

Maharanis in a Democracy & the Royal Dynastic Route for Women's Representation: Vijayaraje Scindia and Gayatri Devi

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Abstract

Women's representation in the Indian Parliament has been abysmally low, more so in the Lok Sabha with only about 5 percent women Members of Parliament till the 1970s. The same applied to the state legislatures too. However, amongst the few female MPs in the legislature, a good number came from erstwhile princely families. While the 106th Constitution Amendment Act, 2023 provides for one-third reservation for women in the Union and State legislatures, earlier the royal dynastic roots also provided opportunities to women in these institutions. Two such female leaders emerged in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, with contrasting personalities namely Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia and Maharani Gayatri Devi, respectively. The article traces their political trajectory and the ways in which they navigated their journey being in opposition party (to the dominant party, Congress). Theoretical reasons for the continuation of dynasties in electoral democracies has also been briefly analyzed.

Keywords: Political Dynasties, Politics of presence, royal patron-clientelism, political capital, representation, emergency

From Palace to Parliament-Vijayaraje Scindia and Gayatri Devi

Women's representation in the Indian Parliament has been abysmally low, more so in the Lok Sabha with only about 5 percent women Members of Parliament till the 1970s. The same applied to the state legislatures too. However, amongst the few female MPs in the legislature, a good number came from erstwhile princely families. While the 106th Constitution Amendment Act, 2023 provides

for one-third reservation for women in the Union and State legislatures, so far, the political inheritance from dynastic families also provided opportunities to women in these institutions. Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, two of the largest states in India present an interesting political trajectory in this context. Rajasthan was created out of the 22 princely states that formed *Rajputana*, while, Madhya Pradesh underwent several integration, re-integration and divisions to be in its present form. Prior to independence, these states comprised both, British Indian provinces and princely states. The transition from princely rule to electoral democracy brought with itself many changes in the polity. The traditional aristocracy had to negotiate to maintain their position of prominence in their respective fiefdoms. In the early decades of independence, members from royal families had to compete in elections with veteran leaders of the freedom struggle. While some of them joined the Congress party, others found an alternative platform in the Swatantra party and Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Gwalior and Jaipur were two such prominent princely states in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan whose members eventually founded political dynasties to compete in electoral democracy. My paper will trace the political journey of Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur and Vijayaraje Scindia of Gwalior to understand the idiosyncrasies of democratic polity in India in a complex web of caste, class, gender hierarchies and regional dynamics. I have largely relied on the biographical and autobiographical account of the two princesses to address the given questions, apart from a few secondary readings and my field trip to these two states. The paper proposes to address the following questions-

- What were the circumstances that impelled them to join active politics and the challenges they faced in establishing their distinct political identity?
- Did their social background and gender pay political dividends?
- What advantages did their royal lineage bring to the political parties they joined?

Table 3: Percent dynastic MPs by gender (2004.14)

Parliament	Total no. of female MPs	Percent female MPs who are dynastic	Total no. of male MPs	Percent male MPs who are dynastic
2004	45	57.88	498	16.67
2009	58	68.96	485	25.36
2014	63	42.86	480	19.17

Source: Chandra, Bohlken and Chauchard 2014

The Theoretical Aspect: Dynasties and Women's Representation

British feminist scholar Anne Phillips in her seminar work underlines the significance of the politics of presence over the politics of ideas.¹ Social identity of the representatives is not just a matter of symbolic representation but also ensures fairness and equality. Given the power hierarchy in our society, marginalized groups, especially women have dismal presence in political parties as well as in the legislature. Very few women in India have made it to positions of authority, as ministers, chief ministers or governors, as compared to their male counterpart. Women's representation in Indian Parliament has been abysmally low. While the percentage has been less than 15 for Lok Sabha, upper house had a better share of 17-18 percent women representatives so far. Almost similar figure holds true for state assemblies in India in the last 75 years. A substantial number of women have been able to enter the legislature through the dynastic route. Erstwhile royal political dynasties too have contributed in enabling women to be the political decision-makers by encouraging their participation in democratic politics. This paper will engage with two such prominent women leaders from royal families who eventually shaped democratic political dynasties within their family and made a lasting impact on politics in their region.

