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PARA TEACHERS

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The use of para teachers in primary education started on a large scale in the late seventies with the start of the centrally sponsored NFE scheme. But the use of para teachers in regular primary schools has started only in the eighties, the first initiative being the volunteer Teachers Scheme of Government of Himachal Pradesh, in 1984. Subsequently the para teachers have been employed in most of the states. These schemes of para teachers have originated in the background of the states' effort to universalize primary education, especially after the NPE,

During the last few years, especially after the start of DPEP there has been phenomenal rise in the number of Para teacher Schemes. Almost all the educationally backward states have come up with the scheme of para teachers.

The term 'para teacher' covers a wide range of recruitment for teaching in schools and alternative learning centres. In a broad sense, any appointment, that is a deviation from the past practice in that state, is referred to as a para teacher. This broadly refers to large number of teachers recruited by the community (though not always), at less than the regular teacher pay scale, for the formal as well as Alternative schools, to meet the demand for basic education within the limited financial resource available, in the shortest possible time. Engagement of para teachers is also seen as a concerted effort to universalize access in the remote un-served habitations that do not qualify for formal primary school and have no school within an approachable distance of one kilometer. The recruitment of para teachers, in some cases has been visualized as an interim strategy to provide adequate number of teachers, without compromising on quality. In other instances, the scheme of para teachers is envisaged as continuing along with regular teachers, though there may be possibilities of individuals graduating from the first category to the second. There also exists a trend of departing from the earlier system of teacher recruitment, with states opting for appointing teachers only on contract, through panchayats. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, the older policy of teachers' appointment on permanent basis as regular government employees has now been substituted by appointment of teacher on contract by District and Block panchayats. Since all the teachers will be appointed on contract in the state and the cadre of regular teacher has been done away with, therefore the contract teacher system has become the regular system. The government of Rajasthan has taken a similar policy decision. In these cases, it has been seen as decentralisation of accountability framework.

For the purpose of this study, all schemes of appointment of teachers, that is a deviation from past practice in a broad sense, has been covered under the umbrella of para teachers. However, such para teachers, who are working with part time education programmes like, NFE and some Alternative schooling centres under DPEP have not been included.

Origin:

The recent schemes of Para teachers have come up in response to the challenge of providing universal access to primary education under different situation. It has three aspects. First, there are a sizeable number of small size habitations in remote and tribal areas, in different states, which do not qualify for formal primary schools within the state government norms. These habitations are dispersed and the children of these habitations

do not have access to primary schools within a radius of one kilometer. Providing formal primary schools in these habitations is financially not viable. Therefore, local teachers from the communities are appointed, on a comparatively lower salary to these schools in remote habitations. Secondly, para teachers are appointed in regular schools to ensure a minimum of two teachers in every school. There are a sizeable number of single teacher schools in most of these states. Thirdly, to address the adverse Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR), or in other words to meet the teacher requirement. Large vacancies of teachers exist in the regular schools. These vacancies have arisen partly because of the retirement of teachers and partly due to the increase in enrolment. State governments are finding it difficult to fill up these vacancies with teachers in regular pay scales. Para teachers are being appointed to meet the requirement of teachers, because it does not require any significant increase in financial allocation, especially when the state governments are faced with the paucity of funds.

Rationale:

The existing para-teacher schemes are quite varied and so are their origins and rationale. These variations in the schemes are rooted in the contexts in which these schemes have originated and also the specific problems they are trying to address. Para teachers were first employed in India with the part time education programme in the late seventies. Then the rationale for employing para teachers was different. It was argued that since the children because of 'their problems' can not join full time schools, setting up part time school during the hours convenient for them was considered necessary. Since children were available for part time only, so the teacher also needed to work part time.

They were meagerly paid (initially it was Rs. 100 p. m. which was raised to Rs. 200 p.m.) because they had to work for only about two hours daily. That is how the concept of para teachers in education came into existence. In the mid- eighties, the para teachers were extended to formal primary schools and in the decade of nineties para teachers have been extended to upper-primary, secondary and senior secondary schools also. The appointment of para teachers, in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh has been extended up to the senior secondary levels. The rationale for appointing para teachers has changed. Focus has shifted from the 'problems of children' to the financial inability of the governments. Currently para teachers are paid less, not because they are working part time or the services they provide do not justify payments more than what they are paid currently. They are paid less because of state governments' financial inability to pay them adequately, especially when the requirement has been very large within a very short period of time, coupled with the high rise in the salary of government employees.

