

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1. Introduction

The initial impetus for writing this thesis came with the introduction of policy reforms in the drinking water sector in India, especially in the state of Maharashtra, which involved a new demand-driven approach. This new approach was welcomed because it appeared to align efficient water resource management in the state with the overall move towards creating sustainable drinking water resources as well as taking into account social considerations in water allocation decisions.

In this demand-driven project (henceforth termed Jalswarajya Project – meaning ‘water independence’), the mechanism to bring efficient water management at the village level was through people’s participation in the decentralised institutions—Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), Women Development Committee (WDC) and Social Audit Committee (SAC)—and through the beneficiaries contributing 10 per cent of the project capital cost for sustainability purposes.

First time in a developmental project, rural women under the Jalswarajya Project formed a majority in decision-making processes in the decentralised institutions, not just within VWSC but also extending to other institutions, which are more political in nature. This constituted a landmark move beyond the constitutional amendments (73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments in 1992 and 1993, respectively) of one-third representation of women in local governments. What made this project unique was the non-negotiable principle of 50 per cent women’s representation and one-third representation of the marginalised groups<sup>1</sup> in the decentralised institutions. This was both because women had previously no role in the decision-making of any development project and because they had a central role in provisioning of drinking water to meet household needs.

Women participating in the project are viewed as moving beyond their private spheres to being key players in community decision-making processes. So the purpose of this thesis is to examine women’s participation within the decentralised institutions of Jalswarajya and their ability to influence decision-making capabilities at household and community levels. It also reflects on the process of mobilising women as part of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to draw the notions if in reality the strategy supported women to bring change within the household decision-making process.

As the research progressed, the realisation emerged that with the shift from the traditional supply-driven approach in the drinking water sector to the new demand-driven one, the role of the state had also shifted from being a service provider to that of a facilitator, which corresponds with the changing character of the State. Water, which traditionally was provided free of cost to people, were now to be viewed through a socio-economic lens (GoI, 1999).<sup>2</sup>

The Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme Guideline (ARWSP) (1999-2000) provided the framework for implementing rural drinking water projects in India. It called for people’s participation and contribution to the capital cost (with a minimum of 10 per cent) and 100 per cent operation and maintenance (O&M) of the water supply infrastructures for sustenance purpose depending upon the requirement of water (based on litre per capacity per day [lpcd])<sup>3</sup>.

In the process, Maharashtra was the first state to implement the reform policy in all its rural water supply services in 2000 (see Chapter 3).

The change in the rural water supply framework can be related with the change in perspectives at the international level that saw including women as central players in water management and viewing the universal common good through an economic lens. This action for change was largely driven by the New Delhi Declaration (1990), more important the Dublin Statement (1992) where its principles were echoed at the UN Rio Summit (1992) (see Section 1.4).

Nevertheless, the implementation of drinking water projects that enabled women's participation within decentralised institutions or water governance bodies was associated more with the roles women have in relation to water, hygiene and, more importantly, providing water to meet the family needs rather than the dictums of gender mainstreaming policies within water management (Cleaver, 1998a and 1998b; van Wijk-Sjibesman, 1998). Henceforth, it is important to reflect on the relations between women and water that got associated and further how it has been iterated within the international circle to address women as key player within drinking water management policies and projects.

## **1.2. Women and Water**

The popular representation of women in the context of drinking water in poetry and paintings has more often than not involved a romantic imagery of women fetching water. Paintings depicting women carrying or balancing pots of water over their heads portray the common association of women with water (Sorenson, et al., 2011). Traditional documented evidence also highlights that the association of drinking water with women was right from the Vedic period in India (Joshi and Fawcett, 2005). Nonetheless, the association between women and water still persists in modern-day India, but there are other factors that intersect with caste, ownership rights, and entitlements over community water resources. These intersecting factors along with the growing scarcity in safe drinking water have worsened the conditions for women and their role in relation to water.

