

## **GENDER, GOVERNANCE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA**

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### **Summary and Scope**

This study focuses on gender equality and democratic governance in the five largest states of the South Asian region, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Beginning with a general introduction to the region, the first section highlights the shared historical and cultural heritage of South Asia and delineates the challenges confronting individual states in the region. The second section explains the difference between Western/European, and South Asian understandings of democracy, followed by a discussion on the concepts of gender, democracy and governance. The significance of the state and the women's movement is discussed, and the importance of gender equality as one of the core principles of democratic governance emphasised. The third section delineates and discusses four issues, namely, interest, representation, limits of representative democracy, and neo-liberalism that this paper argues has a bearing on the debate on gender quotas. The fourth section discusses women's movement mobilisation for reserved quotas in local and national governance institutions in the above-mentioned states. Women's participation in governance institutions is assessed, and the necessity of bridging class inequality and effecting distributive justice underlined. The fifth section identifies key issues with regard to women's mobilisation for equality in politics in South Asia; the advantages as

well as the limits of reservations for women are analysed and summed up. By way of conclusion, this paper suggests that the elimination of social and economic inequality and the implementation of distributive justice are mandatory pre-requisites for achieving gender equality in politics; the women's movement, it maintains, has a significant role to play towards this end.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Democracy in South Asia: An Overview**

A study of democracy in South Asia must begin with a delineation of the region's geographical and political contours. Initially, the term South Asia was coterminous with the Indian subcontinent including Afghanistan on the west and Myanmar – a province of British India till 1935 – to the east. The idea of South Asia as a distinct geographic and political entity is a recent, roughly six decade old construct formalised by the adoption of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Charter by the heads of state of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives in 1985. These seven member states constitute the geographical and political entity presently referred to as South Asia. For reasons of scope and analysis, the term South Asia in this paper is restricted to the five largest states of the region, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Despite a shared sub-continental cultural heritage, post-colonial South Asian nation-states charted different political trajectories. India achieved independence in 1947 to become a parliamentary democracy with constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. The decline of the post-independence secular-nationalist consensus paralleled a fragmentation of the polity, regional and ethnic rebellions against the central government, and increasing demands by newly politicised social groups on the state. These challenges coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalism and a weakening of India's secular fabric. India's emergence as an economic power parallels

the persistence of high levels of poverty and human deprivation. Much remains to be achieved in terms of ensuring equality, liberty and justice for a large number of Indian citizens.

The state of Pakistan was an outcome of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. The Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal of united India were partitioned on confessional lines as a result of which the new nation-state of Pakistan was divided into two (East and West) territorial halves. In 1956 Pakistan adopted a constitution to become a republic based on Islamic principles. After a period of political uncertainty and martial rule, a new constitution (1962) established a presidential form of government with a single National Parliament (Assembly). The country's first elections resulted in an absolute majority for the East Pakistan-based Awami League party. The refusal of West Pakistan to respect the electoral mandate precipitated Bengali resistance culminating in the secession of East Pakistan and the establishment of the independent nation-state of Bangladesh. Pakistan has been subject to prolonged periods of martial law (1977-1988 and 1998-2008). National elections in 2008 restored a civilian government. As Pakistan battles to consolidate civil authority within, and defend its borders against extremists without, it has a long way to go towards providing security and justice for the majority of its citizens.

Bangladesh is South Asia's youngest nation-state. The country plunged into political turmoil soon after its establishment in 1971 with the assassination of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib and an extended period of martial law. Bangladesh's subsequent drift towards an Islamic state was in contradiction to its original self-identification as a secular country. The rise of Islamist forces precipitated violence against Hindu, Christian and Buddhist minorities. Opposition to martial law began with student protests in 1983 ending with the restoration of democracy. National elections in 1996, 2001 and 2007 voted in civilian governments whose democratic record was marred by allegations of violence, corruption and authoritarianism. One of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh faces enormous challenges in terms of

ensuring equitable development and protecting the democratic rights of citizens and minorities

Sri Lanka gained independence from the British in 1948 to adopt a constitution providing for a parliamentary form of governance. The rise of Sinhalese nationalism, its repudiation of Tamil (Sri Lanka's largest minority) concerns, and its opposition to moves for political decentralisation precipitated a brutal civil war between government forces and Tamil rebels led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Sri Lanka's bicameral parliamentary democracy was replaced with a presidential form of government (1978) headed by a powerful president, the replacement of a federation by a unitary state, and the abolishment of crucial safeguards for minorities. The civil war drew to a close in 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE and widespread allegations of indiscriminate killings of civilians by Sri Lankan security forces and by the LTTE. Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has undermined its notable achievements in social and human development. Much depends on the present regime's willingness to address the concerns of Tamil and other minorities, and uphold citizens' democratic rights before Sri Lanka can emerge from its war-ravaged past.

Historically, Nepal was a monarchy since the eighteenth century when Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah forged the warring kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley into a single political entity, thus laying the foundations of modern Nepal. An 1923 Anglo-Nepalese treaty affirmed Nepalese sovereignty and its present territorial borders. Nepal came to be subsequently dominated by the *Rana* dynasty that ruled as hereditary prime ministers with the King as titular head. Popular discontent and opposition to the *Rana* autocracy began to be articulated during the 1930s and 1940s. The Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal led a successful struggle against the *Ranas* who were eventually overthrown. A referendum endorsed a parliamentary form of government and a new democratic Constitution with a bicameral Parliament and fundamental rights. A Congress-led government was established in 1991 after Nepal's first democratic elections. Parliament

was subsequently dissolved in 1995 as Maoists began an insurrection aimed at abolishing the monarchy and establishing a people's republic. After a prolonged civil war, Nepal became a secular and democratic republic in 2006 with a Constituent Assembly (CA) voting to abolish the monarchy. Maoists joined the government yet political tensions continue in the wake of Nepal's transition to democracy. Nepal struggles to maintain its fledgling democracy in the face of internal political fragmentation and ensure equitable development and justice for its citizens.

As the above discussion indicates, the political record of South Asian nation-states presents an ambiguous picture. India and Sri Lanka have retained their formal democratic systems since independence, albeit with restrictions on human rights and civil liberties. Pakistan and Bangladesh, on the other hand, witnessed frequent and prolonged disruption in civilian rule by the military and restrictions on civil rights. Nepal's struggle for democracy that began in the last decade of the twentieth century was realised in 2006 after an extraordinary mass popular mobilisation. Notwithstanding these divergent histories and trajectories, South Asian nation-states share certain paradoxes and challenges distinguishing them from Western democracies.

Presently, all five states are democracies with elected governments. At the same time, however, South Asia is one of the world's poorest, least developed, and profoundly unequal societies.<sup>1</sup> The disjuncture between constitutionally guaranteed formal equality and pervasive socio-economic inequality is an enduring contradiction underpinning South Asia's democracies. Integral to, and symbolic of, this great contradiction is the condition of female citizens for whom inequalities across caste, class, ethnicity and region intersect with those of gender. With the exception of Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup>, South Asia fares poorly with reference to the UNDP Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) that measure gender equality. A report on gender equality in 2009 ranked India – South Asia's pre-eminent democracy – 114<sup>th</sup> among 134 countries – behind Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.<sup>3</sup> The South Asian region is also home to the world's largest number

of poor and illiterate citizens – a majority of whom are female – with notable gender gaps in primary development indicators such as health, education, employment and political participation.<sup>4</sup> The marginalisation of women in politics and policy making, and in structures of power and governance flows from, and is influenced by, the structural inequalities of gender across the region. For the majority of economically underprivileged and politically marginalised South Asian women, the formal rights of equal citizenship are yet to translate into equal access to basic social services or the availability of social and economic opportunity that shall, in turn, generate the equality of outcome crucial for transformative change.

In addition to the overarching inequalities of, among others, gender, caste and class, South Asian states share a poor record of protecting the rights of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. In India, powerful dissident movements by ethnic minorities in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram in support of greater autonomy have been subject to coercive repression by the state; Muslim, Christian and Sikh religious minorities have been targets of violence by right-wing forces – in many instances with the consent or active collaboration of state agencies. The period of state-backed Islamisation in Pakistan coincided with violence against Ahmediyya and Shia religious minorities; the record of secular parties like the Pakistan's People's Party (PPP) is not much better: Christian, Hindu and Ahmediyya minorities in Pakistan have been targeted by Islamist forces during the present civilian regime while a blasphemy law routinely used to legitimise violence against minorities; popular demands for greater provincial autonomy in the province of Baluchistan have been negotiated through military means with increasing violence against civilians. In Bangladesh, the rise of right-wing Islamist parties fuelled violence against Bangladesh's Hindu, Christian and tribal minorities, the most salient of which is the conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Sri Lanka's failure to protect its Tamil minority precipitated a brutal civil war between state forces and the LTTE that ended with grave breaches of human rights by both sides. In Nepal, the long-drawn struggle for democracy that

began in the 1990s claimed thousands of lives with hundreds of disappeared citizens and a deeply damaged social fabric.

