CHAPTER I
WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: AN ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

1.1 Introduction

‘Development’ with the active participation of people has been an enduring theme through succeeding governments at the Centre and States since India’s Independence. Though the concept was widely supported in spirit, in practice there has been a reluctance to decentralise power to the extent to which villages can operate autonomously (Meenakshisundaram, 1994; Kabra, 1997). People’s participation (for e.g., as in the Community Development Programmes) was variously envisaged through Block Development Committees consisting of selected elders and later through male heads of households for economic/productive activities (e.g. IRDP). Thus, development continued to be an activity that was controlled and implemented by the bureaucracy. Further, the term ‘community’ led to the misconception that it was a homogeneous entity. The various development interventions thus fell into the trap of failing to take into account the diverse socio-economic interest groups within a ‘community’. The growing disillusionment with the slow pace of development caused the ideologues of the State to look for alternatives. The dominant intellectual and political climate within which development planning was taking place favoured the inclusion of women in these bodies. Various reasons, justifications, and rhetoric were provided for ‘accommodating’ a sizeable number of women in the Panchayati Raj system. The inclusion of women was welcomed for a variety of reasons:
i) The women members could tackle the problems faced by women (e.g. availability of drinking water, educating the girl child, health of family, etc.) more diligently;

ii) Presence of women members would reduce corruption and increase efficiency, thus cleansing the political and bureaucratic systems;

iii) And last but not the least, problems that women face within the family such as dowry, violence by family members, etc. will be dealt with more humanly. ¹

In other words, it was posited that an increase in the political participation of women would positively impact on the process of social development.

Karnataka was the first state to subscribe to this view and constituted a ‘re-vitalised’ Panchayati Raj system in which 25 per cent of the seats were reserved for women. Karnataka was showcased in the national media as a state that was moving steadily towards achieving the twin targets of rural development and public participation of women. At the Centre, the parliamentarians, for a substantial length of time, were unable to decide about the Bill that could pave way for a critical mass of women to get access to public life. Finally, they opted to unanimously pass the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution wherein women were to constitute one-third of the total members in the new decentralised system of local governance.² However, they have still not been able to extend this to the higher political bodies.

¹ Between 1985 and 1994, the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act was proclaimed as revolutionary and newspapers abounded with reports of women’s achievements in managing ‘immediate’ communities. See, for example, a report in The Hindu, 21 April 1987: “A farm woman in a village talked uninhibitedly and said women would insist on their representatives drawing pointed attention to the needs of women such as streamlining widows’ pensions, maternity benefits for women labourers, etc. Another middle class woman had no doubt that the involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions should certainly give a fillip, for instance, to girls education and arresting drop-outs” (ISS, 1992).

² For more on the debate of reservation of seats for women in political bodies, see Sharma, 1998.
By 1990, towards the second term, reports of women’s failure to make an impact on development and their helplessness in Panchayat bodies started trickling in. These reports vacillated from blaming women’s primary socialisation processes and lack of education to predicting women’s empowerment in the second term (1994-99). The reasons and rationale for their viewpoints was seldom clearly articulated. It is in this context that the present study was envisaged to identify the structures and the everyday discourse within the Panchayat, in the Panchayat community and in the families of the Panchayat members to understand the ways in which women’s identities are constructed and regulated.

To achieve the above objective, it was felt that an intensive study of women belonging to a particular village community was not sufficient in understanding the complex realities of women’s lives. The need to study the everyday realities of women’s lives that shape the power relationships in which they are enmeshed was, therefore, considered essential. The study attempts to do this by exploring the linkages between various spheres of activity in which women participate — within the household, work and in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This will also provide answers to questions that relate to the extent to which economic or political factors are sufficient or necessary for their empowerment. For this purpose, it studies individual women members in various tiers of the PRIs — Gram, Taluk and Zilla Panchayats — and their families, as well as a sample of individual male Gram Panchayat members.
1.2 Contextualising the Study

In India, the term empowerment is catching up with regard to women and poorest of the poor as the new approach to development. And the identified empowering machinery is often local level institutions, both governmental and non-governmental. This study considers only the linking of women's empowerment to the local level governmental institutions, that is, PRIs for two reasons:

i) There has been a paradigmatic shift in favour of decentralisation, which is now identified as the agency that will result in women's empowerment and ultimately development.

ii) In spite of the fact that women's entry into these institutions is essentially political, they still seem to be viewed as conduits for economic and infra-structural development.

However, such an exercise needs a thorough understanding of the term empowerment. The concept of empowerment is clearly rooted in the notion of power and in its reverse, powerlessness or the absence of power (Kabeer, 1994). The literature pertaining to the theoretical discussions on the concept of power in social sciences is quite vast and a number of theorists right from Marx to Weber, Parsons, Levi-Strauss and Giddens have dealt with the concept of power in one-way or the other. In common parlance, power is very often understood in 'relational terms' such as ‘A influences B to do something’; ‘A stops B from doing something’; ‘A has power over B with respect to some act’. In other words, it is understood in terms of its reference to relationships of interaction between
persons or groups. Domination, coercion, manipulation and authority are all seen as external manifestations of power.

