

Rajasthan Politics and Women Empowerment

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Abstract: In many low- and middle-income democracies, the entrenchment of the economic elite in politics may undermine government effectiveness by limiting the accountability of elected officials. Researchers evaluated a voter information campaign and exploited the random assignment of reservations for women in village councils to measure the impact of information and reduced incumbent advantage on village council elections. Both interventions increased the number of candidates and drove the worst performers out of the race, though in the case of the voter campaign they had short-term costs in terms of officials' performance post-election. The effectiveness of democratic governance relies on high quality citizens entering politics and the electorate holding their representatives accountable. In many low- and middle-income democracies, the entrenchment of the economic elite in politics may undermine this process. Incumbents may be reelected despite bad performance due to voters' lack of information. Additionally, citizens may be reluctant to seek elected office due to the costs associated with entering an election. A growing body of evidence points to the importance of entry costs in affecting candidate selection and of voter awareness for candidate selection.¹ However, less is known about how voter information and entry costs influence incumbents' decisions to re-run and for new-comers to seek office. There is also little evidence about whether reducing incumbency advantages can improve the quality of governance and government effectiveness.

Keywords: rajasthan, politics, women, empowerment, government, village, councils, election, officials.

INTRODUCTION

Village councils or Gram Panchayat (GP) are the lowest tier of elected representation in India. They are responsible for the provision of village infrastructure and identifying welfare recipients. In addition, GP administer the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the government's flagship anti-poverty program, which guarantees 100 days of work per year to rural households at the state-regulated minimum wage. The GP registers potential beneficiaries, plans and executes public works, and ensures wages are paid on time.

In Rajasthan, each council represents an average of 3,000 people across multiple villages. The GP makes decisions by majority vote, with each member elected to represent an individual ward. The head councilor (Sarpanch) is elected at-large by a direct vote of the GP electorate. While the sarpanch does not have veto power, she is the only full-time member of the council and has significant power over final council decisions. Since 1993, each Indian state is constitutionally required to reserve one third of sarpanch seats for women. In Rajasthan, GP to be reserved for women are randomly selected before each election. This evaluation focuses on the group of GP in which sarpanch seats were not reserved for women in the 2010 election. In GP where sarpanch

seats were reserved for women in previous elections, the removal of reservations weakens the incumbency advantage because female incumbents often face social and family pressure to not re-run for office. In turn this lowers the costs of entry for other potential candidates.

Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the impact of a voter information campaign and reservations for women in the previous electoral cycle on candidate entry, election results, and post-election performance in village council elections in Rajasthan. At the time of the study, two previous election cycles included reservations for women. For the 2010 election, the government randomly assigned half of the GP in the state to be reserved for women regardless of whether they had been reserved in the past. Researchers used this random assignment to analyze the impact of previous reservations in the GP that were not reserved in the 2010 election.[1,2,3]

The second intervention was a voter information campaign. Prayatn Sanstha, a local NGO, ran the campaign between one and 20 days before the elections using publicly available data on MGNREGA implementation. Prayatn used calendar posters and theatrical performances to provide information on the roles of village council leaders and leaders' past performance implementing MGNREGA. Election districts were randomly assigned to receive either a "general" or "gender" information campaign. The general campaign emphasized that citizens should vote based on elected officials' job performance, rather than voting based on caste or gender. In addition to the components from the general campaign, the gender campaign emphasized that both genders could run in unreserved councils, and that women council heads typically performed as well as men.

In total, Prayatn distributed 130,000 informational calendars and performed 472 shows with an average attendance of 32 percent of the adult population of each village. Using administrative sources and household surveys, researchers collected data on election results, measures of the number and quality of candidates entering each race, the likelihood of incumbents running, and post-election performance as measured by employment generated through MGNREGA.

Researchers found that both reservation for women in the previous electoral cycle and the voter awareness campaign increased the number of candidates and decreased the probability that an incumbent ran and won an election. They found some evidence that newly elected leaders in constituencies with the general information campaign performed worse in terms of employment generated under MGNREGA in the short-term.[5,7,8]

Candidate entry: Both the information campaign and previous reservations for women led to an increase in the number of candidates. An average of seven candidates entered each election where the seat had not been previously reserved for women. One additional candidate ran in GP which either had been reserved or exposed to the information campaign. Past reservations for women had a greater effect on the probability of women running—a 48 percent increase—whereas the information campaign increased participation from lower castes and tribal candidates. When seats were no longer reserved, male family members often replaced female incumbents as GP candidates.

Election outcome and accountability: Both interventions decreased the probability that incumbents ran and won elections. Furthermore, they pushed the worst performing incumbents out of the race, and among those who chose to run, it reduced low performing incumbents' probability of winning. Incumbents who performed one standard deviation below mean performance in implementing MGNREGA were 22 percent less likely to run for reelection in villages with the information campaign, and 34 percent less likely to run in previously reserved villages. The best performing incumbents, however, were as likely to run and win as in comparison villages. In previously reserved villages which received the information campaign, the probability of running increases by 26 percentage points, from a base of 54 percent, for the best performing candidates and their family members.

