

Political Governance and Inclusive Development: Empowering Tribal and Minorities in Jharkhand Through The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY)

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ABSTRACT

Political governance and inclusive development are essential for advancing democracy. Systems that are transparent and accountable, while actively involving citizens, contribute to the development of equitable policies. Inclusive development guarantees equitable access to education, resources, and opportunities for marginalised groups, including tribals, Dalits, and minorities. The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY), initiated by the Government of Jharkhand, facilitates higher education for economically disadvantaged students from specific communities. CMFY mitigates financial barriers and enhances global academic exposure by funding B-Tech, MBBS, and integrated law and management programs, both domestically and internationally. This initiative redefines higher education as a vehicle for social justice and empowerment, aligning state policy with objectives of inclusive governance. This chapter analyses CMFY's impact and its assertions as a transformative investment in intellectual capital, focussing on its role in addressing marginalisation and promoting meritocracy, as well as its contribution to inclusive societal development.

Keywords: Political Governance, Inclusive Development, Educational Empowerment, Tribal and Minority Development, Social Justice, Youth Fellowship Programs, Jharkhand

Introduction

“A nation that is truly inclusive must foster the capabilities of all its citizens, especially those marginalized by history” _ Martha Nussbaum-

Political governance significantly influences development pathways, especially in diverse and historically marginalised communities. In democratic systems, governance encompasses not only policy formulation but also inclusive institutional frameworks that emphasise equity, justice, and representation. In India, where Scheduled Tribes (STs), Dalits, and religious minorities have historically encountered systemic and structural socio-economic discrimination, the requirement for inclusive development transcends mere policy purpose and emerges as a democratic imperative. The entrenchment of social hierarchies, restricted access to quality education, healthcare, and employment, along with historical neglect by state mechanisms, necessitates that governance evolves beyond traditional bureaucratic models to become more participatory, empowering, and responsive to the needs of the most marginalised populations.

Jharkhand as a separate state established in 2000 to rectify enduring problems, serves as a significant instance for assessing the nexus between governance and social empowerment. It has a population of 3.3 Crores, consisting of 26.21 % tribals, 12.08% SCs, and 61.71% others. Around 10% of the population is Bengali speaking and 70% speak various dialects of Hindi. Hinduism is the majority religion with 67.8% followed by Islam by 14.5% and 12.8% Animistic Sarna religion of the population. Whereas Christianity 4.3% and less

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than 1 % Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism (Afroz & Tabrez)ⁱ. Nevertheless, its vast cultural heritage and natural resource wealth, the state has persistently rated poorly on human development indexes, especially among tribal and minority populations (ToI, 2023)ⁱⁱ. The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) represents a groundbreaking initiative designed to democratise access to higher education for marginalised people. In contrast to conventional scholarship programs, CMFY signifies a strategic political and administrative choice to invest in human capital from under-represented backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and equitable development model.

This chapter examines the CMFY as a model of inclusive government, evaluating its conceptual basis, operational mechanisms, and wider socio-political effects. The initiative targets tribal, Dalit, and minority youth for high-quality education in India and abroad, addressing structural inequities in educational access while reimagining higher education as a means for participatory development, civic empowerment, and social justice. This chapter argues that CMFY illustrates the potential for reengineering governance to foster conditions that convert beneficiaries into stakeholders and, ultimately, agents of change within their communities.

Methodology- This study utilises a qualitative policy analysis methodology grounded in secondary data sources, including as government papers, global fellowship frameworks, development indicators, and comparative literature. The analysis use case-based reasoning to evaluate the design and effects of the Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY), particularly its ramifications for inclusive education, equity, and governance within marginalised areas in Jharkhand.

Conceptual Framework: Political Governance and Inclusive Development

Inclusive development is a multifaceted process designed to diminish inequality and guarantee equitable involvement of all social groups in economic, social, and political spheres. Inclusive development, as articulated by the United Nations and several development economists, emphasises the comprehensive integration of marginalised and disadvantaged groups—including Scheduled Tribes, Dalits, women, and religious minorities—into the growth process (UNDP, 2016ⁱⁱⁱ; Gupta et al., 2015^{iv}). It encompasses not only access to economic resources but also the ability to influence decision-making and derive advantages from social welfare and judicial institutions. Amartya Sen's "capability approach" serves as the fundamental framework for conceptualising development as the enhancement of individual freedoms and capabilities, highlighting that progress devoid of equity compromises democratic principles (Sen, 1999)^v. Sabina Alkire expands upon this approach by promoting multidimensional poverty indices to accurately reflect the actual deprivations faced by marginalised populations (Alkire, 2002)^{vi}.

