Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

In social theory there has been an interest to understand the motivation behind human behaviour. There have been theorists who attribute human behaviour to the social system which gives direction to human beings and constraint their course of action. The other thought suggests that human actions shape social structures and acknowledge human beings as knowledgeable actors. Loyal and Barnes (2001) suggest agency stands for ‘the freedom of the contingently acting subject over and against the constraints that are thought to derive from enduring social structures. To the extent that human beings have agency, they may act independently of and in opposition to structural constraints, and/or may (re)constitute social structures through their freely chosen actions. To the extent that they lack agency, human beings are conceived of as automata, following the dictates of social structures and exercising no choice in what they do. That, at any rate, is the commonest way of contrasting agency and structure in the context of what has become known as the structure agency debate.

3.1 Agency vs. Structure

Structuralism is an approach that attempts to analyse a specific issue as a manifestation of interrelationship between interrelated parts of a complex system. Structuralists believe that every system has a structure and the position of each element is determined by the overall structure.

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9 As quoted in Aston, Ben ‘What is structure and agency How does this framework help us in political analysis Approaches to Political Analysis’ p. http://benaston.com/downloads/politics/What%20is%20structure%20and%20agency%20and%20how%20does%20this%20framework%20help%20us%20in%20political%20analysis.doc
According to them structures are the 'real things' that lie beneath the surface or the appearance of meaning. The emphasis of structuralist approach is on the relations among elements of a system, the causal force of the relationship and the patterns. The effect of individual character of the elements on the system is considered to have little explanatory bearing. Following are the assumptions underlying the structuralist approach

- Elements of the structure remain constant
- Varying relationships between the structures generate different systems of ideas and types of society
- Social norms, type of society, language and ideas are reproduced by underlying structure
- Individuals are product of relationships and human subjects have a decentred conception of the self

The Marxist conception placed greater stress upon the structural constraints which shape the action of actors. Marx saw human beings as not producers but the product of social relations. Marxists conceptualize class as a structure that entails material interests, capacities, and constraints that exist independently of the actors. As Burris (1987) opines ‘Marxist class theory abstracts from the consciousness or motives of concrete human agents to the logic of the supraindividual structure’.

Some structuralists even explain the role of agency as manifestation of the underlying structure (Marshall, 1998). What an individual thinks, feels and does cannot be realistically separated by networks of statuses and relative power which are complete external to and independent of us. Each individual has some freedom to exercise their own will to act, but their actions are
nevertheless powerfully constrained by the accepted and traditional norms and rules of social behaviour. The idea of gender - masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, is also considered a manifestation of social construction and processes. Structuralist approach helps in analysing gender relations as a result of inherent inequalities in the social structure.

Structuralists were critiqued for underestimating human actions and experience and giving prominence to structures and individual’s position in the hierarchy. Marxists, for example, have been accused by feminists of ignoring gender as a structure. According to Fiorentine (1993) structural approach views gender discrimination as based on a logical fallacy that confuses outcome with process.

Michel Foucault viewed human body as social construction and being determined by the discourse. Bodies are produced by social discourses and their power of production is endowed by the discourse. The emphasis is on the regulatory controls exerted from the outside and body is seen as a material component of social action. Although he recognises that body puts up resistance to power and dominant discourses, he does not explain the reasons and process of body’s resistance (Shilling, 1989). Feminists used this idea and extended it to understand how and why women’s decisions regarding their body and discipline are shaped by the dominant discourse. The tendency of a Foucauldian account of power to reduce social agents to docile bodies has been criticized for undermining women’s agency and emphasizing on behaviour being determined by internalization of power (Fraser, 1989; Hartsock, 1990). His claim that subjects cannot exist outside of power has been seen as damaging, as it does not take into consideration individual agency without which resistance is impossible. Linda Alcoff (1998)
criticized him for not acknowledging human’s ability to influence, create or modify the dominant discourses. On the contrary, Jenkins (2002) argues that Foucault recognises power to be dependent for its existence on exercise of freedom, as resistance is contingent to power relations. Freedom is individual’s ability to transgress and modify existing power relations and thus contains theory of agency within it.

