INTRODUCTION

This work is on the women-market interface. In simple terms, market is a place of exchange and the construction of a modern economy is in terms of market, which is in turn a social institution of economic exchange. Women market interface is all about women’s participation in the market as “rational economic agents” as per the mainstream neoclassical view of rational agent. A modern economy is market focused. It is driven by the logic of market which in turn is described in terms of the theoretical notion of efficiency with latter signifying optimizing behavior of economic agents based on their self-interests on the one hand and optimum allocation of resources and distributions following there from on the other. It is held that when a woman becomes a participant in the market (mostly in the sense of a supplier) on her own term as a rational economic agent she is empowered in an economic sense. This is a very narrow view of women’s empowerment which rests on the neoclassical concept of rationality and optimization and thereby it does not take into account the other spectrums of empowerment viz. political, cultural and like. At the onset of this study it should be made clear that this work is based on the above mentioned narrow view of economic empowerment of women. Hence, to be more specific this is a study on economically empowered women and their interface with the market.

Women’s participation in market has been growing in recent time. They are now increasingly contributing to household, local and national economies. The pertinent questions are therefore the following:

(a) Is this growing participation in market an index of the empowerment of women?
(b) Does it reduce the everyday miseries of a woman’s life?
(c) Are women now enjoying more liberty to express and exchange their views within the private and the public domain?
(d) Or are they compelled to be remaining ‘second’ when it comes to taking decisions for the family or of their own?
(e) Are they still ‘second” or passive agents in making choices for themselves?
(f) Does women’s participation in market signify that they have now become active agents in the economy?
These are some of the queries which merit some attention as women’s empowerment in the context of inclusive development under the neoliberal regime in India has become a keyword since the 10th Five Year Plan which started in 2002. The 12th Five Year Plan Approach Paper defines inclusiveness of development in its multi-dimensional facets – one of them is economic empowerment of women.

It is argued that as economic development proceeds, quality of life for all will improve. However, as far as the present history of economic development in India since 1951 the question remains whether the quality of life of an average Indian woman has really improved or not? Is an average Indian woman really economically empowered today after six decades of economic development of which the first four decades belong to the planning period and the last two decades to the neoliberal period? Note that women as a group is not a homogeneous group. In Indian context, they are heterogeneous in terms of class, caste, power, property and income. So, when we say “average Indian woman” it simply refers to a standardized life of a woman which can be considered as a reference or focal point of our study. So, we have women who are not marginalized and vulnerable as well as women who are socially and/or economically marginalized and vulnerable. Two points merit attention at this juncture:

1. Are the women who were marginalized and vulnerable still so after six decades of economic development? And hence are they economically empowered or not?
2. Also, are those women who were not marginalized and vulnerable in the typical economic sense really empowered?

When we talk in terms of the women-market interface in modern Indian economy the vital question is whether market as a social institution helps to improve the quality of life of women and also, enables her to be empowered?

At this juncture, there is need to define empowerment in our own terms which we will use in this work. *Empowerment in this work is narrowly defined as a woman’s freedom to make choice and decision in her self-interest which is Pareto optimal.*

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1. The most common use of the term “empowerment” refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that “it more nearly equals the power of the high power groups” (http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/empower.htm retrieved on 18.10.2010.). The World Bank defines the term empowerment as “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”. From sociological point of view,
We take off from the premise that women’s labour both in the private (household) domain and the public domain (market) is devalued (Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg 2012). Gender-based oppression is still prevalent in the Indian society at large. It is different from the class-based exploitation. Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), a class is a process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. Class-based exploitation, as an economic category, occurs when non-performers of surplus labour (value) appropriate the surplus labour (value) performed by the individuals providing their labour power in a production process. On the other hand, gender-based oppression is a non-class and hence, non-economic category as gender process is a non-class process viewed in terms of class-focused Marxist approach as developed by Resnick and Wolff (1987).

The history of gender oppression is older than the class based exploitation in the society. Class is an economic concept and it is defined differently by different scholars including the orthodox Marxists in terms of either property rights or ownership of means of production or power and like but not in terms of surplus labour which is the entry point of Marxian analysis of class (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Surplus labour according to Marx is the labour performed by the direct producers (or labourers) over and above their necessary labour which is essential for the social reproduction of labour power of the direct producers. We in this work adhere to the concept of class processes based on surplus labour a la Marx following the class-focused Marxist approach developed by Resnick and Wolff (1987). There can be various class processes which may co-exist in an economic space (public as well as private i.e. household) at a time. Class is an economic process whereas gender as a process is a non-economic process. These two processes mutually constitute each other both in the space of household (private) and in the space of market (public) in complex ways (Dhar and Dasgupta 2014). Also, we need to keep in mind that Marx categorized workers as productive workers who perform surplus value in capitalist class process and unproductive workers who do not perform surplus value in capitalist class process. Following this distinction between productive and unproductive labour, a labourer who is performing surplus labour in a non-capitalist class process (say, feudal, slave and communist etc) is to be treated also as an unproductive worker. We refrain from this distinction. We include all the performers of surplus labour (value) in capitalist as well

women’s empowerment can be defined as “equal status to women opportunity and freedom to develop herself” (Kapur 2001).
as non-capitalist class processes as productive labour. But some workers do not perform surplus labour (value) either in capitalist or non-capitalist class processes. The example may be loading and unloading worker in a factory, security guard, clerks in banks etc. They are unproductive irrespective of the fact whether they belong to capitalist or non-capitalist class processes since they do not perform surplus labour (value) but provide necessary and fundamental conditions of existence and reproduction of the same class processes over time. We are not devaluing the labour power per se of the unproductive worker. We just distinguish them from the productive labour in terms of laying our focus on Marxian concept of surplus labour in this work.

