CHAPTER 5

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: CONCEPTUAL AND MEASUREMENT ISSUES

5.1 Introduction

Advocacy on women's development is not a new phenomenon. From the celebrated classic book of Mary Wollstonecraft\(^1\) to Ester Boserup\(^2\), the writings on gender have laid much emphasis on women's contributions on economic development. Women's movements, that begun to generate constant debates and critics on women's well-being and agency around the world, introduced whole new concepts and paradigms in the gender literature, of which the concept of empowerment is fundamental. (Stein, 1997, Batiwala, 1994). Unfortunately the term 'empowerment', has now become more a 'buzzword' (Bose 2000) only because it has been driven by different contexts rather than by any known theory (Beteille, 1999). The contexts differ due to historical, social, political, economic, cultural and geographic factors the region and accordingly the concept of empowerment is being shaped in India and elsewhere.

In the development process, women's empowerment strategy has its own role in achieving enhanced concentration on women's well-being which could transform their status from being mere passive recipients of benefits to active agents of change, which in turn can alter the lives of both women and men (Sen, 2001; Mahmud, 2003). It is in this context, empowerment is taken as a development strategy, which in turn eliminates or reduces gender inequalities and female deprivation. Since the applicability of the


\(^2\) For the first time, this pioneering work brought the critical picture of women's engagement both in the (rural and urban) agrarian and industrial sector and their contribution for the economic development in different parts of the world. The author condemned the tendency of planners to see women as secondary earners and to concentrate on their roles as housewives. See for e, g; Boserup (1971) and for some remarks on women's social independence, see J S. Mill (1848). In his *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill speaks about the social independence of women for the welfare of laboring classes. See Mill, 'Principles of political Economy' first published in 1848 and reprinted in 1985 by Penguin Classics, London.
empowerment process still is in its infancy, one can debate on alternative methodologies to measure the well-being including the methods of UNDP-HDR, 1995.

To begin with, at the micro-level, gender sensitive indicators of well-being based on Amartya Sen’s ‘functionings and capabilities’ approach\(^3\) give a space to develop a framework and the measurement of well-being outcomes of empowerment (Saith et al 1999).

Poverty has many bearings with its implications on female disadvantages. During the 1990s there were many attempts to interlink both the gendered poverty and empowerment, mainly because the latter loaded with powers could successfully be used to eliminate the persistent gender inequalities. This, however, is reflected in various development approaches of international agencies such as the World Bank and the UNDP. Such means of power, which are discussed in various writings of Amartya Sen, are nothing but the human capabilities and functionings—or in brief, reflect on what people can actually do and be (Dreze and Sen, 1989:42).

The capabilities approach can also be contrasted with that of basic-needs and physical quality of life approaches advocated by M D. Morris. He assessed and integrating three indicators—infant mortality, life expectancy at age one, and basic literacy—into the composite Physical quality of Life Index (PQLI), whereas the concept of human development advocated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1990) focuses on the three distinct aspects of life namely, life expectancy, per capita income, and literacy/education. UNDP HDR 1995, for the first time, uses the gender sensitive indicators for measuring the state of women’s empowerment (UNDP HDR, 1995).

To take forward the discussion, the chapter is organised into four different sections. In the second section, the meaning and conceptual issues of empowerment are looked into.

---

\(^3\) The concept is heavily drawn on the writings of Amartya Sen on human capabilities and functionings. For detailed discussion and rich references cited there, see Sen, 1995, 1999, and 2001 among other contributions. See also Sudhir Anand 1994, Saith et al 1999, and Razvi 1999.
A broad literature review explores the meaning and conceptual issues of empowerment with a special focus on ways and means of measuring empowerment. It also considers the identification of various gender sensitive indicators, particularly focusing on the important components of empowerment viz., resources, women’s agency, and achievements or well-being outcomes. The third section goes on describing the understanding of the functionings approach, which uses three broad indicators: being healthy, being nourished and being educated. It further focuses briefly on the composite assessment of well-being proposed in the UNDP methods of Gender development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The fourth section ends up with the concluding remarks on the importance and usefulness of micro level indicators of well-being.

5.2 Emergence of the Concept

In varying contexts of socio-economic, political and cultural diversities, how to introduce a meaningful concept of empowerment? One can make a good beginning if we understand the nature and usage of the term ‘power’. The emergence of empowerment as a drive emerged all over the world, partly due to women’s movements. Different schools of thought (Townsend et al. 1999) on empowerment emerged initially out of experiences of working with women’s groups in America and Europe and in South Asian countries.

