



# Challenges Faced By Dalit Women In Higher Education With Respect To Uttar Pradesh

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## 1.0. Abstract

**Purpose:** Dalit women stand at the lowest strata of society. They have faced double wrath of being women belonging to Dalits. With the rise in the necessity of higher education, Dalit women are opting for it. But here they too face various challenges. Thus, this study aims to understand challenges faced by Dalit women in higher education with respect to Uttar Pradesh.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. A sample of 6 Dalit women has been chosen from the state of Uttar Pradesh using stratified random sampling. The data collected through personal in-depth interviews have been analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The study found that major challenges they face are related to lack of awareness of government schemes and fear of bullying. It was also found that family support helps Dalit women to opt for higher education. Also, the reservation system and various government schemes offered for girl education encourage them to pursue higher education.

**Originality/Value:** The previous literature has a scarcity of studies dealing with challenges faced by Dalit women in higher education with respect to Uttar Pradesh. The present study aims to bridge the gap by conducting a qualitative study to understand these challenges.

**Keywords:** *Dalit women; Higher Education; Uttar Pradesh; Gender discrimination; Caste discrimination*

## 2.0. Introduction

Dalits are the lowest strata of Indian society and have been considered as “untouchables”. They have faced discrimination at the personal, professional, and societal levels. But the worst condition has been of Dalit women because of their gender and caste. From tortures to physical and mental abuse, they have faced various circumstances that have made their life miserable to a huge extent.

With the changing time, people are realizing the importance of imparting higher education to women. The women's literacy rate has seen a drastic rise recently. Also, to wonder is that Dalit women are equally enrolling for higher education. This is an example of not only women's empowerment but also bridging the “caste barrier” of society.

Though various factors are contributing to rising in Dalit women's literacy, there are many challenges they face. Dalit women face bullying and mental abuse even in higher education. The government and educational institutions are looking to it strictly and prohibiting such activities by taking quick actions against them. Also, the reservation system along with various government programs for girl education is encouraging Dalit women to pursue higher education. (Raghavendra, 2020)

Talking particularly of Uttar Pradesh, the total population of Dalits is 4,13,57,608 while the literacy rate of Dalits is 66.10 percent. Bifurcating literacy rate, the male literacy rate is 75.20 percent and female literacy is 56.50 percent, as per Census 2011. In this paper, we will be reviewing previous literature for understanding challenges faced by Dalit women in higher education. Further, using thematic analysis, we will be analyzing those challenges with respect to Uttar Pradesh. (*Welcome to Official Web Site of Uttar Pradesh Government*, 2011)

### **3.0.Literature Review**

Rani & Kumar (2018) focused on the transition from gender inequality to gender equality. The countries have realized that each citizen whether male or female is equally important for the economic growth of the country. In the fast-growing economies of the world, the countries have started competing in the race of economic development to become the global power of the world. The countries have realized that there are various factors if focused on can be a game-changer in this race and one of them is gender inequality. This problem of gender inequality is not only faced by underdeveloped or developing countries but even the developed countries also face this problem. But now countries have realized that males or females both are assets of the country and both are equally important. Thus, the countries have taken steps towards gender equality by starting various programs for the upliftment and empowerment of women so that they could equally participate in the growing GDP of the country. Historically it has been seen that women are better performers and task completers than men. Thus, gender equality must be focused upon.

Churiyana (2017) highlighted the educational status of Dalit women and the problems faced by them. It raises the issue of the condition of women in the Indian society, as being the patriarchal one in which women are mostly deprived of their rights and are never left independent. The study highlights that they have to face difficulties thrice than women of higher castes. It further states that education is the biggest tool of eradicating this discriminating custom of society. It can help them to realize their rights and open their mind to the whole world. But it is mostly seen that they are not able to access the educational facilities due to the hurdles they face in the path of their upliftment. Education is the primary step in their social, political, cultural, and economic development. The research puts light on the initiatives and policies taken by the government for the upliftment of Dalit women and what impact they have brought on the life of Dalit women. As education is the

catalyst for their socio-economic change, realizing this fact framers of the constitution have given the concept of “*compensatory discrimination*”. It is also found in the study that the government has taken various steps like Dr. Ambedkar National Merit Scholarship, National Overseas Scholarship for SC students, Scheme for girls/boys’ hostel students, Post Matric Scholarship, Pre-Matric Scholarship (PMS) for children of those engaged in unclean professions. The study has found that there is an increase in the number of schools that impart primary education and a progressive increase has been seen in the enrolment of Dalit women in schools, thereby increasing the education rate among Dalits. It has also studied the root cause of the backwardness of Dalit women that lies in the historical background of the country. It stated that the rate of school drop-out is maximum among Dalit women.