Note that broadly speaking different class processes may of two types – exploitative class processes (like slave, feudal, capitalist etc) and non-exploitative class process (self-independent/ancient, communistic etc). In a non-exploitative class process performer(s) of surplus labour themselves appropriate their surplus labour and hence, they themselves take the decision of its distribution within the production process and also, outside the production process in the society. On the other hand, in an exploitative class process surplus labour is appropriated by the non-performer(s) of surplus labour and hence, they take the decision of how to distribute it within the production process and also, outside the production process in the society. A woman worker may be in this sense either a productive labour or unproductive labour. Also, she may belong to either to an exploitative class process or to a non-exploitative class process as a direct producer/labour. And, further, a woman may not be a direct producer as she may not perform surplus labour and hence, can be treated as unproductive labour. Also, it is possible for a woman to occupy the position of appropriator and hence, exploiter in an exploitative class process. So, going by the heterogeneity of class processes in a social site a woman may be viewed as a productive labour or unproductive labour or an appropriator of surplus labour as non-performer of such surplus. Further, it is possible for any individual following our class-focused Marxist approach to occupy several class positions at a time (Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg 2012). Hence, a woman can also hold different class positions at a time.

As already mentioned above, gender as a process is different from class as a process. While class process is an economic category gender process is different from class process and is a non-economic social process which is mutually constituted by the political, cultural, economic and natural processes in a social space at a time. Gender process and
class process are intertwined. They are over-determined i.e. they mutually constitute each other. Neither gender process nor class process can be claimed to be superior or more important than the other. This we claim following the Althuserian logic of over-determination. Therefore, gender-based oppression and class-based economic exploitation are also over-determined which implies each influences other and in turn gets influenced by the other continuously over time. Given this complex inter-relation between gender process and class process and hence, between gender oppression and class exploitation can we opine that a woman who joins the market is really empowered one? This question arises before us because of this complex and conflicting inter-relationship between gender process and class process, and because there are many instances in reality where a woman has joined market not on the basis of her own willingness but under some socio-economic compulsion at the household/family level. This does not mean that there no woman who has joined market out of her own choice or remained out of the market out of her own choice despite having the capability to join the market.

Predominant gender process that we observe in India is guided or based on the principles of patriarchy. Under patriarchy man holds the upper hierarchies of power and woman the lower. Woman is seen as the lacking other of man. In such a formation, femininity is defined in terms of masculinity i.e. lack of masculinity where the masculinity represents ability to flex one’s power over other (viz. woman) and superiority of man over woman and femininity in that sense represents lack of one’s ability to wield power over others and also, lack in taking decision on one’s own. Rather, femininity is envisaged in terms of motherhood, care-giving and subjugation of woman to man. Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff (2009) using the Marxist concept of class process showed that the home front foregrounds exploitation in households. Household production may take place within a variety of exploitative or non-exploitative relations (just as they happen in public domain). They analyzed how the activities of working space and domestic space are interrelated to each other through the class (economic) process and non-class (non-economic) processes like gender process. The class and gender positions within households operate as both causes and effects of each other and the same applies to the space outside household (Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff 2009).

We will make an attempt in this work empirically to seek some answers to the questions (which we have mentioned above) with regard to a woman’s economic empowerment –
especially when she joins market i.e. the public domain. The work is based in the backdrop of the district of Murshidabad in West Bengal. Class and gender processes may have multiple meanings, unconscious senses and hidden possibilities. Following the logic of over-determination, we would try to explore the mutual inter-relationship between class and non-class gender processes. Finally, we would like to intervene whether non-class gender processes are also subject to struggle and transformation through women market interface?

This introductory chapter is organized as follows. In section I we describe the theoretical position of our study followed by descriptions of objectives of the study (Section 2), principal hypotheses (Section 3), methodology (Section 4), and description of our survey area (Section 5).

I.1 Theoretical Position of the Study:

Women market interface is about women in market like other economic agents in the market. Women participation in markets is growing as a factor of production (either as a labourer or as an entrepreneur) and also, as service provider. However, while assessing the contribution of women in an economic system one should also take into account her contribution in the private domain i.e. in the household space which remains obfuscated when in general we talk about women participation in market. A typical woman in Indian society, who is participating in the market, always performs this double role – one in the private domain and the other in the public domain.

The question is whether this growing participation of women in public domain is an index of empowerment of women? Does it help to improve the quality of life of a woman or helps to reduce her miseries and gender based oppression in the society? Are women now enjoying more freedom to express and exchange their views and making choices within the private and public domains? Or are they still compelled to remain ‘second’ to take decisions of their own?

It is argued that as economic development proceeds, quality of life improves. Quality of life includes freedom to make choices. While exploitation as an economic concept signifies appropriation of surplus labour by the non-performers of surplus labour\(^2\), gender

\(^2\) This Marxian concept of class-focused economic exploitation is taken from Resnick and Wolff (1987).
oppression as a non-economic (political and cultural) process implies the domination of women by men who are more powerful than women under patriarchy. In our rendition, to analyze the living condition of potentially empowered women there is a need to understand these two concepts viz. class-focused economic exploitation and gender-based oppression.

The concept of empowerment can be explained in several ways. It may be economic empowerment, political empowerment and cultural empowerment. In gross, we can say that a person becomes empowered only if she would take spontaneous decision according her own choice that relates to different spheres of her life and also regarding the lives associated with her. In this work, we would restrict ourselves to a very narrow definition of women’s empowerment which signifies a woman’s capacity to make free choice and her freedom in decision making regarding economic matters affecting her and her family’s life.

There are two possibilities as far as a woman’s entry in the market or public domain is concerned. She is either entering the market on her own as per her own choice or she is forced to do so. The question here is whether she is empowered when it means a forced entry? Does forced entry increase her stress and miseries further? Does she face after joining the market is an egalitarian gender space both in market and in home? Do class based exploitation and gender based oppression intertwined together make her more vulnerable and marginalized in a patriarchal society?

