Chapter III

Women's Political Empowerment through Reservation

3.1 Introduction

In recent times, governance has been defined in a broader perspective. UNDP (2000) defined governance as "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs. It comprises the mechanisms, process and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences." One of the significant goals in these regards set by the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, in Beijing was sufficient representation of women in all decision-making bodies. It has considered that in any representative body there should be a 'logical balance' of men and women to voice the concern of the society. As we know, good governance means being participatory, accountable, predictable and transparent which reasonably call for a gender balance in political decision-making and it is believed that women's insights and values can enhance and enrich the overall decision-making process (Shamim and Kumari, 2002: 2). Therefore, women's political participation is an important aspect for the total governance process of a country.

3.2 Why is Women's Participation Important for Governance?

From the ancient period till today, many theorists laid importance on the issue of women's participation in political decision-making. A century and a half ago, John Stuart Mill pointed out that majority and minority's participation will have to be ensured for a government to be called talented and efficient government. He specially indicated women to be included in his definition who were extremely 'minority' at that time. In his book On Liberty, Mill discussed the ways to represent
and articulate competing interests and emphasized the importance to tolerate different views from different quarters. In his book *Representative Government*, Mill (1861) stressed on the electoral politics, argued for bringing intellectual and social diversity in government, and provoked for giving franchise to women. Mill termed the idea of depriving suffrage to half the total population and thus losing their talents in society as no utilitarian idiocy. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* pursued this idea.

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**Figure 1**

**Economic Decision-Making Facts and Figures**

- Only 1% of the world’s assets are in the name of women.
- Men in the Arab States have 3.5 times the purchasing power of their female counterparts.
- 70% of people in abject poverty living on less than 1$ per day are women.
- Among the developed countries, in France only 9% of the workforce and in the Netherlands 20% of the workforce are female administrators and managers.
- Women’s participation in managerial and administrative posts is around 33 per cent in the developed world, 15 per cent in Africa, and 13 per cent in Asia and the Pacific. In Africa and Asia-Pacific these percentages, small as they are, reflect a doubling of numbers in the last twenty years.

*Source: Debroy and Kaushik (2005:152)*
Rule and Zimmerman (1994) pointed out that a parliament would fail to recognize or comprehend issues of great importance to women in society if there were few women members, which would virtually give birth to broader question of answerability, openness and isolation. Non-existence of women in parliament or in political process is not only an indication of power, which in the long run would composite gender stereotypes and raise the question of gender equalization. The extent of women’s representation in government has considerable political consequences. Validity and trustworthiness of democracy will be in question if women, who actually constitute half of the total population, remain absent in different institutions of the government. At the same time, confidence of women on various institution of the government may be diluted because of their lesser representation in different institutions, which might leave adverse consequence on the legitimacy of the total governance process, and we all know that confidence is one of the indicators of legitimacy. Therefore, it can be said that for bringing legitimacy of the governance and ensuring democracy in its true sense, it is necessary to ensure women’s participation in the political process of any country.

3.3 Women Representation in Decision-Making Process
The 1990s have witnessed a wide range of initiatives at national and international levels to increase the parliamentary representation of women. At the international level action plans are drawn up by bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as well as by the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995: Para. 181) states, “Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice of democracy but can be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account”.

The strategies to increase women's presence in decision-making process adopted all over the globe as a part of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action embody the assumption that parliaments remain an important sphere of decision-making. All over the world in the 1990s, there has been an increased attention to the issue of women in public decision-making. The issue has been taken up by the UN bodies and highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women and national plans of action based upon it. It has also been taken up by bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance. As December 1998, there were 163 countries that had ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and had corresponding periodic reporting obligations, including in relation to Article 7 on women's equal rights in politics and public life. As Anne Phillips (1995) has point out, the equal opportunity argument for increasing women's parliamentary representation is the easiest one to make. So easy that it is often assumed rather than made, discussion promptly moving on to the forms of direct and indirect and systemic discrimination which have prevented women playing an equal role in public life. Indirect discrimination may include factors such as the electoral system or the structures of work and political careers, particularly the failure to accommodate family responsibilities or the privileging of gladiatorial styles of politics. Identification of such barriers is relatively straightforward, despite final attempts to revive arguments that women have other or higher priorities in life than engaging in public decision-making.

While the equal opportunity argument is relatively straightforward, like most justice arguments it needs to be supplement by utility arguments to convert power holders to cause. Such utility arguments may be in terms of doubling the pool of talent from which legislators are recruited or increasing the electoral appeal of
parties. It is also common for equal opportunity argument to be buttressed, as in the Beijing Platform for action, by the suggestion that the election of women will make a difference to quality of parliamentary representation, introducing new perspectives and increasing the level of empathy with issues of daily life. The issue of authenticity is raised, namely whether those allocated the role of women in society can ever be truly represented by those who have not shared these experiences (Anne Phillips, 1995).

At this point, it is common for the goal of increasing the number of women in parliament to be redefined as the goal of increasing the number of feminist women in parliament, who will promote justice for women other than themselves. For example, former Australian finance minister, Senator Peter Walsh, complained that the trouble with affirmative action was "you do not end up with women... you end up with feminists" (Sawer and Simms, 1993:185). Even given a feminist agenda, there is the question of to what extent women can affect dominant political values while their numbers remain at token levels.

Another source of international pressure to develop programs in this area is provided by multilateral and bilateral donor agencies (particularly those of northern European and Scandinavian countries). Women's international organizations are yet another source of support for initiatives to bring more women into parliaments. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is currently surveying organizations that promote women's political participation. Their sample includes those operating at the international or regional level, such as the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics, the Organization of Women Parliamentarians from Muslim Countries, Parliamentarians for Global Action and South Asian Network for Political Empowerment of Women (Karam, 1998: 223).
3.4 Gender Quotas – A New Global Trend

In general, quotas for women represent a shift from one concept of equality to another. The classic liberal notion of equality was a notion of “equal opportunity” or “competitive equality”. Removing the formal barriers, for example, giving women voting rights was considered sufficient. The rest was up to the individual women. The strong feminist pressure in the last few decades, a second concept of equality is gaining increasing relevance and support: the notion of “equality of result”. The argument is that real equal opportunity does not exist just because formal barriers are removed. Direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers prevent women from getting their share of political influence. Quotas and other forms of positive measures are thus a means towards equality of result. The argument is based on the experience that equality as a goal cannot be reached by formal equal treatment as a means. If barriers exist, it is argued, compensatory measures must be introduced as a means to reach equality of result (Drude Dahlerup, http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Chapter4_Dahlerup.pdf accessed on 26 September 2007).

