
ASSESSING ENROLMENT TRENDS IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGED GROUPS (SEDGS) IN RAJASTHAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION (2019-2024)

Dr. Navneet Dhawan^{*1}, Dr. Reet Bishnoi² & Dr. Kavita Gill²

¹Senior Fellow (ICSSR – Sponsored)

²(Assistant Professor)

Department of Geography, Guru Jambheshwar science & Technology university, Hisar,
Haryana. (125001)

Article Received: 09 July 2026

Article Revised: 29 July 2026

Published on: 17 August 2026

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Navneet Dhawan**

Senior Fellow (ICSSR – Sponsored) Department of Geography, Guru Jambheshwar
science & Technology university, Hisar, Haryana. (125001)

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.8950>

ABSTRACT

Historically, rural and marginalized communities in Rajasthan have faced a dual burden of geographic isolation and economic exclusion, resulting in persistent educational inequalities and pronounced gender disparities. In alignment with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, implemented in Rajasthan by the Department of College Education in 2023, the state has prioritized the inclusion of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) to enhance equity and improve participation in higher education. This study examines the under-graduate enrolment regular mode trends of SEDGs in Rajasthan's higher education system using the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2023–24 data, covering five years (2019-2024). The analysis reveals a steady increase in the overall UG enrolment of SEDGs, indicating gradual progress toward inclusive higher education. The findings further highlight a significant rise in female enrolment among SEDGs, particularly within the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, reflecting the positive impact of recent policy initiatives aimed at reducing educational disparities and promoting gender equity.

KEYWORDS: Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), Higher Education, NEP 2020, AISHE 2023–24, Enrolment Trends, Gender Equity, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Rajasthan, Educational Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

India's push to democratize Higher education/Tertiary education aligned to NEP-2020 has led to exponential HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions) growth, but access remains highly unequal across SEDGs strata. Rajasthan, the largest state in India by geographical area, characterized by vast arid land regions, a highly dispersed rural population, and a complex historical structure, presents a unique socio-cultural, socioeconomic and social-spatial landscape that profoundly influences higher education access and retention. Higher education serves as a critical engine for socio-economic mobility and individual empowerment. Tertiary education/higher education is no longer just a social welfare goal but an economic imperative. Tertiary education in Rajasthan has historically been defined by deep-seated structural stratification and unequal access. Geographical barriers, economic disparities and rigid socio-cultural norms have disproportionately impacted the SEDGs population.

Higher education, as defined by the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), refers to education pursued after completing 10+2 or its equivalent, or after ten years of schooling with a minimum three-year programme, including general, professional, vocational, and technical education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, implemented in Rajasthan in 2023, aims to transform the higher education system by promoting multidisciplinary learning, academic flexibility, increased Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), research, technology integration, and equitable access to quality education. A key focus of the policy is the inclusion of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), an umbrella term used in NEP-2020 Literature Demonstrates /encompassing historically marginalized sections such as women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), minorities, persons with disabilities, first-generation learners, migrant and low-income communities, and students from geographically disadvantaged regions. Despite considerable progress since Independence, these groups continue to face barriers in access, participation, and educational outcomes due to persistent social, economic, and regional inequalities. NEP 2020 therefore emphasizes targeted interventions to enhance their participation and ensure equitable opportunities in higher education.

Objectives of the study

To investigate the UG enrolment regular mode dynamics, growth patterns/trends, of these historically underserved populations (SEDGs) by gender i.e Male – Female category. This study systematically highlights the inter-sectional gender trends of the SEDGs' identities in

the higher education ecosystem of Rajasthan during 2019-2024. The Present study tries to highlight the comparison between Rajasthan's pattern of UG enrolment with the corresponding all India pattern showing strong, stagnation or decline implications for inclusivity in higher education.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined the participation of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) in higher education, highlighting persistent challenges in access, equity, and retention. Surveys on SEDG education indicate that despite policy interventions, marginalized communities continue to face significant barriers in accessing and completing higher education. Tilak (2015) and Thorat (2018) observed that although India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has increased substantially, horizontal inequalities continue to persist, with students from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) being disproportionately concentrated in lower-tier and non-professional institutions. They argue that the expansion of higher education has not eliminated structural inequalities rooted in caste and socio-economic disadvantage.

