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THEORETICALLY DEFINING THE GENDERED EMPOWERMENT AND QUOTA REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Democracies are seen as synonyms for political participation and representation. With the global wave of feminism, empowerment and political representation of women were seen as essential tools for delivering gender justice; they detected vulnerability based on gender. The aspect of empowerment is necessary to define the unequal power dynamics based on social gender norms. In contrast, political representation is seen as a way to reform the vulnerability. Feminism's recent global wave pushed the government to reconsider its patriarchal policies and accommodate the representation of women. The current paper looks into the various aspects of the women's empowerment and Representation debate.

Keywords: Gender, Empowerment, Representation, Quotas

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1. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment theories are essential in linking an individual's life's personal and social aspects, showing how both influence each other. At the micro level, empowerment signifies the transition from powerlessness to personal strength. Meanwhile, at the macro level, it becomes a collective movement, allowing communities to take greater control over decisions that impact them.

Feminist perspectives emphasise the need to challenge the division between private and public domains about gender. Women are often confined to the private sphere, leaving political and professional opportunities out of reach, while men navigate both areas freely. Feminists argue that granting women the right to vote does not achieve equality. A fundamental reshaping of these boundaries is essential to dismantle gender barriers, enabling women to engage actively in politics and ensure equal participation in the workforce.

He said excluding women from political life has long been recognised as a critical issue that demands attention (Phillips,1988). However, it is crucial to understand that personal and private activities significantly impact public and

social life. This distinction between the public and private spheres can be framed through "social individuality" (Griscom,1992,p.2). This notion highlights that women often navigate environments rife with contradictions between their identities and societal norms. It reveals that the divisions between 'self,' 'others,' and 'community' are, in fact, artificial constructs. The lack of empowerment that many women experience can be transformed through active participation in the spheres of 'others' and the 'community.' By dismantling the social barriers that have historically marginalised women and restricting their roles to that of the 'self,' we can foster empowerment that uplifts the entire community of women. The feminist lens underscores the connection between personal experiences and political engagement, making it highly relevant to the empowerment theory. These principles of feminism extend beyond women—they apply to all individuals and groups suffering from oppression and marginalisation. Empowerment seeks to shine a light on vulnerable groups urgently in need of social change. In the 1980s, a coalition of activists from the Global South introduced empowerment as a powerful strategy to challenge the prevailing influence of northern feminists in international discourse (Elliott, 2007, p.9). The term swiftly gained prominence among international development agencies as a rallying cry to leverage women's well-documented dedication to family wellbeing for broader development goals. Ultimately, empowerment has become synonymous with innovative psychological and social advancement approaches, paving the way for transformative change. (Parpart et al., 2003).

Concern for local, grassroots, and community-based movements is essential for fostering genuine change. The concept of power interlinks directly with empowerment, as it involves transforming power dynamics—whether gaining, expanding, diminishing, or losing it. Empowerment represents a crucial transition from powerlessness to taking control over one's life and community (N. Page & C.E Czuba, 1999, p.24-32).

- Understandings of the term "empowerment" vary due to its multidisciplinary approach. Feminists particularly emphasise empowerment about power. Power operates through several key dimensions (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).
- Power Over: This facet examines the dynamics of domination and subordination, drawing a clear line between powerlessness and diminished agency.
- Power To: This power reflects individuals' decision-making capabilities, personally or within their community.
- Power With: This collective form of power highlights the strength found in collaboration, enabling communities to achieve shared objectives effectively.
- Power Within: This aspect pertains to self-confidence, self-awareness, and assertiveness. It embodies an individual's ability to critically analyse how power affects their life and gain the confidence to act and drive change.

These various types of power manifest in three actionable stages: individual, household, and institutional. Different political theorists examine these dynamics, emphasising the need for empowerment strategies that resonate across all areas of society.

Weisberg articulates that empowerment is fundamentally a learning process, and he critiques its role as a mobilising force, particularly evident in the feminist movement of the 1960s, which sought to unite women globally (Nelson,2002). According to Weisberg, empowerment involves acquiring essential skills and knowledge that lead to financial upliftment. The Human Development Report reinforces this notion by stating, "The people must drive development, not just for them; individuals must actively participate in the decisions and processes that shape their lives." (Elliott, 2007).

