Chapter VII
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Democratic decentralisation in the overall development of a nation is recognised as a vital process in recent times. It is aimed at facilitating the participation of people and community at the grassroot level in charting their own destiny rather than thrusting from the top of the decision-making establishment. In India, community participation in the societal development has been evident in some form or the other from the times immemorial. However, such participation was not representative of all the sections of the community, be it rich or poor; be it higher caste or lower caste; or be it men or women. To correct such distortions of the past, wherein the community participation was largely individual(s) sponsored initiative, the Independent democratic India envisaged programmes to evolve the community participation in a systematic manner by making it mandatory for the local-self governments at the village level as far back as 1953 through its Community Development Programme. Since then, the mechanisms of community participation have undergone several changes and were made mandatory for almost all areas of the development.

In the education sector, community participation is felt indispensable and inevitable for materialisation of the long cherished goal of universalisation of primary education. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the processes and practices of community participation in rural primary education. The study precisely attempted to look into this aspect in the context of eight villages selected across two districts of Orissa.

The main thrust of the study has been to understand the role of communities in securing universalisation of primary education. It focuses on the role assigned to the community at the policy level and its articulation in actual practice. The premise of the study is that the universal primary education can not be understood without its linkages with the larger social context within which it takes place. Therefore, the social and educational mapping of the sample villages is drawn to contextualize the processes and practices of community participation. It explores the role of the community in the planning, management and organisation of the school activities. It critically examines the discrepancies that exist in the expected and actual roles of the School Management
Committee (SMC). Most importantly, the study dealt with the interplay of dynamics in terms of caste, class, and gender in the decision making processes and conflict resolution. It is sought to understand the way the preferential engagement of the under-privileged social groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women has been practised at the village level.

Despite various policy provisions, universalisation of primary education still remains a distant dream in Orissa. Though the state has shown some signs of improvement in certain broad indicators of primary education development, it is still far behind the national averages as well as many of the states of the country. Today, Orissa occupies a unique position in the literacy map of India for being the seventh most educationally backward state in the country. According to the Census – 2001, the total literacy rate of Orissa is 63.61 per cent which is below the national average of 65.38 per cent. The male literacy rate is 75.95 per cent and the female literacy rate is 50.97 per cent as against the national averages of 75.85 per cent and 54.14 per cent respectively. Thus, the literacy status of Orissa in comparison to other states is discouraging and needs special attention from the social researchers.

It is important to examine the case of Orissa in terms of various other indicators of primary education development. The number of educational institutions, especially primary and upper primary schools, has increased over the years, teacher-pupil ratio has gone up, enrolment ratio has increased and the rate of drop-outs have decreased. The number of primary schools has gone up from 9,801 in 1950-51 to 42,104 in 2000-01. The gross enrolment ratio at the primary level has gone up from 17 in 1950-51 to 108.8 in 1999-2000. The teacher-pupil ratio in primary stage has gone up from 19 in 1950-51 to 41 in 2000-01. The dropout rates in Primary level were 77.5 in 1973 which came down to 34.7 in 2002-03.

There are regional variations, gender and caste disparities not only in the literacy rates but also in the enrolments as well. The educational situation is better in coastal districts in comparison to non-coastal districts. For instance, according to the Census – 2001, the literacy rates in coastal districts like Khurda (80.19 per cent), Jagatsinghpur (79.61 per cent), Puri (78.40 per cent) and Balasore (70.94 per cent) are higher than the non-coastal districts like Kalahandi (46.20 per cent), Balangir (54.93 per cent), Koraput
(36.20 per cent), Malkangiri (31.26 per cent) and Keonjher (59.75 per cent), etc., which have recorded lower literacy rates, below even the state average literacy rate. It is in this background of overall development and literacy that two districts, namely, Balasore and Keonjher were taken for selecting the villages for the study.

The caste composition of the districts also reveals an interesting picture. For instance, 17.05 per cent of the total population of Balasore district is from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, out of which 10.86 per cent are Scheduled Castes and 6.19 per cent are Scheduled Tribes. On the other hand, 56 per cent of the total population of Keonjher district constitutes the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population, out of which 45 per cent are from the Scheduled Tribes and 11 per cent are from the Scheduled Castes. Balasore is a non-DPEP district in the coastal Orissa and Keonjher is a DPEP district which is in the non-coastal parts of the state.

