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# *Para Teachers in Elementary Education*

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*School education is a dynamic process. Efforts for provision of access in terms of academic and physical facilities are continuing. In this context, this paper sketches the evolution, growth and present status of one of the components i.e., Para Teachers, being appointed since the last two decades. The article also reflects on the Para Teacher's Schemes adopted by different states. Despite the increase in number of teachers (para teachers included), the present scenario as revealed by the field visits appears to be quite grim. Consequently, this article attempts to highlight the problems and prospects of Para Teachers Scheme. At the same time, some measures are suggested for developing para teachers as important contributors in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme for achievement of the cherished goal of education for all.*

## Background

Since independence Universalization of Primary Education has been perceived as the first and foremost goal. This was also reflected in the Constitutional Provision of free and compulsory education for all the children until they complete the age of 14 years. Presently, declaration of free and compulsory education for the children of 6-14 years of age as a "Fundamental Right for Education" has reinforced this concern. The National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action (1992) reaffirmed the national commitment to Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) with the declaration of universal enrolment and retention of children up to 14 years of age, and a substantial improvement in the quality of education.

The commitment to achieve universal enrolment and to provide quality education, resulted in initiation of number of schemes out of which, Operation Blackboard, District Primary Education Programme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (ongoing) are the prominent. The main focus of OB Scheme (1987) was to provide a school building comprising at least two reasonably large all-weather rooms with a deep verandah and at least two teachers in every school, as far as possible one of them a woman. It was also recommended to provide an essential teaching-learning material including blackboards, maps, charts, toys and equipment for work experience. The World Bank assisted District Primary Education Programme (1994) was approved as a centrally sponsored scheme of GOI for primary education development. This scheme stressed on local area planning, with more focused coverage on primary stage (Classes I-V and its NFE equivalent) with stress on girls and for socially disadvantaged groups and to maintain the balance in Teacher Pupil Ratio. Although, Operation Blackboard and process of rationalization of teachers has resulted in overcoming the shortage of teachers in school, but the existing number of vacancies needs to be filled is a gigantic task. As a result, para teachers are being appointed on the basis of the following two premises i.e.: (i) There are remote un-served habitations where the children don't have the access to primary schools within 1 km distance; and (ii) There are single teacher school as well as, remote places where

teacher are not interested to go, which leads to shortage of teachers in school leading to adverse teacher- pupil ratio.

During the field visit to Haryana and Uttar Pradesh related to the study titled “Micro planning in DPEP Districts – A Comparative Study of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh” several aspects related to para teachers in the school system emerged. This article is an attempt to share the problems and prospects of Para Teachers Scheme. At the same time, some measures are suggested for developing para teachers as important contributors in the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) programme for achievement of the cherished goal of education for all. Before discussing the findings regarding para teachers, it is imperative to review the earlier literature for development of better understanding about the para teachers.

**A Review**

The concept of “Para-Teacher" has come into vogue after NPE 1986. Para teachers are full time employees in the schools who are not necessarily professionally qualified as teachers but are generally from community. Such teachers are normally appointed on a fixed salary/honorarium, which is much lower than the normal full time teachers in the formal as well as alternative schools, with the aim to meet the demand for basic education within the limited financial resource available. They include - Contract Teachers, Shiksha Karmi, Guruji, Community Teachers, and Voluntary Teachers etc. Para teacher's salary, recruitment procedure and service conditions are entirely different than the regular teacher (Working Committee Report, 2001,p.20).

Para teachers were first appointed in Night Schools / Adult Literacy / Madarsa during late seventies in the Non Formal Schemes (DPEP Calling, 2000, p.54). Under the Education Guarantee Scheme, large number of para teachers was appointed to promote enrolment of children of deprived sections, particularly in remote places. The regularization of these para teachers in formal primary schools was carried out only in eighties in "Volunteer Teacher's Scheme" of Government of Himachal Pradesh. This scheme was initiated for the provision of additional teacher in existing single teacher schools. The Para Teacher Scheme gained popularity during 'Shiksha Karmi Project' (SKP), of Rajasthan in 1987. In SKP two locally recruited resident educational workers known as 'Shiksha Karmi's were appointed in place of primary school teachers who were found to be frequently absent from their duties (Singh, 2000, p.19). Other states also adopted the scheme for instance, Madhya Pradesh in 1994; Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh in 1998; and Maharasthra and Uttar Pradesh in 2000. The para teachers have been classified into two categories (DPEP Calling, 2000,p.56). These include – (i) Para teachers working in formal primary schools (e.g. 'Shiksha Mitra' scheme of Uttar Pradesh), and (ii) Para teachers working in non- formal primary schools (e.g. Education Guarantee Scheme of Madhya Pradesh)