During the 1970s, the writings of Paulo Freire, on the Concientisation approach, advocating the liberation of poor through raising awareness (Karlekar, 2004) influenced the two original schools of thought. The first school namely American Community Psychologists (hereafter CP for short), mainly consists of the authors such as M A Zimmerman, Paulo Freire, Julian Rappaport among others, whereas the second school

---

4 Janet Townsend brings about the two important schools of thought on ‘empowerment’ writings. One is the Community Psychologists (PC) School from United States, which includes the authors such as Zimmerman M A, Paulo Freire, Julian Rappaport and Jane Stein among others. The second school is based on the writings of Srilatha Batliwala, Nails Kabeer and others (or Tapalehui). One sharp difference between these two groups lies in the recommended levels of analysis. If the CP school strongly believes in psychological empowerment of individual at the levels of the organisation and the community, the latter advocates the personal empowerment at the familial and collective levels. For a clearer but a brief observation see the appendix by Janet Townsend and for the detailed look-see chapters two and eight in Townsend et al (1999).
includes the feminist thinkers such as Batliwala (1994), Kabeer (1999), among others. The CP school authors see empowerment process as humanising the society by increasing inclusion and equality. Both the schools display a sharp technical difference between their approaches. For instance, if the American Psychologists propose for the psychological empowerment of individual at the organisation and community level, the writers at Tapalehui advocate the personal empowerment at the familial and collective levels. (Townsend et al, 1999).

The historical emergence of empowerment concept goes back to the thoughts of Paulo Freire’s theory of *Concientisation*, which were also widely adopted by the proponents of feminist “popular education” in Latin America. The defined goals of the latter, as Srilatha Batliwala puts it were:

...To unambiguously take the standpoint of women; (and) ...demonstrate to women and men how gender is constructed socially, ...and ...can be changed...[to show] through the lived experience of the participants, how women and men are gendered through class, race, religion, culture etc;

...To build collective and alternative visions for gender relations...and deepen collective analysis of the context and the position of the women ... locally, nationally, regionally and globally...To develop analytical tools ...to evaluate the effects of certain development strategies for the promotion of women's strategic interests...To help women to develop the skills to assert themselves... and to challenge oppressive behavior... which can pressurize for change (Batliwala 1994: 128).

By 1980, according to the feminist critics, Freire’s strategies completely failed to make expected changes to the lives of poor women. Another important approach is the writings of Molyneux, which shed some thoughts on women’s “practical” and “strategic” interests. Here the practical needs according to the author are: food, health, water, fuel, childcare, education, improved technology and so forth. To fulfill these needs, he gave some suggestions...
... Analysis of women's subordination and to bring some alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those exist... such as the abolition of sexual division of labor, to alleviate the burden of domestic labor and child care... freedom of choice over child bearing ... and male violence and control over women.

It is from these ideas the notion of empowerment emerged and was more clearly articulated in 1984 by DAWN (1994: 129) activists from Bangalore, in south India:

To put it more broadly in the words of Jane Stein, a CP school thinker, "...the roots of empowerment lie in the multifaceted efforts of many of those who experienced the domination to achieve self determination and free themselves from external control... Gandhi’s Satyagraha movement in India, ... Mao Tse-tung, uniting China...Black Africans’ struggle for freedom from the British, the Spanish, the Germans, the French, the Portuguese and the Afrikaners...these strategies – non-violence, the use of group –process to increase political consciousness and ethnic or racial pride directly affected the civil right movements in the USA and can be seen as precursors of the women’s empowerment movement" (Stein 1997: 54)

The roots of emergence of empowerment as a development strategy (movement) to affect changes were influenced by the powerful thoughts and ideas of several leaders of the world, which incidentally also influenced by the civil rights movements in the USA and the latter is the main precursor for the empowerment movements.

5.3 Meaning of Empowerment

As an NGO activist Srilatha Batliwala puts it: 'I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so it gives a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means'. (Cited in Kabeer, 1999:436). Sociologist Andre Beteille says, “The idea of empowerment may be invoked in virtually any context: in speaking about human rights, about basic needs, about economic security, about capacity building, about skill formation or about the conditions of dignified social existence (Beteille 1999: 590). The process of empowerment, as we discussed earlier ought to address the “conditions” of the women in the society, in which they live, which could affect their own “position”. In the context of increasing intra-household gender
inequalities, and female deprivation at all strata of life, we will attempt to explore a more suitable, (workable) meaning and definition of the term empowerment.