During just a decade and-a-half, countries as different as Argentina, Uganda, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France and Costa Rica have, through the use of gender quotas, attempted to rapidly change women’s historical under representation in political institutions. Gender balance among political representatives is important for many reasons. Today, only about 16 per cent of the world’s parliamentarians are women, and according to feminist movements as well as to feminist theory this shortage of women in political institutions may have serious consequences for the political agenda, for the articulation of women’s interests and for the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Phillips 1995; Norris 2004).
Today, around 40 countries have introduced gender quota in elections to national parliaments, either by means of constitutional amendment or by changing the electoral laws (legal quotas). In more than 50 other countries major political parties have voluntarily set out quota provisions in their own statutes. Even if quota provisions are often very controversial, the use of the quota tool to make historical leaps or jump stats in women’s representation is becoming a global trend (Dahlerup, 2004: 3).

3.5 The Beijing World Conference on Women - New Discourses

Several new discourses, while contested, are gaining influence in the world today. On the global level, the Platform for Action, agree upon at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, may be seen as representing a discursive shift in relation to women in politics (FWCW 1995). The Beijing Platform has been very influential, and women’s movements all over the world have attempted to give the controversial demand for gender quotas legitimacy referring to the Platform for Action¹. A discourse is here defined as interlinked constructions of meanings, which included perceptions of possible actions. The relationship between general assumptions and possible political actions is central to the field of policy analysis (Bacchi 1999).

The Beijing Platform talks about ‘discriminatory attitudes and practices’ and ‘unequal power relations’ that leads to the under-representation of women in arenas of political decision-making. Whereas previously the focus was on women’s lack of resources or lack of will to participate in politics, attention is now directed towards

¹ Some of these new formulations may in fact be found in the CEDAW convention from 1979. The convention recommended the state to adopt ‘temporary special measures’. The Inter-parliamentary Union, IPU, and other international and regional organizations formulated early on new claims for women’s representation. However, it is the Beijing Platform that is most often referred to in the quota debate.
those institutional and cultural mechanisms of exclusion that prevent women from obtain an equal share of political positions in most political institutions in the world.

The demand for a certain minimum level of representation for women is being challenged by a new discourse of equal representation, often expressed by the term *gender balance*. Thus, the goal is no longer described as 'more women in politics' but as equal participation' and 'equitable distribution of power and decision-making at all levels' (Dahlerup 1998).

Affirmative action is suggested as a possible means of attaining the goal of women's equal participation in political decision-making. The Beijing Platform represents on the whole a new discourse, focusing on mechanism of exclusion through institutional practices, setting gender balance as the goal and demanding that government and political parties commit themselves to affirmative action.

### 3.6 What are Quotas?

The core idea behind quota systems is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that women are not only a few tokens in political life. Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee, or a

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2 Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats. Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women. Women have the right as citizens to equal representation. Women's experiences are needed in political life. Election is about representation, not educational qualifications. Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male dominated political system. It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected. Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily.
government. The quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that women are not isolated in political life. Previous notions of having reserved seats for only one or for very few women, representing a vague and all-embracing category of “woman”, are no longer considered sufficient. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a “critical minority” of 30 or 40 per cent. Quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed. Most quotas aim at increasing women's representation, because the problem to be addressed usually is the under representation of women; this is particularly relevant since women constitute 50 per cent of the population in most countries (Dahlerup: 2002). A stake in this debate about gender quotas is the meanings of some key concepts in political analysis - equality, representation, citizenship and rights.

3.6.1 Equality
Electoral quotas for women are a form of affirmative action, aimed at increasing women’s representation in elected legislative bodies, other kinds of reforms with the same ultimate goal are sometimes advanced. It has been pointed out, for example, that proportional representation has a better track record than simple majority systems in getting women elected (Rule and Zimmerman 1994; Squires 1996; Matland 1998). More commonly, there is support for a range of equal opportunity measures, including reforms such as skills training for women, financial aid, and forms of caring leaves such as maternity leave (Norris 2003: 3). By way of contrast affirmative action measures are described as aiming at equality of result, rather than equality of opportunity.
Some theorists make the case that electoral quotas are more easily defended than employment quotas, since the issue of political representation makes a crucial distinction (Bacchi 1996: 15). The argument is that quotas in political representation are more clearly justifiable than quotas in numbers of lawyers or university professors, for example, because government should be tied to the people to some degree (Bacchi 2004).

3.6.2 Representation

Women’s political participation deals with the effectiveness of women’s representation. The new trend to introduce gender quotas points to a renewed interest in representation in political institutions, even if women’s movement’s relation to the state has always been ambiguous. We have witnessed several historical shifts between stressing the empowerment of women at the grassroots level and demands for increased representation in the political institutions (Dahlerup 1998). Even if representation in political institutions might be an important tool, the value of gender quota and political representation are closely linked to socio-economic changes in women’s position and in society at large (Rai 1998). Anne Marie Goetz (2003: 49) argues that established democracies are facing not simply a ‘deficit’, but that they are built upon deeply gendered conditions for political participation.

Phillips (1995) points out that generally in established democracies it is assumed that elected representatives express the full variety of opinion of their electors and hence that women’s views are automatically included. Elected representatives are expected to display a degree of impartially because of their distance from the particular commitments of any specific group. Members of under-representative groups have challenged this position. They make the argument that majority of elected representatives represent the views of the selected portion of the population
from which they come, commonly middle-class men. This provides the grounds for defending a 'politics of presence', which holds that political representatives should display the characteristic (sex, race, etc.) of members of under-represented groups in order to counter the partiality of those who currently dominate elected bodies. Commonly, quotas are aligned with a politics of presence.

3.6.3 Citizenship and Rights
A key argument used defenders of quotas is that women are entitled to equal citizenship and equal rights. There are, however, long-standing debates in Western liberal democracies, and more recent debates in newer democracies, about the content both of citizenship and of rights. Both these concepts have proved problematic for women making claims to inclusion. Krook, Lovenduski and Squires (2004) illustrate that different conceptions of citizenship create different kinds of opening for quota demands.

In Western feminist theory, Carole Pateman (1989) was among the first to draw attention to the male norm operating within conceptions of citizenship. She pointed out that it was no coincidence that women had a long, hard battle to win voting rights. This was because political participation was tied to expectations about citizenship behaviors conventionally preformed by men.

