

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AND JALSWARAJYA PROJECT: PROFILE OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

“Jar don pahije astil, tar don nauwa boardawar lihu”, in English, *“If you need two more members, lets write their names in the new board”*, says the president of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), when it was found only four women members were listed in Social Audit Committee (SAC), however, having six women members in SAC is a pre-requisite of Jalswarajya Project (Ansurda Village, Osmanabad Dist., MH, India).

4.1. Introduction

The chapter dovetails into understanding the socio-economic characteristics of women members from all the three decentralised committees established by Jalswarajya Project., The Jalswarajya project had an emphasis on women’s participation within the decentralised institutions created by the sector reform projects for effective delivery of drinking water and sanitation services. Women were considered as important stakeholders for operation and maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructures. Jalswarajya Project brought different layers of decentralised governance within water sector emphasising on women’s participation as a non-negotiable principle of the project. This chapter seeks to examine how such pattern of governance had camouflaged people’s representation and participation in decentralised governance. In the process, it shows who these women were and what their socio-economic background was after the committees; namely, VWSC, WDC and SAC were formed.

In this chapter, information pertaining to the variables has been presented in order to obtain a fairly comprehensive profile of the women who were members of the decentralised institutions created under the rural drinking water project funded by the World Bank in Maharashtra. Very few studies have looked into the gender dimension in the decentralised institutions, particularly the process of decision-making by the women within these institutions and at household level. In the Indian context, this study has attempted to describe the characteristics of women who were the members of the decentralised institutions and their roles and responsibilities.

Though some studies (Kulkarni et al., 2008) had presented the profile of women in decentralised institutions within rural drinking water sector, but they had analysed women in a generalised way, i.e., as members of the village community rather than exclusively looking into the members of the institutions. However, it is not our purpose to expose lacunas in these studies but to do an in-depth exploration of the area of what is considered as the real need.

The rural drinking water project implemented in Maharashtra had a strong component of gender strategy. The project was funded by the World Bank and supported by the GoM. Maharashtra was also known to be the first State in India to adopt a sector reform policy in the water supply and sanitation sector in 1999. The reform project implemented, as Jalswarajya was commonly known amongst most rural population in the State. Before entering into the village, one can identify the villages with Jalswarajya message boldly put out on the main road and the water tank built under the project. Implementation of Jalswarajya Project was what most villagers were proud of. It was like having been awarded for a clean village free from open defecation or receiving the award from the President of India under the ‘Nirmal Gram Puraskar Yojana’.

Jalswarajya Project was initiated when the GoM, Department of Water Supply and Sanitation had submitted the proposal to the World Bank on November 5, 2002 (GoM, 2002b). It highlighted the failures of the State in providing the rural population with safe drinking water due to traditional top-down system of financing and delivery; lack of consideration of community demands; choice of technology; the willingness to pay for the scheme and

inappropriate attention paid for the resource availability. Specifically, the GoM reported that about 62 per cent of the villages in Maharashtra were categorised as 'difficult' villages, where no source of water was available within a distance of 500 meters. The contributing factor had partly been due to lack of management of the water supply infrastructures and the ownership by the community members (ibid).

Women were considered as the most suffered groups when crisis of drinking water was heightened. It was assumed women had the knowledge about preserving water and had resources to meet the future demand of water as ascribed by their productive and reproductive work role. So the involvement of women in drinking water projects and issues of lack of governance were addressed through devolution of power to the people based on the principles of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. It provided platforms in addition to the Gram Panchayat by creating institutions for delivery of drinking water and sanitation services and people's representation within these institutions based on affirmative action of the State (GoM, 2003a).

Accordingly, Jalswarajya Project placed the VWSC, WDC and SAC as important decentralised institutions with stipulated rules and regulations to be abided by members selected within these institutions. The project principles, non-negotiable norms and values were to be inculcated into the lives of the community and they were motivated to work on the individual village schemes with adequate representation. Women, SCs, STs and the poor were encouraged to participate as representatives within these committees established by the project (50 per cent women's reservation and 1/3rd SC and ST representation).

The expected outcome of all these processes was that, women were empowered to take self-decisions that governed their lives. As a result women's empowerment through the delivery of drinking water and sanitation services has been analysed in the forthcoming three chapters. The profile of women representative in the decentralised institutions, their participation in decision-making and setting up precedence of good governance have been analysed in this chapter.

4.2. The Profile of the Decentralised Committee Members

There were a number of factors that determined which women were members of the decentralised committee, who selected them and how that process unfolded and whether it followed transparent and democratic processes.

As the researcher proceeded in listing the women members from all the three decentralised institutions of Jalswarajya Project (VWSC, SAC and WDC), it was found only four women were members of SAC listed on the Panchayat building wall in one of the villages. When asked for the reason of this omission, the president of VWSC stated, "*more women could be nominated to satisfy the minimal criteria by simply writing two names of the women from the village*". But later the original names of the members were obtained from the Panchayat register. The statement of the VWSC president revealed the deeply entrenched hegemony of power vis-à-vis the newly created representative processes. This clearly indicated the supremacy of the VWSC's role in the drinking water projects.

The Jalswarajya Project was the first of its kind where financial decentralisation had accompanied the political decentralisation. Due to which the villagers as members of the VWSC had direct control over the financial resources of the project in the village. Especially

the president of VWSC, who maintained and operated the bank accounts of Jalswarajya Project on behalf of the VP (GoM, 2003a) was extremely powerful in the village decision-making process.

As stated earlier, each of the decentralised body consisted of a minimal of total 12 members, which was the non-negotiable principle of the project. In precise, minimum six women were to represent the two decentralised committees - VWSC and SAC (equating to 50 per cent), followed by nine members in the WDC (equating to 75 per cent). Accordingly, the sampling process was carried out in the study. In order to understand whether the non-negotiable principles of the project were met, a tabular representation of the findings is presented in Table 4.1.