Deshpande (2011) and Chanana (2006) emphasized that women from marginalized communities experience a "triple burden" of economic deprivation, patriarchal restrictions, and caste-based discrimination, which collectively limit their participation in higher education. Similarly, Prof. A. K. Shukla (IGNTU) highlighted that a large proportion of India's rural population continues to face educational disadvantages due to inadequate infrastructure, limited institutional access, and poor awareness of government welfare schemes. He further noted that economically weaker sections within SEDGs often remain excluded from policy benefits because of lack of awareness and outreach.

Supporting this view, Dr. Harsh Chauhan, Chairperson of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, observed that rural, tribal, and geographically inaccessible regions continue to suffer from inadequate access to quality higher education institutions, resulting in lower educational participation among disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes these disparities and advocates targeted interventions to improve the enrolment, retention, and academic success of SEDGs. Collectively, the existing literature suggests that while higher education enrolment has expanded in India, significant socio-economic, gender, and regional inequalities continue to affect equitable access, underscoring the need for focused policy implementation and continuous monitoring.

METHODOLOGY

Analytical Framework

The study is based on the latest release of the AISHE-2023-24 report published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. This study employs a mixed-method, secondary data-driven research approach designed to analyses/evaluate the enrolment in regular mode of SEDGs in Rajasthan from the academic years 2019-2024, i.e. over a period of five years. The entire study relies on secondary data retrieved from AISHE report 2023-24. The extracted data on the growth of enrolment in regular mode of SEDGs by social category and gender at the India level and Rajasthan level has been processed/computed using statistical tools like Excel, etc. The AISHE data was segmented and analyzed across distinct analytical vectors like macro – growth trend –computing growth percentage changes in overall, male and female (Gender-wise) in regular mode. This enrolment data in regular mode which contextualize SEDGs performance at India and state level has been expressed by Tables and Graphs at appropriate places.

Significance of the study

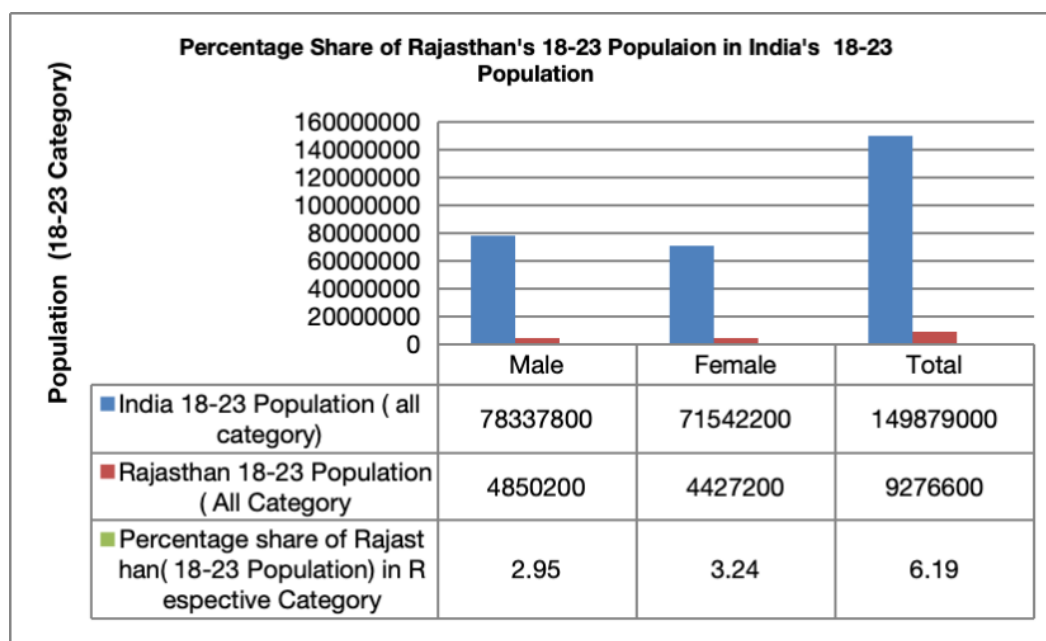
Rajasthan presents a unique set of geographic challenges like vast desert areas and socio-economic barriers manifested along intersecting lines of caste, class, gender and physical ability. This study, which is based on quantitative data from AISHE-2023-24report, provides a dedicated macro-level analysis of undergraduate enrolment in regular mode of SEDGs (Gender-wise) of Rajasthan.

