

GENDER DISCRIMINATION MASKED IN SCHOOL ENROLMENT GROWTH: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

Madhu Kushwaha¹

Abstract

Due to concerted legal and policy level efforts by the Indian government, India has achieved impressive growth in elementary school enrolment during past years. Female participation has increased at all levels of education including elementary education.

However, careful examination of enrolment data shows one disturbing or discriminatory trend. In most of the Indian states girls' enrolment is higher than that of boys in government schools but the pattern gets reversed in terms of private schools. In other words, fewer girls are in private schools and parents have preference for private school for educating their sons.

How to explain the increased female participation in government school and big gender gap in private school enrolment? Unlike government school private schools in India are fee charging schools and perceived as 'good quality' or better school and mostly impart instruction in 'English'.

In Indian patriarchal social system girls' education is considered less important than that of boys, so girls usually get whatever education available 'free' or less expensive, whereas boys receive 'better quality' private education and it becomes a new marker of gender discrimination in education.

The present paper used secondary data analysis of school enrolment data of government and private unaided school available in public domain and found that this new form of gender discrimination is prevalent throughout India with regional variations.

Keywords: *Enrolment, Gender discrimination, Growth, Private school.*

INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations, worldwide over 265 million children are currently out of school and 22% of them are of primary school age. Additionally, even the children who are attending schools are lacking basic skills in reading and math. In the past decade, major progress has been made towards increasing access to education at all levels and increasing enrollment rates in schools particularly for women and girls. Basic literacy skills have improved tremendously, yet bolder efforts are needed to make even greater strides for achieving universal education goals. For example, the world has achieved equality in primary education between girls and boys, but few countries have achieved that target at all levels of education (SDG 4).

¹ Professor, Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi -221010, U. P., India., & Fulbright Visiting Scholar, University of Maryland, USA

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) are a global agenda, adopted by all United Nations Member States countries in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. There are a total of 17 goals; SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and SDG 5 focus is to achieve gender equality and eliminate all forms of gender discrimination. A sub-section 4.1 of development goal four states, by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, *equitable* and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes. And sub-section 4.5 emphasizes to eliminate gender disparity in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education.

According to United Nations Sustainable Development goals, about two thirds of countries in the developing regions have achieved gender parity in primary education. Due to sustained and concerted efforts by Indian government, India has achieved impressive growth in elementary school enrolment during past years. Gross enrolment rate (GER) in the year of 2015- 16 for elementary classes (I-VIII) was 96.9 percent (U-DISE, 2018). This was achieved mainly by successful implementation of programs namely DPEP and *Sarv Shiksha Abhiayn* (education for all). DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) was started in 1993 -94 with an aim to achieve the goal of universal primary education. *Sarv Shiksha Abhiayn* (SSA), government of India's flagship intervention programme was started in the year 2000-2001. SSA's core objective was to attain universal elementary education (UEE) in the Country. Its' overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of Children. These two programmes DPEP and SSA have made decisive impact on increasing enrolment, reducing stagnation and improving classroom transaction. In the year 2009 Indian government has passed landmark legislation, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 declaring elementary education (grade I to VIII) as a fundamental right of every Indian child.

India has made remarkable progress in terms of increasing primary school enrollment after committing to Education for All. Gross enrolment rate in the year of 2015-16 (GER) for elementary classes (I-VIII) was 96.9 percent and Gender parity index, GPI (ratio of girls' enrolment to boys) based on GER suggest that female participation has increased at all levels of education including elementary education. At elementary level it has increased from .98 to 1.05 since 2009-10 to 2015-16 (U-DISE, 2018). However, careful examination of enrolment data shows one disturbing or discriminatory trend. In most of the Indian states girls' enrolment is higher than that of boys in government schools but the pattern gets reversed in terms of private schools. In other words, GPI of government school is higher than that of private school. It seems that fewer girls are in private schools and parents have preference for private school for educating their sons.

Government schools in India have for long been weighed down by a perception problem: the education they impart is suspected to be low on quality, making for poor learning outcomes, their physical infrastructure too deficient to allow them to focus beyond textbooks, and they are

thought to have too few, well-trained teachers. This perception got some backing with the poor learning levels demonstrated by government school students over the years (ASER 2014, 2018). This is a controversial claim because private school students perform better not solely due to school but other factors also contribute to their performance. In fact, the gap between the performance of government and private school students narrows down when other factors like, parents' education, household assets, availability of private tuition etc. were taken into account (Wadhwa, 2014). There can be debate on the comparative quality of government versus private schools and budget private schools. But three observations can be made about private schools; first, there is prevalent societal perception that 'private schools are better' than government schools, second, private schools emphasize on knowledge of English or they claim to impart instruction in English language which have potentials to affects one's life chances and third, most importantly private schools are fee charging school, and it acts against girls' chances to get equitable good quality education in India.