However there are different roles and responsibilities performed by women and men in relation to water use. This can be divided into two concerns: domestic (water supply for drinking, washing and maintenance of hygiene) and productive (water for irrigation and large livestock). But the concern of this study is more related to understand the gender relation in regard to domestic use of water because provision of drinking water has traditionally been considered as women's domain and women have suffered the most to secure water for themselves and their family members due to the roles and responsibilities imposed on them. But the productive water has always remained within the men's domain, as water for production is related with land rights (Kulkarni et al., 2007).

In order to fulfilment of women's roles (reproductive and productive) that are performed with the household level and outside, they need water. So women go out in search of water and carry head-loads of water to perform their daily household activities. If sources of safe drinking water are unavailable due to scarcity or unhygienic conditions, they walk extra miles irrespective of the

terrain, weather or their health conditions. Women make uncompromising efforts to provide water to their family members. There are several examples from developing nations, which have become a well-known fact that show how women carry water even while facing hazardous consequences and yet continue to provide water to family members, irrespective of their age.

Women not only fetch water, but also are responsible for family health and hygiene. In order to perform these activities, women need water. Thus women are crucial actors in the provision of water, fighting water-related diseases and performing the other household chores that are associated with their gender roles. Despite all hardships, women continue to provide 'invisible' labour in the household and support male family members in the field for productive activities.

In this context of household division of labour, women have been identified as the main drawers of water (Water Aid, 2001; Cleaver, 1998a and 1998b; Ahmed, 2005; GWA, 2006). Though women have long been a focus in the domestic water subsector, their central place has been primarily determined by the idea of their 'natural' role as household managers (Cleaver, 1998a). Through such conceptualisation, women specifically within rural areas who are poor and are of marginalised caste groups become fundamentally discriminated, thus strengthening the structural basis of inequality. In this process, men have controlled the labour within household, they have had the right over and access to land and other resources, and they have balanced between productive and reproductive activities within the household.

Thus, the productive and reproductive roles and responsibilities of women and men reflect social relations in terms of gender and get perpetuated through gender beliefs (Lahiri-Dutt, 2006). Since gender is not fixed (ibid), and when gender ideologies get ascribed in terms of drinking water, it results in complex structures and relationships. This is because the notions of gender simply do not refer to women or men, but to the way their qualities, behaviours, and identities are determined through the process of socialisation (Agarwal, 1997). It is generally also associated with unequal power and access to choices and resources. As a result, when the gender relations that evolve with water intersect with caste and class factors, women suffer from a double burden. Women carry heavier water loads due to ascribed roles and responsibilities and risk themselves from sexual harassment and other hazards (Ahmed, 2005).

In order to promote women's representation within community-managed drinking water projects, policies were formulated for efficiency and equitable distribution of water through women's equal participation within the decentralised institutions established for water management. Given the central role of women in relation to water, they have been provided a voice within the decision-making bodies and allowed to play a role in ensuring effectiveness in service delivery.

### **1.3. Drinking Water Sector in India**

Prior to recognising the central role of women in development during the 1990s, women were mostly viewed as passive in the statist discourse of development. First, in the welfare mode, as a vulnerable group towards which various programmes and policies were aimed at and, second, when population was considered an impediment to development, women were the target groups for population control. But with the rise of the women's movement in India and across the globe

(during the 1970s and the 1980s), women were viewed as one of the significant contributors to development. This notion of women and development, however, did not last long. The concept of development and development policies underwent a change with several developing nations getting into debt crisis and being compelled to reform their economic policies to reduce inflation and fiscal imbalances.

Subsequently during the 1990s when the economic reform policies were adopted in India, the role of the state changed and its developmental policies shifted from the traditional welfare approach to a market or neo-liberal paradigm. Until then, in the drinking water sector, the state with the central government's assistance provided safe drinking water to its people free of cost.