The Table 4.1 showed that most of the respondents (43.15 per cent) from 12 villages belonged to WDC, likewise about 29 per cent belonged to VWSC and 28 per cent belonged to SAC.

Table: 4.1
Distribution of Respondents' Representation in the Decentralised Committees

Decentralised Committees	Frequency	Percentage
Women Development Committee (WDC)	107	43.15
Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)	71	28.63
Social Audit Committee (SAC)	70	28.23
Total	248*	100.00

*Out of the total sample of 252, four members from the VWSC, WDC and SAC were unavailable during the data gathering process.

The data from the table indicated the minimal representation of women in the three decentralised water committees had been fulfilled as per the project rules. Thus, the villagers did not compromise representation of women within the decentralised institutions. Similar results were found in the study of Kulkarni et al., (2008).

Before analysing the socio-economic profile of the committee members, it was vital to outline the few key details about the project implementation and the date of interview.

The sample of villages selected for the study was in the exit phase. These villages had, implemented Jalswarajya Project in 2004 – 2005 with the exception of Bedarwadi village in Osmanabad District, which had implemented the project in 2002. The committee members from the decentralised institutions were interviewed in late 2008. There was a total gap of almost three years (36 months) between the project implementation period and the review.

The first 18 months in Jalswarajya Project was the duration of project planning, implementation and monitoring the activities by the community members. Subsequently, the next 18 months in the study to understand the outcome of gender development strategy. As it was assumed that the SHGs were functioning to its full capacity and that women were aware of their roles and responsibility and actively participating in decision-making within household and community level.

Keeping this viewpoint here, the women representatives were asked about the duration of them being members within the decentralised institutions of the project. The Table 4.2 clearly depicted that though a majority (55.24 per cent) of women respondents were members for four years, there was still a significant number of women who could not recall the exact year since they were members of the decentralised committees.

Table: 4.2
Distribution of Duration of Women Representative in the Decentralised Institution

Since when the member of the committee	Frequency	Percentage
Five Years	38.00	15.32
Four Years	137.00	55.24
Three Years	46.00	18.55
Two Years	15.00	6.05
One Year	3.00	1.21
Others	9.00	3.63
Total	248.00	100.00

Age

It is interesting to understand the age classification of members within decision-making capabilities. As it provides a background to understand what age group of women are likely to form the members of the decentralised institutions.

In doing so, the age of the respondents from the study was classified. The women respondents who were members of the decentralised committees for delivery of water supply and sanitation services aged in the range of 19 to 70 years. Table 4.3 shows that, a large number of them (48.79 per cent) belonged to the age group of 31 to 46 years. Further, about 25 per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 19 to 30 years and 47 to 70 years respectively. The mean age was about 40 years with a standard deviation of 11 years.

Table: 4.3
Distribution of the Respondent's Age

Age (completed in years)	Frequency	Percentage
19 – 30	63	25.40
31 – 46	121	48.79
47 – 70	64	25.81
Total	248	100.00
Mean = 39.67		Median = 38.00
Mode = 35		S.D. 11.00

The analysis of the data indicated a large section of the members from the decentralised committee belonged to the middle age groups. It implied that women in the committees were mature and had huge responsibilities in their respective committees. Interestingly, the number of younger and older age group women was placed below the middle-aged group. The reason being, the older women generally freed from their child bearing and nurturing work was the ideal choice to be members of the decentralised committee (SOPPECOM, 2008). However,

Kulkarni et al., (2008) and SOPPECOM, (2008) pointed out that previous experience in governmental institutions, willingness to take active leadership role also were significant factors in determining the eligibility for membership in the decentralised institutions that were established by the water project.

Overall the findings in this study were similar to those reported by Kulkarni et al., (2008) where a majority of the women (72%) members from the *Pani Samiti* of Gujarat State (68 respondents) were within the age group of 30 to 45 years followed by the higher age group 46 to 64 years. Thus, it can be concluded that women in older age who were more unlikely to be water users were more likely to be on the water committees (SOPPECOM, 2008; Cleaver and Nyatsambo, 2011, citing Ahmed, 2008). Besides, these older women in rural areas also “command social authority that sometimes cuts across caste boundaries and gender lines” (Singh, 2006, p. 73).

Marital Status

Marital status in the life of a woman is more important as compared to men. Women in rural areas generally were more likely to get married at an early age if compared to men (Singh and Samara, 1996). This had partly been due to the long cultural pattern that was followed, the issues of purity and chastity, their subordinate position and choices predetermined by the male members at household and community level had left them with hardly any space to make decision concerning their own lives (Joshi and Fawcett, 2005).

In order to address these above-mentioned issues, Jalswarajya Project, which was designed to empower women, had assumed to bring about changes in women’s conditions through active participation of women in decision-making fora along with the men. Young girls got married late and enrolled for formal education. If women delayed their marriage, they were assumed to take on the membership of decentralised institutions established by the project. In order to understand this relationship, the marital status of the women along with their age was further probed by the researcher.

Based on this variable, the Table 4.4 depicts the percentile distribution of respondent’s marital status, where in an overwhelming (233 out of 248) respondents were married and about 13 member respondents were widows. Further probing to understand if any relationship existed between both these variables (age and marital status), a statistical examination was carried out.

Table: 4.4
Distribution of Age and Marital Status of the Committee Members

Age (completed in years)	Marital Status				Total
	Married	Unmarried	Widowed	Deserted	
19 – 30	62 (98)*	1 (2)	0	0	63 (100)
31 – 46	115 (95)	0	5 (4)	1 (1)	121 (100)
47 – 70	56 (88)	0	8 (12)	0	64 (100)
Total	233 (94)	1 (0.5)	13 (5)	1 (0.5)	248 (100)
$\chi^2 = 14.437$ $df = 6$ $p = .006$ $C = .180$					
Note: * The numbers in brackets indicate row percentage χ^2 = Pearson Chi-Square Value df = Degree of Freedom p = Significance C = Contingency Coefficient					

The results of the statistical analysis in Table 4.4 shows a positive relationship which indicates that almost half of the respondents (115) from the married category (233) fell within the age group of 31 to 46 years, followed by 63 respondents within the age group of 19 to 30 years.