However, the problem is that all the private schools are fee-charging schools. School fees become one of the important determining factors when parents choose school for their children, more so in the cases when they have limited resource and responsibility of educating many children. In such a situation the decision that which child will attend government school and which will go to private school is mostly taken in terms of the gender of the child or we can say gender of the child is one of the important factors in that decision. In Indian patriarchal social system girls' education is considered less important than that of boys so girls usually get whatever education is available free or less expensive, whereas boys receive 'better quality' private education and it becomes a new marker of gender discrimination in education.

The increased female participation in elementary education has masked the big gender gap in private school enrolment in India. The present paper uses secondary data analyses of school enrolment data available in public domain to capture the extent and nature of the gender gap in private school enrolment in India.

Table 1. Enrolment of Boys and Girls by Type of School Management (in %)

		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
Stage	School type	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Elementary (I-VIII)	Government	49.25	50.75	49.29	50.77	49.24	50.76
	Private	56.54	43.46	56.37	43.62	56.55	43.45
Secondary (IX-X)	Government	49.23	50.77	49.05	50.95	48.77	51.23

	Private	56.85	43.15	56.86	43.14	57.32	42.68
School Education (I-XII)	Government	49.32	50.68	49.25	50.75	49.20	50.79
	Private	56.48	43.52	56.34	43.65	56.56	43.44

Source: U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2018, NIEPA, New Delhi

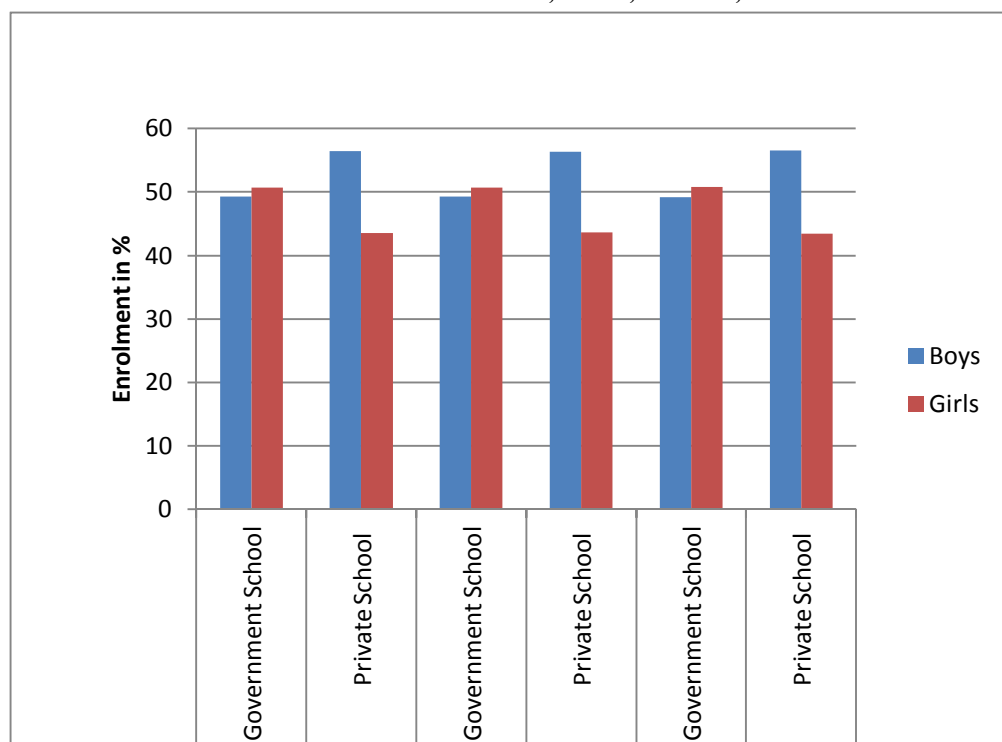


Figure 1. Boys' and Girls' Enrolment (Grade I-XII)

Source: U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2018, NIEPA, New Delhi.