The first scheme of para teachers in primary schools in Himachal Pradesh was started for the purpose of providing additional teacher in single teacher schools. Subsequently, this concept of para teacher has been applied in many states, but the contexts in which these schemes have evolved are different. A very substantial proportion of para teachers has been appointed in formal primary schools to maintain the balance in Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR). States are finding it difficult to provide teachers with full pay scale in the shortest time frame. Besides meeting the demand in the shortest time frame, engagement of para teachers is also seen as a cost - effective strategy. This has led them to adopt the para teacher recruitment route.

With the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, when Primary Education has become the responsibility of Gram Panchayats, appointment of para-teachers by the Gram Panchayat has found a new context. Powers to appoint para teachers in most cases have been vested in Panchayats. In these states, it is seen as empowerment of the Panchayat Raj system and a decentralization of the accountability framework. In many schemes this has been further decentralised and the power to identify/select teachers has been vested in the parents of the beneficiary children. It is allowing states to develop a decentralised framework with the involvement of community through the Panchayat Raj system and the Village Education Committees. Decentralisation of appointments has quickened the process of teacher recruitment.

The existing process of recruitment in different states has been time consuming. Appointment of such a large number of teachers in such a short time frame without decentralizing the recruitment process probably would not have been possible.

In schemes like, Vidya Sahayak of Gujarat and Shikshan Sevaks of Maharashtra, the appointment of para teachers have been seen as interim measures to be able to meet the heavy financial requirement in a phased manner. But in most of the schemes, such understanding is not clearly visible, In Madhya Pradesh, the government policy is to appoint teachers only on contract basis. School teachers will henceforth, no longer be, a regular government employees. Either the Janpad Panchayats or the Zila Panchayats appoints them. The regular teacher cadre is a dying cadre in Madhya Pradesh.

Though this has not been articulated very clearly in these schemes, there also seem to be an understanding among the educational planners and implementers that the local appointments will solve the most difficult problems of irrational deployment of teachers in schools. The appointment of teachers in most of these schemes is against vacancy in a particular school and they are then not subject to the regime of transfer.

In Himachal Pradesh, which is near achieving the goal of universal access, retention and quality are the two major concerns. The new scheme has been launched, mainly with a view to provide minimum three teachers in each school to improve the quality of learning.

Though, the schemes of para teachers vary significantly in their origin and approach but the common factor in all of them is that the teachers are low paid and are appointed on contract. In most cases, barring Gujarat and Maharashtra, pre-service training is not mandatory. Induction training is largely between 20-40 days duration, except in the case of Vidya Volunteers of Andhra Pradesh and Sahyoginis of West Bengal. Another significant point about the para teachers is that they are mostly from the local community. Appointing authorities in most cases are VECs/SCs/Panchayats. The local communities have a major role in functioning and management of para teacher run schools, especially those in similar habitations. Honorarium to the para teachers also in majority of the cases, is paid through the community

Coverage:

At present in different states, more than 220 thousand para teachers are engaged in full time schools out of which the state of Madhya Pradesh has a share of 53.7%, about 118 thousand. The rest, about 102 thousand para teachers are distributed in states of Andhra Pradesh (35,000), Gujarat (485), Rajasthan (18,269), Arunachal Pradesh (10,961) West Bengal (8,065) Assam (2,332), Kerala (385) and Orissa (380). If number of para teachers working in part time Primary education programmes, is also added, this number will go above 500 thousands. These 220 thousand para teachers have been appointed in the last 5 years and out of this about 180 thousand have been appointed during the last two years.

The states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have notified new schemes of para teachers on the patterns of Education Guarantee Scheme and Shiksha Karmi Program of Madhya Pradesh. Going by the proposals of different states for the current year, about another 90 thousand more para teachers are going to be appointed in formal schools. Bihar is also in the process of finalising a scheme of para teachers "Lok Shikshan Karyakaram". With this, all the states under DPEE barring Kamataka and Tamil Nadu, will be having provision of para teachers for full time schools.

Types of para teachers:

Due to the very varied origins and rationales of these schemes, categorising them has been a difficult task. But, on the basis of the types of schools, the para teachers are working with, they can be classified broadly into two categories:

- I. Para teachers working in formal primary schools and
- II. Para teachers working in schools other than formal primary schools

Again, within both the categories, there can be two sub categories.

A1. Para teachers appointed in formal primary schools. This has been done with a view to address the problems of single teacher schools as well as the high Pupil Teacher Ratio. In spite of the OBB scheme, there are many single teacher schools existing in the country today.