Unlike structuralists, Weberian theory assigns a much greater causal importance to human agency. Structures are treated as an outcome reproduced by social action. Classes are not an effect of a structure but an outcome of the motivated behaviour of knowledgeable human actors. The emphasis is on seeking to understand the subjective meaning associated with social action (Burris, 1987). Weber conceives gender inequality and stratification as women’s position in the labour market and their status as women - each affects the other in some way.

Some social scientists are convinced that individuals have a great capacity for acting freely and without constraints by larger social structures. Indeed, some argue that "social systems" do not really exist at all - they are merely convenient abstractions which have no reality outside of our minds and language. If social systems do exist in some fashion, it is only as a result of the actions of free human agents. The differences in various theoretical perspectives lead to contradictory conclusions about the degree that individuals, and particularly women, can control their occupational destiny and the possibility of increased gender egalitarianism.

Majority of sociologists do not follow either position of according human behaviour to structural factors or to individual’s ability to great extremes and instead attempt to find some sort of middle
ground, recognising that each position has something valid to say about how people experience their social communities. Some even deny that it makes any sense to consider human agency and social systems to be separate and opposed ideas. The social system helps create what the individual is while the individual helps create the social system. Thus, they exist in a dynamic interdependency and none can be considered as being the "primary" while the other being an "illusion".

Socialist-Feminists like Heidi Hartmann (1981) have endorsed a dual-systems approach to gender segregation, attempting to integrate both viewpoints and brings together structure and agency perspectives by referring to the "partnership" between capitalism and patriarchy. For instance, she suggests that capitalist economic processes generate the positions within the division of labour and patriarchal relations determine whether men or women fill them. Patriarchy is a form of solidarity among men, enabling them to dominate women through control over women's labour. They conceive patriarchy in terms of gender ideology and subjectivity as opposed to defining it as men's control over women's labour, also analyse gender as a property of individuals rather than the social structure (Barrett 1980)\textsuperscript{10}. Socialist-Feminist perspectives thus combine structure and agency approaches by supplementing a structural analysis of capitalism with a conception of patriarchy that emphasises gendered actors' agency and consciousness.

According to Wharton (1991: 375) this formulation links capitalism with patriarchy in a way that ‘treats these two social relations as separate and distinct entities, lodged in two different realms’. Capitalism is treated as a system that exists outside of individuals, constraining their activity, while patriarchy (although acknowledged to be a "system") is seen as operating primarily

\textsuperscript{10} Referred in Wharton, 1991.
through the actions of men and women. Socialist-Feminism inherited from Marxism a concern for structural questions that it has combined with an agency orientation to gender.

Wharton (1991, 374-7) posits that ‘Explanations of occupational segregation emphasizing patriarchy have tended to embrace an agency view of theory, whereas those that view economic processes as most important adopt a structural position. As a result, gender figures more prominently in explanations that highlight agency than in those emphasizing structural processes. However, agency theories of segregation treat gender strictly as an individual characteristic shaping the interests and dispositions of actors but ignore its role in shaping the macrostructure within which action occurs. In contrast, structural approaches emphasise supposedly gender neutral, economic processes, minimizing both the theoretical significance of gender and agency’.

3.2 Agency and Structure

Anthony Giddens (1984) furthered the ‘duality of structure’ and explored the process of constructing social reality - whether it is the individuals or social forces that shape our social reality- through theory of structuration. He argues that although people are not entirely free to choose their own actions, and their knowledge is limited, they nonetheless exercise agency which reproduces the social structure and leads to social change. Giddens identifies the connection between structure and action as fundamental element of social theory. He believes that structure and agency are a duality that cannot be conceived of apart from one another and his main argument is contained in his expression "duality of structure". Action and structure cannot be analysed separately, as structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while
actions are given meaningful form only through the background of the structure: the line of causality runs in both directions making it impossible to determine what is changing what.

