CURRENT ISSUES ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Achieving equality among women and men and removing all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental human rights and United Nations principles. Women around the world nevertheless regularly undergo violations of their human rights throughout their lives, and recognizing women's human rights has not always been a importance. Achieving equality between women and men requires a complete understanding of the ways in which women experience discrimination and are deprived of equality so as to progress applicable strategies to exclude such discrimination.

The term `empowerment' turn out to be very popular, women were speaking about gaining control over their lives, and contributing in making the decisions that affect them in home and community, in government and international development policies. But problem is, very little have clear idea on empowerment. This is very easy to say but difficult to understand what is empowerment? This article takes a lead role to clarify the idea based on numerous scholars' views. And finally, make a conclusion with alternate analysis of women's empowerment.

KEYWORDS: *Empowerment, women, power, gender, self-reliance, decision-making, control over.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of gender sensitivity is one of the unique features of our times. It has taken hold human thoughts like never before. For all practical purposes, the worry of gender equity has graduated to the level of a policy intentions (Sharma : 2000). Two views have appeared in the modern discourse on the modalities of gender equity; women's progress and women's empowerment. It is Easter Boserup's (1970) pioneering work, Women's Part in Economic Growth that paved way to the rise of women's progress perspective. According to Sharma (2000;21), the progress strategy, however, has come under severe interrogation not only for its miscarriage to deliver its promise but also for operational against the attention of womankind. Consequently, the era of 90s has witnessed the rise of women's empowerment perception which shot into reputation at Beijing Conference.

As our experience, Paulo Freire (1996) in his book Padagogy of the Burdened has discussed `empowerment' in a proper way for the first time in 1970s. And after him, many scholars discussed it as human potential specially for women empowerment. Caroline Moser (1993), at first, argued it as restructuring of power. But as a concept, `empowerment' is broadly used, but seldom defined. The often-uncritical use of the term "empowerment" in progress thinking and practice covers a problematic concept. There is a scope for greater clarity about the concept and its application. Misperception arises with the concept empowerment because the root concept 'power' is itself uncertain. Power has been the issue of debate in social science. Some explanations focus, with varying degree of subtlety, on the accessibility of one person to get another person or group to do something against their will. Such power is located in decision-making processes, conflict, and force, and could be described as zero-sum; or the 'power to generate such relationship as love, esteem friendship, justice and so on. To try to come closer to an understanding of empowerment we need to look at the authentic meaning of the word that has been variously used by writers and researchers, in a variety of context' (Rowland, 1997). And let me try to discuss some perceptions here on empowerment to realize the concept.

Rawland's (1997) view : According to Rawland, in order to understand the process of empowerment, there is a need to be aware that power can take many different forms. Rawland explains :

a. Power over: Controlling power, this may be responded to with compliance, resistance (which weakens processes of victimization) or manipulation.

b. Power to: Generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting as forms of resistance or manipulation) which creates new possibilities and actions without domination.

c. Power with: 'a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together'.

d. Power from within: 'the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes true human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect, which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

Rawland have considered some of the different manifestations of power, we can return to the question of what is meant by empowerment. Using the conventional definition, of "power over" empowerment means bringing people who are outside the decisionmaking process into it. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decisionmaking 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 constraints.

Within the generative, 'power to' and "power with" interpretation of power, empowerment is concern with the processes by which people become aware of their own interests how those relate to the interest of T others in order both to participate from a position of a greater strength in decision-making and actually to influence such decisions.

From a feminist perspective, interpreting 'power over' entails understanding the dynamics of oppression and internalized oppressing. Empowerment is thus more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. As feminist and other social theorist have shown, societies ascribe a particular set of abilities to social categories of people. Empowerment must involve undoing negative social construction, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions [Rowland, (1997).

According to Rawland, empowerment to be within three extents:

a. Personal : development a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the defects of internalized oppression.

b. Rational : developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.

c. Collective : This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based co-operation rather than competition.

Why focus on women?

The important role of women in bearable development has long been recognized. The 1995 Beijing Declaration from the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women and the 1992 Rio Declaration acknowledged that empowering women is important to justifiable development. However gender discrimination continues to be a key driver of poverty.

THE THREE EXTENTS OF EMPOWERMENT:

Interpretation: Interprets it as a redial transformation of power associations between women and men so that women have more power over their own lives and men have a lesser amount of power over women's lives'. Kabeer (1994) has providing another active account of empowerment. She favors empowerment as a concept with hypothetical and practical probability that merits being more than an blank slogan.

