

Decentralization of Education in India

Reflections on meanings, experiences and possibilities

A study for NEG-FIRE
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Foreword and Acknowledgements

This study has its genesis in a piece of documentation I undertook in 2005-06 for the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF). The objective then was to document the experiences of Bodh Shiksha Samiti, an AKF Partner in its work with Panchayati Raj Institutions in the blocks of Thanagazi and Umren, Alwar district, Rajasthan. Many interesting developments had occurred as a result of Bodh's patient but intense work over 5-6 years with rural communities in these two very challenging blocks. The documentation gave us an opportunity to unearth those illustrative stories of community involvement for change in children's education. They are referred to in this document.

The experience of documenting Bodh's work with Panchayats led me to ask many questions regarding democratically elected institutions such as the Panchayats, and the education of children. These questions were often of a fundamental nature, and they went thus: Who does the institution of school actually belong to? Who should take decisions regarding its functioning? Should this be done centrally by the state in terms of deciding what children should learn, how they should learn, who should teach them, what the role of local communities should be in these tasks, and so on? Are alternatives to the state driven model possible?

If Panchayats were indeed created on the rationale of local self governance (which figures prominently in the Indian Constitution), then surely they have a role to play in the lives of young children and their development. At least this is what the term 'governance' should imply. If one follows this strand of thinking further, the question regarding who owns or is responsible for the education of children opens up considerably. The local then jostles for space with the regional and the national in terms of control over the educational process. Decisions about what kind of knowledge, whose knowledge, history, culture etc must be included in the educational experience of the child do not have easy answers – they can be contested. After all, as some would argue, one of the chief tasks of education is the preparation of the next generation. For this to happen, the key questions will continue to be: what should children learn? Who should decide this? How should they learn? These questions are at the heart of the debate on education.

In a larger sense, the questions we have asked above are intimately linked to the idea of societal progress. But how this progress should be driven and who should be involved in it, are questions that will help us determine the nature, scope and direction in which this 'progress will happen'. We believe that Panchayats, as the local institutions of people, are located at the heart of these questions, both in an overall sense and also with regard to the specific task of educating children. It is interesting to note what the founding fathers of the constitution had to say with regard to the role of local self governance (see page

5 of this document) in nation building – the contrasts in their positions cannot be missed.

This study explores these questions conceptually, and then situates them in the context of two Indian states – Kerala and Rajasthan, both with varied histories and socioeconomic contexts. The experiences of decentralized governance are examined in relation to children’s education, and an attempt is made to place the experiences and developments in perspective.

Thanks are due to the New Education Group-Foundation for Innovations and Research in Education (NEG-FIRE) and Marita Ishwaran in particular, for agreeing to support this study. It is the first research commissioned by the Foundation for Innovations and Research in Education. Manish Jain from NEG provided us valuable feedback and helped us sharpen our reflections. Upendranadh, my colleague and co-researcher, played a key role in the conceptualization of this study as well as in undertaking field visits and writing up portions of this document. The many hours we spent in reflecting on concepts and experiences were useful in expanding the thinking behind this exercise.

I wish to also thank M.N Sudhakaran and Madhusudhanan (Trichur) and Shiju (Wayanad), who arranged for field visits in both the districts of Kerala, and who spent many hours with us, providing their inputs. Yogendra from Bodh Shiksha Samiti and Rohit Dhankar from Digantar kindly agreed to host us in Alwar and Baran districts respectively. Their staff took time from their pressing schedules to accompany us to various locations and set up the interactions with teachers, government officials and Panchayat members.

If this small attempt generates more thought on better ways to educate children, it will have served its purpose.

Sheshagiri K.M

Bengalooru

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"To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj (self government). Everything else is but an idle dream..."

Mahatma Gandhi

"The love of the intellectual Indians for the village community is of course infinite if not pathetic. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism?"

Dr. Ambedkar

"...A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually, and no progress can be made from a backward environment."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

CHAPTER 1: Decentralized Education Governance in India

Brief discussion of background and history; reflections on what it could mean

“The smallest territorial unit should be able to exercise effective control over its corporate life by means of a popularly elected Panchayat.” (From the Resolution of the Indian national Congress, 1947)

1. By way of an introduction

To begin with, it must be acknowledged that there is a growing body of literature on grassroots level democracy, local self governance and decentralization in the Indian context (Bardhan, 2007, Sharma, 2003, Mark Robinson, George Matthew 2000, Saxena, 2000 and many others). However, there is paucity in literature that examines 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. The purpose of this document is to explore this conceptual terrain as well as its links to practice. This assumes importance as part of the unfolding agenda of decentralization and local self governance. In this regard, a better understanding and articulation of decentralized education governance can only help in strengthening policy and practice. Both as researchers and practitioners, the authors of this study have sought to understand what the implications of decentralized governance are for the education of children.

In the sixty odd years after Independence, there have been a number of efforts of varying intensity and impact on the decentralization of governance in general and on education governance in particular. These need to be first recounted here in the context of the Panchayati Raj, which has taken roots particularly in the last two decades in the country.

On the whole, observations reveal that the subject of decentralization and education of children has not been addressed much in literature, when compared to the body of literature that exists per se on decentralization in the Indian context. 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, an attempt will be first made to share some thoughts of a conceptual nature – this, it is hoped, will further open up the discourse.

2. Methodology

The two states of Rajasthan and Kerala are used as case studies to explore the dynamic relationship between education and decentralization in the context of Panchayati Raj institutions¹. 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

¹ Initially, this study was meant to cover several Indian states. The idea was to map what was happening, collate experiences from different regions and synthesize them for further discussion. Later, it was decided that the study would initially be limited to these two states. Depending on the experience, NEG-FIRE would take the decision later to undertake a broader exercise.

these states². Given these diversities, it is hoped that a study of experiences of decentralization and education governance would provide a broad view that can contribute to further discussion.

The approach to the study has involved perusal of available literature, both on decentralization in general, and with respect to education in particular. Both in Kerala and Rajasthan, the researchers interacted with a number of persons at the state level, in government as well as in non governmental organizations. In both these states, two districts³ (Alwar and Baran in Rajasthan, and Thrissur and Wayanad in Kerala) were selected. Selected Panchayats in each of these districts were taken up for further study. In addition, the Karakulam Panchayat from Trivandrum district of Kerala was specially chosen to share the interesting insights it offered. 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. Documents, reports, plans and budgets were also studied. In Kerala, given the significant fiscal devolution up to the Grama Panchayat level, there was an opportunity to analyze Panchayat budgets from the seven Panchayats chosen for the study. This exercise provided insights regarding the actual thinking and planning for education at the Panchayat level. However, such an exercise was not possible in Rajasthan, as PR institutions are not allotted any financial resources for children's education – the School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) is provided funds from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and it functions fairly independently of the Panchayat. Interestingly, the Rajasthan Panchayat Act of 1994 mentions that Panchayats should 'look after' primary education – however, devolution of powers to enable this to happen is missing as we shall see later.

This report is structured in the following way. The present chapter (chapter 1) provides an overview of the current understanding and develops a conceptual framework on decentralization and educational governance. Chapters 2 and 3 provide experiences of decentralization and educational governance from the states of Kerala and Rajasthan, covering both the literature as well as field work undertaken by the authors. Chapter 4 brings together the arguments and provides a framework for understanding and enhancing effective decentralization in education governance through the Panchayats as the central agencies for local self governance.

2. Decentralization in India: brief overview

Article 40C of the constitution states that “The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government.” Panchayats were seen therefore as the units for the decentralization of governance from the onset of the constitution in India.

The spirit of the above statement was by and large not followed for the next four decades up to early nineties. Bureaucratic control, coupled with the dominance of a single political party both at the centre and the states, and the process of centralized governance as an ideology of

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 Jumbish which is often considered to be a pioneering effort at bottom up planning for children's education.

³ The reasons behind the selection of these districts are described in the respective state chapters that follow. It must also be mentioned that this study focuses only on Panchayats in the rural context. The study of urban bodies and education governance will require a separate space.

planned development, all inherited from a colonial legacy, served to undermine whatever effort there was at participatory local governance. Sporadic interventions at democratic decentralization were there – the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee of 1957, for instance, reviewed the ‘Community Development Program’ of 1952 and made recommendations on the establishment of an interconnected three-tier organizational structure of democratic decentralization at the village, block and district levels. This was seen as the agency for real progress in rural development.

By 1959, all the states had passed Panchayati Raj Acts and the three-tier system had reached all parts of the country by the mid-sixties. Following this period of euphoria and enthusiasm, there was a lull till the late seventies, till the second phase began following the Ashok Mehta Committee’s recommendations (1977) on Panchayati Raj. Though many states enacted Panchayati Raj Acts in the fifties, the Panchayats were assigned limited functions and resources. Regular elections also did not take place to these bodies. Also, since there was no clear interpretation of decentralization, implementation of the idea suffered. As George Matthew noted, ‘For about 13 years between 1964 and 1977, Panchayati Raj was the whipping boy of all those who wanted to ensure that it be discredited. For them, Panchayati Raj was the incarnation of all the evils in the villages’ (Matthew 2000).

The decade of the nineteen eighties were a period of renewed interest in decentralization. States like Karnataka, Andhra, West Bengal and J&K attempted their own models of Panchayati Raj institutions, either by passing new Acts or by modifying the existing ones. These interventions were based on the Ashok Mehta Committee’s recommendations. So, in addition to elections to local bodies, there was a provision of grants to Panchayat bodies accompanied by autonomy to use these finances, as in the case of Karnataka. In Kerala, District Councils were established in the late eighties and they functioned as autonomous councils for a while before the PR constitutional amendments. These developments culminated in the constitutional amendments of 1992/93.

Following these developments, the first significant response to the constitutional directive of Article 40C 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). This constitutional mandate recognized that centralized 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.

Thus, the rationale for decentralization rests on the political (actually, democratic) imperative that all those whose interests are affected by decisions ought to take part in the decision making process. As far as the education of children is concerned, this means an important stake for parents, community representatives, teachers and others in the decision of various processes that comprise the education of children – the articulation of its aims, decisions related to knowledge and curriculum, the teaching-learning process and so on. Local institutions of self government such as the Panchayats, can then be seen as being representative of the voices of this collective. We will return to a more detailed discussion in section 4.

3. Education and decentralization in India: an account of key developments

Given the above background and experience of Panchayat Raj in India during the past six decades, it is time to focus attention on the subject matter of this study. The decentralization

of education governance finds mention in many an education document. Education Commissions such as the Kothari Commission⁴ (1964-66) reiterated national commitment to it, while the various National Curriculum Framework (NCF) documents since the 70's invoked or implied decentralization 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.

Govinda⁵ notes that though the three-tier Panchayati Raj system was introduced soon after independence in the context of political decentralization, the block level (consisting of 100-150 villages) was considered to be the unit of development administration. The Block Development Office was established as a result. The district, created during the British period, remained as it is. For many years, the district was the centre from which education was governed in the entire district. Given the continuous expansion of primary education, the Block Education Office was established around the 70's. Thus, a 'de-concentration' of power was effected in education, though the Panchayats as elected institutions of people, were nowhere in the picture with respect to these developments. Even with this de-concentration, it has been pointed out that considerable authority was still vested at the district and state levels, especially concerning teacher appointments, transfers, development of textbooks, planning location of new schools, etc. The nineteen eighties' revival in Panchayati Raj did result in some gains for education but by and large, decentralization of authority did not move beyond the district levels.

The NPE of 1986 was a significant development in the education landscape of the country. It was a comprehensive attempt to review the education scenario and suggest future directions. The NPE has 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. As Govinda (op. cit) puts it, the NPE 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. These apart, village education committees were formed through government orders in most states. In many cases, these committees were seen as a subset of the local Panchayat (with the Panchayat president often being the chairman of the committee), though they were not autonomous in any real sense. Local education governance therefore was as such not on the radar of the NPE though at that time there were efforts at the revival of the discourse on decentralization.

A clearer articulation of the link between education and decentralization 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

⁴ The commission observed (P.12, 667): "At the primary stage, it is required to organize the program to bring the school close to the community with an accent on serving the community in different ways..." Further, "School education is predominantly a local-state partnership and higher education is a center-state partnership. It is this basic principle that should guide the evolution of delicate balance between centralization and decentralization which our planning needs."

⁵ See *Approaches to Decentralized Management of Basic Education in India* (Govinda, R and Bandyopadhyay, M, not dated)

plans for economic development and social justice.” Education has featured in this delineation of ‘funds, functions and functionaries’.

The constitutional amendments envisaged that Panchayats would be given the responsibility (at various levels within the three-tier system) of primary, elementary and secondary education, technical training and vocational education, adult and non-formal education, as well as cultural activities. Education has been mentioned at different places in the Act. Specifically, as far as education is concerned:

- The Gramasabha (council of all villagers) will be responsible for adult education
- The Grama 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.
- The Panchayat Samiti (at the block level) has 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, T-L materials, etc.
- The Zilla Parishad (District Panchayat) is expected to look at school infrastructure/basic facilities (up to secondary/higher secondary level, including Ashram Shalas or residential schools), improvement in physical access, hostel construction, support through scholarships and teaching-learning materials for SC, ST and other backward caste children.

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 the fifteen years since the constitutional amendments, many states have enacted their own Panchayati Raj Acts and have taken steps to strengthen local governance.

It must be noted that the years following the constitutional amendments on decentralization also saw an increase in the rhetoric of community participation in education. For instance, the POA of 1992 recommended community participation as well as decentralized management of education – in essence, the POA advocated the following of the eleventh schedule of the constitution, specifically Article 243 G.

With the liberalization and opening up of India’s economy in the early nineties, the Indian government sought external funding for universalizing primary education. As centrally sponsored schemes like DPEP came into being in the mid nineties, the practice of constituting or re-constituting 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), parents, teachers etc. Membership was also reserved for women. Many states had more or less similar guidelines; their Panchayat Acts also envisaged a VEC structure. Such an

arrangement, it was assumed, would automatically bring these committees under the purview or control of the Panchayats. Programs were developed in many states for the training of these committees though it must be added that such inputs were only sporadic and not planned with a long term view. On the whole, these committees or groups were expected to play the role of a vigilante – see if teachers were coming on time or check if all children were in school among other such tasks. The actual process of education, of teaching and learning, were never really on the radar of these interventions. These were deemed to be under the control of officialdom, of the education department. Local community structures were considered incapable of handling these tasks, or even contributing to it. By and large, issues related to the teacher, and curriculum and textbook development, easily the most crucial aspects in any educational enterprise, were not part of the scheme of community participation. In what way then, we may ask, can one characterize the above as instances of community participation? Surely, there must then be various grades and shades of participation, a typology of participation as it were?

However, as we shall see in the ensuing chapters, these arrangements have not fundamentally contributed to enhancing local education governance through the Panchayati Raj Institutions⁶. After all, communication of mere guidelines or organizational procedures through a government order or even through an Act (such as the state PR Act or the constitutional amendment) cannot fundamentally change existing institutional structures, mindsets and processes, both in the bureaucracy and in the local community. Change is critically dependent on the actions of the state to devolve functions, resources, and institutions to local bodies such as Panchayats, and also prepare them in every sense of the term to perform their roles.

If the above represents some of the experiences in community participation with respect to education, what are the developments with regard to Panchayats? Vinod Raina⁷ notes, in the context of Madhya Pradesh, that the government attempted a serious decentralization of school education to the PRIs, including school infrastructure, teacher appointments and transfers, mainly through government orders. The well known Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) is part of this process. Along with this, Panchayats can locally recruit teachers to fill in the teacher shortage. Though these steps are a departure from past practice, Raina raises the moot point of whether they can actually contribute to improvements in the quality of education. The concern in this case is of the phenomenon of the ‘para’ teacher and it is contended that while large scale recruitments by the local Panchayats of para teachers may satisfy an economic logic, there are serious questions about the quality of teaching-learning that results from such a move. In Rajasthan, Panchayat jurisdiction over education has actually been eroded over the years, leading to very little or no involvement in children’s education.

The passing of the constitutional amendments, together with the experiences on grassroots level planning and implementation in initiatives like the Lok Jumbish (about which we will discuss in the Rajasthan chapter) led to the reinforcement of the belief that decentralization could prove to be beneficial for education. Large scale, centrally sponsored programs like DPEP and later the SSA therefore emphasized autonomy at the district and sub district levels. At least on paper, the rhetoric of community participation was clearly evident. Whether this rhetoric was really made operational, is open to debate. While there has been significant expansion in schooling facilities and number of teachers, for instance, the district Annual Work Plans in DPEP and SSA show little variation as regards the challenges of addressing

⁶ This example is brought out quite sharply in the case of Rajasthan. See the Rajasthan chapter.

⁷ See ‘Making Sense of Community Participation’ in *Community Participation and Empowerment in Primary Education* (Govinda, R and Rashmi Diwan, Ed). Sage Publications, New Delhi (2003)

local/contextual issues. A set format seems to be driving these projects to facilitate uniformity in reporting, monitoring and standardization. The other aspect about DPEP, which SSA continued, was the practice of setting up management bodies fairly independent of the bureaucracy at the state and district levels, away from the general education administration apparatus of the state. While the argument for such an arrangement is increased efficiency as regards decision making, the point of concern is whether such arrangements can actually lead to a systemic change particularly where it concerns shifts in authority for increased local governance of education. This question is equally applicable to innovative efforts like the Lok Jumbish about which there is a discussion later in the Rajasthan chapter.

4. What could decentralized governance mean in education? A perspective...

In the previous sections, the rationale for decentralization, as well as key developments in the decentralization of education, has been discussed. We are yet to explore what the concept of decentralization of governance could mean in the domain of education for children. What should be decentralized and who should be responsible? What are the contours of this idea? These and other questions will be discussed in this section, which actually forms the backdrop for much of what is discussed in the coming two chapters.

To begin with, at least two terms – governance, and decentralization, need some discussion. A UN definition of governance goes like this: “The process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).” This statement does not tell us much about what sorts of decisions should be taken, by whom, at what level, etc. Another statement, due to UNESCO, is: “All organizations, public and private, are ‘governed’, that is, conform to decisions about purpose, structure, personnel, clients and resources.” Organizations in the educational context could mean ministries of education, school development committees, parents’ bodies, local Panchayats, or even Teacher Unions where they exert significant influence on decision making. From this statement, in the case of education of children, governance will mean decisions with respect to purpose (as in: What should we be educating children for?), structure (as in: What should be the institutional arrangements and processes?), personnel (as in: Who are the teachers, administrators, trainers, curriculum developers, textbook writers and so on), clients (as in: Who uses education? This could range from children, their parents, potential employers, larger societal structures and so on) and resources (as in: Financial resources and resources in general -- ideas, experiences, efforts of a wide range of people involved in making education happen). All decisions related to the above are ultimately meant to influence the knowledge, behavior and experiences of those involved with respect to educating children. Note the usage of the word ‘client’ in the UNESCO statement – this seems to imply a ‘market oriented definition’ of a client, who merely receives a service as a consumer of education. In this document, we would like to argue that the idea of local governance of education does not involve ‘clients’ in the passive sense as receivers of a service (as discussed above), but instead as active stakeholders who have a voice in helping to determine the nature and scope of education their children experience.

Decentralization in education, as the term seems to suggest, is all about shifting the location of those who govern. It is about transfers of authority from those in one (higher) location to those in another (lower) location. For our discussion, the locations are the central government, state governments, district bodies, sub district governing bodies and school level institutions. In the case of the Panchayats, we are talking about the three-tier system at the district, block and village levels. Decentralization is in a sense an umbrella term, and its usage is often viewed in terms of the extent to which ‘X’ is decentralized. Terms like de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatization are used to characterize the different

degrees and varieties of decentralization (Dennis Rondinelli, 1984). However, there are no watertight compartments in actual practice.

When one creates or establishes lower levels of educational administration, this is usually called de-concentration. Thus, authority is shifted for implementing already existing rules or policies in education, but not for making them. De-concentration is about increasing efficiency in centralized education systems. A classic case is the Block or District Education Office which follows the rule book and exists as a center at a lower level for implementing rules and policies decided by the state or central government. Delegation happens when selected persons (the delegates) appointed by a central authority are given authority over certain aspects related to education. When transfer of authority happens to a private organization or individual, we use the term privatization.

Finally, devolution actually implies a shift or transfer in authority from a central to more local units of governance. This is what we are interested in, in this study. This is what was attempted through the constitutional amendments for Panchayati Raj.

