

## **Development of Community Participation in Primary Education in India: A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

Education is the process which leads the human community towards the path of development. It is evident that most of developed civilisations in this world had their own unique and standard system of education for the development of its citizens. India is a homeland to a vast human resource and young intellectual minds. The demography of India makes it one of the youngest countries in the entire world. Therefore, education becomes a sector which should be developed exponentially in order to cope up with the ever increasing population of youngsters on the one hand and to meet the international standards of education on the other. In this process of educational development of a person, primary education is at the forefront because it is the foundational stone of the learning process of a child. The education system of India has never been static and it has kept evolving and developing from time to time so is the case with primary education in India. It tried to eliminate the traditional and non-innovative techniques of education and focussed more on the adoption of modern and innovative methods to make educational process much more interesting and inclusive for the people. Primary Education was at the forefront of this process of evolution and therefore major policy changes were inculcated in the field of elementary education. The major reform that was focussed upon each and every time was to increase the community participation in primary education in India. Community participation was stressed so as to make primary education more inclusive and accessible. This paper studies the entire process through which community participation made its way toward primary education system in India and how it ultimately become an inseparable part of learning process of a child. This papers studies in details the policies and programmes that were started by Government of India either in isolation or in collaboration with other non- governmental and voluntary organisations to enhance community participation in primary education in India.

**Key Words:** Education, Human Resource Development, Local Self Governance, Community Participation, Voluntary Organisation, Non-Governmental Organisations, Decentralization

### **Introduction**

Human and its well-being is central to the idea of every discipline. In recent times Social Work has emerged as a discipline and also as a profession in itself. It particularly deals with each and every aspect of human life be physical, mental or emotional, its ultimate aim is to secure a good life for individual. The International Federation of Social Workers defines "Social Work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and the liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being"(International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Social work not only deals with an individual but the entire communities as well. Community participation strengthens the ideals of social work in several manners. Education is a process whose ultimate destination is to secure a better life for individual society by making it more inclusive, peaceful and cohesive. Therefore, it can be said that both the Social Work fraternity and Education has a inseparable collaboration with each other because without education it is futile to imagine the welfare of human

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community. Social Work provides a platform to education where it can raise the living standards and potentials of people through awareness and teaching. Community participation is important for Social Work and therefore it has an important role to play in education discourse as well. There is a two-way beneficial relationship between education and communities- Education can develop communities and communities can spread education.

Education does not have a particular definition. It can be defined as a process of life-long learning which develops the inherent talents and potential of a human being so that he/she can represent himself in the best possible manner. Education is not only about intellectual development of an individual, it tends to appeal to moral conscious of an individual. Therefore, education is all about overall and healthy development of an individual.

Community in particular does not have a fixed definition. Community can be defined in several ways. In educational discourse community is all about the group of people who directly or indirectly become a part of educational development of a child be it parents, teachers, neighbourhood, representatives of local governments, education activists or other organisations. In education fraternity it is not necessary for the people of 'community' to live together in a definite area or to have common characteristics but they need to have a common interest and that is betterment of existing education system(Nishimura, 2017). The people belonging to this 'community' comes from diverse backgrounds yet they are hold together in order to contribute their shares in educational development of children.

#### **Tracing the History and Evolution of Community Participation in Primary Education**

Primary Education is the first step towards the educational development of a child and therefore it has to be more strong and stable in itself. The entire building of his learning should be based upon firm foundation of primary education. Keeping this in mind India since its independence and existence as a separate nation, is trying hard to evolve its primary education in the best interest of the learner. The non-static nature of policy making in India make education less prone to traditionalism and stagnation. Policy makers in India are very well aware of the importance of education for the Indian masses and therefore policies and programmes were made and changed from time to time to make them relevant and compatible with changing times. Community Participation as a reform was much stressed during the entire discourse on development of education in India. India is particularly a village society where informal relations and interactions has to play a bigger role in public policy implementation. Community was supposed to play a bigger role in primary education of a children in several ways- ranging from imparting traditional knowledge and skills to providing economic aid to schools. Indian policymakers tried to inculcate communities in education to make it more decentralised and inclusive. Therefore, the basic idea behind the community participation in education was to achieve many objectives of social and economic wellbeing of society with a single reform input. Community participation can play an important role in primary education in two different ways:

- (a) Community Members should play their part in primary education by taking keen interest in learning and participating in teaching and educational process of their children.
- (b) Community Participation should directly and indirectly participate in administrative as well decision making machinery of educational planning and management (Govinda & Diwan, 2007).

