Chapter-IV
Empowerment and Participation of women in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi

Political scientists are unanimously agreed on the premise that context is critically relevant to the analysis of the process of women’s political presence and empowerment. The first issue that needs to be addressed is to probe and examine the causes of women’s historical underrepresentation in the political domain, which has been addressed in the chapter on Participation and Representation. The second question, following from the first, is to examine the structure of the political institutions, as well as the social, economic and political status of women, that opens up a space for them to manoeuvre and influence and establish the framework in which social change towards women’s empowerment takes place. It is useful here to position this analytical framework in the tradition of Anthony Giddens’s Structuration Theory. Giddens’s, in his theory attempts to bridge the gap in social sciences, between structure and agency. Agency is understood as the power of the agent to make a difference and to change a given course of events, or in other words be in command of his or her destiny. Structure, in political theory refers to the rules and resources that are recursively implicated in social reproduction. The institutional features of a given society, have defined structural properties that ensure that social and political relations are stabilised between time and space. These structural properties also articulate forms of domination and power. Giddens develops a concept of the duality of structure that basically proposes that action (re) produces structure (re) produces action (re) produces structure and the cycle goes on. Thus, the social agent, or in this case the representative, reproduces but also produces or impacts structure, and is therefore capable of change, in the short term and transformation in the long term. In this respect Giddens opposes determinism or structuralism, which gives primacy to the structure, and opens up the space for social change, or believes in the power and possibility of representatives to bring about change. However, the scope for change is limited and constrained by the structure the agent or representative is positioned in, or in other words, the independence of the agent, in terms of bringing in change, or making a difference, is limited, by the nature of the structure, in its power to provide or foreclose certain opportunities. In summing up
one can reiterate that the social and institutional structures make certain avenues of action more likely than others and any analysis of social and political change has to examine both the structural framework and the power of individual and group action to change and make a difference. The structural framework in the case of this study is the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and its institutional set up and design has been examined in great detail in the previous chapter. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present the empirical findings of the study and then analyse them to assess the impact and outcomes of women’s political participation in urban local government.

The shift in the political discourse from a ‘politics of ideas’ to a ‘politics of presence’ resulted in the growing and legitimate demand for increasing women’s representation in legislative bodies. The moving into positions of ‘power over’ was seen as the first step towards the empowerment of women. This chapter will begin by presenting an overview of the socio-economic characteristics of the elected representatives, which will be the foundation for further analysis. The social and economic characteristics of representatives have always been the basis for classical political participation studies. Age, education, family status and economic position have been established as being important factors for determining participation in politics. Although, it is understood that caste plays a critical role in Indian politics that is more relevant in the rural local bodies or the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the case of urban local bodies, the role of caste comes into play, only during the time of ticket distribution, when caste equations and caste compositions are considered, so as to increase the chances of winning the seat. Once elected, caste seems to matter less in the urban context, as compared to the rural.

In classical political participation analysis, the main aim was to investigate what type of citizens are more likely to participate in politics or to be elected as representatives and how their socio-economic features or characteristics influence their political behaviour. But, the difference in this case is the provision of quotas for women. Traditional participation analysis did not have to deal with quotas, which restricts the voter’s choices and limits considerably, the selection of candidates. Persons who may desire to contest elections, may be found unsuitable to stand for elections, if the constituency from which they come from is reserved for a group, to which they do not belong. On the other hand, some representatives get elected, who would find it
extremely difficult to be in positions of power, without the existence of quota mechanisms.

4 A Socio-Economic Profile of the Women Councillors

The socio-economic profile of the elected women councillors, their political backgrounds and their motivations to enter politics, are questions which are at the heart of the debate on women’s representation. The implementation of the 74th constitutional Amendment Act, guaranteeing 33% reservation for women, in urban local bodies, saw a dramatic increase in the proportion of women in urban local bodies, from a meagre 9% at best to a straight jump to 33%. The socio economic features of the councillors will allow us to understand the specific constraints and resources of women councillors and may also help in being an indicator of their potential performance. The first part of this chapter, therefore, will analyse the data collected with a view to answering two main questions. Who are the elected women? And where do they come from? The second part will focus on the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of their participation, and the last section will examine the issue of empowerment, at both the individual and collective levels. The collection and presentation of data will be for both men and women and the comparison between them is to test the notion of ‘women’s difference’. Two main sources of information are used here; a detailed questionnaire submitted to both men and women councillors, providing huge amounts of quantitative data, and extensive interviews and discussions with women councillors, offering more qualitative information. The seven indicators which will portray the socio economic profile of the elected representatives are age, marital status, number of children, education, and knowledge of languages, occupation and income.

4.1 The Variable of Age

Age is an indicator of experience and maturity in the Indian context. It is also an indicator of authority, as in the Indian cultural ethos, age is treated with a lot of respect or ‘izzat’. This is particularly relevant to women, because the years in which they can be, most fruitfully, politically active, are also their reproductive and child bearing years. Before the elections there was a belief that older women, who were free or more free from household duties and responsibilities would be more active in local politics, but the data collected shows that the largest group of female councillors,
approximately 47% belong to the ages between 30 years and 40 years of age, and the second largest group of women councillors is in the age group of 20 and 30 years of age. But at the same time, there are more men than women over the ages of 50 and more women than men under the ages of 30. The greater numbers of women, as compared to men, in the younger age groups, goes against the widespread assumption that women usually enter politics, only once they have been set free, by age, from domestic and family duties. On the other hand, the greater number of men, in comparison to women, in the age group above 50 seems to suggest that men are better able to make use of and take advantage of the political resource of maturity.

Graph 4.1

4.2 The variable of Marital Status

Almost 89% of the women councillors and 94% of the male councillors were married. Councillors who are single account for only 6% among the male councillors and 2% of the women councillors. This should lead us to conclude that the political culture of Delhi is fairly conservative and political parties are comfortable with the portrayal of a conservative image of women, one who is a wife and mother. This image is portrayed, even though Delhi being the Capital has quite a large number of single, independent women, working in various walks of life. It is probably true to say that the middle and upper middle class, wealthy people of Delhi, especially the women,
are not really engaged with municipal politics. The women who are elected as councillors usually do not come from a very affluent background, and the fact that a vast majority of them are married, demonstrates that the presence of a husband is a major political resource for them. The husband, in most cases, is a source of great support, in so far as he often provides training, escort and financial support to their wives. In an interesting study conducted by Archana Ghosh and Stephanie Lama-Rewal, in the four cities of Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata, it was only Kolkata that had almost a third of their women representatives who were either single or widowed.\(^3\)

Graph 4.2

4.3 The Variable of the Number of Children

The number of children that a woman councillor has will have an impact on the all important resource of time, which a woman councillor will be able to devote to her work. 24% of Delhi’s women councillors have at least two children, 37% of them have three or four children, which leads us to conclude that they would have restricted access to the resource of time, along with the fact that most of them belong to a relatively young age group. Therefore, these women councillors, who are relatively
young and also have children to care for, are particularly dependent on family support. If their family structure is nuclear, this can have an adverse impact on the performance of their duties as councillors.  

Graph 4.3

![Bar chart showing number of children of councillors](image)

**4.4 The Variable of Educational Qualifications**

When we analyse the data on the levels of education of the councillors, which is a major political resource, the data collected shows that a majority of them are graduates. 39% of women councillors are at least graduates, compared to 28% of male councillors. This would mean that, on average, the women councillors are more educationally qualified than the men and the perpetuated image of the woman councillor as an uneducated, naive and gullible person is essentially incorrect but on the other hand, the existence of a graduate degree, does not have any real correlation to the actual quality or level of knowledge in that person. The value or utility of education has not very tangible or measurable outcomes. It would mean an increase in self confidence or self assertion, which would then be reflected in their levels of participation in debates, discussions and meetings, and also reflect on the quality of their participation, in terms of their inputs given, or interjections made or questions...
raised. Although, these are immeasurable, one can make some tentative conclusions on the basis of educational standards of the representatives. To sum up, most of Delhi’s councillors are at least graduates, especially among women, and 9% of them have a higher degree, compared to 7% of men.

Graph 4.4

The data collected on knowledge of languages or spoken languages revealed that there was a slight gap between the numbers of English knowing men and women, but according to the councillors, that was not much of a handicap, as the meetings of the House and all its committees are conducted in Hindi, a language that all the
councillors, irrespective of gender are very comfortable with. Most of them, in their interviews confided that the lack of knowledge of English was only a handicap when trying to deal with the higher officials of the Executive wing. But on the whole, most of the work at the lower levels is carried out in Hindi and knowledge of English is not essential.

