

SECTION – B

In the following questions, carefully study the cases presented and then answer the questions that follow (in around 250 words):

9. *You are working as a District Magistrate in an aspirational district where women literacy and sex ratio is one of the lowest in the country. It is brought to your notice that a woman who has been elected as 'Sarpanch' on a seat reserved for women candidates in a panchayat in your district is head 'only on the paper'. All the work related to the panchayat is actually carried out by her husband. Even the flag hoisting ceremony on Independence Day is carried out by her husband. However, her husband happens to be a good administrator as indicated by that panchayat's performance on various developmental parameters as compared to other panchayats in the district. Also, her husband enjoys the support of the local people. Given the situation, answer the following:*

(a) Identify the stakeholders and issues involved in this case?

(b) What options are available to you as the District Magistrate in such a scenario? Also, evaluate each option and indicate what option will you choose. (20)

Approach:

- Give a brief description of the case study.
- Write about stakeholders involved in the case and various issues that need to be considered in this case.
- Write some options that can be taken in such a scenario with pros and cons of each option.
- Indicate which option you will choose.

Answer:

This case depicts the phenomenon of "Sarpanch Pati" in which a male relative of an elected woman Panchayat Sarpanch/member discharges all the official responsibilities of the woman. This phenomenon arose as a result of provision of reservation of seats in Panchayat elections for women in the backdrop of patriarchal mindset of society.

(a) Various stakeholders and issues involved in this case are the following-

- **Sarpanch:** She has been **deprived of her rights** to discharge her official duty, participate in the political process and take decisions.
- **Husband of sarpanch:** Though a good administrator, he is indulging in **impropriety** by discharging official duties of the Sarpanch, which is a case of **unauthorised appropriation of an elected office**.
- **Villagers:** Though their Panchayat is ahead of other panchayats in the district, this incident clearly points to their **regressive attitude towards women**. This may also be a factor behind the district's low performance on women's literacy and sex ratio.
- **District and state administration:** The district administration must ensure that there is no violation of **the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act**, which seeks to involve women in decision-making and leadership roles.
- **Women and society at large:** Such incidents strike at the very root of the process of women empowerment, perpetuate traditional patriarchal society and ensure that women are kept subjugated. This acts as a **hindrance to the overall development of society**.

(b) As a District Magistrate, I have the following options available:

- **Take legal action against the Sarpanch under relevant provisions of the state Panchayati Raj Act:**
 - Pros: This will act as a deterrent for others and will create the space for women empowerment as envisaged by the PRI Act.
 - Cons: Without a proper enquiry into the matter, this step may prove hasty. Also, there is a chance that the local aids of the 'Sarpanch Pati' start creating law and order issues.