Gender Inequality in School Education with Special Reference to North East India

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Abstract

Education is viewed as a key factor in the development of human capital. However, in India it is marked by high levels of gender inequality. The objective of this paper is to examine the extent of gender inequality in school education (up to higher secondary) for the North East (NE) states vis-à-vis the all India level. Secondary data from various sources has been employed to examine this issue. The study concludes that gender disparity is very much in existence in NE states though it is relatively less than the all India level. Further the gender disparity is revealing declining trends in past decade in these states but at a slower pace. The smaller states of Mizoram and Meghalaya are showing better gender equality than the relatively larger states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in NE.

Introduction

Over the past few decades there has been an increased focus on the development of human capital as an engine for growth (Azariadis and Drazen, 1990; Barro, 1991; Mankiw et al., 1992). The interaction between human development and economic growth has been summed up by Ranis (2004) when he stated the existence of a two way relation between the two. Human development will have a positive effect on growth when human capabilities and freedom are enhanced for economic growth to take place. On the other hand, economic growth will enhance human development when increased incomes widen choices and capabilities of people at large. Human capital being a

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major component of the overall capital formation required in the process of growth and development, enhancing educational attainment would therefore assume a central and key position in such efforts. The pioneering work of Sen (1985) drew attention on the role of literacy rate and education as a measure of the standard of living of countries (Basu and Foster, 1998). The role of education is not only limited to human capital formation but encompasses a much broader spectrum. Most important of all, it is viewed as a means to bridge inequality amongst peoples and nations. However, in most developing countries including India, gender inequality in education has been one of the major eyesores eclipsing their growth and developmental efforts. One of the many indicators of gender inequality is in fact access to education and it specifically applies to:

1. The numbers and percentage of literate persons, by age and sex
2. Years of schooling completed, by level and sex
3. Gross primary and secondary school enrolment ratios for girls and boys.

The North East Region (NER) of India comprises the eight states of Arunachal Pradesh (AP), Assam (ASM), Manipur (MAN), Meghalaya (MEG), Mizoram (MIZ), Nagaland (NGL), Sikkim (SKM) and Tripura (TRI). These states collectively account for eight per cent of the total geographical area of the country and roughly four per cent of the total population of the country. The region is widely known for its ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. A major chunk of the population comprise of the tribals who are the main inhabitants of the region. However, in a few states like Assam and Tripura, tribals constitute a minority of the population. Being largely tribal societies, and in some states like Meghalaya the practice of the matrilineal system has facilitated an almost equal treatment given to both boys and girls. The region is considered to be one of the most economically backward in the country. Another feature related to the origin of education in this region is that it is largely a contribution made by the Christian missionaries for over more than a century. Over the course of time, this has evolved to a greater participation of both the public and private players. Further, special incentives and packages (such as the provision for setting up of central universities to cater to higher education) have been announced by the Government from time to time to improve the lot of the people residing in this remote part of the country.

From this, therefore, it would naturally be anticipated that education in the NE region would a typically be much favoured with

respect to girls as opposed to the all India situation and that their levels of educational attainment would be much higher than the rest of India. Further, it would also be anticipated that the gender gap in education would be non-existent due to the unbiased treatment of girls in the indigenous tribal societies. In light of this, this paper is an attempt to present a profile of girl's education in the region and further examine the extent of women's education in NER by reviewing its progress over the past decades. The remaining paper is organised as follows: Section 2 deals with the source and treatment of data. The empirical analysis and interpretation of various features are discussed in section 3. The last section is devoted to summary of conclusions and their relevant policy implications.

Data Sources

The data that has been used for this study is obtained from secondary sources namely; the Census data collected by the Government of India (GoI) for 1981, 1991 and 2001, Selected Educational Statistics, Ministry of Human Resources Development, GoI and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) unit data surveyed during the 50th (1993-94), 61st rounds (2004-05), respectively and NSSO report for the 64th round (2007-08). NSSO data has information on several easily quantifiable welfare indicators which is not available in the Census data. An important characteristic of NSSO data is that it is collected at the unit household level. The present study uses this unit record level statistics which enhances the reliability of its empirical results. It may be mentioned here that the main limitation of the study is the variations in data sources which may make the observations not strictly comparable.

Profile of Girl's Education in North East India

In this section we present a profile of the trends and thereof of girl's education in NE India. In order to examine the trends in girl's education we will examine the literacy rates by gender; years of schooling completed by level and gender and gross school enrolment ratios for girls and boys at the primary, middle and secondary and higher secondary levels.

