

Empowering rural women: transforming village lives through government initiativesDr. Vandana Singh¹DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19650588>**Review: 01/04/2026****Acceptance: 04/04/2026****Publication: 19/04/2026****ABSTRACT**

India is a rural dominated country. Here 68.80% of the population lives in villages. Almost 48% of rural population is female, but the status of women development in villages is not good. Although, for the past decade a lot of efforts are being made by the Indian government to improve the status of women, but they are not getting proper results for which there are many reasons such as female illiteracy, superstition and conservatism in rural areas, gender inequality, economic insecurity etc.

The Government of India has taken commendable initiatives and launched number of schemes for women empowerment in rural India including various aspects such as health and hygiene, education, financial independency, safety and security, life skills, social and political awareness.

All these schemes are designed to address the specific needs of women of rural India. These government initiatives will bring change in women's condition and will open the path of their empowerment. Through the present research article, the author has made an effort to explode the major challenges in the way of women empowerment in rural India and also tried to explain initiatives of government of India for women empowerment.

Keywords: Women Empowerment. Challenges. Government Initiatives

Introduction:

India is country of villages. Growth of Indian economy depends upon the growth of rural sector. But unfortunately, there are still many obstacles in the way of development of rural areas in our country. Women are not only the pillars of the family, but of the entire society. By empowering them, we can take our society forward on the path of progress. Women empowerment in villages face many challenges such as cultural, social, economic etc. All these issues and challenges are deeply rooted in traditional norms and educational backwardness. Village people specially women are not aware for their rights. These women think that they born only for household job. They don't play an important role in decision making. Although government has launched many schemes for empowering women in urban as well as rural sector but due to lack of awareness these schemes cannot bring sufficient change in women's condition.

Major challenges in the way of women empowerment:

There are so many issues and challenges which hinder the empowerment of women of Indian villages. Some of the major key challenges are mentioned below.

- Lack of education.
- Unawareness about healthcare services.
- Lack of economic independency.
- Gender inequality

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- Lack of awareness for their rights
- Domestic violence.
- Social conservatism.
- Lack of participation in political issues.

Lack of Education: In rural India there are lack of educational facilities and girls are not allowed to go far for education. Sometimes parents want to educate their daughters but can't do due to some restrictions such as avoiding co-education. Although educational facilities are increased but mostly quantitative enhancement is shown rather than qualitative. In rural areas, educational facilities are not available as per the developmental needs of girls. It is not possible for them to develop only through basic literacy and bookish education.

Unawareness about healthcare services: In rural areas women are not aware about healthcare services due to backwardness and traditional mind-set. They hesitate to discuss their health-related problems. They don't follow proper hygiene due to unawareness. Such carelessness towards their health makes them sick and hinders their development.

Gender Inequality: In rural areas, boys are given more importance than girls. Girls are considered a burden, and no attention is paid to their good upbringing, due to which their path of development is obstructed. People believe that women are only meant for household work, and they cannot go out and compete with men, which is an obstacle in their path of their development.

Lack of economic independency: In rural areas, women are financially dependent on men. They do not have any income of their own. They are considered fit only for household work. It is not considered good for them to go out of the house and do economic activities.

Lack of awareness for their rights: Rural women are not aware of their rights. They consider the discrimination and domestic violence happening with them as their fate and keep quiet. They feel that speaking anything for their rights will bring disgrace to their family.

Domestic violence: Many women in the villages are victims of domestic violence. But they never say anything for the sake of their family's social respect and dignity and are forced to live a difficult life. Due to which their development gets obstructed.

Social conservatism: Social backwardness and conservatism in rural areas are also a big obstacle in the path of women empowerment.

Lack of participation in political issues: In rural areas, women have very limited political representation. Even where women are elected as public representatives, in their name, their family members like father, husband or son take all the decisions and look after everything. Due to which women cannot develop.

Government initiatives to bring women empowerment:

Although there are many obstacles in the way of women empowerment in villages of India, but government has made commendable efforts in last decades. Numerous programs and schemes are launched by government of India to bring women empowerment in urban as well as rural areas. Some major schemes running in rural areas are mentioned below-

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY):** JSY is centrally sponsored scheme running under the National Health Mission in India. It aimed to provide cash assistance to eligible women who deliver their babies in a health facility. Key objectives of JSY are-
 - Reduce maternal and infant mortality by encouraging women to deliver their babies in hospitals or other healthcare facilities.
 - To promote institutional delivery by incentivizes women to choose Institutional deliveries over the home births.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** The Government of India is implementing the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) with effect from 1st January 2017, aiming to provides financial support for pregnant and lactating mothers to improve the health and nutrition for mother and child as well as compensation for wage loss, if any. It offers a cash incentive to pregnant and lactating women to improve their health and nutritional status.

