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Empowerment of women through political participation in Indian movements

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Abstract

The affirmative action policy of introducing gender quotas have been shown to increase political participation. However, some find quota and competence to be incompatible in practice and hence counterproductive for policy making. In this concise academic paper, argue that gender quotas not only have a substantive effect on political participation when men and women have different policy preferences. But they also outstretch and root of gender inequality uneven power relation by given women agency. I validate this by using country-specific academic evidence and demonstrating India as an example.

Keywords: Empowerment of women, political and Indian movements

Introduction

The concept of political participation is very commonly used in academic and non-academic discourses. For the long time it has been considered very loosely and conventionally, it was to be taken within the existing political order not beyond of it. This curtailed the way of alternative politics. As a political participation merely voting and the activities related to institutionalized politics, such as campaigning in elections, convincing others to vote, attending public meeting, distributing party literature, contributing money, contesting elections and so on, have been perceived as a political participation. Until the end of the 1960s, other kinds of political activities such as strikes. Demonstrations mass movements, marches were not considered as rational and political behavior at different walks of the academia. In many countries, this unconventional political participation has demonstrated an alternative means of representation of preferences and responsiveness For instance, in Italy unconventional participation shifted from 'citizen oriented' to 'cause oriented'. This unconventional participation became an alternative to institutional politics to reject the corruption of Italian political order. The relevance of this new politics from below was given less importance across the world (Quaranta, 2015, khanna 1993).The one of the first conceptualization of political participation has been done by Verba and Nie in 1972. They argued that the political participation refers to "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and the activities they take". It needs to be mentioned here that at the time political participation essentially meant related to institutionalized politics. Hereby this conceptualization cut out a wide meaning and activities of political activities.

Social circumstances and public policy strongly influence the access to social opportunities that improve the basic aspects of life like education, health, nutrition and participation in labour- workforce (Dreze and Sen, 2002). Political participation gives disadvantaged group the power of 'agency' to influence policy-making and balance uneven social and economic structures. Agency is an individual's ability to make choices and transform them into desired outcomes. Agency makes women active agents of social change that can the lives of both women and men' (Sen, 1999).

The combination of persistent gender inequalities, deeply rooted in social structures that restrict women's agency, and several economic inequalities that adversely impact health and survival, makes India an intense case study to analyse the impact of gender quotas. The female-male ratio in India is among the lowest in the world (0.93) and is particularly lower in regions with deeper unequal gender-relations. Female literacy has been found to have a

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statistically significant effect on reduction of child mortality, fertility levels and female disadvantage in child survivals (Murthi *et al*, 1955). However, female literacy is low due to the low value attached to female education due to gender bias and the absence of women's agency (Probe, 1999). We care about political participation of women because it gives them access to basic education, basic health and to many, may ensure survival. An enquiry thus of gender quotas and particularly is indispensable.

Among the movements in modern India there is an intersection one that has anti-patriarchal element and another one which have been male dominated, but the participation of women was at large scale in first category there are communist- led food campaigns of the nineteen-forties, chipko the anti- alcohol and anti-price- rise movements of nineteenth century (Kumar, R. 1993). Anti-Arrack movement of 1992 can also be considered in this category. And those which were primarily dominated by male but women's participation at large scale were Nationalist Movement, Tebhaga Movement and Telangana Movement (Ibid). Hereby, it is clear that almost in all the movements the role of women have been crucial. They have presented their capacity in different ways in different movements.

When we look into the people's struggle of telangana in different periods, we find that the roles of women have been major one; they were in large numbers perhaps as many as male were. Either it would have been the struggle against Nizam's rule, British rule or against Indian State, in all the struggle they contributed lot. For any movement or struggle there is a need of ideological backup; education is the medium of making and spreading ideology. Women understood the seriousness of it and following this importance few socially and politically active Women built many schools and other kinds of organization for girls & women, such as Mahila Sangham was established, and Anjuman-e Qawateen founded by Begum Tayeba Bilgrami of which Begum Sugrawas the secretary and other so many organization.

At all the steps women proved their strength and capacity. Despite the anti arrack movement rest of the movements were mainly male dominated movements, but the role of women were at large, even it can be said, these movements stayed for the long period due to involvement of women in the movements They contributed without seeing the facts that involving in movements will make their lives in-secured and vulnerable as they suffered during and after the movements.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, himself reiterated the importance of a nation whose women are side by side with men. He said "No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners".

The Pakistan movement was of a great historical significance for muslim women of the subcontinent as it was the first time they had ever participated in such a great number in any political movement. It marked the cornerstone for the liberation and recognition of Muslim women in the political arena and the creation of Pakistan.

The incidence of Karamchhedu in 1985 is landmark in dalit movement and drew attention of dalit issues at national level. It could happen only due to the stand of women. This

incidence caused the formation of Dalit Mahasabha and other major organizations. This instigated on the issue of pond's right. Few upper caste people tried to curb their right of water over pond. In this conflict seven dalit people were killed and many women have been raped. This was a women Suvartha who refused to keen-down among upper caste people and her initiative strengthened dalit and put a consciousness among them to mobilize and to start a movement.