Where does the above discussion leave us as far as the education of children is concerned? It is illustrative to look at experiences so far, outlined in section 3. Govinda (2003) cited a study of fourteen states by Matthew and Nambiar (in 2002) in which the devolution of powers by state government to the Panchayats, vis-à-vis primary education, was looked at. The key observation was that despite the passing of the PR Acts, which talked about the transfer of education as part of the list of functions to be transferred to the Panchayats, 'Most Panchayats were not clear about their roles as well as functions with respect to education due to lack of information or official communication from the respective state governments.' In the same paper, a PRIA study of Himachal Pradesh is also mentioned. The important observation here is that the Panchayat has been gradually sidelined by the creation of bodies like School Improvement/Management Committees, Mother-Teacher Associations (MTA), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and so on, by the state itself under the aegis of different schemes/programs like DPEP, etc. The links between these bodies (which come more directly under the education department) and the local Panchayats are tenuous at best. In their normal functioning, they even tend to bypass the institution of the Panchayat. It does not require much observation to state that such moves will only erode the power of the Panchayats. The observations from Rajasthan are strikingly similar. Elsewhere, we have already noted that the role of Panchayats is more or less confined to school infrastructure/basic facilities provision, and support to individual children. This applies in large measure even to a state like Kerala, as will be illustrated later.

What is interesting is the generality of description with respect to transfer of educational functions to Panchayats. Statements using terms like 'responsibility for' or 'management of primary/elementary education...' with respect to the education function of Panchayats do not mean much as far as Panchayats are concerned, unless specific roles, functions and actions are reflected upon in terms of their rationale and relevance, and are described in some detail. For example, what sets of powers or decisions are meant to be devolved to the PR institutions, in which case they have to be shifted from the current arrangements? Why should these decisions be devolved? In the absence of such description (which seems to be deliberate), Panchayats tend to address issues that are often peripheral (and by default, non-controversial) in the education of children, like infrastructure and provision, for instance.

Financial devolution, crucial to any process of political devolution, has actually progressed to a very limited extent with the exception of states like Kerala. Further, as Robinson (2005) notes, 'The scope for local revenue mobilization is very restricted, resulting in high level of

dependence on fund flows from higher levels of government.’ On the other hand, large scale, centrally sponsored programs like the DPEP and SSA (which are flush with funds) have had very little to say regarding Panchayats. They are more concerned about the status of community level education committees that they help establish through government orders. The Panchayat as a people’s institution by and large does not feature in these deliberations though on paper the links between these committees and the institution of the Panchayat is mentioned.

At this stage in this discussion, we must reflect on the question regarding what the local governance of education can mean, in an ideal sense. If we use past experiences as a yardstick, we will have limited ideas to add. Most of these experiences, where Panchayats are concerned are in the realm of playing the role of a vigilante, providing basic facilities and infrastructure wherever possible, supporting marginalized children (if resources permit), etc. Thus, most experiences till date can be located within the sphere of decentralization of management and administration. Even here, the issues related teachers are by and large outside the sphere of these activities/decisions, though it is expected that the communities will keep vigil on the hapless teacher and check his or her regularity! Still, there are starting points which we must consider. Many of these examples will come up in the state chapters that follow. However, if we get to the basics of the ideas of governance, and the rationale for its devolution, there is much that can be offered for discussion when it comes to engaging with the education of children.

While all the above aspects are no doubt important, the key aspects of education that affect the interests of those involved are actually the ones that have to do with the educational process itself. For instance, if we begin by asking the question ‘What is school education for?’ we arrive at the notion of ‘educational aims’. The important point here is: *Who* should articulate these aims -- a professional body that sits far away from the people? Or, should it be the bureaucracy? Or, should it be the people whose interests are potentially affected by *what* their children learn, and *how* they go about learning it? Is it possible for these key sets of people to come together and articulate coherent responses to these questions? Of course, these questions do not have easy answers, but to us, they sit at the heart of the debate on decentralization of education. In this regard, is it only the management or administration of education that need to be decentralized, or should we consider the decentralization of how education is even conceived, i.e., the articulation of aims and the process by which one goes about achieving these aims?

The above questions bring us to another set of reflections that have a direct bearing on education. They revolve around the notion of local community knowledge, culture and experience. In our articulation of educational aims, we are confronted by the question: What knowledge, abilities, skills, values etc do we want our children to develop? This question is intimately linked to the articulation of educational aims in any society as it is widely held that knowledge is quite central to the educational process. When answering this question, we have to ask – whose knowledge is important? What kind of knowledge is needed? Who should decide this? Surely, the knowledge of the community in which the child lives, must find its rightful place in the education of every child, depending of course on the context in which he or she lives? The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2005 places such people’s knowledge high on the agenda of what should be happening in school curriculum. To us, this discussion is at the core of the decentralization dynamic. Recognizing diversity and creating space for it is then integral to any discussion on the local governance of education.

In this regard, Vinod Raina (2003) makes an interesting comparison between community participation in education and in watershed development. His observation goes this way –

first of all, there is recognition and concern in the Watershed development guidelines (WDG) of the traditional systems of managing common property resources that this resource has been destroyed. In contrast, he argues, one rarely finds even a passing mention of traditional systems in education (like the system of apprenticeship, for instance). In state controlled formal schools this knowledge and experience arising out of educational activity is completely ignored. Secondly, community knowledge about a variety of areas ranging from agriculture, clothing, food, music, medicine, literature, production systems, materials etc is completely absent in formal education as we know it today. Instead, 'expert' knowledge and technique is what rules the roost in the name of development and education. In even narrower terms, good performance on memory based examinations is what ultimately matters. In watershed development, the WDG emphasizes the usage of this centuries old knowledge and culture of a community. Again, the WDG recognizes the need for significant fiscal devolution and corresponding structures to ensure that this works. In the case of education, the control is by and large with the line department, with VECs, SDMCs and other such education committees only overseeing some monitoring aspects. The Panchayats are by and large not in picture even here.

On the whole, Raina articulates a deeper perspective for decentralization of education governance when he states that "Academic decentralization that draws in the knowledge of the communities in the teaching-learning process, and a locally organized resource support structure to help the community organize to do so, should have been the corresponding corollary from the WDG to education, but simply isn't."

From the above description, it is clear that a successful watershed project must build upon the knowledge of the local community and use the efforts and resources that local people bring to the table. Without this, it cannot even be conceived. Of course, there are challenges of addressing who in the local community participates, who benefits, which resources (of land, water etc) are in the hands of the community, which are under state control, and how these can be tapped for developing the watershed, and so on. The Panchayats as institutions of local self governance would therefore have a crucial role to play in this entire process.

While it would thus seem natural for watershed initiatives to build upon community knowledge and traditions, the practice of educating children so far has not made use of local traditions though we are not short on rhetoric for many decades. In fact, the education that is available in schools currently does not even admit this possibility, as decisions pertaining to what children should learn and how they should learn it are still very centralized and state driven.

We would like to note that the nation-state, the notion of citizenship in this nation-state and the role of education in inculcating this citizenship, coupled with the notion that the local (or rural) is necessarily 'illiterate and backward' act as powerful barriers for co-opting the local (and hence the local governance of education) in matters related to the education of every child. The local, in fact, is seen to be distracting attention from the agenda of this nation-state building which thrives on homogeneity, centralized control and a strong national identity. In this scheme of things, one sees Panchayats playing only peripheral roles, though a lot may be articulated on paper to the contrary.

At a deeper level in the discourse, the local, regional, national and international are all intertwined. In a world of global markets and supranational political organization, the notion of the nation-state may itself be changing – this will have implications for the nature and scope of education, and the place of the local. The key question for consideration is, how distinctive can national education systems remain, pressured as they will be for

international/global convergence on the one hand, and for creating spaces for pluralism to emerge more strongly especially in a context as heterogeneous as that of India? It is interesting to note at this time that there is a gradual emergence of power blocs of the lower castes, even as the shrill voices of jingoism pushed by the Right jostle with these formations for space in the political landscape of the country.

These developments must also be seen in the context of a neo-liberalism which advocates organizing society on the lines of an idealized free market economy (dictated of course by 'market supremacy'), characterized by state withdrawal from the economy, the social and political spheres as well. Neo-liberalism is thus characterized by a very instrumentalist notion of the state. There is enough evidence to show that more than fifteen years of neo-liberal policies have only served to distance the rich from the poor, with the ongoing global fiscal crises as perhaps the best example of the downside of this approach/philosophy. However, one school of thought (supporting the free market/privatization approach) would advocate a kind of 'Public-Private-Partnership' (PPP) as a means to address this concern. After all, is not the state rather inefficient in providing quality services to everyone, especially the marginalized? The counter argument is one of increased governmental responsibility and participation. What does all of this mean for education, and more specifically, where does the local governance of education come in? As Krishna Kumar (2008) notes, PPP is nothing but an ideology that seeks to replace the government's role with large scale privatization of education. He further notes that the emphasis is more on the achievement of immediate tasks (such as provision of access and improvement in learning levels, again emerging from an instrumental view of education) instead of the more difficult (but more critical and relevant) task of institution building. The other view is that increased governmental participation is about ensuring the welfare of the poor and the marginalized, a task that pro-market or pro-privatization ignores in many ways. It is here that decentralization assumes importance. It is perhaps a key anchor available in promoting the welfare of the poor and marginalized. If devolution is genuine, leading to more and more people taking control over the developments that affect their lives and those of their children, it can become relevant. Indeed, this was the idea behind the People's Planning Campaign of Kerala more than a decade ago.

By arguing for a place for the local in terms of the knowledge, values, skills, understanding etc that it may embody, one is not suggesting the exclusion of the non-local as part of the scheme of local education governance. We would argue for a balance, instead, and state that the local has a critical role to play in the formation of self esteem, a sense of rooted-ness and of identity. To this extent, the educational experience of every child must be critically informed by local traditions, knowledge, wisdom, cosmology, etc which must then connect to the regional, national and international experience. Local Education Governance in this sense should play a facilitating role, representing and moderating local voices of expression, learning, unlearning, experience, etc and more importantly, ensuring their transmission to the next generation, a task that education is expected to play.

At the same time, one is not romanticizing the local or the village. On a more cautious note, we must recognize that when one uses the term 'local' or 'community', one is not denoting a homogeneous space and culture, a single history, equal relationships between various people, or even a single language. Given the stratified nature of Indian society along the lines of caste, class, gender, language and religion, what one encounters is a highly complex dynamic of unequal relationships, and multiple, conflicting histories. The Panchayat as a democratically elected people's institution can only be a reflection of the ground situation, at least to begin with. It is this situation that political parties often exploit in order to create their vote banks, where the Grama Sabha or the Grama Panchayat becomes a 'survival space' and where the 'local elites have managed to manipulate the power and resources of the Panchayat

to their advantage, while the Grama Sabhas have served as little more than boxing rings, where people seek to knock out one another to get onto the list of potential beneficiaries for the latest government scheme' (Shilpa Jain, 2000).

From the above discussion, the question that arises is: What are the initial conditions needed for effective/genuine decentralized governance, and what can this mean in the context of children's education? It has been pointed out that 'local democracy requires a significant set of pre-requisites that are often lacking in developing countries. These include an educated and politically aware citizenry, an absence of high inequality in economic or social status that inhibits political participation of the poor or of minorities, a prevalence of law and order, the conduct of free and fair elections according to a constitutional setting that prevents excessive advantage to incumbents, effective competition between political candidates or parties with long term interests, the presence of reliable information channels to citizens, and the presence of oversight mechanisms both formal and informal' (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2007).

If these are indeed the essential conditions, then we may say that Kerala and Rajasthan are situated at the two ends of this spectrum. Yet, as we shall see, where the education of children is concerned, the evidence from the ground in Kerala indicates that despite significant fiscal devolution and creation of structures to promote local participation, the role of Local Self Governing Institutions (LSGI) is at best peripheral. Education does not even seem to be an important item on their agenda. What could be missing? This is a point that will be touched upon in the last chapter.

The preceding discussions have thrown open the contours of local education governance. We will now turn to the two states where this study was carried out to see what they have on offer. The study is qualitative in nature, and discussions have been held with a variety of people, starting from Panchayat representatives, parents, teachers, NGO persons, and representatives of the education department of the state government.

CHAPTER 2: The story from Kerala

1. Introduction

As part of the increased attention to decentralization efforts all over the country in the early 1990's, Kerala's experiences were unique in terms of approach, innovation, scope and intensity. The Kerala PR Act was passed in 1994. This was followed in 1996 by the launch of the People's Planning Campaign (PPC) which set the stage not only for significant transfer of fiscal and administrative powers, but also sought to create space for increased people's participation in local development. Thus, as the PPC unfolded, there were efforts to involve the Grama Sabha, consisting of people who elect their representatives, in the processes of mobilizing, planning, building consensus, capacities and understanding for their own development.

As part of this study, we tried to understand how the PPC looked at the task of making children's education happen. How was it conceptualized in the PPC? What were the preparations for addressing the issues and challenges of providing education to every child and for strengthening ongoing efforts? What roles and processes were envisaged for the Panchayats as part of the PPC? What were the experiences, shortcomings and successes? These questions are the focus of our attention.

We begin this paper with a brief discussion of the larger context of Kerala. Within this, we look at the educational context of Kerala – key developments subsequent to the NPE 1986 are chosen as points for discussion. We draw from the interactions with a number of persons throughout the study as well as from the available literature. These sections are followed by a discussion of the experiences of decentralization with respect to the education of children as a theme. The learning from the study of selected Panchayats is then shared. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting key observations.

2. The larger context

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 (for instance, universal primary education, near total literacy and gender equality in education, low infant mortality rates, availability of roads, basic services such as those of education and health etc, well above the national average and actually comparable to high income countries) are concerned, albeit in a low economic growth scenario. In fact, low economic growth is attributed to a stagnation of agriculture and industry in the state. At the same time, 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. It is striking that in the 1990's Kerala had the highest rates of unemployment among Indian states. 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).

Public action is seen as the key impetus for these achievements. As Sharma notes (2003), 'Nearly a third of Kerala's adult population is affiliated to mass organizations such as trade unions, peasant associations, and student, youth and women's organizations. These are supplemented by a wide variety of sports clubs, theatre and art groups, science movements

and voluntary organizations.’ The spirit of voluntarism thus pervades the social fabric. Perhaps the best example in education is that of the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP), a people’s science movement that emerged in the early sixties. Since then, KSSP has addressed the challenges of developing scientific temper in the public domain, environmental concerns, besides actively promoting literacy and education in the state. KSSP members have also played a key role in the conception and implementation of the PPC and the decentralization process.

As far as the political process of Kerala goes, the state has alternately returned the leftist CPI/M and Congress led coalitions. The two key formations currently are the Left democratic Front (LDF, a Marxist group) and the United Democratic Front (UDF, a liberal democratic group). While the PPC is an LDF initiative (started in 1996), the passage of the Panchayat Raj Act in 1994 was during the UDF tenure. The UDF again replaced the LDF in 2001, but lost out to the LDF in 2006. With respect to our study, the entire period of the PPC till now will be considered.

In Kerala, historical context has played an important role in shaping its present response to the idea of decentralization. Progressive measures like land reforms and social reform movements (spearheaded by lower caste groups as well as progressive elements within church as well) have resulted in rural peasantry (most from depressed communities) gaining resource base as well as political power within the democratic structures at the lowest levels. The bi-polar ‘political power shifts’ have also played an important role in deepening democratic structures at the grassroots level. Within political parties too democratic practices and articulation are far more advanced in Kerala in contrast to several other states. This has resulted in a situation, where it became politically difficult for reversing processes of decentralization, (however inconvenient for some at certain points of time) by a particular regime – on the other hand, there are efforts to further deepen the processes. Having said this, we must also note that the UDF in general has been lukewarm to the idea of decentralization, though it is not in a position to reverse the processes unleashed by PPC during the Left regime⁸. During interactions at the district level, the authors learnt that there are instances where during the UDF regime, there were attempts to ‘lock’ Panchayat resources by making Panchayat contributions to more central schemes mandatory. Thus, while on paper there appears to be significant fiscal devolution, policies such as these place constraints on the path of the Panchayats using their resources creatively for addressing local needs.

From the above discussion, it must be stated that Kerala’s unique socioeconomic and political context has implications for decentralization. High attainments in the Human Development Index, spirited public action, increased public awareness, coupled with remarkable achievements in literacy and universal coverage of formal education opportunities all can contribute in an engaging manner to the decentralization process and make locally driven planning and development a reality. Whether this automatically gets translated into greater sensitivity for the child’s education and overall development, is a question that will need some discussion. We will return to this later.

However, certain other facets of Kerala must be noted. It has pointed out that in an export economy where land is increasingly used for the production of commodities for the external market, participatory planning becomes ‘more difficult and less meaningful’ (Radhakrishnan, 1997, mentioned in Sharma, 2003). This situation leads to a new class of village elite who

⁸ One observation is that the Left party is internally more democratized and believes in sharing power with local leadership. This is also in part due to the fact that elections at all levels are close contests and this necessitates that space be created for local leadership to emerge.

become more powerful but at the same time are more and more alienated from their communities.

3. Brief comments on Education in Kerala

A unique feature that distinguishes Kerala from the rest of the country is its high level of educational development. There are constant references to its high literacy rate as an indicator of the state's educational achievements. For instance, nearly four decades ago, in 1971, the literacy rate was as high as 60% as compared to the all India average of 29% that year. If we go back even further, it has been observed⁹ that Kerala enjoyed this pre-eminent position as far back as 1901 (though there were variations even then within the region). Perhaps Kerala's long and rich educational traditions and its constant engagement¹⁰ with education are the factors that account for its high educational development. In Kerala, the indigenous system (of education, philosophy, literature etc) survived even during the British period – this, it is believed, was responsible for the high literacy rates in the state even at the beginning of the last century. The spirit of these developments is captured in a statement in the document titled *Educational Statistics since Independence* (2004) brought out by the General Education Department: "The progressive educational policies of enlightened rulers of the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin and the educational activities initiated by the Christian missionaries and other social organizations yielded development in the field of education even before independence."

Post Independence, the Communist Party played a key role in ensuring that Kerala's educational progress did not suffer. It constantly engaged with education and brought it within the public domain for discussion and debate. The work of the Christian missionaries too deserves mention. As a result, the educational indices of the state were much higher than the rest of the country even four decades ago.

4. Key developments in education post NPE 1986

Kerala's educational trajectory in many ways resembles the trajectory of other states post 1986. The NPE of 1986 and subsequent national level developments also altered the course of primary and elementary education in Kerala as it did in the other states. To begin with, the 1980's continued to keep up the momentum on the path of achieving universal literacy in Kerala. The total literacy campaign provided a fillip to these efforts, and an important landmark was reached in Kerala's history when in 1990, the district of Ernakulam was declared as the first totally literate district in the country. According to the 2001 census, Kerala's literacy stood at 90.92%, far above the national average of 65.38% for the same year.

A number of initiatives followed the NPE 1986 in Kerala, 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

⁹ See, Nair, PRG in *Primary Education, Population Growth and Socioeconomic change* (Allied Publishers, 1981)

¹⁰ Social reformers, for instance, like Narayan Guru (1855-1928) talked about the need for representation of lower castes in education. He argued, in 1926 that 'no community can make progress except through organization'. Ayyankali (1863 -1941) was a Dalit leader who fought for the rights of Dalit children to study in schools. Rulers of the erstwhile Travancore and Cochin region also patronized education, while the British played an important role in spreading formal education in the Malabar region.

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. For instance, sub district teacher support structures such as the BRC and CRC were established to bring teacher support closer to the school. The notion of ‘activity based learning/pedagogy’ came into the lexicon with DPEP. Textbooks and curricula were reviewed at the primary level, and there were attempts to make training more participatory and relevant to the teacher’s needs. Gradually, the state has attempted to extend the activity based approach to the upper primary and secondary levels as well. In spirit, DPEP emphasized decentralized district level planning. It paved the way for the SSA (in 2001) and the focus since has been on the universalization of elementary education in the state.

There were two other landmark developments in the 1990’s, having implications for education – the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments resulted in putting in place a process for democratic decentralization by rejuvenating the Panchayati Raj Institutions all over the country. Kerala too was part of this development which more or less coincided with the entry of DPEP in the state. In fact, even before these constitutional amendments, 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. Education features in the PDRs. The PPC, as well as the structure and process by which the education of children is addressed, will be discussed later.

A key feature of Kerala’s education scenario (which is perhaps peculiar to the state) is the presence of private schooling, which will come up for some discussion later. The ASER report of 2006 notes that 45% of children between classes (1-8) attend non-governmental schools in Kerala. We may also note here in passing that the number of private (aided + unaided) schools in Kerala is nearly double the number in the government sector. The Christian Missionary Schools dominate the number of private schools, followed by schools run by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangha (SNDP, followers of Narayana Guru) the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the institutions set up by the Muslim Minority Community. Thus, it is interesting to note that there is a division as far as provision of education in Kerala is concerned, along caste as well as religious lines. This is not a recent development; perusal of statistics shows that the private sector involvement in education has been a key part of Kerala’s education scenario since the 50’s and 60’s itself, thanks mainly to the involvement of the Christian Missionaries. Clearly, in such a scenario where private sector involvement is significant, there are implications for the decentralization and increased social control of education, as we shall see later.

