

Reservations for Women at Grass-roots level of Democracy in India – Objectives and Obstacles

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ABSTRACT:

Panchayati Raj is the grassroots level of administration in democratic decentralization of India. To provide political equality to all citizens regardless of any discrimination has become the priority of Indian democracy. Reservation is one of the instrument which has been adopted by India to bring political equality for all citizens. Through 73rd Amendment Act, reservation has been provided for women from 1992 in PRI of India.

KEY WORDS: *Panchayati Raj, Three tiers, Reservation, Empowerment, Objectives, Obstacles.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the world, India is better known as a state of villages. Through the ages, the villages have played an important role in social, economic and political field. As in India, more than 70 % of people live in villages; one can also consider villages as the power centers of India. From traditional period there was Pancha system to reflect those power centers of villages; therefore Panchayati Raj system is not a new concept for India. To strengthen Panchayati raj system, various Acts have been passed by the Government of India from time to time and one of such Act is 73rd Amendment Act. Enactment of this Act is a mile stone in the path of empowering Indian villages. To understand the contribution and novelty of 73rd Amendment Act - it is very much essential to know the Panchayati Raj system in vogue in India till the time of its enactment.

Literally panchayat means a council of five. It refers to a village council or court of elders, entrusted with executive and judicial powers for the governance of community affairs. This institution, which flourished in many parts of India in the past, is now being revived as the basic administrative unit of government (Das, 1986).

Panchayati Raj is a system of democratic decentralization introduced in free India in 1959. It aims at taking democracy to the village level, by delegating substance of power to the people's organization. The term Panchayati Raj refers to a three tier structure of rural local self – government in each district. It calls for a transfer of responsibilities for much of rural development administration to these local authorities. In order to make villages vibrant, the process of decentralization is of great use. Local Self Government or Panchayati Raj system is the result of the above said process. Decentralization is essential for the success of developmental efforts. This decentralization process is not at all new concept for India. In some form or other this was present for years in Indian ruling pattern. In order to have a clear idea of this system, one should start from Indian pattern of local administration.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA

2.1 Ancient India:

Kautilya in his Arthashastra had referred about village administration. There was one 'chief' in charge of a village. He was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in that village. All persons residing in that village were required to contribute to his functioning. Besides him, there was also an important functionary called 'Gope'. He happened to be a link between the chief and the other. However he has to perform secondary functions. He was made in charge of 10 to 20 villages.

Besides Kautilya, Sukracharya in his "Nitisastra" also mentioned about the position of village in the field of self-governance. In ancient time, the villages enjoyed perfect autonomy and were governed by Panchayat – a body of five leading men of village. The panchayat members were treated with greatest respect by the king's officers. It is worth mentioning that in his book 'Discovery of India', Nehru reflected to the tenth century book written by Sukracharya. In fact the local self-government had preserved Indian civilization for over thousand years. (Acharya 2008).

2.2 Muslim Rule:

In this phase village panchayat system has some new inductions like Koala and Jabir System. Koala was responsible for the city administration in place of territorial panchayats and village community passed into hands of land owners and ruler's representatives (Sander 2003). Under the Muslim influence these bodies were considerably reduced in power and prestige.

2.3 Panchayats under British rule:

During the British rule in India the panchayats suffered a great set back. The introduction of Land lordism led to the abolition of village communities. With the passage of time the Britishers began to realize that it was impossible to rule over India from one centre. In 1907, the Royal Commission in its report emphasized the revival of village panchayats. In 1915, British Government passed a Government of India Resolution. It provided that the Panchayats would exercise both the administrative and judicial powers. The existing village administrative committees would be merged in the village panchayats. Panchayats would levy taxes subject to the approval and control of the Provincial Government. In 1918, another resolution was passed to stimulate the sense of responsibility among the villagers of India. The resolution provided that the village panchayats would be revived as the basic units of rural local self-government. Provincial government was directed to draft legislation in details.