Findings

This section presents the statistical analysis and empirical findings derived from the AISHE dataset for Rajasthan as well as India from 2019-2024. The analysis is structured around the core objectives of the study, which are related to gross enrolment growth, its dynamics and understanding institutional enrolment distribution at the undergraduate level. The AISHE-2023-24 report says that in India, the population of the age group 18-23 is 149879000, of which males and female constitutes the 7833780 & 71542200, respectively. Rajasthan constitutes 6.1% of total share of India's population of age group 18-23, in which the male and female shares of Rajasthan's age group are 2.9% and 3.2%, respectively (Table -1 & Fig-1)

Table .1- Percentage share of Rajasthan's population in Age –group. (18-23)

Percentage Share of Rajasthan's 18-23 Population			
	Male	Female	Total
India 18-23 Population (all category)	78337800	71542200	149879000
Rajasthan 18-23 Population (All Category)	4850200	4427200	9276600
Percentage share of Rajasthan(18-23 Population) in Respective Category	2.95	3.24	6.19

**Figure 1**

Growth Trends in Undergraduate Enrolment (Regular Mode)

This section presents a macro-level analysis of undergraduate enrolment trends in Rajasthan and India over the last five years (2019–20 to 2023–24) to assess the growth in higher education participation. Table 2 and Figure 2 reveal that, at the national level, undergraduate enrolment increased by 12.6% during the study period. The growth rate was 12.7% for male students and 11.9% for female students, indicating that overall and male–female enrolment grew at nearly the same pace, while female enrolment registered a slightly lower growth rate. In contrast, Rajasthan presents a distinct pattern. The overall undergraduate enrolment increased by approximately 9.0%, with male enrolment growing by 7.2% and female enrolment by 9.1% between 2019–20 and 2023–24. Although the state's overall growth is lower than the national average, female enrolment has grown at a faster rate than male enrolment, reflecting a gradual narrowing of the gender gap in higher education. The consistent upward trend in undergraduate enrolment, particularly among women, highlights the positive impact of recent educational initiatives and policy interventions in Rajasthan. This improvement signifies a noteworthy achievement in promoting inclusive higher

education and demonstrates the state's increasing commitment to enhancing women's access to higher education.

Table 2: Comparison of percentage growth in undergraduate level enrolment in regular mode over the last five years. (2019-2024)

