Decentralisation of Education in India:
Reflections from Kerala and Rajasthan

Sheshagiri K.M.

Abstract

The present paper is based on a recent study of New Education Group-Foundation for Innovation and Research in Education (NEG-FIRE) on decentralization of education in India. In the backdrop to the efforts for decentralized governance, it makes an attempt to locate the idea of local governance of children's education in the context of two Indian states - Kerala and Rajasthan, both with varied histories and socio-economic contexts. The experiences of decentralized governance are examined in relation to children's education, placing the experiences and developments in perspective.

1.   Introduction

There have been a number of efforts of varying intensity and impact on the decentralisation of governance, in general and on education governance, in particular (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010; Rao, 2009; Bardhan, 2007; Mukundan and Bray, 2007; Sharma, 2003; Matthew, 2000; and many others). However, there is paucity in literature that examine closely the links between the domain of children's education and local self-governance, both in terms of theoretical perspectives, as well as the implications for policy and practice. Interestingly, while there are some accounts of what has happened, or has not happened, there is very little discussion or debate about what decentralized governance could actually mean for education, and what the boundaries/scope of this idea could be. This reflection is critical in order to develop better clarity both with regard to policy as well as practice. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to explore this conceptual terrain as well as its links to practice, and understand what the implications of decentralized governance are for the education of children.

1.1.   Decentralisation in India: an overview

Decentralisation has a special significance in India as it advocates for a shift of decision-making centres closer to the people at the grassroots level. The Constitution of the country embraced in 1950 made this obvious by directing all states to create local self-government bodies under the framework of Panchayati Raj[1] through an electoral process. However, the spirit of this directive was by and large ignored for the next four decades up to early nineties. Bureaucratic control, coupled with the process of centralised governance as an ideology of planned development, all inherited from a colonial legacy, served to undermine whatever effort there was at participatory local governance.

Sporadic interventions at democratic decentralization included, among others, 'Community Development Program' of 1952, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee of 1957 and Ashok Mehta Committee's recommendations on Panchayati Raj in 1977. But Panchayats in the country,

---

[1] Gram Panchayat is the lowest level of democratically elected self-governing body operating in every village within the three tier system of Panchayati Raj. Panchayati Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic units of administration. It has 3 levels: village, block and district. At the village level, it is called a Panchayat. It is a local body working for the good of the village. The number of members usually ranges from 7 to 31; occasionally, groups are larger, but they never have fewer than 7 members.

established through various Panchayati Raj acts in various states continued to be undermined with limited functions and resources. The first significant response to the constitutional directive came sometime during the late eighties (in May 1989), in the form of the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which was finally adopted in 1992 as the 73rd and 74th Amendments (catering both to rural and urban local governance).

The 73rd constitutional amendment recognized that centralised governance tended to stifle local initiative and participation, create dependency, and exclude large groups of people from development. Good governance, it was believed, would be possible only when people participated in and practiced democratic decision making as far as decisions that affected the quality of their lives were concerned.

1.2.   Decentralised education governance in India

Governance reform has emerged as the main concept shaping all discussions and deliberations on development off late, considerably impacting the dynamics of policy making as well as the implementation of development programmes. Decentralisation is singularly being endorsed as an essential instrument to make headway in mass education and the Dakar Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2000) openly calls for developing responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management.

The decentralisation of education governance finds mention in many an education document. Education Commissions such as the Kothari Commission (1964-66) reiterated national commitment to it, while the various National Curriculum Framework (NCF) documents since the 70's invoked or implied decentralisation in terms of creating space for local knowledge and experience to be weaved into the curriculum, to give the 'local' element its due in the education of the child. Given the continuous expansion of primary education, Govinda notes that Block Education Office was established around the 70's, which effected a 'de-concentration' of power in education, though the Panchayats as elected institutions of people, were nowhere in the picture with respect to these developments (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 was a significant development in the education landscape of the country. It articulated grassroots level involvement through micro-planning. The Program of Action (POA) of 1992 was prepared to work out the specific details needed to take forward the NPE. However, the policy or its POA did not consider the devolution of powers to local self-governing institutions. It essentially talked about de-concentration - streamlining the bureaucracy, decongesting the higher level education offices and creating a district board of education vested with authority and autonomy (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

A clearer articulation of the link between education and decentralisation had to wait till the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments which provide a mandate for the control and governance of education by the elected Panchayat bodies. The delineation of specific powers and responsibilities to be transferred from the state to the local bodies is featured in these amendments. Article 243G of the eleventh schedule; for instance, provides that the states and union territories may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and to prepare plans for economic development and social justice.

