

THE ROLE OF ROYAL FAMILIES IN ELECTORAL POLITICS - WITH REFERENCE TO RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

Rajasthan, known historically as the land of kings and princely states, saw a complex political transformation during the Indian independence movement. At the time of independence on August 15, 1947, Rajasthan comprised 19 princely states and three small estates (Nimrana, Lava, and Kushalgarh), in addition to Ajmer (Mewargarh) which was directly under British rule. According to Section 8 of the Indian Independence Act 1947, princely states had the freedom to decide whether to join India or Pakistan or remain independent. However, many of the long-standing royal families faced challenges in adapting to democracy and the integration of Rajasthan into India. The determination of Sardar Patel to maintain national unity and integrity led to the forced integration of these states into the Indian Union. Despite resistance from various princely states, many eventually agreed to integration with the promise of certain privileges. For instance, Bikaner and Jodhpur princely states initially resisted integration, but they were eventually incorporated after intense negotiations.

INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan, whose name translates to "Land of the Rajputs," was home to numerous princely states during British rule. At independence, these states had the option to join either India or Pakistan or remain sovereign. The integration process was guided by the Indian Independence Act of 1947, which aimed to consolidate these diverse territories into a single nation. This paper examines the role of royal families in this integration process and their subsequent involvement in Indian politics.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Princely States and Integration:

Rajasthan was divided into 19 princely states and three small estates. The princely states were given the option to join either India or Pakistan or remain independent. The Indian government, under Sardar Patel's leadership, worked to integrate these states into the Indian Union to maintain national unity.

RESISTANCE AND NEGOTIATIONS

The rulers of several princely states resisted integration. For example, Maharaja of Bikaner initially refused to sign the integration documents. However, after threats of economic and political sanctions, he agreed. Similarly, the Maharaja of Jodhpur, who had contemplated joining Pakistan, ultimately signed the integration documents under pressure.

POLITICAL CAREERS OF ROYAL FAMILIES POST-INDEPENDENCE

1. Jodhpur Royal Family:

Maharaja Hanumant Singh of Jodhpur formed the Akhil Bharatiya Ramrajya Parishad in 1952 and contested elections. After his death, his son, Gajsingh, became active in politics and served as a Rajya Sabha member. Gajsingh's sister, Chandesh Kumari Katoch, also became a prominent Congress leader.

2. **Jaipur Royal Family:**

Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur joined C. Rajagopalachari's Swatantra Party and won the 1962 Lok Sabha elections. Her daughter, Diya Kumari, currently serves as a BJP MLA and Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

3. **Dholpur Royal Family:**

Vasundhara Raje of the Dholpur family served as Rajasthan's Chief Minister twice and has been a key figure in state politics. Her son, Dushyant Singh, has also been actively involved in politics.

4. **Bharatpur Royal Family:**

Members of the Bharatpur royal family, including Giriraj Singh and Vishwajit Singh, have held significant political positions, including MP and MLA roles.

5. **Kota Royal Family:**

Kota's former Maharaja, Brajraj Singh, served as a Lok Sabha member. His wife, Kalpana Devi, has been an MLA, demonstrating the continued political involvement of the family.

6. **Dungarpur Royal Family:**

The Dungarpur family has had notable figures like Raja Lakshman Singh and Harshvardhan Singh serve in various political capacities, including as Rajya Sabha members.

7. **Bikaner Royal Family:**

Karni Singh served as an MP from 1952 to 1971, and Siddhi Kumari has been an MLA from Bikaner West multiple times.

8. **Jaisalmer Royal Family:**

Maharawal Raghunath Singh served as an MP, and Chandra Veer Singh has been a BJP MLA, with Vikram Singh actively involved in politics.

9. **Alwar Royal Family:**

Members of the Alwar family, such as Mahendra Kumari and Bhawani Singh, have been involved in various political roles.

10. **Udaipur Royal Family:**

The Udaipur royal family has had members like Sadaat Mahendra Singh and Mahima Kumari Vishwajit Singh actively involved in politics.

CONCLUSION

Since independence, Rajasthan's royal families have maintained a significant presence in the state's political landscape. While initially resistant to the integration process, many members of these families adapted to democratic politics and have held important political positions. Their continued involvement reflects the enduring influence of Rajasthan's royal heritage on its contemporary political environment.

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