Political Capital and Patrimonial Relations

As far as the politically predominant class of Rajasthan was concerned, the feudal nobility and the princes from the Rajput/Kshatriya clan dominated it. Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph suggest that Rajasthan was not prepared for political modernization and democratic rule. In the 'Essays on Rajputana', they write, "Caste, clan, land and chivalric reputation had legitimized rulership in the old princely states ruled by Rajputs, members of the warrior-ruler caste (Kshatriyas). After conclusion of the subsidiary alliances in 1818, British recognition and support were required as well. The addition did little, however, to change explicitly the way most Rajasthanis understood the legitimacy of their maharajas or nobles; ascriptive factors justified the exercise of power in 1947 as they had done in 1818." ²

Though the perception of the ruled did not undergo much transformation even after British paramountcy was established, it did create some pressure on the rulers to justify their rule by greater public service. Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph suggest that the princes were pressurized to orient their rule towards public service and convert their courts into public institutions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, princely states began to issue annual reports on public

administration that included statements on fiscal situation and programmes/policies of the rulers.³

Patrimonialism is another concept that may help understand the preponderance of dynasties. Patron-clientelism is marked by mutual obligations and a relationship marked by mutual transaction. Placing it in the South Asian context, Anastasia Piliavsky writes, "Political patronage is an expression of the broad moral sense that shapes the ways in which people relate across social levels and contexts".⁴ Perhaps this very relationship grounded in patron-clientelism enables these members of political dynasties to sustain and enjoy uninterrupted power.

Political Background: Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan

Madhya Pradesh as it existed in 1956 also comprised three princely States that were joined to the Hindi-speaking region of the erstwhile Central Provinces. The integration of large princely states, such as Gwalior, Indore and Bhopal into the Indian Union was a tough task. Another challenge was to bring together the traditionally hostile princely states of Gwalior and Indore together. After several rounds of discussions and meetings, the Maharaja of Gwalior softened his stand. V.P. Menon, the erstwhile States Secretary noted the crucial role of the Maharani of Gwalior in this regard, 'I also had an opportunity of discussing the matter with the Maharani whose progressive outlook enabled her to appreciate my arguments'⁵. Moreover, to pacify the warring sides, the erstwhile Maharajas of Gwalior and Indore were made the Rajpramukh and Uparajpramukh respectively of the new union and they were supposed to hold this office for life.

Apart from the tussle between these two princely states, the region also witnessed rift in the Congress leadership. The conflict that arose between Marathi speaking faction led by Dr. Khare and the Hindi region leaders D.P. Mishra and Ravi Shankar Shukla in the newly formed ministry of 1937 is well known. This crisis resulted in the resignation of Dr. Khare and Ravi Shankar Shukla became the new Premiere of Central Provinces and Berar. Thus, rifts were visible even before independence and what initially emerged were loose political units bound together by compulsions of administration. Mayne Wilcox suggested that there was a lack of coherent political community in the newly formed state.

"MP was formed because there seemed to be nothing else to do with its constituent parts...the state was not created on the basis of an indigenous demand and its constituent units in fact possessed almost no political affinity...the parts of the state are greater than the sum."⁶

In Madhya Pradesh, one could witness factions along regional lines and often a power struggle between the upper caste/class leaders within the party. The power tussle along caste line continues until date and one can witness a shift from upper caste dominance until the 1980s, to the rise of the Other Backward Classes since late 1990's. The Chief Ministers till 1990s were either Brahmins or Rajput by caste but post Mandal⁷, as many as three Chief Ministers belonged to the OBC Community. Moreover, the state is also home to several tribal communities, which constitute 20% of its population.

In case of Rajasthan of the 22 princely states, 19 were *salute* and the rest 3 were *non-salute* states. While some like Udaipur and Jaipur were large enough, a few such as Karauli were tiny principalities. These princely states of Rajputana varied not only in terms of their size, history and culture but in their ancestry and historical lineages as well. Most were ruled by Rajput rulers from various sub-clans differing in ranks, except a few such as Dholpur, whose ruler belonged to Deswali tribe of Jats. Udaipur, Jaipur and Jodhpur were principal states of Rajputana. The Udaipur dynasty founded by Kanaka Sen ranked first among the Rajput princes, owing to its history of heroic resistance against the Muslim rulers/ invaders In his work,⁸ V.P. Menon, the Secretary of the erstwhile States ministry⁹ documents the complexities that were involved in bringing all the native states of Rajputana to table to decide over the position of Rajpramukh and Uprajpramukh.

