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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### RECONCEPTUALISING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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#### Abstract

The objective of this study to evaluates different theories and approaches related to the women and development discourse in chronological order starting with the welfare approach and examines their contention to address gender inequality in the world and explore the implication of approaches for the gender-equitable society. The idea of women's agency, autonomy and empowerment are being used extensively in the literature. In this study, an attempt also has been made to convey a clear perception of these three notions.

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#### Introduction:-

Current momentum, the whole debate of women liberation and women empowerment are and primarily centred around feminist thought. The terms such as masculinity, femininity, sexuality, maternity, subjectivity, subjugation, emancipation, etc., are being fitted in the discourse of theorization of women or women as an institution by feminist thinkers all around.

To show that women's tyranny stems, theories have been constructed: From Women's Natural Inferiority according to Aquinas (1980) 'Women's subordinate position in society springs from a fundamental fact- that women become mothers. Because only the female of the species gives birth should be subordinated to men in all matters in society, especially concerning their sexuality. Further, although it is a fact that women have more shame; and women should cultivate shame and sexual restraint for the good of society in general(Aquinas 1980). From the Legal System, Mill (1993) said Women's subordination in society does not come from natural causes but comes from custom and the legal system, and he advocated that women's legal and political rights to end women's subordinate position in the society. Marxian theory by incorporating kinship structures and the sexual division of labour to explain women's tyranny in society(Mill 1993). From Universal Patriarchal Ideology, according to Mitchell (2000), women's oppression cannot be solely tied to a society's production system, patriarchy as an ideological component to women's tyranny is cross-cultural(Mitchell 2000). Marxist feminist likes Heidi Hartmann(Hartmann 2018), Linda Nicholson(Nicholson and Society 1994) and Gayle Rubin(Rubin and Reiter 1975) attempt to rework. American second-wave radical feminist such as Shulamite Firestone(Firestone 2003), Charlotte Bunch(Bunch 1987), and Catharine AMcKinnon(MacKinnon 1989) see something inherently oppressive in all patriarchal system. Further, in recent years feminists have tried to understand how gender tyranny criss-crosses with many tyrannies emanating from race, class, caste, colonialism (Mazumdar 2005).

Research of women in developing countries challenged the most fundamental assumptions of international development, added a gender dimension to the study of the development process and demanded a new theoretical approach.

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**Chronology of approaches concern to role of women in development:****The welfare approach:**

During 1950 to 1970, the welfare approach was most popular. The welfare approach is the earliest concerned with development efforts in the Third World. It is deep-seated in the social welfare model of the colonial administration and post-war development agencies. The welfare approach addresses women "almost exclusively in their roles as wives and mothers while the policies for women restricted to community welfare concerns such as nutritional education and home economics" (Razavi and Miller 1995). Moser states that the welfare approach is still prevalent in development practice. Its primary implementation method is the distribution of free goods and services in the form of foodstuff aid, relief aid, mother-child health programs, family planning programs, etc. (Moser 1993). In terms of women's multiple roles, the welfare approach addresses women exclusively in their reproductive role as mothers and wives and disregard women's productive and community managing roles exclusively (Tasli 2007).

**The women in development approach:**

Initiated by the ground-breaking work of Boserup, the women in development school provided a powerful critique from a liberal feminist perspective of development theories, which concentrated on men as producers and household heads (Boserup 2007). They completely ignored women expect in their roles as housewives and mothers, seeing women as mere recipients of welfare. WID units were established within agencies, seeking to bring women into development mainly by including women's components in broader development projects and programmes. The term WID became trendy predominantly throughout the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) which going ahead following the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. In this period, the WID approach became institutionalized in the United Nations system as well as in Governments, development agencies and NGOs. The popularity of the notion encouraged new discussions and research on the affair, which in turn influenced the development practice. The central realization of the WID approach was that women became visible in development theory and practice.

