DECENTRALISED MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Management of education has to be decentralised in order to achieve the goal of Education for All, through devolving authorities from higher to lower level. Therefore, decentralised management in education can be a way to equality. This paper delineates the decentralised setup of educational management, its rationale, existing situation and prospects.

INTRODUCTION

Equality and inclusiveness are the basic features of a true democratic society. Inequality exists due to various demographic variables such as religion, ethnicity, geographical conditions etc. The contributing factors behind inequality in education are geographical, ethnic and religious. This diversity expresses the need of democratic decentralisation to increase the people participation in every sphere of national life. Educational management system has also been decentralised corresponding to the three tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Assuming that local institutions and agencies can better understand local priorities, problems and their solutions, all the responsibilities of school management have been devolved to these local bodies. Democratic management of educational institutions has hoped to increase equal access (equality) in education through creating inclusive setup which would cater to the local needs. This decentralisation has been proposed as a way to equality and '*quality in education*' (Dash & Panda 2009, p.95). This equality in education will ultimately lead to equality in other walks of life and will result in inclusive society. Decentralisation has also been termed as '*democratic decentralisation*' (Mukundan 2003, p. 27; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay 2010, p.1) as a part and parcel of democratic system. In other words, it is an essential component of democratic system. The basic tenets of democracy are equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Owing to this nature of the system, it (democracy) needs decentralisation in all its aspects i.e. social, political and economical. Therefore, democracy is also known as *social democracy*, *political democracy* and *economical democracy* (Fotopoulos 2000, pp. 211-251). Decentralisation has been defined as *"the transfer of decision making authority, responsibility and task from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations"* (Hanson 1998, p. 112).

Decentralisation has different aims in different countries. In Spain, aim of decentralisation is to confront regional problems. Seeking economic development is the aim in Venezuela and in India, decentralisation aims to foster democracy (Fiske 1996, p.12). Thus, in Indian perspective decentralisation is a specific call for democracy. But decentralisation in education is a very complex enterprise. The road from concept to its implementation is by no means straight and simple. This decentralisation cannot be achieved over night as many policy makers hope. Decentralisation and centralisation exist on the two poles of the continuum. Between the two there are phases which are also known as types of decentralisation.

CENTRALISATION → DECONCENTRATION → DELEGATION → DEVOLUTION → DECENTRALISATION

Deconcentration is the process through which a central authority establishes branch offices, staffing them with its own officers. In case of delegation, decisions are made at local level, but power in a delegated system basically rest with the central authority, which has chosen to lend them to local one and can withdraw at its own will. Devolution of powers is formally held at sub-national levels, the officers of which do need to seek higher level approval for their actions. Privatisation or localisation is the transfer of government functions to private sector or to local enterprises (Therefore, in some aspects privatisation can be considered as another form of decentralisation). (Bray & Mukundan 2003, p.3)

In India, since 1993, responsibilities and authorities in many democratic sphere, including education, have been devolved to local bodies i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). According to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, tasks in following areas devolved to PRIs: Education, including primary and secondary schools (Clause 17), Technical training and vocational education (Clause 18), Adult and non-formal education (Clause 19), Libraries. (Clause 20) and Cultural activities (Clause 21).

This decentralisation in education is a complex process as it can result in substantial changes in educational system, in educational management, teacher - training, designing curriculum etc. Changes in education system indisputably cause changes in social system because education is potential sub-social system responsible for socialisation and social change. This can directly promote social democracy.

In the whole country PRIs, the local level political bodies are established to manage many economic, academic and administrative tasks in educational management along with their other socio-political responsibilities. This is a *reestablishment,* (as education never was centralized in India) is sought to redress historical inequalities by *e*xplicitly identifying the representation of traditionally underserved groups, women, schedule castes and scheduled tribes. Unlike other countries of the world, India is facing multiple problems such as *geographical* one, as many regions are hard to reach with reference to providing educational services. Some *sociological* phenomena such as caste, religion, ethnicity, gender etc., which also transform social status into educational status in the long run. *Rural-urban* division also affects the delivery of educational services and causes multiple inequalities in the society.

Considering all these problems of inequality, decentralisation becomes imperative in the quest for equality. This system has been considered as a way to social justice. In decentralised system local communities can manage the educational services delivery according to their local needs. Local level problems can be identified without delay and quick solution can be provided in their own way which might never have been understood by the authorities in the centre. Central and state government and their administrative machinery facilitate in the terms of resources, monitor their management as well as provide technical support to these bodies.