Within the district, the blocks are selected on the basis of literacy rates, namely, high and low literacy blocks. For instance, Baliapal and Nilgiri represent high and low literacy blocks respectively in Balasore district and Anandapur and Banspal represent high and low literacy blocks respectively in Keonjher district. Two villages from each of the blocks are selected. Bhanupur and Bhelpura in Baliapal block, Chhatrapur and Betakata from Nilgiri block of Balasore district, Purunia and Belabahali from Anandapur block and Anjar and Dangapani from Banspal block of Keonjher district are selected as sample villages for the study.

Among the sample villages, Bhanupur, Bhelpura and Belabahali villages predominantly have peasant castes and less predominantly other backward castes and Scheduled Castes in the village. In Chhatrapur and Purunia villages, the Scheduled Tribes are predominant though there are considerable proportion of the Scheduled Castes, other backward castes and general peasant castes. Betakata, Anjar and Dangapani are predominantly tribal villages in the sense that there are more Scheduled Tribes in comparison to other social groups. The villages are selected based on the representation of caste/tribe groups within each village SMC and some of the tribal villages are especially taken in order to study the community participation in the villages which are predominantly educationally backward tribal population.
The respondents are drawn from the villages on the basis of purposive sampling and a total of 160 parents of the school going children (including 82 fathers and 78 mothers) and 64 School Management Committee members (including 38 men and 26 women) are interviewed. The teachers and Headmasters (the member-secretary of the SMC) who were interviewed by the researcher clarified some of the queries regarding community participation from their official point of view. An attempt has been made to select the respondents purposively representing all sections of the community and also based on their availability at the time of the field work, which was conducted in four phases during 2005 – 2006.

The data collected then coded, processed through the SPSS and tabulated. The tabulated data has been subjected to analysis and an attempt has been made to use multiple variables for the cross-tabulations and generating composite variables like parental educational level, parental occupational status, and socio-economic status in order to examine the data with the help of aggregated variables. Besides, the study presents qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews with some of the key respondents in order to obtain otherwise elusive community dynamics that helps or place impediments in the path to achieve universalisation of primary education.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The social mapping of the villages presents a unique residential demarcation and segregation in terms of various caste groups, namely, peasant (intermediary) upper castes, other backward castes (intermediary, middle level artisan and service castes), Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Different castes within each of these broader social categories live together within their clan as a ghetto, making the principle of cohabitation applicable in a very limited manner in the case of the eight villages undertaken for the study. For instance, it is found that the so-called high caste members maintain social distance from the low caste members in terms of their residential arrangement. The members of a particular clan live together maintaining some distance from the members of other clans of the same caste group. It is found that the basis of such segregation is the distinct ritual status of each of the caste and the clan groups.
Though the villages have apparently practiced jajmani relations till the recent past, the practice is gradually waning. Only in a very few cases the barter system seem to be prevalent, and in most others, the modern urban oriented professional client-patron relations have ushered in. For instance, the barber practices his profession by locating himself in a shop rather than visiting the homes of his clients. He undertakes the personal visits to the homes of the clients only on conditions of higher pay rather than on any obligations or exchanges in kind. Similarly, the villages have also formalised the provision of laundry services by setting up shops instead of going door to door for collection of the clothes. Similarly, the clients have to pay in cash instead of kind or commodities as barter for the services provided. Thus, the village social relations have been transforming more or less gradually.

It is appalling to find that the practice of untouchability is prevalent in different forms in each of the villages. For instance, although dhobi caste (lower caste) members are allowed to take water from the common tube well, they are not entitled to touch the tube well when a higher (brahmin / peasant) caste person is taking water from it. If he/she unknowingly touches the tube well, then the higher (brahmin / peasant) caste person empties the filled water pot and refills the pot, especially if the water is for cooking purposes.

