CHAPTER 5
Women in Panchayats

In the past decade, a number of studies have been carried out in the area of women's political participation, particularly, their participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. These studies have problematised issues ranging from gender specific socialisation patterns resulting in unequal sharing of power between men and women, to the lower levels of participation of women members. The framework of these studies also shows a variety of disciplinary grounds, especially after the implementation of the 73rd Amendment. This ranges from the ideology of affirmative action to psychology-based theories that explain individual behavioural patterns. However, all these studies seem to share a common approach in analysing the differential performance of male and female members. Ignoring the inequalities in the wider socio-political institutions and processes, these studies seldom examine the subjective experiences of individual members' vis-à-vis these indicators. Further, individual characteristics are de-contextualised and identified as the primary reason for women's visible non-participation. Practices and methods or organising principles of social and political systems that are responsible for the creation of the asymmetries between men and women are overlooked. Consequently, too much attention is given to the causative chain of entitlements leading to performance and very little attention is paid to the socio-political contexts wherein these entitlements are derived. In other words, the lower performance levels of women Gram Panchayat

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44 For a useful discussion of this concept, see Sen, 1985.
members are explained by focusing on their 'single-life' perspective (motherhood) and their lack of identification models (Inbanathan 1992, Bhargava, 1994, Kaushik, 1992).

Some of these analyses also bring out the link between women's 'position' or 'status' in society and political participation. Higher levels of education and involvement in economically productive activities are emphasized as predictors of women's ability to participate in decision-making processes, both within the household and in the Panchayat (Vidya 1998). The underlying premise of this approach can be traced back to what can be called 'modernisation' theory wherein development is envisaged through women's empowerment, which, in turn, is understood as a natural outcome of a set of factors like higher levels of schooling, participation in workforce, ownership of property, etc. Although it is true that these indicators affect women's status, they bear a very weak relationship with the concept of status or position that they are indicative of.

It has been established by many studies that women in India derive their primary identity from their family (Ganesh, 1999; Chowdry, 1994). Studies pertaining to women in the labour market also corroborate the point that when women enter into the labour market, due to poverty conditions, the identities play an important role in perpetuating the discriminations in the market (Bardhan, 1985). It has also been established that despite household expenditure being largely met by women, their income is relegated as supplementary and they are considered as secondary earners. The compromises that

\[45 \text{With the increasing interest in gender, the term 'status' has become value-laden. For the purpose of this study, where only those aspects of women's status relevant to their behaviour in public life are focussed upon, it would be more prudent to understand it in terms of knowledge, attitudes and practices of women in} \]
women are conditioned to make in terms of time, nature of work and wages basically
derive from the institutionalised primacy of familial identity. This implicit identification
of women in the familial and domestic sphere has been perpetuated by the state as well.
This is evident from the various developmental programmes and policies.

The state has often put the onus of sustaining the family on women, first through
welfarist programmes immediately after independence, and later through employment
programmes in the 1970s and 80s. Though the state intervention since the 1970’s has
attempted to concern itself with traditions and practices that adversely affect women, it
has attempted to do this by not disturbing the location of women in the domestic sphere.
The states’ willingness to concern itself with women’s entry into the public sphere but
reluctance to intervene in reforms pertaining to personal law is an example of this. As a
result, therefore, it has had minimal impact on the existing linkages between the family
and women. The 1980s and 1990s, however, have seen the visible inclusion of gender
issues in the state’s planning. The state has, however, in all its development
intervention retained the basic premise that macro level rules structure the micro level
practices. This is in cognisance with the larger economic philosophy — the trickle down
effect — that prevailed in most of the countries.

Through PRIs, the state has reserved space for women to enter the public sphere. At
lower levels of governance, it is possible to posit that given the state’s willingness to alter

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public life. Though very important, such an understanding will ensure that we do not get embroiled into a
discussion of what constitutes a woman’s high or low status.
46 For an incisive discussion about the underpinnings that shape development intervention, see Kabeer,
1994.
the existing structural imbalances, the newly created space can be used by women for articulating women's interests (Subha, 1997). However, as many recent studies have pointed out and as can be discerned from the analysis in Chapter 4, such responses still remain limited in occurrence, reach as well as scope. Further, conventional enabling factors such as education and economic status, which in the previous decades were seen as empowering factors, have at best a peripheral influence on women's effective participation in the Gram Panchayats.