In social science, there is an ongoing debate about the concept of power between those who see power as exercised by agents and those who see it as a result of structural factors within a system. These discussions about power, its sources, manner of exercise etc. have been matters of concern especially for those working on issues concerning women and development (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994). In India, the women’s movement has had two ideological and organisational tendencies: one, which focuses on issues of rights and equality and the other, which stresses the personal and community empowerment of poor women (Calman, 1992). Though both acknowledge the complex interplay of various types of power — economic, political, social and psychological — it is the latter conceptualisation of empowerment and strategies for empowerment that is of interest to us since the empowerment strategy is central to the present paradigm for rural development.

Empowerment is defined as “the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power ... and that the process of empowerment is all embracing, because it must address all structures and sources of power” (Batliwala, 1993). In India, the state has co-opted the empowerment strategy, or at least the terminology, by linking women to PRIs. Therefore, it is important especially now to explore ways in which it is possible to empower women within the institutional framework of PRIs.
Digressing a little, Peggy Antrobus (1989) claims that international agencies have co-opted the empowerment strategy in order to conceal the problems faced by women due to structural adjustment policies. However, she goes on to explore ways in which “privileged professionals who work in the field of international development can contribute to women’s empowerment”. With the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendment, in India too, the state has attempted to co-opt the empowerment strategies advocated by women’s groups. However, as Antrobus suggests, it is still possible to turn this to ‘women’s advantage’. Now that a critical mass of women is present at various levels of the PRI, it is all the more important and necessary to understand the sources of power and what constitutes empowerment.

1.3 Objectives of the study

Given this context, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To trace the inclusion of women in the development paradigm so as to bring out the various shifts in the concept of the role of women in development

2. To critically assess the role of power and agency in the empowerment of women

3. To bring out from the personal narratives of the sampled populace:
   i) Their perception of empowerment
   ii) At what realms do they envisage this?

4. To identify and analyse from the collected data the factors that contribute to women’s dis-empowerment
5. To specifically assess how critical are the economic and political factors to the overall empowerment of women

6. In the context of Panchayati Raj, to find out:
   i) Whether structural changes have taken place to sustain women’s ability to
      exert power in the political sphere
   ii) What have been the linkages between women’s participation in the economic
       and political spheres
   iii) What types of changes have been experienced by individual sampled women,
       their households and community due to their representation in the political
       sphere viz. the PRIs

1.4 Chapter Scheme

The chapterisation of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1 charts the evolution of a concern for women’s role in development to a broader and more useful look at the underpinning ideologies that have shaped development intervention in India. It also reviews the dominant approaches to women in development and discusses the dominant notions of development, with a view to understand the strategies and modalities employed in India for rural development. These sections seem justified not only because they provide the context in which discussions in subsequent chapters may be placed, but also because they afford an insight into the politics behind women’s large scale inclusion in decentralised governance. In the last section of this
chapter, we recall the major research question in the context of the reigning ideologies in the field of ‘women and rural development’.

Chapter 2 discusses the methodological concepts and tools used in the study. The first section of this chapter outlines the socio-political context in which Panchayats, and specifically women members, are expected to perform. The following section deals with the specific reasons for choosing Panchayats in Kodagu as the research entities. The last section dissects the concept of power, especially political and institutional power, to identify a range of contributory factors that are most relevant to women’s political performance. The inter-relationships between the concept of power and women’s political performance provide the rationale for a new approach: an approach that draws strength from the interview method and observation methods of anthropological investigation.

Chapter 3 sketches the field area in terms of its administrative history and socio-economic travails. This is done to aid a more qualitative and contextual understanding of the political behaviour of Panchayat members, which is delineated in the later parts of the thesis.

The first section of Chapter 4 profiles the various members of the sample Panchayats in terms of their social and economic background. The next section of this chapter expands on the motivations of this study by looking for relationships between so-called empowering factors and conventional parameters of performance. The quantitative
analyses are simple, largely drawn from the meanings accrued by the doer and meanings attributed to it, which in turn is determined by its social context. Therefore, much stress is laid on the interpretations that can be derived from such analyses.

Chapter 5 and 6 delve deeper into an analysis of the missing links. This is partly because the qualitative field data offers richer interpretative possibilities, and the quantitative analyses fail to provide the space to expand upon it. Chapter 5, thus, first, examines the dominant explanatory frameworks, which have been employed to explain women's political dis-empowerment and Chapter 6 makes a case for looking at an alternative analytical framework, which can go beyond identifying empowering and dis-empowering factors to deciphering women's differential levels of performance in Panchayats.

Chapter 7 concludes the discussion with plausible policy implications of the study findings.

1.5 Women in/and Development: Dominant Notions and Approaches

According to Women in India — A Statistical Profile, 1997, in a comparison of 174 countries India ranks 135 in its Human Development Index (HDI), 103 in its Gender Development Index (GDI) and 93 in its Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The HDI and GDI focus on the expansion of capabilities while the GEM is concerned with

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3 As compared to the HDI, GDI and GEM have been calculated for fewer countries. Therefore, at first glance India's gender related position seems to be better.
the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities of life\textsuperscript{4}. These measures imply that India’s situation, both in terms of expansion and use of capabilities for all its citizens (men and women), is dismal. The consequence of India being a low HDI country is far worse for women as it means that they have to not only suffer as a result of belonging to families that have lower access to opportunities which enhance capabilities but also belong to a gender which is considered inferior.

