Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The abysmally low numbers of women in areas of political decision making at all levels, national, state, local, has for long been a cause of great concern and discontent among feminist scholars and academics alike. Although, South Asia has seen the world’s first woman Prime Minister (Srimavo Bandaranayke in Sri Lanka), one of the longest serving prime ministers anywhere in the world (Indira Gandhi in India) and the youngest woman prime minister, (Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan), the figures of political participation by women, on the ground present a different and sorry picture. Needless to add, political participation by women is unanimously advocated by all, from the public, institutional domain to the private, non-state domain. Participation by citizens of both sexes, is in the contemporary world a necessary precondition for a successful and effective political system. Participatory democracy strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of political institutions and has been widely acknowledged to be one of the key foundations of a democratic and just society and the most effective way of institutionalising such participation has been through ‘representation’. Political participation has been defined broadly by theorists and scholars as the involvement of citizens in such political activities which directly or indirectly influence the behaviours and actions of decision makers, and which would include all forms of legal activities by private citizens, which are more or less aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and or the actions they take or the decisions they make. Although participation can be of various kinds like voting, campaigning, attending public meetings, joining an organisation or party, contributing money to a political forum, mobilising people to vote in a particular way, etcetera but for the purposes of this study a narrower view of participation has been applied, namely representation. The other key concept in this study is empowerment, and the different dimensions of empowerment, in terms of the various notions of power, that form its core, will also be discussed in detail. The objective being to examine and analyse the participation of women in political, legislative bodies at the local level, and also explore the link between representation of women and their subsequent empowerment, if any, both at the individual and
community levels. This work will therefore focus on the participation of women, through political representation in urban local bodies, and assess the outcomes or impact it has on the social and political structures, by examining both personal empowerment as well as group empowerment.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the present study is to probe into the concepts of participation/representation and empowerment in the context of elected women councillors of urban local bodies- in this case, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The study is an attempt to analyse and examine the participation of women, and the resulting empowerment among women, if any, through electoral inclusion in urban local bodies and thereby focus on the relationship between participation and empowerment, and to assess it both qualitatively and quantitatively. Participation or representation of women councillors is at present mandated by law, what this work attempts to understand is whether this participation remains only formal and tokenistic or does it mean something real and substantial?

It will also attempt to assess the outcomes of women’s participation in urban local bodies in the context of its policies and programmes. Does an increasing number of women councillors mean an increasingly gender-sensitive local government or not? Are there any perceptible changes in the programmes, policies and priorities of the local body?

**Rationale of the Study**

This work attempts to fill a major lacunae in the research done on elected women representatives of urban municipal bodies. A lot of attention, scholarly and activist has been paid to Elected Women Representatives,(EWRs) of the Panchayati Raj institutions, and their impact on the rural, social and political structures. On the other hand, relatively less work has been done in the urban sphere. On the issue of urban local bodies, there have been studies on mainly quantitative analysis of women’s presence, in terms of their socio-economic demographics, and the institutional structure, composition and functions of municipal bodies. There is thus a need to examine and assess both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of women’s participation, in the formal, institutional setting of the urban municipal
bodies. This work is thus an attempt to fill the gap as it looks at both these dimensions of participation of women councillors in urban governance and an assessment of their empowerment, if any and also to examine whether this empowerment impacts women as a group.

**Research Questions**

The main or primary research question is to;

1) Examine the effect of the 74\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment Act, regarding its goal of empowerment of women, and also to understand whether increased representation has a direct correlation with empowerment and if not, what is the nature of the linkages between representation and empowerment.

2) To study and examine whether there have been any changes in the agenda and priorities of urban local bodies as a result of increased presence and participation by women. And also whether it has brought about any perceptible shift in policies and programmes of the urban local bodies and made it more sensitive towards gender concerns.

**Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Although reservation of seats for women through the mechanism of gender quotas opens up participatory and representative spaces for women, there is no direct correlation between descriptive and substantive representation.

2. The agenda and priorities of women councillors remain similar to that of their male counterparts, and therefore the policies and priorities of the urban local bodies do not see an automatic shift towards more gender concerns. The shift is hardly possible in the absence of larger substantive changes and reforms in the polity and society at large.

3. In terms of the empowerment potential of the 74\textsuperscript{th} Constitutional Amendment Act, while the mandatory presence of women in the formal, legislative spaces, has led to the individual or personal empowerment of the women representatives, this does not necessarily lead to empowerment of women as a group. Individual empowerment may lead to group empowerment in the long run, only if accompanied by substantive commitment to gender needs and interests, by all elected representatives.
Premises and Framework of the Study

This study is premised on the assumption that there is a strong necessity for participation of women at all levels of government, including and may be most crucially at the local level. This is not only one of the basic requisites of a democratic polity but also because, as has been debated and discussed, women’s interests can to a large extent, only be articulated and protected by women. The politics of a gendered identity revolves around three interrelated concepts: a) a concern for recognition which necessitates acknowledgement of their distinctive identity, b) concern for representation in the public sphere and c) concern for a share in the public assets and resources. This study analyses all the debates and schools of thought on women’s representation and participation. After unraveling and understanding the various debates, this study attempts to look at the outcomes of such representation. Empowerment of women, as a consequence of their participation is assessed at both the personal as well as collective level.

