2.1 Reservation: The Moral Problem and the Constitution

The Indian Constitution guaranteed to all citizens, irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth, the fundamental rights to equality and political participation. Articles 14, 15 and the Directive Principles of the State Policy are very important in this regard. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution reads as follows:

The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 15 asserts:

The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them ... (the State must make) special provision for the advancement of any socially backward class of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Further, Article 46 of the Directive Principles of State Policy asks the State to:

Promote with special care the economic and educational interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and ... protect them from social injustices and all forms of exploitation.

Thus, constitutionally, on the one hand, the state is required to provide equality of opportunity to all its citizens, and on the other, not discriminate on grounds of sex. These apparently conflicting and contradictory requirements of the Constitution arise from the
recognition that equal opportunity implies competition between equals and that substantial section of the Indian population such as women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not equal. It is for this reason that the framers of the Constitution place a special responsibility upon the state to provide for those classes of citizens who are not 'equal' and have been discriminated upon for a long time. The conflict imbedded in these provisions of the Constitution lies between the concept of fundamental rights and the demands of the welfare state (Chatterji, 1993).

The moral dilemma arises due to the recognition in the Constitution that there are enormous disparities between different classes of citizens and that 'equality of opportunity' cannot be ensured when there are such major disparities in the lives of citizens. It is in this context that the state is urged to restrict the liberties of the privileged to provide the less privileged a 'head start' so that in the course of time the unequal classes of citizens can compete on equal terms. On the other hand, the opponents of such reservation believe that the state has no right to decide and curb the individual liberties of any citizen, especially when it comes to issuing quotas for women.

2.2 Problems of Political Exclusions and Inclusions: 1987-1999

Reservation for women has always been a contentious issue. As women do not constitute a single 'class', 'category' or 'interest group', the issue of politically reserving seats for them has always been problematic. Even the women's movement in India is not united on

\[\text{For a more detailed discussion on reservations, see Beteille, 1992.}\]
this issue. The women's movement has debated the logic of reservation of seats for women in political institutions and government at different points of time for more than 70 years (Sharma, 1998).

Those in favour of affirmative action for women claim that women form one of the largest groups of underprivileged and socially discriminated citizens. They also argue that though it is true that women cannot be classified as a single 'caste' considering the enormous differences amongst them, it is equally true that a majority of them are discriminated against in the areas of education, nutrition, health, property rights, presence in the so called public spheres and in the recognition of their work (Narayana, 1998). In their opinion, the state should and has finally realised this and enacted the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution to set right a grossly unequal situation for a class of its citizens by providing for a statistically representative sample of women.

Opponents of affirmative action for women argue that access to the privileged positions in political institutions should only depend on merit, ignoring the evidence of the role of social institutions such as formal schooling, family atmosphere and cultural constraints in stacking the odds against women. The implementation of the quota system in Kodagu district received its share of disruption between 1987 and 1996 when the anti-woman's political reservation was at its peak in Karnataka. Apart from a general feeling of injustice amongst the politically dominant males, several Panchayats were not allowed to be constituted and when constituted, would not allow for the election of the adhyaksha. On several occasions, members of the ruling party, which introduced the quota system for
women would not follow the party line and ask for de-notification of the reserved constituency.

Despite supporting the issue of reservation in public, many party leaders admit that there was dissension amongst the party members\textsuperscript{15}. In fact, the Parliament which was able to unanimously pass the 73\textsuperscript{rd} and 74\textsuperscript{th} Amendments to the Constitution has been unable to pass the 81\textsuperscript{st} and 84\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment Bill, which calls for the extension of one-third reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures.