Graph 4.5 Languages Known by Councillors (%)

4.6 The Variable of Occupation

The occupational profile of the councillors revealed a major contrast between the men and women councillors. The categories considered here were ‘self employed’ or ‘business’, salaried jobs’, ‘housewife’, ‘social worker’, and ‘party whole timer’. During the course of data collection it was revealed that these categories were not mutually exclusive, for instance one could be both a housewife and a social worker. The largest group of men councillors, (76%) is that of self employed people. This means that these councillors run their own business, whether big or small. On the other hand, most of the women councillors (46%) were in the category of housewives or home makers. Even those with a professional degree said they had to give up their jobs, because being a councillor is a full time and extremely time consuming job and they could not manage two jobs and do justice to both. Councillors, who are otherwise housewives, do not have a paid occupation and are thus dependent on their families for financial support, in other words, this financial, monetary dependence means that
the male and senior members of the family are in a position to exert pressure on them. However most of the women councillors were quick to assert that this was not a handicap, but actually an advantage, as they had more time to devote to their work and also because they did not have a job with its own schedules and timings, they were easily and more often available to their constituents and could put aside a lot of time for this work. On the other hand the data revealed that business was the occupation most compatible with a councillors job, mainly for two reasons, namely that business owners can delegate their work to someone else, while they are busy with their political functions, in any case most of the businesses were joint or family owned, and secondly they had an occupation to come back to in case of a defeat in the elections, or not being able to secure a nomination, and most importantly, they had a steady source of income, even after being elected. Although there could be a possible conflict of interest in these businessmen being councillors, as the Corporation handles a lot of infrastructure maintenance work. Most of them vehemently denied the link and said that the process of tendering in the corporation was very strict and impartial.

Graph 4.6
4.7 The Variable of Income

The data on income levels has to be interpreted, keeping in mind that on this sensitive issue, the councillors tended to give underestimates of their incomes. 8% of women councillors in the city have an income of more than 50,000 rupees, compared to 5% of men councillors. But on the basis of field work, one can conclude that men councillors as a group are much more affluent than women councillors. 65% of male councillors had incomes of 5 lacs and above whereas only 49% of women councillors claimed that level of income. Although, the issue of corruption was raised in the interviews, none of the councillors wanted to talk about it on record. But there is a general perception among the people of the city, that the councillors, both men and women, indulge in a lot of bribery and corruption, On the other hand it is a fact that to be active in municipal politics involves large sums of money, for nomination, campaigning etc. And most of these costs have to be borne by the councillors themselves.

Graph 4.7
4.2 The Political Background of the Councillors

Data collected shows that among the female councillors, about 59% of them had held an elective position before. But, what most women councillors referred to as elective positions were on greater probing found to be really nominated or unelected positions and roles in party organisations. Only a small percentage of women, who were active in youth politics could be said to have held elected posts. It has been researched and established that political experience could offset the disadvantages, accruing from low or less education. An important issue here is the rotation of constituencies. The way the reservation for various social groups in politics has been implemented, poses severe problems for gaining political experience and serving as a representative for consecutive terms. It is also useful to examine whether the composition of the local political elite is changing. Quotas for women aimed at introducing them into the political decision making bodies, and hoping that they would bring about changes in the content and the way, politics is done. But, if the new entrants are still a part of the traditional local elites and power remains in the control of the same groups of families or communities, the changes might be more marginal than substantial. The allegation of women being mere ‘proxies; in this case, is difficult to refute. When asked about the main motivation behind the councillor's decision to contest municipal elections, data shows the range of answers given, but again the fact that these are not mutually
exclusive, makes it difficult to pinpoint the determining factor in the decision to contest. “Other’s decision” and “party’s decision” were the answers most frequently given by the women councillors, although they were quick to clarify that the final decision to contest the elections were ultimately their own, albeit whole heartedly supported by their families. Interviews also revealed that a number of women councillors in Delhi became candidates at the behest of a male relative, prevented from contesting by the reserved status of the ward. The assumption being that women would hold onto the seat, for the male family member, who would run for elections once the seat, was de reserved. Therefore we see a large number of first time councillors. About 55% of the women councillors are first timers, giving credence to the assumption that they were put in place of a male relative. Only 24% of them have served for more than two terms. One also has to keep in mind the fact that political families are more open to the idea, or more willing to introduce their women into politics, than families that are not interested in politics at all. It has to be acknowledged that for a woman, a political family background can be an important political resource. Almost 90% of female councillors came from families which were politically active, meaning thereby that they had close relatives in active politics. About 7% of them claimed to come into politics through student or youth politics, and a negligible number came without any background or family connections. And, also only slightly fewer men than women claim to come from a political family, and thus it is not just a female phenomenon. It appears that the prevalence of political families is a general sociological feature in Indian politics, which is not necessarily connected to gender.
On the question of the political careers of the councillors, and their political experience, prior to being elected as councillor, both men and women, admitted to being members of a political party and also some other organisations, mostly voluntary and charitable, and the numbers of people who were members of neither were negligible. This highlights the importance of party membership in order to be
elected. The fact that only a very small number of women mentioned their membership in other organisations, especially feminist or women’s rights groups, reveals a huge disconnect between municipal councillors and the activist milieu, and exposes the myth that social work is an alternative to political activism, a myth that is largely propagated by the women themselves. In other words, beyond the rhetoric, identifying local politics to social work, there is not much of relevance of social work for local politics, not from a normative but from a positive point of view. Interviews also revealed that most women when claiming to be associated with other organisations, basically referred to charitable organisations that could not be used as a supportive base in local elections. Moreover the only women’s organisations, to which most women councillors are affiliated to, are the women’s wings of their own political parties. It is well understood that these women’s wings have a very limited role in the electoral process, they do not have any significant voice or influence in the selection or nomination of women candidates, and their contribution is mostly in terms of providing some help and support to the candidates at the time of campaigning. Although the political party is an unmatched and unparalleled political resource for potential and present councillors, the social work experience can also be of some value, at least in the sense of honing their social interaction and communication skills.

Another recent development is the growing influence and power of Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) in municipal politics, in both direct and indirect ways. Most councillors interviewed said they were very happy to engage with and involve the RWAs in local governance, mainly because they are present on the ground, have time for this work and are seriously committed to the cause of effective service delivery. It has also been observed that some RWA members also nurse political ambitions, although these members made it clear that they wanted to enter politics only to make a difference, and wanting to improve the delivery of corporation services. The details of executive positions held by councillors in their party, prior to their elections, shows that Delhi councillors are very well positioned in the party hierarchy. The fact that 59% of women councillors were holding executive positions in their parties may be explained by the fact that Delhi is characterised by a unique political density that brings local representatives into frequent contact with MLAs and MPs, as well as with the party’s top leadership.
4.2.1 Politics in the Family

The questions on the existence of politically active family members revealed interesting information. Only a very small minority of women councillors belonged to the group which had no politically active relatives. The importance of family connections for women therefore reinforces the political culture of the capital as strongly conservative and patriarchal. It has already been stated that the family is a very important political resource in India, and particularly so for women. Because women are not expected to be politicians, and there is some amount of role conflict, family connections come as a convenient justification for their presence in politics. Objectively, women are much more often than men deprived of other political resources, like education, money, time and contacts. Therefore, the family resource acts like a substitute of other political resources, and that in a sense provides it with legitimacy. For the women councillors of Delhi, looking at their large families, and lack of independent income, the family is definitely a major resource. On the question of politically active relatives in an elective position, 90% of the women councillors had close family members in an elective position. This definitely leads us to conclude that the family is an important political resource and the women councillors of Delhi are definitely the beneficiaries of political inheritances, but at the same time the picture is more complex. Even those councillors, who come from a political family, are not necessarily passive inheritors of their family’s political lineage.
Regarding training resources, most of the councillors, irrespective of gender, referred to the party as their most important resource. Most of them claimed that the senior leaders of their respective parties were a source of inspiration and support for them. But gender wise, the interviews showed that women value their own experiences and efforts to learn, much more than men. Moreover, among the women, relatives as a resource for training seemed to be more common, as compared to the men. For the women councillors of Delhi, having a politically active relative, who can act as mentor and guide, is very crucial as they cannot take the risk of losing their reputations by having mentors and godfathers, who are not relatives.

To sum up, a profile of the councillors of Delhi reveals that according to gender, men have greater access to maturity or experience, and associated with that is authority, access to information, money and political experience. The women councillors, on the other hand, possess a higher education level, which may to a certain degree compensate for less experience in the political domain. The lesser knowledge of English is not much of a handicap, as mentioned before, since the MCD functions mostly in Hindi. The lack of a paid job may have the reverse advantage of more time,
and having politically active relatives, may compensate for the fact that women are more often newcomers, especially because relatives act as a very important training resource for women. However there are two areas in which they are constrained or handicapped vis-à-vis men. Their relatively younger age, and their lack of political experience and activism, because as has already been mentioned, even though women, more often than men, claimed to have experience of some kind of voluntary work, the nature of this kind of voluntary, social service is not an alternative to political activism. The facts and data collected points to the city of Delhi as having a strong patriarchal political culture, which does not augur well for any kind of transformative politics but at the same time, Delhi’s status as the Capital of the country, translates into a series of resources available to the councillors of both the sexes. The councillors of Delhi are more affluent compared to their counterparts from other cities; they are among the most educated and are very well established in their party hierarchy.

4.3 Political Power and its Exercise

Although the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has mandated, the presence of 33% reservation of seats for women, thus guaranteeing their political presence, the question that needs to be asked then, is to what extent does this presence of women in political institutions, translates into them exercising power.\(^5\) Being present in formal position does not necessarily mean that the representatives are powerful.