Over the years, since women were enfranchised, the meanings of their political action and of representation have changed. Although the expectations from women representatives are unrealistic in the sense that they will be able to transform centuries old male designed traditions of politics, but on the other hand, their impact on public policy has also been underestimated. Understanding the processes of women’s representation requires a study of both equity and difference perspectives. Women representatives operate in a context which is highly insensitive to gender as well as cultural differences. At the same time, the achievements that have resulted from feminist interventions are downplayed. Theories of representation have to be relooked in such a way as to include concerns of women’s equality as well as a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of political processes and outcomes.

In terms of gender, political institutions mirror private institutions, meaning that politics is essentially male dominated and oppressive towards women. However with increasing number of women in political arenas, there is rising interest in what this new situation portends. But to understand the possibilities of increasing representation, one needs to look at the nature of institutions of
political representation. Representative institutions determine the process of feminising politics. Secondly, it is also imperative to understand how women themselves think about political representation, as much as how the processes actually operate. It is feminist theory that actually illuminates the gendered nature of political representation.

It is now universally accepted that women have equal rights as citizens that enable them to participate in government, where their particular interests can be advanced and defended. But in evaluating and assessing the outcomes of this representation, there is need firstly to understand the political institutions meaning thereby the organisations, formal and informal rules, processes and procedures, through which politics is done. They control access to resources and influence the way in which political representation works in practice. Established institutions have a tendency to preserve their traditions, and cultures, prevent or obstruct change and protect their elites. Many scholars have shown how, historically women’s bodies and their association with the body and nature has disqualified them from citizenship and the same argument holds for political representation. Political institutions can ignore the presence of women, by disguising the masculine nature of the institution and by treating it as universal.

The next question to be addressed is will greater representation or participation lead to greater focus on women’s interests? Wangnerud (2000) has argued that studies conducted by men declare gender differences among politicians to be insignificant, whereas studies conducted by women found that women did make a gender specific contribution to policies. Dahlerup (2000) concludes that it is difficult to isolate the effect of the growth in women’s political representation from the general social development. But at the same time, certain changes can definitely be attributed to increasing political representation of women. Wangnerud has empirically tested that women do represent women’s interests defined as the recognition of women as a social category, and the acknowledgement of the unequal balance of power between the sexes, much more than their male colleagues. Pippa Norris and J. Lovenduski came to similar conclusions after a survey of the British Parliament in 1997. They found that on the scales related to women’s interests, women and men differed
significantly across party lines (Paxton and Hughes, 2007). However, on other issues, party affiliation proved to be stronger than gender. Sarah Childs found in a survey of 33 labour women MPs in the 1997 British Parliament, that more than two thirds are attitudinally feminist. Several studies carried out in the Scandinavian countries also show that on certain issues like representational politics, labour market politics, body politics and care politics, women differ more from men (Wendy Stokes, 2005). Thus, it is more or less clear that some women’s interests are more likely to be pursued by women than by men, though on established political issues, gender might not be the decisive factor. There are social differences between men and women resulting from their different responsibilities and social locations, and these as a result translate into different approaches to politics and power. But, Phillips (1995) also believes that these initial differences may be outweighed by the common experiences of women. Phillips argues that women representatives will address the interests of certain groups of women, while ignoring the claims of others. The shared experiences of women will certainly lead to common concerns, but there is no way of establishing strict accountability for women as a group. Thus changing the gender composition of elected political bodies, with a greater representation of women, will bring about a qualitative change in the way politics is conducted. The style of politics, along with its content will change. Political spaces will become less masculine, and as a result the gendered notions of society and its politics will change to become more inclusive and less biased against women. There is no way of establishing strict accountability for women as a group. Thus changing the gender composition of elected political bodies, with a greater representation of women, will certainly lead to common concerns, but there is no way of establishing strict accountability for women as a group. Thus changing the gender composition of elected political bodies, with a greater representation of women, will bring about a qualitative change in the way politics is conducted. The style of politics, along with its content will change. Political spaces will become less masculine, and as a result the gendered notions of society and its politics will change to become more inclusive and less biased against women. There is no way of establishing strict accountability for women as a group. Thus changing the gender composition of elected political bodies, with a greater representation of women, will certainly lead to common concerns, but there is no way of establishing strict accountability for women as a group. Thus changing the gender composition of elected political bodies, with a greater representation of women, will bring about a qualitative change in the way politics is conducted. The style of politics, along with its content will change. Political spaces will become less masculine, and as a result the gendered notions of society and its politics will change to become more inclusive and less biased against women.

