

ENROLMENT PATTERN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF INDIA DURING PRE AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A COMPARISON BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT:

Analysis of enrolment pattern of the government and private schools at the national level revealed that there has been a gradual shift of enrolment from government to private institution in case of primary school until the pre-COVID-19 pandemic situation. This gradual shift from government to private schools has been happening in spite of the fact that the cost of education in the latter is higher than that of former. Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 compelled Central and State Governments to ensure 'free and compulsory' education of every child up to the age of 14 years. As per 75th NSS round survey there were 32.6 per cent students at the pre-primary level and 62 per cent at primary level of education who are receiving 'free' education in reality. Therefore, a significant percentage of students from the government, private-aided as well as private-unaided schools have been incurring cost. This not only goes against the violation of RTE Act, but it also breaches the recommendation of Kothari Commission (1964-66) to provide tuition-free education at the school level. Like all other sectors of the economy, education sector has been greatly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 report revealed that during the pandemic, enrolment pattern of the country has seen a shift from private to more affordable private schools or government schools. The objective of this paper is to explore the dynamics of change in enrolment pattern over the pre and Covid-19 pandemic years along with some associated issues like parental aspiration of educating the child, cost of education, preference for particular type institution etc. To accomplish the task the study used secondary sources of data.

Key words: Enrolment, Free education, Right to education, Kothari commission, ASER.

INTRODUCTION :

Indian school education system comprises both government and private institutions. There are schools managed by government (Centre/State/Local body) and private body (private-aided and private-unaided). During the last decade low fee-charging private schools have been mushrooming across the urban and peri-urban as well as rural areas of India. It may be the effects of increased income of the people along with more parental preference towards the 'English medium private schools. Outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic put a serious strain on the education system of India like elsewhere of the world. Earlier concept of 'access' to nearby school had seen a paradigm shift to 'digital access' through virtual classes from the comfort of the home of the learner amidst vast regional disparities, poor network connectivity and reduced income of the parents especially during the pandemic. During the pandemic many parents had to enrol their child into government schools which they did not consider earlier. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 indicated the surge in enrolment in government schools across the ages, grades, states and boards. On the other hand it was observed that a section of students especially from the privileged class background were fortunate enough to attend the online classes taken by their respective schools. It was further observed that online-coaching institute like Edtech, BYJU'S, Unacademy, Vedantu etc saw a remarkable footprint on education sector. All these have further aggravated the 'digital divide' that may trigger a far-reaching effect on the education system of India. COVID-19 pandemic created a space in the society where it needs to be re-examined the present status of government and private Schools in India. This paper intends to contribute to the existing knowledge on the school education especially enrolment in primary schools of India.

OBJECTIVES

- i. To explore the changing dynamics of demand for and supply of education in India at the primary level over the years.
 To assess the status of school preference along with the associated cost of education borne by the parents.
- ii. To study the enrolment status in government and private schools especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY :

This paper is based on the secondary sources of data collected from Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE), Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Reports etc. Methodology adopted here is descriptive analysis using Annual Average Growth Rate (AAGR), percentage etc.

FINDINGS :

This section discusses main findings.

ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: DEMAND SIDE:

The desire to have education among the masses has increased over the years (Table 1). NSSO Reports have shown that the persons in the age group of 5-29 who have never enrolled in any educational institutions decreases gradually (Table 2). Two major reasons cited by the respondents of the surveys of successive reports of NSSO for not attending the educational institutions were a) parents were not interested in studies and 2) education not considered necessary. Over the years number of respondents who have cited these reasons have been showing a declining trend (Table 3). These give strong evidence of increasing aspiration of the masses to get formal education by enrolling themselves or their child into the education.

