

## Conclusion

Women's modern –day participation in politics may be said to begin with the acquisition of voting rights, and although, today there is universal franchise and women have attained the right to vote, albeit after a long and arduous struggle, the levels and numbers of their political representation remains very low. In fact, formal political equality was only the first step in achieving equal representation. The real struggle was to fight for descriptive representation in the political bodies of various countries. Suffice to say, that women have a long history of being excluded from consideration of what legitimately was incorporated in the study of politics, meaning that the ideas, institutions and processes constituting official politics largely ignored gender inequality in the distribution of political power. The dominant thinking was that, only the men would or could inhabit the 'public' sphere, where politics was performed. The advocacy of representative democracy over direct, participatory democracy by early liberal thinkers was also based on the assumption that the process of representation would be undertaken by the men. John Stuart Mill ( *The Subjection of Women*, 1869), was one of the few who forcefully argued that every citizen, including women, not only ought to have a voice in the exercise of government, but at least occasionally ought to take part in the government by the personal discharge of some public function, local or general.

In pursuit of the liberal, democratic ideal, the feminist theorists and activists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focussed primarily on the right to the formal political arena, both as voters and representatives. These claims were justified on the grounds of justice and fair play as well as the utility argument. They argued that the presence of women in politics, apart from filling the democratic deficit as was prevalent in the under representation of women, would also at the same time, enhance the practice of politics, raise the moral standards of the political forum and ultimately enrich the democratic process. The early women's rights activists, while using these arguments, were utilising a strategic essentialism, although they were sometimes labelled as conservative.

The more radical feminist challenge of the 1960s and 1970s was instrumental in reopening the artificial public-private divide and redefining the political. The feminist theorists challenged the divide which put women in the private sphere, on account of

her gender and inhibited her from accessing the public sphere with the help of a whole array of institutional and cultural barriers. It critiqued the way in which liberal democratic theory viewed the public and private realms as separate instead of being interconnected. The 1960s and 1970s saw the women's movement attempting to bridge the public private debate through the slogan of the personal is political, alongside calls for sisterhood. In the period after the Second World War, the industrialised world was disrupted by a whole new set of political demands and movements, which grew out of the conditions of post war world and a deep dissatisfaction with elite dominated politics. The issue of the invisibility of women in politics was raised to challenge and falsify the two assumptions commonly made; a) women were different from men by virtue of their gender and therefore their interests were not relevant to politics or on the other hand b) their interests and activities were no different from men, and therefore did not warrant any attention. Like other movements of its time, the women's movement was grounded in a rejection of formal institutional politics; its targets were the individual consciousness and society. Governments were seen at best, irrelevant and at worst, the enemy of women's rights. The movement targeted the government for not bringing about policy changes but did not aim for more women in formal politics as such. The broadening and widening of what constituted the 'political' also served to delegitimize feminist engagement with institutional politics. Government and its associated institutions were regarded as essentially male, not open to women and where logically only men's interests would prevail. In a way women's participation was seen either as tokenism or co-option. The 1970s saw the emergence of ,what many called second-wave suffragism or third wave feminism, which argued that dissolving the meaning of 'politics' to the point where formal politics is not recognised as a site of institutional power, requiring women's presence and critique, was not in the interests of women. The new feminist theorists and activists also reopened the notion of women as a 'universal category, in opposition to men, and pointed out that homogenizing women led to masking the differences between women and ignoring the presence of multiple identities and fluid and contingent solidarities. It was acknowledged by feminist thinkers and activists that, because of the diversity within women, an objective set of interests, common to all women, is neither real nor desirable. But, the point was made that, one overriding, objective, and real interest was the presence of women in politics. The third wave feminism, influenced by newer understandings of gender and democracy, articulated

claims for political inclusion of women as well as other disadvantaged, marginalised groups. The critical relooking at democracy in the twentieth century, which was fuelled by the disillusion at its failure to deliver, at its reconciliation of both equality and exclusion led to the women's movement, along with the peace, civil rights, anti-racist, green, gay and lesbian movements to investigate theories of political interests and representation.

Feminist theorists, while believing in the intrinsic value of democracy, are also very critical to all the ways in which it has been used to consolidate privilege and exclude difference. As a result, feminists have tended to favour versions of democracy which have a strong participatory component, and which are not confined to the political sphere, and take into account the interconnectedness of the public and private. For feminists, the problem of democracy and that of women's unequal citizenship lies not in its realisation but in its very nature. From this perspective, the history of democratic citizenship as a device for excluding those who do not fill the criteria of membership is integral to the nature of democracy. Democracy is a means of deciding who is and who is not a citizen and of allocating the rights and duties of citizenship. The criteria of citizenship, and the content of rights and duties, were determined, in keeping with the shape of a male life: husband, father, protector and a male of the property owning classes at that. The public sphere, which was the domain of politics, was male dominated and the private sphere was the domain of female concerns and modes. Within this critique, there are two strands of critical feminist accounts of democracy. According to one, democracy assumed and required a high degree of uniformity and homogeneity among its citizens, and was therefore blind to distinctions of gender. Thus, women could be citizens of a gender neutral polity, as long as their lives conformed to a male pattern, but once they raised issues of their difference, as in issues of care and childbirth, they were excluded from equal membership. The other strand identified democracy with political goals, embedded in self interest, practices built on competition and conduct rooted in objectivity. Since, all these characteristics were those ascribed to males, democracy, was both gender neutral and also male – centred. The attempts to address these were through three strategies. The first was a politics rooted in connection, inclusion and subjectivity; values attached to the female and the family or the private domain. The second strategy was the political participation of women as a cohesive group with particular interests and concerns as a

