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# A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS OF MISSION SHAKTI: REIMAGINING WOMEN'S PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT

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Vivaswan Dev Balaji Sharma, B.A.LL.B. (Hons.), Maharashtra National Law University,  
Nagpur

## ABSTRACT

Mission Shakti represents a significant socio-legal intervention by the Government of India aimed at strengthening women's safety, empowerment, and participation in public life. It was first conceived as an umbrella scheme during the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission period 2021–2026. It integrates a wide range of protection oriented and empowerment-oriented programmes into a single framework with two principal components: Sambal, focusing on safety, legal support, and crisis response, and Samarthya, dedicated to capability enhancement, livelihood creation, and socio-economic upliftment. It is situated within the broader constitutional mandate of equality and non-discrimination. Mission Shakti operates at the intersection of law, policy, and social reform. It attempts to translate constitutional guarantees and statutory protections for women into accessible, practical mechanisms at the grassroots level. This socio-legal study examines how Mission Shakti strengthens institutional responses to gender-based violence, expands state accountability, and promotes women's substantive empowerment beyond formal rights. The paper analyses Sambal initiatives such as One Stop Centres, Women Helpline 112, Nari Adalats, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao as legal-administrative structures that operationalise women's rights to protection, dignity, and access to justice. These mechanisms demonstrate the evolving role of the state as a proactive facilitator of women's safety by integrating policing, legal counselling, medical assistance, and community-based dispute resolution. Similarly, the Samarthya component, which has components like Shakti Sadan, Working Women Hostels, Palna (National Crèche Scheme), Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and economic empowerment programmes illustrates the governments' responsibility towards enabling socio-economic rights and creating conditions where women feel empowered in the public sphere. The socio-legal analysis reveals that Mission Shakti has strengthened India's compliance with constitutional values and global commitments relating to gender justice. However, there are significant challenges that lie in the implementation of the scheme. The scheme's success depends not only on administrative efficiency but also on

sustained efforts to transform social attitudes and ensure that legal rights translate into lived realities for women.

**Keywords:** Mission Shakti; Women's Rights; Gender Justice; Sambal; Samarthya; Access to Justice; Public Policy; Constitutional Rights.

## Introduction

The safety and empowerment of women has long been recognised as a central pillar of India's public policy and governance framework. Over the decades, various legislative and welfare initiatives have been introduced to elevate the social, economic, and political status of women. Among these, Mission Shakti stands out as a comprehensive and integrative programme designed to secure women's dignity, protection, and empowerment across the country. Unlike earlier schemes that functioned independently, Mission Shakti consolidates multiple efforts under a unified structure, ensuring that support and empowerment measures reach women in a coordinated and accessible manner.

Mission Shakti is built around two core objectives: safety and empowerment, both of which are essential elements in strengthening women's constitutional rights and enhancing their position in the society. The safety component focuses on providing legal aid, shelter, counselling, and protection services to women in distress and ensures that they can access remedies guaranteed under the various laws. The empowerment component promotes skill development, financial independence, and active participation of women in decision making processes, thereby enabling women to exercise their constitutional freedoms and socio-economic rights in a meaningful manner.

Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Mission Shakti was first introduced in the Union Budget 2021 and later expanded in 2022 as an umbrella scheme that merges earlier programmes with newly developed initiatives. The mission operates through two major components: Sambal, which focuses on protection, support, and access to justice; and Samarthya, which emphasises capability-building, economic empowerment, and long-term rehabilitation. Together, these components aim to create a holistic ecosystem where women are not only safeguarded against harm but are also provided with opportunities for growth, leadership, and self-reliance. With this foundation, the paper now proceeds to examine Mission Shakti in detail.

## Historical and Socio-Legal Background of Mission Shakti

Under the Constitution of India, women and men are guaranteed equal rights in matters of freedom, dignity, and opportunity. There are several constitutional provisions such as Article 14 of the Constitution, which ensures equality before the law, Article 15(1), which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, and Article 15(3), which empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children are several provisions for the constitutional protection and welfare of women in India. Article 16 further secures equal opportunity in public employment.