2.4 Panchayati Raj after Independence:-

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, was an ardent supporter of 'Gram Swaraj'. He was of the opinion that Indian independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic with Panchayat, having adequate powers. Paying respect to his ideas, the formats of the constitution firmly pledged for reviving the village panchayat as a means to carry democracy down to the doors of the villages. The Directive Principles of state policy under Art 40 states that "The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." As this is non-justifiable, there was no pressure on any state to set up such a system.

2.5 Community Development Programmes:

With the development of economic planning in the country, in October 1952, the Community Development was started which was known as Community Development Programmes. The main aim of this programme was to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life in the villages through rapid increase in employment and production and evolution of diversified rural economy. It was this programme that brought in such functionaries as the Village level workers and the B.D.O.

Meanwhile in January 1957 a National Extension Service headed by Shri Balwantrai Mehta was appointed by the Planning Commission's committee on Plan Projects to review the working of the community development programmes. The Team submitted its report in late 1957. It gave a definite shape to the concept of 'Panchayati Raj' which the team called democratic decentralization.

2.6 Balwantrai Mehta Committee

To operationalise the above provision into action, the Balwantrai Mehta committee was appointed in 1957 to suggest the introduction of Panchayati Raj with the following recommendations:

- Three tier Panchayati Raj system.
- Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block or intermediate level Zilla Parishad at the district level.
- All the three units were organically linked together as the chairmen of lower level bodies were ex-officio members of higher level bodies.

These bodies were given all planning and development work. (Historical Evolution of Local Bodies, 2010)

2.7 Rise of Panchayati Raj (1959-64)

The National Development Council (NDC) had endorsed the basic principles of democratic decentralization which was enunciated in the Balwantrai Mehta report. The Panchayati Raj legislations were enacted in a number of States to give effect to the recommendations. For the first time the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in Rajasthan on 2nd October, 1959. It came with two objectives i.e. democratic decentralization and local participation in planned programme. The state of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first two States to adopt these PRIs. The Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) were set up in almost all states of the country. However there were variations in the State legislations on the number of tiers as well as on devolution of functions (Aslam M 2010).

2.8 K. Santhanam Committee

It was realized that without real devolution of financial resources the PRIs cannot become a local self-government. So, the next step towards creating local self- governance was initiated with the appointment of Santhanam Committee in 1963. This Committee was appointed to look solely at the issue of finance in the context of PRIs. The committee recommended for the transfer of certain financial authority like the panchayat should have special power to levy special tax on land revenues, home tax, etc.

2.9 Stagnation and Decline of Panchayati Raj (1965-77)

The initial stage for decentralization has been started and the hold of government over the development programmes not only continued but also intensified and consequently the element of community participation was reduced or eliminated (Commission on Centre-State Relations, 2010). By the end of 1977 the decline of the Panchayati Raj system had been noticed. It had been found that the institution was in crisis with serious problems like change in the development priority, lack of clarity in the concept of local self-governance, lack of resources, lack of uniformity in the institutions.

2.10 Ashok Mehta committee

Ashok Mehta committee was appointed by Janata Party government in December 1977 to suggest a viable organization for grass roots institutions to mobilize people's participation and their active support. It submitted its report in 1978. It was a landmark in the history of Panchayati Raj.

Recommendations: Structures with development orientation at two levels were suggested. The District and the Mandal Panchayats (covering about 15,000 to 20,000 populations) for grass roots level were recommended along with the following:

- Open participation of political parties in Panchayati Raj elections.
- Constitutional protection to further decentralization of power.
- Participation of Panchayati Raj institutions in development activities in the areas of agriculture forestry, cottage industries, welfare activities.

In eighties due to expansion of anti-poverty programmes and creation of district rural development agency (DRDA) and other organizations for rural development purposes at lower levels, it was required to integrate Panchayati Raj system with development programmes. As a result C.H. Hanumath Rao working Group on district Planning was set up (1983) and G.V.K. Rao committee was also set up to review the existing administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes (1985).

The G.V.K. Rao committee recommended strengthening of Zilla Parishad and endorsed the recommendations of Rao's working group for district level planning as well as better integration of block and lower level planning with lower level Panchayati Raj institutions.

L.M. Singhvi committee (1986) recommended Panchayati Raj institutions should be closely involved in planning and implementation of rural development programmes of lower levels.

