

WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

On India becoming independent the most important concern of the people and its leaders was to put the nation on the path of development. The planning commission established in 1950 implemented five year plans, so that India can develop. To begin with these initiatives were all top down approaches of development strategies and view women as passive subjects of protection or as recipients of welfare services. In 1975 when a Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Toward Equality was published, there was a perceptible shift in state policy. Women now began to be seen not as targets of welfare but as actors of development. This development approach however made no appreciable impact on the conditions of women. Further the changing social, economic conditions in India, such as globalization, liberalization and privatization had created various new problems relating to the advancement of women. The government realized that these changing needs of women were not represented and understood by the policy makers and administrators. It was from these roots that an alternative bottoms up approach otherwise also known as participatory approach emerged. The term Empowerment of women came to be often used in the participatory approach. The development discourse which influenced the development interventions of India came from the western society. By taking the west as the norm and imposing it on other third world countries is been questioned. An attempt is been made in this paper to analyze the development strategies under the five year Plans and how the perceptions on women's status within it changed over the years from welfare to development to empowerment. The empowerment approach is again within the terms of dominant/hegemonic cultural formation and do not challenge the structures in society that create these inequality and discrimination. An alternative models of development is been explored to bring about structural changes in society.

Keywords: Development discourse, Five year plans, Women Empowerment

Introduction

On India gaining independence from two hundred years of colonial rule, one of the primary concerns of the people and their leaders was to facilitate economic and social transformation. To address this goal, India adopted a constitution that guaranteed certain fundamental rights to its citizens and outlined Directive Principles of State Policy. These principles enunciated that "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing: (i) That all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood. (ii) That the ownership and control of the resources of the community are distributed in a manner that best serves the common good. (iii) That the operation of the economic system does not lead to the concentration of wealth and means of production to the detriment of the community."

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In accordance with the spirit of the Indian Constitution, a Planning Commission was established in 1950. The government's objective was to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living by efficiently exploiting resources, increasing production, and providing employment opportunities for all. Various development policies, plans, and programs were implemented to drive India's growth. While this development process has positively impacted many individuals, marginalized groups, especially women, have often been unable to benefit from it. The development narrative that shaped India's interventions was Eurocentric. There is a growing critique of using Western standards as benchmarks and imposing them on developing nations like India. From its inception in 1951 until 2016-17, the Planning Commission implemented a total of twelve five-year plans. All the plans were designed to address significant challenges related to women, work participation rates, sex ratios, gender-based violence, and new challenges such as increased intra-country migration, a changing labor market that demands new skills, and rapidly evolving technology.

This paper aims to analyze the development strategies employed under these five-year plans and examine how perceptions of women's status have evolved over the years---from welfare to development to empowerment. It highlights the dual expectations placed on women; they must fulfill the developmental needs imposed by the government and development agencies while simultaneously adhering to gender roles defined by patriarchy, culture, and tradition. Furthermore, this analysis considers how the pressures of late capitalism and neo-colonial governance, intensified by globalization, influence societal structures and shape the realities that woman face.

Development Discourse

After World War II the World Bank and other post-war institutions considered that development was universal, inevitable and inherently valuable. They believed that it was a natural outcome of enlightenment. Many western thinkers and policy makers saw conditions such as poverty and backwardness in Asia, Africa and Latin America as a problem. Thus a new domain of thought and experience namely development came into being, resulting in a new strategy for dealing with alleged problem (Escobar, 1995). The western experts and policy makers assumed that countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America which is often called as Third World countries, could gradually, but steadily be helped to achieve development if they adopted political and economic systems similar to those in the industrialized world. The countries in Asia Africa and Latin America who were liberated from the colonial rule also began to look upon themselves as underdeveloped and how "to develop" became a fundamental issue for these countries. These underdeveloped countries in order to develop "embarked upon the task of un-under developing themselves by subjecting their societies to increasingly, systematic, detailed and comprehensive interventions" (Hall, 1996). The World Bank and other post war institutions which were dominated by European countries assisted the third world/underdeveloped countries

in this task of development. Europe was able to continue its dominance over the third world countries by producing a discourse of difference[^].

In this discourse Europe described the difference between itself and others by assuming that everything European was superior to any aspect of the third world. This aspect can be explained through centre/periphery dichotomy, in which, being western is equated with a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular and modern, and the Third World nations as backward, traditional and primitive implying that West is the centre and everything that lay outside that centre was considered as marginal or the periphery of culture, power and civilization. This domination of the west is reflected even in how women were constructed in non western society.