Rowland further expands on this idea, arguing that empowerment should extend beyond mere access to decision-making spaces; it should empower individuals to actively occupy and influence those spaces.

From a social welfare perspective, Friedmann sees empowerment as a vital mechanism for poverty reduction. He describes it as a two-step process: first, mobilising those in poverty, and second, transforming that social power into political power. Political empowerment emerges as a cornerstone of the empowerment agenda (Friedmann, 1992). Most theories emphasise that political empowerment is not just a goal but a pathway through which individuals can reclaim their agency.

Banducci, Donovan, and Kar identify three critical components of empowerment: strengthening representational links, fostering positive attitudes, and encouraging political participation. The effectiveness of political participation hinges on democratic values within society. Foundational principles such as liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice are essential to the inequalities ingrained in social structures. By championing these principles, we can foster a truly empowered society (Banducci, Donovan & Karp, 2004,p.534).

Empowerment should be understood not as a means to dominate others but as the capacity to act—individually or collectively—for meaningful change. Political participation is a crucial avenue through which this change can be realised.

Empowerment is closely tied to representation, particularly from a feminist viewpoint highlighting the division between public and private spheres. Feminism emphasises the necessity of representing women in the public domain. To grasp the essence of representation, we must see it as a dynamic relationship between the representative and the represented, where the representative acts with the authority to reflect the wishes and agreements of those they serve. (Patnaik, 2005.p.4)

Squires raises a fundamental question: What should representations truly represent? (Squires,2013). The multifaceted nature of representation means its definition can shift based on context. Squires outlines three critical dimensions of representation:

1) Ideological Representation: This focuses on portraying collective groups' beliefs, values, and ideas through political parties.
2) Functional representation involves expressing the specific interests of particular communities, where the representative champions their needs and aspirations.
3) Social representation pertains to embodying identities, such as a woman representative reflecting other women's shared experiences and values.

Squires argues that focusing on representing interests is vital, positioning it as broader and more impactful than mere identity representation, which merely quantifies involvement. By prioritising the interests of all constituents, we can cultivate a more equitable and effective representation that drives meaningful change.

In her discussion of the 'politics of presence,' Anne Phillips highlights a crucial distinction between political participation and representation. She argues that these concepts lead to different results and insights. Political participation fosters equality and inclusivity, while representation often falls short of these ideals, as only a few act as representatives for the wider population. This discrepancy arises because not everyone aspires to be a representative; most individuals seek to engage and participate (Phillip,1998). Phillips emphasises that there is no straightforward equality regarding power distribution among people. In this framework, a single individual often occupies the role of a representative, resulting in varying levels of treatment based on specific criteria. Representation transcends mere participation; it encompasses activities accessible to all citizens, amplifying the need for a more inclusive political landscape where everyone's voice can be heard.

2. WHO AND WHAT SHOULD BE REPRESENTED?

The question of whether women should represent themselves is both essential and complex. Scholars continue to debate the concepts of "women's interests" and "women's issues." Do all women share the same interests, or are their challenges unique? These discussions are vital for a deeper understanding of representation. Liberal feminism emphasises women's specific demands and aspirations, particularly within a male-dominated society where their shared interests must be recognised. Virginia Sapiro advocates for viewing women as an interest group united by common goals and needs. This perspective is essential, as it amplifies women's voices in political arenas (Sapiro,1998,p.161). However, Nancy Hartsock and Irene Diamond caution against reducing women's identity to that of an interest group. They argue that such a view diminishes the true essence of women's equality (Diamond & Hartsock,1981,p.717). Genuine representation should not only position women as equal to men but also ensure they are represented in more significant numbers, thereby illustrating their significance in societal structures.

Furthermore, Iris Marion Young presents a compelling case for recognising women as an oppressed group that deserves representation. She asserts that women share a collective experience of marginalisation that transcends individual interests (Young,1990). By understanding women as a cohesive social group, we acknowledge their right to political representation and reinforce their role in the public sphere. Women's voices are vital to creating a truly equitable society, and their representation is essential.

