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Demand to do away with two-child norm in Rajasthan

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Pressure is building up on the Rajasthan government to do away with the two-child norm being followed in the State with several legislators now openly demanding a review of this practice which bars individuals from contesting the panchayat and municipal elections and disqualifies employees from promotion and other incentives. The government, on its part, has indicated its willingness to review the policy after consultations with stakeholders.

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The two-child norm was adopted by several States when the Panchayati Raj Act, 1992 was implemented to give more powers to the panchayati raj institutions in the country and reserve 33 per cent seats at the grassroots for women.

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However, it has always been a contentious issue with the civil society and women's activists opposing it, describing it as disempowering and discriminatory. They said it curbed the reproductive rights of a woman and violated international conventions to which India was a signatory.

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The issue figured in the Assembly recently with BJP legislator Mohan Lal Gupta raising the issue during zero hour. He had said that the two-child policy was the reason behind the declining sex ratio and female foeticide. He had found support not only within the House but also from government employees and civil society groups. The Panchayati Raj Minister Ghulab Chand Kataria had to assure the House that the government was open to reviewing the policy after wider deliberations.

Rajasthan was the first State in the country to implement the two-child norm in 1992 barring people with more than two children after 1994 from contesting panchayat and municipal elections which was further extended to government employees with a cut-off date of June 2002. Many other States like Punjab, Haryana, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh also adopted the norm but most have now withdrawn it.

Independent audits of the policy have clearly shown that women were at the receiving end because they had little say in deciding on the number of children and often faced disqualifications if they had a third child. There have been incidents where women have been abandoned by their husbands to avoid disqualification after the third of a child.

Civil rights groups which met here on Sunday to campaign against the norm found support from more than 40 government employees who came out openly against the policy.

"As of now 5,600 employees, including senior officers, are affected by the norm and want the policy reviewed," Vijay Goel, general secretary of Rajasthan Bal Adhikar Samrakshan Sanjha Abhiyan told *The Hindu*.

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