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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DENIAL OF PRIVILEGES TO WOMEN: A HITHERTO STRUGGLE BEING OVERCOME BY DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The role of education in social transformation and progress is unchallengeable. Education ensures multiple dividends to a society. It is a great equalizer and emancipator. It empowers the individuals by providing skill and generating employment potentialities in them. Thus, education is the greatest change agent of a society. Viewed from such significance of education, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared it as the basic human right of every individual. The Paper deals with the Privileges of distance education availed by the today's women. Twenty first century has brought in its trail a new hope for women. Dramatic changes have been taken place in the roles, responsibilities, attitudes and ambitions of women in the last few decades. Women have moved long steps ahead from their traditional role of wives, child producers, mothers, house makers and care takers. From the state of non-entity they have reached to a place where they have established their own identity in the modern society.

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INTRODUCTION

The world has witnessed an incredible rise in the status of women in the 20th century. It was at the lowest in 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in India. Women in India were forced to remain confined within the four walls of their household and they were completely dependent on the male counterparts of the family. A long struggle over the last century which doesn't seem to end even yet has brought women few limited privileges as the ones already being enjoyed by the males of the society over centuries like property rights, voting rights, equality in civil rights before the law in matters of marriage and employment etc.

The Issue: There still are un(der)educated and deprived women who rely on their family and relatives for financial support. This accounts for their exploitation and abuse. A large number of girls or women are un(der)educated as they are unable to attend schools and colleges as conveniently as boys or men. The reasons being-

- Child marriage is still a custom in many states of India and most often girls are married of before they reach the age of 18. Marriage is accorded a higher priority than education;

- Many girls do not resume education after giving birth due to unavailability of flexible school/college programmes. Moreover they are afraid about social stigma that they might have to face;
- Girls often have to stay at home for taking care of younger siblings and bear the main burden of housework, while educating a boy is considered a sound investment as girls have to be married off and they are hence a liability;
- Sometimes parents are unwilling to permit their daughters to span long distances to school or take routes that could be dangerous;
- Particularly adolescents who are menstruating - don't go to school because of a lack of privacy and unavailability of sanitary disposal facilities;
- A shortage in the number of lady teachers in some remote areas often make school a daunting experience for girls. The presence of more women can provide a friendly environment that would put young girls at ease.

Thus an alternative means to provide education on a large scale as conventional educational methods is the need of the hour. One such alternative is Distance Education. There are many benefits attached with distance education specifically for the females in a society like ours. A woman can learn at her own pace, she can decide as to where and when she wants to study. For girl students who live in remote or rural areas, distance learning may provide opportunities to attend college that they

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would not otherwise be able to take advantage of. More women are also returning to school, both to finish their primary college education and to pursue graduate studies in their chosen field. Distance learning seems to be particularly well suited to the needs of working women and mothers; allowing them to attend classes while not taking time away from their families and their jobs. These classes can allow women to arrange their education around their schedules, and can increase their educational opportunities. The concept of distance learning is continually evolving and expanding as new technologies are being developed and integrated into the wide spectrum of existing ones. The need and demands of society coupled with the technological advancement have set up the right kind of environment for distance education to nurture in India and be beneficial to the women-the disregarded community.

Review of Related Studies

OFOEGBU I. Felicia (2009) in his study of ODL centres in Benin City has find out that distance education has a great influence on the female learners. He states that ODL provides opportunities to women to attend higher education like their male counterparts. The findings of the study strongly recommend that ODL can be an effective approach ensures education to the women which ultimately create economic opportunities for them. Aminudin Zuhairi *et al.* (2008) Distance education in Indonesia has been used in formal and non-formal education sectors, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, to serve adults, teachers in remote areas, women, and people who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Based on the egalitarian values, in which all citizens have equal access, equity, equality of opportunity and participation in education, distance education has reached different groups of people in Indonesia, irrespective of commitments, geographical locations, social and economic status, gender, ethnicity, age and other constraints. Distance education system enhances the government capacity to provide accessible educational system at different levels, improved equity and increased participation in education. Narendrea *et al.* (2017) suggests that Distance education institute should give the best opportunities and facilities to empower especially women student through education. Special vocational training programmes in for them and their families through open and distance learning model. Therefore, introducing the ODL scheme, which does not take them out of their social environments, yet seeks to deliver qualitative education about their social environment and other societies seriously, reinforces this. Everyone should live happily and let others live in their own way that is the basic mantra to live in peace. Dr Shokeen has opined, Open and Distance Learning mode of Education has enabled the women to have access of functional training, made them self-reliant and prepared them for the demand of the social system. Distance Education has great potential to equalize opportunities for women and it is an important milestone in the development of Higher Education. Open and Distance Learning is a way of meeting women's educational aspirations to meet obligations of the career and the society. It is therefore be regarded as a tool that enables women to access education and to overcome the various obstacles. Satyanarayana and Meduri finds out that, Distance Education enables women to gain confidence in dealing with family members and outsiders, increase career opportunities, achieve higher educational qualifications that increase social esteem. Through it the drop outs and disadvantaged are