No discussion of Kerala’s education scenario will be complete without a mention of the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), a people’s science movement that emerged in the early sixties. In the last four decades, KSSP has contributed in varied and important ways to Kerala’s education. Though the initial efforts were in science popularization in the public domain, KSSP over the years began to look at the education of children more seriously. Over the years, KSSP began to be recognized by the government as a key player in educational

reform efforts. This resulted in its involvement in areas such as teacher training, development of teaching resources, research, review of curriculum and textbooks etc. KSSP played a crucial role in the rolling out of the PPC – its members became an integral part of the process of the bottom up planning process with respect to education. A unique aspect of KSSP was its membership – a large number of teachers have served voluntarily as its members; many KSSP stalwarts have occupied important posts as political appointees within the government in key positions.

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 the first at the elementary level, as far as data released by NUEPA for 2008 is concerned. The drop out rate is very low (though the concern is that it may be high in tribal and fishing communities and other disadvantaged groups, for instance). However, the low percentages with respect to GER and NER are explained by the fact that there has been an overall decline in the birth rate. This is also seen as one of the reasons why some government schools are increasingly classified/declared by the government as ‘uneconomical’ (teachers from such schools become ‘protected’!), as enrolments in the same school have declined over the years and come down to below 15-20 children per school.

The above figures are impressive, no doubt. But do they convey the whole story? For long, Kerala has been considered as one of the most educationally developed states. Yet, in a 1993 study (at the onset of the DPEP) conducted by NIEPA, it was found that the achievement levels of Kerala’s school children were one of the lowest (actually, 18th) in the country, lower than even low literate states like Bihar! Twelve years later, the ASER report findings were still mixed for Kerala – the states figured in the ‘five best states’ list for reading, while it was not the case with achievements in arithmetic. There was no discernible change in 2006 as far as Kerala was concerned. If the achievement levels are any indication, the quality of teaching and learning needs attention and this directly points out to the quality of teacher preparation as an area needing more work. A related concern is if this quality is equitably distributed.

The Kerala State Education Commission (SEC) which was constituted by the government in 2004 had, as one of its objectives¹¹:

“The quality of education in terms of academic inputs, equipping the students to the changing environment, practical training and inculcating values have not been given due importance so far. The SEC will make an in-depth study of the problems and suggest comprehensive measures to improve the quality of education.”

This, in a sense, sums up the mood after nearly a decade of educational reforms. In recent years, quality issues have begun getting more and more attention from the Kerala government. The SEC commission report of 2004 led to, for the first time in nearly fifty years (in 2008), a review of the Kerala Education Act Rules (KEAR) of 1959. Much has been said regarding the role of Local self Government Institutions (LSGI) in the KEAR revision document. These recommendations are still being discussed and are yet to come into effect.

Kerala’s decentralization efforts

Though the first vision of the Panchayati Raj was articulated as early as 1958¹², when the first Communist Government took over, it was not until the late eighties that the push for

¹¹ See page 8 of the Kerala State Education Commission Report (2004)

decentralization began to gain ground in Kerala. Interestingly, in 1989/90, the state government provided every village Panchayat an untied grant; in 1990, elected district councils came into being, a few years before the 73rd and 74th amendments. However, these efforts were subsumed later under the constitutional amendments.

The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act came into being in March 1994 during the UDF government tenure. By October 1995, following the first elections for all the three tiers, the Panchayats came into being. A Government Order was issued following the elections, transferring various institutions and staff to the three-tier system. In the case of education, though officials in education do not get transferred to the Panchayats, the headmasters of the respective schools become ex-officio members of the Panchayat and they are expected to report to the Panchayat. With regard to government aided schools which as we have seen form a significant number in Kerala, there is now a serious debate and move to bring them increasingly under the control of the government (and hence also the Panchayats), given that most teacher salaries are borne by the government at scales equal to that of the regular government teacher. Predictably, the private school managements are up in arms against any such move which they see as eroding their freedom. This is a complex dynamic within which the Panchayats are situated.

In Kerala's case, a significant development occurred in 1996 as the LDF came back to power – it 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.

Some notes on structure and planning processes in the three tier system

What are the mechanisms through which plans are made by the Panchayats with respect to the education of children? For this, we first need to understand the educational roles assigned to the three-tier system as per the Kerala Panchayat Raj (KPR) Act of 1994¹³. The Third, Fourth and Fifth Schedules of the Act respectively outline the responsibilities entrusted to the village, block and district level Panchayats. The table below provides the details.

Village level Panchayat (Third Schedule)	<p>Section C, titled 'Sector-wise functions', outlines the following under point X titled 'Education': "Management of Government Pre-primary Schools, Primary Schools and Upper Primary Schools. Implementation of literacy programmes. Management and promotion of reading rooms and libraries."</p> <p>This apart, under point XIII titled 'Social Welfare', the following point is included: "Running of Anganwadis."</p> <p>Under point XV titled 'Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe development', the following points pertaining to the education of children are mentioned: "Running of nursery schools for Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribes. Provide assistance to Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe Students."</p> <p>Lastly, under the point XVI title 'Sports and 'Cultural Affairs', the following two points may be said to be related to children: "Construction of playgrounds. Establishment of Cultural Centres."</p>
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¹² In the Administrative Reforms Committee (*of?*) which saw Panchayats as the most critical tier of local government, participation of people, and local development.

¹³ See, the KPR Act of 1994 with minor amendments in 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2005

Block level Panchayat (Fourth Schedule)	<p>Section A, titled ‘General Functions’ mentions: “Utilise Governmental-non-Governmental technical expertise at block level.”</p> <p>Section B, titled ‘Sector wise Functions’, has this to say under point X titled ‘Education’: “Management of Government Industrial Training Institutions.”</p> <p>Further, under point XI titled ‘Social Welfare’, the following point finds mention: “Management of ICDS.”</p> <p>Under point XIII titled ‘Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Development’, the point below is included: “Management of pre-metric hostels.”</p>
District level Panchayat (Fifth Schedule)	<p>Section A, titled ‘General Functions’ mentions: “Mobilisation of the technical expertise available from Government-non-Government institutions. Provide technical assistance to Block Panchayats, Village Panchayats and Municipalities. Prepare schemes after taking into account the schemes of the Village Panchayat and the Block Panchayat to avoid duplication and to provide forward-backward linkages.”</p> <p>Section B, titled ‘Sector wise Functions’, has this to say under point IX titled ‘Education’: “Management of Government high schools (including Lower and Upper Primary Schools attached to high schools). Management of Government Higher Secondary schools. Management of Government Technical Schools. Management of Government Vocational Training Centres and Polytechnics. Management of government Vocational Higher Secondary Schools. Management of District Institute for Education and Training. Co-ordination of centrally and state sponsored programmes related to education.”</p>

It is to be noted that unlike in other states, the Grama Panchayats in Kerala are much larger in size, and cater to populations as high as 25000. It is observed that this is a right size for planning developmental activities. In fact, given the large Panchayat sizes, and the relatively fewer number of districts, it becomes difficult to assign any particular responsibility at the block level. This is clear in the sphere of education, where most responsibilities are concentrated at the village and district level (as shown in the box above).

In the domain of education, it is clear that the responsibility of schools has been transferred from the state government to the different layers of the three-tier Panchayat system. It is also clear from the above table that most of the functions related to education are vested in the Village and District Panchayats. The Block Panchayat is provided the responsibility of ‘Management of ICDS’ and ‘Government Industrial Training Institutions’ at the block level, while the Village Panchayat is expected to be concerned about the day to day ‘Running of Anganawadis’ (the difference between the terms ‘Management’ and ‘Running’, is not clear). Though the Block Panchayat is not vested with any responsibility of school education, there are examples of ‘soft’ activity undertaken (as opposed to infrastructure intervention) to provide academic support to schools and children. However, such activities and programs completely depend on the leadership and initiative of those Panchayat members at the block level. This is very much evident in the Kodakara block panchayat of Thrissur district where, under the leadership of a female Panchayat President, a number of innovative activities titled ‘Vidya Jyothi program’ have been undertaken with support from the KSSP.

There is also a clear distinction in terms of responsibilities allocated at different levels. The Village Panchayat is expected to manage schools up to the upper primary (elementary) level and also look at pre-primary as well as the ICDS program; the District Panchayat manages from the high school level onwards, including technical schools, vocational education centres

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).

While the above functions have been transferred to the Panchayats, the Act also mentions about the transfer of functionaries. In the case of education, the Headmaster of the school is an ex-officio member of the Panchayat and as such is required to attend Grama 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.

From these schedules, what is not clear is the term 'Management'. What does this mean in the context of education? While the dictionary provides a range of meanings for the term 'Manage' (as in 'Run, direct, administer, supervise, handle, control...'), do these meanings apply in practice as well? From our observations, two key elements that are at the centre of educational thinking and practice – the teacher and the curriculum -- are outside the purview of the Panchayat system. The state retains control over these aspects of school education. Any attempt by Panchayats to influence these elements is not encouraged, as we shall see in our discussion later. In such a situation, Panchayats have little or no say in the academic matters of the school. They can at best play a supplemental/supportive role. On the other hand, Panchayats are free to augment school infrastructure, provide basic facilities, organize extra classes, extracurricular activities, provide additional nutrition and even appoint teachers on daily wages if there is a shortage of teachers. Indeed, our budget analysis of selected Panchayats (see section...) corroborates this observation. However, it can be said that the boundaries are clearly drawn for the involvement of Panchayats in education. See box () for a detailed description of what village level Panchayats have been doing with respect to children's education and overall development of the child.

Given this scenario, what are the processes followed by the Panchayats to develop programs and interventions for the education of children, and what are the mechanisms in place? At each level, the Panchayat structure includes what is called the 'Standing Committee', a statutory body consisting of elected Panchayat members. These committees are responsible for the approval of plans made for the different developmental areas/sectors delineated under them. Thus, at the Village Panchayat level, there are three Standing Committees – the Welfare Committee, the Finance Committee and the Development Committee. Education of children as an area comes under the Welfare Committee, along with ICDS and Public Health. The Development Committee is concerned with overall development works in the Panchayat. These include agriculture, small scale industry and infrastructure development like roads and buildings, while the Finance Standing Committee is expected to provide support in the preparation and monitoring of income, budgets and expenditure and also provide recommendation for the allocation of finances to different sectors. It seeks approval from the Panchayat President for all the development plans made.

The Block level of the three-tier structure has the same number of Standing Committees as the Village Level. At the District level, there are five Standing Committees -- Finance committee, Development Committee, Education and Health (which came into being in 2002), Public Works, and Finance. Thus, education is recognized as a separate area needing attention though as we have seen, the District Panchayat's purview starts from the high schools.

The functioning of the Standing Committees is coordinated and monitored by the Steering Committee consisting of the Panchayat President, Vice-President and the Chairman of standing committees. The President is the chairman of the Steering Committee.

Within the Standing Committees are the 'Working Groups'. Thus, as part of the Welfare Committee at the Village Panchayat level, there is the 'Education Working Group' (EWG). In a broader sense, the EWG is part of the constitution of what are called as 'Functional Committees' meant for different subjects like Agriculture, Health, Education etc. The task of the EWG (often consisting of elected Panchayat members, department officials, locally available experts/resource persons and selected teachers) is to convene Grama Sabhas (people's meetings) at the Ward level, and, based on deliberations, prepare and present an education plan at this level, incorporating local needs. Once the plan has been made, it is presented by the EWG in a 'Development Seminar' at the Panchayat level, where it is whetted by the concerned Welfare Standing Committee Chairman, the Panchayat Secretary and the President. The Development Seminar is open to public participation.

It may be noted that the EWG is only a planning group, and does not have any mandate for approval of plans made. This authority is vested with the Standing Committee consisting of elected representatives. In the case of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a Panchayat Education Committee (PEC) has been constituted at the GP level. From our discussions, it appears that the PEC is quite separate from the EWG, and is only concerned with the planning of the SSA component for which Panchayats have to contribute 35% (in a later section, we discuss the linkages between the SSA and the Panchayats). It is not clear why this distinction has been made, given that the EWG is responsible for the preparation of educational plans at the GP level.

There are two other groups at the GP level concerned with education. These are the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA, consisting of parents of school going children) and the School Support Group (SSG, consisting of any interested parent or community member). The PR Act does not mention them. These groups often play supportive roles. There are examples of PTA or SSG members taking up teaching duties in schools in the case of teacher absence or shortage. In other cases, members from these groups help in other activities of the school such as the organization of functions, providing training on specific skills such as tailoring, helping to set up school kitchen gardens and so on.

Following the above mentioned processes at the village level, the plan is sent to the block level for further scrutiny and approval. This is where another group, called the 'Technical Advisory Group' (TAG) comes in. As the name suggests, the TAG is expected to oversee the technical details of the proposals. Each subject or sector has a TAG from the block level upwards to the state level. The TAG for education usually consists of selected teachers, resource persons and others interested and competent in issues related to education. The idea is to tap all the available expertise on education in a given area/region. There are specific TAG guidelines for making observations on educational plans. But the TAG, like the EWG, is not an approving body. It is expected to only comment on the feasibility of the plans it scrutinises. It is also clear that the TAG is not a think tank (though in principle it can actually play that role), as the name would seem to suggest. Its functions do not extend beyond commenting on whether plans made adhere to provisions, guidelines and norms for work undertaken by the Panchayat. The think tank role is ascribed to the EWG in the three-tier system in the case of education. It is here that creative possibilities for strengthening children's education can be explored.

Based on comments made by the TAG, the proposal is sent further up to the district level for final approval. There is also the possibility of the plan being returned to the concerned GP if it is not found to be in accordance with guidelines for plan preparation. In such a case, the GP is asked to revise the plan and send it again for approval. At the district level, the final approving body is the District Planning Committee (DPC) consisting of elected representatives, members from the DIET, Deputy Director, General Education Department, the Director, Public Instruction (DPI), and other selected persons. The District Panchayat President is the Chairman of this committee, which approves plans made both by Panchayats and Municipalities (urban bodies). The DPC reserves the right to ask for changes in the plans made.

The People's Planning Campaign

The elaborate structure and process described above is in the context of what is popularly known as the 'People's Planning Campaign' which we have mentioned in the beginning of this article. The launch of the PPC in 1996 represents the point at which decentralization became very substantial in Kerala. In particular, the decision of the LDF government to earmark 35-40 percent of the state plan budget for programs meant to be drawn up by the local bodies, stands out as a key feature that resulted in the unfolding of the PPC, grounded in the principles of autonomy, participation and transparency. This decision meant that elaborate structures and mechanisms had to be drawn up to ensure that this fiscal devolution was effectively managed and monitored besides creating spaces for public discourse and participation in development. Such a development is unprecedented in the history of Independent India. Franke and Chasin (1997) have pointed out that Kerala's decentralization was probably the largest of its kind in the world. The structures and mechanisms described in the previous section represent the preparation to effectively launch the PPC.

Sharma (2003) notes that the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments alone cannot explain why such significant amounts were devolved to the Panchayats, though it must be acknowledged that they did provide the context for it. Economic stagnation was another factor. Decentralization, with the special emphasis on people's participation to increase production and productivity, was seen as a way out to arrest this stagnation. Thirdly, NGO experiences with small development projects for local economic development, notably those of the KSSP, demonstrated that local planning and development could work. A combination of all these factors led to the conception of the PPC in its present form. Given the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, the Panchayats were seen as the structures that would drive and implement the PPC. The remarkable story of the PPC has been explained insightfully and in detail by Thomas Isaac and Franke (2000) and by Sharma (2003). We may note here only the special features, and focus the discussion on children's education in the coming sections.

The 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 Grama Sabhas and participate in the planning process. The idea behind this mass mobilization was to concentrate attention of large numbers of people, and to overcome inertia with respect to their participation. To facilitate discussions in the Grama Sabhas, these were organized ward wise to provide opportunities for more people to participate and articulate their views. Another element that characterized the PPC was that the approach was based, as far as possible, on the notion of the 'development planning cycle'. For instance, the emphasis was clearly on collective deliberation, gathering of relevant data, mapping of resources, their analysis, writing of the development plans, and their review and approval in the development seminar at the GP level. Not only were guidelines for discussions developed for the Grama Sabhas, there were also elaborate guidelines and formats for the analysis of such data and its

presentation in the form of a development plan. Training of Resource Persons who supported these exercises was thus undertaken on a large scale at all the three levels of the Panchayat system. Thus, an ‘action-research’ flavour focusing on a ‘projectized’ approach was provided to the PPC. It was assumed that such an approach would enable effective planning. However, as the PPC progressed, criticism arose that the form/structure of the process was being seen as more important than the actual content. The observation was that this approach was more suited to large centralized agencies undertaking data collection and statistical analyses to prepare plans. In the case of local level participation and planning, it was argued that this rigidity of form and structure was not necessary. Clearly, the capacity of local level administrators and community members for doing these exercises for a variety of developmental areas/issues was overestimated. Consequently, a need to simplify the process and bring it within the reach of people was felt. It was realized that developing unique local level responses and solutions was more important than prescribing formats and processes that may not have been relevant to the context. This thinking later resulted in the preparation of short manuals/monographs by the State Planning Board for the twelve development sectors that the GP was responsible for. Still there were problems, as Mukundan (2004) notes. The guidelines did not factor in local contexts, and were highly academic, with free usage of ‘extensive technical jargon’ of which a sample is provided below (from the education project guidelines of 1998):

“The education sector in Kerala is facing some challenges, and the deterioration of the educational standards is prominent among them. Literacy and numeracy are not the only criteria to be considered for educational standards. Other matters to be considered should include how far the learner has achieved in: acquiring knowledge; applying knowledge; achieving the skills for living; showing progress in scientific awareness, civic awareness and value awareness; involvement in aesthetic activities such as appreciation and art performance; development of creativity; creative approach to the nature; and achieving propriety of values such as patriotism, humanitarianism, equality and rationalism.”
(Mukundan, 2004; page 237)

Such a mouthful hardly helps! One can sense and understand the underlying anxiety of the writers to convey everything they consider to be the essence of education. But can a mere reading of this (which in itself is bound to be difficult for someone at the GP level) suffice? What are the ways in which thinking on education at all levels can be deepened and facilitated? To this question, there were apparently no answers.

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. That is how the concept of the TAG came into being more than a year after the launch of the PPC. Initially, the term used was the ‘Voluntary Technical Corps’ (VTC), consisting of retired technical experts, professionals and others who were interested in participating in the PPC. A large number of VTC members were teachers. The resource persons who played a key role in the launch of the PPC were also co-opted in the VTC, which had units at the block, district and state level. The VTC later became the TAG about which we have already discussed.

What are Panchayats doing in Education?

Education of children, like the other development sectors, was integral to the PPC process. What were the areas/priorities the Panchayats focused upon? Are there any patterns? What were the experiences? In order to explore these questions, the study focused on two districts,

Thrissur and Wayanad and randomly selected seven Grama Panchayats¹⁴. A seventh Panchayat was selected from Trivandrum district more because we felt the need to study in some depth the interesting experiences from Karakulam Panchayat. A separate section is devoted later to this discussion, as it throws up a different set of issues related to the decentralization process. Our analysis is mostly focused on the Grama Panchayats as Primary and Elementary Education come under their purview.

A word or two about the districts chosen

The primary reason for choosing the districts of Thrissur and Wayanad was that they represent districts with high and low literacy rates in the state, respectively (Thrissur, 92.56% and Wayanad, 85.52%, as per the census 2001 data. In both districts, the male literacy rate is higher than that of the female). Given the overall scenario of the state, we wanted to choose districts with significant differences in key indicators such as literacy.

Wayanad district

Situated in the North-eastern part of Kerala, Wayanad was formed as the state's 12th district. It is home to many indigenous tribes and the district as a whole is hilly, with altitudes ranging from 700-2100 m above sea level. The three main tribes are the Paniyas, Adiyas, and Kurichyas. Together, they constitute nearly 18% of the district's population of 7.8 lakh people. Most of the tribal people are laborers, while many belonging to the Kurichyas have small land holdings. On the whole, the educational status of tribal children is worrisome, as the DISE data for 2007-07 shows (only 25% of the tribal children are enrolled in formal primary school, while the percentage at the upper primary level is even lower at 17%). Though the overall SC population of the district is small, at 4.3%, the enrollment of SC children in schools is also low, going by DISE data.

This high altitude district is characterized by the cultivation of perennial crops/spices. The major plantation crops include coffee, pepper, cardamom and rubber. Rice fields are in the valleys formed by the hillocks. Indeed, Wayanad is often referred to as the 'land of the paddy fields.'

