

Social Transformation in Rajasthan since Independence

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Social transformation in Rajasthan after independence has been so tremendous that even one could doubt whether feudalism at all existed there or not. There is a remarkable discontinuity and departure in the post-independent Rajasthan from its feudal past. Nothing like a remarkable continuity persists for a nearly thousand years of society and polity, ecology and socio-cultural values of Rajasthan as perceived by Iqbal Narain P.C. Mathur Princes have own and lost elections. The Jagirdars and thikanedars have not only lost their status and power they have also degenerated into a pauperized lot. On the contrary the peasant castes have not only moved up socially economically they have become electorally a force to response with in India's Parliament, State Legislatures and Panchayati Raj Institutions Certainly there is a vibrant new complexion of society and polity in the post-independence period.

In the game of power politics barring some exceptions no group or individual has consistently and unilaterally moved up. Ups and down have been witnessed in a given segment depending upon emergence and combination of social forces at the local, regional and national levels. Continuity of the tradition in the political area as after independence could be witnessed in terms of the formation of the Swatantra party in the early years which mainly comprised of the ex-princes and ex-jagirdar. Secondly it could be seen in the emergence of the Jan Sangh in which the upper caste segments aligned as a force against the Congress party. The Swatantra party withered away long ago from India's political scene and the Jan Sangh after several political convulsions widened its social base.

Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur opinion that Rajasthan politic was made caste free by the Rajputs who could capture more seats than their percentage in the population. Rajput polity according to Narain and Mathur had secularizing effect. The Rajputs could gain support of the people in the early 1950's not because of the secular character of the polity but because of the uncertainty, which was created in the minds of those who were dependent directly on the

various durbars and jagirdars for their economic survival. People had lost livelihood with the abolition of the jagirdar system and the new economic system was yet to replace the old one. Rajasthan was very backward at the time of independence, industrialization was negligible, there were hardly any jobs which were free from the feudal setup. Secondly as we observed earlier on that there was hardly any political conscious among the mass of the people because of the Congress policy of keeping away from the princely ruled states. Unlike other states where there was popular support for the Congress because, of its role in the freedom struggle, in Rajasthan the Congress played no such role, it was a new player in the politics of the state. The Rajputs could garner sympathy of their former subjects as most of them were dependent of them for their livelihood there was hardly any independent sources of earning.

As Narain and Mathur & have suggested that the Rajput rule was considered the closest to ideal type rule as envisaged in the Dharmashastras. But they forgot that the feudal system was highly exploitative and at different times and at different places there was rebellion against the dehumanizing practices of feudalism. If Rajput rule was considered as legitimate by all sections of society they how does one explain the protest by peasants against the feudal system?

Narain and Mathur see the Chief Ministership of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat as the continuation of Rajput rule. But Bhairon Singh Shekhawat did not become Chief Minister because he was a Rajput but because of his long standing in the Jan Sangh and later on in the B.J.P. If a Muslim has become the Chief Minister it could not be construed as the continuation of Muslim rule. Today party politics has become more important, especially in parties like Congress, BJP and the left parties.

Mathur & Narain has emphasized the secular nature of politics in Rajasthan but when we observe the selection of candidates by both the Congress and the BJP, we observe that it is the caste in a particular constituency that is the important criterion for the selection of a candidate. The BJPs improved

performance in Rajasthan assembly election in 1993 and later on in 2003 could be attributed to its absorption of middle caste peasantry in its fold. In Sikar district, which is one of the districts taken for study for this research, we observe that the BJP also puts up dominant caste candidates. Whereas previously it would put up candidates belonging to upper castes only, it was not concerned with the results. Now since the BJP has tasted power, it does not mind if somebody from the Congress joins it, if the person has the potential to win. Since the BJP because of its tilt towards the upper castes, was running short of backward and peasant caste candidates, it did not mind poaching on independents and those belonging to other parties. In 1993 the BJP was able to form the government because of its astuteness in winning over the independents and MLA's belonging to the Janta Dal. The logic of power made the BJP dilute its ideology. In order to be in power, the BJP has "Congressised" as many commentators have pointed out.