However, despite these constitutional guarantees, Indian society has historically been affected by deep-rooted patriarchy. For generations, women were denied education, restricted to domestic roles, and excluded from public spaces and decision-making. Their participation in employment was minimal, and property rights were severely limited until reforms such as the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, which recognised daughters as coparceners. Further, practices like child marriage and dowry existed which significantly affected the physical and emotional well-being of women. Courts have repeatedly acknowledged this structural inequality. In the case of *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*,<sup>1</sup> the court laid down binding guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace and recognised the women's right to equality and safe working environments under Articles 14, 15, and 21.

However, despite several judicial precedents, guidelines and law, still women were not treated equally as men in the India society, thus, recognising this, the central and state governments introduced a variety of schemes over the decades for the upliftment of women.

It is in this context that Mission Shakti emerged as a transformative initiative. It was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development during the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission period 2021-2026. Mission Shakti integrates numerous safety and empowerment schemes under one umbrella framework. The initiative reflects a shift from a welfare-centric approach to a rights-based, women-led development model, which is aligned with constitutional ideals.

In recent years, the Government of India has consistently said that women are not merely beneficiaries but drivers of national development. At various global and national forums,

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<sup>1</sup> *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, (1997) 6 SCC 241

including G20 discussions and NITI Aayog initiatives, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi has reiterated that India's growth story must be shaped by women's leadership, agency, and participation. Mission Shakti embodies this philosophy by aiming not only to protect women from harm but also to create pathways for their autonomy, mobility, and socio-economic independence. Thus, Mission Shakti represents a crucial step in translating constitutional promises, legal protections, and judicial principles into a concrete system of support.

### **Institutional Mechanisms under Mission Shakti**

Mission Shakti comprises a wide range of initiatives introduced by the Government of India to ensure that the benefits of women-centric policies reach to every level of governance, the Union, State, District, and Panchayati Raj institutions. This multi-tiered approach shows a constitutional vision that women, irrespective of geography or socio-economic background, must have the ability to live with dignity, equality, and safety. It is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in coordination with state governments.

At its core, Mission Shakti consists of two integrated components: Sambal (protection and safety) and Samarthya (empowerment and capability-building).

#### **Sambal: Strengthening Safety, Protection, and Access to Justice**

The term "Sambal" means "support". This component focuses on creating an environment where women can seek help without fear, ensuring timely legal, medical, and psychological assistance. Sambal operationalises the constitutional right to life and personal liberty under Article 21. There are several components of Sambal scheme.

One of the most impactful initiatives under Sambal is the establishment of One Stop Centres in every district of India. These centres provide a single-window system for women facing any form of violence including domestic violence, sexual harassment, emotional violence, or workplace harassment. Under this, services include medical assistance, police help, legal counselling, psychological support, temporary shelter etc. Over 700 One Stop Centres are operational, including in remote rural areas. The centres also provide short-term accommodation for women and their children. Here, female children up to 18 years and male children up to 12 years are allowed to stay with the women. Earlier, there was a requirement to

disclose the name of the father for keeping the kids with the women, however, recently, this requirement has been removed.

Another important component of the scheme is Women Helpline no. The Women Helpline offers emergency support at all times. By dialling 112, women can access police assistance, ambulance services, legal guidance, and information about government schemes. This helpline serves as an immediate bridge between women and justice mechanisms and ensures that there is timely assistance to women at all times.

One of the very important initiates under the scheme is of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. It addresses long standing discrimination against the girl child. Historically, gender bias led to declining child sex ratios, which grew to a point, where in many parts of the country, female child was killed at birth. With awareness campaigns, the initiative has improved the sex ratio at birth and has risen from 933 per 1000 male child as per the 2001 census, to 1,020 females per 1,000 males as per the recent National Family Health Survey.<sup>2</sup> The scheme promotes girl child survival and safety, school enrolment, menstrual hygiene awareness, prevention of child marriage. Further, another important initiative under the scheme is of Nari Adalat or Women's Courts. It is introduced as a community-based grievance redressal mechanism, Nari Adalats empower local women leaders to mediate minor disputes within the Gram Panchayat. These informal courts reduce barriers to justice, especially for rural women who may hesitate to approach police stations or formal courts due to stigma, high cost, or distance. Further, it also encompasses specialised training to police personnel, medical staff, social workers, and government officials to ensure gender-sensitive handling of cases. The aim is to prevent secondary victimisation, which is very common in the rural areas and is often highlighted repeatedly in court observations in sexual violence cases.