Interestingly, in the tribal villages also, the practice of untouchability is found in different forms. Though the tribals are dominant in the villages numerically, they are subjected to discrimination by the Other Backward Caste members, who themselves are lower in the caste hierarchy. For instance, in Dangapani village, when the mid-day meal was first introduced in the school, both the cooks were from the Bhuyan tribe. The children of Other Backward Castes did not take food as it was cooked by the tribal people. Then, in the SMC meeting, it was decided that out of two cooks one should be from the Other Backward Castes and after that all the children took meals in the school. Instances like this are found to be frequent recurrences in the villages under study.

The occupation of the community members is dependent on the geographical location in which the village is located. Where the village is located in the plain areas as in the case of Bhanupur, Bhelpura, Chhatrapur, Purunia and Belabahali villages, most of
the villagers depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. If the village is located in hilly and forest areas, most of the community members are primarily dependent on the forest for their livelihood. However, it is found that predominant occupation of the community members is agriculture and nearly all members of the villages largely depend upon the cultivation as it provides a major source of livelihood for them.

Further, there seems to be a close link between the caste, occupation and land holdings of the community members. For instance, a majority of the peasant castes are found to be farmers or tenants, those who belong to gopala (OBC) are found to be engaged in diary business and those who belong to kumbhara (also an OBC), make the earthen pots and sell them in the nearby market. A majority of the dhiba (SC) members are found to be in the fishing and poultry businesses. The Scheduled Tribe families are engaged as landless labourers, tenants, casual labourers and unskilled labourers. For instance, the santal (Scheduled Tribe) members primarily depend upon forest for their livelihood.

The land becomes a prime instrument for determining the social class in the village. The peasant castes occupy the major portion of land holdings whereas a majority of the Scheduled Caste members have no or negligible land in comparison to the other caste members. For instance, in Purunia village, most of the villagers depend upon agriculture and those who have large portions of landholdings give some land for tenancy to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is found that those who give land for tenancy in turn receive fifty per cent of the crop from the tenants.

The physical location of the school is found to be within the dominant caste habitations in most of the villages which seem to have an effect on the access of schooling to certain disadvantaged groups in those villages. This is reflected in the distribution of literacy rates among different caste/tribe groups of that village. For instance, in Purunia village, the school is located in the peasant caste habitations and most of the villagers are literate as they can read and write with understanding in Oriya language which is not evenly distributed in terms of the social category. The educational situation of the peasant castes and Other Backward Castes is better than the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes.
There is a wide variation in terms of the years of establishment of schools in each of the villages. The oldest school in the sample villages is located in Purunia village which was constructed in 1917 and most of the community members are found to be completed at least their primary level of education. The school in Dangapani village is the most recently constructed in 1998, where the educational situation of the community members is dismal. However, the basic infrastructural facilities like drinking water, toilet facility are not available in all the schools and inadequacy of teachers and classrooms is rampant in almost all the villages.

The social composition of the SMC members in the sample villages are found to be proportionately distributed with the caste composition of the village. The variations in the proportion of SMC functionaries from different social groups are because of the availability of members in each of the villages selected for the study. For instance, in Bhanupur and Purunia villages, out of eight SMC members, two members are from the Scheduled Castes and one member is from the Other Backward Castes and five members were from the general castes. In some of the villages, the seat of the chairperson is reserved for the disadvantaged groups. Like in Bhelpura village, the chairperson is from the Scheduled Castes and in Betakata, Anjar and Dangapani villages, the chairpersons are from Scheduled Tribes as it is reserved for them. There is not a single instance, where the chairperson is from the disadvantaged groups unless it is reserved for them.

There exists some sort of gender differentiation within the SMC in the selected sample villages. In most of the cases the seats are not equally distributed among men and women. For example, in Anjar village, out of eight SMC members six of them are men and only two of them are women. There is not a single village where the number of women SMC members is more than their men counterparts. In some of the villages, the seat of the chairperson is reserved for women, like in Bhanupur village, where the chairperson is a woman. There is not a single instance, where the chairperson is a woman unless it is reserved for them.

The study attempted to describe the socio-economic background of the parents of the school going children and the SMC members in order to understand the social context in which the community participation is sought to be studied. It was also intended to see
whether there are any variations in the socio-economic background of the SMC members/functionaries and those who elect them, namely, the parents of the school going children.

