CHAPTER II

CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

The concept of women's empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world, and particularly by the Third World feminists. Its source can be traced to the interaction between feminism and the concept of "popular education" developed in Latin America in the 1970s (Walters 1991). As such, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the term empowerment, generalizations of women empowerment, empowerment propositions, individual and collective empowerment, choice of women empowerment, women's participation in decision making, women's participation in development process, and indicators of women empowerment.

2.1 EMPOWERMENT

The most conspicuous feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power. To sidestep philosophical debate, it may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power, may be termed as empowerment. This broad definition is defined by feminist scholars and activists within the context of their own regions (Batliwala 1995).

Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is both a process and the result of the process. It is
transformation of the structures or institutions that are in forces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process to enable women to gain access to and to have control over material as well as information resources. In India, it is the sixth Five Year Plan (1980 – 85) which can be taken as a landmark for the cause of women. It is here that the concept of women and development was introduced for the first time. It was realized that no more piecemeal strategies but an integrated approach would deliver the desired goods. The realistic and regenerative developmental efforts in the direction of process in terms of economic independence for women and educational advancement of them is what would answer the basic questions raised for empowering women (Chandra 1997).  

The literature describing empowerment practice is based primarily on the empowerment theory and case examples of empowerment practice. The focus of this literature has been on definitions of empowerment practice (Parsons, 1991; Rappaport, 1981; Simon, 1990; Staples, 1991; Swift & Levin, 1987) and the description of specific methods (Freire, 1973) and outcomes (Maton & Rappaport, 1984); Zimmeraman & Rappaport (1982). Less attention has been paid to how the structure, culture and management of human services organizations can support the empowerment of workers and consumers.

As Srilatha Batiwala observed, “In grassroots programmes and policy debates alike, empowerment has virtually replaced terms such as welfare, upliftment, community participation, and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development and intervention”.
Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems like high population growth rates, environment degradation and low status of women.

Dodd and Gutierrez (1990) say, “although empowerment has been a social work “buzzword” since the 1960’s most members of the profession have not taken serious, systematic look at the major root of the word—power. Yet understanding power is essential before one can discuss what empowering practice is”.

Power is usually defined in two ways: as (1) the ability to get what one wants and (2) the ability to influence others to think, feel, act and / or believe in ways that further one’s interest (Parenti 1978). This relational concept is reflected in two kinds of power – personal and social power. A third kind of power political power depends not only on who influences whom. Personal power is based on Bandura’s (1981) concept of perceived self-efficacy. Personally powerful individuals actively engage in their world and know both how to get what they want and how to influence others in ways that further their own interests. In contrast personally powerless individuals avoid challenging activities and give up readily in the face of difficulty, either because they cannot get what they want or because they cannot influence others in ways that further their own interests.

Social power emanates from the social resources that individuals bring to relationship. French and Raven (1959) describe five bases of social power – reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expell power. These sources of power derive respectively from (1) One’s
ability to provide rewards or remove punishments, (2) one’s ability to impose punishment, (3) one’s normative, role-oriented values, (4) one’s degree of conformity in identifying with others, and (5) one’s degree of credibility or informational influence.

Karl (1995) feels that, Empowerment is word widely used, but seldom defined. Long before the word became popular, women were speaking about gaining control over their lives, and participating in the decisions that affect them in the home and community, in Government and international development Government and international development policies. The word ‘empowerment’ captures this sense of gaining control, sense of participating and sense of decision making. More recently, the word has entered the vocabulary of development agencies, including international organizations and the United Nations.

According to Pillai (1995), “Empowerment” is an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted; nor can it be given away as alms. “power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved”.

Empowerment is a process and is not, therefore, something that can be given to people. The process of empowerment is both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups that people most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize, to take action and bring about a change. Women’s empowerment can be viewed as a continuation of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components:
i. Awareness building about women’s situation, discrimination, and rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group.

ii. Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organize, manage and carry out activities, to deal with people and institutions in the world around them.

iii. Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home, community and society.

iv. Action to bring about greater equality between men and women.

**Power** means:

i. having control, organizing further control;

ii. having a say and being listened to;

iii. being able to define and create from a women’s perspective;

iv. being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women’s place); and

v. being organized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make.