The most indispensable component of empowerment is the term power. Power has widely been defined as one’s capacity to influence or control others (Singh Roy, 1995). According to Srilatha Batliwala power is defined as control over material, intellectual resources, and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human, or financial, such as land, water, forests, people’s bodies and labor, money, and access to money. Intellectual resources include Knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate, sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior – virtually determining how people perceive and function within given socio-economic and political environments (Batliwala, 1994).

In developing countries, women are living in conditions of acute poverty; increased male dominance; lack of knowledge, basic education, healthcare, vulnerability; lack of control over financial or other forms of resources such as a piece of land (Agarwal 1994), skilled labour etc; lack of control over their own body and sexuality; and their silent suffering against the patriarchal system of living. Many of these are – not in their control; hence the decisions taken by others would greatly affect their lives every day. In this respect, Srilatha Batliwala puts as ‘the process of challenging existing power relations, and gaining control over the resources of power’, may be termed as 'empowerment'. Whereas Naila Kabeer says ‘my understanding of the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered in the sense in which I am using the word, because they were never disempowered in the first place’ (Kabeer, 1999:436-437). By this, what Kabeer is likely to mean is that it is the marginalised poor, and disadvantaged sections of the society in general, and women in particular, who are already in the state of (vulnerability and destitution). By disempowerment, we mean
lack of abilities to make *choices*. When the powerless are given such powers by a strategic process, it can be termed as empowerment.

Bina Agarwal (1994) who advocates women’s rights to land assets and property (as resources) for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment, defines empowerment in the context of women’s “position” relative to men and particularly with women’s ability to challenge male oppression within home and in the society, as a *process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged (‘powerless’) individuals or groups to challenge and change (in their favour) existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, social and political positions*. Here, Agarwal argues that land rights would enhance women’s ‘freedom to achieve’ or (capability to function) in non-economic spheres as well.

Empowerment is a process that challenges the existing power relations. As Sharma (cited in Batliwala, 1994) writes, the term empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilisation that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognise the systematic forces that oppress them, but act to change existing power relationships. Empowerment, therefore, is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalise women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context.

In the present context, where women’s status is worsening; where millions of women are missing from our population (Dreze and Sen, 1995), where intra-household gender inequalities (Sen, 2001) in food distribution and intake persist; control over resources is lacking (Agarwal, 1994); male dominance in decision making in the families and in the society prevails, and lack of control over their sexuality and mobility and their reproductive rights including having their own say on how many children to bear (Batliwala, 1994) are dominant; the conditions of acute poverty and destitution continues (Das Gupta, 1995); and where over burden of unpaid domestic work is still prevailing, and
the contexts where women’s positions as second class citizens and their roles as housewives (Boserup Ester 1971) are still dominant, we have a complex case of disempowerment. In such contexts, women’s *empowerment* may be defined as:

Women’s empowerment is a process that gives the power to the powerless (disadvantaged and marginalized) women (individuals or groups) by which they can gain the abilities to exercise choices or to control resources, which could help them to challenge and change (in their favour) existing power relationships that would place them under subordination, which, in turn could enhance their capability to function and hence, to achieve their own well-being and well being of their family and groups.

5.4 Conceptualising Empowerment

Until now, we have discussed the meaning of women’s empowerment with reference to prevailing development literature. Naila Kabeer (1999) puts it as “a wide gap separates the processual understanding of empowerment from the more instrumentalist forms of advocacy which have required the measurement and quantification of empowerment”.

Naila Kabeer who comes from Bangladesh, with a wider experience of working with the NGOs, discusses the valuable insights with regard to the conceptual and measurement issues of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). It would be useful to reproduce her expression of empowerment, which reads as ‘notion of empowerment is about change, it refers to the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them’. She also identifies three important prerequisites of the ability to exercise the choice as:

1. Resources (*Preconditions*)
2. Agency (*Process*)
3. Achievements (*Outcomes*)
Resources: not only material resources but also the various resources, which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice.

**Agency:** The ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Agency or ‘power from within’, is operationalised as ‘decision-making’ process in any given context.

The author tries to link up the ‘ability to make choice’ with that of Amartya Sen’s “functionings and Capabilities” approach. She writes “Resources and agency together constitute what Sen (cited in Kabeer, 1999) refers to as capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of ‘being and doing’.