The data analysis highlighted that that amongst the respondents from the decentralised committees, most of them were married and within the productive age group. This age group of women were considered as stable and matured. They actively participated by understanding their local culture and also were able to mobilise other women for collective action that was required by the project. It was found that higher the age of the respondents, lesser was the participation within the decentralised institutions. Thus, it can be concluded that the middle aged women who were more respected at household levels were more likely to be preferred as members of the decentralised institutions than the young and aged women of the village.

Caste

In the Indian society, caste of an individual plays an important role in determining the socio-cultural and economic status of the person. It also decides to a large extent the choice of work, socialisation, receiving the benefits of development and also occupation in which a person is engaged (Singh et al., 2005). In relation to water, caste determines the access to drinking water facility (Singh et al., 2005; Singh, 2006; Joshi, 2005).

Caste being an important variable in the Indian context, the distribution of the committee member's caste profile was probed to understand its interplay with decision-making. The caste of an individual could be broadly classified into five categories, general, SC, STs, Other Backward Class (OBC) and the Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribe (VJNT). As a result the caste classifications of the women respondents were enquired and listed in the Table 4.5.

A review of the caste profile of women members in the decentralised institutions as listed in Table 4.5 indicated that 33 per cent women members belonged to the ST community followed by about 25 per cent from the general category and above 20 per cent as the OBCs. Evidently, a large majority (about 3/4th) of the women members belonged to the marginalised caste groups, and only 1/4th of them were from the general caste group.

Table: 4.5
Distribution of Respondent's Caste

Caste	Frequency	Percentage
General	63	25.40
Schedule Caste (SC)	29	11.69
Schedule Tribe (ST)	84	33.87
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	51	20.56
Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT)	21	8.47
Total	248	100.00

It was interesting to note while considering the reservation policy outlined in the project (GoM, 2003a, p.54) it had provided for not less than 30 per cent of the seats for the VWSC to be reserved from the backward classes, which comprised of SC, ST, OBC and VJNT categories. In finding a higher women's representation from these backward classes in all the three committees of the project, the researcher further probed to understand as to what should be the actual representation of backward communities within the VWSC. Since VWSC was responsible in implementing Jalswarajya Project.

From the 12 villages, five were considered as tribal (4 villages – Nimbha, Ganeshwadi, Moha and Potgaon from Yavatmal District and 1 Village - Nalid from Nashik) (please refer Annexure 4: Village Profile). As a result only seven villages excluding those tribal villages were taken into the calculations to understand the actual reservation of caste communities within the VWSC.¹ To understand the actual people's representation as per the reservation of SCs, STs and OBCs within the VWSC, the minimal representation of women from seven villages was considered.

Table: 4.6
Non-Tribal Village-wise Representation of Women's Caste Category in VWSC

District	Villages	Caste Classification in VWSC					Total
		General	SC	ST	OBC	VJNT	
Buldhana	Sagoda	2	0	3	1	0	6
	Wadi	1	2	1	2	0	6
Nashik	Kikhware. Kh	3	1	1	1	0	6
Osmanabad	Ansurda	2	0	0	3	1	6
	Bedarwadi	2	0	0	1	3	6
	Bhonja	3	2	0	0	1	6
	Aasu	4	1	0	1	0	6
Total		17	6	5	9	5	42

Table 4.6 showed that within the VWSCs from seven villages, there were a total of 42 members. Similarly 25 women were representatives from the SC, ST and OBC category but the actual representatives as per reservation (30 per cent) of the SCs, STs and OBC equates to 13 members.

Henceforth, the data clearly seemed to indicate that backward community members were merged within the women category. This can be viewed through two perspectives: the political representation of the backward community got an opportunity to raise voice in the public; on the other hand women from the dominant/upper caste groups lacked political representation as men from their caste groups had taken this opportunity to represent themselves within the water committees as much of the water procurement was not upper caste women's task (Singh, 2006 and Singh et al., 2005).

In doing so, men from the upper/dominant caste groups who were generally the rural elites formed the majority within the water committee, while the backward class women who already had suffered severe restrictions in open and face-to-face interactions within their own community as well with the upper community men (Singh, 2006) formed a minority in decision-making hierarchy. Therefore, when there was no government resolution to stipulate quotas for women's representation from the backward community (SCs, STs, OBCs and the

VJNTs), it ran the risk of women outnumbering the representative statistics and reducing the opportunity for the backward community men to participate in the water governance process.

This was because as rightly marked by Singh (2006) that, women in upper/dominant caste groups were concerned with domestic water needs while the men handled the water management tasks which largely concerned with formal decision-making related to construction. Since the VWSC has more control and power in terms of implementing the Jalswarajya Project, the rural elites to capture control and power of the VWSC they formed the majority, leaving women's representation to be fulfilled from the SC, ST and OBC category.

Thus, from a gender relation analysis it can be stated that if women's representation had taken place without considering the quota system for women from the marginalised community, the overall women representation would have fallen short from the men's representation on 50:50 ratio. The rural dominant/upper caste men used such institutional mechanism to capture power and control within decision-making process at the decentralised water governance institutions.

Nevertheless, qualitative findings from the field indicated that there was increased participation of women in the village to implement Jalswarajya Project, but their actual (interactive) participation decision-making was not much. It was just a nominal participation as rightly marked by Agarwal (2010). Thus, from the data it can be concluded that, within the representation of women, the caste and class representation were brought together to fulfil both categories – caste and women within decentralised governance. In doing so, the men from the upper community still retained the control over decision-making through better women's representation.