Low GDI and GEM reflect a serious failure of development strategies and policy intervention. Conventional analysis emphasises the inadequacy of income as a key factor for women’s poor condition and subordinate position. A comparison of HDI, GDI and GEM from a number of countries reveal that a high HDI need not be a pre-requisite for high GDI and GEM. For instance, Thailand outranks Spain in the GDI even though Thailand’s real per capita income is less than half of Spain’s. Developing countries such as Barbados, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Jamaica and Cuba show a marked improvement in their GDI over their HDI ranks. The lessons learnt from these indices has very important implications for a country like India as the decision to seek ‘gender equality’ in these countries seems to cut across income levels, political ideologies, cultures and stages of development\textsuperscript{5}.

\textsuperscript{4} The HDI measures human welfare using three variables life expectancy to measure longevity, educational attainment to represent knowledge and income to serve as a surrogate for common resources needed to ensure a decent standard of living. The GDI measures achievement in basic capabilities as the HDI does, but takes note of the inequality in achievement between men and women. The GEM examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making.

\textsuperscript{5} UN Human Development Report, 1995.
In India, irrespective of the method of calculation, there are large variations in HDI, GDI and GEM within the country. On one hand, there are high HDI rank states like Punjab and Harayana while on the other, there are states like Bihar and Orissa which have low HDI rank. However, though Punjab and Harayana have relatively higher per capita incomes and perform better in the HDI, their GDI and GEM ranks are considerably low.

In this context, Karnataka is an interesting state to study as it can be safely categorised as an average HDI ranking state. Depending on the method used, its GDI varies from 4 to 8 and its GEM is almost constant at 5 — both middle ranks. However, as the authors of the indices caution (especially with respect to the GDI), “the highly aggregative nature of the index does not aid the formulation of appropriate policies which are sharply focused. In fact, by putting forth such a formulation, there is every danger that governments will opt to concentrate on the more visible and relatively more tractable problems pertaining to increasing incomes, education and life expectancy while relegating to the background the more difficult task pertaining to changing the nature of gender relations in society” (Prabhu, 1996).

The point made is more important than is often realised. Development indices reflect dominant development paradigms and vice versa. For instance, Gross National Product (GNP) and comparisons based on per capita incomes reflect the development paradigm’s obsession in the 1950s and 1960s with modernisation and economic growth. Women’s concerns were subsumed in the development paradigm and it was assumed that rapid growth would improve their relative position and status in society. Consequently, the

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Prabhu (1996) and Mehta (1996) calculated GDI and GEM for 15 major states. Due to lack of appropriate data, this

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development strategies and policies pursued in India in that period reflect this ideology. This is evident in an analysis of the Community Development Program and the National Extension Service in the 1950s and the Panchayati Raj and Integrated Agricultural District Program in the 1960s.

In the 1970s, many started questioning the growth model. In many societies, an increase in average GNP did not benefit the poorest sections of society. Though growth was still considered important, the emphasis in the 1970s shifted. The need to distribute income and assets equitably to the poorest sections of society was recognised. Ester Boserup (1970) applied a similar analysis to the situation of women. She challenged the implicit assumption of the modernisation school that development was a gender-neutral process. As women formed a sizeable proportion of the poor, the development strategies of the 1970s began to look at women as beneficiaries and focused on improving their economic status. In other words, there was an attempt to integrate women into the process of development. A reflection of this can be seen in the development programmes such as Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) designed in the 1970s and 1980s.

It was only in the 1990s that the growth model has been at least partially discredited. This was a result of the growing realisation that though important, income cannot be the only criterion for enhancing the quality of life. This realisation resulted in the construction of a new measure HDI, which would encompass important dimensions of human development. Simultaneously, there has been a growing realisation that viewing deprived

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data both papers have calculated many different GDIs and GEMs.
groups, specifically women, as mere inputs in the production process as beneficiaries of development programmes or providing material goods and services will not result in increase in human welfare and subsequently development.

In the past five decades, the paths and strategies employed for 'rural development' have periodically undergone change. Economic growth was the catch phrase in the 1950s and 1960s. It was assumed that if there were 'sufficient' growth it would trickle down to all sections of the populace. To facilitate this, it was considered important to transform change-resistant traditional societies to forward-looking modern societies. This is reflected in the Community Development Program and National Extension Service, and later in the Panchayati Raj System and Intensive Agricultural Development Program evolved during this period. These programmes reflect the notion that development can only occur if there is rapid economic growth. The household was identified as the unit, which would bring about this development through an increase in growth. Women were merely seen and understood as mothers and wives who could firstly, assist in the trickle-down within the household to the husband and children and secondly, help in changing and moulding the attitude of the younger generation. In the 1970s, it was clear that economic growth had not trickled down to all households and that development was still a distant dream.

The above programmes for development were critiqued for treating the social, economic and political realms as unrelated entities. Integrated Rural Development became the new catch phrase. It not only aimed at raising the income levels of households but also
improving education, health and other basic services to improve their quality of life. Due to the presumption that women contribute very marginally to the economy, the IRDP first attempted to bring women into the productive sphere and thereby, integrate them into the development process. However, it was soon clear that the IRDP was not a very successful scheme. In fact, insufficient participation of men and women was identified as one of the main reason for the failure of the IRDP.

