



ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

research and innovation for governance accountability

Engaging Accountability: Working Paper Series

What is driving the Indian middle class towards electoral politics?

Evidence from Delhi

*Poulomi Chakrabarti**

*poulomi@alum.mit.edu



Accountability Initiative, Centre for Policy Research, Dharam Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110 021
Tel: +91 11 2611 5273-76 Fax: +91 11 2687 2746 Email: info@accountabilityindia.org
www.accountabilityindia.org

**ENGAGING ACCOUNTABILITY:
ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**What is driving the Indian middle class towards electoral politics?
Evidence from Delhi**

*Poulomi Chakrabarti**

*The author works as an independent researcher on issues related to local governance and political economy of development in India. This paper is based on research carried out for her graduate thesis in international development at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2007. It has been updated and complemented by further fieldwork in 2009 with the support of Accountability Initiative, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. She is grateful to Judith Tandler, Bish Sanyal and Anu Joshi for guidance on the original research and to Yamini Aiyar and Bala Posani for useful feedback on the current version of the paper.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are entirely those of the author. You may choose to reproduce or redistribute the contents in part or in full to any other person with due acknowledgement of the Accountability Initiative.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....4

I. Introduction: Middle Class Activism and Neighborhood Associations.....5

II. RWA Mobilization in Delhi.....6

III. Fragmented Middle Class and Advent into Formal Politics.....13

IV. RWAs and Municipal Elections.....16

V. Why now? Decentralized Governance and Neighborhood Associations.....19

VI. Political Typology of Neighborhood Associations.....21

VII. Conclusions: Determinants of Electoral Participation27

Abstract

Neighborhood Associations have assumed an important role in public policy decision making as the principal voice of the middle class across urban India. In recent years, these associations have sought a more formal role in policy making by contesting for political office in local elections in at least five major cities. This is significant not only because of its “newness” and implications on public policy but also because it represents a blurring of boundaries between the civil society, traditionally characterized by its ‘apolitical’ nature, and the political society which has largely been the domain of the poor. Using the case of Delhi and drawing on examples from other metropolitan cities, this paper attempts to understand the factors that have led to the rise of middle class neighborhood associations and their subsequent advent into formal politics. The unique institutional environment of the capital and a Government of Delhi program that institutionalized citizen participation through these very associations makes Delhi a particularly interesting case. I discover that neighborhood associations with pre-existing networks with government agencies were more likely to remain apolitical, while the ones without these networks seek to become part of the government machinery through formal electoral channels. Policies on decentralization instituted by the Central and the State Government have been instrumental in this change.

I. Middle Class Activism and Neighborhood Associations

The economic reforms policies instituted by Government of India in the early nineties have had some important implications on the governance and socio-economic profile of metropolitan cities. On the urban policy front, pro-growth measures like US\$1350 million “Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission” (JNNURM) for example, have aimed at upgrading infrastructure in large cities to attract foreign investment. This contrasts sharply with policies targeted at ‘decongesting’ cities in the 70s and 80s. Secondly, the focus on decentralization, most notably the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) - which some argue is an extension of the economic reform policy (Kundu, 2003), has changed the way cities are now governed. Although the Central Government continues to maintain significant control over metropolitan cities because their impact on macroeconomic growth, local governments have assumed more decision making and financial powers in recent years. A parallel development is the combination of citizen participation and privatization of service delivery on grounds of greater efficiency and accountability. The institution of “Ward-Committees” for citizen participation as per the 74th CCA, the mandatory “Community Participation Law” in the JNNURM as well as city-level participation programs like the *Bhagidari* in Delhi are some examples of this development.

On the socio-economic front, the gains of rapid economic growth that followed the reforms have been disproportionately biased toward the urban middle class. The professional and managerial class, in particular, has experienced an exponential growth in income as well as cultural and social visibility (Fernandes, 2006). This growth has transcended into activism by the middle class on various spheres of public life. The year 2006, for example, was declared the “Year of the Middle-class” by a leading institutions of the national media¹. At the level of the city, this activism is exemplified through the rise in middle class associational activity, the most dominant form being neighborhood associations. This includes the Advanced Locality Management (ALM) program in Mumbai, *Janagraha* in Bangalore, Resident

Welfare Associations (RWA) in Chennai, Delhi and other cities. Policies on decentralization and community participation have further reinforced the growth of these associations.

In an attempt to explain the rise of the middle class associations, political sociologists like Fernandes (2006) and Chatterjee (2004) have used the argument of “globalizing” cities – as Indian cities augment their infrastructure to create conditions for global capital, the middle class has mobilized to regain control over urban public space and hence produce a clear socio-spatial separation from groups like street vendors and squatters. Neighborhood associations, Fernandes (2006) argues, are a mechanism through which this separation is achieved, as is reflected by slum evictions in a number of large Indian cities. Harriss (2005b), on the other hand, argues that middle class activism in associational life is a response to its impotence in the “political sphere”. The voter turnout rates in middle class neighborhoods, for instance, had dropped to 35-40% by the late 90s as opposed to more than 80% in poorer areas and slums (Mazzarella, 2006). Harriss (2007) further argues that this activism has led to the creation of a “new politics” – a collaboration between the reforming state, private capital and middle class, aimed at reclaiming urban governance from the dirty politics of the masses. The class character of these associations and their implication on urban governance has hence come to dominate the scholarly discourse on neighborhood associations.

In recent years, however, neighborhood associations have also sought a more formal role in policy making by contesting for political office in local elections in at least five major cities². This is significant not only because of its “newness” and implications on public policy, but also because it represents a blurring of boundaries between the civil society, traditionally characterized by its ‘apolitical’ nature, and the political society which has largely been the domain of the poor. While the more recent wave of research alludes to the political engagement by neighborhood associations, we know very little about the determinants of electoral participation within the middle class. Using the case of Delhi and drawing on examples from other

metropolitan cities, this paper attempts to understand the factors that have led to the rise of middle class neighborhood associations and their subsequent advent into formal politics. This process of deconstructing the urban middle class also provides some insights into 'who' within the array of neighborhood associations in the city is joining formal politics. This understanding could be a first step in making some broad generalizations about the middle class political movement in India. The unique institutional environment of the capital and a Government of Delhi program called *Bhagidari* that institutionalized citizen participation through these very associations makes Delhi a particularly interesting case.

The findings presented here are based on four months of field research in Delhi, spread over 2006 to 2009. I primarily employ qualitative research methods – both interviews and ethnographic tools. I carried out more than sixty interviews with current and retired government officials (Government of Delhi and Municipal Corporation of Delhi), political representatives (the Chief Minister, Members of Legislative Council of Delhi, Municipal Councilors), members of RWAs and umbrella organizations of RWAs, leaders and residents of slum and informal settlements, academics and independent researchers working in this area, representatives of media, and NGOs. In addition, I use government reports, documents and circulars provided to me by the Delhi Administration, MCD, DDA, and the Delhi High Court. I was on the e-mail list of two major RWA umbrella bodies and I use those emails to trace the activities of the organizations. I also relied extensively on newspaper articles to corroborate my findings from interviews and to study the evolution of *Bhagidari* and RWAs over time. For fieldwork on RWAs, I use two wards as case studies. My objective was not to conduct a comparative analysis of the two wards, but to form a sample that would be representative enough of different socio-economic groups in the city. The ward in South Delhi is primarily middle-high income in nature, with some regularized colonies and urban villages. This ward also has some of the most exclusive neighborhoods in the city. The second ward I selected is in North Delhi towards the outskirts of the city. This was a more

heterogeneous in terms of income and comprises of middle income neighborhoods as well as informal settlements like slums, unauthorized and resettlement colonies.

