EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF LIFE SAFETY AND STABILITY (EJLSS)
ISSN2660-9630
www.ejlss.indexedresearch.org Volume 58, 2026 ||



Mission Shakti as a Policy Initiative for Women's Safety and Empowerment in India

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Abstract: *Women's empowerment has become a central objective of public policy in India, especially in the context of safety, dignity, access to services, and participation in development. In this policy environment, Mission Shakti has emerged as an important umbrella initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development aimed at integrating women's safety, security, and empowerment within a single framework. The scheme is built around two broad sub-schemes, namely Sambal and Samarthya. Sambal focuses on safety and protection through components such as One Stop Centres, Women Helpline, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalat, while Samarthya addresses empowerment through services such as PMMVY, Palna, Sakhi Niwas, Shakti Sadan, and SANKALP: Hub for Empowerment of Women. The present paper examines Mission Shakti as a policy initiative by analyzing its objectives, structure, rationale, institutional design, and likely contribution to women's welfare in India. The paper is based on secondary sources, including official scheme guidelines, government portals, policy documents, and selected academic studies. It argues that Mission Shakti is significant because it moves beyond fragmented interventions and adopts a life-cycle and convergence-based approach. At the same time, the success of the scheme depends on implementation capacity, awareness, coordination, accessibility, and monitoring at the grassroots level. The study concludes that Mission Shakti represents an important step toward women-led development, but its long-term impact will depend on stronger institutional delivery, local accountability, and continuous policy support.*

Keywords: *Mission Shakti, women empowerment, women safety, Sambal, Samarthya, public policy.*

Date of Submission: 12-01-2026 ***Date of Acceptance: 31-01-2026***

Introduction

Women's empowerment is one of the most important pillars of inclusive development because it affects not only the condition of women but also the quality of social progress, family welfare, and national development. When women have access to education, health care, employment, mobility, financial resources, and decision-making power, the benefits extend to households, communities, and the broader economy. For this reason, women's empowerment in India is no longer seen only as a welfare concern; it is increasingly treated as a development priority linked with equality, dignity, and nation-building. At the policy level, this shift is also reflected in the government's emphasis on "women-led development" and gender-focused public expenditure. The Mission Shakti portal notes that the Gender Budget for 2026–27 constituted 9.37% of the total budget, up from 8.86% in FY 2025–26, which shows the growing policy attention being given to women-centered interventions.

Despite this policy emphasis, the condition of women in India continues to reflect both progress and persistent inequality. Official National Family Health Survey-5 findings show that women's

participation in major household decisions has improved significantly. According to a PIB release based on NFHS-5, 88.7% of women participate in major household decisions, compared with 84% five years earlier. Another official NFHS-5 summary further notes that the extent of married women's participation in three major household decisions ranged across states from 80% in Ladakh to 99% in Nagaland and Mizoram, while the rural-urban gap remained relatively narrow at 77% in rural areas and 81% in urban areas. These figures suggest that women's agency within the household has improved, yet the variation across places also shows that empowerment remains uneven in practice.

At the same time, the economic dimension of empowerment continues to show a mixed picture. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025 states that the overall Labour Force Participation Rate for persons aged 15 years and above was 59.3%, but the gender gap remained substantial, with male LFPR at 79.1% and female LFPR at 40.0%. The report also estimated that, on average, 61.6 crore persons aged 15 years and above were employed during January–December 2025, of whom 41.6 crore were male and 20.0 crore were female. Rural female labour force participation stood at 45.9%, while urban female labour force participation was much lower at 27.7% in 2025. Similarly, the Worker Population Ratio for women remained lower than for men, at 44.9% in rural areas and 25.9% in urban areas. These figures clearly indicate that although women's participation in the labour market has improved compared with earlier years, economic empowerment in India still remains constrained by structural and social barriers.

The broader social context also explains why women's safety cannot be separated from women's empowerment. Household decision-making, labour force participation, mobility, access to work, and use of public services are all influenced by safety, institutional support, and social norms. In India, policies dealing with these issues were often implemented separately. One scheme focused on shelter, another on maternity assistance, another on distress support, another on awareness, and another on childcare. Such fragmentation often reduced effectiveness because women in distress usually require multiple forms of support at the same time, including legal help, psychological counselling, health support, temporary shelter, financial assistance, and information about welfare schemes. Recognizing this problem, the Government of India introduced Mission Shakti as an umbrella, mission-mode scheme to strengthen women's safety, security, and empowerment through a more integrated framework.

