

# **DASHAM**

## **CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY**

### **PRESENTATION OF CHILDREN'S MANIFESTO**

**October 23, 2018**

Harish Chandra Totuka Sabha Bhawan

Jain Nasiya Bhattarkji

Jaipur

**Jointly Organised By:**

Rajasthan Baal Adhikar Sanrakshan Sajha Abhiyan

Rajasthan Right to Education Forum

Girls Not Bride – Rajasthan

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

Baal Suraksha Network

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

Children below 18 years of age comprise 41% of the population of Rajasthan. If the teenagers till the age of 19 years are included in this population, the figures touch 49.6%, requiring special steps for their holistic development by the government and the society at large. Despite the efforts made by the government, the condition of children is not satisfactory. Without an effective intervention for improving their situation, children cannot become responsible citizens of tomorrow.

The child rights are universally defined by the United Nations and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). According to the UNCRC adopted in 1989, Child Rights are minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be afforded to all persons below the age of 18 years, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability and therefore apply to all people everywhere. The U.N. finds these rights interdependent and indivisible, meaning that a right cannot be fulfilled at the expense of another right.

The UNCRC defines a child as “any human being below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. Children's rights includes their right to association with both parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for physical protection, food, universal state-paid education, health care, and criminal laws appropriate for the age and development of the child, equal protection of the child's civil rights and freedom from discrimination. Interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the enforcement of children being physically, mentally and emotionally free from abuse.

The “Dasham – Children's Participation in Democracy” campaign has been undertaken in Rajasthan to get the attention of political parties and elected representatives to the issues crucial for children below the age of 18 years. The initiative is aimed at inculcating democratic aspirations among children and ensuring their participation in the democratic process and public causes in both the Rajasthan Assembly election of 2018 and Lok Sabha elections of 2019.

The project has been undertaken by organising a series of two-day workshops at all the seven divisional headquarters of Rajasthan since August 31, 2018, in which the children's issues were discussed with the representatives of 135 organisations and media persons of the respective regions.

The initiative has been undertaken by the Rajasthan Baal Adhikar Sanrakshan Sajha Abhiyan in association with the Girls Not Bride - Rajasthan Group, Rajasthan RTI Forum, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan and Baal Suraksha Network with the support of UNICEF-Rajasthan, Save the Children, Action Aid, Plan India, UNFPA and World Vision.

The two-day workshops of children were organised by Baal Suraksha Network in Udaipur on August 31 to September 1, while Educate Girls organised the workshop in Ajmer on September 5 and 6. Urmul Trust organised two workshops in Bikaner on September 6 and 7 and in Jodhpur on September 8 and 9. FXB India organised the workshop in Jaipur on September 11 and 12, while Prayatn and AMIED organised it in Bharatpur on September 14 and 15. Antakshari Foundation and Bharat Scouts and Guides organised the workshop in Kota on September 17 and 18.

## **THE JAIPUR CONFERENCE**

The Jaipur conference was organised at Harish Chandra Totuka Sabha Bhawan in Jain Nasiya Bhattarkji on October 23, 2018 to give voice to the children, who will become the voters, taking part in the country's democratic processes after a few years. Coming from the far-off villages in different parts of Rajasthan, the children assembled in Jaipur to place a unique demand before the political parties for including their crucial issues in the manifestoes of parties for the upcoming Assembly election in Rajasthan. The demand was the outcome of the series of seven workshops organised at all the divisional headquarters, in which over 900 children had participated.

Over 200 children and representatives of more than 100 organisations placed a charter of demands before the political parties at the state-level conference in Jaipur. The series of previous workshops had helped identify the issues, expectations and demands of children, on the basis of which a charter of demand along with the declaration and manifesto was prepared.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PROCEEDINGS

The conference started with the screening of a documentary film which showed the works performed and completed in the previous workshops at the divisional headquarters. Thereafter, the children staged a short play depicting a classroom where the teacher behaved the typical style of a government-run school. Through the play, the problems in the school, such as absence of toilet facility for girls, no arrangements for drinking water and the absence of a boundary wall around the school, were highlighted. The children acting as students also pointed out that there are insufficient teachers in the government schools and a single teacher takes care of the classes of several subjects.