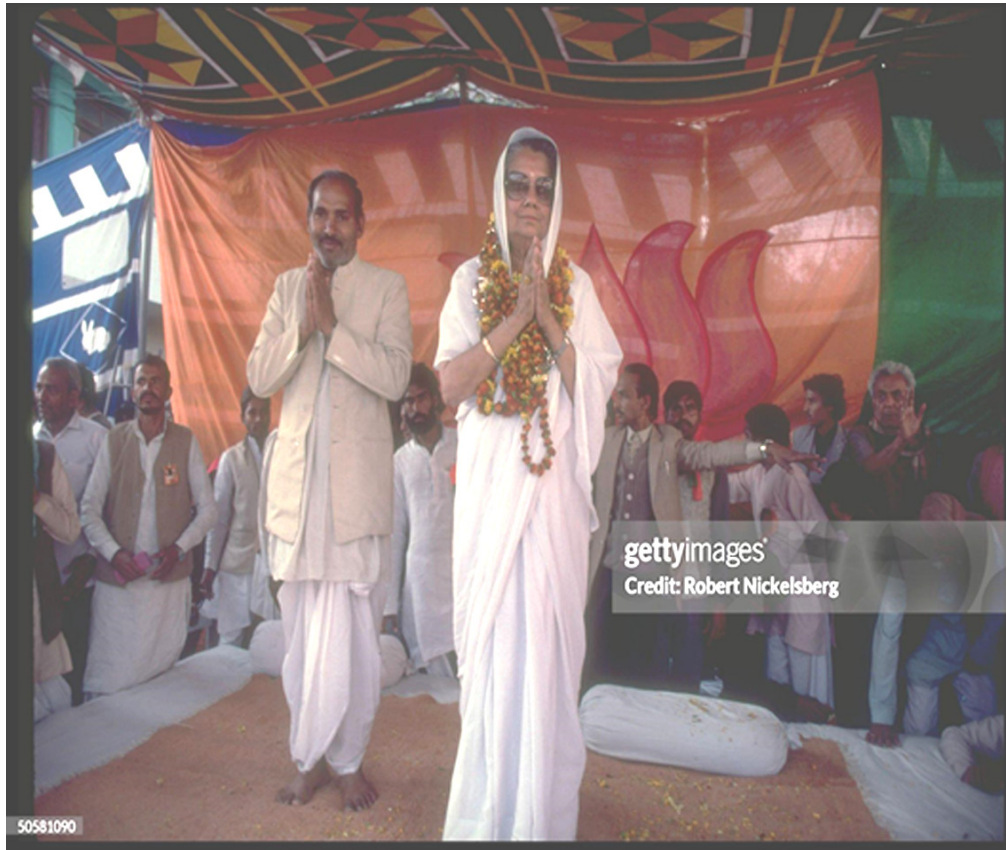
The States ministry considered it important to consult all the stakeholders that included the concerned 'Maharajas' and the popular leaders, such as Hiralal Shastri, Jai Narayan Vyas, Manikalal Varma and Gokulbhai Bhat. Popular leaders like Gokulbhai Bhat of the Congress were active in Praja Mandals. Apart from being the President of Rajasthan Provincial Congress Committee, Bhat was also an adviser to the Dowager Maharani of Sirohi.¹⁰ These leaders proved as important link between the Indian Government (Central leadership) and native princes. They were consulted on all the important matters regarding the integration of states and perhaps this provided some space to the leaders from non-royal dynasties to enter the regional political space in the democratic polity of independent India. Some of them, like Hiralal Shastri and Jai Narayan Vyas went on to become the Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

The Maharaja of Jaipur was made the Rajpramukh for life whereas two more posts of Senior and Junior Uprajpramukh were created to accommodate the aspirations of other significant native states of Rajputana. It is also interesting

to note that the States Department thought that bigger states like Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner, who were joining the Union, should be given some weightage in the Council of Rulers and hence the number of votes that each ruler had in the Council was in proportion to the population in their states. Moreover, the remnants of the feudal structure were retained when it was proposed that special interests such as 'Jagirdars' should have representation in the constituent assembly of the new Union. The States ministry accorded this power to the Rajpramukh, to nominate four persons to represent such interest. Thus, the democratic state itself created space for feudal elements.

