

# Inclusive Higher Education in Punjab and Rajasthan: Role of Post Matric Scholarship Scheme

Paper Submission: 10/12/2021, Date of Acceptance: 21/12/2021, Date of Publication: 24/12/2021



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Education assumes a significant role in the development of any economy. But from among the various levels of education, it is the higher education due to recognition of its power to build a knowledge based economy recently has started attracting much attention. It is mainly due to power to develop the skill, abilities, attitude and encouragement that it has also been acquainted as the main instrument of socio-economic change. But for a long time, certain groups remained deprived of the reach of the education specifically the higher education. It has also been recognized that equity in educational development is an essential component for achieving inclusive growth. Inclusive growth is the process of boosting growth of nation by involving all categories of people without any bias. The mode of financing higher education in the public sector is central to higher education policymaking because it reflects how education is provided to society and at what price. It also, thus, indicates the policy stance of the government towards higher education. So far as India is concerned its 12<sup>th</sup> Year Plan's document 'Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education' considers 'Promotion of inclusion' in higher education as one of the important goals. Due to various efforts made at the national and state level, Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education in India has been improving rapidly, but GER of socially deprived groups (SC-21.8%, ST-15.9%) has always remained less than that of total GER (25.8% as per AISHE, 2017-18) in this level of education. State wise social variations in access to higher education exist in India.

**Keywords:** Inclusive higher education, Post Matric Scholarship.

## Introduction

Education assumes a major role in the development of any economy. But from among the various levels of education, recently the higher education due to recognition of its power to build a knowledge based economy has started attracting much attention. It is mainly due to power to develop the skill, capabilities, attitude and encouragement that it has also been acquainted as the main instrument of socio-economic change. But for a long time, certain groups remained deprived of the reach of the education specifically the higher education. It has also been recognized that equity in educational development is an essential component for achieving inclusive growth. Inclusive growth is the process of boosting growth of nation by involving all categories of people without any bias. Indian Constitution provides equality to all citizens regardless of caste, creed, region and gender. It also directs the State to take various measures to eliminate the different forms of discrimination, inequality and there by helps to create social inclusion. The mode of financing higher education in the public sector is central to higher education policymaking because it reflects how education is provided to society and at what price. It also, thus, indicates the policy stance of the government towards higher education. In the present situation, the issue of financing assumes importance as the government realizes the importance of higher education to associate India's strength in the world economy and to ensure social mobility and social unity. In the federal set, to achieve this, the Centre government is gearing up to increase enrolment in higher education. The Centre is grappling with the dilemma to fulfil its social commitment to ensure access to higher education to all those who are willing to pursue higher education. Higher education has remained out of the reach of some social groups in India, so the nation has also recognized the enormity of challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to ever growing number of students for correcting sectoral and social imbalances. To overcome this problem, the financial aid which covers many types of scholarships is provided by the state and central level governments.

Its 12<sup>th</sup> Year Plan's document 'Inclusive and Qualitative Expansion of Higher Education' considers 'Promotion of inclusion' in higher education as one of the important goals. It reads this will call for much greater effort and greater number of programs which can help in reducing the barriers to access to higher education by socially deprived groups which spring from different sources.' It is not that this need is realized recently. The system of direct financial aid to students, which originated to expand the system of higher education

and reduce social inequalities in this sector, widely prevails in developed countries and in some developing countries too for the last few decades. State financial aid directly to students in the form of scholarships, student loan, student subsidies etc. is always justified for social justice and inclusive higher education.

Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education in India has been improving rapidly, and has reached to the level of 25.8 percent in 2017-18 (18-23 years of age group) from less than even ten percent (9.97%) in the early years of even in the twenty first century and in 2004-05, however it is much less than the rate of 30 percent fixed by MHRD. Social disparities in access to higher education existing a long period and AISHE, 2017-18 too reveals the fact that GER in higher education for socially deprived groups (SC-21.8%, ST-15.9%) is much less than that of total GER (25.8%). It is also true that, the gap between GER in higher education for socially deprived groups and others has been bridging, however at a very slow pace and scholarships schemes have played an important role in this respect.