South Asia's domestic crises and civil wars have had far reaching effects on state, politics and society. They have weakened the moral authority and secular credentials of the state, eroded the federal mechanisms crucial for governing South Asia's diverse societies, damaged their socio-cultural fabric and exacerbated grievance among ethnic minorities. The nature of intra-state violence in South Asia is deeply gendered: the disappearance of male kin members, an increase in widows and female-headed households, women's vulnerability to sexual violence, and enhanced levels of poverty among female survivors of war are some of its common features; the gendered contours exemplify the dismal record of governance of South Asian states. Women remain poorly represented or altogether absent from decision-making bodies and formal politics in conflict zones.

If South Asia's record of poor governance and absence of distributive justice is cause for concern, the emergence of women's movements and their greater albeit fraught engagement with political parties is a sign of democratic consolidation in a region characterised by women's marginalisation in governance.<sup>5</sup> Women's movements in South Asia are part of wider civil society mobilisations that emerged in response to popular disillusionment with the state and its inability to administer democratic governance and ensure distributive justice. The women's movement in India was forged around the issue of state violence against women that informed its 1970s and 1980s campaigns against dowry deaths, domestic violence, and the rape of women by state forces. The electoral arena was not a site for struggle until much later. The present engagement between women/feminist groups and political parties in India around the specific issue of reservation for women in local legislatures and the national parliament has, as this study goes on to illustrate, yielded significant albeit partial gains. The women's movement in Pakistan emerged during an extended period of martial law during the 1970s

and 1980s; due to the gender specific thrust of Islamisation its implications for women were particularly severe. The issue of women's representation in governance bodies surfaced initially during the 1970s – a gain that was subsequently neutralised during ensuing periods of military rule relegating the issue of women's representation into the background. Much like Pakistan, the energies of the women's movement in Bangladesh during the 1980s were initially focused on opposing military rule and state-sponsored Islamisation. Martial law in Bangladesh was not as explicitly women-centred as it was in Pakistan. The reservation of seats for women in local bodies and the national parliament was among the major issues addressed by the women's movement in Bangladesh, with women's groups mobilising for an increase in the number of reserved seats for women at both levels. Compared to its neighbours, Sri Lanka has a notably higher Gender Development Index (GDI) – a singular achievement greatly undermined by a tragic civil war that has been especially detrimental for women.<sup>6</sup> The war polarised women on ethnic and ideological lines making it that much more difficult to forge a collective vision and struggle for women from different ethnic and religious groups.<sup>7</sup> The 1990s witnessed greater engagement of women's groups with political parties in Sri Lanka; women and feminist groups have called upon political parties to address women's concerns and enhance women's participation in politics.<sup>8</sup>

In general, South Asia's feminist movements against state violence, authoritarianism, religious chauvinism and equitable development sought to advance the goals of gender equality and women's democratic rights. The class dimensions of this struggle cannot be underestimated: a large majority of South Asian women are poor, illiterate, undernourished and unemployed. While democracy in South Asia has heightened public awareness of rights, it is yet to alter the political and socio-economic realities of a very large underclass of female citizens. Given the region's great cultural and ethnic diversity, and the multiplicity of challenges confronting individual states, these cross-cutting



factors are part of the wider context against which the issue of women's rights and governance must be framed and analysed.

## 2. CONCEPTS AND CRITICAL ISSUES: GENDER AND GOVERNANCE

### Concepts

#### *Democracy*

The normative meaning of democracy derives from the Western liberal tradition with an emphasis on its procedural dimensions, namely, competitive electoral politics, the rule of law, institutional accountability, the protection of civil rights, and the freedom of speech and information. In the South Asian context, however, a greater public awareness of political rights and popular rule has blended with cultural notions of dignity, community rights and well-being understood more in terms of freedom from want, fear and violence, and the delivery of social goods and services, than in terms of constitutionally guaranteed individual rights.<sup>9</sup> In a broad sense, democracy in South Asia combines a heightened awareness of political rights at the individual and community level with demands for the basic necessities of life such as the provision of public services; it is associated principally with people's rule, political freedom, equality of outcomes and community rights.<sup>10</sup>

A limitation in normative understandings of democracy is that the term 'citizen' masks inequalities *between* citizens. States' possession of the institutions of democracy or their holding of regular elections has not bridged the disparity between citizens. Cognisant of this limitation, conceptualisation of the term moved beyond its institutional aspects to emphasise a citizen-centric participatory democracy<sup>11</sup> based on the values of equity, justice, civil liberties and human rights. The idea of substantive or "full democracy" offered citizens

means of access to governmental processes and a real say in collective decision-making, via elected representatives in national and sub-national legislature. In...a full democracy there would be not only genuine participation in rule by a majority of citizens, but also consistently effective channels of accountability between ordinary people and public officials. Those traditionally lacking power – for example, the poor, minority ethnic and religious groups, women, young people – would have a say in the direction of the nation.<sup>12</sup>

This concept of democracy emphasised the role of citizens and the necessity of greater social equality between them. It recognised that social, including gender, inequality distorts both the principle and practice of democracy; socially marginalised groups are deprived of the institutional access necessary for voicing their interests and concerns. As Kandawasvika-Nhundu wrote: “If democracy is to be realised and practiced, an understanding of how it intersects with gender equality is essential”.<sup>13</sup> Gender critiques move beyond the institutional dimensions of democracy to emphasise its participatory dimension, the suggestion being that the *practice* of democracy must include the active participation of a constituency that has long been historically and politically marginalised:

In a sense the link between women's representation and democracy should be self-evident, since women account for over half the population of most societies: if the majority doesn't have full political rights, the society is not democratic. But for much of history, this proposition did not seem at all self-evident; until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century...Democratic institutions existed long before gender equality...today...gender equality is an important factor in the process of democratisation.<sup>14</sup>

Gender equality is thus integral to democratic practice and process; it is not an 'addition' but rather, an essential *condition* for transformative change and the creation of inclusive and egalitarian societies. This point has special salience for South Asia where representative democracy co-exists with high levels of gender inequality in political representation.

### ***Governance and Women's Rights***

The term governance, in its normative sense, refers to the manner in which national and international (such as the UN, WTO and so on) institutions 'manage' a country's economic and social resources for development.<sup>15</sup> This particular construct does not accord any value to the role or agency of citizens in the *practice* of governance, nor does it take into account the fact of inequality between men and women. Gender inequality in politics – characterised by the relative absence of women in governance and decision-making bodies – pre-empts the possibility of democratic power-sharing between women and men and the possibility of gender-sensitive governance:

Such marginalisation circumscribes women...in attaining the best possible quality of life for themselves [and] their family and communities. In the broader perspective, it compromises the promise of equal development for all citizens within a state and the possibility of meaningful governance undergirded by (gender) justice and peace.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of gender-just governance goes beyond presence; it is concerned with what Niraja Gopal Jayal terms as the content or "substance of governance".<sup>17</sup> It is based on the understanding that the formal legal, legislative and administrative processes of the state must be informed by, and be responsive to, the fact of gender inequality in public life *and* to the ways in which non-state institutions such as the family inhibit and constrain women's engagement in politics and public life.<sup>18</sup> In effect, the struggle for

gender equality is an integral aspect of the struggle for social justice. It therefore follows that if *democratic* governance is to be realised in *practice*, institutional accountability and transparency must be combined with the incorporation of policy measures that address the empirical fact of gender inequality. States' record of governance must therefore be assessed in terms of advancing *in practice* the inter-related goals of social justice and gender equality. In effect, this means integrating the socio-economic interests of the large majority of marginalised women into governance policy and practice:

‘Engendering’ the institutions of governance means ensuring that they are accountable to women as citizens; changing rules, procedures and priorities that exclude the participation of poor women and the incorporation of their interests in the development agenda; and mobilising and organising women’s voices in civil society.<sup>19</sup>

This point has much salience for South Asia where the transformations wrought by globalisation serve to exacerbate gender inequality and, in turn, undermine the inter-related goals of distributive and gender justice. Two developments, namely, the withdrawal of the state and the rise of the women’s movement are critical issues within which the issue of gender equality in politics must be situated and assessed.