Due to which there were several programmes implemented by the central government on a targeted basis (see Chapter 3). But when the model of new economic reform policies was implemented, the state played a key role in reducing welfare costs and imposing market solutions to handle the needs of people (Prabhu, 2001). This vision of development began to harness resources to its optimal level and also recognised the contribution of women in economic development (Kulkarni et al., 2008). Unfortunately while recognising the contribution of women in development and involving women in every sector, this new vision did not challenge the traditional roles of women. So women were brought into the realm of development activities merely as actors whose contribution towards the goal of development could be harnessed (ibid).

The process of bringing women within the development paradigm had to be fitted with neo-liberal ideologies and also aligned with the commitments to several international conventions such as the Beijing Platform and the World Bank's 'Beyond Beijing: Action on Commitment to the World's Women' (World Bank, 2002). Such action clearly indicated women as part of the mainstream development agenda. During this period, when the World Bank promoted neo-liberal policies, several developing nations saw changes in their economic policies, which also had an impact on the water sector (Kulkarni et al., 2008).

In India, the government's role in welfare was seen through reduction in welfare services cost and promotion of people's participation in managing their own affairs through democratic decentralisation (see Chapter 3). It is interesting to reflect that all this was happening at the same time when the Government of India (GoI) brought amendments in its Constitution through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (in 1992 and 1993). It emphasised on devolution of power to the people to manage their own affairs and involvement of women (1/3<sup>rd</sup> representation) within local self-governance.

The whole governance pattern that followed the Constitutional Amendments (73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments) was linked with economic growth. As with devolution of power to people, efficiency in service delivery was assumed and women began to be seen as important actors within this efficiency approach. Additionally, the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) brought export-oriented strategies to create new job opportunities and improve the status of women by providing independent sources of income.

Due to SAP's strategy to harness women's contribution in the economy, it began to mobilise women through establishing SHGs, so that with the access to income women had the capacity to bargain for power at the household level (World Bank, 2002; Elson, 1999). A woman's autonomy was equated with income. Hence, an increase in income was argued to enhance her autonomy (Elson, 1999). But much of such strategy did not look into added responsibilities within the household domain such as those of attending the SHG meetings, and the power differences at household level. Thus women were mostly seen as 'active economic agents'.

In the water sector, several transitions were seen through enunciation of various policies and programmes to address good governance such as the National Water Policy (1987 and 2002). Women and their role in relation to water were acknowledged and women came to be viewed as central players in water management. Several decentralised institutions were established at the national level, such as Department of Drinking Water Supply (DDWS),<sup>4</sup> and at the state level<sup>5</sup> for delivery of water services, programme implementation and formulation of a national water policy.

During this period, the government brought a drastic change in its welfare policies by involving community members to implement, plan, monitor and handle the O&M of the water supply structures. Though this change in the government's policy was somewhat reflected in the first National Water Policy (1987), it became more firmly established with the amendment of the National Water Policy in 2002 (see Chapter 3). Overall the central government was realigning its national welfare agenda so that global policies and principles could apply the concept of good governance in the water sector (Kulkarni et al., 2008).

#### **1.4. International Perspectives on Drinking Water and Gender**

The national policies of many developing countries have been realigned with global agreements under the influence of international laws and policies directed through several declarations and conventions. Before that every developing nation had its own specific laws and policies. Similarly, the water sector has its own laws and policies based on its usage such as navigation (more at international level), irrigation and agriculture, hydropower, and drinking purposes (at national level). The water sector has increasingly gained international attention with the growing linkages between drinking water and human wellbeing. This resulted in the passing of the UN Resolution on Drinking Water in the World Water Conference (1977) held in Mar Del Plata, Argentina.

A further move in this direction was the declaration of the decade 1980-1990 as the 'International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade'. The objective was to provide the entire world's population with reasonable access to safe drinking water by 1990 (Dankelman, 2004; Reddy, 1999). During this period women were seen as 'privileged water managers' and their needs were met without challenging the existing gender inequalities; as a result women's decision-making role in the water sector was not considered (Dankelman, 2004).

At international level, there were several criticisms over the incompetency of major developing nations to provide safe drinking water to their populations. This was due to the lack of people's

participation in safeguarding and handling the O&M of the water infrastructures, resulting huge capital expenditure by the government.

