



HIGHER EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A GLANCE AT FINANCIAL SUPPORT SCHEMES FOR THE MARGINALIZED

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ABSTRACT

“If you educate the man, you educate the person, but if you educate the woman, you educate the nation.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Higher education, especially in developing economies like India, directly contributes to the vertical upliftment of women, moreover towards economic sustainability. Representation of women in higher education is growing fast, but the representation of women from marginalized sections of the society, i.e., SC/ST, OBC and Minority has not been increased proportionately. Gross enrolment of girls in higher education is 25.4% whereas GER of girls from SC/ST is 21.8% and 15.9% respectively as compared to total GER in higher education 25.8% in All India Survey on Higher Education (2017-18). The enrolment of scheduled Casts students is 14.4% and Scheduled Tribes students are just 5.2% of the total enrolment. There are about 35.0% of students in higher education belong to Other Backward Classes and merely 5.0% of students who belong to Muslim Minority and 2.2% from Other Minority Communities. On the other hand, female enrolment in institutions of national importance is still marginal in number. Enrolment of Ph.D. scholars contributes to merely 0.10% of the total population in the higher education sector (AISHE, 2018). This paper here made an attempt to look into the status of girls/women in higher education and more specifically the financial assistance schemes in higher and research level of education among the marginalized community.

KEY WORDS: *Women Empowerment, Higher Education, Financial Assistance Scheme, Marginalized Sections*

INTRODUCTION

The progress of a nation depends upon the progress of the women. Similarly, the progress of entire women community relies on the progress of the marginalized community, who constitute about 35% of the total population and about 48% of the population from marginalized sections of the society. Higher education, especially in developing economies like India, directly contributes to the vertical upliftment of women, moreover towards economic sustainability. The recent data from AISHE (2017-18) shows significant development in the GER of women (48.1%) in higher education in India. Further at the research education level, women have moved much beyond their male counterparts with 58% GER.

Representation of women in higher education is growing fast, but the representation of women from marginalized sections of the society, i.e., SC/ST, OBC, and Minority have not been increased proportionately. Gross enrolment of girls in higher education is 25.4% whereas GER of girls from SC/ST is 21.8% and 15.9% respectively as compared to total

GER in higher education 25.8% in All India Survey on Higher Education (2017-18). The enrolment of scheduled Casts students is 14.4%, and Scheduled Tribes students are just 5.2% of the total enrolment. There are about 35.0% students in higher education belong to Other Backward Classes and merely 5.0% students who belong to Muslim Minority and 2.2% from Other Minority Communities.

On the other hand, female enrolment in institutions of national importance is still marginal in number. Enrolment of Ph.D. scholars contributes to a merely 0.10% of the total population in the higher education sector (AISHE, 2018). Further, the ratio of male and female Ph.D. scholars (in nonprofessional programmes) in higher education is about 60:40 as per the recent data sources.

The contribution of social-religious categories and gender category in the teaching faculty in higher education institutions are significantly dismal. SC and ST together constitute of about 10.8% of total teaching positions in the higher education institutions. On the other hand, OBC constitutes off about

33% of the total teaching faculty in higher education institutions. The proportion of female SC and female Minority teaching faculty is 56/100 against their male teachers counterpart. Women empowerment leads to gender equality (NMEW, GoI). National Mission for the Empowerment of Women launched various schemes for the women empowerment through; Women Hostels in Higher Education Institutions, Women Studies Centre in Universities, Women Polytechnics, Capacity Building for Women Managers, Residential Schemes for Women, Tuition Fee Waiver schemes, Scholarships and Fellowships from Post Matric to Post-Doctorate Level.

The conditions of the women from the marginalized sections of the society (SC/ST/OBC/ PWD/Minority) are much vulnerable in terms of social development. Further, the socio-educational conditions of SC/ST/Minority are comparatively stagnant for years in the race of educational progress. The caste based and religion based inequality have contributed much towards social, economic and educational underdevelopment especially among the women of the marginalized society. Although, the official data from AISHE, UGC, and other sources of higher education show positive development but, when it comes to proportionate development with non-marginalized society, the conditions are almost stagnant for decades with little visible educational progress.

UGC Regulation 2012 on "Promoting Equity in Higher Education Institutions" has been there to promote social, religious, caste, gender-based inclusion, but still unable to equalize the existing gap. As far as research education is concerned, there exists a significant difference between male and female researchers in the higher education sector. Further, among the marginalized sections of the society, there is a huge gender difference among SC/ST, OBC and Minority enrolment.

Contemporary studies

Higher education leads to women empowerment by ability enhancement leading to an increase in earning capacity (Packianathan, Anushree & Manjunatha, 2016). Although the number from marginalized sections of the society have been growing routinely but the social stigma and gender-based discrimination still exist inside and outside the classroom of higher education institutions largely due to lack of leadership opportunity (CPRHE, 2017). Whereas, Sharma and Afroj (2016) concluded that only literacy and school education is not sufficient for women empowerment rather higher and professional education leads to women empowerment. They further argued that social constraints and financial burden are the most critical factors which hinder women empowerment in Indian society.

Kingdom (2002) in her research shows the findings of some recent research on the social and the economic benefits of female education and emphasizes on giving importance on the ways through which women's schooling leads to social gains. On the other hand, Chanana (2007) examined the participation of women in higher education in pre and post liberalization era and found that due to the lower and stagnant cost of education in the post-independent period, women participated well in nonprofessional education. It happened largely due to nature of funding for higher education was more with state subject, whereas in post-liberalization period, funding went to the private sector which further led to declining in women participation due to the increasing cost of education and socio-cultural stigma towards women for higher education.