Literacy Rate

Literacy rate has been measured as the proportion of population aged seven years and over that can read and write (and understand)

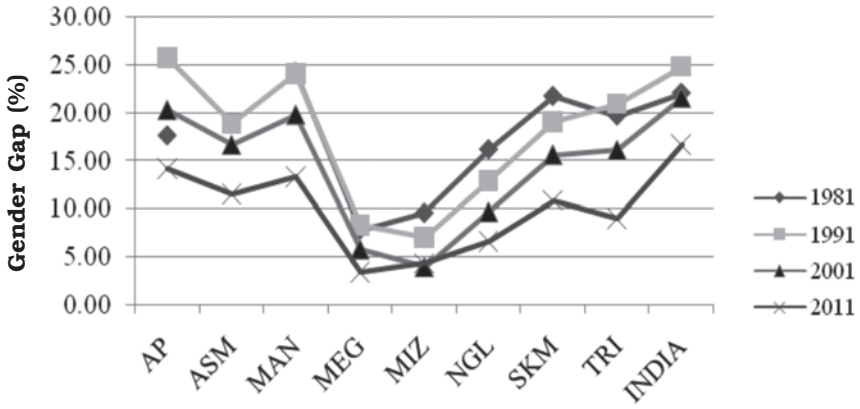
a simple message (GoI, 2001). It may be worthwhile to look at the representation of women vis-à-vis men in terms of their literacy rates as given in table I.

Table I
Literacy Rates in North East States by Gender (in %)

States	*AP*	*ASM*	*MAN*	*MEG*	*MIZ*	*NGL*	*SKM*	*TRI*	***India***
1981									
Males	28.9	NA	53.3	37.9	64.5	50.1	43.9	51.7	**46.9**
Females	11.3	NA	29.1	30.1	54.9	33.9	22.2	32.0	**24.8**
Persons	20.8	NA	41.4	34.1	59.9	42.6	34.1	42.1	**36.2**
1991									
Males	55.5	61.9	71.6	53.1	85.6	67.6	65.7	70.6	**64.1**
Females	29.7	43.0	47.6	44.9	78.6	54.8	46.7	49.7	**39.3**
Persons	41.6	52.9	59.89	49.1	82.3	61.7	56.9	60.4	**52.2**
2001									
Males	63.8	71.3	80.3	65.4	90.7	71.2	76.0	81.0	**75.3**
Females	43.5	54.6	60.5	59.6	86.8	61.5	60.4	64.9	**53.7**
Persons	54.3	63.3	70.5	62.6	88.8	66.6	68.8	73.2	**64.8**
2011*									
Males	73.7	78.8	86.5	77.2	93.7	83.3	87.3	92.2	**82.1**
Females	59.6	67.3	73.2	73.8	89.4	76.7	76.4	83.2	**65.5**
Persons	66.9	73.2	79.9	75.7	91.6	80.1	82.2	87.8	**74.0**

Source: Census of India, (Various Years); (* 2011 Provisional Report)

From table I it can be seen that there has been a substantial improvement in the educational attainment of the Indian population over the last several decades. Overall the literacy rate has increased substantially from 36.2 per cent in 1981 to 74 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate is higher in all the NE states except Arunachal Pradesh than all India average in the year 2011. Female literacy registered an increase from around 25 per cent in 1981 and currently stands at 65.5 per cent in 2011 at the all India level. On the other hand, the literacy rates of males which were 47 per cent in 1981 increased to around 82 per cent in 2011. Despite the higher growth of female literacy rate (40.5 per cent) during the period 1981 to 2011 compared to male literacy rate (35 per cent); yet the gender gap in education has not narrowed down appreciably over the past decades as it still remains at around 17 per cent in 2011(Figure I). This goes to show that in the face of the improvements in literacy rates, the educational gap between males and females still continues to exist.



States* (AP-Arunachal Pradesh, ASM-Assam, MAN-Manipur, MEG-Meghalaya, MIZ-Mizoram, NGL-Nagaland, SKM-Sikkim, TRI-Tripura)

Figure I: Gender Gap in Literacy Rates

Source: Complied from Census Reports (Various Years)

As at the all India level, for the NER too literacy rates of males are observed to be at much higher levels than that of females. However, the gender gap is narrower for the NER compared to the all India situation (Figure I). This is largely due to higher female literacy rates in the NE states compared to the all-India average. In 2011, gender gap in literacy was the highest for Arunachal Pradesh at 14 per cent and the lowest for Meghalaya at around three per cent, Mizoram at four percent and Nagaland at six per cent, respectively. For the remaining states the gender gap in literacy was around 10 to 13 per cent. The question that ensues is whether the figures indicate that gender discrimination in education is much lower in the NER compared to the rest of India?

Examining literacy rates by area in the different NE states reveals the existence of not just the gender gap but also the urban-rural differences. Despite the steady improvement in female literacy in the NE states over the decades, the urban-rural gap is still an extension of the all India scenario. The figures indicate higher literacy rates for the urban residents compared to the rural residents. For instance in 2001, urban literacy rates stood at 80.3 per cent compared to 59.4 per cent for the rural areas. Across states, rural literacy rates are almost half the urban literacy rates. The only upside to this is that the urban-rural gap appears to be converging with each and every decade. To better shed light on this we have presented female literacy rates by area for the different NE states in table II.

