



Graduate School of Development Studies

**INNOVATIVE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO  
ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND  
POOR QUALITY IN RURAL GOVERNMENT PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS IN INDIA  
An Exploratory Review**

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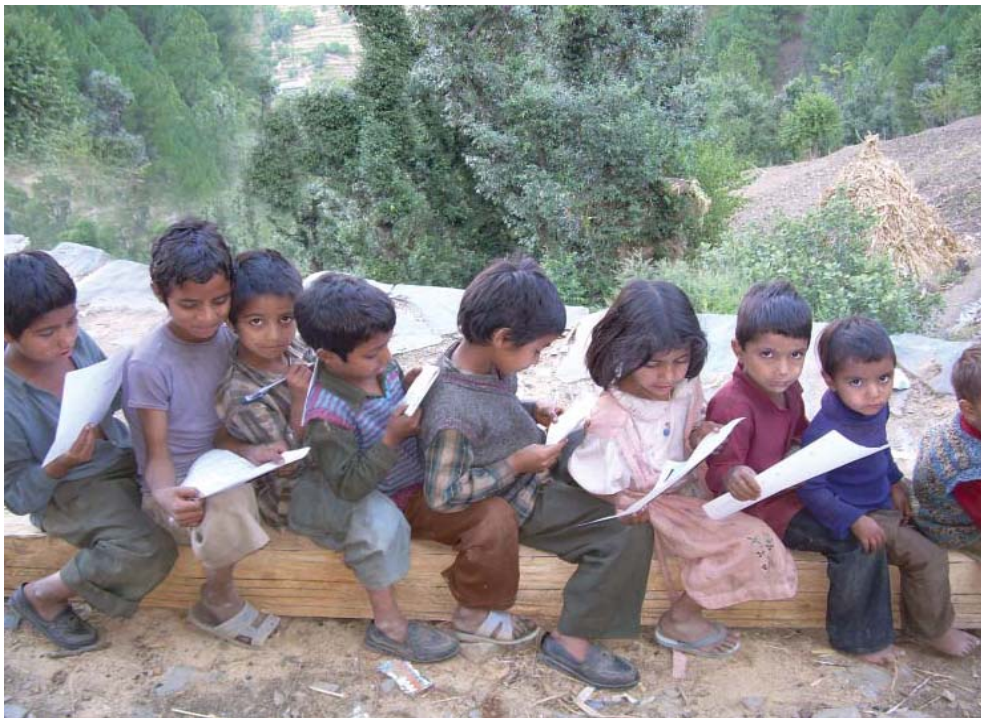
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[Picture Courtesy: ASER 2006]

*Dedicated to all those children living in rural India  
who struggle to acquire the basics of learning despite all  
odds ...*

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*Krishna Narayan*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms	8
Abstract	9
1 INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK	10
1 The Introduction	10
1.1 Role of Teachers in Guaranteeing Quality	10
1.2 Objective of the Research	11
1.3 The Chosen Strategies	12
1.4 Location of Strategies within Hood's Framework	13
1.5 Specific Research Questions and Methodology	15
1.6 Structure of the Paper	15
2 TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND LOW LEVELS OF LEARNING: THE SCENARIO IN RURAL INDIA	16
2 Background Information	16
2.1 The Problem of Low Learning Achievement	16
2.2 The Problem of Teacher Absenteeism	17
2.3 Exploring the Underlying Reasons	18
2.4 Concluding Remarks	21
3 EXPLORING THE EGALITARIAN WAY: DECENTRALIZED VILLAGE LEVEL BODIES IN RURAL INDIA	23
3 The Introduction	23
3.1 Decentralized Village Bodies in Rural India	23
3.2 The Argument	24
3.3 Review of Experiences	24
3.4 Conditions facilitating Effective Functioning of Local Bodies	26
3.5 Concluding Remarks	28
4 EXPLORING THE FATALIST WAY: CREATION OF PARA TEACHER CADRE	29
4 The Introduction	29
4.1 Genesis and Current Status	29
4.2 The Argument	30
4.3 Review of Experiences	31
4.4 Some Critical Issues	33
4.5 Conditions facilitating Effective Service Delivery by Para teachers	34

4.6	Concluding Remarks	34
5	EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUALIST WAY: IMPLEMENTING A SCHOOL VOUCHER SYSTEM IN RURAL INDIA	36
5	The Introduction	36
5.1	School Vouchers in India	37
5.2	The Argument	37
5.3	Review of Experiences	38
5.4	Private Primary Schooling in Rural India	38
5.5	Conditions needed for implementing voucher system in rural India	40
5.6	Concluding Remarks	41
6	CONCLUDING OVERVIEW	
4	3	
6	Various Modes of Management in Perspective	43
6.1	Comparison of the three chosen strategies	43
6.2	Linking Individualist and Egalitarian Ways to 'Exit' and 'Voice'	44
6.3	Combination of Hierarchist, Individualist and Egalitarian Ways	45
	REFERENCES	48

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

1	Figure 1	Elements Needed for Ensuring Quality Education for Children
2	Table 1	Comparison among the three chosen strategies
3	Table 2	Classification of services based on 'Exit' and 'Voice'
4	Table 3	Key features of Hierarchist, Individualist and Egalitarian Ways

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AP	Andhra Pradesh
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
ASPBAE	Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CCTV	Closed Circuit Camera Television
DIET	District Institutes of Education and Training
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EDI	Education Development Index
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GoI	Government of India
GoN	Government of Nagaland
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MLL	Minimum Levels of Learning
MP	Madhya Pradesh
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NCTE	National Council for Teacher Education
NGO	Non Government Organization
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institution
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education
SDMC	School Development and Monitoring Committee
SIEMAT	State Institute of Educational Management and Training
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
TPR	Teacher Pupil Ratio
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VEC	Village Education Committee
WBNAS	World Bank National Absence Survey

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper primarily aims at reviewing three innovative strategies which have either been proposed or implemented in response to the problem of teacher absenteeism and poor quality in rural government primary schools in India. The various strategies of dealing with teacher absenteeism is shown to fall within the Egalitarian, Individualist and Fatalist modes of dealing with public management problems as defined by Hood (1998). A combination of these various modes is shown to be feasible in resolving these issue in rural India.

# Chapter ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK

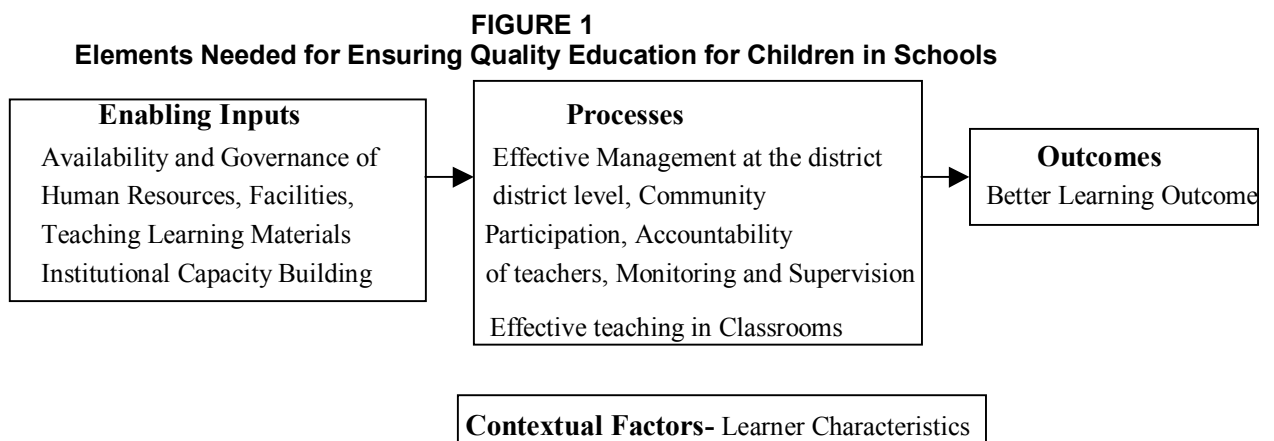
### 1 THE INTRODUCTION

Public Education System in countries is generally viewed as performing several functions, including providing the necessary skills to access jobs and transferring social values to foster national identity (Vegas and Petrow, 2008). In recent times, concern is being expressed that merely ensuring physical access to schooling for children might not be enough (World Bank, 2006a). *What and how much* children learn in schools is equally important for a host of reasons ranging from providing children the opportunity to learn as a human right to improving their individual outcomes in the labour market, enhancing economic growth and reducing inequality in society (Hanushek and Wößmann 2007; Vegas and Petrow, 2008; World Bank, 2007a).

The cognitive aspect (viz learning outcomes of children in schools) forms one dimension of ‘Quality’ in education, the other dimension being the non cognitive (moral and social development of children) aspect. Information on learning achievements is useful for two purposes-to know whether children are learning or not and related with this is the question of whether the educational system is performing well or not (Pigozzi, 2004). Even though the definition of quality has expanded over time to include non-cognitive aspects such as values and behaviour it is apparent that the ‘conventional focus on the basics of literacy, numeracy, essential knowledge and skills has not disappeared...thus the ability of education systems and schools to deliver the basics that everyone should have *remains a key part* of the debate on the quality of education’ (ibid: 143, my emphasis).

### 1.1 Role of Teachers in Guaranteeing Quality

Figure 1 below depicts the important elements needed for ensuring quality education for children in schools by combining two frameworks: the UNESCO Framework for Educational Quality (2005) and the Model of Educational Effectiveness proposed by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) modified for the Indian context by Grover and Singh (2002).



As suggested by figure 1, several factors contribute towards ensuring quality outcomes for children, but for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the role of teachers. Several observers have commented on the pivotal role of teachers in guaranteeing quality (by whatever definition) education for children (Anderson, 2004; Fredriksson, 2004; GCE, 2006; Leu 2005; Rivkin et al 2005; UIS, 2006; World Bank, 2007a, 2007c). One of the critical inputs needed for ensuring better learning outcomes, the availability of teachers, would imply not only recruitment of the required number of teachers but also ensuring their regular presence in schools.

In India, teacher qualification has found to be an important determinant of student's learning at the primary level in several studies (Govinda and Varghese 1993; Kingdon 1998; Saxena, Singh and Gupta 1996 *all* cited in Azim Premji Foundation, 2004). A massive countrywide study carried out by NCERT in 2002 covering more than 80,000 primary students (Class five) across 27 states found that teaching aids, teaching style and teacher's qualification influenced student's outcomes in three subjects-Language, Environmental Studies and Mathematics (NCERT, 2006a). Teacher's commitment and support to students was found to have a positive correlation with maths and language achievement in a study of 44 DPEP<sup>1</sup> districts carried out by Saxena et al in 1996 (cited in Azim Premji Foundation, 2004).

## 1.2 Objective of the Research

Discussion backed by empirical evidence on the extent and prevalence of teacher absenteeism and low levels of learning outcomes<sup>2</sup> of children in rural government primary schools in the country forms the starting point of this research. There are two ways of looking at these issues. Firstly, teacher absenteeism *per se* obviously would result in low levels of learning since there is no one in the classroom for transmitting the curriculum to children. However, ensuring the regular presence of teachers in classrooms is a *necessary but not a sufficient condition* to guarantee quality educational experience for children. As is well known, effective delivery of instruction by teachers, when present, will be influenced among other things by their level of preparedness or how well they have been equipped to undertake teaching. Hence this paper looks at both these issues in conjunction, viewing the teacher as the key actor in the education system.

Apart from looking at some of the underlying reasons behind these two phenomena, the bulk of the paper is concerned with reviewing in detail three innovative strategies that have either been proposed or implemented in order to tackle these two problem issues in rural areas. The Main research question is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The Externally aided District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in 1994 as a major initiative to enhance the effectiveness of the primary education system in the country. One of the key features of this programme was that it emphasized community participation in education through creation of local level bodies such as the Village Education Committees (Varghese, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, poor quality in government schools refers to the low learning achievements of children in these schools.