2.3. **Karnataka: The Socio-Political Context of the Study**

The political representation of women and the issue of quota came onto the main political agenda in the 1980s in Karnataka. The idea of reserving 25 per cent of seats for women in the local governing bodies was enacted by the State Legislative Assembly in 1985. Karnataka was thus the first state to reserve seats for women members. As in other parts of India, until the implementation of the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1985, the Panchayati Raj was a paralysed institution. Very few elections were held and as for women's representation, as per the requirements of the previous legislation, (in the

\footnote{15 This topic of reserving seats for women often came up in informal discussions with local political leaders in Kodagu. Most of them (even those belonging to the ruling Janata Dal) were in a dilemma as to whether they should support their party stand or side with the party workers, who strongly opposed it. The problem was further complicated by these male political leaders' sympathetic attitude and sense of injustice against the system for 'marginalising' them.}
Karnataka Village Panchayat and Local Boards Act) a token representation of one or two women was present at various levels of the PRIs.16

The implementation of the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1985, resulted in elections to Panchayati Raj Institutions, being held in 1987. Due to the reservation of seats for women, these elections saw women in large numbers being elected to the Zilla Parishad and to the Mandal Panchayats.17 In Kodagu district, of the 27 Zilla Parishad members eight were women and of the 853 Mandal Panchayat members, 219 were women.18

Inspired by the Karnataka experiment, the 73rd and 74th Amendments promulgated in the National Parliament in 1992 provided for the reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of seats for women. The seats were to be filled by direct elections and at least one-third of the offices of adhyaksha's (chairpersons) and upadhaykasha's (deputy chairperson) at each level were to be reserved for women. These would be allotted by rotation to different Panchayats at each level (Sharma 1998: 24).

Though there was hardly any controversy over the enactment of these two Amendments in the Parliament, it stirred a hornet's nest at the local level. As a result of the 73rd Amendment, in the 1995 elections, of the 1,091 members in 101 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Kodagu, 509 were women members; of the 48 Taluk Panchayat (TP), 19 were women members and of the 27 Zilla Panchayat (ZP) members, 10 were women.19 The policy of

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16 Between 1960 and 1983, when the Karnata Panchayat and Local Boards Act was legislated, only three elections were held, the first in 1960, second in 1968 and the third in 1978.

17 In their first term prior to the constitutional amendments, there were 14,025 women members out of the total 55,188 Mandal Panchayat members and 231 out of a total of 887 Zila Parishad members.

18 Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore.

19 Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore.
reservation of seats for the offices of adhyaksha and upadhaykasha at all levels had grave implications for the sites of this research — the Gram Panchayats of Maldare, Siddapur and Chennayana Kote. In three contiguous Gram Panchayats located in the southern part of the district, the office of the Adhyaksha was reserved for a woman — in Maldare and Siddapur for a Scheduled Caste woman and in Chennayana Kote for a Backward Caste woman. Additionally, the Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat representation for the area was also reserved for a Scheduled Tribe and a Scheduled Caste woman respectively.

As in other parts of India, since the inception of Panchayat bodies in the 1960s, men dominated the Panchayats in Karnataka. Until 1987, in Kodagu district, the office-bearers at all levels of the PRIs were occupied mostly by the planters who dominated the local social and political activities. The implementation of the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1985, was the first threat that this male-dominated political elite faced. The 1995 elections literally sounded the death knell to the political elite in the three Panchayats that form the sites of this research.

Local politicians, plantation owners and the plantation industry have always played a part in ‘managing the area’. In the sites of research (as elsewhere), the plantation owners take an active interest in getting roads tarred, hand pumps installed, electricity given to households and maintaining law and order by settling local disputes. Four local politicians with a record of such practical administrative and managerial skills and social acceptance in these Gram Panchayats need special mentioning. C.A. Subbaih, born in

\footnote{The implication of this will be discussed in Chapter 5.}

\footnote{The group of local politicians (most of whom are local planters) decide most of the events that happen in the area, that include both political and development agenda.}
1952, lives in Maldare and belongs to the Congress party; M.M. Nanjappa, born in 1944, lives in Maldare. Nanjappa recently changed alliances and shifted to Janata Dal from the Congress. The third is M.M. Ponappa, born in 1932, lives in Chennayana Kote, a Janata Dal member; and finally, M.C. Venkatesh, born in 1965, lives in Siddapur, also a Janata Dal member. All of them belong to landed families, who own between 20 to 60 acres of coffee plantation.

In their respective areas of operation, their efforts include negotiating domestic disputes, especially those concerning land rights, providing summary justice to petty offenders like public slapping of the offender, running the local bank and the Panchayat. They are also considered as ‘efficient’ at getting things done at the local level such as getting the district administration to respond, and involving the plantation industry in local activities such as building of school, anganwadis and roads. Their dis-satisfaction with the system of reservation is symptomatic of more general trends, especially since it is seen as rewarding ‘uneducated’ people at the expense of common good.