counter or corrective to the false neutrality of masculine politics. The third route was that, gender neutrality, if correctly interpreted, could alter the ways in which democratic citizenship is centred on norms of male biology. The first approach is a useful counter to the theories of international relations, where the starting point is innate, inherent human aggression and the inevitability of conflict. The second approach suggests the explicit inclusion of representatives from groups marginalised within the population, in order to include the interests of such groups. The difference\equality debate refers to a set of concerns about how to balance the good of men and women that plagued feminist discussions of equality and inclusion. The basic disagreement is over the privileging of difference or equality; the inclusion of women and women's interests on an equal footing with men, or the inclusion of women and their interests as different and demanding of specific attention. Feminist critics disagree over equality or difference based approaches, with some favouring gender neutrality as a route to equality, while others prefer an explicitly sexually differentiated democracy. As Anne Phillips suggests the divergence is mainly about how much difference has to be recognised, in order to promote a democracy where citizens can engage on an equal footing on matters of shared importance.(Anne Phillips, 1999)

### **Women in Municipal Politics**

The objective of this present study was to explore the complexities of women's political participation and their subsequent empowerment, specifically in the case of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act mandated the presence of 33% women in urban local bodies, and the aim of the present study was to reflect on the theoretical arguments supporting the quota for women, in light of the practice or performance of such quotas, and also to observe the levels of empowerment, both among the elected representatives and in the larger community of women outside as a result of the presence of women representatives.

Feminist political thinking is animated by understandings of how difference and identity articulate with spaces of power and access to resources. These ideas are the basis of studies of gendered citizenship and the nature of women's relationship with the state. They have also influenced feminist analyses of development and how it relates to issues of physical and social reproduction, power dynamics within the

household, as well as the role of the state and civil society organisations in the construction of gendered and other identities. In other words, political processes operate across multiple terrains, which connect and join the social, economic and political spheres. Hence, it becomes critical to have a very thorough understanding of the local. While theorising on local governments, there are two analytical traps that one might confront. The first is to see local politics as a distinct field, worthy of independent analysis, on the facts that local government has particular responsibilities and competencies. The problem with this approach is that it obscures the link between local level political processes and how these processes interact and articulate with political spaces and government functions at other levels. The other mistake is to see local politics as simply mirroring the dynamics and preoccupations and themes of national level politics. Therefore, it becomes necessary to have a mix of both approaches. It is important to identify the linkages between the local and other political levels and also to understand the full range of actors, structures, practices and processes operating both in and on the local level.

The idea that there are specific affinities between women and the local level of politics is actually an old one and one that is quite pervasive. In many countries women were granted the right to vote and be elected at the local level first. In recent times, when a number of countries opted for affirmative action policies in order to jump start women's political representation, many did so through legislation that dealt only or firstly with the local level of politics. The reasons for confining women to local politics were both practical and pragmatic. The stakes at the local level are more modest than at the state or central levels and the reality of the male opposition to quotas for women, made the local level the most feasible for these new experiments. Also it was felt that the eligibility criteria for the local level is less stringent and local government is the closest to women's sphere of life and work, and easier to combine with household duties. It could be the first level that women break into, and as such, it may serve as a springboard to national politics, by developing capacities and gaining experience. The discourse on women's specific attraction to local politics includes a set of notions about women's social roles and about the nature of local politics that can be summed up by the metaphor of a household or family, often instrumentalised by women representatives. By making a comparison between a constituency and a large household and then juxtaposing the two, women representatives have used it to

solve the role conflict they find themselves in. The conflict in their two roles as women and as elected representatives is sought to be resolved by making themselves acceptable in a domain, where their presence is an exception, by likening it to the space that is defined by women's presence. In the process, they translate into political terms, the duties and functions traditionally ascribed to women in their roles as home makers. Three features of urban local politics make it particularly suitable for women politicians, the relatively limited size of the constituencies, the central place of civic amenities and their maintenance in the functions of local self governance and the non professional status of municipal representatives.(Ghosh and Lama-Rewal,2005) Invocation of the limited or small size of a municipal constituency, as opposed to state or national level constituencies, as a strong justification for women's reservation at the local level, also implies a focus on their difference, as persons capable of more empathy, care and concern than men, with an emphasis on the proximity between voters and their representatives characteristic to the local politics. But this argument overlooks the fact, that the local is a very relative notion. The population of a municipal ward can be anywhere between 20,000 to 1,55,000.(Civic Guide, MCD, 2007). Moreover, such an argument promotes a negative conception, that of women as inexperienced and new and therefore they need to enter politics at a level where the requirements, both official and non official and the demands on them are less. The argument centering on the functions of urban local bodies, and their closeness to the concerns of a home maker like water, sanitation and drainage, plays on the image of women as efficient housewives, who has skills that are relevant to local politics. The problem with this argument is that it deliberately ignores the high degree of technicality of the maintenance of civic amenities, as well as the fairly complicated character of some aspects of the functioning of Municipal Corporations. This argument, in some ways serves to reinforce the notion that women are not competent in dealing with abstract problems of higher levels of politics. One of the reasons that women are unable to work the local government system effectively is because it is often responsive to or open to informal institutions and relations of power, which undermine or bypass formal rules and procedures. Their history of exclusion from local government means that they do not have the access to many of the informal networks that sustain and reproduce the institutions and social practices that make up local governance, and these institutions and practices are in any case hostile to or exclusionary of women. The argument focussing on the non official status of

councillor's underlines the idea that local politics is a part time, voluntary activity, requiring less time and effort, and that it is basically social work at the city level. The characteristic features of local politics, in this argument are the same that characterise social work, such as the small scale of actions taken, the importance of social networks, and the voluntary nature of the job. Describing local politics as social work obviously makes it more accessible and compatible to women, as social work is a type of activism that is more open to women, both at a practical and at a symbolic level. Social work is typically seen as a feminine version of collective action, which requires the female virtues of care and devotion whereas politics denotes the male qualities of competition and ambition. But all the above arguments consistently ignore the reality of municipal politics and urban development, and perpetuate the myth that local politics is an extension of household duties.(Ghosh and Lama-Rewal, 2005). Whereas the fact is that like at any other level of politics, municipal politics too, are extremely complex and time consuming and require specific skills. The portrayal of municipal politics as a kind of glorified social work, and the stereotyping of women councillors as gifted housewives, though dangerous to women in the long run, can be of some practical use to women councillors who use it to counter criticisms focussing on their inexperience. While local governments might be the sphere of governance closest to women's lives and concerns, it is also the tier of government most proximate to people's prejudices and biases and there is always the threat of a backlash against women who get involved in local politics, but is also important to understand that if women's voices are to be sustained and reinforced across all levels of government, then their political participation at the local level requires support and integration into broader political processes.