Research on these and related questions has demonstrated the difficulty of extricating particular cause leading to particular effects, and have reiterated the fact that no change is unicausal. However, these studies have also proved that some amount of change is taking place, but it is a very slow and gradual process. It is in this framework that this study is conceived of. Both concepts of participation/representation and empowerment are based on the assumption that the marginalisation of women as a group, is the result of structural forces operating at the level of culture, society, economy and polity. Women as a
group, do have certain common interests but at the same time it has to be acknowledged that gender is not the only, or even the most important element in their identity formation. The other decisive factors could be class, caste, religion, culture etc. The most obvious link between political participation:representation and empowerment is the aspect of bringing women into formal positions of power. Power is the central axis of politics, the power over values, ideas and resources. The normative argument for bringing women into positions of power is to offset and ameliorate the historical and structural barriers that prevented them from doing so. However, another argument is that the presence of women in substantial numbers, or a critical mass, could actually lead to a transformation of politics and could challenge the existing hierarchies of power. The fact of women gaining power to change the rules of the game and also to negotiate gender relations is the key goal of empowerment.

As evident from the above debates, there appears to be four successive stages of empowerment, that are linked to the inclusion of women in political bodies. The first two stages are concerned with the issues of political presence and the exercise of formal power, as power over and power to. These two stages constitute the basis of that kind of empowerment resulting from their political presence and this will be an analysis of the profile of women who have moved into positions of power, in terms of their socio-economic background, their educational levels and their motivations for entering politics. The second stage is to examine and question whether the women who have moved into political positions are actually exercising power as in do they have the required knowledge of rules and procedures to exercise power, do they have autonomy to participate in decision making and most importantly, do they have power to change the way politics is done?

The first two stages deal with political empowerment and the last two understand empowerment in the more conventional sense, namely as an enabling process for exercising more control over one’s life and choices. Here the focus will be on the changes that have been introduced into women’s lives because of their political position. This will look at the perceptions of the women concerned, as in whether they have gained knowledge and interest
in politics, have they gained in status and visibility at home, are they more confident and assertive and finally have they been able to gain gender consciousness.

The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

The two key variables or themes of this study are empowerment and participation of women. As has already been clarified, participation is understood through the lens of political representation, and empowerment is assessed at both individual and group levels. Democracy, in its most minimalist sense, has meant the equality of citizens, who vote to choose a government. The notion of equal and uniform citizenship has also been questioned by scholars who view the whole concept of citizenship as deeply gendered and discriminatory towards women, while espousing the causes of equality and uniformity at a broader theoretical level. The working of this political arrangement of representative democracy, by the ostensibly ‘equal’ citizens across diverse contexts, indicates a plurality of conflicting and competing interests at work, with the relative power of the interests influencing decision making processes. Therefore, the question of what and how much space, the marginalised, disadvantaged groups can have within this political arrangement and to what extent, their interests can be voiced or represented, becomes extremely critical. Representation thus becomes a crucial term shaping contemporary democratic politics at different levels.

The recent 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Acts have been a concerted bid to strengthen local level governance by seeking to ensure adequate, active participation of women in local bodies, through the mechanism of reservation of seats for women. With the help of gender quotas, a wider representation of the diverse needs and interests of women are being sought. The significance of this axis of representation, especially the relation that is posited between the representative and the represented, need to be understood more deeply.

A relationship between the representative and the represented becomes necessary, because the latter cannot be physically present in those political arenas, where crucial decisions, affecting them are deliberated upon. In an ideal situation, the role of the representative is to secure the interests of the electorate or the represented, but in practice the entire process is much more complicated and
complex. In countries, grappling with myriad problems of poverty, deprivation and illiteracy, the ability of the masses to articulate their needs in a cogent, cohesive fashion is eroded. Therefore the political representative is required to give coherent shape to fragmented identities and local interests by couching these in a political language. Therefore, in many cases the representative is not just representing a pre-existing collective interest; indeed there may be no such articulated entity. The task of the representative is thus a central one of providing the marginalised masses with a language out of which it becomes possible for them to reconstitute a political identity and a political will.

