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Women and Capacity Creation in Martha Nussbaum

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Abstract

This paper makes a philosophical analysis of Martha Nussbaum's view on women and capacity creation. Martha Nussbaum an American Feminist philosopher addresses the prevalent problem of gender inequality and aims to create a more fair and just society by emphasizing equal access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities for women. Her philosophy seeks to empower women by recognizing their capabilities and ensuring they have the resources and opportunities needed to fulfill their potentials. She proposes an expository method that focuses on promoting gender equality through policy changes and societal transformation. This paper concludes that by challenging traditional gender norms, stereotypes and advocating for equal right, women would be empowered thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Keywords: Women, capacity creation, human development, Martha Nussbaum, Gender equality.

Introduction

Women capacity creation is one the significant issues raised in the contemporary society. Scholars and feminists have explored the concept of women's rights and equality throughout history. One of these philosophical arguments for women is based on the principle of justice, equality, empathy and equity.

It is a truism that there is all manner of discrimination against women across the globe over and this is due to a common belief that women are seen to be inferior to men. In other words, women have faced numerous barriers and challenges in their pursuit of equal rights, and opportunities, not because they are human, but because they are female.

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Martha Nussbaum, a prominent American feminist philosopher emphasizes the need for a fundamental capability of human beings to "exercise proper functioning" by participating in a multicultural and global contemporary dialogical tradition, then changes are necessary. Research in positive political theory shows that these changes should increase the likelihood of transforming potentially violent conflict into peaceful and democratic forms. Positive and normative modifications contribute to the reconciliation and balance of principles, policies, and puzzles in the international field of humanitarian development, especially in regard to the constitutional political behavior of refugees and internal immigrants, its "cosmopolitan" aspects, and the globalization of human rights.

Nussbaum's philosophy recognizes that women empowerment/capacity creation is a complex and multidimensional concept. It goes beyond the narrow focus on economic empowerment and acknowledges the significance of social and political empowerment. Her approach ensures that women are not only provided with equal opportunities but also equipped with the necessary resources and support to exercise their agency and make choices that align with their own values and goals.

The interest of this paper is therefore to philosophically analyze Martha Nussbaum's idea of capacity creation and women development, pointing out its relevance to the society. Based on that, the questions become; do women have rights? Are rights fundamentally for humans, including women? What is capacity creation? These questions and many of its kinds are the interest of this paper.

Martha Nussbaum's Philosophy of Human Development

Martha Nussbaum is a prominent American philosopher and public intellectual born on May 6, 1947. She is also known for her work on the fields of ethics, political philosophy and philosophy of law at the University of Chicago. In other words, she has dedicated her career to exploring issues of social justice, ethics, and human capabilities. Hence, Nussbaum's work has been influential in various fields, including feminist theory, political philosophy, and development studies.

Martha Nussbaum was influenced from her reading Aristotle's concept of human flourishing and Marx's insight on human dignity. In other words, she develops her idea of human dignity and human flourishing, based on her reading of Marx and Aristotle.

However, Nussbaum's idea of capacity creation is geared towards women empowerment, to ensure a decent and dignified human life. This approach, seeks to move beyond traditional economic indicators of well-being and focuses on individuals' abilities to live a flourishing life. Nussbaum argues that women's empowerment should not be limited to access to resources or equal opportunities but should also encompass the development of their capabilities to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Nussbaum intends to make her version of the Capability Approach real and complete rather than abstract (Nussbaum, 2000, p.xvi). she observes that women are not treated well in most countries... social norms, gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures often limit women's capabilities and hinder their empowerment. In order to address this issue, Nussbaum attempts to formulate a more realistic framework of the Capability Approach by introducing the idea of a threshold of capabilities or the idea of a social minimum of capabilities...the idea of a threshold

of capabilities is important because this makes the Capability Approach applicable as an institutional framework. (Maboloc 2008, p.33). Nussbaum addresses the importance of structural and cultural barriers that limit women empowerment and states that gender inequality is not just a result of individual choices but it's deeply rooted in social norms, institutions and power structures.

In her work, *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum explains the predicaments of women in the society:

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have a professional and technical education. women, are usually burdened by a “double day”, due to the fact that a woman actually has to do two jobs, one outside her home as an employee and another when she returns home to take care of the needs of her children, and more often than not, her husband too (Nussbaum, 2000, pp.1-2).

Women in most countries do not have time for self enhancing activities, since they are less empowered. In other words, women in many parts of the world do not have the opportunity to lead a life they truly value. The reason for this, according to Nussbaum, is that they lack support for leading lives that are fully human and this lack of support is frequently caused by their being women (Nussbaum, 2000, p.33).

Martha emphasizes individual freedom, choice and personal responsibility. According to her, Capability means to go beyond the merely comparative use of the capability space to articulate an account of how capabilities, together with the idea of a threshold level, can provide a basis for constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments (Nussbaum, 2000, p.24).