Table1: Level of Education Parents Aspire for Their Child (per cent)

		PROBE states ¹ (2006)	Pratichi Trust II (2009)
Educate up to class 10/ Madhyamik	Boys	9	14.9
	Girls	14	26.1
As far as possible	Boys	69	57.5
	Girls	52	45.5

Source: PROBE 2006 and Pratichi Trust Report II

Table 2: Percentage of Never Enrolled Students in Educational Institutions

		(5-29) years		(3-35) years
		64th round (2007-08)	71st round (2014)	75th round (2017-18)
Rural	Male	11	8.1	12.6
	Female	21	14	19.3
Urban	Male	6.3	4.6	7.1
	Female	10	6.7	9.6
Total	Male	9.8	7.1	11
	Female	18.2	11.9	16.6

Source: NSSO

Comparing the NSSO data of 64th and 71st round related to never-enrolled students in any educational institute of the country, it is found that both male and female in the age group of 5-29 the number is decreasing. In case of male, it is 7.1 per cent and for female the figure is 11.9 per cent taking rural and urban combined in 71st round. Earlier in 64th round these were 9.8 per cent and 18.2 per cent respectively. During the 75th round survey (latest survey on household social consumption

including education and health) conducted in 2017-18, 11 per cent of male and 16.6 per cent of female have been registered as never-enrolled students. Though these numbers are higher compared to the earlier survey of 71st round but it has to keep in mind that 75th round has covered the age group as 3-35 years old which is different from the earlier 5-29 years age group of students. Nevertheless, in all the surveys it has been observed that number of female students is quite higher than that of male students. This might be the evidence that parents are little less reluctant in case of female child compared to male child in the matter of imparting education to them.

Table 3: Major Reasons Cited by Never-Enrolled Students in Educational Institutions

Major reasons for never enrolled	Location/Category	(5-29) years		(3-35) years	
		64 th round (2007-08)	71 st round (2014)	75 th round (2017-18)	
Parents not interested in studies	Rural	Male	29.5	NA ²	NA
		Female	36.7	NA	NA
	Urban	Male	22.5	NA	NA
		Female	32.8	NA	NA
	Total		33.2	NA	NA
Education not considered necessary	Rural	Male	20.3	NA	NA
		Female	23.2	NA	NA
	Urban	Male	17.2	NA	NA
		Female	21	NA	NA
	Total		21.8	NA	NA
not interested in education	Rural	Male	NA	NA	20.4
		Female	NA	NA	20.7
	Urban	Male	NA	NA	14.5
		Female	NA	NA	15.7
	Total	Male	NA	32.5	19.3
		Female	NA	27	19.9

Source: NSSO.

During the 75th round survey among the never-enrolled students, about 19.3 per cent of male and 19.9 per cent of female of rural and urban areas combined have cited disinterest in education as the reason for their never enrolment in any educational institution. These numbers actually fell drastically from the earlier survey of 71st round. During the 71st round 32.5 per cent of male and 27 per cent of female revealed that they were not interest in education. Therefore, these reduced numbers actually indicates that a larger section of the people realized the importance of education and these are reflected on the age specific attendance ratios as these numbers are continuously increasing over the successive round of surveys (Table 4).

Parental aspiration to get their child educated is the first and foremost step towards the mission of providing quality education to the children. This has been reflected in the age-specific attendance rate in the reports of NSSO (64th, 71st and 75th Round).

Table 4: Percentage of Students in Different Age Groups Attending the Educational Institutions

Gender	Age Group	64 th round (2007-08)	71 st round (2014)	75 th round (2017-18)
Male	5	46.4	33.9	NA
	6—10	89	89	95.8
	11—13	88.6	92.7	95.2
Female	5	45.8	34.6	NA

	6—10	86.9	87.8	94.1
	11—13	83.4	91.1	93.6
Rural	5	44.9	32.5	NA
	6—10	87.3	87.9	94.4
	11—13	85.3	91.3	93.8
Urban	5	50.4	40	NA
	6—10	90.6	90	96.9
	11—13	89.3	94	96.3
Total	5	46.1	34.3	NA
	6—10	88	88.5	95
	11—13	86.2	92	94.5

Source: NSSO Reports (64th, 71st and 75th Round)

Successive round of NSSO surveys showed that the percentage of students in the age groups of 6-10 and 11-13 years registered a higher level of attendance both for male and female. This was true for rural and urban locality. This increase in higher percentage of students attending the educational institutions proved that demand for formal education has been rising.