A recurring issue for women making claims to full and equal citizenship has been whether to insist that women's unpaid domestic contribution be valued, or to demand that women be given access to paid labor (Lister 2000: 49). At times the American women's movement has divided sharply over this issue. One strategy developed in United States and in some other Western liberal democracies has been to press for recognition of something called 'maternal citizenship'. This has meant demanding that women's maternal contributions be valued equally with
conventional forms of citizenship contribution, military service and paid employment. Other feminists have noted that any concessions to maternal feminism have been inadequate, inevitably produce women as second citizens, and have serious repercussions for women who not fit the assumed heterosexual and paired model behind this claim (Lister 2000: 47).

Electoral quotas for women clearly involve a demand for women’s increased participation in public-sphere activities. Feminist have pointed out that numbers of people are treated as second-class citizens or are denied citizenship status altogether precisely because of their bodies. The ways in which the disabled and members of different races have been treated in terms of citizenship in many places at different times supports this contention. It follows that bodies matter to citizenship (Beasley and Bacchi 2002).

Because quotas rely at some level upon the contention that embodied experience requires representation, they challenge the disembodied model that has dominated Western liberal thought. In this way a ‘political presence’ compels a rethinking of conventional citizenship norms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women in parliament: % and no. of seats (year of election*)</th>
<th>Quota type</th>
<th>Year of introduction</th>
<th>Quota provision</th>
<th>Electoral System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2.0, 6 of 300 (2001)</td>
<td>Legal quota (C)</td>
<td>2004**</td>
<td>45 of 345 At least seats (13%) three women (25%)</td>
<td>FPTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>LH: 8.3, 45 of 541 (2004)</td>
<td>Legal quotas (C) (local level)</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>Not less than 33%</td>
<td>FPTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>LH: 5.9, 12 of 205 (1999)</td>
<td>Legal quota (C)</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>LH: 5% of 20% contesting candidates.</td>
<td>FPTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UH: 8.3, 5 of 60 (2001)</td>
<td>LH: candidate quota UH: reserved seats</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UH: 3 of 60 Seats(5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>LH: 21.6, 74 of 342 (2002)</td>
<td>Legal quota (L) (national level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Senate 17% 33%</td>
<td>FPTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UH: 17.0, 17 of 100 (2003)</td>
<td>Legal quota (Devolution of Power Plan) (local level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>National Assembly 17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes
* LH = Lower House, UH = Upper House.
** No election has been held yet.
Key Quota Type: Legal Quotas: Constitutional (C) or Law (L).
3.7 Gender Quotas in Political Participation in South Asia

In order to understand gender issues in governance it is crucial to look at participation and decision-making of women and men in the different institutions. Private-public divide line associated with men and women is one of the important factors that have affected non-participation of women in the decision-making and governance. From the early days when Western political theory uncovered, society has separated into two domains: a 'public' domain, the domain of political authority and contestation, and a 'private' sphere, associated with family and home (Jayal and Nussbaum, 2003:5).

The other question is what kind of autonomy women and men have in their different domains. Although the private domain is associated with women, it is a domain where the family is the most complex site where it is believed that there is a male head responsible for the welfare and safety of all members. Women’s power at household is restricted typically due to lack of access and control over resources, no autonomy in decision-making, low self-esteem, low skill and education, restricted physical mobility and eventually less power as compared to men. In many countries of the world, politics characterized by money and muscle power and South Asia region is also under the grip of this culture. Although South Asia has been the World’s first women prime minister- Srimavo Bandaranaake\(^3\), Indira Gandhi\(^4\), Benazir Bhutto\(^5\), Begaum Zia and Sheikh Hasina\(^6\). And yet, women’s representation in politics in the region has been very limited and continues to be so at the national level (see the table no. 3.1).

\(^3\) Srimavo Bandaranyake- comes to power in Sri Lanka, one of the longest serving prime ministers anywhere in the world.
\(^4\) Indira Gandhi- in India.
\(^5\) Benazir Bhutto- youngest woman Prime Minister of Pakistan.
\(^6\) Begums Zia and Sheikh- in Bangladesh, two women have held the position of prime minister since 1991.
The legacy of the British rule, which led to the partition of India into two nations (India and Pakistan⁷) gave the first debates on the quotas in South Asia. The first quotas were part of the British administrative regime in South Asia. The official stand of the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi was to oppose quotas, particularly quotas based on caste and religion. However, the British Government introduced quotas for a range of minority under the Government of India Act of 1935. Independence came with partition of India in August 1947. In India, both Pakistan and India, the tradition of quotas continued. In India, the Dalit leader Ambedkar articulated the need for quotas for the lowest castes and tribes (Baxi 1995), and this was enshrined in the Constitution. In India the women's movement came out strongly against quotas on the grounds of equal citizenship rights (Rai and Sharma 2000).

Pakistan instituted quotas of 5 per cent for women under first constitution, which was rather arbitrary and based on colonial legislation rather than on percentage of the population. In India, Sarkar has argued that, it was cultural and not political nationalism that enabled middle class modern women to enter into the public sphere by domesticating the nationalist project within the home (Sarkar 1983; John 2000: 3822).

⁷ Pakistan was further divided in 1971, when Bangladesh came into existence after a civil was.
Chatterjee’s insight into presence without empowerment helps in explaining what may have motivated those supporting the emergence of reservations in India. While the constitution provided women with important rights – equality for women within the legal processes, rescinding of obviously discriminatory practices, right to vote, to education and in most cases to property, and laws against violence against
women. The implementation of these rights was patchy and lacked state commitment (Rai 2002). Further, the state’s insistence upon its secular character was mediated by its need to reassure Muslim minorities, which led to the recognition of personal law 8 for religious groups. This created a context where the Indian constitution reflects the dominant (unequal) gender relations on one hand, while the state rhetoric on citizenship continues to insist upon the equality between men and women on the other hand (Pathak and Sudarajan 1992).

In Pakistan, the state negotiated its identity between what it means to be Islamic on the one hand and to be a modern nation-state that treats all its citizens including women equally and therefore provides them with a political framework within which they can all be represented. As Kabeer has pointed out, the tension is between religious and national identities where language, dress and the culture of day-to-day living of Bengalis of East Pakistan rubs against the grain of the Islamic framework that they share with West Pakistan (1988). Women in South Asia continue to have low rates of participation in the governance institutions where quotas do not apply. They occupy only 7 per cent of the parliamentary seats, 9 per cent in the cabinet seats, 6 per cent of the positions in the judiciary and 9 per cent in the civil service (UNDP 2000).