Moving away from the conventional indicators that define and quantify participation, this chapter takes up the central issue of factors that result in women's effective participation in the existing system of disadvantages. The important questions that arise in this context are:

i) How do we understand women's participation?

ii) How do we explain the perpetration and reproduction of inequalities in spite of the presence of enabling factors such as education?

iii) How do we explain the changes that we see amongst certain women with respect to their performance?

Before proceeding further, it is important to understand why the above questions are pertinent, especially in the context of women's empowerment. In Chapter 4, an attempt was made to explain the factors that enable participation. However, this resulted in partial answers without essential links. This chapter, while drawing on the strengths from the conventional parameters tries to look for organic links between various parameters.
5.1 Perpetuation and Constancy: Exploring the Explanatory Potential of Socialisation Theory

To the recurring question of why women accept and reinforce oppression, answers tend to be unconvincing, the most acknowledged one being that they have been socialised into accepting discrimination through a process of internalisation of norms that discriminate them. To this effect, many studies have demonstrated that the prime agents for socialisation in the family-household-kinship networks and society in general are often senior women (Dube 1988). The family and patrilineal kinship is then identified as the primary sites in which women learn the norms, which later form the basis for their further interactions. It is then advocated that for any social change, effecting women’s status and position in society, it is important that they undergo a process of de-learning.

The particular appeal of the re-socialisation thesis in the context of Gram Panchayat members stems from three counts. First, it is argued that this proposition provides a way out of the vicious circle of oppression. Second, it provides a non-confrontationist view and implicitly assumes that social change is possible through a re-socialisation of individuals. Third, though most of the development interventions have already adopted the underpinning gender ideology of this framework in intervening to impact the society in favour of women, there is an implicit belief that major structural changes are unnecessary. And there is a level playing field in which policy makers can introduce these interventions that, in turn, will cause changes in the private sphere too. This is in
cognisance with the larger economic philosophy wherein the multiplier effect of macro policies is emphasised. Re-socialisation theories raise apprehensions about the 'spin-off' effects of these interventions on the grounds that unless specifically addressed, gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms remain immutable.

However, a careful examination of the data leads to the distinct opinion that the socialisation thesis does not have the explanatory potential to the specific problem of the study. The Panchayats in Kodagu seemed to have too many crosscurrents and hierarchical power relations to allow for a level playing field. Alternative gender ideologies continuously combat for space in various discourses that range from hegemonic and authorised to marginalised and disqualified. For instance, the gender ideology that regulates and monitors behaviour amongst 'social equals' differs from the one that directs the interaction between 'social un-equals'. This may be attributed to the multitude of social arrangements that characterise the larger Panchayat community. Though, in principle, all the Panchayat members are equal, in reality they share different relationships with each other and with the Panchayat. Over the years, the larger Panchayat community has established a shared frame of reference based on certain power-laden arrangements. These power arrangements are in turn sustained through various processes of social exchange and interaction. These structures of power allocate roles and situations to the members. The structures of power also regulate the frame of reference, which in turn structures the relationships within the community.
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the years, access is shared by the various newly emerged interest groups, both political and economical. These groups cut across caste, class, religious and linguistic identities. A further negotiation happened with the 73rd Amendment. However, the access that the state has negotiated and institutionalised for the hitherto deprived sections is yet to alter the power equations that determined the access to Panchayats. This is evident from the field observations. Even the day-to-day functioning of the Panchayats subscribes to this negotiating power relationship. Not all Panchayats have secretaries, in which case his or her visiting days are of importance. Similar is the case with the village accountant. The bill collector, who usually performs the watchdog function in case of official matters, also does the same in case of the social relationships that the Panchayat as an institution maintains. Describing the Panchayat as an institution of power with negotiated social and political relationships, which in a way reflects the power relationships of the largest society, however, runs the risk of reductionism. To overcome this, we resort to various observations pertaining to the functioning of the Panchayat. This is done at two levels. One, by analysing access to and types of access to the Panchayats — who accesses for what is central to this analysis; and two, decision-making processes in the Panchayat — this considers the Panchayat meeting as the focal point to analyse the decision-making processes.