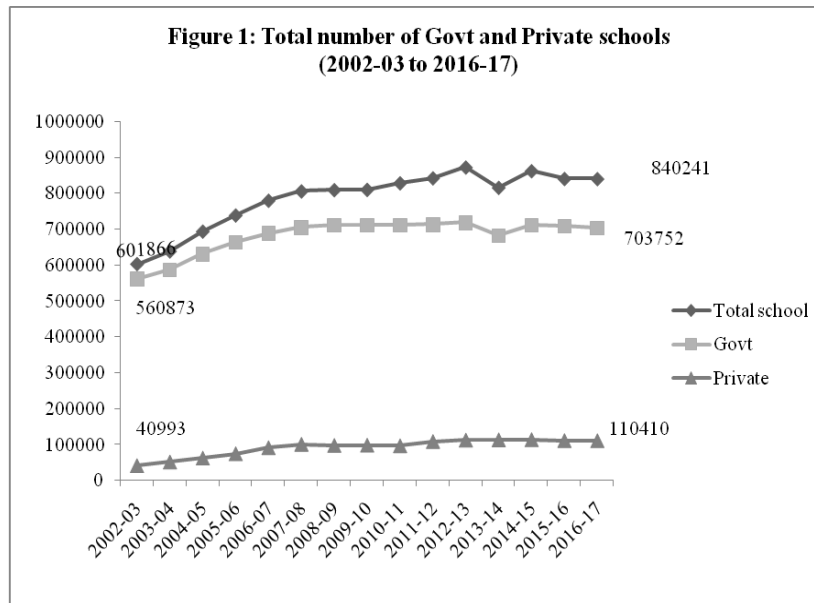
ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: SUPPLY SIDE :

Since 1947, the successive central and state governments have been trying to cope with this increasing demand for formal education by providing schools along with the both physical and human resources so that dreams of the masses to be educated get realized. As the discussion of this paper has been confined within primary schools only, the Table 5 represents the number of primary schools only at all India level over the period of 2002-2003 to 2016-2017 to illustrate the matter.

**Table 5: Total Number of Govt. and Private Schools
(2002-03 to 2016-17)**

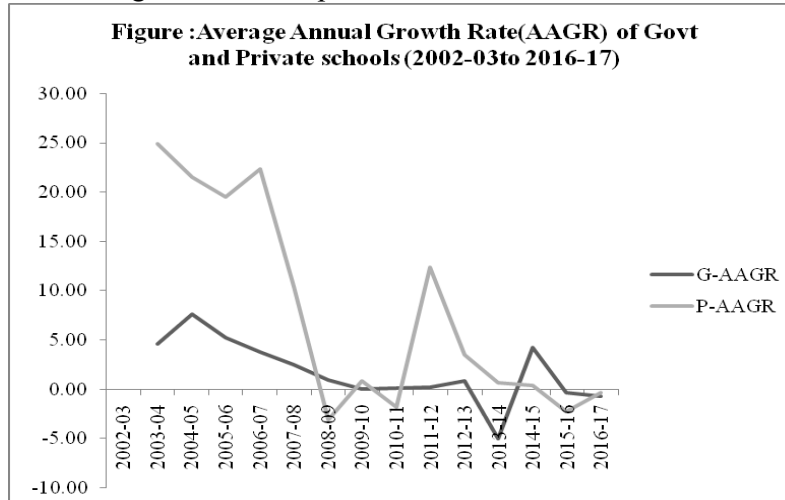
Year	Total school	Govt.	Private
2002-03	601866	560873	40993
2003-04	637469	586287	51182
2004-05	693030	630852	62178
2005-06	738150	663887	74263
2006-07	779482	688653	90829
2007-08	805667	705332	100335
2008-09	809108	711841	97267
2009-10	809994	711846	98148
2010-11	828393	712345	96385
2011-12	842391	713714	108267
2012-13	872676	719257	112087
2013-14	815716	682914	112826
2014-15	862481	711675	113248
2015-16	840546	708746	110739
2016-17	840241	703752	110410
AAGR ³	2.49	1.68	7.78