Education has been mentioned at different places in the 73rd constitutional amendment act. Specifically, the Gram Sabha (council of all villagers) is responsible for adult education. Gram Panchayat (local self-governing institution at the village level) is responsible for formal education through primary and elementary school, ensuring enrolment, mobilizing local communities/parents on their children's education, and undertaking school construction and maintenance. Panchayat Samiti (at the block level) and Zilla Parishad (District Panchayat) have the general functions of promoting education including construction, maintenance of school buildings, hostels, provision of support to marginalized children in the form of scholarships, supply of books, Teaching-Learning (TL) materials, etc.

The constitutional amendment also specifies that 'standing committees' consisting of elected members could be formed for different areas/subjects, at all the levels within the three tier system. Such committees for education, if they were formed, would be expected to be responsible for all the functions with respect to the education of children/adults in the areas under their jurisdiction. While the 73rd and 74th amendments provided a broad, general and enabling framework, much depended on how the states interpreted this framework. In two decades since the constitutional amendments, many states have enacted their own Panchayati Raj Acts and have taken steps to strengthen local governance.

With liberalization and opening up of India's economy in early 1990's, centrally sponsored schemes like District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) came into being in the mid-nineties and the practice of constituting or re-constituting vigilante committees at the village level for education, variously named as Village Education Committees (VECs), School Management Committee (SMC), or School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) was followed in many states. In most cases, these committees existed at that time (as residue of other interventions in the past), but were more or less defunct. The newly formed or re-constituted committees also were deemed to have links with the local Panchayat. The common practice was to have the Panchayat President as the Chairman of this committee, and the teacher as its Secretary. Other members included selected community representatives from various sections of the community.

The success of various interventions towards enhancement of local education governance through PRIs is open to debate. Meanwhile, with changing priorities across different Indian states, the contours of decentralization in education have also undergone a variety of transformations in different parts of the country. This paper, therefore, presents an analytical overview of the conceptual terrain of decentralised local self-governance, its links to practice, and implications on education of children in Rajasthan and Kerala.

1.3.   Methodology

Rajasthan and Kerala are used as case studies to explore the dynamic relationship between education and decentralization in the context of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Rajasthan and Kerala have been chosen due to the fact that both the states have varying historical contexts of evolution of decentralization and local governance. With respect to many indicators of human development, they also stand at two ends of the spectrum. Further, progress on the agenda of universal education also varies considerably, and efforts towards decentralization in education have also taken diverse trajectories in both these states[2].

---

[2] With regard to Kerala, the center piece is the much talked about 'People's Planning Campaign' in which some substantive steps have been taken towards decentralization -- education of children is also part of this thinking. Rajasthan was chosen to understand how thinking about decentralization operates in another different socioeconomic and political context. Also, the state has seen initiatives such as the Lok

The approach involves perusal of available literature, both on decentralisation in general, and with respect to education in particular. Two districts in each of the state - Alwar and Baran in Rajasthan, and Thrissur and Wayanad in Kerala were selected, while a number of persons at the state level, in government as well as in non-governmental organizations were also contacted. Selected Panchayats in each of these districts were taken up for further study. Interviews, group discussions with Panchayat members, teachers, department officials, parents and community members were conducted in open-ended ways to develop as much insights as possible.