She found it necessary to review the notion of power in order to consider empowerment. She explained: 'the multi-dimensional nature of power suggest that empowerment strategies for women must build on 'the power within' as a necessary assistant to developing their ability to control resources, to regulate agendas and make decisions. Power from within needs practical recognition and analysis of matters to do with women's own subordination and how it is maintained. Such power cannot be given; it has to be self-generated (Kabeer: 1994). She highlights the importance of such fundamentals as self-esteem, and the sense of agency. Careful analysis and understanding reflections are necessary necessities for creation of new form of awareness. This idea is based on idea of `critical consciousness' procedure of empowerment is bound up educational practice (Naz :2006).

In addition, Kabeer (1994) belief's that `confidence and feeling of being as active agent' are the essential principles of empowerment and she expends her thought by saying that `empowerment should be considered phase of identifying oneself as an active agent clever of making decisions' (Naz;2006).

Thus, it is not simply an action of decision making but involves more. Kabeer does not ignore the importance of collective action but reflects it useful in completing social as well as political empowerment. In her view, the strengthening procedure ought to have its impact in approach changes at the state and market foundations level that at last form and limit women's live (Naz :2006).

John Friedman's (1992) interpretation: Friedman's (1992: 32-34) theory of `alternative development' is derived from the idea of empowerment that rises from indigenous, political and social cultures of society. According to Friedman, There are three types of social, power, political and psychological. Social power contains in processing knowledge, info and skills. Political power is a tool that impacts policy changes both at the micro and macro level. It's the outcome of the power of voice and united action.

Finally, psychological power is expressed as an individual sense of potency demonstrated in self-confidence behaviour, self-reliance and increased self-esteem. Friedman describes empowerment as social influence, which can be interpreted into political influence. Social networking increases their place and power, which accordingly rushes and strengthens the process of social, psychological and political empowerment.

According to kate Young (1993), empowerment allows women`to take mechanism of their individual lives, set their specific agenda, organize to support each other and make demands on the government for care, support and the social order itself for change'.

As Young, empowerment is a ample change of the practices and structures accountable for women's lower status in the society. It is based on a `transformatory potential' related to the `need to change women's status in such a way that the development will be continued. Finally, she summarizes the idea of empowerment from individual to broader political viewpoints and she puts adequate status to united action, as it is a sure means to specific empowerment.

In true sense, this term is discussed as feminist perspective, and Marilee Karl (1995) says, 'The word 'Empowerment' grabs this logic of gaining control, of involvement in decision-making. More recently, the term has entered the vocabulary of progressive agencies, with international organizations and the United Nations'. And Vanessa Griffen (1987) describes it also through gender lens, as her, empowerment means.

• Having control, or acquisition further control;

• say and being listened to;

• Able to define and make from a women's perspective; being able to guidance social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women's place)

• Being recognized and valued as equal citizens and human beings with a support to make.

And again Beteille (1999:591), discusses it as power distribution without having clear power. According to berteile, 'the main point behind empowerment is that it search for to change society through a rearrangement of power'.

It reflects the kabeer's opinion. But, Dandikar (1986:26) has described empowerment as a multidimensional process, which contains four parallel aspects. These are:
• Women's economic/resource base;
• Public/Political ground allowed to her by society;
• Her family structure, and the strength and limitations it imposes on her; and
• Perhaps most important, the psychological / ideological "sense" about women in her society, which in turn shapes her own perception of herself and the options she allows herself to consider.

When we observes S. Batliwala (1993) opinion, where she says the term "power" is confined within the term empowerment indicating that empowerment is about varying the balance of power in a given society, authority being defined as control over incomes and ideology. The resources may be characterized into human, physical, financial, intellectual, and self, including self-esteem, confidence, and creativity. Ideology mentions to values, faith, attitudes, and ways of thinking and perceiving conditions. She point out that empowerment is a process that comprises a redistribution of power, precisely within the household.

So power, restructuring and power relationship are highlighted by the modern scholars when they have made clarification.

Regarding empowerment, Hashemi et el (1993) have clarified it in a study 'Targeted Credit Programs and the Empowerment of Women in Rural Indian and emphasized on women control over on her lives. They have recognized 6 general dominions in which, usually subordination of women is played out and in which empowerment of women is assumed to be taking place. The six dominions are: 1. Decision-making power within the household. 2. Mobility and visibility. 3. Sense of self and vision of a future. 4. Ability to earn a living. 5. Ability to interact effectively in the public sphere. 5. Participation in non-family groups. In another study of 'Rural Credit Programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh' Syed Hashemi et al (1996) have developed eight empowerment indicators to measure women's empowerment especially for Indian context as a developing nation. And its conceptualization is extremely praised in women development part. The eight indicators are: a. Economic security b. Mobility c. Ability to make small purchases d. Ability to make larger purchases e. Involvement in major decisions f. Political and legal awareness g. Relative liberty from domination by the family h. Participation in public protests and political campaigning.