Source: DISE



Source: DISE

During the period of 2002-03 to 2016-17 the number of both government and private schools increased. The total number of schools was 601866 in 2002-03 and it was increased by 1.4 times to become 840241 in 2016-17 registering 2.49 per cent Annual Average Growth Rate (AAGR). Though the number of private primary schools is lower than the government primary schools, the annual average growth rate of private schools during the same period is much higher than that of government schools. The AAGR of government schools was 1.68 per cent and it was 7.78 per cent for the private schools during the reference period.



Source: Compiled by the Researcher

Barring four occasions (2008-09, 2010-11, 2014-15 and 2015-16) the growth rate of private schools (P-AAGR) was ahead than that of the government schools (G-AAGR) (Figure 2). This shows that there is a skewed preference towards the private school in the matter of choice of schools. The presence of private schools is visible both in rural and urban areas of India and in both localities private schools have been mushrooming at a higher rate of growth than that of the government schools. This is shown in the Table 6.

Table 6: Total Number of Government and Private School Across the Rural and Urban Areas (2002-03 to 2016-17)

Year	Govt		Private	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
2002-03	519807	41066	27458	13535
2003-04	547433	38854	33792	17390
2004-05	588689	42163	41546	20632
2005-06	621318	42569	51032	23231
2006-07	644049	44604	64133	26696
2007-08	661393	43939	71301	29034
2008-09	667072	44769	71301	25966
2009-10	667270	44576	68910	29238
2010-11	668050	44295	66912	29473
2011-12	668853	44861	73945	34322
2012-13	673883	45374	76644	35443
2013-14	681149	44965	76579	36247
2014-15	668902	42773	77090	36158
2015-16	664890	43856	76418	34321
2016-17	659954	43798	76294	34116
AAGR	1.75	0.52	8.08	7.31

Source: DISE

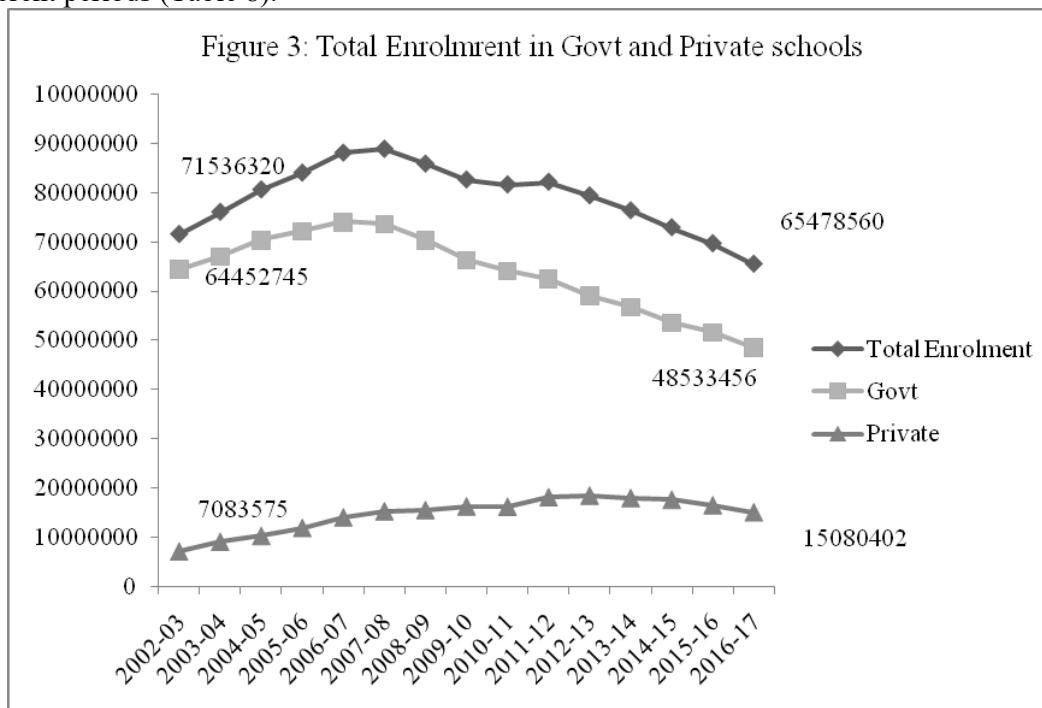
During the reference period AAGR of rural government school was 1.75 and that of the rural private school was 8.08. For the urban area these figures were 0.52 for government school and 7.31 was for private school. Therefore, higher annual average growth rates were observed for private schools in both rural and urban areas of India. The enrolment status of the students shown in the Table 7 reveals that people are preferring private school in a big way and it is true for both rural and urban areas.