This paper is organized into seven sections. Section 2 describes the trajectory of growth of neighborhood associations in Delhi and factors that led to city-wide mobilization by RWAs. In Section 3, I discuss the fragmentation within neighborhood associations and the emergence of two RWA umbrella organizations with vastly different ideologies. While one organization represented the traditional “apolitical” civil society, the other mobilized RWAs in Delhi to contest local elections. Section 4 describes the municipal election in Delhi in 2007 in relation with similar experiences in other cities. Section 5 explores the impact of policies on decentralization by the central and state governments on the relationship between neighborhood associations and elected representatives. In Section 6, I suggest a political typology of RWAs based on micro-level fieldwork in neighborhoods in Delhi and supporting evidence from other cities. Finally, in the last section, I explore the reasons why some RWAs contested elections and comment on the larger implications of this development.

II. RWA Mobilization in Delhi

While middle class activism in India is largely a recent phenomenon, neighborhood associations have existed for many decades. Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are essentially neighborhood management committees in apartment blocks or housing colonies to which the residents are required to pay regular charges, and which look after maintenance of common resources (Harriss, 2005b). They are primarily middle-class in nature, but common in both planned neighborhoods and unauthorized colonies³. It is difficult to draw any generalization about the trajectory of growth of RWAs in Delhi. Researchers, however, argue that these associations were the first form of collective action in the city following Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984 as security concerns heightened in both Sikh and non-Sikh neighborhoods⁴. This was also the beginning of gated neighborhoods in Delhi

(Sridharan, 2006; Batra, 2007). The primary function of RWAs during this period pertained to security - construction of boundary walls, paying security guards, etc. Another reason for their growth in 80s was the development of public housing by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) during the period. The DDA Act⁵ made it mandatory for group housing colonies to set up a management committee that would maintain common facilities when the housing units were handed over to residents⁶.

With the implementation of the Government of Delhi program on citizen participation called *Bhagidari*, in 2000, RWAs gained visibility as the main partners from the citizens' side. The membership of RWAs in the program increased from twenty in 2000 to more than nineteen hundred in a period of just seven years (Office of the Chief Minister of Delhi, 2007). There are two reasons why the Government of Delhi focused on RWAs from planned parts of the city. One, *Bhagidari* was started as an experiment and RWAs were the only institutions that represented citizens at the neighborhood level. It hence allowed the Delhi Government to build on institutions that already existed (Regunathan, 2007; Wadhera, 2007). Second and more importantly, it is bureaucratically and ideologically difficult to implement this program in unauthorized and slum settlements. Issues of development in such areas "inevitably bring up issues about land tenure and no civic agency will carry out any developmental work where land titles are in question" (Yadav, 2006; CURE, 2006). So although government agencies continue to provide basic amenities like water supply, street lighting and pavements in slum settlements, they want to avoid negotiations that may result in provision of land titles. This rationale is well summarized by Chatterjee (2004): "If squatters were to be given any kind of legitimacy by government authorities in their illegal occupation of public or private lands, then the entire structure of legally held property would be threatened". It is therefore interesting to note that only RWAs from the planned parts of the city were part of the program though RWAs are operational in unauthorized middle class neighborhoods as well.

While *Bhagidari* contributed towards bringing RWAs from different parts of the city under one roof, RWAs came to dominate the media and public policy discourse only after 2004, and interestingly, outside of *Bhagidari*. This was as a result of large scale mobilization by RWAs across the city to protest against specific government policies, three of which are particularly significant⁷. The first case, in 2005, involved protests against hike in electricity charges after the state-owned electricity agency, Delhi Vidyut Board, was privatized and broken down into distribution companies⁸. What was unique about these protests was that it was not led by any political party, though the Opposition did take a stand against the tariff hike. Two RWA umbrella organizations, Delhi RWA Joint Front (or Joint Front) and People's Action were at the forefront of this mobilization. The protests also drew support from prominent citizens and celebrities and hence a tremendous amount of media attention⁹. The Government of Delhi was ultimately forced to revert to the old user-charges. In the second case, RWAs protested against a World Bank recommendation to privatize the city's water utility agency, Delhi Jal Board, as part of a US\$150 million loan to carry out water sector reforms. Privatization of water has always been culturally and politically difficult to carry out on the rationale that water is a basic human right. These protests too were led by social activists, including Arvind Kejriwal and Vandana Shiva, who voiced the concerns of the poor (*Times of India*, 21 August 2005). Surprisingly RWAs from South Delhi, a relatively well off part of the city, joined the protests. They feared an increase in water charges without a parallel improvement in services similar to the privatization of electricity (*The Hindu*, July 13, 2005). The involvement of RWAs in this protest was limited since this development coincided with the power hike protests. But what was interesting in this case was that the Chief Minister referred to RWAs, rather than the Opposition or social activists when she withdrew from the project¹⁰, again reflecting the position that RWAs had come to assume.

The most controversial issue that RWA umbrella organizations have been involved with concerns a Supreme Court ruling in February 2006 that ordered the sealing or closing down of unauthorized commercial establishments in the city (*The Hindu*,

May 03, 2006). The order was based on zoning regulations laid out by the Delhi Master Plan¹¹. Although the Plan outlines normative guidelines for development, many of these guidelines end up being enforced through the judiciary - the Delhi High Court or the Supreme Court, when a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) is filed. After violent protests following the closing down of more than 13,000 illegal shops by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)¹², the Supreme Court announced that the final policy on unauthorized commercial use would be decided by the yet to be released revised Master Plan for 2020. The new Plan regularized 1500 unauthorized colonies and allowed for mixed-land use (commercial use in residential areas) on 2138 roads in the city. Since then, a number of RWA organizations, including the Joint Front, have challenged the Master Plan on grounds that it was politically motivated to appease traders ahead of municipal elections¹³.

Although RWAs had limited influence over the outcome of this case, this case is interesting because it provides some useful insight into the nature of RWA activism, especially their methods of operation. As has been noted by Harriss (2005b, 2007) and Mazarella (2006), the judiciary is one of the most important channels that the middle class uses to access and influence the State. Harriss (2007) argues that “new politics” of the middle class that has emerged after liberalization is strongly associated with technocratic and rationalizing modernism of which the judiciary is an integral component. In Delhi too, the middle class uses the rationale of citizen’ rights and public interest to influence policy. For example, about 90% of the Public Interest Litigations filed by RWAs since 2000 (until May 2007) are regarding encroachments on public land and unauthorized construction (Delhi High Court, 2007). Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) in their study of RWAs in Bangalore also observe that the interventions around the Master Plan are closely tied to judicial interventions and the use of Right to Information Act (RTI). This recourse to the courts is not only because of the middle class’s knowledge of the law and access to resources, but it may also be because the occupations of the traders and the poor are not always based on the same structures of legality as the professional class.