By taking the west as the norm and imposing it on other parts of the world, the third world women are positioned as different and deviant (Hall, 1996). Moreover, a homogeneous image of the third world women as helpless and oppressed was created. The discourse also considered Third World Women as an impediment to development. The colonial authorities and post war development agencies considered only women as wives and mothers and had ignored women's productive role. The discourse does this by being disengaged from other scales such as the local or community level, not considering regional, class, ethnic and gender difference between places continuing to treat the subjects of development as subordinate and lacking knowledge and by not including the subject's voices and opinion in development policies and practices (Lawson, 2007). It was this discourse that influenced the policy makers of the Third World nations. As a result, Plans were designed on the assumption that productive work was performed entirely by men. This discourse gave rise to the welfare approach and women became beneficiaries of various welfare programmes.

The third world nations also believed that European countries had developed because of the centralized top down approaches. Thus centralization became the model for development of emerging nations in Africa, Latin America and Asia reinforced by donor agencies including the World Bank" (Johnson, 1997). These governments considered welfare of the people especially women has their duty and began to design programmes and policy for the benefit of women. But the welfare approach was unable to eliminate poverty among women. Many studies have revealed that instead of improving women's rights and status, the development process had contributed to a deterioration of their position (Tinker & Bramsen, 1976). In the 1970s women who were involved in development began to question the welfare approach.

In 1975 the World Conference of the International Women's year at Mexico and the UN Decade for Women (1975-1988) raised women issues such as improved educational and employment opportunities, equality in political and social participation and increased health and welfare services. During the same period the feminist movement in the USA was demanding equal rights, employment, equity and

citizenship for women. In 1970 Ester Boserup book 'Women's Role in Economic Development' was published. The book challenged the assumptions of the welfare approach. All these events had a global impact and led to the growth of Women in Development movement. Many conferences were held to mark the UN Decade for Women and recommendations were made for the establishment of international and national machinery to promote women's interests. Women in Development (WID) movement recognized women's productive role and aimed at integrating women into the economy as a means of improving their status (Parpart, 1993). This led to many third world governments to design policies and programmes which aimed education, training and creation of employment opportunities for women so that they can contribute to the development of country.

In the mid-1980s two major changes took place that has impacted the third world women. Firstly governments worldwide realized that centralized top down approaches had failed to reduce poverty and began to decentralize some responsibilities, decision making authority and resources to intermediate and local governments. Secondly during the same time Neo-Liberal movement had gained momentum. Free trade in goods and services, free circulation of capital and freedom of investment was the main objective of neo-liberalism. Trade liberalization was promoted under the assumption that trade will lead to increased productivity, growth and completion and reduce poverty levels. World Bank and IMF played an important role in promoting neo-liberal ideas (Felix, 2003). Liberalizing reforms became IMF's standard approach to the financial crisis of all developing countries. This resulted in developing countries making structural changes in their economies to be part of the globalization process. They began to open their markets to international competition.

On the one hand decentralization led to devolution of power to local bodies and on the other hand liberalization opened the rural societies to market forces. In this process large section of society were marginalized specifically women. Rural women lost the traditional rights over agricultural production and now had to produce for the markets. This lowered the economic status of women in developing countries, and was reflected in the level of their participation in decision making process at all levels. Though women comprise 50% of the total world population they are not present in the decision making process at all level.

But it must be noted that equity issues often received cursory treatment as development planners emphasized basic human needs particularly for health, education and training as well as equal access to credit and marketing facilities and greater access to land and legal reforms. The WID policy makers did not understand the lived realities and experience of the Third world women and development for third world women meant becoming more western, more modern (Parpart, 1993). The third world women now began to question the WID approach which focused on women in isolation. This approach never challenged the power relations between men and women. Status and power differentials between men and women came to be emphasized. Gender was analyzed as a construction of the identities, roles and

relations of people on the ground of sexual difference (Rajan & Park, 2002). The social constructions of gender was reinforced by social activities that both define and are defined by them (Moore, 1998). This sociological approach on gender became a useful and gave rise to Gender and Development (GAD) in 1980s.