Table 7: AAGR of Enrolment of Govt and Private School across the Rural and Urban Areas (2002-03 to 2016-17)

Year	Total Enrolment	Govt.	Private	Govt. Rural	Govt. Urban	Private Rural	Private Urban
2002-03	71536320	64452745	7083575	58726667	5726078	4218797	2864778
2003-04	76063838	67000178	9063660	61198771	5801407	4991931	4071729
2004-05	80621101	70354631	10266470	64034353	6320278	5890866	4375604
2005-06	84052260	72171297	11880963	65923944	6247353	7081625	4799338
2006-07	88126614	74072974	14053640	67642372	6430602	8555412	5498228
2007-08	88911007	73633772	15277235	67431139	6202633	9305157	5972078
2008-09	85882134	70361246	15520888	64322309	6038937	5970587	9550301
2009-10	82648797	66366516	16282281	60544083	5822433	10103687	6178594
2010-11	81643460	64082881	16211884	58362349	5720532	10106449	6105435
2011-12	82189819	62470583	18141623	56737285	5733298	11245740	6895883
2012-13	79407232	59052230	18490728	53436517	5615713	11585558	6905170
2013-14	76373210	56770603	17970224	51472372	5298231	11148617	6821607
2014-15	72915364	53615294	17633678	48393481	5221813	10933307	6700371
2015-16	69650241	51595197	16519337	46770299	4824898	10376733	6142604
2016-17	65478560	48533456	15080402	43999961	4533495	9373164	5707238
AAGR	-0.54	-1.94	6.01	-1.97	-1.57	8.1	7.18

Source: DISE

Enrolment pattern of government and private schools during the period of 2002-03 to 2016-17 has been shown in the Table 7. This has also been represented diagrammatically in figure 3. It is revealed that total enrolment in primary schools all over the country decreased from 71536320 in 2002-03 to 65478560 in 2016-17 registering AAGR at -0.54. During the same period enrolment in government school also showed that it actually reduced from 64452745 in 2002-03 to 48533456 in 2016-17. But enrolment in private school increased from 7083575 in 2002-03 to 15080402 in 2016-17 registering 6.01 annual average growth. Similar pattern has been observed in both rural and urban localities. Government rural school has seen a negative growth rate of 1.97 per cent whereas enrolment in rural private school has been showing an increase of 8.1 per cent annual average growth in the same period. The trend is same in case of urban area where urban government school are showing -1.57 per cent of AAGR and for private school this is 7.18 per cent. Therefore, though the total enrolment fell 8.47 per cent during the reference period, it was the government school that took the burden of this falling as there was a 24.7 per cent decrease in enrolment in government school. On the other hand, during the same period nearly 7996827 (=15080402-7083575) more students enrolled in private schools registering 113 per cent increase during 2002-03 to 2016-17. From the observation made above it can be concluded that there is an increasing tendency to enrol in private institutions. This conclusion got its support from the data found in successive NSSO reports in different periods (Table 8).



