

The Impact of Decentralisation on Education in India After 1976

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Abstract: Decentralization is a political reform followed in many democratic countries. In this type of governance, power is not vested upon a central authority or level of government, but responsibilities are distributed to the subordinate bodies placed at lower levels of hierarchy. This can have a positive influence on providing the necessities for all the people through enhanced participation and shared accountability. Citizens become more aware of the cost and benefits of any developmental activity.

The size of these decentralized units will determine the degree of autonomy that can be granted to various organisations or departments functioning under each bigger entity. Privatising some services and eliminating restrictions imposed can have a favourable impact on enhancing the quality of certain facilities like health, education, infrastructure and employment. This paper will study the effectiveness of decentralisation in education and assess the role of empowered local governments in promoting school education and enhancing literacy rate amongst girl children in India and analyse the problems that might arise in this process.

Key Words: Decentralization – distribution – literacy- girl children– democracy- privatising .

I. Introduction

Decentralization is the process of taking away some powers from a central authority and redistributing it to the subordinate levels. India, being a diverse country had to accommodate diversity and its federal nature makes it possible to strengthen Democracy. According to Henry Fayol, ¹ everything that goes to increase the importance of the subordinate's role is decentralisation, everything that goes to reduce it is centralisation. The basic idea behind decentralisation is that there are many problems and issues which are best settled at the local level since people have better knowledge of problems in their locality. People can also participate directly in decision making which will enhance the quality of decisions. Democratic polity involves deconcentration of power in a manner that local people are managed by their positive participation. As observed by Bryce² the examples of Switzerland, US and other western countries where local governments have been most developed, justify the maxim that the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success is the practice of local self-government. Most of the India's population is concentrated in villages and this makes it necessary for enhancing the role of these levels of government. The way these local governments function may vary depending on the composition of people and varied diversities prevailing in that country. Education was on the State List and the responsibility of delivery of education at the district and the taluka levels was that of the state government. There was a general feeling that those delivery systems were not working and by bringing education in the Concurrent List in 1976, the Central Government became, in a sense, a permanent partner of state governments in seeking to make that delivery process more efficient.

1. Vliet, V. (2009). 14 principles of management by Henri Fayol - Tools Hero. [online] Toolshero.com. Available at: <http://www.toolshero.com/management/14-principles-of-management>.

2. Bryce: Modern democracies (New York: Marmillian), 1921, vol-I, p.133

There are several subjects that must be given importance to empower citizens living in rural areas and education and health forms the key towards the realization of human development.

This requires decentralisation of power and centralised control at different contexts. The role of village Panchayats, people of rural areas and women is essential for the development of a country. In India, local governments have been empowered through constitutional amendments and it is their responsibility to strengthen their position and function effectively. Irrespective of the areas focused, the principal goal is to empower lower levels of administrative functions by taking away the control from a central authority.

Federalism in the Indian context-An overview: Our Constitution provides a three-tier distribution of powers between the Union and state governments.

The Union List includes subjects of national importance such as defence, foreign affairs, banking, communications and currency. They are included in this list because we need a uniform policy on these matters throughout the country. The, Union government alone can make laws relating to these subjects. **State List** contains subjects of state and local importance such as police, trade, commerce, agriculture and irrigation. The State governments alone can make laws relating to the subjects mentioned in the State List. Concurrent List includes subjects of common interest to both the Union government as well as the State governments such as education, forest, trade unions, marriage, adoption and succession. Both the Union as well as the State governments can make laws on these subjects. Subjects that do not fall in any of the three lists like computer software that came up after the constitution was made are called Residuary list both the Union government has the power to legislate on these subjects. Article 254(2) lays down that to make a law on any item of the concurrent list, the law of the centre shall prevail, and the law of the state shall remain inoperative.³

3. Johari, The constitution of India-A Politico-legal Study, 2004, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi.

The Constitution clearly demarcates subjects, which are under the exclusive domain of the Union and those of the States. However, economic and financial powers are centralised in the hands of the central government by the constitution. The States have responsibilities but meagre revenue resources.

II. Four types of Decentralization

1. Political Decentralization: Where powers of the central government is distributed among the lower levels of the federal structure
2. Administrative decentralization: Where the administrative functions of a central entity is taken away and delegated to others forming a part of the organization
3. Market decentralization: Where investors can operate in different regions without being concentrated in a single location.
4. Fiscal Decentralization: Where expenditure and financial assignments are transferred to lower levels of government.