provided with second chance to get education, acquired better communication skills, enhancement of legal literacy and information related to women's rights entitled to society, developed ability to think critically, enhanced the means and methods of women empowerment.

Women's Journey in India: from Preventions to Privileges

In a country like India, women have always held a paradoxical position. On one hand, there has been an increased percentage of literacy among women. Women positioned in higher professions. On the other hand, the country has failed to liberate itself from the age old practices of female infanticide, dowry torture, trafficking, poor health conditions and lack of education among some section of women. The patriarchal culture and the conventional role expectations from the women have not been eroded yet. When India got its independence, the participation of women in the national freedom struggle was acknowledged widely. Equal rights were guaranteed to women, considering them legal citizens of the country by the Indian Constitution and women were considered as equal to men in terms of freedom and opportunity. India was a premier and pioneering country to reflect gender justice through its Constitution. However, not much could be achieved by these noble intentions of the Constitution could not make much head way in providing an elevated status to the women, because of the continuation of the traditional mind sets, attitudes and culture in the country. At the time of independence, the developmental parameters were not in favour of women. The national female literacy rate was alarmingly low being 8.9 per cent. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls stood at 24.8 per cent at primary level and 4.6 per cent at the upper primary level (in the 11 – 14 years age group). There existed insoluble social and cultural barriers to education of women and access to organized schooling. Only women from the elitist group were allowed to occupy a public space, which they were expected to manage along with their domestic role as homemakers. The occupations like teachers, nurses were earmarked for the women taking their traits into account. The practice of child marriage continued which brought early motherhood and health impairs to innumerable number of girls. Dowry system was an accepted practice. Sprawling inequalities persisted in women's access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities, and enjoyment of basic rights in political, social and cultural spheres.

Women Education in India

The history of India represents and witnesses the long journey of women from demoralized states till date. Among the earliest records of the nineteenth century passionate desire of women towards studies may be found. Rasundari Devi, born 1809, learnt to read by stealing precious moments from her house work and responsibilities of caring of twelve children. Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was awarded the title 'Pandita' acknowledging her education. The attitude was something different in the society regarding women education. William Adam in his report on the State of Education in Bengal (1836) has mention that "A majority of Hindu families has a superstitious feeling, mostly cherished by the women and also discouraged by the men, that the girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become widow". It was also difficult to persuade women to be educated as they were relying upon the male members of the family for economic as well as in all

