

Decentralized Administration of School Education in Rural India: A Study of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to study decentralization (both theoretically and conceptually) in the administration of school education in rural areas, with special emphasis on Rajasthan. It also studies the Panchayat Raj Act and its role in the management of the School education, changes in the organisation of the administrative chain of the education system in the third tier, that is the districts of the state. Qualitative methodology was adopted, in-depth study of present literature. Next section presents the Findings of the study, analyses the followed by the impacts of this new modified structure of the education department, its implementation, success, challenges ahead.

Keywords: Decentralization, Administration, Panchayati Raj, School Education

Decentralization can be described as a process of redistribution of responsibilities, competencies and resources among various tiers of government/institutions, horizontally as well as vertically. This distribution of authority from an upper level to the lower level ensures that not one single entity exercises control with the intention of increasing the overall performance by giving more autonomy at local level.

It must be noted that this sharing of responsibility does not mean that the State is abandoning its control, but rather it is a change in the role and functioning of the state. The need for this change in the duties and responsibilities among various levels of the governance was adopted to help in realizing the essence of democracy in a diverse country, to include all the voices in the governance, the pockets of under-developed and under-represented in the well-developed regions.

According to Kumar (2006), decentralization has the potential to deepen democracy, as the local governments will be aware of the needs and situations of the local citizens in specific localities as

compared to the central governments. This proximity with the citizens will ensure responsiveness, accountability and transparency. The citizens will be well informed of governmental activities, schemes, programs. By bringing governments closer to people, decentralization provides a platform for more effective governance and makes it more participatory.

While being adopted in all the sectors, decentralization in the education sector is one of the most recent and effective reforms undertaken by the governments. Educational reform programs in recent times have focused on decentralization as a strategy to fulfil the desired development objectives envisaged by the government. Many countries across the world that adopted the process of decentralization have been successful in managing their schooling systems and targets in a better

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way. India too adopted the process in the early 1990s and has been fairly successful in improving the educational planning and management of its systems.

As dependence on the participatory element of decentralization is more in the rural areas, because they are already under-represented, under-informed and under-resourced, so here decentralization in education has a great scope to uplift the living standards of people, making their lives easy. One does not invent a separate, different category of primary school- the rural school-because there is a basis of common knowledge and personal development that is necessary for all children, whether they live in urban or rural areas. Primary schools anywhere, give a general elementary education, but there is a need for consciously sympathetic awareness of the rural life around the school, that should be reflected in the curriculum, methods of teaching, values system. Through the institution of *Panchayats* in Rural areas, there is an effort to revolutionize the school system, but it still needs detailed analysis of what is achieved and is needed.

Purpose of the Study

There is an urgent need to investigate the ground level situation to understand how decentralized planning is supporting the functioning of our education system, as it is facing numerous challenges even after decades of planned development. The challenges with respect to quality of education are well-known today, schools being the center where knowledge is imparted holds a very significant position in the management hierarchy. Rajasthan, 75.13 percent rural population was specifically selected, because it is relatively less explored, has been largely backward in educational and economic parameters. The state overall was caught in a “low-level, low-growth” trap and, consequently, in low socio-political consciousness, was also once a part of BIMARU states.

Rajasthan: Educational scenario and role of Panchayats

Rajasthan is the largest state of India and has a great diversity in terrain, language and cultural practices. The state has an area of 342,239 sq. kms. covering 10% of the Indian territory and has the seventh

largest population with 68 million persons (census 2011). More than 75% of the state comprises of rural population with a huge dependence on agriculture.