## **Critical Issues**

### ***State***

With the exception of Sri Lanka, much of South Asia is characterised by widespread poverty and socio-economic deprivation. At the turn of the new millennium South Asia had the most distorted sex-ratio<sup>20</sup> in the world and was identified as the world’s least gender sensitive region.<sup>21</sup> The disparities of class that flow from poverty and socio-economic inequality overlap with

those of gender: the outcome of this convergence for underprivileged women is particularly severe. South Asia's paradox of democracy and deprivation mandates need for active and concerted public intervention to redress this incongruity. The state has a vital role to play in terms of ensuring the provision of basic social services, implementing inclusive and equitable development policies, and eliminating the structural inequalities of class and gender that are especially detrimental for a large number of South Asia's poor female citizens. Quite the opposite, however, is presently the case: governments across the region have slashed public spending and investment, imposed cuts on the provision of essential services, frozen public sector/formal employment, and evinced little interest in regulating the increasingly skewed relationship between the state and the market.<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding the political rhetoric emanating from different political parties within states, there is implicit acquiescence, if not outright endorsement, across the political spectrum for privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation across the region – the costs of which are largely and disproportionately borne by the large majority of South Asia's poor.<sup>23</sup> Declining formal sector employment, the emergence of a large and unregulated informal economy, the erosion of workers' rights, dispossession and displacement wrought by corporate-led industrialisation, and the transformation of rights into commodities willed by a rapidly retreating state have deepened class and gender inequalities across the region. This is the backdrop against which women's demand and mobilisation for political gender equality and greater political participation has been articulated – a conjuncture that raises important questions for the women's movement – both at a general level as well as within respective national contexts.

### ***Women's Movements and Political Parties***

The women's movement in South Asia is among a variety of social movements that emerged in response to popular disillusionment with the state. Although politics in South Asia has historically been a male domain, this trend is

punctured by a paradoxical regional record of having the largest number of female heads of state in the world.<sup>24</sup> The political eminence of South Asia's female heads of state, however, derives much more from their association with privileged male politicians than from any opportunity afforded to women by male-dominated and patriarchal polities. Political parties on the other hand have, over the decades, engaged with women and sought their support, even as they simultaneously betray a manifest reluctance to yield women the institutional space and resources necessary for enhancing their role in politics and political participation – a reluctance informed by social constructions of gender, fears regarding potential erosion in established male power and patronage networks, and an implicit rejection of the principle of gender equality. The cultural notion that men are better equipped to enter politics and public life by virtue of being male has fair resonance across the South Asian region making it that much more difficult for women – especially in rural settings where patriarchy is more entrenched – to breach the status quo. On the flip side, in addition to political and cultural factors, the degeneration of political parties, increased levels in corruption, the lack of material resources and patronage links, and the threat of violence are among the factors that inhibit women's participation in formal politics in South Asia.

The past two decades witnessed growing concern among feminists and autonomous women's groups across the South Asia regarding the lack of women in governance and political decision-making bodies in the region. Aiming to halt and reverse this trend, women's groups in South Asia have, over the years, engaged with political parties with regard to ensuring greater presence of women in legislative bodies. While this engagement has secured an enhanced presence of women in local and national governance bodies, it has also, simultaneously, raised several questions. Can women's legitimate demand for gender equality in politics be meaningfully or substantively addressed by a state that is increasingly disinclined to eliminate the structural roots of gender inequality in society and economy? Will a "politics of presence"<sup>25</sup> serve the interests of South Asia's large majority of poor,

underprivileged women with little power or influence? The women's movement has historically been characterised by an autonomous politics and mobilisation: what may be the implications of its contemporary emphasis on numerical parity on voice, participatory democracy, and an anti-system politics? Will engendering parliament and local governance bodies engender policy-making and democracy in South Asia? These are the questions this paper seeks to address.

### **3. EQUALITY STRATEGIES: GENDER QUOTAS**

For almost three decades, the principle of gender equality has been the stated goal of governments across the world. Equality between men and women is widely accepted as a positive value and a core component of struggles for social justice; governments world-wide have endorsed institutional measures for advancing women's equality. The mechanism of gender quotas is among the measures that have come to define the commitment of states to the idea of gender equality in the political sphere.<sup>26</sup> The argument for a greater presence and participation of women in the political sphere is legitimate and compelling even as it raises questions regarding equality, representation and democracy. It is not my intention here to review the very wide-ranging literature and substantive literature on the topic of gender quotas. Rather, I use a modest selection of the literature<sup>27</sup> to foreground four key issues, namely, interest, representation, the limits of representative democracy, and neo-liberal economic policy against which the demand for gender quotas must be assessed. The suggestion here is that women's struggle for equality in politics is inextricably linked with representation, democracy, the protection of citizens' rights, and meaningful transformative change.

## ***Interest***

Central to the strategy of gender quotas for women as a means to achieve political equality is the assumption that women are best placed to represent women's interests. This seemingly self-evident assertion is, however, fraught with a fundamental contradiction. The term 'women' is not a homogenous category. A consensus among women regarding their putative interests can hardly be assumed – least of all in a South Asian setting characterised by, among others, profound class and caste inequalities. Given the variety of women's perspectives on political issues (including representation) it is neither practically possible nor politically prudent to reduce a diversity of (different) views and interests derived from different *locations* to an objective, commonly shared 'women's' perspective that may end up obscuring material and ideological differences among them.

Also implicit in the women-for-women approach is the assumption that women would, and do follow different policies than men. A brief appraisal of the record and performance of South Asia's erstwhile female heads of state, or the performance of female legislators and provincial leaders within South Asian states does not, however, validate this claim. Female politicians and legislators in South Asia are not known for raising specific issues concerning women's needs or interests; nor do they share a record of shifting public policy in favour of women. If issues such as state violence against women, women's reproductive health, female literacy, dowry deaths, or women's marginalisation in politics do not figure in mainstream political debate or policy-making, the problem seems to lie more with a polity and political class that has consistently failed to prioritise gender issues or put in place institutional measures to redress gender-based violence and discrimination, than with the gender composition of legislative bodies.



## ***Representation***

A further dilemma concerns the tension between the logic of representative democracy and women's claim to best represent women's interests. Women's demand for equal representation in political institutions, and their simultaneous insistence on a special identity and role as women begs the question as to whether women can claim a special mandate beyond the confines of party politics within a democratic set-up by virtue of their sex. If the response to this dilemma is in the affirmative, it would be prudent to reflect upon Anne Phillip's reminder that the marker of legitimacy in representative democracy is elections, not nature.<sup>28</sup> The 'representation' of women's' special interests derives from public recognition and prioritisation of these interests by political parties, legislative bodies and state agencies, not from women's individual identity or experience as women. Women are not endowed with a special mandate beyond party and political system constraints. In other words, women's claim to represent women's interests cannot be viewed in isolation, or outside of, the mechanisms of democratic functioning and control, nor can this claim simply rest and rely upon an implicit (and as yet unsubstantiated) trust in female capability.<sup>29</sup> From the point of view of justice and equality, South Asia needs more women in politics, yet whether the interests of *all* women shall be best served by *female* legislators and whether a greater numerical presence of women in governance institutions is coterminous with greater democratisation of institutional practice is far from clear.

## ***Limits of Representative Democracy***

South Asia's great cultural diversity foregrounds the limits of representation defined by numerical presence. If the demand for political justice privileges numerical parity between men and women in national parliaments and assemblies, what about the representation of marginalised minorities across the rubrics of class, caste, religion, tribe, or region? Must a proportional

number of poor, lower caste, minority or tribal women be elected to parliament in order to ensure justice for these women? To pose this question is not to deny the legitimacy of women's demand for equality in politics but to underscore the clear limits of representative democracy in a context where elected representatives may not necessarily reflect *all* segments of society, or the multiple interests of female citizens within it. Further, while the interests of South Asia's large majority of underprivileged women may, arguably, be advanced by their presence, it is far from clear whether the individual/s seeking to represent the (marginal) group is/are competent to do so. Presence alone does not offer any assurance that the interests of the group shall be part of the political agenda; it also does not tell us much about *how* the substantive representation of women may be achieved.<sup>30</sup> Demands for a separate quota for lower caste/minority women seems to suggest a demise of a polity representing the interests of *all* citizens in favour of a polity comprising special interest groups (gender, caste, ethnicity, religion etc.), each representing its own particular 'interest' that, in the South Asian context, is likely to be politically divisive.

### ***Neo-liberalism and Gender Equality***

Over the decades, there has been a fragmentation of the women's movement due to a parting of ways between those who emphasise economic and class inequality while remaining committed to an anti-system politics as against those who prioritise political equality within mainstream politics with the aim of increasing the number of women in political parties and legislatures.<sup>31</sup> The focus on political equality within the existing normative system diminishes the significance of South Asia's enduring class inequalities. A women's movement activism focused exclusively on political equality within the existing institutional framework is therefore unlikely to challenge the injustices of neo-liberalism or its attendant logic of economic efficiency that seamlessly appropriates the feminist demand for political equality. A report on the gender

gap (in India) by the World Economic Forum illustrates how the neo-liberal logic of economic efficiency and competitiveness subsumes gender equality within it:

The most important determinant of a country's competitiveness is its human talent...And women account for one-half of the potential talent base throughout the world. Over time, therefore, a nations' competitiveness depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilises its female talent. To maximise its competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality – that is, to give women the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men.<sup>32</sup>

Equality between women and men within the context of a neo-liberal policy paradigm may be imbued with symbolic significance but it does not challenge or dislodge the substantive, structural inequalities of gender and class within which women's inequality in politics is rooted. It begs the question as to whether a greater or 'equal' numerical presence of women in political institutions is necessarily synonymous with greater public sensitivity to, and policy intervention on women's issues, or the creation of a gender-inclusive egalitarian polity.

