CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

2.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Empowerment has always been a part of the engendered macro policy of a country. This has always been seen in the existing literature as a policy affecting the quality of lives of women in general. But whether these empowerment policies allow women to transform desired choices into actions need to be analyzed. The present research focuses on this particular question: how far gender empowerment has meant ability to take decisions by women in the society.

Everyone has to make several choices throughout his/her life of which some, not all, are established. Ability to establish choice depends on the extent of power i.e. more power creates more capacity to establish choices. Depending on the ability to establish choices, inequality is generated among various groups in the society. In general, women are treated as weaker section of the society; consequently from the power point of view they are less able to establish their choices.

In India, gender relations are determined by the complex interplay of power relations based on class, caste, ethnicity and religion (Patel, 2006). Thus, in presence of patriarchy, gender inequality is observed in the Indian
society and this is an age-old problem. Yet, this inequality has drawn attention after the publication of the report ‘Committee on the status of women in India’ in 1974. Since then the national policy makers have been formulating various welfare policies for women. With time the approaches of contemporary pro-women policies have shifted from welfare to development to participatory one.

Initially, all the welfare policies were formulated following ‘Women in Development model (WID)’ treating women simply as the beneficiaries. However, inappropriateness of these WID policies to achieve the goal, policy orientation shifted from WID to ‘Women and Development model (WAD)’ approach by incorporating women in the development work as active clients. Pro-WAD approaches of the state, NGOs and women’s groups were assumed to empower women against the forces of patriarchal class society. But from 8th plan onwards the policy approaches have been further changed from WAD to a new approach based on actual participation. This new approach is called as the ‘Gender and Development model (GAD)’. The objective of GAD is to empower the weak because gender is socially constructed and gender relations are the power relations and there exists intra-household inequalities resulting in unequal distribution of power, control over resources and decision-making, dependence rather than self-reliance and unfair, unequal distribution of work and food (Kapur Mehta, 1996).

Despite earnest efforts of Government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), at the verge of fulfillment of MDG goals (2015) it is
observed that the achievement level of women empowerment remains well behind the third MDG goal (to empower women). Not only social but also economic factors are responsible for this lag. This demands a minute enquiry to locate the exact causes of failures/successes that affect the achieved level of empowerment. After the initiation of economic reform, Indian economy is going through various changes, such as faster GDP growth rate, increase in women employment etc. In the light of new changed situation it is necessary to know the effect of these positive changes on women empowerment. It is therefore necessary to measure the achievement level of empowerment, to identify the causes of failure/successes both at macro and micro levels and find causality between women empowerment and its explanatory factors, which are the main research questions handled in this study. The results may facilitate to formulate efficient policies for eradicating gender inequality and empower women. In this context, *empowerment* is defined as *the processes of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired action and outcome* (World Bank Report, 2000-01).

Based on the above discussion, *research problems* in Indian context can be summarized as:

(a) To what extent Indian women can exert their decisions at home and outside.

(b) What are the socio-economic and political factors that influence the level of women empowerment.
2.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

India is the second most populous country in the world consisting of population with various religions, languages, socio-economic characteristics. Thus, in presence of patriarchal society, interpersonal relationship including gender relationships is influenced by cultural values and religious beliefs, which creates separate social construction for men and women which is exhibited through different choice behaviour of men and women with respect to the daily life activities. These social codes of conducts, which rule Indian society, were administered by Manu (Manu Smriti) during later Vedic period (between 200-400 C.E). Although critiqued, still they are in vogue in the Indian society. Manu’s law regarding women dictates that women are placed as inferior to men and are assigned to serve men both in the society and the family. Their main duty is to care and carry on the familial affairs and reproduce future generation to carry over family tradition. They are not allowed to live independently; they should live under the command of their father in childhood, husband in young age and son in old age. Though society has undergone a sea change, status of women still remains in question. Hence, in this context it is essential to enquire whether there has been any change in their status, and if yes, how far this achieved change in status could uplift their position in the society. Also it is necessary to identify the factors, either social, or economic or both, that influence the level of achievement of empowerment by women. Identification of the constraining factors may help to formulate the policies appropriately to raise
the level of empowerment for women at a desired level. In this context, objectives of the present study endeavour to

(a) Estimate the achievement level of women empowerment in India;

(b) Study its variation over population groups (homogeneous with respect to certain characteristics);

(c) Identify the factors causing variation between different population groups and

(d) Provide a state wise mapping of women empowerment in India.