The term empowerment is widely used by NGOs, academicians, development agencies and development practitioners all over the world in the context of uplift of women and other disadvantaged groups.

However, the complexity of the concept of women empowerment stands in the way of its comprehensive measurement. The Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) put forward by United Nations Development Project (UNDP 1995) measure some aspects of women empowerment. The GDI measures achievement in the same basic capabilities including adult literacy, life expectancy and income as Human Development Index (HDI) does and also takes note of inequalities between men and women. The GEM seeks to determine the degree to which women and men participate actively in economic, professional and political activities and take part in decision-making. But several writers critically examined GEM and GDI and pointed out the limitations of these measures to capture women empowerment at the individual level. Gender relations are the key to understand the inequalities between men and women. GEM and GDI indicators do not take these aspects into consideration (Metha 1996; Hirway and Mahadevia 1996). So more
comprehensive indicators incorporating all aspects of women empowerment are required to be developed in the specific context of Kerala.

An analysis of women empowerment taking all its implicit factors into consideration has become imperative due to the unique development pattern of Kerala society and the locus of women in it. In human development and related indices Kerala occupies prime position among other Indian states. UN Conference on Population and Development in 1994 put forward Kerala as the example and even model for the South. It is widely reported that women in Kerala enjoy higher status when compared to their counterparts in other states of India. The indicators that contributed to higher status of women in Kerala include literacy, education, favourable sex ratio, higher age at marriage, low infant mortality rate, high life expectancy and better medical facilities.

The female literacy rate is 87.9 percent compared to the all India figure of 54.2 percent. The state has a favourable sex ratio of 1058 females per 1000 males, where the all India average is 933. In Kerala, both access to and utilisation of health care among women are quite high compared to women in the rest of the country. Female life expectancy in Kerala is 74 years which is 15 years higher than the Indian average and almost 6 years above the corresponding figure for
men in Kerala which is 68(Directorat@ of Economics and Statistics 2001).

Matriliny gave women in Kerala an identity, some amount of security and autonomy (Saradannoni 1999a). Panda (2003) also reiterates that historically the position of women in Kerala has been relatively favourable, especially by South Asian standards.

Kerala is a place where Government has initiated several projects which facilitate gender equity. The gender component of the people’s plan campaign in Kerala needs special mention. People’s plan campaign was an attempt to conceptualise, operationalise and institutionalise a system of multilevel people centered planning process suitable to the regional specifications of Kerala. There were several dimensions to the gender component, among which three features assumed special significance. First was the conscious attempts made by the state to address gender issues during the several stages of the people’s plan campaign and the exercise in gender planning that was undertaken as part of the campaign. Second was the earmarking of 10 percent of the plan grant-in-aid for women component plan (WCP). The projects that directly benefited women were planned as part of WCP. Third significant feature was the feminisation of leadership in rural areas of Kerala with the emergence of women elected leaders with the mandatory 33 percent reservation
for women in councils of the Panchayati Raj Institutions or Local Self Governance (Seema and Mukherjee 2000).

But several scholars pointed out that the improved physical quality of life among women in Kerala has not been reflected in political participation and gainful economic activities. Also the enabling factors initiated by the state for the uplift of women did not bring the expected result. Saradamoni (1999b) observes that only a few women are placed in positions which suit to their educational qualifications.

Women are excluded to a great extent from public political activity in Kerala as elsewhere in India. The decision-making committees in political parties consist mainly of men. Kerala ministries have always been male dominated. Girls in Kerala, who are very brilliant up to secondary school level, are not seen in public domain later (Erwer 1993a). Women in Kerala did not enter into public politics more notably than elsewhere in India, and when they did, they paid a price (Jeffrey 1993). Women’s invisibility in public spheres is a matter of concern in the state of Kerala (Mohanan 2003).

The following tables indicate women’s invisibility in politics.
## Table 1.1- Participation of women in Kerala Legislative Assembly
### 1956-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Travancore Cochin Legislative Assembly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kerala Assembly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The composition in the table points out that the average number of women does not exceed five, which is roughly 4 percent of the total strength.
Table 1.2- Participation of women In parliament 1957- 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Representation of women in Parliament is still lesser. On an average, it is only .75 percent. No woman has been elected to the Rajya Sabha from Kerala.