A vast literature defines and debates the merits and shortcomings of various forms of representations. Hannah Pitkins (1967), originally made the distinction between standing for (the mere presence of women regardless of their views) and acting for (the presence of women acting in women’s interests) as forms of representation. Anne Phillips (1995), in response to Pitkins’ concerns, unequivocally affirms that the basic question of whether, it matters if women are physically present in the political arena so long as members of the dominant groups act responsibly for the interests of all, with a resounding affirmative. The presence of those who could have a different point of view becomes important according to Anna Yeatman (1999), because the inclusion of previously excluded voices brings about changes in political and other institutions. The arguments for gender balance in democratic institutions (Mackay, 2003), are made on the grounds of equality, justice and fair play and on the basis of the legitimacy of the democratic system. Gender disparities in political participation will lead to a breakdown of the democratic ideal of equal protection of all interests. Women may or may not act differently or in women’s interests, but their presence lends legitimacy to democratic institutions, as a signifier of justice, inclusion and recognition, and the quantum of political effectiveness of women depends upon the nature and scale of their political engagement, in a range of institutions, in the political arenas of the state.

Descriptive representation, also referred to as symbolic, numerical or standing for representation versus substantive representation which implies not only that the elected representative shares the opinions and concerns of the persons he or she represents, but also that the elected representative commits to consistent
action with a view to representing their interests. (Tremblay and Trimble, 2003).

Like formal equality, descriptive representation is necessary but not sufficient to ensure that gender justice remains relevant to the political agenda. In most cases the descriptive representation of women has increased as a result of constitutional change, new institutions, quotas, but in none of these cases has gender equality increased at an equivalent speed. Representation is about both identity and interests, (Dobrowsky, 2002), and about more than mere numbers (Dovi, 2002). Several studies suggest that substantive differences in the political agenda may be associated with enhanced representation. The entrenched nature of previous power structures may be a source of justification for modest progress but there is universal consensus in favour of adequate representation, not only for symbolic reasons but as a necessary precondition to integrate the needs and interests of both men and women for more harmonious and inclusive growth and development. These debates about the various forms of representation become strikingly pertinent when we consider women’s marginalisation from the political process and the recent attempts to create a political space for them. The basic purpose of increasing representation through reservation for women, is to alter the distribution of power and resources in elected bodies, where decisions are taken which affect everyone. Representation aimed at providing access to decision making bodies can change the norms and principles that govern distribution of resources, (Hassan, 2009). Greater presence of women in political bodies provides them with a very important political resource, through which they can negotiate structural change, which could alter the very nature of power itself. Thus a further key argument is the need for a more vigorous advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups. (Phillips 1995) She points out that a crucial factor in the politics of transformation is the opening of a fuller range of policy options. However, at the same time it has to be understood that the causal link between descriptive representation and substantive representation, is very tenuous and fragile. Substantive representation is impacted by numerous other institutional, cultural and political factors, which are not necessarily dependent on mere numbers. Some factors which can influence the possibility of legislators acting substantively are their party ideology and its compatibility with feminist issues, their own understanding and identification with feminism, presence of active women’s cells in
political parties, and other organisations and the extent, and strength of women’s political mobilisation in society at large. (Trimble, 2006). Women representatives have to operate and act in a context which is gender insensitive, along with gendered political cultures and processes. Thus, it would be unrealistic to expect the entry of more numbers of women, to automatically or easily effect changes in the deeply embedded gendered norms and practices, and the outcome of these increased numbers, can at best be very gradual and slow.

Unlike other group, like the Other Backward Castes,(OBCs), Dalits, women have not been seen as an interest group, with well articulated demands in civil society and given their dispersal of identities across various markers like class, caste or age, making gender alone the rallying point for women is problematic. Whom, then is the woman representative representing? Does she represent all women, or women of her caste, or women of her class? If women representatives are meant to represent all women, she has a daunting challenge ahead, firstly contributing substantially to the formation of women as a collective interest group, and in the process, creating the political agency for herself and those she represents. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the relationship between the representative and the represented, hitherto assumed to be unproblematic in political debate, is a deeply complicated and contested one.(Niranjana,2002). In this context, the debate over quotas, reflects the feminist debates about ‘women as a group’, given their multiple identities and location in the polity. In India the picture is further complicated by the heterogeneity and existence of numerous social groups demanding preferential treatment. Scholars like Young (1997), talk about a politics of recognition which see women as a disadvantaged group and build a powerful feminist case for women’s reservation to redress historical and continuing disadvantages. Despite their numerous differences women can be conceived as a category on the basis of their oppression in a world defined by a sexual division of labour.