During the 1990s, after the launch of DPEP programme there has been phenomenal rise in the number of para teachers with the realization that it is an innovative way to spend less money on primary education vis-à-vis fulfilling the goal of UEE (Kumar, 2001). Para Teachers appointed during the period 1994-99, are given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Para - teachers appointed between 1994 and 1999**

| State | Number of Para Teachers |
|---|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 35000 |
| Assam | 2332 |
| Gujarat | 26485 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 10961 |
| Kerala | 385 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 118000 |
| Orissa | 380 |
| Rajasthan | 18269 |
| West Bengal | 8065 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 19758 |

*Source: Kumar, K. 2001.*

Different State Governments have adopted the policies to recruit local teachers in different schemes. Para teachers are known by different names such as Vidya Sahayak in Gujarat, in Himachal Pradesh - Vidya Upasak, in Maharasthra - Shikshak Sevak, in Rajasthan - Shiksha Karmi and in Uttar Pradesh - Shiksha Mitra. The main objective behind these schemes is to address adverse teacher pupil ratio and to improve enrolment and retention as well as the quality of education. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh the Shiksha Karmi Programme was started to cope with the problem of shortage of teacher due to vacancies and absenteeism in the remote areas (DPEP Calling, 2000,p.56).

The minimum qualification for the appointment of these para teachers is intermediate in most of the States. It is higher secondary in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharasthra whereas in Rajasthan the qualification of Shiksha Karmi's is class VIII and V pass for males and females respectively (ibid). Similarly, honorarium for para teachers varies from state to state from the meager Rs 1000/- per month in Andhra Pradesh to Rs 3000/- per month in Maharasthra, on an average in other states it is around rupees 2500 per month (ibid, p.57). The duration of appointment is contractual in nature and it varies from 10 months to 1 year or for 1 complete session in almost all States. As an exception, in Gujarat, they are allowed for 2 years and even are absorbed when permanent vacancies are created (ibid, p.57).

Pre service training to para teachers is provided by DIETs. The duration of training also varies from state to state. In Andhra Pradesh it is for 7 days, Madhya Pradesh 12 days, Himachal Pradesh 21 days, Uttar Pradesh 30 days and Rajasthan 37 days. While in Maharasthra and Gujarat two year training is mandatory. In-service training is also provided to these teachers (ibid, p.56). Academic supports from Nyay Panchayat Resource Centre (NPRCs), Cluster Resource Centre (CRCs), Block Resource Centre (BRCs) and DIETs are also provided.

**Methodology of the Study**

This paper is developed based on the findings emerged during the study (ongoing) titled “Micro planning in DPEP Districts—A Comparative Study of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh”. This research project has been undertaken to study the planning process and stages involved in micro level planning, extent of involvement of community, teachers

and other grass-root functionaries in the planning processes and the activities undertaken to involve them in micro planning. Apart from this capacity building measures undertaken for project functionaries for facilitating their participation in micro planning were also studied.

Both the states– Haryana being a Phase-I state of DPEP and Uttar Pradesh having Basic Education Project funded by World Bank, are experienced in multilevel planning. Districts identified are based on high female literacy rate (in their DPEP phases) and districts with DPEP convergence in two different phases. To compare the effectiveness of micro planning in DPEP at different inception of time, one district from each phase was selected namely Hissar (DPEP I) and Bhiwani(DPEP II) from Harayana and two districts Firozabad (DPEP II) and Jhansi (DPEP III) from Uttar Pradesh were selected. Two blocks from each of these DPEP districts were visited. Since DPEP districts were selected on the basis of low female literacy rate, those districts that have shown increase in female literacy rate in their respective phases after the inception of DPEP i.e. between 1991 and 2001 were selected for the study.