It was observed that other than members, politically and economically dominant persons also access the Panchayats. This can be for favours to be granted for their personal work or for favours to be granted for their loyal ones, the latter one being more common. Most
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of them talk to prominent members over the phone and fix an appointment with the secretary, so that immediate attention is paid to the problem.

The less prominent residents often enter the Panchayat as beneficiaries of a scheme in one way or other. Mostly, they seek out the company of their ward member, who in turn will put forward their case. Even certificates that are given by the Panchayats, in case of death, birth and caste, also go through this proper channel of members. While this broadly describes the access of Panchayat during the working hours, there is access during the evenings and on official holidays. Most of the evenings, Panchayats witness the gathering of men of importance in the village, wherein public and private matters are discussed. The dominant political party in the Panchayat always takes lead in the initiation of such gatherings. The Panchayat is also accessed where members and men of importance gather the ‘villagers’ either as beneficiaries or to demonstrate the strength of participation of people in that occasion.

These ostensibly insignificant observations about access to Panchayat do reveal that as an institution, it is not devoid of the hegemonic societal arrangements as in the case of other institutions. This can be further substantiated by the pattern of interaction in the Panchayat meetings, which is well defined in the ‘socialscape’ that they share with each other, even outside the Panchayat.

A few instances of such revealing interactions are provided below:
“Nandanna will tell us how to get the ration cards. If we do not acquire the ration cards, people scold us. People expect us to get them old age benefits, ration cards, etc. But we cannot do it alone. Nor do we know how to do so. Nandanna or George Saab will help us.”

This is Saroja, a Backward Caste woman member. She has studied till class X and speaks Tamil at home. Her husband is a plantation worker and she lives in the labour lines of a company estate in Maldare Panchayat. Even prior to her being elected as a Panchayat member, Saroja shared a relationship with George and Nanda. Nanda alias C.A. Subbaiah is also a Panchayat member, while George is a ‘rich’ contractor residing close to Saroja’s house. Both Nanda and George have been leading an ‘active’ public and political life for more than two decades. Saroja comes from a second-generation Tamil migrant plantation labour family and married into a similar family. She has three children, who now are in their teens. She has been working as an anganwadi helper for the past three years, prior to which she worked as a casual plantation worker. Till 1994, Saroja led what can be referred to as a politically ‘inactive’ life prior to election.

Saroja, Nanda and George belong to a ‘village’ community in which they share a social arrangement. Every encounter that they have is encoded by an already dictated frame of reference, which is in turn sustained and regulated by a hierarchical power structure. In this schema, George and Nanda are the more ‘knowledgeable’ persons. The former possesses both the specific body of knowledge encoded in the institutional framework as well as the attitudinal and behavioural knowledge associated with everyday public life. Belonging to the ‘employer’ ‘landlord’ class and caste (more so in the case of Nanda)
also automatically bestows them into the higher status category. Saroja occupies a lower status in the social hierarchy. She is the 'ignorant' one in this social arrangement. Neither does she possess the specific knowledge that her presence in the Panchayats requires, nor does she extend the 'knowledge' that she learnt during her years in school to her present institutional position.

Therefore, any change as perceived and intended by the state through the Panchayati Raj Institutions requires a re-building of the already established frames of reference, using which people structure their exchanges during the process of interaction. In essence, the existing frames of reference need to be replaced by new ones. It is only then that Saroja can assume 'member-like' qualities.

The tone of voice, the way of looking and the ability to look busy distinguishes an effective, good Panchayat member from an ineffective, inconsequential member. All the members identified as effective use a loud voice, varying in pitch depending on the importance of the utterances. The tone of voice, especially in the presence of other 'subordinate' members (general public from the constituency) and in meetings varies from being emotional to 'announcemental' in quality. Irrespective of the tone, there is always an authoritative feel about the voice. Even the few women members who are considered effective have acquired these qualities over time.

Many studies have empirically demonstrated the process of gendered socialisation in rural schools. See, for instance, Bhattacharjee (1999) for a discussion of gendered teaching-learning processes in rural classrooms.

Kishwar, too, hypothesises in a similar vein about women parliamentarians.
“Namaskara, welcome to this meeting” (Maadcvi, adhyaksha, Maldare Panchayat)

“Raise your voice, Maadevi. Nobody can hear you” (Secretary, Maldare Gram Panchayat).