Three forms of Decentralization: The three D's associated are: De-concentration: Shifting responsibilities from central government to those working in regions, under the supervision of central government ministries. Here, there is not much of autonomy given to the lower levels of the government or any other organizations.

Devolution: This is largely restricted to politics where the local governments can exercise control and perform public functions. They can raise their own revenues, and have independent authority to make decisions.

Delegation: Through delegation central governments transfer responsibilities to the subordinate levels but with greater autonomy towards decision making. This is not only restricted to politics but to organizations, Institutions, offices etc.

Decentralisation of education in India

The establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions, on the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), was a landmark in the history of decentralised development.

Initially there were reluctance to this process of sharing power due to various reasons. Strong central control was thus felt necessary to uphold the unity of the country. Also, the fear that the lower levels of government might lack the competence to deal with implementation of educational reforms made education a subject under the direct jurisdiction of the State government. Corruption at various levels also made it necessary to retain education in the State list. But the larger population at the village level were kept away from enjoying the benefits of various policies implemented by the Central Government. This made it necessary to take steps that will involve the local government in taking decisions pertaining to education, health and other services. There are about 220 million children in this country who go to school. This is almost half the population of Europe and three fourth the population of the US. Education is a subject which touches every person, every family and every institution in this country. Initially, Education was a subject under the State list but subsequently it became a subject classified under Concurrent List. Through the 42nd amendment in 1976 our constitution was amended in many of its fundamental provisions.

***Significance of 42nd amendment, 1976 regarding Education:**

The 42nd Amendment of Indian Constitution is the most comprehensive amendment to the Constitution and carried out major changes. It is also known as "Mini Constitution".

Officially known as The Constitution (Forty-second amendment) Act, 1976, was enacted during the Emergency (25 June 1975 – 21 March 1977) by the Indian National Congress. It made few changes in the

Seventh Schedule (Union List, State List and the Concurrent List): Shifted five subjects from the state list to the concurrent list, of which one subject is Education. The implications of making education a concurrent subject is that both the Centre and the States can legislate on any aspect of education from the Primary to the University level. The process of transferring the responsibilities from the central government to the local governments will enhance the quality, transparency and accountability and will be beneficial to all the people. Shri. Kapil Sibal⁴, the former HRD Minister opines that, any reform in the education sector, naturally evokes a lot of emotion, because it impacts everybody's life and because it is such a sensitive subject, any reform of the education process must be handled with great sensitivity and care.

Since 1976, decentralisation has facilitated literacy rate. There has been a steady increase in the literacy rate in the country.

III. Literacy Rate

As per 2011 census⁵, literacy rate in India has been reported as 74.04% with a 14% increase to that in 2001, whereas the hike is maximum for rural women at 26% in the last decade, which may be attributed to literacy mission of Government of India. The female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% whereas the male literacy rate is over 80%. There has been a considerable increase in the overall literacy levels especially female literacy has gradually but steadily been increasing.

India has also made significant progress in ensuring access to education through its Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All) programme and the implementation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act. Children in rural areas now have access to a primary school within a one-kilometre radius. The number of out-of-school children has decreased from approximately eight million in 2009 to just over six million in 2014.

4. Kapil Sibal, India Today Magazine, ISSUE DATE: September 28, 2009

Updated: October 19, 2011

5. Source: Census of India, Office of Registrar General, India.

State-wise Literacy Rates (1951–2011)

(in Per cent)