Mission Shakti is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and is structured around two major sub-schemes: Sambal and Samarthya. Sambal focuses on women's safety and security and includes One Stop Centres (OSC), Women Helpline (181), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), and Nari Adalat. Samarthya focuses on empowerment and support services and includes Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Palna, Sakhi Niwas, Shakti Sadan, and SANKALP: Hub for Empowerment of Women (HEW). This structure reflects a life-cycle and convergence-based approach, where women and girls are not treated as beneficiaries of isolated schemes, but as individuals requiring a continuum of support across different stages and circumstances of life.

The importance of this integrated approach becomes clearer when one looks at the role of women in crisis-response systems. The One Stop Centre scheme, for example, provides integrated support under one roof to women affected by violence and those in distress, including medical aid, legal aid, police assistance, temporary shelter, and psycho-social counselling. According to an official PIB release, 10,61,337 women had received assistance through One Stop Centres up to 31 December 2024, which indicates both the continuing need for support mechanisms and the growing importance of institutional response systems for women. The Women Helpline (181), another component of Mission Shakti, offers 24×7 emergency and non-emergency response, linking women to police, hospitals, legal services, and OSCs. These services show that women's empowerment is

not only about long-term opportunities such as education and employment, but also about immediate access to protection, redressal, and support in moments of vulnerability.

Mission Shakti is therefore significant not merely as a welfare scheme, but as a policy model that attempts to reduce fragmentation in women-centered governance. Its design reflects the understanding that women's safety, health, care responsibilities, accommodation needs, rehabilitation, access to entitlements, and awareness of rights are interconnected. Components such as PMMVY support maternal well-being through direct benefit transfers; Palna addresses childcare support; Sakhi Niwas provides safe and affordable accommodation for working women; Shakti Sadan focuses on relief and rehabilitation for women in difficult situations; and SANKALP: HEW works to bridge information gaps and improve access to schemes and entitlements. In this sense, Mission Shakti attempts to move from a narrow "welfare" model toward a broader framework of support, protection, and empowerment.

Another important feature of Mission Shakti is its emphasis on convergence and administrative coordination. Women's issues often cut across several departments such as health, police, legal services, education, labour, local governance, and social welfare. If these institutions work in isolation, women may face delays, repeated documentation, and poor access to services. Mission Shakti addresses this challenge by creating an umbrella structure in which multiple interventions can function within a coordinated framework. This is especially important in a country like India, where women's experiences differ across rural and urban settings, states, socio-economic groups, and vulnerability categories. A single, integrated framework can therefore improve both policy clarity and service delivery.

In this context, Mission Shakti deserves careful academic analysis. It represents an important policy attempt to combine safety, support, rehabilitation, awareness, and welfare within a unified institutional structure. At the same time, the actual impact of such a scheme depends on implementation, outreach, staffing, local awareness, inter-departmental coordination, and the quality-of-service delivery at the grassroots level. Therefore, the present study examines Mission Shakti as a policy initiative for women's safety and empowerment in India, with particular attention to its rationale, structure, importance, and likely contribution to women-led development. The paper argues that Mission Shakti marks a significant shift from fragmented women-oriented interventions to a more comprehensive and gender-responsive policy framework, though its long-term effectiveness will depend on the strength of institutional implementation and public accessibility.

Review of Literature

A growing body of literature explains that women's empowerment is a multidimensional concept that includes access to education, employment, resources, decision-making power, dignity, and freedom from violence. **Singh and Singh (2020)** argue that women's empowerment in India cannot be understood only in legal or constitutional terms; rather, it must be supported by social change, economic opportunities, and effective policy implementation. Their study emphasizes that despite policy progress, structural inequality and patriarchal barriers continue to affect women's real empowerment. Research on institutional support systems shows that women's empowerment is closely related to service accessibility during times of crisis. **Verma, Puri, Sharma, and Singh (2020)**, in their study on the One Stop Crisis Centre model in an Indian health care setting, found that integrated centres play an important role in identifying women affected by violence and connecting them with medical, legal, and psychosocial assistance. Their work highlights the value of a single-window support mechanism for women facing distress and violence. A more recent policy-oriented study by **Thakkar (2026)** also underlines the importance of One Stop Centres in strengthening public service delivery for women affected by domestic violence. The study argues that these centres are significant not only for immediate support but also for access to justice,