Nevertheless, in the 1990s, as argued by Joshi (2005), the world witnessed various ambiguities in water policy with differing trends. It was in this context that two schools of thoughts emerged: one considered water as a 'basic human right' (Berlin Rules), while the other considered water as 'an economic good' (Dublin Principles) (Zwarteveen, 1998). But the latter principle overruled the former and was commonly agreed upon by hundred countries in the Dublin Conference in 1992. The Dublin Conference laid four key principles:

1. Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment.
2. Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels.
3. Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.
4. Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognised as an economic good.

This conference was a big breakthrough for market solutions. It postulates that if water is free, people do not regard it as valuable, and so waste it, while the shortage of water in the world is growing. Operation, maintenance and investment should, therefore, be covered by the payments made by consumers and not by state subsidies. This means, in turn, that citizens must pay for their water. The obligation to treat water as an economic good by major developing countries was largely seen to be pushed by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) agenda before the 1990s, so that they could establish modalities to promote privatisation of water, education and healthcare through SAPs (Dellapeena and Gupta, 2009). This was basically the beginning of water sector reform across the world.

On the other hand, not to present as a market solution the Agenda 21<sup>6</sup> revealed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in Rio, 1992 also recognised the central role of women in providing, managing and safeguarding water resources. This has largely been due to the significant rise of environmentalist and other growing concerns regarding the usage of water by various sectors.

Interestingly, while analysing both these situations at the global level, we find that at the Dublin Conference, major nations (developing and developed nations) had participated to reduce the stress on water through adopting a new approach referred to as 'integrated water resource management'. Within four months from the Dublin Conference, 178 governments adopted Agenda 21 at the Earth Summit where it was specified that the integrated management be based on 'the perception of water as an integral part of the ecosystem, a natural resource and a social and economic good, whose quantity and quality determine the nature of its utilisation'.

The Agenda 21 also stressed on full participation of women to ensure sustainable development and promotion of appropriate technology to reduce women's workload. In this manner, the international water policies clearly pictured water as an economic good. It involved women in

the water user's group so that an additional responsibility towards the community could be created and justified, with the time saved from collecting water, to be used for income generation activities. It also promoted Public Private Partnership (PPP), as opposed to the government, as the best mode to handle the situation of water supply.

Following the Dublin Declaration and the Earth Summit, the ministerial and official decision made at the Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation in 1994 (Netherlands) paved to create World Water Council (WWC). Since then every three years, the WWC organises the World Water Forum (WWF) to discuss practical action towards sustainable use and management of water resources.

The WWF in 2000, at Hague, called for Vision 21 on water management through collaborative efforts of professionals and stakeholders across 15 geographical regions of the world. Recognising women's productive water needs within Vision 21, the ministerial declaration launched the Gender Water Alliance (GWA) as a separate body to mainstream gender in the water sector. This has been a major landmark in creating a global water network and recognising the need for women's participation in water management. However, the functioning of GWA is another matter of scrutiny, but if we look beyond, into the dynamics of water politics, we find such forums have often been used for promoting water privatisation by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and global water corporations (Goldman, 2005).

On the other hand, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) quickly followed and embraced this holistic new approach to water management, making it a pivotal part of its Safe Water 2000 decade. But the World Bank's answer to these trends was to delineate new policies that considered water as an economic good (World Bank, 1993) and such contestation was drawn from the directives of both these conferences (Dublin Statement and Earth Summit).

The World Bank argued that competitive market pricing and allocation of resources would improve efficiency in water management, through reducing wastage, preventing environmentally harmful uses of water and maximising the benefits that could be derived from this scarce resource. With this, it promoted, through its policy document, the privatisation of water services by adopting a new approach of decentralisation and participation (World Bank, 1993 pp. 3, 6).

Despite such initiatives with vested interests to control global water resources through the market principle, several governments were still incapable to provide adequate safe drinking water (Dellapeena and Gupta, 2009). As a result, through a human rights perspective world leaders were moved to adopt goals to halve the population with drinking water and sanitation problems by 2015 within the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) 7.C Target 10 in 2000. This confluence of discourses has mainly been due to the rise of epistemic communities and the influence of environmentalism that brought the MDGs into action.