Women's interests are closely linked to their gendered responsibilities in households and communities, which often relate to the provision of local infrastructure and services that may become policy priorities for women. It is for these reasons that effective administrative decentralisation and the efficient and affordable delivery of services, is critical if local government is to be accountable to women, although more efficient service delivery at the local level does not necessarily guarantee more service delivery sensitive to gender interests and women's socio-economic rights. Contemporary studies have shown the undeniable association between decentralisation and neo-liberalism, meaning that policies that increase local

autonomy and responsibility are accompanied by cutbacks in allocations to local governments, requiring them to raise their own revenues. While fiscal decentralisation and financial autonomy is often used as a positive indicator of democratic decentralisation, it can also leave local governments vulnerable in the face of multiplying responsibilities and diminishing resources. This problem is often referred to as unfunded mandates. Local governments, mostly recover their costs through service fees and user charges. These can be financially disastrous for disadvantaged, low income households, and even among these households, it is the women who bear the burden of cost recovery. Therefore, it is not only necessary for women to be politically present in local government; they also need to be legally and technically skilled to engage officials and bureaucrats on matters of planning and delivery. Neo-liberal policies render people increasingly responsible for bearing or sharing the costs of public goods and services. The positive outcome of this is that citizens become more vigilant in holding government to account in terms of their performance. It is also very important that women also play a watchdog role in relation to revenue and expenditure. Gender- responsive budgets are mechanisms by which governments, in dialogue with other sectors, can integrate gender analysis into public expenditure policies and budgets. This does not mean or imply separate budgets for women, but rather the political will to disaggregate expenditure according to its differential impacts on women and men. For decentralisation and women's rights to be positively correlated, both need to be part of a wider democratic process, in which women are organised in civil society, as well as being represented politically at all levels of governance. The attainment and consolidation of women's rights at the national levels will strengthen and assist the movements at the local level, and similarly, if women's political gains through participation in local governance permeate upwards, the concept of intergovernmental relations might usefully replace that of decentralisation in order to signal political, administrative and fiscal accountability mechanisms operating in different directions. Therefore, the three pre-requisites for decentralisation , to be positively associated with women's rights are that women need to be organised and represented politically, otherwise, decentralisation remains only an administrative exercise, and one that typically ignores their interests and concerns. Second, international support to decentralisation policies has to be supervised and monitored to ensure that it does not ignore or undermine local democracy and women's rights, through overemphasis on administrative and fiscal



decentralisation. Third, decentralisation is best pursued in the context of a strong state with which women's organisations engage across all spheres and levels of government. Advancement of women's rights cannot be left to the local level alone, especially if local government is resource constrained. At the same time, holding rights bearers to account at the regional or national levels is problematic, without locally embedded democratic practices that are integrated into the national accountability mechanisms. With these dimensions in place, rights based approaches can limit some of the shortcomings of decentralisation, while a focus on decentralisation can help advance the rights agenda, to a greater engagement with socio-economic rights.

### **The Issue of Descriptive Representation**

The resurgence of interest in representative democracy brought to the fore front the two dimensions of representation: what is being represented and who is the representative? The question of who the representative is, is particularly relevant to politics. The tradition of representation in liberal democracies is based on the assumption that a representative is able to act on behalf of all the people and interests of the constituency. If, the content of politics is shaped by the knowledge of participants, and if some areas of knowledge are specific to some groups of people, then it is important that representatives of those groups are present in the political arenas. And, in these cases, a more focussed or directed strategy for representation might be required than resting on the assumption, that because of the provision of the right to equal access, significant sections of the society will automatically, find their way there. This is where the Politics of Presence, as opposed to the notion of Politics of Ideas comes in. Descriptive representation refers to the socio-economic character of the population and how they are reflected in representative bodies, especially in the political arena. The fight to attain descriptive representation was a long and hard battle, because, representation both as legislators and voters, was only gradually extended to members of minority religions, ethnic and racial groups, women and aboriginals. By attempting to include such groups as citizens, fully exercising their rights of choosing representatives, democratic regimes attempted to become more legitimate. The 1960s and 1970s raised the issues of the systematic exclusion of women's views from legislative expression and the question that was asked was who better to represent these views than women themselves? And would policies and

legislative behaviour change with more women representatives? Two overlapping ideas dominate the discussion on the effects of increasing women's representation, which are the politics of presence and the notion of critical mass. Presence provides the basis for a theory of gender difference and political representation while the notion of critical mass has been used as a descriptive indicator of the proportion of women required to make a substantial difference to politics. The presence theories include consideration of how and why an equalisation of the numbers of men and women representatives makes it likely that other changes will take place. However, there continue to be difficulties in getting the argument for more women representatives accepted.