Nair (2000) has pointed out that the work participation of women in Kerala is among the lowest of all states of India and unemployment rates of women in the state are the highest (Panda (2003) also points out that economic participation of women in Kerala is very low. Occupational sex segregation is severe, with only a handful of occupations such as teaching, semi skilled production work open to women.
The increasing crimes such as dowry death, sexual harassment, kidnapping and rape in Kerala are also matters of concern (Rahman 2002).

The facts mentioned above indicate a paradoxical situation as far as women in Kerala are concerned. It is known as ‘gender paradox’ (Erwer 1998b). The present study is an attempt to have an analysis of empowerment of women in Kerala in the context of the ‘gender paradox’.

The attempt of the researcher is to examine all aspects of women empowerment and to identify the factors leading to the ‘gender paradox’ in Kerala. Is this paradoxical situation due to women’s lack of awareness about their legal and political rights or is it due to their lack of control over resources? Is it because of the gender relations in the family? Do women in Kerala enjoy autonomy? These are the questions require to be thoroughly probed. GDI is misleading because it puts women in Kerala in a very advantageous position without taking implicit aspects of empowerment. Thus a comprehensive analysis of women empowerment in Kerala is warranted because of the widely noted unique social development pattern of Kerala.

In relation to the questions noted above the following specific objectives are pursued in the study.
1.1 Objectives of the study

1. To measure the awareness level of women in Kerala
2. To study the attitude of women towards self and gender issues
3. To probe into the extent of skills attainment of women in Kerala
4. To study women’s control over resources
5. To measure the level of autonomy available to women
6. To study the extent and nature of participation of women in public spheres
7. To identify factors leading to the ‘gender paradox’ in Kerala

1.2 Hypotheses

Women’s awareness, attitude, skills attainment, control over resources, autonomy and participation are influenced by the socio-economic variables viz. (i) age (ii) religion (iii) caste (iv) employment (v) family type (vi) locality (vii) income, and (viii) education.

1.3 Definition of the Concept

The concept women empowerment is difficult to define. There are two specific difficulties in the way to define it. Firstly, the behaviour and attributes that signify empowerment in one context often have different meanings elsewhere. An alternative potential
approach to addressing the challenges of context is to rely on a consistent conceptual framework for measuring empowerment and its effects, but to allow flexibility in the specific indicators used to define the key components of that framework across different settings (Malhotra 2002).

The second difficulty stands in the way of the attempt to consider empowerment as a process. Some authors, who have made efforts at empirically measuring empowerment, have argued that as a process, it cannot be measured directly but only through proxies such as education and employment. However an increasing body of research indicates that commonly used proxy variables such as education or employment are conceptually distant from the dimensions of gender stratification that are hypothesised to effect the outcomes of interest in these studies, and may in some cases be irrelevant and misleading (Mason 1995, Govindaswami and Malhotra 1996).

So there have been increasing efforts at capturing the process through direct measures of decision-making, control and choice. Such measures are seen as the most effective representations of the process of empowerment by many authors since they are closest to measuring agency (Hashemi et al. 1996; Mason 1998; Mason and Smith 2000; Malhotra and Mather 1997). Attempt has been made by the researcher to have an operational definition of the concept relevant to the present study.
The New Oxford Dictionary of English defines the word empower as "give (someone) the authority or power to do something" or "make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights".

At a workshop of Pacific women, Griffin (1987) spoke about what empowerment means to her. "To me, the word simply means adding to women's power. To me power means having control, having a say and being listened to, being able to define and create from a women's perspective, being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society and finally being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make" (Ibid: 117-118).

UNICEF has adopted the Women's Empowerment Framework, developed by Longwe (1990), as an appropriate approach to be used in mainstreaming gender. The framework states that women's development can be viewed in terms of five levels of equality, of which, empowerment is an essential element in each level. The levels are welfare, access, awareness raising, participation and control.

According to Karl (1995) women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. One component of women's empowerment is awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, and rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality. Collective
awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group. Capacity building and skills development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organise, manage and carry out activities, to deal with the institutions in the world around them are other aspects of empowerment. Participation and greater control and decision-making power in the home, community and society, action to bring about greater equality between men and women are considered as the characteristics of empowered woman.

In short empowerment is a process of awareness creation and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control, and to transformative action (Ibid: 14).