aspects. Women have eaged to learn and read but the patriarchal systems were so bright that they were not able to defy the existing codes as it were the men who controlled their lives. Missionaries started the first girl's school but their efforts were soon rivalled by Indian reformers. In spite of their sincere efforts there were no real progress in women education till the second half of the nineteenth century. When the government initiated offering financial assistance to organize and set up girl's schools in the country, the urban professional elites also united with the reformers in support of the formal education for girls. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century institutions were established and lot many women educated through it. Before the century was over a few women came forward to extend their opinion about requirement of female education in the country. By the twentieth century women were ready to design and develop the curriculum and even started schools for girls. Traditionally education was considered as learning and reading sacred literature like 'Bhagwat Gita'. However, subsequently women were encouraged to learn about their religious literature at home itself either from their own family members or through other tutors. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, female literacy rate was too low in comparison with the male literacy in the nation. Female literacy was mostly informal and largely devoid of practical matters. Since most decision were taken by men, female education was ancillary. The Church missionaries were more successful in the South India where the first boarding school for girls was opened in Thirunelveli in 1821. By 1840, the Scottish Church society claimed to have set up six schools with strength of 200 Hindu girls. By mid century the strength in the missionaries in Madras has risen to 8000 girls. The opening of the Hindu college in 1816 was closely followed by the founding of the Calcutta school society to promote female education. Lord Dalhousie, who acted as Governor-general of India from 1848 to 1856, declared that no single change can produce more important and beneficial consequences like female education. Unlike education for males, education for females did not upgrade the prestige automatically and financial status of the family. The reform institutions like the Bramho Samaj, Pratharna Samaj, Arya Samaj and Theosophical society all started supporting and advocating promoting female education. People also started supporting women education because they needed social and religious reforms and also financial mobility. Hence, the stance toward female education was changed drastically. By the end of the century the numbers of schools for girls and school enrolment has got higher drastically. By the end of the World War I, there were many educational institutions for women in different parts of the country. Institutions builders like Karve had efficiently argued that female education was the ideal method for levelling the rough spots in the transition from tradition to modernity which will ultimately lead to development of the country.

Commencement of Distance Education in India

In India, the idea of the correspondence education came forth for the first time in the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) meeting held on January 16-17, 1961. The follow up committee was formed under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari, the then Chairman of the University Grants Commission to observe the proposal for correspondence courses because of their flexibility, financial viability and innovativeness. The University Grants Commission decided to encourage part-time own time education, and the University of

Delhi was asked to undertake a pilot project by instituting correspondence courses. Encouraged by the success, the Education commission (1964-66) recommended the expansion of correspondence courses. The University Grants Commission supported the establishment of the Correspondence Course Institutes (CCIs) by formulating guidelines and providing seed money. The University of Delhi made an important landmark in the history of Distance Education in India by establishing the Directorate of Correspondence Courses and Continuing Education in July 1962. The Directorate was to enroll students from all over the country for the degree courses in arts, commerce and social sciences. The 11th World Conference of the International Council for correspondence education (ICCE) took place in November 1978 at New Delhi. Some of the CCIs participated in the conference shed light on the need for strengthening correspondence education. They affirmed that the earlier proposal for establishing a central organization to promote and strengthen correspondence courses of different universities in the country. Despite of accepting the proposal in 1972, no central organization could be established for streamlining, strengthening and monitoring correspondence education until the establishment in 1985 of IGNOU which was given the additional role of coordinating and maintaining standards in distance education in the country. For the first time in the history of distance education in India, Andhra Pradesh Open University was established as an autonomous institution on 25th August in 1982. It was consequently re designated as the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU).

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was set up on September 20, 1985. With the objectives of providing cost effective quality education to large sections of population including those who are living in remote and far flung areas to democratize and broaden the distance education. IGNOU has been assigned responsibilities related with promotion of distance education, coordination and maintenance of standards of teaching, evaluation and research in these systems, allocation and disbursement of grants to distance education institutions for carrying out its functions. The objectives are to be attained through a Distance Education Council (DEC) later. Correspondence education in India has now been upgraded to distance education. Its long journey has continued to be of poor quality like many other countries overseas. Before the rise of the Open University system in the country, correspondence education faced lot of criticism by educationists and conventional university teachers for its ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

In spite of several limitations, correspondence education continued to spread rapidly in the university system. Fast expansion, meagre student support services and lack of innovativeness of flexibility in course structure caused alarm among educational planners, and intensified their desire to reform the system. By the time the idea of an open university was gaining ground, 34 dual mode universities were offering correspondence courses, and the student enrolment in correspondence courses was 6.16% of the total higher education enrolment. The above table reflects the male and female enrolment in Distance Education. It is clearly visible that female enrolment in all the course are still lesser comparing to male enrolment except in certificate courses. The reason of the more enrolment in certificate course is the shorter duration. Till now women are wedged with the family responsibilities which restrict them to obtain higher education.

