Chapter-III
Women Empowerment: Operational and Measurement Issues

3.1 Introduction
The importance of participation of women in all developmental programmes in different levels is recognised. Their decision making capabilities to take right decisions for themselves is the basis of this desired participation. The use of the term 'women empowerment' is quite recent - a term which has become popular since Cairo and other women conferences. Among feminists in the 1970s, 'emancipation' came to be regarded as too large and ambitious agenda, while empowerment was seen as more practical and enabling immediate actions. Over the past decades the term has been working overtime. It has become a natural word in development populism and is widely used in feminism, public interest campaigning, social movements and management. Empowerment, then, is used in both political and non-political contexts, the common denominator is that in simple terms it refers to individual skills development.

The ‘empowerment approach’ was clearly articulated firstly in 1985 by Development Alternatives with Women for New Era (DAWN) which is a transnational alternative policy group and network of feminist scholars, researchers and activists from the Global South, who produce and disseminate analyses, proposals, and information tools oriented towards the enhancement of economic and gender justice and ecological sustainability and was launched publicly at the 1985 World Conference on Women at Nairobi.

3.2 Understanding the Process of Women Empowerment
Literally if one dissects the term 'Empowerment', we will get a root word 'power' prefixed by 'Em'. Power means to have force to act and may be even to make others less powered act. Hence, when somebody says ‘empowerment’, he/she should essentially imply somebody getting powered. This would then imply that this somebody did not possess power before being empowered. Since in the study's context we are interested in women's empowerment particularly, their empowerment should directly imply that this section of
the human society is considered powerless and at a disadvantageous position.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it has meant ‘to invest legally or formally with power or authority; to authorize, license or to impart or bestow powers or authority, to enable or to permit’.

World Bank as well as several other researchers and authors appear to have consensus on women's empowerment being both a desired product and a process. World Bank also recognizes and documents this essential duality of the term. The promotion of women's empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument: that social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing, and that women's empowerment is a means to other ends. A report by the World Bank (2001), identifies gender equality both as a development objective in itself, and as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty, and promote better governance.

The various definitions fall in a wide range of spectrum from defining women empowerment as an "individual process of taking control of one's life and situations" to considering it as a "political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people".

To gain a much better clarity of the concept of women empowerment, as adapted in the national projects and organizations as well as propounded by international organizations like World Bank, UNDP, focus on the root of empowerment word i.e., 'Power'.

The empowerment in its simplest form means manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is both a process of and the result of the process. It is the transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources.

The way the empowerment of women has been discussed within development studies and has presented some suggestions as to how it might be assessed. Four aspects of women empowerment generally accepted in the literature on this issue. Firstly its relevant to speak of empowering women because, as a group, they are disempowered relative to men. Secondly, empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party like the developmental
agencies; rather women themselves who would become empowered must claim it. Development agencies can only facilitate women empowering themselves by attempting to create conditions favourable to empowerment but they cannot make it happen. Thirdly, definitions of empowerment usually include a sense of people making decisions on matters, which are important in their lives, and being able to carry them out. Reflection, analysis and action are involved in this process, which may happen on an individual or a collective level. Finally empowerment is an on-going process rather than a product. There is no final goal. One does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense. People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time.

Five key uses of the term empowerment in development studies, empowerment as participation, empowerment as democratization, empowerment as capacity building, empowerment through economic improvement and empowerment and the individual. The World Bank, for example, "began to recognize several stages of participation: information sharing, consultation, collaboration and finally, empowerment". Oxfam identifies empowerment as "essentially concerned with analyzing and addressing the dynamics of oppression" and "explicitly rejects the notion that 'participation' in development in donor-funded projects is a sign of 'empowerment'”.