*How do the various innovative strategies (proposed or implemented) aim to address the problems of teacher absenteeism and poor quality in rural government primary schools in the country?*

### **1.3 The Chosen Strategies**

The three strategies chosen to be explored in detail are as follows:

- Creation of local level decentralized structures such as Panchayat Institutions and Village Education Committees (Implemented): These bodies are created for the purpose of making teachers more accountable to the community. Community involvement for securing increased accountability from teachers is expected to result in overall better functioning of government schools (possibly by reducing teacher absenteeism, better teaching etc)
- Creation of a separate cadre of Para teachers (Implemented): Para teachers are mostly hired from among the local community but do not form a part of the regular teacher cadre and are paid less. They are expected to be more accountable, perform better and have more regular presence in schools as they are hired by local bodies and are placed under contract. The strategy of having para teachers is in part a result of government dissatisfaction with regular teachers, including the problems of absenteeism and lack of motivation among them (Duthilleul, 2005). Instead of attempting to reform the system, the government has preferred to replace them with para teachers (ibid)
- Creating competition through a voucher system (Proposed): A mechanism whereby money is proposed to be given in the form of vouchers to parents so that they choose the school (government or private) for themselves. Parental choice resulting in competition is expected to improve the performance of teachers (by reducing their absenteeism rates and compelling them to engage in better teaching) resulting in better quality of education in government schools

The first two strategies (decentralized structures and para teachers) were selected for greater discussion as they are in vogue in several states in India. Hence it would be interesting to know how these two strategies have fared in general. At the outset it should also be made clear that both these strategies had multiple objectives and were *not initiated solely* to address the problems of teacher absenteeism or poor quality. For example the strategy of creating a separate cadre of para teachers who were paid less than the regular teachers also had the objective of reducing the recurring expenditure on teacher salaries borne by the states. Though the voucher scheme is not being implemented currently in *any* state in India, it was selected for discussion as proponents of this strategy have been getting louder in recent times (Ghosh, 2007). Decentralization and Vouchers can be visualized as an attempt to influence the process element whereas Para teachers can be thought of primarily as providing more enabling inputs in the Quality framework (see figure 1).

## **1.4 Location of the chosen strategies within Hood's Framework**

Teacher absenteeism can be viewed as a public management problem and varying strategies may be deployed to resolve it. Hood (1998) distinguishes between four different styles of dealing with public management problems as enumerated below

### ***1.4.1 Doing Public Management the Hierarchist Way***

Public management in the hierarchist way is characterized by strict rules and regulations, formal powers to approve or reject, pronounce judgements on disputes, impose penalties on deviants and punish them and greater inspection. (Hood, 1998) The belief is that some individuals within an organization should assume positions of authority to control and monitor others since people cannot be left to work in an ad hoc way as this would result in slackness and shirking on their part (ibid). So the authority is wielded by the designated supervisors/inspectors within public departments reflecting the 'bossism' approach which strongly believes in having a ladder of authority and responsibility to elicit accountability (ibid). Where management problems crop up, the normal course of action is to clarify the lines of authority and strengthen the role of the formal overseers. This is the traditional way in which public management problems have been sought to be tackled by the state in India

Regular Monitoring by school supervisors can indeed be effective in curbing teacher absenteeism. A recent experiment in which cameras were used for monitoring teachers' presence in rural schools (Dufflo and Hanna, 2006) can be classified partly as a hierarchist strategy Mehrotra's (2006a) suggestion of having a Teacher's Code of Professional Ethics with sanctions against teachers violating the code also falls within this domain. However, since the hierarchist mode of doing management is the conventional one in India, this paper will not focus on this mode. Other strategies that can be termed as relatively unconventional and innovative (falling within other modes of doing public management) will be dealt with in detail.

### ***1.4.2 Doing Public Management the Egalitarian Way***

Doing public management the egalitarian way is characterized by communitarianism and participation for which, based on the subsidiarity principle, decentralized local self governing units are thought to be more appropriate rather than large scale structures (Hood, 1998). The egalitarian mode of controlling organizations is through mutuality and 'maximum face to face accountability' (ibid: 127) of service providers to their clients. Using a group process to check service providers is a mechanism of ensuring maximum citizen participation in the production and delivery of services so that they don't remain 'passive consumers' (ibid: 122).

Along with minimising the distance between producers and consumers, egalitarians also believe in limiting the gap between the top officeholders and the frontline staff within an organization. Hence the process of decision making in an organization through high levels of participation is valued as much as the results or outcome. One of the critiques of egalitarianism is that it presupposes solidarity within a community whereas it is well known that in poor rural areas, local power structures can deter meaningful participation by marginalized groups. High transaction costs could also prove to be a disadvantage in such organizations.

Creation of decentralized units (Panchayats/Village Education Committee) can be clearly located within the egalitarian mode of public management. Fostering and strengthening the school-community link through active participation pursued as a conscious strategy by some NGOs in the field of primary education can also be classified as an egalitarian strategy (Jagannathan, 2000). Another strategy which could fit into the egalitarian mode is actively soliciting the participation of teachers and their unions in order to gain their trust, as was done in the Teacher Empowerment Programme carried out by UNICEF in some states in the 1990s (Stacki, 2004)

### ***1.4.3 Doing Public Management the Individualist Way***

An individualist approach to public management is based on the thinking that essentially human beings are 'rational egoists' (Hood 1998: 98). There are two distinct strands within this mode: the focus could be either on clients or the service providers (in our case teachers) as rational actors. In focussing on clients as rational actors, the individualists believe that competitive provision of public services is desirable and markets produce better results in delivery of services. By providing choice to the clients, competition acts as an effective form of control. Monopoly is one of the root causes of public management problems and perpetuates unresponsive behaviour on the service provider's part. Creation of markets and quasi market mechanisms within public service provisioning would result in the weeding out of inefficient institutions, cut down costs and enhance quality. Accountability is secured by establishing a market relationship with the consumers.

By focussing on service providers as rational actors, the basic premise is that when one wants to improve their performance, one has to manipulate *how* they are paid for *what* they do. In other words, performance based pay is thought of as a principal instrument to improve their delivery of services and to reward their diligence. The idea is that security breeds complacency, so individuals should be placed under an 'optimum degree of psychic tension to encourage maximum effort' (ibid: 104). Rewards and incentive structures play a role in motivating the service providers to perform optimally. Hood (1998) points out that modern principal-agent theory has also served as a justification of performance related pay in the public sector.

Voucher system in educational provisioning not yet in practice in any state in the country is an example of an individualist approach which aims at providing choice to parents to select schools according to their preferences. Similarly, performance based pay for teachers is also currently not in practice (salaries depend more or less on length of service and hierarchy) even as news comes in that the sixth pay commission is examining the feasibility of such a model for government employees.

### ***1.4.4 Doing Public Management the Fatalist Way***

In the fatalist way of doing public management, the core issue is that there are few effective checks on the actions of public officials (Hood, 1998). In response to a teething public management problem (in this case teacher absenteeism), due to various reasons, no active measures may be undertaken to counter it. Instead, parallel structures may be put in place (in this case para teachers) by circumventing the core issue. It is almost akin to resigning that since nothing much can be done to tackle the problem at hand, other alternatives must be sought.

The Shiksha Karmi Project implemented in Rajasthan in the late 80s in response to teacher absenteeism in remote areas is said to be the precursor for adoption of the para teacher model in the country (Clarke and Jha, 2006; Ramachandran, 1999). In this project, two local youth were selected to replace the ‘formally qualified but chronically absent’ (Department of Education, 1993: 31 cited in PROBE Team, 1999: 99) regular teacher. Para teachers tend to be posted relatively more in backward and remote areas where the regular teachers are reluctant to go. Even though the strategy of creating a separate cadre of para teachers had multiple objectives, to some extent it can be viewed as a fatalist strategy as it could be seen as an *admission of the failure* to motivate the regular teachers to work in these areas (ibid).

## **1.5 Specific Research Questions and Methodology**

1. Overall, how successful have been those strategies that have already been implemented (Decentralization and Para teachers) in addressing these two issues?
2. What are the conditions which could (i) facilitate implementation of the strategy that has been proposed (Vouchers) (ii) enhance the effectiveness of those strategies that have already been implemented?
3. Under what circumstances do we choose one mode of doing public management or the other? Is a combination of various modes more appropriate?

An extensive Review of studies culled out from various sources (Books, Journals and Reports) forms the core of the methodology. To bring out the extent of teacher absenteeism and low levels of learning at the primary level, I have extensively quoted the results of Annual Status of Education Report [ASER] 2005 and 2006 and the World Bank Study on teacher absenteeism in the country (Kremer et al, 2005). There are some references to grey literature in the form of newspaper and website articles. The UN Solution Exchange Website ([www.solutionexchange-un.net.in](http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in)) provided me with a platform for having interactive discussions with professionals active in the field of education. To explore the feasibility of the voucher system, I had posted a query on this website in January 2007. Some of the responses elicited from the members of this portal have been cited with due acknowledgement.

## **1.6 Structure of the paper**

This paper is structured as follows: chapter two describes the scenario in rural India highlighting the extent and prevalence of low learning levels and teacher absenteeism and the underlying reasons behind them. The chosen strategies are dealt in greater detail from chapters three to five and chapter six concludes.

## **Chapter Two**

# **TEACHER ABSENTEEISM AND LOW LEVELS OF LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT: THE SCENARIO IN RURAL INDIA**

## **2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Before proceeding further, it would be helpful to go through some of the recent developments in the primary education sector in India. Primary cycle in most states in India is from classes one to five and the elementary cycle is from class one to eight, typically the entry age into class one being around six years in the rural areas.

The 'Education for All' Programme [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)] was launched in 2001 and one of its main objective is that all children should *complete* five years of primary schooling by 2007 (Das, 2007). All the DPEP districts were subsumed and made a part of the SSA framework. More than 94 per cent of the estimated 210 million children in the age group of 6-14 years are reported to be enrolled in schools/alternative centres in 2003-04 (MHRD GoI, 2006). Government schools are the major provider of primary education in rural areas. A nation wide sample survey carried out in 2006 found that 75.2 per cent of all the enrolled rural children in the sample (7-10 years) were attending government schools at the time of survey whereas 18.6 per cent and 1.5 per cent were in private schools and alternative schools respectively (Pratham, 2007). Provision of cooked mid-day meals to children in primary schools since 2001 has also contributed in increasing school attendance (Drèze and Goyal, 2003). Several studies have brought out the fact that in recent times parental value and demand for education has gone up in rural areas (Bhatty, 1998b; Nambissan, 2003a; PROBE Team 1999; Ramachandran, 2004a; Rana and Das 2004).

One has to acknowledge that there are substantial inter state and intra state variations in educational performance across India (Bajpai and Goyal 2004; Govinda 2003; Majumdar 2001; PROBE Team 1999). A composite EDI (Education Development Index for the primary level) for each state was developed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development by merging 22 key variables (PIB Release GoI, 2007a). In 2007, among 35 states, Tamil Nadu was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> with an EDI of 0.672 whereas Bihar was ranked 35<sup>th</sup> with an EDI of 0.335 (ibid).

Despite these variations, the problems of low achievement and teacher absenteeism seem to be pervasive throughout the country, though the extent does vary between states.

### **2.1 The Problem of Low Learning Achievement**

Within the primary education system, though enrolment rates (as a proxy for quantity) have improved tremendously since independence, the quality of the system continues to be low (Aggarwal 2001; Akila, 2004; Bajpai et al, 2005; Bhatty 1998a; Cheney et al 2006; Kainth, 2006; Kingdon 2007a; Kurrien 2006; Rao, 2000; Sharma, 1998; Sood, 2003; Pritchett and Pande 2006; World Bank, 1997) giving the impression of a 'Quantity-Quality trade off' (Duraismy et al 1998:367). The Minimum levels of learning (MLL) framed by the expert

committee of the GoI in early 1990s were designed to prescribe academic standards to be attained by every child at the end of the primary cycle.

Studies have found the problem of low learning achievement of rural children even in educationally advanced states such as Maharashtra (Banerji, 2003 cited in Bajpai et al, 2005) and Tamil Nadu (Grover and Singh, 2002). The most recent evidence of poor learning in rural primary schools comes from ASER 2005 and 2006. The ASER survey conducted on a nation wide basis by the NGO Pratham is the first major independent audit of the rural elementary education system in the country and is considered a path-breaking exercise since it permits the judgement of schooling quality based on outcome based indicators (Kingdon, 2007b; Nehru, 2006). The ASER 2006 survey had sample of 600 rural households in each district and covered 575 districts in the country. Tests were conducted using graded tools in Reading, Arithmetic and Writing for children in the age group of 7-16 years.

