CHAPTER - III

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES
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3.1 INTRODUCTION:

In India, women constitute a sizeable section of rural work force. The realization of women's full potential is crucial to the overall socio economic development and growth of a society. However, this realization requires a real revolution in the way of people's attitudes and behavior. It is a revolution that places gender at the heart of policy making and planning in all areas of development and that awakens the full awareness among the society. With regard to multi dimensional responsibilities, it is required to strengthen the status of rural women economically to enable them to stand in the society on their own with confidence.

Over the past few years, development of women has been receiving special emphasis, however, in practice, it is staggering due to various factors such as low literacy, restrictive social structure, predominance of patriarchal society, low exposure to growth opportunities etc.,. Apart from all these the major factor responsible for the lack of development impetus among women is non-involvement in activities that result in income generation and also due to socio economic dependence which is continuing over the years. Due to this situation the abilities for decision making are hardly developed and the opportunities are not provided.

This situation leads to the lack of growth impetus and opportunity especially for women. Since opportunities are not thought of, hardly they are exposed to the outside environment providing these opportunities. This limited exposure and access, bring in the self imposed restriction of adjusting to the routine family roles. Once the women are exclusively engaged with the family roles, that involvement in activities related to income generation is hardly allowed or undertaken.
Further as they do not undertake income generation activities there is hardly any chance for them to gain economic independence. The whole situation worsens making women depend in all aspects. This cycle repeats in the dependency syndrome.

There are good reasons to focus women. Gender equality turns out to be good for every body. The World Bank reports that discrimination on the basis of gender have greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and a lower standard of living. Women are poorer and more disadvantaged than men. UNDP often quoted that 1995 Human Development Report found that 70% of the 1.3 billion people living on less than $1 a day are women.

3.2 EMPOWERMENT

The emergence of empowerment as a drive emerged all over the world, partly due to women’s movement. The different schools of thought on empowerment emerged initially out of experiences of working with women groups in America and Europe and in South Asian countries.

During 1970s, the writings of Paulo Freire,’on conscientisation’ advocating the liberation of poor through raising awareness influenced the two original school of thought namely American community Psychologists and Feminist thinkers. The C.P. school of authors sees empowerment process as humanizing the society by increasing inclusion and equality and purpose for the psychological empowerment of individual at the organization and community level, while other school advocates personal empowerment at the familial and collective levels.

The roots of empowerment lie in the multifaceted efforts of many of those who experienced the domination to achieve self determination and free themselves from external control... “Gandhiji’s satyagraha movement in India...Mao Tse Tung, uniting China, Black African struggle for freedom from the British etc,”
The idea of empowerment may be invoked virtually in any context in speaking about human rights, basic needs, and economic security, about capacity building, skill formation or about the conditions of dignified social existence. The process of empowerment ought to address the ‘conditions’ of the women in the society, in which they live, which could affect their own position.

The most indispensable component of empowerment is the term ‘power’. Power has been widely defined as one’s capacity to influence or control others. It is also defined as control over material, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human or financial such as land, water, forests, people’s bodies and labor, money and access to money. Intellectual resource includes knowledge, information and ideas.

Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior, virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socio-economic and political environments.

In developing countries, women are living in conditions of acute poverty, increased male dominance, and lack of knowledge, basic education, healthcare and vulnerability. The conditions of silent suffering of against patriarchal system of living are, lack of control over financial or other forms of resources such as a piece of land, skilled labor etc., Lack of control over their own body and sexuality. Many of these are not in their control; hence the decision taken by others would greatly affect their lives every day. In this respect the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining control over the resources of power may be termed as Empowerment.

It is inevitably bound us with the condition of disempowerment and it refers to the process by which those who have denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability, thus empowerment entails a ‘process of
change’. By disempowerment, we mean lack of abilities to make choices. When the powerless are given such powers by a strategic process it can be termed as empowerment.