Power means being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home. Power also means having women’s contribution recognized and valued.
Gutierrez et al (1995) says that the term "empowerment is ubiquitous, used by presidents and poets alike, yet its meaning often seems hazy and undeveloped. The concept of empowerment has been unevenly developed and has been used in different ways. Some describe empowerment primarily as a goal, others as a process, others as a form of intervention.

As regards the definition of empowerment, practitioners describe it as a psychological process to change. One critical element of this change is gaining awareness of the power that exists within any individual, family group or community. This focus on empowerment as a process is emphasized by practitioners involved in different levels of practice (for example individual, group or community work) and with different populations. The applicability of empowerment to varying foci of practice suggests an underlying unity to the concept; although practitioners may work with individuals, groups, or communities that have different goals, empowerment is described as a method for developing personal and interpersonal power through a process of self-awareness.

'Power' is the key word of the term 'Empowerment' which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type — physical, human, financial, such as land, water, forests, people’s bodies and agencies. Labour, money and access to money. Knowledge information, ideas can be included in intellectual resources. Control over ideology, signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalize specific sets of
beliefs, principles, values attitudes, actions and behaviours 'virtually' determining how people perceive think, and function in a given socio-economic and political environment (Apte. 1995)²⁰.

Power is not likely to be handed to “have-not” groups in our society. Power must be developed or taken by the powerless themselves, as well as being granted (Hess, 1984)²¹. It is possible for individuals or groups to empower themselves rather than merely being the recipients of power bestowed by others. Our own definition of “empower” as a transitive verb relates back to the connection of the prefix “em” to the noun “power”. Staples defines this term as: (1) to gain power, (2) to develop power, to take or seize power, (3) to facilitate or enable power, (4) to give, grant, or permit power.

The concept of power refers to the ongoing capacity of individuals or groups to act on their own behalf to achieve greater measure of control over their lives and destinies. The literature on empowerment offers further insight. It has been characterized as the antithesis of paternalism (Swift, 1984)²² with key themes being the participation of people in their own empowerment (Rappaport, 1984)²³ and self-help for social change. A number of writers emphasize the importance of recognizing existing competencies (Rappaport, 1984)²⁴ and building on individual and collective strengths (Pinderhughes, 1983²⁵; Biegel, 1984)²⁶. Individual qualities associated with empowerment includes self-efficacy (Barton, 1984)²⁷, participatory competencies (Kieffer, 1984)²⁸, critical analysis (Kiefer, 1981)²⁹, rationally motivated action (Mondros, 1981)³⁰ skill (Biegel, 1984)³¹,
self - esteem (Pinderhughes, 1983); and a sense of control or actual control (Rappaport, 1984).

According to Zippy (1995), empowerment represents a means for accomplishing community development tasks and can be conceptualized as involving two key elements giving community members the authority to make decisions and choices and facilitating the development of the knowledge and resources necessary to exercise these choices.

Empowerment is often described as building “community capacity” which involves enhancing the aptitude of community groups to procure and manage social and economic resources (Mayer, 1984), implies a focus on developing the resources and skills necessary for individuals and communities to exert authority and power.

Bandura (1986), Empowerment is the process through which individuals gain efficiency, defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that he or she controls his or her environment.

2.2 GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Some of the generalizations that can be made about women’s empowerment as a social change process are listed below. The welfare of one woman, remains inextricably tied to the welfare of all women.
1. Women's empowerment is a social process that neutralizes women's oppressions. If women do not take decisive action on their own behalf, their victimization will continue automatically through their traditional subordination.

2. The actions that follow women's empowerment resolves to develop their potential and to take broader roles in community and societal activities.

3. Women's empowerment is synonymous with the achievement of equity and equal-mindedness in society. These are not accomplished at the expense of others, but in a mutually cooperative spirit wherever possible.

4. Women's empowerment will result in traditional female values being more respected in society at large, it is not women's purpose to take power while respecting men for who they are.

5. Women's empowerment is a base for human liberation and empowerment for all. Although initially women will neutralize patriarchal structure in order to ground their own rights in social realities, women can not be empowered effectively at the expense of others.