Apart from this, there has been number of teacher posts vacant in most of the states. These vacancies have arisen partly because of the retirement of teachers and partly due to increase in enrolment. State governments are finding it difficult to fill these vacancies by appointing teachers in regular pay scales. The para teacher schemes have been conceived as measures to provide teachers at a lower cost, especially when state governments are faced with paucity of funds. In this category, the examples are; 'Vidya Upasak Yojana' of Gujarat, 'Vidya Volunteer Scheme' of Andhra Pradesh, 'Shiksha Sawayam Sevi Scheme' of DPEP Rajasthan and 'Guru Mitra Scheme' of Uttar Pradesh, Vidya Sahayak Yojana of Himachal Pradesh and Shikshan Sevak Scheme of Maharashtra etc.

A2. Para teachers replacing formal primary schools teachers. In this category the only example is of Shiksha Karmi Programme in Rajasthan. The Shiksha Karmi Programme Rajasthan was launched in response to meeting the problems of teacher absenteeism in remote villages in tribal and desert areas of Rajasthan. Regular teachers are replaced by SKs who are local youths and trained specially. The minimum qualification for teachers in SKP is class VIII and for women it is further lowered to class V. They receive 37 days induction training and 30 days in-service training, each year. The appointment is on contract basis. After 8 years of satisfactory service, they are put in the regular grade.

B I. Para teachers working in full time schools in small remote habitations, which do not qualify for formal schools. A very sizeable number of such habitations, situated in the remote, hilly and isolated areas, inhabited largely by backward communities, exist in different states. These habitations have no facility of formal school in the vicinity of 1 k.m. The size of population in majority of the cases, is also smaller for which opening formal primary schools is not viable both from the financial as well as management angles.

These habitations do not qualify for opening of formal primary schools under norms of the state governments. Teachers under this category are also paid less compared to regular teachers. The nature of appointment is contractual. There is no insistence on pre-service training. Though most of them receive induction training, ranging between 20-40 days.

In some cases, these schools are attached to the nearest formal schools and they admit children, only for classes I and II. They have feeder status and children after completing class II, join the nearest formal primary schools. The responsibility of supervising these schools also lies with the headmasters of the nearest schools. The examples of these types are; Community Schools of Andhra Pradesh and Education Guarantee Scheme of Uttar Pradesh. In this case, the new schemes do not grow as parallel to the existing system and thereby do not create dichotomy.

Barring these two schemes, schools in most of the schemes under this category are upto standard V. Examples of these are — EGS of MP, Rajiv Gandhi Swam Jayanti Pathshala of Rajasthan, Alternative Schooling Programme of Orissa, Rishi Valley Pattern schools of Uttar Pradesh, proposed Vasti Shala scheme of Maharashtra and Multi-grade schools of Kerala etc.

CI. Para teachers in part time education programme. The teachers in these programmes also belong to the local community. Teaching is not considered their main profession. They are paid very poorly, ranging between Rs. 200-1,000 a month. No provision for pre-service training exists. The induction training received by teachers is also of significantly short duration. Examples under this category are; teachers of centrally sponsored scheme, Sahaj Siniksha Programme or LJr and a number of Alternative Schooling programmes in DPEP.

Qualification of para teachers:

Minimum qualification of para teachers in most of the schemes is intermediate. Rajasthan SKP is the only scheme where minimum qualification for para teachers have been kept as low as VIII standard and in case of women it is further lowered to 5th standard. This has relevance in the context of Rajasthan. Since SKP is meant for remote habitations and teachers have to be necessarily local, finding teachers with better qualifications would be difficult in many habitations. Even in SKP majority of the teachers are matriculate. In some cases, candidates having pre service training experience get weightage or preference over others in appointment.

Honorarium of para teachers:

Honorarium paid to para teachers vary from Rs 900 to Rs 3,000 per month against the regular teachers' salary of about Rs 5,000 per month. Honorarium of para teachers, who are appointed in regular schools, is in the range of Rs 1800-3000 per month, with only exception of Volunteer Teacher Scheme of Andhra Pradesh. For the para teachers working in schools, which have been set up in unserved habitations, the honorarium is largely in the range of Rs 900-1200 per month, except in Kerala. In all these schemes, teachers are paid less in comparison to the regular teachers. For one regular teacher's salary, in some cases, about 5 para teachers can be appointed.

