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File name: UM\_PRIVATE\_SCHOOLS\_IN\_KAMRUP\_METROPOLITAN\_DISTRI...  
File size: 1.47M  
Page count: 148  
Word count: 61,553  
Character count: 311,528  
Submission date: 26-Jul-2024 04:49PM (UTC+0530)  
Submission ID: 2421665065

### CHAPTER 1

#### Introduction

##### 1.1 The Research Problem

In the welfare model of modern State, education of the citizens is perceived as the responsibility of the State. But recent developments have complicated this relationship with the ascendance of neo-liberalism as a political philosophy and policy paradigm since the 80s. There has been an expansion of private schools all over the world with a reduced role of the state. In India as well, school education has seen a massive transformation (Jain et al., 2018). Overall, there has been a trend of differentiation among schools and the education system has become highly fragmented. The proliferation of different types of schools has led to increasing complexity of the schooling system (Vasavi, 2022). In the case of private schools, they are now ubiquitous in India and are found in every nook and corner of the country. For the year 2018-19, almost half (around 49%) of the school going population was enrolled in a non-government school (UDISE Dashboard, 2018-19). This includes the private aided schools, the unaided schools (recognised as well as the unrecognised ones), and other non-government schools. There's a wide spectrum of private schools, from the elite schools with high fees to the very low-cost ones, schools run by charitable trusts, 'edupreneurs' or corporate bodies, voluntary organisations, missionaries, philanthropic bodies or individual owners, catering to all the social classes (Mehendale and Mukhopadhyay, 2018). It is, however, the rapid growth of the low-fee private schools that seems to have contributed to the expansion of the private school system (Lahoti and Mukhopadhyay, 2019; Jain et al., 2018). The diverse nature of private schools reflects the existing inequalities in the Indian society (Jain et al., 2018).

In India, starting from the 80s, the urban middle classes, and the lower middle-class fractions and sections of the working class started exiting the government schools in favour of a range of private unaided schools (Nambissan, 2010, 2012; Jain et al., 2018). That the private schools are no longer sought after just by the well-to-do classes but also by the lower and the poorer classes has been highlighted by many (Tooley, 2007, 2009; Baird, 2009; Joshi, 2008 etc as cited in Nambissan, 2012). Some commentators seem to believe that the decline of government schools, the corresponding demand for private schools is because they offer education in English, a language

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