

Women Empowerment and Financial Assistance in Higher Education with Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh and Bihar

Bhanu Pratap Pritam^{1*} and Jyotsna Kirti²

¹Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Bhopal Campus Gandhi Nagar, Bhopal, India

²P.G. Department of Sociology, Patna University, Patna, Bihar, India

*Corresponding author: bhanupritam@gmail.com

Received: 04-06-2025

Revised: 30-07-2025

Accepted: 07-08-2025

ABSTRACT

Women constitute half of the total population, yet their participation in higher education has been growing slowly, especially in the STEM field. The participation of females in higher education has grown in the last two to three decades. As far as post-graduate education and research education are concerned, the educational development of the female gender is not up to the mark if compared with their male counterpart. Besides, the lack of financial assistance to females in India, by the household and the government both, contributed to the state of affairs of females in higher education in India. The study here tried to examine the role of financial assistance given to females in higher education for postgraduate and research education by the central government through its various agencies and institutions. Through statistical analysis, it has also been probed to find out the relationship between the two variables and how they impact each other. The study is located to the Indian context in general, and a case of backward states such as Bihar and Madhya Pradesh has also been analysed in particular.

Keywords: Financial Assistance, Higher Education, Doctoral Research, Women Empowerment, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar

Financial support plays the most pivotal role in modern human activities and, more specifically, in the contemporary higher education sector. Looking at the need of financial support, female gender has a dire need to get additional financial support to pursue higher education in general and research education in particular. Gender is a social construct that is largely based on the biological category of humans, and higher education is a tool to empower a particular gender, called women. India has a significant population of active women who participate in the labour sector and contribute to the Indian economy almost equally to its counterpart. Education is a key element to the development of a nation's economy; similarly, women's/ girls' education contributes equally to overall education in especially developing economies like India. Girls

in school education have been outnumbering boys for years in terms of quantity as well as quality, number of students and among the toppers of the Board examinations. Further, women in higher education have shown significant progress in terms of enrolment, especially during the last two decades (Girls GER in Higher Education 28% in AISHE 2021). But, as far as women's participation in professional higher education is concerned, the progress is not significant, still if compared with previous decades, the result is a little better. However, women's participation in research education significantly

How to cite this article: Pritam, B.P. and Kirti, J. (2025). Women Empowerment and Financial Assistance in Higher Education with Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. *Educational Quest: An Int. J. Edu. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 16(02): 231-236.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



goes down in Indian universities and in other institutions of higher learning, when compared with UG/PG education.

Madhya Pradesh and Bihar fall under the larger umbrella term of poverty-driven underdeveloped states of India, termed as BIMARU states. Further, the socio-economic, political and educational status of women in general and marginalized women in particular are not satisfactory enough, especially if compared with other North-Indian states. This paper makes an attempt to explore and examine the educational status of women in India in general and both states in particular with reference to financial assistance. Further, the status of educational development and women-empowerment through higher education in general and research education in particular has also been probed. Finally, the relationship between higher education and women-empowerment has also been explored and established with special reference to these two states.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been prepared for the study:

1. To find out the relationship between financial assistance and women empowerment in Higher Education
2. To find out the various dimensions of women empowerment impacted by higher education and vice versa
3. To find out the impact of financial assistance among different social categories pursuing education at the doctoral research level.

Methodology

The study has objectives to find out the female beneficiaries of financial assistance schemes of central governmental agencies and its impact on the women empowerment at the doctoral research level.

The present study incorporated the descriptive survey research method for the collection of primary data. For the secondary data sources, the researcher has used AISHE, UGC, SES, etc. data sources for analysis besides, data were also collected from the two state universities and one central university from both the states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Ph.D. scholars in general and Marginalized sections

of the society in particular were included to pursue the research study. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample from the population and the sample size was about 300. Average, mean, percentage, etc. statistical techniques were used to analyse the data. A self-constructed questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect the data from the sample universities. The focus of the data was on the women research scholars from the marginalized sections of the society. Analysis and interpretation of the data are discussed below the subsequent sections.

Analysis, Interpretations and Discussion: This section deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from primary and secondary sources followed by the discussions, findings and conclusion.