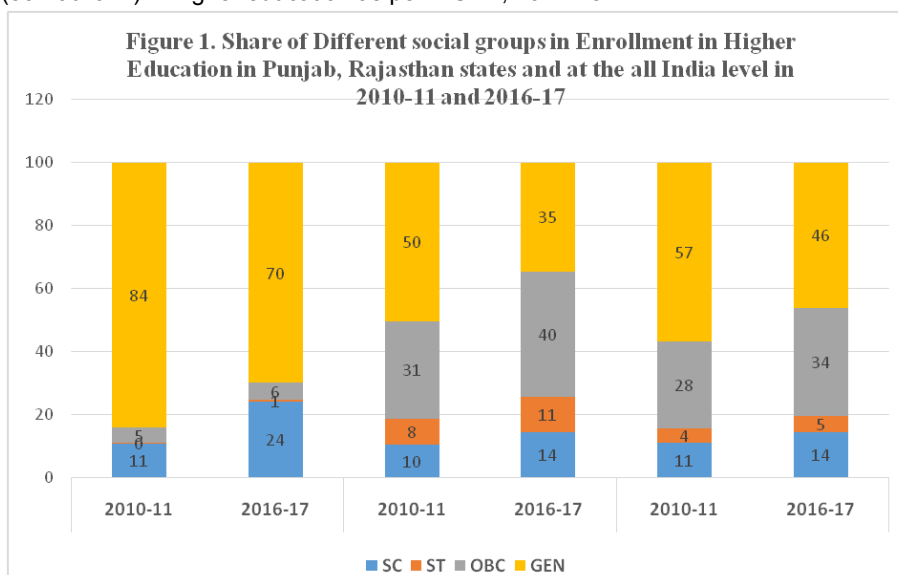
Various states of India too differ in attaining the objective of social inclusion in higher education. In this paper, the position of Punjab and Rajasthan states of India is discussed and it is found that in both of these states, the GER in higher education of Scheduled Castes (21.4% in Punjab and SCs- 7.1%& STs-8.4% in Rajasthan) is much less than total GER (30.3% and (21.7%) respectively in these states (AISHE, 2017-18).

**Objective of the study**

The main objective of this paper is to explore the significance of Post Matric Scholarships for SCs and OBCs in attaining the objective of inclusive higher education in Punjab and Rajasthan states of India. These states are purposely selected as these are having higher proportion of SCs and OBCs population respectively as compared to other states of India, so the case of SCs and OBCs is discussed in the paper. The limitation of the study is that the case of STs is not discussed. For the purpose, the secondary data for the period 2008-09 to 2016-17 has been used.

**Enrolment in Higher Education in Punjab, Rajasthan States and overall India**

Punjab and Rajasthan states are well placed among 29 states and 7 Union Territories of Indian Federation with respect to various social and economic indicators. As per 2011 census, these states occupied total population was 2.77 Crore and 6.86 Crore with 15<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> rank respectively in among all states and UTs of India. Social disparities in access to higher education as compared to school education are widely prevalent in these states. Punjab state is having higher proportion of SCs and Rajasthan state is having higher OBCs population as compared to other states of India. There are 9.18 lakh students enrolled in higher education in Punjab and 18.08 lakh in Rajasthan out of total enrolment (357.06 lakh) in higher education as per AISHE, 2017-18.



**Source: Collected from various AISHE reports, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI.**

An analysis of the data in Figure 1 reveals that the proportion of GEN category students is much higher in Punjab as compared to Rajasthan and all India average figure, however a decline in the ratio has been observed. It is mainly due to the increase in the share of SCs

in higher education. The data further reveals that in Punjab state the share of SC students is increased by 13 percentage points to 24 percent in the year 2016-17 from 11 percent in the year 2010-11 out of overall enrolment in higher education of Punjab. In this respect the share of ST and OBC enrollment is very small for example it was for STs-0% & OBCs 5% in 2010-11 and STs-1% & OBCs 6% in 2016-17 in the state. Due to inclusiveness in higher education, the share of GEN category students in enrollment has reduced to 70 percent in 2016-17 as compared to 84 percent in 2010-11 in Punjab. The share of reserve categories like SCs, OBCs and STs has improved in Rajasthan. The data shows that in the share of SCs (14%), STs (11%) and OBCs (40%) increased in 2016-17 as compared to SCs (10%), STs (8%) and OBCs (31%) in 2010-11 in higher education. As a consequence the share of GEN category students has been showing a declining trend which has also reduced to 35 percent in 2016-17 as compared to 50 percent in 2010-11 in Rajasthan. The data shows there is large variations exist between Punjab and Rajasthan with respect representation of different social groups in higher education. In Punjab the enrollment of SCs students is more as compared to Rajasthan and, in Rajasthan the enrollment of OBC students is more as compared to Punjab and the share of these social groups also large as compared to overall India level. At the national level too, inclusiveness in higher education is quite visible as the share of all the reserved social categories has improved, and the trend in decline in the share of GEN category students exist everywhere.

