

Community Participation in Education is an Effective Measure for Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (Pris)

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Abstract:

The Panchayati Raj system is a pivotal mechanism for realizing India's vision of democracy and sustainable rural development. However, its effectiveness hinges on addressing the challenges it faces and leveraging education and community participation as tools for empowerment. Strengthening PRIS is not merely a constitutional obligation but a moral imperative to ensure holistic development and the empowerment of India's rural population, a testament to India's commitment to democracy and decentralization. However, its true potential can only be realized by addressing the structural and functional challenges it faces. Strengthening pris is not just a constitutional mandate but a necessary step towards achieving holistic rural development and empowering India's grassroots democracy. In India, most of its population resides in rural areas and therefore the democracy should begin thereon in order to ensure good governance and a better functioning of democracy that we desire. To extend democracy to the rural India, the system of Panchayati Raj was established in India. The Panchayati Raj system is not a new concept and therefore is considered as one of the best ways of governance of the rural India. However, the system of Panchayati Raj, despite having derived their powers and existence from the Constitution of India, faces a lot of challenges in their day to day working because of various reasons and therefore this third tier of government has not been able to serve the purpose with which it was introduced in India. Therefore, in this paper, the authors discuss the structure of Panchayati Raj in India and the challenges that the present Panchayati Raj institutions faces in their proper functioning. Community participation not only strengthens the educational ecosystem but also empowers PRIS to be effective agents of change, ensuring that education serves as a cornerstone for holistic rural development.

Keywords: Community participation, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Village Education Committees (VEC) governmentalization, Constitutional Amendments.

1. INTRODUCTION

The community participation in education can be understood properly by examining the existing community structures and their functions in education. In the post Independent India, there have been constant efforts in terms of new policies and programmes for promoting community involvement in education including literacy. In this case, the Constitution of India has played an important role in providing direction and guidelines for seeking community involvement in education. The participation of a community or a social group in the education process is a precondition. The idea of community participation in education is not new to the Indian society. Since the very early days, schools in the forms of 'Pathshalas' and 'madrasas' emerged as community institutions. The society transmitted its knowledge and skills through these institutions. However with growing formalization and Governmentalization of education, the linkage between community and school has weakened leading to widening gap. The gap became very wide when modern formal education in the form of schools was established externally by the British colonial administration without any involvement of local community members. The community participation in modern formal education, therefore, has been main concern for the policy makers in the post-independence period. National educational policies have been formulated recommending active involvement of local community members in the functioning of educational institutions. The following sub-sections of this unit specify the constitutional provision and policy measures and examine important grassroots level community structures and their functions.

- **Community participation can improve the quality of education**-PRIS can work with non-governmental organizations to improve the quality of education in the village.
- **Community participation can improve access to education**-Effective local administration can improve access to education, enrolment, retention, and learning experiences of children in school.
- **Community participation can strengthen the livelihoods of the poor**-Community participation can help strengthen the livelihoods of the poorest of the poor and the overall development of the panchayat.
- **Community participation can be achieved through various programs**-Some programs that can be used to achieve community participation in education include:
 - Parent enrolment in adult education and parenting education programs
 - Home visits by trained personnel to facilitate home-school communication
 - In-classroom involvement of parents, business leaders, and citizens
 - Community-based learning
 - Use of school facilities for community activities

Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayati raj as the foundation of India's political system, it would have been a decentralised form of government where each village would be responsible for its own affairs. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj (village self-governance). By the recommendations of different Samities and obligations of constitution these institutions now have sufficient powers, responsibilities and finances to prepare plans and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice. States are expected to act in consonance with the spirit of the different acts for establishing a strong and viable system of local self-government. The national development goals require the professional management of education to bring about the effective and efficient functioning of educational institutions. Education is a social process. For example, the National Policy on Education (1986) recommended the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework at the district and sub-district levels, such as, District Board of Education and Village Education Committees (VEC) for greater involvement of local community members in the management of elementary education. Furthermore the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have entrusted roles and responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj bodies in management and control of elementary education at local level. Policy Framework for Community Participation in Education The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts have envisaged introduction of democratically elected bodies at the district, sub-district and Panchayat levels. The Acts also provide for adequate representation of women, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The 11th Schedule of the Constitution among other things entrusts the Panchayat bodies with the responsibility of looking after 'education including primary and secondary school, technical training and vocational education, adult and non-formal education, library and cultural activities.' Following the Constitutional Amendment Acts, it has been made mandatory for the states to constitute, through legislation, elected local self government at district and sub-district levels in both rural and urban areas, to plan and administer development activities in their respective jurisdictions. Consequently the states have taken legislative actions to constitute Panchayat structures as local elected government bodies and have initiated decentralization of governance with respect to education, health and infrastructure.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and Programme of Action (POA) revised in 1992 have emphasized the importance of decentralizing planning and management of education at all levels and people's participation in education. In pursuance of the Policy and Programme of Action, the state governments have taken steps to set up structures for decentralized planning and management. It is expected that as part of the decentralization, local communities through appropriate bodies would get involved in improving the functioning of schools. The formation of Education Committee and various other participatory structures and their involvement in education is a result of the constitutional commitment and policy recommendations.

