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W.P. No. 3575 of 2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 16.02.2024

CORAM

THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE P.D. AUDIKESAVALU

W.P. No. 3575 of 2024

and

W.M.P. Nos. 3851 and 3852 of 2024

Manjula

... Petitioner

-VS-

1. The District Collector/
Inspector of Panchayats,
Perambalur District.
2. Block Development Officer,
(Village Panchayat),
Veppanthattai,
Perambalur District.
3. The President,
Erayur Village Panchayat,
Veppanthattai,
Perambalur District.
4. The Ward Member, 2nd Ward,
(Mrs.C.Mariyayee W/o. Chinnasamy)
Erayur Village Panchayat,
Veppanthattai,
Perambalur District.

... Respondents

Prayer:- Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, 1950, praying to issue a Writ of Certiorarified Mandamus, calling for the records pertaining the order dated 24.11.2023 in Se.Mu.No.580/2023/A3



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passed by the 1st respondent, quash the same and direct the 1st respondent to reinstate the petitioner's cheque signing powers.

For Petitioner : Mr. M.Dinesh Hari Sudarsan

For Respondents : Mr. P.Ganesan, (for R1)
Additional Government Pleader

Mr. M.Venkateswaran (for R2 and R3)

ORDER

Heard Mr. M.Dinesh Hari Sudarsan, Learned Counsel for the Petitioner, Mr. P.Ganesan, Learned Additional Government Pleader, who takes notice for the First Respondent, and Mr. M.Venkateswaran, Learned Counsel, who takes notice for the Second and Third Respondents, and perused the materials placed on record, apart from the pleadings of the parties.

2. Having regard to the nature of order proposed to be passed in the Writ Petition, which would not cause any prejudice to the Fourth Respondent, notice to her is dispensed with.

3. The Petitioner has been elected as Vice-President of Erayur Panchayat in Veppanthattai Taluk of Perambalur District and as per Section 188(3) of the Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Act' for short),



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she has to jointly sign cheques of the funds in its bank account along with the

Third Respondent. According to the Third Respondent, the Petitioner was not co-operating in signing the cheques and taking note of that situation, the said Village Panchayat has passed Resolution No. 16 dated 16.08.2023 authorizing the Fourth Respondent, viz., Mariyayee, who is one of its Ward Members, to sign the cheques in the place of the Petitioner. In that backdrop, the First Respondent by Proceedings in Na. Ka. No. 580/2023/A3 dated 24.11.2023 has authorized the Fourth Respondent to sign the cheques of the funds in the bank account of the Panchayat in the place of the Petitioner, which is assailed in this Writ Petition.

4. It is the case of the Petitioner that before passing the impugned order, the Petitioner had expressed inability to sign the cheques as there was no proper explanation for issuing the same without verifying as to whether the works had been properly completed for which the payments was sought to be made through those cheques and it is further stated that the Petitioner is always willing to co-operate to sign the cheques if they are prepared after prior verification of the actual work done by the concerned authority.



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5. At this juncture, reference must be made to Section 188(3) of the Act, which reads as follows:-

“188. Village Panchayat Fund.....[3] Subject to such general control as the Village Panchayat may exercise from time to time, all cheques for payment from Village Panchayat Fund shall be signed jointly by the President and as the case may be, by the Vice-President or the President and another member authorised by the Village Panchayat at a meeting in this behalf.”

It would be evident from the said legal provision that in the absence of the President or the Vice-President, one of the members of the ward, who has been authorized by the Village Panchayat, would be conferred with the power to sign the cheques. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also issued G.O. Ms. No. 92, Rural Development (C.III) Department dated 26.09.1997 in which it has been stated as follows:-

“ All the accounts should be jointly operated by the President and the VicePresident. In exceptional cases, when there is adversarial relationship between the President and the Vice-President, the panchayat, may, by a resolution authorize any other member other than the Vice President to jointly operate the account along with the President. Provided that prior approval of



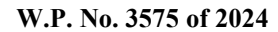
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the Inspector of Panchayats (District Collector) will be obtained

WEB COPY *for this.”*

The Division Bench of this Court in ***Pugazhendran -vs- B.G.Balu*** [(2005) 1 CTC 545] after referring to the relevant statutory provisions, has determined the question as to where if the Vice-President (or President, as the case may be) has adversarial relationship with the President (or Vice President) of the Panchayat, and if for ulterior motive he refuses to sign the cheque, can this be treated as his ‘absence’? In other words, whether the provision in G.O. Ms. No. 92 dated 26.3.1997, which states that in exceptional cases where there is adversarial relationship between the President and the Vice-President, the panchayat, may, by a resolution authorize any other member other than the Vice president (or President, as the case may be) to jointly operate the account along with the President (or Vice-President), is inconsistent with Section 188(3) of the Act? The Division Bench of this Court has held therein as follows:-