The structure of governance of the state is determined by the constitution. The State government is the supreme governing authority of the State and its 33 districts. Like any other state in India, Rajasthan also have a Governor as the ceremonial head-appointed by the President, and a Chief Minister is endowed with the executive powers who is responsible to a unicameral legislature. There are 75 departments in the state secretariat that are involved in policy formation and the executive departments are located outside the Secretariat that handle the execution of governmental policies. The administrative structure is multi-layered. At the district level, district magistrate/Collector is the principal administrator and also the principal revenue officer. The districts are split into sub-divisions, the administration here functions between district and *tehsil* level. There are 244 sub-divisions in the State, managed by the Sub-division officer and then reports to the Collector. The *tehsils* are the basic units for the purpose of general administration, treasury, land revenue, land records, etc. that are under the administration of Tehsildar. Under each *tehsil* there are a number of villages. Villages have governing council named Panchayats, at the block level, there are *Panchayat Samities* and at the district level there are *Zila Parishads*.

With the co-operation of this administrative structure, the education department of the state is engaged in promoting the access and quality of education among its citizens. The educational department has gone through many changes as per the requirement of the times, it has made itself more capable to provide better quality of education to the students. A brief history of the development of the education system of Rajasthan is described in below.

Trajectory of Educational Developments in the state: The methods and matters of education have gone through a long way to reach where and how they look in the present day. The availability of data regarding education in Rajasthan during the Ancient and Medieval periods is very scanty and irregular. Pushkar in Ajmer, Osian and Pahlodi and Nathdwara, etc., were some of the places where the learned Brahmins had their *gurukuls*. Ujjain and Vrindavan had contributed and influenced a lot in spreading education in Rajasthan during the ancient

time. With the emergence of English education, the number of institutions increased. There were around 647 educational institutes. The percentage of literacy was only 5.51 in 1941 (9.56 males and 1.14 Females). There was a clear infrastructure lacuna of the earlier period of post-Independence era, the case being worst in the rural areas.

At the time of independence, in 1948-1949 there were only 4896 Institutions were there in former Rajputana with inadequate resources and facilities. When the state was formed the total number of primary schools was 3,195 only, that grew to 39,335 by 1991. Expansion of the access of education and educational facilities became a main goal. The three five-year plans were decisive in uplifting the educational status and expended the education both quantitatively and qualitatively in the state. In the year 1950-51, there-were 56 only 6027 institutions in the State, after a decade the number increased to 20,771. The percentage of literacy which was only 8.96 increased to 15.2 percent in the year 1960-61. All in all, education started penetrating in the societies of the state.

Between 1949 and 1961, the enrolment increased by more than 400 percent, as per the NCERT (1961), "A review of Education in India (1947-61). There was quite an increase in the reach of education, whereas the quality of it was still a matter of concern. The state through, The Rajasthan Primary Education Act, 1964 made a provision to provide free and compulsory primary education for all children. The administration of primary schools were transferred to Panchayat Samities on October 2, 1969 by the government.

At present, with the help of the state administration, the educational facilities available in the state have increased over the years. As per the UDISE+ data (2018-2019), the state currently has 105674 schools, out of which 63.95% are governmental schools. 88191 schools, which makes it 83.29 % are in Rural areas. But there is still a considerable gap between the need and demand from schools. What is desired and what is actually available to most children is very different.

Present Educational Administration in Rajasthan: The present administrative structure of Secondary Education in the State included the *Panchayat* level governance involvement also. It is as shown in the Fig. 1.