6. Women's empowerment will bring more balance to the male value hierarchies in current traditional and modern societies. Empowerment reestablishes cooperation as a viable social process and makes the development of all people more possible then is the case in fiercely competitive patriarchies.
2.3. EMPOWERMENT PROPOSITIONS

The propositions below, given by Hall (1992)\textsuperscript{37}, suggest some strategies for women who want to empower themselves, as individuals or as a group.

1. Initially women's empowerment will have stronger resistance. However, in the long run, women's empowerment will bring balance and not disruption to social relations.

2. Empowerment will continue to be feasible only if women continue working in the direction of their own goals. If they capitulate, women will move back into their positions of subordination.

3. Women's empowerment moves women in the direction of living more fully. The more empowered women are, the more fully they live, and the more meaningful their lives become.

4. To the extent that women's empowerment increases in a particular social class or cultural setting, those women are empowered will necessarily depend on other women for their well-being. Not until all women move out of their subordination will all women be truly empowered.

5. Women's work outside the home can be a primary avenue of their empowerment. When women have economic independence, they will be able to take firmer stands against their oppression in families.
6. If women can integrate their needs for empowerment with their religious beliefs, their motivations for empowerment will intensify. Women's collective mission includes expressing their real selves in order to neutralize existing restrictive patriarchal structures and to build a truly new world.

2.4. INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

Individual empowerment occurs through the process of personal development. This entails both the growth of skills and abilities, as well as a more positive self-definition. At the psychological level, people who become more empowered, feel better about themselves, there is an increased sense of personal dignity, self-respect, and self-esteem. A new confidence and sense of self-efficacy emerges as the person redefines him or herself as a more capable and worthy individual. Closely connected to the psychological redefinition of self is the actual increase of individual knowledge, competencies, skills, resources, and opportunities which enable more effective action and interpersonal relations. Self-perceptions should be based in reality. There clearly is a positive interactive effect between the development of self-confidence and the strengthening of personal ability.

Such an individual transformation of consciousness and capacity is exciting to behold in others and a profound experience to undergo oneself. While one can foster and facilitate the empowerment of another, it can not be done for another. The ability to redefine oneself and to act effectively for oneself is the essence of individual empowerment. Even before, they can speak, young children exhibit a
strong desire and drive to “do it myself”. The person who lacks power and control over his or her own life has been stripped of a fundamental element of one’s humanity. This transcends even the loss of dignity—it is the loss of self. The individual who has become more empowered has become more human in the fullest sense of the word.

Individual empowerment is not now, and never will be, the salvation of powerless groups. To attain social equality, power relations between “haves”, “have-a-littles”, and “have-nots” must be transformed. This requires a change in the structural problems, then solutions logically should be collective rather than individual in nature. Groups as well as individuals must be conceptualized, operationalized, and measured in collective as well as individual terms.

Not surprisingly, a number of these studies have focused on psychological indicators to measure whether empowerment has developed among individuals. Even when social action organizations has been recognized as the primary vehicles for empowerment, the concept has typically been measured through the perceptions of individual leaders (Kieffer, 198138; Mondros, 198139; Hoffman, 1978)40.

The empowerment process is a continuing development involving many changes whereby an individual or group is able to strengthen and exercise the ability to act so as to gain greater control and mastery over life. It is a process of both thought and action, which is dynamic and constantly evolving. Through it, individuals and groups develop an ongoing capacity to act effectively on their own behalf. The
empowerment process is positive in the sense that it implies that many strengths and abilities already are present or at least possible. It entails that particular methods, actions, activities, and interactions that are employed (the "what") and the way in which social action is conducted (the "how") to produce empowerment. Yet beyond this, it is the dynamic process whereby consciousness is transformed while the individual and collective capacities are developed.

Simply because there is a dynamic empowerment process (as well as no "final state" of empowerment), it does not follow that the concept cannot be assessed at a particular point. For empowerment is a product as well as process. It is analogous to the situation of an athlete who is trying to "get in shape". "Getting in shape" is a dynamic process that necessitates a training regimen with particular requirements for exercise, diet, and sleep. But one can be in varying degrees of "good shape" at a particular point in time. Empowerment works the same way.