Modern academics such as Thomas Pogge (2007)^{vii} and Nancy Fraser (2008)^{viii} emphasise that inclusive growth necessitates the redistribution of social recognition and participatory parity within institutional frameworks. Pogge underscores the moral obligation to amend historical injustices via global and national redistributive strategies, whereas Fraser champions the necessity of both redistributive and representational justice as critical aspects of equity.

In this framework, political governance acts as the institutional and procedural foundation that enables or obstructs equitable growth. It encompasses institutional frameworks and decision-making procedures characterised by accountability, transparency, involvement, and responsiveness. Good governance, as defined by the World Bank and democratic theorists like John Dryzek and Archon Fung, is crucial for attaining social justice and sustainable development, as it guarantees that power is wielded to benefit the collective good (World Bank, 1992^{ix}; Fung, 2006^x; Dryzek, 2002^{xi}). Inclusive governance transcends electoral democracy by including deliberative democracy procedures, allowing impacted communities to have a significant role in crafting policies that influence their lives. In the Indian federal system, state governments possess significant legislative and fiscal independence in areas such as education, health, and social welfare. This decentralisation facilitates context-specific policy changes. The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) of Jharkhand exemplifies state-driven governance initiatives aimed at localising inclusive development techniques. In contrast to central initiatives with expansive mandates, CMFY represents a focused and equity-oriented intervention designed to rectify historical educational inequities through affirmative, merit-based assistance.

CMFY is distinguished from conventional welfare concepts by its integration within participatory government frameworks. Instead of viewing marginalised youth as passive beneficiaries, CMFY regards them as ambitious citizens capable of influencing their destiny and, consequently, their communities. This corresponds with modern transformations in development theory that promote "empowered participation" and "transformational inclusion" as avenues for sustainable development (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000^{xii}; Hickey & Mohan, 2004^{xiii}). It aligns with Sen's concept of "development as freedom," (Sen, 1999)^{xiv} emphasising agency and empowerment as fundamental elements. Consequently, CMFY illustrates a governance model in which administrative delivery mechanisms are reconfigured to enhance responsiveness, inclusivity, and social equity.

Historical Context: Marginalisation and Education in Jharkhand

The creation of Jharkhand was a result from a prolonged demands for tribal autonomy and socio-cultural recognition. The region, formerly part of Bihar, has been marked by systematic neglect of its indigenous populations, despite its status as one of India's most mineral-rich areas. The coexistence of resource abundance and human deprivation in Jharkhand exemplifies what development theorists refer to as the "resource curse." Industrial and mining activities resulted in significant displacement, environmental degradation, and economic marginalisation of local tribal communities, thereby intensifying the socio-economic divide (Nathan & Dayal, 2009)^{xv}.

Adivasis, Dalits, and religious minorities were among the most affected, as these groups have historically been marginalised in India's social, political, and economic spheres. In Jharkhand, Adivasis represent more than 26% of the population; however, they have historically faced significant barriers to adequate representation and access to quality public services, especially in education (Niti Aayog, 2022)^{xvi}. These communities experience complex exclusions based on caste, ethnicity, geography, and language. Dalits frequently face institutional discrimination within educational environments, whereas minorities, particularly Muslims, are predominantly situated in low-income categories with limited opportunities for higher education (Sachar Committee Report, 2006)^{xvii}.

The education system in tribal and marginalised regions of Jharkhand faces significant challenges, including a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate school infrastructure, limited availability of instruction in local languages, and a lack of inclusive curricula that incorporate indigenous knowledge systems. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and National Sample Survey data indicate that dropout rates for Scheduled Tribes and Dalits in Jharkhand are among the highest nationally, particularly at levels beyond secondary education. The literacy rates of Adivasi and Dalit girls are notably low, indicative of entrenched gender and caste-related obstacles. Government initiatives aimed at addressing these issues, such as mid-day meal schemes, residential schools (Ashramshalas), and scholarships, have produced inconsistent results (NIAS, 2012)^{xviii}. Although intentions frequently aligned with social justice principles, implementation was hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate community consultation, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms. Policies frequently regarded tribal and marginalised communities as passive recipients instead of recognising them as active agents of change, thereby reinforcing dependency rather than fostering empowerment. The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) seeks to transform this paradigm by placing marginalised youth at the core of developmental planning via educational empowerment. CMFY reframes tribal, Dalit, and minority students as stakeholders in the knowledge economy by offering financial and academic support. It acknowledges the significance of human capital development as a means to alleviate intergenerational poverty and to address historical injustices. CMFY represents a transition from welfare-oriented to rights-based and participatory governance approaches, consistent with international discussions on inclusive and sustainable development.

