Women Representation in Urban Local Government in South Delhi

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Abstract: In these research paper women representation in urban local government in south Delhi will be describe. Secondary data has used in this article. Local government is an integral part of the three-tier system of government in our country, being at the bottom of a pyramid of governmental institutions with the national government at the top and the state government occupying the middle position. Local government operates both in rural and urban areas. In fact, local government is more important in the daily life of a citizen than the state or central government. Thus, it is important here to know some historical background of these institutions in our country.

Keywords: women representation, Local government, democracy, political system, governmental institutions.

INTRODUCTION: Local government system has existed in India in every phase of its history. The grassroots system had shown a peculiar identity and stability despite frequent changes of power at the super structural level. Local self-government is the fulfillment as well as the foundation of democracy. It is at once the home and the nursery of democracy. It can nurture people's interest in their community and provide a channel of participation in the management of local affairs. In fact, Local self-government occupies an important place in the political system. It not only takes care of the primary needs of citizens but also enables them to learn the basics of governance. It is for this reason that it is an inevitable part of modem democracies. Local government is an integral part of the three-tier system of government in our country, being at the bottom of a pyramid of governmental institutions with the national government at the top and the state government occupying the middle position. Local government operates both in rural and urban areas. In fact, local government is more important in the daily life of a citizen than the state or central government. Thus, it is important here to know some historical background of these institutions in our country.

Historical Background: Pundit Nehru had once said, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves." No development is perfect until it is wholesome and involves equally men and women. The last one hundred years may rightly be called as the age of women's awakening in the world and securing participation of women in the institutions of democracy and governance. It has now become an important item in the Global agenda. The 21st century is known as the 'Era of Women Development'. But the story of the woman as revealed in the reports of WHO, UNICEF, World Bank and National Family Health Survey is quite depressing, shocking and sordid. Women turn up as the single largest group of culturally marginalized, ideologically edged-out, economically deficient and politically deprived section in the society. This inequality is the product of a social system, which has been responsible. for promoting inferiority, discrimination and degradation. Bogged down by male dominance, male aggressiveness and factors of uncertainty, many women are not able to play a decisive role in the affairs of the community. Sushila Patni writes, "To identify women as the inferior segment is to deny them the vital participatory opportunity as well as inhibit the integrated evolution and development of society in totality."

Women in the ancient scriptures of India had been depicted as Shakti, Lakshmi and Vidya. She is the architect of the whole society as well as the destiny of humanity. In the history of political philosophy, the great Greek philosopher Socrates had remarked that perfect justice can be achieved only through suppression of the distinction between sexes in all important matters and the admission of women on equal footing in all the activities of the society. His disciple, Plato also advocated the equality of sexes including their equal participation in political life. The dawn of Industrial Revolution was. Responsible for the growth of two social movements in the name of democracy and equality and the other for socialism. In the 19th century, J. S. Mill's famous book, Subjection of women and Mary Willstone Craft's strong defense of women's rights in Vindication of the Rights of Women produced an environment to have a look into the rights of this neglected section of the society. Under the influence of these writings, the advocates of the women rights gave a thrust to a sort of movement on the issues of women. They raised the slogan that democracy falls short when women of whatever colour or ethnic group cannot exercise vote or cannot elect representative of their choice. The parity of women is necessary not merely on grounds of social justice, but as a basic condition for social, economic and political development of the nation.

In the early history of Indian civilization, we find some evidences of villages being the basic units of social and economic life and the existence of some kind of village government. The local affairs of each village were carried out in an open assembly.

And subsequently in the medieval period, the system of local self-government continued to be more or less the same. However, the system was quite different in the Mughal period. The representative character was abolished and the whole administration of a city was placed in the charge of a nominated government official known as the 'Kotwal', magisterial functions, including the control over police and intelligence. As a result, the local self-government institutions remained stagnated throughout this period. The modem system of local government owes its origin to the British Raj. Lord Ripon's Resolution on local self government of 18th May, 1882 marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of local self-government in India as it laid the foundation of the system that exists even today. His resolution envisaged a network of local bodies for the administration of both rural and urban affairs. It recommended local boards throughout the country divided into two-tiers, district boards and tehsil panchayats.

The institutions of local government established in the early period which included institutions like Municipal Corporations, Municipal Boards in the urban areas and Panchayats and District Boards in rural areas find their entry in article 40 of our Constitution Article 40 of the Constitution clearly lays down that the, "States shall take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them to function as units of self-government. As a result, all the state governments have established both the urban and rural self governing institutions in their respective states.

