CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
AND
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter deals with the conceptual and analytical framework for this study as well as its methodology. As has been noted already, the central theme of research here is women's political empowerment in the context of decentralisation in Karnataka. In this regard, we are focusing on certain major and key concepts of decentralisation, gender, empowerment and political empowerment and leadership.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

Political economy theories, like the one by Vilfredo Pareto\(^1\), the Political economist and Sociologist from Italy, holds that decentralised decision-making optimises the outcomes and ensures the well-being of all those who are likely to be affected by such decisions. The rationale behind this is derived from the democratic imperative; all those who have larger stakes are also affected by the decisions, which are taken by the leaders involved in the decision-making process. Self-interest naturally is a guide in arriving at proper decisions, which is consistent with one's own good. This logical conclusion is argued to be providing a theoretical basis for understanding the decentralised political institutions like the PR bodies, which exclusively promote democratic and decentralised decision-making process.

---
\(^1\) Cited in Decentralisation: Mandal Panchayat System in Karnataka (1995).
Even though there are many theories of decentralisation, four of them are held to be the major ones. They are as follows:

- The Fiscal-Federal theories
- The Public Administration theories
- The Political Economy theories and
- The Public Choice Theories (Islam 2005).

Keeping these in view, it is attempted to understand the theme of present research against the framework of the theory of Public Choice.

2.1.1 The Public Choice Theory

Public choice theory is useful in analysing the benefits and costs of decentralisation of the provision of delivery services. It assumes that the voter is a customer and the politician is a businessman. Public choice school holds the view that the people are aware of their needs, and therefore people's involvement in planning and implementation will be more effective and efficient (Russel and Nicholson 1981; Muller 1979).

Public Choice exponents have examined legislative action, although the legislators, who are expected to perceive the pulse of the people's interest, tend to keep an eye on how to use people's resources by their decision-making process, and not by their own interest. Tax paying public is affected by regulations on the main resources, irrespective of whether they provide them or not. However, the legislature serves their self-interest (by electing them). But they make compromises with special interest groups of their constituency who always keep them in office through their valuable votes as their contribution in their election.
Moreover, the politicians who claim themselves to be committed to act in the interest of the public cannot really do so. Since the public is composed of groups with different interests, the above task is difficult to be accomplished. Paradoxically, individual voters usually exercise their voting, based on their own particular self-interest, although public choice economists have called these assumptions that they worry about the people in order to serve the public interest in participation. They have focused attention exclusively on analysing the government's failure. However, their theories' main limitation is that they are too rational and narrow in prescription. Further, rational voters do not vote. Whenever rational candidates compete for the votes of rational voters, there is no equilibrium. Such outcome is because people belong to different interest groups.

2.1.2 Theories of Poverty

While the above is a discourse on people's choices in a democracy, the argument from their poverty situation addresses the very root of participation by them in a democratic and decentralised system. Chambers (1983)\(^2\) expounds that poverty can restrict a genuine democracy, which includes people's participation in decision-making processes and competing with other groups for scarce resources by articulating their interests. He has also highlighted, in his concept of deprivation trap that poverty contributes to powerlessness. This is because of lack of wealth, resulting in low social status, limited choice, physical weakness and restricting the energy to protest, organise and take part in political activities, leading to lack of contact with political

leaders and not knowing what the powerful are doing (also discussed in Wolf 1996).

Hence, for those who are poor, vulnerable and powerless, there is less to lose and more to gain. This requires reversals in three dimensions, viz., in space, professional value and in specialisation.

2.1.3 Social Inequality and Powerlessness

As our society is pluralistic, the economic and social sphere is the arena of the privileged status group. The same is true of resources and devolution of power. Vest with this distribution is a sort of polarised advantage, but the privileged status group does not want to share power resource with the marginalised sections and with the poor disadvantaged groups.

The above said reason is the beginning of the idea of having reservation of separate constituencies through an affirmative action programme for SCs and STs and the backward castes. This has been provided to initiate democratic decentralisation. In the 1990s, the reservation of a separate constituency for women, through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, was also initiated at the PRIs' level to empower women to challenge patriarchy at the grassroots level. It created the much-needed political space for women. This accommodation imparted professional values to marginalised women in the new arena (Stephen and Sekaran 2001).