Table II
Female Literacy Rates by Area (in %)

	1981			*1991*			*2001*		
States	*Rural*	*Urban*	*U-R*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*U-R*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*U-R*
AP	9.6	41.2	31.6	25.3	62.2	36.9	36.9	69.5	32.6
ASM	NA	NA	NA	39.2	73.3	34.1	50.7	80.2	29.5
MAN	25.1	40.2	15.1	43.3	58.7	15.4	57.0	70.0	13.1
MEG	24.0	58.8	34.9	37.1	77.3	40.2	53.2	83.5	30.3
MIZ	49.9	70.5	20.6	67.0	91.6	24.6	77.3	95.8	18.5
NAG	30.3	56.9	26.7	50.4	79.1	28.7	57.5	81.4	23.9
SKM	18.2	45.4	27.2	43.9	74.9	31.0	58.0	79.2	21.2
TRI	27.6	67.1	39.5	44.3	76.9	32.6	60.5	85.0	24.5
India	**18.0**	**47.8**	**29.9**	**30.6**	**64.1**	**33.4**	**46.1**	**72.9**	**26.7**

Source: Census of India, (Various Years). U-R = Urban Rural gap

As can be observed from table II, while rural literacy rates continue to be lower than urban literacy rates, women in rural NE states have a comparatively higher literacy rate than the all India average. The same is also observed for women in the urban areas. This indicates a steady improvement in women's education. Across states minor variations are observed. For instance, while all the other NE states are showing a fairly consistent improvement in the urban-rural gap, the only exception is observed for Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam. In these states, the urban-rural divide in women education stands much higher than the all India level, as of 2001. Even though Arunachal Pradesh has shown an improvement over the years, yet it is exhibiting the lowest literacy rates in the entire NE. This stands in sharp contrast to states like Mizoram with a relatively higher literacy rate recorded for both men and women.

An examination of the literacy rates by gender and area yields the following: First, women still have lower educational attainment then men. The gender gap in literacy is still very much in existence, even though it has narrowed down over the years. Second, the urban-rural divide has not been bridged as the urban population still has a higher educational attainment than the rural population. Third, rural women's educational attainment exhibits very slow progress and continues to remain at lower levels.

Years of Schooling Completed

The extent of literacy depends to a greater level on the attendance and non attendance in schools. To examine the proportion of children attending and not attending schools at different levels, NSSO data

for the 50th (1993-94), 61st (2004-05) and 64th (2007-08) rounds on employment and unemployment has been used. The information provided in this data set is reported in table III.

Table III
Proportion of Children Attending Schools in NE States (in %)

		1993-94			***2004-05***			***2007-08****		
States	*Area*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
AP	Rural	20.7	24.8	22.8	40.4	48.6	44.7	50.6	57.4	54.1
	Urban	40.5	32.2	36.2	61.7	67.8	64.9	65.0	72.2	78.7
ASM	Rural	23.2	27.3	25.4	44.4	47.7	46.1	44.1	55.6	50.2
	Urban	28.6	20.2	24.4	46.9	50.6	48.7	44.3	46.9	45.6
MAN	Rural	33.7	35.3	34.5	54.7	62.9	58.9	52.1	59.6	56.1
	Urban	43.8	38.5	41.2	63.8	71.8	67.9	63.4	66.3	65.2
MEG	Rural	18.2	18.6	18.4	46.0	45.6	45.8	52.2	55.0	53.6
	Urban	32.6	26.8	29.8	52.6	63.7	57.7	58.2	51.8	55.5
MIZ	Rural	26.4	27.6	27.0	48.4	48.8	48.6	55.8	59.7	57.9
	Urban	31.9	25.3	28.7	61.5	70.2	65.9	54.5	62.0	58.4
NAG	Rural	39.5	45.1	42.4	50.1	59.7	55.0	38.5	44.8	41.8
	Urban	35.8	33.1	34.3	54.8	64.9	60.0	48.8	58.5	53.9
SKM	Rural	30.3	29.7	30.0	55.7	54.2	54.9	53.1	57.5	55.3
	Urban	38.0	23.6	30.3	44.0	51.6	48.1	35.4	41.1	38.7
TRI	Rural	27.9	32.1	30.1	48.8	50.2	49.5	44.2	48.3	46.4
	Urban	29.5	27.0	28.3	39.3	48.7	43.6	43.2	53.3	48.2
All India	**Rural**	**15.8**	**22.7**	**19.3**	**36.7**	**44.4**	**40.7**	**44.6**	**51.7**	**48.3**
	Urban	**24.3**	**22.0**	**23.2**	**43.8**	**44.9**	**44.4**	**43.4**	**45.4**	**44.6**

Source: NSSO 50th, 61st& 64th Round Employment and Unemployment Data.