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that there were more girls in government schools at all levels of schooling and this trend is consistent over the years. Fewer girls were enrolled in private schools at all levels and the gender gap was maximum (14.64%) at secondary level (grade IX-X) in the year 2016-17. At elementary (grade I-VIII) this difference was 13.1% and at grade I-XII level 13.12% less girls were enrolled in 2016-17. It means that in the year 2016-17 at grade I-XII per 100 boys only 87 girls were enrolled in private schools. The gender gap difference in government school was not as high as it was registered in private schools. Table 1 clearly demonstrates that in the year 2016-17 at elementary level the 1.52% more girls than boys were studying in government schools. The number of girls in government school increases at grade IX-X level as 2.46% more girls were in government school. For entire school education (grade

I-XII) 1.59% more girls than boys were enrolled in government schools in the same year. This trend is consistent over the years from 2014-15 to 2016-17. But in private school enrolment gender gap was more than 13 percentage points, and in comparison to boys 13-14 % less girls were enrolled.

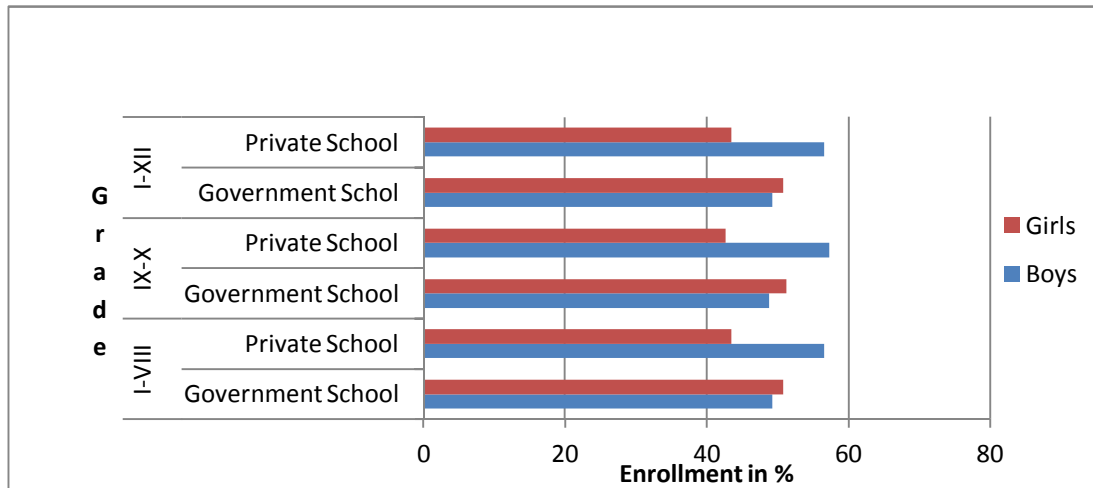


Figure 2. Enrolment of boys and Girls at various stages by School Management, 2016-17

Source: U-DISE 2018, NIEPA, New Delhi

It is clear that there were more girls than the boys in the government school and the gender gap in enrolment figures are consistent at all stages of education in 2016-17. Gender gaps in private schools are more than that of in government schools. For example, in the year 2016-17 gender gap for elementary, secondary and higher secondary is 13.1%, 13.12% and 14.63 % respectively. In other words, for every 100 boys there are only 87 or 86 girls are enrolled in private school. But if we look at the figures of gender gap in enrolment in government school there were 1.52 % more girls at elementary to 2.46% more girls at grade IX-X level were enrolled in government school in that same year. It is clear that more girls are in government school but what is more alarming is that in comparison to boys' fewer girls are in private school.

Gender parity Index- The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a socio-economic index usually designed to measure the relative access to education of males and females. This index is released by UNESCO. In its simplest form, it is calculated as the quotient of the number of females by the number of males enrolled in a given stage of education say elementary, secondary or higher education.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) reflects females' level of access to education compared to that of males. This is calculated for each school stage. A GPI of less than 1 indicates that there are fewer females than males in the formal education system in proportion to the appropriate school-age population. A GPI of more than 1 means that there are proportionately more girls than boys attending school. A score of 1 reflects equal enrolment rates for boys and girls.

Table 2. Gender Parity Index (GPI) by Stage of Education and by Type of Management

(All India)

Year	Elementary (I-VIII)		Secondary (IX-X)	
	Govt. School	Private School*	Govt. School	Private School*
2014-15	1.04	.77	1.01	.75
2015-16	1.05	.77	1.02	.75
2016-17	1.05	.77	1.02	.74

GPI=GER of Girls / GER of Boys.