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas. It is useful, however, to place them in reference to women's demand for gender quotas in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the complexities underpinning women's mobilisation for equality in politics in South Asia.

#### **4. SOUTH ASIA: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS**

The gender gap in politics in South Asia is attributable to a combination of historical, political and cultural factors. Women in South Asia have been historically marginalised from politics and public life; in the post-colonial period women's marginalisation in politics has been shaped by political developments within the state, and by state policy, even as cultural notions regarding gender roles, discrimination within the family and community, greater domestic responsibilities for women, ignorance of electoral procedures, and family/patriarchal/religious constraints on mobility are among the major cross-cutting factors inhibiting women's political participation. Although there has been an overall increase in women's representation in South Asian parliaments and local bodies, the goal of gender equality in public life is far from being realised.

Mobilising for reserved quotas for women in governance bodies is one of the strategies adopted by feminist and women's groups to redress the gender imbalance in politics. While women's access to governance institutions is the first step towards this goal, of equal if not greater importance is the need to effect change *within* these institutions and ensure the entitlements of women affected by lack of rights and influence.<sup>33</sup> The picture in terms of women's representation in governance bodies is not positive: collectively, the number of women in national/state legislatures in South Asia is lower than nine percent.<sup>34</sup> Although women's share in South Asia's national parliaments has increased over the decades, they are still far from achieving equal representation in governance bodies. A ten year review of human development in South Asia noted:

Women's political participation is a key to change in society...[yet] women's participation in politics is very limited...In South Asia women's share in the national assembly has increased from 7 percent in 1996 to 11 per cent in 2006...While some countries have taken affirmative action to promote participation of women in national and local governments, yet in no country are women proportionately or meaningfully represented in national or local governments.<sup>35</sup>

**Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in South Asia (%)<sup>36</sup>**

SouthAsia	2000	2003	2007
India	9	9	8.3
Pakistan	2	22	21.3
Bangladesh	9	2	15.1
Sri Lanka	5	4	4.9
Nepal	6	6	17.3

Source: World Bank Gender Statistics South Asia 2009

**India**

India - South Asia's largest and pre-eminent state – is a parliamentary, multi-party democracy. Sixteen of the last fifty years were occupied by a female in the executive office; women hold 11 per cent of the total number of seats in parliament and ten per cent of ministerial level positions.<sup>37</sup> Paradoxically, however, India has consistently returned a small number of women to the national parliament; women's presence in parliament or the emergence of influential female political personalities like Sonia Gandhi at the national level, or chief minister Mayawati at the state/provincial level, has not made any discernible difference to the policy agenda of incumbent regimes, or evoked greater articulation of women's concerns. India's female politicians lack power in their own right since almost all of them<sup>38</sup> owe their political eminence to powerful political families or kinship links with male politicians. There is an absence of cross-cutting political alliances between female politicians, even as differences in social class, political backgrounds, ideology and party positions prevent them from forging a collective vision for Indian women. Other reasons behind women's low participation in representative structures is the reluctance of political parties to nominate women, or their tendency to field women from constituencies where they are likely to lose, or where male

candidates are reluctant to contest.<sup>39</sup> Female parliamentarians often have to toe the party line with little freedom to formulate or implement their own agendas. While the women's wing of some political parties does interact with the party leadership, there is no channel linking non-party women with members of parliament (MPs) or political parties that focus on women's rights.<sup>40</sup>

Over the years, political parties have increasingly sought the support of women and included women's concerns in party manifestos. The outcome of this engagement has been mixed. A proposed Bill reserving one third of seats for women in the Indian parliament has been repeatedly stalled for years. At the time of writing, the Rajya Sabha passed the 108<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill reserving 33 percent of seats for women in the national parliament and state legislatures; it is expected to be placed before the Lok Sabha for approval. By way of contrast, in response to growing demands for decentralisation and greater representation of women in politics, the passage of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments in parliament in 1993 was relatively smooth. The legislation ensured one-third reservation for women in local village councils (*panchayats*), and one third of the offices of chairpersons at all levels in rural and urban bodies for women.<sup>41</sup> The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment in 1993 drew close to a million women into structures of local governance.<sup>42</sup> Against reports of lower caste women *sarpanchs* with little political experience who were subsequently dominated by upper-caste men, there have been more hopeful instances of women resisting pressure by male compatriots to take up vital issues such as water-management and fuel conservation.<sup>43</sup> Women have used their numerical strength and the political space afforded by the Act to facilitate gender-sensitive development. Women's presence and numbers has made a distinct difference: it has enabled them to prioritise issues of health, education and access to basic services, and effect change in living conditions for the entire community; women *panchayats* in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal have performed exceptionally well.<sup>44</sup>

Generally speaking, India presents a mixed picture: at the national level, there is no notable increase in the percentage of women parliamentarians (8 per cent in 1984 and 8.3 % in 2009 being the highest). Female members of parliament and state assemblies are drawn from different political parties and subscribe to divergent ideologies: as a result they do not share a common politics or common vision for Indian women. Women MPs lack the power to set their own agendas; in many cases they need to defer to male authority. There is almost a complete disconnect between women's groups and female parliamentarians due to which the specific needs and concerns of underprivileged women rarely figure in party politics or parliamentary debate. The continued stalling of the 108<sup>st</sup> Amendment indicates there is more at stake at the national level for male politicians and mainstream political parties. Reserved quotas for women in higher governing bodies (parliament and state assemblies) has proved more difficult as the threat to male dominance at the policy-making (parliament), rather than policy implementation (village and local council) level, is more direct.

### ***Pakistan***

Pakistan has been interrupted by prolonged periods of martial law. The entrenchment of the military and its consistent hold on politics in Pakistan weakened civilian institutions and authority. Benazir Bhutto's ascent to power (1988) was imbued with symbolic and political significance for women. Yet, even as Benazir pledged to empower women and end gender discrimination, her regime was unable to implement the party (PPP) manifesto in any substantive measure – a failure that had much to do with the contradiction between her party's commitment to women, the poor and the disenfranchised, and the interests of a large number of PPP party members – mainly (male) feudal (to which Benazir herself belonged) and wealthy elites.<sup>45</sup> The weakness of political parties, the rise of the Islamist right-wing, cultural prejudice against women, a patriarchal and feudal environment, and

opposition from family and local male elites explain the marginalisation of women in politics in Pakistan. In general, political parties have tended to treat women as a passive vote bank subject to the dictates of men in the family or clan.<sup>46</sup>

Pakistan's first constitution (1956) provided for 3 percent reserved seats for women in national and provincial legislatures: there were ten<sup>47</sup> reserved seats for women for a period of ten years, a provision that was utilised as and when the political situation permitted with a total of 6 female legislators in Pakistan during 1956-1972. After the establishment of Bangladesh, the 1973 constitution provided for ten reserved seats for women in the lower house of parliament, later doubled to 20 (out of a total of 237) in 1985. During 1988-1990, out of a total of 24 female legislators, four were directly elected, all of whom were from elite feudal backgrounds. In 2000, the reserved quota for women in parliament was increased to 60 (17.5 percent) out of a total of 342 member house: a majority of reserved seats were given to close female relatives of powerful male politicians. In the 2008 elections, in addition to the reserved seats, 13 women were elected through direct open election. Although the number of directly elected women in Pakistan's parliament has increased, and female parliamentarians have voiced their opinion on gender and national issues, they remain beholden to their respective parties for their political position and the indirect manner of their election. The reserved quota (17.5 percent) for women has been extended to the state/provincial assemblies<sup>48</sup> though it falls well short of the demand for 33 percent demanded by women's groups. A (2000) legislation provides for 33 percent reservation for women in local government (in urban areas and districts).<sup>49</sup>

The women's wing of provincial parties like the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Sindhiani Tekrik has been used by parties to consolidate their own political base rather than address women's interests.<sup>50</sup> In the 1997 elections, the People's Party of Pakistan (PPP) nominated 9 female candidates



among the 161 seats it contested, while its principal rival the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) PML(N) nominated 6 women among the 171 seats contested by the party; in 2002, women held three out of the 21 central executive posts of the PPP and five out of 47 in the PML(N).<sup>51</sup> Presently, Pakistan has the highest proportion of female parliamentarians in South Asia though as mentioned earlier, most parliamentarians are drawn from the upper-crust of society.