It further recommended, the Panchayats should be made financially viable by combining 2-3 villages in one Panchayat.

It also supported the recommendations of the G.V.K. Rao committee for integration of administrative structures with Panchayati Raj institutions.

2.11 Sarkaria Commission

It was set up in June 1983 by the central government of India. To cope with political turmoil and demands for more autonomy, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi instituted the federal commission (Saez 2002). The Commission was so named as it was headed by Justice Ranjit Singh Sarkaria, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarkaria_Commission - cite_note-tribune-1). The other two members of the committee were Shri B. Sivaraman and Dr S.R. Sen. It had recommended legislative measures to stabilize the system of local government and strengthening of local bodies. The Commission emphasized the regular and periodic election for PRI. (Eleventh Five Year Plan Report, 2006) It also recommended the appointment of state level finance commission for transfer of resources to them.

2.12 Other Committees

Not only the above Committees but also other Committees recommended to provide constitutional status for the local self-governance. The sub-committee of the consultative Committee of Parliament under the Chairmanship of P. K. Thungon recommended for constitutional recognition of the PRIs in 1988. In the same manner a Congress Committee headed by V. N. Gadgil in the year 1989 also recommended for three-tier of PRIs, a fixed tenure of five year and reservation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. These recommendations became the basis for drafting the constitutional amendment bill (Aslam, 2010).

2.13 The Initiatives taken by congress party under Rajiv Gandhi Government:

After the recommendations of various Committees and Commissions it was felt that a strong three tier panchayat raj system with constitutional status was the need of the time. Therefore, the then Prime ministers of India, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi moved the 64th amendment Bill in 1989 for creating a viable and uniform system of Panchayati Raj. Rajiv Gandhi visited extensively the village belt and did not miss even the remote corners. In the process he met 400 odd District Magistrates. It was for the first time that three regional conventions of PRI leaders were called by the government before preparing a bill on democratic decentralization. It must have been for the first time in the world that a Prime Minister proposed a constitutional amendment on a subject of local self-government (Acharya 2008). The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha but could not get the requisite two-third majority in Rajya Sabha. But P.V Narshima Rao, who became Prime minister of India in 1991, was able to build a consensus in its favour, as a result, the 73rd constitution Amendment Act (1992) was enacted.

The constitutional Bill (Seventy Second Amendment) 1991 was passed by Lok Sabha in 22nd December, 1992 being known as the constitution (seventy third Amendment) Act 1992. This Act came into force in 24th April 1993.

This Act inserted a new Part IX after part VIII of the Constitution. This part defines ‘Panchayats’ as an institution (by whatever name called) of self – Government constituted under Article 243B, for the rural areas. ‘Panchayat area’ means the territorial area of a Panchayat. ‘Population’ means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published. Here ‘Village’ means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purpose of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified.

III. OBJECTIVES OF GIVING ONE-THIRD RESERVATION OF WOMEN IN PRIs

In spite of the fact that women constitute nearly half of the total population they are marginalized from enjoying the fruits and benefits of equality and independence. Indian society is characterized by male dominance. Status of women is considered as inferior to men. Equal status of women is out of reach though the constitution of India talks about equality of men and women.

Keeping in mind the importance of women as human resource contributing to development, their participation in democratic processes was also envisaged. As a first step, representation of rural women in political processes was ensured by a specific provision incorporated in the constitution of India through the 73rd amendment Act, 1992. The significant provision of new Panchayati Raj Act is reservation of one third of seats for women in all positions in local bodies. The provision not only addressed the strategic needs of women but also tried to provide them space in local development activities.

The main objective behind implementation of this Act is Gender-Equality and political empowerment of women.

3.1 Gender Equality:

For various historic and socio-cultural reasons, women are vulnerable section of our society and several macro indicators related to education, health, employment, economic participation etc. point towards an adverse status of women vis-à-vis men. Women also comprise a sizeable segment of the poverty struck population.

