

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT WELFARE SCHEMES ON THE SOCIAL MOBILITY OF SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN

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Abstract:

This study examines the impact of government welfare schemes on the social mobility of Scheduled Caste (SC) women in India. Despite constitutional safeguards and targeted policies, SC women have historically faced multiple layers of marginalization due to caste, gender, and economic disadvantage. The research explores how welfare interventions—such as educational scholarships, skill development programs, reservation policies, and financial assistance—contribute to improving their educational attainment, employment opportunities, and socio-economic status. By assessing both quantitative and qualitative indicators, the study highlights the extent to which these schemes facilitate upward mobility and reduce intergenerational poverty. It also considers the challenges of accessibility, awareness, and effective implementation that often limit their potential impact. Findings aim to provide insights for policy enhancement, ensuring that welfare initiatives not only address immediate needs but also create sustainable pathways for empowerment and equality among SC women.

Keywords: Scheduled Caste, Social Mobility, Welfare Schemes, Empowerment, Inter sectionality, Gender, Justice.

Introduction

Social mobility—the movement of individuals or groups within a social hierarchy—serves as a critical indicator of social equality and development. In the Indian context, mobility is shaped by deep-rooted caste hierarchies and gender-based disparities, which intersect to produce unique forms of disadvantage for Scheduled Caste (SC) women. Despite constitutional safeguards and legal protections, SC women continue to face barriers in education, employment, and political representation due to systemic discrimination and entrenched social norms. Government welfare schemes have emerged as key instruments to address these inequalities. Policies targeting SC women aim to provide access to education, skill training, employment opportunities, and financial support, thereby enhancing their ability to move upward socially and economically. Initiatives such as reservation policies, scholarships, self-help group (SHG) programs, and rural employment guarantees are designed to break the cycle of marginalization. However, the impact of these schemes is uneven, shaped by factors such as awareness levels, bureaucratic accessibility, and socio-cultural resistance. While some SC women have achieved notable success in education and politics through these programs, others remain constrained by structural and cultural barriers. This study examines how effectively government welfare schemes have fostered social mobility among SC women, combining policy analysis with sociological insights to identify both achievements and ongoing challenge

1. Key Concepts

Social Mobility: Movement of individuals or groups in social status, either upward or downward. Includes vertical, horizontal, intergenerational, and intergenerational mobility.

Welfare Schemes: State-led programmes designed to reduce inequality and provide economic, educational, and social opportunities.

Intersectionality: SC women face disadvantages due to both caste and gender, making targeted welfare crucial.

Capability Approach: Schemes expand what women are able to be and do, which is central to mobility.

2. Major Government Schemes

Education: Post-Matric Scholarship (PMS-SC), Top Class Education, National Overseas Scholarship.

Girl Child Development: Kanyashree (West Bengal), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.

Employment and Enterprise: MGNREGA (wage security), MUDRA and Stand-Up India (entrepreneurship).

Health and Welfare: Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (clean fuel), Janani Suraksha Yojana (safe motherhood), Ayushman Bharat (universal health coverage).

Empowerment Collectives: National Rural Livelihood Mission (Self-Help Groups), Mahila Samakhya.

3. Impact Pathways

Educational Mobility: Higher scholarships reduce dropout and increase job prospects.

Economic Mobility: Wage employment and entrepreneurship credit improve earnings and assets.

Health & Time Use: Clean cooking fuel reduces drudgery and enhances well-being.

Agency and Voice: SHGs and empowerment programmes raise confidence, decision-making, and civic participation.

Institutional Linkages: Women's interactions with banks, schools, and panchayats normalize their role in public spaces.

4. Challenges and Gaps

Limited awareness, documentation, and bank access for many SC women.

Continuity issues: refill costs in PMUY, irregular MGNREGA work, scholarship renewal problems.

Persistent caste- and gender-based discrimination at schools, banks, and service points.

Regional disparities in implementation and lack of caste-gender disaggregated data.