	Males	Females	Total
India	12.71	11.94	12.6
Rajasthan	7.23	9.12	9.04

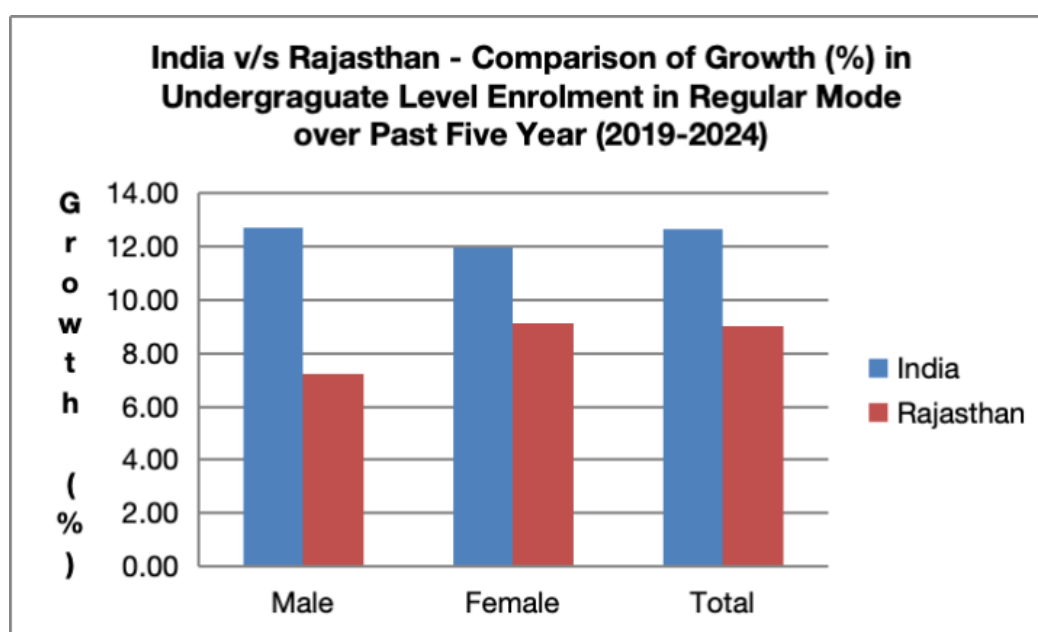


Figure 2.

Growth trends in social category-wise enrolment (Regular Mode)

Enrolment across social categories at the All-India level has shown a consistent upward trend during the five-year period from 2019–20 to 2023–24. As presented in Table 3 and Figure 3, overall enrolment increased by 16.7%, while male and female enrolment recorded growth of 15.2% and 18.3%, respectively. A notable finding is that female enrolment grew at a faster rate than male enrolment across the social categories during the study period. This positive trend indicates a gradual improvement in women's participation in higher education and suggests that gender disparities in enrolment are progressively narrowing at the national level.

Table 3 : All Categories - Percentage Growth in Enrolment regular mode (SEDGs) over last Five Years (2019-2024)

States	Male	Female	Total
India - All Categories	15.29	18.32	16.78
Rajasthan - All Categories	21.23	27.17	24.07

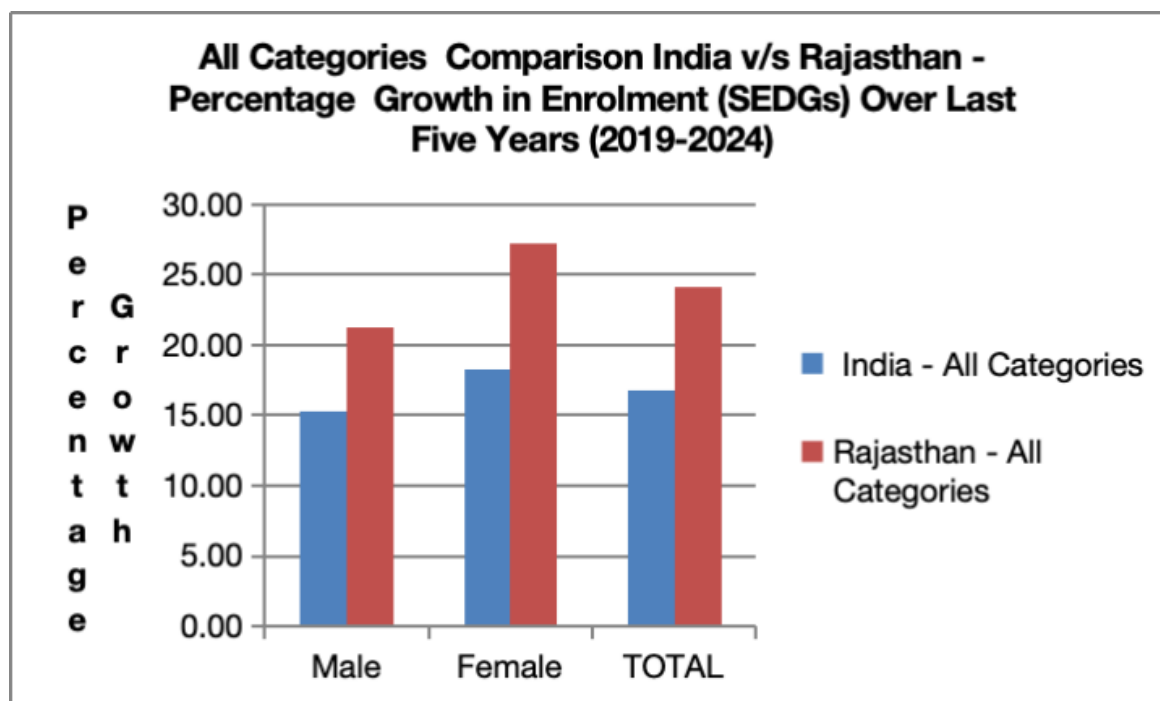


Fig:-3.