2.4 PRI: Empowerment and Development

There is no dearth of written material on both women’s empowerment and rural development in India: studies, government documents, committee reports and a vast amount of newspaper coverage. Additionally, there are a large number of studies carried out by individual scholars, government bodies and non-governmental organisations that try to determine the causes, means and effects of women’s empowerment.
Theorists have adopted three main approaches to address the central question about the causes of subordination or oppression of women. The first approach explains women's powerlessness by focusing on patriarchy. It is posited that the patriarchal kinship system, which determines women's roles and relationships, is the root cause of their subordination (Lambert, 1996). The second approach construes that woman's oppression is a result of her reproductive or productive roles by focusing on a single domain, the household or the workplace respectively (Gothoskar, 1996). The third approach presumes that women experience subordination in multiple domains, in and through their interaction with multiple social, political and economic institutions (Basu, 1992).

There is also an equally large volume of studies that focus on a myriad of issues confronting rural development. Here, too, one can discern three main approaches, which theorists use to explain under-development. Theorists advocating the first approach claim that poor economic condition is the main cause for under-development. Others believe that excessive attention has been paid to economic factors and that rural development is only possible if interventions are made in the on-going social and political processes (Kabra, 1997).

The abundance of empirical literature on both empowerment and rural development is almost equalled by the paucity of analyses in these studies linking empowerment and
rural development. This study targets a set of issues from empowerment literature. It investigates whether in a rural population, where social change is generally considered slow, differences in gender relationships can be related to differences in empowerment by examining the social processes that determine the structural relations of power within the system. It attempts to do so by studying the interactions between a 'gender sensitive' development intervention — Panchayati Raj — and the social processes of a rural community.

2.5 Kodagu District: Rationale for Selection

It is imperative to provide a rationale for specifically choosing women Panchayat members and also for choosing the area of study, i.e., three contiguous Gram Panchayats in Kodagu district.

Though, there is enough evidence to suggest that women’s empowerment and rural development need not go hand in hand, there is an enduring theme in the state policy — a presumption that in a more developed region, the position of women will automatically be higher. This often leads to policy prescriptions which result in a lower concentration both fiscally and in terms of policy on the supposedly ‘better-off women’ in the region characterised as developed by traditional development indicators. It is

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For a detailed discussion about the underlying politics behind women’s inclusion in development, see Kabeer, 1994.

For more than a decade now, quantitative evidence such as the anomaly of high growth rate states like Punjab and Haryana having sex-ratio’s unfavourable to women; the differences in the ranks of HDI and GDI and GEM for the same region, etc. have been repeatedly stressing the fallacy of the assumption that development will result in women’s empowerment.
implied that as other indicators such as literacy rates, per capita income, etc. are higher, women in these areas will automatically be in a ‘higher’ position, vis-à-vis women belonging to the less developed regions of the country. However, recent studies (Basu, 1992; Rajan et al, 1996) have produced evidence, which suggest that women’s relative autonomy is often exaggerated. Within the state, there are no studies that reveal this so-called ‘anomaly’, which results in most studies concerned with issues related to women being undertaken in the traditionally backward districts of the state. Both traditional indicators such as sex ratio, literacy rate, per capita income and the more recent ones such as Human Development Index portray Kodagu district in the Malnad region of Karnataka as a developed district (Human Development Report, Karnataka, 1999).

As stated earlier, this district was chosen to dispel the myth that in a relatively developed district, as defined by traditional indicators, women enjoy a relatively better position. Kodagu is also a district that is well known for the vast diversity amongst the residing population. Due to the nature of its economy — plantation economy — there is a large migrant community both from within Karnataka (from neighbouring districts of Mysore, Dakshina Kannada and Hassan) and from the neighbouring states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Studying such a varied sample will enable us to understand the different contexts in which women are expected to and actually assert their ‘agency’. Additionally, it will provide the means to assess whether differences in gender relationships might be related to differences in perceived empowerment. Feminists have been advocating that it is essential to contextualise women’s experiences within specific historical and cultural
realities and account for the diversity of women’s oppression within analysis (Sen and Grown 1985).