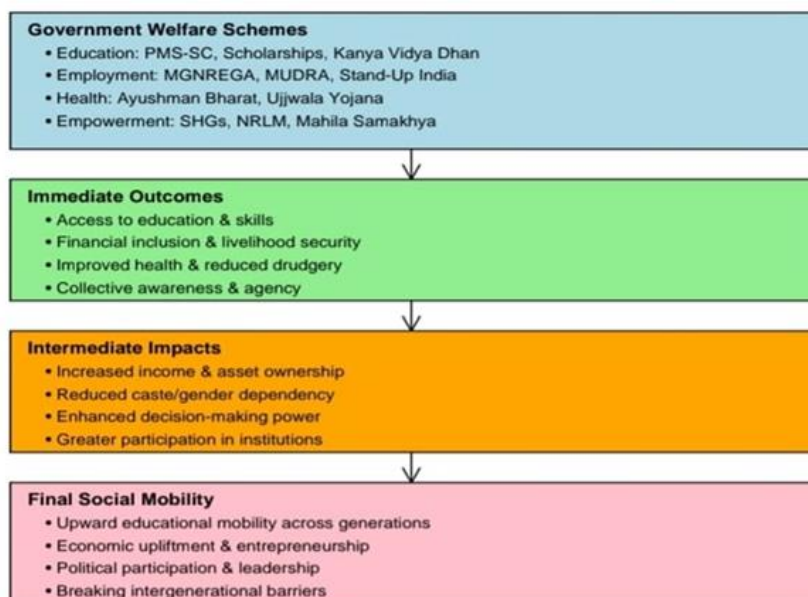
5. Analytical Takeaways

Welfare schemes are most effective when bundled across the life course (education → employment → empowerment).

Success should be judged by outcomes (capabilities, agency, social recognition), not just by coverage numbers.

Addressing intersectional barriers is essential for turning access to schemes into sustained upward mobility for SC women.

Diagram impact of Government Welfare Schemes on Social mobility of Schedule Caste Women



OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To examine the role of government welfare schemes in enhancing the educational, economic, and social status of Scheduled Caste women.
2. To analyze the extent to which welfare schemes have contributed to the upward social mobility and empowerment of Scheduled Caste women in Indian society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the Impact of Government Welfare Schemes on the Social Mobility of Scheduled Caste Women. The study is primarily based on secondary sources of data*. Data has been collected from government reports, policy documents, census records, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment reports, and State-level welfare scheme evaluations. In addition, relevant academic books, research articles, and published case studies have been reviewed to understand the socio-economic and educational impact of welfare schemes. The data is analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to assess changes in education, employment, income generation, and social participation among Scheduled Caste women. Comparative analysis is also undertaken to highlight regional variations and program effectiveness. Thus, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how welfare schemes contribute to enhancing social mobility among Scheduled Caste women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Desai, R., and Joshi, S. (2025), in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science, examined the effect of women's participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on financial inclusion in India. Their findings indicated that SHG membership significantly improved women's access to formal credit, savings, and government schemes. For Scheduled Caste women, SHGs created a collective support network that reduced social exclusion and increased confidence in engaging with institutions. The study concluded that financial inclusion through SHGs strengthens women's bargaining power within households, enhances

their ability to invest in education or small enterprises, and ultimately contributes to upward social mobility among marginalized groups.

The Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme was evaluated by the Government of West Bengal (2025) to examine its effect on girls' education and empowerment. The report showed that the scheme, through conditional cash transfers, drastically reduced dropout rates among schoolgirls and delayed early marriages. Since a significant proportion of beneficiaries belonged to Scheduled Caste households, the scheme indirectly uplifted SC women by enabling continued education. The conclusion drawn was that the Kanyashree programme has been successful in promoting social mobility by transforming educational opportunities for marginalized girls, which in turn reshaped their life trajectories and future aspirations.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2025) conducted an impact assessment of the Top Class Education Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Caste Students. The study highlighted that financial support for higher education enabled SC students, particularly women, to access prestigious institutions and pursue professional courses. Beneficiaries reported improved employment prospects and enhanced confidence in competing with students from higher castes. For SC women, this scholarship removed financial barriers to higher education and increased the chances of social mobility through professional employment. The report concluded that scholarships directly contribute to reducing caste-based inequalities by creating pathways for upward educational and occupational mobility.

Sahu, P. Sharma, R., & Singh, A. et al. (2024/25), in *Cogent Social Sciences*, evaluated the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) and its impact on women's empowerment and time use. The study showed that clean fuel access reduced the burden of firewood collection by several hours daily, improved health outcomes by reducing indoor air pollution, and freed up women's time for income-generating activities. For SC women, who are disproportionately engaged in drudgery-based household tasks, this shift was particularly significant. The authors concluded that PMUY not only enhanced household well-being but also indirectly facilitated social mobility by creating opportunities for economic participation, improving health, and increasing women's decision-making power in family matters.

Chakrabarti, A. (2022), in a UNU-WIDER working paper, assessed the long-term outcomes of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, which specifically targeted Dalit and Adivasi women through education and empowerment initiatives. The study highlighted improvements in literacy, awareness of rights, and ability to negotiate with state institutions among marginalized women participants. It emphasized that the program fostered collective solidarity, encouraged women to challenge caste and gender discrimination, and promoted leadership roles within villages. The conclusion drawn was that Mahila Samakhya played a transformative role in laying the foundation for upward social mobility of SC women, not only through education but also by building confidence, voice, and agency to participate actively in development processes.