The term 'empowerment' - contains the word 'power'. Understanding of the term 'empowerment' starts from interpretation of power itself. Power is defined as the degree of control over material, human and intellectual resources exercised by different sections of society. Thus, the main focus is on control of resources; there are four broad categories: physical resources like land, water, forests; human resources like people, their bodies, their labour and skills; intellectual resources like knowledge, information, ideas; and financial resources like money, finance and access to money. It is identified that the basic feature of power as dynamic rather than absolute in the sense that it is exercised in the social, economic and political relations between individuals and groups. The extent of access and control over one or more of these resources determine the power of individuals. Control in turn basically implies decision making power which can also be exercised
through three basic ways - to make decisions, make others implement one's decisions, and finally, influence other's decisions without any direct intervention - which in one's sense is the greatest power of all. The power establishment is initially done using force or threat to force (power over or dominance), which once established uses, a subtle but much greater potent weapon to sustain and perpetuate itself. This weapon is the creation of supporting ideology that helps rationalize and justify the power relations whereby the powerless comes to accept and even participate in the existing unequal pattern of control of resources. Thus, the recognition of power's partner - ideology came in. This ideology is stated to be a complex structure of beliefs, values, attitudes and ways of perceiving and analysing social reality - virtually ways of thinking and perceiving. These power relations through supporting ideologies are manifested in the socio-cultural, economic and political systems. However, neither power ideology nor state are static or monolithic. There is a continuous process of resistance and challenge by the less powerful and marginalized sections of the society, resulting in various degrees of change in the structures and power relations. Women’s empowerment is thus the process and outcome of the process, which women gain greater 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.

- Education is central to the process of empowerment - education helps raising consciousness at it provides exposure and access to new ideas and ways of thinking and triggers a demand for change.
- The process of empowerment must occur collectively - this basically recognizes the fact that changes in existing power structures may not be affected by isolated cases of a few women rising up and breaking free the traditions but changes are more likely to occur when large women groups demand them.
- Empowerment processes must begin by creating a separate time and space for women to collectively and critically re-examine their lives, develop a new consciousness and organize and act for change. This time and space away from men and their household pressures stresses for it which enables women to analyse their situation, realize
their potential, develop skills and initiate action against dominant ideology.

- Empowerment is like spiral not a cycle which leads to greater and greater changes. Consciousness, problem identification, action for change and analysis of that action and its outcome lead to higher levels of consciousness and more well-honed and executed strategies. This spiral transforms every person involved: the individual (including the change agent), the collective and the environment though not necessarily at the same pace or depth. Therefore, empowerment cannot be a top-down or one-way process.

- Empowerment not only registers a change in self-consciousness but it forces the world to acknowledge this change as well. Empowerment therefore, means making informed choices within an expanding framework of information, knowledge and analysis of available options.

- Empowerment to change society at large and the notions of power must attain political force.

Amrtya Sen (1985) noted that capacitation became a key word in several fields. Capacity building is the mainstream language of the World Bank and donors while empowerment is associated with bottom up, alternative approaches.

Due to its multidimensional interpretations and uses, the concept of empowerment is visualized as a rhizome- a metaphor of tubular root sprouting in many irregular directions- than a staircase. Empowerment is not emancipation. While emancipation targets 'power over', empowerment is concerned with 'power to'. Like emancipation, empowerment differs from protest because it is proactive; it differs from resistance because it is concerned with transformation of social and political hierarchy; empowerment seeks capacitation. This, too, is a matter of Social equality but it is to be achieved through a levelling of capacities, rather than through a levelling of entitlements or political change. In phase two, the levelling of capacities may translate into claims for economic and political equality, but this is not necessarily the case in empowerment. Emancipation has a collective dimension, which is not necessarily the case in empowerment. Unlike emancipation,
empowerment is ethically neutral except that since it refers to the
capacitation of those who were disabled it has an inherently egalitarian
bias. The advantage of empowerment is that the terrain is widened
(liberation has political outcomes) and unburdened of ideological luggage
(emancipation recalls the enlightenment legacy); besides the notion can be used
flexibly (empowerment can be personal and collective etc), so it is a word of
the times. In empowerment, as in 'Snake and Ladder game', there are different
ways of getting to a 'higher' place and several ways up involve falling down
and starting over from a different point in the game. To empowerment, there is
no single forward 'line of match'.

The significance of empowerment is that it signifies a shift in
thinking about power which is both subtle and profound: from 'power
over' to 'power to'; from power derived from position in an institutional
hierarchy to power based on skills, capacities. Institutions themselves matter
to the extent that they are capable, this is the point of institutional analysis.
Thus, empowerment means capabilities in social action.