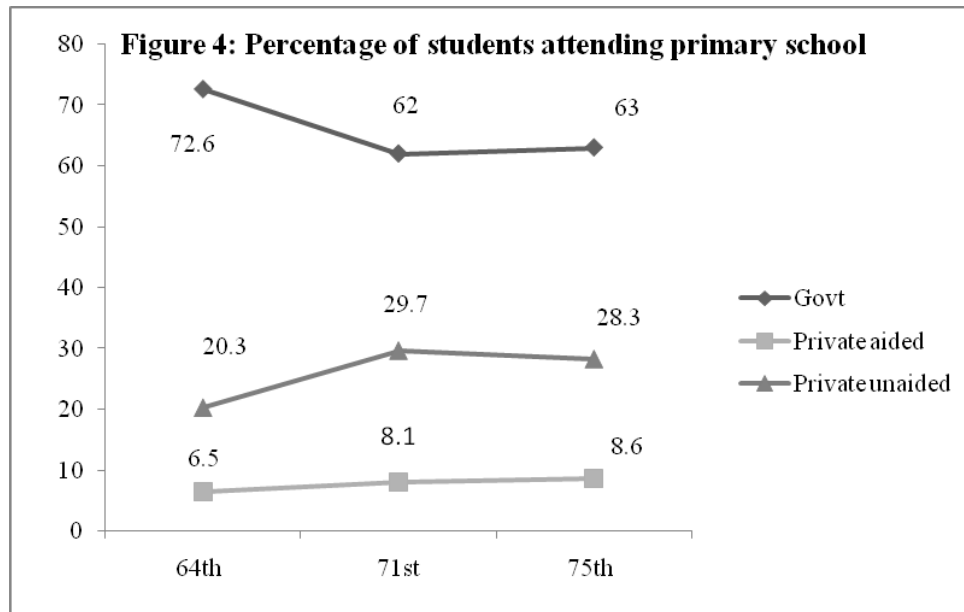
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 8: Percentage of students attending primary school by type of management of institution across the locality

Type of Institution	Locality	64 th round	71 st round	75 th round
Govt ⁴	Rural	81.4	72.3	73.7
	Urban	39.6	30.9	30.9
	Total ⁵	72.6	62	63

Private aided	Rural	3.9	5	5.3
	Urban ⁶	16.1	17.5	18.2
	Total	6.5	8.1	8.6
Private unaided	Rural	14.3	22.5	20.9
	Urban	43	51.4	50.5
	Total ⁷	20.3	29.7	28.3

Source: NSSO Report



Source: NSSO Report

During the 64th round (2007-08) NSSO survey 72.6 per cent of the students of primary level had enrolled into the government schools. This gradually decreased in the subsequent Surveys. It became 62 per cent in 71st round (2014) and thereafter it increased marginally to become 63 per cent in 75th round (2017-18). Share of enrolment in private aided school increased from 6.5 per cent to 8.1 per cent and finally 8.6 per cent in the above said round of surveys. In case of private unaided schools these numbers are 20.3 per cent, 29.7 per cent and 28.3 per cent respectively. U-DISE-2019-20 report found that out of the total enrolment in primary school (I-V) all over India, 54.87 per cent of students enrolled in government schools, 36.3 per cent in private unaided schools and 4.6 per cent was government aided schools. Therefore, the decrease in enrolment in government schools over the years is matched by the increase in enrolment in both private aided and unaided schools. Here private unaided school has been the front runner compared to private aided schools to enrol the primary students.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING PRIVATE SCHOOLS :

Kothari Commission (1964-66) visioned that the country should strive for a common school system of public institution at school education. This system will consist of government schools, schools managed by local authorities and all recognised aided private schools. The Commission recommended tuition-free education at the school stage. They were aware that private schools would be in trouble had the recommendation implemented because of no-tuition fee. But the Commission anticipated that most of the private schools would abolish their fees voluntarily and come under the umbrella of common school system of public institutions and would be supported by the state. Only a smaller portion of schools that would continue to charge tuition-fee would be called as independent schools and would not be eligible for aid from the state. The Commission discourages the system

where parents enrol their child to unrecognized or independent schools. The commission drew a road map that would end the tuition-fee at the primary level by the end of fourth plan and by the end of the fifth plan there would not be any tuition-fee at the lower secondary stage.