Empowerment in the context of women’s position relative to men and particularly with women’s ability to challenge male oppression within home and in the society, may be defined as “a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged [powerless] individuals or groups to challenge and change [in their favor] existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, political and social positions.” So it is a process that challenges the existing power relations. It refers to a range of activities from individual self assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resource and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systematic forces that oppress them but act to change existing power relationships.

Empowerment is therefore a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. Empowerment is bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it. This puts an emphasis on participation, political structure and formal decision making and in the economic sphere on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision making. Individuals are empowered when they are able to maximize the opportunities available to them without constraint.

Empowerment is an umbrella concept covering social, political and economic aspects of human life ranging from political empowerment to capacity building of women in various socio-economic sectors to the programs for change in the traditional beliefs, attitudes and practice. It is individual’s capacity to make choices and transform these choices into desired action and outcome.
Empowerment is thus a process for internal changes and collective mobilization of women and covers wider perspective like economic, political, social and legal areas.

CIDA[ 1994; Anex, 3, p 3. ] defines that empowerment is about people both men and women- taking control over their lives; setting their own agenda, gaining skills, increasing self confidence, solving problems and developing self reliance. It is both “a process and an outcome’.

On the other hand ODA [1994; 32 ] defines empowerment as “a term generally used to describe a process by which powerless people become conscious of their own situation and organize collectively to gain better access to public services or to the benefits of economic growth”.

A distinction is made between gender needs and gender interests. The gender needs refers to the practical needs of women, and gender interests relate to the subordinate position of women within the household and the society. The popular axiom is greater the opportunities for women to access the resources and control them, wider the space for negotiating for their interests. In broad terms empowerment is defined as a continuous process where powerless people become conscious of their situation and organize to improve and access to opportunities; an outcome where women can take control over their lives, set their own agenda, gain skills, solve problems, develop self reliance [ Mayoux and Johnson- 1997 ].

**Different dimensions of empowerment can be distinguished as follows.**

A] POWER WITHIN:- Individual changes in confidence and consciousness.

B] POWER TO: Increase in skills abilities, including earning an income, access to markets and networks.

C] POWER OVER : Changes in power relations within household, communities and at the macro level.
D) POWER WITH: Organizations of powerless to enhance individual abilities and for ability to challenge and change power relations.

3.3. COMPONENTS OF EMPOWERMENT:

Empowerment constitutes the following:

1. Women's and men's sense of internal strength and confidence to face life

2. The right to make choices

3. The power to control their own lives within and outside the home

4. The ability to influence the direction of social change towards the creation of a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally [Heyzer 1994: 21]

The indicators chosen will differ depending on the objective of empowerment being measured for e.g., greater self respect, or access to the benefits of economic growth, or the creation of just and economic order.

3.4. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

Over the last few decades the notion of empowerment of women has received universal recognition. The notion is gaining ground not only in developed countries but also in developing countries. Since the U.N. declaration of the decade of women in 1975 attention and action on women's concerns have steadily increased. In this regard women's organizations, government agencies and international donor agencies focused on the underlying assumption that if women understood their conditions, knew their rights, learned skills, and then the empowerment of different types would follow.

Advocacy on women's development is not a new phenomenon. The writings on gender have laid much emphasis on women's contribution for
economic development. Women’s movement, that began to generate constant debates and critics on women’s wellbeing and agency around the world, introduced whole new concepts and paradigms in the gender literature of which the concept of empowerment is fundamental [stein-1997, Batliwala ]. Unfortunately the term ‘Empowerment’ has now become a ‘buzzword’ [Bose-2000 ] only because it has been driven by different contexts rather than by any known theory [Beteille-1999 ]. The contexts differ due to historical, social, political, economic, cultural and geographic factors of the region and accordingly the concept of empowerment is being shaped in India and elsewhere.

Many empowerment theories have been emerged particularly related to women empowerment.

1] The Moser framework developed by Moser examines women’s roles, going beyond house hold to look for participation in production and development. It distinguishes between ‘gender practical needs’ and ‘gender strategic needs’.