Exercise of power needs some prerequisites, and those are information and knowledge. In the Foucauldian tradition, the exercise of power is implicated in the mechanisms and procedures for producing knowledge, and hence in knowledge itself.\(^6\) Without knowing the rules, regulations or procedures, that enable effective delivery and implementation, it is very difficult to act powerfully in a meaningful way. On the question of knowledge regarding the functioning of the Municipal Corporation, almost all the councillors, both men and women felt that there was a glaring lack of training inputs given to councillors. Most of them claimed to have learnt the job of being a councillor, through practical experience and a hands-on approach. Some also credited their senior party colleagues in the Corporation, with giving them help and advice. Those of them, who had some prior political experience, of either being closely associated with a councillor or any other party functionary,
claimed to have some knowledge of how the system works. But, for the first time
councillors, both men and women, there was no training organised by the
Corporation, to familiarise them with the rules and procedures. Even the two major
political parties in the Corporation have not taken any concrete steps or initiatives in
this regard, although, some senior leaders of the parties claimed to have some
informal training programmes for the new councillors, but it was neither formal nor
structured. Most councillors thus had to depend on the help and cooperation from
their senior party colleagues and their fellow colleagues. Another interesting point
here is that since most of the councillors come from politically active families or if
not, are otherwise politically well networked, a lot of their training and socialisation
into their new roles are undertaken by their family members, which is particularly
helpful to women. On the other hand, a lot of women claimed that in the end it was
their own individual efforts to learn and understand the working of the system that
helped them in overcoming the barrier of no training programmes and they took a lot
of pride in that achievement. Almost, all the new councillors admitted to a feeling of
complete bewilderment and confusion in the initial months of their tenure, before they
were able to find their feet and come to grips with the situation. Most of them, also
felt that this was not a gender issue, and it was not particularly discriminatory towards
women. It was equally difficult for first time male councillors, and what really
mattered were the Councillor's own, individual efforts and initiatives to learn how the
system works. An interesting parallel is sometimes drawn with the lack of training
facilities in rural Panchayats, but there the issues are quite different. The very low
levels of literacy combined with caste prejudices and biases, are very inhibiting and
restricting factors for women representatives in Panchayats. For the women in urban
local bodies, the issues of caste and low education are not of significance. Here, it is
more of a pressure to conform or make a mark in the very male dominated political
cultures and styles of municipal politics.

4.4 Role Perceptions of Women Councillors

The inclusion of women in urban local government, through the 74th Constitutional
Amendment Act had two objectives; the emancipatory aspect of their political
empowerment and secondly, the developmental impact of this inclusion. The
inclusive principles of good urban governance, demands that women’s participation in
political decision making processes in urban local bodies be increased, in order to
allow them to play a constructive role in urban development. To evaluate, the extent to which women are a part of the decision making process, and what are the constraints they face that exclude them from this process, the present study relied on focus group discussions, attending House and committee meetings and detailed personal interviews with councillors, both men and women. There are three main questions addressed here;

a) How do women councillors, as political decision makers perceive themselves and what according to them are their main roles or duties as a councillor?

b) What is the extent and mode of their participation in the actual decision making process?

c) What constraints do they face in their work?

One of the main arguments for increased political participation of women was on the grounds of the symbolic value this would have on the women in society, as a whole. But, in this section, we focus more on the self perception of the women councillors.

All the women councillors interviewed had a very positive self-image and seemed both confident and capable in their roles as councillors, though experience and length of tenure did make a difference. First time councillors were more diffident as compared to councillors with more experience. On the whole, they expressed satisfaction with the increase in their numbers due to the reservation system, and were confident that they would be able to fulfil the popular expectations from them. The women councillors appeared to be quite comfortable with their newly acquired status, along with the accompanying power and respectability. A feeling of self-empowerment was evident during the group discussions and there were, on the whole, very involved and engaged with the issues in their respective wards. Although the exact responses varied, they were agreed on the facts that being elected gave them confidence and self worth and equal opportunities to work along with their male counterparts. There was a lot of enthusiasm to show their capability and efficiency and to also demonstrate and prove their leadership qualities. Although, they were reluctant to talk about it openly, some women councillors were of the opinion that, women being, in general, less corrupt than the men were as a result more acceptable to the people. But, on this issue of women being less corrupt than men, there are no hard evidences to prove this is indeed the case. On the other hand there were some
serious allegations of corruption against some councillors, both men and women. Thus, it would be safe to suggest that it is the women themselves who are interested in pushing forward the notion of women being less corrupt than men, for understandable, possible strategic gains. The perception on the ground is that all councillors are capable and complicit in corruption and gender has nothing to do with it. Another almost universal self perception among the women councillors was the fact of their easy accessibility to the community. All of them cited their easy approachability to their ward members, especially to the women, who felt more comfortable with them, as opposed to male councillors, while discussing some issues.

On the issue of their roles as councillors, both men and women came up with similar responses. A councillor’s role perception would be contingent on many factors like their awareness levels, knowledge, training and concern for the development and improvement of the ward. The overwhelming majority of councillors in Delhi was knowledgeable about the specific problems and issues in their wards and showed a high level of engagement and commitment to solve them. But most of them were in favour of carrying out of developmental works that would improve the general infrastructure of the ward as a whole and so benefit the community at large, which would obviously include women. On being asked, if they felt they had any special responsibilities towards women, they being women themselves, most of them replied in the negative. Their argument was that they were councillors of the ward as a whole, not of the women alone, and it would be a dereliction of their duties, if they did not seek the improvement of the ward as a whole, and only some particular segments of it. They were also quick to point out that any infrastructural improvements like better sanitation, roads and lighting impacted women the most.
Councillors are expected to perform a number of roles as elected popular representatives and as members of the deliberative wing of the Corporation. These roles can be divided into the legislative or deliberative role, the social development role, the agency role and the role of a mediator between the public and the government. Although the boundaries between these roles tend to blur and overlap, it is still a useful categorisation. In the urban local government set up of Delhi, the municipal bodies, representing the local people, are responsible for providing, operating and maintaining basic amenities like water supply, sewerage and sanitation services, road construction and maintenance, public lighting, health and education services. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, entrusted municipal bodies with eighteen functions, encompassing all activities relating to civic amenities, to ensure an improved quality of life to the citizens. Even the responsibilities of planning for social development and environmental protection are in the domain of functions of the local bodies. The implementation of central and state aided schemes and programmes of poverty alleviation, and other social development programmes are also to be performed by the local bodies. Councillors, thus, play a very decisive role in the decision making process, through their participation and attendance in the monthly Council meetings, and in the meeting of those committees of which they are members, and in the ward committees.
The scope of participation by all councillors, whether male or female is mediated by both internal and external factors relating to the Corporation. The internal factors may include the structure and organisational set-up, power structures within the organisation, the rules and procedures governing it while the external dynamics may consist of the relation between the local body and the state government and other utility service providers, the degree of functional and financial devolution, among others. All of these may lead to either facilitating or restricting the scope of participation by councillors.

Although, theoretically, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is vested with a lot of powers and responsibilities, the prevailing institutional set up, with its separation of the deliberative and executive wings, practically provides very little scope for local bodies to take up major infrastructural development work. They have very little say; in fact they are completely excluded from the implementations of major decisions. The governance of Delhi is complicated by the simultaneous existence and functioning of various para-state and state government organisations, which has created an institutional structure without any transparent accountability system or inter-agency coordination. The position of the Municipal Corporation, within the institutional set-up, determines how effective the powers of the local government vis-a-vis other service providing institutions are. The large number of outside agencies in civic management tends to restrict the role of the elected local bodies. To that extent, the scope of effective participation by the councillors, both men and women, in developmental activities and work is automatically constrained and restricted. Most councillors mentioned this fact of the executive handling all the execution of projects, while not being accountable to the people, as a real obstacle in the smooth and effective functioning of the municipal bodies. They felt that the system was unfair, in the sense that as popularly elected representatives of the lowest level of government, they were the link between the people and the utility providers, although they could not exercise much power over the service providers. Even when the local body is not involved in the delivery of a particular service, the councillor has to function as a change agent in the ward level, and face the fury and wrath of the people for all the problems regarding civic amenities. The executive wing, on the other hand has no interaction with the public. The institutional design of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi was designed on the principle of separation of deliberative and executive
powers to have a system of checks and balances, but many councillors feel that this is one of the major obstacles in the effective functioning of the Corporation. The tenuous control over the executive wing by the Corporation’s deliberative wing has made it possible for the executive arm to function in an increasingly unaccountable manner. The executive wing is headed by a senior civil servant, and his or her loyalties lie with the Delhi Government.