**Coverage of Post  
Matric Scholarship for  
SCs in Punjab,  
Rajasthan and overall  
India**

The PMS scheme is considered as a boon for students belonging to the socially weaker sections of the society, who are unable to pursue their education for some reason or the other mainly due to poor economic condition. It is an incentive as well as encouragement for students, who are talented, but do not have means to study further. The Post Matric Scholarship Scheme is the largest intervention by Government of India for educational inspiration of scheduled caste students and is in operation since 1944. The objective of the Scheme at present is to provide financial support to scheduled caste students studying at post matriculation or higher stages to assist them to complete their education. This is a centrally sponsored scheme and applied through State/UT government. These scholarships are available for studies in India only and are awarded by the government of the State/Union Territory to which the applicant actually belongs i.e. permanently settled. A provision of 100 percent central assistance exist which is released to State Governments/UTs for expenditure incurred by them under the scheme over and above their respective committed liability. Even after passing one stage of education who take admission in the same stage of education in different subject and who pursue their studies through correspondence courses are eligible for the scheme. Furthermore, there is a provision for all children of the same parents/guardians to receive benefits of the scheme. As per Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment data, the scholarships are paid to the students whose parents/guardians income from all sources does not exceed Rs. 2.50 lakh per annum. The value of scholarship includes maintenance allowance, provision for students with disabilities, reimbursement of compulsory non-refundable fees, study tour charges, thesis typing/printing charges and book allowance for students pursuing correspondence charges, for complete duration of the course. The rate of scholarship varies from Rs. 230/- to Rs. 1200/- depending upon the class and course of study (Govt. of India, April, 2018).

During the last few years, some changes in the procedure of the payments under this scheme have been made. For example, all the State Governments/ UT Administrations are instructed to avoid cash payment of scholarship and to pay the amount through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to students through opening accounts in Post Offices/ Bank in the name of beneficiary. Executive instructions have been issued to States/ UTs in July 2016 for proper implementation of Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Castes students. Aadhaar as identity document according to the notification number 428 dated 16.02.2017 of Ministry of Social Justice vide Gazette under Section 7 of Aadhar Act 2016 for all scholarship schemes in order to weed out fake admissions. It is also notified that non-refundable fee to students should be released in the following order of priority: Student studying in Government educational bodies' including Centre and State Universities, then to Govt. aided school/ colleges/ institutions, private institutions affiliated to Centre/ State Universities, and last to other institutions (Govt. of India, 2018).

But now, the funding pattern is changed. The central government has reduced its share. According to new guidelines 2020-21, there will be a 60:40 sharing ratio between the centre and the state (90:10 in case of northern-eastern states) of the average demand for the scheme for three years period 2017-18 to 2019-20 (to be considered as a base

period), with 5 percent overall annual increase each year in central assistant for all states together in absolute terms with respect to base period.

**Table 1. Amount Or Share of Central Assistance Released and Number & Share of Beneficiaries covered under PMS Scheme for SC Students from 2008-09 to 2016-17 in selected states**