Kanan (2012) Opined that higher education institutions are not gender-neutral in terms of their structures and functions. UGC made several efforts in the past to promote gender equality in higher education and succeeded in increasing students enrolment significantly but not the teaching faculty. Besides these, the Sixth Survey on Educational Research (2006) has also significantly pointed out that researches and studies are required on higher education in relation with women empowerment.

Definition of the keywords

Women Empowerment: Women empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their potential and powers in all spheres of life. Women empowerment means more than just having power attained by the women, rather a kind of power which is sustainable in nature. Here in this paper, women empowerment implies an ability to sustain in further higher education and attainment to university/college level academic jobs, both in governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Higher Education: Higher education means post-school education; in other words, education under-graduation onwards. Here in this paper, students from post-graduation onwards consist of higher education.

Financial Assistance Schemes: There are several financial assistance schemes available by the central government and the respective state governments at a different level of education. Here in this paper, financial assistance provided to the women researchers by the UGC and ICSSR at the research level in the name of UGC-RGNF, UGC-MANF, UGC-NFST UGC-PDF for women, UGC-NFOBC, UGC-NFPWD and ICSSR Doctoral Fellowships.

Marginalized Sections: Here in this paper, marginalized sections of the society mean students from the lower socio-economic background, i.e. Women belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Minorities and Physically Disabled/specially-abled/Diwyang.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As far as linkages of women empowerment with education are concerned, there are little-known studies available which are also mentioned in previous sections. Whereas studies specifically on women from marginalized sections of the society in relation with empowerment through UGC/ ICSSR financial assistance schemes at research level are concerned, there is no direct research/study available from the available known sources. The little visible education progress among the marginalized society in general and women from these communities in particular. It may be due to the several financial assistance schemes introduced only during the last decade. An effort is made here in the paper to uncover the current status of women's progress in the broader domain of higher education and also try to know that up to which extent different financial assistance schemes have contributed towards women empowerment through.

Therefore, lack of studies in this particular area, besides investigators own reading and experiences, have made the ways forward to write the paper and describe the status and effectiveness of the financial assistance schemes by the central government to the research level in relation to women empowerment. Historically, marginalized sections of the society including minorities had lesser opportunities in the developmental race in the contemporary and competitive world. Further, Female are comparatively more vulnerable in society. Therefore a paper on the status of women from the

marginalized sections of the society including Minority women in relation to the effectiveness of financial assistance in higher education appears to be more significant at this juncture of time.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Recent years data shown in the below-given table reveals that the number of the fellowships, as well as the amount of

Sl no.	Year	Fellowships in Number	Fellowships Amount (in Cr.)
1	2013-14	41970	439.40
2	2014-15	56024	874.53
3	2015-16	69435	1013.23
	Total	167429	2327.16

Source: Rajya Sabha, PIB, 10 March, 2016

The table shows about 70% increase in the number of the fellowships awarded and about 140% increase in the financial assistance given to the various professional and nonprofessional programmes at PG and research level of education during 2013-16.

There were 1333 slots for Scheduled Caste and 667 slots for Scheduled Tribe candidates every year by the UGC during 11th Five year plan (FYP, 2007-12) for all the subjects; besides, 3% fellowships are reserved for the Physically Handicapped SC/ST candidates as per the reservation norms of Govt. of India.

the fellowships both, have been increasing from 2013 to 2016. The data given below represents the fellowships and financial assistance distributed by the University Grants Commission and All India Council for Technical Education to the various programmes such as; Ph.D., PDF, M.Phil., and PG programmes in general and technical education sector.

FELLOWSHIPS OFFERED BY UGC AT M.PHIL/PH.D. AND POST-DOCTORAL LEVEL

University Grants Commission has offered fellowships to the research students of M.Phil, Ph.D. and Post-Doctoral Level during 11th and 12th five-year plans are described below in the table. Although some financial assistance schemes were initiated much before 11th FYP as well, but most of the fellowships at research level were started during 11th FYP.

Research Fellowships offered by UGC during 11 th and 12 th FYP			
	Categories of Fellowships	12 th FYP (2012-17)	11 th FYP (2007-12)
1	DF for Scheduled Caste	2000	1333
2	DF for Scheduled Tribes	750	667
3	DF for Other Backward Classes	300	300*
4	DF for Minority Students	756	756*
5	DF for Persons with Physical Disabilities	200	200
6	PDF (W)	100	100*
7	DSR-PDF	200	100
8	DSK-PDF	100	100

*Launched in 2010, DF-Doctoral Fellowships, PDF-Post Doctoral Fellowships

Source: UGC schemes of 11th and 12th FYP Documents

From the above table, it can be observed that some of the fellowship schemes have been enhanced in number, especially for the SC/ST research students during 12th FYP and some were launched in the year 2010. As far as the present status of these fellowships are concerned, the notifications for the fellowships appear to be irregular for last two year, whereas there is no notification for Doctoral fellowships for the Scheduled Castes for last two years, most of the PDF also appears to be withdrawn for last three years since there is no notification 2017 onwards.

CONCLUSION

Gross Enrolment Ratio of marginalized sections of the society at higher and especially research level of education are at 10% or even less. The affordability of the research level of education by the women segment of the marginalized community in India is too low due to the age, marital status and household engagement related issues, and more importantly the financial constraints. Financial assistance to

the women of a marginalized community in India can be the minimum level of assistance the government should provide in order to compensate their long experience of education followed by research aptitude irrespective of the wide spread socio-economic stigma against women. The research level of education for the marginalized sections of the society must be fully funded with the rider of minimum UGC-NET qualification at entry level. Financial assistance is an essential support system for research level education across the globe; therefore the government should continue these financial assistance schemes with the maintenance of quality research works.

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