The commitment to gender equity is well entrenched at the highest policy making level- the constitution of India. A few important provisions for women are:

- Article 14 : Ensure equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres.
- Article 15 : Prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Article 15B : Provides special provision in favour of women.
- Article 39 : Provides equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.
- Article 42 : Provides just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 51(A) (e): Fundamental Duty to renounce practices, derogatory to dignity of women.

Besides the above provisions, the 73rd Amendment to the constitution has created a mile stone in the path of achieving gender equity in Indian Society. It has been felt that democratic decentralization would be rendered meaningless unless gender equality is ensured. The pace of development in any civil society would be slow if women who constitute about 50 percent of the population are not facilitated to participate in the development process. India with female population of over 450 million possesses a vast reservoir of women power which exceeds the combined total population of the South East Asian countries.

Gender is central to how societies assign roles, responsibilities resources and rights between women and men (Swaminathan, 1987). The 73rd Amendment Act by providing reservation to women has made them conscious about their rights and role in policy making exercise at the local level. This provision is congenial to the development process of a nation. For overall growth of the nation it is essential to ensure advancement of women in all spheres of life.

The govt. of India has initiated numerous steps from time to time for gender equity, but their impact on the emancipation of females in our country is very slow. It is possible to achieve gender equality only by bridging the gap between promise and performance. Therefore, govt. both at the central and regional levels should take proper steps to implement this act effectively for eliminating all sorts of social and economic discriminations against females for improving their capabilities and enabling them to contribute to the national development.

3.2 Political Empowerment

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian constitution has created history in the arena of Indian Polity as it provided one third reservation for women in village Panchayats. In the context of meager representation of women in the state and national legislatures vis-à-vis their population, this step should be considered a significant landmark in the process of political empowerment of women.

O.P. Bohra states that 73rd Amendment Act mainly aimed at decentralizing the power and also removing the gender imbalances and bias in the institutions of local self govt. He justifies the rationale to provide reservations for following reasons, what is the actual intention of our policy makers. 73rd constitutional amendment actually aims for shared perception of justice, deprivation and oppression. Shared experience of marginalization vis-à-vis power structure. Collective empowerment through representation and democratic process will give them voice, feelings of solidarity and democratic politics. Affirmative action will build a critical mass of local leadership of such groups will be active participants in the strategic decision making.

Devaki Jain, in her analysis of the 73rd constitutional amendment states that the main intention of the policy makes behind this reservation is two-fold. One is the democratic justice and second is resource utilization (human). She further states that as the half of the population are women the country development cannot be achieved without the proper participation of women.

Shirin Rai (2000) argues that 73rd constitutional amendment has opened up process of democratizing these deliberative bodies what actually our policy making wanted.

When a woman is empowered it does not mean that another individual (may be man or woman) becomes powerless or less powerful. On the contrary, if a woman is empowered her competencies towards decision making will surely influence her family's/neighbor's behavior (Chattopadhyay, 2006).

Empowerment of women involves many things - economic opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights and so on. The 73rd Amendment Act is step forward to help woman politically empowered. This Act gave the women an opportunity to take active part in decision making and implementation of programmes affecting their lives as equal partners. Women play important role in the decision making process of family involving household management, proper education, nutrition health care of the children. They better know their problems. So the involvement of women in the decision-making process at different levels of the government particularly at the grass root level is highly conducive to the overall welfare of the people and developmental activities.

The immediate fallout of the 73rd Amendment Act was that women's participation and domestic base of the county widened tremendously. About 32 Lakh elected representatives reign local bodies of whom about 10 lakh are women. Amongst them the majority joined politics because of reservation. While, some came forward for the development of the area or to serve the people, some were pushed into politics by the family or by the local people. Very few women came into politics on their own accord or desire. But, once they were thrown into it they developed strong inclination for politics and enjoyed doing it. One of the significant achievements of this Act is that it had improved the awareness and perceptual levels of women and had created an urge in them to assert for their rightful share in the decision-making process at the local level. As traditional 'home-managers' and endowed with the abilities of identifying the common needs of the villages, optimizing the use of the limited resources, interpersonal networking skills in social mobilization and their innate urge of being recognized through their service make women ideally suitable to assume leadership at the local level.