The first problem is that women themselves have never been completely politically cohesive, even when they were fighting for the vote. They are divided by an array of other socio-economic and political markers like class, caste, age. The second issue is that access to the political arenas in a liberal democracy is controlled by political parties through their recruitment practices. Political parties adopt three basic strategies for encouraging women candidates, ranging from the weak to the strong. They are rhetoric, affirmative action, or training and monitoring programmes, and lastly, positive discrimination, usually in the form of quotas. Another factor that influences the descriptive representation of women or their legislative recruitment is the supply side of the supply and demand equation. In addition to the small number of women, standing as candidates, another reason for the lack of women in political spaces was the decision by most women to remain outside the political domain, either by choice or by necessity. A distrust of formal governments and party structures was a legacy of the first-wave women's movement. It was the arrival of the second-wave women's movement that led to a sudden spurt in the numbers of women willing to engage in formal politics. Several factors combined in the 1970s to enhance the willingness and enthusiasm of women to enter politics, including increased participation in higher education, economic changes resulting in increased workforce participation, and political mobilisation of women through the women's movement and other new social movements.

Therefore, the justifications for the descriptive representation of women are based on three claims. The first contention is that the women representative's experience of being a woman will differentiate her from men and thus, they will be able to make

different choices from men, second, that they will be able to identify and then act on behalf of women and or women's interests, third, that women possess a different way of doing things, reflective of sex and gender, that will influence their political styles. With regard to the first and second claims, if women make different choices from men, these are likely to be those issues that are of particular importance to women, but this is not always the case. As we have seen, female councillors sometimes differ from male councillors over more general issues. The third claim, that of a different style, is also difficult to unpick and the difficulty is one which is common to the social sciences; how can we attribute causality, when the variables continually shift and there are only approximate control situations.

### **The Issue of Substantive Representation**

The concern of substantive representation, is not just to look at the mere number of women in legislative, or political bodies, (in this study, the focus is on urban local bodies), but to ask whether more numbers has led to a difference or change in content and style. Although women, have an equal claim to political power, the question is whether women are passive representatives, representing women, just by being in office, or acting substantively, working for women and their interests. Determining whether women make a difference to politics is not simple or easy. The following broad heads can be a starting point to assessing their impact if any, on politics,

- a) Do women in politics make different choices from men?
- b) Do women in politics act on behalf of women?
- c) Do women in politics possess a different style?

These three heads broadly cover the assumption that women, once in positions of political power, will think and act differently from men and also usher in a new and different style of doing politics. To make the task of evaluating the difference that women bring to politics a little more specific, this study has focussed on certain specific questions.

- 1) Are women councillors, as opposed to male councillors, more likely to see women as a group, as an important constituent?

- 2) Do men and women differ in their attitudes and policy priorities? Do women prioritise political issues differently than men do?
- 3) Do women councillors have a different legislative style than their male counterparts and are they constrained by the prevailing legislative style?
- 4) Do women councillors have an effect outside of local bodies, on the larger community of women outside?

Addressing each of these questions has its own specific problems, and the difficulty lies in extricating women's impact from the surrounding context, including political party affiliations or the amount of power they wield within the party.

In response to the question, whether they think they represent women and their concerns, most councillors were emphatic that they felt it was not right for them to only be seen as representing women, because they were in fact responsible for representing the interests and needs of the entire ward, and not just the women in it. A certain number did believe that they had a special responsibility towards them, and they were aware of the responsibility of being women councillors, in a city which is markedly unfair and unsafe for women. However, the larger numbers of them were of the view that they would not like to be identified by their gender alone, when it came to their representative functions. This, they felt would be a betrayal or letting down of their other voters. Because women are not a unified, homogenous vote bank, most councillors were wary of being seen as a 'woman councillor' who would prioritise women over men. On the other hand, male councillors, tend to view themselves as capable of representing women's interests, but again do not perceive women as a particularly significant constituency.

When we look towards other countries, especially in the developed western nations, we do have empirical evidence, that women representative are aware that there are specific issues affecting women, and that it also affects the kind of bills they prioritise. This may be due to a greater amount of gender consciousness and awareness in the society at large and among women in particular, but that sort of belief and assertion of one's gender, seems to be lacking in the women councillors of Delhi. Only, a small miniscule minority were able to acknowledge, that being women councillors, they had a specific duty and responsibility towards their women voters.

On the question on whether they would differ in their attitudes and policy priorities, again most women councillors were keen to conform to the general trend and not be seen as doing something different that would alienate the rest of the voters. The general perception among both men and women councillors was that, as councillors they had to look at the interests of all their voters, and not privilege one section. All the councillors were keen to portray themselves as sympathetic and supportive of women, but not at the cost of the other, larger body of voters. The conclusion that can be drawn from this, is that since women councillors have to win elections, and women as a group are not a vote bank they can bank on, because, neither are they a monolithic bloc and nor are they a significant numerical majority, they feel they have to follow the party line or policy on any issue. As elections in India are very political party centred, with negligible space for independent candidates, most representatives, both male and female are bound to follow party dictates and discipline. It is insightful here to look at research evidence from other countries, which suggests that women prioritise different political issues than men do, but that is at the national level and not at the local level. For example, looking at US state representatives, researchers found that compared to men, women are more likely to prioritise bills related to children, family and women and healthcare and social services.(Wendy Stokes, 2005). In Sweden, women members of Parliament are more likely than men, to give a higher priority to issues like family policy, elder care and health care versus other issues like jobs and taxes.(Wendy Stokes, 2005). But, we also have to agree that the two instances cited above are not very comparable to the Indian situation. In India, politics is very firmly embedded in the political parties and unlike the USA members do not have conscience voting. Women councillors in India, while aware of the strategic utility of asserting some difference, almost unanimously refute the hypothesis that they would want to represent women more particularly. This would suggest that, as women, they prefer to make a difference to the form of municipal politics, rather than to its content. However, it is important to keep in mind that woman councillors are not wholly passive members, even though they are less in numbers. As our empirical data shows, women councillors raised questions and moved resolutions on a wide variety of issues. Even if they did not raise specific gender centric issues, they nonetheless covered a wide ambit of legal, technical and other such issues, busting the myth that women are only concerned with soft, non technical issues. Even if women councillors want to disregard party lines and act as ‘women,’ there are additional constraints that