In 2001, for the first time, data related to water was recognised to be disaggregated based on gender at the International Conference on Freshwater, held in Bonn, as a preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD<sup>1</sup>). This conference called upon to design gender inclusiveness through training of water experts and policy-makers, in addition to

recognizing the division of roles and labour (paid and unpaid) between women and men through the formulation of water policies and a water management system (IISD, 2001).

### **1.5. Impact of International Policies on Gender**

Prior to the reforms within the water sector, there were several policies that were promoted by the World Bank to bring structural changes in developing nations. One of them, the SAPs, was implemented in the late 1980s to deal with the economic crisis by removing 'excess' government controls and subsidies on services and promoting market competition as part of the neo-liberal agenda. It aimed to achieve long-term or accelerated economic growth in poor countries by opening up the economy and reducing government intervention and to reduce fiscal deficits.

To reduce the government's fiscal deficits the World Bank imposed conditions for cuts in public spending, higher interest rates, privatisation of the public sector and deregulation of the labour market, and among others (Argiropoulos and Rajagopal, 2003). Along with these conditions, the economic policies, which came into being, were designed to control resources, create markets and bring economic growth so that people pay for a resource in accordance with its demand so that the product is valued. This vision of development has long been percolated into our lives, and it has gained control over governmental and natural resources; people who earlier had free access to education and health services now pay for it; people who used free drinking water now pay a value for it; nothing comes free; governments impose a certain price tag in the form of tax or people's contributions, both mean the same to the poor common women and men.

The World Bank and IMF provided financial loans to developing nations so that factors obstructing accelerated economic growth could be resolved. As stated, these loans came along with conditions that the market was the best mechanism for organising and allocating resources than the state. Therefore, the state had to reduce its role rather than provide free interventions in socio-economic development, and the market had to be used as a facilitator. In this process, SAPs assumed that individuals would act for their benefit and respond rationally to market signal rather than depending on those services provided free by the state. At the macro level, this condition was expected to result in the country's economic prosperity. While in developed countries, much of such changes were brought through parliamentary democracy, in developing nations like India, SAPs were adopted without any parliamentary debate (Mohan et al., 2000). It was much like a bunch of policy reforms undertaken by these countries at the behest of international pressure.

SAPs not only affected farmers and the country's overall economic gains, but also eventually placed harder responsibilities onto women's role. Traditionally though women have always shared an unequal burden of work as compared to men and have sacrificed their needs when there was shortage of resources, SAPs further created unequal access to resources by involving private players and increasing the burden of work. Women's work not only increased within the reproduction sphere, but they also undertook production activities as part of the cheap labour producing global products for the world market. This has meant working long hours, outside and inside the household domain. To support the mother's workload, girls are often withdrawn from schools.

Imposition of SAP brought about a reduction in the government's welfare costs, which had a direct consequence on women's health and education. The neo-classical assumption, which was adopted by SAP, was considered to be gender neutral and implied no gender roles and access to resources. But the studies conducted by UNICEF (1989) and the Commonwealth Secretariat (1989, 1991) highlighted the impact of SAP on women and children, who were more susceptible to deterioration in welfare and living conditions (Baden, 1993). The studies also criticised the 'trickle-down' approach for accentuating the gender-unequal burden of the programmes—due to unequal access and control over resources and the existing gender division of labour (Moser, 1993).

As mentioned, post-welfare (see §1.3) the efficiency approach focused on the programmes' inefficiency in getting people, and particularly women, to participate in the productive market to bring economic growth. But this strategy did not look into the added responsibility of women, or the power relationship between men and women. To counter the 'efficiency approach', feminist discourses put forth the 'empowerment approach' to challenge the gender biases of macroeconomic policies, including biases of policy-making, and the existing gender bias at the household level. In this approach, women were viewed in a relatively more dynamic fashion than the previous two approaches (welfare and efficiency). Women were seen as both active as producers and passive as consumers in society.