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing consensus that representation in decision making is vital for the development of women as a whole and that reservations through the mechanism of gender quotas are the way to do that.(Dahlerup, 2007). This marks a radical departure from the nationalist position and also from the initial years of the women’s movement in
independent India. The reasons for this shift are firstly the growth and expansion of the women’s movement, especially in urban India and secondly the growing ferment in Indian politics and society put the gender question at the forefront. The women’s movement began to look for new ways of wielding its influence over the State, and to achieve the goal of exercising power within the State, began to consider reservations or quotas, as a way of increasing women’s representation in politics. The argument from the perspective of interests does not depend on establishing a unified interests of all women but rather on establishing a difference between interests of men and women and providing space for a wider spectrum of policy options. (Phillips 1995) From the 1980s, quotas in state legislatures became one of the major demands of the women’s movement. The most significant step taken by the government, in this direction, came in 1989 with the mandating of 33% reservation for women in rural Panchayats and urban Municipalities. The 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Acts proved to be a landmark and a critical step in the context of increased women’s activism, and as a response the State’s efforts to provide greater opportunities to women in local governance. Despite various social and institutional handicaps and hurdles, women’s participation in politics has had a significant impact both in terms of the subjective dimension, namely the ways in which women see themselves in their new roles as well as the objective dimension as in the actual developmental impact.

After analyzing and understanding the question of participationrepresentation, it follows logically to look at the outcomes of this. This study seeks to explore and establish, if any a correlation between participation and the consequent empowerment of women. The concept of empowerment is a deeply contested one and encompasses a wide spectrum of meanings. The gaining of power by the vulnerable is very often called empowerment and the main subtext of this is that, what the vulnerable or the marginalised need is the power to solve their own problems, and the ‘assistance mentality’ of most states or governments was the real barrier to their growth and development. Naila Kabeer, (1994), talks of the ‘disempowering and infantilising ways’ in which policy makers have frequently treated the poor, especially poor women. The
argument that transformation in the nature and distribution of power was necessary for a better world, gathered critical force in the 60s with the civil rights movement in the USA. Later, more specific ideas of empowerment were developed in social work, health, counselling, education, youth work and community development. In recent years, empowerment has become a key term in theories of neo-liberalism. A lot of academic and activist attention was paid to empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s as structural adjustment programmes, sponsored and initiated by the World Bank and the IMF, increased the sufferings of poor women, particularly in Latin America and Africa. Third World feminism focussed on the materiality of power relations, not only in cultural practices, but in all aspects and dimensions of daily life. At the UN Women’s Conference in Beijing, China, in 1995 empowerment was adopted as a requirement for a better world for women. The problem with the concept of empowerment was that it meant different things to different people. Critics argue that ‘power’ which should be at the heart of the debate is pushed back out of the language of development by the powerful, who have taken a bundle of words like empowerment, participation, emancipation, democratization and development, to make them mean whatever the user chooses them to mean.

Empowerment can be seen both as a process and an outcome. Empowerment as a process looks at the policies and strategies of development adopted by countries that impact women. It provides a guideline or framework to understand social relations and its reciprocal impact on social and economic forces. When viewed under this lens, colonial policy can also be viewed as empowering as it shaped, transformed and impacted women. In the 1970s and 1980s, third world feminists used the concept of empowerment to address the issue of the gender differences that exist in the control and distribution of resources. Embedded in the notion was the idea of power, in a relational context or in other words power over whom and power to influence whom\what. Some scholars are of the opinion that the dominant perspective of empowerment held by development experts and by the ‘women in development’ approach(WID) is to give women the chance to occupy positions of power, in terms of political and economic decision making, but the problem is that it does not involve a structural change in power relations.
Nancy Hartsock (1983), contrasts the obedience definition of power with an energy definition which believes that power is generative and not necessarily dominating. She also makes a distinction between ‘power over’ meaning control and ‘power to’, meaning the ability to influence change. Michael Foucalt, (1991) also conceptualises power as relational and constituted in a network of social relationships among subjects who have some agency. This definition would also include the notion of resistance to power. Following this notion, there were many studies documenting the importance of the phenomenon of ‘power to’…i.e. the power to bring about change in situations of inequality and discrimination in which women are trapped. Power to refers to the strategies that women use to increase their control of resources and their ability to generate decision making capacities. Scholars like Gita Sen and Caren Grown (1987), argue that women’s organisations are central to these strategies. Sharma (1991), focuses on the original understanding of empowerment, which stresses awareness, the understanding of systemic forces, or the notion of ‘power within’, as the beginning of empowerment. While the goal is the end of oppression, no explicit reference is made to the gaining of formal power in the political institutions. Chandra (1997), views empowerment as the redistribution of power which challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. Empowerment according to the scholar is both a process and an outcome of that process. It is a transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as informational resources. Like the Foucauldian thinking, this notion of empowerment closely links power to information and knowledge.