Sabharwal & Sonalkar (2015) in their research highlights the conditions of various strata of society due to caste and gender-based discrimination. Since the Vedic times, Indian society had a hierarchical form of class structure, in which Dalits had to suffer a lot as being the lowest class in the hierarchy. They were socially, economically, politically, culturally excluded from mainstream society. They were even deprived of reading Vedas. Women from this community suffer not only from caste discrimination but also gender-based discrimination. Dalit women are of at least 16.60 % of the Indian population and such a large population of the country is deprived of its social, political, cultural, and economic rights. Thus, the problem of Dalit women is unique and non-avoidable. They face a large amount of violence, sexual harassment from upper-class males. Many of them are pushed into the work of prostitution. The analysis done in the study is based on official data taken from different ministries as well as a study was done in the labor market and health institutions. In the study, it is observed that various pieces of literature related to gender and caste discrimination have played a vital role in changing the conditions of women in India. This literature along with civil societies has also forced the government to take immediate steps in making policies for the economic and educational empowerment of women. All these efforts have increased women's representation in local governance etc. This paper focuses on the problems faced by Dalit women in Indian society. All these practices have led to the lack of confidence among Dalit women and even after so much effort done for their improvement, they have not been able to move out of this circle of untouchable and continue to be the most pathetic community in Indian society.

Thaiyalnayaki (2015) has conducted a study in the Nagapattinam District of Mayiladuthurai Block to study the education and employment status of Dalit women. This study derives the data of their wealth status and its effect on their socio-economic conditions. It has been seen that changes in socioeconomic factors bring changes in the life of people in terms of their per capita income – annually as well as monthly, per capita food expenditure and expenditure is done on the education of each child, their savings, and changes in the lifestyle of working Dalit women. The age group which dominates the earning class is 31-50 while the age group which is included in the young are 18-30 is the starting phase of the economic status of Dalit women. The old age group is largely dependent on this earning group or they survive on their past earnings. Married women primarily work as housewives and the unmarried majorly work as salaried ones. People who are the only person to earn in their families are seen in all categories of work such as mason, business, and a salaried

employee. In the block, some fewer women have done their higher secondary and even much less who have done their graduates, while a majority of them are illiterate. The work they are mostly involved in is construction. The major part of the block's population is seen spending their money on food items and very few of them spend their money on cooking fuel. The private employees are more as compared to government ones and it is seen that majority of them are satisfied with their jobs as they feel the environment very favorable and friendly for them to work comfortably. It is also impressive to see that women are equally involved in occupations as that of the male population

#### **4.0. Research Methodology**

The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The stratified random sampling technique has been used to choose a sample of 6 Dalit women in three districts of Uttar Pradesh: Ghaziabad, Meerut, and Lucknow. The data from the sample chosen has been collected through personal in-depth interviews. The collected data has been analyzed using thematic analysis. Our research interview was based on our understanding of the issues that Dalit women face generally and was as well influenced by some of the previous literature published in this context before.

#### **5.0. Data Analysis**

Dalit women often face the wrath of society more than anyone else and although the gender ratio in participation in higher studies has considerably increased with the current 47.6% enrolment of women in higher studies, the participation of schedule caste and schedule tribe women still denotes a bleak reality. SC/ST representation in higher education including both men and women is a mere 14.4% which itself translates into an even wider disparity of participation by the Dalit women in higher studies (Joy, 2019).

