

Status of Adolescent Girls and Women, in selected villages of Dang region of Karauli district of Rajasthan

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Abstract:

The Dang area of Karauli district of Rajasthan is the synonymous of varied challenges like geography, livelihood, socio economics conditions and use of resources. The research has emphasized on understanding and assessing the status of adolescent girls and adult women in four villages as Chaubey Ki, Daulatiya, Daulatpura, and Lakhruki. We investigated the challenges faced by adolescent girls in these villages. It was found that adolescent girl faced major problems of early school dropouts, limited educational opportunities, and menstrual health issues. Furthermore, we examined the economic, social, and cultural factors influencing the lives of adult women. The report highlights the possible areas where intervention to bolster women's development, addressing their goals and surmounting obstacles across various domains.

Keywords: Livelihood, Adolescent, Education, Awareness, Opportunities

Introduction:

The status of women in rural and tribal communities reflects deeply rooted social, cultural, and economic practices, which often determine their roles, rights, and their overall level in society. The Dang area of Karauli district in Rajasthan, known for its rugged terrain and traditional lifestyles, offers a unique case study of how women navigate the complex dynamics of gender within a specific cultural and geographic setting. Historically, Rajasthan has been associated with patriarchal norms, and rural areas like Dang which is not exception. However, understanding the status of women in such regions requires an exploration of various factors, including economic participation, access to education, health care, and the role of customary laws.

Whenever we talk about the Dang region, we often recall the infamous Chambal River ravines, once known as the land of dacoits. The Dang region in Rajasthan spans eight districts: Baran, Bharatpur, Bundi, Dholpur, Karauli, Kota, and Sawai Madhopur (Government of Rajasthan, 2022). Karauli and Sawai Madhopur are the two primary districts that make up around 60% of this area, particularly covering much of the Chambal region. The Chambal Dang encompasses villages and localities within a 30-50 km range, mostly situated in valleys or basins that have been eroded by the Chambal River (Department of Mines and Geology, 2019). This area is specially categorized based on resource availability and community development to facilitate targeted government interventions for regional

progress.

The Dang area of Karauli district consists of three blocks: Sapotra, Mandrayal, and Karauli (Department of Mines and Geology, 2019). Located along the banks of the Chambal River, the region has been given special status due to resource availability and recent development efforts (Bhartiya, 2016). Karauli, the 32nd district of Rajasthan, was established on July 19, 1997, to accelerate the development of the Dang region (District Karauli, 2024). Two key factors contribute to the region's special status: it is an extended part of the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, and it was historically home to many dacoits, which hindered natural development. The area's undulating geography causes significant rainwater runoff during the monsoon season, creating immense challenges for the local community. These factors have made it difficult for residents to engage in basic livelihood activities, complicating their ability to meet even their most basic needs.

As far as women focused program which address their empowerment, NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission) is one such program which has contributed in some extent to support women force through financial needs. The program has covered around 81 percent rural households in SHGs (RAJEEVIKA, 2023) in Karauli district. Another program is MGNREGA which has footed in remote parts of Dang area to provide sure income source in form of daily labour in infrastructure work of Gram Panchayats (Kumawat and Upadhyaya, 2015). Women are also linked with Anganwadi where they were provided skill development training under ICDS program, but the no are very less.

This research paper aims to examine the status of women in the Dang area of Karauli district, focusing on their socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and the challenges they face in striving for equality and empowerment. By analyzing these dimensions, this study will contribute to a broader understanding of gender roles in rural Rajasthan and the implications for social development. Furthermore, the research will investigate how traditional structures coexist with modern influences, shaping the lived experiences of women in this dang community. This exploration is crucial for informing policy initiatives aimed at improving the status and rights of women in similar rural settings across India. In this research paper, we have worked on the objective to understand the status of different aspects of women like cultural, health, educational, wellbeing and other aspects of women's and adolescent girls. Through this multifaceted approach, we aimed to capture a comprehensive picture of the challenges, aspirations, and lived realities of the women and girls in the research context.