Households have immense influences upon the activities of women in the market. Orthodox Marxist class analysis has neglected this site. Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff (2009) brought to the fore the exploitation of women in households using a Marxist language of class. In a household, production, which is mostly non-paid (either in cash or in kind), may take place within a variety of exploitative or non-exploitative class relations (just as it happens in market). They analyze how the activities of working space and domestic space are interrelated to each other through the class (economic) process and non-class (non-economic) gender processes. The class positions occupied by women within the household depend upon the gender position or status of the member in the household. It also holds good in the case of women or men in the public domain. The class and gender positions within households (and also in market) operate as both causes and effects of each other;
they mutually constitute each other in overdetermined sense (Fraad, Resnick and Wolff, 2009).

Women are significant contributors to the economic growth of a country. Till the date unpaid household economic activities and even unpaid work/labour of women as family labour (as in farming activities in rural India) are not recognized as economic activities officially and hence, these women do not officially contribute to the GDP or GNP of the country although they help procreating surplus labour and add to the gross production of a country. Since these unpaid activities of women (whether at the level of households or in the public domain) are not considered as economic activities these groups of women remain outside the standard definition of labourforce of the country in the mainstream economic definition of labourforce. So, they constitute the outside although they in reality are inside. They are in this sense inside-outside of the labour force of the country. There is no official data to estimate the number of these women. If we add them to the official figure for the country’s labourforce then the total labourforce would be much larger than what it is today. Keeping these women outside the labourforce means that officially we are not recognizing their true contribution in the economy measured in terms of economic growth as growth is now the parameter or indicator to adjudge the economic performance of a country or society.

Different feminist theories seek to use their theoretical knowledge to change women’s social condition. As argued by Bunch (1980), “feminist theory begins with the immediate need to end women’s oppression,” and “it is also a way of viewing the world”. Feminist theories seek to understand women’s sub-ordination and exclusion from/with cultural and social arenas (Jackson and Jones, 1998). Now, following table reflects the sources of women oppression as argued by different theorists.

Table I.1: Theoretical Sources of Women Oppression

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<td>Engels (1884)</td>
<td>From social division of labour and the rise of private property</td>
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<td>Radical Feminist: Juliett Mitchell</td>
<td>From universal patriarchic ideology</td>
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<td>Marxian Feminist : Firestone(1970).</td>
<td>From incorporating kinship and division of labour</td>
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<td>Freud(1993)</td>
<td>From women’s psychology</td>
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<td>Recent Feminists</td>
<td>Multiple oppression, emanating from race, class, caste and colonialism</td>
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*Source: Compiled by the author herself from Mazumdar (2005).*

According to Aristotle, as cited in Mazumdar (2005), “the nature of man is the most rounded off and complete, and consequently in man the qualities are found in their perfection….. Women’s subordination include remaining silent, obeying their husbands at all times, and loving more than being loved”. Acquinas (1980) opined “Women” to act “as a helper to man, not indeed a help-mate in other works, as men are more efficiently helped by other men in other works, but as a helper in the work of generation…..God is justified in creating women for without sin the world would have been imperfect. Rousseau follows the same vision. Criticizing Rousseau’s argument, Kofman (1992) argues that “under the pretext of giving back nature her suppressed voice and of defending nature’s end, what is really being advocated as always, are the phallocentric ends of man. It is the voice of man”.

Women’s movement in the West is deeply attached with philosophy of liberalism (Mazumdar, 2005). Liberal feminism emerged within the context of economic and political liberalism in England (Mazumdar 2005). Early liberal feminist claimed individual living in society should have political and legal rights irrespective of their sexes. They critiqued the relegation of women to ‘private’ domestic sphere as their natural place. According to Whelehan (1995), the concept of public vis-a-vis private sphere is used to identify the limits of state intervention in an individual’s existence (Mazumdar, 2005). Liberal feminist identifies the causes of oppression, but keep the public-private dichotomy intact. They consider private sphere is natural, so it is out of state intervention. Private sphere is the realm of abstract individualism - where ‘man’ maintains his dominion free from state regulation. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book ‘A vindication of the Right of Women’ argued that women’s proper dignity can come through education and getting
access to public work outside of home. In support of the liberal feminist view, John Stuart Mill argued that women’s subordination does not come from any natural causes but from custom and legal system.

Radical and socialist feminists have criticized liberal feminism for keeping public/private dichotomy intact and thus keeping the private from being thoroughly politicized (Mazumdar, 2005). “The personal is political” encapsulated the basic insight of radical feminism (Mazumdar, 2005). They held that there is no distinction between the “political” and the “personal” realms. Every area of life is the sphere of “sexual politics”. They focused on the notion of inviolable ‘private’ sphere pertaining to the issues like domestic violence, tension present in women’s domestic lives so as to pinpoint the sex-gender inequality (Mazumdar, 2005).

Marx identified the economy or production as material object that causally changes other institutions of society like family. Although Marx opined that the gender oppression is the first oppression in the history of any oppression in the human civilization, he was more involved in making an altogether different critique of capitalist economy as was emerging in his time in Europe through the lens of working class. However, Firestone (1970) identified a materialist view of history based on Marxist method of the dialectical movement of history via class struggle. According to Firestone (1970), those who reproduce biologically have no control over reproduction and those who do not reproduce have control over the means of reproduction, and hence, from this fundamental sex-based division all classes have sprung. So, Firestone (1970) contends that sexuality causes the structural basis of society.

Marxists have criticized feminism for overlooking capitalist system of production as the real reason for women oppression and for blaming women’s oppression an unchanging universal concept (Graham 2009). On the other hand, feminists have criticized Marx for being gender blind. They have argued that women’s oppression existed before the emergence of capitalism as an economic system. However, this view of some feminists (Mazumder, 2005) is not absolutely correct as Marx clearly pointed out that the history of gender based oppression is the first of its kind in the history of mankind (Dhar and Dasgupta, 2013). Before the nineteenth century when capitalism as a full-fledged system was yet to develop kinship was the primary organizing element of society, not market.
Even then gender oppression was very much prevalent as it is under capitalism (Mazumdar, 2005).