| Year    | Punjab                     |                                |                                |                                | Rajasthan                  |                                |                                |                                | All India level                |                         |
|---------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
|         | Fund Released (InRs. lakh) | No. of beneficiaries (in lakh) | As % of Fund released in India | As % of beneficiaries in India | Fund Released (InRs. lakh) | No. of beneficiaries (in lakh) | As % of Fund released in India | As % of beneficiaries in India | Amount released (Rs. In Crore) | Beneficiaries (in Lakh) |
| 2008-09 | 200.00                     | 0.03                           | 0.31                           | 0.09                           | 10340.11                   | 1.96                           | 16.2                           | 5.71                           | 645.49                         | 34.36                   |
| 2012-13 | 398.92                     | 1.40                           | 0.24                           | 2.70                           | 6013.35                    | 2.43                           | 3.63                           | 4.7                            | 1654.64                        | 51.72                   |
| 2016-17 | 28008.40                   | 3.09                           | 10.01                          | 5.28                           | 20056.00                   | 3.11                           | 7.17                           | 5.3                            | 2798.76                        | 58.62                   |
| Total   | 114216.43                  | 14.2690                        | 51.9                           | 27.01                          | 73033.5                    | 20.11                          | 47                             | 42.48                          | 1754.13                        | 434.83                  |

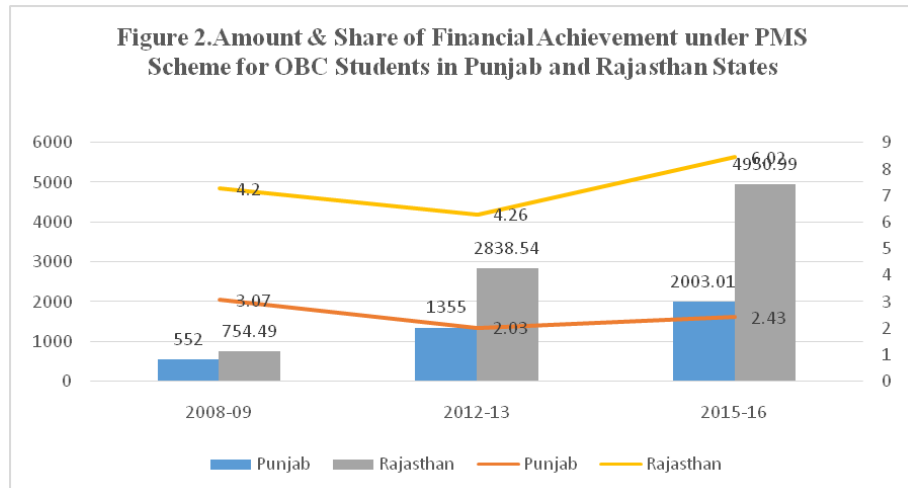
**Source: Collected and Calculated from Annual Reports, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.**

An analysis from the data in table 1 reveals that in Punjab state, under the scheme of Post Matric Scholarship for SCs, the total amount released in 2016-17 was Rs. 28008.40 lakh and the total number of beneficiaries was 3.09 lakh as compared to the total amount released Rs. 200.00 lakh and a very less number 0.03 lakh were beneficiaries in 2008-09. The share of Punjab in total fund released and total beneficiaries of India is increased respectively from 0.31% to 10.01% and 0.09% to 5.28% from 2008-09 to 2016-17. In Rajasthan state, under this scheme, the total amount released was Rs. 20056.00 lakh and the total number of beneficiaries was 3.11 lakh in 2016-17 as compared to the total amount released Rs. 10340.11 lakh and 1.96 lakh beneficiaries in 2008-09. The share of Rajasthan in total fund released total beneficiaries of India from 2008-09 to 2016-17 is decreased respectively from 16.2% to 7.17% and 5.7% to 5.3%. In all over India, under the scheme of Post Matric Scholarship for SCs, total amount released increased to Rs. 2798.76 Crore and the total number of beneficiaries to 58.62 lakh in 2016-17 as compared to the total amount released Rs. 645.49 Crore and 34.39 lakh beneficiaries in 2008-09. Under this scheme, the average amount per annum of fund released is Rs. 12690.71 lakh and average number of beneficiaries per annum are 1.59 lakh in Punjab state as compared to Rajasthan in which average amount of fund released is Rs. 8114.83 lakh and average number of beneficiaries are 2.23 lakh. While comparing Punjab & Rajasthan's position with respect to garnering resources under the scheme and providing benefits to the SC category of students it is found that total fund released in Punjab and Rajasthan was Rs. 114216.43 lakh and Rs. 73033.5 lakh out of total Rs. 1754.13 Crore in India during 2008-09 to 2016-17.