4.5 The Quality and Extent of Women’s Participation

Councillors, both men and women, can take part in the decision making process, concerning the goals and objectives of the Corporation, either at the deliberative or policy level, through their attendance and participation in the general House meetings and other specialised committee meetings, or also through, administrative and managerial functions, which find expression at the ward level. The participation of women councillors in managerial functions at the level of the ward committees was assessed through detailed, extensive questionnaires and personal interviews. Their participation at the legislative or policy making levels were evaluated by their membership in important decision making committees like, the Standing Committee, Ward Committees and other specialised committees. While membership to these committees made it mandatory for their presence in these bodies, the question was also to assess the quality of their participation, and the extent of their involvement with the issues discussed, and this was done on the basis of their interventions and inputs in the committee meetings. On the basis of information provided by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, it was found that the membership of women councillors in municipal committees was quite high, in proportion, or sometimes more than their presence in the Corporation. Almost all councillors of both genders are members of some committees, and because a specified number of members of several committees have to be replaced by new members each year, women councillors get the opportunity to become members of the important, hard committees like finance and accounts, drainage and water supply. The membership patterns would prove that it is a fallacious and erroneous assumption that women are members of only the so called soft committees, pertaining to education and child care. But, again this observation has to be tempered with the fact that the number of women is much more in the committees dealing with child care and health. The contrast is stark between the Municipal Accounts Committee, which has no women members and the Mahila
Kalyan and Bal Vikas Committee, which boasts of no male member. In some other committees, too, like High Powered Property Tax, and Grants-in-aid, the membership of women councillors is restricted to one. In the Standing Committee, which is the most powerful committee, in terms of powers and jurisdiction, there is just one woman member. In the Ward Committees, where the tenure is five years, all the elected councillors of the particular areas are members. On an average, therefore, all women councillors are members of two or three committees and even their membership in the so called hard committees, except in the case of the current Standing Committee, is not below one-third. This is significant in light of the fact that there is no reservation for women in these committees and the members decide and elect among themselves. Membership patterns have shown and reinforced the fact that, women do get the opportunity to become members of committees, on their own strength, without any system of reservations. Interviews with women councillors also revealed that many of them had worked as chairpersons or the deputy chair in ward committees and this was an important way of gaining knowledge about how to conduct meetings, rules regarding quorum, resolutions agenda etc. According to records accessed, in the last term of the MCD, from 2010 to 2011, women councillors were chairpersons of two statutory committees and deputy-chairpersons of four statutory committees. The two statutory committees headed by women were the Ward Committee, City, headed by Ms. Renuka Gupta, and the Ward Committee, Rural, chaired by Ms. Nisha Mann. Women councillors were deputy chair in four statutory committees, namely, one of the most important committees, the Standing Committee, Ward Committee, Central, Ward Committee, Sadar Paharganj, and Ward Committee, Rural, Narela. In the case of Special Committees, the Appointments, Promotions, Disciplinary and Allied Matters Committee, Garden Committee, Hindi Committee, Municipal Accounts Committee as well as Code of Conduct for Councillors Committee were all chaired by women councillors. Women councillors were deputy chairpersons in Medical Relief and Public Health Committee, Environment Management Services, Law and General Purposes Committee, Hindi Committee and the Code of Conduct for Councillors Committee. As a matter of fact, the Hindi and Code of Conduct Committees have women as both Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. Regarding, the question of women in formal positions of power in Ad-hoc Committees, the Welfare of Scheduled Caste and Implementation of the SC Quota Committee is headed by a woman councillor, as is also the case with the
National Festivals, Fares and Allied Matters Committee and the Mahila Kalyan and Bal Vikas Committee. Women councillors officiate as Deputy Chairperson in three ad-hoc committees, namely, Anti Flood Measures Committee, Grievance Redressal and Mahila Kalyan and Bal Vikas Committee. Therefore, it is quite evident that the mandating of 33% women in the Municipal Bodies has clearly resulted in their visibility in positions of formal power. An analysis of the composition of the various committees, through an examination of MCD records, also reveals an encouraging trend. All committees have a fair representation of women, although it may not be an exact one-third. This is a very positive sign, because there is no reservation for women in membership of committees, and it is decided by the members themselves. The last two terms of mayor-ship in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi were served by women councillors, and although the office of the Mayor is more symbolic than substantial, it nonetheless, sends across a clear political message that women are no longer a token presence in the Corporation.

Table Number: 1 Membership of Women in Statutory Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Name of the Committee</th>
<th>Total Number of Members</th>
<th>Number of Male Members</th>
<th>Number of Women Members</th>
<th>Percentage of Women Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Standing Committee</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Rural Areas Committee</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, City</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Ctrl</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, South</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Wards Committee Karol Bagh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Sadar</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>Wards</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Number</td>
<td>Name of the committee</td>
<td>Total no. of members</td>
<td>Members (men)</td>
<td>Members (women)</td>
<td>Percentage of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Civil Lines</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Shahadra South</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Shahadra North</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Rural, Narela</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Najafgarh</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)</td>
<td>Wards Committee, Rohini</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table Number: 2 Memberships of Women in Special Committees**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Name of the Committee</th>
<th>Total number of members</th>
<th>Number of members (men)</th>
<th>Number of members (women)</th>
<th>Percentage of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Remunerative Projects</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Licensing and Tehbazaari</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Community Services</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Welfare of SCs and quota impl</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Anti Malaria Measures</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Anti Flood Measures</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Naming, Renaming of Streets</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Grants in Aid Committee</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>National Festivals, Fairs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>Mahila Kalyan, Bal Vikas</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)</td>
<td>Grievance Redressal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>DDA Municipal Representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>DDA Advisory Council</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>DJB Municipal Representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)</td>
<td>DLB Municipal Representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16)</td>
<td>Hardyal Municipal Lib</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Number: 4 Women Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in MCD
Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Committee</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Chairperson (men)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Deputy Chair (men)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statutory Committee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhoc Committee</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Committee</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Number: 5 Male Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons in MCD
Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Committee</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Chairperson (women)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Deputy Chair (women)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statutory Committee</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhoc committee</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Committee</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although, it has been established that women councillors, on the whole, have membership in proportion to their presence, the question that needs to be addressed is how effective is this participation? The quality of their participation can be evaluated by the issues they raised and the frequency of their interventions or inputs on various subjects. These would indicate their priorities and the extent of their participation. The data collected shows that the priorities of women councillors do not differ very much from those of their male counterparts, as has already been discussed. Women councillors prefer to take up or prioritise issues that impact their ward as a whole, and not specific women’s issues and therefore the issues they discuss or raise in the House meetings are those that are common to all, namely, the budget, personnel management or the functioning of the Corporation, while water, sanitation and public health get
relatively less attention. Therefore, the oft repeated argument that, issues like water, sanitation, health and environment are of more interest to women, cannot be proved conclusively, on the basis of their responsiveness to these issues in the highest decision making body of the Corporation. A perusal of the records of the MCD, pertaining to questions asked by the various councillors on issues concerning their wards, shows that out of forty-eight questions asked over a period of slightly more than three years, fifteen questions were asked by women councillors, which is marginally less than one third. Out of these fifteen queries, five were raised by one particular woman councillor. The questions asked covered a wide ambit, mainly concerned with the general infrastructural, maintenance issues like drainage, desiltation, maintenance of local markets, community centres, street lighting, public toilets, parking facilities and income derived from those, and drive against mosquito breeding. There were also questions regarding policies on tehbazaari and unauthorised construction, and distribution of trade licenses. Women councillors also raised administrative issues like promotion, transfer and recruitment of the staff of the Municipal Corporation. Therefore, on the whole, women raised their voices on a wide variety of issues, on policy, administrative and maintenance concerns, much like their male counterparts. It was thus both interesting and heartening to note that, contrary to popular perceptions, women councillors do not restrict themselves to the soft, non-technical issues but express themselves on a wide variety of concerns. The notable absence was the articulation of women specific interests or their gender concerns. This can, to a certain extent be explained by the general consensus among all councillors, both male and female, that their mandate is to serve and further the interests of the entire electorate of their ward, not a particular segment of it. Almost all the women councillors interviewed subscribed to this view. One also has to keep in mind the fact that in the Council, there is always a united voice of the councillors, which is dictated by the party line and this party discipline cannot be violated. Neither, women nor men have a separate identity or the freedom to pursue their own agendas. Regarding the number of interventions by women councillors in the general debates and discussions, although, it is less than men and slightly less than their proportion in the Corporation, the positive feature is an upwardly moving trend for both men and women councillors.
Table Number: 6 Questions raised by Women councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Of Questions Raised</th>
<th>Questions Raised By Women Councillors</th>
<th>Percentage Questions Raised By Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Number: 7 Issues and nature of Questions asked by Women Councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Maintenance, Infrastructure | 1. Drainage  
2. Desiltation,  
3. Maintenance of Local Markets, Community Centres, Street 
Lighting, Public Toilets, Parking 
Facilities and Income derived from these.  
4. Drive against Mosquito Breeding. |
| Policies                | 1. Tehbazaari  
2. Unauthorised Construction  
3. Distribution of Trade Licenses. |
| Administrative          | 1. Promotion  
2. Transfer  
3. Recruitment of staff of the Municipal Corporation |

A detailed scrutiny of the records of the MCD showed that out of ninety resolutions moved and passed by the House, about, twenty-seven were initiated by women members, and about six had two women members moving the resolution. In percentage terms, this is about 30% of the total resolutions passed and is less than the numbers of women present in the House, but the figures are not disheartening, and quite encouraging. Another positive feature was the fact that the resolutions passed by the women councillors, were on a variety of issues and showed their engagement with the needs and concerns of their particular wards. The issues ranged from mid-day meals in schools, school trips for students, and buying desks to maintenance of public
utilities, beautification of parks, building old-age centres and gymnasiums for the young, low-cost housing for the poor, more efficient garbage disposal, recruitment of more safai karamchaaris, rehabilitation of dairies, finding solutions to the parking congestion. There were also resolutions passed for the promotion of the Punjabi language and more funds for the national and regional festivals. But as has been already discussed, women councillors are wary of pushing a ‘women’s only agenda for many reasons, and always emphasise the fact that they represent the entire ward. But it is a fact that women are behind men in terms of putting across their views in general body meetings and that women as a group are less vocal and participate much less than men in meetings of the House.