prevent them from doing so. All councillors, including the men, are subject to the same institutional and party constraints. Another important factor is whether the woman councillor belongs to the political party which controls the local body. Women councillors who belong to the majority party, have more opportunities for leadership positions on committees but also are more vulnerable to threats of removal, upon defection from the party agenda. Thus, the inhibiting influences of the institutional factors are enormous. Needless to say, women councillors act within institutions, and these institutions can have a substantial impact on their ability to act for women. Even if women councillors believe that they have a particular mandate to represent women, which is not the reality on the ground, the extent of their willingness to act, substantively, in the interests of women, is influenced by a range of variables, including numbers, party systems and even media pressure.

On the question of a bringing a different style to doing politics, most of the women councillors interviewed, said that they were in favour of a political process, which was cooperative, rather than confrontational, but at the same time reiterated that it was difficult to bring about any real changes in the political culture of local bodies. Because of the long control by men of local bodies, a male legislative style is prevalent, which rewards male qualities such as competitiveness rather than female qualities of collaboration. Women councillors because of their being political newcomers, have less institutional and social power, than their male colleagues. This also means that they have less power in committee meetings and other such face to face interactions, where policies are discussed and debated. The empirical data collected shows clearly, that in all committees, regardless of whether the chair is male or female, women committee members engage later, speak significantly fewer words, take fewer turns and make fewer interjections and interruptions. Although it has to be noted that they are not completely silenced or dominated by the men. Therefore, on the issue of women bringing a different legislative style, through different policy priorities and innovative, gender centred legislation; there are no conclusive evidences of any change, which can be attributed to women. Although, many women councillors in their interviews, talked about a more consensus and compromise oriented style of politics, it does not as a whole, change the style of doing politics at the ground. Realistically, politics continues to involve zero sum, win lose decisions, and women feel the pressure to adapt to that environment, in order to protect themselves from

being politically irrelevant. In the words of Joni Lovenduski,(2005)the greatest dilemma for the second wave of feminism has been to see whether women will be able to change institutions, before institutions change women. In the end, political styles reflect the specific politics and culture of each place. Culture and therefore styles also change generationally and with the changes in party and party beliefs and commitments. The findings of this study, does not give any hard evidence of women councillors behaving differently from their male counterparts. This question is also very problematic, in terms of methodology. Most of the specific talents or qualities deemed to characterise women in the 'women as a resource' argument, are essentially vague, value loaded and immeasurable. There are no satisfactory methods to compare the sincerity, devotion and honesty of men and women, other things being equal.

Regarding the question of the composition of municipal committees, gender wise, one can deduce to a certain extent, that the traditional sexual division of labour in the domestic unit is replicated to a certain extent in the local bodies. Thus, the most powerful committee of the Corporation, the Standing Committee, which controls the finances of the House are largely male dominated, and the numbers of women present is not significant, In the last Standing Committee, there was one woman member and sixteen male members. On the other hand the Health and Education Committees are predominantly female, a trend that is global in its nature. A more recent development is that, in several municipal corporations, a Woman and Child Welfare committee has been created, and quite expectedly it is composed largely, if not exclusively of women members. A perusal of the minutes of the committee meetings show that a wide range of issues are addressed and a number of practical recommendations are accepted, which suggests a deeper and more substantial awareness of women's issues. The problem lies in the fact that these committees fulfil a largely symbolic function, by sending out the political message that the interests of women and children are being looked after by the Corporation. Their power and impact are severely crippled by the fact that they have no budget of their own, and they address their recommendations to the Health Committee. The positives are that the existence of this committee will at least highlight the needs of the traditionally disadvantaged groups like those of women and children and may increase the sensitivity and awareness of the Corporation towards these issues.

Another important finding of the study was the almost total absence of women's rights organisations in municipal governance. The involvement of women's organisations in the implementation of women's reservations is crucial if it is to become an instrument for social change. Studies have demonstrated how even with an increase in numbers of women, women's concerns are not significantly addressed. Feminist advocates thus speak of the need to think beyond bodies in legislatures. Even in countries and regions, where women are blatantly underrepresented in political office, women can achieve substantive representation through their participation in women's movements or women's groups. Women's movements pursue women's gender interest and make claims on political and cultural systems for the inclusion of women and their interests. They are therefore a space outside of the formal, institutional politics, where women can speak for women. Even when the institutional political arenas push out or marginalize women's interests the women's movement and groups can push it back on the agenda, by building up public pressure and forcing the government to act. Therefore, it is clear that women's movements and groups may have an impact, even when the governmental structures work against them, and also women's movements need not always be oppositional.

Women in positions of political power, may provide a sympathetic ear, and collaborate with women's groups in setting the agenda. Political parties should also establish structures that act as a bridge between women's movements and the government. Although feminists have traditionally been wary of the government, viewing them as oppressive and patriarchal, many now have come to realize the benefits of engaging with and working directly with governments to advocate women's rights. Today, most governments have some sort of women's policy, machinery or government body devoted to the upliftment of women in various ways. This can take the form of a national women's agency, a women's commission or a women's ministry. Having a designated space for women within the governmental space, promotes women's interests in a number of critical ways. First, women's policy machinery can coordinate and consolidate the development and implementation of a policy. In the absence of a single site for the creation of a gender sensitive national policy, a structured institutional response to issues of gender inequality is likely to be overlapping and frictional and spread over many departments. Further, an institutional, women's policy machinery produces a single



direct route to governmental cooperation with women's movement and groups, who traditionally act from outside the state structures. Women's movements, through their critiques and comments, on existing and anticipated proposals, can constructively assist with policy formation and help in representing the different bases for inequality across women, such as race, ethnicity or religion.