Law hence becomes a powerful means to control policy when the middle class is outnumbered by the more politically active “informal” population.

The use of judiciary for problem solving is not a new phenomenon. But the fact that middle class residents were rallying in the streets of Delhi is radical. Three important factors contributed to mobilization by Resident Welfare Associations. First, class identity – although RWAs are widespread in most middle class parts of the city, RWA activism was primarily led by professionals, as opposed to the business community or public sector employees. Interestingly, they defined themselves not only by their own identity, but also against other social groups. For example, one of the reasons why power distribution companies had to increase rates was because of electricity thefts by informal settlements. A rationale for protests by RWAs was that it was “unacceptable for them to pay for people who form ‘vote-bank’ of political leaders” (Kaul, 2006)¹⁴. Another example is protests against reservation for backwards classes in institutes of higher learning or affirmative action¹⁵, which is not even a city-level issue. These observations hence further support the exclusionary nature of these associations. Zérah’s (2007) in her study of RWAs in Mumbai, for example, concludes, “contrary to their (RWA’s) claims of defending the general interest, neighborhood associations emerge as an interest group mobilized on an apparently exclusive vision of the city”. Second, the protests in Delhi were bound by a single issue - almost all cases of protest have been triggered by some form of privatization of service delivery that resulted in, or was expected to result in, increase in user-charges. RWA activism hence seems like a reaction against changes in modes of service delivery away from a subsidy-based model whose largest beneficiary, it has been argued, was the middle class itself. Third, as I argued earlier, *Bhagidari* has been instrumental in bringing RWAs under one umbrella, not only as partners in the program but also as an outcome of the publicity that the program received in the local media. For example, ‘Joint Front’ was formed as a result of a *Bhagidari* workshop of RWAs in South Delhi to discuss cable television regulation. With time, the media came to regard RWAs as the main representative of the citizens of Delhi¹⁶.

III. Fragmented Middle Class and Advent into Formal Politics

As discussed earlier, the scholarly discourse on middle class associations while focusing on the stratification of associational life itself, has largely ignored the diversity within the RWAs until very recently. Harriss (2007) in his study of associational life in Chennai, for example, makes a sharp differentiation between two kinds of middle class organizations. The ones run by elitist upper middle class focus on urban governance and interests of consumer citizens – neighborhood associations. The less affluent stratum of the middle class mobilize and organize the poor to make demands on the State – the activist NGOs. In the popular perception too, RWAs have come to represent a body unified by their opinion on public policy, most often against the government and as representatives of the “common man”. Closer analysis, however, reveals that the middle class movement – at least in Delhi, has been highly fragmented. This is perhaps best reflected in the difference in ideology of the two largest umbrella organizations – “Joint Front” and “People’s Action” that emerged as a consequence of the “power hike protest”. While these two organizations used similar techniques to mobilize RWAs and attract media attention¹⁷, they differ significantly in their ideology, membership and methods of operation. At the time of this study, Joint Front, had 250 RWA members most of who were professionals from the more affluent parts of South Delhi. United Residents Joint Action (URJA), the RWA wing of People’s Action, had more than double that membership spread over all parts of the city. The internal organization of Joint Front is structured around issue-based groups like urban planning, gender, water, etc., whereas sub-groups in People’s Action are based on different population groups and institutions, like students/youth, NGOs and RWAs¹⁸.

Secondly, the difference in membership is reflected in the issues raised by the respective groups. In the Master Plan Sealing case, when Joint Front challenged the new Master Plan guidelines on mixed land use, RWAs from the low-middle income parts of Delhi criticized Joint Front for being elitist and unaware of the “ground

realities and the unemployment prevailing in the Capital” (*The Hindu*, March 28, 2006). This kind of conflict within neighborhood associations is found in other cities as well. Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) noted that when elite RWAs filed a PIL against commercialization in their neighborhood, which led the Bangalore Municipality to enforce zoning regulations in the city, RWAs from unauthorized neighborhoods organized a *bandh*(strike) in protest. To quote a member of one of the later RWAs - “I represent an association whose members are 99.9% in violation. You cannot expect me to say that I’ll be happy to demolish them. It’s a livelihood issue”. This example not only provides interesting insights into the role of legality in the behavior of neighborhood associations, but also exemplifies fragmentation within the middle class.

Thirdly, the methods of operation of the two RWA umbrella groups in Delhi indicate differences in ideology in the two groups. In the power hike case, People’s Action protested under the banner of “Campaign against Power Tariff Hike” and made analogies with the ideas of “civil disobedience/*satyagraha*” and “non-cooperation” used during the non-violent freedom struggle against the British (*The Hindu*, October 03, 2005; *The Hindu*, May 07, 2006). They appealed to RWAs to not pay the 10% hike. Forced installation of meters was called ‘Meter Terrorism’. The Joint Front refused, on the other hand, to join this campaign even though they had also protested against the hike. The Joint Front President, in response, argued that drastic steps like non-payment of bills should be reserved for extraordinary circumstances. People’s Action boycotted all meetings with the Chief Minister until the power hike was withdrawn. Joint Front, on the other hand, attended these *Bhagidari* meetings called by the Chief Minister and engaged in negotiations with government officials and politicians. They insisted that RWAs be a part of consultation before major policy decisions are made. This included the electricity meter review and testing initiative announced by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (*The Hindu*, September 09, 2005). Thus People’s Action, in its methods of protest, is reminiscent of an opposition party while Joint Front seeks to involve in government decision making as one of the “partners”. As Harriss (2007) and

Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) have noted, elite RWAs like the Joint Front represent the paradigm of “public-private partnership” and “collaborative change” between the civil society and the state. Programs on citizen-government partnership, like *Bhagidari*, have further provided a platform for such collaboration.

Fourth and most importantly, while neither of the RWA umbrella organizations had formal affiliations with political parties, as is typical of civil society in India (Harriss, 2005b and Chatterjee, 2004), People’s Action describes itself as a political advocacy group. It was the main force behind mobilizing RWAs in Delhi to contest the Municipal Elections in 2007. Joint Front on the other hand represents the more traditional “watch-dog” role of the civil society - monitoring government action while remaining “apolitical” in the process. Interestingly, these two organizations were also extremely confrontational regarding the other’s political stance. Joint Front used the “apolitical civil society” argument to criticize the decision of RWAs to contest elections, as is exemplified by the following statement: “If RWAs start contesting elections, what would be the difference between us and the political parties? Our job is to assist residents in sorting out local problems and that is our only scope of functioning. Similar attempts have failed in Gurgaon, and RWAs doing so would only become another political front”. (The Hindustan Times, January 28, 2007). Joint Front also accused head of People’s Action of using RWAs in Delhi to further his personal political agenda while he was a resident of Gurgaon, a suburb of Delhi (Aggarwal, 2007). Referring to patronage politics, People’s Action mobilized RWAs to join formal politics on the rationale that “it is up to the middle-class to clean up the dirty politics of this country” (Kaul, 2006). They were extremely critical of *Bhagidari* and argued that since the leadership in Joint Front had played an important role in the program, they had in turn become loyalists of the government and avoided direct confrontation with them. People’s Action also believed that programs like *Bhagidari* were “not only a means for the government to disown its responsibilities, but also designed to blunt the RWAs and keep them from criticizing the government” (*Civil Society*, Sep-Oct, 2005).

