



Research Paper

Women's Empowerment in Contemporary India: A Policy Review of Government Initiatives since 2014

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Abstract

This study offers a comprehensive thematic review of key policy initiatives introduced in India since 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to promote women's empowerment. It examines major government programmes, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Stand Up India, Mission Shakti, and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, which are designed to strengthen the socio-economic position of women. These initiatives collectively address multiple dimensions of empowerment, such as education, healthcare, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, safety, and leadership participation. Based on secondary data drawn from official reports, policy documents, and other credible sources, the study evaluates the outcomes of these interventions in advancing gender equality and fostering women-led development. The analysis highlights improvements in women's participation in governance and economic activities, as well as enhanced access to healthcare and digital resources. Despite these advancements, the review identifies ongoing challenges, including regional imbalances, persistent patriarchal structures, and implementation gaps that limit the overall effectiveness of these programmes. The study concludes that achieving sustainable and inclusive empowerment requires continued policy innovation, with greater emphasis on emerging sectors such as digital entrepreneurship and green energy.

Keywords:

Women Empowerment, Government Schemes, Gender Equality, Financial Inclusion, Women-led Development, India

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I. Introduction

"When women are empowered, a nation is empowered. Empowerment of women leads to development of a family, development of a society, and ultimately the development of nation"

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India

Empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for inclusive growth, poverty alleviation, and national development. In India, where women comprise nearly half of the population, the need to address gender inequality has long been recognized. However, the decade since 2014 has witnessed an intensified and structured approach to women's empowerment under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Recognizing that women's empowerment is integral to achieving the vision of a New India, the Modi government has introduced a series of transformative policies, schemes, and reforms that cut across various dimensions of women's lives—education, health, economic independence, safety, leadership, and social dignity.

Flagship initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Yojana, Stand Up India, and Mission Shakti reflect a comprehensive strategy to address both structural and cultural barriers to women's advancement. These schemes have targeted the deep-rooted issues of gender-based discrimination, economic marginalization, lack of access to clean energy, digital illiteracy, and underrepresentation in governance. Additionally, the government has emphasized improving women's participation in decision-making roles, promoting financial inclusion, supporting female entrepreneurship, and ensuring their safety through legal and institutional reforms.

This paper seeks to explore and evaluate the impact of these initiatives through an evidence-based analysis, drawing from government reports, statistical data, and independent studies. It also reflects on the shifts in public perception, policy focus, and grassroots outcomes that have emerged in the past decade. While notable

progress has been achieved, the paper also acknowledges the enduring challenges that require attention, such as regional disparities, cultural resistance, and infrastructural limitations. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how the Modi government's efforts have shaped the landscape of women's empowerment in India and the road ahead.

II. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. **To critically review** the major women-centric schemes launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014.
2. **To assess** the impact of these schemes in improving the socio-economic status of women across different sectors such as health, education, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, safety, and governance.
3. **To identify** key challenges and gaps in the implementation of these initiatives.
4. **To provide** evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of women empowerment efforts in India.

III. Methodology

This study is a **descriptive and thematic review** based entirely on secondary data drawn from government publications, national surveys (such as NFHS-5), global indices (such as the Global Gender Gap Report), academic literature, and reports by organizations like UNFPA. A systematic document review was conducted to evaluate key women-centric schemes introduced since 2014, identify implementation challenges, and assess gaps in outcomes. The study follows a thematic framework to synthesize findings on women empowerment efforts during the Modi era.

IV. Literature review

Sharma (2019) emphasizes the evolving landscape of women's welfare and empowerment in India, highlighting significant policy interventions under the NDA-II government. Schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana, and Mahila Shakti Kendra aim to improve health, education, and economic independence for women. Despite constitutional safeguards and developmental programs, Indian women—especially in rural areas—continue to face issues like domestic violence, dowry, gender discrimination, and lack of financial autonomy. Though progress is evident in political participation and employment, challenges remain rooted in patriarchal norms. Continuous awareness, grassroots implementation, and socio-cultural change are essential for sustained empowerment.