Sl. No.	States/Union Territories	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	30.30	40.07	51.15	63.19	73.02	81.30	86.6
2.	Andhra Pradesh	—	21.19	24.57	35.66	44.08	60.47	67.0
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	NA	7.13	11.29	25.55	41.59	54.34	65.4
4.	Assam	18.53	32.95	33.94	—	52.89	63.25	72.2
5.	Bihar	13.49	21.95	23.17	32.32	37.49	47.00	61.8
6.	Chandigarh	—	NA	70.43	74.80	77.81	81.94	86.0
7.	Chhattisgarh	9.41	18.14	24.08	32.63	42.91	64.66	70.3
8.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	—	—	18.13	32.90	40.71	57.63	76.2
9.	Daman & Diu	—	—	—	—	71.20	78.18	87.1
10.	Delhi	NA	61.95	65.08	71.94	75.29	81.67	86.2
11.	Goa	23.48	35.41	51.96	65.71	75.51	82.01	88.7
12.	Gujarat	21.82	31.47	36.95	44.92	61.29	69.14	78.0
13.	Haryana	—	—	25.71	37.13	55.85	67.91	75.6
14.	Himachal Pradesh	—	—	—	—	63.86	76.48	82.8
15.	Jammu & Kashmir	—	12.95	21.71	30.64	NA	55.52	67.2
16.	Jharkhand	12.93	21.14	23.87	35.03	41.39	53.56	66.4
17.	Karnataka	—	29.80	36.83	46.21	56.04	66.64	75.4
18.	Kerala	47.18	55.08	69.75	78.85	89.81	90.86	94.0
19.	Lakshadweep	15.23	27.15	51.76	68.42	81.78	86.66	91.8
20.	Madhya Pradesh	13.16	21.41	27.27	38.63	44.67	63.74	69.3
21.	Maharashtra	27.91	35.08	45.77	57.24	64.87	76.88	82.3
22.	Manipur ²	12.57	36.04	38.47	49.66	59.89	70.53	76.9
23.	Meghalaya	NA	26.92	29.49	42.05	49.10	62.56	74.4
24.	Mizoram	31.14	44.01	53.80	59.88	82.26	88.80	91.3
25.	Nagaland	10.52	21.95	33.78	50.28	61.65	66.59	79.6
26.	Orissa	15.80	21.66	26.18	33.62	49.09	63.08	72.9
27.	Pondicherry	—	43.65	53.38	65.14	74.74	81.24	85.8
28.	Punjab	—	NA	34.12	43.37	58.51	69.65	75.8
29.	Rajasthan	8.50	18.12	22.57	30.11	38.55	60.41	66.1
30.	Sikkim	—	—	17.74	34.05	56.94	68.81	81.4
31.	Tamil Nadu	—	36.39	45.40	54.39	62.66	73.45	80.1
32.	Tripura	NA	20.24	30.98	50.10	60.44	73.19	87.2
33.	Uttar Pradesh	12.02	20.87	23.99	32.65	40.71	56.27	67.7
34.	Uttaranchal	18.93	18.05	33.26	46.06	57.75	71.62	78.8
35.	West Bengal	24.61	34.46	38.86	48.65	57.70	68.64	76.3
	ALL INDIA²	18.33	28.30	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	73.00

Source : Economic Survey, 2013-14; Office of the Registrar General : 2012, India; M/Home Affairs

1. Literacy rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 Censuses relate to population aged five years and above. The rates for the 1981, 1991 and 2001

Censuses relate to the population aged seven years and above. The literacy rate for 1951 in case of West Bengal relates to Total population including 0-4 age group. Literacy rate for 1951 in respect of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur are based on sample population.

2. India and Manipur figures exclude those of the three sub-divisions viz. Mao Maram, Pheemata and Puntul of Bongaigaon district of Manipur

as census results of 2001 in these three sub-divisions were cancelled due to technical and administrative reasons.

3. N.A. - Not available as no census was carried out in Assam during 1981 and in Jammu & Kashmir during 1991.

4. Created in 2001, Uttarakhand Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh for 1981 and 1991 are included under Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

Data book for PC; 22nd December, 2014

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Figure 1

The above data indicates that there has been a substantial increase in literacy rates since

independence. Between 1971 and 2011, decentralisation has facilitated this increase.

6. Economic Survey, 2013-14, Data book, 22nd December, 2014, Office of the Registrar General.

Advantages of shifting education to Concurrent list:

The Central government has many sources of revenue and the States are mostly dependent on the Grants and financial assistance from the centre.

*In India, significant progress had been made in universalising primary education, with improvement in the enrolment and completion rates of girls in both primary and elementary school. The net enrolment ratio in primary education for boys and girls was at 100%, while at the national level, the youth literacy rate was 94% for males and 92% for females⁷.

*The New National Education Policy and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) share the goals of universal quality education and lifelong learning. The flagship government scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, is aimed at achieving universal quality education for all Indians, and is complemented in this effort by targeted schemes on nutritional support, higher education, and teacher training. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs⁸. As late as 2001, only a little over 25% of all rural 18-year-olds were attending schools, the rest having dropped out earlier. By 2016, the share of 18-year-olds in schools and colleges had gone up to 70%. This is a rapidly rising trend of education in rural India⁹.