According to Giddens (1976: 128-129) "social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution. In this regard he defines structures as consisting of rules and resources involving human action: the rules constrain the actions, the resources make it possible. These actions, can lead, in turn, to the reconstitution of the structure, defined as rules and resources, which will, in turn, affect future action. Thus, we have a close interrelationship between structure and agency.

Giddens in the form of what he calls ‘Structuration’ theory has set out to try and transcend the dualism of structure and agency. The process of structures (re)producing systems is called structuration. His basic argument is that, rather than representing different phenomena, they are mutually dependent and internally related. Systems here mean "the situated activities of human agents and structures are "...sets of rules and resources that individual actors draw upon in the practices that reproduce social systems. Giddens argues that human beings are knowledgeable agents whose practices constitute social systems. There can be no question of structures operating independently of human beings; these structures are constituted by practice and have no existential significance apart from practice (Giddens 1981:26).

Structure can act as a constraint on action, but it also enables action by providing common frames of meaning. Structures can be placing constrains upon human agency, but can also be enabling and structures like traditions, institutions, moral codes, and other sets of expectations -
established ways of doing things, are generally quite stable, but can be changed, especially through the unintended consequences of action, when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently. Structures, for Giddens, are not something external to social actors but are rules and resources produced and reproduced by actors in their practices. He also emphasises the importance of time and space for social theory and social analysis. Mohanty (1991) argues that the political histories in which experiences and perceptions of agency are formed and reformed, are central to understanding oppositional agency. Although women have struggled historically to attain freedom, equality and power, their narratives and experiences differ across ethnic diversity. These arguments highlight that agency is located in a specific context and time.

Thus, actors (agents) employ the social rules appropriate to their culture, ones that they have learned through socialisation and experience. These rules together with the resources at their disposal are used in social interactions. Rules and resources employed in this manner are not deterministic, but are applied reflexively by knowledgeable actors, albeit that actors’ awareness may be limited to the specifics of their activities at any given time. Thus, the outcome of action is not totally predictable. Giddon’s metaphor for this is that rather than being distinct phenomena structure and agency are in fact two sides of the same coin. As such, we have a conception of the mutual constitution of structure and agency. As Taylor (1989) argues, this conception is the most distinctive feature of ‘Structuration’ theory, yet a feature which serves crucially to undermine the theory as a whole.

Theory of Structuration also helps in explaining the network of macro and micro forces i.e. individuals' internal sense of self and identity at micro level related to the macro level change in
social institutions. In order to illustrate this relationship, Giddens discusses changing attitudes towards marriage in developed countries. He claims that any effort to explain this phenomenon solely in terms of micro or macro level causes will result in a logical fallacy. Social relationships and visible sexuality (micro-level change) are associated with the decline of religion and the rise of rationality (macro-level change), but also with changes in the laws relating to marriage and sexuality (macro), demand for which came from the level of everyday lives (micro). These, in turn, had been affected by the social movements of women's liberation and egalitarianism (macro); which themselves had grown out of dissatisfactions within everyday life (micro). Thus these different levels, which have traditionally been treated quite separately by sociologists, are in fact revealed as having significant influence upon each other, and cannot really be understood if studied in isolation. Inevitably, Giddens concludes that all social change stems from interplay of micro- and macro-level forces.