Relationship between Panchayati Raj Institution and Community Structures

As explained above, the Constitution (73rd and 74th Amendment) Act 1992 has accorded statutory status to local self-government known as Panchayati Raj system and has entrusted it with the tasks of looking after primary and secondary education. The CABE Committee on Decentralized Management of Education suggested constitution of Village Education Committee (VEC) at the village level and the Panchayat Standing Committees on education at intermediate and district levels. The committee delineated the roles and functions, organizational and administrative support for VECS and preparation and training requirement for them. The states have formulated guidelines for formation and involvement of the VECS in elementary education with adequate representation to the Panchayat bodies.

Since the VEC is considered to be an integral part of the overall Panchayat administration of elementary education as envisaged under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, it is important to understand the linkage between Panchayat institutions and VECS in terms of the following:

- Representation of the Panchayat members in VEC and other community for;
- Roles and functions performed by the Panchayat members in primary education;
- Statutory provisions and actualization; and Networking of Panchayat and other government a non-governmental bodies.

COMMUNITY STRUCTURES IN EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Village Education Committees (VEC), School Management Committee (SMC), Mother Teacher Association (MTA), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Mothers Associations and Women Motivator Group (WVG). For understanding community structures and their functions in depth, we would concentrate 54 on analysis of VEC and PTA in the context of: Nature and composition of the community for (VEC, SMC, etc.), Community Participation in Education Formation processes involved, Areas and extent of their operation, and Roles and responsibilities. Under various educational programmes such as District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), added emphasis has been given to the formation and involvement of VECS and PTAS in elementary education with specific roles and functions.

Village Education Committees (VEC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Village Education Committee is a village habitation level body set up through government order entrusted with responsibilities of administering educational programmes and looking after schools or other educational institutions at the village level. The committee usually has average 10 to 15 members with representation from the women, the disadvantaged groups such as SC and ST, elected Panchayat members, head teacher and others. The nature and composition of the state varies from state to state, as each state has formulated its guideline for setting up such committees. This is also considered as one of the sub-committee under Panchayat system.

The CABE Committee highlighted some of the functions of the VEC as follows:

- Generation and sustenance of awareness among the village community ensuring participation of all segments of population;
- Developing teacher instructor and community partnership to oversee and manage the effective and regular functioning of the schools and centres;
- And vesting it with appropriate statutory and financial authority.

Some of the centrally sponsored programmes such as the DPEP and SSA have specified its roles and functions and have sought greater involvement in planning and implementing the programmes, functions currently being performed by the VEC under SSA are as follows:

- Ensuring enrolment of all the children in the age group of 6 to 14 years;
- Monitoring school activities for retention and providing good quality education;
- Paying special attention to the educational needs of the girls and other disadvantaged groups;
- To improve facilities in the school, e.g. Compound wall, new classrooms, toilet facilities, repair and maintenance etc; and on the whole
- To involve community with the school.

FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY THE PTAS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- Assisting the teachers in conducting school activities;
- Helping the teachers in conducting door to door survey work;
- Assisting the teachers in pursuing the parents of un-enrolled children for sending them to school;
- And providing feedback to the teachers about educational progress of their children. However the effectiveness of the VEC depends upon the awareness and motivation of the members and technical and resource support provided to them.

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The communities in India are at different stages of socio-economic development and educational attainment. Despite over five decades of planned development, so far only 65.38 per cent population of India is literate and around half of the female population remain illiterate even today (2001 Census). The elementary education in India is characterized by incidence of low enrolment and high dropout rate. Besides, quality remains a major issue at all levels of education. However the nature and extent of the problem varies from state to state, region to region and from community to community. Due to differential socio-economic background, the communities respond to education and developmental programmes differentially.

The problems and issues relating to differential community participation in education can be explained in terms of the following:

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.