Thrissur district

Situated in the central part of Kerala, Thrissur was formed as a district in 1949. It is an important cultural center and is often called the 'Cultural Capital of Kerala.' The district is famous for its numerous ancient temples, churches and mosques. The region that comprises the district has an ancient history, and has played a significant role in the political history of South India. Hindus (dominated by the Nairs and Ezhavas), Christians (mainly Catholics) and Muslims (mainly Sunnis) constitute the bulk of the district. SCs at 11% also form a significant portion of the population, while the ST population is very low at 0.2%. Thrissur is also known for its textile mills, coir, tile and timber industries which generate much employment for its people.

From an educational point of view, the headquarters of KSSP is located at Thrissur. KSSP has played a very active role in strengthening school education in the district. In particular, KSSP activists have played important roles in the PPC, as grassroots workers, teachers, TAG/EWG members and so on.

It is also striking that 68% of all schools in the district are private schools (both government aided and unaided), as compared to 39% in Wayanad district. The private schools do not come under Panchayat jurisdiction, though there is now a move to change this. The private school managements are not comfortable with this move and are resisting it.

Perhaps the best way to understand what has happened is to study Panchayat budgets at the GP level allocated specifically for the education of children. This, we have done for the selected Panchayats over a period of five years (2003-04 to 2007-08). Before we discuss the budgets, it would help to broadly look at the types of educational interventions undertaken by Panchayats. The table below provides this overview. Four distinct areas emerge, though it must be added that not all Panchayats look at these areas uniformly and with the same degree of depth and consistency.

¹⁴ The Panchayats are Adat, Mattathoor, Alagappa Nagar and Nenmanikkara (from Thrissur district) and (Sultan Bathery and Noopuzha) from Wayanad district. Karakulam Panchayat was selected from Trivandrum district.

Intervention area	Brief description
Early Childhood Development	Essentially, this includes support to the ICDS program. The supplementary nutrition component is routed through the Panchayats. In some cases, the Panchayats augment this component with activities like milk supply to the centres, for instance. Other common items include building construction, repair and maintenance for ICDS, furniture and material supplies (including vessels and toys/play materials). Panchayats also pay an additional honorarium to the worker (Rs.150/- per month) and helper (Rs.75/- per month) at the Anganawadi, the rationale being that they do much more work in addition to looking after the centre. There are some examples of Panchayat intervention in the pre-primary sections attached to schools especially for supplementary nutrition. It is claimed that most of the building development as far as ICDS is concerned, is due to Panchayat intervention in the last 3-4 years.
School Development	This includes a range of activities, though the big ticket seems to be infrastructure development, which includes construction of buildings, compound wall, playground, renovation, maintenance and repair, kitchen garden development, school supplies like furniture, play and lab equipment, library books, fans etc. Few Panchayats have supported purchase and/or development of T-L materials, and only one Panchayat (Karakulam) has actually developed an additional text material for children and teachers, while another has supplied computers to its primary schools and organized computer classes by external faculty. SSA contribution is a common area across all Panchayats; they are required to deposit 35% of the SSA plan amount for their Panchayat. SSA develops this plan and requests the said amount from each Panchayat. The Panchayat does not have much to do with the planning and implementation of the SSA component.
Direct (academic) support to children	Most of this comes in the form of extra coaching for students appearing in the 10th standard exams. In a few cases, Panchayats also support this extra coaching for students from other classes as well. A common activity is the provision of refreshments during these extra classes which are invariably conducted by the schoolteachers at no extra pay. Some Panchayats specifically focus on SC/other deprived children in terms of supplying them with 'educational kits' or nursery materials, as well as providing them with special tuition.
Extra Curricular activities	This finds mention here almost entirely due to the efforts of the Karakulam Panchayat, which has undertaken some innovative activities for the past ten years. These include the development of the 'Kala Gramam' (a cultural activity centre where children are provided a year long training on traditional dance forms, music and folklore) and 'Operation Olympia', an effort to identify and nurture sports talent, especially in swimming, football, athletics and basketball (the Panchayat has even constructed a separate swimming pool for this purpose, and has hired special faculty). The Alagappa Nagar Panchayat has also done this activity, albeit sporadically. Some Panchayats have instituted 'Children's Panchayats' which are modelled on the Panchayat, and whose objective is to give children a sense of the political processes of participation and decision making in Panchayats. The Karakulam Panchayat has also conducted workshops for children as part of the children's Panchayat activity, on themes like pollution, parliamentary practice, health issues, challenges of facing alcoholism in the family and community, etc. A few Panchayats have organized children's camps on science, supported by the KSSP.

Budget details are provided for all the selected Panchayats (see Annexure 1). We have not reflected expenditure statements as these were not readily available; we were also told that in the past 3-4 years, expenditure levels have been more than 85%. A perusal of budgets 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 – 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.

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. We did not come across any other activity of the Panchayat with respect to tuition classes in terms of developing teaching-learning or revision material. In most cases, tuition classes appear 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 did we find a strong emphasis on extracurricular activity in the form of ‘Operation Olympia’ and the ‘Kala Gramam’ programs that have now been on for a decade. 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). In Karakulam, as we shall later see, this idea came out of the experience of developing an additional text material to educate children on the idea of Panchayati Raj. Elsewhere, other Panchayats have picked it up, though it is difficult to ascertain the seriousness, depth and sense of purpose in this activity.

From the above observations, it is clear that Panchayats have mostly engaged in the non-academic or non-pedagogical aspects of Early Childhood or School Education. The notion of quality, though not articulated anywhere explicitly, seems to be one of augmenting infrastructure, supplying materials and providing tuitions. In a few cases, like that of Karakulam, there is emphasis on doing much outside the purview of the school, as in organizing spaces to enable children to hone their sporting skills (Operation Olympia) or to discover their cultural traditions, as in the case of the Kala Gramam initiative. On the whole, as we can see, Panchayats are not engaging then with educational issues in a deeper manner. As we have kept noting at different places in this chapter, there is little or no intervention that involves the teaching-learning process itself. Is this because this area (that is, teachers and the curriculum) does not come under the Panchayats (it is directly under the control and influence of the education department), or is it because the Panchayats have not put together the needed architecture/expertise to intervene in these matters? Can we also say that the education of children is not high on the agenda of the Panchayat? In fact, most of the current activities we see do not really require much engagement, as they can all be contracted out to a third party who will be involved in construction, maintenance or in supply of material. In terms of amounts, budget allocations in early childhood development and school education by Panchayats ranges from 5% to 10% of total Panchayat budgets¹⁵.

¹⁵ We have considered the total Panchayat budget as that which includes the state plan outlay as well as resources generated by the Panchayat through collection of revenues, taxes etc.

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.

There are two other studies that have attempted to map educational activity of the Panchayats (Mukundan, 2004 and Sharma, 2003). Their key observations are noted below.

Mukundan notes from a study of 18 Grama Panchayats in Kannur district that the Panchayat Development Reports (PDR) identified a wide range of educational aspects in their narratives. However, concerning the issues of quality and learning achievements in children, these reports were superficial. He goes on to note that most educational projects were mainly based on a 'state-level framework' and there was no evidence of thinking based on local needs and priorities. Further:

'Almost 90% of the (educational) projects were related to noon-feeding programs, scholarships and uniform distribution, teaching-learning aids distribution, awareness camps for parents and teachers, construction of toilets and cooking sheds, repairs and drinking water. Most Panchayat projects replicated and overlapped with parallel projects of the General Education Department.'

As we have already noted, when the two key elements – the teacher and his/her development, and the development of curricula and textbooks, are still vested with the departmental bureaucrats who act in accordance with the Kerala Education and Service Rules, there is little scope for Panchayats to enter into these areas. Teachers and educational officers at the district and sub district levels, for instance, feel that they are more accountable to the department and its bureaucrats than to the local communities. Mukundan further notes '...even when Panchayats did develop projects, only a minority, most of them related to construction of buildings and toilets, were implemented as planned...the softer, qualitative sides of education proved much more difficult to address...' Much of this actually depends on the kind of expertise that the Panchayats can actually tap at their level.

Sharma's observations (2003) too mirror what we have presented so far. This study mapped the entire activity of 12 Panchayats across three districts (Thrissur, Wayanad and Trivandrum). Education as an activity too features in this study. She concludes:

"Education is clearly not a high priority for the Grama Panchayats. Among the way in which general issues are defined, lack of infrastructure in education appears in only one GP in Wayanad and the investment in education, too, is paltry. As in the case of agriculture, the key issues in education elude the GP's. The dynamic of privatization of education, a key issue, is beyond their grasp. Quality improvement, a highly complex task, is attempted largely in the form of provision of infrastructure. GP's do attempt to address issues related to students from weaker sections, and some efforts to provide remedial coaching, educational tours and other benefits for such students are indicated. However, while an improvement in the school building and some focused programs for weak students are positive developments, and improve the situation of education in the GP somewhat, these are not likely to bring about a major shift in the educational scenario."

From the above observations, we may note at least three aspects. The first is that decentralization by itself does not automatically result in the strengthening of technical and conceptual expertise in an area. This is certainly more so in the case of the domain of education, where we are not merely talking about putting in place buildings and supplying materials and equipments. What is required is a more serious and deeper engagement with a

complex area. From our study of what Panchayats are doing in education, the core issues of knowledge, teaching and learning, seemed to have been by passed by the Panchayats. Despite the presence of the EWG's and the TAG's, we see little evidence of Panchayats breaking new ground. This may partly be due to the lack of expertise or capacity in the EWG's and also due to the fact that the TAG's are involved more at the stage of scrutiny of a plan/project rather than at the stage of its preparation and formulation. Decentralization, therefore, demands much more capacity building for educational tasks other than establishment of buildings and provision of supplies. As a district level TAG member in Thrissur notes, 'Nowadays, the presence of computers in all the Panchayat offices allows them to cut and paste previous years' plans. As a district level TAG member, I have very little work to do, since there is nothing much that is being planned by way of new activity or innovation.'

The second aspect is related to the boundaries of decision making in education. This is where existing state policy is bound to have implications for decision making at the local level. As long as policies related to the teacher and the curriculum are fully vested with the state and central levels there is very little that Panchayats can do beyond what they are already doing. In this sense, it is understandable that Panchayats will attempt simplistic solutions or look at complex issues like education in a simplistic way. This explains why infrastructure and physical provisioning are a predominant occupation of the Panchayats. This also explains why Panchayats appear to be least involved with the SSA, a central scheme for the Universalization of Elementary Education in which decisions are still very centralized. This is discussed in the next section.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Panchayats

As mentioned earlier, the three-tier system is expected to contribute 35% of the funds for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan at the district level. Another 20% is contributed by the state, while the remaining 45% is provided by the centre.

SSA prepares a district plan in which the amounts to be contributed by each GP is specified. The number of school, number of teachers and children are the key variables that determine how much each Panchayat needs to contribute to the SSA. On the whole, each Grama Panchayat is expected to contribute 35% of the total outlay. The following table illustrates how this works at the district and block levels in one selected block of Thrissur district (see table below for data on Kodakara block, one of seven blocks of Thrissur district).

Sl. no	Intervention/activity	Unit cost	No. of units	Total outlay	PRI share (35%)
1	Remedial teaching	32350	7	226450	79258
2	a) Management and MIS	28571	7	199997	--
	b) Lrg enhancement program	10476	7	73332	25666
3	School grant	--	53	299000	104650
4	Teacher grant	500	421	210500	73675
5	Free supply – textbooks		11402	2152900	753515
6	IEDC	900	282	253800	88830
7	AIE	--	0	--	--
8	Teacher Training	1500	421	631500	221025
9	Maintenance/Repair grant	7500	13	97500	34125
10	Civil Works	--	0		
	a) Furniture	500	125	62500	21875
	b) Girls toilets	30000	0		
11	Innovative Education		0		
	a) Girls education	7143	7	50001	
	b) SC/ST children	7143	7	50001	17500
	c) Early Childhood Edu	400	208	83200	

	d) Computer Education	23809	7	166663	58332
	e) Educationally backward	1290	7	33201	11620
12	Community leaders' training	895	7	6265	2193
13	Research and evaluation	1300	53	68900	24115
14	Functioning of BRC	105771	7	740397	259139
15	Functioning of CRC	7600	5	38000	13300
	Total			54,44,107	17,88,818

* All figures in Indian Rupees

It is clear from the above table that there is a fixed format for the SSA plan. The Panchayat does not have to do anything more than deposit its contribution in the SSA account at the district level. From the data available, the contribution of the seven Grama Panchayats in Kodakara block ranges from 1.7 lakhs to 3.5 lakhs depending on the size of the Panchayat, i.e., the number of schools, teachers and children in the Panchayat. In fact, the calculation of this amount is also done by the SSA district office. The implementation and monitoring of the activities is done entirely by the SSA. From the table above, what is striking is the uniformity of the plan. For example, under item 11 titled 'Innovative Education', which would perhaps imply innovative approaches based on need, the unit costs across the block and district are all the same. How will this permit an approach that is based on individual and local needs and issues? Even items 12 and 13, on Community Leaders' Training and Research and Evaluation have been allotted fixed amounts. These are activities that can be developed in diverse ways. It is easy to understand why there is a fixed format – it makes monitoring and implementation easy. Multiplicity/diversity would be more challenging to manage. All of this fits in easily with the current centralized way in which education works.

For our discussion, it is important to study the linkages between the SSA and the Panchayats. The questions are: Are Panchayats involved in the planning of the SSA activities, or is the SSA plan made independent of the Panchayat? What role do they play at the planning stage? Is the SSA component whetted by them, for instance? How are they responsible for the activities under SSA? From discussions with Panchayat representatives, this does not appear to be the case. It seems that the Panchayat plan is quite independent of that of the SSA, which, as we have seen, follows a fixed format. This goes against the grain of decentralized planning. Further, how does the SSA component influence what the Panchayat does outside of SSA (that is, the non-SSA component)?

From these observations, it is clear that the Panchayats 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. The linkages between the GP's and SSA are weak. A comment that we have often heard from Panchayat members is that 'SSA has adversely affected the decentralization process in Kerala. There are too many minute directions given by SSA...it is a set scheme.' A striking feature of the budget data is that the Grama 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.

The above example of the SSA and the Panchayats points out the challenges of undertaking joint planning that involves convergence of resources. This is a crucial element that is an integral aspect of the process of political, financial and administrative devolution. In specific terms, as far as education is concerned, funds are available at the district and sub-district

levels in the three tier Panchayat system, the SSA, and the MP-LAD (up to rupees one crore) and MLA-LAD (up to rupees 75 lakhs) schemes. What is however needed is the notion of a 'master plan' which can provide for an integration of funds as well. Such an attempt is being tried out in the Kodakara block of Thrissur district, a first of its kind in Kerala. Thanks to the efforts of the local MLA, the block has been declared as an e-learning, e-governance and e-communication constituency, involving a convergence of all the financial resources available in the block. As part of the e-learning and communication efforts, all government and government aided schools have been supplied with computers. High schools are also supplied an LCD projector. The idea is to link all schools through a network that can be used by children and teachers to interact for sharing of ideas, experiences etc.

The Karakulam case

Are there any examples of LSGIs in Kerala going beyond what has been discussed in previous sections? If so, what are the experiences? The case of the Karakulam Panchayat in Trivandrum district is illustrative and there is much that we can learn from it.

Starting 1998, the Karakulam Panchayat initiated a number of activities that got school going children, adolescents and youth involved. In 1998, the Panchayat started an Integrated Information Technology Centre – essentially, this was targeted at adolescents, youth, school going children and women in an effort to provide access to information technology and bridge the digital divide. Also, as part of the Kudumbasree initiative (a poverty reduction program of the state focusing on women's organization), adolescent groups were also formed in the KK Panchayat. Primarily, this was intended to create awareness on matters related to health and hygiene.

Over a period of time, these activities provided children and adolescents in these groups a space for articulation of their questions, concerns and thoughts on a number of issues that seemed to bother them. Social issues, health and hygiene figured repeatedly in conversations with children. For instance, many children voiced their concerns about the selling and consumption of Paan Masala/Gutkha in the vicinity and asked the Panchayat why it was not doing anything about it. These and many other similar questions were put to the Panchayat from time to time. This triggered the thinking, in 2003/04, about starting a 'Bala Panchayat' (Children's Panchayat, or 'Kuttigala Panchayat') in Karakulam. Grama Sabhas exclusively meant for children, were promoted with the view to educate children into the political processes. The idea was that such processes would make adolescents more aware of developments around them besides giving them an opportunity to participate in developments that impacted their lives.

The other important idea that emerged from the above deliberations was about the bringing out of a book for children regarding the Panchayat itself – why was it set up, what it was meant to be doing, what it has done in Karakulam and so on. Essentially, the book was meant to inform children about local self governing institutions, their roles etc. It was felt that children were not aware about Panchayats even after a decade after the state Panchayat Act – the book was expected bridge this gap and help prepare the next generation of citizens who would be aware of their rights and responsibilities. The Panchayat was encouraged to prepare a book on these lines, given that the state Panchayat Raj Act actually stated that Panchayats were expected to 'manage' all government and government aided educational institutions (schools) under their jurisdiction.

The 'Grameena Pattana Kendram', a local NGO (*more about the connection between GPK and KK Panchayat later*) helped in the development of the book titled 'Puttigalku Panchayat'

(Panchayat for Children) which was prepared during the school academic year of 2006/07. A handbook for teachers was also prepared. The Panchayat invited the headmasters to share the book, and encouraged them to use it as ‘additional text’ in their schools. As one Panchayat member noted, ‘The teachers seemed happy with the book and used it for a period of 3-4 months...’

‘Puttigalku Panchayat’ – the book at the centre of a controversy

First of all, what does this book contain? The preface of the book states that it is meant for primary and secondary level students, and that it can be used as a guide or additional text by teachers to help children get a clear idea about the Panchayati Raj system. It is envisaged that the theme of local self governance will become part of the school curriculum *in future*.

Starting from the rudiments of democracy, the book provides a clear perspective about the key features of Panchayati Raj – its rules, structure, responsibilities, Panchayats, citizen’s rights, role of Grama Sabhas, transparency in administration, social auditing, developing civic sense in children and other aspects which are integral to decentralised governance. The emergence of the Local Self Governance Institutions (LSGI) in the State has been presented through simple illustrations. The book provides a historical perspective about the role of civic bodies in the erstwhile States of Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. The legislations passed from time to time unto the latest Panchayati Raj Bill passed by the Assembly in 1994 and the transition of the LSGIs as local governments have been introduced lucidly.

Another striking feature is the detail about the role and significance of Grama Sabhas. Children can develop a clear impression about the link between Grama Sabhas and democracy and how their participation will help to improve their lives and those of others in their neighbourhood. The book also explains the rights and responsibilities of citizens including their right to seek information for the betterment of society.

When everything seemed to be going well, the book on Panchayats for children and teachers got engulfed in a controversy. Karakulam Panchayat members feel that it needlessly became a political issue. Local politicians, aided by the media, did not welcome the idea of a Panchayat developing reading material for children, even if it was meant to be ‘additional’ material, outside the school curriculum and syllabus. This was dubbed as an attempt of the LSGIs to intervene in academic matters of the school. As long as the Panchayat was developing infrastructure, organizing tuition classes etc, it was playing its role. Developing materials/literature for classroom usage was seen as an instance where the Panchayat was exceeding its mandate. While most teachers did not mind using this material, according to the Panchayat, some teachers who were averse to be directed by the Panchayat on academic matters and who were not keen on doing ‘extra’ work, fuelled the controversy which went all the way up to the state level. The Panchayat was then asked to withdraw the book from the schools.

Another interpretation of the controversy is that ‘Puttigalku Panchayat’ was actually called a textbook. This was in fact done upfront, on the cover of the book itself! Further, the Panchayat Development Plan for the year 2007/08 stated the following:

“KK has done something which no other PRI in the state has done...when ordinary schools concentrate on prescribed syllabus, KK has attempted to provide knowledge based on local history. So also, children are not usually aware of the local self government system which has developed during the past years. KK initiated a new venture to prepare a textbook intended to provide knowledge about the local self govt. system. Based on this book, training modules also have been developed. This year, we have decided to include this text in the syllabus in the schools of KK.”

Apparently, this raised the hackles of those involved in textbook writing and those who believed that the development of curricula and textbooks are solely the responsibility of the state government and not the Panchayats. Reflecting on these developments, GPK representatives feel that people in government are ready for ‘peripheral changes but not systemic changes.’

Situating the Karakulam experience in a broader discussion

How do we interpret the Karakulam experience? It raises the question of the boundaries of decentralized decision making for children’s education. In this regard, what roles should the Panchayats play? What are their boundaries? We must first engage in a broader discussion and then situate the Karakulam experience within the frame of this discussion.