There are two types of local government units in the country. These can be grouped into two broad categories i.e. Rural and Urban. The Rural Local Government consists of a three tier structure of local bodies popularly known as Panchayati Raj. It operates at three different levels including the Districts, the Blocks and the Villages) these bodies have their own organization and area of operation.) In the urban area, we have bodies which are termed as Municipal Corporations for bigger cities and municipal boards/councils/committees for small cities and towns. For cantonment areas and notified areas, there are separate boards/committees. Now we will discuss in brief the forms of local bodies in the urban areas.

WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL SCENARIO: Women in many countries had to wage long and grim struggle to acquire their right to vote. As of today, 118 countries of the world have granted voting right to women in political life. In Latin American and Caribbean countries the access of women to the political system is limited by the conditions of poverty and low educational attainment whereas the prospect is still bleak in some Arab countries like Kuwait and U.A.E. Although, right from the Mexico Conference of 1975, there has been a global awareness and realization that political participation is not confined merely to 'the exercise of voting rights, yet women are seen as major voters rather than policy formulators or decision makers. They have not been able to create a position for themselves in policy formulating and decision-making. The absence of a large majority of women from political decision-making has a negative impact on the entire process of democratization. Apparently universal franchise is inadequate to overcome structural constraints that affect the presence of women in political offices. Many of them avoid facing grueling campaigns, aggressive media and the exposure of their private lives. Giving power to women is visualized by vested interests as a shift in the power balance and their deprivation of prestige and benefits.

WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS OF INDIA: A glance into the past rich heritage of Indian culture tells us a glorious position occupied by women during the Vedic period where they were coequal partners with men in all aspects. A steady degradation in their position started mostly during the Mughal rule and the consequent political and social confusion in the 18th century. A number of social and religious movements in the middle of the 19th century reforming Hinduism and the Indian society gave a fresh breathe to women's life and identity in this country. While these reform movements provided the fertile ground for the emancipation of women, the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi marked the climax, when he sowed the seeds of encouragement for the participation of women in the political movement. Under his inspiration, women stepping outside their private sphere started participating in the freedom movement and forming different women's organizations. In 1918, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had endorsed franchise for women. In the first election in 1926, less than 1% of women of the total population were enfranchised. In 1929, Gandhi had declared, "women must have right to vote and equal legal status with men. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point when women begin to effect the political deliberations of the nation"

The Constitution of India is generally looked upon as the manifesto of social revolution. In order to translate the egalitarian goals as perceived by Gandhiji into reality, it was recognized that constitutional provisions for women will provide a vista in the building of new nation and vice versa. Thus social, economic and political rights were granted to women on equal footing with men under various constitutional provisions The Preamble encompasses the principle of equality and social justice. The Articles like 14, 15, 16 and 19 under Fundamental Rights speak about equality of all sex and prohibition of discrimination on

various grounds. In Articles 15(3), 16(4) positive discrimination in the form of reservations for women, children and backward classes are provided. While, Article 21 guarantees right to life and liberty trafficking of women and forced labour are prohibited under Article 23.

The various provisions of Directive principles of State Policies under Article 39(a), 39(d), 39(e), and Article 42 requires on the part of the state to give protection to the women. Article 39(a) requires the state to direct its policy towards securing for their citizen, men and women equally, the right to an adequate means of livelihood. Article 39(d) directs the state to secure equal pay for equal work for men and women. Article 42 is to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. The Article 51 (A) mandates that the state shall renounce practices that are derogatory to the dignity and the status of women. Under Article 325 and 326 women were given the right to vote and stand in the elections. After the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act, Articles like 243(D) and 243(T) provides for the reservation of women in the Panchayat Raj institutions and Municipalities. In all the five year plans emphasis has been made to raise the socio-economic status of women in our country.

In post independence, the development in the sphere of education, rapid urbanization, media exposure and communication has facilitated increasing the level of political consciousness of women to some extent for which they have succeeded in gaining certain recognition in the political aspect. But the scenario on the mounting participation of women in various decision-making bodies has not changed dramatically. Women of the new generation, particularly in the era of globalization, are facing greater challenges where they have to reconcile their traditional roles with the modem values of global culture. It is a paradox that our country was ruled under powerful prime minister for a sufficient long period of time and some women from the upper classes head political parties and command large followings, yet there is a great pause between constitutional guarantee and the actual representation of women.

Women are not treated as a political entity in their own right. On the other hand, political parties and other power groups have treated them as a means to further their own interest and gains. The organizational culture, values and beliefs of the political parties in our country are male oriented. By 1974, the committee on status of women in India produced a commissioned report titled" Towards Equality' which evaluated and acknowledged the continuing plight of the Indian women. The political participation of women was declared to be a patchy one as a result of differing ideologies and issue-based protests. Only token numbers of women were participating in formal, politics, many of which were from higher class and caste back grounds.

