CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Women suffer discrimination in the society which is an age old problem. In presence of patriarchy, gender inequality emerged from and within the system. In this society, women were commonly constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society creating separate codes of conduct for women and men (Kabeer, 2000). Consequently, societal differences became prominent among women and men. Extent of this difference varies; even across time along with varying structure of the society with respect to culture, caste, ethnicity, and class. The society even in this 21st century could not get rid of these characteristics. Being treated as a deprived section, women are still denied from power indicating that they are relatively less entitled to make strategic choices.

But from development perspective, women’s role was never denied, as they are also a part of the society. This was mainly one of the reasons why, mainstreaming of women is recommended by various scholars to entitle them the equal share of development process. As a means; empowerment of women is suggested which signifies the expansion of freedom of choice and action (Mosedale, 2003). It is assumed that empowerment generates self confidence among women not only for making important decisions for their life but also to carry out them. In this connection, it is to mention that empowering women is not an easy task because this particular term involves multidimensionality and is latent in nature. Though proxy variables
are used to capture empowerment, but complexity arises in its measurement because women cannot be treated as one group or a category like poor, backward castes etc. rather they are a crosscutting category of individuals that overlaps with all those socially excluded groups (Malhotra, 2003).

It is argued that disempowerment of women is generated from complex relations within the household and family, which makes assessing women empowerment much difficult. Besides, empowerment can be treated as a process on the one hand and agency on the other hand. It is considered as a process because most often the result of the effort to empower women is not always achieved in the same period; rather it is gained at different periods. Commonly, empowerment of women depends on the components like ‘resources’ and ‘agency’, where ‘resources’ are treated as the ‘enabling factors’ (Kishor, 2000a) and ‘agency’ as the ability to formulate strategic choices, to control resources and to take decisions that affect important life outcomes. Agency is considered as a most important component of empowerment and it works both at macro and micro levels. At the aggregate level, agency acts for ‘social inclusion’, whereas, at micro level, it acts to gain ‘self-efficacy’ that can change women’s lives. But agency alone cannot empower women. The reason is, in absence of opportunity to exercise and promote agency through intervention of government and others at aggregate level, agency failed to earn empowerment for women. In short, as a necessary condition, women should be economically, socially and politically empowered and as a sufficient condition women’s individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests is required.
In various phases of life one has to make several choices, but all of those cannot be transformed into desired actions. Establishment of choice depends on the extent of power (agency) one possesses. Subsequently, depending on the ability to establish choices, inequality is generated among various groups in the society. In order to deal with the issue of empowerment efficiently, the concept of power must be made clear. Traditionally power is considered as zero sum game i.e. one person’s gain in power implies another’s loss in power. But later it is realized that this does not hold true always and leads to development of new concept of power as power within, power to and power with. Where power within signifies the assets like self esteem and self confidence of an individual, power to refers to productive or generative power which creates new possibilities and action without domination (Rowlands, 1997). Power with refers to collective action indicating that more can be achieved by a group working together rather than by individuals alone (Mosdale, 2003). In this connection Michel Foucault argued that power is considered to circulate and to be exercised rather than possessed (Deveaux, 1996). Collins proposes a model of power which consists of four domains namely structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal. Structural domain of power refers to the social organisations which are organized to reproduce women’s subordination over time. In the disciplinary domain power relations are managed through bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance. Hegemonic domain of power deals with ideology, culture and consciousness and also involves women in supporting own subordination. The interpersonal domain of power “functions through routinized day-to-day practices of how people treat one
another…..such practices are systematic, recurrent and so familiar that they often go unnoticed” (Collins, 2000, 281).

Above mentioned gender inequality also exists in the patriarchal Indian society. Consequently, like many other societies around the world, women’s physical well-being, health, security and bodily integrity are often seemed to be beyond their own control in India. Also, women have less control over financial matters and health care decisions either for themselves or for their children. Being marginalized, women lose their self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, this gender inequality is recognized as a major issue after the publication of the report of the ‘Committee on the Status of Women in India’ in 1974. Since then government and non-government organizations are working tirelessly to eradicate gender inequality from the Indian society through empowering women. Even, several constitutional amendments are incorporated in favour of women. The principle of gender equality is prescribed in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt positive measures in favour of women to reduce discrimination against them. As a measure of empowerment national policy makers formulated many policies in favour of female welfare. Following United Nations (UN), here, in India, the policy approaches also changes from welfare to participatory one. For example, before seventh plan all the policies and programmes were oriented to welfare of women, but Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) and onwards have focused on ‘Human Development' with special reference to women development where they were
not only considered as beneficiary but their active participation was emphasized in order to empower them. Approach of the Eighth Plan marked a further shift from ‘development’ to ‘empowerment’ of women. Even, national level organization like “National Commission for Women (1992)” was set up to protect and promote the interests of women in India. The Commission continued to pursue its mandated activities like safeguarding women’s rights through legal awareness programmes. It looks into the individual complaints/pre-litigations, sexual harassment of women at workplace; organizing ‘Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats’ with the help of local NGOs and Legal Aid Boards; and review of the existing legislations and preparation of new Bills relating to Prevention of Inter-Country trafficking in the SAARC Region, framing of Rules under Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 (Report of the Steering Committee on Empowerment of Women and Development of Children for the Tenth Five Year Plan, 2002-07).

But the fact is that despite earnest efforts from the government and non-government organizations, there is a long way still to go to achieve targeted results. Along with United Nations, Indian Government also had the objective to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG) within 2015. Third MDG targets to empower women, but at the verge of MDG, India lags well behind the target rate. Many scholars assumed that not only social but economic factors are also responsible for this lag in achievement. In other words, many believed that lack of financial power and access to property of the female may be the root cause of denied power. This demands a minute enquiry to locate the exact causes of failure/successes that affect the achieved level of empowerment.
After the initiation of economic reform, Indian economy witnessed increase in women employment (23 to 26 percent during 1991 to 2001, Census of India, 2001), which is further confirmed by NSS 68th Round Employment data where average yearly urban female employment increases by 2.50 between 2004-05 to 2011-12. Gender development index (GDI) has also increased from 0.560 to 0.600 during 2001 to 2005 (Human Development Report). In the context of new changed situation it is important to know the effect of these positive changes on women empowerment. It is therefore, necessary to measure the achievement level of empowerment to have an idea whether there is any lag between targeted and the achieved level, also to identify the causes of failure/successes both at macro and micro levels (if any gap exists), and to locate the causality between women empowerment and its explanatory factors. These are the main research questions handled in this study. The results may facilitate to formulate efficient policies to eradicate gender inequality and empower women.

**Organization of the present study** is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introductory Discussion.
- Chapter 2: The Research Problem and Objective of the Study.
- Chapter 3: Literature Review
- Chapter 4: Gender Analysis of Empowerment
- Chapter 5: Data and Methodology
- Chapter 6: Women Empowerment Index: Findings and Analysis
- Chapter 7: Mapping of Women Empowerment in India
- Chapter 8: Regression Analysis: Identification of Causal Factors
- Chapter 9: Conclusion.