Rathgeber criticized the WID approach by following points. In essence, -The WID concept was "non-confrontational" and put its main emphasis on the question "how women could be superior 'integrated' into ongoing advancement initiatives", and this without challenging the existing structures in which the sprig of women's subordination and tyranny are embedded (Rathgeber 1990). Another the WID concept "focused exclusively on the productive aspects of women's work", and ignored the reproductive aspects of their lives. Similarly, according to (Young 1993), WID approach ignored the gender aspects of the matter and assumed that women could become sole agents of their destiny without any corresponding change in or reaction from men.

The WID approach underwent a significant transformation throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. In focus, there is a transformation phase, first from 'equity' to 'anti-poverty', and, then from 'anti-poverty' to 'efficiency'.

**The equity approach:**

The equity approach is derived original WID approach. WID movement introduced equity approach in the United States, which became very popular during the United Nations Decade for Women. It is based on the principle that economic growth hurts women. Hence, the equity approach advocates the equivalent distribution of the benefits of advancement between men and women. It supports women's incorporation into the development process through access to employment and the market place. The equity approach indicates inequality between women and men, demands economic and political equity for women, and hence, recognizes a strategic gender need. This approach not only considers women's reproductive role but also significantly addresses their productive role. However, these qualities made the equity approach challenging to implement, and they became diluted to make it more acceptable (Tasli, 2007).

**The anti-poverty approach:**

The anti-poverty approach is also known as the second WID approach and considered as a milder form of equity approach. It was prevalent in the early 1970s. It focuses mainly on women who have low-income with the principal goal of poverty reduction. According to Moser, the anti-poverty approach shifts the emphasis from reducing inequality between women and men to reducing income inequality (Moser 1993). Buvinic et al. argues that the focus on poor women made the feminist agenda less threatening to male bureaucrats and program implementers (Buvinic 1986, Razavi and Miller 1995).

Various worldwide agencies such as the World Bank and ILO and many countries adopted the anti-poverty approach during the 1970s as part of their national programs (Razavi and Miller 1995). Buvinić stated that the anti-poverty method was primarily concentrated in applications which were designed principally to boost women's employment and income-generation (i.e. talent refining) as well as their access to productive resources (i.e. credit) after its implementation (Development and Buvinić 1984). Still, success for these projects was minimal. During the United Nation's Women Decade, a large number of income-generating projects designed had "misbehaved" since their economic objectives were distorted into welfare action during the implementation (Buvinić 1986). Another point of criticism regarding the employment and income-generation projects is that they remained limited to those activities, which were traditionally undertaken by women (Buvinić 1986, Moser 1993).

#### **The Efficiency Approach:**

The third approach of Women in Development is known as the efficiency approach, which was very popular during the 1980s, and until now, it is viral. The central assumption of this approach is that increased economic participation of women automatically increases the equity. As this approach has roots in the neo-classical economic model, according to this approach, the women were regarded as an unused or underutilized asset for development. Thus, it can be said that the primary purpose of an efficient method is to ensure that development can be made more 'efficient' and 'effective' through women's economic contribution. The efficiency approach focuses mainly on economic growth and considers women only as an input factor for the economy. Therefore, it does not only shift the emphasis from women to development but also limits the concept of development solely to economic growth. As such, it fails to understand development as a multidimensional phenomenon, with not only economical but also social and cultural aspects (Rathgeber 1990, Muyoyeta 2007, Tasli 2007).