At the local level, the barriers for rural/poor women are greater. Women are discouraged from entering electoral politics<sup>52</sup> and often forced to stand as independents in the absence of nomination from political parties; elected women councillors at the local (village) are frequently obliged to depend on influential male members, forced to defer to men in order to receive funding, and are often not in a position to oppose policy set by men. Women's presence on local councils is poor; more often than not women are obliged to follow the party's mandate and are unable to exert any influence on local governance.<sup>53</sup> However, as a Shirkatgah (a leading women's group) report notes, "Local bodies are the best training ground for women if they are to play an effective role in the politics of the country"; it is here that [female] politicians gain confidence and are trained to take decisions and formulate policy.<sup>54</sup> A notable example of women forging a common front to advance women's political participation was a special training programme spearheaded by the Aurat Foundation for women in local governance in anticipation of the 2001 elections at the local/rural level where 33 per cent of directly elected seats were reserved for women. The campaign symbolised the promise and potential of an activism aimed at subverting male dominance in mainstream politics and bridging the class, ethnic and urban-rural divide.<sup>55</sup> The training programme covered 7000 Union Council (village level) constituencies; its outcome in the province of Baluchistan was particularly rewarding: as one of Pakistan's most backward and conservative provinces, a fair number of female councillors (17) were elected with an increase in overall female participation rates.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Sri Lanka***

Sri Lanka has a better record of gender equality than other South Asian states, though this has not translated into greater political participation of Sri Lankan women. The regimes of Sri Lanka's two female heads of state – Srimavo Bandaranaike (1970-1977) and Chandrika Kumaratunga (1994-1999) are not known for gender sensitivity. Much like in India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka's female presidents owed their political eminence to their association with male political leaders. Apart from gender, class plays an important role in the selection of political leaders in Sri Lanka: male leaders are preferred to females unless the latter are from prominent, upper class and politically influential families. In 2000, Sri Lanka's parliament had nine women out of a total strength of 224; the cabinet had 42 men and 2 women; the number of women elected to national office is low: below 4 percent in 1977, 5.3 percent in 1989, and 4.3 percent in 2004.<sup>57</sup> Women are under-represented in the executive/decision-making positions in Sri Lanka's mainstream political parties: the United National Party (UNP) had 5 percent women and the Executive Committee 8 per cent. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) has 10 percent, the Socialist Lanka Samaj Party (LSSP) 2 percent, and the Communist Party (CP) 4 per cent.<sup>58</sup> Studies indicate that the gendered norm of male leadership; women's domestic and childcare responsibilities, lack of adequate resources, and the threat of violence are the principal constraining factors behind women's poor political participation in Sri Lanka.<sup>59</sup> In addition to these factors, the lack of access to resources, cultural prejudice surrounding women's political participation, and the lack of family connections inhibit women's political participation.<sup>60</sup>

Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia not to have reserved quotas for women at any level. Although the number of women running for electoral office has increased over the years, this has not translated into a greater number of women being elected. In 2004, there were 10 women parliamentarians in Sri Lanka, 90 percent of whom owed their political eminence

to kinship ties with male politicians; most of those elected belonged to the majority Sinhala community. Women and feminist groups have lobbied with political parties on the issue of including women's gender interests in party manifestos – an engagement that produced significant shifts in party positions regarding women.<sup>61</sup> Women's groups in Sri Lanka have demanded a 25-30 per cent quota in nominations by political parties for women candidates as a means to redress the gender imbalance in politics. On the eve of the 2010 national elections, women's groups and NGOs shared a platform with political parties to voice concern at the under-representation of women in politics (11 women in Parliament out of a total strength of 225) and suggested the likelihood of a less violent and less fractious politics with the entry of a greater number of women in local and national governance bodies<sup>62</sup>. In general, women's engagement with political parties around the issue of political participation remains paradoxical: political parties have expressed interest in women's concerns yet they are also known to have co-opted the women's movement to advance their own interests.<sup>63</sup> Time and future elections shall indicate whether there is any shift towards a greater role of women in Sri Lankan politics.

### ***Bangladesh***

The women's movement in Bangladesh emerged during the national liberation struggle (1970-71) and was part of the civil society response to political developments in the 1980s – not the least of which was the politicisation of Islam and the subversion of democracy by the military. The movement played a key role in opposing martial law and attempts by the military leadership and the Islamist right-wing to alter the secular identity of the state; there was a high turnout of women voters in the 1996 national parliamentary elections that ended martial rule. During the 1980s, a group of 20 women's organisations demanded, among others things, the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women (CEDAW) and an increased female quota in the civil services.<sup>64</sup> Bangladesh had two female prime ministers who have dominated national politics in the post 1991 period: both Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh National Party or BNP) and Sheikh Hasina (Awami League, current prime minister) owe their political prominence to their close links with male political leaders; their respective regimes are not known for advancing women's rights or gender friendly governance.<sup>65</sup>

One of the areas of mobilisation for the women's movement in Bangladesh has been around the issue of women's representation in parliament. A constitutional provision provided for 15 reserved seats for women in the national parliament, a quota that was doubled to 30 in the second national assembly (1979-1982) and eventually lapsed in 2001.<sup>66</sup> Confining women to reserved women-only quotas has been counter-productive: it has left male-dominated political parties with little incentive to field women candidates in the open/general category. For exactly this reason, the women's movement in Bangladesh has opposed the policy of reservation and mobilised in favour of a greater number of reserved seats for women to be open for direct election because "Instead of contributing to women's agency and autonomy, [quotas] accentuated [women's] dependence in politics and reinforced their marginality".<sup>67</sup> Contrary to women's demands, a 2004 constitutional amendment increased the number of reserved seats for women from 30 to 45 to be filled by indirect election and distributed among political parties based on their respective strengths.<sup>68</sup> The number of women contesting general seats remained low; in the 2001 election there were less than five per cent female candidates nominated for election. Presently there are 45 women out a total of 345 members of parliament (13 per cent of total parliamentary strength).<sup>69</sup>

At the local level, there have been efforts by the government to include a greater number of women in governance bodies. The 1997 Local Government Second Amendment reserved three seats for women in the Union Parishad (village council) through direct election. The number of women

candidates, however, has remained disappointingly low. Restrictive gender roles within the home and community; gender stereotypes regarding the role of women; discrimination within existing institutional structures, limitations on mobility and lack of resources to contest elections are the intersecting factors constraining women's political participation at the local level in Bangladesh; successful women candidates are known to have faced threats by male opponents.<sup>70</sup> Bangladesh presents a paradox whereby an increase in reserved seats for women through indirect election in parliament has not translated into political advantage because women-only quotas do not enhance women's autonomy or agency and serve to reinforce male monopoly in politics.

### ***Nepal***

After a prolonged civil war and the abolishment of a 240 year-old monarchy, Nepal became South Asia's youngest democracy in 2008. Women were crucial to the movement for democracy during which they have been victims of rape and sexual abuse, and deprived of the benefits of education, health, access to productive resources, and reproductive rights. With support from the United Nations (UN) and other international agencies, women's groups in Nepal succeeded in securing a reserved quota of seats in the newly established Constituent Assembly (CA) where women constitute just over 33 per cent of the total number of seats – a huge jump from the previous figure of 6 per cent.<sup>71</sup> Nepal's interim constitution (2007) provides for 33 percent reservation for women in governance structures. In the 2008 elections, there were 32.8 percent women (197 out of 601)<sup>72</sup> in Nepal's national parliament: parties nominated 167 women while 30 were elected directly. Women parliamentarians formed an inter-party alliance and have pressured the government for 50 per cent reservation for women in all policymaking positions. Women's lobbying forced the government to pass bills decriminalising abortion, allowing women to inherit property at birth,

and women's right to give their children citizenship rights. At the same time, however, it has been difficult for women to voice other gender-related issues through parliamentary channels because gender issues are not deemed important.<sup>73</sup> Patriarchal dominance and a lack of experience and training are among the major factors inhibiting women's political participation in Nepal.

At the local level, the Act on Local Election mandates representation of women at the district and village level as a result of which more than 100,000 women stood as candidates for Village Development Committees (VDCs) with more than 36,000 elected to Village Assemblies.<sup>74</sup> In 2007, a women's NGO alliance promoted a list of 3000 rural and urban women for peace and electoral processes including in the CA even though there was no direct participation of women in the 2006 agreement between political parties.<sup>75</sup> There exists a high degree of political awareness among Nepali women with the potential for carving out a greater political role for women in collaboration with women's groups. Whether democracy in Nepal can ensure a more substantive role for Nepali women in politics and governance remains to be seen.