2.1.4 Key Concepts of Participation, Accountability & Transparency

It is also argued that the key concepts of decentralisation like participation, accountability, transparency and fiscal transfers are interlinked and their effect on development cannot simply be measured
(Romeo 1999; Crook and Manor 1998). In addition, effective leadership and decision-making are also significant parts of decentralisation. Without leadership and effective implementation, the set objectives of decentralisation will not be complete.

2.1.5 Gender Based Discrimination

Rural India is constrained by problems of illiteracy, gender-based discrimination, caste and religious conflicts and political rivalry based on these. Despite decentralisation of finances, administration and political participation by people, traditional factors associated with caste and religion continue to haunt the elected members of the various tiers of Panchayats. More important is the domination by the elite over members belonging to weaker sections (Inbanathan 2001).

Chart 2.1: Analytical Framework for the Study

Women’s Political Empowerment

Decentralisation Non-Governmental Organisations

Opportunities Training

1. Participation
2. Equality in Power
3. Access to Opportunities
4. Community/Local Development

1. Awareness about Political Rights
2. Capacity building
3. Participation

1. Decision-making
2. Effective Participation
3. Leadership
4. Effective Community Development

54
The above chart/diagram intends to provide a framework for the outcome of interface between local government and NGOs, through training and capacity building exercises given to vulnerable sections like women. It presents the situation after women have obtained training, that is, to see the effectiveness of their leadership after undergoing such orientation or training. It also tries to project how community development receives its due attention after such sections of society (like women as a vulnerable group) receive equal power and opportunities for participation.

Secondly, women members are worst affected by this system of control by dominant individuals or groups because of their status being that of a secondary citizen. They also continue to be under the control of their husbands, brothers or fathers, and thereby fail to operate independently in their roles as members of panchayats, or, sometimes, even as their heads.

2.1.6 Role of NGOs in Empowering Decentralised Governance

For this grim situation, the arrival of the NGOs into the picture to provide orientation and skill-transfer to the members, particularly the women among them has brought some improvement. This has enabled them not only to take their roles in the proper perspective, but also to understand their rights and enact them and provide good leadership. Training has helped them to take proper decisions by exercising their discretionary powers. Finally, the representatives have been able to plan development programmes required for their area or constituencies, and implement them using resources generated locally, besides external help.

Thus, it is no exaggeration of the fact that greater the transfer of skills to women representatives in panchayats to participate in their political roles, higher is the quality and effectiveness of leadership by them.
Greater participation in development planning and management supposedly promotes national unity by giving groups in different regions in a country a greater ability to participate in planning, decision-making and thus increase their stake in maintaining political stability. Greater equity is presumed to be more likely when representation of a wide variety of political, religious, ethnic and social groups participate in development (Esman and Montegomery 1982).

2.2 Conceptual Framework/Definitions & Approaches

2.2.1 Basic Concepts

To understand the above discussion on the advantages of a decentralised government with participation by the hitherto non-participated sections, like women, better, the key terms and concepts that are frequently in use in this context need to be elaborated/explored for their meaning.

Political Rights

A number of factors are part of political rights. They are: right to exercise franchise; right to contest elections; right to obtain seats of power in public sphere; right to establish political organisations; right to raise objections and criticisms against government and so on. All these rights are considered to be crucial for the success of democratic decentralisation.

Capacity Building

Capacity to use legal framework to one's own advantage is another important right in this direction.

Participation

This right refers to the capacity, knowledge, expertise, representation and contribution that elected representatives could
gain in order to control and exercise their powers as leaders in grassroots democracy.

**Empowerment**

The process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes is referred to as 'empowerment'.

**Decision-Making**

It is a process where an individual is facilitated to implement one's own ideas and views, regarding any development issue, for the benefit of a public interest.

**Leadership**

The individuals occupying a position with a status, which confers on them the right to take decisions, exercise authority, initiate action and direct or control the activities is referred to as leadership. A leader is simply referred to as one who leads the masses (Sharma 1996).

**Decentralisation**

The above discussion confirms that effective decentralisation enables not only good governance but also facilitates women's access to political rights and empowerment. It also helps them to counter effectively the constraints brought about by socio-economic, cultural and gender disparities.