2] The Gender Analysis Matrix [GAM] developed by Rani Parker, expresses the need for a frame work appropriate to their gross roots work. As a result GAM is very much influenced by the reality and ideology of participatory planning; It can also accommodate the constraints imposed by shortage of funding and time, illiteracy and insufficient or non existent quantitative data on gender roles. GAM thus examines impact on four areas- labor time, resources and socio- cultural factors and conducts impact at four levels of society – women,-men, household and community.

3] Longwe-Frame work: on women’s empowerment on the other hand was developed by Sara HluPekile Longwe, a consultant on gender and development based in Lusaka, Zambia. Longwe defines ‘women empowerment’ as enabling women to take on equal place with men and to practice equally in the development process in order to
achieve control over the factors of production on equal basis with men. Poverty is seen arising not from lack of productivity but from oppression and exploitation. Longwe's framework is based on the notion of five different levels of equality which determine the level of women's empowerment in any area of social or economic life like "control, participation, conscientisation, access, and welfare. Regarding women empowerment three dimensions have been considered. They are 'power to' 'power with' and 'power within'.

4] Social Relation Approach: [SRA]: Was developed by Naila Kabeer at The Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, U.K. which analyses social relations within the family, market, state and community that illuminates the ways in which gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced. The main components of this approach are-

[A] Development as increasing human wellbeing [survival, security, and autonomy.] And not just economic growth,

[B] Social relations which includes gender relations, class, ethnicity and race,

[C] Institutional analysis consisting of factors which produce inequality in the state, market, community and family.

The SRA aims at redistribution of resources, power and responsibilities to enable women to act as agents of change in their own development. If the intervention concentrates only on 'welfare' then it is very unlikely that women will find the project empowering. Equal participation in the decision making process about certain resources is more important for achieving women's empowerment than equal access to resources and neither participation nor access are as important as "Equal Control" Implementation of all the above empowerment levels of equality will lead to "increased equality" and ultimately "increased empowerment".
Another systematic interpretation of the concept of 'women empowerment' is found in the technical literature of the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT –[HDR] where it is referred to as GENDER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE [GEM]. The GEM uses variables constructed explicitly to measure the relative empowerment of women and men in political and economic spheres of society, their participation in decision making, their shares in professional and technical jobs and political participation.

The conceptual framework expounded by the United Nations defined empowerment as the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Empowerment can be felt at different levels of hierarchy—individual household, group, community and society, where they are exposed to new ideas and activities. It also includes capacity building and removing all inhibiting factors like lack of resources, availability of savings and credit and knowledgeable skills [kay 2002]. Another definition given by Sen and Batiwala [2000] Empowerment is the process by which powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources and over ideology in addition to extrinsic control. --- a growing intrinsic capability, greater self confidence, and inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers.

In the development process, women's empowerment strategy has its own role in achieving enhanced concentration on women's well being which could transform their status from being mere passive recipients of both men and women [Sin, 2001, Mohamud, 2003]. It is in this context, empowerment is taken as development strategy, which in turn eliminates or reduces gender inequalities and female deprivation. Since the applicability of the empowerment process is still in its infancy one can debate on alternative methodologies to measure the well being including the methods of UNDP-HDR 1995.
At the micro level, gender sensitive indicators of well being based on AmartyaSen’s ‘functioning and capabilities’ approach give a space to develop a framework and the measurement of well being outcomes of empowerment [Saith et.al. 1999 ]. Poverty has many bearings with its implications on female disadvantages. During 1990s there were many attempts to interlink both the gendered poverty and empowerment mainly because the latter loaded with powers could successfully be used to eliminate the persistent gender in equalities. This is however, reflected in various development approaches of international agencies such as the World Bank and the UNDP. Such means of power are nothing but the human capabilities and functioning or in brief reflect on what people can actually ‘do’ and ‘be’ [Dreze and Sen 1989: 42].