### ***Women's Movement Activism***

Women's activism in South Asia demonstrates the radical potential of a collaboration transcending the boundaries of gender, class and caste. A few empirical examples highlight the point. In 1996 members of a women's organisation, the *Mahila Jagriti Sangathan* (Women's Awareness Organisation) in the state of Madhya Pradesh established that liquor was the root cause of four successive rapes. Women from various communities attempted to close down the liquor shops but failed as they were licensed. Their subsequent campaign against liquor vendors were joined by 40,000 women from the adjoining state of Chhattisgarh who signed a joint memorandum demanding a ban on liquor. Faced with an unresponsive administration, women joined forces with local *panchayats* in their struggle to achieve prohibition in the

state. The *panchayats* used their numbers and political presence to make the struggle a success.<sup>76</sup>

The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Women's Council) (BMP), a women's organisation committed to gender equality and democracy developed support groups for three women representatives (one from an urban council and two from rural village councils). Each support group consisted of 15 women from the representative's constituency including BMP members trained to provide support to the elected representative. Together they organised constituency meetings, built alliances with political leaders, and linked representatives with women leaders that in turn, helped women representatives attend council meetings, question the allocation of resources and procedures, and succeed in getting development project for their areas, engage with gender issues, and set up an autonomous women's cell. Women's collective organisation invested them with the authority and legitimacy to shape and facilitate gender-sensitive governance.<sup>77</sup>

In Pakistan, the Women's Action Forum (WAF) was established during a period of martial law during the 1980s. WAF's focus and engagement broadened with an emphasis on education and electoral participation in the 1980s.<sup>78</sup> An important initiative was the collaboration between WAF - an urban-based autonomous women's group - with the *Sindhiani Tehreek*, a rural, lower-class women's group in Sindh province, working on women's issues that are insufficiently addressed by mainstream political parties including women's representation in local bodies.<sup>79</sup> In general, women's activism enhanced the capacity of underprivileged women to access resources and political spaces, thereby demonstrating that alliances bridging class and caste difference while sharing resources and skills have the potential to advance women's political participation.

## 5. KEY ISSUES

Several key points emerge from the above discussion. From the point of view of justice and legitimacy, a greater numerical presence of women in national parliaments subverts the established gender hierarchy and imparts greater legitimacy to the political system. Women's greater political presence in national and local governance bodies is an essential first step towards redressing the gender imbalance in politics; it opens up the possibility of challenging established policy-making and reorienting development agendas. The justice argument favouring reservation for a historically marginalised constituency is based on the understanding that

...quotas for women are needed to compensate for the social barriers that have prevented women from participating in politics and...making their voices heard...That in order for women to be more than 'tokens' in political institutions, a level of presence that cannot be overlooked by political parties is required, hence the demand for a 33 per cent quota.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, however, a greater numerical presence of women may not necessarily secure the representation of the diverse interests of women – especially those of South Asia's very large constituency of underprivileged women with little influence or resources. From a class perspective, existing trends are not optimistic: in India for instance, the majority of female members of parliament are from upper class/caste backgrounds, as is also the case in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka where female legislators come from feudal or elite backgrounds. In an overview of the 1991-1996 Indian Parliament, Shirin Rai noted that the majority of women in the Indian parliament were elite women from upper caste and class backgrounds "allowing them a far greater range of options than are available to poorer women".<sup>81</sup> The class origins of female MPs in India is a major determinant of women's entry into parliament; it is also the reason why a large majority of underprivileged women



lack the education, access to resources, institutional support or wealth necessary for entering governance institutions. In such a context, the anticipated engendering of parliament may achieve little more than the engendering of elites.<sup>82</sup> The privileging of gender must not be at the cost of ignoring South Asia's great class disparities. Accordingly, the inclusion of women in political institutions process is an important, albeit insufficient condition for challenging the political status quo unless the class disparity flowing from socio-economic inequality is addressed simultaneously. As Shirin Rai asserts:

If development agendas are to be re-articulated, if transformation of the lives of women has to take place in tandem with that of the gender relations within which they are enmeshed, then the issues surrounding economic and social class relations have to be addressed.<sup>83</sup>

Further, an examination of the record of female parliamentarians in South Asia indicates that a greater *presence* of women does not necessarily translate into a better *representation* of women's *interests*. Most Indian female parliamentarians, for instance, "did not have women's issues high on their list of interests. Rather, they wanted to be on committees relating to economy, international relations and trade. As ambitious women these MPs want to be where power and influence converge".<sup>84</sup> While the pursuit of power and influence is not confined to female MP's from South Asia<sup>85</sup> it does indicate that women MPs may not effectively represent women's interests or necessarily pursue a different politics and agenda than men. Accordingly, while there is a very strong case in favour of women's entry in greater numbers into parliament, there is no way of knowing or predicting how women shall behave once they are there. The focus therefore should be more on engendering policy rather than the gender of policy-makers.

A related concern is the representation of women from minority/ethnic groups. As mentioned already, the record of South Asian states regarding the protection of (ethnic, religious, tribal) minorities is poor. The fact of discrimination against minorities can translate into a legitimate defence of quotas for minorities though this would necessarily come with the assumption that the 'interests' of minorities are clearly defined and consensually agreed upon by the group. This may not, however, be practically achievable, given the gender, class, sect, and regional differences within a minority group. The case of Indian Muslims – a diverse and heterogeneous group is a case in point. As an under-represented minority, the case for a greater presence of Muslim women in parliament is particularly strong, yet advocates of group representation overlook the (gender) dynamics of power within the group; representatives of marginalised groups are not immune to the influence of power within the group. It is hard, if not altogether impossible, to arrive at a consensus regarding a common, objectively defined 'interest' of a particular social group across the differentials of gender, class, sect, region or language. This does not mean that the claim for minority representation should be surrendered or discarded for want of representatives; rather, it may be more prudent for women and the women's movement to demand policy directives to protect and advance the rights of minority women. In effect, this would mandate discarding the emphasis on cultural difference, and demanding instead the removal of social and economic inequality underpinning the gender imbalance in the representative structure. In a South Asian context where an emphasis on cultural difference has generated a polarising identity politics, minority/ethnic women's rights interests may be advanced, yet at the same time cannot be contingent on, presence alone. The equality of outcome for marginalised or oppressed groups – so central to the popular understanding of democracy in South Asia – mandates equality of opportunity (of access to representative institutions) for members of such groups, yet, at the same time, the protection and advancement of minority interest must not be held hostage to minority presence. As Judith Squires

wrote, "The identity of the representative is of little import, as long as the issues are conveyed effectively".<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, in the absence of all-women parties in the South Asian region, female MPs do not represent an exclusively female constituency, nor are they accountable to women as women. Female parliamentarians may participate in debates on women's issues though they are essentially "party women first"<sup>87</sup> and subject to the same party constraints as their male counterparts; their accountability essentially flows from their respective party positions party and politics than gender identity. The record of political parties in South Asia in relation to gender issues is not particularly impressive: they may or may not prioritise gender issues. Women and feminist groups therefore have a crucial role to play in this regard in terms of facilitating the articulation of gender issues within political parties and their integration into public policy. The women's movement in South Asia has played a significant role towards facilitating women's access to political institutions; it has been far less successful in forging and consolidating the vital link between political parties, female representatives, non-party women and/or women's groups necessary for ensuring greater public debate on gender issues and gender-sensitive policymaking. It needs to play a far more pro-active role towards this end.

In contrast to the national (parliament) level, women's entry into governance bodies at the local level has been at a much larger scale. In India, reserved seats allowed over a million women to enter local governance bodies; in Pakistan, local elections brought 42,049 women in local governance; in the 1997 Union Council elections in Bangladesh 13,000 women were elected to fill in the reserved seats for women.<sup>88</sup> In Nepal, a 1997 Act on Local Election drew the participation of 100,000 women in the village and district level council election with more than 36,000 women being elected to the village assembly.<sup>89</sup> There is evidence of female representatives effecting important qualitative changes on the ground in terms of establishing

micro-credit programmes, literacy campaigns, training programmes and self-help groups for women.<sup>90</sup> The presence of local female councillors has facilitated a more engaged connection between local government and women from local communities.