This evolution in thinking has led to a major shift from a focus on women specific project to mainstreaming women/gender at the programme and policy level (Razvi & Miller, 1995). During the women's movement in the 1980's feminist particularly of the third world were 'growing discontent with the largely apolitical and economic models in prevailing development intervention' (Batliwala, 2007). It was from these roots that the notion of empowerment grew and it came to be most clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) as the Empowerment approach. Empowerment was used to mean people's participation and women's development. The Empowerment approach also brought issues of power as it relates to gender which gave rise to strategies for empowering women (Rowland, n.d.). Since 1990's Empowerment has become a major goal of all international and national agencies which are working in the field of development. The term Empowerment was first introduced by the policy makers following the Fourth world conference held at Beijing in 1995. This conference impressed upon the governments of the Third World, the need to empower women. The Third world nations who were anxious to demonstrate their progressive approach to gender issues immediately took the catch phrase empowerment.

The UN has played a significant role in taking up the cause of the marginalized, especially women. Report of the world conference of the UN Decade for Women Equality, Copenhagen 1980; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979; The Cairo conference 1994; Report of the fourth World conference on women, Beijing, 1995, Report of the Human Development, UNDP, 1995; The inter-parliamentary Union Report 1998; etc were the efforts made by the UN to promote women's empowerment. Empowerment of women was also addressed by the Millennium Summit in 2000; the Millennium Development Goals was adopted by all UN member states. Of the eight goals promoting gender equality and empowering women was one of them. The developing nations were given financial aid by developed countries, World Bank, IMF and other such organizations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals build on the vital principle of "leaving no one behind", and emphasizes a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. All these efforts of the UN led to the member nations to formulate policies and programs that were necessary for women's empowerment. Empowerment has become such an important concept that it has affected a large number of women in their daily life. It was this development discourse that dominated India's development strategies.

Development Strategies in India

During the colonial era, government's economic policies in India were concerned more with protecting and promoting British interests than with advancing the Welfare of the Indian population. At the time of Independence India inherited an impoverished economy. The Indian economy was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural in character. There were few modern industries and bulks of the industries were traditional cottage and small scale processing activities. Capital formation was inadequate to bring about rapid improvement in per capita income. Immediately following the transfer of power, the government's main concern was to put India on the path of development so that all sections in society could benefit from it. The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 had signaled acceptance and the principle that the government will play a major role in initiating and regulating development of the economy.

This led to the setting up of the planning commission in 1950 for economic development of the country. It was a challenging task for the planning commission to evolve and enforce policies and programme designed to best serve the interest of the country as a whole and simultaneously accommodate the interest of big industrialists, the hope of Gandhian miniaturists, the ambitions of Nehruvian intellectuals and those of a rural landed elite (Khilnani, 1997). The planning commission focused on women's issues as per the perceptions of their members on women's status within the economy (Patel, 2003). It is important to analyze the development strategies and how the perceptions on women's status within it changed over the years from welfare to development to empowerment.

Welfare Approach

The welfare approach to development though began with the First Five Year Plan but an effort to address women's welfare was made as early as 1939. The Indian National Congress constituted the National Planning commission, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Commission in 1939 appointed a sub-committee brought out the document "Women's Role in the Planned Economy" which reflected the changing consciousness and the vision of women in the anti colonial struggle of a new socio economic order where in women would have an important role to play. The sub-committee was to deal with the place of woman in the planned economy (Shah, 1947). It must be noted that most of these issues and recommendations by the committee were not incorporated into the first five year plan. Women's role was only considered a 'social and welfare', and clubbed together with the welfare of the disadvantaged groups like destitute disabled aged etc. The reason for this is that it takes policy makers out of their familiar conceptual territory of welfare, poverty and efficiency into the nebulous territory of power and social justice (Kabeer, 2001). During this period it became the duty of the government to look to the welfare of women (Devendra, 1994). The Central Social Welfare Board set up in 1953 and acted as an Apex Body at national

level to promote voluntary action at various levels, especially at the grassroots, to take up welfare related activities for women and children.

The second to Fifth Plan (1956-1979) continued to reflect the very same welfare approach, besides giving priority to women's education and launching measures to improve material and child health services, supplementary feeding for children and expectant and nursing mother. Such approaches viewed women as passive subjects of protection or as recipients of marginal welfare and social services, unrelated to policies and strategies for economic development or structural changes in societies as a result of economic changes (Pandey, 2002). Women's role was being considered social and welfare also matches with the international approach at that time that women were a social and welfare subjects (Jain & Hameed, 2009). The Welfare approach remained till 1975 when a Report of the Committee on Status of Women in India, Towards Equality was published. This report pointed out that "women were increasingly marginalized, they face more violence in their lives than ever before, the sex ratio had worsened as had condition of work". And shortly after the report was published from the late seventies on there was a perceptible shift in state policy, for women now began to be seen not as targets of welfare but as actors in development (Butalia, 1998). It was also because the women in Development movement had gained momentum internationally. It was in this background that development approach to women was initiated.