In our reflections on Kerala, we have seen that despite significant devolution in terms of finances and mechanisms for development of local plans and for local level decision making, matters related to teachers – their selection and appointment and their transfers, are outside the purview of the Panchayats. Similarly, Panchayats are not expected to play any role that would be seen as influencing *what* children learn (that is, in terms of content). This is left to state level institutions which frame curricula and design subject specific textbooks. Thus, Panchayats have only secondary/peripheral roles to play, as the key matters related to the teacher and curricula/syllabi/textbooks are all under the education department at the state level.

Further, examples such as those of Karakulam bring into focus the issues related to ‘common’ textbooks, multiplicity of textbooks, the notion of curriculum and textbook, the debate between promoting uniformity and allowing plurality, and so on. These must be examined in our discussion. First, let us take for discussion the idea of the common textbook. The problem seems to lie with the notion that *a* textbook, produced centrally by one authority, must be used by *all* schools in the state. In this case, the government and some private publishers¹⁶ undertake the task of producing textbooks based on some agreed upon curriculum at the state level. Thus, we have been so far following a homogenized and central approach to textbook making. On the other hand, our (more nuanced) understanding and knowledge of children’s learning and development tells us that learning happens well when the content of curricula is made contextual and is more rooted in the child’s experiences and knowledge that are embedded in culture. But who is to undertake the task of producing a multiplicity of textbooks? The NCF 2005, which takes into cognizance such a possibility under the current Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) states in this regard (in Section 2.5, page 9 of the National Focus Group document on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks):

‘...endorse this need and recommend that the NCERT and other national bodies must consciously promote building of capacities in decentralized curriculum development and textbook production, in the states and at the district level.’

More than four decades ago, the Kothari Commission had also explored the notion (albeit cautiously) of a multiplicity of textbooks and curricula (Section 9.21):

“No useful purpose is served by having only one textbook in a subject for a given class – this is almost invariably the position under the existing programmes of nationalization. It should be an important policy to have at least three or four books in each subject for each

¹⁶ Private unaided schools, in particular, use textbooks prepared by private publishers. To that extent, there is ‘choice’. These textbooks are invariably based on syllabi such as the ICSE, CBSE and so on.

class...there should be more than one approved syllabus and each school should be permitted to adopt the syllabus best suited to its own condition.”

Examples of such an approach do not currently exist within the government schooling system in India.

When we engage further with the curriculum and textbook issue we realize that, notwithstanding the fact that several states produce their own textbooks and conduct their own board examinations, the notions of curriculum and syllabus are co-terminus with the textbook. Indeed, the textbook is still considered as the only indicator of what needs to be ‘covered’ to enable the child to pass the examination! It is looked at as the equivalent of the curriculum. Such a narrow view prevents a deeper understanding of the place and role of the curriculum in fostering children’s learning and development. A more comprehensive understanding of the curriculum is in line with the description of Winch (also quoted in the NCF 2005):

“Curriculum is, perhaps, best thought of as that set of planned activities which are designed to implement a particular educational aim – set of aims – in terms of the content of what is to be taught and the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be deliberately fostered.”

If this represents a broader notion of curriculum, we can immediately see that it permits us to have a multiplicity of textbooks and other teaching-learning resources. It does not any longer offer a pride of place to *a single* textbook, nor does it imply that the textbook is the only reference point for the teaching-learning process. The textbook is no longer the ‘Bible’, as many teachers would like to believe. The above definition does not however tell us much about decentralized decision making regarding the curriculum or any other teaching resources for that matter. For that, one would need to invoke the idea that local context and diversity is important and has its place in the curriculum, and therefore needs to be reflected in textbooks, other teaching-learning resources and classroom pedagogy. This in turn is intimately linked to the idea of decentralization.

One last point, before we return to the Karakulam example. The issue of decentralizing and diversifying curricula also points out to the need to have appropriate mechanisms to ensure quality and conformance with commonly agreed upon standards of attainment. Further, multiple curricula must also be seen within a broad democratic vision. Taking these concerns into account, the NCF 2005 suggests that ‘appropriate regulatory mechanisms be created by establishing an independent body at the state level with a federal national structure to approve different curricular packages, which include textbooks, teacher training and recruitment processes, assessment and examinations, etc’ (Section 2.5)

In the light of the above discussion, how do we understand the Karakulam experience? We are here not talking about an alternate textbook that contested with existing ones brought out by the state. On the other hand, the Panchayat brought out a book which at best was intended as an additional or supplementary text. Nevertheless, the intervention can be deemed as a curricular one, as the Panchayat expected the teachers to allocate some time as part of their daily class routines/plans to transact the book. The book itself was prepared with the help of a local NGO, the Grameena Pattana Kendram with the involvement of competent persons who designed, wrote and illustrated it. Thus, ‘Puttigalku Panchayat’ can be said to meet at least the basic notions of quality of teaching-learning material for teachers and children. Therefore it cannot be rejected on the grounds of poor quality/presentation. The problem seems more to be about allowing or creating space for a decentralized and independent (yet accountable) process of determining what children should learn (in this case, beyond the centrally

prescribed texts). In some ways, the Karakulam experience makes us ask the question that if a local body has the capacity or can summon the capacity to get more deeply involved in education, then why should not this be allowed to happen?

It is illustrative to note the position of the state on this issue. Nearly fifty years after the Kerala State Education were formulated (in 1959), the government decided to revise them in 2008. The Kerala Education Act Rules (KEAR) report, which was finalized in early 2008¹⁷, has the following to say by way of defining the contours of LSGIs vis-à-vis children's education:

“...Before leaving this theme, it is necessary to allay certain apprehensions widely and repeatedly expressed in the media about the scope and extent of the interventions of LSGIs in school education. To put the record straight and to dispel any erroneous notions that may have crept in the minds of the general public, the committee wishes to clarify that it has not recommended the intervention of LSGIs in any of the following matters: framing of curriculum and syllabus; preparation, printing and distribution of textbooks; mode of payment of salary to teaching and non-teaching staff or disciplinary action against them.” (P.12 of the report)

This is in contradiction with the spirit of the earlier discussion regarding multiplicity of curricular packages and textbooks.

Summing up

In the preceding pages, the experiences of Kerala with respect to decentralization have been described in some detail. In particular, the People's Planning Campaign, through which the state has attempted devolution, has been focused upon. The creation of structures and mechanisms of the PPC to create space for increased people's participation, have also been noted. In particular, the implications of the PPC for the education of children feature in this study, through the selected districts and Panchayats.

How do we understand the Kerala scenario? There is no doubt that important and remarkable developments have taken place in Kerala in the last decade with respect to decentralization. These do not have any parallel in other regions of the country. The steps taken by the government towards significant fiscal devolution are a clear indication that there have been serious efforts to place more resources in the hands of the sub district structures all the way down to the Grama Panchayats. Further, the creation of working groups, standing committees and technical advisory groups for education at different levels is also a serious effort to promote, broaden and deepen the nature and scope of people's involvement in matters that affect their lives, including the education of their children. Yet, when one looks at the experiences so far with respect to children's education, it is clear that the LSGIs have played a limited role so far. Analysis of budgets, which are a clear indicator of plans and priorities, tell us that on the whole, Panchayats have ended up providing doing 'more of the same'. This has often included infrastructure provision, material supply, additional nutrition support, tuition support and so on. There are very few instances, as in the case of Karakulam Panchayat, to move beyond these well trodden paths. Even here, the state has intervened to curtail the activity of the Panchayat. Given these experiences, one may ask – is a genuine decentralization taking place? In using the term 'genuine' with respect to decentralization, one implies the space available for contribution of perspectives from below, a point touched upon in the introductory chapter. In the Kerala, the creation of this space does not seem to have occurred, though there are structures created for nurturing it. As an example, the nature and extent of involvement of PRIs in SSA only serves to underline that the provision of

¹⁷ The report is still being discussed and is yet to come into implementation.

education continues to be by and large a centralized phenomenon, so much so, that PRIs are not in the know of how SSA makes its plans and implements them on the ground. The message thus seems to be clear even if it is implicit -- that the LSGIs can at best play peripheral roles in a state controlled model of education.

The above observations will also need to be seen in the larger context of the current 'public mood' in the state vis-à-vis the education of children. An instrumental view of education seems to still prevail by and large, where the task perceived is the improvement in learning levels of children, and an improvement in examination results (the latter is considered more important). Parents often perceive educational quality by these indicators, and schools are only too happy to be catering to this perception. From the point of view of educating the child, no one is denying that these end results are not important. But when the focus on them becomes exclusive in terms of the links between education and employment/careers, the space for reflections about education in terms of its overall purpose and possibilities shrinks.

Perhaps this what the State Education Commission of 2004 had in mind when it noted: "The quality of education in terms of Academic inputs, equipping the students to the changing environment, practical training and inculcating values have not been given due importance so far...There is an urgent need to make school education 'student centered'. The classroom transaction, the curricular and extra-curricular activities and other inputs ought to be student-oriented." The commission further noted that "...while the concern for quality is by itself a positive factor, quality in educational processes would materialize only if concern is matched with tough decisions and rigorous action." It is striking that these concerns were articulated in Kerala a decade after the introduction of DPEP, with its attempts to reform the textbooks, teacher training and pedagogy. In a state where human development indicators are way above the rest of the country, observations such as these reveal that these achievements are by themselves no indication of how one approaches the child's education. They do not necessarily guarantee that current educational practice is grounded on deeper reflections of its socio-political purpose and possibility.

The space available for LSGIs, and the role that they can play, is intimately linked to this overall public mood. Increasingly, even as the rhetoric of 'progressive pedagogy' continues, on the ground there is a movement towards the admission of more and more children in private schools. Parents who can afford private schooling for their children, believe that these schools, with their emphasis on marks/grades and examinations, will provide a better future' for their children than government schools. The LSGIs stand at the crossroads of these developments. From all accounts so far, the structures and processes created through the PPC have only played a supplementary role. Serious engagement is still far away.

One final word -- during the course of the study, we learnt about the existence of 'Panchayat Schools'. Though data on the exact number of schools is not readily available, it is learnt that there may only be a few hundred schools in all, throughout the state. Over the years, the number of Panchayat schools has come down in number. At one point in time, then, the idea of Panchayats completely managing their own schools, flourished. Why was this idea not pursued? Is it because Kerala's Panchayats were perceived not to be capable enough to manage these schools? Or, is it because the education department wanted to vest complete control over the system? Or, is it because Panchayat managements were perceived to be no different from the managements of private schools over which the government has little control? Whatever may be the reason it difficult not to believe that the opportunity to provide Panchayats more space in the education of children was missed.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION AND DECENTRALISATION – THE ELUSIVE MIX

An Analysis of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Education in Rajasthan

The experiences of the state of Rajasthan with respect to decentralized educational governance will be discussed in this chapter. While the state has witnessed externally funded projects like Shiksha Karmi (SK) and Lok Jumbish Pariyojna (LJP) which pioneered, during the decade of the nineties, local community participation in education, the sustainability and mainstreaming of those efforts into state-wide institutional mechanisms of decentralization has not taken place with subsequent large scale programs like the DPEP and the SSA. This has resulted in a peculiar situation in the state wherein elementary education is currently completely devoid of substantive community content, except for notional and mostly defunct bodies like SDMC. Tracking this historical trajectory of decentralization provides us lessons for rejuvenating the same.

Prior to embarking on an understanding on decentralization and education in Rajasthan, a few caveats are in order, as this chapter does not follow the contours of the previous chapter. This is for two reasons. One, the content and context of decentralization is divergent from that available in Kerala, and two, the experience of key stakeholders in negotiating decentralization in education varies substantially. These reasons have led to devising methods of data collection and field investigation which were different from that of Kerala. To illustrate, the authors were not able to undertake any substantive analysis of PRI budgets (or spending) on primary education in Rajasthan as it was done in the case of Kerala. Similarly, analysis of the role of the Panchayat from the stakeholders' point of view in terms of 'what is happening and what ought to happen' framework, which yielded results in the case of Kerala, was not as appropriate in the case with Rajasthan as the stakeholders we engaged with shared their views from the point of view of difficulties and problems of negotiating the ideas of decentralization in education. In this sense, what is described in Rajasthan is far more rudimentary in terms of ideas and functioning of decentralization in contrast with Kerala.

This the chapter begins with a brief profile of the state education scenario, followed by a discussion of the decentralization experience, views of people engaged in education, supplemented by observations from the sites visited. Finally, a brief summary of the state's experience is provided at the end.

The context

The North Western state of Rajasthan is characterized largely as a semi-arid and arid region, with low rainfall and harsh climatic conditions. The state has to its west the famous Thar Desert and its western districts border Pakistan. The state is predominantly rural in character. With about 24 per cent of the population living in urban areas, there are handful of major cities and urban agglomerations, which attract migrating populations for employment.

In terms of the conventional indicators used, Rajasthan is characterized as one of the 'educationally backward' states of India. Though several large scale education projects have been implemented in the state since the late eighties, significant challenges to universal elementary education persist with regard to school infrastructure, primary level gender disparity (at 7% at least), primary level drop out rate (at 58%) and out of school children (at 6%). Further, the difference between male and female literacy as per the 2001 census data, is significant (males, at 75.7%, and females at 43.9%). The sex ratio is also adverse, at 921 females for every 1000 males.

One important feature in Rajasthan's education development is the presence of a large number of NGOs of national repute working in the field of education. The state boasts of having some important educational resource centers of the country like Vidya Bhavan Society, Digantar Shiksha Evam Khelkud Samiti, Sandhan and Bodh Shiksha Samiti, apart from other well known NGOs like Urmul, which has been working in Western Rajasthan since the mid eighties. Another NGO, the Social Work and Research Center (SWRC, at Tilonia), is often credited with the concept of the 'Night Schools', seen as a precursor to the Shiksha Karmi project. These institutions have pioneered in expanding education access, enhancing quality and in providing technical inputs for government in implementing programmes like Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi. 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, as mentioned in the introductory remarks, 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 the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi initiated, which played an important role in creating an enabling environment for educational development efforts from below. These programmes have created cadres of dedicated personnel, and have provided good examples of community mobilization and empowerment in education.

It must be noted that the historical conditions for decentralization which favored positively in case of Kerala are absent when we look at Rajasthan. As it is well known, there is a history of the state in which the political structures of the state have been governed by feudal gentry (this is true even now, though to a lesser extent). This has effectively resulted in inaction as far as democratic decentralization is concerned. Low levels of literacy, high presence of ST population and low density of population (leading to isolation and marginalization), social evils like child marriages and low awareness among the populace in general and absence of progressive social and political movements have also 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 decade, 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. It may be too early to assume drastic changes, as we shall see in the case study of Rajasthan, where decentralization in education is far less and the agenda is far from over.

Education scenario: a snapshot

Over the last two 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 is still high, at 41%. The enrollment in these schools is below 30%. Only 17.5% schools have 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. While statistics do provide some solace that the state is ahead of other educationally backward states like Bihar and Jharkhand, the inability of the state to achieve universalization of elementary education is a reality to be confronted with.

Panchayat Raj Institutions 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/Grama Panchayat (for each village), followed by Panchayat Samiti (for each block) and Zilla Parishad (for each district). The foundational structure viz., village panchayat is constituted with the members directly elected. the rest of the structures have representatives from the lower tiers of panchayat raj structures. Coopted members like Members of Legislative Assembly, Parliament etc are also part of Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.

One important feature of local self government structures in the state is that they follow statutory reservations for women, SC and ST population as well as backward castes in membership as well as in rotation of leadership. Such provisions are in accordance with the constitutional mandate of 33 per cent women reservations and representation in proportion to population in the case of SC, ST and backward castes. With respect to implementation of activities under panchayats, it is to be noted that the system of 'Standing Committees' for development portfolios like education, public works, basic services and economic services, exists in Rajasthan. Such 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. Elaborate procedures are laid down for such standing committees in terms of their functioning. Thus, on paper, while people's representatives are expected to provide political leadership, the bureaucracy comprising the Village Development Officer, Block Development Officer and Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad provide bureaucratic leadership. (See box below for details on Standing Committees as mentioned in the Act.)

“... Standing Committees of a Panchayat.- (1) Every Panchayat shall constitute standing committee, one each for the following group of subjects, namely:
(a) Administration and Establishment;
(b) Finance and Taxation;
(c) development and production programmes, including those relating to agriculture, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, co-operation, cottage industries and other allied subjects;
(d) Education; and
(e) Social services and social justice including rural water supply, health and sanitation, gramdan, communication, welfare of weaker sections and allied subjects.
Source: Rajasthan PR Act of 1994

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. For example, only committed expenditure like 'salaries' are transferred to the Panchayat bodies which would mean there will be no choice of PR bodies in terms of development planning. Even the spending of own resources generated by Panchayats are governed by the rules of the state government.

The Administrative Reforms Commission set up by the state government in the year 1999 under the chairmanship of Shiv Charan Mathur, a former Chief Minister of the state 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.

A more recent development that could have positive implications for overall decentralized governance is the link between the PRIs and departments like the DRDA¹⁸ (District Rural Development Agency). The state government has taken the measure of appointing the Zilla Parishad Pramukh (chief of District Panchayat) as the chairperson of DRDA. The responsibility of planning and implementation of DRDA schemes is thus vested with the Zilla Parishad. Another development is the legislation whereby all Gram Panchayat Presidents (i.e., the Sarpanch) have been made members of respective Panchayat Samiti and similarly all Pradhans (President of the block level Samiti) have been made members of Zilla Parishads. This has the potential to restore the much-needed link between Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.

In sum as pointed out by the mid term review of 10th plan, some developments did take place in Rajasthan but there is a lot more that needs to be done. The following observation illustrates this.

The MTR of 10th Plan (*dated?*) describes the overall progress towards decentralization thus: "...The Government of Rajasthan has transferred nine schemes which were earlier being implemented by DRDAs to the Zilla Parishad with effect from 1.4.1999. It has also set up a Village Level Standing Committee for each village under the Chairmanship of Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat to act as "watch dog". It will keep watch on the absenteeism of grass root functionaries of the Departments, namely Patwari, Teachers, ANMS, MPW, VLW, Anganwadi workers and Compounder posted in rural areas. Primary and Upper Primary Education, Literacy and Continuing Education, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Restoration of Traditional Drinking Water Sources, Rajiv Gandhi Swarn Jayanti Pathshalas will all be implemented by the PRIs. Further, innovative projects like Lok Jumbish, Shiksha Karmi and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) have also been brought under the umbrella of the Panchayati Raj Department...." The MTR further noted that while there were case studies of good practice, what was impeding large scale replication was that there were too few examples available.

The domain of children's education does come into the scheme of PRI responsibilities, as we have seen. However the perception and value that local communities and the concerned PR and education departments attach to the PRI actually doing something in education, is limited. This could be due to lack of adequate reflection, understanding and awareness on what PRIs can do, should do and are doing with respect to the education of children. It is thus clear that education does not feature as an area of priority. This is underlined by the MTR micro study on the perception of community on PRIs and their priorities in a Panchayat of Dungarpur district. The result indicates that education (Lok Jumbish and Siksha Karmi)

¹⁸ With increasing flow of funds from the Union in mid 1970's, a District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) was set up in most states. The DRDA Board comprising largely of officials took over the development functions of both the Union and the states at the district level. Funds moved in a hierarchical system – often resulting in money not being spent.

appeared to receive third priority compared to others like farmers cooperative, land and human resource development for agriculture improvement (PAHAL) scheme.

Panchayat Raj bodies and Education

In order to understand better the local governance of education with respect to Rajasthan, a reading of the provisions of the 1994 Rajasthan PR Act (1994) and its amendments made subsequently, will help. Education, especially primary education comes as a function of Village Panchayats (including the overseeing role of Ward Sabha and Gram Sabha). This is the intended level of decentralization that the PR Act envisages for the state. Further, the PR Act states that the functions of Grama Sabha are: "...promotion of literacy, education, health and nutrition..." At the 3rd tier, local Panchayat is vested with the portfolio of development of primary education in the village. As mentioned earlier, a standing committee is envisaged for education exclusively at the Grama Panchayat level.

At the Panchayat Samiti level, there is also 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. With district elementary education officer as its member, this committee shall look into matters of appointment or disciplinary action against teachers up to the primary level.

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. It has been observed in an earlier study (*reference?*) that "...even though by a government order of 2003, management and administrative control of primary education has been passed on to PRIs, in practice, however, PRIs function as agencies of the state government rather than as independent self-governing bodies".

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. Our brief interactions with the Principal Secretary of Panchayat Raj and also with the Commissioner of Panchayati Raj resulted in receiving a generic reply to the effect that PR bodies have 'nothing to do' with education and that it is the SSA which handles education in the state! There are several reasons for this situation. Views of cross section of stakeholders including PR leaders, teachers as well as civil society leaders become important to bring out the analytics of the situation. The lessons and experiences gathered from the field work are presented below.

Decentralisation from the vantage point of education

With specific reference to Rajasthan, decentralized educational initiatives 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. It is illustrative to note that Rajasthan has been witness to the pioneering work of grassroots planning for primary education through these projects. Both these projects have been highly acclaimed for their innovative approach and successful involvement of the community.