In the light of this understanding, there are two issues in the case of the women councillors of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Firstly, women councillors are not feminists. This is not to say that they are not aware of women's problems, only that they do not consider them to be a proper ground for political action. Also, even though a substantial number of them are well educated, they do not seem to be trained in the feminist perspective, or in other words, do not have the theoretical background and training that a women's movement provides. The women councillors, although very aware and in most cases very sympathetic to the particular problems faced by women in their wards, are unable to see it as a systemic problem. They were very clear that they could help women only individually, in a private capacity. Therefore, for the women councillors of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the personal is not political. The other issue, which is a serious inadequacy, is the total absence of contact with the women's groups and organisations. The two types of organisations, of which they have sometimes been members of, are the women's wings of their respective political parties and charitable organisations. Both these types of organisations have the same characteristic of not challenging the dominant notion of gender prevailing in society, and instead offering a gender segregated space of activism to their members, within the system. There is no critique or questioning of the system as such. Their aim is to help raise women's issues, but within the dominant sexual division of labour, through activities like literacy classes, vocational training etc. Their idea is not to challenge the prevailing system, but to find a space within it. As far as the women's wings of political parties are concerned, their objective is to mobilise women in support of the party, rather than to mobilise the party to raise and support women's issues. The only exception to this, is the All India Democratic Women's Association of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M), which has been at the forefront of the women's movement in India, since the beginning, by the magnitude of its membership, and more importantly by its ability to consistently raise issues affecting women's rights, even when it is not very much to the parent party's

liking or approval. But this engagement or involvement is at the level of national politics. Most women's groups or organisations do not have any contact with urban governance, or with the women councillors working in them. First, many of them do not see the need to interact with municipal councillors, in a structured, long term manner, because they feel that policy decisions are not taken at the level of the councillors. The real policy is designed and conceived of in party head quarters and women councillors are seen as politically not being a part of that process. Second, and more important, there is a general distrust of politicians and most women's activists avoid, or keep to a minimum, any contact with politicians, either at the state or local levels. There is in general, a reluctance to engage directly with the politicians. However, this is not the case either in rural or national level politics.

At the national level, the women's movement is one of the main movers of the Women's Reservation Bill, and it has been generally accepted by the women's groups that women need to represent women, in order to further their interests. There is also a high level of involvement of women's organisations at the rural level, in Panchayati Raj institutions, mainly because, rural India is seen more as a priority than urban India. Many women's organisations consider that their support is critical in villages, where women are less educated and more constrained by patriarchal mores, compared to the cities. Also, municipal politics is quite close to the state and national levels, when it comes to the role of the parties, and women's groups feel they will not be able to make much of a difference there. As a result, the women's movement in India is generally disassociated with urban local politics, to the detriment of the latter. A strong and mutually reciprocal link between the two would enrich both and efforts should be made from both sides to make this happen. The women's movement, as a site of debate and interaction, can help create a feminist, group perspective and a set of priorities that is a product of multiple voices. While trying to understand women's impact on politics, it may therefore be important to consider both the efforts of women in political office and the contribution of women in organisations and movements.

### **Critical Mass and Women's Impact**

The notion of 'critical mass' suggests that when women reach a certain percentage in a legislative body, they will be better able to pursue their policy priorities and

legislative styles. The argument is that there is a point at which the proportion of women in an elected body will start to have a decisive effect, because there will be enough of them to feel confident about acting differently from the norm. The term, which has its origin in Rosabeth Moss Kanter's work on women in an American Corporation, has had a decisive influence on theories of women's representations. Although, she did not use the term, critical mass, Kanter, made a distinction between four different types of groups; a) uniform groups which have only one type of persons, an example of which would be 100 % men and 0% women, b) skewed groups have mostly one type of persons, for instance 85% men and 15% women, c) tilted groups are moving towards balance, for instance, 65% men and 35% women and d) balanced groups have nearly equal numbers, for example 50% men and 50% women. Women in a skewed group are tokens and are found to suffer from stereotyping, and feeling a compulsion to conform to dominant male norms. Since they are under pressure to blend into the male culture, they may find it difficult to form alliances with other token women, to further their interests. Kanter suggests that changes in women's behaviour and to the culture of a group were only possible if a group moved from skewed status to tilted or balanced status. Juxtaposing her analysis to women in politics, it becomes quite clear that if the only women in politics are the token women, they may not be able to make a difference to policies or legislative styles. But if women reach a critical mass and move out of token status, the increased influence of women, and a feminization of the political agenda will be seen. There have been a lot of debates as to how much exactly contribute to a critical mass. Common use of the term usually suggests 30% of women as the critical cut off. The United Nations uses this cut off when it argued that women need to make up 30% of national elites to exert meaningful influence on politics. Research has often used 15% to signify movement out of Kanter's skewed group category. However, in the research on critical mass, like the research on women's impact on politics in general, the problem remains of extricating the quantum of women's impact from other closely related factors. In understanding, whether high numbers of women, a critical mass, makes a difference to women's impact, it is also important to note that power is not evenly distributed in legislatures and other decision making bodies. Being a part of the party in power is important for influencing legislation and policies. The party in power has a much greater opportunity of getting its agenda passed, compared to parties in opposition. Members, who chair powerful committees or those who occupy