The Objectives of the PMMVY are-

- to provide cash incentive for partial compensation for the wage loss so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first child
 - To improve health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers.
 - To promote positive behavioral change towards girl child by providing additional cash incentive for the second child, if that is a girl child.
- **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM):** The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 12th April 2005, to provide accessible, affordable and quality health care to the rural population, especially the vulnerable groups. The Union Cabinet vide its decision dated 1st May 2013, has approved the launch of National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) as a Sub-mission of an over-arching National Health Mission (NHM), with National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) being the other Sub-mission of National Health Mission.

NRHM seeks to provide equitable, affordable, and quality health care to the rural population, especially the vulnerable groups. The thrust of the mission is on establishing a fully functional, community-owned, decentralized health delivery system with inter-sectoral convergence at all levels, to ensure simultaneous action on a wide range of determinants of health such as water, sanitation, education, nutrition, social and gender equality.

- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana:** Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on April 8, 2015, for providing loans up to 10 lakhs to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises in Manufacturing, Trading and Services Sector including allied agricultural activities. Key objective of Mudra Yojana is to "*fund the unfunded*" by bringing micro and small businesses into the formal financial system.
- **Stand-Up India:** Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi launched the Stand-Up India scheme on 5 April 2016 as part of the government's efforts to support entrepreneurship among women and SC & ST communities. It encourages women to start their own businesses by providing financial assistance and support. The scheme provides loans ranging from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore to eligible borrowers. It specifically targets women, SC, and ST individuals who are first-time entrepreneurs. The scheme focuses on supporting the establishment of new businesses, rather than the expansion of existing ones.
- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM):** Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) is a flagship scheme of the Government of India aimed at reducing poverty in rural areas. The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development and aims to organise about 8-10 crore rural poor households into self-help groups (SHGs). The main objective of DAY-NRLM is to reduce poverty in rural areas. This scheme focuses on organizing rural poor families into Self Help Groups (SHGs). It aims to improve the livelihoods and socio-economic conditions of SHGs by increasing their household income through various financial services and livelihood opportunities.
- **One Stop Centres (OSC):** One Stop Centres (OSCs), also known as Sakhi centres, are a government initiative in India designed to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence. These centres offer a range of services under one roof, including medical aid, legal aid and advice, temporary shelter, police assistance, and psycho-social counselling. The goal is to support women in both private and public places, regardless of their age, class, caste, education, or marital status. As on March 2025, 802 OSCs are operational across the country either in own building or pre-existing government building or rented accommodation.
- **Mission Shakti:** Mission Shakti, a program by the Government of India, was launched with the two verticals Sambal and Samarthya on April 1, 2022. It aims to ensure women's safety and economic empowerment. The program is being implemented during the 15th Finance Commission period, from 2021-22 to 2025-26. Mission Shakti is a two-pronged initiative focused on women's safety, security, and empowerment. It is an umbrella scheme of the Indian government that covers various sub-schemes focuses on safety and security, empowerment and self-reliance through various programs and initiatives.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** In 2015, the Indian government introduced the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme to address concerns of gender discrimination and women empowerment in the country. The name Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao translates to 'Save the girl child, educate the girl child'. The scheme aims to educate citizens against gender bias and improve efficacy of welfare services for girls. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana aims to achieve the following goals-

- Improve the child sex ratio
 - Ensure gender equality and women empowerment
 - Prevent gender-biased, sex selective elimination
 - Ensure survival and protection of the girl child
 - Encourage education and participation of the girl child
- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):** The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) was launched in February 2017. The scheme aimed to make six crore people in rural areas digitally literate. The scheme was implemented in rural areas, with an average target of 200-300 beneficiaries per Gram Panchayat.
 - **Scheme for Adolescent Girls:** The Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG), now part of Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, aims to improve the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls aged 14-18, particularly in Aspirational Districts and the Northeast Region, and to facilitate their self-development. It focuses on breaking the cycle of nutritional and gender disadvantage.

The scheme is implemented through Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) under the larger ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) program. It targets adolescent girls in the age group of 14-18 years, especially in Aspirational Districts and the Northeast Region. The scheme also works to transition out-of-school girls back into formal schooling or provide them with bridge learning and skill training. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has focused on universalizing the scheme, expanding its reach to more districts.

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) which** provides affordable housing to rural families, with a significant number of beneficiaries being women.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** that provides free LPG connections to women from below-poverty-line households, improving their health and reducing indoor air pollution.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** that focuses on improving sanitation and hygiene, with a positive impact on women's safety and well-being.
- **Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) which** provides micro-credit to women through NGOs and other intermediaries.
- **Women Helpline (WHL) which** provides support and assistance to women in distress through a 24/7 toll-free number.

The schemes mentioned above are some glimpses of government initiatives. The government is making commendable efforts for women empowerment in various areas. As a result of which, the condition of women is improving even in rural areas.

Conclusion: Although many efforts have been made by government of India for women empowerment but there is still a need of awareness in rural areas so that the women of the villages can be benefited from the

various schemes and the path of women empowerment can be paved. Inclusive and equitable society is need of the time, and it can be achieved only by joint efforts of all people, government and whole society.

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