The empowerment product moves beyond the realm of the perceived to the domain of concrete reality. It is critical to the empowerment process that there be a sense of control and feelings of the ability to act successfully. But the empowerment product requires an actual capacity for effective action. Obviously, feelings of efficacy and real capacity interact positively in the empowerment process. Successful action requires self-definitions of effective individual and collective capacities. The process is dynamic with no finished empowerment product. Yet, like a snapshot of a mighty river, one can capture and gauge the presence of individual or collective empowerment at a given point in time.
is an important indicator of the ability to act effectively. Empowerment itself refers to the process of gaining power, the capacity to wield it, and the degree of control that actually exists.

This product dimension of the empowerment process cannot be evaluated accurately through the use of perception scales either at the individual or collective levels. For the most important product is power itself, not simply the perception thereof. A conception of empowerment which is devoid of the elements of real power is hollow and potentially illusory.

2.5. CHOICES OF WOMEN FOR EMPOWERMENT

Women must make several choices, according to Hall (1992), in order to assess the usefulness and meaningfulness of empowerment. Some of the choices the women must consider are listed below.

1. In order to be empowered, women must want to be empowered. Although it may be comfortable to live dependently for a short time, sooner or later women must address the issue of becoming independent and make deliberate choices in one direction or another.

2. Empowerment has many phases, and choosing actions that constructively build one's resources is one aspect of an overall empowerment that must be continuous in order to be effective.
The capacity for successful action refers to the ability to make and carry out decisions in a purposeful way in accord with individual or collective interests. At the individual level, the ability to act in behalf of oneself is a function of factors such as critical consciousness, sense of entitlement, knowledge, resources, opportunities, competencies, skills and self-respect. Collectively, a group's efficacy is a product of such variables as its size, the quality of its leadership, resources, allies, opportunities, and strategies. At both the individual and collective levels, self-perceptions and the impressions of others are important determinants of the capacity to act effectively. Time is another important element; both historical experience and potential prospects for power shape current ability to act. Overall, the development of a number of specific qualities, competencies, relationships, resources, and opportunities constitute the ongoing capacity for successful action.

Thus, the process of empowerment produces a greater capacity to act effectively in order to gain more control over life. And the capacity, the product of being empowered, makes possible the process of achieving individual and collective goals. Some of those goals may be instrumental to increasing control over life by altering relations of power with relevant institutions, groups, and actors. When this type of power yield occurs, it increases both individual and collective capacity. At such times, empowerment generates power, and that power in turn contributes to greater empowerment capacity.

While the actual power generated social action increases capacity, this does not mean that the achievement of goals is synonymous with empowerment. Accomplishment of ends in an ends
3. Women must be sufficiently courageous to ask basic questions about the quality of their lives in order to live fully and productively.

4. The choice to be empowered needs to be renewed continuously. Empowerment is a process that has to be forged at all stages of the lifecycle.

5. The accomplishment of women's empowerment does not mean that others will necessarily be oppressed. When women choose their own empowerment, they are in stronger positions to support others and to make more solid contributions to society.

6. Choosing to be realistic in interpersonal and community matters is essentially the choice to be empowered.

2.6. WOMENS' PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon. Both inside and outside the households women are excluded from positions of power. They are denied opportunities to participate in the decision making process. Even when the decisions are to affect their well-being, they are only passive observers. The primary challenge facing women today, therefore, is to increase their participation so that they get hold of the situation and become actively involved in the process of decision making (Chandra 1997). "An idea which is gaining momentum these days is that increased participation of women in decision-making at all levels will help to adjust the goals pursued through the development" (Karl 1995).
Participation has two dimensions – quantitative and qualitative. Many a time only the quantitative aspect of participation is taken care of. People’s participation in terms of mere numbers has no meaning. Women often make up majority of the rank and file and compromise a minority as far as decision-making process is concerned. Today, there is a need for change – change in the right direction – change from quantitative to qualitative.

As long as women would be left behind in the process of decision-making, it would be hard to get the democratic process started. Active participation in social, economic and political spheres would help in enhancing the process of empowerment and it would also give women the desired self-respect and social dignity, and those, of course, are the pre-requisites of empowerment.