2. The story from Kerala

Kerala's decentralization can be better appreciated against the backdrop of its distinct socio-economic context, its history and culture. What attracts attention is the state's remarkable achievement as far as human development indicators are concerned, albeit in a low economic growth scenario attributed to a stagnant agriculture and industry in the state. At the same time, amidst high rates of unemployment, migration from the state to other parts of the world, notably the Middle East, had become an important aspect of social and economic life in the state. These features have spawned much literature on what has come to be known as the 'Kerala Model.' Land reforms, coupled with high investments in public health, education and general welfare are some of the key government interventions and civil actions that are seen as responsible for this scenario (Amartya Sen, 1997, Kurrien, 2000).

2.1. Key developments in education

A unique feature that distinguishes Kerala from the rest of the country is its high level of educational development. However, the educational trajectory in many ways resembles the trajectory of other states post 1986. A number of initiatives followed the NPE 1986, as part of efforts to universalize primary education and bring in qualitative changes in the educational system. DIETs were established in all the 14 districts between 1989 and 1991 in two phases. The SCERT came into being in 1993, when the State Institute of Education (SIE) was upgraded. The early nineties saw renewed efforts to extend in-service training to all teachers, based on the modules developed by the NCERT.

DPEP entered the state in 1993/94 in six districts and with it came the efforts for curricular and pedagogic reform. The notion of 'activity based learning/pedagogy' came into the lexicon with DPEP. In spirit, DPEP emphasized decentralized district level planning. Post the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, Kerala too put in place a process for democratic decentralization by rejuvenating the Panchayati Raj Institutions, which more or less coincided with the entry of DPEP in the state. However, even before these developments, there were District Councils (DCs) which were in operation during 1991-92. The DCs engaged in localized attempts to promote community participation in school education.

The big leap however occurred in 1996, when the LDF government set in motion the 'People's Planning Campaign' (PPC) - this was meant to put people in charge of prioritizing and planning for their own development. There was significant (between 30%-40%) fiscal

devolution of state plan resources for this bottom up planning process for which Panchayats were responsible, with support from Technical Advisory Groups (TAG) at the block, district and state levels. The Panchayat Development Reports (PDR's) are the key documents prepared by the Panchayat 'Education Working Group' year after year.

A perusal of general educational statistics seems to suggest that the challenges of retention and drop out have by and large been addressed by the state. Teacher-student ratios are better than the all India norm. In terms of the Composite Educational Development Index (EDI), the state is nationally ranked higher at the elementary level, as far as recent data released by NUEPA is concerned. The dropout rate is very low (though the concern is that it may be high in tribal and fishing communities and other disadvantaged groups, for instance). Despite such impressive figures, however, the achievements levels of Kerala's school children continue to be question mark (NIEPA, 1993; ASER, 2012). Therefore, the quality issues have begun getting more and more attention from the Kerala government in recent years.

2.2. Kerala's decentralization efforts

Though the first vision of the Panchayati Raj was articulated as early as 1958, when the first Communist Government took over, it was not until the late eighties that the push for decentralization began to gain ground in Kerala. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act came into being in March 1994. By October 1995, following the first elections for all the three tiers, the Panchayats came into being. A significant development occurred in 1996 when the Government decided to provide as much as 35% to 40% of the state plan budget to the three-tier Panchayat System to enable a decentralized planning and development process. Further, elaborate mechanisms were put in place to ensure people's participation in the planning process.

Most of the functions related to education are vested in the Village and District Panchayats. The Village Panchayat is expected to run schools up to the upper primary (elementary) level and also look at pre-primary as well as the ICDS program; the Block Panchayat is provided the responsibility of 'Management of ICDS' and 'Government Industrial Training Institutions' at the block level; and the District Panchayat manages from the high school level onwards, including technical schools, vocational education centers and so on. Further, it is expected to manage nodal education institutions like the DIET and co-ordinate centrally and state sponsored schemes (such as the ongoing Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan).

The Headmaster of the school is an ex-officio member of the Panchayat and as such is required to attend Gram Panchayat meetings to report on the progress of his/her school, and also share any issues, concerns etc. that may need to be addressed by the Panchayat. In many cases, the Headmaster is also designated as the Implementing Officer for a particular educational plan taken up by the Panchayat.

