

Source:-Prajayatna - Community-Owned Schools in Karnataka -
The new Agenda in Education Reform

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Significant Reflections

The current educational climate in our country is indicative of a situation, where the majority of stakeholders in the process of education are preoccupied more with the issue of universalisation and compulsory elementary education. Providing quality education is becoming synonymous with new plans to increase enrolment and retention, schemes to involve the community to participate in schools, provision of resources that is not a priority (e.g. computers in schools where there are no rooms for children or basic infrastructural facilities like water, toilets) more teacher training programmes to improve classroom processes and providing increased funding for infrastructure. Though all these are very useful and may contribute to quality education, the lifeline of quality education is missing- that is ownership of schools. Without ensuring ownership, all else is like building a roof without the foundation.

Quality raises the more crucial question about what a school means or does to a society. It reflects a society's perception or interpretation of its educational needs. Here, quality could connote many different aspects. It could mean a learning that is relevant to the context of the community, a more transparent system which provides the parents, the child and the community information about the school performance, or about teachers being effective facilitators, or an opportunity to take responsibility to participate in decision making. For quality, which encompasses the aspects mentioned, it is impossible for the machinery that is far removed from the community needs to determine this.

Who owns the schools?

The experience through the different processes in the 6 districts mentioned in this document, reinforces the understanding that for education reform or quality education to take place the most important question to be asked and answered is regarding the core issue of community ownership- in the sense of who is in-charge of the process of reform. Prajayatna believes that education can be *qualitative*, only if it is based on a community vision. When a community defines its vision of education, it not only brings with it a sense of ownership but necessarily makes the community accountable to realise this vision. Therefore quality education holds within itself the seeds of accountability.

But, what remains to be seen are the mechanisms that would ensure accountability into practice. It is observed, that there is a trend to speak of 'empowering the community'¹ to be accountable, without developing a mechanism for the same. For the community, to be prepared to take on more responsibility of management of the educational structure at the local level, there have to be mechanisms to enable this participation. Some of the questions that the programme was confronted with, were - how would the community participate without the existence of a structure and how could such structures be facilitated, and even if structures are built, how would they be appropriately designed to reflect people's aspirations?