Table Number: 8 Numbers of Resolutions Moved by Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Resolutions Passed</th>
<th>Resolutions Moved By Women Councillors</th>
<th>Percentage Resolutions Moved By Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues On Which Resolutions Were Passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mid-Day meals in schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School trips for students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Buying of Desks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Maintenance of public utilities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Beautification of parks,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Building old-age centres and gymnasiums for the young,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Low-cost Housing for the poor,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. More efficient Garbage Disposal,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Recruitment of more Safai Karamchaaris,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rehabilitation of dairies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Finding solutions to the parking congestion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Promotion of the Punjabi language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. More funds for the National and Regional Festivals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A scrutiny of the minutes of the current Standing Committee, show the absence of any interventions or inputs by the women members, but that can be explained by the fact that there is only one woman member in the committee, which in itself is a very significant factor. Even in the general body meetings where all the councillors are present, the number of interventions by women is almost insignificant. In all the meetings attended, and minutes recorded, as part of data collection there were never
more than one or two interventions by women, and in many there were none. (See
annexure). The paradox that comes forth is that while women do not seem to be
actively taking part in the debates and discussions taking place in the House, they are
at the same time very engaged with the issues and concerns of their wards, and as the
data reveals ask pertinent questions on those problems. One reason might be that the
majority of women councillors take some time to gain confidence to participate in the
general proceedings of the House, given the male dominated and masculine nature of
almost all public spaces, in this case, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. As scholars
like Lovenduski point out legislative institutions are inherently averse to change and
in order to understand the impact of increasing numbers of women in legislative
bodies, it becomes necessary to consider the nature of political institutions and how
gender relations may affect them. Increasing the presence of women, is variously
expected to change the institutional culture, the agenda or output, the styles and the
procedures of the legislative bodies, but it is critical to keep in mind that, these
changes or the processes of these changes, will be institution specific and will vary by
political system and political cultures, and most importantly will be slow and gradual.
Therefore, the increased numbers of women in the MCD, as mandated by the 74th
Constitutional Amendment Act, will have an impact on the body, which may not be
immediate and measurable, but will be incremental. The scope for participation in
deliberations by councillors is much more if decentralisation permeates below the
municipal level. The proposal to introduce and strengthen Ward Committees, as part
of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, is a step in the right direction. These will
allow intense and frequent participation, as the size of these units will be smaller. The
participation of women councillors is definitely more noticeable in ward committees,
where the local and specific problems of the ward are discussed, the numbers of
members are less and there are greater chances of interaction and cooperation. Ward
Committees coincide with the administrative division of the city into zones; the
average number of wards in each zone is eleven in Delhi, and the population served
by the ward committees can be as large as eight lakhs in Delhi, according to the
figures in 2001. But in spite of these being more effective and direct units of political
participation by the councillors, there did not seem to be much enthusiasm among
them to make full use of this unit, which may be due to the fact that the functioning of
these is not quite systematic. Another interesting observation was that most councillors claimed that at the level of the Ward Committees, party lines were not so clearly demarcated and councillors from different parties worked in a spirit of harmony and cooperation, cutting across party affiliation.

4.6 The Developmental Role of Women Councillors

The developmental role of the councillors consists primarily in ensuring the availability and delivery of the basic civic amenities to the citizens, and is influenced by their perception of the local issues in their wards, on the priority assessment of the services required and on specific suggestions from the ward population. Physical infrastructure like roads, water supply drainage and sewerage get the most attention from both men and women councillors. The top priority given to these services is because of the immediate impact they have at the ward level. Projects on child care, education which are of equal importance to the community do not get the same preference, because their impact is more long term and not so immediate. Even during the interviews women councillors rated general infrastructural issues like roads, water and drainage as their top priority because these were the main problems in their wards. Problems like shortage of schools and health centres were the least recognised.

But at the same time, the women councillors were quick to point out that since it is women who have to bear the brunt of problems related to water, sanitation and drainage, working on these issues was an indirect way of helping them, and one way of side stepping the issue of not working or prioritising women-centric projects, was to assert that development of general infrastructure also impacted women’s lives and maybe, in a sense, more than men.

One issue that comes to the fore frequently, when looking at the identification of local priorities for developmental work, is the enormous but unspoken issue of corruption. Although, it is difficult to get hard, empirical evidence on this issue, informal discussions and talks with both the corporation officials and councillors indicate the increasingly heightened role of corruption in local politics. Many officials suggested that the priorities of councillors, in terms of the construction and maintenance of civic infrastructure, are actually determined by the financial and vested interests of the councillors and not, as they claim, by their impact and necessity. Construction and maintenance of infrastructure is the most important function of the local bodies at the
ward level, even though infrastructure development at the city level is the responsibility of other organisations. The municipal councillors only have the power to repair, construct and maintain infrastructure at the ward level and this becomes an avenue for indulging in corruption. There seems to be a strong nexus and network of corruptions between contractors, councillors and officials. The popular perception of councillors is that they are being increasingly seen as corrupt persons who become councillors only to make money. Charges of corruption are regularly traded between the councillors and corporation officials, with each blaming the other of indulging in corrupt practices.

The widespread prevalence of Corruption at the local level has also meant that women councillors too, are not immune to such allegations. The assumption, therefore that women, are less inclined to corrupt practices and that corruption is largely a male phenomenon, along with the belief that presence of women in large numbers would result in less corrupt local politics, needs a serious rethink and re-examination. One of the major reasons for the enormous jump in corruption at the local level is the increasing costs of campaigning and contesting elections. The rationale behind corruption is that all the costs of the elections have to be recovered and since constituencies are rotated, councillors utilise all opportunities to collect as much money as they can during this period.

One of the major arguments in favour of decentralisation was that it provides an opportunity for the institutionalisation of gender concerns at the local level, which would have a positive impact on the daily lives of ordinary women. But what our investigations and analyses reveal is that women representatives in the public domain, can be as gender blind as the men, since their actions are constrained by a series of compulsions. Their affiliations to class, caste as well as a whole lot of other cross cutting institutional loyalties, mainly the political party to which they belong, lead to limiting the representation of women’s interests. Working on issues specific to women’s needs and interests, is thus not a major concern for elected women councillors, even though they are aware of and even sympathetic to the problems of women in their wards. Most women councillors in Delhi felt that the lack of clean water and safety and security of women were the two most important problems faced by women. They claimed that many women voters look to them for solutions to various problems, both personal and otherwise, and the councillors sympathised with
them and used their power and influence to mediate in cases of harassment by the police or by their employers, to help local women on issues of dowry, marital disputes, domestic violence etc. But, all these were at an individual level and not translating to any systemic or policy change. Women are therefore, not a constituency for women councillors, even though they are aware of women’s issues. The women councillors reiterated the point that since they represented both men and women voters, they could not be partisan when dealing with local issues. As a result, there was no gender differentiation with respect to their priorities and this was reflected in the type of work done by women councillors in their wards, which were of the same type as carried out by male councillors. A more political and strategic reason for not highlighting women’s issues specifically, that came up in informal discussions was the fear that this focus on women’s issues would jeopardise their electoral future. On the issue of cutting across party divisions and coming together as a group, to work collectively towards women's interests, most women councillors replied in the negative, although they were quite open to cross party cooperation at the ward committee level. It was quite apparent that women councillors are not able to express solidarity and push their gender interests at the corporation level, where the party loyalties and affiliations are very strong. Another reason could be the compulsion felt by the women councillors to conform to the dominant agendas and priorities, in order to further their political careers. Also, despite reservation of seats for them, they still constitute a minority and feel a sense of isolation among the dominant group of male councillors, hence their urgent need to follow the dominant, male lead and not to be seen to be aligned with feminine issues, which, in any case have very few political advantages. Another important cause of constraint is the lack of knowledge or awareness about the real feminist issues. The study shows that while women councillors are generally sympathetic to the problems faced by women, and are quite willing to help them on a personal, individual basis, they never, in any way, aim to bring about systemic changes, which is the root of the problem. Their lack of a feminist perspective, which would look at women’s problems in its entirety, and not as isolated cases, results in their individual endeavours not leading to any policy changes. Another related cause could be their class backgrounds, which are mostly middle or upper middle class, and which makes them more comfortable dealing with class issues of their particular segment, than with the gender concerns of women as a whole. But, by far the determining factor seems to be the political party and its
programme. In a local government system, based on political parties, it is imperative to be a member of a political party, in order to have a chance at winning elections, and once elected on a party ticket, it is almost impossible to flout party discipline and pursue one’s own agenda. As has been mentioned before, party loyalties at the Corporation level are extremely fierce. So the most important factor is the ideology of the political party, and if it is sympathetic to women’s issues, there are greater chances of its representatives, both men and women being able to pursue these.

4.7 Agency Role

In this role, the councilors as the most proximate link between the government and the citizens have the work of identifying the beneficiaries of several programmes for social development and poverty alleviation run by the state or central governments. Councillors are also the legally recognised signatories of various documents for identification of the local people, like ration cards, Below Poverty Line (BPL) identification cards, etc. They are also approached by their ward members for character certificates, hospital or school admissions and other administrative requirements. All councillors are required to perform these functions and these also enhance not only their popularity in the locality but also give them confidence and a sense of importance and self-worth. In these agency roles, the women councillors can also act as role models for women in the larger society, by combining both the traditional mother/wife roles and being a part of the public sphere. While most councillors are uncomfortable with a complete departure from the traditional roles prescribed for women, and always reinforce the value of families, their very presence in a traditionally male dominated space, can be a source of inspiration for many. Councillors also play the role of mediators and adjudicators at the local level. As the nearest elected representative of the government, they are often called upon to settle disputes of all types, at the local level. These may be of personal natures or to do with the police or with other agencies. Councillors, as observed, are quite happy to use their influence and powers in such cases, and most of them devote at least a couple of hours each day towards these functions.