According to Batilwala (1994) the most conspicuous word in the term empowerment is power. Power can be defined as the degree of control over human and intellectual resources exercised by different sections of society.

She defines women’s empowerment as the process and the outcome of the process, by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and gender based discrimination against women in all the institutions and structures of society.

According to Narayanan (1998) the term empowerment is rooted in the theories of Paulo Freire who put forward the notion of
‘conscientisation’ as a process by which the poor could challenge the structures of power and take control over their lives. Freire’s analysis however, totally ignored gender as a determinant of power. Thus by expanding Frieran analysis and giving gender as integral place, feminists put forward the concept of women empowerment.

Empowerment is a process and it is therefore something that can not be given to people. In this process we conceive of power as creative and enabling essence of the individual aspect of empowerment.

Montis (1996) speaks about economic and political empowerment of women. Economic and political empowerment of women does not refer only to some improvements in their position within the structures. It also means to have power to change those economic and political processes that maintain those structures.

Giri (1998) also highlights the importance of economic empowerment as an integral part of women empowerment. When it comes to economic empowerment, white women work along with men equally harder, their work is neither recognised nor taken into account in computing income. The Statistics in our country show that number of women employment of a regular nature has been increasing and women are now to be found in a variety of jobs once considered to be the realm of men.
Sahay (1998) has conducted an extensive study on empowerment. She claims that empowerment is a word widely used but seldom defined. Sahay suggests five techniques of empowerment as accepting client’s definition of the problem, identify and build upon existing strength of client, raising client’s awareness of issues of power imbalance, teaching specific skills and mobilising resources or information for the client (Ibid: 68).

Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would promote women’s inherent strength and positive self image (Country Report, Govt Of India, 2000).

Bennet (2002) describes empowerment as “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable institutions which affect them”. The empowerment process, as she characterises it, operates from “below” and involves agency. But it requires “systemic changes” which may be initiated from above.

Sarala Gopalan (2002) defines empowerment as a state without oppression- an environment of freedom, choice, equality and respect for individuals’ a life with dignity. She refutes the argument that empowerment is an internal personal factor. Internally one can feel empowered only if there is recognition of this status externally.
AH women and men are born equal. Owing to a variety of factors the equality and empowerment are lost for some. The prerequisites for empowerment of women are literacy and education, awareness, skill development, good health, access to economic resources, capacity and opportunity for participation in decision making within the family, community and institutions of governance. These prerequisites can be possible only if Government takes a role to support women.

Kabeer (2001) offers a useful definition of empowerment that effectively captures what is common to these definitions and that can be applied across the range of contexts. She says empowerment is “the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where the ability was previously denied to them.”

Malhotra et al. (2002) focuses on the unique additional elements of empowerment. First, women are not just one group amongst several disempowered subsets of society, (the poor, ethnic, minorities etc). They are a cross cutting category of individuals that overlaps within all these groups. Second, the household and interfamilial relations are a central focus of women's disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups.

Third it can be argued that while empowerment in general requires institutional transformation, women empowerment requires
systemic transformation in not just any institution, but fundamentally in those supporting patriarchal structures.

Malhotra provides a clear picture of different aspects of women empowerment which makes it different from other empowerment processes.

Controversy exists regarding whether empowerment is a process or product. A prudent interpretation of empowerment could find it as a process through which product is achieved.

S has been identified that socialisation is the root cause of the subordination of women. Socialisation is the process by which society trains its members to accept, and play their socially determined roles. Women empowerment is thus the process, and the outcome of the process, by which women gain control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and the gender based discrimination against women in all the institutions and structures of society.

There are authors who perceive power as the focus of empowerment. Empowerment is considered as increase in one or more of the following forms of power. ‘Power to’ is defined as power to make decisions and decision making possibilities, ‘power with’ is defined as a collective power gained through working as a group,
'power within' defined as individual power to believe in oneself and one's abilities (Canadian Council for International Cooperation 1991).

When we think about women's empowerment, we discard 'power over' but highlight 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within'. Empowerment in the real sense is to enable women to flower their talents, faculties, abilities and capacities and to realise their full potentialities and real identity as freedom of thoughts, expression and action and strength to handle every sphere of their lives (Kapoor 2001).