The findings of the ASER 2006 Survey reveals that despite almost six years of SSA which emphasizes the enhancement of quality (in terms of learning achievements) as a major goal, overall, learning levels continue to remain low. Though there are inter state variations in performance of children, the worrying national scenario is that 40 per cent of children studying in class five could not read a class two text and 55 per cent could not do a division sum. Even though the ASER 2006 report does *not* disaggregate the data by government and private school (the test scores represent the performance of children who were enrolled in *any* type of school at the time of survey) these scores reflect the problem of inadequate learning in government schools as overall, slightly more than 70 per cent of the surveyed children were enrolled in these schools at the time of survey. The ASER 2005 report which disaggregates the data by type of school shows that 40 cent of students studying in class five in government schools could not read a class two text and 58 per cent could not solve division sums in 2005. The performance of Kerala (less than 50 per cent of class five children in the sample could solve division sums) often touted as a success story in education lends some credence to the sentiment expressed by Thomas (2001) that in Kerala 'the school system has been churning out semi-literates like an overworked grinding mill' (2001:205).

Children attending school and yet not gaining functional literacy skills is labelled as 'Education Poverty' by Tilak (2002:198) which he believes plays a major role in perpetuating income poverty. Bertrand (2003) observes that worldwide, the numbers of children like these who are 'missing out on education' (2003:6) would be even higher than the 104 million out of school children.

## **2.2 The Problem of Teacher Absenteeism**

Teacher absenteeism in the country has been extensively commented upon and its prevalence also brought out by studies carried out in various regions, including the educationally advanced ones (Abadzi, 2002; Bajpai and Goyal, 2004; Bandyopadhyay 1991; Kainth, 2006; Kingdon, 2007a; Majumdar, 2001; Mehrotra, 2006a; Pandey, 2000; PROBE Team, 1999; Ramachandran, 2001, 2005a; Weiner, 1991; World Bank, 1997). It is to be noted that primary teachers are routinely called upon to carry out a range of official non academic duties viz. election duties, census enumeration, polio campaigns etc (NCERT, 2006b). Ramachandran et al (2005) distinguish between three kinds of absence-officially present but engaged in government duty, officially present but not in school, and absent without information. Mehta (2006) points out that only seven states in the country reported

more than 20 days (in a year) of involvement in official non academic duties for primary teachers in 2004. It is then the unauthorized teacher absenteeism or shirking which is perceived as a ‘major trouble spot of the village school system.’(Majumdar 2001:347)

The most recent authoritative study on teacher absenteeism in the country, widely quoted in policy circles is the World Bank National Absence Survey (WBNAS) carried out by Kremer et al in 2003. Making unannounced multiple visits to 3700 primary schools across 20 states, 35,000 observations on teacher attendance were collected. Overall, 25.2 per cent or roughly one in four teachers were found to be absent in rural areas with substantial inter state variations. Overall, official non academic duties accounted for only *four per cent* of the total absences and *ten per cent* of absences were on account of officially sanctioned leaves. The study also found that the absences were fairly widespread, rather than being concentrated among a few teachers (Kremer et al, 2006). The ASER 2005 study also found an average teacher absence rate of 25 per cent (Pratham, 2006). The government machinery itself admits that ‘school effectiveness as a systemic issue which is intimately linked with teacher absenteeism is yet to be tackled in all its dimensions’ (Second Joint Review Mission SSA, 2005).

Studies have also reported acute parental dissatisfaction with teacher absenteeism in several states (Mehrotra, 2006a; Rana and Das, 2004). Paul et al (2004) surveying 26,796 rural households across 148 districts in 22 states found that overall, only 16 per cent of parents of children attending government run and aided primary schools expressed full satisfaction with the behaviour (which could include absenteeism) of teachers. Teacher absenteeism was also cited by parents as a reason for children discontinuing school (Pande, 2001).

On the impact of teacher absenteeism, Kremer et al (2005) in their study found that a 10 per cent increase in teacher absence led to a reduction of 0.02 standard deviation in test scores and 1.8 per cent lower student attendance. Dufflo and Hanna (2005) in their study in rural Rajasthan found that a reducing teacher absence by one half was associated with 0.17 standard deviation rise in achievement scores. Duraisamy et al (1998) contend that teacher absenteeism could also encourage student absenteeism. Studies in other developing countries have found teacher absenteeism to be negatively correlated with student performance (Das et al, 2005; Suryadarma et al, 2006). Teacher absenteeism was found to act as an additional barrier for schooling of girls in Pakistan (Ghuman and Lloyd, 2007). This observation could very well hold true in the Indian context too as parents typically do not want to leave the girl child unsupervised in schools (Srivastava, 2001).

### **2.3 Exploring the Underlying Reasons**

The quality of the frontline staff and their performance is critical in ensuring the effective functioning of the human resource intensive elementary education sector (Jha et al, 2001). Teachers can only be held accountable for those functions over which they have control. The government, education planners and teacher training institutions should also be held accountable as they exercise influence over other aspects of the education system (Kellaghan and Greaney, 2001). One has to go beyond the proximate determinants to analyze the underlying causes of poor service delivery (World Bank, 2004a, 2006b). In the Indian context, there are several systemic deficiencies contributing to lack of motivation and absenteeism among teachers as enumerated below.

Though teachers were highly revered in India in ancient times (Dogra and Gulati, 2006) school teaching has declined to the status of least favoured profession over half a century (Batra, 2005). The degradation in the status of school teachers is partly on account of the number of non academic tasks that they are expected to carry out such as polio campaigns, animal census etc which results in lowering of their self worth (Ramachandran, 2005c).

Teacher Pupil Ratio (TPR) is an important indicator that has a bearing on the classroom transaction process (Mehta, 2006). Because of the backlog in filling vacant teacher posts and notwithstanding the recruitment of para teachers, the TPR remains far above the norm of 1:40 in some states, thereby pushing the national average upto 1:42 (Govinda, 2005b). Confronting overcrowded classrooms on a daily basis could result in cynicism, frustration and stress among teachers (Education International, 2006). Apart from dealing with overcrowded classrooms, many teachers teach in schools with poor infrastructural facilities (Govinda, 2005b). The quality of physical infrastructure was found to have strong correlate with teacher absence in the World Bank Survey (Kremer et al, 2004). Some critical facilities like availability of drinking water and toilets in schools could have a strong bearing on teacher motivation (ibid).

Primary teachers in government schools in India are typically found to be ill equipped for teaching in multilingual and multiability classrooms populated by many first generation learners (World Bank, 1996 cited in Karlekar, 2000). Lack of skills in effectively managing the classroom transaction process often leads to demotivation and frustration among them. Many teachers have weak understanding of the subject that they teach (World Bank, 1997). The quality of teacher training in the country is unsatisfactory and hence does not contribute in developing a good teacher (Kondapalli, 2002).



*Training for teachers being provided at the DIET [Picture Courtesy: Dyer et al, 2004b]*

The training programmes are not tailored to meet the teacher's needs and thus holds little relevance for them. The transferability of what is learnt in training programmes to actual classroom situations remains problematic and hence there is not much of a positive transformation in the teaching learning process (Clarke

2003b; Dyer 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Dyer et al 2004a, 2004b; Mooij, 2006; NCTE, 2006). Multigrade teaching<sup>3</sup> is a common phenomenon at the primary level across rural India (Bajpai and Goyal, 2004; Kondapalli 2002; Subrahmanian, 2002). Multigrade teaching can be effective only when two basic conditions are met- teachers must be properly trained to use this as a pedagogical tool (Benveniste and McEwan, 2000; Birch and Lally, 1995) and the group handled by them should be small with an ideal teacher pupil ratio (TPR) of not more than 1:35 (Noronha, 2007). Most of the training programmes are designed assuming a monograde situation and the teacher educators and administrators themselves may have little idea of handling a multigrade class (Ramachandran, 2005a). Studies show that multigrade teaching has a negative impact on students learning if the teachers are not well trained for it (Bashir 1994; Govinda and Varghese 1993 *both* cited in Azim Premji Foundation, 2004).

Since this paper is looking at both the issues of teacher absenteeism and low learning achievements of children, one aspect which needs to be discussed here is that how much of teaching actually takes place in schools or the number of hours of instruction to which the child is exposed, even if teachers are present, known as 'Instructional Time-on-Task' (World Bank, 2004c). Both the amount of time which is available for instruction as well as the proper use of that time is related to how much children learn at school (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). The total instructional time in rural primary schools is reduced considerably due to a range of factors. Ramachandran (2004a) points out that the teaching time in multigrade situation may be as less as 25 minutes in a day. Taneja (2007) points out that teachers are often burdened by the activities of a non-teaching character which happen on a day to day basis such as maintaining records, carrying correspondence, supervising mid-day meals etc which eat into their teaching time.

Teacher apathy and neglect leading to gross underutilization and misuse of instructional time has been documented in several field investigations (Bajpai et al, 2005; Drèze and Gazdar, 1997 cited in Bhatta, 1998a; Rana and Das, 2004; Majumdar, 2001). Only 45 per cent of the teachers were found engaged in teaching/learning activities during the time of survey in the World Bank study on teacher absenteeism (Kremer et al, 2005). The PROBE Team (1999) surveying 195 primary sections/schools in five states found that there was no teaching/learning activity taking place in half the schools when the enumerators arrived. Similar deficit in instructional activity has also been reported from other states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand (Grover and Singh, 2002; Rana et al, 2003; Rana and Das, 2004)

Periodic supervision and monitoring is necessary so that continued support is provided to teachers for carrying out their teaching responsibilities effectively (De Grauwe, 2001; Gaynor, 1998; Jain, 1997). Studies reveal that many schools are not inspected regularly- there may be shortage of supervisory staff and many of them may lack capacity to carry out proper supervision (Bennell, 2004; Clarke and Jha, 2006; Grover and Singh, 2002; Pande, 2001; PROBE Team, 1999). The World Bank survey found that lower absence rates among teachers were associated with

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<sup>3</sup> In Multigrade teaching, teachers are responsible for delivering instruction across two or more curriculum grades within a given time table period. In Monograde teaching by contrast, teachers are responsible for teaching a single curriculum grade within a given time table period (Little, 2001). India has the second largest number of multigrade schools at the primary level in the world after China (Jagannathan, 2000)

increased frequency of inspection, hence having regular inspections could deter teacher absence (Kremer et al, 2004).


Within the Indian education system, there are typically no incentives for teachers who perform well (Balachandran, 2005; Ramachandran et al, 2005). A well defined performance appraisal system is virtually absent and primary teachers have negligible prospects for promotion (Jha et al, 2001; World Bank, 1997). Moreover, the performance appraisal of teachers is restricted to enrolment data and retention rate and they are never held accountable for learning outcomes (Ramachandran, 2004a). In China, career advancement of teachers is dependent on their performance whereas in India, promotions are more or less time bound (Rao et al, 2003). Pritchett and Pande (2006) point out though that elementary government school teachers in India are well paid and their total compensation is sufficient to expect them to fulfill their duties

There are virtually no sanctions in place for teacher absence. The World Bank study (Kremer et al 2005) found out that only one teacher had been fired for absence among the 3000 interviews given by headmasters. Closely linked with this is the fact that teacher unions in India are typically strong and politically influential (Kabeer, 2003; Kremer et al 2006; Kela, 2003; Kingdon and Muzammil, 2001a, 2001b; Mehrotra, 2006a). Teachers who are in leadership positions within the unions and have links with political parties rarely attend school (Ramachandran, 2005a). Lack of teacher accountability towards the community has also been cited by some observers as a reason for teacher absenteeism and poor quality in government schools (Bajpai et al, 2005; Clarke and Jha, 2006; Drèze and Sen, 1995; Ghosh, 1991; Pritchett and Pande, 2006; PROBE Team, 1999; Ramachandran et al, 2004; Shuchi and Grover, 2002).

The 'No detention Policy' practised by most states viz automatic promotion from one primary grade to another without any evaluation of learning outcomes has its own consequences (Aggarwal, 2001; Azim Premji Foundation, 2004; Majumdar, 2006; Ramachandran et al, 2004; Thomas, 2001). Children may get pushed from one grade to another irrespective of their mastery of content. Of particular concern is the inability to master reading skills, which places the child at increasing disadvantage as he/she moves up to higher classes since the transmission of curriculum is heavily dependent on the printed word (Bhattacharjea, 2007). This policy may have adverse consequences for teachers as they might become complacent knowing well that the child would anyhow get promoted.