*Source: *GPI is calculated based on GER of boy and girls in un-aided private school reported in U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2018*

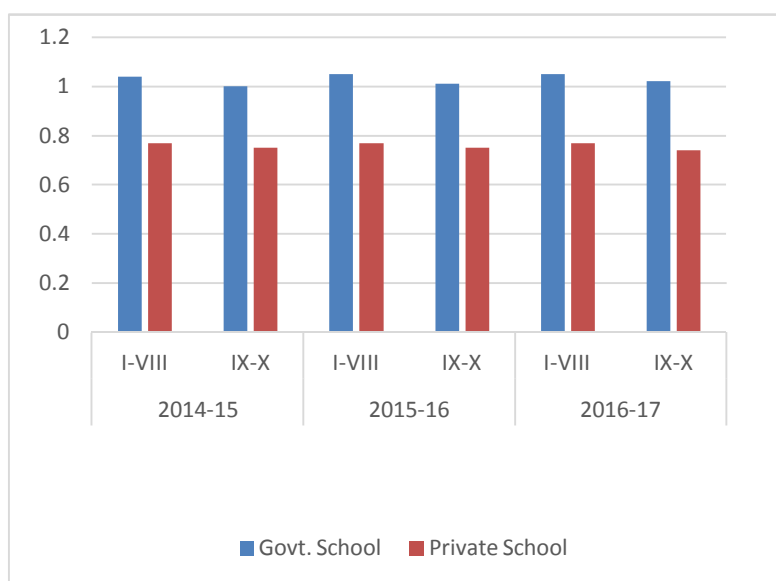


Figure 3. Gender Parity Index of Government and Private School (All India)

It is evident from table- 2 and figure- 3 that GPI of government schools of elementary and secondary level of education is more than 1 and it has marginally increased in the year in 2016-17 whereas GPI of private schools at elementary level was .77 and it is consistent from 2014-15 to 2016-17. At secondary level private school's GPI was .75 in the year 2014-15 and 2015-16 but it has marginally decreased to .74 in the year 2016-17 and in the same period government school GPI has increased from 1.01 to 1.02. It is clearly evident that there are less girls in private schools and their number further decrease as one moves from lower grade (I-VIII) to higher grade (IX-X) level