From the political parties contesting the Assembly election, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly Mr. Rao Rajendra Singh (BJP), Mr. Mahesh Sharma, general secretary of Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee, State Women's Commission Chairperson Ms. Suman Sharma (BJP), Dr. Sanjay Madhav (Communist Party of India - Marxist), Ms. Nisha Siddhu (Communist Party of India), Mr. T.P. Sharma (Aam Aadmi Party) and Mr. Shailendra Awasthi (Samajwadi Party) were present in the conference.

The political leaders present on the occasion supported the demands of children and said that their parties would include children's issues in their manifestoes. The demands of children pertained to their education, protection, development at Anganwadi Centres, health care services in the government hospitals, free distribution of sanitary pads, power supply in villages, implementation of laws and programmes for their welfare and their regular interaction with the elected representatives and political leaders.

The children also demanded that all the political parties should establish separate cells for them. Besides, organising Baal Sabhas at the village panchayat level should be made mandatory. The Resource Institute for Human Rights (RIHR) spokesperson, **Mr. Vijay Goyal**, said much efforts had been put in for giving a final shape to the demands for inclusion in the manifesto in view of the problems being by the children all over Rajasthan.

**Mr. Arvind Ojha**, Chief Executive and Secretary, URMUL Trust, Bikaner, said though the children below 18 years were not allowed to vote, but they were future voters of the state and their demands should be heard. He said that 41% of Rajasthan's population comprises children below 18 years of age. It, therefore, becomes important to hear the children out and consider including their demands in party manifestos. A booklet of the demands of the children was launched at the event.

A large number of children from different districts, including the deaf and dumb students of schools and colleges, raised the critical issues which are affecting their growth and development. They also

challenged the traditions of educational opportunities being denied to the girls and children forced into unwanted marriages at the tender age.

**Komal** from Hanumangarh asked whether the children's voice would not be heard only because they are not voters. When the elections approach, the political leaders come to schools and even touch the students' feet, but they later forget everything, she said. "We are children now. Even you were a child at some point of time. Please try to understand our problems. Anganwadi Centres in the villages are in a bad shape. Education is the second ladder of life after the proper health. The girls should get free sanitary napkins every month because of their natural needs," Komal said.

**Priyanka** from Bundi made an important point about the travelling facilities for children. She said the seats in the public transport system are reserved for the special categories of women, elderly people, disabled persons and even for MLAs. "Only because we are small, should we travel in buses in the standing position? Why are there no seats for children in the buses and trains?" she said in an emotional voice.

**Ajay** from Sikar said his family does not have a pucca house in the village and the family's hutment was demolished by the authorities several times. There is now power supply in his locality and he is not able to study during the night in the darkness, he said.

**Meera** from Phalodi said the only school in her village was closed two years ago and it has not been reopened despite the submission of several memorandums. The government hospital is situated 100 away from the village. There is a power grid situated at a distance of half kilometre, but the electricity is not supplied to her locality, she said.

**Priyanka Saini** from Bundi said the children often faced problems because of a liquor shop situated on the way to her school. "The people around the shop, who are in an inebriated state, harass us. We feel very bad. The liquor shops near the schools should be immediately closed," she said.

**Kavita Rathore** from Sikar said the doctors never come on time in the Primary Health Centre in her village, and the nurses are often not available. There should be a helpline number, where a complaint can be made about them. She said the hospitals in her region are so dirty that even a healthy person can fall sick after visiting them.

**Dipesh Arora**, a specially abled child who has lost his hearing ability, said the doctors in a government hospital could not understand what he wanted to say when he went there to get a disability certificate. "A similar incident happened in a bank, when the bank employees could not understand anything even when I wrote my requirements on a piece of papers. The guard pushed me out of the bank," he said with dismay. The demands of specially abled children pertained to an

easy access to public places and the availability of interpreters in the institutions.