An examination of the level of current attendance of children at different levels of schooling for all the NE states reveals the following: First, the proportion of children attending school in all the NE states has increased over time. Second, the urban-rural divide is still in existence. Rural boys and girls have lower attendance compared to urban boys and girls. The only exception here is for the state of Sikkim, where the proportion of rural children is relatively higher than that of the urban children. This could be attributable to a higher proportion of children in the rural areas. Third, the gender gap in education is very much in existence. The gender-gap increases as one progress to higher levels of schooling (see appendix tables III: A, B and C at page 29). While at lower levels of schooling (primary and middle levels)

girls are observed to be almost at par with boys in terms of attendance, the situation is the opposite for high and higher secondary levels. Attendance of girls at different levels of schooling diminishes at each and every successive stage. For all NE states uniformly, boys are observed to be having a higher percentage of attendance compared to girls. This difference is also observed at the all India level.

It has been noted by researchers that the proportion of children attending school declines as one progress to higher levels of education (Velkoff, 1999; World Bank, 2003). Accordingly, it can also be inferred that the proportion of girls not attending schools would naturally be high. This can be verified by an examination of the proportion of children not attending schools.

Table IV reports the proportion of children not attending schools for all stages, that is primary, middle and secondary and higher secondary stages, for all the NE states.

Table IV
Proportion of Children Not Attending School in NE States (in %)

		1993-94			*2004-05*			*2007-08*		
States	*Sector*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
AP	Rural	78.9	74.9	76.8	59.3	51.1	55.1	44.4	38.3	40.9
	Urban	58.7	59.9	59.3	37.5	30.9	33.9	27.7	18.7	23.3
ASM	Rural	76.1	71.6	73.7	55.1	51.5	53.2	52.8	41.4	46.7
	Urban	68.6	68.0	68.3	49.7	46.4	48.1	49.8	43.9	46.8
MAN	Rural	64.7	62.0	63.4	44.6	36.3	40.3	42.4	34.4	38.1
	Urban	54.8	53.4	54.1	33.8	25.4	29.5	29.9	28.1	28.9
MEG	Rural	81.5	80.7	81.1	53.6	54.2	53.9	38.1	33.5	35.8
	Urban	65.3	64.5	64.9	45.8	34.7	40.6	25.7	28.5	27.0
MIZ	Rural	72.7	71.6	72.2	51.4	50.8	51.1	41.1	39.7	40.4
	Urban	65.4	64.3	64.8	36.6	28.2	32.4	38.4	29.1	33.7
NGL	Rural	59.8	54.0	56.8	48.6	38.6	43.5	54.3	48.5	51.5
	Urban	62.4	56.2	58.8	41.7	32.1	36.7	41.6	35.0	38.2
SKM	Rural	69.3	69.7	69.5	43.9	45.5	44.7	41.4	36.2	38.7
	Urban	61.6	69.1	65.8	52.9	45.4	48.8	57.8	48.6	52.4
TRI	Rural	71.6	66.9	69.2	50.8	49.3	50.1	53.4	44.5	51.5
	Urban	68.6	66.4	67.5	58.5	48.8	54.0	45.3	38.4	42.1
All India	**Rural**	**83.9**	**76.4**	**80.0**	**62.5**	**54.5**	**58.4**	**52.6**	**44.3**	**48.3**
	Urban	**73.6**	**70.3**	**71.9**	**53.2**	**51.4**	**52.2**	**47.8**	**45.6**	**46.7**

Source: As in Table III

It can be gauged from table IV that India and the NER in particular have a very high rate of children not attending schools. For the NE states the figures in the rural areas average around 43 per cent of boys and girls that do not attend educational institutions in 2007-08, and around 37 percent in the urban areas, while it is around 47 to 48 per cent, respectively for all India. This difference reflects the distortion of the educational system existing in the rural and urban areas. Further, gender difference of non-attendance in educational institutions is also very much visible. As can be seen from the table, be it for individual states in the NE region or the country as a whole, girls constitute a higher proportion of children not attending schools. Even though the figures have declined from the years 1993-94 to 2007-08, it still becomes obvious that girls are generally given a secondary status when it comes to education.

Gross School Enrolment Ratios

To further explore the issue of such disparities we will examine the gross school enrolment at different educational stages. Gross enrolment ratio (GER) is defined as the percentage of enrolment in classes I-V, VI-VIII and IX -XII to the estimated population in the age group 6 to below 11 years and 11 to below 14 years and 14 to 18 years respectively. Enrolment in these stages includes under-age and over-age children. Hence, the percentage may be more than 100 per cent in some cases. The GER at the primary, middle, and higher secondary levels by gender across the NE states has been reported in table V.