The 1990s witnessed a more inclusive usage of the concept of empowerment. The focus on ‘power to’ which began in the 1970s was included with the notion of ‘power over’. Srilatha Batliwala (1994), defines power as the ‘control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology and empowerment as the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power’. Contemporary scholars believe that the way forward is to reconcile the issue of empowerment as a process and also as an outcome of that process. The inclusive notion of empowerment encompasses
all the elements of redistribution of resources, structural transformations as well as greater control over power, and all these elements work in a complex continuum, resulting in changes that ensure more power to women. But it can also lead to an erosion of power, leading to disempowerment. The Gender And Development,(GAD) literature has documented many cases where women have actually lost power as a result of development initiatives. Institutions have manifest male biases and western imported strategies of capitalist/neocapitalist development have actually led to an erosion of women’s power for instance women’s increased dependence, reduced or restricted access to resources and decision making, and the political policies that limit women’s rights. Another related question is whether women’s empowerment leads directly to men’s disempowerment. Batliwala believes that empowering women actually liberates and empowers men. When men and women are recognised and treated as equal partners and there is a change in gender relations, positive energy and skills are brought to social, political and economic structures.

It is also important to note that the process of empowerment is not a uni linear, uni-dimensional path. There is no direct cause and effect relationship between process and outcome. Nor is it always clear when a change is cause, when effect, when process and when outcome. According to Naila Kabeer ,in evaluating empowerment outcomes, one has to consider the complex nature of the empowerment process and the effect it may have directly or indirectly in enhancing power. She also emphasises the transformative potential of ‘power within’ and like Batliwala focuses on collective, grassroots participatory action. Jo Rowlands (1998) broadens the analytical perspectives on gender and development. She argues that empowerment is more than participation in decision making ,it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. It is thus personal as well as relational and collective but the core of the empowerment process consists of increases in self confidence, self esteem, a sense of agency and of self and a sense of dignity, being worthy of having a right to respect from others. Rowlands and Kabeer argue for a feminist model of power which draws on the Foucauldian notion of power as productive and bound up with knowledge, and thus not finite, but which is enhanced by a gender analysis of
power, of how internalised oppression places internal barriers to women’s exercise of power, thereby contributing to the maintenance of inequality between men and women. Empowerment entered the lexicon of gender and development discourse in the 1990s, but while mainstream development agencies emphasise the reformative nature of empowerment, alternative development practitioners increasingly use it in a transformative sense at the level of small scale, grassroots community development.

This work will attempt to locate empowerment as a process that lies in the tension between agency and structure and also reflect on whether it is possible to achieve agency without some transformation of existing power relations. The inequality of distribution and control of resources embedded in capitalist structures will be focussed on to understand that the issue of empowerment is directly linked to the redistribution of resources. Negotiating with and if required challenging the state, is a necessary part of the collective action leading to women’s empowerment. This work will therefore focus both on personal empowerment as well as group empowerment and what outcomes, or impact it has on the social and political structures.

Methodology and Sources of Data

The present study is based on both the quantitative and qualitative research methodology. It was a deliberate decision of having both approaches, because both have their own merits as well as drawbacks. Quantitative studies are useful in detecting general patterns and trends, give an overarching view of a complex reality, and thus enable us to arrive at comprehensive conclusions. Their weakness is that they often lack depth, since not all relevant information necessary to understand complex social processes, can be quantified. In many cases, reliance only on statistical interpretation of data, may actually hide the voices of the people concerned. On the other hand, purely qualitative research lacks the breadth for arriving at broader conclusions, though it leads to a more context sensitive understanding. But the challenge then is to coalesce the individual insights into a larger, broader pattern. It brings to the fore the uniqueness of each particular case, and reiterates the fact that generalisations cannot be made of a complex reality. Thus, a combination of both approaches
were used for the present study in order to understand the general pattern as well as specific individual voices.

Women as a group or as a collective have rarely been the focus of studies on empowerment. The question of empowerment is mainly looked at with regard to the representatives themselves, not to the larger body of women in society. This study will also employ the gender approach in its complete sense. Both men and women will be interviewed because that will eventually lead to an understanding as to what results can be attributed to gender and what to other factors? Interviewing both sexes will help in isolating the situations in which women differ from the men. Another very important objective of the present study is to attempt a measurement or assessment of the empowerment of the community of women or women in general. This is to differentiate between the women who are in positions of formal power, from the ordinary women who do not have access to formal political power, and in this context, the notions of both personal and group empowerment will be analysed and debated. The sample size of the present empirical study is half of the current strength of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The pilot study, to test the methodological tools and approaches, encountered a lot of reluctance and a general non-cooperative attitude from councillors, to give detailed interviews especially on issues of income, cooperation from the MCD, and problems regarding its functioning. Thus the sample size of this study is about 50% of the overall strength of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and although it is random, it is also purposive. The councillors were given an exhaustive and detailed questionnaire, and then they were also personally interviewed, to gain an insight into their motivations, agenda, priorities and problems faced in the discharge of their duties. Both male and female councillors were interviewed in order to understand where the difference, if any, lay. To assess and analyse their participation in the process of deliberation, in the Municipal body, a large number of meetings of the general House meetings as well as a large number of committee meetings were attended and minutes and discussions recorded. Apart from recording the minutes of the abovementioned meetings, the MCD records were accessed to collect data about questions raised by women councillors, and resolutions initiated by them, to address the specific concerns of their wards.
Regarding the issue of community empowerment, as has been mentioned above, empowerment is most often related to the individual and so a conscious attempt has been made to understand and analyse the empowerment of women as a group, as a consequence of the increasing numbers of women councillors. Towards, this purpose, focus group discussions were held in different places of Delhi, keeping in mind the variables of income, geography, development level and nature and composition of the electorate. Accordingly, focus group discussions were held in upscale, affluent areas, as well as low income, and heavily congested areas, including areas which have a large concentration of migrant workers. Data was also collected from middle class, professional areas as well as urban villages and all the information and data were collated to get a sense of, or an understanding of the empowerment of women as a group.