Decentralisation can be broadly defined as the transfer of planning, decision-making or management function from the central government and its agencies to field organisations, sub-ordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporation, area-wise regional development
organisation, specialised functional authorities or NGOs (Rondinelli 1981).

The term "Decentralisation" in the first sense signifies a relaxation of control from time to time by the higher authorities through the downward flow of power and of radial simplification and administrative process. It is a means for improving national planning and implementation by delegating the power to the lower level. The central theme of decentralisation is delegation of power operated in a system of socio-political organisation.

The concept 'decentralisation' also refers to the process of de-concentration and devolution of power; and the word 'authority' denotes the delegation of authority to the staff of a central department, who would be stationed outside the headquarters for discharging specified functions. The process of devolution of power and authority refers to the constitutional and legal transfer of power to formally created regional or local authorities for discharging the specified functions.

Lexicographically, decentralisation means both reversing the concentration of administration at a single centre, and conferring powers on local government. The dictionary thus captures the idea of decentralisation as a political phenomenon, involving both administration and government.

Besides the concept "decentralisation of power", a variety of other such concepts have been used by academics and administrators. Yet, the meanings of the concepts are not the same. Concepts such as local self-government, local government, grassroots democracy, grassroots institutions, new Panchayat Raj Institutions, local-bodies or institutions empowering people, small government approach and decentralised
governance now have been used interchangeably to connote the same meaning of devolving powers and responsibilities from a higher level governing institution to lower level governing institution.

Decentralised governance includes transfer of power, resources, decision-making and implementation from a centralised system to that of a decentralised one. The process of devolution of power and authority refers to the transfer of power created by regional or local authorities for discharging specific functions.

2.2.2 Governance

As is known, the term governance means government or institution, which is established for the sake of peoples' development and to create an environment of change. Whatever steps are taken to achieve this goal could be addressed as governance. Some of the relevant definitions of the term, as propounded by scholars are as follows:

The concept of 'governance' is encompassing and contextual. It means different things to different people. The actual meaning of the concept depends on the level of governance, the goals to be achieved and the approach to be followed. Governance is a broader term than government and, it can, therefore, be seen as one of the institutions involved in governance. It is possible to have governance without government (Rhodes 1996). Webster's 3rd International Dictionary (1986: 982)\(^3\) indicates that governance is a synonym for government or "the actor or process of governing, specifically authoritative direction and control". It can also be simply defined as the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented. This interpretation

---

\(^1\) Cited in Administrative Reforms for Good Governance, (2004).
specifically focuses on the effectiveness of the executive branch of the
government.

Thus, governance is all about the 'processes' and 'structures' that are
used in mobilising a society's economic and social resources to serve the
public interest. So, 'governance' involves authoritative allocation of
values by those in power through decision-making (Barthwal 2003)\(^4\). It
refers to the exercise of authority for management of collective goods
(Kaufmann 1999). Governance is the process of making decisions and
implementing them.

UNDP (1997) defines it as an exercise of economic, political and
administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels.
Governance is about how the governments and other social organisations
interact, how they interrelate to citizens and how decisions get taken in
an increasingly complex world (Plumptre and Graham 1999)\(^5\).

Sangita (2004) has defined the term 'governance' as the process by which
diverse elements in society yield power and authority and thereby
influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life,
economic and social development.

The various definitions stated above bring to focus the fact that in the
government or in any other institution, the desired goals and
programmes need to be achieved for this purpose of accomplishing
people's development and welfare. This necessitates a proper, systematic
supervisory process, which ensures thorough attention towards time


management, avoiding delays, influence of vested interest and other disturbances or constraints. This process ensures the design and implementation of programmes, keeping the welfare of all in mind. This is what we call as governance. It ensures control, order and discipline. Here, the decision-making process could be individualistic or collective.

2.2.3 Gender

The conceptual framework of contemporary western political thought reflects a vision of politics that is gender-myopic contemporary theories. In general, male-female disparity or gender is defined as the socially constituted differences between women and men (Naila 1994), or as undervaluing of what is seen as feminine. Gender is a set of qualities and behaviour, expected from a female or male, by their society (Liz 1993).