At each level, the Panchayat structure has a statutory body called the 'Standing Committee'. Consisting of elected Panchayat members, these are responsible for the approval of plans made for the different developmental areas/sectors delineated under them. At the Village and Block Panchayat levels, the designated Standing Committee responsible for education of children, along with ICDS and public health, is called the Welfare Committee. At the District level, however, the responsibility of higher school education lies with the Education and Health Committee. There are two other groups at the GP level concerned with education.

These are the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the School Support Group (SSG), which often play supportive roles.

2.3. The people's planning campaign

The structure and process described above is in the context of what is popularly known as the 'People's Planning Campaign' launched in 1996. Grounded in the principles of autonomy, participation and transparency, it earmarked 35-40 per cent of the state plan budget for programs meant to be drawn up by the local bodies. PPC was characterized by a mass mobilization of people through 'Kalajathas' (theatre processions) which highlighted the theme of 'power to all,' and urged people to come out into the Gram Sabhas and participate in the planning process. Not only were guidelines for discussions developed for the Gram Sabhas, there were also elaborate guidelines and formats for the analysis of such data and its presentation in the form of a development plan.

As the momentum of the PPC gathered, and project plans were churned out, it was realized that the 'technical soundness' and in many cases, the feasibility of these plans, were questionable. It was realized that a technical and financial appraisal was necessary to improve the quality of these plans. This resulted in the launch of Technical Advisory Group (TAG), consisting of retired technical experts, professionals and others who were interested in participating in the PPC, at the block, district and state levels

2.4. Panchayats and education in Kerala

Education of children, like the other development sectors, has been integral to the PPC process. An analysis of Panchayat budgets allocated specifically for education of children from seven (7) randomly selected Gram Panchayats from two districts of Kerala, namely, Thrissur and Wayanad, over a period of five years (2003-04 to 2007-08)[3] shows that most investments have been in the area of infrastructure- construction of rooms, walls, maintenance of buildings and repair, both for schools and for the ICDS and/or pre-school sections.

Intervention in Early Childhood for the children in the age group of birth-six years is a predominant activity in all the Panchayats; however, even here, infrastructure creation and augmentation along with material supply appears to be the main activity. In fact, it is claimed by the Panchayats that most of the expansion (both in terms of numbers and infrastructure) of the ICDS program in the past few years has been due to their direct interventions.

Panchayat interventions in schools are also almost on the lines of infrastructure, maintenance and material supply. These are all in government schools, as Panchayats do not support any infrastructure creation in government aided or unaided schools. There is also the SSA component contributed by the Panchayats, about which there is a discussion in the next section. In some cases, there is a supply of library books. Only in the case of the Karakulam Panchayat was there an attempt to get more deeply involved in the academic activity of school by preparing an additional text material for children. This experience is discussed in a later section.

---

[3] Figures don't reflect expenditure statements as these were not readily available. Expenditure levels were however reportedly more than 85% during the last 4-5 years.

Direct support to children is mostly in the form of tuition classes (termed as 'remedial teaching' which is undertaken by the schoolteachers themselves. All Panchayats support this activity by providing refreshments to children during the said hour. In most cases, tuition classes appeared to be focused on those children who are appearing for their standard ten examinations - this is an attempt to help these children secure good marks/grades in this public examination. According to some Panchayat members, this activity becomes crucial to send out a signal to those parents who may otherwise tend to remove their children attending government schools for a private school admission. In some Panchayats, there have been exercises to ascertain children's learning levels to identify the 'weaker' students. Tuition classes are then arranged with Panchayat support, based on the results of these tests.

Only in the Karakulam Panchayat a strong emphasis on extracurricular activity in the form of 'Operation Olympia' and the 'Kala Gramam' programs was noticed. The Alagappa Nagar Panchayat has also picked these activities though they are on a much smaller scale. Another activity that is now common across many Panchayats is the idea of the Children's Parliament (Bala Sabha/Panchayat).