The Shiksha Karmi programme (1988-2004) was launched to reach out to the children in remotest areas of the state, where formal schools were non-existent 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. They underwent rigorous training as schoolteachers. The belief was that these 'Shiksha Karmis' (literally, 'education workers') could enable children to attain certain basic competencies; subsequently, children attending these schools could be mainstreamed into the nearest regular school in an appropriate grade. It is to be noted that over a period of time, several such SK schools have since been upgraded as mainstream primary schools as there was demand from the local community for formal schools. The Gram Sabha played an important role in this process, in terms of identifying the Shiksha Karmi, identifying out-of-school children and motivating parents, etc. In a caste-dominated society like Rajasthan, one would appreciate that the local communities have been vested with powers to select the teacher, which otherwise would have been the prerogative of vested interests at the higher levels. As the experience bears out, such powers have been used judiciously by the local community. The project has till date been able to reach 200,000 children.

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 decentralisation 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 in LJ programme. For instance, the choice of place for NFE centres were determined through a process of school mapping, where in appropriate location was identified based on the need and presence of out-of-school children. Decision making about teacher appointments and starting of new schools was vested with a block level committee. To that extent, decisions were decentralized in LJP.

It is to be noted that involvement of women in the education process itself is seen as empowering in nature. Mobilisation through women groups was also seen as a process of empowerment of women, who could then visualize a better future for their wards through education. Extensive use of visuals and PRA exercises in school mapping also provided voice and agency for women to engage in a meaningful way in the entire process.

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. Explanations for such a situation can be found in the realm of 'real politick' governed by interest groups like teachers lobbies, political processes and the large bureaucratic mechanizations which often view decentralization as a threat to the power structures. Most often vested interests operate through centralized executive and political structures rather than through decentralized political systems. For example, we found during the field work that a Panchayat Samithi president had to exert influence for affecting transfer of a teacher at the level of the state Minister for Education! Indeed, as the authors learnt during the study, all teacher transfers are now vested with the secretary and education minister¹⁹, with the block or district level education officer only having powers for deputation.

Thus, 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). The rhetoric of 'bottom-up approach' of decentralization in these programmes appeared to have no clear perspective on harnessing and channeling the energy generated earlier by people's mobilization and their involvement, in a sustained way. One would thus have expected a more substantive involvement of local communities and PR bodies in education in the state during the DPEP and SSA period of educational development. This is somewhat puzzling and would reflect the basic characteristic and limitations of 'externally induced' participation processes which are often devoid of local content and ownership. Thus, in the post LJP/SK phases, decentralization and participation remained as mere words than deeds!

It must be noted that both SSA and DPEP accorded importance for decentralization in the management of education. An important feature of education management by the 'local' is through the structures such as School Development and Management Committees (SDMC), wherein the 'hardware' (infrastructure) development functions are to be handled by the representatives of local communities. However, these structures promoted by DPEP and SSA became 'parallel' to the decentralized local governance structures promoted through the Panchayat Raj institutions. Thus one observes a tension, in roles, functions and the relative spheres of influence of institutional structures that are ostensibly meant to enhance the space and voice of the 'local' communities in terms of decision making, management and control and development of education. One would expect such a tension to be more 'creative' for furthering the goals. However from the field experiences one can conclude that often such parallel structures often result in non-responsive and non-accountable situations vis-à-vis development in general and education development in particular.

SSA officials feel that involving PRIs in education means adding another layer of bureaucracy and political leadership over education. This view, held by SSA officials (from the top officials to the front line staff) brings out the divergent perspectives on decentralization within the government system. While acknowledging the role of PRIs, SSA officials feel that divesting all powers to Panchayati raj institutions is not 'desirable' as the leadership at that level is not aware and competent to address issues of education. SSA feels that PRI members ought to get involved in 'awareness building', enrolment drives, improving infrastructure of schools, clean and green drives and such matters. They also feel that

¹⁹ "Thousands of teachers transferred! On Monday, the government brought out a list of 15000 teachers who were transferred in all the districts. Of this, some 10000 are primary school teachers while the rest are middle school teachers (...) After the cessation of transfers during the last academic year, the government offices were fairly peaceful. But now teachers are making a beeline to the secretariat to meet ministers and legislators to either get the transfer revoked or to lobby for a better post." (*Rajasthan Patrika*, June 30, Jaipur)

moving beyond these functions would mean ‘infringing’ on the turf of SSA. Such a perspective in one way defeats the purpose of decentralization. As a result, there have been no real efforts by the SSA or by the PR department/ministry to build the understanding of PR bodies to actively get involved in the education of children in their constituencies.

The above mentioned apathy of officials does not only stem from their individual dispositions and perspectives. A closer scrutiny of SSA documents reveals that decentralization is understood in a narrow perspective (SSA itself is considered by many analysts as a top-down, directive oriented programme despite rhetoric to the contrary). Concepts like SDMC, Village Education Committees etc in effect mean creating parallel structures to the PRIs and not utilizing the constitutional provisions of decentralization. This can be interpreted as a route to ‘retain’ power within the realm of the education department. While one acknowledges deficits in capacities of PRIs in appreciating educational issues, it can be argued that the same would be applicable for any local structures! If one were to look at training and capacity building material of SSA for SDMC or VEC, it can be concluded that the approach to decentralization is very superficial and directed from the top. The ideas of local planning are given a go by in spirit though one would find such ideas sprinkled around in the training manuals. There is no effective training or capacity building for PRI bodies, except some sensitization activities. With such a lack-luster approach towards decentralization, particularly in respecting the PRIs as legitimate local governance structures, SSA has effectively disarmed the local initiatives in education in the state. Unfortunately such a situation has been augmented further by lack of clarity or purpose demonstrated by the PR department vis-à-vis education. Such a mutual apathy has resulted in creating a vacuum in the state with respect to forging an effective partnership between the community and education.

Broad observations from two districts

In order to learn from experiences from the ground, the districts of Baran and Alwar were chosen for in-depth study. Alwar was specifically chosen as it has a history of NGO efforts in education, with community involvement. In particular, NGOs like Bodh Shiksha Samiti (BSS) and the Society for All round Development (SARD), both education NGOs working in different parts of the district, have worked with PR institutions over the years to address the challenges of education in the area. The authors were interested in analyzing the experiences of BSS and SARD to see what insights they offered for furthering reflections on the decentralization of education. The selection of Baran²⁰ as the other district was not because it offered any specific perspective (as in the case of Alwar) but because it seemed to represent the typical/overall scenario as regards decentralization of education in the state. This came up in discussions with education department officials as well as NGO representatives. In terms of educational indices, there is not much to choose between Alwar and Baran. However, Baran has a much higher ST population at 21%, while a distinct feature of Alwar district is the presence of the ‘Meo’ Muslim community in parts of the district.

About the districts

Alwar

The district of Alwar shares the border with Haryana state in the North. It is part of the Jaipur division of the state. Historically, the district is prominent, and it has many places of historic/tourist interest. A key feature of the

²⁰ The NGO Digantar has recently started educational interventions in Baran, focusing on the teacher and his/her development. There are plans to also strengthen the Baran DIET. However, the community does not find a prominent place in these interventions.

district is the presence of textile, oilseed, paint, porcelain as well as the automotive industry. Alwar city, the headquarters of the district, is a key point on the vegetable supply route, mainly for supply of onions and mustard, and cotton and marble to other parts of the country. Other important landmarks in the district include the famous Sariska National Park, a tiger sanctuary. Agriculture is the mainstay of the rural population.

Alwar has seen much NGO activity in the past 15-20 years. Bodh, SARD and Ibtada are the main NGOs that have worked in education, involving the community in their efforts. In particular, SARD and Ibtada have focused on the Meo Muslim community

Baran

Baran is one of the most backward districts of the state, located at about 75 KM away from Kota, the south-eastern hub of the state. Baran is the only major town of the district and it is inhabited by SC, ST and backward caste communities. Agriculture is the mainstay and with little or no industrialization with the exception of a power plant. The district has also been closer to the state of Madhya Pradesh, which results in movement of people in search of livelihoods to the near by towns of the state.

The role of PRIs in education can be understood from the perceptions of cross section of representatives of the society of the district. During interactions with stakeholders, the focus of discussions was on the experiences of the engagement of PRIs in education, and what they offered in terms of positives and limitations.

Interactions with PRI members in both districts reveal that they are interested in playing a more active role in the education of children. The problem, however, is that they do not quite know how to go about it. This perception is also reflected in the statements of local NGO functionaries who were met in both districts.

Teachers, and the officials in the education department, on the other hand, observe that that “Typically, a Sarpanch is not qualified”, when the PRI heads confront any educational issue with the teachers. A similar outlook prevails towards the SDMCs constituted with parents as members. The teacher community believes that the SDMC is a ‘ritualistic body’ and even if there are changes in its composition, it may not yield any better results. Such skepticism emanates from the fact that teacher community has time and again expressed its apathy towards decentralized governance in education. Another irony of the situation is reflected in the approach of education department vis-à-vis decentralization and involving local governance in education. Bodies such as SDMC, Parent teacher association and other such committees, which are constituted as part of education policy, do not mention how PRIs can be involved (except for some fleeting remarks). Hence, effective devolution of responsibilities to the local government structures does not take place by design. Thus, the lack of discourse between the Education and PR departments at the policy making level is also reflected by the ground realities of the two districts studied.

One interesting observation from an educationist associated with the local DIET in Baran is that when the teachers are selected through RPSC (Rajasthan Public Service Commission), there is absolutely no role for PRIs. This situation has emerged during the past ten years, the period which has also seen the slow unfolding of decentralization as an approach to development across the country. Though there are right now two cadres of teachers (education department and PR Dept), in effect it would mean that they are merely ‘salary heads’. All decisions are taken by education department with respect to teachers and education management. To that extent, role of PRIs in education is something to do with a functional classification of responsibility of disbursing salaries of teachers!

Another specific feature identified as primary cause of lack of community involvement in education is that, most of the processes that facilitate community participation and

involvement are ‘prescriptive’ in nature and would eventually rob the local initiatives. The perception of teacher as ‘authority’ by themselves is another specific factor that appears to create a sense of alienation among the community members -- a popular view among community members is that the teacher often ill-treats community members as they are illiterate and has no right to ask any questions.

SDMCs, their development and implications for PRI

An important insight regarding PRIs and education was made available in the district visits through the study of the formation of the SDMC (School Development and Management Committee), mentioned earlier as primarily a creation of the DPEP and SSA, quite independent of the Panchayats. Each school is expected to have an SDMC. In a given Panchayat, there may be more than one SDMC, depending on the number of schools in that Panchayat.

It is interesting to note how the texture of the SDMC has changed over the years, and how this is related to the PRI. Earlier (in 2001, during the Congress regime), the SDMC had, as its president, the Sarpanch, who was in a position of authority (as in the authorizing of expenditure, for instance). By making the Sarpanch the president of the SDMC, the committee came under the direct purview of the Panchayat. Areas like teacher transfers still remained outside the PR structure. The headmaster was the secretary and other members included parents of school going children, one or two Ward Panch members, etc. There was also the mandatory reservation for women and representatives from backward castes. In 2006, during the BJP regime, this arrangement changed. The Sarpanch was removed from the president’s post, and the headmaster replaced him as the president. Another teacher was made the secretary, thus effectively pushing the PRI out of the picture. For sometime (till May 2008) this arrangement continued. On 8th May this year, the education department issued another notification regarding further changes in the composition²¹ of the SDMC. The headmaster and teacher were no longer meant to be the president and secretary respectively. In their place, the president would be a parent of a child going to that school. The post of vice president has been created, and another parent would assume this position. The headmaster would now be the secretary. The Sarpanch or any other Grama Panchayat member could still be a part of this dispensation either as a parent or as an elected PR member. According to the new rules, the Ward Panch is a member of the SDMC but he or she is not a signatory and cannot take decisions. Further, the May 2008 GO proposed that the SDMC should register separately as a society under the 1860 society registration Act, ostensibly to enable the SDMC to raise its own funds.

What is the perspective/thinking behind these changes? First of all, it may also be noted that in the second and third arrangement (proposed in May) the SDMC does not report to the Panchayat – it is ‘line managed’ by the education department. The explanation I have encountered is the following. There have been many reports of corruption in the earlier arrangement – funds are routed through the SDMC for school construction, maintenance etc – most of the time, the Sarpanch would demand ‘his share’ before approving expenditure on school infrastructure/basic facilities etc. This often resulted in a lack of understanding and

²¹ The new SDMC will have the following as members: Parents of school going children -- one parent is chosen as the President of the SDMC; also there must be three women/mothers on the parents’ list, and totally there are nine parents in the executive committee including the headmaster who is the secretary. Other members (outside the executive committee) may include the ward panch or sarpanch; a child from class VIII; Anganwadi Worker; MLA representative; BEO representative; ANM; any donor who has donated Rs.5000/- or more to the school automatically becomes a member of the SDMC; NGO representative; self help group member. In all, there will be 20 members in the reconstituted SDMC.

coordination between the Sarpanch and the headmaster, who it seems, was at a loss when such demands were made by the Sarpanch. So it was decided by the government that the headmaster should be made the SDMC president and one of the teachers, the secretary. Even after this was done, there were reports of corruption! This led to another change (in May this year) where it was decided to pass over the post of president to an active/interested parent; the post of vice president was created to allow another parent to be selected to this post.

From these changes, it is clear that education is now more or less outside the purview of the Panchayats in Rajasthan. Decision making now vests with the parents. The Sarpanch or Ward Panch is just another member of the SDMC. A lack of confidence and distrust in the Panchayats seems to have led to this development. The other point made is that Panchayats never really took serious interest in the affairs of the school, except where financial resources were available for development of infrastructure – this, it has been observed, often led to corruption. At the same time, the question that arises is this – was enough done in terms of *preparation* of the Panchayats in the first place? It is not clear what the role of the Panchayat Samiti on education will now be. What role is the Panchayat now expected to play on the whole? It is interesting to note that the new rules do not provide the Panchayat much space, other than stating that Panchayat members can also be members of the SDMC. This move has further eroded the mandate of the elected representatives. As some PR representatives from Alwar argue, ‘it is nothing short of an abuse of democratic norms and processes...’

How are we to believe that the new dispensation will be better than the existing arrangements? Parents will remain members of the SDMC only as long as their children are in school. This raises the question of stability – if the parent of a child who is in the fifth grade becomes the president of the SDMC, his/her tenure will be only for a year in the event that the school is a primary school. Is this time enough to do anything of note? On the other hand, co-opting parents opens up the possibility of allowing representation from backward castes to play a greater role in the affairs of the school.

As expected, teachers were up in arms against the new SDMC proposal. At the time of visits to both the districts, the researchers heard about teacher meetings being held in various parts of the districts to discuss the May 2008 GO. Predictably, there was resistance on the grounds that ‘parents are totally ineligible to be given such responsibilities’ and that ‘teachers were in the best position to manage the affairs of the school...nobody else should interfere in this task’ as teachers in a meeting in Alwar put it. Subsequently, the new GO was stayed. It remains to be seen if the new Congress government will push forward this GO or come out with another one. In any case, PR bodies are effectively out of the radar of educational interventions, at least for the time being.

Teacher perceptions on Decentralization and Education

Perceptions of teachers on decentralization in education are usually highlighted with a suspicion that the whole exercise is aimed at “controlling” them! From that vantage point, all efforts for genuine decentralization in education management are resisted by teachers. In the previous section, we have discussed a recent example of such resistance to the proposal of more active parental involvement in education. Interviews with teacher’s union representatives (Rajasthan Shikshak Sangh) bring out this stark reality. Regional president, district president and other office bearers are candid in admitting that PRIs at best can help in improving physical infrastructure and their involvement in matters of teachers and in-school processes are uncalled for. Teachers in Alwar by and large view the PR members with disdain and state that they are not capable of ‘doing anything’ but make a lot of money. This view is echoed even in the education administration by persons such as the BEO. The key

argument is that many PR representatives are illiterate and unaware and this prevents them from playing any active or constructive role in the affairs of the school. Also, 'how can we be dictated by someone who cannot even read or write'? This reflects the teacher position in general. There are some exceptions as well, and one also hears about PR members who have tried their little bit to improve schools (as in improving school facilities, for instance...). But these examples are too few and far between.

According to teachers, there is no 'tangible' role for PRIs in education. As they point out, in a situation where teacher transfers are done at the level of the Minister of Secretary of Education (which more often than not involve political influences), there is no point in identifying PRIs as institutions for governance of matters related to education. Hence there is no administrative role for PRI bodies in education, except that some teachers (appointed as Panchayat Raj teachers) may draw salaries from that account.

Teacher accountability hinges on administrative controls and as long as they rest with the government bureaucracy, teachers are comfortable with that arrangement. Teachers perceive that their accountability lies towards BEO-DEO-State education department and not with local governance structures, be they PRI bodies or structures like the SDMCs. This situation arises due to lack of understanding/sensitivity among teacher community on decentralization and their perceived sense of superiority over the elected local representatives. Typically the power centers lie at the state headquarters and it is reported that transfers and appointments of teachers are brought about with the influence of state level bureaucracy and political leadership. Such situations in reality would render PRI bodies dysfunctional as far as education is concerned. Time and again this perception is echoed not only by teachers but also by civil society representatives and education bureaucracy.

There appears to be a sense of alienation between community and teacher at the field level. This observation is echoed by a senior NGO functionary who is associated with training teacher community at the district level. There is a sense of mutual suspicion – with the community finding fault with teacher and the teacher also feeling that he/she is not welcome into the community. Many community members often feel that the 'teacher is someone, who is engaged in all other activities other than teaching'. Hence the suspicion that the teacher is not doing what he or she is supposed to do. In Alwar, this tension reaches extreme forms and results in what PR members routinely describe as 'School pe Tala Lagao' (lock the door of the school). When nothing else works with teachers who do not come to school regularly, or who have some other issues with the community, PR members report that they lock the school and report the matter to the BEO. In many cases, this results in the deputation of the teacher elsewhere. Thus, PR members seem to be perpetually in a confrontation mode with teachers.

Teacher union members in both districts feel that interference of 'others' is the main reason for low quality of education. Citing the example of new SDMC guidelines, union members feel that taking permission from SDMC president for leave is one instance of interference of community in education! The economic power determines the equation between SDMC and teachers. For a majority of teachers, most of the SDMC members are illiterate and giving them power is thus not desirable. Teachers insist that school development work (like supervision of construction, midday meals etc) may be entrusted to community or PRI representatives, but they should not interfere in teaching learning activities, transfers and control of teachers. For many teachers, moving village leadership into 'undesirable' hands is also one of the reasons for the growing distance between teacher and PR bodies (and community in general).

Teachers also identify excessive focus of community participation and PRI involvement only at the primary/upper primary schooling and ask why it is not so in other areas of education. Urban local bodies and others do not appear to have administrative role in education (most secondary schools are under direct supervision of education department and not under municipality in urban areas).

In Alwar, teachers pointed out their concern that they have too many restrictions, and too much of paper work and other non-teaching jobs – this is the main reason for not being effective. They thus feel that they should be left with only teaching and other responsibilities should be dispensed with.

On the statutory front, teachers opine that most committees on education set up within PRIs do not discharge functions effectively as most of them are notional and PR members do not even know that they are a part of these committees! In Baran, teachers reported that in a small study that they have conducted, 8 Panchayat Presidents do not even know the names of the education committee members of their Panchayats!

Community apathy often results in overburdening of the teacher – as a result, he has to manage many non-teaching activities, ranging from school construction, midday meals etc apart from the already existing task of paper work, data communication and so on.

Panchayats and Education – the perspectives of PRI representatives

A former MLA, who is currently the Pradhan of a Panchayat Samiti in Baran feels that PRIs are not effective in undertaking any development activities in general and that of education in particular because of the way they are constituted and structured. The rotation system of Village Sarpanch position through elections acts as a dampener for any one to take up long term development activities. Commitment therefore does not come easily. According to the president of the Samithi, the SDMC also is not functional as teachers and even the community does not regard it as a serious institution. There is also no effective linkage between PRI and SDMC except that in some cases the ward member of the Panchayat where the school is located would automatically become member of SDMC.

Within programs like DPEP and currently the SSA, the Samithi president feels that there is no space for PRIs as construction and other activities are to be done by SDMC with head master as the principle agent of implementation. Such situations and actions would send wrong signals to the political leadership on their role and space in development of education activities. Also public perception of government schools as being poor in quality is an issue, as many government school teachers themselves do not send their wards to government schools.