In the present context women’s status is worsening and millions of women are missing. The intra household inequality in gender and food distribution persists. Male dominance in the families and in the society still prevails. Because of this situation women lack and control over resources and they don’t have a say in their sexuality and reproductive rights. The conditions of acute poverty and destitution where over burden of unpaid domestic work is still prevailing and the contexts where women’s position as second class citizens and their role as housewives, economic exigencies, poor literacy, negligence of health, where atrocities against women are still dominant, we have a complex case of disempowerment in such contexts , women empowerment may be defined thus “ Women empowerment is a process that gives the power to the powerless [disadvantaged and marginalized] women [individuals or groups] by which they can gain, the abilities to exercise choices or to control resources, which could help them to challenge and change [ in their favor] existing power relationships that would place them under subordination, which in turn could enhance their capability to function and hence, to achieve their own well being and well being of their family and groups.”
Based on the above definition following inferences can be drawn that women empowerment is a continuous process encompassing several naturally reinforcing components that are ushered through increasing level of participation. It is pre-dominantly a concern and an important issue for maximizing participation in family and society affairs.

Empowerment implies power to participate in decision making in all spheres of family, society and social emphasis to be given to empowerment. It is a concept much talked about and liberated upon, and debated in various ways. Empowerment could be “striving to enable women to make their own decision in shaping the course of their lives.”

It would be very difficult and challenging indeed to translate it into ground reality. The different parameters associated with this are the need to make women aware about alternatives in managing or handling their affairs with respect to money, relationship and their rights. The need to infuse self confidence and self esteem, the need to improve their economic status, information about their rights and decision making power and their economic independence. The other parameters could be women's education, their physical well being and reproductive health.

Another popular definition of women empowerment found in “Development crisis and Alternative vision: Third world women perspective”. The authors Sen and Grown state that Women’s Empowerment is the transformation of the structures of sub ordination, including change in the law, inheritance rights, control over women’s bodies that endorses male control. If women are to be empowered the authors call for resources [finance, knowledge and technology.] Skill training and leadership on the one hand and democratic process for conflict resolution on the other. Empowerment of women is a holistic concept. It is multidimensional in its approach and involves a basic realization and awareness of women’s power, potentialities, capabilities and competencies and of the rights and opportunities for all round development in all spheres of life.
Women empowerment is therefore a process which enables women to have access and control over various factors necessary for their economic independence, political participation and social development. But such political participation and social upliftment would be meaningless and almost impossible if their economic independence is not achieved. The process therefore involves several challenges which need to be properly addressed at different levels both individual and collective levels. It is a process by which women would be able to develop their confidence level and increase their inner strength and self-reliance to decide and determine their important choices in life.

Generally, development with justice is expected to generate forces that lead to empowerment of various sections of population in a country and to raise their status. But power is not a commodity to be transacted. "Power can not be given away as alms. Power has to be acquired and once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved. Women have to empower themselves. Unless they become conscious of their oppression, show initiative and seize the opportunities it would not be possible to change their status.

3.5. MEASUREMENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The notion of empowerment is about change. It refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Therefore empowerment is group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The important pre-requisites of this ability or capacity to exercise the choices are

1]Resources [preconditions]

2]Agency [process]

3]Achievements [outcomes].
1) Resources: - not only material resources but also various resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice.

2) Agency: - is an individual’s or group’s ability to make purposeful choices. The ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Agency or power from within is operationalised as decision making process in any given context.

Nature of the choice: - Since the ability to exercise is ultimate manifestation of empowerment, the concern is with the prevailing inequalities and opportunities in making choices by people rather than differences in the choice they make. For instance, proper nourishment, good health and shelter are treated as very basic needs.

3) Achievements is seen in terms of human well being with the selected indicator.

The understanding of empowerment on three important dimensions of power or ability to make choices such as resources, agency and achievements is basic to any analytical method on measurement.

3.5.1 Measurement of resources:

The dimension of resources and their power sharing often dictates the status of women.