Table 9: Percentage of Student Receiving Free Education⁸

	Pre-Primary			Primary		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Rural	40.8	47.5	43.8	71.1	74.1	72.4
Urban	12.4	16.4	14.2	30.4	31.1	30.7
Rural +Urban	30	35.8	32.6	60.8	63.6	62

Source: NSSO 75th round (2017-18)

The right of children to free and compulsory education Act, 2009 mandates that no child up to the age 14 years old should be denied the education on the basis of gender, caste, and religion as well as income status. It is the constitutional responsibility of both the state and central Governments to ensure that all recognised schools imparting elementary education must comply with this rule.

From the Table 9, it is found that a significant percentage of students are not receiving free education in both pre-primary and primary level. In spite of the provision laid in the RTE Act, it has been observed that at the pre-primary level 32.6 per cent and for primary 62 per cent of the students has reported receipt of free education. The rest is either the students who did not receive free education or non-reporting cases. It can be said that there might be a possibility that a significant portion of students are being enrolled into the fee-charging schools of both unaided and aided private schools because it is assumed government schools is not charging at all. Therefore, the dreams of tuition-free education at school stage remain unfulfilled.

Table 10: Average Annual Expenditure per Student at Primary Level by Type of Institution

Type of Institution	64th round	71st round	75th round
Govt	473	1111	1253
Local body	521	NA	NA
Private aided	3137	9355	12889
Private unaided	4175	10623	14485
Not known	3484	6501	24612
All (Inc. n.r)	1413	4610	6024

Source: NSSO Reports

Though the tuition-fee has been abolished in government and local authority schools, it still prevails in private-aided schools and that explains a part of the huge difference in private average annual expenditure per student at the primary level by type of management of the institution (Table 10). At the 64th round NSSO survey the average annual expenditure at primary level was Rs 473 per student for the student of government school and for private-aided it was Rs 3137 which is nearly 6.6 times higher than that of the government schools. The successive NSSO surveys showed that the gap had widened in absolute terms. During the 71st NSO survey the average expenditure of private aided schools was 8.4 times higher compared to government school and during the 75th survey the figure was 10.29 times higher. So, the 'free' part of the 'free and compulsory education of children up to 14 years', the provision laid down in RTE Act, 2009 actually does not exist in reality.

In spite of large difference in the average education expenditure between government and private schools it has been found that a large section of students has been enrolling in private schools and the figure is increasing (Tables 7 and 8). The reasons for choosing a particular school encompasses a host of factors comprising teaching and learning, safety and security of the child, expenses, medium of instruction, non educational benefit etc. (Hill et al 2011; Streuli et al 2011). To

understand the dynamics of the choice of school in a broad perspective of rural India, Azim Premji Foundation Conducted a field survey covering four southern states of India by taking 121 public and private schools along with 1210 families. It found that though the Indian parents have option to choose between government and private schools, in reality they have little information about schools they wish to enrol the child. The study revealed that apart from teaching-learning and discipline and safety, cost acts a deciding factor for the choice of Govt School and for the Private school it was the English medium.

The Government Vs Private Schools in the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic :

The pandemic has impacted education sector in many ways. Students from nursery to university level had to ‘accept’ the online classes instead of offline classes. Some schools especially private schools took initiatives to start online classes soon after the first nation-wide lockdown imposed on March 2020. Some private schools particularly low-fee charging schools faced difficult times and it became a question of their survival due to poor school infrastructure and less privileged parents of their students. Pandemic had severely hit the income opportunities of the parents leading many of them to failure of payment of school-fees. Unable to survive the battle, many private schools had to close the schools. Teachers of those schools had to take odd jobs in order to survive. In this backdrop it has been found that there has been a shift in the enrolment pattern between the government and private schools. This time shift is observed from private schools to government schools. Various reputed national newspapers had been reporting all these regularly during the pandemic periods. ASER 2021 report found that there had been a clear and substantial increase in enrolment in government schools across the ages or grades or states or boards. On the flipside of the story is that enrolment in private schools has shown a downward movement. According to Banerji and Wadhwa, the major change in enrolment that is evident in ASER 2021 is a big jump in government school enrolment accompanied by a fall in private school enrolment (Banerji and Wadhwa, 2021).