#### **Women And Development:**

The WID and WAD approaches cannot be completely differentiated. Historically, it was supposed that the WAD approach probably appears in the second half of the 1970s. It has some of its theoretical base derived from dependency theory. In most of the dependency theory, has given remarkably very little specific attention to issues of gender subordination as also seen in the Marxist analysis. The WAD approach grew out of an alarm with the explanatory limitations of modernization theory and its proselytization of the idea that the exclusion of women from earlier development strategies had been a heedless oversight. In the heart, the WAD approach begins from the point that women always have been part of improvement processes and that they did not unexpectedly appear in the early 1970s as the result of the insights and interference strategies of a few scholars and agency personnel. Pala noted in the mid-1970s that the opinion of "integrating women into development" was inextricably confluent to the maintenance of economic dependency of Third World and mainly African countries on the industrialized countries. The WAD perspective focuses on the affinity between women and development processes rather than merely on strategies for the incorporation of women into development. Its point of disappearance is that women always have been "integrated" into their societies and but that this incorporation serves primarily to sustain existing international structures of inequality (Pala 1977). The WAD perspective recognizes that Third World men who do not have elite status also have been unfavourably affected by the construction of the disparity within the international system. Still, it has given petite analytical attention to the social affairs of gender within classes. The question of gender and cross-gender alliances inside classes has not been systematically addressed. Theoretically, the WAD perspective recognizes the impact of class, but, in practical project design and implementation terms, it tends like WID, to group women together without taking strong analytical note of class, race or ethnicity, all of which may exercise a powerful influence on women's actual social status.

WAD offers an additional critical view of women's situation than does WID, but it fails to embark on a full-scale analysis of the connection between patriarchy, contradictory modes of production and women's subordination and tyranny. The WAD perspective implicitly assumes that women's condition will improve when international structures become more equitable. In the meantime, the under-representation of women in economic, political and social structures still is identified primarily as a problem which can be solved by vigilantly designed interference strategies rather than by more fundamental shifts in the social affairs of gender. Finally, it should be noted that there is a tension within the WAD perspective that discourages a strict analytical focus on the trouble of women independent of those of men since both sexes are seen to be underprivileged within oppressive global structures based on class and capital. Since the WAD perspective does not give detailed attention to the overriding influence of the ideology of patriarchy, women's condition primarily is seen within the structure of international and class inequalities.

**Gender And Development:**

As an earlier alternative to WID focus, the Gender and Development approach has been emerged in 1980's. It finds its intransigent roots in socialist feminism and has bridged the gap left by the modernization theorists, linking the relations of production to the relations of reproduction and taking into account all aspects of women's lives (Jaquette 1982).

The GAD concept sees women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development efforts. Besides, unlike the WID concept, it puts a strong emphasis on women's emancipation. The WID concept assumes that any betterment in women's economic situation will automatically lead to advancement in other spheres of their lives. The GAD concept, however, is not that optimistic about this assumption. Women's weakness in socio-economic and political structures, as well as their limited bargaining power, puts them in a very disadvantageous position. One of the strategies suggested by the GAD approach is the self-organization of women at the local, regional and national levels. The GAD concept shifted the discussions in women and development discourse from 'women' to 'gender'. This new gender focus put an emphasis on power relations between women and men and their relative positions in socio-economic and political structures. The GAD concept urged an institutional change within socio-economic and political structures to eliminate the gender inequalities and to strengthen the status of women.

In order to realize this structural change, the GAD concept introduced the instrument of gender mainstreaming. The GAD concept inspired new debates in women and development discourse and had significant implications for both theory and practice. However, the GAD concept has also drawn criticism. El-Bushra emphasizes some points of 'confusion' regarding the GAD concept: First, the confusion in discourse: She argues that it is not clear what the concept of gender is all about and explains that different individuals and agencies differ radically in their interpretation and implementation of the concept. Second, the unsureness resulting from the postulation that gender transformation equals women's economic mend. According to El-Bushra, umpteen development agencies still adopt women's economic improvement as their primary strategy and presuppose that advancements in women's economic situation would automatically lead to gender equality (El-Bushra 2000).

A bonus point of criticism of the GAD concept concerns gender mainstreaming. One problem with gender mainstreaming is that it is rather challenging to implement. The goal of integrating women in all spheres and at all levels of society is not an easy task.