Around the mid-1980s there was a growing realisation that merely making ‘work’ or employment the tool to reach the goal of economic as well as social well being for the underprivileged was insufficient. Experiences of various collectives had effectively demonstrated that at the crux of women’s ‘development’ was the issue of redistribution of power. Recognising the crucial role that power relations play in affecting rural development, empowerment was seen as the key strategy for rural development. This is visible in the development strategies adopted by the state since the mid-1980s wherein empowerment is seen as a means to achieve the goal of development. It is now believed that development is possible only if the under privileged sections of the population are directly and actively involved in the process of development. The focus has thus shifted from the meso and macro levels to the individual. A reflection of this can be seen in the fact that rural development was envisaged through local self-government — the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India.

Simultaneous to the change in approach to rural development, there was a movement to identify various underprivileged groups in society. It was thought that the involvement of
these groups in rural development as stakeholders was essential for not only the success of individual programmes, but also for the overall objective of rural development. In effect, it was clear that without redistribution of power, these groups would remain at the periphery and in the process, result in the partial achievement of rural development. As a consequence of the above exercise, women were identified as one of the numerically largest underprivileged sections of society and 33 per cent of the seats were reserved for them at all levels in the local self-government. Positions of visibility and power such as president, vice president and members in standing committees were also reserved for women. This was done with the understanding that without consciously allocating to women roles that require their overt recognition as social partners, the objective of social and economic well-being would be difficult to achieve.

This study examines the constructions of women that development strategies and indices have advocated over the past four decades. It seeks to draw lessons from the past as that is of significance to the present empowerment approach advocated by the reigning rural development strategy through PRIs. The study does so by tracing the various approaches to women and development especially those, which have influenced rural development strategies and programmes. It also attempts to define empowerment as a process and describe the process of empowerment in different contexts such as family, work and in the public sphere.

For this purpose, it is important to understand the historical background of the various strategies used for rural development. The first section traces the different approaches to
women in development. The second traces the changes that have occurred in the perception of development in terms of its theoretical underpinnings, and the last section discusses the reasons for perceiving women's empowerment through PRIs.

1.6 Approaches to Women and Development

During 1945-65, many 'Third World' countries attained independence from colonial rule. And with this, 'development' became an important item in the agenda for all newly emerging nation-states. Alongside development came the programme for welfare and planning. Women's entrance into the development planning process is a mid-twentieth century phenomenon. Their appearance in the development programme, although belated, can be attributed to two prevailing notions of that period. Firstly, in the 1950s, development was perceived in terms of economic growth. Secondly, the household was identified as the unit, which would bring about this development or increase in economic growth. Major shifts in development thinking emerged by questioning these two premises, that is, the equation of development with economic welfare and the altruistic functioning of the household. The result of challenging these assumptions was the introduction of women into the sphere of development (Young, 1994; Sen & Grown, 1985).

Women have had a rather dialectical relationship with development. Their ambiguous relationship becomes apparent when a periodic analysis of the changes that have occurred in the policy is undertaken. This is evident in the manner in which they have been
perceived and in the construction of roles for them to promote 'development'. These periodic shifts mark various stages in development thinking vis-à-vis women, the important ones being welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment (Buvinic, 1983; Moser, 1989).

Poverty and regional/inter-regional income disparities, particularly of the vulnerable groups, needed to be immediately addressed. The 1950s, therefore, saw the emergence of various strategies and approaches for development as a panacea to the prevailing problems. In the programmes that were chalked out to tackle these problems, women were identified as a ‘delivery channel’. For instance, in a health programme or in a nutritional programme, women were recognised as ‘mothers and wives’ — as instruments carrying out efficient delivery within the household to the husband, the breadwinner of the family, and to the children (Sen, 1990; Maheshwari, 1985).

This was primarily because in this period, development was equated with the growth of the economy in terms of GNP. The growth strategy adopted by the Third World countries was in cognisance with the major models of that period. These models began with the assumption that if the economy grew at an ‘appropriate rate’ the benefits would automatically ‘trickle down’ to the poor households and, by implication, to all the members within the household. This is popularly known as the welfare approach. The welfare approach aimed at playing a complementary role to the financial aid required for economic growth by providing relief aid to vulnerable groups such as women and
children. It is important to understand that this approach conceptualises women only in terms of mothers responsible for their children and family. “Traditionally, the state has interpreted women’s needs ... in their capacity of mothers and wives” (Stromquist, 1993). Needless to say, here men define women’s needs and requirements, entitlements and capabilities. This approach became popular because the policies and programmes derived from it did not carry any re-distributional consequence for men. They are implemented in a sex-segregated environment, are technically simple and relatively safe to implement. The main problem with this approach is that it assumes women to be passive recipients of development, defining them entirely in terms of motherhood and child rearing (Buvinic, 1983; Moser, 1989; Nijeholt, 1992).

Moreover, the household was seen as a single homogeneous unit and the altruistic functioning of the family eulogised. Therefore, development efforts were directed at men who were seen as breadwinners of the family (Agarwal, 1994). Women's reproductive capacity was seen as important and welfare-oriented programmes were targeted at them so that whatever trickled down would be better utilised by them as mothers and wives (Sen and Grown, 1985). A natural consequence was women's noticeable absence in the various development theories postulated during the first international development decade (1960-1970). During this period, discrepancies in the intra-household distribution of resources in the form of feminisation of poverty⁷, low entitlement and capabilities⁸.