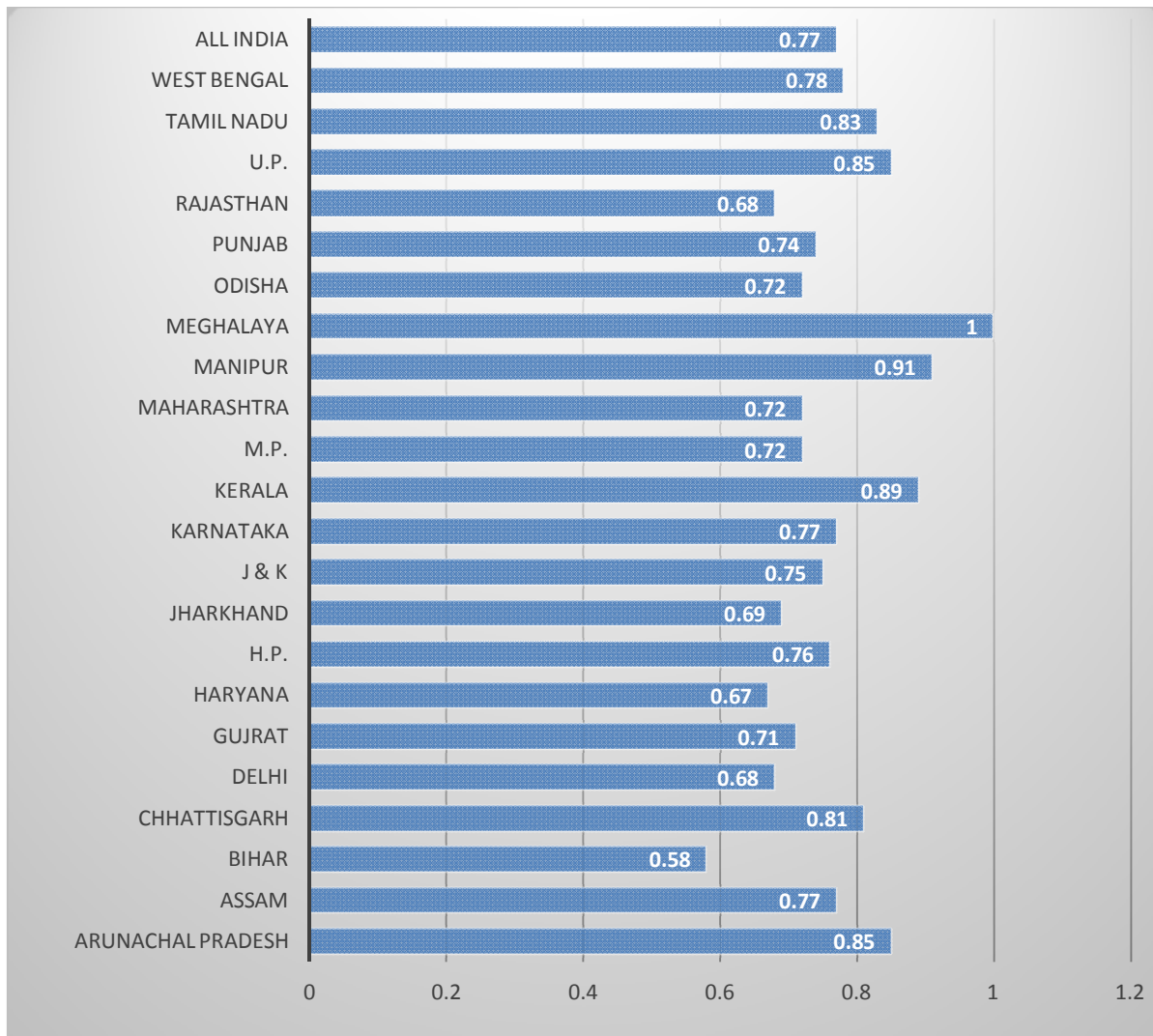


Figure 4. GPI of Private Schools at Elementary Level, 2016-17 (Major Indian States)

Source: Author calculated the GPI of private school on the basis of GER of boy and girls in un-aided private school of various states as reported in U-DISE Flash Statistics 2018, NIEPA, India

Figure 4 demonstrates regional variations in GPI of private schools. At all India level private school GPI was .77 and almost all states with a notable exception of Meghalaya have GPI less than 1. A North Eastern state Meghalaya has the GPI of 1 means that there is gender parity in private school enrolment and parents are not discriminating against girls while choosing education in private schools. Most of major Indian states have private school GPI between .6 to .7 except Bihar as it has the lowest GPI of .58, it shows that in Bihar per 100 boys only 42 girls were enrolled in private school at grade I-VIII level. Some of the states having GPI more than .8 were Manipur (.91), Kerala (.89), Arunachal Pradesh (.85). U.P. (.85), Tamil Nadu (.83), and Chhattisgarh (.81).

GROWTH OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN INDIA

There is regional variation in the number of private and government school enrolment. This map shows the Indian states having percentage of government school enrolment. Most of the Indian states have less than 60% of students enrolled in government-managed schools. Bihar has heavy dependency on government school and the only state in India having 91.56% school going population enrolled in government managed institutions whereas in Maharashtra and Kerala less than 30 % school going children were enrolled in government managed schools. But Kerala private school GPI is .89 whereas private schools of Bihar GPI is lowest (.58). It shows that of number states having high percentage of government schools and sates having population attends government

In some states, the growth of private schooling was very pronounced. For example, in Uttar Pradesh (UP) from 2010-11 to 2014, the number of private schools rose by 31,196, private school enrolment rose by nearly 7 million students and government school enrolment fell by 2.6 million students (Kingdon, 2017).



Figure 6. Percentage distribution of sex-wise participation of students in government and private school (Grade I-XII) of different regions of India-2015-16

Image Source: *Educational Statistics at A Glance, 2018, MHRD*

Figure 6 demonstrates regional gender disparity in private school and government school enrolment. For entire school education (grade I-XII) central regional states namely (Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh) have highest participation ratio of boys to girls in private school followed by the Western regional states (Goa, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan). Interestingly, both the central regional states comparing to other states have one of the high percentages of enrolment (M.P. 60.57% and Chhattisgarh 73.05%) in government-managed schools. It means that though in these states altogether there were fewer students enrolled in private schools but more boys than girls were enrolled in fee-paying private schools.