Field visits included discussions with the State and District planning team members. Focus group discussions were also held to know the views of block resource coordinators and cluster resource coordinators, regarding their involvement in planning process. A visit to schools including interaction with headmaster, teachers, VEC members and parents of the children studying in the school was another important aspect to study the micro level planning process. Information regarding para teachers was a part of the larger framework of the study since appointment of para teachers was one of the responsibilities VECs as per the government orders in UP and Haryana. Presently, Haryana has discontinued the scheme since December 2002 and para teachers recruited were sent back. In addition, based on the micro planning only number of teachers required (taking into account the existing vacant posts of teachers) in these schools were identified which led to recruitment of para teachers.

During the field visit 21 schools in two districts (two Blocks each) of Haryana and 23 schools in two districts (two Blocks each) of Uttar Pradesh were visited. The issue of para teachers stood out prominently during the discussions with Village Education Committee members, school headmasters and teachers. A lot of information was collected through observation of ongoing classes and interaction with the children. During the meetings with VEC members, headmaster, teacher and students a few questions were asked to understand the extent to which the para teacher scheme is operational in the States. These are:

- What is the procedure of appointment of para-teachers?
- What are their required qualifications?
- Did they get any training before joining the duty?
- Who arranges for their training?
- What is the duration of training?
- Do they get any opportunity for in service training?
- Who monitors their functioning?

In addition to these discussions, in Uttar Pradesh a detailed discussion with the para teachers revealed the existing situations in terms of their working conditions, availability

of teaching-learning materials, academic support from CRCs and BRCs, emoluments and whether they receive it on time or not as well as about other training opportunities.

**Findings**

A field visit to districts of two states namely Haryana and Uttar Pradesh has revealed the plight of children studying in the government schools in the interior regions specially, Eka block, district Firozabad. It is situated around 65 km away from district headquarter. The block has many single teacher schools, with one para teacher assisting in teaching. Further out of these six schools, two schools were found closed even during the school hours, in one para teacher was waiting outside the locked rooms / offices for the teacher to come and in another para teacher was found to be the only one teaching. The regular teachers were not available in the school. There was no information about their absence, late coming or involvement in non-teaching duty. During the discussion with these para teachers it was revealed that the community and the villagers monitor their presence/absence. Parents and children (interviewed separately) reported that para teachers are regular and enthusiastic about their work. Some of them even take initiative to teach people in the village.

Non-teaching tasks assigned to the government schoolteacher range from census survey to election duties of various kind. In most of the states, 85 days of the 150 days available for schoolwork during one session are wholly or partly consumed by non-teaching tasks (Kumar, 2001). In reference to this para teachers mentioned that in the absence of regular teachers, and sometimes even when they are present and are engaged in different non-teaching duties, they have to look after the teaching process of all the students. Further due to the contractual nature of their job as well as its dependence on reports from community and the regular teacher, they have become the pawns in the hands of the school and village politics. Meager emoluments, which they received as compared to their counterparts, was also a cause of dissatisfaction. In spite of this it was found that parents of students were content that their children are being taught regularly in the school by these new teachers. Further during the interactions, para teachers articulated the need for frequent training programme for handling the content of curriculum and classroom management programme for multi-grade teaching.

During the field visit in Haryana it was revealed that, the para teachers were placed in those schools where the pupil teacher ratio was high. The services of para teachers were discontinued from these schools since December 2002 (mid session) due to the closing of DPEP programme by 30$^{th}$ June 2003. Consequently, parents and school headmaster were facing difficulty in finishing the syllabus and preparations for examination of large number of students. The government made no alternative arrangement. The situation can be clearly demonstrated by the school located in the Sabharwas village in Bhuna block of Hissar district. The records of this school revealed consistently high enrolment rate in the last two years. Currently 280 children were enrolled in Sabharwas Government Primary School. The school had three regular teachers. Later on four para teachers were appointed under the DPEP programme for one year, but their contracts were cancelled in December 2002. This has led to creation of multifaceted problems in terms of handling/managing large class strength, capabilities needed for multigrade teaching, increase in workload on existing regular teachers, division of additional responsibilities etc.