However SAP was still implemented in its old fashion (Kulkarni et al., 2007; Elson, 1995) due to which women's position in society was not challenged. It was through men that the development programmes and services were addressed in bringing changes related to women. Women had little space to challenge the obstacles in their development processes. As a reaction to the impact of SAPs on women's lives, academicians, policy planners and development activists in the developed as well as developing world moved the focus from 'women' per se to 'gender equality'. This shift scrutinised the gender power relationship, which resulted in the formulation of a 'gender and development' framework.

SAP's hard-line neo-liberal economic policies and its impact were analysed to bring a change in the strategy, from direct reduction in governmental roles to people's participation in programmes and activities through their contribution to capital costs. Gradually a policy shift in SAP from the neo-classical assumptions to the neo-liberal framework was also seen, where people were involved in managing their own affairs rather than the government doing it for them.

This shift in policy came to the fore when the World Bank in 1994 argued that community participation could be used as the means of ensuring development projects reach the poorest, who share the costs of development as well as its benefits (Fonchingong & Ngwa, 2006). Irrespective of the implementation of community participation through SAPs, the gap between the rich and the poor became much wider, and also did not result in substantial economic growth.

Consequently India was one of the first countries to adopt a more open economy with greater involvement of market forces; this brought changes in the regulatory structure, increased participation of the private sector and redefined the role of the public sector. It brought the

concept of sectoral reforms within governmental functionaries. Provided with international dictums on water the GoI right from the early 1990s when India adopted the New Economic Policy, it marked a clear distinction for reduce role in provisioning of welfare services within the water sector.

#### **1.6. Drinking Water Sector Reform and Gender**

Post water sector reform, the GoI moved from its traditional supply-driven approach to a demand-driven one. People were no more considered as end beneficiaries, drinking water projects were implemented based on people's demand and their willingness to contribute in the project capital cost and handle the O&M of the water supply infrastructures. Similarly women are no more seen as 'beneficiaries', but instead as 'actors'. This reflects the expansion of the scope of women and their participation in the decentralised institutions within the water sector as 'partners-in-development'.

From a gender perspective, having domestic water close to the residence was the main concern. But within drinking water projects, provision of water at the doorstep is often valued in terms of time saved in procuring water for meeting household needs (Cleaver, 1998a). As stated in modern times the concern for women's role in the water sector can be internationally related with the promulgation of Dublin principles which got reiterated in the Earth Summit in 1992, while traditionally it can be traced to the post-Vedic period (Joshi and Fawcett, 2005). As a result from a demand-driven perspective the first step in recognising women's role in water management was when the GoI in 1996 implemented the Swajal Project in Uttar Pradesh. Women were brought to participate in the water management institutes by paying 10 per cent of the project capital cost and handling the O&M of the water supply infrastructures.

Recognising women's central role in relation to drinking water was an important change, but with the shift in policies the role of the State changed from being a service provider to a facilitator. It empowered Gram Panchayats and Water Users Associations (WUAs) (such as VSWCs in Jalswarajya Project) to implement the scheme and levied villagers to pay for the services of water supply based on villager's choice of the water supply technology (for example pipeline water supply or stand post water supply). This strategic move of the State saw major cuts in welfare services. The poor and vulnerable groups in society were the hardest hit through such reform that supported capitalism as a measure of progress and growth.

Consequently through such reform it has negative effect on women. For example, the privatisation of social services makes the poor unaffordable. Due to which women are often forced to take on other responsibilities, and provide extra care for the sick and the elderly, increase in health cost means reduced spending on health that could further lead to an increase in maternal deaths and among others. But the concern is how can we be confident about the sector reform that have adopted a demand-driven approach with private sector participation be accountable to women and the overall sustainability of the water resources.