The men from the lower caste who were educated could not participate as per the reservations norms. In fact the women of their community were represented as their proxies (similar findings was observed within women's participation at the PRIs by PRIA, 2005). Hence, decentralised governance in water projects, which aimed at efficiency through people's participation, was likely to be using reservation policy as taxonomy to capture resources and the benefits meant for the upliftment of the poor by the dominant/upper caste groups.

Educational Qualifications

Like caste system in India, education is an important variable in the development context across the world (Tilak, 2002; Brown and Lauder, 1996). Better education status of the women members from the decentralised committee plays an important role (Jain, 1996; Singh, 2006). It is assumed that if more members of the committee are literate they become aware about the project – financial aspects, which can act as a measure to reduce corruption, bring transparency and further strengthen accountability in the project. In this regard, the educational qualification of the committee members was examined.

Table: 4.7
Distribution of Committee Member's Educational Qualification

Education	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	75	30.24
Primary level of education	74	29.84
Secondary level	90	36.29
Higher Secondary level	7	2.82
Graduate	1	0.40
Post Graduate	1	0.40
Total	248	100.00

The data from the Table 4.7 clearly depicted that a large number of respondents, about 36 per cent of the women had studied up to secondary level, which in the Indian context implied 8 to 10 years of formal education. There was also a high proportion of women (30.24 per cent) who although were members of the decentralised committees had not received any formal education, whereas, almost about a similar proportion of women (29.84 per cent) had received formal education up to the primary level. .

The analysis from the data showed that women who had studied up to secondary level of in school were likely to be members of the decentralised committees. This indicated that the knowledge about basic reading and writing skills in women could assist them to participate in the gender development strategy of rural drinking water project.

Similar trend was evident from the findings of Kulkarni et al., (2008). Their data was clubbed from 5th to 7th and 8th to 10th standards forming as the secondary level of education, it indicated a total of about 49 per cent, followed by non-literate group of above 15 per cent and primary level of education as 13 per cent and like-wise reduced percentage of women for higher educational attainments (above 3 per cent). From both these data sets it could be stated (reconfirming Kulkarni et al., 2008) that younger women who were educated too did seem to participate in the water committees established by Jalswarajya Project.

Since education of the respondents played an important role for women becoming members of the decentralised water committee it also had an important role in reducing poverty and mutually reinforcing each other (Tilak, 2002). But the issue here was to understand how development projects designed for people's participation and economic development eventually had addressed poverty issues of communities through membership in SHGs and promotion of micro-finance coupled with provision of drinking water and sanitation services.

Poverty Line

Water and poverty have a complex relationship; it is related in several aspects with health, agriculture and many other factors (Kulindwa and Lein, 2008). This close link has been strengthened in the form of MDGs, where the Goal No. 1 relates to poverty reduction, and the Goal No.7 to secure access to safe and clean drinking water under 'Ensuring environmental sustainability' (MDGs, 2000). But the focus in the study is to understand while addressing the Goal No.7.C Target 10 (halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015) of MDGs it is also assumed that Goal No.1 is addressed.² The Jalswarajya Project while addressing the issues of safe drinking water in

rural areas also addresses issues of poverty like improving economic situation amongst women by bringing them to the forefront as a collective of SHGs and then providing training to promote IGAs. A revolving loan fund of Indian National Rupees (INR) 1 Lakh was provided by the WEF to undertake economic activities (GoM, 2003a; GoM, 2006).

The bringing of women to participate in the water projects was also based on certain accepted norms of women having the traditional role of providing water to the household members and meeting the reproductive needs which demanded water (Singh, 2006; Ahmed, 2005; Cleaver, 1998). As a result, women had to walk long distances despite their health conditions and carried head loads of water containers spending much of their time in collecting water for the household and productive needs (ibid).

Projects such as Jalswarajya designed to provide pipeline water supply at their doorsteps assumed to save time for women. The time saved could then be utilised for income generation (GoM, 2003a) as a measure of poverty alleviation in rural areas and also a tool for women to negotiate and bargain for power at the household level – challenging the long patriarchal dominance of women. Thus women's participation in decentralised institutions was also seen as a strategy where they could act as coherent unit at the village level and take action against women's subjugation (Ranadive-Deshmukh, 2005, emphasising on SHGs).

However this above process was not an end in itself, there were several means which acted as catalysts to bring about structural reform in the society. In this study, several variables and their attributes were measured to judge the process such as income, the colour of the ration card³ and the type of occupation as a measure of poverty amongst the members of the decentralised committees. It also examined the poverty situation of women members in the committee.

In this context, the variable to assess the poverty situation of an individual was the purchasing power, which could at best be judged by the income source. As a result the family income of the women's respondent was examined to assess the poverty situation amongst those women from the committee. The Table 4.8 shows the income distribution of the committee members, which included their total family income per annum.

The total annual income distribution of the committee members was recoded into different variable using the quartile values of the actual data, which ranged into several categories. In this process, the Table 4.8 showed that a majority (50 per cent) of the respondent's income ranged from 130001 to 29, 999 INR as the mid-range, followed by above 30 per cent as the lowest income range –INR 1500 to 13,000 and about 19 per cent as the highest income bracketed into the range of INR 30,000 to 1, 50,000 per annum.

The analysis from the data showed that a majority of the women from the decentralised institutions had their family income below INR 30,000 per annum. It meant that women who were a part of the gender development strategy were above the national poverty line index of the World Bank's Purchasing Power Parity (PPP²) (Ravallion et al., 2009) – mostly within the middle-income category.

Table: 4.8
Distribution of Respondent's Family Income (per annum)

Annual Income (INR)	Frequency	Percentage
1500 – 13000	76	30.65
13001 – 29999	124	50.00
30000 – 150000	48	19.35
Total	248	100.00
Mean= 26468.75	Median= 18000.00	
Mode= 15000	S.D= 24248.67	

However, considering the income categories of the respondents and comparing with the national figure of measuring poverty line, it tended to identify with those groups who often argued about the flaws within the conceptual level of defining the poverty line index itself. This was due to two conditions, first the comparability of consumption expenditure estimated over time by the GoI and second, the calculation of universal poverty line index promoted by the World Bank.