3. DEFINING POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The representation of women in a political system is a vital indicator of its democratic integrity. When women advocate for representation, they assert their rightful citizenship and engage actively in the political landscape. Thus, political representation emerges as a critical feminist issue (Lovenduski,2005,p.1). The concept of political representation gained traction alongside the feminist movement in the 1970s around the globe. Initially concentrated on women's participation in the public sphere, this focus has since broadened to encompass various dimensions of gender equality. Feminists argue that the persistent underrepresentation of women signifies a failure within democratic governments to uphold equitable representation. Scholar Anne Pitkin outlines four distinct meanings of political representation:

1) **Symbolic Representation:** This refers to an embodiment of ideas or entities, as seen when a flag or a king represents a nation.
2) Formal representation encompasses the institutional rules and procedures that govern how representatives are selected, such as electoral regulations and processes. Descriptive representation highlights the similarities and differences between representatives and their constituents, illustrating the importance of representation that reflects diverse backgrounds.
3) Substantive representation focuses on the actions undertaken by representatives, emphasising their responsiveness to the needs and concerns of their constituents.

Pitkin's definition can be summarised as "to make present again." This concept of political representation emphasises the crucial role of political leaders in voicing and advocating for the opinions, perspectives, and interests of the people they represent. Engaging effectively in this role ensures that all voices are heard and valued within the political landscape (Pitkin,2023).

Gender and empowerment are necessary for achieving inclusive and sustainable- equitable growth. Scholars believe that women's low participation in politics is due to political parties' minimal interest in and trust in women's engagement in politics.

Defining and measuring political participation in a strict, structured, universal definition is difficult. However, scholars have attempted to restrict political participation in various contextualised definitions, and many studies have also employed overly narrow definitions, leading to misleading conclusions about women's behaviours and engagement. For instance, Bourque and Grossholtz (1998) argue that such limited perspectives represent subpar scientific practice. Goot and Reid (1975) boldly challenge the persistent myths about women's participation, including the demeaning stereotype of women voters as "mindless matrons." A glaring example of the flaws in earlier research is Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba's "The Civic Culture." In this influential work, they suggested that women's political behaviour differs from men's primarily in their greater propensity for apathy, parochialism, conservatism, and sensitivity to personality, emotional, and aesthetic factors in political life and electoral campaigns (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 325). These perspectives undermine women's active role and political participation. Maurice Duverger's 1955 study found that women were less likely than men to participate in elections and join political parties (Duverger,1955). Subsequent research confirmed that women are generally less active in political participation. Putnam argues that stable democracies need many people to access the right kind of social capital, specifically 'bridging social capital.' This type of social capital benefits society in many ways, like fostering community unity and helping to implement public policies effectively. Social capital connects to political participation because it mainly comes from being part of non-political groups and is an essential step towards traditional political activities (Putnam et al., 1994).

Butler and Stokes, in their study, have analysed the class dimension of gendered political participation. As they suggested, regardless of their job status, the study's women were categorised according to the occupational class of their husbands. While gender differences in voting behaviour were mentioned in passing, the study focused more on how these differences affect children's political development than women's voting preferences (Butler & Stokes, 1975).

Gayatri Spivak, in her work "Can the Subaltern Speak?" discusses the relationship between "proxy" and "portrait" in her 1988 essay. She has emphasised the importance of this distinction. She argues that identities such as 'women' or 'class' are stable and fundamental identities, and the aspect of representation knitted these two aspects of power relations very intensely. Representation defines the element of inclusion, exclusion, or differentiation between 'other' or 'self' (Chakravorty,1988). Similarly, Judith Butler, in her work 'Gender Trouble', suggested that feminists should argue for inclusive Representation (Butler,1993).

In contrast, Barry Hindess connects the notion of citizenship with representation. Does he add a fundamental question to the debates: What is the role of the power structure in regulating and producing the accessibility of resources? What is the meaning of access to representation? What should be excluded from representation, and what is the basis for Representation (Barry et al.,2013)?