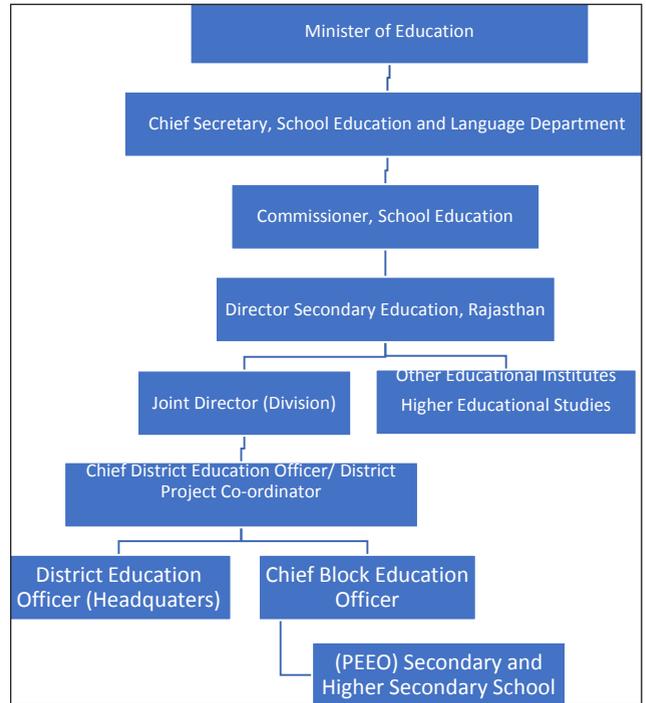


Fig. 1: Organisational administrative Structure of Education Department

The institutional map of the administrative structure for Primary Education in Rajasthan that is responsible, apart from, for the formulation and implementation of the educational state policies on education, as well as the finance, administration and management of the primary school system, as well as the situational ranks in the school organisation is as follows:

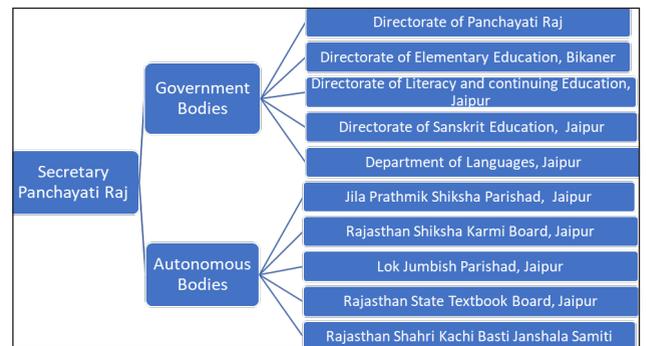


Fig. 2: Administrative Structure of Primary Education

Studying the existing structure, it is clearly visible that the State has a system of accountability and planning that is mostly a top-down one, be it for planning, execution or any way of functioning of the formal government structure for education department. It is also centralised in terms of programme management, design and

implementation and the existing decentralised approach to planning is limited to sub-programmes for which the options opened to communities are limited by the criteria set by state planners. The autonomy given to the decentralized bodies is very situational and limited, within a certain boundary, and within certain procedures.

Secondly, although after 1999, the administrative and institutional structure of school education has been placed directly under the purview of Panchayati Raj, but they are more or less used for increasing the enrolment of the left-out and school drop-outs. Their potential as a governing body is not utilized by the education bodies till now. Until the local people and the local governance mechanisms are fully functional and involved without any interference the vision of an inclusive meaningful education for all will not become a reality.

The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and Educational decentralization

Gram Sabha was given the responsibility of promoting literacy, education, health and nutrition, identification and approval of development works in order of priority from out of the works, plans, programmes and projects recommended by the *Ward Sabha*, before they are implemented.

The Chief Executive Officer is empowered to enter on and inspect any school or other institutions maintained by or under the control of any *Panchayat* or *Panchayat Samiti* and any records, registers or other documents kept in such institution.

The District Elementary Education Officer is to act as Officer in-charge of Elementary Education for *Zila Parishad* and exercise the powers and perform the functions that are conferred upon, or assigned to, him by the State Government.

After describing the duties to all the levels and the respective officers, the act proclaims that the State Government will be the Chief Superintending and Controlling Authority for all matters of the *Panchayati Raj* Institution administration. This provision is self-evident to prove that the PRI's are in reality dependent on the state government for their existence. And if their existence is a question, then the amount of power they possess, that was given to them through the acts is also superficial to a certain extent. State government after the

Centre remains the main power of authority in whose hands the existence of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions lies. The decentralization is mere division of functions, or creating new offices but not a source of empowerment for the local educational departments, even if it is- then also it is very weak institution that has limited autonomy.