Table V
Gender-wise Gross Enrolment Ratio by Stages/Classes (in %)

Stages	*Year*	*Sex*	*AP*	*ASM*	*MAN*	*MEG*	*MIZ*	*NGL*	*SKM*	*TRI*	*India*
Primary I-V	**1980-81**	Boys	94.5	78.8	125.7	64.5	82.6	103.7	122.6	121.4	**95.8**
		Girls	50.7	62.6	103.2	67.2	74.2	83.4	85.9	93.6	**64.1**
	1990-91	Boys	121.4	109.7	118.7	67.4	153.4	113.2	130.0	144.0	**114.0**
		Girls	58.1	89.7	105.1	60.8	146.1	99.1	115.2	122.7	**85.5**
	2004-05	Boys	130.0	105.6	154.4	145.3	132.3	88.7	144.5	133.7	**110.7**
		Girls	115.9	104.8	148.9	150.0	122.7	87.2	142.7	128.3	**104.7**
	2007-08	Boys	149.1	106.0	176.0	193.5	176.1	92.5	149.3	149.4	**115.3**
		Girls	136.6	106.2	170.3	189.5	165.7	92.5	146.7	146.2	**112.6**
	1980-81	Boys	29.0	48.8	60.8	31.6	52.2	45.4	43.7	48.2	**54.3**
		Girls	13.4	31.0	41.0	28.3	45.0	34.2	25.1	34.5	**28.6**

Middle VI-VIII	**1990-91**	Boys	54.7	60.3	69.8	38.8	78.3	67.3	46.8	80.2	**76.6**
		Girls	33.3	43.9	61.3	38.0	79.4	63.0	45.1	64.7	**47.0**
	2004-05	Boys	81.8	72.1	97.7	72.1	82.2	55.7	61.5	80.7	**74.3**
		Girls	69.2	67.2	91.5	81.0	81.3	55.5	72.2	75.6	**65.1**
	2007-08	Boys	100.9	92.0	107.6	99.7	86.3	58.9	67.6	88.0	**81.5**
		Girls	87.7	90.5	100.9	107.0	85.0	61.3	81.9	87.6	**74.4**
Higher Secondary IX-XII	**1980-81**	Boys	13.2	27.0	40.9	18.7	28.0	19.7	10.9	27.4	**34.2**
		Girls	4.8	14.7	24.0	16.5	21.9	11.0	6.0	18.2	**15.4**
	1990-91	Boys	29.5	26.9	40.1	13.7	24.7	21.2	23.3	35.7	**33.9**
		Girls	14.6	18.1	28.7	12.5	24.4	18.9	18.6	24.6	**10.3**
	2004-05	Boys	0.6	35.9	50.5	32.6	44.2	21.5	33.1	41.3	**44.3**
		Girls	0.5	28.3	46.8	33.9	45.1	21.1	33.5	36.3	**35.1**
	2007-08	Boys	65.4	46.3	77.0	49.1	67.1	27.2	44.4	59.9	**62.6**
		Girls	60.6	41.9	77.4	53.7	70.3	30.1	45.1	59.8	**53.2**

Source: Selected Educational Statistics (Various Issues)

It can be inferred from table V that, while, enrolments at the primary stages continue to remain at higher levels for both boys and girls, the same is not evident for middle and higher secondary stages. The ratio of school enrolment appears to be waning as one proceeds to higher levels of education. A major educational problem facing both boys and girls is that although they may be enrolled at the beginning of the year, they don't always remain in school. An important point to note is that girls' enrolment although declining from one stage to another, remains much lower than those of boys. UNICEF (1999) estimated that 41 per cent of Indian girls under the age of 14 years do not attend school and are often taken out of school to help with the family responsibilities. This in fact is one of the most distressing aspects of the educational system in contemporary India. NSSO (2007-08) reported that the primary factor responsible for non-enrolment of children is that parents are not interested in the education of their children. Besides, financial constraints and the belief that education is not necessary are the other major factors.

Examining the gross enrolment for the different NE states we also see the existence of gender disparities in enrolment. For stages I to V we witness a lower girls to boys enrolment which gradually improved over the years. On an average, girls enrolment at stages I to V, in 1980-81 was only 77.6 per cent while boys was 99.2 per cent respectively which increased to 144.2 and 149 per cent respectively in 2007-08. For middle and higher secondary levels we observe a

gradual deceleration of enrolment for both boys and girls. In 2007-08, enrolment for both sexes in VI to VII stages was around 88 per cent and 55 per cent for IX to XII stages. This shows a declining enrolment as one proceeds to higher educational levels. Inter-state difference in enrolment is also evident. For instance, Nagaland and Assam continue to have the lowest enrolments for all levels of education compared to the other NE states. Sikkim has also not fared well for secondary and higher secondary levels as the enrolments are still less than the rest of the NE and the all India level. On the other hand, Arunachal Pradesh has shown slight improvement in enrolments at higher educational stages. Meghalaya and Mizoram have exhibited an almost proportional enrolment among boys and girls over the years.

The declining enrolment rate of girls at different stages of schooling can be weighed against the total enrolment of students at each corresponding stage. This is shown in table VI where we present the percentage of girls' enrolment to total enrolment in different stages/classes of education for the different NE states for 2004-05 and 2007-08.