An alternative to dualism of structure and agency was introduced by Jessop as ‘strategic relational approach’. This approach argues for a dialectical understanding of the relationship between structure and agency and emphasises structure conditions agency and define the range of strategies which might be deployed by agents. Hay (1995) argues that, structure and agency, rather than being conceptualised as two sides of the same coin, should be thought of as two metals which contribute to the alloy from which the coin is moulded. The fundamental idea is that action takes place in a pre-existing structure, thus privileging some strategies over others. The structure is both enabling and constraining while actors are reflexive, and formulate strategies on the basis of their knowledge of the structures. Actors reflection crucially depends on their understanding, construction and interpretation of the context (Mcanulla, 1998).
Archer (1995) argues that Giddens downplays the importance of structures and seems to suggest that the world can be changed at will. Structural and environmental constraints do exist and cannot be simply resolved through human action. Also Giddens was critiqued for his failure to take into account the fact that some people have more choice than others, due to their class, gender, ethnicity, background etc in any given situation. Sewell (1992) provides a useful summary of the theory as well as taking on one of its underspecified aspects: the question "Why are structural changes possible?" He argues changes arise from:

- "The multiplicity of structures societies are based on practices that derived from many distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources."
- The transposability of rules: they can be "applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they were initially learned."
- The unpredictability of resource accumulation (e.g. investment, military tactics, or a comedian's repertoire).
- The polysemy of resources (e.g., to what should success in resource accumulation be attributed?).
- The intersection of structures (e.g. in the structure of capitalist society there are both the modes of production based on private property and profit, as well as the mode of labor organisation based on worker solidarity).

In her work on agency and empowerment for women in later life, Wray (2004) theorizes agency as multi-dimensional and constituted differently across time and space, and empowerment and disempowerment as conjoined rather than polarized, locates power relations within the context in
which they are played out. Such an approach is evident in the work of McNay (2000) and her insistence that agency and empowerment be understood as generative and variable. She argues for a dynamic approach to agency that is based on the creativity and unpredictability of individuals and their ability to adapt to constraint in imaginative ways.

The essential passivity of the subject i.e. conception of self in relation to the other, assumes the negative paradigm resulting in an etiolated conception of agency which cannot explain how individuals may respond in an unanticipated or creative fashion to complex social relations (McNay, 2000). Within this negative paradigm accounts of subject formation are either based on the effects of domination or practices of freedom. Here, agency is seen as emerging from constraint or autonomous action. This is problematic because it does not explain the unanticipated and innovative actions of women when faced with material and/or cultural constraint. In contrast, conceptualizing agency as creative and generative and autonomy as relational, allows for the recognition of different strategies used by women to deal with constraint and potentially disempowering experiences and allows for a generative conceptualization of agency, able to account for the interplay of cultural and structural power relations across ethnic difference.

According to Saltzman Chafetz (1990) such multi-level analysis could take place on the three levels of micro, mezzo and macro. Here, the micro-level refers to psychosocial relations within the context of culture, for example family and friendship networks. The mezzo-level refers to the structures within groups, such as the organisation of ethnic, age and gender groups. The macro-level represents society-wide political and economic systems and class and gender stratification
(Saltzman Chafetz, 1990). This type of analysis highlights the interplay of material and cultural factors and is sensitive to the numerous power relations that contribute towards experiences of empowerment or disempowerment.

These accounts illustrate the complex connections between choices arising from agency and consent and those based on coercion and compulsion. They remind us that although consent may be viewed as an autonomous act, cultural values and norms shape the choices available. Also an actor chooses to act or not to act vis a vis other social actors, and norms. So, the decision to stay with a husband rather than seek a divorce is made within the parameters of what is conceived to be and actually is possible. This raises questions about the interplay of culture, gender and structural inequalities across ethnicity. It suggests agency, empowerment and disempowerment are contextually located, multi-dimensional and suffused with diverse power relations that may create acts of resistance and/or compliance (McNay, 2000; Saltzman Chafetz, 1990). This affiliation to an ethnic identity provided migrant women with opportunities to share experiences and maintain cultural values and beliefs. Different forms of agency were constructed through the interplay of cultural and structural relations of power. Using three levels of analysis it is possible to theorize these types of agency (Saltzman Chafetz, 1990). First at a micro level, women are empowered through the process of identifying with friends with similar cultural backgrounds. At a second mezzo level, this process of identification is affirmed through identification with a particular ethnic, age or gender group. A third macro level of analysis highlights how acts of agency are produced through these encounters. An example of this is the launching of campaigns against structural constraint and inequality.
According to Ryan and Deci’s (2000) Self Determination Theory individuals have innate intrinsic needs. The theory attempts to understand individuals’ motivation for the choices they make. These motivations, they explain, could be intrinsic or extrinsic. The extrinsic motivations have been identified as:

- External Regulation - Force or Coercion by others
- Introjected Regulation - Opinions of others - to gain approval or avoid guilt or shame
- Identified Regulation - Individual identifies it as a valuable act
- Integrated Regulation - Individual identifies it as a valuable act and the act in accordance with other values and thinking about life

In her discussion of cultural and ethnic difference Avtar Brah (1996: 117) defines agency as relational. She notes that both individual and collective agency is modalities of mutli-locationality continuously marked by everyday cultural and political practices. Hence, what constitutes agency changes continuously within shifting cultural and political spaces, it cannot be assumed that experiences of agency are somehow fixed and unmarked by diversity. Instead, the multitudinous power relations operating within particular ethnic and cultural localities create different ways of thinking about agency and empowerment. There is a need to examine these differences if we are to move beyond universalized ethnocentric concepts of agency and empowerment. Focusing on the impact of culture and ethnicity on agency and empowerment does not negate the significance of structural and material constraint in shaping women’s experiences. Rather, it highlights the diverse array of factors that impinge on life across culture. Both the feeling of being in control of one’s life and the significance attached to this, are highly contested across culture and time.
According to the Encyclopaedia of Psychology, agency means to act, and it therefore refers in some way to doing something, or having the power and capability of producing an effect. This implies that capability to act is intrinsic to the agency of an individual.

Amartya Sen’s work focused on inequality and poverty and he critiqued the existing literature on inequality measurement for focusing on income. Rather, he argued, the focus should be on the freedoms people have for leading a valuable life. These freedoms he termed as capabilities for beings and doings which people value and also ensures their well-being. Thus the focus, he argued, should be on what people are able to be and to do and not on their income which is just a means of well-being. Drawing from Sen’s capability approach, capability is the freedom to achieve valuable beings and doings, it would be safe to assume that freedom to be agents is fundamental to individual agency. Therefore, agency of an individual has two important aspects. One is the opportunities and resources to achieve valued end of human life; this could range from basic like nourishment, health, housing to complex functioning like self-respect, participation in community life. The other aspect is freedom as a responsible agent to affect the physical and social environment to achieve those valued ends. Sen in his work labels the freedom to achieve valuable beings and doings as Capability Approach. The freedom in the capability approach has two aspects:

- **Process Aspect**: ability to be agents and affect the processes at work in their own lives and the society.
- **Opportunity Aspect**: ability to achieve the valued ends.

This implies that capability of an individual has an impact on the well-being of that individual.
In the development paradigm the focus has been on women’s contribution as a tool and the aspects of their well-being. This approach was ‘welfarist’ in nature and women were seen as passive beneficiaries. However there has been a gradual shift in focus from welfare and well-being of women to active and enhanced agency and active promoters of change - from being passive beneficiaries to active agents of change. Amartya Sen (1999) has observed that the bias against women is influenced by their social and economic status. In his framework aspects of well-being and agency overlap substantially, well-being of an individual is primary, but the ‘personhood’ cannot be restricted to that. It is important to recognise women as agents who can choose to act between various alternative actions and can act or even refuse to act thus taking the responsibility of their actions – either doing or not doing. There is evidence that the aspects of well-being are strongly influenced by women’s education, earning power, property rights through independence and freedom to choose and achieve. An individual has more voice and has a social standing if she has the ability to be an agent in order to achieve the valued ends; because she is less dependent and more visible.