A little louder, but with her eyes looking down at the table: “The agenda of this meeting is…”

The Secretary shrugs, as if to show that he tried his best to train her into the art of being a good speaker. The members take up the issue of group insurance scheme that the government has introduced and the issue of the condition of the streetlights and hand pumps in the Panchayat wards. Maadevi is silent all through. She sits uncomfortably behind a big table, fidgeting, always looking down. Though she is an adhyaksha, she obviously lacks the conviction or authority to function ‘effectively’. At the conclusion of the meeting, when everybody is signing the attendance register book, another woman member, Josephine, addresses herself to a powerful, effective male member C.A. Subbaiah (Nanda), using a cajoling tone:

“Nandanna, I have been asking for tube lights to be put on our road for over three months now, but nothing has happened”

Nandanna, in a loud, authoritative voice to the Secretary, “Why has this not been done?” Turning back to Josephine, looking her in the eye, Nandanna reassures, “I will see what can be done.”
Throughout this conversation, the adhyaksha remains at her table, not participating.

Maadevi, the Maldare Panchayat’s adhyaksha, is a middle-aged woman in her 40s. She has three children. Two of them are in their twenties while the third one is the late teens. Her husband is a temple priest. The Secretary is a Kodava from the neighbouring Taluk. He is a government functionary, exercising authority that the state has vested in him.

Nanda is also a Kodava planter in his late 40s, and has been leading an active public life for many years now. Josephine, also in her 40s, belongs to a second-generation migrant family from Kerala. Her husband had deserted her 15 years ago and she now lives in her father’s house with her two teenage daughters. Her household members work as marginal plantation workers and she, too, supplements the family income by working as a casual plantation worker. Though she has never led a public life, in comparison to Maadevi, she has had more interaction with the outside world (both due to her work as a plantation worker and due to her religion).

It can be gathered from these illustrations that the pattern of interaction in the Panchayat meetings is defined according to the ‘socialscape’ that they share with each other even outside the Panchayat. On the one hand, there are the elected representatives and on the other, there is the Secretary, the State’s representative. Institutionally, both have clearly defined sets of roles. These roles provide them with a frame of reference according to which the exchanges are structured. The frame of reference is in itself based on the premise that both groups — the members and the secretary — have special access to ‘knowledge’, power and authority. Though, the secretary occupies a very low status in
the institutional hierarchy, he enjoys a high position in the system and in its operation because of his familiarity with the written body of state knowledge and his ability to interpret it. The authority of the secretary, thus, derives its sustenance from his relationship with a specific body of knowledge, which arises from the institutional arrangement. As elected representatives to the Gram Panchayat, the members occupy a low status in the institutional hierarchy, but are presumed to occupy a high status in the larger Panchayat community and in the Panchayat itself. Their familiarity with the constituency and the fact that they are democratically elected representatives of the constituency provide them a legal-rational authority with which they can structure their interactions in the Panchayats. The interactions between Nanda, (a powerful member and a Kodava planter who has been active in politics for a little more than two decades) and the Secretary, exemplify the mutual acceptance of the legal authority bestowed upon them by the institution. The institutional norms ‘allow’ them to meet and interact as equals as it presumes that they each have a specialised set of knowledge. Though this institutional sanction extends to all members, other societal ‘agreements’ overflow and compete for supremacy. Very often, especially in the case of women members, the other frames of reference effectively discount the legal-rational authority bestowed upon them by the institution.

From the above account, it can be seen that the Secretary regulates the activities of the Panchayat members, thereby subjecting them to a net of power relations. The Panchayat members are also aware of the hierarchy operating in their relations, particularly with the Secretary. The Panchayat members do not belong to a homogenous social and economic
They each enter the Panchayat from different social standpoints. Accordingly, caste and gender enters the system of Panchayat Raj Institutions with established frames of reference, structuring the exchanges between the different groups. For example, take the case of Nanda — both as an individual and with his social background, he has the capacity to reinforce his position. By his talk and gestures, he seems to be re-enacting the previously existing perspectives that have constructed the reality for the other members of the Panchayat. Even though Maadevi and Josephine cannot meet the Secretary on an equal footing, Nanda, with the legal-rational authority entrusted upon him by the community and now by the state, not only meets the Secretary as an equal but, at times, also as a superior. He uses all the authoritative means at his disposal (voice, eye movement, posture, etc.) to reinforce the power relations in the community, where the members repeatedly become aware of themselves and of each other's roles and positions.