Tripathy and Raha (2019) emphasize the significant role played by the Indian government in empowering women through both historical reforms and contemporary welfare programs. Legislative interventions, from the abolition of Sati to modern acts like the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, illustrate efforts to challenge deep-rooted patriarchy. Post-independence judicial actions and laws have targeted gender-based violence and promoted women's rights. Recent schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila Shakti Kendras, and PMMVY aim to enhance education, health, and economic participation. Despite advancements, issues like literacy disparity and safety continue to demand long-term, integrated policy measures.

Seema Singh and Antra Singh (2020) critically analyze women's empowerment in India, highlighting the complex interplay of autonomy, access to resources, and supportive policy frameworks. Drawing from feminist scholars like Kabeer and Batliwala, they discuss how empowerment evolves through dimensions like economic independence, self-confidence, and political participation. Their review of government programs—from Beti Bachao Beti Padhao to Mahila Shakti Kendras—shows progress, yet persistent gaps in education, health, and safety impede full empowerment. They argue for realignment of strategies to meet Sustainable Development Goal 5, urging a shift from welfare-based approaches to rights-based, multidimensional empowerment.

Goyal (2022) highlights the transformative vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in fostering empowerment across India. The study emphasizes key government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Jan Dhan Yojana, Digital India, and Atmanirbhar Bharat, aimed at inclusive development, poverty reduction, and economic revival. Goyal argues that Modi's governance promotes empowerment not just through welfare but by enabling self-reliance and innovation. Despite achievements, the study acknowledges structural challenges and emphasizes the need for deeper reforms to fulfill the aspirations of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." The empowerment vision remains ambitious but demands sustained and inclusive implementation.

Lakshmi Devi (2022) presents a comprehensive overview of women's empowerment in India, highlighting persistent gender inequalities in education, employment, and social roles. The study emphasizes that despite various government schemes such as Mahila Shakti Kendra, PMMVY, and One Stop Centres, women continue to face discrimination, violence, and limited decision-making power. Drawing on UNDP and

feminist perspectives, the article stresses that empowerment requires both external resources and internal transformation. While legal and policy frameworks exist, Lakshmi Devi argues that attitudinal change—especially societal acceptance of gender equality—is essential for achieving genuine and sustainable empowerment.

Kapur and Narayan (2020) argue that while India has made notable progress in legal reforms and flagship schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila-E-Haat, deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to impede true women empowerment. Their study highlights India's lag in gender parity, as seen in low labor force participation and wage gaps. They emphasize that empowering women requires not just policy, but systemic attitudinal shifts, especially in rural areas. Despite gains in politics, education, and entrepreneurship, India's position in global gender rankings remains low, revealing a significant gap between policy intent and practical outcomes.

V. Policy Framework for Women Empowerment

The Modi administration has adopted a holistic and integrated policy framework to promote women's empowerment, recognizing its critical role in nation-building. The government's approach goes beyond isolated welfare schemes and embeds gender considerations across flagship programs. Policies address a wide range of issues including girls' education, maternal health, financial inclusion, skill development, and protection from violence. By aligning women-centric objectives with broader national missions such as Digital India, Skill India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and Atmanirbhar Bharat, the administration ensures that empowerment is not viewed in isolation but as an essential pillar of India's socio-economic development agenda.

VI. Key Initiatives for Women Empowerment under Modi Government

The Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched a comprehensive set of flagship programs that specifically focus on women's development and empowerment. These initiatives address a wide range of issues such as gender inequality, health hazards, financial dependence, limited entrepreneurship opportunities, and safety concerns. The following are some of the most impactful schemes introduced since 2014.

6.1 Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)

Launched in January 2015, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) was a response to the alarming decline in the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in many Indian states. The program aims to prevent gender-biased sex selection and ensure survival, protection, and education for the girl child. Implemented across gender-critical districts in a multi-sectoral manner, it engages the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Education.