Marxist feminist has provided a dual system theory, which explains capitalist exploitation of labour via the extraction of surplus value, the category of patriarchy. In Engel’s (1902) “The Origin of the Family, Private property and The State”, we get a historical materialist explanation of the oppression of women. With the emergence of more and more social surplus, more exchange of products and private property started taking place, and we observed a revolutionary changes in societal arrangement which overthrown female from their right on private property. According to him, this overthrown of property right was the world historic defeat of the female.

According to Hartmann (1997), labour market is more important than the family as a determinant of women’s labourforce participation. He argued women are segregated because men enjoyed a more powerful hidden exploitation on women in the labour market by being better organized. This power helps them to exclude women from better jobs. Because of their weaker position, women are compelled to depend on men for their own sustenance and for better living standards for themselves and their children.

Beauvoir (1987) has alleged that it is the lack of self-consciousness that makes the women ‘other’ in society. This failure to be subject, women cannot transcend their present situation. Women’s “otherness” in society is different from the “otherness” of the proletariat and racial minorities. A woman sees her and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her and “she is very often well pleased with her role as the other”. This is true for all ages in all cultures, be it “matriarchy” or “patriarchy”. Further, she criticized Engel’s theory that women lost their control over means of production because of their physical weakness rather it is women’s otherness. Therefore, she tried to establish that it is the social and culture ideology that determines women’s economic status.

Hochschild (1989) drew our attention to the hidden exploitation of women in contemporary America. With the passage of time, very little has changed. If anything, the forces of global competition have intensified the exploitation of women in the households. However, as a sociologist, she never thinks the language of Marxian political economy as a correct approach to envisage a woman.
Orthodox Marxian theory characterized by historical materialism poses a sequential structure of societal transformation. With economy conceived as the base, there is mode of production, which is defined as the articulation of forces of production and relations of production. The forces of production shows the fundamental way in which humans relate to non-human nature via production of basic necessities such as food and shelter. The relations of production reflect the social relations in which humans actually engage with each other to constitute a society’s non-material base in the production process. Actually relations of production refer to the class relations between the direct producers and non-producers. Social relations of production take a specific form, that of class relation. Following Marx, class relations represents in terms of the process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. These class relations follow different form.

Superstructure represents the second tier of social construction as per this orthodox Marxian view. It is based upon the first tier which is base viz. the economy. Superstructure consists of politico-legal system, ideology, philosophy, religion and culture of a particular society and in turn helps to reproduce the relations of production. Finally, there are forms of social consciousness that reflect the mode of production and superstructure of a society. All of these together constitute complex social totality. According to the theory of historical materialism, the mode of production is causally prior to all other aspects of society.

Considering forces of production as a centre of the complex social totality, only one type of relations of production can correspond to a specific historical stage of the development of forces of production. To ensure a stable society, relations of production should not impede the development of forces of production in any manner. If they do create barriers to the free development of forces of production, a condition of social crisis will emerge. Then through a class struggle this problem will be solved and advent of a new relation of production will take place. The rest of the social elements adjust to the shift in the mode of production. This way of looking the history of journey of human civilization had been defined as historicism. This is a rational, ordered, progressive movement of society from a preordained origin to a predestined end. Under communism the forces of production would reach their most developed stage and the relations of production can no longer act as fetters to technological development. With the end in the conditions of conflict, both
class and class conflicts disappear under communism. Each stage in history is negated by the next one through the dialectic that describes the evolution of society through contradiction (Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg 2012). So in historical materialistic theories of transition, we have seen uniformity between class relations and the development of forces of production. In orthodox Marxist theory historicism is the undisputed logic of transition and economic essentialism is the undisputed logic for social transformation. Because the mode of production or the economy are the key to the understanding of society and its evolution, such a rendition of society has been described as driven by economism or economic essentialism which in turn determines the political and cultural.

This essentialism-based view is problematized by the class-focused Marxist approach (Resnick and Wolff 1987). Essentialist theories are theories that organize their field of research into opposing and watertight binaries of cause and effect and subsequently see them as mutually exclusive. Anti-essentialism, on the other hand, is the rejection of any presumption that complexities are reducible to simplicities of unidirectional causality. Every cause is itself also an effect and vice versa (Resnick and Wolff 1987).

Class focused Marxist approach is based on the Althuserian logic of over-determination where two variables X and Y mutually constitute each other each being cause and effect of the other. Hence, it cannot be said which one is before and which one is later. The concept of over-determination is premised on the understanding that no element can exist on its own. Thus over-deterministic logic has rejected the logic of unidirectional causality. Mutual constutitutivity, unlike the logic of causality, does not simply affect the state of being that is presumed to exist but it makes possible the very existence of the being (Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg 2012).

This way of looking at the world marks a departure from the orthodox Marxist rendition of economic as the base of the society. First, in this over-deterministic logic economic, political, cultural and natural mutually constitute each other. Second, the linear progression of society as claimed by historical materialism breaks down. Society does not follow the linear transition from primitive communism to socialism/communism via feudalism and capitalism. Following Class Focused Marxist Approach we can say economic and non-economic processes mutually constitute each other and none is more significant than the other.
Class in orthodox approach is defined as a noun in terms of either ownership of means of production or ownership of property or power. But class-focused approach renders class as process in terms of Marxian category of surplus labour, which we have already defined above.