Second array of the scholars, whose works have contributed significantly to
the understanding of the concept of empowerment, have focussed on the
key word 'choices'. Women empowerment should be measured and defined
on the basis of abilities of women to make choices. The ability to choose
depend on two main factors: Number of alternatives to choose from and the
consequence of the choice and advocates that choices should be evaluated in
terms of their transformatory significance, the extent to which the choices made
have potential for challenging and destabilising social inequalities and the
extent to which they merely express and reproduce these inequalities.

Strategic life choices include such as where to live, whom/whether to
marry, how many children etc and second hand choices are related to the
quality of ones life, such as what to have for dinner, when to go to the market
etc. Second hand choices are of less importance in discourses on
empowerment.

The concept of empowerment is the interplay of three closely linked
dimensions - agency, resources and achievements. Agency is how choice is put
into effect and hence is central to the process of empowerment; resources
The medium through which agency is exercised; and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency.

The impact of three factors generally proposed to help achieve women empowerment. The role of education in empowering women is found to have been overstated across many studies. This premise is based on the argument that in a society where women's role is seen more in reproduction terms, women are educated to become better wives and mothers. Though this may not be an altogether invalid aspiration, such an education is opined not to help women question their sub-ordinate position. The often-premised access to wage labour as contributing positively towards women empowerment may not actually be so. One, women in informal economy, does not impact market and hence still are not seen as contributing to the economy. When they do enter the labour market they are not supposed to ignore their conventional roles as mothers and housewives. This pushes them under increased work burden, which is not shared by their male partners but at many times pulls in another female member of the family. Coming to the issue of percentage of seats to women in various national parliaments across several countries, both developed and developing, the ideal situation of equal women participation may be a dream not possible in near future. However, the participation of women in local governments as a more plausible option, which in spite of the likely misuses it can be put to, does hold the potential to get women started in the active politics.

The concept of women empowerment has two dimensions:

i. Building self-reliance and internal strength of women ability to determine choices in life.

For the “instruments of women empowerment” should focus on building the abilities of women to have control over material and non-material resources. The process of women empowerment should focus on meeting strategic gender needs and should challenge the subordinate position of women. Women empowerment is seen in the overall context of gender equality and focuses on building the internal strengths of women which comes out to be operating at both individual and societal level.

The definitions and concepts of women empowerment should include building the “abilities of women”, women empowerment is a process
whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination'.

The empowerment is central to the issues of equality, liberation and justice, with the concept of power being fundamental to its understanding. There has been increasing global recognition of the vital importance of empowerment in developing responses to underdevelopment and the increasing poverty.

The combination the concepts of "gender equality" with that of empowerment for "Women's involvement in the development process", it constructed the "Women's Empowerment Framework", a model with five levels of equality, where empowerment is seen as a necessary part of the development process at each level, for women to advance towards equal status.

The five levels of equality are:

1. Welfare: This addresses the basic needs of women
2. Access: It refers to equality of access to resources
3. Awareness-raising: It is an understanding of the fact that women as a group are subordinate and this subordination should be rejected.
4. Participation: This is the point where women take decisions equally alongside men. Mobilization is necessary in order to reach this level.
5. Control: The ultimate level of equality and empowerment, where there is a balance of power between women and men and neither has dominance.

Empowerment is said to be found in the movement from one level to another. The five levels are shown as separate only for the purpose of analysis. They are necessary dimensions of the development process, but are not empirically separate aspects.

The entire discussion above on the various definitions, interpretations and explanations as given by different researchers, authors and agencies clearly outlines that empowerment is understood to operate at various levels and that there are different dimensions to this process.
3.3 Interpretations of Women Empowerment

Various scholars have attempted to define the term women empowerment. These definitions fall in a wide range of spectrum from defining women empowerment as an individual process of taking control of ones’ life and situations to considering it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. All literature, however, appear to have consensus on women's empowerment being both a desired product and a process.

Many authors focus on the root of empowerment word- 'Power'. Basic presumption is that women must be disempowered or without power because then only one can talk about them getting empowered. Empowerment is more an ongoing process rather than an end product. This concept is only relative, i.e., somebody will get empowered relative to others.