Another feature that stands out when we study budget allocations across five years is the lack of consistency and continuity of activities. Some activities appear for a year or two and are then discontinued for reasons that are not clear. A number of such budget items can be identified.

Panchayats in Kerala have little or no control over how the SSA spends the money they earmark/contribute. This goes against the spirit of decentralized planning in the SSA and decentralized planning in general. Another striking feature of the budget data is that the Gram Panchayat contribution to the SSA has not been continuous. Many Panchayats have contributed their share to SSA only much later (some, as late as 2006-07), their contention being that 'we do not know what happens with this contribution.. .so, why should this amount be given by the GP? Instead, the GP should be allowed to spend this amount according to local needs.' Only when these Panchayats have been 'warned' by higher authorities that their budgets will not be approved if they do not contribute to SSA, have they relented.

3.   The elusive mix – the story from Rajasthan

One important feature in Rajasthan's education development is the presence of a large number of NGOs of national and international repute working in the field of education. NGO experiences and ideas have played an important role in contributing to the state's thinking and practice in education. Be that as it may, the education development in the state and its link with decentralized governance through the Panchayati Raj is weak in the state both in its absolute terms as well as in comparison with other states. This is a paradox, as one would have expected a far more intense relationship between education and decentralized governance structures in the state, in light of the presence of strong civil society organizations, as well as the experiences from the decade of nineties through initiatives such as Lok Jumbish (LJ) and Shiksha Karmi (SK).

Low levels of literacy, high presence of ST population and low density of population, social evils like child marriages and low awareness among the populace in general have resulted in political leadership and power centered at the state capital (and district capitals). This has prevented a de-centering of power, especially into the rural areas. However, advancement of civil society movements to address some of the democratic deficits have been far more successful in Rajasthan during the recent decades, with several NGOs and people's groups

articulating aspirations of people through a more people centered process. The enactment of Right to Information Bill, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee programme have their roots in some of the people's movements which originated from Rajasthan. This gives hope for a deeper decentralization of political power in the coming decades.

3.1 Education scenario: a snapshot

Over the last two and half decades, Rajasthan like other states has seen a significant expansion of schooling facility mainly due to initiatives like the SK, LJP followed by the DPEP and SSA. Private educational institutions too have flourished especially in urban locations, big villages and peri-urban areas. However, in terms of the basics, the state has catching up to do. For instance, according to the DISE data for 2006, the percentage of single teacher schools was still high, at 41%. The enrollment in these schools was below 30%. Only 17.5% schools had toilets for girls. Further, the statistics show low transition rate from primary to elementary and middle schools, and poor learning achievements in children. The state thus stands at the bottom with respect to many educational development indicators.

3.2 Decentralisation in Rajasthan

In 1994, the state PR Act (and subsequent amendments and announcements of framing of rules) of the state which envisaged a three tier local self-government for decentralized governance, came into being. At the bottom of this three tier system is the Village/ Gram Panchayat (for each village), followed by Panchayat Samiti (for each block) and Zilla Parishad (for each district). With respect to implementation of activities under panchayats, the system of 'Standing Committees' for development portfolios like education, public works, basic services and economic services, exists.

Standing committees are expected to discuss the plans as well as supervise implementation of development activities at the Panchayat, Samiti as well as Zilla Parishad levels. The Rajasthan Panchayat Raj Act assigned 33 subjects to Panchayats, 58 to Panchayat Samiti, and 19 to Zilla Parishad, but these were subject to 'conditions laid down by the State Government'. However, provisions for effective delegation have not been enacted, and Panchayat bodies act instead as agencies of the state government and implement activities that are assigned to them.

The Administrative Reforms Commission set up by the state government in the year 1999 has laid down processes to be adopted by the state government to genuinely effect decentralization in the state. Important directions described in the recommendations relate to devolution of decision making, financial allocations and freedom to plan and act as per the local needs and requirements. For example the committee recommended that 40 per cent of the state budget be allocated to PR bodies for implementing their 'own' plans, instead of directing programmes from the top. While some recommendations have been implemented, it is to be noted that not all such governance recommendations find place in subsequent amendments to the PR Act of the state.