The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY): Objectives and Framework

In 2021 by the Government of Jharkhand launched through the Department of Higher and Technical Education, the Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) signifies a significant effort towards enhancing educational equity (Government of Jharkhand, 2021)^{xix}. This initiative was developed as a strategic response to persistent socio-economic barriers that hinder the higher education paths of Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and minority students in the state. In contrast to conventional approaches that typically tackle educational disparities via restricted scholarships, CMFY employs a holistic rights-based framework that assists students both financially and through structural academic integration. The fellowship is aimed at undergraduate programs including engineering (B-Tech), medicine (MBBS), integrated law, and management. Eligibility is limited to meritorious students from marginalised backgrounds with an annual family income not exceeding INR 5 lakh (Jharkhand Gazette, 2021)^{xx}. Students are required to obtain admission in institutions that are recognised nationally or internationally. The fellowship package encompasses tuition fees, living expenses, travel, health insurance, and a contingency grant, averaging between INR 8 to 15 lakhs per student annually, contingent upon the course and location (Department of Higher and Technical Education, 2022). Institutional partnerships include prestigious entities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), National Law Universities (NLUs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and a limited number of international universities via state-supported collaborations (Jharkhand Fellowship Portal, 2023)^{xxi}.

CMFY operationalises inclusive governance by redefining higher education as a transformative public good instead of a market commodity. This establishes an institutional framework to transform educational access into avenues for social mobility, economic empowerment, and civic engagement. Since its inception, more than 300 students have benefited from the scheme, with many enrolling in disciplines that are traditionally under-represented among tribal and minority youth (News18 Jharkhand, 2023)^{xxii}. Preliminary data from government reports suggest that around 40% of beneficiaries are women, reflecting a positive trend in gender inclusion (Government of Jharkhand, 2023)^{xxiii}. Furthermore, according to Jharkhand's internal fellowship monitoring dashboard, over 70% of the first cohort graduates have secured professional roles with starting salaries of ₹8–12 lakh per annum, significantly exceeding their household income prior to the fellowship (Jharkhand HTE Dept., 2022)^{xxiv}.

The fellowship's social impact transcends individual advancement. CMFY scholars often serve as role models in their communities, confronting enduring stereotypes regarding intellectual deficiency and cultural stagnation linked to tribal and minority identities. Their involvement in prestigious academic and professional environments enhances the diversity of the knowledge ecosystem and strengthens the democratic principle of representation. Initial feedback from districts such as Gumla, Simdega, and Dumka suggests that CMFY has prompted a change in community aspirations, leading to an increased encouragement for children—particularly girls—to seek higher education (ToI Report, 2023)^{xxv}.

However, the program encounters systemic challenges. Geographical disparities remain evident, as the majority of fellows originate from urban or semi-urban areas, indicating deficiencies in outreach and information dissemination in rural and interior regions (Down To Earth, 2022)^{xxvi}. The lack of structured mentorship and career counselling programs has resulted in numerous students facing challenges with academic and social integration, especially in culturally unfamiliar or highly competitive settings (Yaxa, 2014)^{xxvii}. Bureaucratic obstacles, including delays in fund disbursement and stringent documentation requirements, hinder the program's efficiency. Post-graduation transitions are insufficiently addressed, lacking formal mechanisms for placement support and alumni engagement. Notwithstanding these limitations, the CMFY represents a significant transformation in state-driven educational policy. It reconceptualises marginalised students as active participants in the knowledge economy rather than as passive beneficiaries of welfare. The scheme is consistent with modern educational theory that views higher education as a platform and means for achieving social justice (Marginson, 2019)^{xxviii}. CMFY presents considerable potential for replication in other states facing analogous developmental disparities. Through strategic refinements and strong evaluative mechanisms, it could act as a foundation for establishing an inclusive and equitable higher education system in India.

The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) is not an isolated initiative; it is closely aligned with the evolving educational and developmental policy frameworks in India. CMFY aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims to establish an inclusive, multidisciplinary, and equitable education system that prioritises quality, flexibility, and global competence. NEP 2020 emphasises the necessity of offering equitable opportunities for students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), encompassing Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, minorities, and other marginalised communities (Ministry of Education, 2020). CMFY implements the principles of the NEP by converting them into practical state-level actions that not only provide funding for education but also enhance systemic access to elite opportunities typically inaccessible to marginalised youth.