4.8 Constraints Faced by the Women Councillors

On the issue of constraints faced by women councillors in the discharge of their duties, most councillors were of the opinion that the major problem for them was the
balance between their family or private lives and their professional lives. As councillors, they claimed, they had to be available for their ward members at any time they needed them, so there were no fixed timings in this job, unlike other jobs. They were of the opinion that it was a very time consuming job, which left them with very little time for their children and families, and this was a source of guilt for them. On the other hand, almost all the women councillors spoke warmly of the support they received from their families, especially their husbands and in laws or parents. Another constraint that was particularly applicable to women councillors was the issue of their mobility. Delhi is a particularly unsafe city for women and most councillors said they did not feel comfortable travelling alone, especially after dark. They were hesitant to perform their public duties late at night, in the case of an emergency like fires or mob violence. Here again, they claimed that their families came to their rescue and supported them wholeheartedly, by escorting and accompanying them and making it possible to attend to such emergencies.

Besides the difficulties on the domestic front, there are also certain institutional and structural constraints faced by them. These constraints impede their effective inclusion in the deliberative and decision making processes of the Corporation. The overarching problem was the one of a lack of knowledge of the specific rules and regulations of the Corporation and the system of its functioning as a whole. This lack of knowledge could be further divided and clubbed under different heads. The issue of funds and finances was the most fundamental constraint faced by councillors. With an increasingly aware citizenry, demanding improvement in the services provided by the Corporation, the councillors are only too aware of this critical constraint. This was the most important institutional difficulty faced by the women councillors, as in getting funds to solve problems of basic amenities in their wards. Replicating the Local Area Development Fund allocated to representatives elected at the national and state levels that is the MPs and MLAs the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, too has a Councillor’s Development Fund. A part of the annual budget for development projects is allocated equally to councillors as CDF, which they can spend according to their own priorities to solve problems in their own wards. The fund was previously forty lakhs, which has now been raised to sixty five lakhs. Besides this, a part of the budget allocation for infrastructure development is decentralised at the ward committee level. Discussions with women councillors revealed that one of the major obstacles to the effective use
of this fund was the lack of information and the lack of transparency regarding the fund and for this they squarely blamed the Corporation officials. They complained that it was difficult to get complete and correct information about the total and project wise allocation and about the availability of the fund on time. Here another insightful observation needs to be made. The small number of highly educated and qualified women councillors and/or the women who were at a high position in the party hierarchy, did not complain of such difficulties. It would be reasonable to surmise then that education, political experience and party networks, and networks within the Corporation, could be useful in overcoming these difficulties.

Non cooperation on the part of the Corporation officials was another major hindrance to their effective performance, as mentioned by a majority of the women councillors. There seemed to be a huge trust deficit between the councillors and the Corporation officials. According to the women councillors, Corporation officials were reluctant to share information with them on work related issues, rules and procedures, etc. Many women councillors expressed the fact that male councillors were in a better position to get cooperation from the officials, as they could socialise with them and bond with them better, whereas being women, this route was completely closed to them. Although they accepted the fact that getting knowledge of the way the system works was difficult for any first time councillor, they still pointed out that it was doubly difficult for a woman, unless she had powerful patrons and mentors in the party and the Corporation. Councillors as a whole and women councillors in particular, face difficulties in negotiating with other service providers working in the city. As councillors and being representatives of the lowest and most immediate tier of the government, they are accountable and answerable to the public, but the institutional structure of the MCD keeps them excluded from the project planning and implementation stages. The lack of cooperation and lack of grievance redressal mechanisms of the private utility agencies were also factors that impacted their work and performance.

Although, none of the male councillors would criticise the reservation of seats for women, on record, their opposition and resentment was quite clear. This feeling of latent hostility and opposition was also quite disturbing for the women, although they refused to comment on it. They were very careful not to admit to any sort of gender discrimination either within the party or within the MCD as a whole, and claimed to
have the full support and cooperation from their male colleagues. However, in the course of the informal discussions, they were willing to admit that there was resentment on the part of their male colleagues and also that they could understand the reason for that. Most women councillors were also thankful to their political party for their support and help, in the discharge of their duties.

In summing up, the institutional obstacles faced by women councillors, could be countered to a great extent by training programmes for new councillors, with focus on constitutional and legal provisions, preparation of budgets, the tendering process, house taxes and other such technical and financial issues. They also felt that the numbers of women should increase and the rotation of reserved seats should take place after two terms. There were also suggestions of increasing funds at the ward level and also greater financial support from the party. There is no doubt that the provision of reserved seats for women in urban local bodies has to a large extent, helped in recognising the voice and role of women in local governance, but also shows at the same time that reservations per se do not lead to effective participation in decision making .There are several factors at play here, some of which are gender specific and some which are general in nature. The gender specific issues are the women’s own perception of the issues at stake, their knowledge and training, their political and family backgrounds, and their relationship with other women’s groups and NGOs. The general factors are the level of decentralisation, meaning the vertical networks with the state and central governments above and the ward committees below, horizontal relationships with other utility providers and political equations within the party and the corporation.

4.9 Self and Community Perceptions of Women Councillors

This section will attempt to evaluate the levels of individual empowerment of the women councillors and the group empowerment of women as a whole as a consequence of the presence of these women councillors in positions of formal political power. Empowerment has been described in detail in preceding chapters as both process and outcome, and therefore difficult to measure and assess. The following section will try to summarise the results of the empirical data regarding the empowerment of women councillors and its impact on the community.
4.9.1 Personal Empowerment

The term ‘empowerment’ has been used in this study from two perspectives. One is from the perspective or viewpoint of the individual, and the other is from the perspective of the community. From the perspective of the individual councillor, there is undoubtedly, a great increase in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, all of which are core elements of personal empowerment. Power is the core component of the term empowerment, and the concept of power is understood in many different ways. The most common understanding of power is in the form of ‘power over’ which basically connotes control or power over resources, assets and ideology. Being elected as councillors and becoming members of various committees, which legislate and deliberate on a large range of issues, is definitely an exercise of the ‘power over’ form of power. This form of power is basically the ability to exert power over institutions, resources and people. Power in this form may be enforced through violence or fear, or through inbuilt socialisation that compels the weak to accept the will of the stronger. This ‘power over’ has been historically exercised by men over women to maintain their subjugation and exclusion in society, because this kind of power is not only about control of bodies and physical and financial resources, but more importantly about controlling ideology and mindsets. It would in that sense be an oppressive and divisive force. Although ‘power over’, as a dimension of power may seem undesirable and unattractive, it is nonetheless, a very important and the most widely manifested forms of power, and in contemporary neo-liberal societies, having a share in power over may still be the best protection an individual or group could have. Therefore, it is essential and critical that women should have a share in power over, especially since they have been historically denied this share. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act proposes to do that, mandating through law, the presence of 33% women in urban local bodies. The need to have a women’s presence or voice in legislative bodies at all levels is now universally recognised, because without their presence, their particular needs and interests will never be on the political agenda. Thus, first and foremost, empowerment is the exercise of the ‘power over’ form of power. Seen in this context, the women councillors of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi are definitely empowered. A majority of them admitted to an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, after being elected as councillors, while a few said that they were already empowered before becoming councillors, and being
elected to public office, only strengthened their sense of self. Most of them also
admitted to having more voice in the decision making system at their homes. They
said their family members treated them with more respect and paid more attention to
their views and opinions. Their status in the family definitely improved after they
became elected representatives. Most councillors also said that they got a lot of
support and help from their family members, in the discharge of their duties. Women
councillors with young children depended upon the cooperation and support from
other family members, in the care and upbringing of their children. Women
councillors also admitted that one of the challenges they face is the fact that they have
both domestic and public duties, and for this the support provided to them by their
family members is critical. Another major challenge that they have to overcome is the
issue of mobility. Many times their duties involve travelling after dark, going to
different places in their wards, in case of emergencies, crises or accidents. Most
women councillors admit that they require the support and cooperation of the male
members in their families, brothers, or husbands in times like these. One of the
reasons that the families are so supportive of their women standing for and being
elected as councillors, could be the fact that the stakes in municipal elections have
become very high, and it is a matter of pride to have a councillor in the family. In
contemporary times, the status and importance of councillors has visibly increased.
The importance and prominence given to local issues by the print and electronic
media has ensured that councillors are now very visible and prominent at the local
level. Most of the councillors interviewed were very aware of their prominence and
were keen to enjoy and appreciate it. They appeared confident and eager to use their
new-found authority and powers. At the same time, most agreed that their new-found
fame was a double-edged sword, and that they could not take their constituents for
granted. Most councillors agreed that in recent years, what seemed to matter most,
was the performance of the councillors. Party or caste affiliations were secondary in
most cases. To sum up, one can conclude that all councillors, especially women, are
personally empowered by becoming elected representatives of the people. All the core
components of personal empowerment, like self-confidence, self-esteem, self-
reliance, sense of agency, dignity and sense of self in a wider context, seem to be
present among the women councillors, and therefore, as far as personal empowerment
goes, all the women councillors are much empowered.
4.9.2 Collective or Group Empowerment

Apart from personal empowerment, which is characterised by the ‘power over’ form of power, there are some more nuanced notions of power, such as ‘power to’ and ‘power within’. To have ‘power to’ is where power is seen as an ability of an individual to influence the outcome of a situation against the wishes of other actors. In this understanding of power, the unit of analysis is individual decision making, but the structures and processes in which these decisions are taken and influenced, are ignored. The ‘power to’ form of power is creative and enabling, as it gives women a chance to re-invent and reconstruct themselves, and is the power to mobilise for change. Nancy Hartsock, in this context talks about the contrast between the obedience and energy definition of power. The energy definition of power talks of power that is generative and not dominating. One aspect of this ‘power to’ is the kind of leadership that comes from the wish to see the group achieve what it is capable of, and setting its own agenda. It is a form of power that can persuade or open up new possibilities. Michael Foucault also defines power as relational and infinite and something that exists only in its exercise. His notion of power is a productive one, which is bound up with knowledge.