While some RWAs associate in the language of citizenship the “new-politics of the consumer citizen” (Harriss, 2007) is perhaps not the dominant politics of the middle class as was earlier believed. As Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) also notes in Bangalore, we are observing two parallel developments – “constructive engagement” as well as “aggressive confrontation”, and the growth of the “engaged citizens” as well as that of the “rowdy activists” within the middle classes.

IV. RWAs and Municipal Elections

Lama-Rewal (2007), who studied the 2007 Municipal Elections in Delhi closely, noted that RWAs engaged in formal politics in three main ways. One, candidates tried to gather support of RWAs and mobilize voters in middle class neighborhoods. Two, some RWAs organized “meet your candidate” events, though these events were confined to the upper-middle class parts of south Delhi. And three, RWAs contested elections themselves as independents as well as through political parties.

A total of 32 RWA from across the city were selected and supported by two organizations - People’s Action, and “*Jan Pratinidhi Manch*” (JPM) - a federation of about twenty associations in various constituencies. While RWA involvement in local elections was new in Delhi, People’s Action had some prior experience in formal politics. One, as part of the “Delhi Election Watch” – a coalition of civil society organizations, People Action was involved in citizen participation in the Delhi Assembly elections of 2003. Two, it conducted a voter registration campaign in the mostly middle-class suburban town of Delhi called Gurgaon ahead of the 2004 Parliamentary Election. Three, People’s Action was also instrumental in the creation of “Gurgaon Resident’s Party” to contest the Haryana Assembly Elections in 2005. And four, the head of the organization also had experience in politics indirectly as the Public Relations consultant for a prominent politician who was a Union Minister in the previous BJP led government (Kaul, 2006; 2007).

Both People's Action and JPM used similar methods for publicity and in selection of candidates. They used the media and internet extensively for campaigning, including collaborating with Delhi's largest Hindi newspaper, *Punjab Kesri*. With regard to selection of candidates, both organizations constituted local committees comprising of RWAs and other influential people in the ward. The committee selected candidates from a pool of applications from the ward and put them up for "adoption" by any of the main political parties. If they were not able to find support, they contested as independents. People's Action saw participation from about 250 RWAs to select 21 candidates in as many wards. JPM had 11 candidates from RWAs as well as NGOs and slum associations. The greater socio-economic heterogeneity of the JPM translated in a wide variety of development issues, such as health, education, public parks etc, while People's Action's manifesto primarily focused on good governance Lama-Rewal (2007). The new delineation of ward boundaries by MCD ahead of the elections and increased the number of wards from 132 to 272, comprising of fifty thousand people each. Since some of the smaller wards thus created had significant middle class presence, which could potentially translate into votes, it further encouraged RWAs to participate.

The results of the elections, however, were disappointing for RWAs; RWA candidates could not win any seats. The outcome of the MCD elections was largely decided by the sealing issue discussed earlier. Since the Congress Party was in power at both the Municipal and State levels, the anti-incumbency vote went largely in favor of the opposition - the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). RWAs also believed that lack of Party resources and experience in campaigning, as well as certain Election Commission regulations like registration of voting symbols days before elections (that does not allow enough time for voters to identify independent candidates) also contributed towards their performance (Kaul, 2009). Nonetheless, we observe some interesting trends from the election results. First, RWA candidates took the third position in five wards with a total of 5% of the total aggregate votes. Second, as compared with other independent candidates, RWAs candidates did better (*The Hindu*, April 09, 2007). And third, middle class participation in wards where RWAs

contested was higher than other comparable wards and from previous years (*The Hindu*, April 20, 2007). While it may not be possible to speculate on the significance of these trends, the process through which these developments were shaped could offer some insights into the political behavior of RWAs.

Interestingly, a similar brand of political engagement by middle class neighborhood associations has emerged throughout metropolitan India. In the 2001 municipal elections in Chennai, for example, RWAs put up and supported a number of independent candidates (Lama-Rewal, 2007). In 2006, RWAs in Chennai went on to support party candidates and were involved in related political activities like obtaining voter IDs for their members, verifying electoral rolls, and encouraging members to vote (Coelho & Venkat, 2009). Surprisingly, 75% of the RWAs in Coelho's study had been approached by political candidates for support during elections. During the 2002 municipal elections in Mumbai, the NGO "Action for Good Governance and Networking in India" or AGNI (that had previously promoted the city's citizen-government partnership program - the ALM scheme) organized "meet your candidate" meetings. In the 2007 elections, AGNI took the initiative to produce a rating of all candidates based on police records, assets or liabilities and their educational qualification. Another NGO "Lok Satta" (now a political party) launched the "Vote Mumbai Campaign" comprising of more than 50 organizations in the same elections. The RWA candidate from the elite Juhu area (Ward 63) received support from Lok Satta, AGNI as well as some vocal film stars through the "vote ward 63" campaign. He became the first RWA candidate to win a local election in India (Zérah's, 2007). In Hyderabad, Lok Satta had organized the "Vote Hyderabad Campaign" to support "citizen elected candidates" in municipal elections of 2006 (Lama-Rewal, 2007). RWAs in Bangalore put up their own candidates and even campaigned for some councilors in the 2007 local elections (Kamath & Vijayabaskar, 2009). In the more recent 2009 parliamentary elections, the number of middle class professional independent candidates has seen a dramatic rise in many large cities, especially Mumbai where as many as nineteen independents were vying for the South Mumbai's seat¹⁹.

By their own account, the motivation for RWAs to enter formal politics is driven by a desire to change the clientelistic nature of politics in India, which they believe marginalizes their concerns in the political sphere. In Mumbai this is exemplified by the argument of corruption in party politics (Washington Post, April 29, 2009), and in Delhi in the improvement of standard of candidates who enter the council of the Municipal Corporation (Civil Society, May 2007). There are, however, two puzzling dimensions to this phenomenon. One, while neighborhood associations have been in existence for many decades, why are they joining electoral politics now? And two, all neighborhood associations are essentially middle class in nature. So why did some associations contest elections while others remained “apolitical”? During my fieldwork, I observed that the answer to these questions might lie in two related developments, i) the changing modes of governance in cities that have taken effect after liberalization, and ii) the relationship between neighborhood associations and political representatives at the local level which again has been influenced by decentralized governance. .