The entitlements on resources to women will enhance their ability to make choices. Entitlement enables access, such access to resources, for e.g., land inheritance as a resource power can help women exercise greater degree of autonomy. However resources can be treated in terms of human, material and intangible sources of power that can determine the ability to exercise human choices. When it comes to gender equality and role in decision making both ‘access’ and ‘control’ are important.
Access in the context of material, human and intangible resources, refers to the opportunity available to use the resources. Control over certain resources can act as a bargaining power to determine the use of that resource. Control is observation of an acknowledged and socially sanctioned equal share in decision making in both the private and public spheres.

3.5.2. Measurement of Agency

Agency is often attached to decision making process in both private and public arenas. Women’s agency plays vital role in enhancing capabilities to affect their living. In this connection ‘Sen’ observes that “focusing on women’s agency may be precisely the role that such an agency can play in removing inequalities that depress the well being of women. Empirical work in recent years has brought out very clearly how the relative respect and regard for women’s well being is strongly influenced by such variables as women’s ability to earn an independent income, to find employment out side the home, to have ownership rights and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions with in and outside the family. These different aspects may at first sight appear to be rather diverse and desperate. But what they all have in common is their positive contribution in adding force to women’s voice and agency through independence and empowerment.

As an agent of social change women’s well being is closely connected to capabilities which could influence the well being of the family members, particularly of children and also of the elderly and adult members. As the development discourses have emerged with the goals of women’s well being on par with men their agency has been given greater prominence with the notions of well being.

3.5.3 Measurement of Achievements: Amartya Sen’s notion of Functioning and Achievements is considered as better approach to assess the achievements or the well being of the women.
Assessment of well being: Here three basic functions are examined,

1] Being healthy,

2] Being nourished and

3] Being educated.

1] Being healthy: - The notion of health ranges from good health to morbidity to acute ill health. The indicators which explain the functioning of being health are, A] Mortality indicators:- The sex differential in mortality rates itself is a direct evidence of female disadvantages in terms of gender treatments, health care facilities and neglect of girl child. Decline in sex ratio ie., the ratio of female to male is another good indicator of health as a direct evidence of this fact. B] Maternal mortality rate :- MMR is another important indicator that can indirectly reveal the extent of female deprivation and sex inequality in our societies [ lack of care ,nourishment leading to poor physical growth.] C] Life Expectancy at Birth :- reflects the mean year of time that an individual is expected to live if prevailing mortality rates persists through out the person’s life. Life Expectancy at birth, calculated for male and female is widely used to measure differentials in over all well being. D] Morbidity indicators:- This comprises the conditions that are sex specific such as reproductive disorders and the conditions that are applicable to both sexes. Conditions may be more specific to either sex like physical disorders [ women working in factories], gender environments [women confined to kitchen work] , differential medical care and nutrition.

2] Being Nourished :- Indicators categorized here are, A]indicators of intake, B]indicators of out come. A:- Indicators of intake are consumption of the sources of macro nutrients [carbohydrates, proteins and facts ] and micro nutrients [vitamins and minerals].
B:- Indicators of outcome- these indicators rest upon anthropometric measurements like, people's appearance reflects their nutrition status, balanced physical body constitution etc.,

3] **Being Educated** :- The indicators of education are divided into two groups, A:- Indicators of access or participation, B:- Indicators of content and purposes.

A:- Indicators of access or participation- represents the accessibility of education from basic literacy up to tertiary education and they can display the inequalities in terms of access. These indicators of access are subdivided into stocks and flows variables.

Stock variables- give information about the older population. Adult literacy refers to persons [15 year and above] who can read, write and understand.

Flow variables- include gross enrolment, net enrolment and dropout ratios at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The gross enrolment ratio [GER] is the total enrolment in any level of education regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group. The net enrolment [NER] ratio refers to enrolment with respect to official age group for that level.

B:- Indicators of content and purposes:- In most of South Asia and Sub-Saharan countries, gender differentials in primary and secondary levels are in favor of males and widen at tertiary level.