The postcolonial state in South Asia has different political systems. India is a hybrid of centralized economic management of the country accompanied by a federal, multi-party, first-past-the-post electoral and political system which allowed for political competition at both the national and the state level. In Pakistan, after a brief pause, the military became a dominant force in political life, though it was challenged in different periods by democratic forces. In Bangladesh too, this pattern

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8 This allows people of different religions to follow their own religion rather than secular state law in the area of marriage, divorce, custody, etc.
of rule was seen until recently, when a fragile but growing stabilization of
democratic government is visible.

Gender balance among political representatives has become important world
dependently. This is also the time, when international organizations such as the UN were
beginning to recognize the importance of women in public life. The UN Conference
on Women held in Mexico on the status of women world-wide and the declaration
of the decade for Women in 1975. Women’s groups in south Asia were affected by
these developments.

3.8 Reservation Discourses in South Asia

We can identify three distinct phases in the unfolding of reservation women
discourses that led to provisions of special measures for women in the region. Phase
one was that of constitution making after the achievement of independence in 1947.
Here, debates on citizenship and the position of the state in society.

In India, the Congress caste-based inequality was translated by Ambedkar into
specific measures, called reservation or quotas under the 9th Schedule (Article 330
and 331). There were also certain redistributive strategies introduced in tandem
with the reservation: the reservations that were put in place were comprehensive in
education at all levels, in state employment, including the judiciary, as well as in
political institutions. They were in the first instance provided for 50 years, but from
1989 extended for another 40 years, pointing to the political sensitivity of removal
of reservation once they have been established. While there was discussion of
reservation for women in Constituent Assembly, this was rejected by women
members representing the All-India Women’s Congress, as demeaning for women

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9 Article 331 stipulated a reservation of seats for the Anglo-Indian community for
two years if the President thought it to be under-represented in parliament.
struggling for equality with men in all spheres of life. However, the precedence had been set for using reservation as a means of recognizing historical exclusion.\footnote{However, class-based exclusion was not taken on board the quota regime. Rather, this was to be addressed through equal opportunity provisions on grounds that class mobility allows a way out of the poverty trap, which the caste structure does not allow. This approach to reservation has led to the charge that the 9th Schedule creates sub-elites within the scheduled castes and tribes, limiting the redistributive role of reservation.}

In Pakistan, the recognition of women's exclusion and the symbolic importance of their inclusion for an Islam Republic led to reservations for women but was not accompanied by comprehensive approach to provisioning for the basis of women's wider socio-economic needs. Reservation of seats for women in national and provincial assemblies, senate and local government was agreed in the first constitution of 1956 at a minimal level of 3 per cent. Women were always elected on reserved seats through indirect election. The revised Constitution of 1962 and 1973 also provided reservation of seats for women at similarly low levels of 2.75 per cent and 5 per cent respectively in the national and provincial assemblies. The insignificant number of reserved seats combined with indirect mode of election on women's reserved seats together with a failure to address the socio-economic and religious basis of women's exclusion proved a failure in terms of mainstreaming women in politics and providing opportunity to play an effective role in politics.

In Bangladesh the first constitution of the country, promulgated in 1972, provided for 15 indirectly elected reserved seats for women in the national parliament for a period of ten years. This gave women a minimum representation of 4.7 per cent. Members elected to general seats constituted the Electoral College for electing candidates for the reserved seats (Chowdhary 2003).
The second phase of reservation politics for women beings in the 1970s and 1980s. This, of course, is also the time when international organizations such as the UN were beginning to recognize the importance of women in public life. The UN Conference on Women held in Mexico on the status of women world-wide and the declaration of Decade for Women in 1975. Women’s groups in South Asia were affected by these developments. Diffusion of ideas on women’s participation in public life however had to be mediated within the nationalist context. Women’s groups did not wish to be seen as westernized and cut off from their own culture. To negotiate the boundaries of tradition and citizenship was a challenge to the women’s movements and groups in the South Asia.

India responded to UN exhortations and some unease about women’s status within Indian society among women’s groups by establishing the first Commission on the Status of Women in India (CSWI in 1972). A majority of the CSWI members rejected the step as a retrograde one from the equality conferred by the constitution. The CSWI recommended the constitution of statutory all women panchayats at the village level to look after the welfare of women, though this was not implemented by most state governments.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1998-2000) recommended a reservation of at least 30 percent of the total seats for women in the local government institutions. These developments towards a quota system for women’s representation reflect some wider political processes in the country. As Gopal Jayal has argued, there was a growing concern over the failure of development programmes and the perception that these would be able to perform better with local participation which would help to identify local needs. By the 1990s the women’s movement in India had begun to engage with the state at both the national and local level, and women’s groups were being consulted by the government on
issues of women's welfare culminating in the establishment of the Women's National Commission in 1992. Attention towards the mobilization of women's vote came in the context of the collapse for the Congress dominated political system and the beginning of coalition governments in India. Women were regarded as a new constituency by Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of the Congress Party, who addressed the issue of India's modernity by focusing on the position of women in the country. In 1992 provision of reservation of seats in local government for women under the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian constitution was a key intervention by his government (Rai 2000, Raman 2003).

In 1985, the number of reserved seats for women in Pakistan national assembly was raised to 20 per cent for the period of ten years or three general elections, whichever came earlier. Women's mobilization came in the context of the enactment of the Hudood Ordinances in 1979 by the military dictator General Zia-Ul-Haq. These Ordinances in were a set of six laws, which were used to Islamize criminal law\(^\text{11}\) (Ali 2000:47).

Ali (2000) has sketched out the struggles of Pakistani women to find a voice that allowed them to be bothered secular citizens as well as Muslim. A mature women’s movement responded by organizing rallies against the legislation and by demanding equal representation. Women only police stations, pressures on political parties to have more women on their lists and a lobbying of media to report atrocities against women made for the background for argument for higher representation of women in political institutions. Efforts to fulfill commitments in international treaties and conventions to promote women’s free, equal and full

\(^{11}\) The Hudood Ordinances disregard the testimony of women for inflicting hadd or punishment, evidence of four, adult male Muslim is required of the actual act of penetration as proof of adultery or rape. Women also stand discriminated against because these laws fix a lower age of criminal responsibility for girls than for boys.