Aristotle\(^6\) took his curious set of binary oppositions even further in his 'Economics' where he states that men were stronger, women weaker; men courageous, women cautious; men the out-door type and women, domestic; men educate children, women nurture them.

Gender divides human beings into two categories: male and female. It is a system, which organises virtually every realm of our lives; whether we are sleeping, eating, watching TV, shopping or reading, gender is at work yet because it is everywhere, it is sometimes difficult to see it in operation (Francis, Stavropoulos and Pam 2003).

Object Relations Theory is a school of thought associated with the work of Mealanie Klein (1963)\(^7\) and taken up by the US feminist psychologists, such as Nancy Chodorow (1978a, 1978b)\(^8\). It relates to the first

---

\(^6\) Cited in Gender Studies (2003).
\(^7\) Cited in Gender Studies (2003).
\(^8\) Cited in Gender Studies (2003).
possibility (which these theorists tend to argue) that gender is a set of roles and cultural meaning acquired in the course of ego-formation within family structures. It also holds that significant change in child-rearing practices and kinship organisation can alter the meaning of gender and close the hierarchical gap between the genders of man and woman (Chodorow 1978b)9.

Judith Butler (1990 & 93) has argued that gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering.

The sum and substance of the above definitions is to understand that gender is not a biological entity. The difference between males and females in terms of their biology is termed as 'sex'. Gender is the term applied to understand social reconstruction of the roles of men and women. In any society, it is gender relation operating in its various institutions that determines the roles and responsibilities of both men and women. This includes all the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts, where we find the distinct participation by women as opposed to that of men. Thus, gender studies enable the understanding of difference in work participation rates, decision-making, access to resources and to development on a differential basis between men and women. This provides a link to understand that capacity building of a woman, as a weaker sex, is an important criterion to empower them.

2.2.4 Leadership

Leadership is the situation where an individual, occupying a position with a status that confers on him the right to take decisions, exercise authority, initiate action and direct or control the activities.

From the above perception, the study has focused on how many scholars writing on leaders and leadership have described these concepts:

The basic concept about the leader is one who leads others, be it a group or a number of groups or a community.

Linderman (1921) describes the leader as "an individual whose realisation, judgements and feelings are accepted by a group and forms the basis of belief and action."

Bogardus (1934) makes a similar statement. He says, "A leader is a person who exerts special influence over a number of people."

Allport\(^{10}\) emphasises on the personal relation of leadership: "Leadership, according to present usage, means the direct and face-to-face contact between the leaders and their followers. It is a personal-social control".

According to Robert Tanner\(^{11}\), leadership is "an interpersonal influence, exercised by situation and directed through the communication process, toward the attainment of a special goal or goals."

In general, there are three approaches in community leadership: (1) the political approach; (2) the reputations approach; and (3) the decisional approach.

Panchayat Raj system calls for a meaningful and dynamic leadership at the grassroots level. The decentralised planning process calls for an

\(^{10}\) Cited in Rural Leadership in A Welfare Society (1994).
increasingly important role of the local leaders in administering the social services, implementation of social welfare and economic plans and programmes with people's willing involvement and participation. The success or failure of development programmes indeed of more generous ideological aspirations of the people as embodied in our Constitution may will depend upon the type of leadership available at district, block and village levels.

Planning Commission (1955) mentions factors contributing to leadership which can be classified into 3 categories: (a) social status of family; (b) economic status of the family; and (c) individual personality traits. Other factors that improve leadership chances are age, education, leisure-time available, inclination to attend social and ceremonial matters, hospitality, and influence from outside the village like contact with officials and knowledge of court affairs etc. Lewis (1958) has placed the factors responsible for leadership upon wealth, family reputation, age and genealogical position, personality traits, state of retirement, education, connections and influences with outsiders and, finally, numerical strength of the family and lineage. Beteille (1965) has concluded in his studies, that the emerging leaders of the village are not members of the old land-owning class. They generally belong to the class of small owner-cultivators. Their power is, to a large extent, based upon numerical support within the village and political control outside it. Roy (1967) has given 6 characteristics of the leader. They refer to:

(a) individuals with high income and high level of living are likely to become leaders in the new organisations;

---

(b) people with more education will participate more in these new social organisations;

(c) members of large families are more likely to emerge as leaders;

(d) age and caste do not seem to determine who will be leaders and who will be not;

(e) the new leaders seem to have a higher level of contact with extension agencies; and

(f) The new leaders are generally a little more secular-oriented than most village people but they are not extremely secular.