## **2.4 Concluding Remarks**

The above discussion brings out the fact that teachers do face several disempowering elements in their work environment (PROBE Team, 1999). As the PROBE Team (1999) rightly observes 'a teacher trapped in a ramshackle village school, surrounded by disgruntled parents, irregular pupils and overbearing inspectors can hardly be expected to work with any enthusiasm' (1999:63) but goes on to add that 'the deterioration of teaching standards has gone much too far to be explained by the disempowerment factor alone' (ibid). Jha et al (2001) remark that investments in teacher training alone will not have much impact unless other core issues of teacher recruitment, transfer and appraisal are not addressed.



### Report Card

Name: Manmohan Singh      Country: India

Overall Mark: 43/100      Overall Grade: E      Overall Rank: 9

Subject	Grade (A-F)	Rank (out of 14)
Complete Basic Education	D	8
State Action	E	7
Quality Inputs	D	6
Gender Equality	D	9
Overall Equity	E	5

India was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> out of 14 countries in the School report of Asia Pacific countries published by ASPBAE and GCE in 2005 [Picture Courtesy: [www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)]

Keefer and Khemani (2004) argue that in India ‘one of the primary effects of education spending is simply to provide jobs in the public sector rather than the public good of basic learning’ (2004:936). Several observers have pointed out that simply pumping in more resources would not be enough if the system lacks incentives and accountability (Kremer and Glewwe, 2005; Kremer et al, 2005; Mehrotra, 2006a; Pritchett and Pande, 2006; Vaidyanathan and Nair, 2001; World Bank, 2006b). As mentioned in the previous chapter, different strategies have either been proposed or implemented and the argument underlying each one of them vary, as I proceed to show.

# **Chapter THREE**

## **EXPLORING THE EGALITARIAN WAY: DECENTRALIZED VILLAGE LEVEL INSTITUTIONS IN RURAL INDIA**

### **3 THE INTRODUCTION**

This chapter begins with a brief discussion about a couple of strategies which can be classified as falling within the egalitarian mode, before zooming in on one strategy to be discussed in detail viz creation of decentralized bodies in rural India.

Reviewing the activities of six major NGOs in India in the field of primary education, Jagannathan (2000) points out that all of them viewed community participation as a very important tool in enhancing the quality of school education and pursued it as a core strategy, apparently with a fair amount of success. Participation of parents in managing the school affairs led to an increase the attendance rates of teachers as well as children (ibid).

The Teacher Empowerment Programme was initiated by UNICEF in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the 1990s and was based on the philosophy of securing active participation of teachers and their unions (Stacki, 2004). Under this initiative, over 12,000 teachers in Uttar Pradesh took a historic pledge on the occasion of teachers' day in 1994 'to avoid absenteeism and drunkenness and to become better teachers' (ibid: 213). Teacher unions were visualized as playing a complimentary role in helping the schools to improve (ibid). This can be classified as an egalitarian strategy as conscious efforts were made to secure the involvement of frontline staff in implementation of the programme and in decision making.

#### **3.1 Decentralized Village Bodies in Rural India**

In India, the decentralized bodies existing below the state (a three tiered system at the district, block and village level) are known as 'Panchayat Raj Institutions' (PRI) and they have been granted constitutional status under the law vide the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment (Behar and Kumar, 2002). Majority of the state governments have technically transferred some or all of the 29 functions (including primary education) mandated to be transferred to the PRIs (Planning Commission GoI, 2001; World Bank, 2006b). However, the extent of devolution of powers to them has been left at the discretion of the individual states (Chaudhuri, 2006). As a result, there exists wide variation in involvement of panchayats in school education across states (NCERT, 2006b).

Along with these elected PRIs at the village level, there are 'user groups' (World Bank 2006b:80) or community bodies which have been created specifically for the purposes of securing community participation in education. In some states like Gujarat, these bodies form a sub-committee of the PRIs while in others like Maharashtra, they exist parallelly (along with the PRIs) and are formed under centrally sponsored schemes such as SSA. The nomenclature, size and tenure of these community structures vary from state to state-they are known as Village Education Committees (VEC), School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) and so on (MHRD GoI, 2006). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emphasizes the role of these community structures in school supervision and accountability,

micro-planning, construction and maintenance, learning improvement activities and utilization of funds routed through them (MHRD GoI, 2006; Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, undated).

Decentralization and community involvement has been recommended by many observers in the country so that the elementary education system functions effectively in rural areas (Bandyopadhyay 1991; Ehouman et al, 2002; Ghosh, 1992; Jain, 2000; Malgavkar, 1996; Sharma, 2000; Sinha, 2005). Mehrotra (2006a) remarks that ‘the key reform without major fiscal implications is the one to improve teacher accountability’ (2006:261).

## **3.2 The Argument**

The need for strengthening accountability relationships between service providers and citizens is the core argument behind this strategy (World Bank, 2004a). One needs to distinguish between the long route and the short route to accountability (ibid). Citizens use the long route to accountability when they participate in political processes (eg. elections) to hold the state answerable for its actions. The short route to accountability is established when citizens, acting as clients, hold the service providers directly responsible for their services. Creation of decentralized institutions is based on the premise that the local functionaries will become directly accountable to the community through these structures. Hence the mechanisms of short route to accountability or ‘micro level accountability’ (Paul 1991: M-79) or ‘social accountability’ (Malena et al 2004:3) would be established. Collective voice and accountability could then potentially lead to better delivery of public services and also matching of services with local preferences (Ahmad et al, 2005; Mahal et al, 2000; Mehrotra, 2006b)

Facilitating community participation has been recommended by many observers for enhancing the impact and sustainability of educational programmes (Bray, 2001; Colletta and Perkins, 1995; Leu, 2005; Shaeffer, 1992, 1994; Verspoor, 1992; World Bank, 2000a). The term ‘School based Management’ is used by many authors to refer to the process of enhancing school effectiveness through increased community involvement (De Grauwe, 2005; Gaziel, 1998; Gertler et al, 2006; Govinda, 2005a). Williams (1994) identifies three models relating education and community—the traditional community based education in which the government plays a minor role, the government provided education in which the communities play a negligible role and the collaborative model in which communities play a supportive role in government provision of education (cited in Pailwar and Mahajan, 2005). Coppola et al (2003) point out that forms of community participation can vary ranging from sending children to school to helping in school construction, managing schools and paying teachers’ salaries. Shaeffer (1992) points out that community involvement can take two forms, collaboration and participation. Collaboration is essentially a consultative process where the stakeholders are not involved actively as partners whereas Participation is ‘the ability to get involved in governance, policy and administration, to serve as a more equal partner...and gain power through the process’ (1992:280)

## **3.3 Review of Experiences**

### **3.3.1 Performance of Panchayat Raj Institutions**

A sample survey of 14 states (covering all the regions of the country) to study the involvement of PRI bodies in primary education was carried out by the NGO PRIA

in 2002. The findings revealed that in majority of the states, though the PRI bodies have been vested with the powers to supervise the attendance of teachers, they are not authorized to initiate any disciplinary action against them, except for complaining to the higher authorities. In many cases PRI members hardly bother to complain since action is rarely taken, and this in turn causes disillusionment. Hence, the PRIs were found to play a marginal role with respect to teacher management, though their role in infrastructure provision and maintenance was found to be comparatively better (PRIA, 2002). Low levels of awareness about their rights serves as an additional barrier for them. Pradhan (2006) reports that in Orissa, PRIs have been authorized to grant leaves, but the members are ignorant of this power, firstly because the official circulars conferring them the powers hardly reaches them and secondly, most of them are in English! Similarly in Haryana, the members are hardly aware of the importance of Annual Confidential Report as a monitoring and supervision tool, though they are authorized to note their remarks in the ACR of teachers (PRIA, 2002).

In Kerala where the PRIs have been granted substantial powers, Pritchett and Pande (2006) point out that though they demonstrate considerable involvement in infrastructure related aspects, most of the other crucial activities in teacher management (viz hiring and firing teachers etc) still lie within the domain of the state government. In West Bengal where the PRIs have a long history of existence (Crook and Sverrisson, 2003) 73 per cent of the members in the sample study conducted by Acharya (2002) opined that teachers were irregular in attending to their duties during the past five years. In Madhya Pradesh (MP), a state often hailed as a pioneer in decentralization (Johnson et al, 2003) the head of the village PRI body is mandated to sign on the salary slip of the teacher as a mark of having verified his/her attendance-many times they do so without undertaking any kind of monitoring (Noronha, 2003; Sharma, 1997). On the other hand, the relatively low level of teacher absenteeism (17.6 per cent) found in MP in the World Bank study is attributed by some as a positive effect of undertaking democratic decentralization in the state (Mehrotra, 2006a; World Bank, 2004b). Positive effect of decentralization in reducing teacher absenteeism is also reported from Karnataka (Drèze and Sen, 1996; Ghosh, 1992)

Pritchett and Pande (2006) remark that in most states in India, there is a 'dual line of authority' (2006:77) between the state departments and PRIs-hence in practice, the teachers still owe most of their accountability to the government rather than to the local bodies. In a nutshell, 'the weak alignment of funds, functions and functionaries has not created conditions for accountable governance' (World Bank 2006b:69).

### ***3.3.2 Performance of Community Structures***

The most acclaimed (and successful?) process of empowering the VECs was undertaken by the State of Nagaland (PIB Release, 2007b) and has been endorsed by the GoI as a good model which could be adopted by other states (MHRD GoI, 2006). In response to teacher absenteeism, the State passed the 'Communitisation of Nagaland Public Institutions and Services act' in 2002 (Rio, 2005). Significant powers were granted to the VECs which include-disbursement of salary to teachers based on 'no work no pay' principle, funds for purchase of essentials, inter-school utilization of teachers and grant of leave (Department of School Education GoN, undated). An Impact assessment carried out by UNICEF in 2004 revealed encouraging results-teacher attendance improved to 90 per cent in 18 of the 28 sample schools which resulted in improved student attendance too. A promotional

book released by the Government in 2004 also claims improvement in the academic performance of children as a result of Communitisation (Talitemjen, undated). Unfortunately, Nagaland was not covered under the World Bank study on teacher absenteeism to undertake any comparisons.

Review of functioning of community structures from different parts of the country presents a mixed picture. Field investigations from Uttar Pradesh (UP), the largest state in the country reveals poor functioning of VECs (Banerjee et al, 2007; Srivastava, 2001). The PROBE team (1999) surveying four northern states found VECs on the whole to be token institutions without performing useful supervisory functions. In Karnataka, the SDMCs (equivalent of VECs) were found to prioritize civil works and paid inadequate attention to undertake initiatives for learning improvements in school (Azim Premji Foundation, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2003). Similar observations have been reported from Kerala, Bihar and MP (Kumar, 2007; Mishra, 2007; Rajasekharan, 2007). In their micro study in West Bengal, Wankhede and Sengupta (2005) found that VEC members carried out minimal supervision of teachers. Findings from group discussions with parents in eight states revealed that the VECs were mostly dysfunctional (Mehrotra, 2006a).

Micro studies carried out in six DPEP states by Ramachandran and Saihjee (2002) found that VECs hardly functioned in any of the states. They remark that 'mechanical interpretation of community participation and equating it to an officially constituted VEC has not fostered genuine participation of families of children attending government schools' (2002:1609). Evidence regarding the effective functioning of VECs including their role in reducing teacher absenteeism and enhancing educational quality under DPEP is limited and unclear (World Bank, 2003, 2007b; Zanini, 2001). The Second Joint Review Mission of the SSA acknowledges the need for greater empowerment of community structures for effectively monitoring the functioning of schools (MHRD GoI, 2006).

### **3.4 Conditions facilitating effective functioning of local bodies**

Bennell's (2004) observation that the link between decentralization and improved teacher performance in government schools (as opposed to alternative schools which will be discussed in the next chapter) seems to be problematic may well hold true for majority of the states in the country. In this section, an attempt is made to review some of the conditions or pre-requisites which could potentially contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the decentralization strategy in rural areas.