As universal calculations towards poverty were more justified to seek development assistance, the World Bank promoted a universal poverty line index, under its revised 2005 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)⁴ (Ravallion et al., 2009). This PPP was used as a base cut-off of US \$ 1.25 earning of a person per day to estimate the earning of a person within her nation and the currency required for purchasing same amount of goods and services in the domestic market, as the dollar would buy in the US. Accordingly as per the PPP, the World Bank estimated the absolute poor people in India to be 456 million in 2005, but the Indian government's estimated figure was of 301 million in 2004-2005 (Ghosh, 2011).

Reflecting on the poverty figures, several perspectives and criticisms were raised on the World Bank and the Government's calculation measures. But the concern that lay ahead was helping those million populations living below poverty line and meeting the MDGs ratified by India of halving the poverty by 2015. In doing so, the long-time provision of assistance from the World Bank acted as a key strategy for bringing about reform in welfare services by the GoI. It was assumed that it would tackle other ailments besides increased poverty such as lack of people's participation in governance, lack of education and healthcare needs, unsustainable use of resources due to lack of value attached with it, lack of peoples' ownership over government schemes and programmes, and lack of transparency with governmental budgets and allocations (World Bank, 2001a).

However, the assistances that were provided by the IFIs to reduce fiscal deficits increased poverty rate and brought deterioration of developmental infrastructures. This clearly indicated the increasing inequality, the lacunas in 'trickle-down' approach (Bandyopadhyay, 2007, Saxena and Farrington, 2003). As a result, against this backdrop, sector reform was considered an alternative to the process of development of human (Aluwalia, 2002) and natural resources so that sustainable development could be achieved by India aligning with the global commitments, such as those of Rio Summit – Agenda 21(1992), the MDGs (2000), Beijing Conference (1995) and the Dublin Statement (1992).

Nonetheless, considering the World Bank's calculation of poverty line, it was observed that many of the committee members and their family members (50 per cent) lived on the border

line of 1.25 US\$ per family per day. Taking per person earnings as the root calculation⁵, one could find a large section of the women population who were members of the committee still lived below poverty line despite the emphasis on poverty alleviation in the Jalswarajya Project. Their total family income per day calculations summed up to 1.60\$ per day per family and when this figure was further divided per person, the income was much lower than the estimated cut-off earning.

Moreover the poverty line of the members from the committee was examined through the colour of the Ration Card⁶ that they possessed. As a result, to understand the socio-economic position of the committee members and their family, the colour of their ration card was probed based on the GoM regulation listed on their website⁷. There were three different colours indicating the economic status of the family such as the white, saffron and yellow. The white indicated the creamy layer of population; the saffron indicated the middle class including those above the poverty line and yellow referred to people living below poverty line and also those Antyodaya families – known as the poorest of the poor. Based on these aspects, the BPL population received subsidised food from the Public Distribution System (PDS)⁸ as it was closely linked with food security (Dev, 1996).

The tabulated data from the Table 4.9 showed that a majority (52.42 per cent) of the respondents had their ration card in Saffron colour. As per the GoI norms Saffron colour Ration cards were issued to those who were above the poverty line index of the government, calculated on the basic calorie requirement met by the household. Followed by the Saffron Ration Card holders, a large number of respondents (46.78 per cent) possessed yellow ration card thus living below the poverty line.

Table: 4.9
Distribution of Respondent's Ration Card

Colour of the Ration Card	Frequency	Percentage
Saffron	130	52.42
Yellow	116	46.78
White	1	0.40
Not Available	1	0.40
Total	248	100.00

Similar were the findings from the study of Kulkarni et al., (2008) in Maharashtra where a large number of respondents (42.98 per cent) from the decentralised institutions held orange (saffron) card, followed by about 25 per cent yellow card. Thus, it could be concluded that women members of the decentralised institutions were generally from the above poverty line.

Similar to the attributes of income and colour of the ration card in understanding poverty variable, the occupation status of the respondents also played a vital role to indicate the socio-economic status of an individual. As a result of which the occupation classification of the women who were members of the decentralised institutions had been examined. The types of occupation or livelihood strategies of the committee members are presented in the Table 4.10.

Table: 4.10
Distribution of Respondent's Occupation

Types of Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture (Cash Cropping)	115	46.37
Labour	73	29.44
Housewife	52	20.97
Government Service	3	1.21
Self employed (shops, etc)	4	1.61
Others	1	0.40
Total	248	100.00

The Table 4.10 showed that about 46 per cent of the women were involved in their own field working for cash crops, followed by about 30 per cent women working as labour in others' field and above 20 per cent performed the household chores as housewives.

Similar findings had been reported from Kulkarni et al., (2008) in Gujarat. It was found that most of the women from the decentralised water committees were engaged in agriculture as primary or self-cultivator on the field owned by their husbands/families and the remaining respondents were working as agriculture labourers. However, the landownership of the members was not examined in the study, as Jalswarajya Project did not emphasis on the distribution of decentralised committee membership based on this category. It was more focused on reservation policy of the SCs, STs and the OBCs. Nevertheless, it could be assumed that when a large number of women were engaged in growing cash crops in their own field, it implied that these women or their family member possessed land (at varying size). Similar was Kulkarni et al., (2008) experience in Maharashtra, where a majority of the women interviewed belonged to landowning families (about 58 per cent).

Thus it was evident that as per the World Bank's PPP calculations, majority of the women and their family members fell into the poverty line index. But through the colour of the ration card as determined by the government norms for access to subsidised food, majority were not eligible. Due to which a large number of women and their families did not fall within the national poverty line index.