The emancipation and victimization of women with respect to their labor and status within the house and in the society have led to the emergence of women's movements for recognizing their status, dignity and equality of life. Thus emerged the concept of empowerment. Empowerment is thus a process of social change which gives power to the powerless, particularly poor women. In the measurement of wellbeing three basic functions namely, being healthy, being nourished and being educated are used to develop with respect certain composite indices of GDI and GEM as valid measures of well being.
3.6. INDICATORS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The various indicators of women empowerment can be classified into the following categories:

1] **At the individual and household levels,**

2] **At the community level,**

3] **At the National level.**

1] **Important indicators at the individual levels are:**

a] participation in crucial decision making process,

b] improved health and nutrition conditions ,

c] extent of sharing domestic work by men,

d] ability to prevent violence,

e] extent to which women take control of their reproductive functions and decide on the family size,

f] extent to which a woman is able to decide where the income she has earned will be channeled to,

g] feeling and expression of pride and value in her work,

h] self confidence and self esteem .

2] **The important indicators at the community level are ;**

a] Existence of women’s organization,

b] Allocation of funds to women related development projects,
c] Increased number of women leaders at village, district, provincial and national levels,

d] Involvement of women in designing development tool and application of appropriate technology,

e] Increased participation in community programs, productive enterprises, policies and arts,

f] Involvement of women in non traditional tasks,

g] Increased training programs for women and

h] Exercising her legal rights whenever necessary.

3] At the National Level, the following are the important indicators;

a] Awareness of her social economic and political rights,

b] Integration of women in the general and national development plans,

c] Existence of women’s net work and publications,

d] Extent to which women are officially visible and recognized and the degree to which the media take need of women issues.

3.7. TYPES OF EMPOWERMENT:

Concept of empowerment has become one of the widely used development terms. Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process, which enables women to realize their potential and powers in all spheres of life.

The empowerment of women can be divided in to two types namely, 1) process empowerment and 2) product empowerment.
1] Process Empowerment:

This can be referred to as the psychological process of enhancement of the critical consciousness, transformation of attitudes, a clear perception about themselves and of their roles and their attitude towards collectivism. All these are purely perceptional and need not be executed. This indicates the readiness of the women to take charge of their lives for their betterment.

Issues related process dimension are :-

1] Critical Consciousness ;-

A] Economic independence increases the decision making power of rural women.

B] Rural Women have a different role to play than ever before by participating in self and community development activities.

2] Transformation of Attitude;-

A] Education has become essential for girl child now than ever before,
B] Legal rights can give a strong back up for decision making in the houses.

3] Role of Perception;-

A] Economic support by women is crucial for the family,

B] Men should share /help in the house hold work.

4] Self Perception;-

A] "I" can influence and convince others for better living,

B] "I" can confidently believe in my abilities and will use them for self and community development activities.
5] Attitude towards collectivism; - A] Women as a group can make more effective decision to solve problems more effectively than individuals,
B] Productivity of group is higher than that of the individual alone.

2] Product empowerment;

This can be referred to as the actual capacity for effective action in terms of their managerial competencies, power to make choices or decisions, reduction in household drudgery, their ability to access the information and resources and the critical awareness which they can attain for improving or strengthening their position in the family and society.

Issues related to product dimension are;

1] Managerial Competencies; A] Process planning and analyzing skills,
B] Process leadership, communication and decision making skills.

2] Decision making power; - A] Participate actively in investment, savings and economic activities. [education of children, health, family planning and social activities.] B] Participate in decisions of household activities.

3] Reduction in drudgery and household work; - A] Fetching water and fuel
B] Taking care of children, sick and old etc..

4] Accessing the information and resources; - A] can get information and official assistance with respect to setting up of new enterprise/improving the existing enterprise, B] can get information on innovative practices and use of new implements/tools on the farm.

5] Critical awareness; - A] Aware of women specific programs, policies on education for girls, dowry prohibition etc., B] Aware of conservation of resources, assistance offered by government with respect to legal rights of women against exploitation and harassment etc.,