public Service

Ethical Dilemmas:

General Laws vs Traditional customs

- The present situation is mainly due to conflict between the general laws and traditional customs of communities with respect to marriage.
- According to the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** marrying a girl child at an age of less than 18 is prohibited. But in some societies, like discussed in present case, tradition of child marriage is prevalent.
- This dilemma for the community is always there. However, they should be made to understand traditional values like this may be detrimental to their own community.

Report the incident vs Fear of penal action

- The parents of two married girls are in a dilemma whether to report the incident or not.
- They are reluctant to file complaints against the irresponsible decision of the headmistress because of the fear of penal action for having solemnised the marriage of minor girls, as the child marriage is legally prohibited.

Responsibility of the school of ensuring equal education vs upholding the societal values

- School has the responsibility to educate all the children irrespective of the caste, creed or any personal issues of children (like if a student is married or not).
- However, it is duty of the school to keep other students away from any kind of influence of child marriage.
- But by not allowing the two married minor girls they can meet the latter objective but the former.

b) Course of action taken by District Magistrate to manage the situation holistically-

- **Help married girls to get admission in the school:** First of all I will ensure that the two married minor girls who have been denied admission to school get the admission and the proper education.

- **Direct the Headmistress not to repeat such irresponsible behaviour:** Though I can take a penal action against Headmistress for not allowing girls to attend school, I will give a stern warning that such incidents should not be repeated in future and all the children should get their right to education.
 - Also, I will ask if any minor married girl comes to school for admission, school management should directly report to the concerned authority.
 - A similar circular can be issued to other schools in the region.
- **Tackling the issue of child marriage:** Afterwards my priority will be to educate and motivate the people of the concerning community so that they give up the irrational and rudimentary traditional custom of child marriage and do not marry their girl child until she attains at least 18 years of age.
 - For this purpose I can take help of elderly and senior people (community leaders, representatives, religious leaders etc.) of the community. If they can appreciate the idea of girls empowerment, the society itself will start to transform.
 - A widespread community camps or mobile van advertisements with the help of various NGOs can be done in this region to make people aware of the welfare schemes associated with the girls.
 - Through concerted efforts with civil societies, local administration would try to motivate parents to leave the traditional rudimentary customs and focus on their girl child's education rather than marrying her as a minor.
- **Give stern warning to parents:** Legal provision under the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** should be followed. I will make sure the public order is maintained and laws are followed.
 - I will also warn the other parents that if any more child marriage takes place the accused persons/parents would be dealt strongly.

Conclusion

Thus, I can adopt this course of action to solve the present issue as I think education is empowerment and if we are going to close the doors of a school to married girl students, then that is going to strike a death knell to women's empowerment.