3.3. Decentralisation and education

At the 3rd tier, local Panchayat is vested with the portfolio of development of primary education in the village. A standing committee is also envisaged for education exclusively at the Gram Panchayat level. At the Panchayat Samiti level, there is a provision to impose education cess to collect revenues for the development of education. Provision of Block

Education Officer is another feature noted in the PR act to enable effective educational governance at the grassroots level. At the Zilla Parishad level, district education officer would be in charge of elementary education within the district. S/he will work in tandem with district planning officer and district executive officer of the Zilla Parishad. District establishment committee is another important administrative feature that enables the Zilla Parishad to engage in affairs related to elementary education.

However, given the fact that educational services are under the direct supervision and control of the state education department, such provisions are rarely used to address educational needs in a local way. Also there are no specific operational powers available for the president of the Panchayats or Samitis with respect to governance of educational institutions or personnel. On paper, while public education up to the elementary level is vested with the PR bodies, effective or real decentralization is not visible in the field. At the state level, the Panchayati Raj department itself does not visualize educational management as a mandate of PR institutions.

Specialised decentralised educational initiatives in Rajasthan came into being with the Shiksha Karmi and Lok Jumbish programmes. Both of these externally funded projects accorded importance for 'local planning' and participation in the implementation of educational interventions. Broadly, the focus has been to enhance access, enrolment and quality. Both these projects have been highly acclaimed for their innovative approach and successful involvement of the community.

With financial assistance from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Shiksha Karmi programme (1988-2004) was launched to reach out to the children in remotest areas of the state, where formal schools were nonexistent or dysfunctional. The concept of para-teachers was introduced through this project, which has resulted in creating access to schools in remote, un-served areas. Implemented for a period of over one decade, the project has reached out to over 2500 villages/hamlets with Shiksha Karmi schools, which were run by youth of the village (both boys and girls) whose qualification often did not go beyond elementary school. The Gram Sabha played an important role in the process, in terms of identifying the Shiksha Karmi, identifying out of school children and motivating parents, etc.

The Lok Jumbish Pariyojana (1992-2004), or the 'people's movement', was conceptualised in 1989 to ensure education for all in Rajasthan by the year 2000, through mobilisation of the community. LJ also emphasised the need to set in motion processes to empower women and make education an instrument of women's equality. Community participation and women's empowerment were identified as integral strategies for achieving the educational goals of LJP. Towards this direction, all interventions of Lok Jumbish were aimed at a focus on decentralization and participation. Setting up of core committees (women's groups, building committees), undertaking (the now famous) school mapping exercises for bottom-up planning, and establishing alternate Non-formal education centres (NFE) with active community participation were all important ingredients of community participation.

The impact of such decentralized management of externally funded projects has resulted in important gains. However, efforts towards mainstreaming the same into educational system and according sustainable role for decentralization in education are found to be missing. The net result of such processes has been that the mainstream development thinking has not been able to internalize whatever lessons and experiences the decentralization of education provided. In many ways the momentum generated through the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha

Karmi initiatives was arrested by the more 'top down' approach characterized by the DPEP and its later version, the SSA.

3.4. Broad observations from the field

Observations in Baran and Alwar districts of Rajasthan show that the creation of the (largely defunct) School Management and Development Committees (SDMC) as part of SSA has created confusion. The linkage between these committees and the democratically elected Gram Panchayat is not clear. There is no effective representation of any PRI member on this committee as decision making units. Further, school education funds are routed through this committee from the SSA, and not the Panchayat. Such a situation leads to an erosion of the mandate of the Panchayats. Acceptance of SDMC by teaching community is another contentious issue, which also erodes the spirit of decentralization.

Perception of teachers on the decentralization of education centers on the apprehensions that local leadership lacks understanding and awareness about issues of education and that these local leaders would end up 'controlling' teachers and treat them in unfair ways. Therefore, from the vantage point, teachers feel that local leadership should be involved in improving physical infrastructure and management of non-academic matters and issues of teacher transfers, service conditions etc. should be dealt only by education department.