Empowerment and Participation of women in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi: Political scientists are unanimously agreed on the premise that context is critically relevant to the analysis of the process of women's political presence and empowerment. The first issue that needs to be addressed is to probe and examine the causes of women's historical underrepresentation in the political domain, which has been addressed in the chapter on Participation and Representation. The second question, following from the first, is to examine the structure of the political institutions, as well as the social, economic and political status of women, that opens up a space for them to manoeuvre and influence and establish the framework in which social change towards women's empowerment takes place. It is useful here to position this analytical framework in the tradition of Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory.1 Giddens's, in his theory attempts to bridge the gap in social sciences, between structure and agency. Agency is understood as the power of the agent to make a difference and to change a given course of events, or in other words be in command of his or her destiny. Structure, in political theory refers to the rules and resources that are recursively implicated in social reproduction. The institutional features of a given society, have defined structural properties that ensure that social and political relations are stabilised between time and space. These structural properties also articulate forms of domination and power. Giddens develops a concept of the duality of structure that basically proposes that action (re) produces structure (re) produces action (re) produces structure and the cycle goes on. Thus, the social agent, or in this case the representative, reproduces but also produces or impacts structure, and is therefore capable of change, in the short term and transformation in the long term. In this respect Giddens opposes determinism or structuralism, which gives primacy to the structure, and opens up the space for social change, or believes in the power and possibility of representatives to bring about change. However, the scope for change is limited and constrained by the structure the agent or representative is positioned in, or in other words, the independence of the agent, in terms of bringing in change, or making a difference, is limited, by the nature of the structure, in its power to provide or foreclose certain opportunities. In summing up one can reiterate that the social and institutional structures make certain avenues of action more likely than others and any analysis of social and political change has to examine both the structural framework and the power of individual and group action to change and make a

difference. The structural framework in the case of this study is the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and its institutional set up and design has been examined in great detail in the previous chapter. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present the empirical findings of the study and then analyze them to assess the impact and outcomes of women's political participation in urban local government.

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

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

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

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

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

 c) What constraints do they face in their work?

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

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

Elections in numbers:

Total Number of wards 272

South Delhi Municipal Corporation

Total 104; SC (SC-Women) 15; Women 45

North Delhi Municipal Corporation

Total104; SC (SC-Women) ; 20 Women 42

East Delhi Municipal Corporation

Total 64; SC (SC-Women) 11; Women 27

The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992: Towns and cities contribute substantially to the economic development of the country. These urban centers also play an important support role in the development of rural hinterland. To keep this economic transformation in line with needs and realities at the grassroots level, it is necessary that the people and their representatives are fully involved in the planning and implementation of the programmes at local level. If democracy in Parliament and State Legislatures is to remain strong and stable, its roots must reach towns and villages and the cities where the people live.

The Constitution of India has made detailed provisions for ensuring protection of democracy in Parliament and in State Legislatures. Hence, democracy in these institutions has survived and flourished. However, the Constitution did not make Local Self Government in urban areas a clear-cut Constitutional obligation. While the Directive Principles of State Policy refer to Village Panchayats, there is no specific reference to municipalities except implicitly in Entry-5 of the State List, which places the subject t of Local Self Government as a responsibility of the State. Entry-5 reads as under:-

"Local Government, that is to say, the constitution and powers of municipal corporations, improvement trusts, district boards, mining settlement authorities and other local authorities for the purpose of local self-Government or village administration."

As a consequence of inadequate Constitutional provision for Local Self Government, democracy in municipal governance was not stable. Though the respective municipal acts of the States provided for regular elections to municipal bodies, they were frequently suspended and superseded for indefinite periods of time. Frequent and indefinite suspensions or supersession's eroded the very basis of local self-government and had a negative effect on democracy at the grassroots level. The general position with regard to financial resources of the municipal bodies was also not satisfactory. Over the years, there was a steady encroachment on the assigned functions and revenues of Urban Local Bodies by specialized agencies of the State Governments. As a result, many urban local bodies became weak and were not able to perform effectively. The weakened status of Urban Local Bodies crystallized public opinion in favour of need for a Constitutional guarantee to safeguard the interests of urban local bodies in order to provide for:-

- Regular and fair conduct of elections to these bodies
- Holding of elections within a specified time limit in case of supersession
- Adequate representation of SC/ST and women in the elected bodies
- Placing on firm footing the relationship between the State Governments and the urban local bodies with respect to: –
- functions and taxation powers of the urban local bodies – arrangement for revenue sharing between the State Government and the urban local bodies.
- Involvement of elected representatives at grassroots level in planning at the district and metropolitan levels.

Accordingly, the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Parliament in 1991, which was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee with Members from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for consideration. The Committee held several sittings and also took oral evidence and written comments from various organizations and individuals. The Committee had the opportunity of visiting various municipalities and held detailed discussions with their officers and elected representatives as well as with several State Governments. This was probably the first time that the Parliamentary Committee had deliberated so extensively on a legislation concerning local self-government.