Sabina Alkire (2002) perceives individual agency as an assessment of what a person can do in line with his or her conception of the good. Agency may be exercised in a group or as an individual. Human agency is also not restricted to the individual, but may have an effect on other individuals or one’s environment. In her attempts to measure agency beyond control, ability and advancing own well-being, she observes that agency can be measured with respect to one or more domains of capability, exercising direct control or ‘effective power’ by an individual or group, exert agency for own as well as other’s well-being and understanding if people can act on behalf of things they value and their reasons to value. This measure of agency has been
developed based on the presumption that people’s agency is informed by their knowledge and values.

According to Alsop and Heinsohn, agency is an actor’s ability to make meaningful choices – that is, the actor is able to envisage and decide on options. This definition includes the actor’s ability to imagine the result or effect of the action before the action takes place, thus presuming that the actor is aware of the significance and rationale of the action. As Kabeer has observed, agency is about more than observable action, it encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or ‘the power within’. Thus, it presupposes that the individual actor is conscious of his action, the reason behind it and also what they want to achieve by way of his action.

Other authors point out that human agency is determined by personal and collective goals and aspirations, belief systems and cultural differences (Bandura, 1986 & 2000; and Hernandez and Iyengar; 2001). Hernandez and Iyengar observed that it is not alone an individual’s relationship with the self but the relationship self has with others. Based on this view, Heron (2008) explains how exercising agency can either enhance equality or inequality. He concludes that human agency is diminished by interplay between internal and external relations of domination and existing inequality, which is dependent on policy environment. Therefore, reduction in access and quality of social services will reduce human agency.

Agency thus is the willingness of an individual to act or not to act in order to achieve the valued ends, based on the individual’s understanding of the external environment, available resources
and opportunities, understanding of the importance, stimulus, motivation and anticipated consequence of the action. Agency is in relation with other actors and is not the same at all times and in all positions. Agency of an individual cannot be thus completely separated from various social factors.

Iversen (2003) in his engagement with Sen’s ‘capability approach’ emphasizes the need to be careful in interpreting the concepts such as agency, freedom and choice in domestic scenarios. The argument is that interdependence between capabilities of individuals within a household has an impact on well-being, thus highlighting that interdependence, power relations, material endowments, agency, bargaining skills and fall-back position of one member will affect the well-being of others. This highlights the importance of collective agency. As Barnes (2000, 2) notes: ‘The key characteristic of human beings for sociological theory – the characteristic that allows them to live, as invariably they do, in social units. What constitutes agency and empowerment – is not their individual agency but their collective agency, and agency of this kind implies non-independent individuals who routinely, as a matter of course, affect each other’s actions in their encounters. This type of collective agency is continuously transformed within and across the spaces of cultural and ethnic identity. Nevertheless, dominant western conceptualizations of agency are often used uncritically; individualistic notions of choice, autonomy and in/dependence often pervade accounts of agency.

3.3 Agency of Women

Women’s agency within the development framework views women’s agency as a tool for better development indicators. The underlying assumption is that opportunities for work outside home
leads to greater agency of woman, which in turn leads to progressive choices thus resulting in improved development indicators. The emphasis of women in development approach as discussed in the previous chapter does not take into account the creative and generative use of agency of women, as it treats women as a homogenous group and does not recognize the conflicts within this group. A few studies problematized some of these assumptions.