### **Samarthya: Promoting Empowerment, Capability, and Economic Independence**

While Sambal focuses on safety, Samarthya strengthens women's long-term empowerment by enhancing their economic, social, and developmental opportunities. It aligns with the constitutional vision of substantive equality, by recognising that empowerment requires not

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<sup>2</sup> Poonam Muttreja & Martand Kaushik, "View India's Gender Gap Report Ranking as a Warning", The Hindu (July 5, 2025), available here <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/view-indias-gender-gap-report-ranking-as-a-warning/article69801562.ece>

legal protections but also access to resources, livelihood, and autonomy.

One of the primary components of Samarthya scheme is of Shakti Sadan. It integrates the earlier Swadhar Greh and Ujjawala schemes by creating comprehensive rehabilitation homes for women who are homeless, trafficked, or in distress. These shelters provide safe accommodation, food and healthcare, legal support, skill development training and assistance in securing employment. In states like Maharashtra and West Bengal, Shakti Sadan centres collaborate with local skill institutes to train women in tailoring, handicrafts, digital literacy, and food-processing, thus, ensuring their economic independence and reintegration into society.<sup>3</sup> Another component of the scheme is of Sakhi Niwas, which provides hostels for women to live in. It offers safe, affordable accommodation for working women and students. Many hostels also include daycare facilities, reducing the disproportionate childcare burden on women, which is a critical step in achieving equality in employment under Article 16. Another component of the scheme is Palna, which is a national crèche scheme. Palna provides daycare facilities for children aged between 6 months to 6 years and allows mothers to work without compromising their children's safety. The crèches centres offer nutrition, early education, immunisation, and health check-ups of the children. This initiative is crucial for supporting women's workforce participation, as otherwise, many women would not be able to work, if their kids do not have adequate and safe place to live while they are working. Further, under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, financial assistance is given to pregnant and lactating women. It helps to encourage institutional deliveries and maternal healthcare. Women receive ₹5,000 in instalments, based on the pregnancy registration, check-ups, and child vaccination schedules. States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have reported measurable improvements in maternal and infant health due to the scheme. Also, under the Gap Funding for Economic Empowerment, women's skill development, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion is supported. It provides the resources to women to start their own start up. Self-help groups in Odisha, Assam, Jharkhand and other states have used this support to establish enterprises in weaving, handicrafts, food processing, and handloom production, which has helped in creation of sustainable livelihoods. Further, Hubs for Empowerment of Women are also created, which operate at national, state, and district levels to coordinate and monitor the implementation of Samarthya initiatives.<sup>4</sup> These hubs work closely with Panchayats, self-help

<sup>3</sup> Gadadhara Mohapatra, Evaluation of the Impact of Mission Shakti in Women Empowerment in KBK Districts in Odisha (Indian Inst. of Pub. Admin., Final Study Report, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Jhanaranjan Mohanty, Performance Analysis of "Mission Shakti" in Empowering Women in Odisha: An Empirical Study, 4 Int'l J. Hum. & Soc. Sci. Invention 77, 77–85 (2015).

groups, and local bodies to identify women in need and connect them with the appropriate schemes, to ensure that people who require the support get the support with the help of the scheme.

### **Evaluation of Mission Shakti: A Socio-Legal Perspective**

Mission Shakti emerges as one of the most comprehensive and integrated policy interventions by the Government of India to advance women's safety and empowerment. By bringing multiple earlier schemes under a single umbrella framework, the initiative strengthens institutional coordination and ensures that services reach women more efficiently. Its multi-level structure, including the central, state, district, and local governance levels, addresses a longstanding challenge in women-centric policy implementation, which is the fragmentation of services and the absence of a unified support mechanism.