It is identified that internalization of oppression as the frightening forms of subjugation because then the powerless do not even question the power relations. Power stands for control over material, human and intellectual resources exercised by different sections of society. Control is explained to be decision-making power, which is to make decisions, make others implement one's decisions, and finally, influence other's decisions without any direct intervention. The last of the forms is termed to be a weapon that creates supporting ideology which helps rationalize and justify the power relations whereby the powerless come to accept and even participate in the existing unequal pattern of control of resources. Many scholars also agree that such power relations are challenged and when the overturning struggles become collective and strong to become transformative, changes in structures happen.

Another set of scholars focus on the 'abilities' and 'choices' in their interpretations of empowerment. Empowerment as the abilities to make choices, which must be transformative in nature. To be able to make choices, both the availability of alternatives to choose from as well as these alternatives seen to exist. In this connection a useful differentiation between strategic life choices, which are strategic decisions, and the second hand choices, which will simply be related to everyday quality of life. Hence, the
definition of empowerment then is “The expansion in the people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”.

Empowerment has mainly two dimensions - building on self-reliance and internal strength of women and ability to determine choices in life. She too describes about two types of choices - practical and strategic and stresses on the latter to have more significance for changes to happen. Empowerment is understood women’s abilities for undoing the internalised oppression and explains about inhibiting and enabling factors that determine these abilities.

Then there are a few other researchers and authors who particularly lay stress on issues of gender equality and participation of women in development process. The World Bank's report on "Engendering Development" (2001) defines rights, resources, and voice as the three critical components of gender equality. It gives the empowerment framework, which encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation and control.

Thus, most of the authors and theorists see empowerment to be coming from the individual continuum. Individual level changes impacting change at other levels is also accepted while most would also agree that for any permanent changes in the societal structures to take place, the struggles against gender inequalities should come to the level of community.

Thus, studying different levels of empowerment gains significance. Need to study and understand women empowerment in a given context is also highlighted. The empowerment also influences different aspects of women's lives and one should give importance to these as well.

The Self-Help approach has been advocated as the most potent tool to fight the two most gigantic and serious problems of the world today - poverty and gender inequalities. Micro finance through self-help groups is being projected as a highly successful tool.
3.4 Levels and Indicators of Empowerment

One of the major objectives of the study is to understand the different levels of empowerment and the perceptions of women towards them. It is intended to analyze the changes in the lives of women after their involvement in the activities of the SHG. This has to be seen at the individual, familial and societal level. In other words, this is basically to develop an understanding about the views of women participants about the notion of empowerment after getting involved in the SHGs.

The different levels at which the women's empowerment takes place include:

• The **Individual Level** deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities, their abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal.

• The **Group and Relationship Level** deals with the collective action and sense of agency that women experience together, in a group.

• The **Community Level** deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do, how women should behave etc.

These are three levels of women empowerment and there are different indicators at different levels.

3.4.1 Empowerment at Individual Level

The basic thrust of the present study is to analyze empowerment of women not only in terms of their economic independence but also in their overall development. The overall development of women encompasses social and political empowerment apart from economic. In other words, increasing access to credit and economic resources by women does not bring about their empowerment unless and until they have control over such resources. Also with respect to governmental provisions where efforts are concentrated on providing loans to women to bring about their empowerment, it is important to know whether the loan availed by women is invested in activities undertaken by them or in the enterprise of their family member.
3.4.2 Indicator of Empowerment at Individual Level

The assessment of the impact of SHG’s membership on the individual level of women empowerment can be captured through following indicators:

a. Participation in group meetings

The most regular and important feature of group functioning is the periodically held group meetings that form the focal point of all activities taken up among the group members. A large percentage of women expressed that they are able to place their point during discussions in group meetings.

b. Mathematical Calculation skills

The SHGs are basically formed for the purpose of savings and credit, one usually would expect that women members would be required to be able to do the mathematical calculations for such transactions. Hence, it is expected that the women’s calculation skills would improve considerably after their joining in the group.

c. Self-confidence level

Self-confidence is the feeling of empowered to take up a responsibility and start taking decisions of life for self and others. It can be considered to be an important indicator of assessing individual empowerment among women. While probing on this issue during the in-depth discussions and FGDs, almost all women opined that there are considerable improvements in their levels of confidence since they have joined the group.