The Bill as reported by the Joint Parliamentary Committee was taken up for consideration and passed by the Lok Sabha on 22nd December, 1992 and by the Rajya Sabha on 23rd December, 1992 and it received the assent of President on 20th April, 1993. It was published in the Government Gazette on 20th April, 1993 as the "Constitution (Seventy Forth Amendment) Act, 1992".

The above Constitution Amendment Act came into force on 1st June, 1993.

The Constitution (Seventy Forth Amendment) Act, 1992 has introduced a new part namely, Part IXA in the Constitution, which deals with the issues relating to municipalities. The main provisions introduced by the above Act are as under:-

- **Constitution of Municipalities-** It provides for constitution of 3 types of municipalities depending upon the size and area namely (i) Nagar Panchayat for an area in transition from rural to urban area; (ii) Municipal Council for smaller urban area; and (iii) Municipal Corporation for larger urban area. Demographic and other conditions, which are determining factors for constituting a particular type of municipality differ a great deal from one State to another. It has, therefore, been left to the State Legislatures to decide which specific type of municipality will be constituted for particular urban area.

- **Composition of Municipalities**- The seats shall be filled by direct elections. Besides the seats filled by direct elections, some seats may be filled by nomination of persons having special knowledge and experience in municipal administration. Persons so nominated shall not have the right to vote in the meetings of the municipality. The Legislature of a State may, by law, also provide for the representation in a municipality of members of the House of the People and the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly the Municipal area and also the Members of the Council of States and the members of the Legislative Council of the State registered as electors within the municipal area. The manner of election of Chairpersons of municipalities has been left to be specified by the State Legislature.

- **Constitution of Wards Committees-** This provides for constitution of Ward Committees in all municipalities with a population of 3 lakhs or more.

- **Reservation of seats-** In order to provide for adequate representation of SC/ST and of women in the municipal bodies, provisions have been made for reservation of seats. The proportion of seats to be reserved for SC/ST to the total number of seats shall be same as the proportion of the population of SC/ST in the municipal area. The reservation would be made in respect of seats to be filled by direct elections only. Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved for SC/ST shall be reserved for women belonging to SC/ST. This is a mandatory provision. In respect of women, the seats shall be reserved to the extent of not less than one-third of the total number of seats. This includes seats reserved for women belonging to SC/ST. These reservations will apply for direct elections only. This is also a mandatory provision. There will be no bar on State Legislatures from making provisions for reservation of seats in any municipality or office of Chairperson in the municipalities in favour of backward class of citizens. This is an optional provision.

- **Duration of Municipalities-** The municipality has a fixed term of 5 years from the date appointed for its first meeting. Elections to constitute a municipality are required to be completed before the expiration of the duration of the municipality. If the municipality is dissolved before the expiry of 5 years, the elections for constituting a new municipality are required to be completed within a period of 6 months from the date of its dissolution.

- **Powers and Functions of the Municipalities-** All municipalities would be empowered with such powers and responsibilities as may be necessary to enable them to function as effective institutions of self-government. The State Legislature may, by law, specify what powers and responsibilities would be given to the municipalities in respect of preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and for implementation of schemes as may be entrusted to them. An illustrative list of functions that may be entrusted to the municipalities has been incorporated as the Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution.

- **Elections to Municipalities-** The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the panchayats and municipalities shall be vested in the State Election Commissions.

- **Audit and Accounts-** The maintenance of the accounts of the municipalities and other audit shall be done in accordance with the provisions in the State law. The State Legislatures will be free to make appropriate provisions in this regard depending upon the local needs and institutional framework available for this purpose.

- **Committee for District Planning-** Planning and allocation of resources at the district level for the Panchayati Raj institutions are normally to be done by the Zilla Parishad. With regard to urban areas, municipal bodies discharge these functions within their respective jurisdictions. However, some important questions may arise, which would concern the urban-rural interface, and it may be necessary to take an overall view with regard to development of the district as a whole and decide on allocation of investments between the rural and urban institutions.

- **Metropolitan Planning Committees-** It is provided in the Act that in every Metropolitan area (with a population of 10 lakhs or more), a Metropolitan Planning Committee shall be constituted for preparing a draft development plan for the metropolitan area as a whole.

Conclusion: In this **article** women representation in south Delhi has been show. In the early history of Indian civilization, we find some evidences of villages being the basic units of social and economic life and the existence of some kind of village government. The local affairs of each village were carried out in an open assembly. And subsequently in the medieval period, the system of local self-government continued to be more or less the same. However, the system was quite different in the Mughal period. The representative character was abolished and the whole administration of a city was placed in the charge of a nominated government official known as the 'Kotwal', magisterial functions, including the control over police and intelligence. As a result, the local self-government institutions remained stagnated throughout this period. The modem system of local government owes its origin to the British Raj.

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