Table VI
Percentage of Girls Enrolment in Different Stages/Classes

States	*2004-05*			*2007-08*		
	Primary (I-V)	*Middle (VI-VIII)*	*Secondary (IX-XII)*	*Primary (I-V)*	*Middle (VI-VIII)*	*Secondary (IX-XII)*
AP	45.8	45.2	41.3	46.7	45.9	44.9
ASM	48.9	47.0	42.5	49.2	48.5	45.2
MAN	48.2	47.3	47.9	48.3	47.4	47.9
MEG	50.3	52.1	50.3	49.0	51.2	51.5
MIZ	47.6	48.9	49.9	48.5	48.8	49.6
NGL	47.8	48.0	47.4	48.2	48.9	48.2
SKM	49.7	52.8	50.3	49.2	53.7	50.9
TRI	47.8	47.1	45.5	48.5	48.8	46.8
India	**46.7**	**44.4**	**41.5**	**47.5**	**45.7**	**43.4**

Source : Compiled from Selected Educational Statistics (Various issues).

As suggested by table VI, the percentage of girls enrolled at different stages of education has marginally increased over time. However, with every increase in educational stages, the percentage of girls' enrolment is exhibiting a declining trend. This implies that girls' enrolment at different stages of education peaks only at the primary level and from then on starts the downward movement with

every higher level of education. On the other hand, it also implies boys' enrolment increases with every higher stages of education. The only upswing is the relatively high and increasing enrolment for girls in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim at around 49 to 50 per cent for all stages as of 2007-08. Clearly a lot still needs to be done towards achieving higher enrolment of girls at all stages of education.

This disparity in the school enrolment of girls and boys becomes noticeable when we examine the gender parity index (GPI) in education. GPI is calculated by dividing girl's GER by boy's GER of a given level of education. It measures progress towards gender equity in education. When the GPI shows a value equal to one at any level of education it shows that there is no gender disparity at that level and learning opportunities are available for girls equally to that of boys. Figure II presents the gender parity index in education.

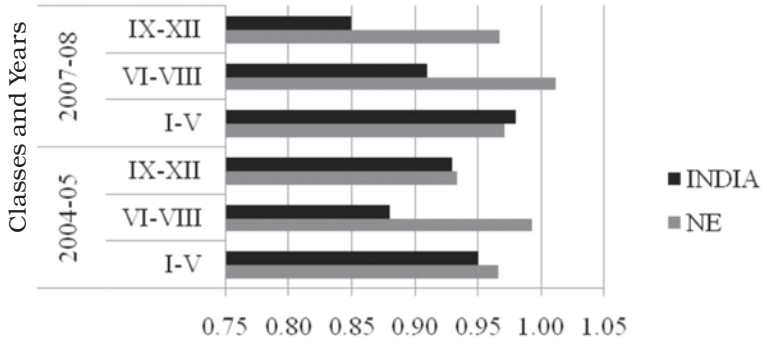


Figure II : Gender Parity Index

Source : Compiled from Selected Educational Statistics (Various Issues)

Figure II corroborates the existence of an imbalance in enrolment and educational attainment of boys and girls for all levels of education. For instance, in 2007-08 the index is less than one for all other stages of education except for stages VI to VIII only wherein it is greater than one. Comparing between the educational attainment of children in the NE states and the all India figure, the index is much higher in the former compared to the latter. Thus, it could lead to the belief that there is less gender discrimination in the NE states. However, it is important to note that even if that were the case the figures still exhibits a disparity between the educational attainment of boys and girls in the NE states in particular and India in general. The persistent problem of educational inequality

confronting these societies today could also be attributed to high drop out rates of children in these states. We present the drop-out rates for the different NE states in table VII. The drop-out rate represents the percentage of pupils who drop out from a given grade or cycle or level of education in a given school year.

Table VII
Drop-Out Rate from I-X stages of school education in NE India

States	*1990-91*			*2004-05*			*2007-08*		
	I-X			*I-X*			*I-X*		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
AP	79.1	82.2	80.2	69.6	72.3	70.8	63.7	62.2	63.0
ASM	79.8	83.4	81.4	75.2	74.7	74.9	80.1	80.2	75.7
MAN	74.2	78.4	76.1	46.0	39.6	43.0	47.9	40.8	44.6
MEG	66.0	59.7	63.1	79.6	78.7	79.2	76.8	75.5	76.1
MIZ	45.4	42.2	43.9	69.5	64.1	66.9	72.1	67.9	70.2
NGL	68.9	68.8	68.9	66.9	67.6	67.3	74.6	73.4	74.0
SKM	84.9	85.9	85.4	83.3	81.2	82.3	80.6	79.3	79.9
TRI	83.5	85.7	84.5	73.6	73.1	73.4	73.5	73.4	73.4
India	**67.5**	**76.9**	**71.3**	**60.4**	**63.9**	**61.9**	**56.6**	**57.3**	**56.7**

Source: Selected Educational Statistics (Various Issues)