Effective functioning of local institutions is contingent upon the extent of powers and autonomy vested with them (Kurian, 1999). As discussed earlier, in most states, critical functions in teacher management still rest with the government. The reason why community monitoring may be ineffective is because the service providers know that the local bodies do not have the authority to punish them (Dufflo and Banerjee, 2006). Though the country as a whole has performed well in political decentralization, it has lagged behind in administrative decentralization (Sethi, 2004; World Bank, 2000b). The powers devolved must be commensurate with the responsibilities and the local bodies must be empowered to elicit responses from the public officials.

One pre-requisite of successful decentralization is adequate level of human capital at the local level (Drèze, 2000). To take an example, in MP, the rural literacy rate is around 58 per cent (GoMP, 2003). As Sen (1996) has rightly argued 'one's ability to obtain and understand information about laws, policies and the rights to which one is entitled is often highly dependent on the ability to read'

(cited in Johnson 2003:11). If the PRI/VEC members are poorly educated, the teachers question the capacity of these members to perform their functions and desirability of being placed under them (Vasavi et al, 1997). My own field experience in MP suggests that teachers in general resent being placed '*under the control of illiterates*' as they frame it.

Capacity building of the functionaries is vital in so that they are able to carry out the functions devolved to them (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; Narayana, 2005). Particularly for monitoring primary education, which is a continuous activity to be carried out in a sustained manner, capacity building becomes crucial (Vasavi et al, 1997). Even after four years of implementation of SSA, at least 12 states were indicted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India for performing below par (in terms of coverage and quality) in imparting training to the VEC members in 2005-06 (CAG Reports, 2006). The Quality of training offered was found to be grossly unsatisfactory in some states (ibid). Poor capacity building translates into poor awareness levels. Lack of awareness was advocated as a major hindrance in effective functioning of the PRIs during the participatory poverty assessments carried out across 78 districts in seven states (Viswanathan and Srivastava, 2007).

The manner of formation of VECs and awareness of its existence is another factor affecting its functioning. In 14 states, a study found that VECs were formed mainly through government orders (EdCil, 1999 cited in Jagannathan, 2000). In Karnataka and West Bengal, the members of the SDMC/VECs are nominated by the local politician, so in reality these structures may act as mechanisms for local politician control rather than community control (Pritchett and Pande, 2006; Rana et al, 2003). Members themselves may be unaware of their membership status and in many cases, teachers rather than community members end up operating the VECs (Dale, 2006). A CAG Report (2001) on DPEP shows that in those villages where the VECs were formed, only one third of the households were aware of its existence (cited in Pritchett and Pande, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, one of the critiques of the egalitarian mode of management is the implicit assumption of the community being internally cohesive and more or less harmonious. As Ramachandran (2001) points out, ideally, community participation should entail participation of the most marginalized groups in the decision making process. In rural India, the caste, class and gender inequalities resulting in skewed power structure makes both the PRIs and VECs prone to elite capture thereby excluding the disempowered groups (Bardhan, 2000; Kumar et al, 2001a, Patnaik, 2005; Subrahmanian 2002, 2003; Sarangpani and Vasavi, 2003; World Bank, 2006b). Children of VEC members hailing from the better off sections may be attending private schools, thereby reducing their stake in the functioning of government school (Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi, 2001; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002).

Field observations suggests that even in educationally advanced states, PRIs and VECs have not yet focussed their efforts on initiating learning improvements in schools. Participation in Infrastructure and Mid-day meals management is relatively easy since it produces tangible results and funds are made available for both these activities. Muraleedharan (2006) points out that even in an educationally advanced state as Kerala, the village assembly is hardly involved in discussing issues on quality with the PRIs. Ramachandran et al (2004) observe that it might be premature to expect community participation in quality improvement since there is hardly any awareness on the level of learning competencies that primary age children are expected to acquire.

Finally, as Gaynor (1998) points out, decentralization changes the way in which the community and teachers relate to one another. An attitudinal change on the part of teachers is required to adjust to this reality as many of them struggle to come to terms with community as active stakeholders (ibid). Teachers' resistance to decentralization and aversion to local accountability needs to be tackled (Drèze 2000; Mehrotra, 2006a; Rajaraman, 2000; Sudarshan, 2000; Vaidyanathan and Nair, 2001). Goswami (2006) reports that the Model Right to Education Bill (2006) proposed moving towards a 'school based cadre' of teachers to curb teacher absenteeism wherein the community will have a greater say in the appointment and transfer of teachers. A massive protest was organized by the All India Primary Teachers Federation in February 2007 on many of the proposed provisions under this Bill, including this one (Times of India, 2007). The politics of decentralizing teacher management in India cannot be ignored.

### **3.5 Concluding Remarks**

Ackerman (2004) observes that decentralization automatically does not lead to either societal participation or increase in accountability of officials. As Shaeffer (1994) points out, decentralization itself has many forms ranging from delegation to devolution. Devolution implies substantial transfer of power to local bodies, but due to the persisting dual line of authority, teachers have not yet been made truly accountable to the community. Community participation in school affairs seems to be restricted to certain select activities (viz infrastructure). For participation to yield results, links between the community bodies and the higher levels of government needs to be strengthened (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). Overall experience till now suggests that due to various constraints as discussed above, creation of local structures such as PRIs/VECs have had very limited success in tackling the issues of teacher absenteeism and poor quality (in terms of learning) in rural primary schools.

## **Chapter FOUR**

### **EXPLORING THE FATALIST WAY: CREATION OF PARA TEACHER CADRE**

#### **4 THE INTRODUCTION**

Teacher management in public schools in India was traditionally associated with state control resulting in streamlining of recruitment and posting, fixation of pay scales and disciplinary and promotion procedures (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). Several states took measures to decentralize partially or completely the teacher management system in the mid 1990s. The chief characteristic of a para teacher in India is that he/she is recruited on a contractual basis with fixed remuneration as opposed to employment on a permanent tenure like that of a regular teacher (Pandey, 2006). Local bodies play an important role in recruitment of para teachers in most states (Fyfe, 2007) and in majority of the cases they are local residents (Govinda and Josephine, 2004)

There are two categories of para teachers in India—those who serve in regular primary schools and those who serve in ‘alternative schools’. Alternative schools form a separate entity from regular (primary) schools and are set up in habitations without any primary schooling facilities within 1 Kilometre (NCERT, 2002; SSA Fourth JRM, 2006). This chapter will aim to provide an overview of the experiences associated with creation of a separate cadre of para teachers (serving in both situations) in the country. It is to be noted that there is no uniformity in practices concerning recruitment and conditions of para teachers across states as education is on the concurrent list of subjects (Fyfe, 2007).

#### **4.1 Genesis and Current Status**

The hiring of para teachers in regular schools has an economic and a non-economic rationale, both of which have to be explored for a better understanding. Beginning with the former, the rising share of teacher salaries in recurrent expenditure at the elementary level combined with the increasing fiscal deficit faced by several states led to a freeze on recruitment of regular teachers (Mehrotra, 2004; Mehrotra and Buckland, 2001). This coupled with gradual attrition of existing manpower led to a massive shortage of teachers in these states (Kumar et al, 2001a). Thousands of teacher positions are vacant in government schools (at all levels) in at least 31 states in the country (Raghavendra et al, 2006). Most states are hesitant to hire new teachers on account of huge recurring liabilities even though there are incentives to do so under various schemes (Rani, 2003). Instead, para teachers are hired to meet this shortage as a low cost solution since they are appointed on one-fourth to one-fifth of the regular salary (Kumar et al, 2001a).

The educational level required for a para teacher in regular primary school is the same as that of a regular primary teacher (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). However, the pre-service training programme for them is largely condensed in comparison to the official two year teacher training programme for regular primary teachers (Mehta, 2003).

The non economic argument of hiring para teachers in regular schools is summed up by the observations of the National Committee of State Education

Ministers set up in 1999 to recommend measures for achieving UEE in the country (Pandey, 2006). This committee observed that poor community control over teachers, teacher absenteeism and low teacher motivation are major reasons for *not* recruiting new regular teachers. Hence recruitment of para teachers was to be given preference for filling up the vacant positions not only in remote areas but in the whole country (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). It argued that a local person recruited by the local body would be accountable to it and hence would perform better, but admitted that the underlying reason for channelling appointments through them was to avoid chances of litigation on pay scale at a future date (ibid). Hence there seems to be three main reasons for hiring para teachers in regular primary schools—for meeting teacher shortage, countering teacher absenteeism and provide additional support to regular teachers in schools with high pupil ratio (ibid). So in effect, para teachers may work alongside regular teachers in these schools but there may be regular schools which are *run solely* by para teachers (Jhingran, 2003; NUEPA, 2007)

As stated earlier, para teachers are also recruited for alternative schools but they are paid even less than the para teachers in regular primary schools (Kumar et al, 2001a). Most importantly, alternative schools as a norm are staffed *exclusively* by para teachers. In remote areas, the qualification requirements are also generally lowered (Duthilleul, 2004). Ensuring universal access is emphasized as an objective for opening such schools (Govinda and Josephine, 2004).

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan supports the recruitment of para teachers in all types of schools (Jhingran, 2003). The number of para teachers hired has gone up from 2002 onwards since the states could now appoint them with central government funds under SSA (Kingdon, 2007a). As many as 4, 99,000 para teachers were appointed in 2005-06 across 35 states, majority (93 per cent) in rural areas and 66 per cent of the total number were posted in primary schools (NUEPA, 2007). The states of AP, Bihar, Chattisgarh, MP, Rajasthan and UP accounted for 84 per cent of the total appointments (ibid).

## 4.2 The Argument

Having a local person as teacher may have a few advantages. Community monitoring may be easy resulting in increased accountability and regular functioning of the school (Kingdon, 2007a). The ‘social distance’ between the regular teachers and children attending primary schools has reportedly widened in recent years resulting in poor treatment of children along with caste based discrimination (Bhaskar, 2005; Jenkins and Barr, 2006; Jhingran, 2005; Kabeer et al, 2003; Kaul, 2001; Ramachandran et al, 2003; Vasavi, 2003). A local person hailing from the community is expected to demonstrate greater empathy towards children.

A local person can deliver instruction in mother tongue, something which is critical especially at the primary level (Lockheed, 2004; World Bank, 2004c). In a country like India with considerable linguistic diversity even within states, studies show that children face difficulties in comprehension if taught in a different language or even in a different dialect, particularly in tribal areas (Aruna, 1999; Jhingran and Miller, 2006; Kurrien, 2007; Nambissan, 1994; Singh, 1995). Empirical evidence proves that teacher’s lack of knowledge of children’s language and culture inhibits development of a good rapport with them (Pandey, 2006). According to the World Bank (1997) ‘teachers who share the ethnic background and language of their students are more effective than teachers who do not’ (1997:

164). One of the most successful examples of local persons (women) being moulded into effective primary teachers is the BRAC primary education program in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2003).

### **4.3 Review of Experiences**

The subject of para teachers, though controversial, has attracted comparatively less professional research in India (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). Nevertheless, the first section will attempt to provide a general overview of para teacher experiences in the country and their performance in regular schools whereas the second section will discuss the role of para teachers specifically in alternative schools.

#### **4.3.1 General Overview and performance in regular schools**

The qualifications possessed by para teachers serving at the primary level would be a good point to start with. The latest DISE 2005-06 data reveals that overall, 22 per cent of male and 14 per cent of female para teachers in primary schools had Bachelors in Education or equivalent degree and concludes that para teachers could be better qualified than regular teachers (NUEPA, 2007). A Study conducted by DPEP in 1998 covering para teacher schools in five states found that overall, the teaching learning process was unsatisfactory and para teachers lacked the basic pedagogic skills (cited in Govinda and Josephine, 2004). This study also found that though the learning achievements of children in para teacher schools was far from satisfactory, there was *hardly any marked difference* in performance of children in these schools and in regular primary schools (with no para teachers).

In their study of para teachers in regular schools in rural Uttar Pradesh, Govinda and Josephine (2004) found that majority of them were dissatisfied with the training received and with their compensation since they felt that they did the same amount of work as that of a regular teacher. The regular teachers in their sample were appreciative of the support provided by the para teacher though they believed that their lack of professional training would affect quality. Sharma (1999) in her study of para teacher scheme in regular schools in rural MP found that the scheme was successful in promoting a rural based para teacher though most of them encountered difficulties in handling multigrade teaching situation. Parents and village representatives in her sample generally viewed the appointment of para teachers as a positive development. Para teachers were found to be performing poorly in Andhra Pradesh as they were unable to understand children's problems and the curriculum transaction process (CAG Report Andhra Pradesh, 2006). Para teachers generally were found to be working harder than the regular teacher in the PROBE survey, possibly due to greater accountability (PROBE Team, 1999).