On the other hand when women and their work were related to their reproduction sphere, it unknowingly got extended to the productive sector, which were unpaid (Kulkarni et al., 2007) despite their involvement in the IGAs such as, cash crop cultivations (Longwe, 1994). Therefore, when the WEF provided revolving loan funds to the SHGs for them to undertake IGAs but seldom they had any control over the money because much of the financial decision-making power were held by the men at household level (observation revealed from the FGDs and the 'Then and Now Analysis'). The situation was no different with women living below poverty line. The only difference being that perhaps their respect had grown in the family for bringing home money through the loans provided by the SHGs.

Meanwhile, if we looked into the benefits of Jalswarajya Project in Table 6.18 it was found that women from the decentralised institutions considered economic benefits as the most valued factor in the drinking water project despite the lack of decision-making within the household as economic transaction and weekly marketing were still made by the men (Table 6.15). This process can be further illustrated as per Ranadive-Deshmukh, (2005) where she

stated that collective action was a more effective vehicle to set the motion of empowerment, and in this case the SHG had ushered a motion for empowerment, which is illustrated in detail in the succeeding chapters. But the concern remained that if poverty alleviation programs addressed women's empowerment through SHGs, it then was vital that the ownership and control over assets by women were also addressed. Else much of the work or rather IGAs which women took up through the loans provided by the SHGs went unnoticed and there was less impact on economic empowerment of the women (ibid).

This conclusion can be further strengthened from the qualitative findings of the 'Then and Now Analysis' that after three years of SHGs being promoted. Today, due to lack of funding some SHGs got dismantled. On the other hand, appreciating the formation of SHG, one of the women from the decentralised institution said that, 'SHG became a wheel for the village development, women were given the responsibility to make the village 100 per cent open defecation free', further she also highlighted that women's role in the Jalswarajya Project was like, '*binpagari fool adhikari*' (work without money).

Thus, it can be observed that SHGs as an economic empowerment tool was linked to the community mobilisation process so that these women from the SHG could motivate other women to participate in the project activities that ranged from the cleanliness drive (which the project often claims), (World Bank, 2011) to other water related works such as preparation of kitchen garden, drainage and many others. In doing so, women were mobilised to carry out the community work. Thus, we find that women's role that was previously not recognized within the productive and reproductive sphere, were now recognised and in order to address these issues, their work had now further extended to community roles, which was seldom paid. Due to such conditions imposed on women, poverty alleviation programmes that were strategized through community initiatives had little scope to contribute to women's economic development as it burdened women with additional workload (Cleaver, 1998; Kabeer, 1994; Young, 1993; Moser, 1993).

4.3. Women representation within Decentralised Institutions

Post 2000 with the implementation of Sector Reform project, the government had put an emphasis on people's participation as a key to success for project deliveries and therefore reformed government functionaries to bring about institutional reform and established decentralised governance as a platform for people to manage their own affairs collectively (Kulkarni et al., 2008; Sijbesma, 2006; GoM, 2003a). In this process, Sector Reform projects in Maharashtra especially the SRP Project, Aaple Pani Project and Jalswarajya Project strengthened the VWSC for effective delivery of water services.

The VWSC was created by the State Government and formalised through a Government Resolution (GR) in November 1996 (Kulkarni et al., 2008). The tenure of this institution was for five years, wherein it included members of the Gram Panchayat, Village head/Sarpanch and other representatives – such as 50 per cent reservation for women, and others including SCs, STs and marginalised groups (GoM, 2003a). However the main mandate of this committee was to manage the water supply at the local level. Since traditionally women being the key water managers at the household level, their representation was brought forward at the village level through being members within the water delivery institutions (Joshi, 2005). In this process, when the sector reform projects were implemented they adopted VWSCs that were already in place at least on paper and further emphasised to strengthen these institutions (GoM, 2003a).

Projects such as Aaple Pani, SRP Project (that continued as Swajaldhara in four districts) were implemented before Jalswarajya Project, emphasised on strengthening VWSC and bringing people's participation through capital contribution and full operation and monitoring of the water infrastructures. Women's participation in the water project was mainly through capital contribution, the O&M and attending meetings as members of the VWSC. There were no separate budgeted activities for women's empowerment under this project. As a result reservation of women under the VWSC members was itself perhaps considered a process towards empowerment, but as stated by Kulkarni et al., (2008), the women empowerment component in terms of funding under the project of Aaple Pani did not work.

When Aaple Pani Project was implemented in the State, it covered three districts across 75 villages. The mechanism for implementing the project was similar to Jalswarajya Project at the village level (please refer to annexure 2 for more details). Much of the project principles, norms and values were adapted within Jalswarajya, but the only difference that separated both these projects was women's empowerment, which was not the major focus of Aaple Pani as compared to Jalswarajya. Moreover, there were other decentralised institutions created under the Jalswarajya project such as the WDC and SAC for bringing about women empowerment and transparency and accountability (GoM, 2003a).

In all the three committees in Jalswarajya Project, women's representation was an essential component, VWSC and SAC reserved 50 per cent of the membership for women and WDC reserved 75 per cent (ibid). Women's involvement within the decentralised institutions was mainly through; regularly (often compulsory) attending meetings; SHGs' involvement in construction and monitoring of village water works, ensuring that the area around water infrastructure was kept clean, resolving conflicts over citing of community water distribution points, and collecting financial contribution. However, a special fund had been provided for women's development that was used for capacity building through trainings and exposure trips and also as revolving seed money to the SHGs.

Earlier the ratio of WEF - (INR1 Lakh) was 60:40, where 60 per cent of the amount was used for training and exposure trips and 40 per cent as seed money for the SHG, but with the mid-term review of the Project in 2006-2007, the proportion of the WDF was reversed so that more funds were available as seed money⁹.