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⁷ In India, the dominant development strategy was rooted in the Harrod-Dommar's saving-growth relationship.
⁸ ‘World Survey on the Role of Women in Development’, UN (1989) says: “While some women have improved their position, far more have become poor. Ironically, poverty among women has increased, even within the richest countries, resulting in a 'feminisation of poverty'. Poverty particularly afflicted families in which women are the sole income earners, a growing phenomenon. Increases in maternal and infant
identified for women and other vulnerable groups of the society became evident from many studies conducted in Asia and Africa (Sen, 1985, 1990; M.sheshwari, 1985; Sen, 1985, 1989). Many of these studies also pointed to the virtual absence of development programmes in which vulnerable groups participated as social partners and quoted it as the primary reason for the failure of rural development.

Further, the growing concern about population growth and increasing poverty in the Third World resulted in the linkage of women’s issues and development concerns in the second UN development decade. Though focus on poverty and meeting basic requirement helped in placing women squarely within the development framework, concern for women did not bring any significant changes in the way women were perceived. Thus, recognising the inadequacies of the welfare approach, it became apparent that growth alone is not sufficient to wipe out poverty, but equity and redistribution were necessary. Moreover, there was a growing realisation that women’s productive contributions — especially in agriculture — had been ignored due to the preoccupation with her reproductive role (Young, 1994). This new understanding resulted in the consideration of women as producers and providers. Despite these studies, the perception that ‘trickle down’ theories would eventually result in development and improvement in the status of women still prevailed.

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mortality in some countries have been observed for the first time in decades as social services have been cut as part of adjustment packages."

*Sen (1982) developed the concept of entitlements and capabilities. It draws attention to the different basis of claims on resources, which prevail in a society. The distribution of resources in any society occurs through a complex system of claims, which are in turn embedded within the social relations and practices that govern possession, distribution and use in that society.
As a critique of the welfare approach emerged the **equity approach** wherein women were recognised as persons in their own right. Their productive role was emphasised and women became to be viewed as active participants in the development process. The basic concern in this perspective was to secure a measurable reduction in the inequality between men and women. The equity approach presumed that women do not participate in the development process and therefore, firstly, attempted to bring women into the 'productive' process and subsequently, in the developmental processes. In other words, it tried to *integrate women into the process of development*. Thus, this approach resulted in an increase in the number of programmes aimed at increasing women’s participation in employment and thus, improving their share in resources, land and income in many Third World countries.

The equity approach aimed at *transforming gender relations* by redistributing opportunities and resources in favour of women. However, its conception of the socio-economic reality of the women in the Third World countries seemed to be misplaced. It presumed that women did not perform any economic functions and therefore emphasised that an attempt be made to increase their economic contribution by extending their role to productive spheres.

The limited success of this approach was due to its essentially integrationist nature. This can be attributed to two reasons: firstly, the lack of an enabling environment (socio-cultural milieu); and secondly, as a corollary, women were integrated into a model of
development, which could not have enabled the expected redistribution of resources and opportunities.

As a consequence, redistribution was seen as an essential measure to tackle poverty, and women were identified as agents for redistribution. Therefore, the anti-poverty approach, which followed the equity approach, was merely a watered-down version of the equity approach (Buvinic, 1983). A number of factors can be held responsible for the rise of this approach. Concerns about population growth, inability to eradicate poverty and the growing realisation that the benefits of economic growth do not automatically 'trickle down' were all causal factors for the rise of this approach. As the name suggests, its primary focus was poverty alleviation. Following from this, women's problems were seen as primarily related to poverty.

The development policies following these two approaches — equity and anti-poverty — merely increased women's burden of work. Considering that work done at home was regarded as unproductive, women were provided 'gainful' employment outside, thus, adding to their burden. It was presumed that women's insufficient participation in the process of growth and development was the root cause for women's subordinate position and problems. The scope of their 'productive' work was thus extended to accommodate their increased participation. However, a large number of empirical studies conducted in the Third World countries soon revealed that the socio-economic status of women had considerably worsened after being 'gainfully' employed (Agarwal, 1989; Bardhan, 1985; Sen and Grown, 1985).
Persistent imbalances in the external sector created by the absence of new supplies of capital, the deterioration in terms of trade and the need to pay off foreign debt and the interests on it have resulted in a majority of countries adopting adjustment policies. Thus, the 1980s saw the re-emergence of the doctrine of the efficacy of the market. This brought women's efficiency at managing home and work to the forefront. No conflict was seen between helping women and promoting development. Women's triple role in development — in production, in reproduction (biological and social) and in community management — was considered advantageous for attaining the objectives of increased production and to efficiently manage poverty (as buffers during the periods of structural adjustment).