Objective of Study-

These are the main objectives of the study as

1. To analyse the socio-economic conditions of adolescent girls and adult women in the selected villages, focusing on like education, employment, income levels, and access to basic amenities. factors
2. To study the levels of educational attainment among adolescent girls and adult women and identify the barriers to continuing education, such as financial constraints, cultural norms, or infrastructure issues.
3. To assess the health and nutritional status of adolescent girls and adult women, including access to healthcare services and awareness of health-related issues.
4. To identify the challenges faced by women and girls related to gender-based discrimination, early marriage, domestic violence, and societal expectations.

5. To explore the extent of participation of women and adolescent girls in livelihood activities and their contribution to household incomes.

Research Methodology:

The section outlines the approach and methodology for the study examining the status of women in the Dang area of Karauli district, Rajasthan. The methodology includes the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analysis framework that has been used to assess the socio-economic, cultural, and gender-related aspects of the women's lives in the dang region.

1. **Research Design-** Exploratory Research Design
2. **Study Area-** The study has conducted in the selected 4 villages of Mandrayal block of Dang area of Karauli district, Rajasthan,
3. **Sample Size:** Four focus group discussion have been conducted for the study, ensuring coverage of different age groups of women, marital statuses, and educational backgrounds. The selection of the villages is done as per the convenience of the researcher.

4. Data Collection Method

a. Primary Data Collection: It is collected from structured checklist having both close-ended and open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews with key informants such as women community leaders, local NGOs, and government officials were done to get insights into gender issues, cultural practices, and government initiatives that impact women. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been conducted with women of various age groups to gather qualitative data on their perspectives regarding social norms, access to resources, and barriers to empowerment.

b. Secondary Data Collection: It is collected from various reports, journals, census data and impact assessment reports of local NGOs.

Finding and Analysis:

From the data analysis, following findings can be taken in different aspects of status of women and adolescent girl in the dang area of Karuli district of Rajasthan as

A. Socio-Economic Conditions

- The situation of livelihood is very challenging in the dang area. Due to difficult geography, most households in the Dang region rely on subsistence agriculture and daily-wage labour, with limited sources of stable income. Agriculture is mostly dependent on rainwater which is very limited in the area due to undulating topography which holds very less water.
- All the livelihood works are done by women and with the help of their children mostly, they also go in NREGA as per availability. Adolescent girls and adult women contribute significantly to agricultural work, but their efforts are unpaid or undervalued.
- Lack of infrastructure support like poor road connectivity, no electricity, and less water supply further exacerbates socio-economic challenges for women. In summers women have to travel 2-3 km to collect drinking water.

B. Educational Attainment and Barriers:

- The situation of education is also very poor especially with the case of women. This is mostly due to poor facilities in schools, lack of transportation, and societal norms discouraging girls' education beyond middle school. Due to scattered population, most of the girls are to travel 1-2 km in schools which often restrict them to continue after certain age.

- Early marriage is another common tradition in the dang region, preventing girls from completing secondary or higher education. After 12-14 years of the age, girl's activities are limited to their home only which involves caring of other siblings, cooking, collecting woods and care of animals.
- Another factor is cultural resistance and lack of role models within the community deter girls from pursuing education.
- People there often treat girls unfairly compared to boys, both at home and in school. This unfair treatment stops girls from growing and keeps the whole area from reaching its best. Girls in the dang area usually start schooling around 5-6 years age and typically go up to class 8th or 10th in government schools of their nearby proximity.
- Unfortunately, very few girls go on to complete graduation or prepare for competitive exams due to limited resources. After reaching the government school, many either get married or take on extra responsibilities at home.
- When we talked to school-going girls about changes they'd like in their schools, the most common request was for different teachers. Many girls weren't happy with the teaching style, and those satisfied mentioned having only male teachers. They expressed a desire for female teachers, feeling more comfortable with them. Financial constraints or the belief that the brothers' education is more crucial are common reasons given for denying girls the opportunity to pursue their studies further.