In the current scheme of operations, teacher is non-accountable to PRIs and it is the department which looks after education – there is no role for PRIs. There is no mechanism of enforcing discipline among teachers and the PRI leadership cannot even recommend any action against teachers in the event of their non attendance or irregularity in discharging duties. According to the Pradhan, there are instances wherein irregularities in engineering or the public works department are handled by PRI leadership by way of recommending an inquiry or action against erring officials; but the same would not happen in the field of education! Teachers, according to many PR members, are ‘well connected politically.’

It is interesting to note from the observations of the Pradhan that, even if well intentioned Panchayat members want to address issues of education, non-responsive attitude of education

department makes it difficult for PRI members to address any of the issues related to development of education. For example, education standing committee of Atru Panchayat Samithi has attempted to review several times problems of education but the officials would normally provide data and information about enrolment and non-enrolment and confine discussions around such issues. There appears to be no serious and comprehensive discussion about education as officials often show scant respect for such topics.

On strategies for effective coordination between PRI and education, it is suggested that there can be joint trainings to the PRI representatives and head teachers so that they can address some of the problems at the field level. However for such an action, SSA and PRI departments should work in tandem.

From the experience of the Sarpanch of Khidliganj village in Baran, we learnt that systemic interference of PRIs in schools is not a solution to improve education; on the other hand, personal initiative works better! The defunct Panchayat system, and politically motivated decision making in PRIs, appears to be main reasons for Panchayats being ineffective as a system to improve education. And hence personal rapport with community and schools is the only way to help any school.

Teacher absenteeism, lack of teachers, and bad physical conditions of schools are some of the areas that have been addressed in the schools by the Panchayats in both districts. There are instances where the personal initiatives of the Sarpanch have made a difference. But these examples are few, and examples to the contrary are more in number.

In Piplod village a local school (at Motipura) has up to grade IV with over 110 children on roll. The SDMC has been recently reconstituted, which has one ward member as its member. Other than that there is no effective link between the school and Panchayat. For several years bad road that connects school with the village has been raised as an issue by the community at SDMC as well as PRI. Teachers themselves are skeptical about SDMC and according to head teacher, most often constitution of SDMC and attending to its function becomes a time consuming affair by itself for the head teacher as he is supposed to convene. Parental involvement in school activities is limited to addressing some of the physical needs; like tree plantation was done in the village.

On the whole, from our interactions with a number of PR members in both districts, we have learnt that they 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. There are several instances of PR members locking up the school as we have already mentioned (if teachers do not attend regularly for instance...) and/or complaining about teachers at the block level with the BEO and Panchayat Pradhan to get them transferred. Teachers are also not above corruption, according to some PR members. 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.

PR representatives in Alwar also feel that 'important' areas like children's education have been gradually taken away from their jurisdiction over the years. The way the SDMC has been constituted and reconstituted, reflects these changes (this has been discussed already). In an ideal case, PR members feel that education of children should be 'completely under their control' – this means having a say in the transfer of teachers, payment of their salaries, management of schools and so on. But there is little to suggest that this will happen in the

future, though the 73rd and 74th amendments say so. At present, there is a crisis of confidence in the Panchayats.

Another observation that comes out strongly from interactions with PR members in Alwar is that there has been no preparation/orientation/building of capacity of PR members in general and this applies to education as well. SDMCs currently get some training inputs from the education department through the SSA. PR members who are part of SDMCs are expected to attend this training. Otherwise, orientation and preparation of Panchayats is not taken seriously. There are some annual (2-3 days) exercises for Sarpanches conducted by the government but the general refrain seems to be that ‘these are not useful; are mostly lecture based; do not address the fact that a large number of PR members have very limited reading and writing skills...’

NGO interventions with PR Institutions

In a situation of mutual distrust and suspicion between PRI leadership and educational apparatus, creative solutions are 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 Samithi and SARD²² have been able to work with Panchayat representatives and have created conditions for their sustained involvement in the education of children. Their experiences are discussed here. What is important to glean from these experiences is 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.

The Bodh experience²³

Bodh Shiksha Samiti came into existence in 1987 with a vision to ‘participate in the formation of an egalitarian, progressive and enlightened society by contributing in the evolution of a system of equitable and quality education and development for all children’.

Despite the ineffective transfer of powers to PRI bodies in the state, Bodh believes that there is potential of opening up enormous opportunities of participation in democratic processes at the societal level. For Bodh, local governance goes beyond the mere delivery of basic services and includes aspects related to local decision making based on developmental needs, and creating systems for transparency and accountability in meeting those needs.

Over the years, Bodh has initiated a broader and encompassing process of involving the local communities, and, using this as the basis, has moved into the realm of working with PRIs as a means to address issues of education access in rural areas. It is in this context, its work in two blocks of Alwar district is recounted to understand the processes adopted and the outcomes of the same.

²² In particular, this description is from the period between the late nineties to 2005/06, when both Bodh and SARD were supported by the Aga Khan Foundation as part of the PESLE program. Other sources for Bodh’s work in education in Alwar district include CARE and the Good Earth Foundation.

²³ This section draws heavily from an earlier study undertaken in 2006 by Sheshagiri on the experiences of Bodh Shiksha Samiti and the Society for All Round Development (SARD) of working with Panchayati Raj Institutions for education. The study was supported by the Aga Khan Foundation.

Working with PRIs

Thanagazi and Umren are among the most difficult and inaccessible blocks of Alwar district, which is itself among the poorest and most educationally deprived districts of Rajasthan. Bodh's program area is amidst the thick forest area of Sariska and the hard rocky terrain of Aravali hills. Means of livelihood are limited to agriculture, livestock and agriculture labor. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and OBCs largely inhabit Thanagazi while Umren has a mixed population of these communities as well as Meo Muslims and Sikhs. The area also has nomadic communities like Banjara, Nat, Lohar and Bawariya.

Bodh's work with PRIs organically evolved out of a rigorous process of community conscientization. According to Bodh, PRI representatives find themselves in an interesting situation – unlike other elected representatives, like the Member of the State Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Member of Parliament (MP), they continue to live in the same situation as that of the community, which they cannot ignore. In their day-to-day existence and work, they cannot survive therefore without establishing a close relationship with the electorate. Thus PRIs became a subset of the larger community.

At the same time, their position as elected representatives gives PR members the opportunity to establish linkages outside the community as well. They interact with the general administration apparatus of the state, as they attempt to leverage resources for the welfare of the people. On the downside there is also a danger of getting co-opted by the vested interests which often works against the interests of larger community, especially the marginalized sections.

On the other hand, Bodh realizes that if communities are *organized* enough, they can exert pressure on their elected representatives and the general administration to bring about a people centered development process. Its experiences demonstrate this possibility.

Bodh consciously did not opt for the 'individual centric' approach in its work with communities, but went for 'systemic' or community level changes. In the first phase, which began in 1999, 40 community schools (Bodhshalas) were established in un-served, un-reached habitations after Bodh ascertained that there was enough community demand and interest for education. Generating this interest itself took time and much effort. Bodh's dedicated teachers worked alongside the community and were instrumental in bringing about these changes. Progress was tardy, tedious and tortuous, but Bodh's community workers and teachers worked with conviction and steely determination to bring about changes in mindsets of people living in the far-flung and isolated communities, vis-à-vis the education of their children. The initial mobilization of communities and setting up of education centres with active participation of communities led to developing a strong commitment and conviction among the community members towards quality education.

Over time, Bodh's work in the area attracted the attention of the local PRI representatives, and they realized the potential of the initiatives -- wherever possible, they attempted to support activities of Bodh, in terms of material support for improving schools, getting permission to start new schools, etc. They were among the first 'converts' to the process. Many, who were watching from a distance, started coming closer with the belief that changes could occur in their communities, too.

Developments of the first two years of Bodh's work found collective expression in a meeting organized by Bodh in 2000/01 at Thanagazi, in which the local communities were invited to plan the next steps. This meeting is often considered a milestone by Bodh. Though PRI representatives were not invited specifically by Bodh, they attended this meeting out of the

realization that ‘there was something happening’ that they could not ignore any longer as people’s representatives. The communities had amply demonstrated possibilities of making children’s education happen, often in areas that were untouched by ‘modern development’ through the basic services of the state. Many Panchayat members who participated in this workshop expressed their conviction about the work being done by Bodh and announced extension of their full support to the programmes. By then, rupees one million had already been collected by the communities. Regarding the establishment of Bodhshalas, Bodh proposed that it could provide Rs. 15,000/- per village from its budget towards construction of Bodhshalas. The rest of the amount would need to be mobilized by the community including the PRI. Thus began a partnership and a change in the approach of PRIs towards education. Many PR members pledged support.

Subsequently some of the PRI representatives such as the Ward Panch and Gram Panchayat Sarpanch extended overwhelming support and managed to mobilize cash as well as materials from their respective villages. As they were holding important positions or were key opinion makers in their communities, they were able to leverage resources which enabled the construction of ‘Pucca’ Bodhshalas in many places. Many such success stories not only served as great motivating factors but also forcefully demonstrated the possibilities to those who were skeptical about these processes. From this point onwards, Bodh strengthened its relationship with the PR bodies. Bodh’s greatest successes came from the villages of Govdi, Bhopala, Kraska, Sirawas, Rogda, Rundh, Doba and Milakpuriya. In due course of time, these experiences spread to the adjoining block of Umren at the invitation of the Pradhan of the block. A highpoint of Bodh’s work in this block was the decision taken by the Pradhan to appoint teachers in remote schools with Bodh’s support, realizing that regular teachers were seldom attending these schools. In talking this decision, the Pradhan was stamping his (and the Panchayat Samiti’s) authority at the block level, an event which had not occurred before in the history of PRI in the region. The BEO of Umren block and the education department had to accept this decision. These experiences showed that people’s elected representatives could take decisions beneficial to the larger population, even if the bureaucracy was apathetic to their issues. These efforts gradually made the PRIs become more aware of their roles and responsibilities where it concerned the education of children in their constituencies. Not only were there improvements in physical infrastructure and facilities, there were dialogues around issues related to quality of schools as well. Another important milestone was reached in 2004 when the Panchayat Samitis of Umren and Thanagazi wrote to the Education Secretary of Rajasthan, endorsing Bodh’s Jan Pahal program, expecting the state to provide the support needed for its success. A collective declaration was made to improve government schools by the Gram Panchayats, teachers, and local CBOs. Forums at various levels of the three tier system were formed to regularly discuss education issues.

In the words of the Secretary of Bodh, the experiences of Govdi and other Panchayats:

“...provided us the idea for the first time that an aware and organized community, with active support and involvement of its PRI members, has the power to transform the functioning of the government school. (...) We came to realize that alternate educational management mechanisms are possible. These can effectively replace the traditional top down approach which strangles the educational system and prevents possibilities from unfolding.” (P.33, *Panchayati Raj Institutions – decentralized governance in education*, Aga Khan Foundation, 2006)

By creating the ideal of education of all children as ‘a common good’ for the entire community, Bodh was able to include everyone in the realization of this ideal. By itself, this coming together has the potential to ‘iron out’ the inequalities that may exist in these hierarchical societies at least where it concerned the education of children. The PRI then

becomes a subset of this larger 'Community Based Organization'. PR members are uniquely placed to drive these processes of change as elected representatives of people.

As our observations in these blocks shows, these gains have not been consolidated or built upon both at the ground level as well as at the policy level by Bodh. For instance, there are no processes in place that would bring together PRI representatives to develop a deeper understanding of educational issues, or develop skills needed to play a greater role in education. The organization now recognizes the need to develop a separate program for working with Panchayats in both the blocks and at the district level in Alwar. This may then lead to larger systemic and policy change.

The SARD experience

SARD came into existence in 1996 on the premise that there was a need to focus on 'previously overlooked communities (particularly rural communities) and promote their development through participatory, holistic and integrated programs'. SARD's vision is of 'a society that gives equal opportunities and ensures that the basic minimum needs of all citizens is met through environmentally sustainable economic activities'. SARD works with Meo-Muslims, a community of farmers and agricultural laborers, living in some of the remotest areas of the Deeg, Nagar and Kaman blocks of Bharatpur district (Mewat region) of Rajasthan, since 1999.

PRI has a crucial role to play, as SARD believes that it has the potential to represent the grassroots reality and take decisions on its behalf. SARD's vision for the PRI is that the Panchayati Raj Institution has the potential to play a central role in the integrated development of the Mewat region, leading to the empowerment of its people. SARD therefore views the PRI not merely as the 'channel', but as the 'maker' of change. The organization's vision for PRI thus places the people's institution in a position where it actively, in consultation with local communities, will use the resources available for their socioeconomic development. 'Integrated' here means 'all aspects' of people's development. Education (of children) is thus used as an entry point for SARD's interventions in the area.

SARD's area of operation under the AKF supported PESLE included a direct intervention in 14 villages of Deeg, and Kaman blocks of Bharatpur district, where it has its 'Taleem Ghar', also known as the 'Quality Education Center'. This catered to children in the age group of 3-14 years. Children, who do not have access to basic education, and those who have dropped out and never been to formal government schools, were encouraged to participate in the QEC program. Many QECs were established in the five Meo dominant villages of the program. The other villages included were primarily consisting of Jats and Gujjars who are the OBCs (designated as 'Other backward castes' by the Government of India). Through its Outreach program, SARD worked directly with 9 government schools, and provided academic support to 72 government schools to improve their quality.

SARD through its interactions and analysis identified that there is limited knowledge of PRI members regarding their role in promoting children's education is mostly in the realm of provision of physical space, monitoring attendance of teachers and children, and provision of infrastructure and basic facilities to schools. However, they appear to be desirous of building partnerships with NGOs and other Community Based Organizations (CBO) to mobilize resources for education.

SARD's approach of working with PRIs is two pronged in that it aims to activate and strengthen the functioning of the PRI at the micro (ground) and meso (block, district) levels

in the three-tier system. At the grassroots level, interventions and activities have focused on the Gram Panchayat; at the block level, the Panchayat Samiti and with the Zilla Parishad at the district level. The organization has constantly explored how representatives of the PRI could be involved in different ways to explore how PRI resources can be used for children's education – these have involved the creation of forums by SARD, as well as participation in existing platforms under the PRI.

SARD's strategies of working with the PRI involved:

- The creation of platforms for interaction, where PRI representatives, government department officials have often come together to exchange information, cooperate with each other, break barriers, overcome isolation, and undertake joint planning, budgeting and decision making.
- The bringing of education issues center stage at various levels in the PRI system; SARD has attempted to often go beyond the physical parameters of access, space etc and has tried to initiate dialogue on qualitative issues, by regularly participating in available PRI forums at the district, block and village levels
- Enhancing the awareness level of PRIs regarding the problems of block and village and also supporting PRI representatives to clearly understand their roles, functions and norms that empower them
- Involving the PRIs in generating resources from the villages for QECs and government schools – leveraging resources from community (through grain banks, for example) and govt. schemes available
- Identification of interested and enthusiastic PRI members with whom SARD works intensely to bring about change in attitudes, etc.
- Undertaking exposure visits of PRI representatives, government officials, teachers etc to educational institutions – over the past 2-3 years, many PRI members have visited educational institutions in different parts of the country to enable them to develop better understanding regarding children's learning. From time to time, SARD has also facilitated the participation of the PRI members in its QECs to show that alternative approaches to teaching children exist

In the initial stages of its foray into the Panchayati Raj system in 2000-2001, SARD started by meeting the block and district Panchayat Pradhan and Pramukh respectively. These meetings served to highlight SARD's beliefs and its work with the officials of the PRI at the block and district levels. The organization also regularly extended invitations to the block level Panchayat Samiti members for any event/function it organized. At the same time, SARD elicited support from these people's representatives for its interventions in the Mewat region. However, the problems of the Mewat area evoked a lukewarm response from the officials and PRIs representatives – nobody, it seems, was very keen on undertaking any development activity in this area. The argument was that Mewat, with all its orthodoxy, illiteracy and conservative traditions, would not embrace the path of 'modern' development.

Like in the case of Bodh, progress was slow, and acceptance within the PRI for SARD's work came only gradually. What seems to have made a dent is SARD's approach of using every opportunity to engage with PRI representatives – this has included taking part in their meetings, inviting them to SARD's meetings and events, organizing exposure visits to other organizations such as Bodh, Ekalavya, SIDH and many others.

As in the case of Bodh, in SARD's case, there has been a lack of institutionalised interactions which would have led to systemic changes. Further, these initiatives did not continue with the

same intensity once the support from PESLE came to an end. This again highlights the pitfalls of dependence on external funding.

The experiences of Bodh and SARD are insightful in terms of the possibility of creative engagement of all stakeholders (communities, PRIs, teachers, education department and civil society agencies) to enhance educational development and outcomes in children belonging to marginalized communities. Over the years, this engagement has been made possible as it is based on principles of participation, trust and mutual reciprocity. Role clarity and advocacy with local governments have also played an important role in focusing these processes.

What is important to appreciate at this juncture is that, in absence of any institutionalised engagement at the higher levels between Panchayat Raj and Education department on congruence of vision and goals, such experiences remain isolated. Scaling up of these experiences require acceptance of roles for each of the stakeholders in the development process in general and that of education development in particular. Such an approach of mutual accommodation would yield results instead of each department or stakeholders fighting for their spaces.

It strikes us that in the state of Rajasthan where progressive civil society movements have been able to influence and guide enactment of legislative policies on Right to Information and Right to Work, decentralization and education development still remains an elusive dream.

Summary

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to place the perspectives of various stakeholders on decentralisation of education governance. Teachers, PRI leaders, SSA officials, PRI officials and NGOs have provided their perspectives in this regard. There are possibilities of bringing about genuine decentralization in education, but this would require political will at the highest level. It would also require the existing power structures to review the current top-down development paradigm and ideas of ‘control’ and ‘power’ that have ruled the affairs so far. In turn, this should be replaced by broader perspectives of participatory democracy and local self governance which are constitutional guarantees of citizenry.

The experience from Rajasthan presents a unique case of missed opportunities for making genuine decentralization in education happen. Experiences from mainstream ‘decentralization project’ so far have resulted in little or no impact on education. Neither education has become an issue of concern for PRIs, nor have they demonstrated any concerted interest on issues related to education. The reasons for this situation are many including reluctance on the part of the state apparatus to devolve powers and build the capacities of the PRIs.

PRI members at various levels, more so at the Gram Panchayat level, are not aware of their roles and responsibilities with respect to educational governance. Clearly this calls for an intensive process of training/orientation, development of understanding and capacities among PRI members. Further, it also involves the tapping of local resources of people like parents, teachers and others to make a difference.

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.

The experiences of NGOs like Bodh and SARD provide a positive perspective and illustrate the possibilities of meaningful participation of PRIs in education. However, one would conclude that such local experiences have not been translated into broader systemic changes as the lessons learned have not been disseminated or adopted by the broader education system.

From the point of view of the education discipline per se, decentralization appears to be more a ‘lip service’ with no genuine effort to understand the philosophy of decentralized governance and democratic decentralization. Lack of perspective is visible when one analyses the blue print of SSA operational guidelines.

Educational bureaucracy of the state has not been successful in bringing about any significant change in the current ideas of decentralization, even with creation of bodies like SDMC and VEC. Such bodies do not provide any space for engagement with PRIs and often create conflicts at the local level as they become contentious structures for exercising power and authority – in parallel to the PRI structures. Creation of parallel structures (or non-convergence with PRIs) for education management at the local level, like SDMC, PTA, VEC brings out the contradictions in the system, in terms of non-recognition of decentralization. On their own, the SDMCs just follow instructions from the top, with little space for creative decision making at their level.

From the observations in the districts, one can conclude 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.

Teacher appointments and transfer are still within the ambit of the education department at the district and state level. Panchayats appear to have little say in the matter; they can only write to the education department in case disciplinary action has to be taken against non-performing teachers. Thus, the issue of accountability of teachers remains outside the purview of Panchayats. The bureaucracy still exerts much control on these critical areas and takes away the essential characteristic of the Panchayats as elected representative bodies. On the whole, it can be said that there is lack of adequate devolution. Consequently, Panchayats continue to be weak.

CHAPTER 4: Some final comments

In this study, there has been an attempt to present first the backdrop to the efforts for decentralized governance in India. Within this larger discussion, the study has aimed to locate the idea of local governance of children's education. The contours of this idea have been discussed. The study is focused on governmental initiatives and does not exclusively discuss the dimension of privatization, which, as we have seen, is also part of the concept of decentralization. Further, in discussing about the decentralization of education governance, the study has focused on Panchayats and not the urban governance structures.

The experiences of Kerala and Rajasthan, two very different states in terms of their socio-political-cultural and economic conditions, have been explored. The objective has not been to compare and contrast between these two states, as the idea is to first map the experiences of education decentralization in a larger number of states – towards this end, this study is but a small step. Still, it can be stated that the observations of this can apply and be used to understand the experiences in other regions of the country. This is a task that can be undertaken in the coming months. With this comprehensive understanding, one can then make observations that are more encompassing, and which will help to deepen the discourse on decentralization of education.