The panchayats are no longer community institutions, they are political bodies dominated by party interests (Acharya, 2002). The electoral process has brought forth the political interests to the fore. The analysis of the process of decision-making with regard to devolving money and power in these participatory structures explains the case. While emphasizing the need for community empowerment, Raina (2003) -explains that. Though participation must begin at the local level with communities, a project cannot end there. Whether we would like it or not, the state continues to be a major player, and we want it to be a major player if education is to be universalized or sustained livelihoods for the vast majority of poor have to be ensured. Local empowering action perhaps requires a strong state, particularly in times when the dominant market mechanisms can marginalize the poor further without state-mediated safeguards. If the community participation is to advocate the social empowerment of the poor, it must also, therefore, advocate their political empowerment.

EDUCATION AND MANAGEMENT

Education can be characterised as the sequence of learning experiences to the students in order to impart knowledge, ethics, attitudes and skills with the aim of making them responsible citizens of the society. While, Educational Management is the process of planning, organising, directing and controlling the activities of an organisation by utilising human and material resources so as to effectively and efficiently accomplish functions of teaching, extension work and research. Educational Management focuses on educational planning at macro levels, its goals, principles, approaches and processes. In addition, at the micro level it deals with institutional planning and educational administration.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Educational management is important as it deals with various administrative problems of educational organisation. The following are some of the important features of educational management –

1. It includes the study of various theories of management science, which define and describe the roles and responsibilities of the educational manager and develop managerial skills.
2. Helps in decision-making, problem-solving, communication, managing information and building effective teams.
3. Helps in planning of co-curricular activities, academics and preparation of timetable.
4. Helps in the maintenance of school records, evaluating students' achievements
5. Financing and budgeting of the institution.

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

1. Structure Of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India constitute a new chapter in the process of democratic decentralisation in India. In terms of these Amendments the responsibility for taking decisions regarding activities at the grass-root level which affect people's lives directly would rest upon the elected members of the people themselves. By making regular elections to Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies mandatory, these institutions have been given their due place in the democratic set-up of the country. The development of Panchayats is seen as a boon for the villagers; as they can now discuss about their issues with confidence, and even seek solutions through the Panchayat in their region. The Panchayat system has made a common person even in the rural areas, more cognisant of their rights. The one most positive aspect about Panchayats is their high-degree of accountability before the people. When it comes to administrative benefits, the Panchayati Raj has "bridged the gulf between the central government and the people in the rural areas."

2. Educational Administration Under Panchayati Raj Institutions: The Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies have an important role to play in reconstruction of the education system. It is being realised that there is an alienation between the community in general and educational system and thus efforts towards ensuring larger enrollment, raising retention rate and improving teaching-learning process, have not succeeded substantially. The establishment of Institutions of local self-government may be seen as a significant step in the direction of making the system more effective as well as responsive. The Panchayati Raj/Municipal bodies should be made responsible for planning, execution and monitoring of various educational programmes at different levels. It may not be out of place to mention here that the National Policy on Education and the Programme of Action (1992) emphasise the importance of decentralisation of planning and management of education at all levels to ensure greater community participation. Keeping in view the recommendations of the POA, the Minister of Human Resource Development, in his capacity as the Chairman of the CABE, set up a CABE Committee, under the Chairmanship of Shri M. Veerappa Moily, the Chief Minister of Karnataka, to formulate guidelines on decentralised management of education in the context of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The Committee under its terms of reference was to formulate guidelines for the management of education at district, sub-district and village levels keeping in view the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India.

3. Gram Panchayat Institution and Education Management: The Programme of Action approved by the CABE attaches considerable importance to Village Education Committees. The village normally represents a cohesive community and is ideally suited for promoting programmes, involving support of the community, such as, Early Childhood Care and Education, Primary Education, Non-formal Education and Adult Education. VEC may be considered the ideal organisation to mobilise and involve people in the educational efforts.

3.1. Role of Gram Panchayat in Educational Administration where Panchayat Comprises Single Village

The Constitutional (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992 was enacted to reform the Panchayat System in India. The Legislature of Indian States was given powers to determine the powers and composition of Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayats. Hence, the powers, functions and composition of Gram Panchayats are determined by the State Governments in accordance with the local needs. Gram Panchayat is the organisation of elected panchas by the members of Gram Sabha of the village. It is a self-government organisation. The number of members in a Gram Panchayat depends upon the population of the village.

The functions of Gram Panchayat include, implementation of welfare plans, social justice and development, upliftment of women, economic development, etc. Gram Panchayat also plays a significant role in educational management at grass root level. CABE committee (1993) report also emphasises the decentralisation of powers for the successful educational management. The Committee observed that in order to secure effective participation of the people, there was a need for broad-based participative structures for education as distinct from the general Panchayati Raj structures.