The first democratic elections in the country witnessed some princely rulers of erstwhile Rajputana in the electoral fray. Rajasthan witnessed some of the major princely families jump into the electoral fray post-independence. Some of the major ones include the princely families of Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur, Bharatpur in Rajasthan while from Madhya Pradesh; these included the princely states of Gwalior, Rewa and Rajogarh. However, it is interesting to note that none of these Princes had ever joined the Indian National Congress or any other political party prior to independence. On the contrary, the Congress leaders from these states such as Jai Narayan Vyas, Hiralal Shastri and D.P. Mishra had prior experience of being part of the democratic process during the freedom struggle as well as in the popular movement in the princely states. Despite this, some of them could not defeat the princes in the electoral battle in new democratic India. Case in point being the electoral contest between the prince of Jodhpur, Maharaja Hanwant Singh and Jai Narayan Vyas.

The Jodhpur Maharaja defeated J.N. Vyas in the first assembly election held in Rajasthan in 1952. Jai Narayan Vyas had been the founder of Jodhpur Praja Mandal and later, the Prime Minister of Jodhpur State for a year beginning 1948 as well as the Chief Minister of the state when he contested for the aforementioned election. Hanwant Singh ran election as an independent candidate while Vyas fought on a Congress ticket. Similarly in Guna, Maharani Vijayaraje Scindia of Gwalior with no prior experience of holding any political/administrative post, contested on a Congress ticket against incumbent V.G. Deshpande of Hindu Mahasabha. Deshpande was a popular leader of Hindu Mahasabha and had been in active politics prior to independence. His popularity can be assessed from the fact that he was elected not from one but two constituencies, namely Gwalior and Guna in the 1952 elections to the Lok Sabha. However, the Gwalior Maharani defeated him by a margin of around 60 thousand votes despite being a novice in democratic politics.



Rajmata Vijayaraje during a campaign. Source: Getty Images

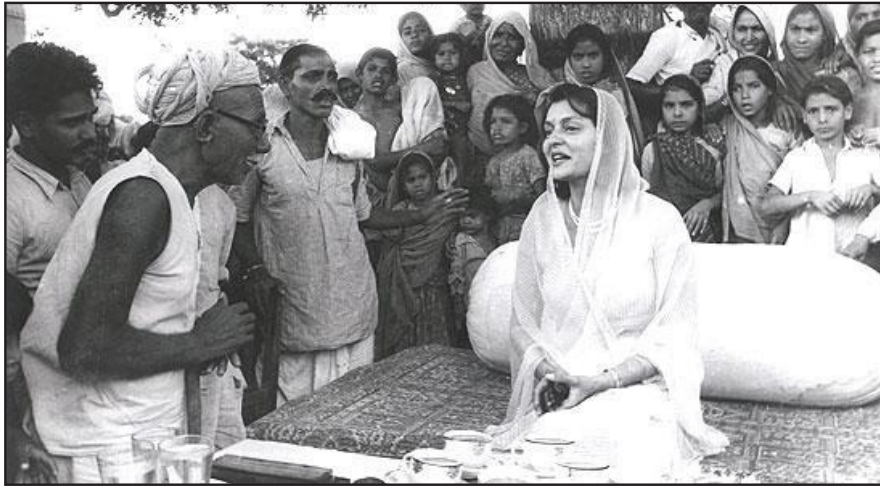
The Dowager Maharani; an aborted call and the ‘calling’- Vijayaraje Scindia

The aforementioned paragraph sets the tone for the political journey of a Maharani into the democratic polity. The circumstances that led to Gwalior maharani Vijayaraje's electoral debut is as interesting as her political career. Initially, it was tough for the royals to come to terms to the transition from princely rule to democracy which they believed was imposed on them. Maharani Vijayaraje Scindia in her autobiographical work notes, "They wanted to bring in democracy in the place of feudal rule, but that democracy did not extend to the people of princely states, who were to be transferred to the new regime without giving an opportunity to decide their fate."¹¹ Given this kind of resentment among the princes in general, any activity by members of the royalty that appeared as a move against the ruling Congress party was perceived with suspicion. Jawaharlal Nehru became concerned about the fact that Sardar Angre, an aide of Gwalior Maharaja Jivaji Scindia, was supporting the Jana Sangh candidate in Madhya Pradesh and thus scuttling the chances of Congress party in the region. Maharani Vijayaraje's entry into politics was initiated under such