d. Self-respect, self-grooming and self-care

The socialization of Indian women stresses that they should respect their father, brothers, husband, in-laws and all other family members specially male members. Her most holy 'karma' is to serve her husband and in-laws family, bring up children and handle all other household work properly. Attempting to serve all these duties and expectations properly, Indian women often get so entangled that she does not have time to think about herself. Group membership, participation in meetings, taking up income generating activities, power of decision making make her to respect, and care herself. Self-esteem shines.
e. **Impact on the Mobility of Women**

Women particularly in rural areas of north India are expected to remain within their homes handling household chores. They are believed to be and are dependent on their men for their mobility- married women should go out of home only after seeking permission of their husbands and in-laws while daughters should seek permission from their fathers or brothers. They should be accompanied by men during their travel for long distances since they are considered ignorant and travelling alone is insecure and hence mostly women do remain confined within the boundaries of their homes. Their movements are restricted to at the most within the same village. They have to wait for some male family member to accompany them even if they would wish to visit their parental home in the neighbouring village. SHG membership breaks this dependence and woman member gains freedom of mobility.

f. **Negotiation skills**

These skills are needed while applying for loan and negotiate well with the bank officials. Discussions with bank officials confirmed these changes. The women argue logically and are most times able to convince the bank officials to sanction them loan of desired amounts.

### 3.4.3 Empowerment at Familial Level

The status of women in the family is influenced by a number of factors. Only making women access loans and involving them in income generating activities does not improve her position in family. Some of the issues to be discussed in the section are: whether working outside overburdens a woman along with that of managing her home or is the household chores shared among the family members; whether she has right over her body or make decisions in terms of family planning and spacing between children and; whether the birth of a male child is perceived as a sense of pride by her, which is again nothing but the perpetuation of ideology of patriarchy. Generally women consider that bearing a male child increases their position in the family and society. In such a scenario, her decisions regarding birth of a girl child or denial of dowry during marriage of her daughters have to be understood, along with her views on the provision of educational facilities and employment opportunities to girl children.
3.4.4 Indicator of Empowerment at Familial Level

The familial level includes the immediate family members of the woman. These relationships primarily include parents, in-laws, husband, children and other members of the joint or nuclear family.

a) Relationship with Husband

Wife has been called 'Ardhaangani' (half part of husband), implying two things- one that the husband is not complete without her and secondly implying that she walks hand in hand with her husband throughout the life in every aspect of his life. This better half of man, the wife as is called in English, thus, actually should occupy a very important place in husband's life as well. The husband should respect her, love her, provide her with resources to run the house and involve her in every decision of the family.

b) Relationship with other Family Members

The relationship level includes the immediate family members of the woman. These relationships primarily include parents, in-laws, husband, children and other members of the family.

3.4.5 Empowerment at Societal Level

Neither educational facilities nor employment opportunities in themselves can bring about empowerment of women. These may be considered to be one of the variables acting towards improving the position of women in the society. Though women achieve economic independence, their position cannot be better, unless their social values have been properly understood. Apart from economic, the social and political empowerment of women has also to be understood.

3.4.6 Indicator of Empowerment at Societal Level

SHGs are the only form of organization other than their family of which they have been members for so long and would continue to be the members. Though for them group is primarily a monthly meeting forum for lending and saving, they are happy and confident about the sustainability of the groups. The empowerment at group level is giving them the sense of "agency" which means they could act strong and be together if needed in future.
a) Visibility of Women and their SHGs

The visibility of micro finance programme and women members in the village is very much evident. All the residents of the village who have approached are aware of these women and their SHGs.

b) SHGs Efforts to Protect and Promote Women’s Interests

Women are not much conscious of the strength of collective action, and do not exercise their strength collectively. SHGs are yet to take institutional shape but have taken steps to protect and promote the interest of the women and to organize a programme for collective empowerment of the village. Women SHGs at the village level with their collective action voice for provision of basic amenities like drinking water, cleaning drainages and public roads, provision for individual household toilets, street lights etc., by local bodies.