It is apparent that this efficiency approach also continues to view women as a delivery system. But the difference between the welfare and efficiency approach is in regard to their perception of women as a delivery system. In the welfare approach, women were assigned almost exclusively to the social welfare sector, within which interventions for women were further narrowed down to address primarily the domestic roles (assigned to them in programmes delivering nutritional training, maternal and child health care, etc.). In the efficiency approach, the aim was to use women's unpaid time and efforts were made through various development programmes to use their 'free' time efficiently for development.
The above-mentioned approaches have been institutionalised, and are adopted by all policy instituting bodies. An examination of World Bank Reports, Human Development Reports and policy statements of developing countries in the 1990s reveal none of the approaches are discarded completely today. Various elements of each approach enters policy-making but with the important addition of ‘empowerment’ to the policy. Dissatisfied with the above approaches, women from different Third World countries started thinking in terms of alternate visions and strategies of development. Their emphasis is on “the right of women to the freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives... It thus emphasises the importance of women's say at the personal level of gender relations in family and household and at the societal level of social processes and social change” (Sen & Grown, 1985).

With the concept of ‘empowerment’\(^\text{10}\) figuring prominently in all the policies concerning women in the 1990’s, a new terminology emerged, particularly in some recent studies, to call such an inclusion as **empowerment approach** (Moser, 1989). “The concept of women’s empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world, and particularly by Third World feminists” (Batliwala, 1993). The empowerment approach is in fact a set of methodologies or strategies, which has arisen from the writings and grassroots experiences of the Third World women (Batliwala, 1993; Sen and Grown, 1985; Agarwal, 1994; Kabeer, 1994).

\(^{10}\) Empowerment is a complex term to define. The meaning of the term empowerment varies from individual self-realisation and self-assessment, to participation or involvement in projects in a functional sense, to control over decision-making in all aspects of one’s life and livelihood. For some it is an attempt
The above analysis of the various approaches to integrate women into the development process reveals the following facts:

i) Each of these different approaches arose as a response to a distinct set of imperatives, but it is important to note that they are neither chronological in order nor mutually exclusive when examined in terms of policies.

ii) Of all, welfare and efficiency seem to be the two dominant approaches and are located at either ends of the policy spectrum. The other approaches can be seen as either transitional, as in the case of equity or anti-poverty or, yet to be taken seriously, as in the case of empowerment.

iii) These various approaches have shared the same ‘meta-theories’ (Marxist, modernisation, etc.) of development, which they have been critical of. For example, the welfare approach uses the liberal neo-classic economic theories with its persisting emphasis on growth as the primary goal and meaning of development. The complementary modernisation theories stress on ‘non-economic’ factors as its inspirational source, which are likely to promote or inhibit economic development. Similarly, the equity approach, which partly laid the foundation for the development of an alternate approach to gender and development, uses the Marxist framework with its focus on structures of production.

to change the social and economic institutions that embody the basic and unequal power structures in society, whether between individual men and women or groups of people (Rao, 1997).
However, these shifts have led to some important and enduring changes in the way policy-makers viewed women’s role in the development process. These shifts go hand in hand with the dominant theories that try to explain under-development at different points of time. This has also resulted in a change in the institutional means adopted for ending women’s engendered position in development. In other words, the paradigmatic shifts regarding women in development were concurrent with the changes in the perception of development. These shifts also got reflected in the changing priorities in the development programmes. This link between the changing perception of women in development and various perceptions of development can be substantiated further with an analysis of different approaches of development and development programmes in the post-independence period.

1.7 Approaches to Development

Though women’s empowerment is now being widely accepted as a necessary condition to achieve the goal of development, the term development is yet to gain a consensual definition. It has been and still is viewed from a multitude of perspectives. This is in spite of the fact that economists, sociologists and historians have worked in this field with a rare inter-disciplinary verve. “Some see it (development) in terms of a purposive and planned project; others prefer to talk of processes and social transformation. Some define it as the enhancement of individual choices; others see it as the equalising of opportunities; still others as redistributive justice. Some emphasise ends; others means; and still others focus on the interrelationship between ends and means” (Kabeer, 1994).
A decade-wise analysis of the dominant or the most 'conspicuous and vocal' perception of the term development reveals that there have been major changes in the understanding of the term 'development'. It also reveals that the agents and processes identified for 'development' change based on the development theory in vogue. It is an important factor as major development programmes are designed on the basis of this understanding. Modernisation, dependency and now, the actor-oriented approach have played an important role in India. These theories have not only been translated into major development programmes but they also envisage development through different agents. This is clear in an analysis of the important rural development programmes in India such as Community Development Programme (CDP) and National Extension Service (NES), Panchayati Raj and Integrated Agriculture District Programme (IADP), Small Farmers Development Programme, Middle Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and now, Local Self-Government (LSG).

When many countries attained independence from colonial rule, the alarming rates of poverty, regional and inter-regional income disparities, low health status, etc. of these countries were understood as under-development and development was defined in terms of economic growth and modernisation. This conception of development/under-development gave rise to various theories. For example, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the model of development that was dominant in India was based on economic growth and modernisation.
The modernisation theory emerged from an understanding that the lack of development is a consequence of the absence of necessary socio-cultural factors. The suggested solution was to transform the change-resistant ‘traditional societies’ to forward-looking ‘modern societies’. Growth was measured in terms of per capita GNP, and an increase in GNP was considered as a necessary condition for development and modernisation.

This perspective is seen in the programmes and strategies that were evolved in the period. In India, the Community Development Program (1952) and National Extension Service (1953) reflect this perception. Though these programmes were considered to be comprehensive in content and had multi-purpose goals, the emphasis was essentially on agricultural production. Women were noticeably absent in these programmes except as clients of the welfare-oriented community development program.