Table 1: Dimension-wise analysis of the impact of financial assistance in the Universities of Bihar

Dimensions	Political	Economic	Educational	Socio-cultural	Psychological	Fellowship Related	T-Mean
Social Categories	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D 1-7
UR (104)	3.56	3.25	3.75	3.42	3.84	3.34	3.61
OBC (40)	3.59	3.42	3.79	3.49	3.71	3.2	3.61
SC (24)	3.52	3.29	3.63	3.31	3.61	3.15	3.53
ST (4)	4.14	3.28	3.91	3.12	3.92	2.87	3.63
T-Mean	3.70	3.31	3.77	3.33	3.77	3.14	3.60

T Mean-Total Mean score.

Interpretation- The data from Bihar presents the responses of four social categories—UR (Unreserved Category), OBC (Other Backward Classes), SC (Scheduled Castes), and ST (Scheduled Tribes)—across six key dimensions: Political, Economic, Educational, Socio-cultural, Psychological empowerment and Fellowship Related issues. Additionally, an overall T-Mean is also provided, reflecting the average empowerment or experience across all dimensions for each category.

Looking at the overall trends, the total mean score (T-Mean) for all dimensions combined is 3.60, indicating a moderate sense of empowerment or positive experience across categories in Bihar.

Almost all the dimensions have equal mean value, but fellowship-related issues have the lowest mean which stands for relatively lesser awareness regarding the issues and relationship with financial assistance. Economic empowerment (D-3), on the other hand, scores the lowest with a T-Mean of 3.31, reflecting that economic independence and support remain a key challenge for scholars in the state. It may be due to the variance in the fellowship amounts across the institutions, such as UGC-JRF, ICSSR-JRF and Non-NET Fellowships, etc.

Breaking this down by social categories, the UR group has a T-Mean of 3.61, indicating a fairly balanced sense of empowerment across dimensions. Their highest score is in psychological empowerment (3.84), followed by educational empowerment (3.75), reflecting a strong sense of self-awareness. However, their score for economic empowerment (3.25) is notably lower, highlighting challenges or barriers in economic independence.

The OBC group also reports a T-Mean of 3.61, similar to the UR category. Their highest score in the dimension is educational empowerment (3.79), indicating strong educational engagement, while the psychological dimension (3.71) also scores relatively well. However, like the UR group, they face challenges in the economic dimension (3.42) and fellowship related issues with (3.2), though their score is slightly higher than that of the UR group, suggesting that while economical barriers exist, they are somewhat less pronounced for OBCs.

The SC group has a slightly lower T-Mean of 3.53, reflecting more challenges compared to the UR and OBC groups. Their highest score is also in educational empowerment (3.63), but their educational empowerment dimension is lowest among all categories, indicating less support or opportunities in terms of educational scholarships and other forms of fellowship assistance. Economic empowerment (3.29) is another area of concern for the SC group, reinforcing the trend of financial barriers across all social categories.

The ST group, though the smallest in sample size, shows some distinct trends. Their T-Mean is 3.63, the highest among the social categories in Bihar. Highest political empowerment scores (4.14) indicates that this group feels more politically

empowered compared to other categories. This suggests that ST students likely perceive greater access to political representation, decision-making opportunities, or state-sponsored programs specifically aimed at their community. They report the highest educational empowerment score (3.91) and psychological empowerment (3.92) indicating significant educational inclusion and they feel empowered in self-worth and decision making. However, the ST group faces notable challenges in Fellowship Related issues (2.87), which is the lowest score across all dimensions for this group. This suggests that despite strong political backing, ST students in Bihar may struggle to access fellowship opportunities or related support. Additionally, their economic empowerment score (3.28) is similar to the SC group, which suggests that both ST and SC students may rely heavily on government sponsored financial assistance.

The data for Bihar highlights the responses of four social categories—UR (Unreserved), OBC (Other Backward Classes), SC (Scheduled Castes), and ST (Scheduled Tribes)—across six key dimensions: Political, Economic, Educational, Socio-cultural, Psychological empowerment, and Fellowship-related issues. An overall T-Mean reflects the average empowerment or experience across all dimensions for each group, while the total mean (T-Mean) of 3.60 indicates a moderate sense of empowerment.

Fellowship-related issues have the lowest awareness, while economic empowerment also scores low (T-Mean 3.31), indicating economic challenges. The UR and OBC groups both have a T-Mean of 3.61, excelling in psychological and educational empowerment but facing economic difficulties. The SC group has a slightly lower T-Mean (3.53) and struggles with economic and educational opportunities. The ST group has the highest T-Mean (3.63), excelling in political and psychological empowerment but facing significant challenges with fellowship opportunities and economic support. Overall, while psychological and educational empowerment is relatively high, economic independence and fellowship support remain major concerns for all categories.