The data reveals that SC/ST and non-SC/ST members (Other Backward Castes and general castes) are more or less equally distributed in the sample. Enough care has also been taken to ensure more or less equi-proportional representation of mothers and fathers among the parents and men and women among the SMC functionaries. However, the distribution in terms of each of the villages presents some variations because of the availability or non-availability of members of certain caste or social categories such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes or general castes or men and women.

The data shows that slightly more than half of the families live in nuclear households and the rest live in joint family households. More than three-fourths of the Scheduled Tribe families are of nuclear type and, among the Scheduled Castes, more than half are in nuclear family households. Further, among the Other Backward Castes and the general castes, a majority live in joint family households. The so-called ‘upper’ and the ‘middle’ castes (namely, general and Other Backward Caste families) are found to be the landed class in the villages. It is found that they live in joint families because of their unwillingness to break the family land holding into several pieces. The bigger the piece of the land, the better are the returns from the land for the entire family and, therefore, better will be the social status in the village. Once the land is broken into pieces, then the family loses its power and prestige in the village. This seems to be one of the reasons why the general peasant castes and OBCs dominate in the institutional structures like School Management Committee or the village panchayat in comparison to the other caste groups. Bigger family may also mean bigger say in the village community affairs and hence the patriarchal joint family structures are sought to be protected.

On the other hand, in the case of Scheduled Caste and Tribe families, the contention regarding land among the family members is remote as they do not have the landholdings and the considerations of breaking the land into pieces does not exist.
Therefore there is no common binding force that may keep the family intact as a joint family.

The educational status of the parents and the SMC functionaries reveals that the educational status of the SMC functionaries is slightly better than the parents of the school-going children. More than half of the fathers have received low level of education or no education and a few of them have completed Intermediate or above. Among the mothers, significantly, more than half have either received no education or just completed their primary level of education. There is only a single instance where a mother has gone to the college and completed graduation.

The educational situation of the general castes and Other Backward Castes is better in comparison to the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes. For instance, the number of non-literate is found more among the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in comparison to Other Backward Castes and general castes. The number of respondents who have completed intermediate, graduation and above is more among the general castes and Other Backward Castes in comparison to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There is not only social disparity but also gender disparity regarding the educational status of the parents and the SMC functionaries.

The better educational levels among the non-SC/ST groups indicate that they have role models within their families for the children to look up to for any kind of guidance and supervision. On the other hand, most of the children from SC and ST backgrounds are deprived of any role models within the family as their parents have minimal or no education. Therefore, the children from these home backgrounds are mostly the first-generation learners.

The occupational status of the fathers illustrate that nearly half of them are either unskilled labourers or casual labourers and a few others are engaged in petty-business or in farming. In contrast, most of the mothers and the women SMC functionaries are engaged in household activities and are mostly housewives. A few are casual or unskilled labourers and there is only single instance where a mother is a lower level clerical staff. This explains the gendered nature of occupations in the Indian context in general and the rural areas in particular. Further, while most of the mothers from Scheduled Castes/Tribes:
are casual/unskilled labourers, those from general and Other Backward Castes are engaged in household activities. Thus, the data substantiates the view that the occupational status of the members of different caste members is contingent upon their status in the caste hierarchy. The village social structure continues to perpetuate the traditional social and occupational hierarchies in terms of caste. Modern Weberian notions of social class based on the prestige, power, and class also found to be appropriate for the sample group.

Moreover, three-fourths of the school going children are from the families where monthly income is in the middle range, a smaller proportion of the households are in the lower income range and a very few of them are in the high income categories. The number of families in the low income categories is more among the Scheduled Tribes in comparison to general and Other Backward castes. It is essential to highlight the finding that the number of households whose monthly family income is high is more among the general and Other Backward Castes and less or negligible among the Scheduled Tribes which is also true for the SMC functionaries.