The discourse on re-socialisation, thus, deflects attention from the question of structural discrimination. In other words, the overlap of the personal with the social and political spheres has consequences for women's socio-political role in the family and society. Apart from being situated in a patently stratified institutional milieu consisting of hierarchical power relations, they also have to battle against the hegemonic discourses of the dominant groups. In short, not only is there no level playing field for women representatives, the playing field is so stratified that movement from one level to the other can occur only if all the members agree on a new perspective for the construction of
reality. Observing Maadevi and Josephine leads us to believe that such a process is far from occurring.

5.3 The Process of Socialisation

The theme of women's participation in politics being weaker than that of men is one of the major issues that the scholarship on women and politics have focussed upon. Most scholars explored the barriers hindering women's equal participation and those unusual circumstances in which women have been effective. The different barriers have been analysed as stemming from their domestic responsibilities, the detailed and specific arrangements of social and political institutions and most importantly their socialisation (Walby, 1997). Most analyses conclude that the pattern of socialisation of girls as compared to that of boys makes the former passive and submissive. This is seen as the main reason for the lower participation of women in public life (Currell, 1974; Stacey and Price, 1981).

Studies on socialisation focus mainly on the differential socialisation patterns for boys and girls. Recent studies have, however, drawn our attention to the patterns and practices that construct gendered codes in everyday life (Bhattacharjee, 1999). They show primary socialisation to be a process involving active engagement of the 'socialising' individuals and the 'to be socialised' individuals. This engagement requires all social actors to accommodate slowly and steadily their responses to the established gender code in
society. The process of accommodation is in itself an ‘active’ learning period for the participating actors.

In Kodagu society too, gender socialisation is an active process in which both the adults and children are involved. Everyday rituals, traditions and occurrences/happenings help the formation of relationships. The content of these relationships, in turn, structure gendered practices. The child understands the existing gender rules by reading gender into the contexts of social interaction. In other words, a child perceives his/her gender identity by performing and being involved in routine everyday activities.

“When I was a child, I was like a boy. I was not afraid of anything. I could climb trees much higher than the other girls could, and very often higher than the boys. When angry, my mother used to say that she had three sons, instead of two and a daughter. My parents did not really differentiate between us. They allowed all of us to study and never made me feel that I was different. However, as I grew older, I became ‘wiser and stopped being naughty’. Slowly, on my own I started behaving like a girl.”

(Muthamma: She belongs to Kodava community and is a member of Chennayana Kote Panchayat. She retired as a primary school headmistress.)

“I was like a boy for a long time. My mother used to get exasperated and say ‘who will marry you if you are like this?’"
Parents (primarily mothers), and subsequently the children, believe that over time girls need to develop ‘girl-like’ qualities. As in the case of Muthamma and Ayesha, most women members in their childhood resist, negotiate and finally establish gender encoded frames of reference. And this process is carried out through the everyday practices and interactions of adults and children. In other words, a girl’s primary socialisation is a period in which the ‘socialising’ senior women actively engage with the ‘to be socialised’ young girls in the family and community and vice-versa. Though the young girls may sometimes put up a resistance as in the case of Muthamma and Ayesha, they soon accommodate and agree on a ‘proper perspective’ in order to be perceived as ‘normal’.

The protest or resistance is only short-lived. Parents too, who initially may not discriminate between a boy or girl child, soon begin to project a cumulative or eventual gendered stage to the ‘to be socialised’ child by teaching them to behave ‘normally’ by posing the question “who will marry you?” While recollecting, these ‘gendered’ and ‘encoded’ images replay themselves in a different role for these women. See Muthamma for instance: “I was like a boy and not afraid of anything”, meaning boys are not afraid of anything, only girls would, and should, be afraid. Or examine Ayesha, who says: “If a girl plays like a boy... no one will marry her”, indicating that for societal acceptability, girls are required to be gentle, submissive and well trained.
The de-learning or re-socialisation thesis attempts to change these shared frames of reference, which shape the ideologies of appropriate feminine behaviour. Even though the 73rd Amendment has resulted in the entrance of a large number of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, empowering women to participate as effective members is a difficult task. As can be inferred from the process of primary socialisation, if women members need to be thus empowered, it requires a period of secondary socialisation: A period when women and men de-learn the agreed-upon patterns of practice, which construct femininity and masculinity. In other words, they need to re-learn 'behaviours' that will make them 'competent' elected representatives. But, is this at all possible considering the fact that it is through everyday encounters and interactions that an ideology of 'appropriate' behaviour is constructed? As we have attempted to show, the Panchayat member's exchanges in social interactions preclude the members from perceiving his/her gender identity any differently in the present institutional setting.