Resnick and Wolff (1987) reject determinism because (a) it is epistemologically untenable, and (b) “politically dangerous”. But this new perspective does not disable a Marxian critique. “Resnick and Wolff were never persuaded to see Marxism as so hopelessly mired in determinism that a rejection of determinism requires the rejection of Marxism” (Cassano 2009). For Resnick and Wolff “overdetermination” is itself overdetermined by multiple meanings. Following Althusser, they extend the use of “overdetermination”, producing a kind of holistic social system theory in which any social process interacts with and affects all other processes in a social formation.” (Cassano 2009) Society’ is not a thing, fixed and constant. Rather, it is a perpetually ongoing fabrication, a set of interacting and living process. Previously, theorist represents social formation as closed totalities. Resnick and Wolff do not reject the notion of “totality”. But their totality has no closure. They believe that social theorist’s perspective is always limited, partial, and fragmentary. This acknowledgement of the partial perspective of the theorist leads to their epistemological assertion: “Truth is not absolute, but rather relative.” (Cassano 2009).

Resnick and Wolff (1987) generate a unique definition of ‘class’. Before, the political economists used the word - ‘class’ - as a category or group of similar things. A ‘class’ of social actors is defined based upon their possession of power or property or means of production or some composite of these elements. Resnick and Wolff furnish a new definition of ‘class’ which describes processes of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour as indicated by Marx in his Das Capital.

We know from the Class Focused Marxist analysis, that there are differences between notion of necessary labour from that of surplus labour and the notion fundamental class process from that of subsumed class process. By necessary labour, we mean the amount needed to produce the subsistence consumption of the direct producers themselves by which they can go on reproducing their labour power. Surplus labour, on the other side, is the amount they produce beyond this necessary labour. Following Marx, this surplus labour may be appropriated either by the direct producers themselves or by others who are
non-performers of surplus labour. Those who appropriate the surplus take the decision to
distribute it in society. So, in this rendition distribution is very much attached to
appropriation at the site of production; it is not separated from production. The
organization of the performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour
comprises a class process. The fundamental class process refers to the performance and
appropriation of surplus labour. On the other hand, subsumed class process refers to the
distribution and receipt of the surplus labour. Fundamental class process and subsumed
class process mutually constitute each other in overdetermined manner. We cannot say
which one is more important. Distribution of surplus labour takes place to various
economic agents who ensure the necessary conditions of existence and reproduction of the
corresponding fundamental class process. An individual can at the same time belongs to
different class processes – fundamental and subsumed. Hence, this negates the concept of
homogeneous class groups as propounded by the orthodox Marxist theory.

Following Marx the term ‘exploitation’ is an economic term which relates to fundamental
class process. It occurs when the surplus labour is not appropriated by direct producer.
That is why Resnick and Wolff (1987) argued that a social actor may be exploited in one
working place, where his/her surplus labour is appropriated by other, while he or she
exploits other in another working place. The same individual personifies two separate
class position at two different social sites. Resnick and Wolff (1987) has expanded and
expounded upon both their non-deterministic Marxism and their non-substantive
definition of class as a process. So, we have broadly speaking two different types of class
processes – exploitative and non-exploitative.

Class is an economic process. Following Class Focused Marxist Approach, a society or an
economy is a disaggregated and decentred space of heterogeneous class processes which
are mutually interrelated in complex overdetermined manner.

Following this concept of class exploitation gets foregrounded even at the site of a
household. It adds to the feminist tradition that household production may take place
within a variety of exploitative or non-exploitative relations.

We have observed that the concept of class is very much essential to understand the
process of societal transformation. Marxist class analysis basically addresses what happen
in the production sphere which creates exchange values (keeping in mind capitalism as the
predominant or hegemonic system of production). It further assumes that within a household only use values are created. So, orthodox Marxian analysis keeps household production outside its purview. But Marxist Feminists argue that household is that site from where the concept of exploitation emerges (Cassano 2009). Not only that, struggle inside the household has both causes and effects of those positions outside household. So Marxist class analysis must not stop at the doorstep of household and must investigate what happens inside the household.

Surplus labour’ is the entry point of the class-focused Marxist approach. While class process is an economic process non-economic processes include political, cultural and natural processes including gender process, which is a non-class non-economic process. The Marxian category of exploitation is applicable in the case of class-process while oppression as category is associated with non-class processes including gender process. While exploitation signifies appropriation of surplus labour by non-performers of surplus labour, “oppression” signifies basically a political process of dominating other persons by directing and controlling their mind, body and labour power. Fradd, Resnick and Wolff (2009) refuse to give priority of one process on other processes. Economic and non-economic processes overdetermine one another. The point is to analyze the differences and varying interrelationships between political, cultural and economic processes. Therefore, it is very much essential to explore the interaction between class and gender in market with an extension of their interaction within household.

In regard to the status of women in Indian society, a complementary relation between male and female is portrayed in Indian philosophy as they are like purusa (men) and prakiti (nature as women). Masculine dominance is not natural to start with in this rendition. Seclusion of women was unknown. Women had enjoyed the property right. A part of the ancestral property was given to them as dowry, which became their own property and used to be called stridhana (wealth of women). Women used to go about as they liked. In early stage, there were no such conception that men and women should occupy separate spheres and that each sex should avoid the character and activity which is the proper preserve of the other. There was no reason that society forced women into a domesticity for which they are not suited. It was the selfishness of some powerful person who wish to see themselves perpetuated, the fear of not having any obedience for their own sake, the so-called ‘dharma’ as religion viewed in terms of stipulated social code of conduct, forced
women to confine within household (Radhakrishnan 1942). Further, to make women economically subservience, women were deprived from property right (Radhakrishnan 1942). Society recognized the job in which women had have comparative advantage as less skilled, low paid jobs, low-profile job etc. So through this conception, patriarchy started to rule over the assets (including labour power, leisure time, material property etc) of women. Later, on account of economic and other conditions, this oppression has gathered a momentum (Banerjee 2002). In India patriarchy is treated as basic force behind the social and cultural construction of gender categories. However, patriarchy is not an unchanging and universal concept, rather a living social system (Banerjee 2002).