The summated index of Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the parents and the SMC members reveals some significant findings. It establishes the view that a majority of the children come from the low SES families. Those from medium SES backgrounds constitute one-fifth of the sample and only a few have high SES. Interestingly, one-half of the SMC functionaries are from low SES home backgrounds. One-third of the SMC members are from medium SES and a few from high SES families. In terms of caste/tribe, the data shows that most of the Scheduled Tribes have low SES in comparison to other categories. A majority of the general caste respondents have medium SES. Similarly, those with high SES background are mainly from the general castes and very less or negligible among the Scheduled Tribes/Castes. Thus, the data reflects that the social deprivation in terms of social class lies in the rural social hierarchy. While general and OBC groups are largely from the medium and high SES, SCs and STs are from the low and medium SES.

It is in this socio-economic context of both the villages and the parents of the school going children and the SMC functionaries that the processes and practices of community participation through the School Management Committee are sought to be
understood. The levels of awareness, structure and functioning, perceived and the practised roles of the SMC are explored. A majority of the men knew about the SMC from the school teachers whereas most of the women respondents have stated that they were informed by the other members of the village neighbourhood. It may be because of the rural social practices whereby men have easy access to the teachers, who are usually male members from outside the village, from the neighbouring towns. Therefore, the women do not interact with the teachers directly and their primary means of communication is either their husbands or the other women and relatives of the same village. However, it is found that wherever the women teachers were available, the women of the village were more accessible to them than the men. Interestingly, the electronic means of propagation of community involvement by the government is not so prominent among the community members.

So far as the process of formation of the SMC is concerned, ideally as per the principles laid down in the Community Participation Rules for the Orissa School Education 2000, the members of the SMC are supposed to be elected from among the parents of the children going to the school. The parents shall elect all the SMC members except the member-secretary who is the Headmaster of the school of the village concerned. The selection of the student guardian members shall be made in the open meeting of Parent – Teacher Association (PTA) convened for the purpose by the Headmaster of the school as per the programme communicated to them.

However, the data reflected different ways in which the SMC members are put in place. Three categories emerge out of the data, namely, nomination, selection and election. Ideally, and as per the principles laid down for the SMC formation, as mentioned earlier, the members of the Committee are supposed to be elected from among the parents of the children going to the school. But, the data shows that the election was not an option exercised at all in the actual process of SMC constitution. There was not a single instance of election for the post of Chairperson or for the SMC members in all the eight villages spread across both Balasore and Keonjher districts. What is even more interesting is that a few of the SMC members did not even know how they were placed on the SMC. It explains that they were not even present in the Student Guardian Meeting.
and their names were suggested and nominated in absentia in order to fulfill the criteria of filling up of the seats allocated under the guidelines.

It is interesting to note that slightly less than half of the men members are said to be put up by the other parents/guardians of the school going children. The rest of them are there either by default or because of the pressure from some influential members of the village. Among the women members, slightly more than half gave credit to their husbands. Interestingly, what is revealing here is that nearly one third of the SMC members did not respond to the question as to why did they become a SMC member/functionary. This kind of apathy seems to govern the functioning of a novel idea of involving the direct stakeholders from among the community in achieving the goals of universalisation of primary education in the rural areas. What is even more significant is that a majority of those who did not respond are women. Thus, providing representation to certain groups in itself may not necessarily and automatically bring about their participation in the decision making, but those ideas may need to be transacted along with more proactive state interventions in promoting the actual participation of the community.

Some parents have mentioned that the SMC meetings are held once in a year and some others have stated that the meetings do not take place at all. That means once the parents put their child in the school, they may not even bother about what is happening to the education of their child within the school and what has been planned and discussed in the School Management Committee regarding their children’s education. There is a gap in the very process of information flow or even if one may say so, the very process of community participation. Thus, it may be stated that there is a hiatus between how the SMC is functioning and how it should have been functioning as per the policy guidelines. The Committee is expected to reach out to its primary stakeholders, namely, the parents of the children going to the school. It may imply two things: Firstly, the information about the conduct of the SMC meetings and the issues that are discussed are not transmitted down to the parents and, secondly, it may also mean that the parents are apathetic to what happens within the School Management Committee.