V. Why now? Decentralized Governance and Neighborhood Associations

To understand why these developments are taking place across so many cities, we need to review some of the larger systemic changes in urban governance in India in the last decade. The Government of India, in an effort to strengthen local governments in cities, enacted the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CCA) in the early 1990s. The Act laid the framework to incorporate changes in the organization, functions, and jurisdiction of urban local bodies. The implementation of the act, however, has been difficult in most states with the exception of Kerala and West Bengal. Decentralization in Delhi has been especially limited due to its unique institutional environment. As the capital city, federal government institutions have a very strong presence in the city with most of the important development agencies directly under the center²⁰. Delhi further enjoys a special status among Union Territories that allows it to have its own (State) Legislative Assembly. Therefore

three levels of political representatives operate in the city – Members of Parliament (MPs) of the Federal Government, Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the Delhi Government, and councilors of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

This complexity in institutional environment in Delhi has not allowed enough political space for direct citizen participation through formal channels like “Ward Committees” mandated in the 74th CCA. Ward committees, supposed to comprise of local political representatives and residents of one or more municipal wards, thus formed had as many as 1.25 million citizens per committee. This impeded proximity and accountability between the people and their elected representatives (Kundu 2006). The *Bhagidari* program implemented by the Government of Delhi sought to institutionalize citizen participation in governance by involving neighborhood associations in local level decision-making but managed to do this without making any formal changes within the political structure, something the federal act was unable to achieve. One of the most important impacts of the program was that it led to increased interaction between RWAs and local elected representatives. This was achieved through *Bhagidari* meetings and workshops, and administrative mechanisms like creation of special “*Bhagidari* Cells” in all local agencies, including the municipality. Since *Bhagidari* had the patronage of the Chief Minister, she took personal interest in the working of these Cells. These mechanisms put RWAs in direct contact with the top tiers in government agencies often bypassing local political representatives.

At another level, greater demand for political decentralization in the city led to some changes in the devolution of financial resources to local political representatives. Councilors and MLAs have traditionally been provided with Local Area Development Funds for development works in their respective constituencies. In the last few years, the Councilor Local Development Fund amount had been incrementally increased from US\$85,000 (35 lakhs INR) in 2002 to about US\$250,000 (1 crore INR) in 2006. In mega-cities like Delhi, where millions of dollars are pumped in for large infrastructure project especially in recent years, the

councilor's fund constitutes a minuscule proportion of the city budget. But at the local level, this amount had now become significant enough for some capital investments as opposed to minor maintenance works. Further, elected representatives enjoy a considerable level of discretion in allocation of that amount. So while MCD itself continues to be a primarily technocratic organization and governance in Delhi is still very centralized²¹, municipal councilors and MLAs have acquired greater executive powers in their areas.

The creation of a parallel system of governance due to *Bhagidari* at one level, and greater executive powers to elected representatives at another level has altered the dynamics in the relationship between neighborhood associations and local politicians, often creating conflicts between the two (Chakrabarti, 2008). Other cities in India are also observing similar impacts of macro-level decentralization policies, like the 74th CCA and JNNURM, since the late 90s. This is an important factor which makes the rise of neighborhood associations a uniquely 2000s phenomenon.

VI. Political Typology of Neighborhood Associations

Based on the relationship between political representatives and neighborhood associations as observed through fieldwork in various neighborhoods in two wards in Delhi, I would classify RWAs into three categories: i) the "adversarial RWAs" – RWAs in constant conflict with local politicians, ii) "antagonistic-cooperative RWAs" – adversarial RWAs that have learned to work together with elected representatives, and iii) the "politically savvy RWAs" - who share a symbiotic relationship with politicians. My findings in Delhi draw striking semblance to recent studies of neighborhood associations in other large cities. I will draw upon examples from other parts of India in an effort to formulate some broad generalizations about the middle class political movement in India.

Adversarial RWAs: RWAs in the newly developing North Delhi ward belonged to this category. This ward comprised of middle income neighborhoods (traders and professionals) as well as slum and unauthorized settlements – it is hence a good representation of the larger demographic of the city. These RWAs, like most of their counterparts in Delhi (Sridharan, 2006), shared a bitter relationship with their local political representatives. This conflict is largely driven by the consequences of governance reforms – *Bhagidari* as well as fiscal devolution. As discussed in the previous section, political representatives felt threatened as *Bhagidari* encroached into their area of operation. In this ward in particular, there were several disagreements between RWAs and politicians regarding decisions on local budget expenditure. RWAs blamed the councilor and MLA, both of whom belonged to the BJP (that has traditionally attracted middle class trader votes), of corruption and nepotism. RWAs believed that a disproportionate share of the budget went into neighborhoods of traders (the *baniya* community) and the trader caste was favored while issuing contracts for construction works. The increase in local level area development fund has further fueled this conflict. RWAs in this ward advocated direct transfer of funds from the government to RWAs rather than channeling it through political representatives. RWAs in this North Delhi ward were affiliated with People's Action, the political advocacy group that mobilized RWAs to contest local elections. Members of these RWAs also happened to be the first in Delhi to register for the MCD elections.

What is intrinsic in this adversarial relationship between RWAs and political representatives in this ward is that neighborhood associations depended on political representatives for access to services, especially since this area was still developing. While *Bhagidari* had allowed RWAs some access to senior officials, this was largely limited to state government agencies. Further, the Congress Government could not exert much indirect pressure on the BJP representatives in the ward to comply with RWAs. RWA interaction with technocratic/executive wing in local agencies in this ward was often limited to mid-level officials in the field offices. This contrasts sharply with RWAs in the more affluent parts of South Delhi ward who

had direct access to the top-tiers in the government and where some RWAs did not even know their local councilor prior to *Bhagidari* workshops.

In other cities too, researchers have observed a strong relationship between RWAs and local politicians in middle income neighborhoods even though most RWAs perceive councilors to be corrupt and biased in favor of poorer sections of the population whose votes they rely on (Lama-Rewal, 2007; Zérah's, 2007; Coelho & Venkat, 2009). In Bangalore for example, RWAs in the newly developing parts of the city work closely with local politicians to improve public services and are also less averse to being overtly aligned with a political party or candidate (Kamath & Vijayabaskar, 2009). Coelho & Venkat (2009), in their study of RWAs in Chennai, also noted that having a ruling party MLA from their constituency was always a highly prized and carefully cultivated asset for RWAs. In line with my findings in Delhi, several middle income RWAs in Bangalore have threatened their councilors of putting up their own candidates for elections if councilors fail to deliver on their promises. Since this RWA federation boasted of a population of more than two hundred thousand, they believed that their potential votes could have serious implications for party candidates.

Antagonistic-cooperative RWA: The RWA of a neighborhood in the South Delhi ward can be classified in this category. This neighborhood is one of the prime residential properties in the city, possibly also the country. It is home to several high-level civil servants, industrialists, a significant expat population as well as a number of elite private schools and other institutions. The area was developed in 1972 for retired civil servants and has subsequently been populated by rich businessmen. The RWA President described its objective as ensuring that the area remains “the top colony in Delhi; the aim is not to ensure minimal, but optimum services”. For this reason, they used multiple sources of funding - own resources (annual fee collected from residents), contributions from private corporations through Corporate Social Responsibility (maintenance of public parks, back lanes, sponsoring public events, etc.), and through government officials and political

representative in government agencies. But the key distinction between RWA in this neighborhood from the “adversarial RWA” described earlier is the former’s access to the highest tiers in both the state and local government. These networks were established by civil servants who initiated settled in the neighborhood in the 70s and have been cultivated over time. More recently, members of this RWA were involved in the initial stages of implementation of the *Bhagidari* program of the Government of Delhi.