Impact:

Between 2014 and 2019, significant progress was made in improving the Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in target districts, with states like Haryana—previously known for highly skewed sex ratios—showing notable gains. Since the launch of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme in 2015, there have been measurable improvements in various indicators related to the welfare of the girl child. Nationally, the **Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB)** improved from **918 to 930**, while **institutional deliveries increased from 61% to 97.3%**, reflecting enhanced access to maternal health services. **First-trimester antenatal registrations rose to 80.5%**, and **girls' enrollment in secondary education climbed from 75.5% to 78%**. The scheme's integration with other government initiatives such as Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana has further contributed to building a more supportive and inclusive environment for girls in India (Press Information Bureau, 2025a; Press Information Bureau, 2024).

6.2 Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

Launched in May 2016, the Ujjwala Yojana provides free LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households. The objective is to promote clean cooking fuel usage and reduce dependence on traditional, harmful cooking methods such as firewood and dung cakes, which adversely affect women's health.

Impact:

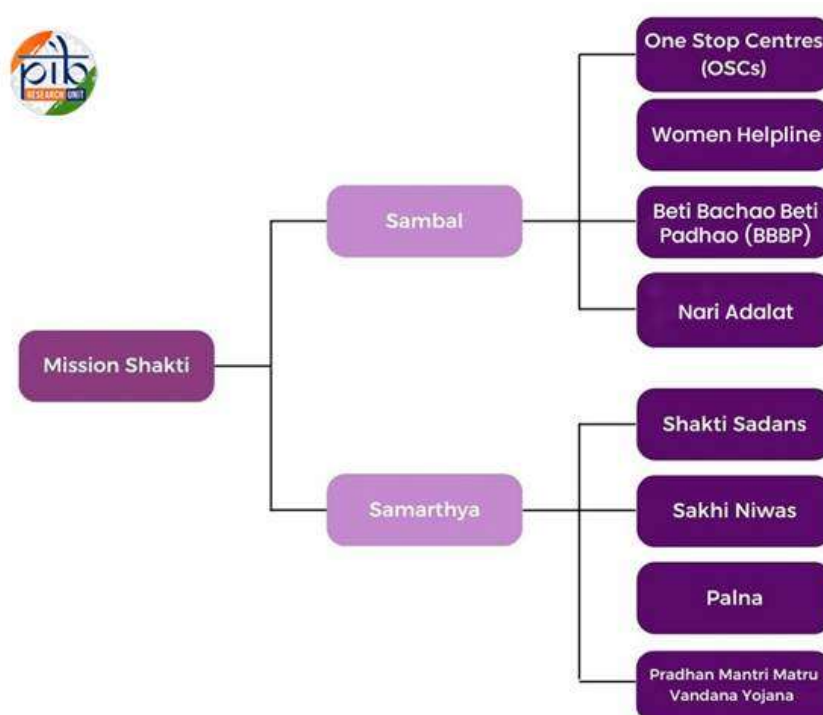
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has significantly improved access to clean cooking fuel for poor households, particularly women in rural India. As of July 2025, over **10.33 crore LPG connections** have been provided, with **average annual consumption** rising from **3.68 to 4.47 cylinders** between 2021 and 2025. Subsidies of up to ₹ 300 per cylinder have made LPG more affordable, leading to reduced indoor air pollution, better respiratory health, and less dependence on firewood. This has freed up time for women to pursue

education and income-generating activities. With only **1.3% inactive users**, the scheme reflects strong adoption and impact on women's well-being and environmental sustainability (Press Information Bureau, 2025). However, evidence from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) shows that only 58.6% of households use clean fuels, reflecting continued dependence on traditional energy sources, particularly in rural areas. This indicates that access does not necessarily ensure sustained usage.

Supporting this, Roy (2024) finds that while PMUY significantly increased LPG adoption, long-term usage is shaped by socio-economic factors such as income, education, and regional disparities, suggesting that policy interventions alone are insufficient. Therefore, although PMUY has expanded access, its long-term effectiveness depends on addressing affordability, behavioural, and supply-side constraints to ensure sustained clean energy transition.