The lack of awareness among the SMC members may also suggest that the Committee is not functioning democratically involving all the members, indicating the
dominance of one person or a group of persons or a community or a set of community
groups within the village. The members who did not respond to the question may also be
the ones who may not want to risk giving any kind of answers as well. Further, though a
majority of the SMC members argued that all members do participate in the meeting, it is
interesting to note that considerable proportion (one-third) have stated that all members
do not participate in the meeting. Those who mentioned that not all SMC members
participate in the meeting have stated that these ones are either busy with their own
work/job or are busy in their household work or are poor and busy with their wage
labour.

There appears to be some gap between the expectations of the parents and SMC
members and the actual goals envisaged by the Community participation Rules of 2000.
Further, there are differences between the expected roles and the actual goals practiced by
the SMCs currently. For parents, making the school function effectively is utmost
important and it supersedes all other functions of the SMC. They are not as keen to
pursue other roles stipulated for the SMCs. The general apathy may be due to the lack of
effective communication as to what they can expect from the School Management
Committee.

In most of the villages, the school building was constructed prior to the setting up
of SMC and, therefore, the present SMC had no role in it. In some cases, where the
school was constructed in recent years, the SMC played a role in the school building
construction. The community helped in repairing the school assets such as chairs, tables,
benches, desks, blackboards, cooking equipment, etc. and also repairs the school
building. Some of the SMC members have also done the annual fencing where there is no
permanent school boundary and some others have collected funds for repairing.

Various strategies for increasing the enrolment and reducing the drop-out in the
school were undertaken by the SMC. In some of the villages, SMC functionaries have
visited the houses of the children of five years and above to bring them to the school in
regular intervals, once or twice in a year. Some of the SMC members mentioned that the
quality of education provided in their schools is much to be desired. In order to attract
more children to the school they tried to provide quality food in the school as part of the
Mid-Day Meal Scheme. During the course of investigation, it is found that the SMC
functionaries grew vegetables along with flowers in the school garden to supplement the quality of food in the mid-day meal. Various kinds of strategies such as convincing/persuading, sometimes even threatening, are employed by the SMC members to force the parents to send their children to the school and thereby attempt to reduce the drop-out rate in the school.

Whenever the teachers in the school go on a long leave without notification to the SMC, the members discuss in the meeting and give a warning to the concerned teacher through the Headmaster. Some of the SMC members said that they undertake periodic checks at the school to see the behaviour of the teacher in the school. It is found that various cultural activities are conducted in the school like Ganesh Puja/Saraswati Puja, Independence Day/ Republic Day, Teachers’/ Children’s Day, Annual sports/ Cultural activities where the SMC members play a major role in it. The SMC functionaries participate in the process by purchasing the vegetables and other necessary items from the local market and help in cooking and distributing among the children. As the small children can not manage these activities, the SMC members help in this process. Although there are different sources for resource mobilisation such as contributions from the rich community members, government funding continues to be the most important source for conducting such socio-cultural activities in the school.

Decision-making process within the SMC seems to be one of the complex phenomena in the community participation. The kind of items that are given priority in the meeting is dependent on the physical context in which the school is located. For instance, where the school does not have a concrete building, the SMC members discuss ways and means to change the thatched roof annually before the rainy season. Where the school does not have a permanent boundary as in the case of Bhanupur and Bhelpura village, fencing is given primary importance. Similarly, especially in hilly areas like in Betakata, Anjar and Dangapani villages where there is acute drinking water problem, they have to provide drinking water facilities to the children attending the school and where the Mid-day Meal programme has a considerable impact on the enrolment of the children in the school like in Betakata, Anjar and Dangapani villages, emphasis is given on the quality of food that is provided in the school. It is found that the decisions are taken unanimously by the members. Though some of the members have pointed out that
there were no disagreements in the past over any item, it may not be completely true. For instance, in Bhelpura village, there was disagreement on the issue of teacher recruitment which was resolved in the village meeting by appointing an ad-hoc teacher from the village community. However, the chairperson holds the key position within the SMC. In some cases, the village headman, headmaster of the school, husband of the women chairperson are also stated to be holding the key positions in the decision-making within the SMC.

Various problems are perceived to be placing impediments to the effective functioning of the SMC such as inadequacy of teachers, poor socio-economic condition of the community members, lack of sufficient financial aid, lack of co-ordination among the members, inadequacy of classrooms, lack of incentives for the SMC members, political interferences and reservation of SMC seats in the village community.