**Nature of the Choice:** Since the ability to exercise choice is the ultimate manifestation of empowerment, we are more concerned with the prevailing inequalities and opportunities in making choices by people rather than in the differences in the choices they make. For the measurement purposes, we have to focus on certain universally valued basic functionings of women’s survival strategies and well being. For instance, proper nourishment, good health and shelter are treated as very basic needs. This is the strategy
suggested by Sen (1999). There may be some shortcomings confronted with inequalities in exercising choices. The methods of measuring such gender inequalities adopted in UNDP's human development Index (HDI) and Gender empowerment Measure (GEM) are more relevant to the present context. Another important but critical character of choice is that women's acceptance of being subordinated to their husbands and in-laws, which can have adverse implications on their well being and well being of other female family members. (Kabeer, 1999).

**Achievements:** Seen in terms of human well-being with the selected indicators.

5.5. Measurement Of Women's Empowerment

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

5.5.1 Measurement of Resources:

The dimension of resources and their power sharing often dictates the status of women. Many studies (Boserup, 1971; Agarwal 1994; and Panda and Agarwal, 2005) have showed that the entitlements on resources to women will enhance their ability to make choices. Entitlement enables access. Such 'access' to resources, for instance, land inheritance, as a resource of power can help women to exercise greater degree of autonomy, where they enjoy some rights over decisions on land management (Agarwal, 1994) However, there are some doubts while dealing with the resources that are entitled to women. How resources can be defined so that it could spell out the potential for human agency? How to define 'access', 'control' and 'decision making'?

UNDP methodology to assess Human Development Index (HDI) has come up with three broad indicators such as life expectancy to measure longevity, Educational attainment to represent knowledge; and an appropriately adjusted real GDP per capita to serve as a surrogate for command over resources (Shiva Kumar, 1996, Seeta Prabhu et al, 1996).
Many authors used several other non-conventional indicators to assess human well being (see Rustagi 2000, 2004:293; see also Indira Hirway et al 1996; Sonpar and Kapur 2001; Vishwanathan, 2001 among others). For operational reasons, we may treat 'resources' as 'human, material and intangible sources of power (Kabeer, 1999) that can determine the ability to exercise human choices'. This notion is reflected in the definitions of 'power' aired by several authors (see Batliwala, 1994; Batliwala et al., 1998 and Kabeer, 1999).

When it comes to gender equality and role in decision-making, both 'access' and 'control' are important. To define access, Batliwala et al (1998) opined that in the context of material, human and intangible resources, the term 'access' refers to the opportunity available to use the resource'. Control over certain resources can act as a bargaining power to determine the use of that resource. 'Control' means, they observe, 'an acknowledged and socially sanctioned equal share in decision making, in both the private and public spheres' (Batliwala et al 1998:18).

5.5.2. Measurement of 'agency'

In the literature on empowerment, 'agency' is often attached to the decision making process in both the private and public arenas. Women's agency plays very vital role in enhancing capabilities to affect their living. Sen has profound observations here. He writes...

...Focusing on women's agency may be precisely the role that such an agency can play in removing the inequalities that depress the well being of women. Empirical work in recent years has brought out very clearly how the relative respect and regard for women's well being is strongly influenced by such variables as women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership rights and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions within and outside the family. ...These different aspects may at first sight appear to be rather diverse and disparate. But what they all have in common is their positive contribution in adding force to women's voice and agency—through independence and empowerment (Sen, 1999: 191).
As an agent of social change women's well being is closely connected to capabilities, which could influence the well-being of the family members, particularly of children and also of the elderly and adult members (Mahmud, 2003). As the development discourses have emerged with the goals of women’s well being, (on par with men) their agency has been given greater prominence with the notions of well-being.

5.5.3. Measurement of Achievements: Functionings Approach

Pure income related approaches to the measurement of poverty led to think on other alternative approaches of measures. In this respect, the alternative approaches developed either by Morris (Morris, 1979, cited in Razavi, 1999; Batliwala, 1994, and Saith et al, 1999), or by Sen (1985a) can be viewed as the first set of alternative responses to income based measurements of well-being. For the purposes of gender inequalities, the same can be made more specific. (Razavi, 1999). A number of efforts have been made by feminist thinkers to explore persisting gender inequalities and female disadvantages including that on ‘missing females’ (Mari Bhat, 2002) and ‘missing girls’ (Premi, 2001). Amartya Sen’s notion of ‘functionings and achievements’ (see Saith et al., 1999; Mahmud, 2003, and Razavi, 1999) could prove to be better approaches to assess the achievements or the well being of the women.