important posts, also have greater influence on public policy than the regular cadre of a party. Seniority and experience also play a significant role, making it almost mandatory to appoint the senior most as head of committees. Thus, even if women reach 15% or 30%, if they are newcomers and lacking in experience, they will still be disadvantaged in terms of positional power. This suggests that though greater numbers may help women in developing a voice, it could take more time for women to truly affect policy outcomes. It is also important to note theory and evidence that more numbers of women can have a negative on outcomes for women. Sociologist, Peter Blau, (Peter M. Blau, 1977) focussed on the social networks possible between minority and majority group members. When minority members are only a small part of the group, they are bound to have, more contacts and connections with the majority group members and these social connections between the minority group and the majority group may increase the support from the dominant group towards the minority group. On the other hand, when numbers of minority members increase, they can have more connections with each other and consequently, fewer with majority members. Fewer connections could decrease support from the dominant group and potentially increase discrimination towards the minority group. Furthermore, as the numbers of women increase, they become a more threatening minority and a backlash may result. Janice Yoder's theory of intrusiveness suggests that when women are a small minority, they can use their token status to draw attention to their issues. But with an increase in numbers, they threaten the long established power and privileges of men leading to hostility and discrimination. (Janice Yoder, 1991) Women feel more comfortable using a female legislative style, when there are more of them in power, but men appear to be threatened by female power and subsequently reduce their tendency to compromise and collaborate. Given the fact that it has been repeatedly pointed out that party affiliations strongly impact the relationship between gender identity and political preference, it would be unrealistic to expect any significant gender differences without a critical mass of women and more importantly, this critical mass of women, should identify themselves as feminists and be prepared to act for women. Ultimately, it will be the critical acts of women, rather than their critical mass, that matters, for policy influence. The underlying argument is that quality of women representatives is as important as quantity of women representatives, if not more. The potential of women's representation is likely to be greatly affected by institutional considerations like the nature of political parties, the legislative bodies

etc. The activity to increase women's representation and the effects of its increase are first and foremost felt within political parties. Changes in each political party are shaped by its rules, ideology and culture. Over time a similar change will take place in legislatures that will be shaped by its pre-existing institutional cultures, rules and practices. Thus, there are at least three elements to an understanding of the effects of increasing the numbers of women representatives. The first object of study must be the party. Social and cultural changes in gender relation will appear in political parties before they are manifested in legislative bodies. The second requirement is to characterise the culture of the relevant institution in terms of gender. The third requirement is to appreciate and understand how institutions modify and shape the behaviour of women representatives. The absence of both institutionally sensitive theories of gender politics and gender sensitive theories of political institutions make it very difficult to respond to questions about whether presence of women makes a difference. To answer these questions satisfactorily, presence theories have to be integrated with theories of institutional change. Institutions are the formal rules, procedures and practice that shape and structure relationships between individuals in various units of the polity. Political institutions express particular choices about how political relationships ought to be shaped, and contain a normative element and those are the norms, principles and ideas that hold a given institutional structure together. The most consistent prediction of institutional theory is that institutions resist change and try protecting established gender norms. Historically, legislative bodies have been male and middle and upper class spaces, which established certain norms of behaviour and these norms, are saturated with gender, racial and class assumptions. When these norms are challenged or disrupted, there follows what Puwar describes as 'disorientation' which is compounded by amplification of numbers, through which a small number of women may be imagined as a large, overwhelming group, thus exaggerating their possible impact.(N. Puwar, 2004) Infantilization also occurs, which is the attribution of lower levels of competence and status to the newcomer, who also has to bear the twin 'burden of doubt; and the 'burden of representation', that any of their mistakes will be attributed to the entire group of women, and their performance will be judgements of the capacity of all women. Super surveillance, whereby the behaviour of the newcomers is constantly and closely observed and harshly judged. (Joni Lovenduski, 2005). Women representatives are subjected to intense and conflicting pressure. They are expected to conform to institutional norms and also to

display acceptable feminine norms. To sum up, theoretical arguments about the impact of women representatives is that the changes that they will bring about will be slow and incremental because all political bodies are gender regimes and very resistant to change. The positive side is that the presence of women strengthens democracy by increasing the political participation of women. Thus, the process of increasing women's representation will gradually influence the issue agenda and alter political discourse. But because of the inherent resistance, feminisation of politics will see a cycle of mobilisation, claiming, progress and backlash.

The arguments to increase women's representation and the contexts, in which they are made, seem to offer not only change but also the promise of transformation. Although substantive and descriptive representations are analytically different, there is a tendency to expect substantive representation to follow from descriptive representation. Moreover, because gender identities ascribe to women, a different style of politics, they are expected to transform institutions. Claims are frequently made in the arguments for representation that women's interests and ways of doing things will affect political life in profound ways. Broadly speaking, the arguments for presence have raised expectations that culture, discourse and policy will change to a more gender balanced equilibrium and that incoming women will pave the way for further increases in women's presence.

### **The Issue of Women's Empowerment**

This study attempted to examine the level of empowerment from two perspectives, one from the view of the councillor herself and the other from the standpoint of the community at large. The notion of empowerment is very complex and nuanced, and in its most essential sense, implies a change in power relations. To be empowered would mean the actual exercise of power and not its mere possession. It is a process, in which an individual or group, experience, as well as challenge and subvert power relations, and it takes place in a certain institutional context and setting. Whether acquiring skills, developing awareness, or gaining confidence and self-esteem in order to take decisions, individual empowerment takes place within the structural constraints of institutions and discursive practices. Similarly, groups become empowered through collective action, but that action is enabled or constrained by the structures of power they encounter. Therefore, empowerment, may be defined as a redistribution of power, whether between classes, castes, genders or individuals, and