The study tried to understand the group dynamics in operationalising the community participation in terms of caste, class and gender and how they affect the goals of democratic functioning within the SMC. It is sought to understand the way the preferential engagement of the under-privileged social groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women has been practised at the village level. Three important issues of group dynamics in terms of the role of caste, class and gender in the functioning of the SMC are noteworthy. Caste is perceived to be an important factor in the working of the SMC. The caste background of the chairperson is perceived to be important for the effective functioning of the SMC. The members of the higher castes stressed that they are better in governing the SMC compared to the lower castes. Majority of the parents and the SMC members irrespective of their socio-economic status opined that the lower caste people either lack interest or not well educated to perform the task of chairperson effectively but a few of them pointed out that they lack either managerial quality or lack competency to perform the task. However, the members from the lower castes reject this line of argument and stress that commitment and willingness are important and not the caste for the effective functioning of the SMC.

The data also substantiates the view that the rich, though they are not members, influence the work of the SMC. However, there appears to be some consensus among the rural community that the school improvement is given utmost priority and not their
political agendas. Thus, the caste and class dynamics interplay with the political affiliations in the day-to-day running of the rural school and the SMC of that school.

Further, gender of the chairperson is perceived to be important for the effective functioning of the SMC. The men members argue that they are better in governing the SMC compared to their women counterparts whereas some of the women members reject this line of argument and stress that commitment and willingness are important and not the gender for the effective functioning of the SMC. However, the household responsibilities are found to be the most significant impediment for the women chairpersons to perform their task effectively. Thus, the data indicates that the caste, class, gender and political affiliations do affect the functioning of the SMC in multiple ways and directions.

CONCLUSIONS
Overall, though the role of the community has been stressed right from the time of the Independence both at the national as well as the state level policies, it has not translated fully into a successful practice at the village level. One of the reasons for this could be the way the policies and programmes are sought to be implemented. Despite the state has defined and redefined the role of the community several times to suit the requirements at various points of the country’s post-independence phase, they have largely remained as matters of administrative convenience rather than real harbingers of change. For instance, a review of the policies in the state of Orissa since Independence shows that the Rules of Community Participation 2000 are in fact a proto-type of what existed in the sixties onwards in terms of provisions they envisaged. In this sense, they are at best described as ‘old rules with a new nomenclature’. However, this is not to undermine the intent of the policies as such.

There are, of course, some of the points of departure which are crucial to understand the current context. For instance, while the earlier arrangement of the community participation in education through the VECs of the Panchayati Raj Institutions was more at the level of assertion of power by the panchayat representatives over the education system, the present mechanism to involve only the parents instead of larger village community seem to have gone down well by curtailing the role of political
parties and ideologies within the school activities. In many cases, the PRIs were entangled in their own conflicts and power struggles and were not effective in delivering a representative participation.

In other words, what the recent Rules of 2000 stipulate is the setting up of the measures to make community participation more focused and specific by involving a body of parents of the school going children to address the issues of education of their own children. In a way, it is path-breaking as it sought to get rid of the interference of the political parties or the Panchayat members or the caste/community leaders, who saw school as an extension of their political turf, in the day to day functioning of the erstwhile Village Education Committee. This has, in many instances in the past, diluted the basic function of the community participation in the schooling and, as a result, the government village school has become more or less defunct, giving rise to the migration of the rich rural folk to the urban centres to educate their children or to the rise of private schools or to the massive drop-out of the children from the poorer households.

Seen in this light, the setting up of the school specific committees are a sea change compared to the sixties when a VEC catered to the entire revenue village which may have more than one school. Further, the norms of setting up of a primary school have also changed over the years -- from a stipulation in sixties when the school was granted for every 300 children in the school going age in the general habitations and 200 children in the case of tribal habitations to the recent times, as per the DPEP norms, a primary school had to be set up for every twenty five school going children. The process of decentralization itself has undergone change in so far as the education system is concerned. New measures of micro-planning at the level of habitation, instead of even at the level of the entire village itself have effectively addressed the issue of enrolling the children from the disadvantaged castes/tribes as well as girl children.