Nevertheless, the project had overemphasised women's issues through their participation in these decentralised institutions and mobilised them in the form of SHGs at the village level. The researcher's experiences from Ratnagiri District (Phase II District) in Maharashtra State indicated that during the community mobilisation process for establishment of the decentralised committees, the key influential villagers (the Village Sarpanch and the Gram Sevak) along with the DFT simply read the name of the members for each committee, which was already pre-decided. No wonder such processes can be correlated to the statement of VWSC president in Aasu village mentioned in the opening statement of this chapter. A trend which might have followed right from the Phase I and Batch I villages implementing Jalswarajya Project.

Nonetheless, this showed the nexus between the influential in the village with the DFT compromising on the process of implementing the project. However, there was no data from the field, which could substantiate this interpretation, but certainly at the field level one can observe the relationship that created a bond between rural elites and the government officials

to capture resources and power within development programmes¹⁰. As a result of which it was essential here to understand the process of how the rural women were selected as members for the decentralised institutions.

Process of becoming the Decentralised Committee Members

Leaving aside Ratnagiri District where the project got implemented as Phase II, it was more significant to understand what process took place amongst the Phase I villages, so that one can relate the trend of project implementation that was followed within other villages across the districts implementing Jalswarajya Project.

It was apparent that the DFT members along with the SOs carried out community mobilization through motivating villagers to participate with the help of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) tools in bringing about change in their knowledge, attitude and practice about safe drinking water and sanitary needs (GoM, 2003a). The output assumed through the awareness generation was that the villagers were motivated to attend the Gram Sabhas – both women for Mahila Gram Sabha and entire village population for the main Gram Sabhas.

The Mahila Gram Sabha, which was held before the main Gram Sabha consensually, drew up a list of women's representation for all the decentralised committees and which subsequently was presented at the Gram Sabha for final approval. However, not all followed this process. Rather, in most villages, both the Sabhas were held together as the main Gram Sabha in the presence of the DFT, the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), and the SOs (if available) (researcher's observation at Ratnagiri district). A minimum of 40 per cent villagers registered under the electoral roll were required to be present as a quorum for the Gram Sabha (GoM, 2003a). Perhaps due to this prevailing situation, the non-negotiable principle of women's participation was introduced by Jalswarajya Project to ensure women's participation in collective decision-making that governed their lives. But in practice there were loopholes where even without the 40 per cent quorum at the Gram Sabha, the water committees were established by the villagers along with the DFT.

Considering these above issues, the researcher further probed to understand the process of how these respondents from the Phase I, Batch I villages became the members of the democratic decentralised institutions established by the project.

Table: 4.11

Distribution of the Process of Becoming the Member of the Decentralised Institutions

Process of Becoming the Committee Member	Frequency	Percentage
Self recommended to the Gram Sabha (Volunteered)	16	6.45
Family Member recommended to the Gram Sabha	17	6.85
Others recommended to the Gram Sabha	180	72.58
Do not know	33	13.31
Any other	2	0.81
Total	248	100.00

From the Table 4.11 it was evident that a majority (72.58 per cent) of the women members for all the three decentralised institutions (VWSC, WDC and SAC) were recommended by

others, which included the Village Sarpanch or the Gram Sevak. Interestingly another significant proportion of about 13 per cent members stated that they were unaware of how they became members.

The data from the Table 4.11 seemed to indicate that in most of villages, the Mahila Gram Sabha was perhaps merged with the main Gram Sabha, and in the presence of the DFT and the SOs the list of women was presented to the villagers prepared by the Gram Sevak and the Village Sarpanch similar to the researcher's experience in Ratnagiri district. Thus, from the data it may be concluded that women participation in the decentralised institutions had largely been through other's recommendation rather than their self-motivation. But these findings contradicted with Kulkarni et al., (2008) findings in Jalswarajya Project, where about a majority (59.65 per cent) reported their reasons for participation were because of their self-interest, and then followed through recommendation from others to the Gram Sabha (about 29 per cent).

During the field investigation, the researcher found that some of the women members from the decentralised institutions were surprised to learn that they were members of the Jalswarajya committee. They had no idea about their membership as others recommended their names at the Gram Sabha. Further from the FGDs, and the 'Then and Now Analysis' it revealed that previously women had never visited the Gram Panchayat as there were restrictions for them to go out of their house and they feared to speak at the Gram Sabha.

In order to elicit their participation in the project, the Village Sarpanch and the rural elites had to convince the head of households especially the women's husbands and their in-laws to allow their wives and their daughter-in-laws to participate in the SHGs and the decentralised committee meetings. As a result of which women participated in the project.

Further, it would be interesting to understand what was women's participation in the decentralised committees and at the Gram Sabha after becoming the members of the water committees and being part of the gender development strategy, which is illustrated in the following chapters.

4.4. Summary

Before we proceed to understand the participation of women within the decentralised committee established through Jalswarajya Project and their process of empowerment, the section below presents a brief summary of the socio-economic profile of the committee members in this chapter.

With the implementation of Jalswarajya by the GoM, the drinking water sector in Maharashtra saw a major shift from the welfare to a demand-driven approach. It involved people to manage their own affair and as a result several VSWCs were established in villages to implement the sector reform rural drinking water project. Jalswarajya Project with the support of World Bank was implemented in a big fashion across 26 districts of the State.

Unlike SRP and Aaple Pani, Jalswarajya Project strongly emphasised on women's empowerment by promoting their participating in the decentralised institutions for effective water governance. Institutional arrangements were made under the project for democratic decentralisation – they established VWSC, WDC and SAC. In each of these committees

except WDC, 50 per cent of women's representation was considered as a non-negotiable principle whereas for WDC 75 per cent of women's representation was essential.

Jalswarajya Project strongly advocated for mobilisation of women and their participation in the cash economy through SHGs. A separate WEF was available in Jalswarajya Project for capacity building of women and providing the seed money to initiate IGAs. Through such initiatives women were assumed to have access to cash, which strengthened their confidence so that they could participate in household decision-making processes and could articulate their needs in the decentralised institution meetings.