Terms of Appointment:

All the para teachers are appointed on annual contract basis. The annual contracts can be renewed if the para teachers work is found satisfactory. In some schemes, there is a provision for annual increment but in majority of the schemes such provision do not exist.

In the EGS types of schemes, mostly Gram Panchayat contract para teachers. The selection of para teacher is also done by Panchayats on the basis of criteria laid down in the schemes. Payment of honorarium to para teacher is also through the Panchayats. But in schemes like Vidya Upasak of Gujarat, Vidya Sahayak of Himachal Pradesh and Shikshan Sevak of Maharashtra, the appointing authority is vested either in Zila Parishad or in the Education Department of the state governments. In case of the SKP of Rajasthan, the BDO appoints the Shiksha Karmi. In case of SKP, Madhya Pradesh the Shiksha Karmis are appointed either by the Janpad Panchayats or by the Zila Panchayats, depending on the grade of Shiksha Karmis.

All the Vidya Upasaks of Gujarat will be absorbed as regular teacher after 5 years of their service. They may be absorbed after three years also if the vacancies exist. In the Shikshan Sevak scheme of Maharashtra also such a provision has been included. In Madhya Pradesh, state government policy is to appoint school teachers only on contract through Panchayat Raj bodies. There are three grades of SKs in Madhya Pradesh. The vacancy in SK grade II and III are filled 50% by promotion of SKs from the lower grades and 50% by direct recruitment. In case of SKP of Rajasthan, after 8 years of satisfactory service SKs are promoted as senior Shiksha Karmis on A fixed salary, equivalent to regular teachers. SKs in Rajasthan are entitled to have facilities like medical reimbursement after hospitalization and ex gratia payment of Rs 30,000 to the nearest kin in case of death. They are also compensated for textbooks and examination fees if they appear in exams for improving their qualification.

Trianing and academic support:

Training of teachers is crucial for achieving quality of education. By and large, the pre-service training for para-teachers is not mandatory. Maharashtra and Gujarat are the only two states, where pre service training for para teachers appointed in formal school is mandatory. They have to undergo the same training which regular teachers undergo. But all the para teachers undergo induction training, mostly in the range of 20-40 days. In some cases this training is as short as seven days also. In service training of para teachers in majority of the schemes is between 10-20 days per year. There are some schemes in which it is not spelt out clearly. By and large, it can be said that the training of para teachers with few exceptions is quite inadequate. And this requires immediate and serious attention.

Academic support to para-teachers is provided through BRCs & CRCs in ; DPEP districts, but in non-DPEP districts, it is through the DIETs. In some of the schemes, like SKP of Rajasthan and SSK of West Bengal,) separate arrangement for academic support has been made. In non-DPEP district where CRCs / BRCs do not exist, for DIETs to be able to reach to all the schools, seem a very unrealistic proposition. Some arrangements below DIETs need to e made.

The issue concerning the pre-service training and the quality of induction as well as in-service training of the para teachers, should be the matter of concern. The academic support system, also need to be reviewed from the point of its adequacy.

Nature of school:

The para-teachers in the schemes documented, are either appointed in regular primary schools or schools which have been set up in remote habitations, which did not have any schooling facility within the approachable distance of one kilometer. These schools are full time schools, run during the day hours.

Curriculum and textbooks:

Regular school curriculum and textbooks are used in the schools. In case of EGS Madhya Pradesh, though the curriculum is the same as in the regular schools, separate non-graded textbooks have been prepared for the EGS schools. Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have developed multi-grade materials especially for these schools. These textbooks and material developed in these states allow free pace of learning for children and also encourage independent learning. These are suitable for multilevel / multi-grade situation. In fact, free pace of learning presumes multilevel classroom.

School infrastructure:

Schools which are in unserved habitation, barring Rajiv Gandhi Swarna Jayanti Pathshalas of Rajasthan, Multi-grade Centres of Kerala and to some extent EGS of Madhya Pradesh, are being run in places / buildings provided by the community. In SSK of West Bengal, there is a provision that Panchayat can utilise development funds to construct suitable building for running the SSKs. By and large the infrastructure in para teacher run schools in remote habitations, is quite inadequate. This hampers the teaching-learning process. This requires immediate attention. It is necessary to provide these learning centers basic minimum infrastructure to ensure that we move towards the goal of achieving universal quality primary education.

Litigation impacting the para teacher schemes:

These schemes have been challenged legally in different courts. Primarily, there have been three grounds on which these programmes have been challenged.