### **1.7. Jalswarajya Project**

Before the completion of Swajal Project in Uttar Pradesh it was coined a success which led the GoI to implement Sector Reform Pilot (SRP) Project in 67 districts across 26 States (Joshi, 2004). The SRP Project implementation guidelines clearly stated States implementing were to prepare their respective sector reform projects. On the other hand the Sukthankar Committee, which reviewed the status of drinking water in Maharashtra, clearly highlighted for a reform through involving people to select their water supply technology, contribute in the project cost and handle the O&M of the water supply infrastructures (see Chapter 3).

As a result the Government of Maharashtra (GoM) with the loan from the World Bank implemented the Jalswarajya Project in 2004, for meeting the rural water supply and sanitation services in 26 districts of Maharashtra with the following objectives:

- Increasing rural households' access to improved and sustainable water and sanitation services
- Institutionalising decentralisation of rural water supply and sanitation service delivery to rural local government and communities (GoM, 2003a)

The Jalswarajya Project is aimed at translating community participation, a field reality, not only in the water and sanitation sector but also beyond. The project considers participation as the highest level of user involvement to collectively identify, analyse and prioritise problems; search and evaluate options for solutions; plan for sustainable solutions to existing problems; and implement these through social actions. It also aims to plan and take care of the long-term O&M of the water supply and sanitation infrastructures (GoM, 2003a; Bhogle, 2005).

The project beneficiaries are predominately considered as the rural poor, including women. In order to function in a systematic procedure, women and men from the village were brought together at the Gram Sabha level to establish the decentralised institutions under the project. Each of these committees has an adequate representation of women (50 per cent in VWSC and SAC and 75 per cent in WDC).

Significantly Jalswarajya Project is designed to unburden women's task of water collection and increase their participation through decision-making processes at the decentralised institutions. Unlike other sector reform projects (Swajal, SRP Project and Swajaldhara Projects at the central level and Aaple Pani at the State level), the Jalswarajya Project in Maharashtra has placed greater significance on gender mainstreaming. The gender mainstreaming in the project is understood through active women's participation in the decentralised institutions (VWSC/WDC/SAC) created for the delivery of water and sanitation services, women taking leadership positions as presidents/treasurers of the VWSC, WDC and SAC, becoming members of the SHGs, instigating income generation activities (IGAs) and handling the O&M of the water supply infrastructures by collecting water tariffs.

SHGs, as part of the women development activities within Jalswarajya Project are associated with the timesaving phenomenon so that women with access to financial resources could

increase their decision-making capabilities at the household and community levels. As a result, women's participation within decentralised institutions created for delivery of water services were considered to be efficient and effective from the viewpoint of water resource sustainability.

In the Jalswarajya Project, the bringing of women and men together to the Gram Sabha was to build wider ownership, transparency and accountability in relation to all members in the village (Bhogle, 2005). Significantly, women's water needs in terms of technological options and distance of water sources were sought to be addressed. In this drinking water project it is interesting to note that the notions of promoting women's participation are framed in the instrumentalist language of 'means' or better project outcomes, on the one hand, and looking at participation as a process of transformation or 'end' in itself, on the other, thus providing space for the articulation of their voices by the women.

Therefore, this study exclusively looks into those women, who are members of the decentralised institutions, their participation within the institutes. It also explores women's roles and responsibilities within the decentralised institutions, their attendance pattern within the committee meetings and the issues being raised and addressed to challenge the patriarchal structures that inhibit the empowerment process of women. But how effective have the Maharashtra state's initiatives been in water resource management to achieve the gender-sensitive goals are the concern that this study explores further (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In Jalswarajya Project the VWSC has the financial authority over the project capital, so it strategically appoints women as treasurers of the committees to handle the project funds. But one cannot disregard the influence of tradition when it comes to economic decision-making at household and community levels, as men are often found to make crucial decisions over financial aspects. So how is the gender strategy adopted in the Jalswarajya Project likely to challenge the traditional power relationship between women and men over economic aspects? Will it result in traditional values getting reinforced? Because if such traditional power structures are not challenged in the drinking water project, women could often be viewed as mere signatories for banking purposes. Further such discriminative practices could worsen the budgetary awareness level and unequal access to financial statements among women, irrespective of them participating in the decentralised institution meetings or in the Gram Sabha.