The main source of confrontation between the local councilor and the RWA in this South Delhi neighborhood hinges on class issues. Lama-Rewal (2007) notes that RWAs tend to question the competence of local councilors, who often have a lower social status than themselves. This RWA too had a poor image of local politicians, especially the councilor who lacked college education, but used its networks in higher bureaucracy and political leadership to indirectly control the councilor. The councilor in this ward was a resident of a low-income urban village called Munirka. He contested the elections on a Congress Party ticket and attributed part of his electoral success to affirmative action policies – a third of the seats were reserved for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe candidates to which he belonged. His votes largely came from the population in slum and resettlement colonies in the ward. Most residents in this elite neighborhood, however, do not vote. In fact the RWA met with the councilor for the first time during a *Bhagidari* workshop. The increase in Local Development Funds as a result of decentralization, however, made the councilor an important source of funding. The RWA accessed these funds indirectly through high level officials in the MCD and senior leaders in Congress Party in the Delhi Government, while the councilor carried out the implementation of works. Much of the services and improvements in infrastructure were carried out through government resources. The councilor complied with the demands of the RWA in avoid displeasing his superiors in the MCD and Congress Party. Referring to his dealing with the councilor, for example, the RWA President of the neighborhood said, “Of course he (councilor) is unhappy; I can call his boss and he will have to bend”. I term the relationship between the RWA and councilor as “antagonistic

cooperation” because although the two collaborated on multiple projects in the neighborhood, this cooperation is largely coerced by higher bureaucracy. We observe similar patterns in the behavior of elite RWAs throughout India. In Mumbai, for example, 61 percent of ALM members interviewed in by Zérah (2007) asserted that they bypass the councilors while approaching government agencies. Further, elite RWAs are also most likely to use the English media, the Right to Information (RTI) Act, the master planning process and the judiciary, as opposed to political representatives for problem solving (Kamath & Vijayabaskar, 2009).

Another reason for conflict between the councilor and RWA regarded the RWA’s demands to evict informal settlements/businesses from public spaces in the neighborhood. While the RWA described encroachments in the neighborhood as a “nexus between illegal squatters, the councilor and local police”, the councilor believed that evictions would hurt his constituency. The councilor described himself as a representative of the rich as well as the “informal” population in the ward. In Bangalore too, Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) observed that while local councilors and RWAs shared a stressful relationship, councilors were particularly hostile to elite RWAs. This again was largely because such RWAs undermined the electoral process through their use of bureaucracy for service delivery. This segment of RWAs exemplifies the classic description of the “exclusionary middle class” presented by many scholars of the Indian middle class. The RWA President was, in fact, one of the founder members of Joint Front - the main organization that approached the courts for action against unauthorized commercial establishments. Joint Front was also severely critical of RWA’s decision to contest municipal elections on grounds that it would weaken the civil society in the city.

Politically Savvy RWA: The segment of RWAs also belongs to the South Delhi ward. Though not as exclusive as the neighborhood described above, this neighborhood shared comparable occupation and income characteristics to other neighborhoods in the affluent parts of South Delhi. What distinguished this RWA, however, was its long history of association with political representatives. Many of the development

works around the neighborhood - like internal roads and pavements, the bus-stop and street lights outside the neighborhood, were carried out through the support of MLAs and MPs in the past. This intervention from a higher political level allowed for smooth implementation of zonal infrastructure concerning connectivity and land use. The RWA was, as a result, also able to charge a much lower membership fee to its residents (US\$10 as opposed to US\$60 annually in comparable neighborhoods). In the last few years, as greater fiscal decentralization within MCD had provided greater executive powers to councilor, the RWA, for the first time, began to develop a cordial relationship with the councilor. Workshops and meetings conducted through the *Bhagidari* program further facilitated this development. Though the implications of *Bhagidari* are unique to Delhi, similar developments are mirrored in other parts of India. In Mumbai, for example, Zérah (2007) noted that in the span of ten years since the beginning of the ALM scheme, the most dynamic neighborhood associations within the started interacting with the local politicians to garner support for their initiatives. In Chennai too, Coelho & Venkat (2009) note that for more significant works, RWAs draw on their networks with politicians rather than administrative officials. In their study, only 12 percent of RWAs used terms like “unfriendly”, “adversarial” or “watchdog” with respect to elected representatives

The motivation behind the councilor support of RWAs, on the other hand, may be explained by the changing demographic characteristics in the South Delhi ward. These changes are perhaps also a good representation of the transformations taking place elsewhere in urban India. South Delhi is currently going through a process of gentrification as slum and low income residents are slowly being replaced by middle class residents. Middle class participation in the electoral process, as discussed earlier, has traditionally been very weak. Investing in middle class neighborhood was a means for the councilor to expand his voter base. For this purpose, the councilor carries out development work in both slum settlements and middle class neighborhoods. For example, he invested on sanitation, schools and other basic facilities in slum settlements, but also funded waste-water treatment plants, ornamental gardens and upgraded roads and other infrastructure in middle-class

neighborhoods. The RWA, in response, encouraged residents to vote for the councilor in local elections. I term this RWA as “political savvy” because of symbiotic relationship it shared with the local elected representatives.

VII. Conclusions: Determinants of Electoral Participation

The scholarship on urban associational life in India has largely been dominated by its class dimension. Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) and Coelho & Venkat (2009), for example, argue that this exclusionary bias of neighborhood associations in literature, while extremely valid, tends to “reinforce the notion of the middle class as a singular category pitted against poorer groups”. The most recent wave of research departs from previous studies by focusing on the heterogeneity within the middle class. Kamath & Vijayabaskar (2009) argue that heterogeneity in the composition, modes of engagement, and political relations within the middle class creates limitations for collective action. The authors argue that the significance of RWAs towards shaping the urban reform agenda, as a result, has been over-estimated by scholars in the past. The political typology of RWAs, presented in this paper, is a further effort to deconstruct the urban middle class in terms of its varying political behavior.

The political typology of neighborhood associations is based on the relationship between local political representatives and neighborhood associations. I suggest that the dynamics of this relationship, in recent years, has been shaped by urban policies targeted towards greater decentralization in governance. This includes the *Bhagidari* program at the state level, as well as greater devolution of funds at the level of the municipal government. *Bhagidari* led to the creation of parallel system of governance that undermined the role of elected representatives, often leading to an antagonistic relationship between neighborhood association and politicians. This encouraged certain neighborhood associations to seek formal representation in local government. Devolution of financial and decision making powers to local

political representatives in the municipality further made participation in local politics more attractive.

The political typology of RWAs implies that RWAs with pre-existing networks with government agencies are more likely to remain apolitical. These networks could be at the top - with senior bureaucrats and politicians as observed in elite neighborhoods, or with local level politicians as seen in neighborhoods of trading communities and lower-middle class neighborhoods. In the former case, elite RWAs leverage their networks in the higher government to influence local political representatives indirectly. Contesting elections is neither necessary because of this influence, and neither viable since these associations form a small minority in the city. Most elite RWAs are members of Joint Front, the organization that opposed RWA participation in local elections. These RWAs are more likely to assume the traditional “watch-dog” role of civil society while maintaining their distance from formal politics. Further, the hegemonic behavior of RWAs towards informal settlements, as suggested by scholars (Fernandes, 2006; Chatterjee, 2004), is largely limited to this segment of RWAs²². These RWAs have also protested against a master plan policy that regularized unauthorized development in the city.

