

Feminine Social Capital and Women's Political Participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan)

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Abstract

Feminine social capital shapes women's experiences in different public and private domains of life in which their political participation is no exception. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of social capital and Patricia Hill Collins' explanation of intersectionality and matrices of domination: this piece of scholarship unearths that 1) what is social capital among women and 2) how does feminine social capital enhance women's political participation? The methodological application of this study is guided by feminist epistemology. Data for this study come from 26 women political representatives through the purposive sampling technique. The study was confined to women's political representatives only. The interview guide was the instrument of data collection. The thematic analysis technique helped in the analysis of data. The study findings suggest that women's social capital was not sound enough because their social circles were weak, the reciprocity and trust among women were deficient, and women had also less social support from their families for their political participation. However, one positive aspect was observed that the increasing women's social capital was reflecting satisfactory results in their political participation.

Keywords: *Feminine social capital, social circles, reciprocity and trust, women political representatives, political participation.*

Introduction

Women's political participation has been a matter of concern for social scientists and especially for feminist scholars. Different socio-cultural, economic, and political reasons behind women's politics are widely debated by feminist scholars (Bock and James, 2005). However, very little is known about social capital as a smart influencing factor of women's political participation. Social capital is understood as a kind of social network an individual is set within (Allan, 2013, p. 41). Women's social networking in the same articulation is known as feminine social capital (Van, 2006). Feminine social capital in this study is presented as women's social circles, reciprocity and trust among women, and women's familial support. In Pakistan, the role of feminine social capital in women's political participation has not been seriously focused on. Feminine social capital/women's social networking is not that much debated in academia, however, it plays a vital role in their political participation. In Pakistan's academia, feminine social capital in women's politics is becoming an emerging debate (Khan, 2010). Thus, this study is an attempt to explore the role of feminine social capital (i.e.

women's social networking, reciprocity and trust among them, and familial support to women) in women's political participation in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Literature and Theoretical Underpinnings

Social capital is a widely debated concept in academic circles and especially in social sciences' discourse (Lowndes, 2004; Lawless, 2012; Rosenbluth, 2015; Awan, 2016; Bari, 2008). It is recognized as an important characteristic of human life because it ignites an individuals' social location. In Bourdieu's sense (Allan, 2013, p. 41) "social capital refers to the kind of social network an individual is set within". According to Pierre Bourdieu's social capital is one of the four types (i.e. economic, social, symbolic, and cultural) of capital. By capital, he meant "accumulated goods devoted to the production of other goods." Bourdieu's understanding of capital does not mean only wealth and income; rather, capital is something broader than wealth and income (Grenfell, 2008; Ullah, Mustafa, & Badshah, 2017). He has divided capital into four distinct types (economic, social, symbolic, and cultural). By economic capital, he meant wealth and income which occupies the core value of human life because it strongly influences an individual's level of other capitals. Allan (2007) argues that economic capital is like a rolling ball; once it comes into motion other capitals (social, symbolic, and cultural) automatically get into motion. Symbolic capital is considered to be an important life aspect to understand social relationships based on symbols. It is also worthwhile to determine an individual's social location/social class. Cultural capital is the informal skills, linguistic styles, and tastes used by a specific group of people as the result of economic status. The cultural capital is further divided into two types i.e., institutionalized, and embodied. Materials and goods i.e., books, computers, and painting are associated with institutionalized culture, and embodied cultural capital is revealed by an individual habitus (Allan, 2007; Shah, Rehman, Ali, & Ashfaq, 2018).

Social capital has a significant role in determining an individual's social class. Feminine social capital has always been a weak in Pakistan, and this is due to gender-based division of labour as women are assigned domestic roles and their exposure to the public sphere is not sound (Bari, 2005; Khan, & Rehman, 2018). Women's political participation has always been a center of discussion among social scientists and particularly among sociologists (Allan, 2007; Naazer, Mahmood, & Ashfaq, 2017). By women's political participation, the researchers simply mean any activity conducted by women in politics in society. Women's political participation is referred to as their role as a political party worker, as voters, as election campaigners, as protesters, and any other role in the political processes (Awan, 2016; Khan, Khan, & Rehman, 2017). The study area is a traditional Pashtuns' society where the social network/social circle of women is much closed. It is because of their socialization inside the family and lack of disclosure to the outer environment. Due to the traditional setup of society, women are not allowed for establishing or enhancing social circles outside the home. Their roles are restricted to domestic activities i.e., rearing and caring for children, washing clothes, preparing food, and cleaning the home (Shafiq, & Rehman, 2018).