In both the notions of ‘power to’ and ‘power over’, the analysis of only those conflicting interests takes place, that are identified and articulated. The meaning of power as in ‘power within’, on the other hand, stresses that some interests are not only excluded from the decision making process, but are also not elevated up to the level of consciousness. This refers to the problems of many group based interests that remain unarticulated or unexpressed, and may remain so, unless the bearers of those interests get included in the decision making process. Power within is to have the power to decide on the rules of the game, to have control, to decide upon issues and to make decisions. It is a recognition that sometimes one is restricted by structures outside one’s own self, and is grounded in self-acceptance and self-respect, which in turn extends to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. This power from within must be self generating and form the foundation from which women must challenge various kinds of domination, including the most pervasive form, that is patriarchy. Women have to learn and know what are their strengths and potentials as well as the obstacles and restrictive barriers that hold them back. ‘Power with’ is the capacity to
achieve with others, what is difficult to achieve alone. It is the ability and power of working together, in groups and organisations, for the smooth functioning of social life. It is a sense of community, of the whole being greater than the sum of the individual parts. This notion of empowerment, thus, is basically a collective or group enterprise. It is different from personal or individual empowerment. It looks at whether empowered individuals, or in this case women, are also able to empower their community, or in other words, what impact do the individually empowered women councillors have on the community of women at large. Do they only exercise ‘power over’ or do they also exercise some amount of ‘power to’ and ‘power with’?

In this context, it is very useful to underline the glaring disconnect or disengagement of the women councillors with women’s rights groups and other civil society organisations. These groups can play a very critical role in sensitising both the elected women councillors and the larger body of women in the society about the needs and interests of women, and ways of articulating them. The women’s groups which have been actively involved in the women’s movement can also give useful inputs to the councillors about how to strategise, negotiate and bargain for their demands. Unfortunately, this crucial link seems to be absent in the urban local government scenario. These linkages between civil society groups and the local tier of government are more evident in the rural context, for a variety of reasons, and because of this gap, most women councillors are unable to develop a feminist perspective. Although, they are aware of the problems faced by women, they are not able to put it in perspective, to discern the fact that women’s issues need to be seen in the larger context of the social and political system that is in place, and then to mobilise for change and transformation.

While it is quite clear that being elected as councillors brings about positive changes in the lives of the women and helps them to realise their individual or personal empowerment, the question of the empowerment of the group or collective is not so easy to assess. In collective or group empowerment, changes take place in the group in many different ways, in the ways in which they are organised, the activities undertaken by them, the relations within and between them, and the relationship with the wider community and the formal institutions of power. Empowerment can be said to happen, when changes over time, give women more access to power, in one or
more of its different forms. These instances of increased power to, power with, power from within and on occasion power over are very significant. They do not in themselves demonstrate empowerment, rather they demonstrate the outcome of that process and are by themselves the evidence that empowerment has taken place. The core and critical components or elements of collective empowerment are group identity, collective sense of agency, group dignity, and self organisation and management. A group may already possess some or any of these elements, but what is important is that these increase, and this increase needs to occur in all the elements, not in one or two. It is also possible that similar processes acting in different contexts or within different power relations will have differential impacts. Therefore, for both personal and group empowerment, the empowerment process will take a form which will be linked to the particular, cultural, historical, economic, political and social location, as well as the individual’s specific place in the life cycle, her specific experiences and the interaction of all the above with the gender relations prevailing in that particular society.

However, it is quite clear and evident that the empowerment of the larger body of women in the society cannot be directly and proportionately linked to the presence of women councillors. The process of empowerment of the community is more gradual and incremental, as compared to the gains made in personal empowerment by the women councillors themselves. Also, some of the outcomes of community empowerment are not very tangible or quantifiable, for instance the councillors acting as role models for the younger generation of women in the community and the larger body of women being inspired and encouraged by their success. However, in most cases there was definitely a sense of ease and comfort among the community women, if their local councillor happened to be female, especially in semi-urban and semi-rural areas. In these areas, the women felt much more comfortable discussing their problems and concerns with a woman, but this was not so much evident in the more affluent areas where gender mattered less. In these areas people looked towards performance more and were quick to criticise their councillors, for their lack of performance, irrespective of gender. Although all women councillors were quick to point out the advantage of their gender, when it came to interactions with the community at large, and especially with the women, as they were more accessible,
more sympathetic, more understanding, the results from the focus group discussions are very revealing.

4.9.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were carried out in various parts of the city, which differed from each other in terms of income levels, levels of development, nature of the population, position and access of women to resources, among others, in order to understand and analyse the community perceptions towards women councillors.

The first focus group discussion was held in an upscale, upmarket ward in South Delhi, which had a very politically visible and prominent woman councillor. During the interview with the councillor, she had stressed on the fact that she was very accessible to the people, in spite of having a very hectic political schedule. The focus group discussions with the ward constituents bore out this fact. They were all agreed that access to her was not a problem, although some were of the opinion that it was basically her personal staff who attended to their problems, and that meeting her directly was sought to be minimised. But they were also quick to understand that since she was gaining a lot of prominence at the national party level, this was a normal consequence. But, on the whole they agreed that she or her staff were easily accessible and attended to their problems. Some of them also stated that they were proud to have such a high profile councillor. On the question of her performance, most were of the opinion that it was quite good, in the sense that a lot of infrastructural projects were started under her initiative, although many of them failed to be completed on time, and added to the existing problems. In this regard, many felt that a lot depends on the councillors political networks and contacts., and they were agreed that it was because of her long experience and extended political contacts, that their ward got a lot more attention than wards which did not have an influential councillor. On the question of specific works undertaken by her for the women constituents, it was negative, which corroborated the councillor’s own views that she gave priority to those works or projects which benefitted the whole ward, including the women. She was not in favour of doing anything exclusively for women. On the question of the empowerment of the women in the community, most people, including the women agreed that it had a very limited effect, in the sense that it would probably make it a easier for some of her women constituents to approach her with their
problems, because of her gender, but on the whole it did not make much difference. Most of the people, including the women claimed that it was the performance of the councillor that was their primary concern and that gender did not matter. On the basis of these observations one can conclude that the empowerment of women in the community is not directly linked to the presence of a woman councillor in immediate, tangible terms. The gains to the women in the community are very incremental and diffuse in nature.

The next focus group discussion was in a low income ward, which had unauthorized settlements, lots of migrant working class, and small and middle businesses. The councillor was a local person and had lived in the area for a very long time. She was very conversant with and aware of the various issues in the ward. While trying to locate her residence in the area, it was found that everyone in the vicinity knew of her house and was happy to guide people to her home. It seemed that she was very well integrated in the community. During the course of the interview, a couple of her constituents came with some problems, mostly to do with her signatures on identity documents, even though it was late in the evening. This bore out the councillor’s claim that she was available to her constituents at all times. The fact that she did not have a separate office space meant that her house was where she operated from. According to the councillor, this was a good arrangement, as she could carry out her domestic duties alongside her professional ones. During the course of the focus group discussion with the residents of the ward, the fact that she was very easy to approach figured prominently, especially for the women. Many women constituents said that they felt intimidated by the presence of a large staff or male assistants, and preferred to talk alone with the councillor. One reason for this could be the fact that women in this area were less educated or less independent than their sisters in the earlier ward, and hence their levels of comfort would be greater with a female councillor than with a male councillor. On the question of her performance, most people reiterated that although nothing specific had been done for women, the infrastructural development work which had been carried out would improve the living standards in the ward, and thus benefit everybody. The people were very happy that some longstanding infrastructural issues had been taken up and sought to be resolved by the councillor. The women in this particular ward definitely felt empowered by the presence of a woman councillor. The points that emerged from this discussion were that women
from a particular socio-economic background, who had a limited and controlled interaction with the opposite sex and the wider society in general, who were less educated and less confident of themselves, felt a certain amount of empowerment in terms of comfort and confidence, in the presence of an elected woman representative. But even in such a scenario, what eventually mattered was the performance of the councillor, in tackling the problems of her ward.