Para teachers have been seen as a part of the solution for teacher absenteeism, but the WBNAS found that para teachers and regular teachers had roughly the same absence rate of about 24 per cent (Kremer et al, 2005). Other studies found para teachers to be less absent in MP (Bose and Vaugier-Chatterjee, 2004 cited in Naik, 2006) and UP (SIEMAT-UP, 2005 cited in World Bank, 2006a). Also, there seems to be some field evidence suggesting that regular teacher's absenteeism could *increase* after appointment of para teachers (Mehrotra and Buckland, 2001). Though the para-teacher schemes officially glorify the spirit of selfless service, studies show that there is hardly any spirit of voluntarism among them as most of them are drawn in due to unemployment and the nurture the hope of getting regularized in future (Leclercq, 2003a; Pandey, 2006). Kumar et al (2001a, 2001b) point out that a potentially explosive political situation in the country

arising due to rising unemployment of educated youth was handled peacefully under the guise of the para teacher scheme by extolling the virtues of decentralization

#### **4.3.2 Para teachers performance in Alternative Schools**

Alternative schools correspond to what Gaynor (1998) terms as ‘alternative model’ of teacher management in which the community plays a major role in hiring, firing and supervising teachers. Para teachers in alternative schools are confronted with a different and potentially difficult set of dynamics than para teachers in regular schools. Habitations where alternative schools function tend to be inhabited by marginalized groups or located in remote rural areas and most importantly, these mostly function as single or two teacher schools (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). This section will discuss the role of para teachers in the Education Guarantee Scheme, the alternative schooling scheme of Madhya Pradesh which was launched under DPEP in 1997.

In the Education Guarantee Scheme, the community (not having any primary schooling facilities within 1 Kilometre) is made responsible for identifying a local teacher and also provide space to put up a school for delivering primary curriculum, which is guaranteed within 90 days on demand (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 1998). The Government provides training to the teacher and his/her salaries and the salaries are disbursed through the village PRI body (ibid). Thus, the community is given a major role in managing the school (ibid).

The EGS has attracted considerable scholarly attention and it won the Commonwealth International Innovation Award in 1998. Gopalakrishnan and Sharma (1998,1999) incidentally both bureaucrats in the MP Government, claim that the EGS para teachers demonstrate greater accountability to the community and these schools do not compromise on any of the quality parameters like training of para teachers, academic support etc. Clarke (2003a) in her field study found that the EGS para teachers were committed and motivated and there was interactive learning in classrooms whereas others (Jha et al, 2001; Noronha, 2003; Ramachandran 2004b) report close interaction between the EGS para teachers and the community. Possibly the most balanced critique of the EGS is provided by Leclercq (2002, 2003a, 2003b) who points out that EGS schools only provide an ‘incomplete guarantee’ (2003a:1862). In his study he found that though the schools were basically functional, the EGS para teachers were poorly equipped to deal with multigrade teaching. The Quality of education imparted by them was found to be problematically low. Social distance between children and EGS para teachers still existed as these positions were dominated by upper caste men. Poor teaching capacities of EGS para teachers has also been reported by others (Khera; 1999; Rahul 1999). Gopalakrishnan and Sharma (2003) provide statistics to show that children in EGS schools performed *at par* with children in regular schools in the fifth grade board examinations in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alternative Schools in West Bengal performed better than regular schools in several aspects in the Pratiche Trust Study carried out in 2002 (cited in Pritchett and Pande, 2006).

#### 4.4 Some critical issues

In rural India, barriers to accessing schooling are not only physical but also social (Goyal, 2006; Reddy and Rao, 2003; Taylor, 1991). Studies show that alternative schools have expanded physical access to schooling particularly for the most disadvantaged groups viz. scheduled caste and tribal children and for those residing in remote rural areas (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 2003; Leclercq 2002, 2003a; McCarten and Vyasulu, 2003; Ramachandran, 2004b; Singh and Sridhar, 2005). In some cases, appointment of para teachers has resulted in better functioning of regular schools (Govinda and Josephine, 2004; Sharma, 1999).

The debate over para teachers in the country is highly polarized. Some observers contend that increased dualism is being perpetuated within the primary education system with different classes of children being taught by different teachers and low quality education being delivered to the most underprivileged through para teachers (Govinda and Josephine, 2004; Nambissan, 2003a; Ramachandran et al, 2004; Rao, 2000; Roy and Khan, 2003; PROBE Team, 1999). Others like Jhingran (2003) argue that since issues related to the formal school system such as deployment and regular attendance of teachers has not been addressed adequately despite best efforts, it is but practical that alternative arrangements be devised so that children are not deprived of their right to education.

The apprehension that para teachers schemes may result in damage to educational quality is frequently expressed (GCE, 2005; Kondapalli, 2002; Rani, 2003; Rao, 2000; Pandey, 2006; Tilak, 2002), even in government documents such as the 149<sup>th</sup> report on Demand for Grants 2004-05 (Parliament of India, 2005). Limited available evidence actually suggests that learning achievements of children in regular schools and para teacher schools do not differ much. This is surprising, considering that alternative schools have relatively poor resources (Ramachandran, 2005b). Studies (Kothari et al 2000; Mercer et al 2000 *both* cited in Ramachandran, 2004b) show that there is no significant difference in learning between children in EGS schools and formal primary schools in MP. However, one cannot read too much into these findings. As Govinda and Josephine (2004) point out, comparison between regular schools and para teacher schools in terms of learning outcomes is futile in the Indian context since the problem of low levels of learning is pervasive all across the board. Evidence from other developing countries however show that contract teachers do a better job of teaching children with learning difficulties in lower grades (Michaelowa et al, 2007).

The creation of a separate cadre of para teachers has led to a diversification of the primary teacher status (Göttelmann-Duret, 2000). Creating multiple layers of teachers with varying service conditions is seen to have a demoralizing impact on the entire teaching force. The National Council for Teacher Education (2006) observes that the trend of recruiting para teachers has led to 'further degradation of the status of school teachers, thus diluting the identity of a teacher as a professional' (2006:19). The All India Primary Teachers Federation has demanded scrapping of the para teacher scheme in the country (Times of India, 2007). Concerns are also expressed about the demand from para teachers for integration into the mainstream with regular salaries, which would then defeat the very purpose of a having low cost solution (PROBE Team, 1999; Vegas, 2007). If they are integrated in an adhoc manner under political pressure, it might contribute to a further weakening of the teacher cadre (PROBE Team, 1999).

## **4.5 Conditions facilitating effective service delivery by Para teachers**

Given the caste based inequalities existing in rural India, insistence on local residence to avoid the problems of absenteeism could limit competition and perpetuate upper caste dominance in filling up the para teacher positions (Govinda and Josephine, 2004) As Leclercq (2002, 2003a) has shown, the social distance between children hailing from disempowered groups and the para teachers in such cases is maintained. In remote tribal areas, the danger of lowering entry level qualifications could result in recruitment of tribal youth who themselves are drop outs and have failed to complete schooling, thereby putting a question mark on their mastery of subjects (Nambissan, 2000; Rahul, 1999).

Govinda and Josephine (2004) rightly observe that though possessing academic qualifications and training does not guarantee quality, compromising on these aspects could prove damaging. Studies have brought out the poor quality of classroom transaction process of para teachers and their demand for more training. In Andhra Pradesh, though the para teachers were supposed to be given training for 30 days before they start, it was found that in six districts the training ranged from only three to seven days (CAG Report Andhra Pradesh, 2006). One cannot fault them for poor teaching under such circumstances. As several studies show, para teachers appear to be ill equipped to handle multigrade teaching. Mehta (2003) in his analysis found that some of the states with the highest proportion of para teachers (MP and Chattisgarh) had the lowest rates of in-service training.

Ongoing academic supervision and support is crucial, particularly for para teachers in alternative schools who are professionally isolated without any peer group support (Govinda and Josephine, 2004). Pedagogic supervision is a function which cannot be devolved to the community (Gaynor, 1998). Observers point out that overall the amount and quality of academic support provided to para teachers by the monitoring personnel is low on both quantity and quality (Govinda and Josephine, 2004; Leclercq 2002, 2003a; Sadgopal, 2003).

Two of the distinguishable features of the service conditions of para teachers is the contractual nature of their job and their low wage structure. The argument of placing them on contract is that it would act as an incentive to them and force them to perform (Duthilleul, 2005) Their commitment and lower absenteeism rates is attributed to the impermanence of their contract and it is believed that placing them on permanent contracts would make them indistinguishable from regular teachers (Mehrotra, 2004, 2006a). In practice, however, there is hardly any framework for performance appraisal and most para teachers get their contracts renewed (Duthilleul, 2004). The monitoring personnel have a central role to play in assessing the performance of para teachers but there is infrequent and inadequate monitoring on their part (ibid). Dissatisfaction with remuneration has been echoed in several studies-apart from being perceived as unfair, the low wages may affect their motivation and force them to take up secondary employment (Bennell, 2004; Govinda and Josephine, 2004; Leclercq, 2003a; Sharma, 1999). Lack of job security could lead to increased absenteeism among them (Kremer et al, 2004)

## **4.6 Concluding Remarks**

In concluding, one cannot overlook some of the positive benefits that have accrued as a result of their appointment in regular and alternative schools. As Drèze and Sen (2002) have pointed out, it might be premature to completely dismiss these low

cost schemes (cited in Kingdon, 2007a). Some argue that these low cost options may come with considerable hidden costs as substantial investment is needed for providing intensive training and guidance (Buckland, 2000 cited in Fyfe, 2007; Mehrotra and Buckland, 2001). However, there seems to be excessive focus on ensuring physical access particularly by setting up alternative schools in the country, whereas investment in improving the calibre and performance of para teachers has taken a backseat (Ramachandran, 2003). Hiring of para teachers, who supposedly face greater threat of punishment for poor performance, may not turn out to be a simple fix for teacher absenteeism in the long run, even though it may be an efficient strategy (in terms of costs) of achieving an ideal teacher pupil ratio (Kremer et al, 2004; Rogers et al, 2004)

The moot point however remains that most of the problems which afflict the regular system (viz. poor multigrade teaching skills, a defunct monitoring system, lack of incentives, no performance appraisal etc) are no different from those which plague the para teacher system as well. It is quite possible then that the behaviours and attitudes of these two categories of teachers may eventually converge in the long run (if para teachers continue to get recruited and are not integrated).

# **Chapter FIVE**

## **EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUALIST WAY: IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL VOUCHER SYSTEM IN RURAL INDIA**

### **5 THE INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned earlier, within the individualist mode of management, one can choose to focus either on service providers or on clients. This chapter begins with a brief discussion on examples where the focus is on service providers viz teachers. A detailed discussion will follow on school vouchers which is an example of focussing on clients.

Performance based pay for teachers is being increasingly advocated in recent times, the argument being that they face weak incentives as qualifications and experience determines their pay and there is no link to performance (Kremer, 2005). Currently no such system of a performance based pay exists for teachers in the country. Some key issues need to be sorted out for devising a pay for performance systems viz the behaviour which the performance based plan intends to promote (viz increasing attendance of teachers, enhancing the academic achievement of children as a measure of teachers performance etc) the percentage of salary which will be based on performance and most importantly, mechanisms to be used to evaluate the teachers performance.

Providing incentives for teachers has been thought of a solution to reduce absenteeism rates among them (Jacobson, 1989; Koonce, 2007; Scott et al, 2007). Whereas Kremer and Chen (2001) found no evidence that payment of bonus contingent on teachers attendance reduced absenteeism among them significantly in Kenya, Dufflo and Hanna (2006) in their study in non formal schools in rural Rajasthan found that payment of incentives conditional on presence reduced teacher absenteeism by more than half (from 44 to 27 per cent) over a period of 27 months.