The key theoretical understanding of this study is made through Bourdieu's concept of 'social capital' and Patricia Hill Collin's conception of 'intersectionality and matrices of domination. By social capital, Bourdieu meant that "it is a social circle in which an individual is set within" (Allan, 2007, p. 414). Collins perceives "intersectionality as a particular way of understanding social location in terms of crisscrossing systems of oppression" (Allan, 2007, p. 510). It is pertinent to mention here that although the concept of social capital in the Bourdieu sense is not directly used in women's political participation, however, we use it as a foundation for making a theoretical understanding of feminine social capital. Besides, Collins' understanding of intersectionality and matrices of domination is the key theoretical

concept in this study because these try to unearth the influence of the crisscrossing systems of oppression on feminine social capital and subsequently on women's political participation. Collins' concepts of intersectionality and matrices of domination are interlinked. Matrices of domination work within intersectionality. By matrices of domination, she meant "the overall organization of power in the society" which includes four domains i.e. structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal of power (Collins, 2012). Collins' concept of intersectionality is employed here to explore how the social location of women is oppressed by men dominated crisscrossed system that causes women's social capital/networking very weak. Moreover, Collins's second conception of matrices of domination is also engaged to explore how the overall organization of men-dominated power in society influences feminine social capital and women's political participation. This study specifically uses the concept of the interpersonal domain of power (a domain of matrices of domination) to unearth how day to day women's interaction (women social circle), familial and neighborhood relations (familial support), and women trust among themselves influence women's political participation the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan.

Methodology

This study explored the role of feminine social capital in women's political participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Feminist epistemology was the guiding methodological source behind the qualitative methods applied in this study. The selection of the mentioned methodology was made in line with the research questions, ensuring reliability and objectivity, and the research expertise of the researchers being feminist scholars. After meeting such preconditions, the researchers selected women political representatives for data collection through purposive sampling and collected data from 26 respondents which were saturation points. When similar responses were noted during data collection from the respondents the interviews were stopped and that was determined as the saturation point. It is worthwhile to mention here that women political representatives in this study are understood as all those women who represent their political community in one capacity or the other.

The researchers used an interview guide as a tool of data collection. It was comprised of questions about women's social circles, their reciprocity and trust in the community, and familial support to women. Women's political participation (contesting elections, attending party meetings, holding corner meetings, taking part in protests, etc.) was also part of the interview guide. Participants' interviews were carefully transcribed into presentable text. Thematic analysis protocol helped in data analysis. Data were frequently scanned for getting familiarity with and extracting categories and themes from. To address the research questions of this study, these categories and themes were further supported and clubbed together with frequently skimmed responses and ideas. The similarities and dissimilarities in the participant's views are presented below.

Discussion

The earlier discussion presented on how this study was conducted while the latter analyzes primary data with the help of secondary to address the study concern and reach out a valid and reliable conclusion. The nature of social capital/networking among women political representatives is discussed below in line with responses of the participants and then the discussion moved towards women's political participation in connection with their social networking.

Women's Social Circle and their Political Participation

The majority of the participants marked their social circle as a weak because there was no proper and frequent communication among them, their social circle was quite limited, no regular face to face interaction was there, and the participants were not even speaking to their friends and other relatives on regular basis. Collins argues that the overall organization of power in the society (matrices of domination) is held by men and intersectionality (crisscrossing of different socio-cultural, economic factors, etc.) works within this men-dominated organization of power (Collins, 2002). It means that the men-dominated interpersonal domain of power is influencing women's social networking and their social circles by not allowing them for proper and frequent communication, women's face-to-face interaction is not enough, and they are not speaking to their friends on regular basis. This situation affects women's political participation because politics/political activities need strong communication, networking, face-to-face interaction, and proper coordination. One of the ex-female members of the KP assembly stated that:

“The most common barrier we face in our political contribution is our poor social networking. Most of our female members are not properly connected and communicating regularly because of men's dominant socio-cultural norms of society. The majority of our female members are not allowed to speak publically even in their neighborhood and they are not permitted to make social networking outside the family. When we call them (women political activists) for any political activity, they say we are not allowed for making any kind of social or political circles outside the home”.

This is strong evidence of how women's weak social circles influence their political participation. The intersection of social, cultural, economic, and other factors affect women's political orientation, training, and overall political socialization because this intersection works within male organized power (matrices of domination) system in the society. The nub of discussion reveals here that social circles among women are very weak because of which their political participation is badly affected.