C. Health and Nutritional Status

- The health infrastructure is very poor in the area due to difficult geography and poor connectivity with road. Poor health and nutrition habit rises high prevalence of malnutrition among adolescent girls and women, largely due to poverty, lack of awareness about balanced diets, and cultural practices that prioritize men and boys for food.
- Limited healthcare infrastructure in the dang region makes lack access to primary health centres or hospitals which thus refrain to avail the basic health facilities to people. On other hand, low awareness of maternal and reproductive health, resulting in high rates of early pregnancies and maternal health issues.
- One of the significant transformations during adolescence for girls is the onset of the menstrual cycle, typically occurring between the ages of 11 to 15. In conversations with various groups of girls, approximately half of them had already experienced menstruation and they were unaware about the basic of menstruation hygiene. Although, all the girls have access to sanitary pads from their respective Anganwadi. In some remote households which are far from AWC takes help of nearby market to purchase sanitary pads which are easily accessible and affordable to them.

D. Gender-Based Challenges

- The area has been land of dacoits for long time and also come under forest reserve which always refrain women not to cross the boundary of their house. On other side, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms in the dang region resulted restricted the mobility for women and girls, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and employment.
- Due to rooted patriarchal system, gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and early marriage, is prevalent, with minimal legal intervention due to lack of awareness and social stigma. This is often due to social pressure and avoiding the burden of family expenses in marriages.
- Women are often excluded from decision-making processes, both at home and in the community. Their involvement is limited to household work and agriculture related work only.

E. Participation in Livelihood Activities

- Women in the Dang region primarily work as agricultural and livestock rearing work. They also work as labour or engage in household chores, with little to no access to formal employment opportunities. In these works, their involvement is only to provide physical efforts but not in decision making.
- Traditional skills like handicrafts or dairy farming are underutilized due to lack of market linkages and entrepreneurial support. Due to difficult terrain and no road connectivity, there is no facility of any organized milk cooperative society/ chain like AMUL, SARAS etc. Some of the family's sale cattle milk to local milk supplier but which gives them very less income.
- Financial literacy and access to credit facilities are low among women, hindering economic empowerment. There are some SHGs formed by the government in the area but most of them are inactive and notable to fulfil the objective of why they are formed.

F. Access to Government Schemes and Initiatives

- The area is far from the various government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Sukanya Yojana are very limited among the local population, particularly women. Some efforts are made by ICDS department so provide access of schemes related to MCH, but their approach is also limited to well connected villages only.
- The geographical isolation and bureaucratic hurdles are other some reasons which impacts the implementation of government programs in the Dang region. Due to forest coverage and various political interest, the area had list priority for the government department responsible for women development.
- Other factors such as cultural barriers, need for male approval, often discourage women from accessing benefits of available government benefits. Due to lack of electricity facility and internet, they are far from the digital world which refrain them from what is happening in their villages.

G. Cultural and Traditional Practices

- Child marriage is a significant cultural practice among adolescent girls in many villages of Dang area. Despite the legal age for girls to marry being 18 and boys to 21, it is common for them to be wedded by the age of 14 or 16 in these areas. An interesting tradition prevails, where if the older sister in a family is arranged to marry a boy, the younger sisters are also arranged to marry boys close to their respective ages within the same household. This often results in all the sisters getting married simultaneously. The reasoning behind this tradition is that marrying all daughters together lessens the financial burden on the family, as opposed to arranging separate marriages for each daughter. However, despite the early marriage ceremonies, the girls only move to their in-laws' houses when they are around 16 to 18 years old. This creates a notable gap of at least 3-4 years between the marriage rituals and the living at husband's home.
- Their lack of choice in deciding whether to marry or leave their parents' home adds to the complexity of their situation. Unfortunately, this compels many girls to drop out of school early age and restrict them to continue education.
- Additionally, the women follow the Pardha/ Ghoonghat (veiling) tradition but not necessarily covering their faces but draping a veil over their hair. These customs, deeply rooted in tradition, significantly impact the lives and education of adolescent girls in these villages.
- Another tradition which massively prevails is dowry and it is still widely practiced, restricting the growth and opportunities for adolescent girls and women. Often families have to spend huge amount

of money to fulfil the desire of boy's families.