The differences between the Rajasthan and Kerala experiences are but a product of the socio-political history of each state. Commentators familiar with Panchayati Raj reforms generally agree that the states which are often considered to be the frontline in terms of decentralization reforms are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Incidentally, these are also the states where functioning Panchayat bodies have existed since the 1950's. States that are better off economically, are socially more cohesive, and have active civil societies are the ones which generally possess relatively stronger Panchayat institutions. This perhaps is the contrast one can offer to explain the differences between Kerala and Rajasthan. In Rajasthan, unlike in Kerala, the degree of poverty and inequality are still significant challenges to development and decentralization, besides commitment of leadership to deepening the reform process through political will. Legislation may be there in the form of the PR Act, but bureaucratic openness, a critical factor for progress, is less evident in Rajasthan. It is not as if there are no examples of grassroots involvement in education in the state – the examples of the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi initiatives have been discussed. 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. In Kerala, the role of the Communist Party has been crucial in terms of commitment of political leadership to decentralized governance. Though the Left Democratic Front (led by the Communist Party) and the United Democratic Front (led by the Congress) have come to power alternately, the UDF has not reversed the policies that were out in place at the onset of the PPC.

In Rajasthan, one sees erosion in the space for Panchayati Raj institutions with respect to children's education. The convenient excuse is that they 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 (whether they live in villages or in urban areas) are generally capable of resolving their own problems, given the opportunity and adequate

support. It also underlines their intelligence. In Kerala, this challenge has been addressed somewhat by the creation of technical support groups at different levels to enable Panchayats develop contextual, technically sound and relevant plans. However, the potential of such mechanisms has not been utilized optimally.

The experiences of NGOs like Bodh, and to a limited extent SARD, show us what is possible with some sustained engagement. Yet, these experiences are at best local, and have not translated into a systemic change in policy.

In Kerala, the PPC is the most significant development for promoting local self governance and participation of people in their own development. We have also seen how the elaborate structures and mechanisms that have been put in place create conditions for more autonomy in decision making. This, coupled with significant fiscal devolution, enables Panchayati Raj institutions to more seriously engage in local self governance.

What has Kerala, with its high achievements with respect to education, literacy and other human development indices, to offer for our study? At best, the story is mixed. Despite the remarkable experiences of the PPC, the subject of children's education is not among the priority areas for Panchayats, except where individual leadership has pushed some innovative ideas. Our study of six Panchayat plans and budgets shows this to be the case. Further, even where there is some involvement in education, the interventions mostly are in the areas of infrastructure provision, supplying materials and supporting needy children through scholarships etc. The *process* of education is clearly outside the domain of the Panchayats, given that the state retains control over it in terms of teacher appointment, training and transfers, and curriculum and textbook development. The Karakulam case sharply brings out the tensions that can be generated when Panchayats are seen to 'exceed their mandate'. Academic decentralization, which one believes is a key idea in local education governance, is therefore clearly not on the radar of local education governance in Kerala.

As we reflected on Kerala's experiences, one could not help but think of an 'evolutionary perspective' with regard to the local governance of education – that a society whose Human Development Index is comparable to that of some countries in Europe, should certainly invest more creative energy in the education of its children. This position, we realized, turns out to be simplistic. Higher levels of educational and human development do not necessarily translate into a more progressive set of interventions in education for children. Despite a rich history in terms of involvement of movements like those of KSSP, and the rhetoric of progressive pedagogy thanks to projects like the DPEP and SSA, Kerala is today confronted by the challenges of privatization of education. With more and more parents opting for private schools as the 'better' option (these schools are seen to provide 'better' quality; more importantly, children studying in these schools get better results in the examination), there is a struggle to retain children in government schools. Panchayats as institutions of local governance cannot be far away from this struggle. They therefore see support for tuition, improvement in infrastructure and improvement in examination results as the markers that would force parents to rethink their strategy of putting their children in private schools. These are the immediate tasks that Panchayats address their energies towards. But what about the overall direction?

In our interactions with a number of people during this study, a view that has been encountered increasingly is the one that it is instrumental – that it is a ticket to better jobs and a better life in a material sense. In this view, a largely memory based approach to learning, as well as clearing the examination with good grades, become more important than any intrinsic value that education may hold for the parent, teacher and child. Further, given that the

economy of the state is influenced in important ways by migration of large numbers of people to the Gulf countries, an increasing number of people tend to get alienated from their local contexts. In such a scenario, participatory planning becomes more difficult, as Sharma (2003) notes.

The point should be made here that there is a need for a paradigm shift, first within the discourse of decentralization, and this shift must be linked to the local governance of education. Firstly, there must be a belief that it can work – that effective decentralization requires fundamental understanding and practice of principles of decentralization that forms the basis for all further actions. This, in practical terms would mean, respecting and implementing the idea of principle of subsidiarity which essentially states that whatever decisions can be taken at a given level must be taken, instead of depending on another level or authority. Adherence to this principle unlocks the potential of decentralization.

As has been noted earlier, the actual practice of decentralization also presupposes certain historic conditions that go beyond rhetoric. These conditions would include levels of literacy, competing political ideologies aspiring for political power, aspirations of common people for good governance and local development and articulate media. The experience from Kerala indicates that historical and political developments have led to each of the competing coalitions attempting decentralization policies which are progressive in nature. Such political expediency has also worked better for the community as the aggressive and articulate media and community ensure that the incumbent regime can not undo what the previous regimes have undertaken. A contrast is available in Rajasthan, wherein successive regimes have attempted to diminish the role of decentralization in governance. Political apathy, bureaucratic neglect can be seen as important reasons for such a situation. The examples of Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi have already been pointed out.

In practical terms, the following may have to be thought of:

1. It is important to provide necessary inputs for all stakeholders on decentralization and education both from an analytical as well as practical point of view.
2. Awareness building at the PRI level is important for the leadership to assimilate and appreciate their roles and responsibilities.
3. Inter departmental coordination is necessary for effective transfer of responsibilities and functions. Rules and regulations need to be backed with administrative measures that would ensure effective decentralization at the field level
4. Top level coordination (at least at the secretary level) is important to send out signals to the bureaucracy on the importance of decentralization.
5. Programs and projects that address decentralization of education need to develop appropriate implementation architecture and coordination with other departments
6. Model/proto types of decentralized governance in education may be developed based on learning from experience and the same may be disseminated. Cases from Kerala would be of great value in this context.
7. Bodies like SDMC/VEC need to be integrated into the PRI system so that there would actually be a practical decentralization. Creating such parallel structure to be supervised by government functionaries is not an answer for genuine decentralization.

However, the essential conditions discussed above need not be sufficient, as we have seen in the experience of Kerala's LSGIs, even with its high achievements on the Human Development Index. We need to go a step beyond what Bardhan and Mookherjee (2007) spell out as the pre-requisites for decentralization. Perhaps what is additionally needed is a 'centering' on the child. In a broad sense, we must ask: What are the elements of this society

that is centered on the child? Can such a society arise? Centering on the child essentially means taking interest in, and exploring, the myriad possibilities that exist for the unfolding of the potential of every child. A number of people who are involved in this process, starting from parents, teachers, Panchayat representatives, political leaders, bureaucrats and so on, have critical roles to play in this vision of a society that gives importance to the child and the optimal development of its potential as a human being. In many ways, it can be argued, we are already centered on the child by default – the very birth of a child results in irreversible changes in the life of the adult caregivers, who have to then ensure that children are cared for; our education system is paranoid about achievements in the examinations; there is always pressure of some sort or the other on children to perform, and so on. In many ways, therefore, there is a centering on the child through the basis for this is often anxiety for the survival of the child, and its growth and development. However, the notion that is being invoked here is different in that it is empowering, allowing for uniqueness and creative expression which have been given short shrift in today’s education system. It is a notion by the help of which we can engage with serious questions such as ‘What is education? What is this education for? What is development? What is this development for?’ without taking someone else’s answers to these questions as the given. It should be emphasized here that ‘marginalized people or communities’ (including their democratically elected representatives) too are capable of engaging with these questions. It must be noted that the society being visualized above has to be rooted in different cultural contexts – we must first understand the social construction of childhood if we are to present a meaningful vision of the development of the child. Such an investigation is outside the scope of this study.

It follows from the above discussion that Panchayats as genuine representative institutions of people too have to rethink their assumptions about children, their growth and development, and the role that they can play in this process. For this to happen, much will depend on what one believes about human beings and collectives of human beings. As Shilpa Jain pertinently asks: “When given a choice, will human beings tend towards ‘goodness’? More importantly, can they learn, unlearn and relearn? Do human beings have the capacities for self discipline, for changing themselves, and for caring of one another and the world around them? Without romanticizing...I do believe the answers to the above are all a resounding yes.”

This study is but a small attempt to show that such possibilities are in the realm of reality.

Annexure 1 -- Panchayat budgets on Education – selected Panchayats from Trivandrum, Trichur and Wayanad districts

Activity	Mattathoor Panchayat – Thrissur district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Early Childhood Development					
Pre-primary nutrition program in schools	50000	--	60000	--	--
ICDS building repair	--	--	--	240000	--
ICDS building construction/extension	300000	352000	500000	250000	361000
ICDS additional honorarium (worker and helper)	45800	60600	75600	100000	119700
Purchase of land for Anganawadis	--	--	245000	--	315000
ICDS nutrition	--	--	--	1000000	1350000
Privately run day care centre support (food)	--	--	--	80000	80299
Direct support to children					
Refreshments -- for SSLC (10 th standard) students	--	--	--	60000	100000
School Development					
SSA contribution	--	--	500000	400000	397695
School buildings	105000	155000	70000	165000	977100
School kitchen construction	--	--	--	120000	--
Total funds of PRI					
% of total					
Activity	Nenmanikkara Panchayat – Thrissur district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Early Childhood Development					
ICDS nutrition	675000	684770	550000	600000	539442
ICDS building	--	16146	34200	--	117812
ICDS furniture (chair)	13600	--?	--?	--?	--?
ICDS-toys/play and teaching material	50000	15480	9931	--?	--?
ICDS honorarium		16000	21500	--?	--?
School Development					
SSA contribution	--?	--?	56000	125677?	123871
School library renovation				15000	--?
Extracurricular activities					
Cultural activity for children	--?	36100	--?	--?	87400
Balasabha (Children's Parliament)				36670	8325 ?
Total funds of PRI	11182859	9103198	12697339	9431593	10549926
% of total	6%	8.4%	5.3%	8.2%	8.3%

Activity	Karakulam Panchayat – Trivandrum district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Early Childhood Development					
Cooking vessels for AWCs	40991	--			--
Nutrition for AWCs	450232	506605	427927	970950	1136800
Nutrition for pre-primary	--	144305	85000	31200	54000
AWC building/compound wall	--	155000	700000	--	500000
AWC maintenance	--	--	129000	--	55000
AWC furniture/play	--	--	82700	160075	238630
AWC honorarium	--	--	--	--	43200 (<i>late?</i>)
Child friendly toilet for AWC	--	--	--	--	6000
School Development					
Thatching of LP school	56156	47592	--	--	--
Supply—Furniture/play equipments to LP schools	57474	58000	--	--	--
Nutrition for LP Schools	47199	--	--	--	--
Ceiling fan for LPS/UPS	46684	--	--	--	--
School building/maintenance	--	--	668000	420504	--
Compound wall for two schools	--	--	262500	--	--
Vegetable garden in school compound	--	--	--	1550	--
Construction of school kitchen	--	--	--	--	58296
SSA contribution	--	--	--	261250	198440
Purchasing of library books for schools	20000	--	--	30000	--
Extracurricular Activity					
Operation Olympia	276109	200000	350000	300000	300000
Science camps (Sahavasa camps)		30000	25000	--	--
Training for children in performing arts (Kala Gramam)	120000	120000	120000	100000	120000
Instruments for Kala Gramam program	--	--	100000	--	--
Construction work in Kala Gramam	--	--	200000	--	--
Children's Grama Sabha	--	--	--	50000	20000
Swimming pool side wall construction (as part of Operation Olympiad activities)	--	--	500000	--	--
Compound wall for swimming pool	--	--	--	--	418000
Direct support to children					
SSLC special coaching refreshments for students	36544	--	--	--	--
Total funds of PRI	98,25,464	2,48,13,118	3,63,62,284	2,56,69,430	?
% of total	11.7%	5.1%	10%	9%	?

Activity	Alagappa Nagar Panchayat – Thrissur district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Early Childhood Development					
Milk supply to Anganwadis	5937	--	--	--	--
Anganwadi worker and helper extra honoraria	45000	6900	--	--	69075
Anganwadi nutrition	291602	300000	330000	390000	600000
Anganwadi building	267500	251680	160000	100000	30400
Anganwadi tube well	52125	--	--	--	--
Pre-primary nutrition	--	--	--	--	--
Pre-primary electrification	11220	15205	--	--	--
Nursery materials for SC students		15000	--	9280	--
School Development					
Laboratory equipment supply to schools	118600 (computers)	160734 (computers)	--	--	--
Library development	--	--	4363	19750	--
Education kits supply to BPL students	--	--	--	--	--
Sports kits supply to school	29656	--	5194	--	--
School toilets repair	--	--	--	--	--
School infrastructure maintenance	37600	--	--	--	--
School furniture supply	--	--	36939	3061	--
School infrastructure development including playground	--	--	--	159000	261921
SSA contribution	--	--	--	53345	150000
Direct support to children					
Special tuition for SC/ST students	--	--	--	--	24367
Extracurricular Activities					
Football coaching	--	39500	24961	29980	20000
Training in music and music instruments for SC/general students	--	95787	92000	--	--
Balasabhas	--	--	--	45000	60000
Total funds of PRI*	71,26,120	55,91,000	62,10,000	58,68,969	1,53,35,765
% of total for children	12%	15.8%	10.5%	13.7%	7.9%

*Plan funds only

Activity	Sultan Bathery Panchayat – Wayanad district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Direct support to children					
Extra tuition classes for SC/ST children	18000	--	--	200600	30000
Uniforms for children	--	--	--	145600	--
Supply of notebooks	--	--	175300	55000	--
School Development					
School infrastructure/maintenance	60184	9850	--	550000	80709
School library	--	--	--	55000	--
Primary education <i>(this needs to be elaborated...what does it mean?)</i>	--	--	--	--	25000
Cultural program	4000	--	55000	--	--
SSA contribution	--	--	--	580000	421328
Total funds of PRI (State + own funds)					
% of total					
Activity	Noolpuzha Panchayat – Wayanad district				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
School Development					
School infrastructure	117110	--	551500	--	455370
Computers in schools	--	130525	--	--	--
Direct support to children					
Books <i>(what sort of books? For children?)</i>	--	--	--	--	10000
Extra/tuition classes for SC/ST children	--	44400	55000	55000	55000
Uniforms to children	--	--	--	556115	522363
Total funds of PRI (State + own funds)					
% of total					

Annexure 2 – glossary of terms used

ANM – Auxiliary nurse and midwife	NER – Net Enrollment Ratio
AKF – Aga Khan Foundation	NPE – National Policy on Education
ASER – Annual Status of Education Report	NGO – Non-governmental Organization
BEO – Block Education officer	NFE – Non-Formal Education
BRC – Block Resource Centre	NUEPA – National University for Educational Planning and Administration
CBO – Community Based Organization	NSS – Nair Service Society
CRC – Cluster Resource Centre	OBC – Other Backward Castes
CPI/M – Communist party of India/Marxist	PDR – Panchayat Development Report
DC – District Council	PRI – Panchayati Raj Institution
DEO – District Education Officer	POA – Program of Action
DIET – District Institute for Education and Training	PTA – Parent-teacher Association
DPI – Director of Public Instruction	PPP-- Public Private Partnership
DPC – District Planning Council	PPC – People’s Planning Campaign
DPEP – District Primary Education Program	PEC – Panchayat Education Committee
DRDA – District Rural Development Agency	PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
EDI – Education Development index	QEC – Quality Education Centre
EGS – Education Guarantee Scheme	RPSC – Rajasthan Public Service Commission
EWG – Education Working Group	SDMC – School Development and Management Committee
GER – Gross Enrollment Ratio	SPB – State Planning Board
GP – Grama Panchayat	SSA – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
GPK – Grameena Pattana Kendram	SCERT – State Council for Educational Research and Training
ICDS – Integrated Child Development Services	SIE – State Institute of Education
KSSP – Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat	SSG – School Support Group
KPR Act – Kerala Panchayati Raj Act	SK – Shiksha Karmi
KEAR – Kerala Education Act Rules	SNDPS – Sri Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Sangha
KILA – Kerala Institute for local Administration	SARD – Society for All Round Development
LDF – Left democratic Front	SC – Scheduled Castes
LJP – Lok Jumbish Pariyojna	ST – Scheduled Tribes
LSGI – Local Self Government Institution	TAG – Technical Advisory Group
MDM – Midday Meal	UN – United Nations
MP – Member of Parliament	UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
MTA – Mother-teacher Association	UDF – United Democratic Front
MLA-LAD Scheme – Member of Legislative Assembly – Local Area Development Scheme	URMUL – Uttari Rajasthan Milk Union Limited
MPW – Multi-purpose worker	VEC – Village Education Committees
NCF – National Curriculum Framework	VTC – Volunteer Technical Corps
NCERT – National Council for Educational Research and Training	VLW – Village Level Worker
	WDG – Water Development Guidelines

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Annexure 4 – List of people met

Name of person	Position	Location
K.N Harilal	Member, SPB	Trivandrum
C.P Narayanan	Member, SPB	Trivandrum
C. Ramakrishnan	Special Sec to Education Minister	Trivandrum
P.K Ravindran	Special Sec to Panchayati Raj Minister	Trivandrum
(Late) P.R Gopinathan Nair	Professor, Center for Development Studies	Trivandrum
Madhusudhanan	DIET (Now SCERT faculty)	Trichur
Ramakanthan	Director, KILA	Trichur
M.N Sudhakaran	Member, District Planning Committee	Trichur Panchayat
Janardhanan	Member, District TAG	Trichur
Thankam teacher	President	Kodakara block Panchayat, Trichur
Panchayat members, Alagappa Nagar Panchayat, Kodakara block, Trichur district		
Panchayat members, Mattathoor Panchayat, Kodakara block, Trichur district		
Panchayat members, Nenmanikkara Panchayat, Kodakara block, Trichur district		
Panchayat members, Karakulam Panchayat, Trivandrum district		
Panchayat members, Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad district		
Teachers from Beenachi school Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad district		
Teachers from Panchayat school, Vadakannad, Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad district		
Panchayat members, Nookpuzha Panchayat, Wayanad district		
Government schoolteachers, Karakulam Panchayat (Govt. UPS. Kazhunad)		
Sharath Kumar (Secretary), and Staff of Grameena Pattana Kendram, Trivandrum		
DIET faculty, Trichur district		
Ravindranath	Member, legislative assembly	Trichur district
Sashi	EWG member	Trichur district
Purushottam	Planning officer	Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad
O.M George	Vice President	Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad
Dominique	Asst. Educational Officer	Sultan Bathery Panchayat, Wayanad
Michael Tharakan	Professor, Institute for Social and Economic Change	Bangalore
Govinda R	Faculty, NUEPA	New Delhi
Dayaram	Senior Program Officer, Education – Aga Khan Foundation	New Delhi
Staff, Bodh Shiksha Samiti, Thanagazi and Umren blocks, Alwar district		
Staff, Digantar Shiksha Evam Khelkud Samiti, Baran district		
Teachers, Panchayat President and Ward members, Jhankdi village, Nagalbani Panchayat, Thanagazi block, Alwar district		
Noor Mohd, Sarpanch, Palakdi Grama Panchayat, Umren block, Alwar district		
Navi Kumar Sharma, teacher, Machdi Govt. school, Palakdi Grama Panchayat, Umren block, Alwar district		
Madanlal, Sarpanch, Umren block (<i>Grama Panchayat?</i>), Alwar district		
Om Prakash, Parishad Pati, Umren block, Alwar district		
Ramesh Chand Yadav, Sarpanch, Umren Grama Panchayat, Alwar district		
Ashik Dikshit, Ex. Block Panchayat President, Umren block, Alwar district		
Zakir Khan, Pradhan Umren block, Alwar district		
President, district Panchayat, Alwar district		
SSA officials, Alwar district		
Yogendra	Secretary, Bodh Shiksha Samiti	Jaipur
Rohit Dhankar	Secretary, Digantar	Jaipur
Sharada Jain	Director, Sandhan	Jaipur
Pradeep Kumar Sheel	Joint Director, SSA, Rajasthan	Jaipur
Shubhra Singh	State Project Director, SSA Rajasthan	Jaipur
Ram Lubhaya	Principal Secretary, PRI, Rajasthan	Jaipur
	Commissioner, PRI, Rajasthan	Jaipur
<i>List of people met at Baran needs to be included here...</i>		