By the end of the 1950s, it was clear that the CDP and NES programmes were unable to meet the expectations with which they were launched. A committee set up to suggest measures to correct the problems in implementation of the CDP and the NES recommended the establishment of a three-tier system of rural local self-government called Panchayati Raj. It is evident from the committee’s recommendations that the State mainly viewed PRIs as an instrument for the realisation of the ends of community development, and as an organ of the government to execute Community Development

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11 Economic betterment through the improvement of agriculture and expansion of cottage industries was to be pursued side by side with an educational campaign among all people of all ages, measures for better health, sanitation and medical aid and construction of reasonably comfortable dwellings.

12 Balwantrai G Mehta Committee, 1957.
Programmes and other schemes (Maheshwari, 1985). By 1960s, all the states had passed the Panchayat Acts and by the mid-60s, Panchayats had been set up in all parts of the country. However, they remained dysfunctional owing to the following reasons:

i) They were seen as mere agencies for the implementation of NES and CDP

ii) They were totally controlled by higher levels of government because local autonomy was seen as a luxury for underdeveloped countries.

The prevailing notion that community development can occur only if there is rapid economic growth led to the launching of another program called Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP). The IADP and Panchayati Raj were seen as complementary, with the former aiming at an increase in agricultural production and the latter aiming at community development. The improvement in agricultural technology and increasing food shortages in the mid-60s led to an overriding emphasis on agricultural production. This resulted in a further reshuffling of priorities in the CDP, in the process of which the concept of rural development got reduced to enhancement of agricultural production. In addition, to hasten the process of rural development, various independent administrative hierarchies (under the aegis of the Central government) were set up such as the Small Farmer’s Development Agency, Tribal Development Agency, Middle Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency, Command Area Development, and so on.

By the 1970s, it was clear that the strategies based on the modernisation theories did not result in ‘development’. It failed to explain the distribution of under-development or the persistent impoverishment of vast regions of the globe. Modernisation’s theoretical belief
that bottlenecks to development was only temporary and internal no longer carried conviction. Their strategies for ‘development’ were also questioned mainly because social, economic and political realms were treated as separate and autonomous. Moreover, by the end of the 1960s, it was evident that the so-called ‘economic development’ visualised by the modernisation theories had not trickled down to the rural masses in any of the developing countries (Desai, 1971; Gusfield, 1967).

The disillusionment with the modernisation theory led to another set of explanation provided to understand maldevelopment. At the theoretical level it gained currency as dependency theory (Frank, 1975; Amin, 1979). They provided a critique of the modernisation theories on the following grounds: assumptions of linearity; inevitability and autonomy of social, political and economic phenomena; and exclusive concentration on conditions internal to a particular country (Schuurman, 1993). The dependency theorists attributed persistent impoverishment and under-development of the Third World countries to the capitalist system of the core countries. They argued that under-development resulted from the contradiction between social classes, which is dominant in the capitalist social formation. In other words, the capitalist mode of production is characterised by polarising tendencies, which placed the peripheral Third World countries in a dependency relationship with metropolitan centres of the First World. This led to parallel dependency relationships in other spheres too, such as the dependency of the lower classes upon the upper classes; the rural upon the urban; the less technological upon the more technological; and finally, women upon men. Therefore, the dependency
model advocated development in terms of increased participation of people as against the earlier focus on improved technology.

Unwilling to completely abandon the tenets of modernisation, but at the same time drawing heavily from the dependency model, many countries developed Integrated Rural Development programmes (IRDP). This aimed at transforming the rural standard of living by increased agricultural productivity, thus raising income levels of households. IRDP also recognised the contribution of better education, health and other basic services to improve people's quality of life and their overall productivity. However, this programme meant for local development, was undertaken through centralised planning. This centralised planning could not carry out efficient implementation at the local levels. Many studies have identified this as the major lacunae associated with the IRDP (Maheshwari, 1985).

1.8 Decentralisation: A Mechanism for Rural Development

The failure of this intervention in the form of integrated rural development resulted in an impasse at both the theoretical and policy levels. Despite being a combination of two models, modernisation and dependency, rural development programmes in general met with failure because of the same reason that have been identified earlier in the context of women's integration in development, that is, lack of an enabling social atmosphere. In other words, there was a lack of institutional backup to carry out the changes/shifts that were envisaged at different points of time. Moreover, all the hitherto practised
development models were carried out in a centralised form of administration. This can be traced back as a major reason for the failure of earlier approaches. In a centralised form of administration there is no mechanism to ensure people's participation in the development process. This is more so in a country like India where participation is most often determined by social and cultural factors such as caste and gender (Kothari, 1989; Hasan, 1989).

It is in this context that the initiatives to put in place decentralised mechanisms in many countries have attracted attention. They offer possibilities for building on the essential principles of Integrated Rural Development Programmes while avoiding problems associated with over-centralisation of functions and responsibilities.