3.5 Pre-requisites of Empowerment

Development of Alternatives with Women in a New Era (DAWN) has identified six pre-requisites for empowerment namely,

- Resources (finance).
- Knowledge and technology.
- Skill-training.
- Leadership on one side.
- Democratic process, dialogue, participation in policy and decision-making
- Techniques for conflict resolution on the others.
3.6 Barriers to Empowerment

The box explains forces working for and against the change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forces working for change</th>
<th>Forces resisting change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User/ Self-advocacy mandates</td>
<td>The power of orthodoxy and convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Mandates</td>
<td>Professional fears:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of status and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Denial of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal/policy mandates</td>
<td>Professional mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &quot;They are not competent&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &quot;They don't know how&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internalized oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>User mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• &quot;They don't mean it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of change or uncertainty about what is expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational constraints:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We can't afford it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Top down beaurocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legislative ambiguity and Confusions of terminology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Suzy Braye and Michael Preston-Shoot (1995)

3.7 Types of Empowerment

The various types of empowerment could be mainly economic, social, political, psychological and others. These basically relate to the different dimensions or aspects of women's lives. All these may operate both at the individual and collective levels.

3.7.1 Economic Empowerment

The concept of Economic Empowerment is focused on the individual, with control over resources seen as the central means for
redistribution of power. It is similar to power as a result of increasing access to economic resources, such as credit inputs.

Though economic empowerment is recognized as crucial for addressing issues of gender inequality, it is not seen as a sufficient condition in itself. Self-esteem and a sense of self-confidence also play important roles in women's potential to mobilize external strengths for bringing about fundamental changes.

In addition, internal constraints such as women's health and education are critical for meeting the long-term goal of emancipation. Furthermore, the concept of empowerment is premised on addressing women's strategic interests, which lead to transforming the structures of subordination at the family, civil society, state and global levels, through a collective action.

Empowerment becomes problematic as it involves gains, which would necessarily have to be achieved from the powerful and negotiated wider strategies for social reform. In other words, the empowerment of women is seen as inherently threatening, as it will be at the expense of men.

3.7.2 Social Empowerment

There is an 'alternative development' which is premised on the concept of empowerment, which emerges from within cultures, endogenous to the political and social context of society. Three kinds of power are identified social, political and psychological, with the last often a result of successful action in the former two.

Social power is understood as information, knowledge and skills, which enhance the bases of household production and promote political power. Political power, which is seen as a mechanism for affecting policy changes at the macro and micro levels, can be brought about by the power of 'voice' and collective action. While psychological power is seen in terms of self-reliance and increased self-esteem, similar to the notion of 'power within'.

Empowerment implies social power being translated into political power, which leads women to make political claims, resulting in legal and institutional changes. The process of claim making is strengthened through social networking, which reinforces the processes of social, psychological and political empowerment. However, it is argued that practical claims can be used as an effective entry point for initiating strategic or political claims.
As women's oppression is experienced differently by different groups of women, proponents from the personal end of the continuum believe that it leads to different empowerment mechanisms and goals. In other words, there is no single model or goal to be promoted, though there is the core to the empowerment process common to different situations. They subscribe to the notion that empowerment is not something that can be done by outsiders 'to' people, implying that such power cannot be 'bestowed', but has to be self-generated.

Women empowerment is viewed as a gender issue, and not merely as a woman's issue, and thus entails transformation of social and structural relations. Gender subordination is seen as a complex, multi-dimensional and all pervasive process, affecting all aspects of women's lives and embedded at many different mutually reinforcing levels: individual consciousness, the household, work, legislation, state structures and international economic and political systems. Consequently, addressing issues of gender equality implies also affecting wider structural changes. As individuals alone cannot always effect such changes, collective solidarity strengthened through vertical and horizontal networks and movements is seen as an important means.

The empowerment process as subscribed to by this school of thought can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. At one level it emphasizes the importance of empowering women and women's groups to make their own choices, to speak out for themselves and to control their own lives.

In this sense, it is based on the notion of 'power-to', seeking to build alliances and allies rather than reversing the existing power hierarchies, based on the notion of 'power- over.' In fact, it views this transformatory process as grounded in bottom-up processes of planning, with women participating in defining their own empowerment goals as 'agents' and 'participants' rather than as 'clients' and 'recipients.' In other words, women's own aspirations and strategies are seen as a central element and important factor in any empowerment process.

Many scholars have provided a very helpful insight into the various dimensions - both levels and types- of the concept of women empowerment. Empowerment is explained as an outcome- both social and individual.
While others viewed it as a means to end, i.e., to obtain certain demographic outcomes such as fertility and birth rate declines. Then while some scholars opined individual behaviour as mediating between the context and outcome, others felt that social, political and institutional processes were the one mediating. The relational level of empowerment of women was also given due cognizance not only with respect the changing relations between husband and wife but also the other family members, community, market and the state. Need to study and understand empowerment in a particular context is accepted as a norm.