4. GENDER QUOTA AND REPRESENTATION

Quotas have helped improve women's political representation and participation even in highly traditional societies of Arab, Africa and Asia. The quotas implemented were different in terms of various types and designs based on the contextual realities of these societies. This also resulted in the non-uniform political engagement of women across these societies. Over the last decade, gender quotas have become part of the legal and constitutional mandate of roughly 130 nations, which increased women's political participation and representation globally. The quotas are a system that can facilitate political recruitment and ensure a secure political position. There are three prominent types of quotas;

1) The quota through the reservation of seats
2) Through legal candidature
3) The quotas at the level of political parties. ("Quotas," 2024)

The prime objective of quotas is to increase women's representation since their prime aim is to address the underrepresentation of women Since women are underrepresented. The term "double quota" is occasionally used to describe a quota system that not only mandates a specific proportion of female candidates on the electoral list but also ensures their electoral victory. Argentina and Belgium can be seen in this regard. The phenomena of "Placement mandates" is also relatable in this regard. The work Women, Quotas and Politics (Dahlerup, ed. 2006, p.19-21) distinguished between two types of quotas. The first dimension of quotas is related to the question of the mandate of the quotas system, while the second dimension defines the nomination and selection process of the quotas.

Some other scholars have adopted different modes of classification, and many do not agree about reserving seats as a category of gender quotas. Other scholars have divided the party quotas into two classifications. The first is aspiration quotas, which play a crucial role in the pre-selection process and ensure that only women candidates will be nominated from specific electoral constituencies. The second type of quota applies at the candidate selection level, called candidate quota. This implies that a certain defined proportion of women candidates is selected through this quota process. Both of these are crucial to ensure the representation of women at the fundamental party competition level.

4.1. MAJOR CATEGORISATION OF GENDERED POLITICAL QUOTAS

There are four significant categorisations or types of political quotas: Reserved seats, party quotas, legislative and soft quotas. In this last section, we will discuss each in detail.

1) Party Quotas

The reserved seat quotas as an electoral Representation model are not adopted in Western countries. Instead, this model of quotas is adopted mainly in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The party quotas are usually adopted as a prominent model of gendered electoral representation, primarily in Western countries. It was initially adopted in the 1970s by the socialist democratic parties of mainly Western European countries. The Green parties, socialist and conservative parties across the Western European countries adopted this model during the 1980s and 1990s. This quota is based on internal party consensus as an adopted voluntary agreement model between the party members. They adopted a consensus to share a specific proportion of seats with the women candidates of the same party. However, there is no set rule for the sharing of seats between the different genders, but roughly, they share 25 to 50 per cent of seats for women candidates. At the same time, some political parties adopt this kind of quota to an entire list of candidates. In contrast, some political parties share the winning seats amongst the various gender sections. Such consensus is based on the strong political determination of the political party to adopt a revolutionary, non-conservative policy. It can also be seen as the electoral social reform based on gender Justice.

2) Legislative Quotas

This is one of the least adopted models of the quota system of the West. This model is usually adopted in Asian and African post-colonial societies. They appeared in the 1990s as a new kind of gender quota policy. They are slightly similar to the party quota system because they are also concerned with the party selection process. These quotas can be seen as reforms adopted by the governments at the parliamentary forum level, along with the consensus of all the political parties. They are an agreeable and mandatory provision for all political parties. As part of political policy understanding, the state government recognises gender as a political identity and believes that thorough legislative quotas ensure gender justice. Like party quotas, the legislative quotas are between 25 and 50 on the total seats. It is important to note that there is no fixed mandate for adopting the quotas. They can implemented in different ways based on the contextualised political realities of the concerned political system.

3) Soft Quotas

This is the third quota system adopted mainly in Western countries. Unlike the strict quotas system, soft quotas are bundled policy measures adopted in Western democracies. Such policies can be considered favourable action policies that provide more excellent political representation for women. Policies for gender justice can also be seen as an alternative to the formal quota system. The policies are crucial to encourage possible women participants for greater electoral engagement.

5. SUMMING UP

Empowerment can be seen as the multidimensional process that increases the agency, autonomy and even capacity of the specific group concerned. It may be individuals or groups, or it can even be seen in the enhancement of marginalised sections of society, such as women. The

Empowerment ones engage more in the state and society's social, political and economic spheres. Another empowerment dimension is 'reforms', which means replacing traditional structural barriers with more equitable and just ones. Both empowerment and representation can be seen as fundamental for basic gender equality. The empowerment process can only be initiated with the basic and essential representation. The multi-cultural societies have permanent features of continuous struggle between various identities and groups for their representation. Conscious, empowered women can make sure they are represented in such societies. Politically and electorally, such representation can be ensured through quotas. They are powerful tools to enhance representation probability via specific legal and institutional measures. However, the quota system is subject to debate because it creates a level playing for just gender representation, but it might undermine merit-based selection and political engagement.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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