

Women Empowerment And Its Conceptual Perspectives

Dr. Aparna Chutia

Assistant Professor Department of Sociology Dhemaji College, Dhemaji.

ABSTRACT

Women Empowerment is a comprehensive concept and multidimensional. It relates to economic, social, political and other aspects of life. Being comprehensive, it suggests that all dimensions of life need to be empowered. Empowerment with regard to all dimensions of life apparently to be initiated simultaneously.

Empowerment expresses at different level and also in different aspects of life. Significantly the concept takes ideological commitments into its formations. It is based on gender, equality, ability of self assertion and enabling skill development. The term has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes.

Women Empowerment has its origin in their subordinate position in patriarchy and associated ill treatments and non recognition to their contributions. It is important that the additional positive contribution of women to general development by enabling their participations meaningfully in development process. Significantly, the promotion of women's empowerment has concerns with development goals of equality, social justice and freedom. World Bank (2001) in its reports identifies gender equality both as a development objective in itself and as means to promote, growth, reduce poverty and promote better Governance. As a means, women Empowerment would be a contributing force to overall development of a nation. The study tries to conceptualize the term empowerment and women empowerment in particular.

Key Words: Empowerment, Gender, Gender equality, Patriarchy.

Introduction:

Empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status of women as well as development. In this regard, Human development Report 2003 is of immense significance which speaks of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that prominently emphasizes women empowerment (Purzade & Pande 2007). Empowerment of women is a worldwide concept. The last 30 years of 20th century prepared the action plan in the four world conferences on women held at Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). These conferences have

helped to strengthen the socio-economic, political and legal dimensions of the role of women. It was decided in the Mexico conference as the decade of women from 1975 to 1985. The UNO has adopted Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and in India 1993. The concept "Empowerment" was introduced at the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. The conference defined empowerment as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. Necessarily, emphasis on women empowerment has its origin in their subordinate position in

patriarchy and associated ill treatments and non-recognition to their contributions. All over the world women have been suffering from discrimination, violence, exploitation, marginalization, exclusion and so on at various levels. Women have been relegated to a secondary status in the family and the society. So, their status has to be increased. The two aspects of empowerment, status improvement and contribution to development are interrelated. In this regard, development of women can be viewed from two angles, first one is the improvement of status and second one is their participation in development process. And both the sides have empowerment content.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are framed as below –

1. To understand the concept “Empowerment”.
2. To focus on different aspects of Women Empowerment.
3. To discuss about various dimension of Women Empowerment.

Methodology:

The method of study is based on descriptive and analytical method. Secondary data is collected from books, journals and news papers.

Review of Literature:

Zairab Rahman's (2007) book, “Empowerment of Rural Indian Women, a study of Uttarakhand” finds that increasing rate of women's exploitation in every sphere of life results from their powerlessness in patriarchal society. Hence as she argues, women need empowerment which would be measured in terms of women's freedom to shape their lives. Their control over resources.

The paper includes in the edited volume entitled “Women Empowerment: Challenges and Strategies” by M. Lakshminpathi Raju (2007) discuss various

perspectives of Women Empowerment including the issues and problems that confront them.

Neeta Tapan (1998) in her book entitled “Needs for Women Empowerment outlines the Schemes adopted by the Government and facilitated by NGO during implementation to improve women's conditions.” Discuss various forms of gender discrimination in society which hinders the progress of women.

The author Susena Srivastava in her book entitled “Women Empowerment” (2008) demonstrates the strategies and initiatives to empower women to overcome discriminations, achieve full equality, well being and participation in decision making that determine their lives and future of the society.

Discussion:

Empowerment means literally, becoming powerful. In a common sense of understanding empowerment is to make an individual, a group or a community as a whole powerful so that the members participate, decides upon, get access to and enjoy freedom of choice in matters which they are deprived of or denied to within the existing system. In brief, women empowerment is a process, seen as opposed to a static situation that challenges existing assumption about power, helping, achieving and succeeding relating to women. (Rowland 1995, Kabeer 2001). Women empowerment as a process enhances individual or group capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. In essence, Empowerment spokes of self-determined change (Tapan 2010:50). The Empowerment approach was first clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). It is now a buzz word in every nation of the world in the domain of development discourse. It conceptualizes a process through which change in power balance can be achieved. Thus the term empowerment is often used to describe a process whereby the powerless or disempowered gave greater share of control

of resources and decision making. This is because the most understanding feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power. Power has different dimensions. Each

dimension of power has implication in the process of empowerment. Implications of different dimensions of power are briefly present in Table No. 1.

Table No. 1 Power Relation and Implications

Type of power relation	Implication for an understanding of Empowerment
Power Over : Ability to influence and coerce.	Changes in underlying resources and power to challenges constraints.
Power to : Organize and change existing hierarchies.	Increased individual capacity and opportunities for access.
Power With : Increased power from collective action.	Increased solidarity to challenge underlying assumption.
Power from Within : Increased individual consciousness.	Increased awareness and desire for change.

Source: Rowlands (1997)

As stated above empowerment naturally is about power and about changing balance of power considering four types of relations along with their corresponding implications mentioned above. Keller and Mowers (1991) also describe it as “a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self reliance to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.” In the first sense, empowerment is a process that helps and assists women to understand their identity, capacity, strengths and power and its application in day to day life in various aspects of their individual and social life.