It is increasingly believed that having a critical mass of women in positions of leadership will hasten the process of women’s empowerment (Batliwala et al., 1999). The specific area of study consisting of three contiguous Gram Panchayats in Kodagu district was chosen for this specific purpose — Maldare, Chennayana Kote and Siddapur. In all the three Panchayats, strangely enough, the seats of the adhyaksha have been reserved for women. In addition to this, the seats for the representatives from the areas to the Taluk and Zilla Panchayat have also been reserved for women. In effect, this implies that there are more women in positions of leadership.

Tensions emanating from the discontentment of the local elite came to the fore in 1995 following the declaration of reservation of adhyaksha seats in three adjacent Panchayats of Maldare, Chennayana Kote and Siddapur. In Maldare, though elections were held in 1995, the Panchayat could not be constituted. A member of the Maldare Gram Panchayat filed a case in the court against reservation of offices in three contiguous Panchayats. The case went up to the High Court and was dismissed. It is only then that the politically dominant members relented and allowed for the election of the adhyaksha and constitution of the Panchayat. In Chennayana Kote, though the Panchayat was constituted, there was a lot of discontent, which finally led to the removal of the adhyaksha, and eventually the ‘de-reservation’ of the seat for a woman.
2.6 Methodology

An unstructured interview schedule was used to direct the 'interviews'\textsuperscript{24} with women representatives, their families and the sample of male members. A sample of male representatives and male members in the household were chosen as empowerment is understood as a process of changing power relations in favour of those at the lower levels of hierarchy. This implies that the more 'powerful' will have to relinquish some of their power to the less powerful. Applied to the household, this meant transfer of power from men to women or husband to the wife, and in case of the Panchayat, from male members to female members. The day-to-day activities of women members were also observed through participatory methods. Apart from observing women members in their everyday lives, their interaction within the household, their interaction with other workers at their workplace, their interaction with the people from their wards, with male Panchayat members and in Panchayat meetings was also observed.

The methods chosen to conduct a research always reflect the theoretical beliefs and ideology of the researcher. This is true of this study too, which has adopted the framework of what is now increasingly being referred to as a 'feminist methodology'. This methodology emerges from the strong theoretical belief that there is no "unified tangible reality out there for all to see, predict and control" (Baviskar, 1997). Feminism has had an enormous stake as well as influence in recognising and voicing the multiple

\textsuperscript{24} The interviews were more in terms of sessions or periods during which the researcher and the members engaged in discussions of various issues concerning their everyday lives in which power plays an intrinsic part, though they may not be conscious of it.
realities that are present at any point of time. As a field of inquiry, feminism recognises that any reality is a constructed position, constructed by different people. It recognises that there are multiple realities that need to be understood. Thus, in its inquiry it seeks to understand the various, often differentially placed social realities. It recognises that in a world of multiple realities, the only way that the viewpoint of its subject ‘women’ can be understood is by privileging their subjective reality (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990).

Feminist methodology emerged by questioning the claims of positivism — that there is an ‘objective’ truth that research needs to understand and capture, and that this can be done only by a ‘detached’ observer. In other words, feminism questioned the whole notion of ‘value-free’ research. As Thelma McCormack (1989) explains, feminist methodology attempts to create “a new kind of knowledge, which does (did) not attempt to be objective, and (was) no longer attempts (ing) to predict and control knowledge without social causation and without looking for irregularities that might lead to ‘laws’ and would obliterate the line between subject and object and create both a richer knowledge and a more ethical one”. In other words, it recognised that it is not only impossible to understand but even difficult to ‘capture’ women’s realities from the positivist standpoint. In her critique of mainstream ‘objective’ research methods, Winnie Tomm (1989) says, “the so-called objectivity of male-defined rationality was found to be replete with unexamined pervasive prejudice against women’s interests”. In other words, a feminist methodology concerns itself with the replacement of ‘scientific objectivity’ and strict neutrality of the positivist paradigm with conscious subjectivity, and the
mutually inseparable dependency of "facts and feelings, figures and intuition, the obvious and hidden, doing and talking, behaviour and attitudes" (Gurumurthy, 1998).