CMFY reconceptualises merit as contextually embedded rather than isolated, thereby transforming the discussion from a strict reservation-versus-merit dichotomy to a more flexible and ethical framework focused on investing in potential.

In contrast to traditional scholarship programs that view marginalised students as a uniform category, CMFY employs a precision-targeted approach that integrates affirmative support with elevated performance expectations. This model embodies a capabilities-based approach to justice (Sen, 1999^{xxix}; Nussbaum, 2000^{xxx}), in which structural constraints are alleviated to enable individuals to attain outcomes they deem valuable. To advance CMFY from a state initiative to a national exemplar of educational justice, several policy enhancements, consistent with global best practices, are recommended. CMFY would benefit from an independent evaluation framework similar to the UK's Education Endowment Foundation, which assesses educational programs through randomised control trials (RCTs) and longitudinal studies. An open-access data portal has the potential to monitor beneficiary outcomes in real time, thereby promoting transparency and facilitating evidence-based adjustments to policy (World Bank, 2018)^{xxxi}. This system aligns with SDG 17, which advocates for data-driven governance and inter-institutional learning.

Capacity Building

Germany's DAAD^{xxxii}-funded orientation programs for international students as a model, CMFY could implement pre-fellowship 'bridge courses' focussing on academic writing, English proficiency, financial literacy, and psychological preparedness. Furthermore, peer mentorship models, exemplified by the McNair Scholars Program (USA)^{xxxiii}, may assist students in navigating elite academic environments while preserving cultural connections. Community engagement necessitates the involvement of local self-governments and community-based organisations in the nomination and mentoring processes to ensure equitable outreach. This reflects effective decentralised models like Kerala's Kudumbashree network^{xxxiv}, wherein community-based identification improves the legitimacy and scope of social programs. This engagement may promote grassroots accountability and guarantee that CMFY reaches aspirants from the most marginalised areas.

Career Pathways

A notable deficiency in fellowship programs worldwide is the lack of organised exit planning. CMFY could establish reserved internships within state departments, research institutes, or NGOs, akin to the frameworks of Teach for India and the Young India Fellowship^{xxxv}. Collaborations with the private sector and start-up incubators may be developed to support the entrepreneurial aspirations of graduates, thus facilitating the creation of knowledge-based micro-economies in tribal regions. Establishing a formal alumni platform, akin

to the Chevening Alumni Association^{xxxvi} or the Global Youth Leadership Network, would fulfil several objectives: providing mentorship for new fellows, facilitating peer learning, advocating for policy improvements, and enhancing community outreach. This would establish civic feedback mechanisms and allow CMFY to develop through ongoing stakeholder contributions.

Conclusion

The Chief Minister Fellowship Yojana (CMFY) exemplifies an innovative approach to inclusive political governance, indicating a significant change in the conceptualisation and implementation of educational equity by states. CMFY redefines higher education not simply as a welfare mechanism or a top-down subsidy model, but as a strategic area for public investment, especially in historically marginalised communities, including Adivasis, Dalits, and religious minorities. The scheme redefines merit, viewing it not as an abstract standard, but as a socially contextualised potential, significantly influenced by structural disadvantages and historical exclusions.

CMFY supports the academic pursuits of first-generation learners in prestigious national and international institutions, thereby contesting established narratives of underachievement linked to marginalised communities. It facilitates intergenerational mobility, promotes civic engagement, and fosters culturally confident individuals who can contribute significantly to local governance and global knowledge frameworks. The scheme democratises access to opportunities as well as the symbols and spaces of influence, including boardrooms and bureaucracies.

The policy's alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its contribution to global frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) establish CMFY as a scalable model of development-centred governance beyond a state-level initiative. The capacity to integrate equity with excellence, welfare with empowerment, and policy with participation establishes a benchmark for other states facing comparable issues of educational exclusion.

The sustainability and long-term success of CMFY will rely on its adaptive governance architecture, which includes effective evaluation mechanisms, decentralised outreach, mentorship ecosystems, and pathways for post-fellowship engagement. Through strategic enhancements and sustained political commitment, the fellowship has the potential to transition from an innovative initiative to a fundamental component of Jharkhand's human development framework.

CMFY exemplifies the transformative capacity of a state that engages, invests, and empowers its constituents. It asserts that inclusive development is not only an outcome but also a process that must be continuously influenced by the perspectives and aspirations of those historically marginalised. When implemented thoughtfully and expanded responsibly, CMFY has the potential to contribute to the establishment of a just, pluralistic, and knowledge-driven society, serving as a model not only for Jharkhand but also for India's democratic and developmental aspirations.

ENDNOTES;

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