On the other side, there is a small section of Indian women who have received its share of the benefits and opportunities generated through the process of development (Bagchi and Dutta 2005). However, a report from *The Economic Times* has revealed that mid and top level IT companies are staring at gender crisis. TCS, Wipro and Infosys, the top three IT service providers in India, alone employ over one lakh women, but most of them crowd out after their entry. Most of them quit to focus on family or to pursue careers that have less working hours and lesser time-zone complication. So, one of the factors behind this volatility and negligence of labouring activities of women may be the strong cultures which dominate and direct the path that women have to choose. Sometimes these decisions are made by individual families purely on the basis of their own calculations of cost and benefits; there may be no pressure of community traditions, comparable to earlier times. Condition of women is at severe disadvantage in both home and labour market (Banerjee 2002). These positions could not be segregated since both stem from the way that families follow to socialize their daughter.

Today, many women have two lives, one inside her home and the other inside the market. It is argued that owing to the increased average expectation of life and the reduced size of families consequent upon the process of industrialization and urbanization both in the developed and developing countries, women today hardly can pay the individual attention to the family as before.

It seems in primitive stage, women worked along with men. Women used to help their male partners in various activities in agriculture, domestic craft and cottage industries. This does not, however, mean that a watertight compartment was there between men’s work and women’s work.
However, society recognized no problem in connection with woman as workers at home, even though, their work was highly strenuous. Since domestic factory functioned as a family unit the question of payment of wages to women workers did hardly arise. Now when the women pulled out of their hearth and home and were engaged in market-based activities, the question of work condition and wage-payment arose. Women became new economic status independent of men folk. Women became the competitors of men in market-based activities. Employment of women in gainful occupations has received diverse and varied criticisms (Dasgupta 1964). Firstly, Women were hardly capable of strenuous activities. They may suffer from physical ailments and deformities which adversely affect her power and capacity of child bearing. Secondly, women’s involvement in factories, mines, office and other establishments might bring some dysgenic consequences in their family. Thirdly, a working mother is not only at home, she is not in the neighbourhood also. So, division of labour became no longer a friendly association. Woman has, thus, taken her place in working life, no longer as man’s helpmate in the running of family business, but as a worker in market (Dasgupta 1964).

Engel’s view that women’s subordination as a result of having lost control over means of production because of physical weakness could not have occurred if there is absence of any type of enslavement, which is a result of the imperialism of the human consciousness, seeking always to exercise its sovereignty in objective function. Thus, woman may fail or sometime be failed to lay claim to the status of subject. In spite of these obstacles we can observe there are growing numbers of participation of women in market. Being ‘other’ she is continuing her market-based activities. Therefore, definitely there are some reasons behind this picture. We are looking forward a theory that integrates class processes that exist in market (production) with household gender process. Neither we agree with liberal feminist nor do we follow orthodox Marxian view. We are following class-focused Marxist approach. We would like to integrate private (civil) sphere with public as well as reproduction, child caring based gender process with economic production sphere.

In India concept of women as reserve army of labour exerting a downward pressure on wages in general could not explain the entire situation that prevails. Here women get lower wages as these are set for them despite there being Equal Payments Act in independent India. Some women do get benefits. However, lots of women now work hard for survival. Thrown out into the competitive world they discover their potential to earn, to survive, and
to protect their family from crisis. Is this participation reflecting their spontaneity and natural choice or their forced entry in market? By empowerment, patriarchy measures rising participation in political, economical, cultural and societal activity. This idea has been reflected in some well-defined indices also. Gender specific index - gender empowerment measure (GEM) is focusing on political participation, economic participation and power over economic resources (Bhuimali and Malakar 2008). Political participation and decision-making power is measured by women’s and men’s percentage shares of parliamentary seats. Economic participation and decision-making power, is measured by two indicators - women’s and men’s percentage shares of position as legislators, senior officials and managers and women’s and men’s percentage shares of professional and technical positions. Finally, power over economic resources is measured by women’s and man’s estimated earned income. These measures have failed to cover the entire domain of women’s participation in labour market. We think pattern of gender process within family and state affair are not universally given. There are different determining factors of this oppression. Social processes including economic, educational, legal, political, cultural, and gender and like together determine the condition of women.

What we have supposed that position of women in labour market is influenced by mutually constituting set of processes. There may be different class identities. These are multiple and shifting with individual participating in a number of class processes at any one time. Therefore to explore the true position of women in labour market, we have to identify diverse class processes that coexist in a society. This effort will not give the totality of women’s position. We have to further extend our analysis to realize how the other non-economic social processes interact with each other and affect all other processes in a social formation.

It is also clear from the very definition of Gender Empowerment Measure that it emphasizes the capabilities of affluent women community, not the deprived women who are engaged in unorganized/informal sector. Notably when all authentic statistical sources have announced majority of working women are working in unorganized/informal sector then why we are unwilling to evaluate decision-making strategy under this segment of the market as an indicator of empowerment? We have to observe and evaluate the class processes that are prevailing within this sector too.
We have uttered the word “exploitation” to present the condition of women in labour market, we also use the term “oppression” which is a political term referring to the process that sex-based domination of other person. We use the two terms to distinguish economic from political processes, to explore their interactions. We will observe how the gender identities influence the class position that women will accept or seek in the market? We think gender process is one type of social ideological processes that includes the production and distribution of sets of meanings which are attached to primary and secondary sex characteristics. Gender process may produce the conditions of existence for class process. Simultaneously, gender process in any society may be determined by the other social processes there.

I.2 Objectives of the Study:

We have observed that status of women within society is determined by different social processes which are prevalent in the society. Any society is a web of social relationships which are social processes, social patterns and social interactions. These relationships are also subject to change. The term ‘social change’ is used to describe variation of any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interactions, or social organizations. Whenever a large number of persons is engaged in activities that differ from those which their immediate forefathers were engaged in some time before a social change is said to have occurred (Sharma 1989). So both class and non-class processes are subject to change. Therefore it is essential to categorize working women under the circumstances of these changed situations.