Growth Trend in enrolment in SEDGs at all India level (Regular Mode)

As discussed in the literature review, the AISHE report does not use the umbrella term SEDGs in its raw tables, so it was extracted from the raw tables under the following standard AISHE parameters and used in this investigating paper at all India and Rajasthan state level analysis.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment India Level –SC-Category:-

The percentage growth in this category during the last five years (2019-2024) is computed in Table 4 & Fig. and found that in the female category it is 25.1, which is greater as compared to the male counterpart as well as total enrolment of this category. This is a remarkable achievement.

Table 4 : India – Percentage Growth in Enrolment in regular mode. (SEDGs) -2019-2024

Social Category	Males	Females	Total
SC	21.35	25.16	23.24
ST	28.23	39.16	33.72
OBC	25.38	27.78	26.57
Muslims	3.93	10.51	7.23
Other Minority Communities	25.60	18.26	21.61
Persons with Benchmark Disability	26.46	1.99	14.60
EWS	92.14	92.17	92.16

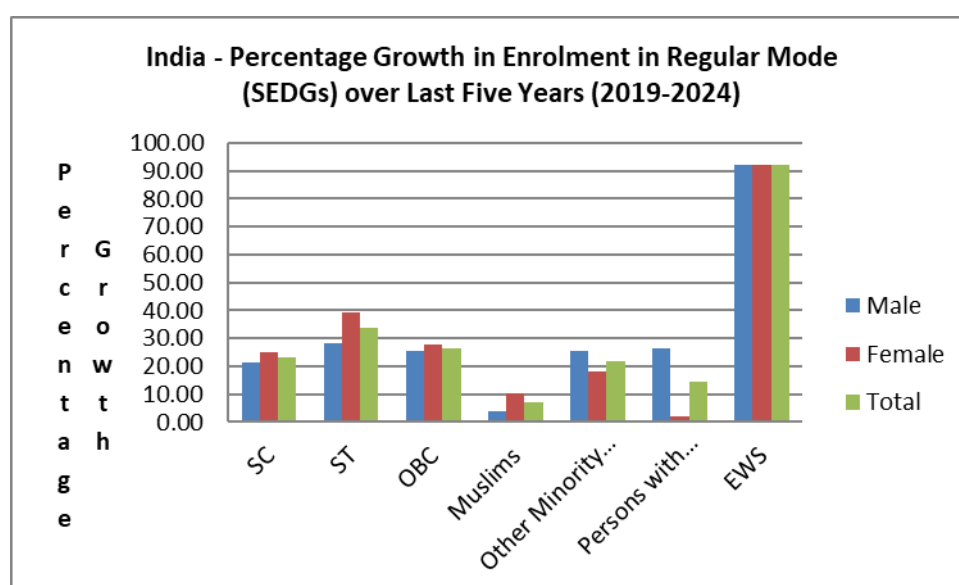


Fig-4.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – ST Category

The ST category also shows a positive trend in enrolment, particularly among female students. A notable feature is that the percentage growth in female enrolment is substantially higher than that of male enrolment during the study period. This indicates a significant improvement in the participation of ST women in higher education.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – OBC Category

At the All-India level, enrolment in the OBC category increased by 26.5% during the last five years. The growth rate was 25.3% for males and 27.7% for females. The findings clearly indicate that female enrolment has grown at a faster rate than male enrolment, reflecting a positive trend in women's participation in higher education among the OBC population.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Muslim Category

The Muslim category shows a considerable gender difference in enrolment growth at the All-India level. Female enrolment increased by 10.5%, whereas male enrolment grew by only 3.9% during the study period. The substantially higher growth among female students indicates a positive shift in the participation of Muslim women in higher education.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Other Minority Communities