Development Approach

During 1980 and 1990 efforts were made for women to enter into the modern sector (Saunders, 2002) i.e., to enter the labour market and take part in the capitalist production (Parpart, 2002) so that women could contribute to development (Razvi & Miller, 1995). Along with productive role (especially subsistence production), reproductive role (child bearing/rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks) and community management role (in order to ensure the provision and maintenance of collective consumption resources) (Mose, 1989) women had to produce for the markets. Accordingly the sixth plan (1980-85) adopted a multi disciplinary approach with a special thrust on the three core sector of health, education and employment. The Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the year 1985 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children.

In the seventh plan (1985-90) the developmental programmes continued with major objective of raising their economic and social status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. A significant step in this direction was to identify/promote the Beneficiary-oriented Schemes (BOS) in various developmental sectors which extended direct benefits to women. The thrust on generation of both skilled and unskilled employment through proper education and vocation training continued. In this development strategy, women's burden of work increased (Butalia, 1998) This approach however made no appreciable impact upon poverty alleviation, reducing women in particular to even further levels of destitutions as mechanization

displaced them from their tradition occupations, the devastation of natural resources made their subsistence labour more difficult , male migration to urban centers in search of employment left them to cope with family responsibilities and struggle with land and few governmental welfare measures, land reforms, or health, literacy and employment programs touched them (Rajan & Park, 2002). Women were not able to take advantage of the economic growth to the same extent as men and the poverty among women has only increased (INSTRAW, 2005).

In the 1990s, India initiated a process of economic reform and structural adjustment resulting in what came to be known as new economic policy. This system works only by producing and selling things and services, and the more that is produced and the more that is purchased the more there is progress and prosperity. Gross National Product the most important measure of economic growth is the sum total of goods and services produced by a given year. It is a measure of the success of a consumer society obviously to consume (Robbins, 2004). This consumerist economy produced consumers with extensive range of products and services that were not easily available before. In 1993 the 73rd and 74th Amendment to the constitution ensured that 33% seats for panchayats in rural areas and urban local bodies were to be reserved for women. This ensured the direct involvement of women in positions of decision making. Decentralization and Economic Reforms have been two major policy imperatives in the 1990s. Mainstreaming of women into the new and emerging areas of growth became imperative. Women were now encouraged to participate in the decision making process in the economic and political sphere so that they could influence matters that affect their lives in society. The result was participatory/ empowerment approach became the main objective as the government was now under the influence of the feminist and other international organization.

It was during the Eighth five year plan (1992-1997) with human development as its major focus, played a very important role in the development of women. It promised to ensure that benefits of development from different sectors do not by-pass women, implement special programmes to complement the general development programmes and to monitor the flow of benefits to women from other development sectors and enable women to function as equal partners and participants in the development process. In 1992 the National Commission for women a statutory body set up as a nodal agency to safeguard the rights and interests of women. Its major objectives are to investigate, examine and review all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the constitution review of both women --specific and women related legislations and suggest amendments wherever needed and to function as an agency to keep surveillance and facilitate redresses grievances of women. Of the total 41 legislations having a direct bearing on women, the commission reviewed and suggested remedial legislative measures in respect of 32 Acts and forwarded the same to the government for further action. Another major initiative taken by the government was setting up of the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh(RMK) in 1993 as a national level mechanism to meet the credit needs of the poor and assetless women

in the informal sector. RMK has taken a number of promotional measures to popularize the concept of microfinancing, thrift credit, formation and stabilization of SHGs and also enterprise development for poor women.

Empowerment Approach

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) made two significant changes in the conceptual strategy of planning for women. Firstly Empowerment of women became one of the nine primary objectives of the ninth plan. To this effect, the Approach of the plan was to create an enabling environment where women could freely exercise their rights both within and outside home, as equal partners along with men. Secondly, the convergence of existing services available in both women-specific and women related sectors, To this effect, it directed both centre and the states to adopt a special strategy of Women's Component Plan whereby identified Ministries were required to assure that at least 30% of funds/benefits flow to women'. Other major initiative during this period were introduction of Gender Budgeting to attain more effective targeting of public expenditure and to offset any undesirable gender specific consequences of previous budgetary measures. However the Ninth Plan refrained from making any commitment for achieving any specific goal or target.