circumstances when she met Nehru to allay such fears about Maharaja's active support to Jana Sangh candidate in election, but was herself offered to contest to prove Gwalior's loyalty to the Congress. Vijayaraje Scindia recalls in her autobiography, "Improbable as they must seem, these were the circumstances that combined to push me into politics-a tissue of rumors, a wife's anxiety to save her husband from the consequence of such rumors (that he was lending support to the Hindu Mahasabha) and an abortive telephone call".¹² She recalls that Nehru was skeptical of the growth of Hindu right-wing party in Gwalior-Guna region and suspected that the Maharaja was extending his support to the Jana Sangh candidate. Hence, he thought it prudent to capitalize on the influence of the Gwalior princely family by fielding the Maharani herself on the Congress ticket. Vijayaraje Scindia who began her political career at the behest of Congress leadership, later became its fiercest critic and also the founder of one of the most powerful political dynasties (hailing from erstwhile royalty) spanning over six decades over three generations in two states. Thus, the foundation of the Scindia dynasty in Madhya Pradesh appears to be mediated by the Congress itself.

In 1957, Vijayaraje Scindia won from the Congress ticket by a great margin from Guna parliamentary constituency, with 76% of votes polled in her favour. However, due to differences with the State Congress leader D.P. Mishra, 'Rajmata' parted ways with the party. Moreover, the tough stance of Congress towards the erstwhile princes and attempts at pruning their privileges disillusioned the royal families and many of whom including Vijayaraje joined the Swatantra party. Later, she joined the Bhartiya Jana Sangha, a right wing Hindu nationalist party from which the Bhartiya Janata Party was to emerge in 1980. Thus, she continued to be the member of BJP and contested her consequent elections under it, winning from Guna parliamentary constituency, four times in a row since 1989.

She was also the Member of Parliament in the Third Lok Sabha elections (1962-1967) from Gwalior constituency. Her only son Madhavrao Scindia joined the Bhartiya Jana Sangh at her behest and won from her erstwhile constituency, Guna by a huge margin in 1971 Lok Sabha election. However, subsequently, he joined the Indian National Congress. Christophe Jafferlot suggests that the success of Scindias' stems from this faculty of combining innovation and rootedness in a territory. He adds that they were predestined to govern according to the criteria of the past but they pursued their vocation by adjusting their know-how.¹³



*Maharani Gayatri Devi interacting with locals in Rajasthan.
Source: A Princess remembers (1985)*

Maharani Gayatri Devi: Rebel for a cause

Gayatri Devi was born in 1919 as the princess of Cooch Behar in West Bengal. She was more realistic than Rajmata Scindia in her approach towards the fate of princely states in an Independent India. She writes, “However, all along it was obvious that the princely states could not remain as they were once India became independent.”¹⁴ Gayatri Devi recalls that though her husband Man Singh, the Maharaja of Jaipur considered merger as a politically wise and historically inevitable move, she was unhappy about losing their identity as rulers.

In her words, “Although Jai had tried to convince me of the necessity of his actions, I really disliked the idea of his no longer being the ruler of Jaipur.”¹⁵ Both, Vijayaraje Scindia and Gayatri Devi had similar reactions to the changing dynamics in independent India. Their displeasure captures the general reluctance of the princes to relinquish their hereditary power to rule over the ‘subjects’. In the early decades of India’s Independence, people at large still revered the princes as their real rulers. Recalling the occasion of birth of her son, Gayatri Devi writes, “Even though Jaipur no longer had an independent identity as a state, the people still thought of us as their ruling family.”¹⁶

In 1956, the post of ‘Rajpramukh’ that pacified the loss of their royal powers too could be abolished. A sense of betrayal prevailed amongst the Princes who considered it a breach of faith on part of the government. In Maharani Gayatri Devi’s own words, “not only had the ruling party failed to respect the argument that made Jai Rajpramukh, it now seemed determined to isolate him.”¹⁷ This was

a final blow to the Jaipur royals already disillusioned with the change of guards in the region, after independence. Meanwhile, due to strong disagreement with Nehruvian policy, erstwhile Congress leader C. Rajagopalchari in 1959 formed the Swatantra Party, favoring a market-based economy and the end of 'license raaj'. The policies and the liberal views of the party appealed to the disgruntled Princes, some of whom including the Jaipur Maharani, Gayatri Devi joined it.