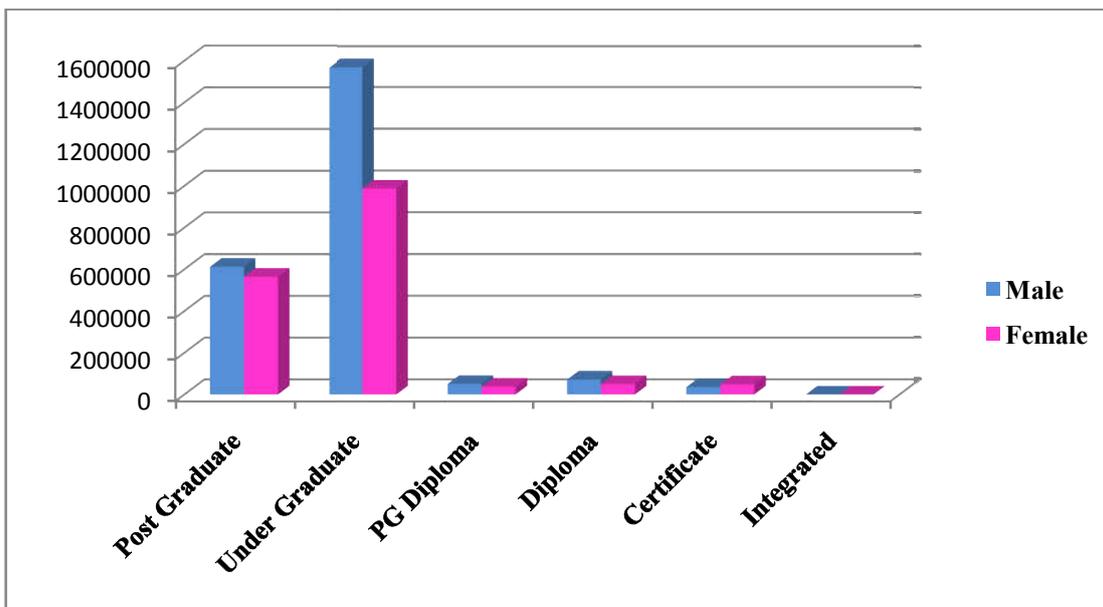


Fig. 1A. Course wise Distance Enrollment in India

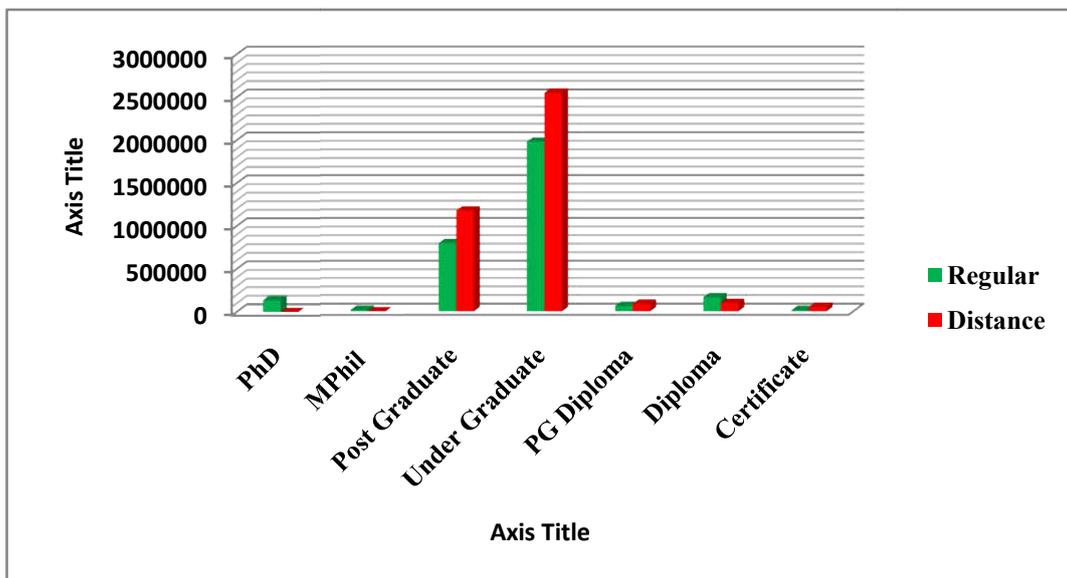


Fig. 1B. Regular VS Distance Enrollment in India

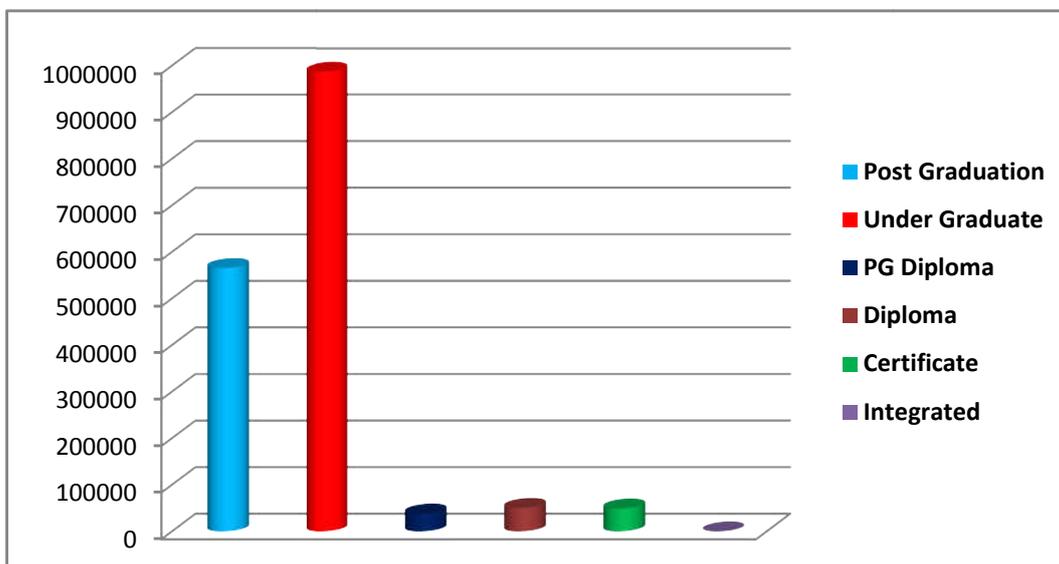


Fig. 1C. Female Enrollment in Distance Mode

Table 1. Present Distance Enrolment in India

| Level | Male | Female | Total |
|----------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Post Graduate | 612906 | 565601 | 1178507 |
| Under Graduate | 1567538 | 986873 | 2554411 |
| PG Diploma | 51658 | 38421 | 90079 |
| Diploma | 72223 | 50521 | 122744 |
| Certificate | 36313 | 49289 | 85602 |
| Integrated | 178 | 73 | 251 |

Source: AISHE 2017-18

Table 2. Enrolment status in Regular and Distance Mode in India

| Level | Regular | Distance |
|----------------|---------|----------|
| PhD | 139218 | 0 |
| MPhil | 17912 | 0 |
| Post Graduate | 797694 | 1177430 |
| Under Graduate | 1980564 | 2553590 |
| PG Diploma | 63514 | 89943 |
| Diploma | 164698 | 99199 |
| Certificate | 15417 | 52607 |