Based on the interview which consisted of 20 questions, nine codes for thematic analysis ("How to Do a Thematic Analysis of User Interviews", 2021) were identified as part of our qualitative study which has been described as follows-

- a. Financially strong Dalit women prefer to seek higher education
- b. Higher education persuasion is higher in women with stronger family support
- c. Marriage is a major obstruction in the path to seek higher qualifications beyond secondary education.
- d. Reservation in government and private institutes as per the government norms and policies proved especially helpful for seeking higher education of the lowest strata of Dalit women.
- e. Safety and security issues are one of the pertinent and widely overlooked issues that have become a hurdle in the way of higher studies of Dalit women.
- f. Dalit women who had access to proper conveyance to their college and had their institutes located nearby their residential places had higher chances of attending college.
- g. Awareness about government schemes and aiding in female education by the families impacted in a positive manner towards the higher education of Dalit women.

- h. Technological advancements like access to the internet made it easy for women to seek help in their higher education.
- i. Dalit girls that had families with a positive mindset or had a close member in their family with a positive outlook towards education to back them had higher chances of receiving higher education.
- j. Networking is now an integral part of ease of education and employment and access to social media platforms helped tremendously in not only propelling higher education but also the chances of employability among Dalit women.

The basis of the development of these codes and the responses leading to their formulation has been explained in detail in the next section. These codes express vividly the issues faced by Dalit women in higher education and provide a gist of the gaping issues that need to be tackled in order to reform Dalit women in terms of education and employment.

When asked about the role of government policies and the reservation system in their chances of receiving higher education, all of the participants seemed to agree that it had helped them in being admitted to the colleges and schools. They also admitted that many of their peers who remained devoid of higher education was because their family was not quite aware of the educational schemes that are put in action by the government.

We faced major difficulties in recruiting the participants in this study and the families of the participants were the prime hurdle in our way. Some of the families from rural backgrounds supposed that we were sponsored by a government body and would vanish after collecting the data. This act had happened repeatedly in the past giving rise to their apprehensions regarding the interviews. Some families were totally reluctant and rigid about not letting their daughters speak to strangers for so long. We received our first few participants only after long reassuring talks we had with their families before we could even speak to the ladies in question.

This incident alone validates the research questions we had about the role of the family in the higher education of Dalit women and whether a positive outlook towards things among family members had any impact on them going for higher education. When asked about the role of the family, one of the correspondents responded- "It is not a question of WHETHER the family influences our decision of taking up higher studies or not. It is entirely a question of IF the family allows us to take up higher studies. It's not a matter of choice. It is a matter of permission." The other participants had quite similar views regarding this and one of the participants added, "It's not that the family is in direct opposition of our education. They are only worried about our safety and are not very sure about the benefits of higher education on our lives directly. The employability is still more or less the same amongst us except the creamy layer of Dalits."

This remark drew our attention towards the increasing privatization of jobs which is a good thing but is alarming in the sense that some of the studies have indicated the bias of hiring either non-SC/ST candidates or hiring the candidates that fit their personality stigma and obsessions. Surprisingly enough, the way an individual dresses, speaks and their social circles themselves have a big impact on their likeliness to get hired by the companies (Joy, 2019) which were confirmed by the remarks of the participants about the importance

of social media in their education. “It makes us feel safer to have a tight-knit social network over social media platforms given today’s conditions where we are judged by people for our digital presence.” The fear of bullying is also a big cause as to why either the Dalit women do not take up private jobs or they do not want to pursue higher education at all.

## 6.0.Conclusion

The major findings state that challenges Dalit women face while pursuing higher education are related to a lack of awareness of government schemes and fear of bullying. It was also found that family support helps Dalit women to opt for higher education. Also, the reservation system and various government schemes offered for girl education encourage them to pursue higher education.

As of concluding remarks, even today, Dalit women are being discouraged from getting higher education. Because of their caste and gender, they face bullying from their colleagues. But government and educational institutions are rapidly taking strict actions to curb these activities. The families that are unaware of government schemes behave in an orthodox way that women should be confined to household chores. As the awareness is increasing, Dalit women are able to get family support both financially as well as morally. They are getting “restricted” freedom to pursue higher education. Marriage, also, is a major factor that obstructs the dream of Dalit women to enroll in higher education. Though some in-laws are allowing them to get higher education and do the job, this number remains relatively low. Thus, family support plays a great role in Dalit women’s life to pursue higher education. Further, the reservation for education among women in different educational institutions may prove to be one of the most important opportunities for such women, who find it difficult to attend schools and colleges. This would provide a good incentive for them to pursue an academic career for themselves.

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