“25. In our opinion, we can give a wider meaning to the word ‘absence’ than mere ‘physical absence’. One word can have several meanings, just as several words can have one meaning (synonyms). It all depends on the context in which it has been used. For example, the word ‘desertion’ appearing in Section 13 of the Hindu Marriage Act implies not only factum of separation,



26. *In our opinion, if the Vice-President (or President, as the case may be) by his conduct makes it impossible for the village panchayat to function (either by neglecting his duties or by causing regular obstruction in the administration or otherwise) he may be said to be 'absent'. Such interpretation of the word 'absence' in Section 188(3) would be taking a practical view otherwise the Vice-President (or President, as the case may be) if he has adversarial relationship with the Vice-President (or President as the case may be) can make it very difficult for the Village panchayat to function by his simple act of refusing to sign cheques. Funds are often required for various purposes and if the President or Vice-President refuses to sign cheques for ulterior*



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motives, as is the allegation in the counter affidavit in this case,

the functioning of the village panchayat may become impossible.

We are not expressing any opinion as to whether in this case, the Vice-President has refused to sign for some ulterior motives, but we are certainly of the opinion that Section 188(3) of the Act, as well as G.O. Ms. No. 92 dated 26.03.1997 can be read harmoniously in the manner mentioned above. We do not agree with the learned single Judge that if the Vice-President (or President, as the case may be) refuses to sign it can never be a case of 'absence' within the meaning of the word in Section 188(3) of the Act, and the only recourse which can be taken to is under Section 206. It may be noted that Section 206(2) of the Act states that before removing the Vice-President the procedure mentioned in sub-sections (2) to (13) of Section 205 has to be complied with, and that procedure is a cumbersome, time consuming one. Surely for signing every cheque it would be impracticable to resort to that procedure. If the conclusion of the learned single Judge that for refusal to sign cheques action could be taken under Section 206(3) of the Act for removal of the Vice President (or President, as the case may be) the time bound



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programmes like Village Panchayat, ear-marked grant account like Sampoorana Grama Yojana Scheme (Food for work), Village Panchayat Scheme Fund Account, etc. will lapse if the funds are not utilized within the time stipulated, since the procedure mentioned in sub-sections (2) to (13) of Section 205 is very elaborate and cumbersome.

27. *We would however point out that before granting prior approval it would be the duty of the Inspector of Panchayats (District Collector) to give a hearing to the Vice-President or (President, as the case may be) (which need not be a personal hearing as already mentioned above), and apply his mind and decide by a written order giving reasons as to whether in his opinion, the Vice-President (or President, as the case may be) is refusing to sign the cheque for ulterior motive, or for genuine reasons in the interest of the village panchayat. It will be the duty of the Inspector of Panchayats, to decide this matter objectively and impartially without being influenced by any extraneous pressures or considerations. If the refusal to sign the cheque is for good and genuine reasons in the interest of the Village Panchayat, the Inspector should refuse approval, but if it is for*



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extraneous considerations or is mala fide he should grant it.”

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6. In view of the aforesaid legal position, which governs the controversy involved in this case, the following order is passed:-

- (i) if the Petitioner does not intend to sign any cheque sent to her, she must communicate the reasons for the same in writing to the Third Respondent within a working day along with a copy to the First Respondent;
- (ii) in the event that the Third Respondent is of the view that the reasons stated by the Petitioner for not signing the cheque is not acceptable, the matter shall be immediately brought to notice of the First Respondent, who shall thereafter conduct an enquiry as to the correctness of the rival claims of the Petitioner and the Third Respondent;
- (iii) if the First Respondent is satisfied that the objection of the Petitioner is justified, no action would be required to be taken against her;
- (iv) in the event, it is found that the contention of the Petitioner is untenable, necessary orders shall be passed empowering the authorized member of the Village Panchayat to sign that particular cheque in her place; and
- (v) such course of action shall be followed in respect of each cheque that is not signed by the Petitioner.



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WEB COPY In the result, the Writ Petition is disposed on the aforesaid terms.

Consequently, the connected Miscellaneous Petitions are closed. No costs.

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Index: Yes/No

NCC: Yes/No

Note: Issue order copy by 04.04.2024.

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To

1. The District Collector/
Inspector of Panchayats,
Perambalur District.
2. Block Development Officer,
(Village Panchayat),
Veppanthattai,
Perambalur District.
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P.D. AUDIKESAVALU, J.

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