Also appearing frequently in definitions of empowerment is an element related to the concept of human agency- self efficacy. Drawing from the human rights and feminist perspectives, many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions or 'inner transformation' is essential to the formulation of choices. That is women should be able to define self-interest and choice, and consider not only able but also entitled to make choices (A. Sen. 1999; G. Sen 1993; Rowlands 1995; Kabeer 2001). Kabeer (2001) goes a step further and describes this process in terms of 'thinking outside the system'.

Another attempt in conceptualisation of the term women empowerment is worth mentioning here. It is through breaking the process down into key components namely resources, agency and achievements. Resources form the conditions under which choices
are made; agency is at the heart of the process through which choices are made; achievements are the outcomes of the choices.

In many discussions on empowerment, resources are treated not as empowerment as such but as catalysts for empowerment or conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur. Education and employment are counted as enabling factors.

When we go through the various definitions given by different authors on the concept women empowerment, at the outset we may find diversity among their views. But we can find consensus on its conceptualisation. There is a nexus of a few key, overlapping terms that are most often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control and power. Most often these are referring to women’s ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control over one’s own life and over resources is often stressed.

In every definition there is reference to the ability to “affect one’s own well being” and “make strategic life choices”. For example G.Sen (1993) defines empowerment as “altering relations of power ----- which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well being”. Keller and Mbwewe (1991) describe it as a “process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self reliance, to assert their independent rights to
make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination”.

Based on various definitions, let us define women empowerment in terms, which will be helpful for the present study. Here focus is given to Karl’s (1995) definition that women empowerment is a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. The components are required to be stated clearly for the present study.

Women empowerment is defined as a process of awareness creation, which helps women to change their attitudes and attain skills. Women empowerment enables them to assert their rights to gain autonomy and control over their lives, which leads to participation and collective actions promoting overall uplift of women.

To operationalise the definition the researcher had a look into the attempts by several authors, Malhotra et al. (2002) have consolidated the commonly used dimensions of empowerment drawn from the frameworks of various authors. The frameworks suggest that women empowerment needs to occur along the dimensions economic, socio-cultural, legal, political and psychological. The dimensions and the commonly used and potentially useful indicators are given below.

Economic

The indicators to assess economic dimension of empowerment include women’s control over income, relative contribution to family
support, access to and control of family resources, women’s access to employment, ownership of assets and land, access to credit, involvement and/or representation in high paying jobs and representation of women’s economic interests in macro economic policies.

The economic dimension specified by Malhotra is similar to the component ‘control over resources’ in the present study.

Socio cultural

Indicators to measure socio cultural dimension of women empowerment are women’s freedom of movement, lack of discrimination against daughters, commitment to educating daughters, women’s visibility in access to social spaces, access to modern transportation, participation in extra familial groups and social networks, shift in patriarchal norms, symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual, women’s literacy and access to a broad range of educational options, positive media images for women and women’s roles and contributions.

Familial /Interpersonal

Indicators to measure familial/ interpersonal dimension include participation in domestic decision making, control over sexual relations, ability to make child bearing decisions, use of contraception, access to abortion, control over spouse selection and
marriage timing, freedom from domestic violence, shifts in marriage and kinship system indicating greater value and autonomy for women, local campaigns about domestic violence, regional and national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce, political, legal and religious support for such shifts and systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion and reproductive health services.

Legal

Knowledge of legal rights, domestic support for exercising rights, community mobilisation for rights, campaigns for awareness off rights, effective Social enforcement of legal rights, Saws supporting women’s rights, access to resources and options, advocacy for rights and legislation and use of judicial system to redress violations of rights determine legal dimensions of women empowerment

Political

The determinants of political dimension of women’s empowerment are knowledge of political system and means of access to it, domestic support for political engagement, exercising the right to vote, women’s involvement “in the local political system/ campaigns, support for specific candidates or legislation, representation in local bodies of government, strength as a voting block, representation of women’s interests in effective lobbies and
interest groups. All these indicators are relevant in the present study under the component ‘participation’.

Psychological

The indicators to measure psychological dimension include self esteem, self efficacy, psychological well being, collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilisation, women’s sense of inclusion and entitlement and systemic acceptance of women’s entitlement and inclusion. The indicators like self esteem and self efficacy measure women’s attitude to self and help to measure the component ‘attitude’ in the present study.