In Bangladesh, the international donor agencies, working with the UN framework of Women in Development (WID) were instrumental in pushing forward the discourse of gender equality (Kabeer, 1994, Goetz 1996). A major part of the development budget is underwritten by external funding, which makes donor pressure an overwhelming source for change. International pressure also comes from the UN and other international NGOs that support particular forms of initiatives- reservation for women being one – to address issues of gender inequality. The role of NGOs in Bangladesh in addressing the quota issues is also important. While many NGOs are involved in providing micro-credit (Kabeer 1995) others focus on political empowerment issues, particularly women's representation in political institutions (Kabeer 1999).

They also mobilize women at the local level; provide them with support and training, which is largely funded by international donor agencies and institutions. The 1986 Constitution did not provide for quota but with regard to local government institutions. Article 9 of the Constitution stated that, “The state shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representations shall be given as far as possible to peasants, worker and women”. Reservation of seats was re-incorporated into the constitution in 1990, valid for ten years. This provision lapsed in 2001, which means that the present parliament does not have reserved seats for women (Chowdhury 2003), though it was reintroduced in 2004 at 13 per cent of seats in the next parliament.
The third, or the current, phase can be characterized by several key elements. Economic liberation has led to the further erosion of the welfare state in India and Pakistan. The latter has also felt the crushing burden of refugees on its Afghan border as well as expenditure on security. At the international level, the third wave of democratization has led to pressures on military regimes to democratize on the one hand, and the war on terror has led to Musharraf being courted by US on the other. Discourses of constructed modernity (Democratic and liberalizing regimes) and fundamentalism have formed the backdrop of the region’s most recent engagements with the changing international system. Contemporary generation have also seen a world-wide consensus emerging about the relevance of state feminism, especially after the Beijing conference, 1995, and the emergence of an international discourse on the importance of women’s empowerment through participation in political institutions of the state as well as supra-state institutions (Bystendinzy 1992; Papart et al. 2002). This phase has seen the debate on the extension of reservation for women to the national parliament in India and the extension of reservation in Pakistan and Bangladesh, where in the wake of the Beijing Conference the government announced a National Policy for the Advancement of Women in 1997. The Policy called for larger number of reserved seats in the legislature for women through direct elections (Chowdhury 2003). At the national level in Pakistan (the Senate, National and Provincial Assemblies) 17 per cent of the seats are reserved for women.

3.9 How Do the New Local Reservation Systems Work in South Asia?

Even though the countries have a common political history the local political systems vary slightly from each other. In India, the 1992 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts addressed the question of strengthening the role of the local government and made provision for reserving not less than 33 per cent of
the total seats in the local government for women (Mohanty 2003). As table 3.1 shows, Gram Panchayat is the lowest level and is meant to consist of eight to ten villages, though since the population is the criteria it can also serve just one village. The Gram Panchayat has about 10,000 to 15,000 inhabitants, though the Acts do not specify any such number leading to variations across the country. The number of members in Gram Panchayat is not fixed but varies from 5 to 30 members including a Pradhan (Chairperson) and vice chairperson depending on the size of the population in the village. The Panchayati Raj system is a party political system and members are elected as candidates from a party list on a first-past-the-post basis and serve a mandatory term of five years. There is also one-third reservation for women among the positions of the chairpersons of these bodies (Baviskar 2003). There is a rotating system of reservations for women, which means that if you have a panchayat with nine villages and nine members, in three of these villages only women candidates can stand for election. In the next election women still stand in three other villages (Baviskar 2003).

In Bangladesh, the local system in Bangladesh consists of four tiers, but until now continuous elections have been held only to Union Parishad. The reservation of seats for women in local government institutions in Bangladesh is stipulated under Article 9 of the Fundamental Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of Bangladesh. Direct election of women representatives to the rural local government Union Parishad as well as the urban local government was provided for in order to implement the constitutional provision. This also conformed to the recommendations of the study on the Institutional Review of WID capability of the Government of Bangladesh 1996 and the Local Government Commission Report 1997.
The number of members in Union Parishad is fixed and does not depend on the population size of union unlike the system in India. A union covers 5 to 15 villages with an average population of 24,500 people (Nathan 1998:110; Thorlind 2003: 61-62). Union Parishad consists of one chairperson, 9 general members and three women members in reserved seats, totally 13 persons. This means that the percentage of women will be at least 23 per cent and not 25 per cent, as there are no quotas allocated for the post of chairperson. All the positions are directly elected including the chairperson on a first-past-the-post basis in non-party based elections (Siddiqui 2002). The chairperson is elected from the whole Union Parishad and the post is open for both men and women to contest. The 9 general members are directly elected from one of the 9 wards the union is divided into and also open for both men and women. The women in the reserved seats do not have any special ward of their own but are elected from three of the general wards (Aminuzzaman 2003). In these wards (open for women only) women candidates contest against each other but are elected by votes from both men and women.

As Pakistan is a federal republic; the local government has been viewed as a provincial decision area. Therefore the reservation of seats for women to the local government has varied between the different provinces (Graff 2003). Women’s right organizations and activists have demanded the restoration of the provision of reserved seats for women together with a demand for a substantial increase of 33 per cent reserved seats for women to be filled through constituency-based direct election by joint electorate. The successive governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif failed to respond positively to women’s demand on the issue. In 1999 a military coup removed the civilian government and as a part of democratization process the military regime of Musharraf adopted the Devolution of Power Plan in 2000 to establish an identical set up of local government bodies in all four provinces of Pakistan. As Table 3.1 shows this guaranteed 33 per cent reservation for women
at all three levels of local government; Zila council (district level), Tehsil council (sub-district) and Union Council (union level). The members of Union Councils are elected directly but the Tehsil and Zila councils the members are elected indirectly by an electoral college formed by the elected councilors in the Union Council. The Union Council consists of eight to ten villages. It is composed of 21 members, one Nazim (Chairman), one Naib Nazim (Vice chairperson), eight general Muslim seats, four women Muslim seats, four Muslim peasant/worker seats, two women peasant/worker seats and one religious minority seats. This means that six out of 21 seats are reserved for women, and that the actual reservation percentage is 29 per cent and not 33 per cent, which is the figure that is usually quoted. This is due to the fact that there were no quota allocated for Nazims’ or the minority seats (Graff 2003). The elections to Union Council are on a first-past-the-post and non-party based as in Bangladesh but contrary to both India and Bangladesh the union serves as a multi-member ward for election of the council members. The women for the reserved seats are elected by votes from both men and women as in other two countries (Graff 2003).