Nussbaum uses the concept of capability “to make comparisons regarding the quality of life, which intends to advance the idea that it is in asking what people are able to do or to be, and not in their level of satisfaction nor the amount of resources they are able to command that the quality of human life is best understood” (Nussbaum 2000, p.12).

Her idea or version of the capabilities approach is that we begin with a conception of the dignity of the human being, and of a life that is worthy of that dignity. The Capability Approach, in this sense, should be able to provide people in general, and women, in this particular example, the real opportunities for a life worthy of their humanity.

In her book *Creating Capabilities the Human development Approach*, Martha Nussbaum explains that individuals should have a range of basic capabilities including the ability to a long and healthy life, to have access to education and information, to participate in political processes and to engage in meaningful relationships.

In addressing this concern, Nussbaum presents a two-fold intuitive idea as the foundation for a Capability Approach that considers each individual life in a fully human way. She says:

The intuitive idea behind the approach is two-fold: first, that certain functions are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life and second, this is what Marx found in Aristotle – that there is something that it is to do with these functions in a truly human way, not merely an animal way” (Nussbaum,2000, p.72).

This, therefore means that the first part of this intuitive idea has something to do with what constitutes “the good life” and thus requires an understanding and elaboration of the concept of human flourishing. Hence, people seek not the way of their ancestors, but the good... we want an account that is respectful of each person’s struggle for flourishing. The ultimate end of human life is eudaimonia which he describes as the state of living well (Nussbaum 1986, 6).

According to Maboloc, (2008,p.35) For Aristotle, ‘the good’ is a question about what it means to flourish, and the idea of human flourishing is connected to the notion of living well as the ultimate end of human life. To the Greeks, eudaimonia means “living a good life for a human being”; or “human flourishing”, which is equivalent to “living well and doing well.” Therefore, the good life for each individual consists of a life that is well-lived – the kind of life that each person has reason to value, because it is a life that flourishes with noteworthy human activity. Nussbaum gives us an account that emphasizes human flourishing;

We believe that human life is worth living only if a good life can be secured by effort, and if the relevant sort of effort lies within the capabilities of most people... the good life should be assessed in terms of what the person is actually “able to do and to be...eudaimonia is seen to be of good living and good acting. Living well, in this sense, is connected with doing or being able to “act out” what is necessary to realize the good life. Nussbaum, for instance, makes an analogy to athletic conditioning, saying that good athletic conditioning, is a kind of preparation for an activity; it finds its natural fulfilment and flourishing in activity (Nussbaum 1986, pp.320-324).

On the other hand, the second part is meant to emphasize the notion of a life lived in a truly dignified way. Nussbaum’s concept of the human person, in this sense, is anchored on two basic ideas – the notion of human flourishing and the concept of human dignity.

To her, there are ten capabilities as central requirements of a life with dignity. These ten capabilities are fundamental...whether in a written constitution or in some other way. The capabilities are held to be important for each and every person: each person is treated as an end, and none as a mere adjunct or means to the ends of others. Hence, these capabilities are essential for individuals to have the freedom to pursue their own goals and live a life that is meaningful to them (Nussbaum, 2000,p.40).

Moreover, Martha Nussbaum (2000,p.45) sees freedom as the fundamental essence of human existence, where individuals are not bound by external forces or predetermined destinies. Freedom

allows individuals to make choices and take actions that align with their authentic selves, leading to a sense of fulfilment and self-actualization, as such individuals are not defined by their circumstances or social expectations, but rather by the choices they make and the actions they take. She argues that freedom is not just the absence of constraints but also the ability to transcend one's limitations and create a meaningful life.

Nussbaum stresses the importance of enhancing the potential of women. True empowerment for women requires not only equal legal and political rights but also the development of capabilities and opportunities that enable women to live a flourishing and meaningful life. These include the capability to have good health, to have control over one's reproductive choices, to have access to education, economic opportunities and to participate fully in political and social life. These capabilities are not just instrumental for women empowerment but are also intrinsically valuable and contribute to a just and equal society. Hence, there is the need for societal and cultural transformation, and international political and economic thought must be sensitive to gender difference as a problem of Justice and the feminist thought must begin to focus on the problems of women in the world.

The Need for Women Capacity Creation

Nussbaum critically examines the need for women empowerment and capacity building in the society. Empowering women removes barrier to their fulfilment and flourishing; thereby creating a just, conducive and inclusive society.

Martha Nussbaum's feminist's theory holds immense importance for society as it addresses the systemic issues that hinder gender equality and advocates for a more inclusive and just society. Nussbaum's work emphasizes the need to recognize and value women's capabilities, enhance their opportunities, and dismantle oppressive structures that perpetuate gender discrimination. In other words, her theory contributes to the overall progress and well-being of society.