The Sambal component, particularly the One Stop Centres and the Women Helpline, has become a crucial access point for women seeking immediate legal, medical, and psychological support. These mechanisms are consistent with the jurisprudence laid down in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, where the Supreme Court underscored the state's obligation to create accessible and effective redressal systems for women facing violence. Similarly, initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have contributed to improving the sex ratio at birth and has addressed the gender biases at the societal level. The Samarthya component has significantly contributed to women's economic empowerment by enhancing access to education, skill development, and livelihood opportunities. Economic empowerment is not merely an economic objective but a socio-legal objective. Through self-help groups, rehabilitation homes, working women hostels, and childcare support, Samarthya strengthens women's ability to participate meaningfully in the economy and public sphere.

Despite these achievements, Mission Shakti faces several challenges. A major issue is the uneven spread of information across regions. Rural and remote areas often lack awareness of programmes such as One Stop Centres, Nari Adalats, or the 112 helpline. If women in the rural areas are not aware about these schemes, then they will be of no use. Further, Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and patriarchal norms also discourage women from reporting violence or seeking institutional support. These constraints highlight the persistent gap between legal rights and their actual realization on the ground, which is a concern noted in women's rights jurisprudence.

Further, infrastructure gaps and shortages of trained staff also limit the effectiveness of the scheme. Where police, hospitals, and legal service authorities do not coordinate adequately, survivors often experience delays in assistance or justice. This undermines the constitutional promise of speedy justice under Article 21. Thus, robust monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to ensure accountability and proper utilisation of resources. The Samarthya component is conceptually strong but is also struggling with implementation barriers. Many women still face difficulty while accessing credit, travelling for training, or participating in entrepreneurial ventures due to social restrictions. Further, in many parts of the country, there is not enough infrastructure to facilitate safe and efficient travel.

For Mission Shakti to achieve its full potential, several reforms are necessary. One of the most important steps that should be taken is to have awareness campaigns across schools, colleges, and panchayati raj institutions to ensure that every woman knows how and where to seek assistance. Further, regular and mandatory sensitisation programmes for police, healthcare workers, and administrative staff should be conducted so as to strengthen survivor-centric responses by the officers. Also, digital empowerment of women should be prioritised, so that women can access information, financial services, and grievance-redressal platforms digitally.

## Conclusion

Mission Shakti is one of the significant policy initiatives of the Government of India for the safety and empowerment of women. By moving beyond traditional welfare, this scheme positions women not merely as beneficiaries of state support but as active participants in national progress. The components of the scheme, Samarthya and Sambal, together create a comprehensive ecosystem that integrates protection, legal support, rehabilitation, and economic empowerment. Through Sambal, the state is trying to establish a robust institutional mechanism for women including initiatives like One Stop Centres, Women Helplines, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalats, which have enhanced women's access to justice, medical assistance, psychological counselling, and community-level dispute resolution. The Samarthya component is essential for empowering women with the skills, resources, and opportunities which are necessary for them to become self-reliant. Programmes such as Shakti Sadans, Working Women Hostels, and the National Crèche Scheme (Palna) help in enhancing women's capability to participate in education, employment, and economic activity. Collectively, these measures contribute to bridging socio-economic gaps and promote greater

participation of women in the workforce and public sphere. Despite its strengths, Mission Shakti faces many challenges that hinder its full effectiveness. It includes uneven awareness, infrastructural limitations, insufficiently trained personnel, and persistent social stigma, all of which continue to restrict the reach of the scheme, particularly in rural and marginalised areas of the country. This cannot be solved solely by the government, but will also require active participation of citizens. Addressing these limitations will require community engagement, improved inter-agency coordination, and regular capacity-building of frontline officials. However, the long-term success of the scheme depends on the deeper societal change, where patriarchal norms are replaced by a culture that recognises and values women's autonomy and equal citizenship.

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