Because of the interest in raising achievement levels, focus has also been on paying incentives to teachers contingent on enhancing student's performance. Kingdon and Teal (2002) found that though performance related pay improved student performance in private schools, the same did not hold true for government schools. One possible explanation for this could be that government teaching jobs are permanent with very little chances of dismissal (ibid). On the other hand, Muralidharan and Sundararaman (2006) in their study in rural government primary schools in Andhra Pradesh found that providing bonus payments to teachers based on improvement in test scores raised the achievement levels of students in incentive schools significantly.

Clarke and Jha (2006) point out that since teachers are paid well, non-monetary incentives like awards and recognition would be much more appropriate in the Indian context. Teacher awards were introduced in 1950s but in recent times the selection of candidates for awards has become highly politicized and rarely depends on performance (Ramachandran et al, 2005). It does seem that appreciation and recognition from higher authorities for their efforts could play a major role in motivating the teachers (Mooij, 2006).

## 5.1 School Vouchers in India

The idea of school vouchers in India was first mooted by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council in 2000 (Das, 2003). Vouchers find a mention in the draft approach paper to the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2007-2012) albeit at the secondary level of schooling (Planning Commission GoI, 2006). According to this paper, 'voucher schemes can help promote both *equity and quality* in schooling in areas where adequate private supply exists' (ibid: 48, my emphasis). Several observers have supported the idea of vouchers as a potentially effective solution for the problem of poor educational quality at the primary level within the country (Aiyar, 2004; Balasubramanian et al, 2003; Das, 2003, 2005; Tooley, 2001; Tooley and Dixon, 2005a, 2005b; Valluri, 2005; Varma, 2007; Weidrich, 2003). Others (Bagchi et al, 2006; Ghosh, 2007; Kaushik, 2006; Raina, 2007) have voiced their opposition to this idea.

## 5.2 The Argument

Voucher proponents argue that the poor quality and inefficiency of public schools can be attributed to the monopolistic nature of these schools which denies consumers free choice (Friedman, 1962; Kremer and Sarychev, 2000; Savas, 2000; Virmani, 2002; Willmore, 2004). Virmani (2006) points out that in India market failure has been used to justify public production of services, but the problem of government failure is much more serious. A related argument is that the state should ensure services are available but necessarily need not *produce* them since a shift towards regulatory governance would entail greater accountability towards citizens (Bortolotti and Perotti, 2007; Muralidharan, 2006; Robinson, 2000; Savas, 2000).

Supporters of the voucher scheme in India advocate that 'choice and competition working together would provide universal access and high quality education for all' (Shah and Braun-Munzinger 2006:5). Instead of funding schools, the money (in the form of a voucher) should be given to parents and with it they can go to *any* school of their choice (ibid). This choice would result in public schools competing amongst themselves, and also with private schools to attract students and retain them and would also make them accountable to parents (ibid). Also, *all* children irrespective of their socio economic background would have a choice to exit the inferior public school and move to another superior school within reach (Shah, 2007). Competition would also force the public schools to improve their performance (Muralidharan, 2006) As for the impact on teachers, increased competition would bring about substantial reduction in teacher absenteeism and they would be more involved in providing better learning outcomes since they would be under the 'constant scrutiny of voucher empowered parents' (Balasubramanian et al, 2003: 3535). A Voucher system would also encourage investment by private sector in quality schooling in rural areas because of security of revenue (Muralidharan, 2006).

Hence the voucher system, by replacing government monopoly with competition, would force inefficient schools to raise their efficiency and quality (Hoxby, 2000; Levin, 2002; West, 1997). Voucher system is also one of the mechanisms of demand side financing which ensures that money is the hands of those who demand education (thereby giving them the choice) and not those who supply them (Patrinos, 2001). Neal (2002) points out that a voucher system can have significant positive impact on the composition of the teaching force. He also

argues that accountability systems such as incentives and rewards for teachers are not as effective as markets in enhancing their performance.

One of the underlying claims of some voucher proponents is that privately managed education is both effective and cost effective than public education (Carnoy, 1997). Private schools are shown to be performing much better than public school in several aspects, including academic achievement (Coulson, 2003, 2004). Ladd (2002) points out that if this indeed is the case, then one of the mechanisms by which a voucher system could enhance the overall productivity of the education systems (in terms of student achievement) is by facilitating a shift from public to private sector.

### 5.3 Review of Experiences

Kalra (2007) points out that the idea of school vouchers is gaining credence in India at a time when its effectiveness is being debated in countries where it has already been implemented such as Peru, Columbia, Chile and Sweden. Evidence of improvement in academic standards under a voucher system seems to be quite mixed (Kalra, 2007; Ladd, 2002; Rouse, 1998). The 'sorting effect' viz many schools preferring to enroll students with advantaged background (knowing that socio economic variables also correlate with academic achievement) could lead to greater inequality and segregation (Gauri and Vawda, 2003, 2004; West, 1997). Whereas some (Davis, 2006; Hoxby; 2003; Sandström and Bergström, 2002) show that that greater competition does improve the performance of public schools, others (Carnoy, 1998; Goldhaber, 1999; Ladd, 2003) point out that conclusive evidence is not available to support this contention. McMillan (2005) in fact argues that public schools could actually *lower* their quality and productivity in response to competition for incentive reasons.

Teachers and politicians may resist efforts to close public schools even with low enrolments and poor quality (Gauri and Vawda, 2003, 2004). Well off parents tend to take greater advantage of school choice since they are better informed (Levin, 1998). The 'Peer Effect' viz calibre of students in a classroom affecting the educational achievement of an individual student is shown to be greater for low ability students (Zimmer and Toma, 2000). If peer effects are positive as is mostly shown to be, then the gains in achievement for those better performing students who leave public schools in search of high quality peers could be offset by losses encountered by those who are left behind (Carnoy and McEwan, 2003; Ladd, 2002).

### 5.4 Private Primary Schooling in Rural India

For fostering real competition, there should be enough suppliers of the chosen service (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). The starting point would then be to have an overview of the extent of private primary schooling<sup>5</sup> in rural India. Private schools

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<sup>5</sup> Private schooling in this chapter refers *only* to the private *unaided* schools (which are entirely self financed, hire their own staff and charge fees). These schools may be *recognized* (granted approval by government upon fulfillment of certain conditions) or *unrecognized*. Private *aided* schools are also run by private managements but they are funded and regulated by the government and do not charge fees (Kingdon, 1996b)

catering to the rural population typically fall into lower end of a segmented private sector.

Several authors (Aggarwal, 2000; Kingdon, 1996a, 2005, 2007a; Kochar, 2001; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002) have cited evidence to show that enrollment in private primary schools in rural areas has grown in recent times. Six per cent of the total rural children in the country were found to be studying in private schools at the primary level (World Bank, 2001). The most recent macro level data on private primary schooling in rural areas comes from two sources. The ASER 2006 survey found that 18.6 per cent of all rural primary age children (7-10 years) in the sample were attending private schools in 2006 (Pratham, 2007). Eight states had more than 30 per cent of children in private schools at the primary level.

Much more is known about rural private primary schooling from the World Bank National Absence Survey (WBNAS) carried out in 20 states (Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006; Muralidharan, 2006). Overall, 28 per cent of the villages in the sample had access to private primary school in the same village with substantial inter state variations .51 per cent of these schools were *unrecognized* .Private teachers were found to be two to eight percentage points less absent than government school teachers. The most significant finding of this study was that private schools were disproportionately located in those sample villages where teacher absence in government schools was high.

Broadly speaking then, the phenomena of private primary schooling appears to be uneven across rural India, but the main reason behind its existence per se in prosperous states (such as Punjab), less prosperous states (such as UP) and in educationally advanced states (such as Kerala) seems to be the perceived lack of quality in government schools (Abadzi, 2002; Dogra, 2005; Duraisamy, 2001; Kabeer, 2003; Kingdon, 1996a, 2005; PROBE Team, 1999; Retnakumar and Arokiasamy, 2006; Shiva Reddy, 1991, Waldman, 2003). Largely it appears to be a case of what Batley (1996) terms as 'informal or unintended privatization' which manifests as a consequence of failure of public services.

Kingdon (1996a) argues that the true size of private primary schools is grossly underestimated in official statistics for the main reason that these statistics do not count the unrecognized schools. The incentive for seeking recognition for many of these schools is minimal due to various reasons- recognition would entail adherence to government norms in terms of qualification and pay for teachers (Mehta, 2005), in many states registration and recognition of private elementary schools is not mandatory (ibid) and finally conditions for seeking recognition are demanding and in particular rural private primary schools have greater difficulty in seeking recognition (Kingdon, 2007a).

Muralidharan and Kremer (2006) found that private school student's achievement was 0.41 standard deviation higher than government school students in the same village after controlling for school characteristics and home background in the WBNAS. Several observers have pointed out though that private schools in rural areas may possess certain positive attributes viz a low teacher pupil ratio, better infrastructure, regular functioning, disciplined atmosphere etc, but the quality of education provided itself may not be of a very high quality (De et al 2002; Leclercq, 2003a; Mehrotra and Panchamukhi, 2006; Nambissan, 2001; PROBE Team, 1999; Rana and Das, 2004; Rana et al, 2005; Singh and Sridhar, 2002; Srivastava, 2001). Commenting on this aspect, De et al (2002) remark that 'parents face a difficult choice between low quality and no quality' (2002:5234). Multigrade teaching may be a common feature in many private schools too (Leclercq, 2003a; Majumdar, 2001).

Private teachers are likely to receive substantially less training than government teachers (Aggarwal, 2000; Mehrotra, 2006a). Also to be noted is that *no substantial difference* was found in teacher absence rates in private schools and government schools in the WBNAS. Ramachandran (2007) in fact argues that the quality of services provided by the private sector is influenced by the quality of services available in the public sector itself-where government schools are poor, private schools at the best may be marginally better. Achievement tests conducted under DPEP revealed that even though private schools performed relatively better than government and aided schools, they were far away from the MLL standards (Aggarwal, 2001).

## 5.5 Conditions needed for implementing a school voucher system in rural India

This section will aim to explore the potential issues in implementation of a school voucher scheme in rural India. A pilot voucher scheme for primary school going children was launched by the NGO Center for Civil Society (CCS) in March 2007 catering to the urban slum population in New Delhi (Mukul, 2007).



*Slum Children in Urban New Delhi with their School Vouchers:* [Picture Courtesy: Center for Civil Society, New Delhi]

Possibly the first question to be raised in implementing a voucher scheme in rural areas would be whether there are enough private schools for parents to have a choice. Assuming that there is enough supply, the next question is whether an adequate number of them could be compelled to participate in the voucher programme, since they may be subjected to some form of governmental regulation which they usually resist (Mehendale, 2007)

An effective regulatory system is required to implement a voucher system for setting certain standards and defining objectives and also for monitoring the performance of schools periodically (Levin, 1998, 2002; Lauglo, 1995;

Muralidharan, 2006). The flourishing of unrecognized private schools at the primary level in both rural and urban areas in several states speaks volumes about the effectiveness of the existing regulatory mechanism. Mehta (2005) in his study covering seven districts of Punjab found that 65 per cent of the total number of unrecognized schools were operating in rural areas and 34 per cent (of the total number) were primary schools. In many cases the regulations for gaining recognition are easily flouted through corrupt practices (De et al, 2002; Leclercq, 2003a; Tooley and Dixon, 2003, 2007; Tooley, 2004). De et al (2002) remark that 'the regulatory mechanism of recognition norms has failed to ensure a minimum acceptable norm of quality schooling' (2002:5236).

Substantial information needs to be conveyed to parents about the quality of schools competing with one another to facilitate effective decision making (World Bank, 1995). Balasubramanian et al (2003) while proposing a voucher model for rural India assert that 'the judgement of the quality of education should be left to the parents, community opinion leaders and in a way to the market' (2003:3534). To what extent is this feasible in rural areas is debatable. There is some evidence though that poor parents view teacher functioning as a critical factor in distinguishing between the quality of schools (Boyle et al, 2000; Nambissan, 2003b) But in general, it is complex to gauge the education production function and understand when high quality instruction is being provided (Cullen et al, 2005; Devarajan and Shah, 2004).