To her, women empowerment is not solely an individual issue but also a matter of social justice. Hence, education plays a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes, promoting critical thinking, and fostering agency among women. The education system should not only impart knowledge but also cultivates empathy, compassion, and respect for diversity, enabling women to challenge societal norms and contribute actively to their communities. Nussbaum states;

Education is a fundamental aspect of women empowerment. She says, "Education is a key instrument in the empowerment of women, enabling them to exercise their capabilities and expand their opportunities" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.56).

By providing women with quality education, society can equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate fully in social, economic, and political spheres.⁴ Education and awareness programs help to challenge societal attitudes and norms that perpetuate violence and harassment.

Women empowerment is crucial for achieving gender equality. Nussbaum argues that women should have equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and political representation, among other aspects of life. By recognizing and valuing women's capabilities, society can break

free from the traditional gender roles that limit women's potential and perpetuate inequality. Hence, it challenges the prevailing social norms and encourages society to create an environment where women can fully participate and contribute to all spheres of life.

Women empowerment has a direct impact on economic development. Studies have consistently shown that empowering women economically leads to improved productivity, increased GDP growth, and poverty reduction. Nussbaum's theory recognizes the economic potential of women and emphasizes the importance of providing them with equal opportunities in the workforce; by empowering women economically, society can harness their skills and talents, leading to overall economic prosperity. Women empowerment contributes to the well-being and health of society.

Nussbaum argues that women should have access to quality healthcare, reproductive rights, and a safe environment free from violence and discrimination.

By ensuring women's well-being, society can improve the health outcomes of women and their families. This, in turn, leads to healthier and more prosperous communities. Nussbaum's theory highlights the significance of addressing gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and healthcare disparities to create a society where women can lead fulfilling lives.²

Women empowerment plays a crucial role in fostering social and political participation. Nussbaum states the importance of women's political representation and their involvement in decision-making processes (Nussbaum 1999, p.45). By empowering women politically, society can ensure that their voices are heard, their concerns are addressed, and their perspectives are included in policy-making. Nussbaum highlights the link between women's social and political participation and their overall well being;

The denial of women's rights and opportunities not only violates their dignity and autonomy but also hinders their ability to lead fulfilling lives. Women's participation in decision making processes empowers them to shape their own destinies and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole. Nussbaum's work leads to more inclusive and democratic societies where diverse viewpoints are considered, and decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of all citizens.³

Nussbaum's theory recognizes the importance of intersectionality, which refers to the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression and discrimination. She asserts, "We must recognize that women's lives are shaped by multiple intersecting factors such as race, class, and sexuality" (Nussbaum, 2000). Nussbaum's framework acknowledges that women's experiences of empowerment are shaped by their intersecting identities, such as race, class and sexuality. By recognizing and addressing these intersectionality, it helps to ensure that women from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities and access to empowerment resources. By acknowledging the unique experiences and challenges faced by women from different backgrounds, society can work towards a more inclusive and equitable approach to women empowerment.

Nussbaum's theory challenges the deeply ingrained patriarchal values and norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. By empowering women, society can challenge and transform these norms, leading to a more egalitarian and inclusive culture. Women's empowerment also promotes social cohesion, as it encourages collaboration, empathy, and respect among individuals of all ages.

Nussbaum addresses the need for gender-based violence and create a safe environment for women. She states, "Violence against women is a violation of their basic human rights and inhibits their ability to fully participate in society" (Nussbaum, 1999, p.23). By combating violence and providing support to survivors, society can create a culture of respect and dignity for women, ensuring their empowerment and well-being.

Nussbaum's theory recognizes the economic potential of women and highlights the importance of their equal participation in the workforce. She states, "Economic empowerment of women is not only a matter of justice but also a catalyst for overall economic growth" (Nussbaum, 2000, 45). By providing women with equal employment opportunities, fair wages, and access to resources, society can tap into their talents and contributions, leading to economic progress.

Nussbaum emphasizes the significance of women's political representation in decision-making processes. She argues, "Women's voices must be included in political discussions and policy-making to ensure a more inclusive and democratic society" (Nussbaum, 1999,60). By empowering women politically, society ensures that their perspectives and interests are considered, leading to more equitable policies and a stronger democracy. Nussbaum challenges the prevailing social norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. She states;

We need to transform cultural attitudes and norms that limit women's capabilities and perpetuate inequality. By challenging and transforming these norms, society can create a more inclusive and egalitarian culture that values and respects the contributions of all individuals. By implementing these ideas, society can strive towards a more just, equal, and prosperous future for all.⁵

Furthermore, Nussbaum highlights the importance of economic empowerment for women. Women should have equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, and employment opportunities, as such, economic independence enables women to break free from oppressive relationships and make autonomous decisions about their lives.