will be substantive only when all relevant structures and sources of power are addressed. Since the core of empowerment is the idea of power, it is useful to have a more nuanced analysis of power. Power, may be broadly defined as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The most common notion of power is thus the ability to exert power over institutions, resources and people. This notion of 'power over' is therefore the power of an individual or a group to make another individual or group do something against their will, and thus implicit in this notion is a sense of force and strength. Patriarchy is thus a form of 'power over', in which men make rules which subjugate women and thereby control their lives. Scholars have distinguished between different understandings of power, making a distinction between 'power to', 'power over' and 'power within'. Power in the 'power to' framework, involves gaining access to a full range of human abilities and potential, is both creative and enabling and the power to mobilise for change. In contrast, power in 'power over', inheres in the implicitly accepted procedures within institutions, which as a matter of routine, systematically benefits certain individuals and groups at the expense of others. The meaning of power as in 'power within', stresses the fact that some conflicts of interests are not only excluded from the decision making process, they are not even elevated to the level of consciousness and will never be unless the bearers of these interests are included in the decision making process. 'Power within' is thus the power to decide on the rules of the game, to have control, to decide upon issues and to make decisions. It is the recognition that one is not helpless, and that sometimes, one is restricted or constrained by external structures, which one should try and overcome. This notion of power is grounded in self-acceptance and self-respect, which extends in turn to respect for and acceptance of others as equals, and this form of power is in a sense central to empowerment. The empowerment approach, seeks to identify power, less as domination over others and more in terms of the capacity of individuals to increase their own self-reliance and strength. 'Power within', must be the foundation from which women challenge the existing and entrenched power structures, and realise their inner strength and potential to bring about change and transformation. 'Power with' is the capacity to work together with others, to achieve with others what is not possible to achieve alone. People's ability to work together in groups and organisations is critical to the smooth functioning of society. Therefore the notion of 'power with' is both a capacity and awareness and can be best used as an embodiment and as the foundation of group empowerment. Both individual and collective, group participation have been an important foundational concept for analysing empowerment. Involvement and

engagement with group politics is empowering, even if it does not result in immediate transformation of prevailing power relations, because this group involvement can bring about a change in the private, personal space of an individual, and this kind of change is equally empowering. It is also important to focus on the relationship between structure and agency. This allows the disempowered groups, in this case, the women, to make judgements about the nature of their experience with structures and discourses of power, and their own political actions. It allows us to recognise the importance of individual consciousness and understanding, or the power within, as well as the importance of collective action, or power with, that can organise or exert power, challenge gender hierarchies and improve women's lives. In summing up, it is clear that while individual empowerment is quite visible and pronounced the empowerment of the group is more diffuse and immeasurable.

In the background of this theoretical understanding of empowerment, the present study aimed at examining the empowerment levels of both the individual woman councillor, and empowerment of women as a group, in the larger society. With the help of detailed questionnaires, interviews and extensive group discussions, it was clear that all the women councillors of Delhi are individually empowered. Most of them are educated, and come from moderately well-off families. They are also very well connected politically, having politically active relatives or family members. As has been discussed before, women councillors of Delhi, utilise their political connections as a major political asset. Personal empowerment is as the very name suggests an intensely unique and private experience and it involves very different processes from those which lead to a collective or group empowerment. A distinction can also be made between personal or individual empowerment and empowerment in close, intimate relationships. Empowerment can be seen to happen, when changes over time, give women more access to power, in one or more of its different forms. There may be an increase in the ability to act, to perceive themselves as capable, to hold their own opinions, to control resources, to interact with others, to initiate activities and many other instances. All the women councillors interviewed admitted to increase in self confidence after being elected councillors. They had more voice in decision making in the family and as a result of being elected representatives, their status in the family had increased and all the women said that after being elected, the family valued their opinions and involved them in decision making. As elected women councillors, therefore these women, demonstrated instances of increased



power to, power with, power from within, and on occasion power over, and these are significant, because, although they do not in themselves demonstrate empowerment processes, they demonstrate the outcomes of empowerment processes, the fact that empowerment has taken place. Self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of agency, sense of self in a wider context, and dignity have been mentioned as the core and critical elements for personal or individual empowerment, and the women councillors of Delhi identify with and embody these in varying degrees, some more than others. But the basic minimum individual empowerment is present in all.

On the other hand, collective or group empowerment was not so easy to ascertain. In the light of Jo Rowlands, enumeration of the core components of group empowerment, which include group identity, collective sense of agency, group dignity and self-organisation and management, and on the basis of interviews and focus group discussions, it would be fair to conclude that as a group, empowerment outcomes are not very pronounced, across all the components. Women as a group are still disempowered in many ways and for this to change there would have to be substantive and effective transformations at all levels, from the local to the national. And for this change to be feasible and possible, it remains critical to have representative spaces for women.

In the light of all these observations, it will be fair to say that it would be wrong to assume that women councillors will act differently from their male counterparts, immediately on being elected. Research has shown that new members, both male and female, try to adapt to the prevailing norms of the institution. However, because these are always male norms, it is the women who have to change their behaviour and styles. Combined to this is the fact of the burden of popular expectations from them. Not only does it take time for women to adjust and adapt to legislative norms, along with this is the fact that institutional norms and rules also take time to change. Irrespective of the problems associated with the notion of critical mass, time is a very important variable in the explorations of further connections between the descriptive and the substantive. Women councillors need time to build up a reputation, develop confidence and assert themselves politically, before they can consider changing the rules of the political game. These pursuits are also mediated by party work, ward work and election campaigns. One also has to keep in mind that not all women are predisposed to act for women, and their interpretations of what women want or need are necessarily diverse. Viewed in the abstract, feminizing politics, like many other

political processes is both a cause and an outcome. Even on close examination, causes of change are notoriously difficult to extricate, untangle and assess. However, this is not to suggest that women do not require a presence in the decision making bodies. On the other hand, it is now almost unanimously agreed that presence is critical, and this requirement of presence has now been mandated by law in many countries including India. It is also important to point out that this increased representation has had positive impacts. Suffice to say that the impact of women's increasing numbers is subtle, indirect and gradual, both in terms of their participation and empowerment.