Post-election performance: In non-reserved councils, the general campaign led to a lower performance implementing MGNREGA and had no statistically significant impact in villages with previously reserved councils. These results indicated some short-run costs of broadening the political base through the information campaign. Sarpanch from lower castes may be disadvantaged at first in dealing with the whole village and the administration to organize MGNREGA work. One should keep in mind however that our analysis only measures the short-run impacts on a single program. Broadening the candidate pool could lead to a process of learning and selection which could lead to better outcomes in the long-run.[9,10,11]

DISCUSSION

Women's Empowerment in Rajasthan

Rajasthan, a state in India, has made significant progress towards women's empowerment in recent years. The state government has implemented several programmes aimed at educating gender equality and empowering women's. In this blog, we will explore some of the initiatives undertaken by the Rajasthan government to empower women and the impact they have had.

Women's Education in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan government has taken significant steps to improve girls' education in the state. Several government initiatives have been initiated to enhance or improve or enrich girls' enrollment and retention rates in schools. These programs include the 'Padho Pardesh' scheme, which provides financial assistance to girls from economically weaker sections to pursue higher education abroad, and the 'Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya' scheme, which provides free education to girls from marginalized communities.

As a result of these initiatives, the literacy rate among women in Rajasthan has increased from 43.85% in 2001 to 56.97% in 2011, according to the Census of India.

Healthcare in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan government has also launched several initiatives aimed at improving women's health outcomes. The 'Mamta' scheme provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women to access healthcare services. The 'Janani Suraksha Yojana' provides free delivery and postnatal care services to pregnant women from marginalized communities.

As a result of these initiatives, the maternal mortality rate in Rajasthan has decreased from 318 per 100,000 live births in 2014-16 to 244 per 100,000 live births in 2017-19, as per Sample Registration System.

Rajasthan government initiatives for Women's Empowerment

The Rajasthan government has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment. The RSCW i.e., Rajasthan State Commission for Women was established to protect and promote women's rights. The 'Bhamashah Swasthya Bima Yojana' provides health insurance to families, with the female head of the household as the primary beneficiary. The 'Annapurna Rasoi Yojana' provides subsidized meals to women and children from marginalized communities.[12,13,15]

As a result of these initiatives, women's participation in decision-making processes at the village level has increased significantly. Based on research conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research, the proportion of women participating in village meetings in Rajasthan increased from 19.3% in 2005 to 46.6% in 2013.

Women's Employment in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan government has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting women's employment. The 'Mukhya Mantri Kaushal Anudaan Yojana' provides financial assistance to

women to acquire skills and start their businesses. The 'Sakhi Mandals scheme provides training and support to women to start their enterprises.

As a result of these initiatives, the labor force participation rate among women in Rajasthan has increased from 19.3% in 2004-05 to 24.9% in 2017-18, according to the National Sample Survey.

The Rajasthan government has implemented several initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. These initiatives have had a significant impact on women's lives in the state, particularly in terms of education, healthcare, participation in decision-making processes, and employment. However, there is still a long way to go in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Rajasthan. The government needs to continue its efforts to address the various challenges that women face in the state, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and social norms that restrict women's freedom and agency. With sustained efforts, Rajasthan can become a shining example of women's empowerment and gender equality in India.[17,18,19]

Women's empowerment is essential for promoting gender equality, economic development, and social development. Achieving women's empowerment demands a collaborative endeavor from the government, civil society, and private entities. Providing women with access to education, healthcare, and economic resources, and promoting their participation in decision-making processes are some of the ways in which women's empowerment can be achieved. Challenging cultural and social norms that discriminate against women is also crucial for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

RESULTS

The schemes and programmes implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development for empowerment of women in the country including the State of Rajasthan during the last three years are as under:

1. POSHAN Abhiyaan
2. Anganwadi Services Scheme
3. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)
4. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme
5. One Stop Centre (OSC) and Universalisation of Women Helpline
6. Child Protection Services Scheme
7. Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)
8. Swadhar Greh Scheme
9. Ujjawala Scheme
10. Working Women Hostel

In addition to above, the Government of India has taken various steps to ensure empowerment of women through their social, educational, economic and political uplifting through various schematic interventions. While the schemes implemented by the Government like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban & Rural), the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) ensure that the women are socially sound, the initiatives like Samagra Shiksha, Scheme of National Overseas Scholarship, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojna, Swacch Vidyalaya Mission, etc. promote girl's education especially for vulnerable sections of society and have adequate facilities in place to fulfill their special requirements.[20,21,22]

Further, the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 prioritises gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

In order to enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes, National Vocational Training Institutes and Regional Vocational Training Institutes. To ensure economic independence of women through skill development and vocational training, the Government has also introduced Skill India Mission. The National Skill Development Policy focuses on inclusive skill development, with the objective of increased women participation for better economic productivity. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendras lay emphasis on creating additional infrastructure both for training and apprenticeship for women; flexible training delivery mechanisms, flexible afternoon batches on local need-based training to accommodate women; and ensuring safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers, equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism. There are schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India, Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), for helping the women to set up their own enterprise. Under the Swachh Vidyalaya Mission, it was ensured that all schools have at least one functional toilet for girls. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY) aims to safeguard the health of women by providing them with clean cooking fuel and also from drudgery of collecting firewood.