**Amira Khatoon** from Jodhpur said her village had no school or hospital and the people often die before getting to hospital in case of emergency. **Kundan Kunwar** from Udaipur said children in the rural families, who do not know anything about career choices, are lagging behind in the competition.

**Ms. Suman Sharma**, Chairperson, Rajasthan State Women's Commission, said she was glad to note that an effective platform had been created for children who were raising the issues of their basic rights. The problems pertaining to children were eye-opening for the politicians, she said, while promising that she will refer the charter of demands to BJP's manifesto committee. "If the children have to come on stage to speak about basic needs even after 70 years of Independence, we really need to ponder upon the questions.

**Mr. Shailendra Awasthi**, leader of Samajwadi Party, said the children should continue to exert pressure on political parties to get their demands fulfilled. "We too had the same resentment against the system when we were young. The solution lies in waging a continuous struggle and make the politicians realise that they must fulfil their promises made to the people while seeking their votes in elections," he said.

**Ms. Nisha Siddhu**, leader of Communist Party of India, said the closure of thousands of schools as a result of merger had deprived the children from poor families of their right to education. She said her party, CPI, would continue to raise such issues as it has been in the Opposition for a long time. She also pointed out that since the Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens, they should strive to build a society where justice and equal treatment is available to everyone.

**Dr. Sanjay Madhav**, leader of Communist Party of India (Marxist), said the era of privatisation which had begun in 1993 had created problems for the poor and downtrodden and deprived them of their livelihood, while the questions of children's rights related to the welfare state. The politicians should fight both inside and outside the Assembly to ensure the availability of equal rights to children, he said.

**Mr. T. P. Sharma**, leader of Aam Aadmi Party, said the AAP government in Delhi had shown that an immense progress can be made in the health and education sector with the right spirit and dedication to the public cause. "If we can do it in Delhi, there is no reason why it cannot be done in Rajasthan. There is much leakage of funds, as many things are not revealed in the public. The concepts like Mohalla Clinics and mobile vans can be introduced in Rajasthan which has a difficult geography," he said.

The half-day conference ended with the delivery of vote of thanks to the participants and a call made to the civil society to generate awareness about children's rights and put pressure on the political parties to resolve children's issues and give them a safe childhood and equal opportunities for ensuring their growth as responsible citizens of the country.

## LIST OF PARTICIPATING MEDIAPERSONS

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Media Organisation</b>
1	Ajay Sharma	Daily News
2	Rajkumari Dogra	Freelance Journalist
3	Hanumant Singh	BTS News
4	Nikita Bishnoi	Hindustan Times
5	Manish Godha	Nai Duniya
6	Rohit Kumar	Pinkcity.com
7	Manish Hooja	Pinkcity.com
8	Vijay Kedia	The Public Side
9	Preety Joshi	Freelance Journalist
10	Ravi Katara	ETV Bharat
11	Karan Tiwari	HNN
12	Minu Sharma	DD News
13	Mohammed Iqbal	The Hindu
14	Rakesh Sharma	Punjab Kesri
15	Rohit Jain Paras	The Hindu
16	Shiv Prasad	DD News
17	Nagesh Kumar	DD News
18	Ankur Jain	ETV
19	Ranjit Kaus	Mehfil Media
20	Vijay	Samachar Plus

21	Manoj Shrestha	Dainik Bhaskar
22	Santosh Sharma	Daily News
23	Himanshu Vyas	Hindustan Times
24	Asha Wadhvani	Child Line Jaipur
25	Sunil Sharma	AI TV
26	Arvind Sharma	The Times of India
27	Naim Khan	Khan Kasmi
28	Mahesh	News 18 Rajasthan
29	Swati Saini	AI TV
30	Jawed Ansari	UNICEF
31	Jaya Gupta	Rajasthan Patrika
32	Chavi	Patrika TV
33	Prithvi Sengar	Media Research Scholar
34	Lavina	Media Research Scholar
35	Narayan Bareth	BBC
36	Dinesh Kumawat	News 24