



Women's Participation and the Governmentality of the Government in Kuwait.

KEYWORDS

S. M. Khalid

Ph.D Scholar, India-Arab Cultural Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, PIN-110025

ABSTRACT *The GCC (Gulf Co-operation Council) states are among the most rapidly developing states, with women certainly playing the important role in the development of these authoritarian states. Women are now making front page headlines regularly in the local media for their achievements in public life. This paper tries to understand women's political role of women in various governmental and non-governmental organizations in the GCC states and it also raises questions as to how these organization assist government in achieving the desired end and influence change. In this attempt, the paper suggests broader frameworks to understand the complex state-society relations departing from the traditional rentier-state paradigm. The paper looks into the positions women occupy within the state apparatus how they help state in achieving state objectives with reference to the governmentality literature.*

INTRODUCTION

The GCC (Gulf Co-operation Council) states are among the most rapidly developing states, with women certainly playing the important role in the development of these authoritarian states. Women are now making front page headlines regularly in the local media for their achievements in public life. In the GCC states now a day's women associations are starving hard for women's development and success. This paper tries to understand women's political role of women in various governmental and non-governmental organizations in the GCC states and it also raises questions as to how these organization assist government in achieving the desired end and influence change. The 'rentier government' in the GCC states, is discussed as various strategies of the state.

First, prominent theoretical frameworks in the GCC states, the rentier-state theory, does not incorporate and draw the complete picture of important political developments taking place in the GCC states. Second, it is also significant to understand what actions are shaping development and which in turn are supporting state-directed objectives. Third, women are not considered so significant in the political process in Kuwait in particular and in the GCC states in general. Then only we can better understand how these strategies and women's participation make an impact on liberalization especially political and towards democratization in the GCC states, significance of women's participation can be better understood by an unconventional approach while studying the GCC states. For this purpose, the paper undertakes the literature on governmentality and apply the practice of governmentality in a rentier state.

Understanding Governmentality

Michel Foucault coined the term Governmentality, which denotes to the various means through which the state governs, or practices control over, organizations of its people. Governmentality also refer to the way in which people are trained to govern themselves, shifting power from a central authority, and dispersing it among masses. Governmentality according to Foucault, leads to the creation of "docile bodies" which are used in modern economic and political institutions. The state can use various other mechanisms of control, instead of punishment and direct coercive measures, the state can provide citizens with entitlements and welfare allocations which is typically found within the GCC states.

The Rentier States: its functioning and shortcomings

The central idea of rentierism in an oil-based economy is that oil revenues are the primary and the dominant sources of state revenue. The sources of income are not earned from production activities but accrue by the virtue of ownership of the oil resources. This makes the state independent of their citizen for the generation of income. The GCC states do not impose any kind of tax on the income of their

citizens as they have large pool of petro-dollar. The primary function of the GCC states is distributive (distribution of the money earned from oil revenues in form of welfare schemes), and it seeks to legitimize its rule by establishing a patron-client relationship. The GCC monarch are patriarchal monarchies catering to the 'cradle to grave welfare' of their population. As the citizens of these rentier states do not pay any tax and receives at lot in form of welfare schemes, they have no valid reason to demand for political liberalization and participation. This is essentially a "no representation without taxation". In these states opposition forces may be co-opted, bought off, or coerced and brought in line with the government policy. Likewise loyalty from citizens are earned with free healthcare, state jobs and education. The result of all these factors is the overwhelming security of the regime.

Rentier state discourse has mainly two viewpoints - First viewpoint is concerned with the rents and its effect on the political system, while the other viewpoint is concerned with the state's total dependence on the oil and gas exports and its impact on the economy. At the same time restructuring of economy can lead to social development of women in GCC states if individuals and members of their community, their well-being and autonomy are enhanced.

Kuwait: Rentier state, Governmentality and Women

The GCC states earns mass support through various superficial and imagery means, like construction of traditional and cultural believes. This process is exemplified through the means of the state's supported women's organizations. The women's associations as government machinery re-configure civil society and the state. In the Gulf states power is derives through resources controlled by the few ruling elite, these resources have been used to undertake the fast development and to build a 'modern' society in a short span of time. The large reserve of petro-dollar which these states have at their disposal lead provides a unique case for a governmentality approach by controlling the activities of civil society.

Government supported women's organizations and their activities

Various forms of organizations are functioning in the GCC states, and a number of them receive some kind of monetary support from the state. There are, many women's organization, from expatriate organizations to various Islamic groupings and also few women diwanis. Women's associations were first formed in 1963- Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) and Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS). Women's Cultural and Social Society was a group of wealthy women, who gather for social events and indulged in charity work. Arab Women's Development Society comprised mostly of the middle class women with an aim to modernise Kuwaiti society and to raise the status of women mainly by educating them. It expanded the feminist struggle demanding not