In addition to women's traditional roles related to domestic chores, they also support their husbands within the productive sphere. Therefore, women's work through the implementation of a demand-driven approach, especially community-led initiative, extends their role to undertake community work. To fulfil the community role women take out extra time that is saved from fetching water from long distances when pipeline water supplies are received at doorstep. This is where, at the practical level, the time-saved phenomenon applies. Further, women's time saved from collecting water is also utilised for community work, which remains unrecognised as it is unpaid, and results in extending their burden of labour. But often the Jalswarajya Project argues women's saved time to be utilised for income generation activities through becoming members of the SHGs notwithstanding woman also has to confront the household power relationship with her in-laws and husband and seek permission to attend meetings.

As a result, in view of understanding the phenomena of women's subordination, this study attempts to analyse the relationship that exists between women and water. In this context, the term 'gender' is implicitly used. The structural imposition on women by developmental projects such as those of the World Bank has brought 'women's participation' within decentralised institutions, especially within water and sanitation projects for better water governance. In this process, the gender and development perspective intends to understand how developmental projects and government functionaries have used the term (gender) and the perspective of the phenomena. This is not to question the adopted framework but rather to understand the implications of gender and development approach at the field level.

The study exposes the gaps within decentralised water governance and the gender paradoxes that impede on women empowerment at the micro level. The term 'gender' at times may perhaps seem to be synonymously used in relation to women because the water sector policies and programmes address women in general rather than adopting the framework of gender (Joshi, 2004). Though rhetorically they are aligned to gender terminology, the core understanding and implication of the programmes and policies have been in relation to women. Moving further the study extend to understand the implication of programmes and policies at household level, which is an exception within women and drinking water studies. As a result, the issues of gender within the drinking water sector still remain under-researched and un-recognised in water policy except for few emerging studies (Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen, 1998; Cleaver, 2001, Cleaver and Hamada, 2010; Ahmed, 2005; Kulkarni et al., 2008; Singh, 2006 and among others).

### **1.8. Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first, which is the introduction to the study, discusses the normative concerns laying out the research context. The second chapter brings forth the literature available in relation to gender and drinking water, the rationale for selecting the Jalswarajya Project, the conceptual framework on gender and drinking water, and the methodology of the study. The third chapter deals with water laws and policies, its evolution in the Indian context and its implications within the five-year development plans. It also presents the shift in the government's role in the water sector from a supply-driven approach to a demand-driven one.

The fourth, fifth and the sixth chapters detail out the research context and the findings from the experience of Jalswarajya Project. Each of these chapters primarily highlights the perspectives from the field, especially those from the women who are members of the decentralised institutions established by the drinking water project. The first data analysis chapter provides the socio-economic profiling of the women members from the water committees; the second highlights the manner of participation and accountability which women consider. The third details the impact of the gender development strategy designed under the project on the lives of women members in the Jalswarajya Project. The final chapter of the study brings out the issues, which still confront women in rural areas, in relation to drinking water needs, as well as the lessons and recommendations for policy and practice.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The world like marginalized groups, upper caste, lower caste, dalits are used but one distance oneself from the ideology attached to these terms.

<sup>2</sup> Government of India, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme Guidelines (1999-2000): ARWSP Guidelines.

<sup>3</sup> Villages with 40 lpcd pay 10 per cent of the capital cost, and if villagers want an increase from 40 to 55 lpcd they now have to pay 20 per cent of the capital cost (Cullet, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Under the Ministry of Rural Development, which was responsible for planning, policy formulation, direction, financing, monitoring and reviewing the implementation and progress of drinking water project at the central level.

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Panchayati Raj Departments and Water Boards were executing the programme. In the state of Maharashtra, Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran (MJP) was executing the programme.

<sup>6</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 18, paragraph 18.8, in Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio De Janeiro, UN Doc. A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol.1), Annex II (1992).