This Act has also improved the status and self-esteem of women. Being elected as a representative of panchayat, some felt that their and their family's status had improved. For some, this Act has also created an opportunity for personal growth of women. The political empowerment of women demands that they must think and act according to their knowledge and conscience. Their exposure in the decision making process is also helping them to be conscious about their rights and duties to be enjoyed in a civil society.

IV. OBSTACLES IN IMPLEMENTING IT

The reservation provision under the 73rd Amendment Act was made to ensure that women play a major role in rural reconstruction. It also provided women an opportunity to demonstrate their potential and to prove their capability as partners in the process of development. But it has been observed that so many obstacles are there in the path of political empowerment of women. Causes related to it is of various kinds and varied in nature, however a few basic causes deserve specific mention.

4.1 Gender Discrimination:

Although, gender discrimination has been banned by the constitution and women have been guaranteed political equality with men, yet there is difference between the constitutional rights and rights enjoyed in reality by women. Even after half a century of independence bearing a few exceptions, women have mostly remained outside the domain of power and political authority. Insecurity does not allow the women leaders to assume leadership at the grass roots level. In reality, they are members on record only. Allegedly, they are not consulted while taking decision.

Guided by their traditional dominance in a patriarchal society, the males used to cite some of the disabilities of women like illiteracy, family responsibilities, poverty, lack of experience, exposure, awareness and communication skills as the inhibiting factors for effective participation of women in the decision making process at the local level. Females are treated as inferior to males. The most important areas of concern in gender disparities appear to be the gender gaps in literacy and non-agricultural wage employment, high infant mortality rate, adverse child sex ratio, and escalating violence against women. We can say there are gender inequalities in India in all spheres of life whether it is education, health, economic opportunities, and political participation and even in population.

The active participation of women is increasing, particularly on account of reservation in Gram Sabhas, Panchayats and other local bodies. But again it is not sign of their emancipation. Still our society is reflecting their helplessness and humiliation. We can say reservation for them is a counterfeit freedom as she is not free to entertain or express her own views, or venture decisions whether in personal matters, domestic matters or on social issues. Even the laws of the land related to property and assets still discriminate against her. In practice, the government functionaries show still greater discrimination. They face gender discrimination and harassment in private life, in public places and the work place. They are still exposed to violence, exploitation and humiliation. Their lives are endangered even before they could take first breath in the wide world.

The women are treated as a mere object of helplessness, begging for mercy and charity and not an equal partner in the process of development. This is basically a lack of gender sensitivity. The gender focus has not been achieved. The genuine women empowerment thus obviously is not a concomitant of their numerical or quantitative presence, but depends on their qualitative participation, which in turn flows from the gender orientation, a frame of mind, an attitude, a perspective. For a true assessment or appreciation of the status of gender sensitivity in the society, one needs a particular receptive mindset or a vision differently tuned.

4.2 Lack of Education and Awareness:

Education and awareness is inter-related with each other. Awareness is rested upon the pillars of education. Education plays an important role in bringing about awareness on women's rights. Although education is essential for everyone but in case of women it is particularly significant. Education not only opens up vast avenues and opportunities for growth, but affects families and future generations as well. Education empowers women to make decisions about themselves, their families and their communities.

Despite the clear advantages of female education, parents tend to prefer to educate their sons. "A girl's role in life is often perceived solely as a link to the household; expenditure on her formal education may thus be seen as a waste of resources. It is commonly perceived that she would be married into another family and would take with her any advantages she gains from education" (Sharma, 2006). This social attitude is resulting greater number illiteracy among women.

Because of this denial of education, many social, psychological, economic and political dreams of women remain unrealized for years. They are forced to live a life of serfdom, slavery, poverty, humiliation and helplessness. Though millions of women were freed from the clutches of their traditional roles though 73rd, this lack of education is forcing them to be dependent upon others in decision making and functioning as representatives.

Awareness of women implies women gaining knowledge and understanding about the roles to be played significantly in social economic and political fields and to take steps to improve their standing in society. As for the years they were forced to be isolated and were without a voice, they were little conscious about their rights and duties. Experiences show that though the reservation has grown the numbers of elected women representatives, most of them have limited or no knowledge about their authorities and responsibilities.