On the basis of the experience of the experts through the women component plan, during the people’s plan campaign in Kerala, the following qualitative indicators can be suggested for measuring women empowerment.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

Awareness

In the context of women empowerment, awareness means awareness about women’s situation and discrimination, awareness that gender is socially constructed, awareness about women’s rights, awareness about women’s opportunities and awareness about the need for equality at all levels.
Capacity building and skills development

Capacity building and skills development mean women’s ability to specify problems/issues and ability to transform problems and issues into projects, capacity to utilise decision-making opportunity, capacity to execute power in decision-making, capacity to organise a group, capacity to manage a group, capacity to carry out activities, capacity to maintain public relations, capacity to communicate matters and capacity to carry out activities with clear perspective. The various indicators under skills development are relevant to the present study.

Participation in development process/ governance

Participation in the context of women empowerment means the participation at different levels. Participation in the decision making process in the family, participation in the group- outside home, community and society, participation in economic activities, and participation in controlling resources like money, land and property. Women’s burden of work within the family is a determinant factor of participation. Reduction of women’s work within the family is necessary to ensure women’s participation. It is possible through promoting qualities of nurturing, caring, gentleness- not only in women but also in men. Participation of women in strengthening women’s organisations is to be determined.
Autonomy

The extent of autonomy is based on mainly whether women can define their attitudes, values and behaviour in relation to their own real interests. The ability of women in maintaining equal mindedness with their male counterparts and cooperate towards a common end and fulfilling their real life determine the level of women’s autonomy.

(John and Leelakumari 2001).

CSDA’s INDICATORS FOR EMPOWERMENT

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has developed a range of indicators of women empowerment, both quantitative and qualitative. CIDA breaks down empowerment into Segal, political, economic and social empowerment, for the purpose of quantitative indicators. They also suggest a range of qualitative indicators to accompany quantitative ones.

Legal empowerment indicators include the following. The enforcement of legislation related to the protection of human rights, number of cases related to women’s rights heard in local courts and their results, number of cases related to the legal rights of divorced and widowed women heard in local courts, the effect of enforcement of legislation in treatment of offenders, increase/decrease in violence against women, rate at which the local justices/prosecutors/lawyers who are men/women is increasing/decreasing, and rate at which the
number of men/women in the local police force, by rank is increasing or decreasing will give a macro level measure of women empowerment.

Political empowerment indicators include percentage of seats held by women in local councils/decision making bodies, percentage of women in decision-making positions in local governments, percentage of women in the local civil service, percentage of women/men registered as voters, percentage of women in the junior senior decision making position with unions, percentage of union members who are women/men and number of women who participate in political campaigning as compared to the number of men.

Economic empowerment indicators include changes in employment/unemployment rates of men/women, changes in time used in selected activities particularly greater sharing by household members of unpaid housework and child care, salary/wage differentials between women and men, changes in percentage of property owned and controlled by women and men across socio economic and ethnic groups, average household expenditure of female/male on education/health, ability to make small or large purchases independently, percentage of available credit, and financial/technical support services going to women/men from government/non-government sources.
Legal empowerment indicators include the number of women in local institutions and number of women in positions of power, extent of training or networking among local women as compared to men, control of women over fertility decisions and mobility of women within and outside their residential locality as compared to men.

In addition to these quantitative indicators, there are a series of qualitative indicators which suggest to assess women’s awareness of their legal and political rights and their perception about empowerment in general and autonomy in particular. Several of the above indicators given by CIDA help to have only a macro level assessment of empowerment and do not help much in the present study (CIDA 1996).

Sahay (1998) quotes certain indicators to measure women empowerment at the individual level proposed in the Draft Country paper India for the 4th world conference on women, Beijing, 1995. Increase in self esteem, individual and collective confidence, increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large, and women in particular such as women’s health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights and literacy, increase or decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care, increase or decrease in workloads of women, changes in the roles and responsibilities in the family and in the community, visible increase or decrease in levels of domestic violence and other forms of violence perpetrated on the women and girl children and visible
changes in women’s participation level determine women empowerment.

