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SYNOPTIC REPORT

Mona Sedwal



National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

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17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi - 110016

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MONA SEDWAL



Department of Training and Professional Development in Education
National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi – 110 016

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The study seeks to unearth the underlying social dynamics prevalent in two educationally distinct blocks of Rajasthan, through the lens of the School Management Committees (SMCs) present in the chosen schools. It focuses on explaining the broader idea of managing schools within their social constructs, and relies on comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork that accounts for the multiplicity of stakeholders that constitute such committees.

School Management Committees play a crucial role in ensuring equity and access to basic elementary education. They evolve based on the interactions of their various constituent stakeholders, who define the nature of the school infrastructure, its enrolment patterns, distribution of compensatory funds, teacher qualifications, and the social composition of the committees.

The study is divided into six chapters, starting out with an introduction of the study area, followed by a review of the literature in the field, research methodology, a profile analysis of the selected field, analysis of the data, and concluding with the findings of the study.

The study provides a trajectory of School evolution in a global as well as national context, through a look at various academic theories and legal frameworks that underwrite the idea of school management. The study outlines the multiplicity of stakeholders in the area, and how they come together to constitute a SMC. The study traces the origins of school management to a centralised system where the management is carried out on the authority of an external officer, and grounded in classical public administration theories of scientific management, functionalism, and bureaucratic theory. These theories prioritise organisational structure and standardised procedures, which, in turn, set common management targets applicable to all schools. Under this system, periodic school inspections are considered the most effective means of assessing structural functioning and managing the schools, which act as recipients of directions and authority from a centralising structure above. In contrast, the modern ideas of school management, based on the principle of equifinality, are

decentralised by nature, where the schools have greater autonomy in determining their needs and structures. Such an approach is characterised by flexibility, and sees problem-solving as an opportunity to attain better self-management practices rather than remain as passive implementers.

The chapter then moves on to identifying the evolution of school management through an analysis of rights and legal measures, such as the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments, the Right to Education (RTE), 2009, and the insertion of Article 21A of the Indian Constitution, which obligates the state to guarantee free and compulsory education to all children from the ages of six to fourteen. However, given the limitations that exist in its effective implementation as well as the reach of judicial and legal measures, SMCs are seen as alternative avenues for parents and guardians to assert their rights to compensate for the deficit that arises. Furthermore, given the ambit of the Act is to empower students from marginalised and disadvantaged sections, and the growing prevalence for private school enrolment, SMCs play a pivotal role in the implementation of Constitutional ideals that rely on a functional state-provided education system. They oversee operational dynamics, manage school finances, ensure judicious allocation of scarce funds, and aid in infrastructure development, monitoring and evaluation, and fostering a supportive educational environment, all the while seeking to bring about transparency and accountability in the system.

The role of administrative leaders in ensuring smooth operationalisation between the school governance and the societal structure is widely acknowledged, more so in remote areas that necessitates tailored approaches to management, along with involving the spectrum of stakeholders. Community participation is an ongoing, organic process, and learning from best practices is essential. Stakeholder partnerships, based on data, can address school needs, celebrate successes and tackle challenges effectively. In such scenarios, good leadership capabilities can help minimise challenges and orient school management in a purposeful direction. At the local level, Gram Panchayats and Municipal leaders help in decentralised administration, and enhance connection between communities and primary schools in collaboration with the Panchayati Raj institutions. At the same time, the study acknowledges the lack of any universal solution to the needs of school management

and instead emphasises area-specific approaches to achieve common objectives, overcome compartmentalisation, and improve efficiency.

In terms of the underlying rationale of the study that focuses on SMCs, the author presents the challenges of government schools lacking behind their private counterparts in terms of educational quality and the potential of SMCs to oversee them to improve curriculum and teaching methods, their engagement with local self-governance mechanisms such as the panchayats, ensuring that the transformative potential of Information Communication Technology (ICT) can reach the grassroots, enhancing understanding of the role of technology, fostering learning and cooperation opportunities, and adopting a holistic approach to unlock educational potential.

The second chapter of the study focuses on analysing and assessing the review of literature on school management, by reflecting on the ideas and themes present in government reports, articles, books, theses and the like to present the idea along four broad themes - a global perspective of community participation in school management, the Indian context of policy perspectives, exploring the institutional dynamics that are present within SMCs, and lastly, analysing the committees within their situational context of Rajasthan.