rehabilitation, and institutional responsiveness. At the same time, it points to implementation issues such as lack of awareness, underreporting, and operational gaps, which may reduce the effectiveness of such interventions. In the context of Mission Shakti, **Mohapatra (2023)** examined the impact of Mission Shakti-led self-help groups on rural and tribal women in Odisha. The study found positive changes in women's social, economic, political, and psychological empowerment, suggesting that institutional support and collective participation can improve confidence, agency, and community-level participation. Although this study relates to Odisha's Mission Shakti model, it is relevant because it supports the broader idea that integrated support systems can contribute meaningfully to women's empowerment. Studies related to **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** also provide useful insight into the policy dimensions of women's empowerment. An evaluation by **NCAER (2020)** noted that BBBP was designed not only to address the declining child sex ratio but also to promote awareness, behavioural change, and improved value for the girl child in society. Similarly, later discussions on the scheme's performance have emphasized the importance of convergence, awareness generation, and local implementation for improving girl-child welfare and long-term empowerment outcomes.

Structure of Mission Shakti

Sambal: Safety and Security of Women Sambal is the protective arm of Mission Shakti. It includes One Stop Centres, Women Helpline, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalat. The purpose of this sub-scheme is to ensure that women facing violence, harassment, denial of rights, or distress can receive timely institutional support. **One Stop Centre (OSC)**The OSC scheme provides integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence and women in distress in both private and public spaces. Official descriptions note that OSCs provide services such as medical aid, legal aid and advice, temporary shelter, police assistance, and psycho-social counselling. This is one of the strongest components of Mission Shakti because it directly addresses the fragmentation that often discourages women from approaching public institutions. **Women Helpline (181)** The Women Helpline under Mission Shakti is intended to provide round-the-clock telephonic support and connect women with police, One Stop Centres, hospitals, legal services authorities, and other support systems. The helpline matters because institutional access often begins with communication. A woman facing harassment or violence may not be in a position to physically visit an office; a helpline can function as the first point of support and referral. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** was launched on 22 January 2015 to address the decline in child sex ratio along with related issues concerning the protection and empowerment of girls and women over a life-cycle continuum. During the 15th Finance Commission period, it operates as a component of the Sambal sub-scheme under Mission Shakti. Its inclusion is important because Mission Shakti does not only address women after crisis; it also includes preventive and awareness-oriented efforts directed toward the status of the girl child. **Nari Adalat** Nari Adalat is a new component under Sambal that provides an alternative grievance redressal mechanism at the Gram Panchayat level. Official SOPs describe it as a women's collective designed to resolve cases of harassment, violence, and curtailment of rights or entitlements through negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation with mutual consent. It also serves as a platform for awareness regarding rights, schemes, and social entitlements. This is an important innovation because it tries to make dispute resolution and awareness more community-based and accessible.

Samarthya: Empowerment of Women Samarthya is the enabling and support-oriented arm of Mission Shakti. It includes PMMVY, Palna, Sakhi Niwas, Shakti Sadan, and SANKALP: HEW. Together, these components aim to reduce barriers that limit women's health, mobility, shelter, care responsibilities, and access to schemes. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)** With effect from 1 April 2022, PMMVY became a component of Samarthya under Mission Shakti. Official scheme information states that it provides cash incentives through Direct Benefit Transfer,

including ₹5,000 in two instalments for the first child and ₹6,000 in one instalment after birth for the second child if the second child is a girl, subject to scheme guidelines. PMMVY contributes to empowerment by supporting maternal well-being and reducing immediate financial vulnerability during pregnancy and childbirth. **Palna** provides day-care and crèche facilities for children. This component is vital from an empowerment perspective because care burdens often restrict women's ability to engage in work, training, or public life. By supporting childcare in a safer environment, Palna indirectly supports women's economic and social participation. **Sakhi Niwas** aims to provide safe, secure, conveniently located, and affordable accommodation for women who are in the workforce or aspire to join the workforce. It also provides day-care facilities for the children of residents. This reflects an important understanding within Mission Shakti: safe housing and care support are practical conditions for women's mobility and employment. **Shakti Sadan** merges the earlier Swadhar Greh and Ujjawala Home interventions into an integrated relief and rehabilitation home for women in distressful situations, including trafficked women. Its objective is to create a safe and enabling environment so that women in difficult circumstances can overcome adverse situations. This component demonstrates that empowerment policy must also include rehabilitation and reintegration, not merely awareness or cash assistance. **SANKALP: Hub for Empowerment of Women (HEW)** is intended to bridge information and knowledge gaps regarding schemes and facilities available for women and to guide them in accessing benefits and entitlements. It also functions as a project monitoring unit for Mission Shakti components and works in convergence with BBBP. This component is especially important because one of the major barriers in public policy is not only lack of schemes, but lack of awareness and navigation support.

