

## Primary Education in India: Experiences of Community Participation

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### INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful instrument for social change, a means of reducing social inequalities and the most important investment in human resources. It is observed that the poor environment of the school, low performance of the learners, lack of monitoring and on-site support hamper the quality of education in schools. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy in the Constitution states: 'the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 years within 10 years of adoption of the Constitution' (i.e. in 1950). It means that the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) was to be achieved in India by the end of 1960. However, the target of achieving UEE has been eluding the country till now. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and Programme of Action (POA),

1992 expressed its need very emphatically and planned to provide free and compulsory education of good quality to all children up to the age of 14 years by the turn of the twenty-first century.

When it was realised by the government that it was not possible to achieve the target unless its responsibility was entrusted to local bodies, the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution of India were made to handover the responsibility of elementary education to Panchayati Raj Institutions. In order to give further boost to achieve the target, the Government of India has recently declared education as a 'fundamental right' for children in the age group 6-14 years through its 86th Amendment of the Constitution of India. The primary school can thrive and put forth its effectiveness only when the community comes forward to look after its well-being.

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The community members must be given to feel that the school belongs to them and its development is their responsibility. The present paper tries to discuss the role of community participation in primary education and how the school is responsible for giving quality education.

### **About Community**

There are many meanings and definitions of community. A group of people who are socially related by virtue of identity with a particular location is called community. The nature of the social relationship and location are, however, ideologically contested. Conservatives and socialists may stress different bases for the existence of community, but both identify the social relations inherent in community as something greater than the concerns and interests of each individual living in it and providing the basis for the longevity of a community. Liberals are reluctant to conceptualise community on the same elevated basis because of their commitment to individual freedom. Instead they see community as based on the freely chosen associations of individuals with common interests and needs. The concept of village as a community is fixed with a territorial identity and at the same time is created above the traditional boundaries, i.e. linkages with castes or religious groups residing in other villages. Desai (2009) in his book on Rural Sociology, pointed out, "The word community has, for past many decades, denoted religious or

caste groups, or in some instances economic group not necessarily living in one locality. But with the implementation of Community Development Projects (CDPs), it is intended to apply it to the concept of village community as a whole, cutting across caste, religious and economic differences."

Community has been variously defined in the discourse on education as 'parents', 'The larger community' and 'elected representatives' or members of such local structures as Village Education Committees (VECs). 'Community' is not a homogeneous, monolithic entity, but one that lends itself to varying interpretations. It has a local class-caste composition. If the term 'community' is taken to mean parents, the background of the children determines the class-caste composition. If on the other hand, community means the elected representatives, their class composition would influence the nature of involvement (Anjali Noronha in Govinda and Diwan, 2003).

### **About Participation**

'Participation' is the act of taking part or sharing in something. Participation, in addition to its definition, has specific meanings in certain areas. It means:

- A notion in theory of management, economics and politics;
- A notion from virtual reality;
- The sharing of something in common with others;
- The joining with others in activities; and

- Getting some benefit from the performance of certain aspects.

Participation is called for not only on the part of the direct beneficiaries, i.e. pupils and teachers, but also the community via its representative organisations and volunteer groups. Participation also deals with decision-making at all points in the educational process at both national and local levels. Participation implies that the structures and organisations of the education system will be transformed or adapted, particularly to coordinate centralisation and decentralisation of the system. Participation in the various dimensions has come to be recognised as a basic principle of action, an over all development strategy in national development of all the sections including education. Participation is necessary to make education relevant to the needs, problems, aspirations and interests of the population benefiting from it, particularly disadvantaged group (Yadav and Panda, 2005).

### **About Community Participation**

‘Community participation’ is a powerful and pervasive slogan. It places a high value on people’s involvement in public affairs. Schools, in particular, are vulnerable to this change. Community participation, many believe, can provide an opportunity to eliminate the alienation of people from schools.

The World Bank describes community participation as ‘a process through which the stakeholders influence and share control over

development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them’. In education, community engagement in schooling means management of schools to achieve universal enrolment, retention and achievement with improvement in quality. Hence, community participation means involvement of the total population in the system to facilitate the achievement of the goals of UEE.

### **Community Participation in Relation to Primary Education**

Community members play a vital role in the framework of educational programmes. The school community partnership is to be considered as a two-way process where community performs certain role for the benefit of the school and the school, in turn, helps the community in some form or the other, and both become symbiotic partners for mutual benefit. The basic requirements of universalisation of primary education like enrolment, retention and achievement cannot be fulfilled without active participation of community. Likewise school becomes a centre of activity, a micro-centre of learning, a centre of popularising science in day-to-day activities. It works as an empowering centre for not only the learner, but also the community (Panda, 2002).