While studying the emergence of decentralisation, it also needs to be kept in mind the historical background of rural development in India. In spite of a myriad of policies and programmes, the benefits of economic development did not percolate down to the rural masses (Boserup, 1970; Agarwal, 1994). In fact, more often than not, inappropriate public policies and ill-designed programmes and projects served to impoverish rural communities. Various longitudinal studies and political analysis regarding centralised planning and decision-making came out with the finding that it only widened the regional and rural-urban income disparities (Kothari, 1988; Meenakshisundaram, 1994). Moreover, for a substantial section of people such as Dalits, Adivasis and women, the quality of politico/socio/economic life, even after years of centralised planning, did not improve. This disillusionment led to decentralisation being looked upon as a historical
necessity (Kothari, 1988). It also caused social scientists, theoreticians and as well as policy makers and bureaucrats to re-examine the existing paradigms and strategies for rural development.

Subsequently, there has been a concentration on the individual actor/agency and his/her interaction with the meso and macro levels. The **actor-oriented approach** criticised the modernisation and dependency approaches to development. According to them, social change emanated from external impulses such as state policy, market etc. whereas the earlier approaches presume that the meso and macro levels determine the individual actor’s behaviour. The actor-oriented approach stressed the role of the human actor. Even in situations where it seems that the individual actor’s actions are completely determined by the meso and macro levels, the behaviour of the actors can take a diverse range of forms.

The actor-oriented approach resulted in greater emphasis being accorded to participation and democratic values. Various studies reveal that rural development programmes are more likely to be successful if people actively participate in them (Maheshwari 1985). ‘Democratic decentralisation’ is increasingly being seen as an institutional means, which will ensure active participation of people and at the same time, rural development.
The above analysis of the various approaches of the development process reveals the following facts:

i) As in the case of women in development (WID), the different approaches to development also turned out to be a response to a distinct set of imperatives.

ii) Unlike the case of approaches to women in development, theoretically, new approaches came up by critiquing the previous ones and thereby provided alternate paradigms. However, this did not get translated at the programme levels and in this way it is similar to the case of WID: the approaches are neither chronological in order nor mutually exclusive.

iii) The movement from modernisation to the actor-oriented approach has caused a shift in the focus from the primacy of the meso and macro levels to micro levels.

iv) All the approaches/theories of development essentially tried to provide an explanation for under-development. But, in spite of various changes, the notion of development has remained almost the same. For example, the economic aspects of life and of nation are dominant in all the theories.

v) Though, at the level of formulation the approaches to women in development aimed at restructuring institutions to facilitate the set goals of welfare, equity, efficiency and empowerment, this could not take place because the development approaches at the formulation level did not perceive the need to restructure institutions as essential.
1.9 Women and PRIs as Agents for Development

There have been major paradigmatic changes with respect to the type and kind of institutions, which will result in 'development' and as to how and through whom this will take place. Both women and local self-government institutions are increasingly being seen as agents of development. They are being viewed as the vehicle, which will result in empowerment and finally human development. This sudden realisation has to be provided with reasons.

As for women, five main reasons can be identified:

i) In most societies they constitute the majority of the poor, the underemployed and the economically and socially disadvantaged.

ii) They also suffer from the additional burdens imposed by gender-based hierarchies and subordination.

iii) They are the providers of an entire range of basic needs. Therefore, to understand the impact of development strategies on these same needs the viewpoint of women as the principal producers and workers forms an obvious starting point.

iv) The impact of development on technology, employment and incomes and working conditions in these sectors rely heavily on women, as the inclusion of

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These basic needs are food production and processing and responsibility for fuel, water, health care, child rearing, sanitation, etc.
women into economically productive workforce resulted in feminisation of labour force in the most technologically advanced industries such as electronics.

v) The vantage point of women enables to evaluate the extent to which development strategies benefit or harm the poorest and most oppressed sections of the society and also to judge its impact on a range of sectors and activities crucial to socio-economic development and human welfare (Sen and Grown 1985).

Regarding local self-government, the following factors are in its favour:

i) The known drawbacks of centralised decision making at governmental levels

ii) The advantage of ensuring people's participation even at the level of accessing the decision-making processes. In this sense, it is akin to 'returning power back to the people'.

iii) An efficient way of tackling ethnic problems and the growing demand of different groups for greater political autonomy as in the cases of India and Sri Lanka.

iv) Its efficiency to reach the intended beneficiaries and to deliver tangible benefits to rural communities and hence, promoting rural development. In other words, they are client specific.

v) A powerful instrument for social and economic transformation of rural society as they are area specific.

vi) The association of Local Self-Governance bodies with people's organisations would help in the mobilisation of resources, including voluntary labour for development, and would facilitate monitoring the implementation process.
The much-talked about agenda of the present development approach — empowerment of women — was visualised through LSG primarily because of its proximity and accessibility to women. Therefore, it is now believed that the twin objectives — development and empowerment will occur through the institutional framework of the PRI. It is also believed that the inclusion of large numbers of women in these bodies will not only help in ensuring the success of the programmes designed specifically for them but also enable the development of rural areas.

1.10 Research Question

At this point, it is clear that in spite of the many shifts in the ‘thinking on development’, there has not been much improvement in the quality of life for women vis-à-vis men. This leads us to believe that up till now, development thinking has not asked the appropriate questions. This points to another more important question: Whether the latest shift in thinking holds any new promise for women, especially with regard to improvement of their position? In other words, is the linking of women, decentralisation and development really a shift from the earlier approaches? The study is an attempt to answer these questions both at the theoretical and at the empirical levels.