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ROLL OF SARPANCH IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT*

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Abstract

A sarpanch or pradhan is a decision-maker, elected by the village-level constitutional body of local self-government called the Gram Sabha (village government) in India [1]. The sarpanch, together with other elected panchayat members (referred to as commissioners or a panel), constitute the gram panchayat. The sarpanch is the focal point of contact between government officers and the village community and retains power for five years. The legislation in the amendment of the constitutions (73rd) for entailing the provisions in respect of panchayat raj and municipality is definitely a hall mark for new and effective system of local self-government. The late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had embarked upon empowerment of people to have greater say in their own affairs at the grass root levels in addition to the nation and state levels. The concept of empowerment is again embossed on the society which is a complex organism of multilevel interactions and interrelationship.

Keywords : decision maker, constitutional, government, provisions.

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Introduction

A sarpanch or pradhan is a decision-maker, elected by the village-level constitutional body of local self-government called the Gram Sabha (village government) in India [1]. The sarpanch, together with other elected panchayat members (referred to as commissioners or a panel), constitute the gram panchayat. The sarpanch is the focal point of contact between government officers and the village community and retains power for five years.

Meaning of sarpanch

Sar, meaning head, and panch meaning five, gives the meaning head of the five decision makers of the gram panchayat of the village.

In the state of West Bengal, a Sarpanch is termed as Panchayat Pradhan (Pradhan means Head) and his deputy as Upa-Pradhan.

Panchayati raj

Although panchayats have been in existence in India since antiquity, in post-Independence India, most of the rural development and community development projects have been sought to be executed through panchayats. India's federal structure of governance means that different states have different laws governing the powers of the gram panchayats and sarpanches.

Sarpanch Election and Responsibilities

The Sarpanch, is an elected head of Gram Panchayat and has the following responsibilities that needed to be performed on behalf of a village:

- To maintain street lights, construction & repair work of village roads
- To maintain village markets, fairs and functions, collection of taxes if any, festivals and celebrations arrangements.
- To maintain record of births, deaths and also the marriages in the village and update the administration accordingly.
- Maintenance and creation of basic civic amenities and infrastructure in a village
- A Sarpanch has the duty to look after both the village infrastructure and civic amenities and has to maintain them. For Example:
- Opening up or maintenance of a medical dispensary in a village for providing basic health facilities.
- To maintain street lights, construction & repair work of village roads
- To maintain record of births, deaths and also the marriages in the village and update the administration accordingly.

Micro planning and prioritization of needs in the Village Convergence of funds and functionaries of all Government schemes at the village level to achieve human development goals.

Panchayats are autonomous rural governing bodies. And the Sarpanch is the head of this panchayat. Its an elected post. The sarpanch holds constitutional power. So in single word Sarpanch is like prime minister of the area.

Reservation for women

Underlining the parity of the genders Gandhiji observed that "woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities, she has right to participate in the minute details of the activities of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he by sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have" (Mahatma Gandhi, 1918).

To make political empowerment of women, a reality the issue of reservation of 1/3 of the seats for women at the grassroot level organisation was taken by women's organisations and the social activists. The Government of India passed the 73rd and 74th Amendments which paved the way for women's political participation at the grassroot level panchayatiraj institutions. It was

expected that the panchayat raj institution would insure political empowerment and a betterment of their social status removing the social and economic discrimination against them.

Article 243D of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment requires one-third of seats in panchayats and one-third of panchayat chairperson positions be reserved for women, across all three levels of the panchayat raj system. [2][3]:24 This amendment followed various state-level legislative reforms in which reservations were set for panchayat positions to be held by women.