**The Empowerment Approach:**

The empowerment approach developed in the mid-1980s is relatively new in women and development discourse. A distinctive quality of the empowerment is that it approaches the matter from the standpoint of the Third World women. In particular, the DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), a "network of activists, researchers, and policymakers" (Sen and Grown 1988) from the Third World, had an essential contribution to the emergence and development of this approach. However, the notion on empowerment has become a crucial discourse for many feminist and development thinkers at the international platform leave on to think that there is a commonly shared perspective on what it means, how it measured. Several scholars, researchers have given the definition and interpretation differently and used indifferent context to say something different. It still lacks a clear definition (Hennink, Kiiti et al. 2012). In fact, many of them worth it because of its fuzziness, which gives them breathing space to work it out an action (Alkire 2007). The literature contains an entire range of vantage points for investigating women's empowerment, like Self efficacy (Bandura 1986) Self-respect (Bhasin 1992), Self-reliance (Moser 1989, Keller and Mbewe 1991), autonomy (Dyson and Moore 1983, Basu and Basu 1991, Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001), Agency and Status (Gage 1995, Tzannatos 1999), Women's land rights domestic economic power (Mason 1996), bargaining power (Hoddinott and Haddad 1995, Quisumbing and De La Brière 2000, Beegle, Frankenberg et al. 2001), power (Agarwal 1997, Pulerwitz, Gortmaker et al. 2000, Beegle, Frankenberg et al. 2001), patriarchy (Malhotra, Vanneman et al. 1995), gender equality (EMPOWERMENT 2000, King and Mason 2001, Asante 2002), peace and security (Porter 2013). Often there is no clear delineation between operational meanings of these terms in terms of women's empowerment. Mason and Smith treat empowerment, autonomy, and gender stratification interchangeably (Mason 1996, Mason and Smith 2000).

**Re-Conceptualizing Empowerment, Autonomy And Agency:**

The term "empowerment" has been used to symbolize a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. It has been used more often to advocate a specific type of policies and intervention strategies rather than to analyze them. It is also viewed as social inclusion and participative development. According to UNIFCEM,

"gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power" developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes, and right to control one's life are essential elements of women empowerment.

An empowered woman must have to need the right to use to the material and human social resources necessary to make tactical choices in her life. Access to resources alone does not automatically translate into empowerment or equality. However, because women must also have the ability to use the resources to meet their goals, it means, resources to empower women. They must be able to use them for a purpose that they choose (Figure No. 1, shows the process of empowerment and interrelations).

**Autonomy:**

Various studies have aimed at quantifying women's autonomy and agency without clearly demarcating these terms. Mason and Smith treat empowerment, autonomy, and gender stratification interchangeably (Mason and Smith 2000). Similarly, Jejeebhoy considers autonomy and empowerment as equal terms (Presser and Sen 2000); In contrast, other authors have explicitly debated that autonomy is not equivalent to empowerment, stressing that autonomy implies independence whereas empowerment may well be obtained through interdependence (Kabeer 1998, Malhotra, Schuler et al. 2002).

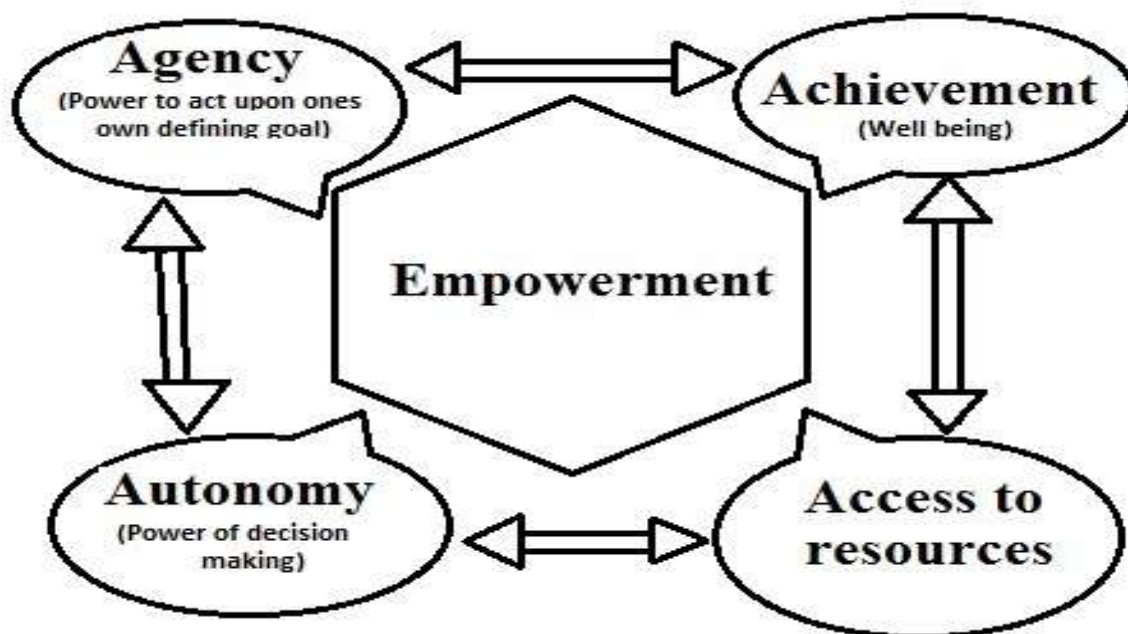
Autonomy means the freedom and power or authority of the person to make and exercise choices and take his /her own decisions. It is, however, not essential that the power is obtained through a process of struggle and through social processes.