Table 11: Percentage of Enrolment in Government Schools

Std	ASER 2020		ASER 2021	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
I-II	61.1	66.7	72	74.1
III-V	65.6	73.3	70.9	77.1

Source: ASER

A report⁹ by the Central Square Foundation (2020) on private school of India during the Covid-19 found that out of the total private schools surveyed, 55 per cent of them reported that there was a major decrease in new admission. Some reasons may be put forwarded for this changing pattern of enrolment of government and private schools. Firstly, parents had been facing the severe economic hardship during the pandemic. Secondly, many low-fee-charging private schools had to shut down their schools as those were unable to bear the expenses. Thirdly, during the pandemic many state governments provided various supports to the learners in the form of learning materials as well as with dry mid-day meal.

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent imposition of nationwide lockdown since March 2020 has put the economy to be hard hit. The country witnessed a recession for the first time in forty years. The first quarter (April-June) of 2020-21 saw a contraction of 23.9 per cent of the GDP and was followed by 7.4 per cent in the next quarter. During 2020-21 the Indian economy witnessed a negative 7.3 per cent GDP growth rate. It has been reported that more than 90 per cent of the workforce in the country is engaged in informal sector contributing 50 per cent of the GDP (Government of India, 2013-14). Therefore, this slowdown in economic activity has affected the lives and livelihood of the majority of the people. This is also evident from the lower private final consumption expenditure, important engines of growth. During FY 2020-21, private final consumption expenditure fell to Rs. 1793863 crores from Rs 2019783 crores of the pre-pandemic level, that is, during the FY 2019-20.

So, this might have a bearing effect on the income of the households and accordingly their expenditure on education also. It has been found that nearly 20 per cent of household income is spent on education (Oxfam, 2020). This has been playing a role in taking the decision by some parents to shift their child to government schools. Therefore, whether the shift of enrolment from private to government schools is permanent or transitory has been left for future research work.

CONCLUSION :

To create a more egalitarian society, education assumes an important role to play. In this direction the responsibility to provide basic education to the citizen at completely free of cost rests on the government of a country. Since the adoption of constitution, it took nearly 60 years to make the right to free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years as a legal right of the child. Growing private institution especially unaided ones has mingled this provision in the sense that they do invite a higher cost compared to government and aided-private schools. An increasing number of parents has been opting the private schools due the reasons stated in the NSS 71st and 75th round surveys. Recent survey of ASER 2021 pointed that a reverse movement has been observed and probably the Covid-19 pandemic might be the reason for such behaviour of the parents to shift their child from private to government or less-expensive schools. Government schools must take this opportunity to reshape its images of poor-quality schools as reported by the stakeholders of these schools in the NSS survey (71st & 75th round). On other hand, government must take necessary action to abolish all sorts of expenses in school education especially at pre-primary and primary level.

NOTES :

1. Public Report On Basic Education (PROBE) Team conducted a survey in sampled villages of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan.
2. NA – Not available.
3. AAGR is computed by finding the arithmetic mean of a series of growth rates.
4. Includes the enrolment in school under local body management.
- 5, 6, 7. Aggregate enrolment in Govt, Private aided and Private unaided schools respectively and include non-reported and not known cases.
8. A student is considered as recipient of free education if the student is not required to pay any fee in the current academic year with respect to the education in basic course (NSS Report No.585: Household Social Consumption on Education in India, pp 101).
9. Central Square Foundation is a non-profit organisation working in education sector of India.

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