As she documents in her memoir, she never thought of making politics a career but was unhappy with the ruling Congress which she thought had become arrogant. Describing the conditions that led to her joining the Swatantra Party, she explains,

"I had no personal ambitions and, in spite of my disappointment with the Government, felt no animosity to any individual. I thought that the Princes should find capable candidates, back them, and help in their election campaigns to Parliament in New Delhi and to the State legislative assemblies. In this way, I imagined, there would be a sensible, non-extremist opposition to the Congress Party. With these ideas in mind, and a rather inchoate wish to do something for the country, I finally took the step of joining the Swatantra."¹⁸

To her surprise, she was offered to contest elections and ran for Lok Sabha seat for the first time in 1962 from Jaipur and won by a majority of 175,000 votes over the runner-up Congress candidate and had her name registered in the Guinness book for the largest majority won by any candidate in any democratic elections in the world. To use her words, "Whatever the situation might be in the rest of India, in former princely territories people voted, when they had the opportunity, from a sense of the age-old bond between an Indian ruler and his subjects. The actual platform was a secondary consideration."¹⁹ Her landmark victory testified the reverence of people for their erstwhile rulers remained intact long after the end of princely states. Three members of the Jaipur family became parliamentarians in 1962. While Gayatri Devi and her stepson Pat joined the Lok Sabha, Maharaja Jai Singh became a Rajya Sabha MP.

Gayatri Devi became a prominent face of the Swatantra party in the Lok Sabha and took the ruling Government to task by raising pressing issues. In reply to the President's address to the Parliament, she emphasized the problems faced by the people due to rising prices and shortage of basic commodities.²⁰ On another occasion, she schooled Prime Minister Nehru (whom she otherwise admired) for failure of his Government to speculate and check Chinese invasion of India.

She retorted, "If you had known anything about anything, we wouldn't be in this mess today."²¹

The Charitable trust fund started by her husband Maharaja Jai Singh often came in handy when Gayatri Devi needed to invest in a few pressing needs of her constituency, such as grants for schools and hospitals. Before the emergency ordeal, she had been actively engaged in juggling between Jaipur and New Delhi to resolve local issues of the people and fulfilling her deliberative duties in the Parliament.

Emergency: The point of Departure

A very important aspect that reaffirmed the legitimacy of the princes (including the Scindias) in the democratic polity was their standing during the national emergency imposed in 1975. Being in the opposition party and opposed to Indira Gandhi's autocratic leadership, Vijayaraje Scindia of Gwalior and Gayatri Devi of Jaipur were jailed. Angama Jhala Dey in her work writes about the vulnerability of the Princely legacy during the traumas of emergency, in the following:

"Both Gayatri Devi and Vijaya Raje Scindia were earlier motivated to enter politics in response to Congress-led governments in their own states...It was a traumatic time for courtly families whose private properties were falling into disrepair and were sometimes seized by the government and their private collection unduly taxed."²²

The national emergency imposed by the then prime minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975 was a serious blow to the erstwhile aristocratic class in India, especially for those who made their opposition to the Congress party public. Consequently, even the blue-blooded female political leaders opposed to Mrs. Gandhi were not spared and were humiliated by putting them behind bars in an inhumane condition. Writing about the condition of the jails during the national emergency imposed in June 1975, Coomi Kapoor, in her work titled, 'The Emergency: A personal history' recalls,

"The conditions in most jails were appalling...The former Maharani of Jaipur Gayatri Devi was housed in Tihar jail, in a small room with a veranda which was meant for visiting doctors. It had open sewers running along its side."²³

It is interesting to note how Vijayaraje Scindia, speaks about another female politician, Indira Gandhi, the forerunner of another dynasty, in the aftermath of

her authoritarian rule during the national Emergency. In her autobiographical work, Scindia writes, “No one could have been more conscious of her fantastic personal appeal, or fitted herself more easily into the image of queen, than Mrs. Gandhi herself”.²⁴ She recounts that all the dissenters were put behind bars during the 1975 emergency, following which she herself was planning to take refuge in her ancestral home of Nepal. However, at the last hour, she changed her mind to stay in India and face the consequences, about which she writes,

“I could not bring myself to run away, seeking safety and leaving others to face the music- I, who called myself a leader and who had been accepted as such by a large number of people. Leaders did not run away”.²⁵