Increase in bargaining/ negotiating power of the women as an individual in the home and community as well as in collectives of women, increased access to ability to gather information and knowledge not only about the project, but what affects their lives, formation of cohesive women’s groups/collectives at the village level, district, block, state levels, positive changes in social attitudes among the community members towards discrimination against women and girl child, awareness and recognition of women’s economic contribution within and outside the household and women’s decision-making over the kind of work she is doing are equally important in determining empowerment Women’s economic income and expenditure in her control is another indicator of social empowerment.

Quantitative indicators of empowerment include demographic trends as maternal mortality rates, fertility rates, sex ratio, life expectancy at birth, average age at marriage, number of women participating in different development programmes, greater access and control over community resources/ government schemes/ services, visible changes in physical health status / nutritional levels, changes in male/female literacy levels- primary, secondary and adult
literacy including enrollment and retention rates and participation level of women in political processes at the local level.

Hashemi et al. (1996) in the villages of Bangladesh used a model based on eight indicators of empowerment which were mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, involvement in the major household decisions, relative freedom from domination within the family, political and legal awareness. The indicators also included women’s participation in political campaigning and protest.

Panda (2000) gives the following indicators, which can be used to assess the level of empowerment of an individual. The most important dimension is power which can be assessed through power to make decisions at household level, control of resources, level of control over sources of power, level of change in power relations with time (household and group level) and level of political activity in challenging basic power relations in society (individual resistance and mass mobilisation).

Panda highlights the next dimension for empowerment as autonomy and self reliance which can be measured through freedom of action, possession of critical elements to effectively and efficiently undertake desired activity, level of self awareness, existence of vision of future and absence of unsolicited influences in decision-making.
Level of influencing decisions, level of providing material, labour, finance and management input to the project/programme and level of acceptance of responsibilities/ consequence of decision will determine the participation level.

Awareness and capacity building of women can be assessed through ability to manage productive resources, developing alternative economic structures locally, creating alternative employment at local level and ability to interact effectively in public sphere. Participation in non family group, action to bring gender equality, ensuring mobility and visibility, creating mutual dependence, redefining gender relations at domestic and social levels (through reformulation and restructuring of power relations), organising struggle through bringing women together, thinking through common problems, agreeing on common issues, deciding on common actions and forging common ideologies, transforming institutions (family, education, religion), transforming structures (legal, political, economic and social), mechanisms to sustain the gains in equality, creating alternative power structure at local level, asserting rights to make choice, challenging and eliminating subordination and attaining the status of decision making power in the household are the indicators to assess awareness and capacity building of women.

Based on the discussions above and the definition adopted for women empowerment in the present context, the researcher identified
the different dimensions of women empowerment to be analysed. The dimensions are termed as components in the present study. The rationale behind it is stated by some of the authors. Women’s empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components (Karl 1995).

The components, which are obvious from the definition, are awareness, attitude, skills attainment, control over resources, autonomy and participation. The word ‘components’ is used to reinforce the interrelationship among them. Each component is unique in fulfilling the objectives of the present study and hence analysis is done separately for each component. The indicators to measure each component were selected primarily from the indicators discussed above.

Since measurement of women empowerment is context specific, a focus group discussion was organised at Trivandrum, including different stakeholders to reexamine the variables and indicators identified in each component. The focus group consisted of the State Women’s Commission Chair-person Ms M. Kamalam, former chief secretary Dr. Padma Ramachandran, prominent writer Dr.K. Saradamoni, Dr.Jayasree, faculty of University Women’s Studies Department, University of Kerala, Statisticians, women activists, doctors, politicians and journalists.
The group was divided into subgroups to discuss the variables and indicators related to each component. Apart from the variables and indicators given in the interview guide the group suggested to include ‘health’ as a variable to measure autonomy. The group also suggested the variable ‘artistic skills’ to measure the component ‘skills attainment’.

Interview schedule was finalised consolidating the views expressed by the participants in the group discussions. The following components, variables and indicators were found to be helpful for the present study.

Awareness

a. Awareness about the subordinate status of women

Awareness of the subordinate status of women is the first step in the process of empowerment. Gender division of labour, unfavourable sex ratio and atrocities against women are the factors that contribute towards the subordinate status. Women’s awareness of such factors is treated as the indicator of empowerment.

b. Awareness of legal and political rights of women

Awareness of legal and political rights is a basic requirement for empowerment. The right answers for the questions about the percentage of seats reserved for them in local bodies, dowry
prohibition act, dowry death and rape are regarded as the indicators to assess awareness. Other selected indicators are knowledge of location of women’s commission office and legal age for marriage of boys and girls.