Therefore, the present study is based on both the primary and secondary sources of data. Extensive field studies, focussed group discussions, interviews and discussions with both male and female councillors as well as attending House meetings and meetings of various committees of the MCD were the primary sources. A large number of books, articles, journals and newspapers have been consulted as the secondary source.

**Scope of the Study**

The present work attempts to analyse and examine the participation of women and the resulting empowerment among women through electoral inclusion in urban local bodies. Although Delhi has three local bodies, the present study will only focus on the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, (MCD). The other two local bodies are the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, (NDMC) and the Delhi Cantonment Board. The NDMC, has a jurisdiction of only 2-88% of the total area, and is basically the area where the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the Parliament, the Supreme Court, and all the central government offices, and the Delhi Cantonment Board covers only 2.89% of Delhi’s total area, and looks after the area where the armed forces are stationed. It is evident that the leading role in local administration is played by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the MCD, which has jurisdiction over almost 94% of the entire area of Delhi. It is thus by far the dominant partner in the local administrative set up of Delhi, and is thus the focus of our study.
Secondly the scope of this study does not extend to a detailed analysis of the institutional set-up and structure of the MCD, although it will be dealt with briefly. The main objective is to view it as a site of women’s empowerment and participation. The participation of women in the Corporation, as mandated by law, has to be studied both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The issue of empowerment will be looked at both from the individual as well as community perspectives.

Thirdly, the time frame of the study is the current, prevailing time period. It is not a historical examination of women’s role in urban local bodies, but an assessment of contemporary times. The passage of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, opened up the doors for the presence of women in urban local bodies, and this work is an attempt to study the participation and empowerment of women in the MCD term, 2007 to 2012.

Chapter Plan

The present study has been organised into four chapters, excluding introduction and conclusion.

Chapter -I locates the issue of women’s participation, as understood through the mechanism of political representation, in the conceptual framework of the theory of citizenship. It also details the developments in feminist theory, regarding citizenship and representation, which is a harsh critique of women’s exclusion from politics and makes a strong claim for greater inclusion. The underlying argument is that women’s absence is a huge democratic deficit which requires concerted action from both the State and civil society. It summarises feminist criticism of the theory and practice of democracy and citizenship and the evolution of a feminist approach to political representation. Democracy was the great organising principle of the twentieth century. After the Second World War, there could be no turning back from egalitarian, inclusive and redistributive politics. This chapter discusses the feminist engagement with political theory. Feminist political thought has generated a comprehensive critique of politics, both the practice and the theory. This criticism has led to new thinking and new theories and inclusive ways of constructing fundamental political concepts like democracy, representation, citizenship, equality and justice. This chapter will examine the practice of politics and how it led to the exclusion of
women, as well as creating and promoting policies that would increase women’s political presence. Democracy can be looked at in two ways; democracy as a choice of how to be governed and democracy as participation and civic development. Although earlier formulations of democracy emphasised participation and citizenship, these were overtaken by the more practical applications of representations in modern, mass societies. A fundamental problem of democracy in practice is that it continually slices up populations into those who count and those who don’t, who is a member and who is not. Feminist probing into citizenship and democracy brought into the foreground the whole debate on the private-public dichotomy. Feminist political theorists tried to understand why the theory and practice of democracy, (which focuses on equality and participation), could coexist harmoniously with inequality between men and women, and women’s exclusion from participation. These reflections on democracy led to investigations of representations and these insights were then marshalled into an argument for the inclusion of women in politics on equal terms and in equal numbers to men, along with a fundamental rethinking of political concepts, so far taken for granted. This chapter sums up the feminist debates about democracy, from a critique of democratic theory and practice, through an analysis of participation, to a reconsideration of representation. It looks at the changing and evolving of the concept of representation, starting from the delegate versus trustee models to the modern contemporary notions of promissory, differentiated and other models, followed by a detailed examination of the various arguments in favour of increased representation for women. The justices, symbolic, deliberative as well as agency arguments are discussed, along with a review of the quota as an institutional mechanism to bring about gender parity. The idea of critical mass is also examined in this context. These various dimensions of participation/representation are addressed to understand the issue of women’s participation/representation in its entirety.