3.10 Quotas in practice: do they make a difference?

Measuring the impact that the introduction of quotas might or might not have had is difficult. One clear measurement would be the increase in the number of women in local government after the introduction of quotas, however, this can only be a quantitative assessment of the impact that quotas have made. A more complex issue night is whether the increased representation of women in local government has increased their active participation in local government bodies. Here we would need indicators such as attendance data, data about the number of times women speak in local government meetings, whether or not women have introduced and succeeded in getting through specific policy initiatives, and even empowerment indicators (training, travel and meeting with other women involved in local government,
mentoring, etc.) would have to be examined. A further level of complexity might arise when we examine the context of women's participation - levels of education, health and cultural and economic position of women, which has crucial effect on their access to both state and community resources needed for performing their roles as representatives in local government. Finally, of course, we need to factor in availability, reliability and coherence of data available, which in many cases are scarce.

3.10.1 Women's Numerical Representation

Women's representation in local government has increased in all the three countries and we suggest that this is because of the introduction of quotas in one or other form. In India, after approval of the constitutional amendments, two elections (in 1995 and 2000) have been held in almost all states and today one million women occupy positions as members or heads in the rural and urban local government bodies (Baviskar 2003).

It has been estimated that within a span of ten years about six million women have participated in the political process as candidates or elected members (Buch 2000b) While there are variations among the states in the magnitude of women's representation, most of the states have managed to meet the constitutional target of 33 per cent seats for women and in some states this proportion has exceeded. For example in Karnataka women occupy 43.6 per cent in local bodies. This means that a large number of women have managed to win general (unreserved) seats, defeating rival male and female candidates (Baviskar 2003). Bangladesh has held two elections under the new quota probation - in 1997 and 2003. In each of these elections over 40,000 women contested over the almost 13,000 reserved seats which all were filled. In Pakistan however only 36,000 of the over 40,000 seats were filled despite the fact that almost 49,000 women contested in the elections that
were held during 2000 and 2001. Most of the problems were reported from districts in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) where many women were neither allowed to contest nor to cast their votes. (Bari and Khan 2001: xii).

3.10.2 Challenges to Participation

Have the new systems with a higher percentage of reserved seats as well as direct election not only increased the number of women but also improved the quality of their participation in contrast to the previous often criticized systems of indirect election? One of the indicators of the success of the quota strategy would be to demonstrate that women's increased presence within local government is resulting in the improved functioning of local government institutions in South Asian countries. State provision, formal and informal networks and customary laws prevent women from participating fully in local government. There is also a lack of education, training and resources for women representatives. Finally, their dependence on male members of household and inability to access economic resources (there are no salaries for local government representatives) are also inhibiting their performance. At the same time it seems like the new systems of reserved seats have created a social mobilization of rural women and changed their status both in the family as well as in the society, and have empowered them.

There is no consensus among the researchers here, which reflects different definitions of, for example, empowerment. In India it is often reported that the reserved seats for women have been filled with 'proxies' the housewives of the male politicians without any real power (Nanivadekar 1997). It is estimated that over 90 per cent of elected women are first timers. Even if the policy of reservation has helped some politically active women to be elected, these women have a lower political awareness and as such their participation in politics does not disturb patriarchal family systems. No gender differences were found between the men and
women representatives with respect to their priority issues (Nanivadekar 1997). Sharma is also critical and argues that women are expected to adjust to the imperatives of party structures for their political survival (Sharma 2004).

Some micro-studies show that the elected women have not addressed any specific gender issues (Ekatra 2003; Ghosh 2003). At the same time other studies suggest that elected women in Gram Panchayats are making a difference in shifting the focus of development policy by highlighting basic needs issues like water, food security, education and livelihood and become effective supporters of women's interests (Datta 1998; Mohanty 1999; Jayal and Nussbaum 2003).

In Pakistan the impact of the new quota system is yet to be seen. Initial research shows that there are frequent complaints by women councilors that they do not receive invitations to the council meetings. They are not consulted in development planning at the district and Union Council levels. At the same time a study showed that female councilors have a strong community contact (Pattan Development Organization 2004). A case study about the urban local government in Bangladesh shows that the elected women members can act as motivators, supervisors, and can be engaged in project planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation processes. However, the participation of the ward commissioners in the activities of the city corporations is low (Mahtab 2003).

The problems for the elected women can be explained by several factors. According to Kabeer, the northern plains of the Indian sub-continent and Bangladesh belong to a belt of 'classic patriarchy' characterized by the institutionalization of extremely restrictive codes of behavior for women. They stand in contrast to societies of South India and much of Southeast Asia whose institutions and practices permit a more egalitarian system of gender relations. At the heart of this system of social
arrangements is the institution of *purdah* or female seclusion which defines and limits the personal and economic autonomy and social power of women and confines women into the private sphere of the home (Kabeer 1988). These patriarchal social relations are limiting women's ability to participate fully in the political life of the local community. In India the issue of caste-based discrimination forms an added layer of exclusion for women.

Further, in most states in India the role of panchayats is still principally confined to implementing centrally conceived schemes. The lack of administrative and financial autonomy prevents these institutions from fulfilling their role as institutions of self-government and the elected women have been addressing gender issues within very narrow parameters set by the panchayats (Mathew 2002; Mohanty and Mahajan 2003; Raman 2004). A similar situation is reported from Bangladesh where the lack of resources and authority is also a problem of the local government (Frankl 2004).

A third issue is the nature of representation by women within the reserved seats. In Bangladesh, the reserved seats have no ward of their own. Instead one reserved seat covers three wards of the general seats, which creates problems when it comes to who the elected women represent, access to development funds and campaigning as they must cover a much bigger area (Frankl 2004). Mahtab's study showed that the women commissioners in the local government were undermined as they were deprived of their responsibilities and financial allocations for development of their constituencies (Frankl 2004). In Pakistan, all members are elected from multi-member constituencies but despite this, women are not given equal share of the development fund as they are not perceived to have any direct constituency or ward.
In India, the elected women have their own ward as they practice a system of rotation. This system has the advantage that the elected women have their own ward and a clear mandate. At the same time it also works against women's interest. Women that have been elected from a reserved ward in the first election have to compete with men as well as women in the next election. And when the ward is 'open' no party wants to nominate a female candidate. An option is to contest in one of the other three wards that have been reserved but then she will have no benefit from the work that she might have done before (Baviskar 2003).