On the flip side however, women's lack of education, training, resources and experience impedes effective functioning at the local level. In Pakistan, for instance, nearly three-quarters of local female councillors were illiterate, from a rural background, and in the absence of experience, information and resources, were ever more vulnerable to patriarchal dominance. Local councils across South Asia are not autonomous or free from political influence of political parties and upper class/caste men. Most local councillors do not draw a regular salary as a result of which they remain dependent on male kin members. Economic dependency and cultural norms prevent female local representatives from traversing distances in order to meet with their constituents or taking an independent stand on issues. The impediments for lower caste women are greater: they are unable to represent their own or the general interests of women satisfactorily.<sup>91</sup> For the bulk of poor, underprivileged and politically marginalised South Asian women, the promise and potential of political representation is inextricably tied with access to basic social services (literacy, health, education) and the availability of social opportunity. For precisely this reason, the importance of the state in South Asia cannot be overstated: it has the resources, the institutions, and the mechanisms to realise the democratic aspirations of citizens and marginalised social groups i.e. freedom from want, hunger and fear, and provide basic social services to *all*, that in turn, shall invest women with the skills, capability, confidence and opportunity to compete for electoral office on an even footing with men. The removal of social inequality is an essential pre-requisite for deepening democracy in South Asia. Greater accountability and transparency of state institutions must be accompanied by a democratisation of social relations and the enlargement of the human capabilities of all citizens.<sup>92</sup>

Democratic governance in South Asia is thus not merely not only about closing the gender gap between women and men in political institutions; it is, more fundamentally, about eliminating social inequality and the absence of distributive justice that creates and reinforces gender inequality in politics. Finally, the women's movement in South Asia needs to reflect upon the paradoxes, contradictions and challenges generated by the retreat of the state in the region and its pursuit of a neo-liberal economic agenda. If a citizen-centric concept of democracy and governance is premised on an active engagement of female citizens with the state and the opening up of development agendas and policymaking to political contestation, the neo-liberal version of democracy and good governance rests on a minimal, non-political technocratic state geared towards the goal of economic efficiency.<sup>93</sup> Paradoxically, the emergence of women's engagement with the state during the 1990s including the demand for greater access to women in governance institutions coincided with the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies across South Asia – a convergence that suggests some measure of feminist complicity with the neo-liberal project.<sup>94</sup> If this seems a rather severe deduction, it remains the case that women's movement activism has been fairly ineffective in challenging a neo-liberalism that endorses gender equality in rhetoric even as it refrains from questioning or addressing the persistence of gender inequality in economic practice.

The contradictions underpinning this paradox are apparent: even as the number of women in national parliaments and assemblies in South Asia registered an increase over the decades, the entry of a greater number of women in legislative bodies has not altered the normative practices of governance, nor has it generated new forms of political engagement or participatory democracy. In a South Asian context characterised by deference of individual politicians to political parties, women's presence in the upper echelons of political parties and parliaments remains a function of their proximity and primary allegiance to political parties. "This means that although

they gain their political status by virtue of their womanhood, they are under little constraint to act in ways that are empathetic or sensitive to the needs of the majority of women".<sup>95</sup> The possibility of women acting as a cross-cutting pressure group across political parties and representative bodies to demand elimination of the social inequality underpinning women's political marginalisation is therefore rendered remote.

By way of contrast, the presence of women in governance bodies at the local level within a neo-liberal context has produced some measure of qualitative change and imparted a degree of popular credibility to institutions of local governance. Unlike their urban, upper class/caste counterparts, local/village female representatives often act as a cross-cutting pressure group for advancing women's interests. For instance, female representatives have facilitated women's access to micro-credit programmes, literacy campaigns and self-help groups (India), generated training programmes for women (Bangladesh) and produced a greater interface between rural women and their female representatives (Pakistan).<sup>96</sup> Notwithstanding the significance of such outcomes generated by a greater political presence, the experience of women in local/village councils is mediated by class differences, as well as by local culture, lack of education, resources, training and political influence.<sup>97</sup> Lacking political influence or proximity to political parties, (poor) female representatives are unable to exert much influence on a centrally-backed neo-liberal policy that defines rural women's empowerment in terms of their greater alignment with the market and micro-credit regimes.<sup>98</sup> Access to micro-credit may benefit individual women and families, yet it renders women increasingly dependent on, and vulnerable to, the market.<sup>99</sup> Women and women's movements in South Asia need to demand a greater mediatory role of the state to pre-empt the inequalities inflicted by neo-liberalism whose frame is far removed from the ideas, politics and energy of women's movement activism.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Two broad issues emerge from the discussion. First, the issue of women's political marginalisation must be framed against South Asia's great paradox of democracy and social and economic inequality that has particular salience for the bulk of poor, economically underprivileged women in the region. There is a clear class dimension to the issue of women's political marginalisation. The institution of the welfare state – so crucial towards developing a gender-just society – is presently in the process of being actively dismantled in South Asia. Poor, underprivileged women are far more vulnerable to the outcome of state withdrawal than their upper-class counterparts; state withdrawal in South Asia spells an end to the struggle for social equality. Widening class disparity can only heighten gender inequality. Feminist groups therefore need to forge greater links with the large constituency of underprivileged women and establish a coherent political front to demand greater state intervention for the provision of basic services to all citizens.

Finally, even as the women's movement has addressed the under-representation of women in local and national decision-making bodies, it has been unable to exert much influence over political parties that seek women's votes but are largely indifferent to gender concerns. Women's and feminist groups need to broaden and deepen their engagement with political parties and female politicians in order to integrate gender concerns in party manifestos and government policy. The South Asian experience demonstrates that an increased presence of women in parliaments and legislatures is not necessarily coterminous with the advancement or realisation of gender equality in politics. Rather, the interface between women's movements, urban-based women's groups, and underprivileged women has the potential to transform into substantive political advantage for *all* women. As the empirical examples from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal mentioned above suggest, a feminist activism informed by a shared understanding of gender and class differences

can effectively subvert male dominance at a local level. At a more philosophical level, democratic governance may be best advanced by the affirmation of women's *individual equality* with men in formal politics, distributive justice for *all* citizens, and public recognition and response to women's *difference* from men as a social group.

### **(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> *Human Development in South Asia 2007: A Ten Year Review*, Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre (Karachi: Oxford University Press), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Post-independent Sri Lanka introduced a comprehensive welfare package including education and health services. As a result of these policies, literacy rates for women rose from 67.3 per cent in 1973 to 87.9 percent by 1994; life expectancy from 41.6 years in 1946 to 74.2 years in the 1990s. See Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia*. Occasional Paper (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> 'Gender Index: India near Bottom'. *The Hindustan Times*, 10 November 2009.

<sup>4</sup> In contradiction to the global norm, in South Asian men outlive and outnumber women. According to the 2007 *Human Development in South Asia* report, there were 95 women for every 100 men in South Asia. The report estimated that 74 million women were 'missing' in South Asia due to systemic neglect and deprivation. Op cit. pp. 30-32 and p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion regarding both these dimensions see Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*. Op cit.

<sup>6</sup> Two decades of war between government forces and the LTTE heightened defence expenditure, impeded economic growth and devastated the lives of millions. Women share a disproportionate burden as survivors: as female-headed households and caregivers in the absence of basic services such as food, education, health, means of livelihood and sustenance and the trauma of gender-based violence by state and non-state forces. *Women in Sri Lanka*, Asian Development Bank (1999), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.16.



<sup>8</sup> Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*.

<sup>9</sup> *State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> "The participatory democracy approach places emphasis on the forms of debate and contestation among social actors in the formulation and implementation of public policy. The definition of the public sphere, and of political activity, is expanded to include not just the arena of government, but also the terrain of the social movements, voluntary associations and other community-based activity". Shireen Hassim, 'From Presence to power: women's citizenship in a new democracy.' *Agenda* (40) 1999, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Jeff Haynes (ed.) 2001. 'Introduction' in *Democracy and Political Change in the 'Third World'* (London: Routledge), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, The Gender of Democracy Matters. Open Democracy Analysis. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/idea/the-gender-of-democracy-matters>. Accessed 22 August 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Inglehart, Pippa Norris and Christian Welzel. 2004. *Gender Equality and Democracy* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan), p.2.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank definition of governance quoted by Niraja Gopal Jayal in 'Locating Gender Discourse' in Nussbaum, Martha, Amrita Basu, Yasmin Tambiah and Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Essays on Gender and Governance* (New Delhi: UNDP), p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> Yasmin Tambiah, 'The Impact of Gender Inequality on Governance' in Nussbaum et al, *Essays on Gender and Governance* (New Delhi: UNDP), p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'Locating Gender in Governance Discourse' in Nussbaum et al, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Gender and Governance: An Introduction' in Nussbaum et al. p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, 'Creating Citizens Who Demand Just Governance: Gender and Development in the Twenty-First Century' in *Gender and Development* 11(3): 45-56 (November 2003), p.52.

<sup>20</sup> According to the 2000 South Asia Human Development Report, the sex ratio for South Asia was 940 females for every 1000 males – worse than sub-Saharan Africa. See *Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, xvi).

<sup>21</sup> *Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question* (Karachi: Oxford University Press), p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> For a general overview of the relationship between neo-liberal reform and poverty in South Asia, especially India, see 'Addressing issues of Poverty and Inequality Through Democracy'. World Forum for Democratisation in Asia, Seoul Korea. Available at [http://www.ldcwatch.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=24%3Aaddressing-issues-of-poverty-and-inequality-through-democracy-&catid=1%3Aldc-watch-statements&Itemid=3&lang=en](http://www.ldcwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24%3Aaddressing-issues-of-poverty-and-inequality-through-democracy-&catid=1%3Aldc-watch-statements&Itemid=3&lang=en) Accessed 3 August 2011.

