

Panchayati Raj in Odisha and the Role of Sarpanch

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Abstract: Panchayati Raj System has existed in India in general and Odisha in particular from time immemorial. It has gone through vicissitude and has assumed the present form after the revolutionary step of the 73rd Amendment. Biju Patnaik the dynamic chief-minister of Odisha introduced the changes even before the Amendment could be passed in the parliament. In 2011 the reservation for women was raised to 50% in PRIs in Odisha.

As Biju Patnaik remarked the sarpanch is to the panchayat as the chief-minister is to the state administration. The sarpanch is supposed to play a vital role in implementation of various yojanas to achieve development. People of the village look up to him for guidance and expect his help in the moment of crisis. Yet the study reveals that he is dominated by the bureaucrats at the local level and higher. The elected representatives at the higher level also dictate to him regarding the implementation of policies. In the study the lady sarpanches are found to depend on their husbands giving rise to the talk of the phenomenon of 'Sarpanch Pati'. But despite the constraints under which he/she operates, there are a few shining examples of sarpanches whose role performance is worth emulating.

Key Words: Bureaucrats, Development, Pivotal role, Reservation, Sarpanch Pati, Three-tier Panchayati-Raj system etc.

INTRODUCTION:

The structure of the paper is as follows. First there will be a discussion on the importance of panchayati-Raj in general. A brief discussion will be there on the new panchayati raj system. Panchayati raj structure in Odisha will be dealt with. Then the office and role of the sarpanch in Odisha in the context of various yojanas will be taken up. The perception of the sarpanch respondents of the study areas regarding the difficulties they encounter in their role performance and the lady sarpanches' dependence on their husbands will be dealt with.

METHODOLOGY: This paper is the result of a combination of both primary and secondary data collected for the sake of a doctoral work. With the

help of a structured schedule primary data have been collected from 70 no. of sarpanch respondents i.e, 30 no. from the district of Balasure and 40 no. from the district of Mayurbhanj. The lady sarpanches' number is 38. i.e, 15 from Balasure and 23 from Mayurbhanj. Their perception regarding the role performance of sarpanch has been analysed. For the formal structure of panchayati raj secondary data have been collected from books, journals and other sources.

1.1: IMPORTANCE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ :

PANCHAYATI RAJ system is so designed as to bring democracy at the door steps of the rural people, to evoke people's participation in the decision making and in implementation of developmental programmes and schemes. It is an innovative mechanism to bridge the gap between the decision making centre and the centre of action. It is a fact that the people of a locality know and understand their problems better than any outside agency. It is the wearer of the shoe who knows where the shoe pinches'. Local self-government, means that the people of a locality should be given sufficient autonomy and share in the running of their own administration. It also means that the local problem should be solved in a manner suited to their conditions.

. Local self-government institutions also provide a very effective training ground for future politicians. The new leaders are discovered and processed in the Panchayat Raj system (Mahewsari,1987). In fact local bodies like PRIs facilitate the process of building up of leadership from bottom upwards.

1.2 PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ODISHA :

Like the whole of India, in Odisha the village Panchayats have been the oldest units of local self-government. India successfully gained her independence under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who feels the heart and soul of India reside in the village areas. So, he had the conviction that all-round development of India is possible through the progress of local self-

government at the grass-roots level i.e Panchayati Raj System.

The history of panchayati raj in Post-Independence Odisha can be traced from 1948. The Odisha Gram Panchayat Act amended up to date, states constitution of Gram from any village or a group of contiguous villages with incorporation of Gram –Sasan composed of all persons registered by virtue of the Representation of the People Act 1950. Organization of panchayati raj is one of the directive principles of state policy. It is a Gandhian ideal which seeks to train and strengthen democracy at the grass-roots level. Article 40 of the constitution of India has given a directive to the state for effectively organizing village panchayats at the village level and for providing them with adequate power and resources.

Balwantrai Mehata Committee envisaged the concept of three-tier Panchayati Raj System, the lowest tier being composed by the Gram Panchayat.. The Central Government accepted the recommendation of the committee. Though the advice of the Central Government to the State Governments to institute three- tier Panchayati Raj System was not accepted by all-the state governments the Congress government of Odisha under the leadership of Biju Patnaik in 1962 went for the implementation of the advice (Rout, 2016).