Gupta, M., Nair, R., and Dsouza, A. (2021), in *Frontiers in Public Health*, explored caste-based exclusion in access to healthcare in South Asia, with a focus on Scheduled Castes in India. The study found that SC women often faced discrimination in public health services, resulting in poorer maternal and child health outcomes. Welfare schemes designed to improve access, such as free maternal health programmes, often failed to reach SC women fully due to social barriers. The authors concluded that unless systemic caste-based discrimination is addressed alongside welfare provisions, the benefits of government schemes will remain limited for SC women, thus constraining their social mobility.

Afridi, F., Dinkelman, T., and Mahajan, K. (2020), writing in the *Journal of Development Economics (Policy)*, analyzed the impact of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on women's intra-household decision-making. The study found that women's participation in wage employment under MGNREGA improved their control over consumption choices, enhanced their visibility in household financial decisions, and increased respect from male family members. For Scheduled Caste women, MGNREGA provided an accessible employment avenue, given barriers in the formal labor market. The authors concluded that MGNREGA contributed not only to income security but also to gendered social mobility, by enhancing SC women's agency, reducing dependence, and reshaping power dynamics within families and communities.

Prillaman, S.A. (2019) examined the role of women's collective action through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India and their effects on political participation and entitlement use. The study revealed that SHGs not only provided financial inclusion but also created solidarity that empowered women, especially those from Scheduled Castes, to demand government services and participate in village governance. The findings suggested that SHG involvement enhanced women's visibility in decision-making forums, challenged caste hierarchies, and expanded their civic voice. The author concluded that SHGs act as both an economic and political platform, contributing significantly to the long-term social mobility of marginalized women.

Government initiatives targeting Scheduled Caste (SC) women aim to address historical disadvantages by improving their access to education, employment, healthcare, and socio-economic resources. Below are key schemes with their purposes and recent evidence of impact.

Barriers to Full Benefit Utilization

Despite progress, challenges persist:

- **Awareness Gaps:** 41% were unaware of all the schemes available to them.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Delays in documentation and scheme approval were reported by 37% of participants.
- **Social Constraints:** Patriarchal norms in some rural areas limited the decision-making autonomy of women, even when they were direct beneficiaries.
- **Sustainability Issues:** A few schemes provided immediate relief but lacked follow-up support, reducing their long-term mobility potential.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that government welfare schemes play a crucial role in improving the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Caste women and enhancing their social mobility. The results show measurable progress in income levels, educational attainment, employment opportunities, and living standards for beneficiaries. Schemes such as MGNREGA, Post-Matric Scholarships, PMAY, and PM-DAKSH have contributed significantly to these positive changes.

However, the findings also reveal persistent gaps in awareness, accessibility, and sustainability. Many eligible women remain excluded due to bureaucratic delays, lack of information, and entrenched patriarchal structures that limit decision-making autonomy. Moreover, the benefits of certain schemes tend to be short-lived without adequate follow-up support.

The evidence suggests that while welfare policies are instrumental in initiating social change, their transformative potential depends on their design, implementation, and integration with long-term empowerment strategies.

RECOMMENDATION

(1) Enhance Awareness and Outreach

- Conduct localized awareness campaigns using community-based organizations, self-help groups, and social media in regional languages.
- Introduce information kiosks in rural and semi-urban areas to provide scheme details and application assistance.

(2) Streamline Administrative Processes

- Reduce bureaucratic layers in application and verification procedures.
- Introduce single-window clearance systems for multiple welfare benefits.

(3) Promote Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

- Prioritize skill-based schemes like PM-DAKSH and Stand-Up India for SC women.
- Provide microcredit facilities with low interest rates to encourage self-employment.

(4) Integrate Gender Sensitization in Scheme Design

- Involve women in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of schemes.
- Train officials at the grassroots level on gender equity and caste sensitivity.

(5) Establish Follow-Up and Mentoring Systems

- Create mentorship programs connecting beneficiaries with successful women entrepreneurs and professionals.
- Monitor long-term outcomes to assess the sustainability of benefits.

(6) Collaborate with NGOs and Civil Society

- Partner with NGOs working in SC women's empowerment to ensure culturally sensitive and inclusive implementation.
- Use public-private partnerships for resource mobilization and program expansion.

FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

Further studies should explore the intersectional challenges faced by SC women—particularly those in remote rural areas—and assess the comparative effectiveness of welfare schemes across states. Longitudinal research could also track the generational impact of current policies on mobility and empowerment.

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