- a) Ensuring the provision of reservation for different categories in appointment.
- b) Para teachers are being paid low wages in comparison to the regular teachers, for the similar work. Thereby these teachers place the grievances that they are being discriminated. Unequal ways for equal work violates the constitutional provision of right to equality and
- c) The third issue is the appointment of local persons as teachers, and in some cases, only women being appointed as teachers.

Due to court interventions, the schemes have undergone certain changes. In scheme like SKP of Madhya Pradesh, the appointment of para teacher is at block/district level instead of village level and the teacher, in this case, does not belong necessarily to the community. This has meant that the advantage which para teacher schemes have from teacher being local may be lost. But the Shiksha Karmis continue to be appointed against vacancy in a particular school, thereby the problem of irrational deployment of teachers, is taken care of.

There are number of cases still pending in different courts against the para teacher schemes. As para teachers are paid less than half to one seventh the amount of regular teacher, this is a contentious issue, which

will continue to attract legal interventions.

Prospects:

The appointment of para teachers has helped states in ensuring access for a very large number of remote habitations, mostly inhabited by the deprived communities. It has also helped in providing a second teacher in single teacher schools, as well as filling up teacher vacancies in schools. The requirement of teachers has been substantially large. Filling up all the vacancies with regular teachers would have required major enhancement in the financial provision for education, especially when salaries of government employees have gone up very substantially. Without substantial increase in financial allocation for education by the states, ensuring adequate teachers in schools within a very short time frame, can be possible only by appointing para teachers for less salaries / honorarium. This does provide solutions for the problems of access as well as shortage of teachers for the time being but this dualism of high paid and low paid teachers in the primary education system can not continue for a very long time without creating tension and distortions in the system.

The issue of incentives is equally important. In most of the currently started schemes, there does not exist any provision of these teachers getting absorbed in the regular system. Gujarat has appointed para teachers, without compromising on qualification and pre service training requirement and the scheme has a provision of absorbing all these teachers after five years. Some may be absorbed even before that, if vacancies exist. Maharashtra also has opted for similar provisions.

In Shiksha Karmi Scheme again, there is provision for SKs to be made permanent after 8 years of satisfactory service. SKs of MP are placed in a regular scale after three years of satisfactory service, but the SKs salary is lower compared to the regular teachers.

Gujarat and Maharashtra have taken these schemes as an interim measure to tackle the problem arising out of heavy requirement of teachers in a situation when they are faced with the financial constraints. It also helps in resolving the conflict arising out of dualism in the system.

The states probably need to estimate the number of teachers required till the enrolment reaches a plateau, and ensure absorption of para teachers in the regular system in a phased manner. The period after which these para teachers in different states will get absorbed in the regular system will vary, based on the requirement of number of teachers as well as the financial situation of the state.

The issue of inadequate training is a matter of serious concern. Gradually the states need to address this issue. It is true, that the training imparted through our teacher training institutes is also inappropriate. But no training and poor training are no answers. There is a need to think afresh about the training needs of these teachers. Academic support systems also need strengthening.

Again schools, which have been opened in unserved habitations, are likely to face many problems. Most of them, because of the small number of children are likely to remain single teacher schools for long time, based on the present norms. For a single teacher to be able to teach children upto class V is almost an impossible task, unless continuous support and training is extended to him. Secondly, most of these schools lack basic infrastructure required for organising classes properly.. By allowing these schools to functions up to class V a parallel system of schooling, which have started with inferior inputs, will be created and allowed to exist.

If these schools opened in smaller habitations are seen as an extension of the nearest formal primary schools, where children are admitted only up to class II, the problem of continuing with an inferior system can be resolved. Availability of schools in their vicinity can ensure regular attendance of younger children. Once they get oriented to schooling for two years it should not be difficult for them to walk a distance of 2-3 kilometers. The local school headmasters along with the community can be responsible for proper and regular functioning of these schools. The schools headmaster can supervise and extend academic support to the satellite school. The teachers of satellite schools after certain years of service can also get absorbed in the regular system and this will be a great source of motivation for them. The feeder and satellite states will also help state; to get rid of dualism in the primary education system. Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have planned these schools as feeder schools, but there is no provision for absorption of these teachers in regular system.

Para teacher schemes seem to have helped states in solving the problems if ensuring universal access as well as meeting requirement of teachers to cope with the increased enrolment in schools, without increasing the financial allocation in primary education. But this may prove a short term solution. Systematic approach, with long term vision, regarding use of para teachers, needs to be developed in the states.

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