In 1964 the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru praised the implementation of three-tier Panchayati Raj System in Odisha as successful one. But subsequently panchayati raj in Odisha suffered a decline. In other parts of India also the system did not cover itself with glory. The revolutionary breakthrough came in the form of 73rd Amendment. It is to be noted that before the Amendment could be passed in the parliament Biju Patnaik the then Chief- Minister of Odisha introduced the intended changes at the grass-roots level. As a mark of respect to the contribution of Biju Patnaik to the Panchayati Raj System in Odisha, 5th March the date of his birth is observed as the Panchayati Raj Day.

The 73rd amendment of the Constitution of India enforced from April 24, 1993 marks the beginning of a new era in the history of panchayati raj. The Act provided for a new panchayati raj system with its special features like establishment of gram sabha in each village and three-tier system of PRIs at village, intermediate and district levels, reservation of seats for STs, SCs and women, uniform five-year term for PRIs, devolution of power, authority and responsibilities to panchayats, financial autonomy to the panchayats, appointment of a finance commission and a

separate state election commission to conduct elections to PRIs timely. The Panchayati- Raj System in Odisha contains all these features. In 2011 the reservation for women in PRIs has been increased to 50%.

With the Gram Panchayat at the base of the Pyramid, the sarpanch is the key figure and functionary at that level. He plays the pivotal in the panchayat.

SARAPANCH:

Sarpanch, of the Gram Panchayat is directly elected by the voters of the Panchayat area. A citizen of India of 21 years of age can contest for the post of sarpanch, provided he is a voter of that Gram Panchayat and ward/sahi. He must be able to read and write in Odisha. He/she must not have more than two children.

The offices of Sarpanch in Gram Panchayat shall be reserved for SCs / STs and the number of offices so reserved for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes shall bear same proportion as to their population. Similarly half of all Sarpanches are women and half of total SC / ST Sarpanches are women. Among Gram Panchayats these reservations are on rotation basis which are to be notified by the Election Commission of Odisha. The provision for direct election of the Sarpanch under the New-Panchayati Raj system gives legitimacy and respectability to the office of the Sarpanch. The provision for reservation of the office of the Sarpanches for SC / ST and women in this New Panchayati Raj System satisfy the criteria of inclusive development

TERM OF THE SARPANCH :

The Sarpanch is elected for five years. He / she is eligible for re-election. His / her office laying vacant before the expiry of the normal term on the basis of voluntary resignation, death, incapacity, misbehavior, corruption charges, an election shall be held as soon as possible but within 6 months of the occurring of a vacancy. But normally Naib- Sarpanch hold the office of Sarpanch-in –charge till date of publication of result of bye-election. The person so elected shall hold office for a rest period of 5 years.

REMOVAL OF THE SARPANCH:

The section 24 of the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act describes in detail the procedure on no-confidence motion against the Sarpanch or Naib-Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat. After the expiry of two years from the date of assumption of office of Sarpanch or Naib-Sarpanch, a vote of

no-confidence against both or against either of them can be moved in a specially convened meeting of the Gram Panchayat. If it is duly passed then the concerned office bearer of gram panchayat shall cease to hold the office.

1.3 POWER AND DUTIES OF THE SARAPANCH:

The section 19 of the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act deals with power, duties and functions of Gram Panchayat. The following are the functions of Sarapanch. All the executive powers of the Gram Panchayat are vested in him. He convenes and presides over the meetings of the Gram Panchayat. He is responsible for the proper maintenance of the records and proceedings of the meetings. He exercises supervision over the acts, rules and proceedings of the Gram Panchayat and controls all officers and employees of the Panchayat. Sarapanch has to exercise such other power, discharge such other duties and perform such other functions as may be assigned to by the Government from time to time. It can be mentioned that he, also presides over, the meetings of " Gram Sabha .