5.4 Transformation: The Explanatory Potential of the Agency Approach

In recent years, many studies have posited that in spite of structural constraints, women manage to rise beyond it and perform as active agents. Increasingly, the view that women are not passive victims despite rigid structures is gaining ground. There is now a major set of writings, which focus on the specific ways in which 'women' exert agency within structural constraints (Raheja and Gold; 1996, Rao, 1997). Agarwal (1994) uses a number of ethnographic material that illustrate women's covert resistance involving both daily activities such as diversion of food and income resources from the control of the male
household head to more symbolic contestations of male power through song, dance and parody (Kandiyoti, 1998). The appeal of the above ‘everyday forms of resistance’ framework lies in that it presents the oppressed women as rational actors who consciously adopt certain tactical positions and behavioural traits. This section examines the empirical evidence from this framework that posits women as active agents, continually looking for space to manipulate familial, kinship and institutional relationships to their advantage.

“I cannot speak in the meetings. They all speak so loudly. There is too much shouting. I always wait for the meeting to finish and then meet the adhyaksha and the Secretary. At home, too, I wait for my husband to finish having his say. Very often, he too raises his voice and if I am not obedient, beats me. But, when I started collecting names for the insurance, he will slowly understand. First, he beat me for even suggesting it and said no woman of his would go out on the road. But, later he slowly came around and now he never talks about it. However, he does not stop me or beat me.”

(Safiya, Siddapur Panchayat member, belongs to a low-income household and has studied till class IX.)

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50 James Scott (1985) coined the phrase ‘everyday forms of resistance’ with reference to the peasant-landlord relationship in Malaysia. Scott used examples of strategies used by Malaysian peasants to explain the ways in which even the powerless assert themselves.
“There is no use in talking in the meeting. They will not listen to me, as they know more about these issues. When I want to get lights on the road or repair the road, I approach Venkateshanna. Sometimes, I wait after the meeting to talk to Yamuna”

(Cauveryamma, Siddapur Panchayat member and belongs to a middle income household.)

Safiya and Cauveryamma seem to be acting as rational beings who have sacrificed their short-term welfare in order to gain long-term benefits. Safiya is ‘accustomed’ to violent forms of exchanges in her household. Safiya is a woman in her late 30s married to a truck driver with three teenage sons. Safiya was born into a Hindu household in Kerala. She eloped with Mustaffa (her husband) while she was in high school. Though his family was unhappy to have a Hindu daughter-in-law, they reluctantly accommodated her. She underwent a rigorous training of the Quran for three months in Kerala and later was inducted into the ‘ways’ of a Muslim family by her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. During the phase of induction, she was often abused and beaten by her husband as well as mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. However, about six years ago, she managed to convince her husband that his mother and sisters were exploiting him. Soon they set up a separate home. According to her, since then the frequency as well as intensity of beating has reduced. The decision to become a licensed Life Insurance agent was also met with fierce resistance and violence, but her perseverance and convincing arguments was finally rewarded.
Though the patrilineal system at the micro-level and patriarchal system at the macro-level construct the dominant discourse, women like Safiya seem to create spaces of their own to challenge the dominant ideologies. Although, they do not use direct action to challenge the patterns and practices of the politically dominant, they attempt to change the status quo through negotiated and partial resistance. Seemingly powerless, Safiya exemplifies women who find strategies that mitigate the effects of the system that oppresses them.