The detailed studies and research on the history of evolution and development of the collaboration between community participation and education can be presented in a comprehensive manner. The entire process of evolution of community participation in primary education in India can be broadly described as follows:

#### **Education in Pre-Independence India:**

This phase particularly begins with the education system of pre-independence era when most of the education system was governed and maintained by local communities. There used to be Pathshalas and Madarsas which were highly decentralized institutions without any centralized agency, mainly governed by local people. Community proved to be the main stakeholder of these institutions.

#### **Education in British India:**

After the British conquest of India, the situation somehow changed. Modern and western liberal sort of educations was encouraged so as to prepare an entire generation of Indian clerks with enough knowledge of English so that they can aid British government in its administrative tasks. It devoid the Indian masses of proper and affordable education facilities. It also created regional disparities in India as better education was provided in big cities as these provided better opportunities to British government for harbouring their trade and commercial businesses while villages and towns were left unacknowledged. Management and administrative tasks were endowed with municipalities and panchayats while the task of curriculum and syllabus designing was given to colonial government.

#### **Education in Post- Independence Era:**

When India got independence in 1947 from colonial administration, major emphasis was laid down in order to improve the existing educational system as the major objective of education was now shifted from preparation of clerical class to educating the large masses of Indian population. The constitution makers of India highly were highly serious about the issue and therefore they inculcated several provisions regarding free and

compulsory primary education to children in form of fundamental rights as well as in form of directive principles of state policy. Article 41, Article 45, Article 21A (enacted by 86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002), Article 24 and Article 39 of the constitution provide effect to the commitment of Government of India to provide affordable education to Indian masses (Laxmikanth, 2013). Education was transferred to concurrent list from centre list by 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 so as to make a coordinated field between centre and state government but more or less it remained a centrally administered field (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1986).

Several commissions and committees were constituted by Government of India in order to review the implementation of educational policies in India. The major point that was focused the most by all these commissions was that of enhancement of community participation in education. It was suggested that Government of India should try its best to formulate and implement such sort of policies which tend to enhance the role of communities in primary educational process of children. Government of India therefore taking into consideration the recommendations of these committees and various experts, made several policies and proposed several programmes so as to increase the role of community in primary education in order to improve the quality of education and make it more accessible, affordable as well as inclusive for Indian population. The most advanced mechanism which has been developed as a result of this evolution is School Management Committees (SMCs).

These various expert commissions and commissions as constituted by Government of India for studying and analysing the existing education system of India and their recommendations can be studied in chronological order as follows:

B.G. Kher Committee was appointed in 1953 under the chairmanship of B.G. Kher. It submitted its report in 1954 and suggested that there is a need of massive decentralization of powers from central to state governments and more to local bodies so that elementary education can become much more inclusive and relevant to the large Indian population (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1954).

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was another committee that was constituted after B.G. Kher committee to study extensively over the need of devolution of powers at various levels of decision making. It submitted its report submitted in 1957 and strongly emphasised the need for decentralised institutions of local self-governance like Panchayats in case of rural areas and Municipalities in case of urban areas. Not only this the committee recommended that the key sectors which are central to the development of human being like health and education should be highly decentralized and the task of their administration, management and financing should be given to the institutions of local self-governance. Therefore, this committee strongly recommended that degree of community participation can be increased in education by making more powerful institutions of local self-governance (Rani & Arora, 2004).

Both B.G. Kher Committee and Balwant Rai Mehta Committee gave precious recommendations regarding democratic decentralisation of powers in the realm of education in India.

National Education Commission (1964-66) which is also known as Kothari Commission was appointed in 1964 by Government of India. The commission recommended that the education policy and educational machinery should be more sensitive towards the needs and aspirations of vulnerable sections. It suggested to make educational system more feasible and accessible to marginalised sections (National Education Commission, 1966). The recommendations of the Kothari Commission later become the basis of National Policy on Education of 1968.