Chaudhari (1964) has observed that with the introduction of PRIs, ‘the sanctity of traditional authority has gone: the influence of religion in day-to-day activities has withered away, and the sanctions behind the caste have disappeared. Instead, political authority has cast its influence over society. The National Institute of Community Development launched (1967) launched a nation-wide survey on the awareness of ‘Community Development in Villages’. Their analysis of the background of leaders reveals that leadership still continues in the hands of the upper, higher castes.

Sen and Roy (1967) define a leader as being higher in every positive score above than non-leaders. The urban linkages of the leader are higher than that of the non-leaders. Barnabas (1964) has characterised the lay leaders in extension work as those having high social status, owning more land, and being better educated than non-leaders.

Sirsikar (1964) has defined leadership in the following words: “it appears that there is a perceptible trend towards concentration of social,
economic and political power. The decentralisation of power has not yet reached the poorer sections of the village community like landless labourers and the scheduled castes”.

Abraham (1967) has argued that leaders from village India emerge from the level of land owning economically advantaged classes. Singh (1973) in his ‘Changing Power Structure of Village Community’ has described village leadership as one that has increasingly become more conciliatory and pragmatic in orientation’.

Wood (1959) has argued that, in order to be effective, leaders have to be pragmatic and exercise control through informal relations and integrated bureaucratic innovations with in the framework of informal leadership. He has argued that paternalistic and lineage based leadership has been vanishing. Orenstein (1959) has said that informal leaders are more effective in the villages than formal leaders. Alan Beals (1959) has called leader as one “who had the capacity of successful action”.

Dube (1968) and Srinivas (1969) have described leaders in terms of the concept of dominant caste. This refers to a situation where only a handful of individuals or families in a caste, hold the prestige of status symbols, financial resources and position of influence, within and outside the caste group. These get further weakened in the wake of village factionalism.

Despite this, the concept of dominant caste is held as crucial for the study of leadership. Srinivas has observed that the dominant caste is functional for the maintenance of village community and also works as a reference point for the lower castes to improve their position, both social and economic.
According to the same authors, position in the local caste hierarchy, wealth, especially ownership of land, reputation and size of the family, age, connections and influence outside the village, leisure-time available, elaborate performance of ceremonies and hospitality – all are supposed to be characterising leadership.

In their efforts to highlight leadership in the progressive phase, many scholars like Roy and others have relegated many of the traditional attributes to the background and ascribed high productive validity to several modern variables in identifying progressive leadership.

Tannenbaum and Massarik have defined leadership as “an interpersonal influence exercised in certain situations and directed through the communication process, toward the attainment of a special goal or goals”.

The Situationalists look for leadership characteristics in social situation in which one has to function as a leader. Merton (1957) has explained leadership as a compliment of role relationship which persons have by virtue of occupying a particular social or political status.

The above definitions speak about leaders and leadership. The emphasis is upon such roles of leaders, which relate to decision-making, social control and inter-personal relationship. A number of factors are responsible for good leadership. In these, besides socio-economic factors, the personality of the leader, her or his charisma is also important. Not only this, leaders represent even certain individual traits. On the whole, the personality of the leader and her or his leadership together influence what we consider as the output of leadership. Both of
these are like two faces of the same coin. Although a number of factors are responsible for contributing to leadership, it is an important concept to be understood whenever we discuss empowerment issue.

2.2.5 Leadership in the PRIs

The Earth Summit in Rio, the Human Rights Conference in Vienna, the Population Conference in Cairo and the Beijing Conference - all these are milestone events in terms of advancing our understanding of the crucial role of women in development. They also enable in focusing the attention of the international community on the issues concerning the role of women in the workplace and society. Also, the Nairobi Conference has recommended reservation of 33 per cent of seats, for women in all countries. Women's power can be distinguished from women's status in that, status refers to women's overall position in the society while power refers to women's ability to influence and control at the interpersonal level. Power can be defined as 'the ability to control or change the behaviour of others and the ability to realise one's will, even against opposition.