Another issue is low or no special honorarium. In India, a Panchayat member gets between Rs. 10-50 as 'sitting fee' for attending a meeting. In many cases, if she is an agriculture labourer she will lose Rs. 50 as her daily wage and she cannot feed her family (Baviskar 2002). In other studies (Sharma 2003) several women pointed out that without a salary the Panchayat is more open to corrupt practices and to being dominated by upper class individuals who can afford not to be paid. The issue of payment is also a particular one for women as being paid brings them status 'maan' within the family. In Pakistan, councilors who come on reserved seats are not offered any honorarium, which makes it difficult for women councilors to fund transportation costs out of their own pocket, as most of them are economically dependent on the male members of their families. In Bangladesh, the members are supposed to get some honorarium to cover transportation costs and so on but not all members are able to get their money (Frankl 2004). The study made by Mahtab 2003 showed that the women commissioners do not have proper facilities, such as specific office space, transport and other facilities.

As noted before, the local elections in India are party-based as opposed to Bangladesh and Pakistan where the elections are non-party based. More research is needed to examine the role of the political panics and how women's membership of
these institutions might affect their work within the panchayats (Parpart et al. 2002). In the Indian local elections there is always a high number of candidates not affiliated to any political party (Nanivadekar 1997a), and a study by the NGO Ekatra suggested that. 70 per cent of women have succeeded in raising issues at various levels even without the backing of political parties. In Bangladesh, elections are supposed to be on a non-party base but according to Ahmed the parties control and decide who will represent the party in the elections even at the local level. By doing so, they play an important role in shaping women’s representation in formal politics (2003). In Pakistan, Ban and Khan argue that party-less local government has provided the space to the poor to nominate their own candidates as well as forced the local elite to involve disadvantaged groups in the process of nominating candidates (Bari and Khan 2001).

The age, education, socio-economic status and political background of the elected women seem to have a crucial effect on their access to both state and community resources needed for performing their roles as representatives in local government. In India, studies conducted in several parts of India show that a majority of the women belong to the lower socio-economic strata both in terms of education and class (Buch, 2001). In India, a majority of the elected women are from 'non-political' families with no previous political experience. The seats reserved for the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes means that the rich and politically dominant families are not able to grab the positions (Baviskar 2003). At the same time it seems like the percentage of women from lower incomes is lower at the leadership levels (Mohanty and Seldon 2003). When it comes to age, studies have shown that, in the first election, most of the women were 40 years old or older (Datta 1998; Ghosh 2003).
In the second election however studies have shown that relatively younger groups have been elected (Panchayati Rai Update 2003). Similar findings from the survey done in Pakistan by Pattan Development Organization in 2001 show that more than half of the women were illiterate, very few own land and a majority of them had never contested elections before and neither had their families. And as in India, the percentage of women from the lower strata of the society decline among the higher positions and levels in the local government. Almost 60 per cent of the elected women are 45 years old or younger. In Bangladesh, however, a study done by World Food Programme in 1999 showed that the elected women had a better socio-economic status than the average rural women. Over 40 per cent were between 30 and 38 years of age and even though a majority of the elected women were housewives, most of them had at least a secondary education (86 per cent). Most of the elected women came from landowning families and 53 per cent owned more than five acres of land - a substantial amount in a country were half of the rural people are landless. The study also showed that both the elected member and her family were very active in the village, where they were known for considerable social involvement even before the election (World Food Programme 1999). More research needs to be done to explain the differences between India and Pakistan on one hand and Bangladesh on the other. According to Mohanty the high average of women from lower social economic strata must be regarded as a success when it comes to decentralization since women from all classes of society have been represented (Mohanty 2003).

The lack of previous political experience as well as low level of education and socio-economic status underlines the need for training and capacity-building among the elected women. In Bangladesh training is offered by both the government and NGOs. A 2002 study (Democracy-watch 2002) showed that the elected members had received a lot of training from different NGOs but also that
they wanted and needed more training. The study also showed that effective training would mean including both men and women. In India evaluations have shown that the women want education and training continuously. So far most of the training programmes have focused on rules and regulations of local government but according to Raman the training also has to focus on problem-solving methodologies. People have to be trained for self-government (Raman 2004).

Despite the problems, however, the reservation for women in local government have, together with other movements like for example the micro-credit movement, created a massive social mobilization in the rural area (Mohanty 2003). In India the women's participation in the public sphere of Panchayats has also enhanced their status in their families, castes and villages (Baviskar 2003; Sharma 2003). In Bangladesh too, women's participation in local politics has led to a measure of increased freedom, reduced inequality and oppression (Frankl 2004). As elected members of Union Parishad, some women have been able to introduce some change in the traditional village court. This, as well as the member-ship in the Union Parishad, has made them well known in the village and given them a larger social network than before.

3.11 Comparative Analysis of Quota System in South Asian Countries

The quota systems in the three countries are slightly different. In both Pakistan and Bangladesh quotas have been introduced at both national and local levels, while in India the quotas were introduced at the local level and the bill to introduce quota at the national level still languishes in the system (Rai 2000).

In India there is a system of ward rotation for the reserved seats, which is not present in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh the wards for the reserved seats for women are three times bigger than the general seats. This is not the case in the
other two countries. In Pakistan the union is not divided into the case in the other two countries. In Pakistan the union is not divided into different wards as in India and Bangladesh but serve as a single constituency for all the candidates. In Pakistan and Bangladesh the local elections are non-party-based in opposition to the system in India. In India the seats of the chairperson is included in the quota system, which means that one-third of the members are women. That is not the case in Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, there are also some similarities in these different quota regimes. All three electoral systems have constitutional histories bound up with British colonial past, are plurality-majority political systems and women are directly elected by both male and female votes.

Further, the analysis of quota provisions in different countries shows some level of diffusion of ideas. Various elements can be evaluated here. All three states are signatories to CEDAW (though with some opt outs) and therefore have to report to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) regularly. This, together with the Beijing and post-Beijing UN initiative prioritizing women’s participation in political institutions have provided the impetus to examine quotas as a strategy for women’s empowerment.

A second element of diffusion is the role that women’s movement and NGOs have played in demanding that women’s exclusion from political institutions be addressed. Some of these demands have been the result of responses to state law, as the anti-Hudood law movement in Pakistan. The women’s movements in all three countries have been influenced by the shift in the international women’s movements from skepticism towards to engagement with state institutions. Finally, donor agencies are a source of diffusion of ideas on quotas.
Table 3.2

The Local Governments in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of councils</th>
<th>Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh*</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Zila Parishad</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>n/a**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-District</td>
<td>Upazila/Thana</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>n/a**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parishad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union level</td>
<td>Union Parishad</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>Directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village level</td>
<td>Gram Sarkar</td>
<td>68,000</td>
<td>n/a**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India***</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Zila Panchayat</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>Directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-district</td>
<td>Panchayat samities</td>
<td>5,910</td>
<td>Directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village level</td>
<td>Gram panchayat</td>
<td>231,630</td>
<td>Directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan****</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Zila councils</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-district</td>
<td>Tehsil/Town councils</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>Indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union level</td>
<td>Union councils</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>Directly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes:

* The urban local system consists of City Corporations and Poushavas (municipal bodies) (Mahtab 2003).