6.3 Mission Shakti

Mission Shakti, introduced in 2021, is an umbrella initiative that consolidates various government programs focused on women's safety, security, and empowerment. It integrates One Stop Centres, Women Helplines (181), and schemes like Swadhar Greh and Sakhi Niwas, aimed at providing shelter, legal aid, and rehabilitation for women in distress.



Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India (2023).

Impact:

The integrated framework under **Mission Shakti** has substantially improved institutional support for women facing violence or abuse. As of January 31, 2025, **812 One Stop Centres (OSCs)** were operational across the country, having provided assistance to **over 10.8 lakh women** since their inception. These centres offer a **single-window mechanism** for access to critical services, including medical assistance, legal aid, police facilitation, psychological counseling, and temporary shelter. This initiative has significantly strengthened the **safety net for vulnerable women**, ensuring timely and coordinated support (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

6.4 Stand Up India scheme

Stand Up India, launched in 2016, facilitates bank loans between ₹ 10 lakh and ₹ 1 crore for women and SC/ST entrepreneurs to set up greenfield enterprises. It mandates every bank branch to support at least one woman and one SC/ST borrower.

Impact:

Launched in 2016, the **Stand Up India scheme** has played a pivotal role in fostering inclusive entrepreneurship among women and SC/ST communities across the country. As of April 5, 2025, the scheme has facilitated the disbursement of loans amounting to ₹ **61,020.41 crore** to **2,73,607 beneficiaries**, including **1,90,844 women entrepreneurs**. It primarily supports first-time entrepreneurs in establishing **greenfield**

enterprises in sectors such as **manufacturing, services, and trading**. By mandating every bank branch to extend credit to at least one woman and one SC/ST borrower, the initiative has significantly enhanced access to formal financial systems, promoted **economic empowerment**, and generated **local employment opportunities**, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

6.5 Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)

Launched in 2015, MUDRA Yojana aims to provide collateral-free loans to micro and small enterprises. It has a special focus on women entrepreneurs, particularly those from low-income households.

Impact:

Launched in April 2015, the **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)** has emerged as a transformative initiative for promoting financial inclusion, particularly among women from low-income households. By late 2023, nearly **70% of the 44.46 crore loans** sanctioned under the scheme—amounting to over **30 crore loans**—had been disbursed to women borrowers (Press Information Bureau, 2023). In the fiscal year 2021–22, **71.4% of all PMMY accounts were held by women**, with the majority falling under the **Shishu category**, which provides collateral-free loans up to ₹ 50,000 (NITI Aayog, 2022; Press Information Bureau, 2023). The scheme has empowered millions of women to launch micro-enterprises such as tailoring units, food stalls, beauty parlors, and handicraft businesses, thereby enhancing their economic self-reliance. By focusing on small-ticket loans and easing access to formal credit, PMMY has effectively nurtured grassroots entrepreneurship and contributed to local job creation, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions (Press Information Bureau, 2023).

6.6 Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)

Launched in January 2015 as a flagship initiative under the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign, the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana is a government-backed small savings scheme aimed at securing the financial future of the girl child. It offers one of the highest interest rates among small savings instruments and encourages long-term financial planning for a girl's education and marriage.

Impact:

Since its inception, SSY has emerged as a key tool for promoting financial security for girls in India. **By November 2024, over 4.1 crore** accounts had been opened, including **1.42 crore between April 2018 and October 2021**, with particularly high participation in states like Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (Press Information Bureau, 2025; 2021). With a minimum annual deposit of just ₹ 250 and tax-free returns, the scheme promotes disciplined savings, enhances financial literacy, and reinforces the social importance of investing in daughters (Press Information Bureau, 2025; 2021).

6.7 Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) – Toilets for Women

Launched on **October 2, 2014**, by the Government of India, the **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** is one of the largest sanitation drives in the world, aimed at eliminating open defecation and improving hygiene standards across the country. Recognizing that women and girls are disproportionately affected by poor sanitation, the mission placed a strong focus on building toilets specifically to ensure **privacy, safety, dignity, and educational continuity** for females in both rural and urban India. The absence of safe sanitation facilities had long been a deterrent to girls' education and posed serious threats to women's health and personal safety.