In this study, feminist methods of inquiry have been consciously adopted with a view to understand women’s notions of empowerment. In view of the fact that in the past decade or so, the state has co-opted the terminology of empowerment, it is essential to check whether the notions of empowerment professed by the state are the same as those of people in general and of women, in particular.

The state attempts to realise the goal of empowerment through the institution of Panchayati Raj and the above approach or methodology will enable better understanding of the scope of PRIs in facilitating the state-sponsored political processes for mobilisation at the grassroots.

2.7 The Framework of Power

Any strategy for empowerment of the poor, and women's empowerment in particular, must be based on an understanding of, and ability to overcome the causes of the lack of power. Though there has been a lot of debate at the theoretical level about the term 'empowerment', especially on issues like 'what it comprises of' and 'how best it can be achieved', there have not been many primary research studies that contribute to an understanding of the term in everyday life (Carr et al, 1998). It is also important to

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remember that in spite of its widespread use in development circles today, it is a relatively recent development concept. Development and or empowerment practitioners seek to address the main problem of 'how to change the causes of oppression of the powerless groups, especially women?' It is in this connection that they either implicitly or explicitly try to address the causes and reasons for women's powerlessness.

Some like Gail Omvedt (1986) identify two broad approaches that development practitioners adopt to overcome women's powerlessness: the economic and the socio-political approaches. Others distinguish between three broad approaches: the integrated rural development approach, the economic approach and the consciousness raising cum organising approach. According to Srilatha Batliwala (1993), those who promote women's empowerment through the integrated rural development programmes ascribe women's dis-empowerment to their lack of education, low economic status and lack of decision-making power. According to her, those who promote women's empowerment through economic interventions see dis-empowerment as a consequence of their economic dependence, which results in their lack of decision-making power. And thirdly, those who promote women's empowerment through awareness building see women's empowerment stemming from a complex interplay of factors — historical, cultural, social, economic and political.
In the past two decades, the state has largely adhered to the integrated rural development approach to women’s empowerment and has thereof aimed at improving women’s access to educational, economic, and recently through the PRIs, the decision-making resources. However, to gain any measure of success especially with regard to women’s empowerment, it is necessary to understand the term empowerment. In other words, it is necessary to understand the ‘gender of power’.

From the above discussion it is clear that immaterial of the approach to empowerment, it is commonly believed that gender relations are characterised by power. At this point, it is necessary to digress a bit and understand the manner in which gender relations have been analysed. “Gender has been investigated in terms of the individual (how men and women behave, their beliefs and attitudes, gender attitudes), in terms of social structure (gendered divisions in the social activities or labour of men and women) and in terms of symbolic orders (gender symbolism, how we think about masculinity and femininity)” (Davis, 1991). In each of these analyses, feminists have recognised that gender is not simply a matter of difference between individuals or social organisations, and have tried to see how this difference constructs unequal power relations between men and women. Feminists have also come to the conclusion that gender cannot be treated as a single ‘caste’ and therefore, the original view of power being vested with men alone is faulty.

Today, it is a well-proven fact that there are power hierarchies amongst women too, both in their individual dealings and within the social structure/organisation. It is in this

26 There are experiments, which the state has undertaken such as the Mahila Samakhya where it has attempted to overcome women’s subordination through the process of awareness building and by organising women.
connection (having established that power and gender are inevitably and inextricably connected) that it is important to understand the manner in which relations, both individual and organisational, are constructed and maintained.

In the context of a study about development intervention involving women, it is important to recognise and understand the manner in which women's roles and identities are constructed, defined and dealt with in their day-to-day interactions with male and female members of the society. In other words, an attempt is made to study the ways in which relations of power are regularly being produced, reproduced and undermined/changed in a specific institutionalised context. Steven Lukes's concept of power (1974) and Giddens's theory of power (1976, 1979, 1984) seems to be the best choice for the present study of power and gender in marital, familial and institutional encounters between women and men.