Chapter -II unravels the notion of empowerment which is another key theme in this study. Interestingly, the term empowerment, which is so closely associated with the term power, was largely ignored by mainstream political scientists, till the 80s and 90s, when it entered the lexicon of the development debate. This chapter will delineate the various definitions of the term and also trace
its evolution from ‘power to’ to ‘power over’ and finally ‘power within’. After analysing the various aspects of power, this chapter then turns towards an understanding of the multi layered nature of empowerment. Empowerment is an over defined term and used in diverse contexts. Initially, the term indicated a view of politics from below, at the grassroots level, outside the state agencies, but in its more contemporary form, it also includes institutional strategies, like reservations and quotas for women. The chapter also analyses and studies in detail, the various theoretical, gender perspectives of development, like Women in Development,(WID), Women and Development,(WAD), and Gender and Development,(GAD). These different perspectives and approaches to development arose at different historical junctures and reflected the changing understandings of both gender and development. From the initial Women in Development or WID to the contemporary Gender and Development, or GAD, there has been a radical change in the way that gender and development have been looked at. While WID, endorsed the view that by greater integration and participation in the political and economic structures of society, women would move into positions of power, in terms of political and economic decision making, it did not envisage a structural change in the power relations governing society and politics, and was therefore to a certain extent limited in its appeal. On the other hand, the WAD approach, argued for a development approach to women that recognised the dangers of integration into a patriarchal system, and emphasised the need to create ‘women’s only’ projects, to protect women from being dominated and submerged by patriarchal concerns. The GAD perspective emerged in the 1980s as a counter to both the WID and WAD. This approach believed in a synthesis of both the issues of material, political economy as well as the feminist issues of patriarchy and ideology. This perspective on development would argue that women are deeply and directly affected by their material conditions and by their subordinate positions in the national, regional and global economies. At the same time, women are also deeply impacted by the nature of patriarchal power in their societies, which is maintained by the accepted norms and values that define gender roles and duties in a particular society. GAD therefore adopts a twin approach to the study of women and development, investigating women’s material position and class position along with the patriarchal structures and ideas that maintain and sustain their subordination. The focus is on relations between men and women, not on women alone. In this approach, there is an emphasis on the interconnections of gender, class
and race, and the social constructions of their defining characteristics. This, analysis of the various approaches to gender and development, is followed by a review of the empowerment debate in India, and the particular issues it raises and addresses. The chapter then turns to the various ways of assessing empowerment. However, there is no overall consensus on which strategies are best suited to promote empowerment or whether strategies operating at different levels should be phased or operate simultaneously, and on the design and structure of these strategies. It also examines and probes into the concepts of individual or personal empowerment, and community or group empowerment, and will apply the insights gained from this, when analysing, collating and understanding the data.

Chapter -III takes a detailed look at the institutional design and structure of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi,(MCD), as that is the context, taken to understand and examine women’s participation and empowerment through inclusion in urban local bodies. After a brief review of the various debates on the nature and functioning of urban local governments, and the theoretical debates on decentralisation, including all the dimensions of political, administrative and financial, it delves deeply into the composition, powers and functions of the MCD and then criticises its shortcomings both structural and practical. The dichotomy between the deliberative and executive wings of the municipal body, as well as the presence of other private utility service providers, leads to a lot of overlapping of powers and jurisdictions, consequently leading to a lack of accountability. There is also a detailed examination of municipal finances, including both its sources and heads of expenditure, because strong and robust financials are the basic foundation for an effective system of local government.

Chapter -IV deals with the presentation of the empirical findings. It presents both the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analysed to firstly give us a socio-economic profile of the councillors, both male and female, and then a more detailed qualitative analysis of the performance, participation and priorities of the women councillors. The reason to collect data on both male and female councillors is to test the notion of the ‘difference’ women are supposed to bring to politics and governance, by their presence in political institutions. To assess the empowerment outcomes, the observations and insights collected from the focus group discussions as well as the personal interviews are analysed to assess both personal and collective empowerment.
Conclusion summarily attempts to link up together both the theoretical debates and arguments with the empirical findings and observations, to arrive at some answers to the research questions posed in the beginning. The theoretical discussions on representation, as a form of participation, and empowerment, both individual and group, provide a foundation and a background, against which the empirical findings and data are tested, in order to arrive at an understanding of the main issues raised in this study.