Further, in order to encourage employment of women, a number of enabling provisions have been incorporated in the recently enacted Labour Codes viz. the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 and the Code on Social Security, 2020 for creating congenial work environment for women workers. Stand Up India scheme promotes entrepreneurship amongst women. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) mandates that at least one third of the jobs generated under the scheme (MGNREGS) should be given to women. The data in respect of these schemes are maintained by the respective Ministries/ Departments.[23,25,27]

The Government of India has also decided to implement the Umbrella Scheme for Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women as an integrated women empowerment program under the name 'Mission Shakti', for addressing the issues of women on a life-cycle continuum basis and for making them equal partners in nation-building through convergence at different levels of governance and a participative approach.

The schemes implemented by the Ministry are monitored at Central/ State/ District level in all States and UTs, including in Rajasthan. Further, third party evaluation of the schemes is undertaken for scheme appraisal and guidelines are revised from time to time for ensuring effective implementation of the schemes.

Under Anganwadi Services Scheme, a robust ICT enabled platform named Poshan tracker has been designed to capture real-time data on implementation and monitoring of Anganwadi Services across the country. The Poshan Tracker management application provides a 360 - degree view of the activities of the Anganwadi Centre (AWC), service deliveries of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and complete beneficiary management. Similarly, PMMVY is monitored through a centralized web based software named PMMVY-Common Application Software (PMMVY-CAS).

CONCLUSIONS

MMBA [Mahila Mandal Barmer Agor] is working towards changing social, economical and political status of women in Rajasthan, where status of women is going down tragically. In some part of western Rajasthan cases of killing of infant girls have come up. According to Census 2001 in all the districts of Jodhpur region, the gender ratio is very low, indicating indicating

tragically low status of women. The educational level of women is very low and in case of Dalit women it is much lower. Violence against women is very common in the area since time immemorial and it is going up recently. Women have no liberty to take the decisions and no rights over home resources.[28,29]

MMBA believes that there is strong need to work intensively on women issue to bring about positive social change. Owing to male dominant system and social environment, violence against women sometimes takes the social sanction. Dalit women are in more problem.

In this rather dismal scenario, MMBA has taken several initiatives for empowering women:

Livelihood Project

1. Shepherd Development Project through Wool
2. Embroidery Work through Self Help Groups
3. Barmer Printing Work
4. Embroidery Products
 - a. Cotton on Silk Thread Embroidery with Mirror
 - b. Gudadi Work Bed Covers
 - c. Old Patch Work
 - d. Organdy Cut Work Bed Covers
 - e. Suti Aari Work Bed Covers

Formation and Capacity Building of Women Self Help Groups

With the objective of exploring collective strength, increasing social and economical level and increasing participation in development activities, 360 SHGs with a membership of 3,966 women have been formed. Meetings were organized with these groups every month on specific dates. Women were briefed about the importance of SHGs and savings. Apart of savings village level issues were discussed such as NREGA, mid-day meal, common distribution pattern, women health and girl child education and also tried to draft the strategy towards working collectively on the issues.

Leadership skill development trainings for leaders of formed SHGs have been organised with the objective of social and economical development, development of occupational resources, development of awareness regarding laws, generate organisation strength and access to resources.

Most of the SHGs have been provided training in income generation activities. These include 1,000 artisans of embroidery and applique.

A mechanism is in place for monitoring of SHGs.

Advocacy against Women Exploitation

Family, community and state are responsible for all visible and invisible forms of violence against women such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, rape, dowry, murder, prostitution or infant girl killing. To eradicate violence against women the government has taken several legal steps, but the suffering of women continues. Many cases of violence against women come to the organisation and attempt is being made to solve them with the support of local organisations.

Advocacy on Food Safety and Right to Work

MMBA is making efforts to enable the deserving people to avail proper benefits of the government schemes such as mid-day meal, anganwadi centers and NREGA. For this fairs and

workshops are regularly organised. People are being helped to get their job cards prepared under NREGA and also in actually getting work under the scheme.

Marwar Jagrook Manch

MMBA has promoted Marwar Jagrook Manch at district and block level to advocate the problems and issues of women. Active women of village level SHGs and women sarpanches/panches (ward members) are member of this manch. This manch discusses issues related women and holds protests through rallies, dharna, etc., to address the issues. In the recent years, the manch has carried out advocacy on NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), BPL (below poverty line) issues, social security scheme, food security, common education system, violence against women, water supply, etc.

Events like **International Womens' Day** are celebrated on a massive scale every year to instill solidarity among women and highlight concerns of women on the issues like domestic violence, social exploitation, infant girl killing, etc.[28,29]

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