The norms and rules governing social activities tend to ensure that specific outcomes are reproduced without any apparent exercise of agency. It might come through any external or exogenous sources such as a social custom or political decisions and is not the outcome of recipients own desire, realization and commitment, e.g. the power is exercised because of the parliament passing women Empowerment bill or providing reservation or else given through some social customs such as tribes in India have social norms that enable their women to be more empowered than their non-tribal sisters (Heise, Raikes et al. 1994, Visaria, Mitra et al. 1999, Sethuraman 2008). In these tribeswomen are more involved in decision-making, have greater freedom of movement, and are free to choose their marital partners and can divorce and remarry without stigma (Kendra 1990, Das Gupta, Chen et al. 1995, Shiva Kumar 1995, Sethuraman 2008). This kind of happening mostly in Northeast states. While these states are worst performing states for women in terms of education and health outcomes, access to job and resources, they occupy the highest position in autonomy and freedom of movement. Women are forced to go out and thus have greater freedom of movement due to livelihood compulsion, especially in the problematic geographical terrains. Nevertheless, this cannot, in any way, be attributed to empowerment.

If power comes through exogenous sources that cannot directly result in empowerment, for example, Women Reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions can give them autonomy but shall/ have not made them empowered.

**Agency:**

Women's agency is an essential component of women's empowerment. Women's agency can be said to be operational when it results in a fundamental shift in perceptions, or "inner transformation" so that women can define self-interest and choice, and believe themselves as not only able but permitted to make choices (Sen 1993, Rowlands 1995, Kabeer 2001, Nussbaum 2001, Sen 2014). While agency tends to be operationalized as decision-making in the social science in literature, it can take several other forms; bargaining and negotiation, Deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance, more intangible cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. It can be exercised by personage as well as by collective.

**Achievements:**

**Figure 1:-** Process of Empowerment.

Achievements refer to the consequences of the choices made, it can say outcomes, and while empowerment is essentially a process from one state to another (Rowlands 1995, Baden and Oxaal 1997, Kabeer 2001). Agency encompasses the capacity to formulate strategic choices and to control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes. Therefore, the agency should be treated as the essence of empowerment and resources and achievements as enabling conditions and outcomes, respectively. There is a fragile line between empowerment and autonomy, sometimes it seems to be overlapping, but the autonomy is a step ahead of empowerment. Qualitative interviews confirmed that some respondents who were destitute in socio-economic terms nonetheless enjoyed high autonomy, and vice versa (Alkire 2007). Whatsoever may be the conceptual distinction between these terms, it is complicated to separate them into operational categories in empirical research. Probably this is the reason why these terms are used interchangeably in empirical work.

**Conclusion:-**

Thus, the literature shows that all theories and approaches related to women are very important; it would be wrong to ignore any of them. The study also suggests that there is a good possibility to take all the approaches as a complement to the empowerment approach so that a gender-equitable society can be achieved.

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