Democracy has a meaning and is a reality only where people at large, once sensitised to their rights, duties and obligations, are encouraged to exercise them (Jain 1967).

India is perhaps the first country to recognise the social fact manifested by Lênin on the International Women Workers' Day in 1921. Following the resolutions of the day, concrete measures have been taken by it to draw women into leadership positions, and thereby into politics, by giving them adult franchise in 1957 and one third reservation of seats in

---

the local self-government. Women's participation in panchayats is hailed as a milestone in participatory democracy. A number of committees have expressed support to the women's political participation through reservation of seats in their favour.

In this direction, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment giving 33.3 per cent of seats in the various tiers of the panchayats is hailed as a progressive step. Views have been expressed both for and against such a move. Reservation is said to have encouraged empowerment of women through access to leadership and through it to awareness and entrepreneurship. There are critics who have argued that reservation has created proxy leaders.

Absence of such leadership in the past, for women, is recognised to be due to a patriarchal structure of the society and subdued customary position of women and women's sphere of activities being limited to the household management. Another reason for negligible representation of women in Municipal Council is the perverted system of elections. Municipal elections, like any other elections in the country, require hiring of anti-social elements for booth-capturing and bogus voting. Women candidates do not compete with their male counterparts. Realising their practical limitations on the said account, even educated and enlightened women aspirants do not generally aspire for such positions (Mishra 1997).

2.2.6 Empowerment

Empowerment shows that a person can take decision in individual capacity or in a group for their personal or public life without depending on others or without being controlled by others. This study has focused on power and empowerment definition of many scholars as follows:
Before understanding the term empowerment, we should know what ‘power’ is. Here are a few explanations of the concept as propounded by political scientists and other social scientists:

1. Dahl (1969), power – capacity of an individual or group of individuals to control the conduct of others in the manner which one desires.

2. According to Gramsci (1971), dominant class (es) are able to present their ‘interests’ as if they are universal, securing the consent of subordinate class (es); hegemony derived from false consciousness.

3. Giddens (1984) has called social action as depending upon actors who are both “rules’ and “resources”. By using rules and resources (structure) agents unintentionally reproduce them.

2.2.7 Empowerment as a Process and as an Outcome

The term empowerment is used both in its meaning of being a process as well as an outcome of the process. Hartsock (1985) has distinguished between ‘power-over’, meaning control, and ‘power-to’, meaning the ability to influence change. ‘Power to’ is power to bring about change in situations of inequity and discrimination in which women find themselves. Another interpretation of the term could be found in Batliwala (1995). She has defined power as control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology and empowerment, as the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power.
Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance (Chandra 1997).

Empowerment - the goal of this method or practice is to address the role powerlessness plays in creating and perpetuating personal and social problems. It can be distinguished by its focus on developing critical awareness, increasing feelings of collective and self-efficiency and developing skills for personal, interpersonal or social change (Jenkins and Hooyaman, 1991; Gutierrez 1990; Pinderhughes 1989; Rappa 1981; Solomon 1976; Staples 1990).

Pillai (1995) has defined empowerment as an active multi-dimensional process, which enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

Power is the key of the term 'empowerment', which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type – physical, human, financial, such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and agencies, labour, money and access to money, knowledge, information etc. Ideas can be included in intellectual resources. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalise specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behaviour, virtually determining how people perceive, think and function in a given socio-economic and political environment (Apte 1995).
Another dimension of the term is clear when we read Staples (1990). It is argued in the work that the ability to act or to prevent action goes to the heart of any definition of "Power". The prefix "empowerment" is attached to the noun "Power" to create a verb. According to Webster's New World Dictionary (1982), this prefix is used to form verbs meaning, "To make, make into or like, cause to be". "Thus, to empower is to make, or cause power. Yet, the actual definitions offered for "empower" are (1) to give power or authority to, (2) give ability to, enable, permit with the example, "Congress is empowered to levy taxes". Webster's New World Dictionary (1982) refers to the process by which power is gained, developed, seized, facilitated or given.