The more direct networks between the middle class and local political representatives can take a few forms, depending on the income and occupational characteristics of residents. These networks could be based on identity - caste and occupation, as observed in neighborhoods with strong trading communities. This is reminiscent of the association between residents and politicians commonly observed in informal settlements. Secondly, as the middle class assumes greater significance in numbers, especially in gentrifying parts of the city, its influence in electoral politics also increases. It is common for non-elite neighborhood associations across India to have strong affiliations with local elected representatives and political parties, which I term “politically savvy” RWAs. These affiliations have become more significant in recent years as local political representatives have assumed greater financial and executive powers due to

policies on decentralization. The “apolitical” nature of these neighborhood associations is restricted to abstention from contesting elections, though they are highly active in local politics through fund-raising and voting.

Neighborhood associations without these networks in government agencies and political parties seek to become part of the government machinery through formal electoral channels. These RWAs share an adversarial relationship with their local political representatives and the recent policies on decentralization has further fueled the conflict between the two. Interestingly, these neighborhood associations, like the ones involved in activism through umbrella organizations, also comprise of professionals. These RWAs are part of People’s Action, the political advocacy group that mobilized RWAs to contest local elections.

Notes:

¹ This included the national daily “Hindustan Times” and “Outlook”. In television media, “New Delhi Television” (NDTV) declared two middle class activists as “people of the year” the same year, while CNN-IBN started a new program series focusing on the “rise of the radical middle-class”. This media attention was triggered by protests by the middle class across the country against the judicial system in two specific cases where middle-class victims could not just a fair trial due to manipulation by powerful politicians. Due to enormous public pressure, the two cases were eventually reopened and the accused were brought to justice.

² These include local municipal elections in Chennai (2001), Hyderabad (2006), Mumbai (2007), Delhi (2007) and Bangalore (2007) (*Refer Section 3 for details*)

³ “Unauthorized” development refers to housing privately developed without following the zoning regulations. As a result, infrastructural facilities like electricity lines, water supply, paved roads etc, are not formally extended to these areas by the local government. The population in unauthorized areas may belong to any income group because such housing is more a reflection of the gap between housing development by government agencies and demand as a result of high population growth.

⁴ Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in October 1984. After her death, anti-Sikh pogroms engulfed Delhi and other cities in northern India, resulting in over two thousand seven hundred deaths, mostly innocent Sikhs.

⁵ Much of the planned housing (both plotted and group housing) in Delhi is developed by DDA. Group Housing in this context is apartment style housing (more than one floor) developed by DDA. Plotted housing (similar to single-family homes in the United States) is privately constructed, although infrastructure is laid out by the DDA.

⁶ 67% of the RWAs in the city were formed in the 80s (Harriss, 2006), although it must be noted that a number of new RWAs have come into existence after Harriss’ study as a result of *Bhagidari* and related developments.

⁷ It must be noted that collective action by RWAs is not new to Delhi. As many as hundred RWAs in a high-income neighborhood, for example, had bargained with government agencies to prevent unauthorized constructions in their neighborhoods from being demolished by the DDA in 2000. The Government of Delhi too had encouraged formation of Federations of RWAs at the district level that could discuss issues pertaining to higher scale. These associations, however, had been area-specific and short-lived.

⁸ These distribution companies installed new electricity meters with the aim of reducing power leakage and loss. Residents alleged that the meters were faulty and led to higher electricity bills. Errors in billing were experienced from early 2004 (*The Hindu*, February 09, 2004; *The Hindu*, February 26, 2004) onwards but the new private enterprises announced a tariff increase of 10% in mid-2005 which led to further discontent.

⁹ For example, from July 15th to September 5th, 'The Hindu' newspaper ran 35 stories on the power issue. 'The Times of India' had 15 and 'Punjab Kesri' (a Hindi newspaper read the masses) had 33 stories respectively (Sirari, 2006)

¹⁰ "Sheila Dikshit, today completely ruled out "privatization" of the water distribution system in the Capital and asserted that water tariff would be raised "only" if it was approved by and acceptable to the consumers...Seeking to allay fears of the RWA's representative with regard to privatization, she said: "We do not intend to privatize the water sector. This is a basic necessity of every person. It cannot be handed over to the private sector."(*The Hindu*, August 25, 2005)

¹¹ The Master Plan is a statutory planning document that outlines the broad policies for the long-term (usually 10-20 years) development for the city. The plan is prepared and enforced by the Delhi Development Authority and a host of local bodies are responsible for its implementation. The plan outlines amongst other guidelines 'non-conforming' land uses, primarily for industrial and commercial use in residential areas.

¹² For example, four people were killed in clashes between the police and protesters in Seelampur area of Delhi. The Markets and Traders Associations with the support of the main opposition party – Bharitiya Janta Party (BJP) called for a city-wide strike, "*Dilli Bandh*", against the Congress Party that was in power in both the State and City (*The Hindu*, September 21, 2006)

¹³ For example, the following statements by head of RWA umbrella organizations support this argument:

"Joint Front President: When nobody else listened to us the courts listened. Today at last the MCD, Police and government are under pressure to implement their own law, which so far they have cynically disregarded and lined their pockets" (*Civil Society*, July-August, 2006)

"People's Action President: Our hope was that irrespective of the incidents and the pressure, the Court would seek a fresh way to resolve the endemic problems of Delhi by putting the fate of the city in the hands of a group of qualified planners rather than tired bureaucrats who are influenced by the political dispensation of the day" (*The Hindu*, October 23, 2006)

¹⁴ For example: "RWAs lamented the insensitivity of the State Government towards consumers who pay their bills honestly and alleged that political parties and politicians in order to protect their vote banks were covering up power theft" (*The Hindu*, December 18, 2005).

¹⁵ Backward castes: (Scheduled Castes (SC) and Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Castes (OBC) are provided reservation in the public sector as a means of affirmative action by the Constitution of India. The Youth Group of People Action started the rally against reservation in educational institutions in April 2006. This was followed by similar protests by medical fraternity in elite Medical Schools.

¹⁶ The *Hindustan Times*, one of the largest national daily's, for instance, calls RWAs the "residents voice", thus contributing to asserting their legitimacy as the spokespersons of "local people" (Lama-Rewal, 2007)

¹⁷ Heads of both the organizations had strong affiliations with the media - People's Action President heads a Public Relations agency while Joint Front President was the Chief of Press Trust of India (PTI), a major news agency. This along with their ability to gather local celebrity support in the protests allowed them to attract significant media attention.

¹⁸ Apart from URJA, 'United Students' is a youth group within People's Action. New Delhi People's Alliance (NDPA) was created as a larger pressure group comprising of NGOs, RWAs and Market and Trade bodies and unions.

¹⁹ Some of the prominent independent candidates include Meera Sanyal, South Mumbai (head of ABN Amro), Captain CK Gopinath, South Bangalore (co-founder of Deccan Airlines) and Mallika Sarabhai, Gandhinagar in Gujarat (accomplished classical dancer). These candidates used a combination of old campaigning methods and new media to reach out to their voter base. The Mumbai attacks in November 2008 acted as a catalyst to attract middle class into formal politics, primarily concerned with corruption in party politics. A fifth of the 5,500 candidates face at the national level, for example, faced criminal charges (Washington Post, April 30, 2009; Global Voices, April 30, 2009).

²⁰ For example, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) are under the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India (GoI). The MCD, although an autonomous body, is controlled by the Ministry of Home Affairs GoI. The Delhi Police is also under Ministry of Home. Government of India appoints the Chief Secretary of the Delhi Government and the Commissioners of the Delhi Police and Municipal Corporation of Delhi respectively.