This speaks volume about her perception of true leadership and eventually legitimized her as a leader with strong credentials. Both the erstwhile Maharanis were imprisoned in Tihar jail and have documented their ordeals in their respective autobiographies. They even once shared room in the Tihar jail. In July 1975, Gayatri Devi was arrested under the COFEPOSA²⁶ on allegations of ‘large scale evasion of taxes’. In an interview, Gayatri Devi shares the trauma of being in jail for five and a half months.²⁷ She narrates about the terrible noise in the jail premises, poor quality of food served. In her own words, this experience was akin to living in a bazaar surrounded by squabbling women criminals and prostitutes. Similarly, Vijayaraje recalls her stay as prisoner no.2265 in Tihar jail and her interaction with fellow inmate Maharani Gayatri Devi, “It was depressing beyond words. Gayatri Devi, who was ill and in need of major surgery, had convinced herself that she was going to die in Tihar.”²⁸

While Vijaya Raje Scindia was released on parole on health grounds, Gayatri Devi was released on parole only after she wrote to Indira Gandhi expressing her approval for government’s 20-point programme and assuring that she was no longer interested in politics. Though Gayatri Devi did not participate in active politics afterwards, she expressed her support for the newly elected Janata party government in 1978.

Given her stand during the emergency, the Janata party thought Vijayaraje Scindia as an apt candidate to take on Indira Gandhi in the upcoming election to the Lok Sabha from Rae Bareilly in 1980. The constituency of Rae Bareilly had earlier elected Feroze Gandhi as its representative who won consecutively in 1951 and 1957 elections. In subsequent Lok Sabha elections, his wife Indira, won from the same constituency in 1967 and 1971. Vijayaraje knew that it was

going to be a tough battle for her to plunge into the traditional Gandhi bastion and she was reluctant in the beginning as she recalls in the following manner,

“I tried to reason with my party colleagues that they had made a blunder in taking me away from the place where I could have been useful and putting me against Mrs Gandhi in her own stronghold.” However, the leadership in Janata Party was euphoric about the contest and in Vijayaraje’s own words, “...the Janata leaders saw me as the one person who just might be able to defeat Mrs. Gandhi. Almost certainly I could have done so in Gwalior, but not in Rae Bareilly, which was her home ground, as it had been her husband’s before her, a constituency that between them they had nursed assiduously for more than twenty years.”²⁹

Her fears were not ill founded as she lost to Indira Gandhi in this election, the only election she lost. The same year in 1980, she became the Vice-President of the newly formed Bhartiya Janata Party. From 1989 to 1998, consecutively she was elected as the MP from Guna constituency as the BJP candidate. Her rift with her son Madhav Rao, who Joined the Congress and left to Nepal while she was imprisoned in Tihar, made her share her political legacy with her daughters Vasundhara Raje and Yashodhara Raje. Thus the rift in the Scindia dynasty further consolidated their position in electoral politics, with one end attached to the Congress party, while the other with the BJP. With Jyotiraditya Scindia joining the BJP in March 2020, this was seen as ‘ghar-wapasi’ as now the entire Scindia clan was in the BJP of which, Vijayaraje Scindia was a founding member.

The Legacy

The political legacy of Maharani Gayatri Devi was carried forward not by her children but by her step-granddaughter, the Deputy CM of Rajasthan, Diya Kumari who became BJP MLA consecutively since 2013, the same year she joined active politics.

The two women from erstwhile royalty proved their mark in Indian politics. With contrasting personalities, they shared the commonality of challenging the mighty Congress party, in a polity marked by patriarchal values. While ‘Rajmata’ Vijayaraje Scindia was an enigma³⁰, known for her austere lifestyle and religiosity, ‘Maharani’ Gayatri Devi was a socialite known for Ostentatious living. The former supported traditional beliefs, like the worship of Sati, while the latter defied convention such as Purdah (in Jaipur royalty). Both paved the way for blue-blooded political dynasties that thrive largely on old ties of patron-client relationship and the capital generated from it.

Endnotes

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- 28 Gayatri Devi, S.R.Rau, *A Princess Remembers: Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur*, (Anchor Press, New York, 1985), 244.
- 29 Vijayaraje Scindia, Manohar Malgaonkar, *Princess: The autobiography of Dowager Maharani of Gwalior* (London: Century, 1985), 261.
- 30 The Age of Kali, William Darymple, 1998, pp 62. Like Lady Thatcher - whose unshakeable convictions and sense of destiny she shares - the Rajmata provokes the strongest of responses. In her time the Rajmata (Queen Mother) has been called a madwoman and a saint; a dangerous reactionary and a national saviour; a stubborn and self-righteous old lunatic and a brave and resilient visionary. At the age of seventy-nine she is still an enigma.

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