Assessment of well-being

An important reason behind adopting the framework of Sen’s pioneering contribution of ‘functionings’ is directly based on the relationship between the basic ‘functionings’ and the respective achievements. It has to be distinguished from the commodities, which are used to achieve those functionings (Sen, 1985a: 7). The framework examines three basic functionings namely: being healthy, being nourished and being educated.

Being Healthy

The notion of health ranges from good health to morbidity due to acute ill health. (Saith et al 1999) have worked on Sen’s basic functionings indices: being healthy, being nourished and being educated and their contextual relevance to the developing countries.
What the authors' findings say is that apart from these basic functioning indicators, indices such as anthropometric measures are potentially useful and makes much more demands on micro level research. Under different categories of basic functionings, the authors have recommended several social indicators to assess the achievements of respective functioning. For instance, other sub indicators that are shown through the chart 2 explain the functioning of 'being healthy'.

Chart 5.2 Indicators of 'being healthy'

Mortality Indicators

Differential Mortality Rates

These gender sensitive indicators of health reveal different aspects of demographic situations of people in which they are living. The sex differential in mortality rates itself is a direct evidence of female disadvantages in terms of gender treatments; health care facilities and neglect of girl child. decline in sex ratio, i.e., the ratio of female to male population (henceforth, FMR for short) is another good indicator of health, as a direct evidence of this fact. There is also much evidence in India that the phenomenon of declining sex ratios are due to the relative neglect of health and well-being of women.
(particularly young girls including female infants), leading to survival disadvantages of women vis-à-vis men over long periods (Dreze and Sen, 1995: 141). The concept of ‘missing women’ (even also ‘missing girls’) conveys that due to conditions of women’s adversity in mortality and due to female disadvantages in well-being compared to males, significant differential mortality rates are observable. In the context of intra household comparison, the FMR could be used for all such micro level researches to explain the persisting gender inequalities.

The age specific death rates are another set of health related indicators, which are calculated for groups of five years; especially the groups of 0-4, and 5-9 have greater impact on overall FMR. These indicators could prove reliable, since they depict a picture of poorer antenatal care, unsatisfactory health delivery system (Agnihotri, 1997 cited by Saith et al., 1999) and increased availability and use of gender determination of foetuses (Sen, 2001).

Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR)

MMR is another important indicator that can indirectly reveal the extent of female deprivation and sex inequality in our societies. Maternal mortalities occur due to lack of care during pregnancy and delivery as well as long history of neglect with under nourishment leading to poor physical growth. Lack of investment in pregnancy related health facilities, especially in rural areas and prevalence of acute poverty may lead to high rates of MMR. Such sex inequality conditions may not give an exact account of disadvantages for women as against males, but, of course, enable to understand female deprivation and sex bias.

Life expectancy at birth

Life expectancy reflects the mean years of time an individual is expected to live if prevailing mortality conditions persist throughout the person’s life. Life expectancy at birth, calculated for males and females, is widely used to measure differentials in overall well-being. But this index is criticised as the higher female mortality in India up to the age of 35 is disguised by the estimated female life expectancy at birth (Chatterjee, 1990, cited
by Saith et al., 1999). Therefore, overall female life expectancy is the best indicator of development, and also useful in its usage to capture gender differences in well-being and hides age specific differentials in mortality.

*Morbidity indicators*

Morbidity indicators may be grouped into two categories. First, comprising the conditions that are sex specific such as reproductive disorders. But it suffers from the same constraints as the MMR. The second group contains the conditions that are applicable to both the sexes. Often the conditions may be more specific to either sex. For instance, (a) some physical disorders of working women in factories, (b) gendered environments, as for example, in rural Karnataka, where the males work in the open air while females work around the ‘dark, smoke filled kitchen’ this makes the exposition to infection gender specific (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987, cited by Saith et al 1999), or (c) differentials in medical care and nutrition.

*Being Nourished*

Indicators under this heading are categorised under two headings: Indicators of intake and indicators of outcome.