The National Policy on Education (1968) was a strong step towards the formulation and implementation of such a policy which made education much more accessible and feasible for all children up to fourteen years of age irrespective of their region (rural or urban). It laid down the basis of free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age. However, up to this time education remained a field which was more or less governed by the government at the centre. This policy called for enhancement of community participation in primary education so as to eliminate regional disparities in education and vanish out the alternate private education sector which is creating a direct rift between those who have and those who don't have. Therefore, it was not implemented well at the state and local levels because of poor machinery and lack of decentralization in financial and administrative powers. Looking at the failure in implementation of National Policy on Education (1968) and its reasons, education was transferred to Concurrent list from Centre List in 1972 through 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act (Rani & Arora, 2004).

Ashok Mehta Committee was constituted in 1977 and submitted its report in 1978 in which the committee gave tremendous suggestions regarding the decentralisation of administrative and managerial work through Panchayati Raj Institutions. It was emphasised that Zila Parishad should be given higher amount of power and to improve the quality of education a Board of Education should be constituted. However, it was not possible to implement the recommendations of the committee due to fall of the erstwhile government (Chaturvedi, 2003)(Rao, 2008).

National Policy on Education (1986) paved the way for encouragement of community participation in primary education by making provisions for setting up of Village Education Committees (VECs). It provided for

enhancing direct communication and interaction between the formal and official setup of primary schools and local community members (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1986). Formulation of National policy on Education (1986) was followed by Ramamurthi Committee (December 1990) and Reddy Committee which developed the revised National Policy on Education of 1986 (Government of India, 1998).

Programme of Action (1992) laid down a path for the proper and precise implementation of Revised policy of Education (1992). It suggested the appropriate mechanisms through which community participation can be enhanced and involvement of parents and local community members can be encouraged in the formal mechanism of the school management. This Programme of Action suggested for several tactics like awareness campaigns, plays, folksongs etc. through which interest can be generated in the communities regarding the importance of education and they can play their part in it (Government of India, 1992).

73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts (1992) provided for decentralisation of powers regarding educational machinery. More and more involvement of people was sought in educational process through Panchayati Raj Institutions. A considerable volume of powers related to educational planning and management were transferred to local bodies (Rao, 2008).

National Curriculum Framework (2005) carved out some innovative techniques regarding enhancement of community participation in primary education in India. As per the NCF community should be considered as human resource and should be properly utilized in the form of teacher for traditional knowledge and vocational techniques. This would make students more sensitive towards the need of local society and they can find more feasible and suitable solutions to the problems encountered by local community in their day to day routines (Government of India, 2005).

Right to Education Act (2009) proved to be one of the most effective stroke in making primary education accessible and affordable. Right to Education is “An Act to Provide for Free and Compulsory Education to All Children of Age of Six to Fourteen Years” (Government of India, 2009). It provided for establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) which is one of the most developed and evolved body for inculcation of local communities in planning and management process of primary and upper primary schools in India. **School Management Committee is a body of individuals ranging from Head Teacher of the school, teachers, parents of the students, members from the local bodies and education activists along with several governmental and non-governmental organisations. School Management Committees work for the improvement in infrastructure and facility development in schools, budgeting, resource mobilisation and keeps an eye over the functioning of formal administrative machinery of the schools.** In this way the concept of School Management Committees gives a bundle of powers and responsibilities of management and planning of schools to the members of community. SMCs provide a classic example of cooperation between formal system and community for administration of an entire system of schools.

#### **Conclusion**

India has an extensive range of programmes and policies regarding primary education and its collaboration with communities. However, the present status of primary education in India is not very encouraging. It is lagging behind in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Lack of proper implementation and proper sensitisation of administrative machinery are the main reasons behind these situations. Therefore, such mechanisms should be discovered which can cope up with the Indian needs and make proper implementation of existing policies and laws. Community participation has always been a key concept for improvement of educational system in India. Keeping this in mind law makers in India formulated several policies which can enhance participation of local people in primary education in India. School Management Committees are the most advanced vector of community participation in India. Proper implementation of laws and regulations prescribed in RTE, 2009 can make Indian Education System much more strong and inclusive.

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