1.4 ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH:

It is to be remembered that the term "ROLE" is associated with certain expectations. In fact certain "do's" and "don'ts" are attached to this concept. (Acharya, 2012) . This has to be borne in mind while discussing the role of the " Sarapanch " In other words people have certain expectations of, hope, belief and faith on the character, behavior, attitude and proper discharge of responsibilities of the Sarapanches.. The role performance of the Sarapanch facilitates

specifically the all-round development of the Gram Panchayat. In the upcoming panchayat polls in the state in 2017 an out-fit campaigned against liquor sale. Milita Odisha NishaNibaranaAbhijan (MONNA), the group of women raised its voice against the sale and consumption of liquor and demanded complete ban on alcohol in the state .Kesomati Pradhan from Kandhamal's Daringbadi said they have decided to choose a good candidate as their Sarapanch who will support their movement. The role of the Sarapanch can also be ascertained from the following account. The latest incident developed due to the demonetization drive of the central government in a village setting (The Times Of India, 2016). In the district of Kalahandi agricultural labourers in the village got paddy for harvesting work from landlord . The landlords were helpless because of scanty supply of high value currency notes. The agricultural labourers moved to the Panchayat and demanded kerosene in exchange of paddy. Unable to get the same, they took the Sarapanch as hostage for long five hours. They released him only after getting the promise from the Block Development Officer who assured them that he would make arrangements for the sale of paddy . But the primary agricultural credit society only gives money as minimum support price fixed by the government to the registered members . The scenario brings to limelight the role of the Sarapanch and the expectation of the rural folk from him and the constraints under which he operates.

Regarding the perception of the problem of liquor sale the sarpanch respondents have been interviewed and their responses have been presented in the form of table.

Table- 1.1

METHODS OF TACKLING LARGE SCALE LIQUOR CONSUMPTION IN THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY:

The sarpanch respondents were asked as to how they would tackle the problem of liquor consumption in the area under their jurisdiction if such case cropped up and if villagers felt uncomfortable due to the activities of the drunkards. Their responses have been presented in tabular form.

Name of the districts	Total no. of Sarpanches	To inform the Police Station	To summon the PalliSabha and Gram Sabha	To solve personally	Others if any
Balasore	30(100%)	10(33.33%)	10(33.33%)	10(33.33%)	0%
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	15(37.50%)	15(37.50%)	10(25%)	0%

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 10 no. (33.33%) of the sarpanches point out that they would inform the police station in order to solve these problems, 10 no. (33.33%) of sarpanches would like to summon Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha and 10 no. (33.33%) of sarpanches felt confident solves these problems through personal care. In the district of Mayurbhanj 15 no. (37.50%) of sarpanches also would give the information to the police station, 15 no. (37.50%) of sarpanches would summon the Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha, 10 no. (25%) of sarpanches felt capable of solving these problems personally in order to bring peace and restore order in the village community. This shows that slightly more percentage of sarpanch respondents in Balasore display confidence over solving 'liquor' problem vis-à-vis those of Mayurbhanj.

One can evaluate the role performance of the sarpanch in the context of the following yojanas.

1. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND SWORNA JAYANTI GRAM SWO-ROJAGAR YOJANA, (SGSY)

The Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) was launched on 1st April 1999 as single self-employment programme with the merging of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and allied programmes including the Million Wells Scheme (MWS). The aim of this programme is to bring assisted poor families above poverty line by supporting income generating activities through the combination of bank credit and government subsidy. In this particular matter the gram panchayat plays a crucial role in SGSY. As per norms, the list of BPL families is approved by the Gram Sabha. The guideline of the SGSY also reflects that identification of key activities is designed by three member committee, including Sarpanch. The Sarpanch also keeps vigilant eyes on the performance and repayment of the loan by swarajgaris. In the implementation of SwornaJayanti Gram Swo-Rojagar Yojana (SGSY) the Sarpanch has an important role. He has to select and prepare the list of beneficiaries. But in true sense the final decision on selection of beneficiaries and work has been taken by the DRDA as per guide line. Some time also some names have been added or deleted in the block level. So, the role in the selection of the beneficiaries by Sarpanch is more or less meaningless (Bihari, 2015).

2. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme, (MGNREGS):

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a principal rural poverty alleviation programme with special focus on the role of the PRIs. The MGNREGS ensures for 100 days wage employment with guarantee. According to the MGNREGS PRIs, especially the gram panchayat implements the 50 percent of budgetary allotment. In the way of selection of the beneficiaries sarpanch may provisionally prepare a short list which is approved by both Palli Sabha as well as Gram Sabha. In this matter a selected committee consisting of three members headed by the Sarpanch plays vital role. But in true sense the central government indirectly controls the section of beneficiaries as the selection of beneficiary is based on the guideline of the programme. This scheme is more bureaucratic as per ground reality with lack of flexibility, The role of the Sarpanch in this scheme is insignificant.

3. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND (INDIRA AWAAS YOJANA, (IAY):

Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) is a Centrally sponsored flagship scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development. The objective of the programme is to provide financial assistance in the context for construction of houses to the poor in the rural areas. Selection procedure is basically based on BPL list which has been accepted by the Planning Commission. The preparation of such list is the responsibility of central agency basically by the bureaucrats with the coordination of state and PRIs. Such process leaves little space for the elected representatives of the Gram Panchayat (SARAPANCH) along with Naib-Sarpanch and all ward-members.

The Central Government directly controls the programme through allocating funds directly to DRDA bypassing the state machinery. The Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) funds are operated by the Zilla Parishads / DRDAs at the district level. The process of transfer of funds and guidelines of (IAY) implies the implicit control of Central Government through PRIs. So, the above fact clearly reveals that the role of Sarpanch in village administration is rendered more or less negligible.

4. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND (MOKUDIA YOJANA, (MKY):

The State Government launched MOKUDIA scheme for the year 2008-2009. The basic objective of the MOKUDIA is to provide financial resource to the rural households whose name does not find place in the BPL, list but are otherwise genuine poor for construction of houses

in the joint name of spouse. As per the names the list of beneficiaries shall be placed before Palli Sabha for information to avoid corruption and duplication. The unit cost of MOKUDIA house is Rs. 75,000/-(seventy five thousand). The selection of beneficiaries should be based on Palli Sabha but in reality no Palli Sabha has been conducted with regard to the selection of the scheme. In regard to the selection of the beneficiaries the block level and district level elected representatives and MLA play crucial role. In the same manner state government directly involves in the monitoring and evaluation of the yojana. This shows that the Sarapanch who is the head of the gram panchayat is bypassed by the higher level representatives.

5. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND HARISCHANDRA YOJANA (HY):

HARISCHANDRA YOJANA is one of best poverty alleviation programmes with important focus on the role of the PRIs. The Odisha government decided to implement HarischandraSahayata for providing financial assistance to poor and destitute for conducting the last rites of their family members and for cremation of unclaimed dead bodies. Funds will be placed with Gram Panchayata @ Rs. 20,000/- per year. The Sarapanch will decide the destitute persons and deserving poor for assistance. Sarapanch can sanction assistance between Rs. 1000/- to 2000/- in rural areas. Collectors may convene meeting of B.D.Os to educate them on

HarischandraSahayata and its operational guidelines and in turn BDOs should properly sensitize Sarapanches. This again shows how Sarapanches have to operate within the overall control of B.D.Os and Collector.

6. ROLE OF THE SARAPANCH AND TRAINING OF RURAL YOUTH FOR SELF-EMPOLYMENT (TRYESM):

Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYESM) is an important ruralpoverty alleviation programme with special focus on the role of the PRIs. It was launched by the Government of India in the Department of Rural Development on 15th August 1979, as a facilitating component of IRDP. The objective of the scheme was to provide technical and entrepreneurial skills to rural youth from families below the poverty line, to enable them to take up self-employment in the broad fields of agriculture and allied activities, industries, the service sector and business activities.

However the role of sarapanch regarding selection of applicants for TRYSEM may be ignored by the bureaucrats in the same manner as it is done in case of other yojanas. (Mohanty, 2012).

So far as the difficulties which they encounter or experience in their role performance, the sarpanch respondents of Balasore and Mayurbhanj have expressed their views. These finding also corroborate the above line of argument.

**Table 1.2
HINDRANCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS:**

The respondents were asked to identify the persons hindering the developmental work. The responses recorded are displayed in the following table .

Name of the districts	Total no. of Sarpanchess	B.D.O and Block Staff	Collector and Staff	Chairman of the Block	Asst.Engineer and Junior Engineer	Others
Balasore	30(100%)	12(40%)	3(10%)	5(16.66%)	4 (13.33%)	6(20%)
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	18 (45%)	2 (5%)	6(15%)	6 (15%)	8 (20%)

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasore 12 no (40%) of the sarpanches perceive hindrances by the B.D.O and block staff, 5 no. (16.5%) of the sarpanches face some problems created by the chairmen of the block, 4 no (13.33%) of the sarpanches face some problems created by the junior engineer of the block and 6 no. (18%) of the sarpanches face some problems

created by others, . 3 no. (10%) of sarpanches face some problems created by the collector & staff.