- Sons are preferred over daughters, which leads to neglect of girls' education, health, and overall development at most of the area. In this situation, women's roles remain largely confined to domestic work, caregiving, and secondary participation in economic activities.

H. Aspirations and Challenges

- During our conversations with the girls of selected villages, we observed a striking acceptance of their family's decisions regarding marriage. They seemed resigned to the notion that early marriage is an inevitable part of their future, and the practice of marrying two sisters simultaneously within the same family is understood as a means to alleviate financial burdens on their fathers.
- Attempts to inquire about their aspirations and ambitions yielded limited responses, as the girls appeared unaccustomed to contemplating a future beyond their expected marital roles. In exploring their desires for changes in their school or village, the girls exhibited immediate and practical concerns. They emphasized the need for electricity to facilitate nighttime studying, a consistent supply of water, and well-constructed roads connecting villages in the Dang area. These requests highlight the girls' strong connection to the village issues, underscoring the direct impact of these challenges on their personal lives and overall well-being.

I. Safety and Security:

- **Domestic Violence and Verbal abuse:** In study it was found that women face domestic violence and verbal abuse on a routine basis. Women seem to fully accept that it is a part and parcel of their married life. Even married daughters in household have said that their mothers tell them to not come back home if her husband abuse them. Most mother in laws seemed to be very aware of domestic violence but believe that if the wife is wrong, they cannot be upset with the consequences. It is not about the age as even older women complaint of domestic violence and verbal abuses. There can be multiple reason for abuse misplaced anger, addiction, dowry etc. However, women in the locality have mixed responses when they witness domestic violence. Young adult women also complaint about violence and verbal abuse from their mother in laws.
- **Intimate partner violence:** None of the women was aware of it. It is never openly discussed nor were women comfortable talking about it. They have a pressure to procreate within first year of marriage. The choice to say no is not there and thus many women admitted to having pregnancies they wouldn't have had if they had a choice in this.
- **Attempts at sexual abuse:** Except two women in all four villages no one spoke of any sexual molestation or abuse or even in being a situation where they are vulnerable and can be taken advantage of. Both cases were different in one the women could divorce her husband and was remarried to someone else only because her family supported her. The other is of a widowed women who complained that there is a chance that her husband's older and younger brother might ask for sexual favors in return of any financial help.
- **Family bride or Juti system:** This is not a system followed publicly nor does anyone mention about it. But some households in these four villages follow this system where if only the eldest brother is married, and they have more unmarried brothers then she must be able to procreate with them too. This is because of the underdevelopment of dang region and lack of girls due to female infanticide in the past that young men find it difficult to find girls for marriage.

- **J. Participation in decision making:** Women in these villages face significant barriers to collective action and community engagement. Public union formation and extended meetings are off-limits,

effectively excluding them from formal structures of power and decision-making. Village gatherings often operate as closed spaces, with women rarely invited or welcomed to participate. This lack of inclusive spaces discourages collective action, hindering any potential efforts for women to unite for a common cause.

K. Political awareness

- Despite awareness of major political parties and participation in voting, women in Dang villages exhibit limited agency in the electoral process. Decisions about who to vote for, regardless of panchayat, MP, or MLA elections, are often made collectively by the village, seemingly bypassing individual women's preferences, and thought processes. This lack of independent decision-making is further amplified by limited access to information, as most women neither read newspapers nor regularly use news on their mobile phones.
- Furthermore, the "Sarpanch Pati" system, where a woman's elected position as sarpanch is effectively controlled by her husband, highlights the gender imbalance in formal and informal decision-making power within villages.