Source: AISHE 2017-18

Table 3. State Wise Female Enrolment through Distance Mode in various levels

| Name Of the State /UT | Ph.D. | MPhil | Post Graduation | Under Graduate | PG Diploma | Diploma | Certificate | Integrated | Grand Total |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------|-----------------|----------------|------------|---------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Andaman and Nicobar Islands | | | 458 | 1025 | 28 | 16 | | | 1527 |
| Andhra Pradesh | | | 13426 | 28635 | 485 | 267 | | | 42813 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | | | 1837 | 4959 | 24 | 15 | | | 6835 |
| Assam | | | 32421 | 13922 | 894 | 2894 | 1 | | 50132 |
| Bihar | | | 22145 | 19704 | 573 | 2760 | | | 45182 |
| Chandigarh | | | 5844 | 4623 | 289 | 197 | 18 | | 10971 |
| Chhattisgarh | | | 7192 | 10758 | 14108 | 17131 | | | 49189 |
| Dadra and Nagar Haveli | | | | | | | | | |
| Daman and Diu | | | | | | | | | |
| Delhi | | 52290 | | 229951 | 1803 | 1632 | 73 | | 285749 |
| Goa | | 965 | | 1000 | 44 | 59 | | | 2068 |
| Gujarat | | 5359 | | 16125 | 334 | 887 | 5923 | | 28628 |
| Haryana | | 33871 | | 28227 | 304 | 291 | 2 | | 62695 |
| Himachal Pradesh | | 6107 | | 9257 | 438 | 136 | | | 15938 |
| Jammu and Kashmir | | 24055 | | 18662 | 771 | 530 | | | 44018 |
| Jharkhand | | 8470 | | 5831 | 355 | 548 | | | 15204 |
| Karnataka | | 15652 | | 12410 | 367 | 551 | | | 29480 |
| Kerala | | 19674 | | 86901 | 483 | 207 | 2245 | | 109510 |
| Lakshadweep | | | | | | | | | |
| Madhya Pradesh | | 11044 | | 51872 | 1943 | 2452 | 1513 | | 68824 |
| Maharashtra | | 59270 | | 200104 | 2113 | 4690 | 774 | | 266951 |
| Manipur | | 1457 | | 769 | 14 | 16 | | | 2256 |
| Meghalaya | | 1786 | | 1659 | 80 | 46 | 68 | | 3639 |
| Mizoram | | 669 | | 1200 | 12 | 16 | | | 1897 |
| Nagaland | | 1120 | | 520 | 27 | 423 | | | 2090 |
| Odisha | | 7924 | | 10471 | 658 | 2510 | 1096 | | 22659 |
| Puducherry | | 5091 | | 101 | | | 11 | | 5203 |
| Punjab | | 5742 | | 3850 | 73 | 423 | | | 10088 |
| Rajasthan | | 22942 | | 20111 | 1452 | 1477 | 1725 | 4 | 47711 |
| Sikkim | | 2487 | | 1407 | 18 | 14 | | | 3926 |
| Tamil Nadu | | 90388 | | 124425 | 6332 | 3837 | 19315 | 69 | 244366 |
| Telangana | | 15458 | | 5096 | 1168 | 650 | 719 | | 23091 |
| Tripura | | 3458 | | 3815 | 38 | 1512 | | | 8823 |
| Uttar Pradesh | | 24138 | | 26209 | 1429 | 1750 | 15035 | | 68561 |
| Uttarakhand | | 11848 | | 11288 | 416 | 1167 | 14 | | 24733 |
| West Bengal | | 51013 | | 31986 | 848 | 1417 | 757 | | 86021 |
| Total | | 565601 | | 986873 | 38421 | 50521 | 49289 | 73 | 1690778 |

Source: AISHE 2017-18

Still it is pertinent to mention here that women have somehow crossed the socio cultural barriers at their end reached up to the present position. Distance education has enabled them to continue their educational aim at any age, time or situation. The above table elucidate the clear picture regarding the enrolment status of enrolment in the regular as well as distance mode of education. It reflects that distance mode of education has increased its demand for the public in the present circumstances.

To opt for the post graduation courses, the populace prefer distance mode of in comparison to regular mode. The demand is higher in the graduation level as per the information provided. The prominence of subject wise women enrolment in distance mode is presented in above table. The highest enrolment in the post graduation course is 90,388 in Tamilnadu. The second highest enrolment is 59270 crops up in Maharashtra and 52290 in Delhi. The under graduate enrollment is differ somehow as it shows higher i.e. 2,

29,951 in Delhi, 2,00,104 in Maharashtra and 1,24,425 in Tamilnadu. The Post Graduate Diploma courses are highly obtained in Chhatisgarh as the number shows, 14108. Similarly 6332 from Tamilnadu and 2113 females from Madhya Pradesh have enrolled in PG Diploma courses. Diploma courses are mainly adopted in Chhatisgarh as their enrolment number is 17,131 and 4690 in Maharashtra. The highest female enrolment in the certificate course is high in Tamilnadu i.e. 19,315 and 15035 in Uttar Pradesh. There is very low enrolment in integrated course.

Conclusion

The current position achieved by the women is not by a single night. They have walked a long journey to make them able to stand equally with the male in the society. The socio cultural barriers and various challenges could not make them standstill and they reached to the place where they are equally educated with the male. To reach this goal, distance education act as a path way and offered various scopes for the women. Through distance education they are able to get second options to continue their study which is ultimately raising their aspiration. The distance education with its three approaches i.e., Achievable, Affordable and Accessible has lend a hand towards the journey of women from the prevention juncture to privilege standing in the Indian society.

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