The enrolment pattern among other minority communities presents a contrasting trend. During the last five years, male enrolment increased by 25.6%, whereas female enrolment recorded a growth of 18.2%. Thus, unlike several other SEDG categories, the growth rate of female enrolment remained lower than that of males in this category.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Persons with Benchmark Disabilities

Among Persons with Benchmark Disabilities, the growth in enrolment differs considerably by gender. The percentage growth in total, male, and female enrolment was recorded as 26.4 %, 1.99 %, and 14.6%, respectively. The comparatively lower growth in female enrolment is a matter of concern and indicates the need for greater attention towards improving access and participation of women with disabilities in higher education.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – EWS Category

The EWS category demonstrates a remarkable improvement in enrolment at the All-India level. The percentage growth in total, male, and female enrolment exceeded 92% during the study period. This substantial increase indicates significant improvement in the participation of students belonging to economically weaker sections in higher education.

Growth Trend in enrolment in SEDGs at Rajasthan level in Regular Mode

Percentage Growth in Enrolment –SC Category: In this category, the percentage growth in enrolment was calculated as a total of 36.8 and in the male and female categories, it is observed as 31.8 & 42.4. This reveals that enrolment of females is strikingly improving in the last five years, i.e. 2019-2024.

Table 5 : Rajasthan –Percentage Growth in Enrolment in regular mode (SEDGs) - 2019-2024.

Social Categories	Male	Female	Total
SC	31.8986	42.47068	36.86479
ST	31.06968	37.94081	34.47756
OBC	32.2854	29.67356	30.9887

Muslims	4.011461	23.78903	12.54102
Other Minority Communities	25.85465	-9.61084	5.71163
Persons with Bench Mark Disabilities	-12.3475	-74.2445	-52.8561
EWS	254.8726	272.6418	263.5049

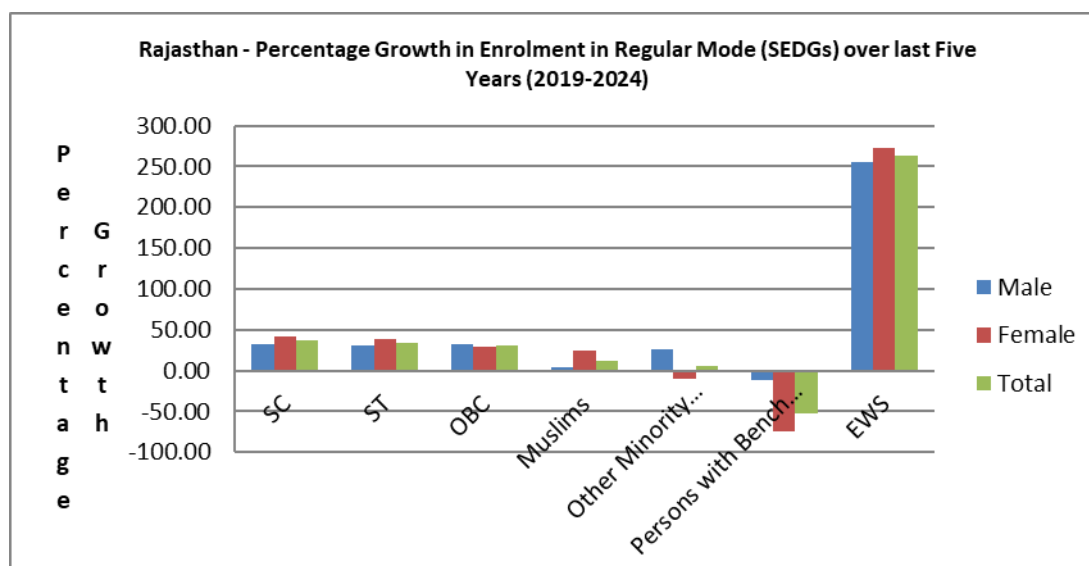


Fig-5.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – ST Category

The ST category in Rajasthan shows a positive trend in enrolment, particularly among female students. The percentage growth in female enrolment was 37.9%, compared with 31.0% among males during the study period. The higher growth rate among female students is a notable feature, indicating an encouraging improvement in the participation of ST women in higher education.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – OBC Category