In 2001 the National Policy for Empowerment of women was adopted to eliminate all types of discrimination against women and to ensure gender justice, besides empowering women both socially and economically. The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres -- political, economic, social, cultural and civil
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) adopted a sector --specific three fold Strategy for empowering women, based on the prescriptions of the National policy for Empowerment of Women. They include:

- Social Empowerment -- to create an enabling environment through various affirmative development policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realize their full potentials.
- Economic Empowerment --to ensure provision of training, employment and income generating activities with both 'forward and backward linkages with the ultimate objective of making all potential women economically independent and self reliant and
- Gender justice- to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus allow women to enjoy not only the de-jure but also the de-facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz., political, economic, social, civil, cultural etc.

The approach to the tenth plan for empowering women was distinct from that of the earlier plans, as it had definite goals, targets and a time-frame. This plan envisaged that empowerment of women as a process demands a life cycle approach. Therefore every stage of their life counts as priority in the planning process. Depending upon the developmental needs at every stage, female population has been categorized into 5 distinct sub-groups they include

- Girl children in the age --group 0to 14 years, they deserve special attention because of the gender bias and discrimination they suffer from at such a tender age,
- Adolescent girls in the age group 15-19 years are very sensitive from the view point of planning because of the preparatory stage for their future productive and reproductive roles in the society and family, respectively
- Women in the reproductive age-group 15-44 years need special care and attention because of their reproductive needs
- Women in the economically active age-group 15-59 years have different demands like those of education/ training, employment, income generation and participation in the developmental process, decision making etc
- The elderly women in the age group 60+ years have limited needs mainly relating to health, financial and emotional support.

In 2006 the Department of Women and Child Development was upgraded to a ministry. As a nodal Ministry for the advancement of women and children, the Ministry formulates plans, policies and programmes, enacts/ amends legislation, guides and co ordinate the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of women and child Development. Besides, playing its nodal role, the ministry implements certain innovative programmes for women and children. These programmes cover Empowering strategies, welfare and support services, training for employment and income generation, awareness generation and

gender sensitization. These programmes play a supplementary and complementary role to the other general developmental programmes in the sectors of health, education, rural development etc. All these efforts are directed to ensure that women are empowered both economically and socially and thus become equal partners in national development along with men. The Ministry has six autonomous organizations viz.,

1. National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development (NIPCCD)
2. National Commission for Women (NCW)
3. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)
4. Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA)
5. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB)
6. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

Despite of all these efforts women and children continued to be victims of violence, neglect and injustice. The Eleventh plan(2007-12) aimed at addressing these problems by looking at gender as a cross cutting theme. In this plan, women's agency and the need for women's empowerment are emphasized and, for the first time, women were considered not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth. It recognized that women and children were not homogenous categories; they belong to diverse castes, classes, communities, economic groups, and are located within a range of geographic and development zones. The approach to gender equity is based on the recognition that interventions in favour of women must be multi-pronged and they must:

- (a) provide women with basic entitlements
- (b) address the reality of globalization and its impact on women by prioritizing economic empowerment
- (c) ensure an environment free from all forms of violence against women(VAM)-physical, economic, social, psychological etc
- (d) ensure the participation and adequate representation of women at the highest policy levels, particularly in parliament and state assemblies, and
- (e) strengthen existing institutional mechanisms and create new ones for gender main-streaming and effective policy implementation.

The twelfth five year Plan (2012-17) with the subtitle: 'Faster, Sustainable, and More Inclusive Growth' aims to convert the aspirations and voice of women into a reality. The strategy of inclusion envisages the engendering of development planning high priority. The key strategies for women's agency in the Twelfth Plan are: (i) Economic Empowerment by generating employment with equity in work conditions, skill development, increasing awareness about growing feminisation of agriculture and sensitisation of policy makers and making government schemes and technology accessible to women. (ii) Strengthening Social and Physical Infrastructure especially health and education, sanitation, transportation and so on for inclusive growth. (iii) Enabling Legislations so that the laws conceived to promote women's equity and gender balance in society are revised and strengthened to make them effective. (iv)

Women's Participation in Governance is essential for empowering women and bringing gender dimension under focus. (v) Inclusiveness of all categories of vulnerable women, specially SC's , ST's OBC's and minorities. (vi) The government of India has been implementing various programmes for women .Many of these programmes although gender neutral often have differential impact on women in view of their different life experience, requirements, socio-cultural drivers and priorities these constraints are meet through Engendering flagship National Policies/ Programmes (v) Gender Budgeting is further strengthened in the 12 plan and its reach extended to all Ministries, Department and State government.