And just the once it has found, researchers has analyses empowerment through gender lens and begin it for judging women progress. Though it is very hard to differentiate real boarder line between development and empowerment. It has also found in Chen and Mahmud's (1995) interpretation when they have hypothesized also empowerment as women's progress.

As Chen and Mahmud (1995) Empowerment is a process of encouraging change that progresses women's backup position and bargaining power within a patriarchal edifice, and identify different causal pathways of change; material, cognitive, perceptual and relational.

In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and ability building leading to better involvement, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. In addition, empowerment is a process that is both individual and collective. Sometimes it involves people as assemblies that most frequently begin to progress their responsiveness and the ability to organize to take action and get about change.

ALTERNATE THOUGHT AS BEYOND

Today, when empowerment approach is leading supreme, there is need for a cool and composed scrutiny of some of its disabilities. In the awareness of systematic scrutiny, I explain it through large, structural and social perspectives.

Viewed from liberal perspective, women's empowerment approach suffers from three fallacies: exclusionary bias, adversarial orientation and subversive logic (Sharma: 2000:21). It suffers from an exclusionary prejudice in that it eliminates man from the feminist discourse, organisation and drive. It is noticed, it separates women from men. This is apparent from the fact that, by and large most of the women study centers are directed by women and all the seminars and conferences on women are monopolised by women. Even, most of women mobilisations are led by women. Not only that; women academicians invariably claim, gender studies as one of their field of specialisation. As a result, the theoretical discourse on the gender problem seems to have increased an activist desire. Within the academic treatise again the women query is being observed in separation from the gender relationships situation. Disconnecting consequence of it, all the isolation of men from the gender discourse. As if this were not enough, it also evinces a confrontational coordination. Basically, it inclines to project man as an foe of woman (Sharma;2000:25).

In its current discourse, women's empowerment viewpoint could also be a danger to domestic peace as it may drive a section between male

and female. That is the cause why many women do not approve this perspective; because they sense they are well adjusted and find nothing incorrect with gender relations.

From structural point of view, women's empowerment approach is basically psychologistic, structural and selective (Sharma: 2000-26). It is psychologistic in that sense; it places above positivity on the ability of conscientization as a key to women's empowerment. also as the position of `awareness generation' among women for their empowerment cannot be overstated, conscientization of women alone, to the omission of man is as vital, possibly even more than variation in the attitude of woman, for set gender relations on an even upturn. Above all, while attitudinal modification among both women and men is a required condition for gender equality, it is, however, not a adequate situation. From Marxist angle, women's empowerment framework hurts from a sort of non-structuralist situations. That is so because it flouts the significance of existential situations, including the fact of economic dependence of woman on man. The financial dependency of woman is built into the building of property relations which are conquered by man. For sure, developmental approach has unsuccessful to make an impression into the arrangement of gender-based property relations.

From organizational view, a different issue with women's empowerment is that it treats women as a homogeneous category, an identical mass. This, however, is not true. The point of the matter is that there is inside differentiation among women and it is as expressive as between man and woman (Sharma: ibid). These women vary significantly not only in their backgrounds but also in their requirements and interests. The question, then, is; whose empowerment are we talking about? Empowerment of women which sector or class? It is no surreptitious that movement for women's empowerment has taken over any women of higher levels, predominantly upper class/middle class and power elites (Caplan: 1985).

From social viewpoints, women's empowerment approach can be criticised for its marked Western ethnocentrism (Sharma: ibid). It has helplessness to relate to the cultural attitude of the nations of the East, including Indian Subcontinent. Its most severe limitation is its Western ethnocentric prejudice. So delayed it is in the Western radical discourse that it fails to capture the cultural reality of gender relations in the non-western pert of the world.

In view of the above defined limits of women's empowerment approach it necessities gender empowerment. Where it fails also to identify male's empowerment because most male of Third World Nations have no authority and they are also abused by the existing power-structure in the society. So it needs also to explain empowerment as a gender-neutral perception. At this fact, it is essential to clarify the concept of `gender empowerment'. Gender empowerment should not be misguided for empowerment of man and woman or the vice versa. It indicates transformation of gender relations from hierarchal to equal plan rather than just interfering with women's power position. It aims at reworking of gender relations in a complimentary agenda rather than a conflictual framework. Gender empowerment is a wide category which includes empowerment of women without generating a worry of emasculation of men. It stands for encouragement a balance in gender relations as against the one-sided women empowerment approach. Furthermore, empowerment is not just a query of change of power both economic and political; it is also a matter of change of principles. In my view, men need gender sensitization as much as women do. In fact men requisite it even more, for they still are in a position of authority on account of the spread of patriarchy.

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