In the district of Mayurbhanj 18 no (45%) of the sarpanches perceive some hindrances by the B.D.O and block staff, 6 no. (15%) of the sarpanches face some problems created by the chairmen of the block, 6 no (15%) of the sarpanches confront some problems created by the

junior engineer of the block and 8 no. (20%) of the sarpanches find some problems created by others . 2 no. (5%) of sarpanches face some problems created by the collector & staff. Thus the sarpanches are found to face problems created mostly by either officials or elected representatives of the higher level PRIs. It is natural that they must be at times confronting problems created by them jointly.

Reservation for women in Panchayati-Raj Institutions in Odisha has ushered in many lady

representatives in offices at the grass-roots level. They have slowly become assertive and added a new quality to the representation at the grass-roots level. But the post-amendment manipulative scenario like the dominance of the husbands on the wives who have become office bearers in PRIs is to be carefully observed. This has given rise to the talk of sarpanch pati. The sarpanch respondents in our study were asked. Whether the lady sarpanches were guided by their husbands.

Table-1.3

Are the Lady sarpanches guided by their husbands ?

Name of the districts	Total no. of the sarpanches	Yes	No
Balasure	30(100%)	23(76.66%)	7(23.33%)
Mayurbhanj	40(100%)	38(95%)	2(5%)

The field data reveal that in the district of Balasure 23(76.66%) of the Sarpanches perceive lady sarpanches are usually guided by their husbands, 7 no. (23.33%) of the lady sarpanches have the perception that they are not guided by their husbands. In the district of Mayurbhanj 38 no (95%) of sarpanches perceive that they are directly guided by their husbands, 2 no(5%) of sarpanches are not ready to admit it. Thus a preponderant majority of sarpanch respondents in both the districts perceive that lady sarpanches are guided by hteir husbands in their role performance.

1.6 CONCLUSION:

The strengthening of Gram Panchayat at the bottom is a praise-worthy step to facilitate decentralization of power .The 73rd Amendment in fact brought a sea change in the structure and working of rural local bodies in Odisha. A clear picture of role performance of the Sarapanch under new Panchayati Raj System in a state like Odisha has been presented in the article. In spite of the constraints on their operation how much sarpanches are efficient or capable in order to perform their role for all-round development of Gram Panchayat, in real sense , depends on their will power and personality. No doubt they have to follow the guideline of the bureaucrats at the local level and above. Even to conduct a Gram Sabha they have to act by the instruction of the Block Development Officer. Some time Block Chairmen, Zilla-Parishad Chairmen and local MLAs impose their dominance upon them for achievement of

their partisan-interest. It creates more problem for developmental work . Some Sarapanches complain that if a poor fellow is hungry for some days they have to take permission from B.D.O to provide rice, wheat, kerosene or any other help. The conducting of Gram-Sabha is the basic function and power of Sarapanch. But the complain is that it is usually conducted as per the instruction and permission of B.D.O . It clearly shows that the role of Sarapanch in the process is rendered more or less meaningless due to dominant nature of both bureaucrats i.e B.D.O, Tahasildar, Sub-Collector and Collector as well as Upper-tier politicians that is Block-Chairman , Zilla- Parishad and MLA etc. in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The phenomenon of ‘sarpanch pati ‘ complicates the scene further.

In spite of the constraints within which a Sarapanch performs his role, the success story of one lady Sarapanch, “RituPanchal” , of Vidabada of Ujjain is worth emulating. She has made arrangements to give financial help to the parents on the occasion of birth of a girl child to celebrate the same. Regarding the educational qualification of the praiseworthy Sarapanch is that she is pursuing the M.B.A course in a college (The Samaj,2016) .

Thus while discussing the role of Sarapanch the expectation associated with the office and the way the actual office holder operates need to be taken into account simultaneously. The identified obstacles have to be

removed to make the sarpanch more efficient in the role performance in India in general and Odisha in particular.

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