This increased capacity of decision making at the local level has been hoped to improve the educational delivery system and its quality directly by increasing the amount of input and its quality in the schooling. Programmes designed at this level are guaranteed to be relevant and also can reduce inequalities in access to education of quality. This territorial decentralisation benefits the central and state governments by relieving them of political and financial problems.

It is now necessary to deliberate over the issues of inequality in education which was thought to be solved by decentralisation of education system. It is well evident in some part of the nation that the situation is in a very sorry state. What are the reasons behind it? Which are the contributing factors? What are the major issues that need deliberation beforehand? It has also been identified that it is failure of implementation, not of policy (Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerster & Khemani 2006, p.29; Leclercq 2003, p.21). The major issues which are creating obstacles in the way of democratic decentralisation and posing threat before the national goal of equality and social justice are noted below.

PROBLEMS IN THE SYSTEM
Local elitism

Local elitism is a major problem. Bhatnagar and Williams (1992, p. 4) observed that "sometimes resources for development can be captured by local elites and used primarily for their own benefits rather (that of) intended beneficiaries."

Decreasing interest of community members
Decreasing interest of community members is also a big threat in the way of decentralisation. Individual or community management of education has been a cultural phenomenon in India from ancient period to present time but it is reversing when it is formally assigned to the community. Bray (1996, p.15) writes that "one result of increased government input has been decreased community involvement and control".

Illiteracy and low educational level
Illiteracy and low educational level have cumulative impact on the actualisation of the democratic participation / decentralisation. Illiteracy bars the flow of information to the some definite section of the community and makes them unaware about their roles, rights and responsibilities (Sethy 2006, p.50).

Lack of interest on the part of political leaders and bureaucrats
These groups also do never attempt seriously to include the all sections of the societies in the management of the education. Some socially economically deprived groups dare not to raise their voices and communicate their educational needs. Political leaders and bureaucrats use to maintain secrecy regarding public rights and their roles in the systems.

Dearth of human resources fit for the work is a major problem of the field
Education sector is deprived of the administrative leaders who have firsthand experience of the system as well as interest to improve the system. It needs self motivated personnel who can realise the existing policies like decentralised management and can conceive innovative plans and strategies to implement them.

Lack of expertise in the planning
The loopholes in the policies adopted by states and local governments have made the situation grimmer. Gap between schools and local community/ society is increasing.

Lack of propaganda and ensuing awareness
Due to lack of adequate initiatives in popularisation of the law and policy through different type of media, a large section of population is unaware of the decentralised system and their role in it . Banerjee et al.(2006, p.7) found that most of the parents were not aware of the existence of such type of committees. Sometime, even, committee members are found unaware of the key roles, they are empowered to play in education services.

All these problems are interrelated. To deal with all such types of hindrances in the way of democratic participation and in realisation of equality and inclusiveness in the society, the concerted effort should be made.

CONCLUSION
Problem related to human recourses and planning can be solved by initiating special services in education also suggested by National Policy on Education 1986 (modified 1992). For this, the government should start Union Educational Services. Corruption and local elitism can be eliminated through propaganda via various media networks. Substantial changes are made in educational delivery services. Various types of programmes related to mass literacy and adult education have been launched but failed to reach their goal. Wholistic plan should be launched targeting the achievement of the goal in the terms of learning and awareness not in terms of maintaining budget of the programme. Reputed self help groups and non government organisations should be involved in the educational management activities. Transparency in the system should be maintained through

initiation of programmes like e-governance in educational management. Use of technology should be widened in educational programmes especially in the programs of mass literacy and informal education. Technological uses in education is itself a problem in education but should be tackled through joint efforts.

The above mentioned solutions cannot be forceful if enacted separately therefore combined efforts should be made in all the areas. Administrative restoration, community mobilisation, propaganda and restructuring in committees in the combined way can be beneficial in achieving democratic decentralisation, which is essential for 'inclusive society', free from all types of inequalities despite existing demographic variations. Without equality, democracy is not more than an illusion. Thus, equality and democracy are complementary to each other. Democratic management in education need to ensure equality and quality in education, which in turn will foster democracy.

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