Women Empowerment is viewed from two distinct but interrelated

perspectives. Such perspectives define dimensions of women empowerment. The works of Rowlands (1997) and others focus on a triadic dimension of Empowerment. In this sense empowerment may be *

Personal/Individual Empowerment.

* Collective/Group Empowerment.

* Relational Empowerment.

Empowerment as a process it occurs in the society in relation to various aspects of life. One has to be empowered in social, economic, political, legal and such other aspects of life which concern the individual decisions, rights, freedom etc. Aspects of various dimensions of Women Empowerment are presented as Table No. 2.

Table No. 2 Commonly used dimensions of Women Empowerment

Dimensions	Household	Community	Boarder Areas
Economic	Women's control over income, family resources etc.	Women's access to ownership of assets, representation in local association.	Women's representation in high placing jobs, women CEO's etc.
Socio-Cultural	Women's freedom of movement, lack of discrimination etc.	Women's visibility in and access to social	Women's literacy and access to broad range

		space and social network etc.	of educational options etc.
Inter-Personal/Familial	Participation in domestic decision-making, control over sexual relations etc.	Self selection of Spouses, local campaigns against domestic violence.	Options for divorce, safe abortion, reproductive health service etc.
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights, domestic support for exercising rights.	Community modification for rights, Campaigns for rights awareness etc.	Advocacy for rights and legislations, Use of judicial system to redress rights violation etc.
Political	Knowledge of political system, exercising right to vote.	Women's involvement in the local political system, representation in local Government etc.	Women's representation in regional and national Govt., Strength as a voting etc.
Psychological	Self esteem, Self-efficacy, Psychological well-being.	Collective awareness of injustice, Potential of mobilization.	Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement etc.

Source: Rowland (1995 & 1997)

In this type of categorization on the basis of aspects of life can consider six common dimensions of Women Empowerment –

- * Economic Empowerment
- * Social Empowerment
- * Political Empowerment
- * Physical Empowerment
- * Legal Empowerment
- * Psychological Empowerment

These aspects are very significant in conceptual perspective of women empowerment. All these define the scope and nature and at the same time indicate the need for women empowerment in different aspects of life. Such as economic, political, legal etc.

Economic Empowerment: Empowerment is the efficiency of a woman to earn control and manage economic resources. It is the prime factor of empowerment concept. Empowerment in economic field is the best route for achieving overall empowerment. Economic empowerment of women will create environment for reaching social change and provide a necessary weapon for them to challenge injustice and discrimination. (Samata 2005:17)

Social Empowerment: Empowerment of women depends upon the status of women inside and outside the home. But patriarchal values reinforced by tradition, customs, media and other socio-political institution play a major role in lowering down the status of women. It should be needed to change the perception of women regarding themselves.

Political Empowerment: Political Empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making, both formal and informal and their voice in the formation of policies affecting their society. Political Empowerment of women for it gives women the capacity to influence the decision-making process.

Psychological Empowerment: Women are the foundation upon which the family and society are built. Several studies show that due to cultural views of the low position of women in many societies the women themselves often have a negative image of their potential and importance. The concept of strong determination, assertive nature, motivation etc. determines psychological empowerment of the individual which is very much necessary for the empowerment of women as a whole.

Physical Empowerment: According to the definition of World Health Organization (WHO), Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Health is both an important factor in the achievement of status as well as an indicator of social status, particularly of women. Without good physical and mental health of women economic and political empowerment can't be achieved. Several women related studies have shown that women health is not only a manifestation of biology but also a reflection of socio-political, economic and religious context of women lives. There is need to empower the women by bringing changes in the reproductive health of women.

Legal Empowerment: Legal Empowerment is the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women's empowerment. Protection is needed for the women in different issues like health harassment, superstition, cultural barriers, dominance in patriarchy etc. So it is very much needed of exercising the legal rights whenever necessary to make women aware of civil and political rights. This empowerment has a concern of human rights of women's. The Slogan "Women's rights are human rights" are one which has now taken off worldwide.

The concept women empowerment is multidimensional. It expresses at different levels and also in different aspects of life. Significantly the concept takes ideological commitments into its formation and based on gender equality and ability of self-assertion. Ability of self-assertion is not only a challenge to patriarchy power but also an effort for upward mobility or obtaining the psychological health of being powerful.

Conclusion:

Primarily, Women Empowerment may be conceptualized as a process and viewed as opposed to a static situation that challenges existing assumptions about power, helping achieving and succeeding relation to women. Consequently, powerless or disempowered gain a greater share of control of resources and decision-making. This is because the

most outstanding feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word "power". Evidently, Empowerment speaks of power relations and their implications across multidimensional areas. It also emphasizes on applications in day to day life of women as an individual community member and national citizen. In other words women empowerment emphasizes theoretical perspective, practical utility and empirical groundings. In view of this empowerment as a theory and praxis has been entwined in development goals. The various dimensions of women empowerment economic, socio-cultural, legal, political, physical and psychological dimensions together present a comprehensive and holistic discourse on power relation in patriarchy, equal rights perspectives, participation and contribution to development process. Each dimension is significant by itself and very crucial for empowering a woman in the context and in a totality covering all functional needs of life. Needless to say, empowerment is more contextual than universal in understanding. Defining the concept is subject to debate. It is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and context (Rapport 1884).

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