Deniz Kandiyoti’s pioneering work ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’ (1988) analyses the conditions leading to the breakdown and transformation of patriarchal bargains and their implications for women's consciousness and struggles. She suggested that women strategize to deal with the constraints which patriarchy imposes on them. In the context of patriarchal structures where generation and gender patriarchal system coexists, women tend to gain autonomy and control over others in the family only when she attains the status of the mother in law. This renders bearing male child to be an important parameter in attaining power in patriarchal structures. The older women’s control over others and her use of agency is embedded in the patriarchal structures and therefore explains why they support the traditional patriarchal structure (Zuo, 2006). Kandiyoti (1998) supported this view and theorized that older women have a vested interest in suppressing intimacy and romantic love between the young couple to claim her son’s primary loyalty. On the other hand younger women try to evade their mother in laws’ dominance. The cyclical nature of patriarchy women’s power, position, and status result in their active involvement in the reproduction of women’s subordination. They adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband. The breakdown of classic patriarchy results in emancipation of younger generation male from their fathers and their earlier separation from the paternal household. This process
implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law and head their own households; but it also means that the power and status later in life bestowed by the old normative structure does not exist and the reworked family structures do not give them any empowering alternatives. Women’s agency in context of patriarchal structures ranges from submissiveness, subservience, resistance, adaptation, accommodation to conflict in order to attain resources, rights and responsibilities. New strategies and forms of consciousness are created through personal experiences and political struggles, which are often complex and contradictory. It is clear that concepts of autonomy, agency and empowerment cannot be universally applied across culture. Rather, she argued, these concepts confer different meanings and are understood and enacted in numerous ways.

Koggel’s 200 discussion on women’s paid work and its impact on women’s agency problematizes Sen’s emphasis on freedom to work outside home as a way of enhancing the agency. She observes that enhanced agency as a result of paid work can be mediated by other factors which affect opportunities, earnings, work environment and can limit women’s freedom. It restricts and over emphasises the importance of paid work in defining women’s agency and fails to recognise her agency within her context and location which mediates her agency to make a choice vis-à-vis paid work.

In her study of hijab as a tool of agency or oppression, Diffendal (2006) observes that Muslim women across cultures seem to be using the veil as an instrument of agency. The women argue that it allows women (migrant) to assert their religious and ethnic identities, navigate the social world without fear or shame and draw attention to their abilities in a body oriented culture. The
veil is explained as an act of teenage defiance; reconciling traditional values with the need to work and to demand respect from Muslim men by proclaiming their piety. It helps them demonstrate their independence and display their honour publicly. However, as Hirschmann (1997, 485) observes, the fact that women choose the veil does not of itself make it a free action, or even a protest. Indeed, it could be a sign of the closed circularity of women’s political disempowerment and colonization. Though women creatively use the veil as a tool of agency, thus subverting the expressed aim of the veil, they inevitably affirm the very power structures that disempower them in the first place. Adopting the veil implicitly affirms andocentric rationales for its existence. Women may wear the veil to facilitate their movement in the public sphere, but in doing so they subscribe to the notion that this space belongs to men.

Billaud (2009: 120-1) in her study of Afghanistan’s women MPs and their use of burqa or chadari concludes that ‘veiling and bodywork are to be read as feminine performances destined to manage others’ impressions and not as mere acts of obedience to religious prescriptions’. Performance designates the use of any of the ways of speaking available to a speaker in their appropriate context. Deference and dissimulation under the veil were indeed political gestures that worked as the necessary social makeup for women to break through the public. She observed that women had to use subtle strategies like body discipline, dissimulation and attention to their look in the public to gain political recognition.

Wray (2004) in her work explores how affiliation to ethnic and religious identities may provide a space for the production of agency and empowerment. The empirical study of older women
suggested that the meanings attached to autonomy, independence and agency and empowerment are contextually based.

3.4 Conceptual Map

The conceptual map attempts to map out the interplay of various factors which influences an individual’s agency. This understanding of the concepts and their interrelationship is based on the review of existing literature. As discussed earlier the change in values, aspirations, social norms and social roles which are part of the dominant culture is explained as a function of agency which is influenced by the available resources and opportunities. Though the actor who in this study is the single migrant woman working in BPO and media industry in Mumbai, may use her agency based on the resources and opportunities available to achieve the valued beings and doings. However, the variety of strategies which these women use to express their agency vis-à-vis various aspects of their life are not known.