A society and its institutions are disaggregated and decentred space of heterogeneous social processes which are mutually interrelated in complex overdetermined manner. Society’ is not a fixed and constant site. Rather, it is a perpetually on-going fabrication, a set of interacting and living and dynamic social processes. Today, many women have two lives, one inside her family and the other inside the market. She has to face several social processes within the family and within the market which have strong influences on their lives.

The contradictions between the persistently household-oriented practices of gendering and the challenges posed by a rapidly modernizing economy have made women increasingly vulnerable to degradation and violence (Banerjee 2002). It is also argued that tradition
has, to a large extent, been responsible for many women’s handicaps in the labour market. On the other side, there is a small section of Indian women who have received some share of the benefits and opportunities generated through the process of economic development. A report from *The Economic Times* has revealed that mid and top level IT companies like TCS, Wipro and Infosys which are the top three IT service providers in India, alone employ over one lakh (0.1 million) women, but most of them quit to focus on family or to pursue careers that have less working hours and lesser time-zone complication. Therefore, such type of entry into and withdrawal from market might cause by the social processes which exist both in market and within family also. Sometimes these decisions are made by individual families purely on the basis of their own calculations of cost and benefits. However in globalised economy, under a changed economic scenario, women’s lives are changing. Women now work hard for survival. Thrown out into the competitive world; they discover their potential to earn, to survive, and to protect their family from crisis. Simultaneously, condition of women is at severe disadvantage both at home and labour market (Banerjee 2002).

Therefore, to explore the true position of women within society, we have to identify diverse social processes that coexist in a society. This effort will not give the totality of women’s position. We have to further extend our analysis to realize how the over-deterministic significance of social processes and changes in them at different circumstances.

Family, which is a web of relationship between members of family, is the primary institution of society. It is a site where all type of social processes like, economic, political, legal, cultural, gender processes co-exist. Like the family, market is such a social institution whose relevance in the daily life of an individual cannot be ignored. Though family is the private domain of society, the significance of market in a modern society lies in it being the space for public domain. Both public and private domain shapes one’s life. They determine how an individual behave, act, learn and communicate. As society changes, the relevance of such institutions also alter. Our objective to explore the liaison between market and family that can be best used to understand the status of working women in recent time.
I.3 Hypotheses:

Following Fraad, Resnick and Wolff’s (2009) over-deterministic ontology, we have learned that class processes are multiple and shifting. Women may participate in a number of class processes at any one time. These class processes do exist both in labour market and in the household. Ignoring Marxian determinism, we have known that a social actor may be engaged in one type of class process in the working place, while the same actor may perform different activities by engaging herself in another class process that exists in the household. Such overdetermination produces a multi-faceted social change as far as women-market interface in rural spaces is concerned. That is why, when we have uttered the word “exploitation” to present the condition of women in labour market, we also use the term “oppression” which is a political term referring to the process that subjugation of women to men. We use the two terms to distinguish economic from political processes, and also to explore their interactions. We hold that the gender processes and class processes mutually constitute a woman’s life – especially in the context of her growing participation in the market. We presume that gender process is one type of social ideological processes that include the production and distribution of sets of meanings which are attached to primary and secondary sex characteristics. Gender process may the conditions of existence for class process. Simultaneously, gender process in any society may be determined by the class processes also. And, similarly gender processes determine class processes. Therefore, principal hypotheses of the present work are as follows:

i) Growing participation of women in market increases women’s empowerment;

ii) Growing participation of women in market helps to reduce the everyday misery of a woman’s life;

iii) Due to growing participation of women in market, they are now enjoying more liberty to express and exchange their views within public and private domain.

I.4 Research Design and Methodology:

There is an ever present need for methodological work at all stages of survey process. We opt for a stratified multistage cluster design. There are two reasons for this. First, the absence or poor quality of listings of households or addresses makes it necessary to first
select a sample of geographical units, and then to construct lists of households or addresses only within those selected units. The samples of households are then selected from those lists. Second, the use of multistage designs controls the cost of data collection. Stratification is commonly applied at each stage of sampling. However, its benefits are particularly strong in sampling Primary Sampling Units. It is, therefore, important to stratify the Primary Sampling Units efficiently before selecting them. Stratification partitions the units in the population into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive subgroups or strata. Separate samples are then selected from each ‘Stratum’. A primary purpose of stratification is to improve the precision of the survey estimates. In this case, the formation of the strata should be such that units in the same stratum are as homogeneous as possible and units in different strata are as heterogeneous as possible with respect to the characteristics of interest to the survey.

I.5 Description of the Area of Survey:

We have chosen the first stratum on the basis of literacy rate. Education is considered as vital for social, economical and personal development. It is expected that with more and more education and skill formation gender-based oppression, exclusion and injustice to women will reduce and empowerment of women also increases (World Development Report, 2010, Kapur, 2001). According to district-wise performance of literacy rate observed from latest provisional Census of India (2011) the four districts that have failed to obtain 70% literacy rate are Murshidabad, Purulia, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur. In the Murshidabad District the literacy rate as per the Census (2011) is 67.53% (71.02% for males and 63.88% for females) which is below the State average of 77.08% (82.67% for males and 71.16% for females) and stands fourth from below (above Purulia, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur). Among the urban population 77.15% of male and 68.02% of female are literate whereas in the rural areas male and female literacy rates are 69.52% and 62.84% respectively (Census of India 2011). Compared to the Census of 2001 the district has registered a fast growth rate in female literacy during 2001-11. So in spite of having poor literacy rate, as the district of Murshidabad has registered fast growth in female literacy rate during 2001-2011 compared to remaining three districts (Purulia, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur), we have chosen Murshidabad district as the first stratum for our field survey.