The third chapter outlines the rationale and objectives of the study in order to lend a structured approach to the challenges at hand. It lays out the site for the ethnographic research within two blocks of the Jhalawar district in Rajasthan - Bakani which is an Educationally Backward Block (EBB), and Khanpur which is designated as a non-Educationally Backward Block (non-EBB). In the former, twelve (12) Scheduled Caste (SC) habitations were investigated, while the latter saw fourteen (14) habitations being studied. The author undertook a mixed methods' approach, employing a descriptive research design that was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including school profiling, observations, questionnaires, interviews and surveys. Overall, it focused on unearthing data through purposive and stratified random sampling, with seven (7) schools being chosen from each block for the purpose of the study. Apart from the usual stakeholders of SMCs such as school heads and principals, faculty, staff, students and members of the wider social community, information was also gathered from government functionaries such as Block Education Officers (BLOs) and District Education Officers (DEOs), with mechanisms for feedback being incorporated extensively into the research design. The

primary data sources comprised of surveys, structured questionnaires, focused group discussions, checklists, household surveys, and developed case studies, while secondary sources included examination of State Panchayat Acts, review of training modules under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), as well as gathering information on relevant policies, rules, regulations, and school management roles.

Some of the central research questions that the study sought to address included determining the impact and composition of SC and non-SC communities across both blocks, attitudes of SMC members towards students from these communities, and how it impacts their education, extent to which the SMC members determine and implement relevant government schemes, analysing the management in terms of adherence to inclusivity, determining whether different social compositions lead to differential access to educational resources, infrastructural levels prevalent in the schools, level of technological penetration in school education, educational qualifications and upskilling of the teachers, and gender representations and their impact on school education. While the nature of the study necessitated a broad spectrum of research objectives, some of the core ideas concerned assessing the impact and composition of social categories in EBB and non-EBB schools, studying the functioning of SMC members and, in particular, the attitudes of headmasters towards the students, seeing the degree of involvement of SMC members in formulating and implementing the School Development Plans (SDPs) in collaboration with relevant government authorities, analysing the functioning through the lens of inclusivity, and evaluating the content, methodology and training programmes in terms of their patterns of social inclusion.

Following this, the subsequent chapter deals with laying out the details of the field on the table. Dr. Sedwal presents a comprehensive overview of the profile of the Rajasthan state, in terms of its physical, geographical, social and economic profile, with a deep dive into the particular educational landscape of the state. Among several parameters that are resented, the author highlights the literacy trends in the state, with a particular emphasis being laid on the large gap between male and female literacy, which remains one of the largest in the country, indicating a low gender parity index. Though the state's Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) of twenty-nine (29) is only slightly higher than the national average of twenty-six (26), indicating a slightly worse ratio than the overall average; the state still has a significant number of vacant seats in the

higher education sector. The overall access to quality infrastructure is limited, as seen in the lower number of schools having libraries (65%), electricity connections (16%), and medical facilities (38%). By bringing forth such discrepancies, the study highlights the magnitude of the tasks that confront the SMCs in seeking to reform and overhaul the system at the elementary level of education.

From here, the focus shifts to presenting a brief profile of the Jhalawar district in the state, which contains both the blocks under consideration for the study, as well as the functioning of various government initiatives such as the SSA, RTE, and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) in the state. This section further details the idea of how EBBs came to be as a means of achieving better governance in education based on the twin concerns of a low Female Literacy Rate (FLR) and a higher gender gap in literacy. To address these concerns, a number of bodies such as SMC, Village Education Committees, Parent Teacher Associations and others were constituted in order to meet the common objectives outlined under the SSA. From here, the focus shifts to uncovering the intricate relationship between social dynamics and school management, with a focus on ensuring quality education for all children. In Jhalawar, the study identified a total of fourteen (14) government primary schools (GPS) in both blocks for the purposes of analysis, evenly spread across both EBB and non-EBB areas, each having seven (7) GPS.