Involving the community in the management of primary education is possible in three ways: (i) *Sponsored*: Persons participate, because some official instructions or endorsements

are issued. No force is imposed, but it has been externally supported, (ii) *Compulsory*: Persons participate, because it has been made compulsory, violating it may lead to coercion and punishment, (iii) *Spontaneous*: It means persons come forward at their own to participate without any external support or force (Mohanty, 1998). It can also be in two ways: (i) through the official statutory organisations like Village Education Committee (VEC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and Mother-Teacher Association (MTA), and Panchayat Raj Institution, (ii) through seeking the cooperation of NGOs and Voluntary agencies.

Community can participate in various ways for the improvement of school education such as: (i) compensatory work, (ii) development of infrastructure, (iii) celebration of special occasions or school functions, (iv) administration of the school including planning and implementation, and (v) supervision of the school. Community participation helps in enhancing school effectiveness. The broad areas of school effectiveness are: (i) discipline, (ii) students' achievement, (iii) teachers' motivation and instruction in the school, (iv) interpersonal relations, and (v) participation in cocurricular and extra-curricular activities. It is also observed that there is a striking impact on school enrolment wherever community participation is encouraged to realise universalisation of primary education. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment,

among others, has also emphasised that elementary education should be transferred to the Panchayats. The transfer of elementary education to Panchayati Raj Bodies was a step forward to ensuring community participation in a more meaningful way to achieve the target of UEE.

Without involvement of community in the primary education system, we cannot expect to achieve the goal of cent per cent literacy in our country. Although many attempts and several projects like Adult Literacy Programme, 'Each One, Teach One', Operation Blackboard, National Literacy Mission (NLM), Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), Education for All (EFA), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), etc., were launched yet the goal of UEE has not been achieved.

### **Role of Village Education Committee**

The Village Education Committee (VEC) is the smallest unit for the purpose of Universalisation of Elementary Education at the grass-root level. It has been empowered with legal authority as well as responsibility. Education of the village is a responsibility of VEC.

VEC is an organisation which assesses the requirements of Primary Education and necessary facilities for the schools in the village. It identifies the problems and chalks out a feasible plan for the village, which has to take care of all the boys and girls of the village to get them enrolled in school

and get regular education. VEC has not only to ensure the retention of the children enrolled, but it has also to be actively engaged in improving the quality of education by keeping in touch with the parents and schools. The functions of the Village Education Committee are:

1. Maintenance/supervision of primary schools and AIE centres.
2. Organise enrolment drive in the school area and ensure regular attendance of the children.
3. Planning and development of school in the village.
4. Beautification of schools' environment and playground.
5. Motivating parents to send their children to school regularly.
6. To ensure that all the enrolled children get quality education and are retained in the school.
7. To involve in community with the school.
8. To ensure that all the children in the age group of 6-14 years get enrolment in the school, so that none are deprived of it.
9. Conduct annual census of children of the age group of 6-14 years and illiterate adults of the age group of 15-35 years. The survey should also indicate the non-enrolled children, dropout children, illiterate adults before the beginning of the academic session.
10. Ensure construction and maintenance of the school building, repair and maintenance of approach road to the school, fencing of the school campus, development of playground, park, etc. with community support and contribute in the form of money, materials and labour, maintenance of school equipments like television set and other teaching-learning materials.
11. To improve the facilities in school, i.e. compound wall, new classrooms, drinking water, sanitary facilities, benches, equipment for sports, necessary repairs, etc., with the help and co-operation of the local community.
12. Organise competitions and give awards to the deserving students for their achievements in both curricular and extra-curricular activities.
13. To ensure that every girl child in the village enrolls and remains in the school and gets quality education.
14. Attend to emergent needs of the school as would be necessary at the time of unforeseen accidents like fire, flood, cyclone, etc.
15. To improve educational facilities in the school, i.e. educational equipment, viz., charts, maps, modules, articles for experiments, musical instruments, with the help and co-operation of the local community.
16. Review the work of the school and other education centre after the

annual examinations are over and analyse the reasons for poor performance.

17. Review the coverage of syllabus, attendance of students and teachers in its monthly meeting.

### **Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)**

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) may be defined as a unified platform for parents and teachers where they can meet each other and share their common experiences, problems and occupational hazards and enrich their ideas with regard to enhancement of enrolment, retention and academic achievement of the learners. PTA is essentially a non-political, non-racial, and secular organisation representing parents, teachers and well wishers from different sections of society. The role of PTA is to contact the parents of the children who do not go to school and drop out from the school, who are irregular in the school; persuade them to send their children regularly to school; receive help from local people to improve infrastructural facilities in schools, organise cultural programmes, games and sports competitions and celebrations of national festivals; and help the teachers in classroom management system.