Mission Shakti as a Policy Initiative

Mission Shakti may be understood as an important policy initiative because it moves beyond the earlier fragmented model of women-oriented schemes and creates a more integrated umbrella framework linking safety, support, welfare, rehabilitation, and empowerment within one mission. Its structure reflects a life-cycle approach, as it covers the needs of the girl child, women in distress, pregnant women, working women, and women requiring shelter, childcare, or rehabilitation, making it more responsive to the diverse realities of women's lives in India. The scheme also emphasizes convergence-based governance by bringing together institutions and services connected with health, police, legal support, local bodies, and social welfare, which is especially important because women's issues are rarely isolated and often require coordinated intervention. Through its two broad pillars, Sambal and Samarthya, Mission Shakti combines protection with empowerment, recognizing that women need not only immediate safety and crisis response but also long-term support through maternity assistance, childcare, accommodation, rehabilitation, and access to information about entitlements. Its relevance becomes even stronger in the Indian context, where official data show improvement in women's participation in household decision-making and labour force participation, but where significant gaps still remain in terms of safety, care burdens, access to services, and equal opportunity. The scheme is particularly significant because it includes both universal support systems such as Women Helpline and One Stop Centres and targeted interventions such as Shakti Sadan and Sakhi Niwas for vulnerable women. Among its major strengths are its comprehensive institutional design, better prospects for last-mile access, administrative rationalization through the merging and restructuring of earlier schemes, and the role of the Hub for Empowerment of Women in reducing awareness gaps and improving monitoring. In addition, Mission Shakti aligns with broader gender-responsive budgeting priorities, reflecting the government's growing emphasis on women-focused development. Taken together, these features show that Mission Shakti is not merely a welfare scheme but a broader governance framework that seeks to shift policy from fragmented assistance to coordinated, women-led development in India.

Table:1 Official Indicators of Mission Shakti in India

Indicator	Official figure
Operational One Stop Centres (OSCs)	926
Women assisted through OSCs	13.37 lakh
States/UTs where Women Helpline (181) is operational	35
Women assisted through Women Helpline (181)	99.09 lakh
Operational Shakti Sadans	416
Protection Officers listed on Mission Shakti Portal	2,428

Conclusion

Mission Shakti represents an important development in India's policy approach toward women's safety and empowerment. Its main significance lies in the fact that it does not view women's issues in a narrow or isolated manner. Instead, it brings together protection, support, rehabilitation, childcare, shelter, information, awareness, and welfare entitlements within a unified mission framework. This integrated character makes Mission Shakti more than just another women-oriented scheme; it reflects an attempt to redesign governance around the actual complexity of women's lives. The scheme's two-part structure—Sambal and Samarthya—captures a key insight of gender-responsive policy: safety and empowerment are inseparable. A woman cannot become fully empowered if she lacks safety, institutional support, and protection from violence. Likewise, immediate safety measures alone are insufficient unless women also gain access to maternity support, childcare, accommodation, rehabilitation, scheme awareness, and long-term enabling conditions. In this respect, Mission Shakti presents a more balanced and realistic model than narrowly targeted interventions. The inclusion of One Stop Centres, Women Helpline, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalat under Sambal demonstrates the scheme's emphasis on crisis response, grievance redressal, prevention, and behavioural change. Similarly, the inclusion of PMMVY, Palna, Sakhi Niwas, Shakti Sadan, and SANKALP: HEW under Samarthya highlights that empowerment requires social infrastructure and institutional support. Such a design is especially relevant in India, where women's experiences are shaped by intersecting disadvantages related to region, class, caste, family structure, labour participation, and access to public services. At the same time, the paper finds that the value of Mission Shakti will ultimately depend on implementation. Strong guidelines and broad objectives are necessary, but not sufficient. The real test lies in whether women can actually access services without delay, whether institutions work in coordination, whether awareness reaches the last mile, and whether local-level functionaries are trained and accountable. In the absence of these conditions, even well-designed schemes may produce limited outcomes. In policy terms, Mission Shakti is a promising step toward women-led development in India. It provides a stronger conceptual and institutional foundation than many fragmented interventions of the past. If backed by adequate resources, local participation, effective monitoring, and inclusive outreach, it can contribute meaningfully to a safer, more enabling, and more equitable environment for women. Thus, Mission Shakti should be viewed as both a welfare mechanism and a governance framework for advancing gender justice in India.

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