2.7. WOMENS’ PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Improving women’s opportunities in the area of decision-making requires long-term strategies. They have to be systematic and they must aim at challenging prevailing structures. Society imposes gender roles on women and men that inevitably follow them inside and outside their households. Traditional and contemporary definitions of womanhood are based on woman’s subservient roles. The behavioral expressions reduce women to a mere nothing, as far as their ability to render services are concerned. Economic independence and awareness both are looked upon as negative attributes. “The lack of economic opportunities for women socialized through a life style of dependence, leads to a conditional insecurity. Indian women socialized dependence and status have programmed women’s psyche to believe in the
patriarchal process which controls the female gender (Jethmalani 1995)\textsuperscript{44}.

The household status the women hold, the educational and training background they have, their health status and the burden of work they have to bear are some of the factors that affect the decision-making ability of women. It is a continuum and consists of several inter-related and mutually reinforcing components, such as awareness-building, capacity-building and skill-development. Concrete measures are needed to remove many obstacles that make the process of participation difficult. New strategies for women to increase their access to decision-making, need to be developed. Building a critical mass of women who could act as a pressure group would enhance the process of empowerment. Gender emphasis on people participation by policy makers and growing awareness among people, would create a favourable climate where empowerment could get a fertile land to flourish.

2.8. INDICATORS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of women's empowerment is an increase in women's capacities and willingness to support other women and to work diligently toward strengthening women in their efforts to survive or to gain equality (Bernard, 1971)\textsuperscript{45}.

The Draft Country Paper-India for the 4\textsuperscript{th} World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 proposed qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating the women's empowerment.
2.9. QUALITATIVE INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

a. Increase in self esteem, individual and collective confidence.

b. Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large, and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy and so on., depending on the programme.

c. Increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care.

d. Increase or decrease in work loads of women as result of the new programme.

e. Changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in the community.

f. Visible increase or decrease in levels of domestic violence and other forms of violence perpetrated on the women and girl-child.

g. Responses to, and changes, in social and other customs that are anti-women e.g. child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows and so on.

h. Visible changes in women's participation levels e.g. are more women attending public meeting, training programmes; are women demanding participation in other events related to their lives?

i. Increase in bargaining /negotiating power by women as an individual in the home and community as well as in organization of women.
j. Increased access to and ability to gather information and knowledge not only about the project, but about what affects their lives.

k. Formation of cohesive and articulate women’s groups/organizations at the village level, district, block and state levels.

l. Positives changes in social attitudes amongst the community members towards discrimination against women and the girl-child.

m. Awareness and recognition of women’s economic contribution within and outside the household.

n. Women’s decision- making over the kind of work she is doing; is her income and expenditure in her control or is she still subservient to male members in the family?.

2.10. QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

a) Demographic trends:
   - Maternal / mortality rates
   - Fertility rates
   - Sex ratio
   - Life expectancy at birth
   - Average age of marriage

b) Number of women participating in different development programmes.
c) Greater access to and control over community resources / government schemes / services e.g. crèches, credit – savings groups, cooperatives, schools, wells and so on.

d) Visible changes in physical status / nutritional levels.

e) Changes in male / female literacy levels – primary, secondary and adult literacy including enrollment and retention rates.

f) Participation of women in political organizations at the local level.

2.11 CONCLUSION

Empowerment is control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Empowerment is redistribution of power. Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Power may be personal power and social power. Empowerment is a sense of gaining control, sense of participating and sense of decision making. Power acquired shall be exercised, sustained and preserved and women empowerment is a process. The components of women empowerment are awareness building, capacity building, decision making, greater equality between men and women and so on.
Empowerment is a psychological process to change. Power shall be taken by the powerless themselves. One proposition of women empowerment is empowerment will bring balance and not disruption to social relations. Empowerment may be individual and collective. There are choices for women to assess their empowerment. One such choice is women must sufficiently be courageous to ask basic questions. Women's participation in decision making may be quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative indicators of women empowerment are self esteem, awareness, increase or decrease in work load, visible changes in women’s participation etc. The quantitative indicators of women empowerment are women participation in development programmes, access to community resources and women participation in political process. The quantitative and qualitative indicators of women empowerment are verified to a certain extent in this study in the chapters under the head empirical analyses.
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