#### **Coverage of Post Matric Scholarship for OBCs in Punjab, Rajasthan and overall India**

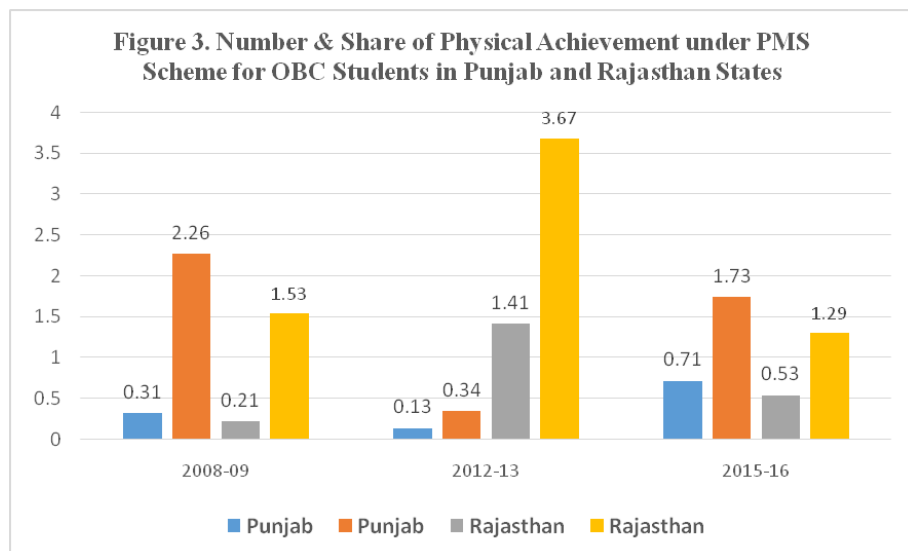
Along with SC students other Backward Classes (OBC) students are also covered under the Scheme. The conditions for the applicability of the scheme are similar to the scheme for SCs. However, the scholarships are paid to those BC students whose parents/guardians income from all sources does not exceed Rs. 1.50 lakh per annum but now according to new guidelines (2019-20), the family income limit has exceeded to 2.5 lakh. The value of scholarship includes all aspects which are covered under the scheme for SCs. The range of rate of scholarship varied to this category of students is comparatively less and from Rs.160/- to Rs.740/- depending upon the class and course of study (Govt. of India, 2018).

An analysis from the data in figure 2 reveals that in Punjab state, under the scheme of Post Matric Scholarship for OBCs, the total amount released in 2015-16 was Rs. 2003.01 lakh as compared to the total amount released Rs. 552 lakh in 2008-09. Under this scheme, the total fund released in Rajasthan state in 2015-16 was Rs. 4950.99 lakhs compared to the total amount released Rs. 754.49 lakh in 2008-09. The total amount of fund released in Punjab as well as in Rajasthan states increased during the time period 2008-09 to 2015-16, but the total fund released in Rajasthan is more than Punjab state because the share of OBCs has been increased higher education in Rajasthan.



Source: Collected and Calculated from Annual Reports, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The share of Punjab in total fund released in India from 2008-09 to 2015-16 is decreased respectively from 3.07% to 2.43%. The share of Rajasthan has increased respectively from 4.2% to 6.02% in total fund released of India from 2008-09 to 2015-16. So, it leads us that Rajasthan as compared to Punjab is beneficiary in terms of garnering resources for BCs under the scheme.



Source: Collected and Calculated from Annual Reports, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

An analysis from the data in figure 3 reveals that in Punjab state, under the scheme of Post Matric Scholarship for OBCs, the total number of beneficiaries in 2015-16 was 0.71 lakh as compared to a less number 0.31 lakh beneficiaries in 2008-09. In Rajasthan state, under this scheme, the total number of beneficiaries in 2015-16 was 0.53 lakh as compared to 0.21 lakh beneficiaries in 2008-09. The share of Punjab and Rajasthan states is decreased respectively from 2.26 to 1.73 percent and 1.53 to 1.29 percent in total number of BC beneficiaries of India From 2008-09 to 2015-16. However, there is no uniform trend is observed regarding coverage of OBCs under the scheme.