Education remains one of the least concerned topics in the *Panchayati Raj* acts. It remains very vaguely defined concept in the act. Mostly the word Education is used to refer to as the department but what particular within education is discussed -the infrastructure, the human resource, the aims of expansion of teaching, the distribution of responsibilities, the administration in the department, etc. the specificities and detailing all are missing. The opaqueness in the distribution of duties among the levels is also an area of concern.

Educational Administration within the District: the Real Decentralization The new decentralized structure of the Education department in the State are the changes brought in the District, its educational set-up and the duties and responsibilities of those in the administration involved at the state, district, block and *panchayat* level in managing the educational affairs.

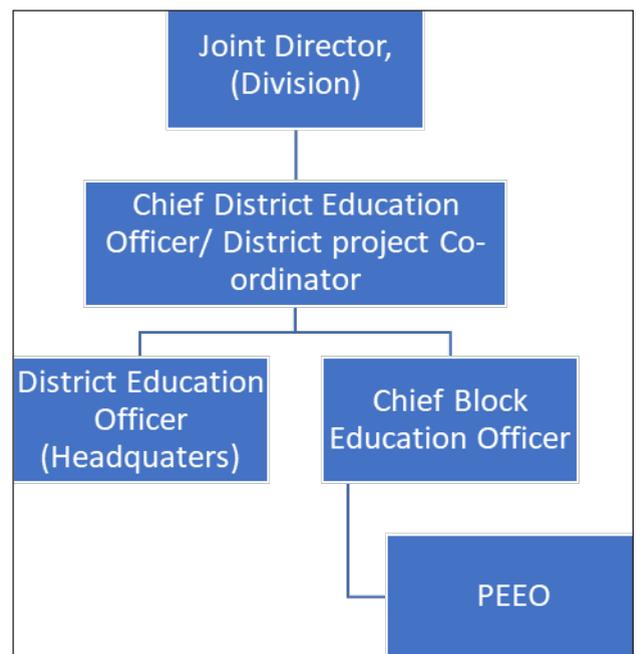


Fig. 3: Chain of Administrative structure of education department at district, block and panchayat level

Under the *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* in the state, a unified administrative system has been set up.

The Rajasthan School Education Council is given the responsibility for planning, implementing and monitoring the objectives and activities of the Scheme at the State level. In addition, to strengthen the administrative structure of the block, district and division level of the state, integrated education packages have been set-up at all three levels by reorganizing the offices at the district, block and Panchayat levels.

FINDINGS

Impacts of Rural Area

There are mixed impacts. The healthy environment is beneficial for maintaining good health of the students. There is less air and noise pollution as compared to urban areas, less distractions for student's mind, the traditional notion of "guru" and the respect that is attached with the word is still present. There is a value attached to the job of teachers, its not merely a job/profession, so the parents and community, mostly agree with what the teachers inspire them to do and the heads of the school ask them to do, like they attend the parent teacher meetings when called, they cooperate in the affairs of schools, give funds or help manually whenever required. This area gives a great amount of support from the parents of the students and the villagers that helps us in implementing all the decisions, collecting the data.

But there are infrastructural problems like road connectivity from the farms to the schools, availability of vehicles, mobiles, laptops, network connectivity. It's the interdependence of other sectors with the education department that dictates the student's enrolment, their presence in the classes, their parents involvement in the school activities, meetings, etc. There is a trend of villagers shifting in the fields rather than living in the main cluster area, so transportation and roads are not available as per the requirement. This leads to absenteeism. They are mostly involved in farming, so there is irregularity in attending the Parent Teacher meetings, and also lack of awareness. They are basically farmers in school uniforms.

Significance of the addition of Panchayat in Education via PEEO

There are regular visits by the PEEO. The Utkrisht

Vidyalayas are supervised twice in a month, and other Primary and Upper-Primary schools are supervised once. The parameter for inspecting includes: attendance, homework of students, the class-wise portfolio, verbally ask students questions from the topics that are covered by the teacher. The information is uploaded weekly. Other parameters include like: staff meetings, attending the class when the teacher is teaching and observing it, syllabus completion with respect to time.