However, a closer reading of Safiya’s life reveals that to a large extent, resistance is in itself framed by the terms of an already existing contract. The contract monitors the type, intensity and timing of ‘revolt’ and ‘dissent’.$^{51}$ All members in a social arrangement agree upon and establish a broad framework that will monitor the exchanges that occur in various social relationships — for example, that of a husband and wife, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Within this established framework, each individual member plays a specific role. For instance, it is within the contours of a husband-wife relationship that Safiya bargains and negotiates for space. On the one hand, her acts of resistance are well timed — she puts up a resistance and sets up a separate hearth after more than seven years of marriage; she attempts to exercise economic freedom only when the economic demands of the household cannot be met by the breadwinner alone. On the other hand, her ‘revolts’ are never overt. She always calls upon tradition and culture to support her demands. For instance, her husband is obligated to support the family and she plays upon this obligation to get him to agree to allow her to earn some extra income. In other words, women do not resist and dissent against the unfairness of the socio-cultural milieu in

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$^{51}$ For a detailed discussion on power and resistance, see Kandiyoti (1988, 1998).
which they are living in the hope of a better future; instead, they continuously negotiate in the space provided for them in both the public and private arenas.

Within the complex social relationships that structure a Panchayat too, we evidence practices that may be perceived as fallout of a woman’s active engagement with the immediate and larger social structure. For example, most of the women members do not visibly participate in the meetings, but a substantially higher proportion of them put up a partial negotiation outside the precincts of the meeting.

See for example one such instance in Chennayana Kote Panchayat:

Meeting is yet to begin and the bill collector/peon comes to get the register signed from Baby (casual plantation worker), one of the members. She asks laughingly but loudly to gain everybody else’s attention:

“Why should I sign the register? Nobody will listen to me here.”

The peon: “Sign it, we will see to it that you have your say in the meeting.”

Baby: “I have given the list with the names for the Bhagyajyoti Scheme at least two times, but none of those recommended by me have got it”

Ponappa (a Kodava big planter and Panchayat member): “What is the problem? We will look into it.”

Baby: “Anna, I don’t want to sign as my work does not get done. I have lost two days wages because I came to see the secretary to get this work done.”

Ponappa: “OK, sign the register now and we will settle this matter later.”
Baby signs the register and starts talking to her neighbour Jamila Begum, another Panchayat member. During the meeting, she as well as the other women members, with the exception Muthamma, a rich Kodava community Panchayat member, are silent. They do not participate in any of the discussions.

Many women, like Baby do not participate in public meetings. In the course of her life, Baby has learnt that to be perceived as a ‘normal’ woman, it is necessary for her to adopt practices that are ‘gender-appropriate’. The contours established by her social relationships do not allow her to express ire publicly in an institutional setting. The structures of power that she in her capacity as a member of the community agreed upon regulate the type and content of her interaction. It is for this reason that she puts up a partial resistance in the presence of Ponappa. Due to his position as the politically dominant large plantation owner, Ponappa is obligated to listen to Baby, a subordinate member belonging to a subordinate group. In other words, the success of the negotiation with the power holders is dependent on the normative constraints that bind them to the subordinate groups. In this instance, in the existing socio-cultural milieu of patronage, the politically powerful male Panchayat members are obligated by tradition to honour certain commitment to both their ‘area’/constituency and to the people who fall under their patronage. It is thus obvious that most women Panchayat members function within the framework provided to them in both their private as well as public spheres.

5.5 Conclusion
While the above discussion provides an account of the manifestations of members as subjects of an established gendered frame of reference in their personal and public life and we see that many a times, more so for women members, there is a continuity of their gendered behaviour across these realms. However, a range of behaviour can be noted amongst the women panchayat members. While all members bring to the panchayat meetings their past experiences, the divergence between women panchayat members' past life experiences and present expectations is rather wide. Thus, a deep fissure is to be expected or revealed between women panchayat members' personal and public behavioural pattern. Their active or passive interaction at the panchayat is often located in a common, pre-panchayat landscape.

Moreover, given the cultural and ethnic symbolism associated with being in the public sphere, their typical response in the panchayats is to be expected and understood. However, the State is attempting through the PRI training policy to divorce or negate women's past as no longer salient in the present context of development. This dislocated identity needs to be understood and accepted. The analytics of such a phenomenon prompts us to go beyond these for a framework that can capture the nuances of negotiations that are legitimised in the existing frame of reference. The next chapter is an attempt towards this.