<sup>23</sup> For a fuller explication of neo-liberal policy and its implications for citizens especially in India see Amit Bhaduri, *The Face You Were Afraid To See: Essays on the Indian Economy* (New Delhi: Penguin 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Srimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh) served as elected prime ministers.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Phillips (ed.), *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> The other two are gender mainstreaming and women's policy agencies. For an in depth discussion, see Judith Squires, *The New Politics of Gender Inequality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Among others, Phillips 1991, 1993; Squires 2007; Rai 2002, 2005; Jayal 2003; Nussbaum et al 2003; Basu 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Anne Phillips. *Engendering Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> For a greater explication of these arguments, see Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy*, esp. Chapter 3, pp. 66-92.

<sup>30</sup> Squires 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *The India Gender Gap Review* (Geneva: World Economic Forum 2009), p.11.

<sup>33</sup> Mukhopadhyay, 'Creating Citizens', Op cit. p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Khawar Mumtaz, Women's Representation, Effectiveness and leadership in South Asia. Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference, Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten. Islamabad, Pakistan, 3-5 May 2005, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Human Development in South Asia 2007: A Ten-year Review*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>36</sup> Source: World Bank Gender Statistics: South Asia. <http://go.worldbank.org/MR87UZQAJ0>

<sup>37</sup> *The India Gender Gap Review* (Geneva: World Economic Forum 2009), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> With the exception of Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister, West Bengal.

<sup>39</sup> See Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'Locating Gender in Governance Discourse' in Nussbaum et al. Op cit.

<sup>40</sup> Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Shirin M. Rai, 'Democratic Institutions. Political Representation and Women's Empowerment' in Anne Phillips (ed.), *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> Strengthening Elected Women Leaders in India: The Hunger Project. [http://www.thp.org/what\\_we\\_do/key\\_initiatives/strengthening\\_elected\\_women/overview](http://www.thp.org/what_we_do/key_initiatives/strengthening_elected_women/overview) Accessed 18 October 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Anurag Joshi, Women and Political Participation in India in Mohanlal Sharma, Olive Peacock and Krishan Gopal (eds.) *Globalisation, Democracy and Governance in South Asia* (New Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 2003) p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> Kalyani Menon Sen and A.K. Shiva Kumar 'Women in India How Free How Equal?' (New Delhi: United Nations, 2001), p.70.

<sup>45</sup> A survey of the background of the members of Pakistan's parliament since 1970 shows that elected representatives are immensely wealthy and come from the ultra-rich elite of Pakistan. Many representatives are ill-informed about Pakistan's social and economic realities. See S Akbar Zaidi 'Elected representatives in Pakistan: Socio-economic Background and Awareness of Issues'. *Economic and Political Weekly of India*, 39(45): 4935-4941, p. 4935. 2004.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCAP Report on the State of women in Local Urban Governance: Pakistan, p.7. Date unspecified. Available at <http://www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/>. Accessed 9 October 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Five each for East and West Pakistan respectively.

<sup>48</sup> The seats are allocated to political parties on the basis of their proportion of the general seats in the provincial assembly.

<sup>49</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all information in this para from Khawar Mumtaz, 'Women's Representation', Op cit. pp. 14-17.

<sup>50</sup> Farida Shaheed, Asma Zia and Sohail Warraich, 1998. *Women in Politics: Participation and Representation in Pakistan* (Lahore: Shirkatgah Publications), p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> All statistics and information in this para from Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, in 1996, as many as 50,000 women stood to lose their vote in Thatta, Baluchistan, because of the reluctance of their male family members to allow their names to be registered on the voter's list. Shaheed et al, p.74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Report on the State of Women in Local Urban Governance: Pakistan* (United Nations, UNESCAP). Date Unspecified, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p.7.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.7.

<sup>59</sup> *Sri Lanka: Country Gender Assessment*. Asian Development Bank (Manila 2004), p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> In the 1994 election, the United National Party (UNP) party manifesto pledged to provide for equal pay, women's right to government housing, safety for female factory workers, a revision of laws relating to sexual violence and

the minimum age for marriage with smaller parties such as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the People's Alliance (PA) endorsing the importance of gender issues. See Amrita Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Ruana Rajpakse, Specific Quotas necessary in Sri Lanka to enhance women's representation in electoral politics. *Transcurrents* (February 21) [http://transcurrents.com/tc/2010/02/specific\\_quotas\\_necessary\\_in\\_s.html](http://transcurrents.com/tc/2010/02/specific_quotas_necessary_in_s.html) . Accessed February 30, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> The Mother's Front was an independent women's organization established in 1984 to protest against the disappearances by security forces. By 1992 the Front had a membership of 25,000 mostly poor women and played a critical role in the defeat of the UNP regime by the SLFP. The SLFP incorporated the Front's agenda and two of its members who won parliamentary seats in 1994 ceased to be active in the movement that had brought them to power. The UNP later formed its own Mothers Front. Basu, 'Women, Political Parties', p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Bangladesh remains the only country to have women heading parliament and the opposition.

<sup>66</sup> *Bangladesh Gender Profile*. KfW Entwicklungsbank (Frankfurt: KfW Development Bank Asia Department 2006), p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Najma Chowdhury quoted in Basu, *Women, Political Parties*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all statistics in this para from Pranab Kumar Panday: 'Representation Without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh'. *International Political Science Review* 29(489): 2008.

<sup>70</sup> KfW Bangladesh Gender Profile, *Op cit.* p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> All information in this para from Global Monitoring Checklist on Women, Peace and Security: Gender Action for Peace and Security 2009. pp. 73-74.

<sup>72</sup> IDEA Country profile: Nepal available at <http://www.idea.int/countryProfile.cfm?CountryCode=NP>. Accessed 10 March 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Mallika Arya, Politics Nepal: Women Push for Gender Equality in New Constitution. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47937>. Accessed March 10, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> *Women in Nepal: Country Briefing Paper*. (Manila: Asian Development Bank 1999), p. 44.

<sup>75</sup> Global Monitoring Checklist on Women, Peace and Security (Gender Action for Peace and Security: UK), p. 81.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>77</sup> Pranab Kumar Pandey, 'Representation without Participation'. Op cit, p. 500.

<sup>78</sup> For a fuller discussion see Khawar Mumtaz, Advocacy for an End to Poverty, Inequality, and Insecurity: Feminist Social Movements in Pakistan, *Gender and Development* (13)3: 63-69 (November 2005), pp. 64-66.

<sup>79</sup> Yasmin Tambiah, 'The Impact of Gender Inequality on Governance' in Nussbaum et al. p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> Shirin Rai, 'Democratic Institutions, Political Representation and Women's Empowerment' in Anne Phillips (ed.) *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) p. 121

<sup>81</sup> Shirin Rai, Caste, Class and Gender – Women in Parliament in India (Stockholm: International IDEA 2002). Available at <http://www.idea.int>. Accessed 9 June 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'Locating Gender in Governance Discourse' in Nussbaum et al, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup> Shirin M Rai, 'Democratic Institutions, Political Representation', Op cit, p.117.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> In the United Kingdom, female MPs of the Blair-led Labour party voted disproportionately with the government, rather than for specifically female concerns. Likewise a vast majority of women who enter politics in Latin America do not campaign for women's issues or make them the primary focus of their legislative careers. Judith Squires, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> Squires, p. 96

<sup>87</sup> Shirin Rai 2002. 'Gender and Multi-level Governance: Feasible and Transformative Politics?' in *Gender and the Political Economy of Development: From Nationalism to Globalisation* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

<sup>88</sup> Shirin Rai, Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (Revised Edition, PDF) in Julie Ballington and Azza M Karam (eds.), (Stockholm: Institute for Democracy and electoral Assistance 2005), p. 17. Available at [http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/WiP\\_inlay.pdf](http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/WiP_inlay.pdf) .8 . Accessed 8 July 2010.

<sup>89</sup> *Country Briefing Paper: Nepal* (Asian Development Bank) Op cit. p. 44.

<sup>90</sup> Rai, Beyond Numbers, Op Cit.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid..

<sup>92</sup> Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'The Governance Agenda: Making Democratic Governance Dispensable' in *Economic and Political Weekly of India* (February 22, 1997), p. 412.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> See Squires, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, p.8 and Shireen Rai, *Gender and the Political Economy of Development: From Nationalism to Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp.167-168.

<sup>95</sup> Squires, p.103

<sup>96</sup> Shirin Rai, 'Women in Parliament, Beyond Numbers', Op cit. p. 177.

<sup>97</sup> In India the majority of women elected women at the local level are from lower socio-economic strata in terms of education and class; in Pakistan more than half of the women are illiterate, with few productive assets. Judith Squires, *The New Politics of Gender Equality*, p. 108.

<sup>98</sup> See Rai, Beyond Numbers, Op cit.

<sup>99</sup> See Rai, 'Gender and Multi-level Governance,' in *Gender and the Political Economy of Development*, pp. 171-176. Op cit.

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