Clearly, the NE states inspite of having a better performance in terms of the overall literacy levels and enrolments compared to the rest of India is, suffering from high levels of school drop outs amongst boys and girls. There has been a higher drop-out rate of both girls and boys in all the NE states, with the lowest only for Manipur. For the rest of the states their dropout rates are much higher than the national average. Similarly, gender breakup of the drop-out rates also reveals the same picture. From table VII it can be noticed that in all the three time periods (1990-91, 2004-05 and 2007-08), drop-out rates of females are much higher than males in all levels of education. This is one of the major causes of the low levels of educational attainment of females in not just the NE states but for India as a whole. The reason for high drop-outs though varied is dependent on various factors. NSSO (2007-08) reported that 21.4 per cent of drop-outs in the country are commonly due to financial constraints and 20 per cent is due to the child's lack of interest in their studies. Other factors includes the inability to cope up or failure in their studies, completion of the desired level or class of education and parents' lack of interest in their children's studies. This proves

that gender bias is very much in existence even in these states as is in the all India situation, though at lower levels in comparison to the latter.

Conclusion and Implications

To sum up, this paper has highlighted the status of female education in NE India. By examining the various aspects of education such as the literacy rates, years of schooling completed and school enrolment ratios, it can be safely stated that gender equality in school education has not been achieved in the NE states. Gender inequality is still in existence, even though it is relatively less than the all India level. Further the gender disparity is revealing declining trends in past decade in these states but at a slower pace. Despite high literacy rates, girls' education in NE India still suffers from low enrolments, especially at higher stages of schooling. This is further compounded by the high level of dropout rates among the girls. Moreover, the existence of the gender gap in education suggests that boy's education is still preferred over that of girls. Some smaller states like Mizoram and Meghalaya are showing better gender equality than the relatively larger states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in NER. It may be pointed here, that the former states are largely tribal and Christian dominated states as opposed to the latter, which is a mix population of tribals and non-tribals and are mostly Hindu dominated. This comparatively lower gender inequality in the former states on the one hand could reflect the role and influence of missionary education. Most importantly, on the other, the practice of matriliny and domination of tribal culture appears to be the main influencing factor of lower gender inequality.

Efforts at reducing this problem of inequality while in place as provided for by various governmental schemes, the lacunae appears to be in the implementation. If this loophole is not properly addressed the consequent impact at higher levels of education will lead to a further divergence rather than a convergence of the gender gap in education. The other issue is related to appropriate and effective planning and its implementation. In this context regional educational planning taking into consideration the regional situations is of utmost importance. This requires the immediate attention of policy makers. By registering the number of children born, the authorities can plan for their education by putting in place the requisite infrastructure for the future. This will not only aid in enrolment through the availability of schools but most importantly the retention of children

in schools. Finally, the regional differences in education as well as urban-rural disparities also need to be addressed. The concentration of better educational institutions in urban and metropolis areas is resulting in a large number of rural children to drop out of schools. A more concerted effort is therefore required to genuinely improve infrastructure in such backward areas of the country. The main challenge for us, however, remains that we bridge this gap in education by increasing equality of opportunities for girls with emphasis to be laid not just on primary but also higher education. One important factor that would work in favour of this effort at reducing gender inequality lies in the inherent structure of the NE societies themselves. The social practices prevalent in these societies – which manifest in the equal treatment of both boys and girls – should be further encouraged to achieve the desired goals in education.

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Appendix

Table III A
Proportion of Children Attending Primary School in NE States (in %)

States	Sector	1993-94			2004-05			2007-08*		
		Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
AP	Rural	9.4	10.8	10.1	21.2	25.1	23.2	29.3	30.4	29.9
	Urban	11.7	12.4	12.1	27.9	29.8	28.9	30.2	27.6	28.9
ASM	Rural	10.3	11.4	10.9	24.3	25.1	24.7	21.3	31.1	26.5
	Urban	9.3	8.0	8.6	17.3	22.3	19.7	20.6	22.7	21.7
MAN	Rural	10.6	9.2	9.9	22.5	24.1	23.3	28.7	32.3	30.6
	Urban	9.6	13.3	11.5	25.6	27.2	26.4	32.5	31.8	32.2
MEG	Rural	7.5	7.1	7.3	20.7	24.2	22.5	29.2	31.8	30.5
	Urban	9.3	11.1	10.2	16.4	23.2	19.5	26.2	26.2	26.2
MIZ	Rural	9.6	8.1	8.8	23.2	21.5	22.3	30.1	32.7	31.5
	Urban	11.6	10.4	11.0	17.9	23.6	20.7	24.9	23.9	24.4
NGL	Rural	12.3	12.1	12.2	20.2	22.7	21.5	18.0	23.4	20.7
	Urban	10.4	12.7	11.8	16.3	19.0	17.7	20.3	23.9	22.2
SKM	Rural	13.2	11.6	12.3	27.4	23.9	25.6	29.1	31.7	30.4
	Urban	13.4	9.8	11.4	14.4	21.6	18.4	22.4	27.8	25.6
TRI	Rural	14.2	15.8	15.0	24.3	23.2	23.8	21.9	24.7	23.4
	Urban	12.8	12.2	12.5	17.8	16.4	17.1	19.6	19.7	19.7
India	**Rural**	**7.9**	**10.1**	**9.04**	**20.4**	**22.8**	**21.6**	**25.2**	**27.8**	**26.6**
	Urban	**9.3**	**9.9**	**9.61**	**17.1**	**17.3**	**17.2**	**19.6**	**20.8**	**20.3**