Lack of awareness about the systems and procedures regarding functioning of gram sabha and gram panchayat lead to subdued leadership on women's part. It also hinders women participation in the panchayat activities like conducting meetings, talking to government officials. It also makes them more dependent on men for paper work.

4.3 Lack of Social and Economic Empowerment:

Indian women are bound to follow the traditions and customs of a community. She is required to bear all the practices of traditional values in any culture. Women are supposed to perform all household chores and child

upbringing without raising any voice in family's decision making process. Exposure to outer world is prohibited for them. Even she has no right to think of herself or about her own children. At present, also some people think that women are meant to be decorated with sarees and ornaments and their world is restricted to the four walls of their homes. Indian culture bothers most about safeguarding virginity of women. This type of social practice and attitude creates women immobility. Immobility of women also leads to low level of literacy.

The traditional role of women overburdens her with more household responsibilities. She does find any time to think of her individual freedom. So she remains ill-cared and ill-treated in primary factors of her life like nutrition, sanitation, healthcare and education. She is treated as a multipurpose worker within the household.

The traditional society having orthodox men dislikes women's stay outside. Men may start doubting the moral behavior of women ultimately leading to a lot of problems in the family such as separation, divorce, etc.

The lack of social empowerment of women also hinders women to be economically empowered. Besides attending to their routine household activities rural women are involved in agricultural and allied activities like livestock rearing, food processing, taking care of domestic animals, growing vegetables and fruits. But these works are also considered as their domestic chores not as contributions towards economic conditions of house. In organized or unorganized sector where women play as work force, they have to be paid less in comparison to their male co-workers. Women workforce in the service sector is very meager compared to the total employable population of women.

4.4 Lack of Political Will:

There has been a general tendency to blame the political leaders for the lack of empowerment of the PRIs. They have certainly been responsible for it to some extent for this dismal situation. The political leaders as well as representatives in the PRIs are equally responsible for this state of affairs. There are various good laws for women emancipation and empowerment but when it comes into reality, it is less fruitful. Reservation for women at Panchayat level has been implemented for almost over two decade, but in case of parliament and state legislative process still is in cold storage.

4.5 Lack of support of Govt. Mechanisms:

One of the major reasons for the inadequate participation of the people in Panchayati Raj affairs is the unhelpful and overriding role of Government mechanisms i.e. Bureaucracy. Bureaucracy was at the helm of affairs during the British era. After independence too, it has been in a commanding position. Its tendency to rule, instead of support the people, continues unabated. Even if there are rules which prohibit them from interfering in the affairs of the Panchayats, they still manage to impose their will by conceiving with the vested interests in the PRIs.

Most of those who are elected to run the PRIs are not very highly educated nor do they have previous background or training. Given the overall atmosphere in which they have to function, they tend to join hands with the bureaucrats at the local level to keep these institutions dormant.

After the implementation of the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, elite conflict is witnessed at the grass roots level. A new set of elite like general category women, SC, ST women have been ushered into power. Though their genuine political empowerment has not taken place, yet they are trying to assert themselves. But the bureaucrats and the male members of the upper caste are forming nexus and are out to thwart the empowerment of women PRI representatives. One of the objectives in this study is to highlight such conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION:

Due to reservation, thousands of women were elected to local bodies. Women get the opportunity to share power with men. Reservation has also recognized the identity of women and their presence in the public life. The aim to bring women into the local governance and development processes has been fulfilled. To make women's participation more effective and reflective of their own interest, it is essential to build their confidence and ability. Still then it cannot be denied that reservation at the grassroots level is a revolutionary step.

It will be enough to say that the 73rd Amendment has brought about a dramatic change in women's status in domestic space or made a forceful impact in their public sphere. At the same time, it is also true that such initiatives have transformed many of them. They are having a sense of freedom. The elements of transformation include empowerment, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity. For many, this was their first opportunity to play an active role in politics. The women of India representing at grass roots level are rightly called the "daughters of Seventy Third Amendment".

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