3.2. Structure and composition of Gram Panchayat for Management of Education: To look after the administration at village level there should be a Panchayat Standing Committee on Education (PCE) comprising not less than 15 members, this will include –

- Chairman of Panchayat;
- One member of SC, ST, BC, and Minorities;
- A representative of PTA (Parent);
- An Anganwari worker;
- A person interested in education;
- Member Secretary- Head Master of Primary/Upper Primary Schools.

3.3. Powers of Gram Panchayat (where Panchayat Comprises Single Village) in Educational Management

These are the main powers of Gram Panchayat suggested by the committee.

- To visit educational institutions
- To check attendance and other registers to enquire and to report the concerned authorities on educational deficiencies and requirements in the village
- To recommend annual budget of school to concerned authority
- To undertake construction and repair works entrusted to them
- To report on regularity of students, teacher's attendance and school functioning
- To frame the school calendar under the guidance of the Zila Parishad

3.4. Role and Functions of Gram Panchayat in Educational Management

- Supervision over adult education, early childhood care and education, non-formal and primary education
- Supervision over composite upper-primary school under delegation of authority from Panchayat Samiti
- Promote enrollment drives in primary schools and persuade parents of non-attending children to send their wards to schools
- Reduce dropouts in primary school by initiating measures and services for retention
- Assist in smooth functioning of primary schools
- Seek support of teachers, youth and women and others for educational and other linked health and welfare programmes
- Mobilise resources and help schools to have water supply, urinals, playgrounds and other facilities
- Prepare plans and proposals within their resources for development of education in the village to attain total adult literacy and universal primary education
- Present reports and proposals to Panchayat Samities and make periodical self-assessment of progress of committee's efforts;
- Coordination with other social service departments and committees for mutual support.

4. Role Of Gram Panchayat in Educational Administration Where Village Panchayat Comprises A Group of Villages- Structure and Composition

Village education Committee is constituted by Village Panchayat. Its Sub-Committee constituted with not less than 7 and not more than 15 members. This will include –

- Chairman of Panchayat or a member of Panchayat from the village concerned;
- One member of SC, ST, RC and Minorities;
- A Representative of PTA (Parent);
- An Anganwari worker;
- A person interested in education from the village;
- Member Secretary- Head-master of Primary/Upper Primary School.

4.1. Powers of Gram Panchayat in Educational Administration

- These will be the main powers of Gram Panchayat in Educational Management-
- To visit educational institutions;
- To check attendance and other registers to enquire and report to concerned authorities on educational deficiencies and requirements in the village;
- To recommend annual budget of school to concerned authority;
- To undertake construction and repair works entrusted to them;
- To report on regularity of students, teacher attendance and school functioning;
- To frame the school calendar under the guidance of the Zila Parishad.

4.2. Role and Functions of Gram Panchayat in Educational Administration

- Supervision over adult education, early childhood care and education, non-formal and primary education;
- Supervision over composite upper-primary school under delegation of authority from Panchayat Samiti;
- Promote enrollment drives in primary schools and persuade parents of non-attending children to send their wards to schools;
- Reduce dropouts in primary school by initiating measures and services for retention;
- Assist in smooth functioning of primary schools;
- Seek support of teachers, youth and women and others for educational and other health and welfare programmes;
- Mobilise resources and help schools to have water supply urinals, playgrounds and other facilities;
- Prepare plans and proposals within their resources for development of education in the village to attain total adult literacy and universal primary education;
- Present reports and proposals to Panchayat Samities and make periodical self-assessment of progress of committee's efforts;
- Coordination with other social service departments and committees for mutual support.

5. ROLE OF PANCHAYAT SAMITI (INTERMEDIATE LEVEL) IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Panchayat Samiti is an intermediary level, elected statutory body endowed with comprehensive functions, bestowed with requisite authority and resources. It should be free from governmental interference and control. The state government shall have to give guidance. The area of Panchayat Samiti shall not be too large and unmanageable, and not too small negating the principles of economy and efficiency. It should be financially viable and within the reach of the common people in its activities.