One of the biggest attractions of going to a private school in rural areas seems to be the strong desire that children learn English (De et al, 2002; Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006; Muralidharan, 2006; Mooij, 2006; Rana et al, 2005; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002; Singh and Sridhar, 2002). But as Raina (2007) rightly observes 'quality does not imply western looking uniforms and a pretension of English medium'. Parents may even make choices based on the characteristics of other children (for eg caste composition) attending schools. The concern then is can we expect parents (especially those hailing from the most disadvantaged background who may be illiterate themselves) to make a reasonably sound 'choice' of schooling for their children, provided of course that the choices are available in the first place.

The 'sorting effect', particularly with respect to caste is a real possibility in rural areas. Observers have shown that private schooling in many rural areas is accessed predominantly by the upper caste groups (Leclercq, 2003a; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002; Rana et al, 2005; Srivastava, 2001). It is not unimaginable to think that many private schools could deny access to children on the basis of caste (even though they may have vouchers) leading to further polarization.

## **5.6 Concluding Remarks**

It cannot be denied that the idea of school choice per se is a powerful one. As Ladd (2002) points out, ethically it is very hard to justify denying of choices to the disadvantaged groups. Children may drop out of the government system due to poor quality and may not be able to access private schooling (assuming that it is available and is of a better quality) because of economic constraints. Indeed some observers (Acharya, 1994; Choudhury, 2006; Majumdar, 2001) have noted that children could exit the public system not on account of economic reasons as commonly believed but instead due to 'lack of interest' which, as Jayachandran (2007) points out, in all probability reflects inadequacies in the schooling system.

When parental hopes of receiving quality education are not fulfilled in government schools, it discourages them from sending children to school even though they may be highly motivated (PROBE Team, 1999). Denying these children the choice to attend another school indeed seems unethical.

A market solution for enhancing the performance of teachers and schools may sit uncomfortably with the rights based discourse. However, some observers (Shah, 2007; Tomasevski, 2003) refer to Article 26(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that parents have the *right to choose* the kind of education they want for their children. Willmore (2004) points out that like in several other countries, this right is violated in India since parental choice for many is restricted to poorly functioning government schools as private schools are unaffordable for them.

There are, however, some real concerns associated with the idea of using vouchers to increase parental choice and create competition between public and private schools to enhance quality in rural areas as discussed above. Mehendale (2007) points out that a voucher system could end up giving a ‘false sense of empowerment’ to parents. Indiresan (2006) observes that it is unlikely that vouchers would be implemented in India as the government typically would not like to displease government teachers.

## Chapter SIX

### CONCLUDING OVERVIEW

#### 6 VARIOUS MODES OF MANAGEMENT IN PERSPECTIVE

This paper aimed at exploring three innovative strategies proposed or implemented for addressing the issues of teacher absenteeism and poor quality in rural government primary schools in India. Strategies falling within Hood's Individualist, Egalitarian and Fatalist modes of management have been discussed in detail. This chapter will conclude by providing a comparative perspective on the three chosen strategies viz Decentralization, Vouchers and Para teachers as well as discussing the conditions under which we could choose one mode of doing public management (Hierarchist, Egalitarian or Individualist)<sup>6</sup> over the other or if a combination of these three modes would be more appropriate

##### 6.1 Comparison of the chosen strategies

Comparison among the three chosen strategies (Decentralization, Vouchers and Para Teachers) in a nutshell is depicted in Table 1

**TABLE 1**  
**Comparison among the Three Chosen Strategies**

	<b>Creation of Decentralized bodies</b>	<b>Voucher System</b>	<b>Creation of a separate cadre of Para Teachers</b>
<b>Problem of teacher absenteeism and poor quality due to...</b>	Lack of Accountability relationship between service providers (teachers) and clients (parents/community)	Monopoly of government schools denying choice to parents	Absenteeism and Poor Motivation among regular teachers, hence they do not perform despite being well paid. Plus their jobs are permanent.
<b>Argument underlying these strateg(ies)-how they would resolve these issues...</b>	Participation of the community (through decentralized bodies) would enhance accountability of teachers and lead to better performance. Local Preferences would be taken into account.	Competition the main mechanism which would force government teachers/schools to perform. Money given to parents giving them the choice to opt out of government schools if they are dissatisfied	Does nothing to address the problem of absenteeism among regular teachers. Para teachers are expected to perform better since they are on contract, are more accountable to local bodies plus they have other supposed advantages (viz reduced social distance/mother tongue instruction etc)

(Table Contd..)

<sup>6</sup> According to Hood (1998), the three most dominant modes of doing public management are the Individualist, Hierarchist and Egalitarian ways. Hence the Fatalist way will not be touched upon in this chapter

**TABLE 1 (Contd...)  
Comparison among the Three Chosen Strategies**

	<b>Creation of Decentralized bodies</b>	<b>Voucher System</b>	<b>Creation of a separate cadre of Para Teachers</b>
<b>Available evidence about the success of these strategies till date...</b>	Limited success. Some positive evidence from MP and Karnataka on the role of PRIs and Nagaland on role of VECs in reducing teacher absenteeism. Improving learning in schools not yet prioritized-infrastructure remains the focus.	Not yet implemented in India. International Evidence on improvement of academic standards under a voucher system inconclusive	Limited evidence suggesting that academic achievement of children taught by regular and para teachers do not differ much. Para teachers had the same absence rate as regular teachers in WBNAS. Social distance may not be reduced as envisaged.
<b>Constraints faced...</b>	Dual line of authority persists in most states. Critical functions in teacher management still rest with the government. Poor capacity building and awareness among functionaries. Marginalized groups may be excluded from participation. Teacher's resistance to decentralization	Not yet implemented	Poor capacity building and on going support. No performance appraisal system in place even though they are on contract.
<b>Pre conditions needed for enhancing the effectiveness of these strategies...</b>	Enhancing human capital (education levels) in rural areas. Devolving effective powers to local bodies. Effective capacity building. Countering resistance among teachers. Altering skewed power structures	Adequate supply needed to foster competition. Substantial information needs to be given to parents so that they are able to decide.	A well defined career path needed. Effective capacity building, performance appraisal system and ongoing support crucial.

## **6.2 Linking Individualist and Egalitarian ways to Hirschman's 'Exit' and 'Voice'**

Hood's individualist and egalitarian modes of management can be viewed as equivalent to the concept of 'exit' and 'voice' respectively developed by Albert O Hirschman in his book 'Exit, Voice and Loyalty' (Hirschman, 1970). Exit in Hirschman's formulation is explicitly associated with choice. Individuals should have the freedom to move through the market and make their own preferred choices if they are dissatisfied with the service being provided. So for example if a parent is not satisfied with the functioning of the public school, he should be able to exit and move his child into another school of his choice. Exit can thus be related to the individualist way (focussing on clients) since it advocates competition as the main strategy. Hirschman's notion of 'voice' is that if beneficiaries are dissatisfied with the services that they receive, they could actively engage themselves with the service providers, monitor them and articulate their complaints so that service delivery improves and becomes more responsive. One also sees the link between Hood's Egalitarian way and Hirschman's 'Voice' in the sense that both of them are centered on participation.

Paul's (1991, 1992) elaboration of Hirschman's concept of exit and voice for public accountability deserves mention here. He observes that the decision to use exit or voice or a combination of both would depend on two factors. Firstly, the expected returns from enhanced accountability and secondly, the costs associated

with using exit and voice. Further, he elaborates that both use of exit and voice are related to market failure. Exit becomes costlier as market failure increases. Locational and spatial aspects may limit the possibilities of exit viz there may be scope for only one school in a small village. Voice is most likely to be used when there is a high probability that it would elicit a response from the public sector. Importantly, the ability to use voice is a function of education and income. Lack of these attributes mostly results in a ‘weak voice’. Table 2 depicts his classification of services with the possibility of using an exit-voice combination:

**TABLE 2**  
**Classification of Services based on combination of Exit and Voice**

<b><u>Low Exit and Low Voice</u></b>	<b><u>Low Exit and High Voice</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rural primary education</li> <li>• rural health</li> <li>• law and order (for the poor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• urban water supply</li> <li>• electricity</li> <li>• regulatory services</li> <li>• irrigation (large scale)</li> </ul>
<b><u>High Exit and Low Voice</u></b>	<b><u>High Exit and High Voice</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• urban low income housing</li> <li>• urban primary education (low income)</li> <li>• welfare/nutrition services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• urban transport</li> <li>• university education</li> <li>• specialist health care</li> </ul>

*Source:* [Paul-1991, 1992]

Paul places rural primary education under the ‘low exit and low voice’ category. He points out these categories of services pose the biggest challenge for designing accountability systems. Exit choices are virtually non-existent (government being the sole provider) and the exercise of voice is also a problem since rural people are educationally disadvantaged and time constrained. However, he emphasizes that given the low possibilities of exit, strengthening voice remains the only viable option. The main concern in adopting the egalitarian way in rural India however is the prevailing social structure which is anything but egalitarian. Some degree of elite domination may be plainly inevitable in such circumstances (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). It is clear that the individualist mode of management (focussing on clients) or exit can work only when there are multiple service providers to foster real competition. As Paul has shown above, primary education in urban areas is an example where this basic condition could be fulfilled.

### **6.3 Combination of Hierarchist, Egalitarian and Individualist Ways**

Table 3 presents a recap some of the key features of these three dominant ways.

**TABLE 3**  
**Key features of Hierarchist, Individualist and Egalitarian Ways**

Hierarchist Way	Regular Monitoring/Supervision of teachers
Individualist Way (focus on providers)	Rewards, Incentives (monetary/non monetary) for teachers
Egalitarian Way	Community Participation for accountability of teachers

What is evident by looking at these features is that probably more than one way could be combined in some measure for tackling public management problems, which in our case is teacher absenteeism. An example of this is a recent experiment carried out in single teacher non-formal education centres in rural Udaipur, Rajasthan in which cameras were used to counter teacher absenteeism<sup>7</sup> (Duflo and Hanna, 2006). Teachers were given cameras with tamper proof date and time functions and they were required to take their snap along with students at the start and close of each school day. Each teacher was paid a bonus in addition to the base salary contingent on presence and was fined for absence. Over a period of 27 months, the teacher absence rate went down from 44 per cent to 27 per cent. Improvement in test scores of children was also registered in experimental schools by 0.17 standard deviation in comparison to control schools a year after the program. This experiment was conferred the ‘ICT Digital Learning Innovation Award’ in 2006.



*Teacher posing with his students for the Camera: [Picture Courtesy: Duflo and Hanna, 2006]*

<sup>7</sup> The Delhi Government has decided to install CCTVs in urban government schools, albeit at higher levels. Among others, CCTVs will be used to ‘keep a watch on such teachers and students who avoid classes regularly’ (Mukherjee, 2007).

It can be seen that this experiment combines the hierarchist way (intensive monitoring) and the individualist way (paying bonus to teachers contingent on presence). Hannaway (1996) suggests that a combination of decentralization and incentives would work better for improving public education since observability is better at the local level (cited in Dixit, 2002). Hanushek (1996) also emphasizes that many approaches could be applied simultaneously for successful reform (ibid). In the Indian context it is suggested that teachers might even welcome greater monitoring and inspection (hierarchist way) so that they are appreciated and rewarded (individualist way-provision of non monetary incentives) for their efforts (Mooij, 2006). In Senegal, contract teachers are provided with the certain incentives (notably a well defined career path) for motivating them to perform better and the system seems to be successful (Duthilleul, 2005). It is not unimaginable to think that probably a teacher (assuming that he/she is well equipped) would perform better if regular monitoring and support is provided by higher authorities, if he/she is rewarded and appreciated for his/her efforts and is supported by the community in discharging his/her duties.

Teacher demotivation and absence usually takes root in the context of substantial deficiencies in the organization of the education sector (Rogers et al, 2004). Ameliorative measures have to be undertaken to tackle the underlying issues. Training of teachers can be taken as an example. If the quality of teacher training itself is poor, then public schools might not be able to produce better academic outcomes even while facing competition under a voucher scheme (Gauri and Vawda, 2003). In Nagaland the Communitisation experiment is apparently most successful in tackling teacher absenteeism. However, the CAG Report (2006) for Nagaland carries unsatisfactory remarks about the training of primary teachers in the state. Again this could well mean that though teachers may be present in classrooms, they might not be well equipped to undertake effective teaching.

In concluding, it is reiterated again that to resolve the problems of teacher absenteeism and poor quality in primary schools in a comprehensive manner, strategies encompassing more than one way of doing public management will be required.

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