Attitude

Attitude determines the behaviour of a person. To what extent women accept the traditional gender role is an indicator of her attitude towards empowerment. Positive attitude to self determines the confidence level of women.

Women’s attitudes towards primary roles in a woman’s life, gender division of labour, career, marriage and gender relations are the indicators relevant in Kerala.

Skills attainment

Level of skills attainment of women can be determined by a self assessment rating scale in life skills like public speaking, organising capacity, decision making, communication skills, accounting and writing reports.

Skills also include technical skills, artistic skills and physical skills. Computer knowledge, repairing and operating electronic/mechanical equipment and driving come under the title of technical skills. Self assessment rating scale in dance, music, painting, drawing and theatre acting will determine artistic skills.
Ability in sports, games and self defence mechanisms determine the level of attainment of physical skills.

Control over resources

Control over resources means economic control, access to resources and control over body. Income share in the family, possession of bank account, depositing money in bank account, permission to operate bank account and level of assistance needed in money dealings are indicators to measure economic control.

Involvement in decision-making process in family, ownership of property, freedom in property transactions, freedom in spending money, availability of leisure time and nature of spending of leisure time - determine control over resources. The extent of feeling of security about the body, freedom to express likes and dislikes in sexual relationships determine the control over body.

Autonomy

To assess autonomy different aspects of familial relationship are examined. Gender division of labour, nature of relationship with other family members, involvement of women in the decision making process in the family, extent and reaction to gender violence are determinants of autonomy.
Indicators like confidence in travelling alone and maximum distance travelled alone and frequency of travelling alone determine mobility which is an aspect of autonomy.

Participation

Levels of participation are political and social/cultural. Membership in political party, participation in voting, participation in Gramasabhas (village assemblies), office bearer ship in local bodies and movements, membership in self help group, membership in local clubs/trade union and nature of participation indicate the level of participation.

1.4 DataBase

Both primary and secondary source materials have been used for the present study.

(I) Secondary data

Secondary data were collected from books, research papers appeared in scholarly Journals, articles appeared in newspapers and magazines, working papers from Center for Development Studies, Trivandrum and various websites.
(ii) Primary data

Primary data have been collected through household survey. Gender and gender relations in society define women’s position and degree of empowerment. Gender represents not only biological sex of an individual, but also the different roles, rights and obligations that are attached to men and women by the society. Different gender roles, rights and obligations become relevant to women through marriage. So interview was conducted among married women. Since 18 was the legal age for marriage for girls, the sample consisted of women aged between 18 and 60. The period from 60 onwards is the closing stage of the life span, the old age. Hence women above 60 have been excluded from the sample.

(iii) Sampling methods adopted

Households for the survey were identified by multistage sampling. At the first stage three districts were selected, each from the northern, central and southern regions of Kerala, which is a geographic division of Kerala. Another factor also Justifies this selection of districts in the present study. In Kerala about 60 percent of the population are Hindus, 20 percent are Christians and 20 percent are Muslims. Hindus are mainly concentrated in the southern part of Kerala, Muslims in the northern part of the state and Christians in the central part of the state. From each region one district was selected through purposive sampling.
From the northern region Malappuram district was selected due to various reasons. Malappuram is considered to be the most backward district in Kerala and the prominent religion is Islam. With Nilgiris in the east and Arabian Sea in the west, Malappuram District presents a treat to the eye. Rich and evergreen forests, ravines, hills and dales, rivers and brooks, sandy surfs and palm fringed coasts, festive mood of the joyful onappattu - the district preserves the cultural wealth of the good old days. St has in store, a hoary past with Zamorine's rule, Mamankam festival, the British rule and indiscriminate oppression of the masses in connivance with exploiting landlords. It has an area of 3550 Sq.Kms with a population 3629640 constituting 11 percent of the total population of the state. Sex ratio of the district is 1063.

Ernakulam is selected from the central part of Kerala. St is the district in India, which acquired hundred percentage literacy for the first time, it has an area of 2407 Sq.Kms with a population 3098378 which is 9.73 percent of the total population of the state. Sex ratio is 1017. The district provides with excellent educational facilities and majority is Christian Institutes.