- **Indicators of Intake:**
  Consumption of the sources of macro-nutrients (Carbohydrates, proteins and fats) and micro nutrients (vitamins and minerals) can be considered as an intake indicator. Since the quantity of food consumed is measurable directly this reflects a commodity-based approach. Yet, in this approach, there are many limitations associated with it such as:

  - Collecting data on estimated food intake is biased and time consuming,
  - Estimation of workload of women (while assessing gender differentials in nutrition) could result in an underestimation of any existing female disadvantage. (Saith et al 1999).
**Indicators of outcome:**

Here, apart from other methods, the anthropometric measurements are more popular.

The anthropometric approach rests on the presumption that people's appearance reflects their nutrition (and health) status, e.g. if their body intake and expenditure balance at too low a level, this will show in their body constitution. Instead of energy intake nor the expenditure, the body structure and constitution would suffice. The anthropometric approach is therefore more direct and simple and less reliant on data collection than the dietary approach (Svedberge, 1991, cited in Saith et al., 1999). On the other hand, Anuradha Khati Rajivan (1996) observes that 'measures based on anthropometric data should ideally serve as indicators of the physical condition of individuals – male and female – and allow us to draw inferences about inequalities in their functioning capabilities'.

The indicators of anthropometric approach however, suffer from certain drawbacks. Many studies show the provenance excessive female mortality, but not reflected in anthropometric indicators (Saith et al., 1999).

**Being Educated**

A vast literature from micro level research is available on the essence of formal education for the day-to-day living of people, next, on the causes of low overall literacy and prevailing gender inequalities in this functioning. But these micro-level studies often do not investigate the issues of gender sensitivity of differential indicators of education (Saith et al, 1999). Following a study by of Saith et al (1999), we present these indicators of education.

Indicators of education are broadly divided into two groups, indicators of access or indicators of participation and indicators of content and purposes. This can be seen through the flow chart below.
Indicators of Access:

These indicators represent the accessibility of education from basic literacy up to tertiary education and they can display the inequalities in terms of access. Indicators of access are subdivided into stock and flow variables.

Stock variables: These give information about the older population. 'Adult literacy' refers to persons (15 years and above) who can understand read and write. Literacy rates have been criticised on several grounds, particularly on the definition they bear. The 'mean years of schooling (average number of years of schooling received per person aged twenty-five and over) overcomes this problem. These two variables reflect past investments and accessibility to education.

Flow variables: These include gross enrolment, net enrolment and dropout ratios at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is the total enrolment in any level of education (regardless of age), divided by the population of the age group. The net enrolment ratio refers to enrolment with respect to the official age group for that level.
Indicators of content and purposes: In most of the South Asia and sub-Saharan African countries, gender differentials in primary and secondary levels are in favour of males and widen at tertiary level. Such gender differences have been studied in both the poor and rich countries subjected to quantification by UNESCO, which has developed the Gender Segregation Index. These indices are based on macro level studies.

5.6. Concluding Remarks

An attempt is made here to discuss the term 'empowerment'; it's conceptualisation and the measurement issues particularly proposing Amartya Sen's 'functionings and capabilities' approach to measure basics of well-being functionings. The literature shows that the emancipation and victimization of women with respect to their labour and status within the house and in the society have led to the emergence women's movements for recognizing their status, dignity and quality of life. Thus emerged the concept of empowerment. The kind of empowerment we discussed here is aimed at the process of social change, which gives power to the powerless, particularly poor women. In the measurement of well-being, three basic functionings viz; being healthy', 'being nourished' and 'being educated' are used to develop with respect to certain composite indices. We also discussed the relevance of UNDP composite indices of GDI and GEM as the valid measures of well-being.

The main purpose of 'functionings' approach is its validity and reflectivity in the measurement of human well being as we have seen in the UNDP methodologies. There is however, a criticism that indicators of single functioning may give false impression of equality in one, while there is inequality in other functionings. In such situations, efforts to develop alternative methods of assessing quality of life as per the demands of different contexts could prove most useful in poor countries. This holds true more so in case of micro level researches, with composite indices the qualitative assessment of persisting gender inequalities and deprivation could help us to understand the different dimensions of well-being. The non-conventional indicators for GDI and GEM are the most well come
tools to assess female disadvantages relative to that of men. Since the UNDP indices do not capture the *micro-level* realities of gender deprivations, the former efforts hold true in different contexts of diverse societies and cultures. Efforts on the qualitative explorations at the micro level researches could be of more relevance to assess the well-being in more meaningful ways. Despite all these constraints, the composite indices of UNDP may still prove the first cut of tools, measuring human functionings and capabilities provide other estimates of gender well being, inequalities and deprivations are also developed to capture the micro-level realities.