*** The urban local system is a three-tier system: Municipal Corporation (mega cities), Municipal Council (small cities) and Nagar Panchayat (transitional areas) (Sharma 2003).

**** The Tehsil Council is called Town Councils in the urban areas (Graff 2003).
The new local level quotas introducing during the 1990s were directly elected reserved seats in all three countries. Table 3.1 shows that the percentage of reserved seats was raised in India and Pakistan to 33 per cent and to 25 per cent in Bangladesh. In Pakistan, Reyes claims that it has opened up not only an enormous political space but a strategic opportunity for women to make a difference in setting and implementing the agenda of local governments (Reyes, 2003: 44). In Bangladesh, Chowdhury argues that the direct election to local bodies in Bangladesh has brought about a qualitative change in their role perception (Chowdhury 2003:55).

According to the Local Government Reform Commission Report 1996, Bangladesh has a four-tier local government structure. However, until now nothing has been determined regarding the three-tier. No consensus has been reached regarding their composition, function or mode of election including the number of sets reserved for women and no elections have been held at any of these levels. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act, 1997 is a milestone in the history of women’s participation in Bangladesh. In this act, provision was made for three reserved seats for women in each Union Parishad. In addition, they would be elected by direct election based on universal adult franchise. This was a major initiative taken by the government of Bangladesh for ensuring women’s participation in political decision-making.

In India, rural local self-government consists of three tiers. As table 3.1 shows this is guaranteed 33.3 per cent reservation for women at all three levels of the local government. There is also one-third reservation for women among the positions of the reservation for women. There is a rotating system of reservations for women.
The most significant and new feature has been bringing about a certain uniformity regarding representation of the weaker sections. While reservation of seats for scheduled castes and tribes has been written into the constitution from the very outset, the reservation for women is new and the most important contribution of the amendment. In 1994 and 1995, the first round of elections to the panchayats was held and nearly one million women entered the threshold of political institutions of local self-government. The second and third round of elections to the local bodies was concluded in 2000 and 2005 respectively.

As part of the democratization process, in March 2000 the military government adopted a Devolution of Power Plan, of which the important feature was the provision of a 33 per cent quota for women in the district, tehsil and union councils, the local legislative bodies mandated to approve by-laws, taxes, long-term and short-term development plans and annual budgets. The union councils, in addition, facilitate the formation and functioning of citizen community boards and cooperatives to reduce poverty, the overriding development goal of Pakistan.

3.12 What led the Governments of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to Initiate Several Changes in Regards to Increase Women’s Participation?

It is an important question that why the governments of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan has taken initiatives for several changes in the constitution to enhance women’s participation in politics at local level and what are the factors that led the governments to initiate changes? There are number of reasons that influence the government of these countries to make changes at local level.

First, the international politics has created a recent shift in the favor of gender equality in all spheres of human life. The UN Conference on Women held in Mexico on the status of women world-wide and the declaration of the decade for
Women in 1975. Women’s groups in south Asia were affected by these developments. In 1990, the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council endorsed a target of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions in the world by 1995 (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 1995). On the global level, the Platform for Action (PFA) agreed upon at the Fourth UN World Conference on women in Beijing in 1995. Beijing conference is a milestone in the history of women’s movement. Apart from it, various donor agencies like World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and soon have taken the issue of gender governance as their priority. India responded to UN endeavor by establishing the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974. The question of women’s reservations came up in the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974.

The Bangladesh government approved both Programmes of Action of the International Conference on Population and development (1994) and the Platform for Action (PFA) without any reservation (Karim, 2000:55).

Pakistan’s efforts to fulfill its commitments in international treaties and conventions to promote women’s free, equal and full political participation are summed up in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women (August 1997), the National Plan for Action (September 1998) and the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (March 2002). The Commission Report and the NPA recommend 33 per cent reserved seats for women for local as well as national elective bodies through direct elections and joint electorate. The National Policy, on the other hand, mandates the adoption of “affirmative action to ensure a desirable level of representation of women in the Senate and the National and Provincial Assemblies”.

Second, the Governments of these countries might have been influenced by growing contribution of Non Government Organizations (NGOs) in the equal rights of women in every sphere in life. NGOs in Bangladesh have widened their roles in political arenas and carrying out several training programmes for women. For example, some NGOs through their organizations, Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB)\textsuperscript{12}, in India, the Institute of Social Science (ISS)\textsuperscript{13}, played a vital role in national politics for the inclusion of women in decision-main role.

In Pakistan, Jamat-e-Islami (religious political party) started a training program for their women. At the NGO level and civil society organizations, several NGOs have worked out different strategies to increase women’s in politics, but the number of NGOs directly working on the issue on a sustained basis is very limited. To increase the level of women’s participation and make it effective in local elections Aurat Foundation\textsuperscript{14} with collaboration with several other organizations and member of program networks run a involving several public meetings, preparation and distribution of materials and intensive advocacy and lobbying. The representation of women in rural local self-government is an important issue, although women’s political participation through gender quota is closely linked to socio-economic changes in women’s position and in society at large, forth chapter will argue on it.

\textsuperscript{12} ADAB was the leading umbrella organization of NGOs in Bangladesh.
\textsuperscript{13} ISS is the leading NGO in New Delhi. The Institute has been working for the last several years in the field of political empowerment of women, gender justice and the role of women in participatory democracy.
\textsuperscript{14} For the first time in Pakistan, collective campaign for women representation was started by Aurat Foundation and later joined by Muthida Labour Federation, SAVERA. The campaign was called the Citizen Campaign for Women’s Representation in Local Government. This campaign has great potential to improve the representation of women in local-self government.
3.13 Conclusion

A comparative study of quotas for women in the South Asian region addresses several important issues of the gendered nature of political participation and representation. Quotas for women in representative bodies at the local level came about as a result of many different factors - an internal debate about the ways in which marginalized groups can be compensated for historical exclusions from public life; external pressures from global social institutions such as the UN and the women's movements and the interaction of national women's groups with these; the changes in the nature of state politics as well as the shifting position of party and factional groups within national politics.