Nussbaum's work also addresses the issue of violence against women. She argues that violence is not only a physical act but also a violation of women's dignity and agency. Nussbaum advocates for legal and social measures to combat violence, including improved law enforcement, access to justice, and support services for survivors. She emphasizes the need for a cultural shift that challenges the normalization of violence against women.

In addition, Nussbaum's influence extends beyond academia, as she strives to translate her ideas into practical solutions for achieving gender equality. By emphasizing the need for structural change, education, economic empowerment, and the eradication of violence, Nussbaum's work continues to inspire and guide efforts towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Nussbaum highlights how women are often objectified and treated as mere commodities in various societal contexts such as media advertisement and sex industry. This objectification reduces women to their physical appearance or sexual appeal, undermining their autonomy and individuality. One of the key aspects of Nussbaum's argument is that objectification reduces women to their physical appearance, treating them as commodities to be consumed. This dehumanizes women, as it denies their individuality, intelligence, and emotions, reducing them to mere objects of sexual desire. By focusing solely on a woman's physical attributes, objectification disregards her other qualities and contributions to society... On the negative consequences of objectification on women's self-esteem and well-being, when women are constantly subjected to objectification, they may internalize these messages and begin to view themselves primarily through the lens of their physical appearance. This can lead to a distorted self-image, self-objectification, and a preoccupation with meeting societal beauty standards. Consequently, women may experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, as they are constantly bombarded with unrealistic and unattainable ideals of beauty (Nussbaum, 2000,p.33).

Furthermore, Nussbaum states that objectification contributes to the perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes and inequalities. By reducing women to objects of desire, objectification reinforces the idea that women exist solely for the pleasure and consumption of others, reinforcing traditional gender roles and power dynamics. This not only limits women's opportunities for personal and professional growth but also perpetuates a culture of entitlement and entitlement to women's bodies. Nussbaum also emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's agency and autonomy. Objectification denies women the right to make choices about their own bodies and sexualities, as their worth is determined solely by the desires and judgments of others. In response to the objectification of women, Nussbaum advocates for a shift in societal attitudes and practices. She calls for the recognition of women as complex individuals with inherent dignity and worth, beyond their physical appearance. Nussbaum argues for the cultivation of empathy and respect towards women, promoting a culture that values women for their intrinsic qualities, talents, and contributions to society. Martha Nussbaum's critique of objectification against women highlights the moral and societal harms it perpetuates. By reducing women to mere objects of desire, objectification denies their autonomy, agency, and inherent worth as human beings. Nussbaum's arguments emphasize the negative consequences of objectification on women's self-esteem, well-being, and perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes. She advocates for a shift in societal attitudes towards recognizing women's agency and promoting a culture that values women beyond their physical appearance.

Martha says discrimination against women is perpetuated through unequal access to education and employment opportunities. Women may face barriers in accessing quality education, Limiting their intellectual age and professional development. Additionally, gender bias in hiring practices and workplace, discrimination can hinder women's career advancement and economic independence.

Nussbaum addresses the prevalence of violence and harassment against women as a form of discrimination. She emphasizes that such act not only violate women's physical and emotional well-being but also perpetuate a culture of fear and subordination.

Nussbaum highlights that violence and harassment against women are not isolated incidents but are deeply rooted in patriarchal power structures. These acts serve to maintain male dominance

and control over women, perpetuating a culture of fear and subordination. By subjecting women to physical, emotional, and sexual violence, perpetrators seek to assert their power and maintain the status quo of gender inequality.

Nussbaum emphasizes that violence and harassment against women are severe violations of their basic human rights. Every individual, regardless of gender, has the right to live free from violence and fear. These acts not only infringe upon women's bodily integrity but also limit their ability to fully participate in society, hindering their personal and professional development.

Nussbaum also highlights the detrimental impact of violence and harassment on women's well-being and mental health. Women who experience such acts often suffer from trauma, anxiety, depression, and a loss of self-esteem. The fear of violence and harassment can also restrict women's freedom of movement and expression, limiting their access to education, employment, and public spaces. Nussbaum calls for a comprehensive approach that addresses both the individual and systemic factors contributing to violence and harassment against women.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Women empowerment/ capacity creation is a vital issue and component of achieving gender equality and creating a more just and inclusive society. It is essential for governments, societal organizations and individuals to work together to promote and empower women by implementing strategies that will promote equal rights, opportunities and representation.

Women occupy a greater number of the populace and empowering them will not only benefits women individually, but also has positive effects on families, communities and the overall development of a nation. It is important to continue advocating for women's rights, challenging social norms and stereotypes and creating supportive environments that allow women to thrive and reach their full potential.

By exploring feminist philosophy, ethics, Justice and existentialism, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical foundations of women empowerment and the potent avenues for achieving gender equality. This project aims to provide participants with a philosophical toolkit to think critically and rationally.

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