The OBC category recorded an overall growth of 30.9 % in enrolment. Male enrolment increased by 32.2%, while female enrolment grew by 29.6% during the study period. Although both male and female enrolment showed positive growth, the growth rate among females remained comparatively lower than that of males, indicating a persistent gender gap in OBC enrolment.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Muslim Category

The Muslim category presents a significant gender differential in enrolment growth. Female enrolment increased by 23.7%, whereas male enrolment recorded a growth of only 4.0% during the study period. The substantially higher growth among female students represents a

positive development and suggests increasing participation of Muslim women in higher education in Rajasthan.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Other Minority Communities

The enrolment trend among other minority communities presents a contrasting pattern. Male enrolment recorded a positive growth of 25.8%, whereas female enrolment registered a negative growth during the study period. This gender disparity indicates a decline in female participation and highlights the need for focused interventions to improve access and retention among women belonging to minority communities.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – Persons with Benchmark Disabilities

The category of Persons with Benchmark Disabilities presents a concerning trend, as enrolment recorded negative growth among males, females, and in the overall category. The decline across all three categories indicates the need for stronger institutional support, accessibility measures, financial assistance, and inclusive educational policies to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in higher education.

Percentage Growth in Enrolment – EWS Category

The EWS category demonstrates a remarkable improvement in enrolment at the Rajasthan level. The growth in enrolment among males, females, and the total category exceeded 200%, indicating a substantial expansion in participation among economically weaker sections. Particularly noteworthy is the growth in female enrolment, which stood at 272.6%, considerably higher than the corresponding growth among males. This significant increase reflects an encouraging improvement in the participation of economically disadvantaged women in higher education.

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals that the overall trends in SEDG enrolment growth at the All-India and Rajasthan levels are broadly similar, with some notable variations across specific categories, as presented in Figure 5. The findings indicate that female enrolment has recorded particularly strong growth among SC and ST communities, reflecting a gradual improvement in the participation of socially disadvantaged women in higher education. At the national level, female enrolment among OBC students has also shown a positive trend; however, in Rajasthan, the growth rate of female OBC enrolment remains lower than that of males, indicating the persistence of a gender gap. A particularly concerning trend is observed among Persons with Benchmark Disabilities in Rajasthan, where enrolment has registered negative growth across male, female, and total categories. In contrast, the most striking improvement

is observed in the EWS category, where male, female, and total enrolment recorded more than 200% growth during 2019–20 to 2023–24, with female enrolment showing exceptionally high growth.

The relatively higher growth in female enrolment in Rajasthan may be attributed to the establishment of new women's colleges, particularly in rural areas and at tehsil headquarters, along with targeted scholarships, fee-related support, and measures facilitating mobility. This combined efforts of targeted welfare measures for example institutional expansion, and policy interventions aligned with the objectives of NEP 2020 have also contributed in reducing the economic, geographical, and social barriers traditionally restricting SEDGs women from entering higher education. Overall, the findings suggest that marginalized women in several SEDG categories are increasingly participating in higher education at a faster rate than their male counterparts, indicating a gradual shift towards greater gender equity and inclusive higher education in Rajasthan. It indicates that Rajasthan's progress in inclusive higher education is substantial.

Note:- AISHE Tables used to obtain percentage growth in enrolment by gender and social groups are – Table No. 1, 1a, 2, 6, 6a, 38, 45, 46 etc

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India. education.gov.in
2. Ministry of Education. (2021). All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20. Department of Higher Education, Government of India. aishe.gov.in Ministry of Education. (2023). All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020-21. Department of Higher Education, Government of India. aishe.gov.in Ministry of Education. (2024). All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22. Department of Higher Education, Government of India. aishe.gov.in
3. Department of College Education, Government of Rajasthan. (n.d.). Policies and schemes for equity in higher education. Higher and Technical Education (HTE). rajasthan.gov.in
4. Tilak, J. B. G. (2021). Academic governance, equity and quality in higher education in India under NEP 2020. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 35(3), 195–212.
5. Varghese, N. V., & Malik, G. (Eds.). (2022). *Governance and management of higher education in India*. Springer Nature. doi.org