only the political rights but also restrictions on patriarchal authority within the family. But this attempt met with the fierce resistance from Kuwaiti men and the government. During the 1970s there was an increase in the employment of women in the government sector due to the policy of government to increase the employment opportunities for women. The Arab Women's Development Society argued for the voting rights for women and to abolish polygamy. The Arab Women's Development Society also attracted the merchant class women to the association which created a rift with Women's Cultural and Social Society. The government having been outraged with the demand for the abolition of polygamy and for the political rights closed down the Arab Women's Development Society. The Women's Cultural and Social Society continued to work on the women's reforms but did not work directly or indirectly with the group of middle class women seeking to restore full citizenship rights to women married to foreign nationals. After disbanding the Arab Women's Development Society government encouraged the formation of many religiously oriented women's groups shifting the character of women's public discourse from demands of autonomy to the advocacy of values. However in 1990s various women's organisations were formed demanding the political rights for women and they participated actively in the reconstruction of Kuwait in the post liberation period. Their efforts ultimately resulted in granting the full political rights to women on May 2005. Most recently "Diwaniyya" which traditionally the domain of men in Kuwait is also organized by the women mostly from elite background, with the government support.

State and its quest for stability

In a bid to gain legitimacy and to reproduce their identities the GCC states put an enormous amount of effort. Due to development at a very fast pace in last few decades along with the forces of globalization, legitimacy, many local practices, and identities became weak across the GCC states, to varying degrees. In due course of time these GCC states have developed various strategies to control economic threats, internal security, and perceived threat on traditional culture, due to inflow of high number of expatriates. These initiatives by the state is engaging its citizens in a discourse of unity and nation-building. The state feminism becomes one of the most important means of identity-building, achieving unity and stability. This is attained through the means of empowerment of women through education, instituting the framework within which women can take up public roles, and the various resources and practices of governmentality unique to a rentier state.

The economy of GCC states are based on the principles of capitalism and economic liberalization, among the GCC states, Kuwait, Dubai and Qatar formulated the economic strategies to take advantage of globalization. This gives set back to the patrimonial, religious, and cultural forces that leads to the 'ruling bargain' between the state and its citizens. People especially the Islamists started opposing any form of liberalization that serves Western interests and started questioning the benefits of capitalism and democratization. Oil has been instrumental in enabling the state to structure existing groups into a patron-client order. Rentierism is important aspect of state governmentality in the GCC states. Integrating Islam means funding the building of mosques and also looking after the content taught at these places. The state funds for lectures and speakers who, for example, highlight issues that are deemed 'apolitical' in substance. However, these discussions highlights that state feminism, which are practiced mainly through the women's associations run by the state, shows that they are more in line with the government as its agent rather than the agent of change for the women.

We can find many commonalities among the Women's government-supported associations across the GCC states in their approach concerning with women's issues. One for the major reason behind the motive to control and development of women organization is that they may create problem of security and stability for the regime, this is also manifest through the laws dealing with the formation of

associations. The laws clearly states that the associations should not engage itself in political activities. Therefore, most of the women associations undertake activities which are not political by any means.

As it is believed that women should possess better knowledge and understanding of Islam as compared to men because women are said to be producers of the nation and train their children's for leading their life in a proper way. Therefore, for them Islamic knowledge is given priority in such associations. Along with this, courses are taught in the area of 'health and beauty' and skills development is done by means of various literacy classes.

Now in a very marginal number have progressed in the GCC states and are thereby entering fields traditionally reserved for men. Kuwaiti women have joined the police force, the armed forces and other regular troops. Women are also entering other fields of work.

Mechanisms of Rentier Government and its limits

Apart from assuring that 'state actors' perform their duties which they have been assigned as an employee of the state, the state multiplies itself through the mechanisms of control. Therefore these state run associations lead their participants contribute towards the goals set by the state through the technique of governmentality. Women participation in these organizations gives wider power to the state in controlling society.

Tribal elite, occupying important positions in government are interested in utilizing intermediary spaces between the state and society as a toll of control and interestingly they even succeeded in doing so. However some women who want greater political reforms look for other avenues, such as peaceful protest. This is well understood by the instances of protest which took place in Saudi Arabia in 1991, Bahrain in 1994 or Kuwait in 1999 when women organized protest. The Kuwaiti women got succeeded in gaining right to vote in 2005, it was only became a reality with the help male counter parts, lawyers, activists, and politicians. This is also viewed as a strategic move for the stability because enormous pressure were mounting in Kuwait through both internal and external factors. Finally, women cannot be encouraged to come forward to take part in economic development and in nation building without having some political rights.

Conclusion

The state developed feminism as an apparatus of governmentality and empowered women to acquire some form of self-development and independence. The women organisations have also led to development of certain capabilities and skills among women. However, majority of the leaders are from the ruling elite and merchant class, they lead the associations towards the goals that are in line with the political aspirations of the state. These associations play important role in developing state feminism as an effective means of governmentality, these associations mainly function as state apparatus and officially performs the task of development of women. These associations and organisations operate within a well defined boundaries where women's are directed to national interest. The constraints placed by agencies of governmentality on women's empowerment may be understood through the strategies implemented within the associations. These includes developing belief among the women that they need to depend on men for leadership and guidance, as well as they are made to believe that men are efficient and strong. Indeed, it is well understood that run by the ruling elite cannot criticize the ruling elite. Therefore, associations which claim to champion of women's participation in public life also destroy their image and doesn't justify their roles by supporting the idea of male superiority.

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