The PEEO's are mainly to bring positive change, provide assistance in functioning of schools, they are the officers who work within the boundaries of schools every day, their main motive is coordinate and increase compatibility among the staff members, the school with the officials, and the villagers. They are not there to punish but to motivate to function in a better, efficient way and help in solving problems, as a guide and a mentor (Nudge Theory).

PEEO's are positioned not for the deterrence or impose anything forcefully, they are mentors, so they usually tell the staff what can be done, where the change is needed, how they should proceed if they face any problem. And in the next supervision there is comparison with the outcomes of the last performance and the current situation in order to check the progress.

If there is any act of disobedience then there are powers given to us to act accordingly, through the 16CC NOTICE and 17CC NOTICE, if the work is not found up to the mark, then there is an explanation call, they are asked to explain the reasons.

Autonomy

The PEEOs are given situational autonomy. They have to follow the orders that are passed on to them, but within the orders, mostly aims are told the procedure is up-to the PEEOs. In fiscal matters they are given the autonomy to prioritize the spendings, raising funds from Bhamashas, local representatives, etc.

Art of Hermeneutics

The implementation of all policies depends on the PEEOs. They start playing their role without any pre-service training. How much support the school gathers from the village depends on how dedicated the officer is, his/her leadership skills. Goodwill

carries more value. Their social skills determine the amount of funds through the Bhamashahs, that are mostly used for infrastructural development of school.

The role that they play is an Art of hermeneutics. Some see themselves as administrators - if teachers/workers/others disobey then first step is 16CC, 17CC Notices, or handle it with through the legal procedures available. Some see themselves as mentors/guide, etc. if they found any delay or disobedience then they try to persuade or remind-remind the teachers and others.

Panchayats

They are the resource providers and a means of establishing communication between all the stakeholders. Ujyari *Panchayat* conduct survey for those children who are out of school, once the survey is completed, lists are made of the drop-outs and then teachers are allotted wards where they go to their home to motivate their parents. This has helped in increasing the enrolment. Inclusion of all the stakeholders, their participation but they did not have any authority in the program. *Panchayats* continued to function within the framework of what may be termed as a “permissive functional domain”, since very limited functional areas have been withdrawn from the line departments of state governments.

The above findings are observations from the interviews and visiting the Schools. They are signifying how the schools are being managed and administered by the PEEOs, what challenges they are facing, in what spheres they are improving, what are the Departments strategies for the road ahead. It can be inferred that Education is **not a neglected subject** in the State, there are continuous efforts being made to achieve total literacy, integrated quality education, proper supervision, but it is **defective and confined**. Most of the achievements depend on the goodwill of the ground level policy implementors.

CONCLUSION

This article was aimed to study the functioning of decentralization, and how the process of decentralization interacts with the administrative planning and management of schools in the rural areas. It was a rearrangement of responsibilities in

order to bring efficiency, transparency, accountability and participatory.

Decentralization, as a technique of effective management was adopted in the governing process by various nations, and the institutes. The administrative restructuring that was adopted as a part of decentralization improved the education sector’s performance in many ways. Connections with the grassroot levels has revived the interest of parents in the activities of the schools, the enrolment has increased to a great extent, the community involvement that was fading has again revived, clear demarcation of responsibilities, funds raising through Bhamashahs to support the schools, etc. there was a space given to every stakeholder to perform its part in the management, planning and administering the school education in the rural areas through the creation of spaces where their existence has a role to play in the department.

The *Panchayats* are indeed an effective means to connect the school with the villagers, but their role is limited to this only. They are dependent on the above authorities for finances and its execution. They are bodies with a huge capacity to change the situations for betterment, but their potential is not fully utilized. The Political decentralization was not matched with the administrative decentralization in case of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions, and the financial decentralization is worst.

The State is also involved in blind massive investments in Education department without proper planning. The easiest way to bring a positive change in this situation is to involve all the stakeholders in the planning, management and governing of the education. Involvement of Panchayats is a big step in this direction, but it should be given meaningful space and duties.

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