The Planning Commission which was established in 1950 was witnessing "policy fatigue" thus necessitating a structural change in the central planning process. A new institution named NITI(national Institute for transforming India) Aayog has replaced the Planning commission in 2015. The Niti Aayog was carved out primarily to pursue the bottoms up approach. The centre to state one way flow of policy that was the hallmark of the planning commission era is now sought to have replaced by a genuine and continuing partnership of states.

Conclusion

Empowerment becomes a buzz word in the current development discourse used in a majority of the policy documents for poverty alleviation. Since the ninth five year plan almost all programmes targeting women are being described as programmes for women empowerment and women are looked upon as agents of change. The feminists challenging patriarchal gender relations, the progressive government policy, and the aid agencies anxious to do something new made empowerment the objective of their work. Soon everybody concerned with women's issues and gender equality-state actors, aid agencies, development professionals and feminist activists and advocates-were using the term empowerment. A careful analysis of the policy documents reveals that there is no clear definition of empowerment of women in them. The concept has been so overused and misused that it has lost its core meaning, thus making it very complex and highly contested. Most programmes have no clarity as to how they will change existing power relations between men and women which is the root cause of inequality in social, economic and political spheres.

The main objective of policies targeting women was to create an enabling environment where woman can freely exercise their rights both with and outside home, as equal partners along with men. (Government of India, 2002). To enable women to participate, 1/3 of the seats for women are reserved at the urban and rural local self-Government, special strategies are adopted so that women can have access to resources such as credit, training and skill development, health care, violence free environment etc. women were encouraged to form Self Help Groups so that women can come together on a common platform to address issues that matter most to them. But despite all these efforts their concern are not taken into considerations and seldom get converted to Policies. Women participation in a development agenda gets decided upon by the development agencies without taking cognizance of women's lived

realities. The plans, policies and programmes focus on providing access to certain resources and infrastructure which was so far denied to women and not on power which was central to women's subordination. The development Plan and policies and Programmes tend to promote the power positions of men while many aspects like the work which women performed such as child care, food production for subsistence etc are not accounted by the Census Reports or the National Sample Survey Organization. Even in the Grama Panchayat level women who are elected to these bodies must prioritize their local needs and voice it before the Grama Sabha and Gram Panchayat. But many women are ignorant or unable to articulate the needs of their wards and do not participate in the planning process. Empowerment as projected provides no space for involvement of women in the, planning process and institutional practices that set the overall condition for development. Moreover Empowerment has become an issue of checklist, and a plan to project the progressive side of the government or political correctness. The focus of empowerment has not been local/bottom up approach instead it has been top down /trickle down approach. Besides the approach of planning has not been planning with women instead it is planning for women (Hannan, 2000)

Strategies like participatory approach were designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts due to the process of globalization. Various programmes were designed so as to provide women access to resources such as credit, training for skill development and so on which were earlier denied to them. Participatory/ empowerment approach has increased the purchasing power of women which did not exist earlier and has created a new class of consumers yielding to the pressures of late capitalism and neo-colonial governance. This Participation will give a sense of psychological ownership and the illusion of empowerment which will diminish opportunities for resistance (Cooke, 2003). And once resistance is eliminated the unequal gender power relations will not be questioned and women will continue to perform the role assigned to them. Thus the participatory approach has re-inscribed another approach by attempting to erase the earlier welfare and development approach. Empowerment approach of development is enabling women to perform their gender roles more effectively and empowerment approach is reinforcing these cultural roles which are constructed. The empowerment approach is within the terms of dominant/hegemonic cultural formation and do not empower women to challenge the structures in society that create these power relation and hierarchy. International forces, national and regional governments have played a dominant role in bringing about development. Vulnerable sections of the society especially women have had to constantly adjust to the various development strategies, be it centralization, decentralization liberalization; all these have been top down approaches imposed on women. Women were not involved in planning these strategies of development and were thus reduced to being only participants in them. Empowerment approach to development is just another strategy which was imposed on women. Empowerment in the true sense can take place only if

it can affect the deep hidden structures which shape the distribution of resources and power in society and reproduce it over time.

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