The literature thus outlines the causal relationship between, resources and opportunities; social and economic structures and location of individuals within those structures; normative culture and individual agency. Theoretical understanding around agency and structure has established the inter-linkages between structure and agency. The empirical studies revealed that relationships are mediated through an individual’s agency however the direction of causal lines between agency and relationships within the socioeconomic structures is unclear.
Figure 1 Conceptual Map

Motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000)
Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation:
- External Regulation
- Introjected Regulation
- Identified Regulation
- Integrated Regulation

Anticipated Consequence of the act

Individual Agency

Meaning of the act

Resources

Opportunities

Achievements

Other Factors:
- Social and economic location
- Social and economic structures
- Normative Culture

With natal family

At workplace

With local community

Other personal relationships

Values

Aspirations

Social norms

Social roles

Relationships

Figure 1 draws out the interplay between structural and individual factors which influence individual agency as well as the use of agency by an individual that affects the relationships and also structures. In order to gain an understanding of the cultural changes which are taking place in the post globalisation India, it is important to understand the role of actors and their day to day
experiences which act as mediator between culture and economy. These experiences help them negotiate with the existing social structures and institutions and give them the opportunity to create a niche for themselves. As Wood, 1995\textsuperscript{11} observes ‘the idea of agency is a key mediating category through which the inter connections between cultural and economic forces, identity formations and social structures can be examined. This implies that agency is not only affected by socio economic factors but also influences culture.

In a context where women are moving out of the family control (physically), it will be interesting to understand how patriarchy still operates and is being reworked. Little is known about how single women who are working away from homes in IT enabled and media sector act as agents to bring about change in the normative social culture. What meaning do they confer to agency and how do they enact it? There is limited literature to indicate that the young women (who are the subjects of this study) coming from small town families where mobility and sexuality is restricted are negotiating their freedom, sexuality, respectability and safety at various levels. More importantly how do they articulate and enact these negotiations with the normative culture vis-à-vis various domains of life like work, family, city is not known. The visible change in the educated working women is wide ranged- education, values related to income management, consumerism, mobility, employment, career advancement, decisions related to choosing life partners, aspirations and expectations from personal relationships. However, in a culture of moral policing and growing intolerance to women in public domain there is a need to understand the dynamics of these contradictions in Indian society. Thus, the need is to understand what are ‘valued beings and doings’ for these women and how do they articulate and use their agency to achieve those beings and doings.

\textsuperscript{11} Referred in McNay, 2004.
3.5 Objectives of the Study:

This study will enable us to understand how use of agency brings about changes in their position vis-à-vis family, work place, community and other relationships. If there are changes in any of the positioning, does it result into change in overall values, social norms and social roles in the larger social structure? The visible change in the educated middle class women is wide ranged, but it remains unexplored how these material values are interspersed with the day to day lives of these women and cultural values and with issues related to marriage, gender relations at work place and in families, expectations from personal relationships, aspirations. Does the newfound economic independence translate into greater autonomy and decision making? Do the old traditional values get replaced by a new set, or are the old values reconfiguring in newer ways with new sets of freedoms and restrictions? How do women accept, resist or subvert the existing normative culture expectations and practices? Does greater women’s agency ensure the absence of violence at various levels? Do changes visible in everyday life actually lead to structural changes – family, labour market, state policies?

The proposed study would like to explore how single working women who have moved out of their family setting establish themselves in the destination city? How do they rework their economic and social relationship with the family? How do they negotiate gender relations within the workplace and in other personal relationships? What are the factors which influence their exercise of agency at individual, familial and societal level? How are they influencing the existing dominant culture? The objectives of the present study are:

- To understand how migrant single women working in ITES perceive and enact their agency.
• To comprehend the interplay of macro influencers, economy and culture on agency (micro level) and also agency as a mediator between economy and culture.

• To examine the dynamic process of changes in the relationship of the women with family, workplace, community and other relationships.

The next chapter spells out the sampling strategy and data collection method and the reasons for choosing the same.