Source: As in table III

Table III B
Proportion of Children Attending Middle School in NE States (in %)

States	Sector	1993-94			2004-05			2007-08		
		Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total
AP	Rural	4.4	5.7	5.1	9.2	10.5	9.9	12.4	10.9	11.7
	Urban	12.1	8.7	10.3	15.5	13.3	14.3	17.1	19.2	18.2
ASM	Rural	5.6	7.1	6.4	10.0	10.7	10.3	14.0	13.4	13.7
	Urban	7.3	7.6	7.4	12.7	10.9	11.9	13.6	12.5	13.0
MAN	Rural	8.0	8.2	8.1	11.6	13.6	12.69	11.8	13.5	12.7
	Urban	8.4	7.6	8.0	12.5	15.2	13.9	13.0	15.9	14.6
MEG	Rural	6.0	6.7	6.4	8.2	7.2	7.7	15.7	14.4	15.1
	Urban	10.4	9.2	9.8	9.0	11.6	10.2	19.2	9.7	15.1

MIZ	Rural	7.4	8.6	8.1	12.4	11.6	12.0	16.1	18.4	17.3
	Urban	7.5	8.8	8.2	16.4	16.0	16.2	15.0	20.4	17.8
NGL	Rural	11.1	10.6	10.8	11.0	11.3	11.2	10.2	9.5	9.9
	Urban	10.3	9.6	9.9	7.8	10.1	9.0	11.2	15.3	13.4
SKM	Rural	7.5	7.7	7.6	15.5	15.1	15.3	15.5	15.4	15.5
	Urban	7.7	6.7	7.2	10.9	14.4	12.8	7.1	8.7	8.0
TRI	Rural	6.6	9.4	8.0	12.2	12.6	12.4	14.0	12.1	13.0
	Urban	8.3	8.4	8.4	8.1	13.3	10.5	8.3	14.5	11.4
India	**Rural**	**3.4**	**5.1**	**4.3**	**8.1**	**10.0**	**9.1**	**11.7**	**13.5**	**12.6**
	Urban	**5.8**	**5.9**	**5.9**	**9.8**	**9.6**	**9.7**	**12.0**	**12.0**	**12.0**

Source: As in Table III

Table III C
Proportion of Children Attending Secondary School in NE States (in %)

		1993-94			***2004-05***			***2007-08***		
States	*Sector*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
AP	Rural	2.5	4.7	3. 7	6.5	8.7	7.7	8.9	16.1	12.5
	Urban	10.0	9.1	9.5	12.0	15.0	13.6	17.7	25.4	31.6
ASM	Rural	5.8	7.7	6.8	8.1	9.0	8.6	8.8	11.1	10.0
	Urban	9.7	9.5	9.6	11.4	11.4	11.4	10.1	11.7	10.9
MAN	Rural	7.2	9.9	8.5	14.24	16.8	15.6	11.6	13.8	12.8
	Urban	8.7	8.6	8.7	16.7	17.7	17.2	17.9	18.6	18.4
MEG	Rural	2.6	2.7	2.7	6.97	6.9	6.9	7.3	8.8	8.0
	Urban	8.9	8.6	8.7	18.47	18.8	18.6	12.8	15.9	14.2
MIZ	Rural	5. 7	6. 9	6.3	10.1	11.9	11.0	9.6	8.6	9.1
	Urban	9.5	9.8	9.7	20.8	22.57	21.7	14.6	17.7	16.2
NGL	Rural	11.6	17.6	14.8	12.3	17.2	14.8	10.3	11.9	11.2
	Urban	9.4	11.6	10.6	18.5	22.4	20.5	17.3	19.3	18.3
SKM	Rural	3.9	3.8	3.8	9.4	11.1	10.3	8.5	10.4	9.4
	Urban	9.9	7.5	8. 6	8.9	7.5	8.1	5.9	4.6	5.1
TRI	Rural	2.7	3.3	3.0	7.4	9.4	8.5	8.3	11.5	10.0
	Urban	4.0	6.6	5.3	8.0	11.6	9.7	15.3	19.1	17.1
India	**Rural**	**1.9**	**4.1**	**3.0**	**5.5**	**8.3**	**6.9**	**7.7**	**10.4**	**9.1**
	Urban	**4.9**	**5.6**	**5.3**	**10. 7**	**11.3**	**11.0**	**11.8**	**12.6**	**12.3**