3.7.3 Political Empowerment

The other school of thought claims that the goal of the empowerment process is political empowerment, i.e., participation in formal political structures and decision-making. Here, the notion of empowerment is based on the belief that personal empowerment alone cannot result in a transformation of gender and structural relations, in the absence of women's participation within the economic and political structures of society. The goal of empowerment process is seen as enabling women to participate equally with men in the development process. However, this school of thought fails to elaborate upon the mechanism to achieve this end.

Educational empowerment for women, interprets empowerment as a "socio-political concept that goes beyond formal political participation and consciousness raising". A Full definition of empowerment must include cognitive, psychological, political and economic components. It is explained below.

(i) the Cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;

(ii) the economic components requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However, it is to be noted that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;

(iii) the political element entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize for social change; and
(iv) the psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live.

### 3.8 Measurement of Women Empowerment

Arguments and debates on how to measure women empowerment have been going on since the emergence of the concept. Owing to the complexities and multidimensionality of the concept of empowerment, measuring it has been almost a formidable task. However, one approach says any kind of development policy and strategy to be conceptualized and implemented we must attempt measuring women empowerment. When setting out to measure if empowerment has taken place in a certain context one must define what it is one wants to measure - empowerment in itself i.e, elements such as self-esteem, gender awareness, agency etc; or enabling and/or inhibiting factors; or perhaps the outcomes of women empowerment, what women have achieved etc. Factors such as conditions, environments and events that contribute to either enable or inhibit empowerment processes should be easy to measure once they are identified. Some factors can be considered to be generally enabling such as support from family and friends, resources, laws protecting the human rights of women (if women are aware of them), whereas others might be more context specific and need to be developed in dialogue with the women themselves.

There are generally two approaches that can be adopted to measure women empowerment. One is to approach empowerment as a set of elements where each element is to be measured, while the other treats it as a holistic process of gaining ownership and/or control over one's life and where the process as a whole is to be measured. Naturally and as argued, one should do both when trying to get a good picture of empowerment, but depending on the approach, the indicators will be different.

World Bank document reflects the bank's concern to arrive at methods to measure women's empowerment, using Universalist Perspective to measure women empowerment, at the beginning it noted that measures of empowerment must involve standards that lie outside localized gender
systems and a recognition of universal elements of gender subordination. and not to mistake them as empowerment.

Empirical evidences have been accumulated to show that it should not be assumed that if a development intervention promotes women's empowerment along a particular dimension, empowerment in other areas will necessarily follow. Different agencies and authors have given different frameworks that concentrate on some of the dimensions of the empowerment.

In nutshell it can be explained that these frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered. For example, the "socio-cultural" dimension covers a range of empowerment of sub-domains, from marriage systems to norms regarding women's physical mobility, to non-familial social support systems and networks available to women.

Moreover, in order to operationalize these dimensions, one should consider indicators at various levels of social aggregation - the household and the community, as well as regional, national, and even global levels. Doing this kind of segregation one get useful roadmaps to measure empowerment. It is also revealed that the potential independence of various areas in which women may get empowered e.g. a woman may get empowered in familial sphere without gaining similar level of empowerment in political sphere. At the same time delineating each dimension separately from another also poses a difficulty as the factors would overlap.

Some factor analysis done by various scholars demonstrate that certain factors may be more closely linked as compared to others in a given setting. It was established by research that the factors most impinging on the survival of women's children (measured by child mortality and immunization) were only "women's lifetime exposure to employment" and "family structure" (residence with in-laws, etc).

It is to note that owing to multidimensionality of empowerment, the construction of index variables or scale variables created to determine a
dimension must be done with enough care so as to avoid the possibilities if
such variables are masking differential effects of interventions on distinct
aspects of empowerment. Inappropriate combining of items relating to
gender and empowerment may also mask differential effects of the
component variables on outcomes of interest.