Rob Jenkins observe that in Rajasthan the BJP has broadened its social base especially among the OBC's S.C.'s and S.T.'s in Rajasthan the B.J.P. has used historical justifications to wed nationalism with regionalism and regional identity to a broadly inclusive form of caste politics. Jenkins believed that in Rajasthan the BJP has a more suitable base than other states because of the skillful use of historically contingent correspondences. The BJP in Rajasthan does not rely on a regional party as an ally, because of the states unique social structure and experience with democratic politics, the Rajasthan BJP itself functions like a regional party. Infact, the BJP is weak in those states where regional parties already exist. Even in Northern States of Punjab, Haryana, UP and Bihar, strong regional parties are an obstacle in the BJP becoming a dominant force in these states. The B.J.P. has acquired a dominant position in states like Gujrat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh where there is an absence of strong regional parties. In Rajasthan despite being the most organized the Jan Sangh could not become the dominant force of parties like Ram Rajya Parishad and Swatantra party acting as regional parties.

Rob Jenkins write that "the Sangh Parivar in Rajasthan does not rely upon obscure points of the logical doctrine or scriptural authority to denounce caste distinctions as a way of unifying the Hindu community. Instead the emphasis is on exploiting a pre-existing regional identity one heavily imbued with what has been called the Rajput ethic and reinventing it for own purposes". Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph define the Rajput ethic as valour without regard to consequences. The attributes of martial acumen and valour associated with Rajput warrior/ princes are not only venerated by all communities in Rajasthan but they also conform closely to the sort of assertive

nationalism that the Sangh Parivar is attempting to project as homogenized form of Hinduism.

Rajasthan is projected by the Sangh Parivar as the purified form of Hindu traditions which was not subverted by the Muslims and the British. According to Rob Jenkins this narrative is a potent source of political mobilization for the Sangh Parivar. This interpretation of the Rajput ethic is born of a belief in the special contribution of Rajasthan history to a larger national reawakening. The idea of Rajasthan as a repository of traditional values also has the merit of being able to appeal in theory to all sections of the electorate.

Rob Jenkins writes that the ideological construction promulgated by Hindu nationalists in Rajasthan, the defining feature of Rajputana the special gift of the land of the Rajputs to the Hindu nationalist reawakening has been its preservation of a stable social order through Rajput rule. It is often stressed by Hindutva ideologues that this social order is tolerant and accommodating not exclusivist. Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur has put forward the view that Rajputs in Rajasthan stand as 1980's. So the question of continuation of Rajput ethos is in itself questionable.

The feudal system in which the Rajput jagirdars exercised unrestrained power was very exploitative and hence there were number of protests against the system. In Sikar district and the Marwar region of the state, the Jats protested against the exploitative land relations. The taxes that were imposed on the peasantry had no rationale or legal sanction, they depended on the whims and fancies of the feudal class. For instance some jagirdars levied the tax called *baiji ka Kalewa* i.e. a tax was levied for the breakfast of the ladies of feudal household. In other words to say that Rajput rule in Rajasthan was the ideal type is too simplistic an explanations which idealizes a system which was as much hierarchical and exploitative as other feudal setups were.

Rob Jenkins observes that the construction to Hindu Nationalist ideology in Rajasthan has not only drawn on selectively on history to supports its claims.

Writers like Narain and Mathur have romanticized the cultural moorings of the B.J.P. for them the B.J.P. because of its Rajput leadership has become the inheritor of Rajput traditions, which were secular, less caste oriented etc. All these attributes about Rajput ethos and culture are not substantiated through evidence. Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur as the outset in a comprehensive essay on Rajasthan put the question, what is the pattern of dominance in the political governance of this state and to what extent can it be regarded as being different from other states of the country ? Narain and Mathur respond. "Our answer to the question so referes back to the basic premise that history and ecology have

bequeathed a distinctive pattern and of socio-economic and socio-political life to the people of Rajasthan, which makes it very difficult to apply Brahmanical models of dominance to the region." Further Narain and Mathur observe that the socio-economic patterns of dominance and development in Rajasthan have been determined by its own political history, ecological handicaps and socio cultural values which have shown a remarkable for a nearly thousand years. The authors have quoted their own writings in support of the above argument apparently offering a definite answer. They have also marshalled eclectically bits of information from historical sources of pre-independence documents and records. Glamorization of Rajputana and Rajput polity by James Tod had a colonial mandate given to him by the Raj. The weak spots of this classical work have unfortunately become the focal points of some of the recent writings on Rajasthan including the one by Narain and Mathur.

Today there is no correspondence between Rajasthan's pre-independence history social organisation, culture and economic development and the formation of and composition of the present power elite. The emergence of the Jats and some other middle castes and politically dominant entities mark the beginning of a partial break in the continuity of tradition in the post independence era. Social and political hegemony of the Rajputs has mystified by Tod, Rudolph and Narain & Mathur.

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