Trivandrum is selected from the southern part of Kerala for obvious reasons. Trivandrum, the district Head Quarters is also the capital city of Kerala. Majority of people belong to Hindu religion. The
population of the district is 3234707. It constitutes 10.16 percent of the total population. Sex ratio is 1058.

Three blocks from each district, two panchayats from each block and two wards from each panchayat were selected through random sampling. Selected blocks, panchayats and wards in each district are given below. From among the wards households were selected randomly. If married woman in the age group 18-60 was not available in a randomly selected household, the household adjacent to it was selected. Since rural urban ratio of the population of Kerala is 70: 30 one third of the households were selected from the urban areas of the selected districts namely Trivandrum Corporation, Cochin Corporation, Tirur Municipality.

Uralappuram District

Perinthalmanna Block, Perumpadappu block and Nilamboor block were selected randomly. From Perinthalmanna block ward no. 6 and 7 of Melattoor Panchayat and ward no. 7 and 12 of Thazhekodu Panchayat were selected. Ward no. 3 and 5 of ASangode Panchayat and ward no. 2 and 5 of Perumpadappu Panchayat were selected from Perumpadappu Block. The randomly selected survey area in Nilamboor block was ward no 5 and 7 of Edakkara panchayat and ward no. 1 and 4 of Nilamboor panchayat. The urban area selected from this district was Tirur Municipality.
Ernakulam District

The blocks randomly selected from the district were Vypeen, Vytila and Kothamangalam. Ward no, 5 and 9 of Edavanakkadu Panchayat and ward no. 1 and 13 of Nayarambalam Panchayat were randomly selected from Vypeen area for survey. Ward no 3 and 5 of Maradu Panchayat and and ward no. 2 and 7 of Kumbalam panchayat were selected from Vytila block. Ward no. 2 and 4 of Paingottur panchayat and ward no. 4 and 6 of Pindimana Panchyat constituted the randomly selected survey area in Kothamangalam block. The urban area selected was Corporation of Cochin.

Trivandrum District

The blocks randomly selected were Chirayinkeezhu, Medumangadu and Parassala. Ward no. 6 and 7 of Chirayinkeezhu Panchayat and ward no. 2 and 8 of Vakkom Panchayat were randomly selected. The randomly selected survey area in Nedumangadu block was ward no. 5 and 9 of Karakulam Panchayat and ward no. 1 and 7 of Aruvikkara Panchayat. Ward no. 8 and 9 of Karodu Panchayat and ward no. 4 and 6 of Kulathoor Panchayat constituted the survey area in Parassala block. The urban area chosen from the district was Corporation of Trivandrum.

(iii) Instruments of data collection

Interview guide, focus group note and structured interview schedule were the tools used for data collection.
(iv) Data processing and analysis

Data were processed and analysed by using SPSS package. Pearson’s correlation coefficient, student t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyse data.

1.5 Chapter Design

The study is divided into ten chapters. Chapter two gives a broad picture of the journey from feminism to women empowerment which makes the implicit aspects of empowerment very clear. Chapter three gives the socio-economic profile of the respondents. Chapter four gives awareness level of women in Kerala. Women’s attitude towards gender issues is presented in the fifth chapter. Skills attainment of women in Kerala is discussed in the sixth chapter. Chapter seven gives the extent of women’s access and control over resources. Chapter eight deals with the level of autonomy of women in Kerala. The nature of participation of women in public domain is discussed in chapter nine. Chapter ten presents summary and conclusions with an explanation of the factors leading to ‘gender paradox’.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Present study is an attempt to analyse the women empowerment in the context of gender paradox in Kerala. The study has gone deep into determining the individual level empowerment of Kerala women,
related to each of the components of women empowerment. St helps to identify the factors leading to the paradoxical situation of women in Kerala. The present study tests the significance of socio economic variables in determining empowerment of women in Kerala.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The reluctance on the part of some respondents in answering certain questions like domestic violence was a major limitation of the study. But it was overcome to a certain extent by organising focus group discussion through neighbourhood committees where the women dared to open up. In some of the houses the privacy of the participant was not ensured due to occasional interference from other family members.

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