Table 2: Dimension-wise analysis of the impact of financial assistance in the Universities of Madhya Pradesh

Dimensions	Political	Economic	Educational	Socio-cultural	Psychological	Fellowship Related	T-mean
Social Categories	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D 1-7
UR (44)	3.49	2.95	3.64	3.27	3.77	3.18	3.51
OBC (6)	2.9	2.76	2.63	2.33	3.04	2.7	2.80
SC (22)	3.86	3.44	3.91	3.58	4.01	3.14	3.76
ST (8)	3.79	2.79	3.94	3.5	4	3.69	3.71
T-mean	3.51	2.985	3.53	3.17	3.705	3.1775	3.44

The data for Madhya Pradesh (MP) presents the responses of four social categories—UR (Unreserved), OBC (Other Backward Classes), SC (Scheduled Castes), and ST (Scheduled Tribes)—across six key dimensions: Political, Economic, Educational, Socio-cultural, Psychological empowerment and Fellowship Related issues. The T-Mean represents the overall score across these dimensions for each group.

The total T-Mean for MP is 3.45, which indicates a moderate sense of empowerment or satisfaction across the six dimensions. Psychological empowerment (D-6) has the highest T-Mean of 3.705, suggesting that respondents across social categories feel a strong sense of autonomy and control of their own actions. The individual feels their work or role is personally meaningful and aligned with their values. However, the economic empowerment dimension (D-3) scores the lowest with a T-Mean of 2.98, indicating significant challenges in access to resources, control over income, and financial independence in MP.

When examining the data by social category, the UR group has a T-Mean of 3.51, reflecting a balanced yet modest sense of empowerment. The UR group's highest score is in psychological empowerment (3.77), indicating strong ability to accomplish goals, while their lowest score is in economic empowerment (2.95), which suggests financial barriers or opportunities. The moderate score in political empowerment dimension (3.49)

shows some level of leadership qualities, but there is still room for improvement.

The OBC group stands out with the lowest T-Mean of 2.80, indicating significant challenges across the dimensions. Their highest score is in the psychological dimension (3.04), which is still much lower compared to the other groups, reflecting weaker psychological and self-efficacy. The lowest scores for OBCs are in the Socio-cultural (2.33) and educational empowerment dimensions (2.63), indicating deep-rooted socio-cultural challenges and educational opportunities. Their score in the economic empowerment dimension (2.76) is also notably low, further highlighting the barriers this group faces in financial support.

The SC group in MP fares better, with a T-Mean of 3.76, the highest among all categories. This group reports its highest score in psychological empowerment (4.01), indicating strong psychological inclusion. The educational dimension (3.91) is also significantly high, suggesting that SC students in MP are receiving ample educational support. However, their economic empowerment dimension score (3.44) is moderate, indicating that while they may receive fellowship support, there are still challenges in the overall quality or accessibility of education.

The ST group also reports a relatively high T-Mean of 3.72, with strong scores in psychological empowerment (4.0) and educational empowerment dimension (3.94), suggesting that this group feels psychologically strong and have ample educational opportunities. However, similar to other groups, the STs score low in the economic dimension (2.79), indicating that financial barriers are still prevalent for this group despite strong support in other areas.

The data for Madhya Pradesh reveals that psychological empowerment is the strongest dimension across all social categories, and represents a strong sense of personal control, motivation, and influence over one's work, tasks, or environment. It indicates that an individual feels empowered in terms of meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact. However, economic empowerment is consistently the lowest-scoring dimension, particularly for OBCs and SCs, which shows individual or group experiences limited control over financial resources, decision-making, and economic

opportunities. It indicates constraints in their ability to access, manage, or influence economic systems that affect their financial well-being. The OBC group faces the most significant barriers, especially in the Socio-cultural and fellowship related dimensions, pointing to deeper systemic issues that go beyond education and political support. Addressing these disparities through targeted psychological interventions and socio-cultural support programs will be essential in ensuring more equitable empowerment across all social categories in MP.

Findings of the study

Overall Empowerment (T-Mean): Bihar (T-Mean 3.60) shows a higher overall empowerment score compared to Madhya Pradesh (T-Mean 3.45). This suggests that, on average, individuals in Bihar feel more empowered across political, economic, educational, socio-cultural, psychological, and fellowship-related dimensions than those in MP.