5.1 Structure and Composition

Panchayat Samiti Standing Committee on Education (PSCE) comprised not less than 11 and not more than 17 members. This will include-

- Chairman of Panchayat Samiti;
- One member each of SC, ST, BC and Minorities;
- One Representative of PTA/NGO;
- One or two representatives of VEC/PEC by rotation;
- A principal of Degree/Pre-Degree College;
- A Headmaster of School Complex/Secondary School;
- A representative of teachers;
- Member Secretary- Block Education Officers or its equivalent;

5.2 Powers of Panchayat Samiti in Educational Management

These will be the main powers of Panchayat Samiti in Educational Management-

- To recruit staff for adult Education, Non-formal Education and Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes;
- To appoint staff in schools from approved panels;
- To transfer teachers within their jurisdiction subject to guidelines;
- To perform academic supervision of all institutions up to upper-primary level;
- To delegate the power of supervision over composite upper-primary schools in the PEC/VEC for the purpose of continuity;
- To prepare budget and to sanction plans and expenditures from the Panchayat Samiti Education Budget;

- To channelise funds to aided instructions under supervision of Zila Parishad;
- To Levy development fees and other fees to raise resources;
- To raise public contributions and donations;
- To propose measures to Panchayat Samiti to raise resources;

5.3 Role and Functions of Panchayat Samiti in Education Management

The major functions of Panchayat Samiti in Education Management are-

- Management of Adult Education, Non-formal Education, Early Childhood Care and Education and Govt, Primary and Upper Primary Schools under
- The supervision of Zila Parishad;
- Supervision and Channelisation of grant to aided primary and upper primary schools in their jurisdiction under the guidance of Zila Parishad;
- Academic supervision of all primary and upper primary schools including private schools;
- Preparation of plans for development of education up to primary level in their jurisdiction;
- Coordination with other social service departments and committees for mutual support.

6. ROLE OF ZILA PARISHAD (DISTRICT LEVEL) IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Raj system. Zila Parishad is an elected body. Chairpersons or Block Pramukh of Block Samities are also represented in Zila Parishad. The members of the State Legislature and the members of the Parliament of India are members of the Zila Parishad. Zila Parishad also plays a significant role in educational administration.

6.1. Structure and Composition: According to CABE committee recommendations, these are the structures of Zila Parishad for educational administration-

- Zila Parishad Standing Committee on Education (ZPSCE) comprising not less than 15 and not more than 21 members includes-
- The Chairman, Zila Parishad;
- A representative each of SC, ST, BC and Minorities;
- A representative of PTA/ NGO;
- Two or more representatives of Panchayat Samiti and Panchayat/ Village Education Committees;
- Principal of a College;
- Professor of Education from University/ College;
- Principal of DIET;
- A Head of school complex/secondary school;
- A representative of teachers;
- Member Secretary- Chief Education Officer or equivalent

6.2. Powers of Zila Parishad in Educational Management

These will be the main powers of Zila Parishad in Educational Management-

- To establish and maintain school up to secondary level including recruitment, appointment and transfer of staff, payment of salaries and exercise control over the staff subject to Govt. Guidelines;
- To exercise control and academic supervision of all schools including aided and private schools up to secondary level subject to Govt. Guidelines;
- To lay down academic and administrative norms for better functioning of educational institutions;
- To disburse grants to aided schools as per the government guidelines;
- To supervise the work of Panchayat Samiti Education Committees and Panchayat Education Committees;
- To prepare and sanction education budget;
- To administer district education fund;
- To prepare perspective plan for district;
- To propose measures including levy of cess, surcharge and taxes for mobilising additional resources for education to the Zila Parishad.

6.3. Role and Functions of Zila Parishad in Educational Administration

The major functions of Zila Parishad in Educational Management are:

- Overall supervision of all educational programmes in the district up to secondary level;
- Preparation, implementation and review of plans for development of education upto secondary level in the district;
- Formulation and operationalisation of programmes to achieve total literacy and universal elementary education;
- Establish and manage schools up to secondary level;
- Academic supervision of all institutions (Govt. , aided, private) up to secondary level in the district including schools in Municipalities;
- Preparation and coordination of plans for development of education up to secondary level including those of Municipalities;
- To review progress and guide Panchayat Samiti and Panchayat Education Committees in their tasks
- Implementation of programmes for improvement of quality of education;
- Coordination with other social service departments and communities for mutual support.

TO SUM UP

Overall Panchayati Raj Institutions play a significant role in Educational Administration. The new Panchayat Act has conferred many powers and responsibilities to the Village Panchayat in different fields. In performing its various duties and responsibilities, the Panchayat can give necessary instructions to different individuals, institutions or the owners of those institutions. The Panchayat system also works towards the development of their regions according to the needs of the people. A Panchayat works at various levels, from creation of necessary establishments such as primary schools, to hygiene -related issues, to water requirements, to seek the central government's help towards generating jobs at the village level as well.

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Web links

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