### **Mother-Teacher Association (MTA)**

The role and function of MTA starts from child census of the locality and to identify eligible children for schooling in the beginning of the academic session of each year, move door to door

to count the children who have attained the age of 5+ years and to convince the poor and illiterate parents, especially mothers to send their children to school. The role of MTA is broadly given below:

- Participate actively regarding enrolment and retention of school-going children.
- Help teachers regarding teaching-learning process and preparing teaching-learning materials for children.
- Collect the folk tales, songs for enriching learning experience of the children.
- Take an active part in beautification of school campus and collect donation from public for school.
- Observe the national days at school with children and organise sports and debates on different topics to strengthen national integrity and international understanding of the children.
- Impart various types of training to the girls like weaving wool, craft training, operating the sewing machine, etc.

### **Community Participation: Some Experiences**

Community participation in the management of education is absolutely essential and is a key determinant of the quality of education programmes. A vibrant and active village education committee supported by regular activities for wider community

mobilisation can become the most crucial factor in accomplishing the goal of universalisation of primary education.

### **Shiksha Karmi Project**

The project has been implemented by the Government of Rajasthan through Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Board (RSKS) with assistance from voluntary agencies. The Shiksha Karmi Project (SKP) aimed at universalisation and qualitative improvement of primary education in remote socio-economically backward village with primary emphasis on girls. The project identified teacher absentees as a major obstacle in achieving the goal of UEE/UPE. It was realised that primary school in a remote village with a non-resident teacher often tended to become dysfunctional and both parents and children failed to realise that this has led to high dropout rates. Under SKP, regular teachers are replaced by local teachers who may be less qualified, but are specially trained.

Enrolment of girls, their attendance and retention in primary schools is one of the serious challenges in achieving universalisation of primary education. The SKP aimed at addressing these issues through decentralised initiatives involving the community. Under SKP, *Praher Pathashalas* (PPs) provide educational programmes for out of school children in their convenient time as they could not attend regular day schools due to their pre-occupations at home. In the PPs, condensed formal

school curriculum and learning materials were provided and *Mahila Sahayogis* were employed in motivating girls to attend schools in remote areas.

### **Janashala**

The Janashala programme has been designed as an integrated approach to coordinate, consolidate and accelerate the qualitative aspects of elementary education. Janashala focuses on improving access and enrolment of children by the active participation of community. Janashala was launched in the year 1998 with a purpose to (i) enhance and sustain community participation in effective school management and protection of child's right, (ii) improve performance of teachers in the use of interactive, child-centred and gender sensitive method of teaching in multigrade classroom, (iii) improve attendance and performance of children, especially girls and other disadvantaged sections of the society, and (iv) improve resource mobilisation and evaluation mechanism of school programme by the local communities/panchayats/municipalities. Under this scheme the district with high proportion of scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and high fertility rate with low female participation and low socio-economic status, etc. was considered for the implementation of this programme.

### **Bihar Education Project**

The Bihar Education Project (BEP) covers all components of elementary

education and has been expanded in a phased manner. Taking the block as a unit for its programme and activities, participatory planning and implementation, etc. were the basic characteristics of the project. The most important aspect is to help to reflect, analyse and take decisions at their own level, to enable themselves to decide their fate with confidence and find out the path of their development. The Bihar Education Project also had undertaken the following: (i) to improve the process of social, economic and cultural transformation in the villages of Bihar through the propagation of primary education, (ii) to develop the strength of the community so that dependence on government is reduced, (iii) to create a positive approach amongst disadvantaged groups / families towards primary education, (iv) to eliminate social and gender discrimination, (v) to sensitise the community towards providing quality education to physically and mentally disabled children, and (vi) to give due representation to disadvantaged groups, SCs/STs, particularly women, labourers and petty farmers in the management of the school.

### **Lok Jumbish**

*Lok Jumbish* (LJ) is the people's implementation of 'Education for All' and an innovative project managed with assistance from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). This has been implemented in Rajasthan since 1992 with the basic

objective of achieving 'Education for All' through people's participation and mobilisation. The Lok Jumbish has attempted to make education a people's movement ensuring active and sustained participation of the people at every level.

The unit of decentralised planning in the Lok Jumbish was the village and the unit of decentralised management was the block. Between the village and the block, there is a crucial structure of the Lok Jumbish called cluster consisting of 25 to 35 villages with similar geographical and socio-economic conditions. The cluster personnel are responsible for penetrating rural areas, earning the confidence of the village community, providing necessary support as facilitators through active participation in the activities and coordinating with the Block Steering Group (BSG). A core team called *Prerak Dal* (Motivational Group) in every village is set up with women members constituting nearly half the membership. A separate women's group is also set up. The members of these groups are trained and empowered through sharing of information. The emphasis in training is on confidence building, creating genuine interest in children particularly girls' education, on learning the techniques of preparing the village map, household survey and survey of the school.