In independent India this movement has a vast importance in the decades of nineties. Thousands of women participated in it. Initially it started from a remote village of Nellore; but soon after it spreads all over the state. It was purely a women's movement and it presented the strength of rural women. First time this movement brought domestic violence and alcoholism at public forum in organized way. This was led by particularly rural lower class and caste women.

The resistance of people against the repression of feudal princely state Hyderabad tells the glorious story of struggle. The role of women become instrumental in spreading and continuing the movement. Hyderabad was under the rule of Nizam. It was the largest princely state among other. This struggle was against the autocratic and arbitrary rule of Nizam and his rajakars and against of Jamindari system which was gravely suppressing the people's right and latter it had been continued against Nehruian regimes' rajakar and feudal. It is important to state that this movement was basically led by the progressive communist ideologies. During the struggle the party annexed over many villages and managed to control bonded labor, low agricultural wages and 'vetti'(forced labour and exactions) and other forms of exploitation. It is important to note that primarily this struggle started on the ground of cultural and lingual issues, but latter covered all the aspects of exploitation and suppression. Women set up mahila sangham all over Anahra and organized meetings and conferences at different places. In 1990, the All Andhra Women Conference was organized in Guntur and it was presided over by pulugurthi Lakshminarasamamba. This raised the issue of women's vocational education in order to solve the livelihood issues.

In the movement several women had been killed, raped, molested and imprisoned, "They were the worst victims of the brutal tortures and atrocities committed by the Razakars, Nizam and Nehru's police and military"(sundariyya, 1972). When legendry leader of theGonds Komuram Bhim was killed by the Nizam' spolice in 1940 over the issue of forest right of tribals in Adilabad, his wife som bai fought, while she had an infant in her lap. Similarly, a pregnant Lambadi peasant's women killed in order to save their land from landlords. Chityala Ailamma, Pramila tai, Brij Rani Gaur, Manikonda Suryavathi, Dayani Priyamvada, S. Suguamma Regalla Acchamamba and other several women sacrificed their life in the Telangana Movement in different ways.

In Indian national movement despite the great contribution of Sarojani Naidu, several other women fought fiercely in the region. There is a series of women who actively participated, being imprisoned and beaten by the British police. Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh and many other women led the major events of movements. For instance, in 1923 congress conference of Kakinada, only fifteen years old Durgabai recruited hundreds of women from all over the state. She worked hard for the success of the congress, but since she was so younger therefore she could not be directly participated in the congress. One can easily evaluate

her influence in the movement as many times during the speech of Gandhi, she worked as a translator of the speech. The deeds and sacrifice of Duvvuri Subbamma, Ponaka Kanakamma and unnava Lakshmbaiyamma broke the stereotype against women. In 1922 a separate wing of Congress Committee for women had been established and it brilliantly promulgated the use of khadi. An important member of the committee, subamma was the first lady who sent to jail with rigorous punishment. A special conference was organized for women while Gandhi and Kasturba came to Hyderabad in the year 1929. On the appeal of Gandhi women massively followed the boycott of foreign goods and accepted the Swadeshi goods and following this a committee was set up under the leadership of Padmja Naidu. During salt Satyagrah in 1930 Gandhi was not interested in participating women in Dandi March, however Sarojini Naidu took part and after the arrest of Gandhi managed a good leadership. Inspired by Naidu many women in Andhra made salt and arrested and suffered from lathicharge. In 1938 during the Satyagrah movement, 'vandematram' became the cause of turmoil in Hyderabad. Students and women breached the ban of Nizam's rule over this song. Progressive muslim women too took part in this movement and hoisted flags. Gyankumari Heda, Padmja Naidu, Brijrani, Vimla Devi Melkote, Sumitra Prasad, Sangam Lakshmbi were one of them. Jammunisha Baji and rajiya Begum was one of the muslim women who actively participated in national movement. According to Baji there was more admiration for Nehru rather than for Gandhi at the time. When Subhash Bose was removed from the party women were very annoyed and sad (Volga, Kannabiran, V & Kannabiran. 2001)

Conclusion

These struggles show that the willingness and strength of women is not lesser than males at political and social domain. However the political atmosphere is not favorable to women. Even, during the national movement the traits of patriarchy were in practices within the party and organizational structure. Women had double responsibility of family and political activities contrary to male who had single responsibility only party work, however their work were considered lesser, even during the movement the presence of women created a trust among the villagers and made a favorable situation for the party member. "For the movement to grow, it is women who are necessary" However, patriarchy at every step remained women at the periphery of the power structure. A successful democracy requires an equal participation in decision making processes, To empower the women in society an equal participation is essential and the solution lies in multi-tiered reservation system (Kannabiran, K. 2006). The entry of women into politics can change the policies, vision & structure of institutions as several feminist too proclaimed that there is a need of change in developmental mode which is totally male centric. It is also necessary to overcome from the patriarchal orientations within democratic organizations.

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