²¹ The MCD has two branches: Executive and Deliberative. The 'Executive Wing' is the technocratic part of the organization that comprises of civil servants - Commissioner, Additional Commissioner, Heads of Departments, Deputy Commissioners and Administrative Officers. The 'Deliberative Wing' comprises of the Mayor and Statutory Committees and Sub-Committees comprising of elected Councilors. As in most Indian cities, the 'Executive Wing' in MCD has more administrative and decision making powers than the deliberative wing (Oldenburg, 1978).

²² For example, following the efforts of the RWA in the neighborhood *Sundar Nagar*, vendors have been restricted from entering the colony. In another instance, an RWA sent a petition against vendors, encroachments and poor sanitary conditions to the Delhi High Court. Following the Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the court directed the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to remove all slum clusters from the colony. Kundu, D. (2006) argues that the appointment of court commissioners by the Delhi High Court to monitor illegal construction is not new in Delhi. But appointment of RWA members in the committee instead of lawyers is definitely a departure from the previous organizational structure. In my own interviews with members of RWAs, they often equated slum settlements within and around their neighborhood to criminals (because they occupy land illegally) and stated that removal of 'encroachments' was one of the objectives of the association.

References

- Batra, Lalit (Independent Researcher). Interviewed in Delhi, 2 January 2007
- Center for Urban and Regional Excellence Delhi (Involved in conceptualizing *Bhagidari* for low-income areas). Interviewed team in Delhi, 4 February 2007
- Chakrabarti, Poulomi. "Inclusion or Exclusion? Emerging Effects of Middle-Class Citizen Participation on Delhi's Urban Poor" *IDS Bulletin* Volume 38 No. 6 (2008): 96-104
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004
- Civil Society. *Delhi's angry Middle Class*. September/October 2005
- Civil Society, *Delhi residents put politicians on the mat*. July-August 2006
- Civil Society, The best future for RWAs is as urban panchayats, September/ October 2005
- Coelho, Karen and T Venkat "The Politics of Civil Society: Neighbourhood Associationism in Chennai" *Economic & Political Weekly*, Volume XLIV, Nos 26 & 27 (2009): 358-367
- Fernandes, Leena. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Frontline, It is an honour for Delhi: Interview with Chief Minister Sheila Dixit. Volume 23, Issue 06, March 25-April 7 2006
- Global Voices, Indian Elections 2009: Reading The Digital Tea Leaves on 'Who Will Win?'. 24 April 2009 (<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/24/indian-elections-2009>)
- Harriss, John. "Political Participation, Representation and the Urban Poor: Findings from Research in Delhi" *Economic and Political Weekly* Volume 40, No. 11 (2005a): 1047-1054
- Harriss, John. "Middle Class Activism and Poor People's Politics: An exploration of civil society in Chennai" London School of Economics, London *Working Paper Series* No.05-72 (2005b)
- Harriss, John. "Middle-Class Activism and Poor People's Politics: Citizen-State Relations in Delhi and the Role of Civil and Political Organizations" (2006)
- Harriss, John. "Antinomies of Empowerment Observations on Civil Society, Politics and Urban Governance in India" *Economic & Political Weekly*, June 30 (2007): 2716-2724
- The Hindu, Reader's Mail: Weird billing. 9 February 2004
- The Hindu, Billing errors continue to haunt residents. 26 February 2004
- The Hindu, Govt. committed towards making Delhi a world class city: Lieutenant Governor". 16 March 2005
- The Hindu, Privatisation a bonanza for water companies. 13 July 2005
- The Hindu, No privatisation of water, says CM. 25 August 2005
- The Hindu, Chaos at MCD office over sealing drive. 3 May 2006
- The Hindu, Delhi traders' bandh turns violent". 21 September 2006

-
- The Hindu, RWAs feel let down by the court directions. 23 October 2006
- The Hindu, Power privatization review urged. 18 December 2005
- The Hindu, New mixed land use policy evokes mixed response. 28 March 2006
- The Hindu, Chaos at MCD office over sealing drive. 3 May 2006
- The Hindu, New mixed land use policy evokes mixed response. 28 March 2006
- The Hindu, NGO launches power protest-II. 3 October 2005
- The Hindu, Consumers start movement. 7 May 2006
- The Hindu, RWAs reject DERC's new initiative to test meters. 9 September 2005
- The Hindustan Times, Politicos face local resistance in MCD polls. January 28, 2007
- The Indian Express, Delhi eyes Center's urban renewal pie. 1 March 2005
- Kamath, Lalitha, and M.Vijayabaskar. "Limits and possibilities of Middle class associations as Urban collective actors" *Economic & Political Weekly*, Volume XLIV, Nos 26 & 27 (2009): 368-376
- Kaul, Sanjay (President, People's Action). Interviewed in Delhi, 12 August 2006/27 December 2006/ 7 June 2009
- Kundu, Amitabh. "Urbanization and Urban Governance: Search for a Perspective beyond Neo-Liberalism" *Economic and Political Weekly* Volume 38, No. 29 (2003): 3079-3087
- Kundu, Debolina. "Decentralized Governance in Metro-cities: The issue of elite capture with special reference to Delhi" presented at IDPAD Seminar on *New Forms of Urban Governance in Indian Mega Cities* 20-21 June 2006
- Mazzarella, William. "Middle Class" Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, 2006
- Office of the Registrar General, Delhi High Court (List of Public Interest Litigations filed by RWAs from January 2000 to May 2007), 2007
- Office of the Chief Minister of Delhi (Information on implementation of Bhagidari), 2007
- Oldenburg, Philip. *Big City Government in India: Councilor, Administrator, and the Citizen in Delhi* Delhi: Mahohar, 1978
- Regunathan, S. (Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister in 2000 - conceptualized Bhagidari program). Interviewed in Delhi, 6 February 2007
- Sirari, Tanvi. "Civil Uprising in Contemporary India", Center for Civil Society, New Delhi, *Working Paper No. 161*, 2006
- Sridharan (Department of Urban Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi). Interviewed in Delhi, 17 December 2006
- Srivastava, Sanjay. "Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes in Delhi" *Economic & Political Weekly*, Volume XLIV, Nos 26 & 27 (2009): 338-345
- Tawa Lama-Rewal, Stéphanie. "Neighbourhood associations and local Democracy: Delhi Municipal elections 2007" *Economic & Political Weekly*, November 24 (2007): 51-60

Times of India, 24/7 water: Citizen's for a protest outside the WB office. 21 August 2005

Wadhera, Kiron (President and CEO Asian Center for Organization Research and Development (ACORD) - implemented Bhagidari workshops). Interviewed in Delhi, 7 February 2007

Washington Post, In India, a Grass-Roots Shift: New Parties Compete in Election as Mumbai Attacks Spur Greater Political Engagement. 30 April 2009 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/04/29/AR2009042904230.html?sid=ST2009042904242>)

Yadav (Special Secretary to the Chief Minister in 2007). Interviewed in Delhi, 2 February 2007

Zérah, Marie-Hélène. "Middle class Neighbourhood associations as political players in Mumbai" *Economic & Political Weekly*, November 24 (2007): 61-68