REASONS

There is huge son preference in Indian society and Indian parents are somewhat reluctant to pay for the education of their daughters. A plethora of social, cultural and economic factors contributes to this trend. A boy is widely viewed as an asset; a future breadwinner and caregiver who will look after his parents when they become old. A girl, on the other hand, is seen as a liability, as parents are often pressured to pay dowries when their daughters marry. It is one of the reasons why even the lower middle class parents send their son to private school but choose government school for their daughters.

All private schools charge tuition fee and in addition to tuition, there are other hidden cost involved in schooling. School fees become one of the important determining factors when parents choose school for their children, more so in the cases when parent have limited resource and responsibility of educating many children. In such a situation the decision that which child will attend government school and who will go to private school are taken in terms of the gender of the child. In Indian patriarchal social system girls' education is considered less important than that of boys so girls usually get whatever education available free or less expensive, whereas boys receive 'better quality' English medium private education. Here we must remember that a girls' life chances differs significantly whether she receives good quality education in English or in vernacular languages. Thus, opportunity for better education goes to boys in the anticipation that it is an investment in the preparation for their future social roles of 'providers' of family.

CONCLUSION

The latest school enrolment data is available for the year 2016-17 and the enrolment trends in government and private schools are almost consistent over the years from 2014-15. Careful examination of these enrolment data reveals three things; **first**, in comparison to boys more girls were enrolled in government school, **second**, in comparison to girls more boys were enrolled in private schools, and **third**, the gender gap in private school enrolment (13 to 14.63 percentage points) is significantly more than that of government schools (1.5 to 2.4 percentage points) in 2016-17. And corresponding GPI at grade I-VIII of government and private schools for the same period was 1.05 and .77 respectively.

From the above analysis of enrolment data two important inferences can be drawn;

1. There are more boys in the population at least in middle and upper middle socio-economic class. India's child sex ratio is unfavourable to girls and child sex ratio (CSR) data is available since 1961 and it is declining continuously over the census years (Census, 2011). Child sex ratio has declined from 976 girls per 1000 boys in the year 1961 to 919 girls per 1000 boys in the year 2011. Given prolonged skewed child sex ratio in the age group of 0-6 years due to the rampant practice of sex selected abortion in urban and affluent India, it is possible that in that age and social class cohort (who attend private school) there are less girls than boys.
2. More girls are out of school than boys particularly at secondary school level (ASER, 2018).

There is no doubt that girls now have increased access to elementary education and absolute increase in girls' enrolment presents a positive picture of state of elementary educational. But in-depth analysis of enrolment data and GPI of government and private school reveals that gender discrimination in private school enrolment is quite prevalent. Thus, private English medium education becomes another marker of gender inequality in education. Though social class and caste intersects gender but it remains a fact that more girls are denied English education than boys in India. Girls' school enrolment figures can be an indicator of status of gender equality in a society but we need to contextualize these figures for better understanding.

REFERENCES

- ASER (2018). Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.asercentre.org>
- Census Report 2011, Government of India. www.census.org
- Educational Statistics at A Glance, 2018, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India. Retrieved from www.mhrd.org
- Kingdon, Geeta, G. (2017). The Emptying Public school and Growth of Private Schools in India, In the Report on Budget Private school in India. Retrieved from www.ccs.in
- Kurian, O. C (2015). India's Missing Millions of Out of School Children: A Case of Reality not Living up to estimation? Retrieved from www.oxfamindia.org
- U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2016-17. School Education in India. NIEPA, New Delhi. Retrieved from <http://udise.in/src/html>
- UN Sustainable Development Goals-Education. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/> on February 12, 2020
- Wadhwa, W. (2014). Government Vs Private Schools: Have Things Changed. Annual status of Education Report (Rural) 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.asercentre.org>

About the Author:

Madhu Kushwaha is Professor in the Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India and a Fulbright Visiting Scholar in the University of Maryland, USA. She has Master's degree in Sociology and Ph.D. in Education. Her area of specialization includes *Sociology of Education, and Gender Issues in Education*. She has designed courses on Gender Issues in Education and her current research focuses on gender discrimination and classroom practices in Indian and American social context. She has publications in leading national and international journals of education and gender studies and authored two books on Gender Issues in Education. She has completed four research projects including one international project on the topics; construction of nationalism and masculinity: role of textbooks, in-service education of teachers, effects of home and school language gap, and impact of incentive schemes on primary education in India. She is actively involved with several nongovernmental organizations working in the field of education and gender equality.