The study specifically targeted habitations in the district with a significant SC population, which comprised 128 out of a total 1586 habitations. In the Bakani Block, which had a total of forty-one (41) panchayats, twelve (12) were SC concentrated, while the same for Khanpur was fourteen (14) concentrations drawn from thirty-eight (38) panchayats. SMC, under various guises, were found to be constituted in almost all areas, with the final narrowing down of the list taking only those schools which had SMCs for consideration. These committees were found to be involved in supervision of civil works, mid-day meals, monitoring enrolment and attendance of children, and mobilising resources for school supplies and furniture. Through regular visits, it was determined that the SMCs had an overall positive impact on enrolment and attendance, though the same argument cannot be extended to a national level without proper on-site determination. Also, the study, to better comprehend the impact of social dynamics on school operations, considered the impact of social components

such as caste, gender, ethnicity and religion, in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding on the subject matter.

Therefore, in the fifth chapter, the study analysed the findings across five key areas of educational infrastructure, including basic facilities, sanitation and digital infrastructure; enrollment; distribution of District Compensatory Fund (DCF); teacher qualifications; and teacher appointments and gender representation. The schools under Bakani EBB included GPS Sanvalpura, GPS Sawakho, GPS Devdungari, GPS Mokham Pura, GPS Barkhedi, GPS Laxmipura Badbad and GPS Banskheri. In parallel, the schools considered in the Khanpur non-EBB included GPS Ummedpura, GPS Potukhedi, GPS Thokariya, GPS Khuntkheri, GPS Kunged, GPS Anghora and GPS Jagdishpura. These schools were further chosen as they depicted a range of establishment years, from GPS Potukhedi in 1961, to GPS Saakho in 2013, thereby depicting changes brought into existence over an extended period. There existed many commonalities as well as differences in the schools in the two blocks, as per the study. While the Bakani block boasted a greater number of classrooms, those in Khanpur had a higher percentage of classrooms in a good condition, showing that mere quantity over quality does not present a complete picture. Similarly, Khanpur exhibited a higher number of schools with playgrounds, but the schools were devoid of rainwater harvesting systems, though schools in both blocks were equipped with libraries and offered similar drinking water access. Electricity was present across the board, but without any access to regenerative systems such as solar panels. Only GPS Banskheri was represented on the Subcommittee for Learner Welfare and School Environment, while GPS Pothukhedi was the sole representative on the Sub-committee for Community Participation, depicting their individualistic focus on overall student welfare and community participation respectively. The role of SMCs and multiple stakeholders under such circumstances cannot be underestimated. While parents' involvement is constant, those by other stakeholders like teachers and government officials vary.

The study points to the crucial role played by school staff, particularly the headmasters, in maintaining records of SMC meetings and fostering close-knit ties with the community members. This brings about accountability, transparency and aids future planning. While all SMCs received funding and assistance from the school administration, non-governmental organisations and/or the government, the lack of

adequate funding and proper cooperation from the side of the parents continued to be persistent hurdles. Despite these challenges, SMCs continued to play a pivotal role in identifying school needs, overseeing construction projects, ensuring enrolment, and monitoring student attendance and performance.

In the context of *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* guidelines, proper school sanitation facilities play a key role in promoting cleanliness and hygienic practices in schools, and both blocks display a good level of access to these practices in their respective schools. The presence of adequate washrooms, classrooms, drinking water facilities, handwashing amenities and libraries is commendable, though with the scope for improvement across parameters such as better furnishings, improved library accessibility, and exploring alternative sources of energy generation. The overall picture though trends in a positive manner. There are appropriate and separate urinals for boys and girls, comfortable classrooms for academic activities, access to drinking water, handwashing facilities, libraries, electricity, dedicated rooms for headmaster/headmistress, and accessible playgrounds for extracurricular activities. However, there are also other infrastructural facilities that could be improved such as lack of adequate furniture, solar panels, rainwater harvesting techniques, and necessary healthcare and medical checkups.