Political Empowerment: Bihar outperforms MP in political empowerment with a mean score of 3.70 compared to MP's 3.51. This indicates that individuals in Bihar may have greater access to or influence over political processes, decision-making, or representation.

Economic Empowerment: Economic empowerment is the lowest-scoring dimension in both states, with Bihar scoring 3.31 and MP 2.98. This indicates significant economic challenges in both regions, including limited access to financial resources, economic independence, and opportunities for economic growth. However, Bihar performs marginally better than MP, suggesting slightly more favourable economic conditions.

Educational Empowerment: Bihar scores 3.77 in educational empowerment, which is higher than MP's score of 3.53. This suggests that respondents in Bihar have better access to educational resources, opportunities, or perceive education as a more effective tool for empowerment than those in MP.

Socio-cultural Empowerment: Bihar also shows a slight advantage in socio-cultural empowerment, scoring 3.335 compared to MP's 3.17. This indicates that the socio-cultural environment in Bihar is somewhat more supportive, with individuals feeling more freedom or participation in social and cultural aspects.

Psychological Empowerment: Psychological empowerment is a strong dimension for both states, with Bihar scoring 3.77 and MP closely behind at 3.705. This indicates that individuals in both states experience a high degree of autonomy, self-efficacy, and control over their environments, though Bihar maintains a slight advantage.

Fellowship-Related Empowerment: MP scores slightly higher (3.18) in fellowship-related issues compared to Bihar (3.14). This suggests that individuals in MP may feel more supported through group affiliations, community connections, or peer networks, despite the other dimensions being lower.

Social Category-Specific Findings

Unreserved (UR) Category: The UR group in Bihar and MP shows relatively similar levels of empowerment, with a T-Mean of 3.61 in Bihar and 3.51 in MP. This indicates a balanced sense of empowerment for the UR category across both states, though Bihar offers a slightly more favourable environment.

Other Backward Classes (OBC): There is a stark disparity in OBC empowerment between the two states. Bihar's OBC group has a T-Mean of 3.61, while MP's OBC group scores much lower at 2.80. This suggests that OBC respondents in MP face more significant challenges across all dimensions, particularly in education, socio-cultural integration, and psychological well-being. Bihar's OBC group experiences relatively moderate empowerment, indicating better support and inclusion.

Scheduled Castes (SC): SC respondents in MP perform better than in Bihar, with a T-Mean of 3.76 compared to Bihar's 3.53. This suggests that SC communities in MP feel more empowered, particularly in terms of political and psychological support. MP appears to have more effective policies or support mechanisms for the SC community compared to Bihar.

Scheduled Tribes (ST): The ST group in MP also shows higher empowerment (T-Mean 3.72) compared to Bihar (3.63). This indicates that ST communities in MP experience stronger fellowship-related support and psychological empowerment than in Bihar, despite economic challenges.

Key Observations

Economic and Fellowship Challenges: Both states show low scores in economic and fellowship-related empowerment, highlighting these as key areas of concern. Individuals in both Bihar and MP face financial barriers, limited economic opportunities, and insufficient fellowship support. This is especially significant for OBC respondents in MP.

Psychological Strength: Psychological empowerment is a relatively strong dimension across both states, reflecting a general sense of autonomy, competence, and self-efficacy among respondents, though MP excels in supporting SC and ST groups in this dimension.

Marginalized Groups (SC & ST): MP shows a more favourable environment for marginalized groups (SC and ST) compared to Bihar, where these communities experience higher levels of political, psychological, and educational empowerment.

OBC Disparity: The OBC group in MP is significantly disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in Bihar, indicating a need for targeted interventions to address their lower empowerment levels, especially in socio-cultural and educational dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Overall, while Bihar leads in many empowerment dimensions, MP shows strength in supporting marginalized groups like SC and ST communities. Economic challenges and fellowship-related issues are consistent barriers in both states, particularly for OBC respondents in MP, who face the most significant empowerment gap. Addressing these disparities will be crucial for enhancing equitable empowerment across both regions. A time-bound portal must be developed to track the progress of the research scholars, financial expenditure,

progression from JRF to SRF, relationship between research scholars and their supervisors, alternative arrangements in case of any conflict between research scholars and their supervisor, and orientation/directives must be given to the university authorities to tackle such issues in order to save the research scholars career and also to save the financial wastage to the government exchequers, etc.

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