District of Murshidabad is the district south of the Ganges or Padma. The river Bhagirathi, flowing from north to south through the district, divided it into two almost equal portions,
which in their geology, their physical characteristics, their agriculture, form a striking contrast to each other. The western tract of the river is locally known as Rarh and the tract to the east as Bagri. Land of Rarh is high and slightly undulating, but is interspersed with numerous swamps and the beds of old rivers. Having such physical pattern, land of Rarh is quite fertile. The eastern tract, Bagri lies low and is exposed to annual inundation which causes widespread suffering and makes the land less fertile (Census of India, 1951).

The district of Murshidabad at present consists of five sub-divisions namely, Sadar, Kandi, Jangipur, Lalbagh and Domkal. Among which Sadar, Lalbagh and Domkal sub-divisions are situated in Bagri region, whereas Kandi and Jangipur lie in Rarh area. Fertility of land influences not only people’s earning, but also their standard of living. In order to keep the heterogeneity among the strata, we have selected one sub-division from each tract which has highest literacy rate. Further, in order to capture the variances among the social processes due to geographical regional differences across urban and rural areas, we have chosen one community development block or simply, block and one municipality area from each sub-division. Hariharpara Block and Berhampore Municipality area have been chosen from Sadar subdivision. Kandi block and Kandi Municipality area from Kandi sub-division have been chosen for our study. This selection was made on the basis of the female literacy rate. All the selected four areas of our study (both rural and urban) do have relatively higher female literacy rates vis-à-vis the remaining areas as per the Census of India (2001). These values are - Hariharpara Block (52.30%), Berhampore Municipality (81.80%), Kandi Block (42.20%) and Kandi Municipality (68.60%).

Murshidabad is a district which was the centre of power in history of Bengal before the colonial period set in. In seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the process of urbanization in Murshidabad district emerged due to it was the capital of Bengal, seats of military outpost, seats of religion and learning, etc. After the Plassey battle in 1757, the process of de-urbanization started. This was because of presence of severe natural calamities, shifting of power of administration to Calcutta under the colonial rule. In the last phase of the nineteenth century the process of de-urbanization was caused by shifting of cantonment, low investment in education and largely by process of well planned de-industrialization by the colonial rulers to favour Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

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3 The relevant table 3.1 is given in p.100-101 in chapter 3.
According to the Census 1951, Murshidabad had a population of 1,715,759 persons. At that time, people who had faith on Muslims religion dominated the district. They formed 55.24% of total population. Share of Hindu people was 44.60%. Remaining population belonged to Jain, Christians, Sikhs and Tribal people.

The latest census (2011) has shown that the population of this district was 7,102,430. Among this 19.78% are urban people and remaining 80.22% are rural. District contributes 7.78% of the total state population and share has increased from 7.32% to the present figure during 2001-11. Hence, it is predominantly a rural district in terms of shares of rural versus urban population. Child composition of the population has decreased from 17.80% (in 2001) to 13.79% (in 2011). Among the total population 36,29,595 persons are male and remaining 34,72,835 person are female. Table 3.2 gives us an overall decadal variation in population in the district as per various Census Reports. However, the decadal population growth is always above that at the state level as can be seen from the table 3.2. Geographically, the district covers 6% of land area of the state whereas its share in total state population is 7.78% as per Census of India, 2011. Population density of the district is 1334 higher than the state average 1029 (Census 2011). In terms of population density per square kilometer the district’s rank is fifth after Howrah. Table 3.4 shows the sub-division wise density of population in district of Murshidabad in 2001 which indicates Jangipur as most densely populated sub-division of the district.

Sex ratio of the district for the year 2011 was 957 higher than state level sex ratio of 947. In rural areas of the district, sex ratio is 953 whereas that in urban areas of the district is 973 higher than state level sex ratio of 958.

Murshidabad is an economically backward district. Situation was not so poor in the past. Lalbagh was the capital of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the pre-colonial period and Kashimbazar was an important international trading place. Population density is relatively higher in those places/areas where economic opportunities are more. Following table shows the distribution of workers and non-workers in the district.

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4 The relevant table 3.2 is given in p-103-104 in Chapter 3
5 The relevant table 3.4 is given in p-105 in Chapter 3
Percentage of female workers in the Main worker category is quite low and share of female Marginal Worker is very high. A large number of female is non-worker. As the economy is basically agrarian, a significant number of women are concentrated in agricultural sector. Important industries include silk, biri, metal crafts and important crops are Rice, Wheat, Potato, Jute, Sugarcane, Pulses, and etc. The population shows heavy seasonal variation due to migration. Due to lack of major industries, the district has witnessed growing tertiarisation and informalisation which allow people to find out alternative livelihoods without leaving the place. Majority of women workforce in the district is engaged in informal (service) activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Division</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Workers</th>
<th>Percentage of Non-workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main Workers</td>
<td>Marginal Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadar Sub-division</td>
<td>27.38</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandi Sub-division</td>
<td>26.11</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangipur Sub-division</td>
<td>34.54</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalbagh Sub-division</td>
<td>25.66</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domkol Sub-division</td>
<td>25.86</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>28.51</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India (2001).

The present work is organized in different chapters as follows. In Chapter 1 an attempt has been made to understand analytically women, family, market and economic empowerment of women. It is essential to analyze social and historical reality of the status and positions of women as they have evolved over time in the Indian society from an early historical period to the contemporary period. Chapter 2 dwells on this issue of status of women in the Indian society as it has evolved over time and an attempt has been made in this chapter to relate this evolution with the modern-day question of women’s empowerment. Chapter 3 deals with the secondary data-based analysis of women’s empowerment in the district of Murshidabad in West Bengal in India where we have tried to decipher some meanings for women’s empowerment as far as women-market interface in the district of Murshidabad is concerned in terms of our class-focused Marxist approach. This is followed by a primary data-based attempt.
to understand the ground reality of women’s empowerment in terms of our class-focused Marxist approach in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad in Chapter 4. The concluding chapter summarizes the major findings of the study as far as women’s empowerment in terms of women-market interface in the district of Murshidabad is concerned.