In terms of digital infrastructure, schools receive digital literacy and problem-solving skills, and adaptation to diverse learning styles and needs, so as to help bridge the digital divide. Only two schools, GPS Mokham Pura and GPS Laxmipura Badbad have access to the internet, while the rest have no access to digital tools such as laptop, desktop, projector, printer and digi board. The dearth of digital facilities across the board is a matter of serious concern in both blocks, and calls for a concerted investment in digital infrastructure. As regards the enrollment patterns, the study delves into the social composition of the students in the schools, with a detailed look at the enrollment numbers by social categories. The revealing pattern is that across both blocks, minority students outnumber the rest in enrollment numbers, followed by the general category and then the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) students. The SC enrollment is a reflection of the social reality, where Bakani block, with 10.49% of its population being SCs has seen 17.16% of enrollment from SCs, while the same for Khanpur is 16.20% of the population and 22.83% of the enrollment. The study further depicts that while the schools might perform admirably when it comes to

admitting students from reserved and disadvantaged sections of the society, getting the benefits of development to accrue to them is another task altogether. GPS Ummedpura in Khanpur block, with less than a fifth of enrollments from reserved categories (10 out of 52 total), is able to garner greater access to resources, hinting at unequal distribution as a lived reality on the ground.

While distribution of the District Compensatory Funds (DCF), which aims to allocate resources and funds to historically backward areas of over socio-economic progress, it is seen that only a limited number of primary and upper primary students benefited from the free textbooks provided under this initiative. The low utilisation numbers point to a lack of awareness and distribution challenges, both key areas where the SMCs can enter the fray. As regards the educational qualifications of teachers, the study addresses a sobering reality on the ground, with just a singular school having a teacher in each block with a Bachelors in Education (B.Ed.) degree, with others having only diplomas and/or certificates in Basic Teacher Training. None possessed a specialised degree such as Bachelors in Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.) or a Master's in Education (M.Ed.) degree, in addition to the lack of teachers pursuing professional courses to improve their teaching capabilities. This points to a lack of opportunities for upskilling, as well as the lack of incentives to do so, denoting a serious lack of attention to quality teaching in the government schools surveyed. As pertains to the gender representation of the teachers, most displayed a fairly balanced approach in Bakani block, pointing to attempts to achieve an inclusive teaching style. The situation bore reflection in the Khanpur block as well, with the exception of GPS Khuntkheri and GPS Anghora, where no female teachers were represented among the appointments made in general mode.

The final chapter presents a set of policy recommendations to address the imperfections that were witnessed during the course of the ethnographic study. It brings together the findings of the study under a common roof, and draws conclusions based on the data presented in the preceding pages. It reveals different social structures across the EBB and non-EBB schools, with the former depicting a higher percentage of OBC enrollment, whereas the latter showed higher SC and Scheduled Tribes (STs) enrollment, thereby necessitating different approaches to school management that need to be undertaken by the SMCs. The role of headmasters as crucial links in the functioning of SMCs and fostering deep links with the community was a marker of

the schools in both blocks, highlighting an inclusive approach to education. The formulation and implementation of SDPs was another standout in the schools, demonstrating the influence of strong and committed decision-makers, which flowed over in the context of ensuring representation of minority and reserved category students in the schools. This chapter links the data gathered from the ground with the national and global policies on sustainable development and accessible education, prominently stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and its various components. The idea of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its emphasis on increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) brings the study to a full circle, as it sets out with an analysis of the policy-making in the context of elementary education at the outset.

The study is a typical depiction of the lived reality of managing schools through the aegis of SMCs. It represents a deep commitment to unearthing complex social dynamics in Rajasthan, through an in-depth look at EBB and non-EBB schools in a comparative perspective. Drawing from multiple literature sources, the study reflects the nuances of working of the committees through the lens of various stakeholders involved, with a rounded analysis of the multiple dimensions of school management.

The study offers an exclusive take by moving the locus away from theoretical explanations of school management to bringing empirical evidence back into the framework of discussion. It deserves plaudits for explaining complex social dynamics in a lucid and comprehensible manner, and for making the same accessible to a large set of readers. By attempting to present the data in a disaggregated manner, the author has succeeded in presenting the idea of school management in a new light, dotted with a collection of analytical tools and intricate research methodology and design.

Since the idea of school management is a constantly evolving field, expanding on the particularities of SMCs beyond the five dimensions presented in the study necessitates a follow-up study of the same actors at a later period. In addition, future endeavours can seek to shed more light on the unique characteristics of SC students in greater detail. It fulfills the requirements to act as an essential tool for researchers, teachers, policy-makers and the general public.



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(Deemed to be University)

17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi - 110016

EPABX No.: 91-011-26544800, 26565600

Email: niepa@niepa.ac.in | Website: www.niepa.ac.in