The women's groups discuss with the community the issues related to



girls' education and mobilise the women of the village in bringing about a change in perception regarding education of girls and their role in the family and society. Women's group also raises voice collectively against social injustice towards their fellow women in the village.

The Lok Jumbish has used School Mapping (SM) as the principal instrument for people's participation and generation of child-wise authentic information. The village education committee had been taking many steps in school mapping. It established contact and generated genuine information through actual survey of each family, filling up a performa containing details of every child in the age group of 3 to 14 years in the family and his/her educational status, noting down the reasons if not participating in education. In school mapping the community prepared a Village Education Registrar (VER) by putting together the survey sheets of every household. The VER thereafter becomes a source of authentic information regarding the actual participation of children in primary education. In *Naksh Nazri* (village map), all school going and non-school going boys and girls from every family are shown through symbols and different colours on the map. The symbols and colours get easily communicated even to an illiterate person. Thus, this map serves as a visual database. Any villager can locate her/his house on the map and can also compare the status of her/

his children regarding primary education in the context of overall status of the village and also in comparison to the children of other families. So, the Lok Jumbish Project has made a positive contribution towards quality improvement in education and helped in formation of vibrant block and cluster resource groups that provided academic support to regular training programmes for primary school teachers.

### **Ninad: A Community Awareness Programme**

Ninad was an innovative programme through which awareness among the community members about different key issues of the District Primary Education Programme was developed in Orissa. Through community mobilisation programme, the community is expected to be involved in the primary education programme and ensure enrolment and retention. The awareness programme is intended to sensitise the community to put forward its school-related demands in the right perspective and avail itself the opportunity to strengthen primary education.

A networking system has been evolved in Ninad from the village level to the state level with different stakeholders, who are properly trained in community mobilisation programme and can guarantee the sustainability of the programme. The stakeholders have been structured at different levels to take part in the community. This also

includes the alternative schooling system for deprived class of children, who could not have access to formal schooling. VECs have been formed and their members are trained about their role and responsibility. Mother-Teacher Association (MTA), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and Women Organisations are advised through training to create awareness and demand for girls' education. These associations ensure enrolment of the girl child. Construction of school building, Block Resource Centres and Cluster Resource Centres, provision of tubewell and toilets are the activities undertaken by involving the community. The endeavour was to bridge the gap between the school and the community.

Ninad has been a unique, intensive and village level community mobilisation programme of its kind. The aim is also to infuse the spirit of spontaneous involvement in the community so that it can actively take the managerial responsibility and ultimately take the ownership of both school and schooling of its children. The basic philosophy of Ninad has been reaching the unreached.

### **Community Participation in SSA**

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* which envisages education for all children from 6-14 years recognised the importance of community participation in a big way. SSA framework speaks of quality elementary education owned and managed by the community in a

mission mode. It is indeed very crucial to involve community in the affairs of a school to bring about improvement in quality of education. Community-based elementary education programmes indicate that involvement of the community has significantly contributed towards promoting a learning environment leading to the achievement of the objectives of quality elementary education. The community members are supported to motivate and mobilise women, youth and other members to actively participate in campaigns through activities like school-based socio-cultural activities.

SSA recognises the significance of community's role in the management of school from planning to the implementation and subsequent monitoring of school activities. Involvement of the community in supervision and monitoring at the local level is also required to make the UEE a success. The roles of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Village Education Committees (VECs), Mother-Teacher Associations (MTA), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Mahila Samakhya groups, etc. are also considered to be significant in mobilising community towards improving the educational scenario in their locality. The community can also assist in effective functioning of the school and in providing quality education to children.

### **Conclusion**

Active participation of the community is the need of the time so as to achieve

the target of mass literacy and universalisation of primary education. The joining and active involvement of teachers and community members can bring a significant change in the school system and improve the various dimensions of our social life. The VEC, PTA, MTA and various other grass-root level functionaries strengthen the management of primary education effectively. Though adequate provisions for involvement of community in implementing different aspects of school improvement programme have been made through various state and national level plans/programmes yet we are far away from our mission. Under RTE active community participation has been recommended.

### **Community Participation under Right to Education Act**

Under Right to Education Act, 2009 implemented from 1 April 2010, community participation has been

ensured through School Management Committee (SMC) consisting of the elected representatives of the local authority, parents or guardian of children admitted in such schools and teachers. At least three-fourth of members of such committee will be parents or guardians. Proportionate representation shall be given to parents or guardians of children belonging to disadvantaged groups. Fifty per cent of members of such committee will be women. The SMC will: (i) monitor the working of school, (ii) prepare and recommend school development plan, (iii) monitor the utilisation of grants received from appropriate government, and (iv) perform other such functions as may be prescribed.

For achieving the desired outcome through SMC, advocacy about 'Right to Education Act' and sensitisation of parents and communities appear to be a must.

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