At that the same time it was found that utilization of teaching learning material was non-existent among most of the schools, they were lying locked in almirahs, trunks etc. Some of students were even not able to recognize pictures in the charts and even could not spell their name correctly all though they were studying in fourth standard. A study conducted under DPEP on learner's achievement levels also pointed out that learning achievement of Class V were significantly lower than Class III, especially in mathematics where para teachers programmes was ongoing because of their low competence and inadequate preparation (DPEP Calling, 1999). It appeared that in these schools, the academic environment for carrying effective and efficient teaching learning was not conducive. The traditional methods of teaching still existed instead of innovative child centered / play way method of teaching by Teaching Learning Material (TLM) and activity-based learning.

On the basis of foregoing discussions it is revealed that para teachers are filling the gap caused due to the shortage and absenteeism of teachers on one hand and on the other, it is a cost effective measure because they were appointed at lower rate of remuneration on contract basis. Since they belong to local areas and this has lead to their availability in the backward and remote areas to address the learning needs of local children using local language and local material. In addition they are also helping to generate community awareness towards education by forming a bridge between school and community.

**Tasks Ahead**

Preceding discussion has revealed a complex dynamic situation existing in school as well as community in each village surveyed. On the one hand the nature of working conditions, amount of honorarium and educational background of para teachers raises serious concerns regarding the quality of education para teachers will provide and on the other side they are filling up the gaps of teacher’s post resulting from vacancy and requirement of additional teachers and are engaged in teaching learning process. At the same time there is a perception and a hope of getting permanent position in the near future. Another vital concern raised is the quality of learning these teachers will provide since all reflected the need for further training. Despite all this, the bright side is their belongingness to community, enthusiasm to learn and teach. These characteristics if sustained could result in their becoming a significant resource for improving the quality of education as well as community participation. In this context following areas need to be strengthened:

- Since community involvement is the essential prerequisite for the development of sustainable education system, its role should be enhanced. Further, when para teachers belong to the same community, where the school is located, they have better understanding of local problems, beliefs and ethos. The already established rapport by para teacher can become strong tool in eliciting community participation in school affairs. Although in some states, like Uttar Pradesh, the appointment of para teachers is in hand of local bodies. This is a positive approach towards realizing the concept of community ownership of the school. Thus, the system for selection and appointment of para teachers needs to be exercised effectively.

- Strengthening the position/role of a para teacher within the community could lead to improved interaction between the para teachers and parents. This will help in addressing the learning needs of the local children achievements of students and regular sharing of their achievements.

- The provision of paying less money to para teachers as well as contractual nature of their job, however are major sources of discontent. The dual system of salary to para teachers and regular teachers is also not productive for long-term sustainability. Salary structures of para teachers should commensurate with the nature of work and responsibility. The issue of incentives such as provision for these teachers to get absorbed in the regular system can be a motivational input to these para teachers.

- During the discussions it was revealed that, many of the para teachers were mostly unemployed earlier. Appointment of this section of manpower may help in creating a motivating work environment and it will give these people a chance to serve the society in meaningful way. They could even be trained for different vocations which can further help in their as well as community's growth.

- The reflected need for more capacity building activities suggested that the quality and duration (frequency) of training programme for para teachers requires a fresh or revised approach. At the same time, pre service training of para teachers should be made mandatory. Further to improve the existing situation of para teachers, a vision for their role, need to be developed. Accordingly, need and skill based strategies for their development should be designed (Diwan, 2002). In addition to this regular academic support from CRCs and BRCs should be ensured through monitoring and supervision practices.

- During the school visits, it appeared that some of the para teachers were not in position to take initiatives in practicing/attempting innovative practices to improve teaching learning process. This may be perhaps due to their personal insecurity problem, associated with the nature and scope of contractual job, in addition to the problem of lack of academic and physical resources in the schools. Moreover, they do not get any grant for TLM preparation as it is given to the regular teachers. This also results in demotivation of para teachers to some extent and it may have significant impact on classroom transaction and teaching learning process. The policy related to quality improvement programmes need to look into this matter urgently.

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