PR members tend to view the teaching community with much suspicion as much as teachers tend to view them with disdain. Many observe that teacher absenteeism is high and teaching does not occur even if the teacher is present in school. Teachers are also not above corruption. During the period that teachers were looking after the SDMC (the posts of president and secretary both belonged to teachers), they allegedly made money out of infrastructure/maintenance funds allotted for school.

In a situation of mutual distrust and suspicion between PRI leadership and educational apparatus, creative solutions are often observed through the facilitation of NGOs, who have brought the agenda of education into the realm of PRIs. Two NGOs from Rajasthan viz., Bodh Shiksha Samiti (BSS) and Society for All Round Development (SARD) have been able to work with Panchayat representatives and have created conditions for their sustained involvement in the education of children.

Experiences of BSS and SARD show that under the conditions of sustained community mobilization and facilitation, PRI bodies can be involved in educational activities, even in a situation where the mainstream educational bureaucracy demonstrates apathy towards PRIs. These experiences are instructive in demanding a more institutionalised approach to decentralization of education, wherein the capacity building of PRI representatives and the development of coordination with education department would become integral part of such an approach.

4. Final comments

The differences between the Rajasthan and Kerala experiences are but a product of the socio-political history of each state. In Kerala, the role of the political parties, both LDF and UDF, has been crucial in terms of commitment of political leadership to decentralized governance. In Rajasthan, however, one sees erosion in the space for Panchayati Raj institutions with respect to children's education. The momentum that was generated for a bottom up process was quickly dissipated when the new framework under DPEP came into being in different

regions of the state. The convenient excuse is that people are incapable of handling this domain, given the educational backwardness, problems of deprivation, caste backwardness and so on. This position overlooks the fact that institutions, once created, have to be nurtured if they are to come anywhere near their stated objectives. This preparation and nurturing has not occurred by any stretch of the imagination. As a result, the PR bodies become the whipping boys of the bureaucracy, teachers and even the political parties. Further, such a position clearly overlooks the fact that people are generally capable of resolving their own problems, given the opportunity and adequate.

References:

1. Bardhan, Pranab and Mookherjee, Dilip Ed (2006), 'Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries', Cambridge: MIT Press
2. Govinda R, and Diwan, Rashmi, Ed (2003), 'Community Participation and Empowerment in primary Education', Sage Publications, New Delhi
3. --------------Govinda R, and Diwan, Rashmi, Ed (2005), 'National Curriculum Framework', Published by the National council for Educational Research and Training, New Delhi
4. --------------Govinda R, and Diwan, Rashmi, Ed (2006), 'Panchayati Raj Institutions - decentralized governance in education', Published by Aga Khan Foundation, New Delhi
5. Govinda, R. and Bandyopadhyay, Madhumita (2010), Changing Framework of Local Governance and Community Participation in Elementary Education in India, Creative Pathways to Success, Research Monograph No.35, Falmer, UK
6. Jain, L.C, Ed (2005), 'Decentralization and Local Governance: Essays for George Matthew', Orient Longman, New Delhi
7. Jain, LC (Ed), 2005, 'Decentralization and Local Governance', Orient Longman Publishers, New Delhi
8. Mukundan, Mullikottu Veettil (2003), 'Democratic Decentralization and Primary Education: A comparison of continuity and change in two districts of Kerala, India', Asia Pacific Education Review.
9. Mukundan, Mullikottu Veettil and Bray, Mark (2004), 'The Decentralization of Education in Kerala State: Rhetoric and Reality', Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands
10. Ramachandran, Vimala and Sethi, Harsh (2000), 'Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project - An Overall Appraisal', published by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Stockholm
11. Sharma, Rashmi (2003), 'Kerala's Decentralization: Idea in Practice' in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 38(36), 3832-50
12. Sharma, Rashmi (2003), 'The Institution of the Grama Panchayat in Kerala', paper presented at the workshop on decentralization in Kerala, on 11th February 2005.