India: Role and importance of a sarpanch; information on how this position is filled and what kind of authority a sarpanch has in relation to the law, including his or her relationship with police; information on how easily a sarpanch can be contacted from outside the country; whether the police consult a sarpanch before arrests are made or any other major action is taken within the sarpanch's community; whether a sarpanch can issue documents and his or her role in doing so
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Role of a sarpanch

A sarpanch is the chairperson of an elected council at village or at low-intermediate levels (district and sub-district) levels in India. Most are men, but some are women. The sarpanch chairs the council, but in many cases, s/he also wields considerable informal power over - and in some places even dominates - public affairs within the arena covered by the council. Since 1993, these posts have all been filled by indirect election by the members of low-level councils who are themselves directly elected by voters, in (almost always) free and fair elections, every five years. (3 Apr. 2008)

Provisions relating to panchayats were added to the Constitution through enactment of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 in 1993 (India n.d.a; see also Frontline 19 July-1 Aug. 2003). The Constitution defines a panchayat as "an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government constituted under article 243B, for the rural areas" (India 26 Nov. 1949, Art. 243(d)) and stipulates that every state must have panchayats "at the village, intermediate and district levels..." (ibid., Art. 243B). The Constitution also empowers states to regulate and oversee panchayats (ibid., Art. 243B, 243C) and since this amendment to the Constitution, the states have enacted legislation relating to panchayats (ibid. n.d.a).

[t]he caste panchayat is different from the gram panchayat, which is an elected body, headed by the sarpanch. The former draws its legitimacy from its claim of being self-appointed keeper of tradition, customs and cultural practices, while the latter is a representative of the law of the land. (6 Feb. 2007)

The sarpanch's relation to the law and police

The professor of Anthropology explained that panchayats are involved in local politics and that they are a means to resolve conflicts between people (27 Mar. 2008). He added that a panchayat

can act as a judicial body in matters where the amount of money involved is small and a panchayat may serve as a court of first instance if they find the amount beyond their jurisdiction; for larger sums of money, the conflict would be resolved before a court of justice (Professor 27 Mar. 2008). In cases where the panchayat would decide on a case to resolve a conflict, the sarpanch would chair the hearing, but the decision would be made by taking a vote of the panchayat representatives attending; although, the professor noted that this procedure may vary by state (Professor 27 Mar. 2008).

The Professor of Anthropology stated that the police would not be required to notify the sarpanch before making an arrest or taking any other important action within the panchayat, but would usually do so (Professor 27 Mar. 2008). Conversely, however, sarpanches are required to notify the police if they find evidence of certain crimes in their area of jurisdiction, such as murder (ibid.). According to the Professor, sarpanches do not have any power to make arrests but, in cases where police have an arrest warrant for an individual, they would probably have the sarpanch accompany them to the wanted individual's house to make the arrest (ibid.). When asked why the sarpanch would accompany the police to make an arrest, the Professor explained that it was first of all to affirm the identity of the person being sought (ibid.). It is also a way to make the arrest publicly known in the panchayat and this procedure is followed out of respect for the village or panchayat (ibid.).

The role of a sarpanch in issuing documents

Sarpanches can issue documents in their capacity as official witnesses and these documents have official recognition by courts (Professor 27 Mar. 2008). However, the Professor elaborated that even though these documents are officially recognized by the courts, "[the courts] don't necessarily have to believe [the letters] but they have some authority" (Professor 27 Mar. 2008). When asked whether a sarpanch can issue documents, the Professor from the University of London indicated that this could vary from state to state (3 Apr. 2008). In a state where a sarpanch is empowered to issue documents, "then the police and the courts would normally take these documents quite seriously" (Professor 3 Apr. 2008). However, the Professor from the University of London added that the police and the lower courts in India are often quite corrupt, so their actions often do not conform to convention or the law. If they harboured an animus against a sarpanch, or if (as is sometimes the case) a sarpanch is a woman or from a low-status caste, the police and courts might behave in a prejudiced way towards them. (ibid., emphasis in original)

Conclusion :

Roll of Sarpanch in rural Development is very important because of he provide a basic amenities to the rural societies people. His posts is administrative so the Government should compulsory B A. Qualification for is posts.

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