* **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act (RTE)** is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted on 4 August 2009, which describes the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between the age of 6 to 14 years in India under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments¹⁰.

7. Journal » Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.47, issue No. 24, 16th June 2012, Decentralised Governance Reforms in Primary Education

8. <http://www.ssa.nic.in>

9. Live mint e-paper, the state of education in rural India Last Published: Fri, Jan 26, 2018.

10. Department of School Education & Literacy, MHRD, Government of India Report, Updated on Thursday, 24 May 2018.

***Saakshar Bharat:** This is another programme¹¹ that aims at educating the girl child. It is a scheme from Department of School Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, and Government of India. The National Literacy Mission covered 597 districts under Total Literacy Campaign, 485 Districts under Post Literacy Programme and 328 districts under Continuing Education Programme. As per 2001 census, over 127 million adults have been made literate of which 60% were women, 23% were SC and 12% were ST. While the Department of School Education and Literacy is responsible for development of school education and literacy in the country, the Department of Higher Education takes care of what is one of the largest Higher Education systems of the world, just after the United States and China¹². The Department of School Education & Literacy has its eyes set on “universalisation of education” and making better citizens out of our young brigade. For this, various new schemes and initiatives are taken up regularly and recently, those schemes and initiatives have also started paying dividends in the form of growing enrolment in schools. The Department of Higher Education is engaged in bringing world class opportunities of higher education and research to the country so that Indian students are not finding lacking when facing an international platform. For this, the Government has launched joint ventures and signed MoUs to help the Indian student benefit from the world opinion.

These schemes are initiated by the government of India to reach even the rural people.

* The Constitution vests the State Governments with powers relating to school education, syllabus, Boards, textbook bureaus and medium of instruction. The regulation and maintenance of the standards of higher education is with the Central Government. However, because of its concurrent authority, the Central Government has been providing policy inputs as well as implementing important schemes with shared financial responsibility.

11. SaaksharBharat.nic.in

12. <http://mhrd.gov.in/>

*Literacy rate among women has also increased substantially since the problems faced by the rural women are duly addressed and the schemes initiated by the central government have been effectively implemented by the local governments.

Impact of decentralisation on women education

Decentralisation in education has facilitated women in rural areas to a large extent. Availability of educational institutions near their dwelling place and easier access makes it possible for women to continue schooling thereby reducing the number of dropouts. Local governments encourage women to participate in community services and they become aware of their basic rights. They are also encouraged to involve themselves in Panchayati Raj institutions. This is particularly relevant where social programmes of importance such as education, health, sanitation services, income generation through some economic activities etc., are managed locally. This makes women participate directly in decision making and they involve in collective actions to assert their rights. Therefore, it is evident that decentralisation is a major initiative towards empowering women.

Disadvantages of Education as a subject of concurrent list:

*Decentralization education in India faces many challenges. Some of the challenges that need to be tackled can be poor decision-making at lower levels of the government, lack of awareness, lack of commitment, poor responsiveness, and lack of inclusiveness.

*There is always a dependence on central governments to receive the money allotted for implementing policies.

*Corruption and misuse of funds directed towards rural development will also have an adverse effect on decentralization.

* If education is a concurrent subject, more bureaucrats will interfere and this causes delay in decision making. States will have to consult the centre before taking any decisions.

*Minorities in all the states feel closely associated with state governments and this makes it difficult for them to acquire the benefits of central schemes.

In India, Kerala is one state that has successfully implemented decentralisation and this is the most literate State. An analysis of the process of decentralisation in Kerala will give us an insight in to the processes that has made it possible.

The Kerala Model- A study:

*In India's 9th five Year Plan, each state was expected to draw out a plan for development. In 1966, the government of Kerala decided to devolve 35% of the budget from the central government and distribute it to the local governments. Through this initiative, the local people could choose their priorities and allocate resources accordingly. This was implemented through the **People's Plan Campaign (PPC)** under the joint supervision of the Department of Local Self-Government and State Planning Board.

*As on 2010 figures, Kerala has 1209 Local Self Government Institutions – 1144 rural and 65 urban LGs. Rural local governments comprise 978 Village Panchayats, 152 Block Panchayats and 14 District Panchayats.