Social scientists have always encountered difficulties in theorising power. Feminists have now joined the bandwagon of social scientists attempting to sort out the dilemmas involved in dealing with the concept of power. The main question that concerns feminist and empowerment theorists is: Should power be linked to human agency or is it a form of structural determinism? In other words, in unequal relationships, does an individual have any freedom to choose or is her activity completely determined by the existing social structure. Is power a straightforward exercise of control or is it ambiguous, complex and subtle? The exact nature by which the powerful control the powerless has been a matter of great debate in feminist studies. Steven Lukes's (1974) theory of power provides a
framework to examine relationships, especially ‘cordial/loving relationships’. On the other hand, Giddens notions of power in his theory of structuration can be used to come to terms with some of the problems that come out in the analysis of power and gender in the public domain.

Though Lukes formulated a political approach to power, it is essentially a theory of relationships and can be adapted to explain both conflicting and mutual interests that characterise relationships. In everyday experience, it is accepted that on the one hand, the same relationship can be beneficial in some areas and harmful in others while on the other, relationships do not remain constant over time. Komter (1979) first connected Lukes’s observations on power to relations between sexes in their study of wife-abuse.

2.8 Lukes’s Theory of Power

Lukes distinguishes three perspectives of power viz., one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional. The ‘one-dimensional’ view is historically rooted in Max Weber’s concept of power. Looking at the decision-making process identifies it and comparing stated preferences to actual outcomes. In other words, one-dimensional perspective focuses on the question of who ultimately makes decisions and controls participation in decision-making. The assumption is that power is exercised in a direct, observable conflict over issues recognised as relevant. While adopting this perspective, the parties involved (such as wives, husbands, older extended family relatives) were asked to state what their preferences are both in specific areas of the relationship and concerning the
relationship per se. It is important to note here that in a relationship, both shared and dissimilar preferences are relevant. Comparison of shared and dissimilar preferences shows the tensions that prevail in any relationship. Dissimilar preferences point to the relative contributions of parties in a relationship and shared preferences reveal the obstructions that prevail in the relationship.

The two-dimensional view of power focuses particularly on potential issues. In other words, it investigates the manner in which power can be used to prevent issues from being raised. According to Lukes, both decisions as well as non-decisions are important — non-decisions do not necessarily manifest themselves in overt behaviour and do not relate only to recognised issues. Here the exercise of power is not necessarily based on observable conflict. Thus, to find two-dimensional power, the researcher should identify areas of non-decision-making and look for grievances that the less powerful party harbours in a relationship because of the inability to place it as a common agenda (Meyer, 1991). At the personal level, these grievances may be directed at the partner in the relationship — husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law etc — and at the structural level, they can be directed at the institutional practices, norms and expectations regulating the relationships.

In his three-dimensional view of power, Lukes critiques the previous two views of power as behavioural and says that genuine consensus does not necessarily exist because no grievances can be detected. The third dimension that Lukes adds is latent conflict — a hidden discrepancy of interests between those exercising power and those subject to this
power. The conflict is latent in the sense that due to the lack of autonomy of the powerless group, desires and preferences remain unexpressed (Komter, 1991). Lukes refers to these needs and wishes as real interests. The three-dimensional approach thus, concentrates on interpretations used by the parties involved in the relationship — interpretations of the relationship per se and of issues concerning the relationship such as between husband and wife, sexuality, children, work (both outside and inside the home), social contacts and leisure (as identified by Komter). The crucial question from this perspective is the availability of alternatives and the awareness of existing alternatives. In empirical research this is possible by confronting the subjects with alternatives, construed on theoretical grounds (Meyer, 1991).

Lukes’s theory is essentially a relational theory in which the actual content of the relationship as defined by the participant is taken into account. This is essential to understand the manner in which an individual functions, because the way in which a relationship is defined shapes the interpretation of what follows, including decision-making. This again is very relevant for interpersonal relationships, where negotiations about the content of the relationship take place on an everyday basis.

The main criticism against Lukes’s theory of power is levelled at the concept of real interests\(^{27}\). The use of hypothetical situations to determine subjective preferences helps to divulge the power mechanisms, which determine these preferences. But in an empirical situation extracting real interests is very difficult and invariably tends to be evaluative.