Reciprocity and Trust among Women Political Representatives

In addition to the weak social circles among women political representatives, the reciprocal relationships and trust among them were also not sound. A bulk of the participants revealed that reciprocal relationships in our political activities are too much weak because of trust deficit. They further claimed that due to domestic and interlocked responsibilities their reciprocal relationships outside the home are very limited and they (women members in politics) also experience a lack of trust. Due to poor reciprocal relationships and lack of trust their political activities are badly influenced. Lowndes argues that trust among women and informal community connections raise their level of social capital which further strengthens their political participation (Lowndes, 2004). This argument is confirmed from the responses of majority participants by saying that they do not have informal community connections that's why they do not trust each other in election campaigning for a candidate, holding corner meetings, and taking part in the political protests. One of the woman members in the district council stated that:

“We always face difficulty in searching a trustworthy female member to perform the duty as polling agent on our behalf during the elections. The main reasons behind this difficulty are we do not have informal connections in the community before the elections which causes a trust deficit among our women political representatives and our female

political workers as well. This trust deficit further gives the very bad impression in our overall political activities”.

A similar situation was almost presented by the majority of women whose political activities were affected by lack of trust and poor reciprocal relationships. The interpersonal domain of power in the overall men's organized power (matrices of domination) influences women's experiences in their daily life (Collins, 2012). The majority of the participants confirmed this notion by saying that they cannot make strong social connections on a reciprocal basis because the overall communal system is dominated by men and they (women) are unable to have sound communal relationships. One of the women political workers expressed that *“although I am a political worker of a local political party my parents do not allow me for having strong political ties in my hometown because they are afraid while allowing me for such kind of activities in men dominated society”*. The crux of discussion here is that trust among women and their reciprocal social relations can enhance their social capital which further gives positive results in their political contributions.

Social/Domestic Support to Women's Political Representatives

Besides women's weak social circles and poor reciprocal relations in the community, social or domestic support to females is also not available. Social support which is a paramount indicator of social capital is also reported absent in the feminine social capital. Most of the participants exposed that their families do not support them for political activities because of social and cultural norms. Men constructed normative structure compels parents and family heads to not support their females for political activities in the public domain. One of the respondents told that *“my parents do not allow me to hold corner meetings even in our local street. My father says that politics is the business of men and women have nothing to do in men's business”*.

The almost same situation is explained by the dominant portion of the participants. They reflected upon domestic support that although we are educated women and can bitterly understand political business as compared to men their families do not allow them for political activities. One of the female members from tehsil council expressed that *“one day after council session I was trying to call a short meeting of my women supporters at my home to discuss council session activities but my elder brother stopped me and said that this, not your political office, do not call women here it's against the tradition of our society”*.

Socially supporting women can be a productive societal norm in raising the level of feminine social capital that can further contribute to women's sound political participation (Sapiro, 2003). Sapiro's idea is confirmed by a bulk of the participant's responses while saying that we would have been too much smart in our political business but unfortunately our families do not support us in this regard. A female political activist who was holding the position as woman secretary in her political party shared that *“One day I was going for a party meeting around 8:00 pm but my father did not allow me and said that due to our cultural setup women are not supposed to go outside home in the night”*. Almost a similar response was reported by other participants who said that *“I am working as an activist for one of the national assembly female members and I am responsible for all kinds of political activities in my village. She further added that although I am confident to carry any kind of political activity outside of my village unfortunately my parents do not allow me for that”*. The hub of discussion is clear here from the responses of different women political workers that social/domestic support to women is one of the strong indicators of feminine social capital that can easily enhance their political participation.

Conclusion

This study entirely tried to uncover the role of feminine social capital in women's political participation in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It unearthed that feminine social capital was too weak because 'women's social circles were found closed', 'the reciprocity in relations and trust were deficient', and 'social/domestic support to women was not available. Because of the mentioned indicators of feminine social capital, women's political activities were seriously influenced because they were facing barriers in calling corner meetings, leaving home for late-night political meetings, giving a public speech in their local community, taking part in protests, and attending party meetings. However, on the other side, the social capital of few women was found sound with their open social circles, strong reciprocity and trust in their relations, and the availability of social/domestic support. It is important to mention here that as the level of feminine social capital/networking among few women increased, it has given positive results in their political participation. The study concludes that the existing feminine social capital/networking in the KP province is very weak and not capable of raising women's political participation. This condition is not only found in the study locale but also witnessed by different studies in other countries (Farris & Holman, 2014; Tindall & Cormier, 2008; Krishna, 2002). To improve women's social capital/networking, different public and private sectors (government institutions, political parties, women organizations, civil society, and the general community, etc.) are recommended to devise proper strategies for raising the level of social networking among women that can effectively increase women's political participation. In the end, it feels necessary to mention that this piece of scholarship reflects the opinions of women political representatives and may not be sound enough in drawing its conclusion properly. To eliminate this space, future research studies can take the opinions of men members for comparative analysis of feminine social capital and women's political participation.

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