The next focus group discussion was in a low-income, resettlement colony in the eastern part of the city. The main problems in this area were the lack of planned development, leading to haphazard constructions and illegal encroachments, and the presence of a large number of petty and hardened criminals, which made the area particularly unsafe for women. The woman councillor of the area, who had served for two terms, was a local person, and the wife of a prominent local resident. Most of the discussants agreed that being a local resident, made it easier for them to gain access to her, although there was no unanimity on her effectiveness or performance as a councillor. Some were satisfied with her work, while some felt that there was a lot more she could have done, being familiar with the particular problems and concerns of the area. Most of the people interviewed, especially the women, agreed that cleanliness and drainage were the main infrastructural issues that came under the ambit of the councillor’s functions and that not enough was done in this regard. They also understood that the main issue of the area was law and order and general security and safety, and that came under the purview of the State government. The general consensus was that the municipal councillor had very limited powers, and that even these limited functions were not fulfilled properly. On the question of whether the councillor, being a woman had done anything specifically for women, the answer was largely negative, with a few disagreeing on the grounds that the councillor had made some improvements to the neighbourhood school which benefitted the children of the area. However this could not be substantiated, as there were no records with the school authorities, and this was not specifically women centric. Another issue that came up very strongly was the complete cynicism with which the people viewed municipal governance in general and municipal councillors in particular. All the people, who were part of the discussion, agreed that corruption levels in the MCD were extremely high, and that most councillors, irrespective of gender, contested elections not out of a commitment to public service, but only to make money out of a
public office. Regarding the question of the community of women at large being empowered by the presence of a woman councillor, the group was of the opinion that although a female councillor meant that women could have easier access to her, it did not lead to any real or substantial empowerment, as the councillor was only entrusted with general maintenance work and did not or could not do anything specifically to improve the lot of the women. The level of disenchantment with politics was so high that people said they were happy as long as there were no glaring misdeeds committed by the councillors, and that they were not really hopeful of any real or meaningful change happening.

The next ward in which focus group discussions were held was in an area which was largely populated by the migrant working class, people who had come to Delhi from the neighbouring states in search of a livelihood, and then made it their home. Since they were all outsiders in a sense, there was a strong bonding and sense of solidarity among them. The woman councillor from that area also belonged to one of the dominant communities in the area, and was a long time resident of the area. The main challenges in the ward were the lack of cleanliness and a permanent drainage network. The electorate largely consisted of small and medium businesses and workers in factories and other low-paid jobs. Most of the discussants were not satisfied with the councillor’s performance, and said that it was unlikely that she would get a second chance. On the main demands of the ward for cleanliness, most were agreed that she did not deliver on her promises. There was a glaring lack of garbage disposal services and the only garbage dump in the area had been demolished during the previous councillor’s regime and the current incumbent had not been able to get it rebuilt, much to everybody’s anger and despair. The people complained that they had no place to dump their domestic waste and there was anger at the fact that garbage disposal was one of the most important functions of the municipality and even this most basic function was not carried out in the ward. The people had formed groups and associations to put pressure on the civic authorities, but according to them, they were just shunted from one officer to another, reinforcing the prevailing conception that the entire administrative machinery was corrupt and in collusion with one another. They also lamented the lack of parks and open spaces in their ward, and in short were of the opinion that no development had taken place in their ward. Their only solace was that the councillor was always accessible and gave them a patient
hearing. Her lack of effectiveness as a councillor though, was disappointing. According to the people in the ward, nothing of significance was done for the women, and therefore the gender of the representative mattered far less than her or his effectiveness and performance. On the question of empowerment of the women at large, there were mixed reactions but the majority felt that real empowerment would take more than the mere presence of a woman councillor. Real and substantive empowerment could only come through policy changes, and that was not the jurisdiction of a municipal councillor. However, the presence of a woman councillor did signal some progressive changes in society, which would impact the young girls and women.

The next focus group discussion was in an urban village in North Delhi, dominated by a particular community of traders and small business. It was only a small settlement to begin with but had witnessed rapid growth and expansion in the intervening years, and was now, as is typical of urban villages, thriving and growing in an unplanned, haphazard way. The woman councillor of that area, was a local resident, of many years, and not very educated. By virtue of living in the locality for a very long time and also belonging to the dominant community, she was a known and familiar figure. All the people interviewed agreed that she was extremely accessible and helpful. They were also very appreciative of her success in the building and maintenance of roads in the area, which was prone to water logging in the monsoons. All the people and especially the women felt that there was a considerable improvement in cleanliness standards, especially in the narrow lanes and alleys of the colony. The womenfolk said this increased and improved cleanliness specially impacted them, as the men were out of the homes for longer, and did not have to put up with the filth and its attendant consequences. They were also quite satisfied with the timely disbursal of the widow pension and other schemes run by the MCD. On the whole there was a fair amount of satisfaction at the councillor’s performance, although there were a few complaints that a very necessary and critical work; that of installing a red light at a very busy intersection, had not been taken up. Regarding the question of any women-centric achievement of the councillor, although the answer was in the negative, most of the women claimed that general improvement of infrastructure, in terms of sanitation and public health mattered to them much more. The area also suffered from acute water shortage and poor quality of the water supplied, but most people
understood that this issue did not come under the purview of the Corporation, but at the same time they felt that it could have been pursued more forcefully and vigorously by the councillor. On the issue of the women at large being empowered by the presence of a woman councillor, there was an acceptance of the fact that she was definitely more accessible to the women and they could relate to her more than to a male councillor. The women of this area, as observer through interviews and discussions were definitely less exposed to the outer world, less educated and more dependent on the men, than women in other areas, and therefore the presence of a woman councillor in such a situation is clearly significant and empowering.

The next focus group discussion took place in two nearby wards in West Delhi. The area was moderately affluent with a concentration of middle class professionals and medium businesses. The people in the wards were mostly educated, cosmopolitan, informed and aware, and understood very well the limited nature of the powers of the councillor. In that limited domain of roads, parks, drainage and public lighting, they agreed that the performance of the two women councillors were quite satisfactory. In both the cases the people approved of the fact that the funds given to the councillors had been spent on something constructive and useful. In one ward it had been spent on relaying concrete slabs in the local market and in the other on putting up lights and benches in the area park. However, nothing had been done which was specifically for women. Regarding accessibility and cooperation, both women councillors ranked very high. Most of the people interviewed said that the councillors were very visible in the locality and making contact with them, either in person or through the telephone was not an issue. Again, the only immediate concern of the residents was the beginning of a shortage in the water supply, and this they planned to take up with the councillors. An important point that came up during the discussions were that since the people of these wards were all highly educated, informed and aware, they made full use of their right to information and other related rights. In such a scenario, with an effective and very vigilant RWA, there is a lot of pressure on the councillor to perform his or her job well and less chances of the public being hoodwinked or misinformed by the elected representative. Most people were of the opinion that the performance of the individual councillor mattered the most, and was primary, and that their gender was secondary. In this context, the issues of corruption among the
councillors and in MCD at large was raised and most were of the opinion that women councillors were no less corrupt than the men, and that corruption was endemic to the MCD. Although, the community appeared to be politically engaged and aware, there was an undercurrent of cynicism and disillusionment with the system at large. On the question of empowering the women in the society at large, all the women were of the opinion that although their personal empowerment was not threatened, as a group, women were still disempowered in many ways, and this could change not only through the presence of women councillors, but through societal reform, and one of the characteristics of a changing society could be the presence of more women in public spaces.

As part of this study, focus group discussions were also held in wards which did not have women representatives, to focus on the issue of the difference that women are supposed to bring to local governance. The women residents of wards which were middle class or upper class were not overtly concerned about the gender of the councillor. Some wards which had male councillors also saw equal support from the women electorate, if the councillor was accessible and effective. Since women councillors, in most cases, do not do anything specifically and exclusively for women, it becomes difficult to gauge empowerment at the community level. And, as has already been pointed out, women are not a homogenous category, and therefore the divides between them are stark, and they can never have common interests. In the context of group empowerment of women, there are many factors which play a significant role. The levels of education, income and exposure to the outside world of the women in the group, or in other words the sense of agency of the group are critical. In cases where the personal empowerment of women is constrained or limited, the presence of a woman in a position of power can have significant empowering effects. A woman councillor serves as a role model to the women at large, by demonstrating that women are equal to men in all respects and that women do not have to abide by the stereotypical gender roles assigned to them by a deeply patriarchal society. On the other hand, in cases where the levels of personal empowerment among women are quite high, the presence of a woman councillor may not have the same empowering outcomes.
Notes


2This was the proportion of women in the Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1978.

3In a study conducted in 2002-2003, data showed that 19.1% of women councillors in Kolkata are single , and 14.9% of them are widows, which means that almost one-third of the female representatives do not have husbands, which is very interesting because husbands are usually a major resource for women councillors. The figures for Kolkata, lead one to the assumption that the political culture of the city is not as male-centric as in other cities, especially Delhi.

4In the existing sexual division of domestic labour, it is very unlikely that men play an active role in rearing or bringing up their children, and hence the number of children they have does not impact them in their choice of occupation significantly.


7Within the Municipal Corporation, the form or structure of the authority set-up is very critical in the decision making process. The MCD follows the Commissioner model, where the Municipal Commissioner, is an integral and highly important part of the authority structure, unlike the Mayor-in-Council system, where the councillors and the Mayor have a greater role to play.

8Joni Lovenduski, in her book, Feminising Politics, 2005, discusses in detail about the difficulty of transforming, inherently, change-averse, political institutions.

9For more details, see Archana Ghosh and Stephanie Lama Rewal, Democratisation in Progress: Women and Local Politics in Urban India, New Delhi: Tulika Publishers, 2005.