The study has clearly brought out the fact that the term ‘community’ in the Indian context is not a homogeneous unit. It is indeed a conglomeration of various communities unequally and differentially placed within a geographic territory or, as Noronha (2003) argues, various groups within a community that are unequally placed. Though the policy framework takes this aspect of unequal rural community into account while professing the community participation in primary education, it did not change the actual ground
scenario much in terms of bridging the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged over the years. Therefore, any efforts to bring about effective community participation are expected to make the democratic governance of educational systems more inclusive with various socially, economically and culturally stratified groups. The process of inclusion is expected to enhance the interaction between the school and the community in a symbiotic relationship with each other so that the community might not only send their children to the school but also become a part of the educational policy-making and the development process

One very important conclusion of the study is that the members of the SMC, basically the parents themselves, are found to have acquired a sense of ‘importance’ in the rural self-governance, no matter how limited their role has been. This seem to have led to a new power structure among the parents of the school going children in the village which may remain broadly in line with the one that existed before (as in the case of the erstwhile VEC structures) or slightly different from it. Usually the more articulate persons of community are likely to gain influence. In a limited sense, there is a sense of empowerment of the community, but it remains debatable if it had empowered the community as a whole like a single integral unit.

However, this is not to undermine the role various aspects of social inequity play in undermining even the structures like SMCs. Though the policy guidelines envisage a participatory and healthy democratic indulgence, the village social structure continues to use even these guidelines to reinforce its age-old hegemony in terms of caste, class, and gender differences. For instance, some of the upper caste SMC members and parents have argued that since the lower caste members are non-literates, they cannot take decisions for the education of the children in the school. Underneath such arguments lie deep rooted notions of high–low, pure–impure and able–less able based on the caste/tribe. Thus, the preferential allocation of SMC membership to the socially and economically weaker and disadvantaged groups has not really...made these groups masters of their destiny, rather are found to have been caught up in the historically dominant social relations within the villages. The fragmentation of the society along the lines of caste, ideology or other interests is perpetuated in the process of community mobilisation even today.
The traditional gender stereotyping is observed in the perceptions of the parents and the SMC members. The patriarchal nature of the Indian society continues to influence as the women members are elected only within the spaces created for the improvement of the women's participation in the decision making. The gender of the chairperson is perceived to be important for the effective functioning of the SMC. Men argue that the women are basically nurturers and are not geared to take on the roles outside the domain of the household. On the other hand, the women appear to be more prepared for the new roles that are created with the structures like SMC. For men, allowing their women to participate in these activities which are aimed at empowering the women means the end of their dominance over the power structures, which is hard to lose.

Therefore it does affect the way women are looked at, but what is important in the study is that it does bring out the change within the perceptions of women themselves who are showing the confidence, willingness and initiative to actively engage in the community activities. This at times brings them to loggerheads with the men folk for which they seem to be ready for. Given the objectives of creating space for the women within the School Management Committee, the change appears to be positive in deed.

What the present study has done was to focus on the processes and practices of community participation and understand the interplay of caste, class and gender in the community participation for achieving the goals of universal primary education through the School Management Committee. Aspects of this study have some relevance in facilitating the greater participation of rural communities in the educational planning and management. The study is also important as it has attempted to fill in the gaps of such studies within the area of sociology of education in India.

Notwithstanding the strengths of the study, there are some of the limitations which may be taken note of. The study has a very limited scope and applicability as it is confined to only eight villages in just two districts of Orissa. A bigger coverage would have brought in much more diversity of experiences in the actual functioning of the community participation for achieving the goals of universal primary education in the state of Orissa. However, the coverage of eight villages itself in two districts meant extensive travel across the eight villages and familiarising the social conditions, relationships and community dynamics in the working of the School Management
Committee, which was time and resource consuming. The study could have undertaken intensive qualitative study of a couple of villages, but that would have meant the lack of diversity in the experiences of villages with diverse social groups. However, the area of community participation continues to be an important area for future research as there are no single or straight answers to the complex issue of community participation and its role in the universalisation of primary education in India.