L. Economic Factors

- Dang villages grapple with significant economic isolation, with the nearest village often exceeding 10km away. This isolation translates to a dearth of local employment opportunities, impacting both men and women. Agriculture, while present, is not the primary income source for most households. Men primarily seek work in other states, as shepherds, or in stone mines, often facing irregular jobs dictated by fluctuating demand.
- Women are treated as secondary citizens and thus their struggles to get economic opportunities aren't even on the list of development in the village. Women in Dang overwhelmingly remain confined to the role of housewives, significantly restricting women's economic participation. They primarily work within their families' agricultural fields, with little to no government assistance reaching their villages.

M. Financial awareness

- A striking lack of financial awareness characterizes the lives of Dang's adult women. Despite husbands claiming to share monthly income, most women, even in their mid-30s, remain unaware of their household's total earnings. This discrepancy is further evident in their inability to account for visible assets or explain their source. Most women in Dang area do have bank accounts but they remain with zero balance. This is done more out of compulsion as direct benefit transfer schemes benefit all households rather than to empower women. Interestingly, while knowledge of monthly savings is very little, women, particularly in their early 30s, demonstrate surprising awareness of daily expenses, even providing detailed breakdowns of spending patterns. This suggests a level of financial management within the allocated budget, even if overall household finances remain opaque.
- When it comes to loan only man can decide to take loan or sell any property, he can discuss it with his wife but women in the house mostly cannot change the decision neither can she decide to take up loan or sell or buy proper without her husband and family's consent.
- Reaching the nearest marketplace in Dang villages presents a significant challenge for women, weaving together threads of physical distance, age-old traditions, and economic dependence. For residents of villages like Daulatpura, lack of proper road connectivity amplifies the already considerable distance to Kaila Devi and Karauli markets, both exceeding 10km away. Even in

villages like Chaubeki with decent roads, the distance to Karauli remains a hurdle. However, physical impediments are merely the tip of the iceberg. Women's access to markets is intricately intertwined with their age and marital status.

N. Age factor

- Newly married women, even above 18, find themselves confined within the house of their husband's family. They are expected to adhere to strict social norms, devoid of any autonomy regarding market visits. Seeking permission to purchase even necessities is discouraged, with their mother-in-law acting as the gatekeeper, controlling all household purchases from food and clothing to jewelry, often based on a pre-determined monthly budget. Even then, going out requires permission from in-laws and husbands, securing financial permission, and often, traveling in groups for safety and social acceptance.

O. Limited Awareness: A Consequence of Restricted Access

- Most women in dang have visited their closest market., a striking observation emerges about their product and brand awareness. Despite market visits, particularly among older women, knowledge about common items like cooking oil, hair oil, and even kaja is absent. This also includes the names of the shops they regularly visited and the names of the buses they took to reach the market.
- Most shopkeepers provide them with the product that is sold the most in the market which implies that even though choices are available they fail to exercise them due to lack of awareness. This limited awareness serves as a prominent indicator of the isolation these women face due to restricted access and deeply ingrained social norms. However, the veil of financial secrecy isn't absolute. Some women, confess to quietly saving a portion of their allocated money, keeping this hidden from their families. This act of secret saving underscores the need for women's financial empowerment and access to independent financial resources.

P. Land ownership: In Dang, land ownership presents a complex and inequitable landscape for women. Limited agricultural land and scarce irrigation restrict cultivation primarily to bajra, with occasional Wheat or Mustard for family consumption. Women bear the brunt of agricultural labor, devoting as much as 5 to 8 hours per day each week to the fields yet receiving no formal recognition or compensation. This aligns with a deeply ingrained cultural understanding that views their agricultural work as an obligatory duty rather than value-generating labor.