*All Panchayats have Standing Committees in which all the members are made to participate in any one of these committees thereby increasing participation. The SCs were to be coordinated with a Committee consisting of the President, Vice President of the Panchayat and the chairpersons of the Standing Committees. Panchayats were free to constitute sub-committees to assist these committees. There is also a provision for Joint Committees that can be a combination of local Governments of neighbouring districts.

*Apart from these, "Peoples Plan Campaign" made during the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) succeeded in providing a concrete methodology for participatory planning that supported and

streamlined the planning process.¹³

13. Mukundan, Mullikottu-Veetil & Bray, Mark. (2004). The Decentralisation Of Education In Kerala State, India: Rhetoric And Reality. International Review of Education

Achievements: Kerala has achieved gender equality in education and total literacy, compulsory primary education and low infant mortality due to adequate health care.

From 1990, the United Nations has introduced the Human Development Index (HDI). Countries are ranked based on life expectancy, education, per-capita GDP collected at the national level. This is the index widely used to compare countries and in 2011, Kerala was placed on top of the index in India indicating the successful implementation of decentralisation. (India's rank according to 2017 estimates is 101).

Privatisation and decentralisation: **Privatisation** can be considered one of the organisational forms of **decentralisation** – indicating a transfer of authority and responsibility from government to private hands. This process can also be of two types- Private entities having their autonomy but still controlled by a central authority to some extent and another type in which there is absolute autonomy¹⁴. Privatization of the country's education system can help to improve the quality of education. This also encourages Public-private partnership at times. In

the Indian context, privatisation of education has increased the quality of education and there is also a great demand to pursue it through these institutions. Not being controlled by the central government or a central body wielding enormous power is the advantage enjoyed by these private institutions. They can decide for themselves and have their own policies and strategies of implementation. This in turn enhances the quality of service delivery. Privatization can include: 1) allowing private enterprises to perform functions that had been retained by government; 2) contracting out public services to commercial enterprises 3) financing public sector programs and transferring responsibility for providing services from the public to private sector.

14. Strategies of Educational Decentralization: Key Questions and Core Issues. Hanson, E. Mark Hanson E.M. (2006) Educational Decentralization. EDUCATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: ISSUES, CONCERNS AND PROSPECTS, vol 8. Springer, Dordrecht Journal of Educational Administration, 1998

New Public Management Reforms and decentralization: When decentralization deals with distribution of power from a central level to the other levels, new public management reforms are more about de-bureaucratization. New public management in education means promotion of school autonomy to make it more effective. It is characterised by Marketization, Privatisation, Decentralisation, performance measurement and increased level of accountability by the public sector. Osborne and Gaebler¹⁵, 1992 saw the government's obligation not in providing services but in seeing that they are provided. They also argued that governments must confine themselves to giving directions and framing policies while empowering communities to serve themselves. Ferlie rightly comment that "The new public management has also been seen by others as a management hybrid with a continuing emphasis on core public service values, expressed in a new way."

Conclusion: Decentralization in India faces many challenges. Some of the challenges that need to be tackled can be, poor decision-making at lower levels of the government, lack of awareness, lack of commitment, poor responsiveness, and lack of inclusiveness. When compared to the functioning of local governments in India, there has been a tremendous change happening in rural areas. Following the pattern of decentralisation in some country will not be suitable for all the countries. It must be modified to suit the emerging needs of the people. It has been pointed out that 'local democracy requires significant set of pre-requisites that are often lacking in developing countries. "These include an educated and politically aware citizenry, an absence of high inequality in economic or social status that inhibits political participation of the poor or of minorities, a prevalence of law and order, the conduct of free and fair elections according to a constitutional setting that prevents excessive advantage to incumbents, effective competition between political candidates or parties with long term interests, the presence of reliable information channels to citizens, and the presence of oversight mechanisms both formal and informal"¹⁶

15. Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler, 1992, Reinventing Government , David Osborne & Ted Gaebler, Addison-Wesley Publ. Co.,

16. Bardhan, Pranab and Mookherjee, Dilip Ed (2006), 'Decentralization and Local Governance in Developing Countries', Cambridge: MIT Press

As Gandhiji rightly said, the independence of India should mean the independence of whole India. It follows therefore that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be widening challenges. In the process of decentralization, the control of central government is mandatory most of the times to enhance accountability and this should not be neglected for an overall development of the nation.

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