The sample consisted of women members from the decentralised committees – VWSC, WDC and SAC as respondents. Out of which about 43 per cent of the respondents were from WDC followed by 29 and 28 per cent from VWSC and SAC respectively. From those who were the members of all the three committees, a majority of the respondents (over 55 per cent) were of the opinion that they had been members for four years, whereas the remaining respondents still struggled to recall for how long they had been member of the decentralised committee.

The majority of women members from the water committees were at the age group of 31 – 46 years. The mean age of the respondents was 40 years. Over 93 per cent of the respondents were married. Statistically both the variable age and the marital status had a significant relationship.

The caste distribution of the women members from the decentralised institutions indicated that almost one third of the respondents (above 33 per cent) belonged to the ST community, followed by 25 per cent from General Caste category and 20 per cent as OBC category. Considering the reservation policy, an overwhelming representation of women from the backward caste was found within the VWSC. This left out the educated men from the lower caste to be represented within the VWSC; as a result women from the backward community were proxy representatives at the VWSC. In this process, the upper/dominant caste men were still the ones who made crucial decision that governed the lives of the rural poor and the marginalised communities.

With regard to the educational qualifications, about 36 per cent of the women respondents had studied up to secondary level, while still a larger section (about 30) had no formal education. Although the Jalswarajya Project aimed at establishment of effective decentralised institutions for efficient delivery of drinking water and sanitation services; it facilitated the process of poverty alleviation amongst women so that they could participate in the cash economy. As a result the project made special provision of INR 1 lakh as WEF to be utilised for skill development training programmes and as revolving fund to the SHGs in the villages.

As far as the income was concerned, 50 per cent of the respondent's family income per year ranged from INR 13, 001 to INR 29, 999 followed by INR 1,500 to INR 13, 000 categories (about 30 per cent). The mean annual income of the women's family was INR 26, 468.74. The colour of Ration Cards of these women's family was mainly Saffron in colour (about 52 per cent) followed by Yellow, which was about 46 per cent.

The primary occupation of the women respondents from the decentralised institutions was to participate in the cash economy through working in their own field for cash crops (about 46 per cent). Nonetheless, the poverty trend of population indicated that most of the women and their families had lived above the poverty index as determined by the GoI. But on the basis of

World Bank calculations, the average income per person per day for most of the population were lower than the cut off mark, thus considered to be living below the poverty line index.

Consequently, despite the significant measures that were strategized for women to participate in the cash economy, much of them still seemed to be living below the poverty line index as developed by the international funding agencies.

Reasons for women's participation in Jalswarajya Project were mainly through the recommendation by others (about 73 per cent), which included the Village Sarpanch and the Gram Sevak, followed by about 13 per cent who were totally unaware of how they became the members of the VWSC, WDC and SAC. There were only a very few (about 6 per cent) who were self motivated to participate in the Gram Sabha as representatives of the decentralised committees.

Notes:

¹ Interestingly in Nimbha village of Yavatmal district despite of being known as Tribal, it is found out of the 20 members interviewed, 17 were members of the OBC category (Please refer Annexure 4 Village Profile). However, this finding is not taken into drawing conclusion due to technical issue – as despite of high OBC population, how could Nimbha village till be classified as Tribal by RSPMU in their village profile data that was available while drawing the sample.

² However the Project states MDGs - Goal 3, Target 4, Goal 7, Target 10 & 11 and Goal 8, Target 12 is supported (World Bank, 2003b). The gender development strategy adopted in Jalswarajya Project overwhelmingly strategize for economic development of women through the time-saved phenomenon. As a result, the MDGs viewed also as a human rights perspective is not incorporated in the study.

³ Ration Card in India is used for access to subsidized food that is available through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

⁴ The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) concept was re-introduced into the international policy debate concerning the appropriate level of nominal exchange rates among the major industrialised countries after the large-scale inflation post World War I. It visioned to key vision was to have the prices of international traded goods to be the same based on 'Law of One Price' in relation to the exchange rate of that country (Taylor and Taylor, 2004). Henceforth PPP conversion factor, private consumption, is the number of units of a country's currency required to buy the same amount of goods and services in the domestic market as a U.S. dollar would buy in the United States. Thus, in 2008, World Bank came out with a revised figure of \$1.25 at 2005 PPP, which meant that in order to determine the poverty line, the total cost of all the essential resources that an average human adult consumed in one year or basically the cost of food to maintain a tolerable life was calculated to determine the poverty line of a person (Ravallion et al., 2009).

⁵ The daily income of the family is calculated based on Mean figure/12 months/30 days of the month/the current exchange rate of US \$ taken as INRs 46 = 1.60\$/day

⁶ Ration Cards are to identify the status for access to subsidized food available through the Public Distribution System but it is also used for other purposes such as residential or domicile status.

⁷ (<http://www.pwd.maharashtra.gov.in/english/food/schemes2Show.php>) Last accessed 12 May 2012.

⁸ The Public Distribution System is a rationing mechanism for subsidized prices of the food items. This system was universal and all registered household were entitled to the food items. But after the 1997 with the World Bank's suggestions, the GoI, introduced Targeted PDS (TPDS) to cut down the increasing food security. This brought in the concept of above and below poverty line population (Swaminathan, 2008). After the introduction of TPDS, the Maharashtra State Government decided to issue tri coloured cards – Yellow ration card for the Antyodaya [poorest of the poor families] and the BPL families – families having equal to or less than INRs 15,000 per annum, Saffron (family income above INRs 15,001 per annum or irrigated land less than 4 hectares or own a four wheeler vehicle) and White Cards for families having income above 1 lakhs Rs or more than 4 hectare Irrigated land the poverty line (APL – families). Link to this: <http://www.maharashtra.gov.in/english/food/schemes2Show.php#rat>. Last Accessed 25 October 2011.

⁹ For more information on the utilisation of the WEF, please see Annex. 1 – Jaulke Experience.

¹⁰ This was observed while mobilizing communities to establish the decentralized institutions in the phase II villages of Jalswarajya Project in Ratnagiri district.