World Bank stresses that individual level and relational level changes
may be well spilling over to the community level changes. The study goes
further in-depth by identifying some the major challenges in measuring
women empowerment as well as suggesting possible way outs to deal with
these challenges. The variation in the nature and importance of
empowerment across contexts poses a challenge in terms of both
consistency and comparability in measurement schemes. One solution to
counter this problem is to use the contextual factors at the analytical stage of
research and not at the measurement stage. Another alternative approach is to
follow 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. World Bank
identifies each context, at any given point of time, to consist of
behavioral and normative "frontiers," that need to be crossed for women
to be empowered along a specific dimension, within a specific arena.
Specifying these frontiers helps to define the indicators of relevance to
that particular context, at that particular time.

In this context experiences from Hashemi and Schuler studies in
India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been cited to place the importance of
initial groundwork through qualitative and exploratory methods, conceptual
analysis, and stakeholder consensus through participatory processes in
establishing parameters that define empowerment in specific country and
development project contexts.

Furthering the discussion on measurement of women empowerment,
the document presents two views based on how does one view
empowerment - a process or a product. While the dimensions
characterising the product are much easier to measure, the process of its
moving and dynamic nature poses a definite challenge.
Some scholars also make a strong case for measuring the process of empowerment at two different points in time to arrive at the best possible estimates. At the same time for different dimensions of empowerment, different time gaps may be required when the change has to be measured. For example, while social and economic changes may take relatively lesser time, say in a few years, however political change may be quite prolonged, running in to decades. Qualitative methods of measuring are more appropriate to measure such a process.

The concept of women empowerment is split into three components each measured separately.

1. Inter-spouse consultation index- the extent to which husbands consult their wives in household affairs.
2. Individual autonomy index – measured by women’s mobility , autonomy on spending money.
3. Authority index-actual decision making power.

The main principles to be adopted for the research are as follows:

a) Defining what is to be measured

Empowerment means different things to different people and in different context. Therefore for any study on women empowerment, study's own contextual definition of empowerment must be taken as a starting point.

b) Using Empowering Methods

When working with an empowerment perspective, it is vital that the methods used are participatory and empowering to the participants. It is important to use a participatory approach that ensures the women's ownership of the processes. However, women must never be pressurized to participate in measuring exercises and it is important to be sensitive and respectful when approaching the women with questions. This is specially important when dealing with women with experiences of severe oppression, violence and abuse.

c) Acknowledging Differences while Generalising

Different groups of women are differently located within structures of class, ethnicity, geographical location, colour, sexuality etc. Therefore the needs and wants of women are different. The methods to measure and
Indicators of empowerment must be developed out of the particular context and in dialogue with the women themselves. Approaching to study with a set of predefined indicators will not help the evaluator to understand the diversity in women's strategies to get what they want and may even obscure the ways in which the women are empowered.

d) Using a Holistic Approach

Empowerment can only be understood when looking at an individual/group's whole life situation. Empowerment is a holistic process of mutually reinforcing elements that increase or strengthen different aspects of empowerment and their likely to contribution for enhancing the other. E.g. increasing women's economic autonomy may have positive effects on her self esteem, her sense of agency in political decision making etc. Likewise, the empowerment process at the individual, group and societal levels are mutually reinforcing. It is therefore important to have a holistic approach to the issue of empowerment and to use methods and to ask questions that capture the different aspects and levels of empowerment and the interaction between them. Furthermore, a gender perspective entails considering the gendered position of women vis-a-vis men as well as the general situation of women.

e) Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

It is important to use several data collecting methods for the purpose of covering the complex nature of empowerment issues, that is, to triangulate. What one method might miss, could be discovered by the others. To use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will also help to validate the measurements and give complementary information. The qualitative approach will bring with it the necessary exploratory view of the situation, and the quantitative will bring with it the possibility to quantify and get comparable results. The quantitative and qualitative methods in combination will make clear patterns in the findings.
3.9 Conclusion

Finally, it is concluded that some popular comparable components of empowerment are included in the eight indicators. They are as follows;

1. Mobility.
3. Ability to make a small purchases.
4. Ability to make larger purchases.
5. Involvement in major decisions.
6. Relative freedom from domination by the family.
7. Political awareness and
8. Involvement in political campaigning and protests.

Because empowerment for each person or group is in a sense, a unique process, indicators must be flexible and wide-ranging, contextual and are likely to change, possibly quite radically, over time.