Q. Cultural factors

- **Marriage:** Across all four villages in Dang, arranged child marriage is found to be a deeply ingrained and inescapable norm. Women had no choice in going to her husband's house even after she turns 18. Notably, married women of all ages and castes displayed no sense of abnormality towards these early unions. Despite the evident ill consequences of child marriage observed within their own communities, many individuals displayed a sense of unwilling acceptance towards this deeply inherent practice. However older women interestingly refrained from framing it as child marriage. Instead, they emphasized the perceived faster maturation of girls compared to boys, justifying early marriage by framing it as a union between two mature individuals. This tradition finds justification in various socio-economic factors. Firstly, girl child is often perceived as a burden, particularly in the region's dire poverty, with marrying them off promptly lessening the family's financial responsibility. Covid, as some women pointed out, was more difficult as financial crisis begin and bread earners from their families lost their job to reduce burden on their families many young girls all over the Dang region were married and sent to their in-law's house. Secondly, a lower

dowry is expected for younger brides. Additionally, girls perceived higher fertility as another motivation for early marriage.

R. Marriage norms

- The couple is expected to remain monogamous throughout their life. Polygamy is looked upon with bad eye. In almost every village we met three generations of a married couple, most remained monogamous throughout their life and even if a few had more than one wife only one stayed with them and the other was sent back to her parents' house. In such a situation the first wife gets close to nonfinancial help from her husband and if she has children, she is expected to take care of them, and they do not inherit anything from their father. Endogamy prohibits marriage with other people and establishes the groups a spouse must belong to. Endogamy promotes the idea that young people should marry "of our own kind" to strengthen the group's unity. Two specific forms of arranged marriage is practiced the villages:
 - **Marriage by exchange:** In this, if you give one girl from your family in marriage it is mandatory for the other family to give away one of their daughters in exchange for marriage. Mostly practiced in Meena community
 - **Samoohek Vivah:** In this if one household has three girls and two are of marriageable age (around 14-15 years old) and they find a household which similar setting where two boys are of marriageable age, and one is younger all there are given off in marriage at the same time. in most households' sisters are given off in the same house the explanation of this is that this keeps the house in balance as women does not fight for the property and also is convenient as this reduces expanses in marriage and efforts of finding a new suiter for every daughter.
 - **Widow remarriage:** In Dang area, a widow's future path diverges significantly based on caste and children. Young, childless widows from communities like the Jatavs may return to their families, potentially even remarrying with support. However, for Meena and Gurjer women, the ancient practice of "**Levirate**" is followed.
 - This custom dictate that the deceased husband's younger or older brother must marry his widow, ostensibly to "keep the family together." Women have no say in this patriarchal practice. Even daughters offer little escape, as lineage continuity takes precedence. But if she has a son the rules of remarriage change. In this situation the women will have to live with her in laws for the rest of her life without remarrying anyone.
 - Leaving her children behind to live an independent life is unthinkable in these tightly woven social structures. Furthermore, the deceased husband's property often becomes a target for exploitation. Land and belongings, rarely registered in the woman's name, easily slip into the hands of relatives, leaving her vulnerable and reliant on others for necessities. Even her own family, bound by societal norms and internal dynamics, may offer limited support in reclaiming her rights.

Recommendations:

- **Strengthen Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** Although Self-Help Groups exist, many are currently inactive. To promote social, cultural, political, and financial mobility, it is crucial to ensure these groups remain functional. For example, women working in small groups to sell agricultural produce or embroidery crafts can operate as small cooperatives, fostering collaboration and mutual support among members.

- **Improve Infrastructure:** Enhancing infrastructure such as roads, irrigation facilities, education, and healthcare is essential for women's overall development. Improved infrastructure provides them with exposure to other regions, enabling them to understand and adopt better practices, ultimately contributing to their empowerment.
- **Skill Development for Women:** As women are predominantly engaged in agriculture, livestock rearing, and household work, offering them skill development programs in areas like handicrafts or tailoring can provide additional income opportunities, leading to improved livelihoods.
- **Effective Implementation of Government Schemes:** Many government schemes fail to reach remote villages in the Dang area. It is imperative to ensure effective rollout and implementation of these programs to benefit the local population.
- **Strengthen Healthcare Systems:** Strengthening primary health centers, deploying community health workers, and conducting workshops on menstrual hygiene and reproductive health are critical measures to enhance the existing healthcare system.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** There is a need for awareness campaigns to educate people about existing government schemes like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* and *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana*, ensuring their benefits reach the intended population.

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