\(^{27}\) Lukes himself makes a reference to this (Lukes, 1974).
Another crucial problem that arises vis-à-vis Lukes’ analysis pertains to gender in women’s interaction with institutions. Unravelling real interests employing a hypothetical preferential choice is of less reference in the context of the study, since most of the choices women make in their institutional interactions are not informed choices. Giddens’ theory of structuration, in particular his notions of power, seem to offer a solution to this problem. Institutions, especially the state institutions like the PRI, are portrayed as traditionally ‘masculine’ in nature where the gender relations are top-down and repressive. Women in their interactions with these institutions as members, and participants in particular, are accorded passivity.

Though it is true that there are structured differences and unequal distribution of existing resources that are available to men and women for exercising control, it is, however, equally true that relations are constantly being negotiated. Even in structured situations as in the PRIs, processes are at work by which the relations of domination and subordination are produced, reproduced and transformed. This is not to say that, society is made under circumstances that women choose, but to acknowledge that women are not cultural puppets where socialisation is all that matters. The Panchayat meetings, where female and male Gram Panchayat members encounter and interact with each other, are always portrayed as a situation where men exert overt and authoritarian forms of control. But then, a question comes to the mind: if this is a fact, then why do women continue to go along with it? Are they really the unenlightened, powerless victims of circumstances? At the same time, another worrisome issue comes to the forefront — the state’s rhetoric
about the PRIs being the sole vehicle that will bring about women’s empowerment and thereby overall societal development.

In order to come to terms with these various queries, it is important to understand the manner in which power works to construct unequal gender relations at the institutional level. For this, we require a conception of power which links agency with structured relations of domination and subordination. Giddens’s theory of structuration deals with these issues precisely, though he himself did not overtly refer to gender relations (Wolffensperger, 1991; Davis, 1991).

2.9 Giddens's Notion of Power

For Giddens, power is one of several important concepts that is essential to analyse social life. Social life is characterised by a ‘duality of structures’ where social structure and human action do not stand in opposition, but rather presuppose one another. In other words, agency and structure are not opposed to each other, but are connected to each other — action presupposes a notion of structure and vice versa. Giddens recognises that power is an integral part and present in all-social interactions, be they at the level of ‘global cultures and ideologies ... to the ‘most mundane levels of everyday interactions’ (Giddens, 1976). It involves the skills and resources which members bring to and mobilise in the production of interaction, thereby influencing its course (Davis, 1991). The basic premise here is that agents are capable and knowledgeable, and are never completely governed by social forces. Giddens further states that compliance by
individuals even in the most oppressive circumstances does not necessarily mean that they are driven to it. On the other hand, it entails a rational assessment about the existing conditions and individuals’ practical knowledge of ‘how to carry on’.

Giddens not only rejects the notion of a powerless individual driven without any knowledge or thought by mechanical pressure, but also rejects the theory that an individual has the capacity to transform society into his/her schema. Most importantly, power is located in a relationship between actors and to this extent, is dependent on access to resources and skills. Investigating power, therefore, involves understanding what individuals do, what they achieve and what they might have done, given the existing unequal and asymmetrical access to resources and skills. This does not mean that there are no structured forms of domination. In fact, these forms use mundane sanctioning processes such as disapproval, criticisms etc. to construct a normal and orderly life. Within a specific social system, rules and resources organise activities and, when mobilised in interaction, reproduce the system itself (Wolffensperger, 1991).

The institution of Panchayats as a structure of governance is portrayed as institutions with a transformative capacity, which is capacitated to empower women. The premise is that for women’s empowerment we require both an ‘enabling structure’ to sustain it as well as an identification, or at least an understanding, of the different factors and various linkages that will together result in women gaining control over their lives. Giddens’s theory of structuration provides us with a framework to understand individuals in institutional settings. It helps in answering the central problem of relationship between gender and
social system. But it is important to understand both the gendered character of the system and analyse how it systematically produces gender differences.

Thus, it is politically advantageous to use Giddens’ model as we can demonstrate that agency, structure and gender are inextricably linked. As is clear from the above discussions, power itself is a complicated concept and so is empowerment, which is essentially derived from power. Lukes’s theory of power evidently complements Giddens’s framework in that it explains the manner in which power functions in everyday instances. In other words, Lukes provides a starting point to understand the way power operates in relationships. These theoretical perspectives offer a pre-requisite framework for analysing the various relationships in which women are enmeshed and therefore, are relied upon to build a knowledge base on the process of women’s empowerment through the PRJs.