**Present Crisis and Challenges**

It is absolutely true that this scheme has benefited the nation in increasing the GER of higher education and bridging the social inequalities in higher education, but presently the Punjab state has been bearing the impact of crisis due to various reasons on this front. Due to some change in the policy related to the scheme and delay in release of grant have created crisis. Cases of fake admissions by the private colleges and misuse of resources have diluted the applicability of scheme in the state. As a result a special audit of 3,606 colleges and technical institutes claiming post-matric scholarship scheme for SCs/OBCs from 2011-12 to 2016-17 has also detected an embezzlement of Rs 372.80

crore. At the same time the reason for the crisis is a delay in the release in Centre's share of the scheme amounting to Rs 1,615 crore to the state government (The Times of India, May 30, 2018).

Earlier, the students covered under the scheme had not to pay any tuition fee but the new policy reads "the state government or the UT administration will frame modalities regarding periodical and timely release of scholarship (including fees) to student's accounts so that students can pay the fees to the institution on time and not be subjected to any penalties for late payment/ non-payment of fees. Scholarship payment and any other admissible allowances would be made by the state government directly to SC students' accounts in post offices or banks after which the students will pay it to their institutes. It also provides for every state forming a fee-rationalization committee for reviewing fee structures for various courses which are not otherwise covered by the fee fixation committee required to be constituted as per the Supreme Court's directions" (Govt. of India, 2018). As a result of this, the students opposed this rule through the agitation in Punjab as well as Rajasthan.

There are pending claims of the state with regard to scholarship, however a reason of delay in completion of documents by the state government is often mentioned for such delay by the Centre Government. (The Times of India, May 30, 2018). Suffering from resource crunch many colleges are asking such students to pay the fee and they would refund the amount after the students get the scholarship amount in their account from the government (The Tribune, Oct. 31, 2018).

Repercussion of the changes in policy of scheme can be seen even in many other states and areas like in Tamil Nadu (The Indian Express, Nov. 8, 2018), as there is delay on the part of the state governments to pay college fees of students enrolled under the post matric scholarship and students are dropping out of the college.

The allocation for the post- and pre- matriculation scholarship for marginalized groups such as scheduled castes (SCs) and other backward castes (OBCs) has "remained stagnant or in fact reduced". Allocation to post-matriculation scholarships across the groups has declined while pre-matriculation scholarships have increased. The increase (in percentage terms) in pre-matriculation scholarships was the highest for SCs (156%), followed by minorities (122%) and OBCs (53%), while the fall in post matriculation scholarship was the highest for SCs (-60%) and the least for OBCs (-17%) (Paliath, Feb,2019).

## **Conclusion & Suggestions**

In both of these states, Punjab as well as Rajasthan, the share of SCs in higher education has increased. However, the share of OBCs has increased in Rajasthan to a large extent and it constitutes even a higher proportion than that of GEN category in higher education. So the objective of social inclusiveness in Punjab and Rajasthan has been achieved to some extent. So far as the amount and share of central assistance released and number of share of beneficiaries covered under PMS for SCs is concerned, Rajasthan as compared to Punjab has garnered more resources and benefitted more students. Similarly, Rajasthan remained more able in providing the assistance to large number and share of students of OBCs category under this scheme in higher education.

It is also true that the gap between GER in higher education for socially disadvantaged groups and others has declined at a very slow pace so the positive impact of scholarships cannot be denied. The Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme has largely succeeded in achieving its objectives. But the institutions suffered from a resource crunch and found it difficult to continue with the implementation of the scheme due to the delay in the release of the amount by the Centre and as well as state governments. On the other hand, apprehension of the fund striving institutions about the payment of fee by such students after getting it disbursed by the state governments in their accounts addressed. There is no doubt that the cases of fake admissions and irregularity have diluted mitigated the scheme. For the further improvement of the scheme, it is suggested that income limit of the SC and OBC students families covered under the scheme should be enhanced annually. Further, it is suggested that the scheme should be expanded for all those families who fall in this economic limit. No doubt, social inclusiveness as a result of this scheme has improved in higher education in both the states, but due to procedural hurdles, the performance of the scheme with respect to transfer of resources is not that satisfactory in Punjab as compared to Rajasthan. So, there is a need to reformulate the rules of the scheme clearly as well as allocate the funds timely.

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