Further, power is both situational and relational. The fundamental notion of power implies a relational context that is individual or group. In social relations, power has to be considered in gendered terms. Increased power of women will be reflected in their increased decision-making authority in family and community affairs. Empowerment thus becomes instrumental in changing the relationship of women vis-à-vis men in a society.

There are optimistic notes expressed by few scholars about the ability of power in transforming the weaker sections when it is made available to them. Hall, for example, (1992) has viewed that 'empowerment will enable women to maintain stronger functioning position. Staples, 1990, has argued that the ability to act or to prevent action goes to the heart of any definition of "power". The prefix 'em' is attached to the noun 'power' to create a noun.

In other words, the definition has attempted to show that power is instrumental in bringing out one's capacity. Authoritative person or group uses power to achieve its goals. This can be self-interest or by way
of representing the interest of the society. Use of power becomes a force and is legitimised in such context. On the whole, the concept of power refers to the ability for decision-making, either for self-interest or to bring about the development of the whole community.

Thus, political empowerment may be perceived as a cycle, beginning and ending within the individual and continuing indefinitely. A woman becomes aware of her rights, perceives an injustice in her own life and relates her experience to that of others. She acts with them to define the need and exert pressure for reforming and ultimately through this collective process gains a fuller sense of her own identity and power (Kumar 1992).

In the same way, empowerment creates suitable environment for expression of self-ability, leadership, decision-making and so on. It points towards capacity of vulnerable individual or groups to escape from external pressure to accept others opinion or action. It condemns control by traditional and patriarchal dictates and enables expression of own interest based on once own perception, experience, values, limitation, interests and chances.

This type of empowerment is close to the process of decision-making. Together, this influences the process of change. It also acts as a useful instrument for controlling power, attitude and behaviour.

2.2.8 Non-Governmental Organisations

According to several studies and as we have stated earlier NGOs are working for the weaker section without consideration for region, religion, caste and creed in the context of development and empowerment without expecting any sort or benefit.
Beveridge (1949) has defined NGOs as voluntary services, or as private enterprises for social progress. Voluntary action denotes an organisation which, whether its workers are paid or unpaid, is initiated and governed by its own members without external control. It is a 'power breaker' agency to meet the needs of the special groups and a safety valve for those who otherwise cannot participate in its activities as paid employees.

Banton (1968) characterises voluntary organisations as a group organised for the pursuit of one interest or of several interests in common. Usually, it is contrasted with in voluntary groups serving a greater variety of ends, such as kin groups, castes, social classes and communities. Sills identifies it as a group of persons organised on the basis of voluntary membership without state control, for the furtherance of some common interest of its members.

Smith and Freedman (1972) consider voluntary associations as a structure formally organised and relatively permanent; secondary grouping as opposed to less structured, informal ephemeral or primary grouping.

Kramer (1981) has defined them as innovative and flexible, protective or particularistic interests, promoting citizen participation and meeting needs not met by the government.

Cumper\textsuperscript{13} describes NGOs as "Organisations not mainly financed by governments.... and not under the control of governments".

\textsuperscript{13} Cited in Non-Governmental Organization and Health in Developing Countries (1996).
Tongswatei\textsuperscript{14} has defined the main characteristics of a NGO as 'a non-profit, non-government, private group, at least partially formalised into organisation that an individual joins by choice'.

These definitions are sufficient proof to show that NGOs are non-profit organisations working for providing basic amenities to hitherto exploited, marginalised and deprived communities in a society. They are financed by a number of external agencies besides the government. They exercise a definite control over these financial allocations to enable achieving the desire plans and goals. In reality it is representing a significant link between the government and citizens welfare.

The above conceptual framework sheds light upon the fact that decentralisation enables devolution of power to the poor and the weak by facilitating their participation in decision-making and leadership roles. Developing leadership characteristics is an important step towards achieving political empowerment. Further, such empowerment provides opportunities to participate in and take suitable decisions in a governing process. Thus, the whole chain of enabling processes, lead to a situation, where gender disparity is expected to decrease and even eliminated. Ultimately, it is expected to help in the creation of equal opportunities for both men and women who experience the power and through it fulfil the desired, goals and plans of development.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Cited in Non-Governmental Organization and Health in Developing Countries (1996).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}