Impact:

The **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** has significantly improved sanitation access for women and girls by constructing nearly **100 million toilets** and reaching over **12 crore families** (PIB, 2024). Safety concerns were a major driver, with **80% of rural households** building toilets to avoid risks, and **93% of women** later reporting reduced fear of attacks or animal threats (SBM Survey, 2018). The initiative has also contributed to a **7% reduction in sexual assaults** in covered communities (Hossain et al., 2022). Additionally, with **97% of government schools** now having separate toilets for girls (UDISE+ 2021–22), SBM has helped lower dropout rates and improve menstrual hygiene and dignity, advancing women's safety, health, and empowerment (PIB, 2024).

VII. Women's Participation in Governance and Leadership

The Modi government has prioritized the inclusion of women in decision-making and governance roles as a critical pillar of empowerment. A historic step in this direction was the passage of the **Women's Reservation Bill** in 2023, which mandates one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State

Legislative Assemblies. This legislative reform is expected to significantly enhance women's participation in national policy-making and strengthen grassroots democracy.

At the same time, there has been a concerted effort to increase women's representation in **bureaucracy, judiciary, and the armed forces**. More women are now entering the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), Indian Police Services (IPS), and judiciary. A landmark move was the extension of **permanent commission** to women officers in the Indian Army, ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement and leadership roles. These measures collectively contribute to a more inclusive and gender-balanced governance framework.

VIII. Education and Skill Development

Empowering women through education and vocational skills is a key focus of the Modi government's agenda. The **Skill India Mission**, launched in 2015, aims to equip youth, particularly rural women, with employable skills. Special provisions under schemes like **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** target rural women by offering training in sectors such as retail, healthcare, IT, and hospitality. These interventions have improved the employability and economic participation of women from marginalized backgrounds.

In addition, digital literacy programs such as the **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** aim to bridge the digital divide by making women in rural India digitally literate. There is also a national push to promote girls' involvement in **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)** through initiatives like **Atal Tinkering Labs**, encouraging innovation and scientific thinking among school-going girls.

IX. Health and Nutrition for Women

Health and nutrition form the foundation of women's empowerment. The **POSHAN Abhiyaan** is a flagship mission to combat malnutrition among women and children by converging efforts across ministries. It focuses on monitoring nutrition indicators, community mobilization, and improving maternal and child health outcomes.

Additionally, schemes like the **Janani Suraksha Yojana** and **Ayushman Bharat** provide critical maternal care and financial coverage for healthcare, ensuring that women, especially from low-income groups, receive timely and affordable medical support. These interventions have led to improved maternal survival rates and enhanced health security for women across India.

X. Social Campaigns and Cultural Shifts

Beyond policy reforms and welfare schemes, the Modi government has effectively utilized social campaigns to initiate cultural transformation around gender roles and women's dignity. One notable campaign is **#SelfieWithDaughter**, launched from Haryana and later expanded nationally. It encouraged parents to proudly share pictures with their daughters, promoting the value of the girl child and challenging gender discrimination. This campaign gained massive traction on social media and fostered positive narratives about daughters in Indian families.

Another important initiative has been the **Menstrual Hygiene Awareness** campaign, which sought to break the silence and stigma surrounding menstruation. Through school outreach programs, distribution of sanitary napkins, and public sensitization, the campaign educated millions of adolescent girls and communities on menstrual health and hygiene.

These efforts have helped create an environment where women's issues are discussed more openly, encouraging behavioral change and nurturing a more gender-sensitive society at the grassroots level.

XI. Challenges and Gaps

Despite the significant strides made under Prime Minister Modi's leadership in empowering women through targeted schemes and policies, several challenges continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality in India. One telling indicator is India's rank of **131st out of 148 countries** in the **Global Gender Gap Index 2025**, a slip from 129th in 2024, with an overall gender parity score of **64.1%**, significantly below the global average of 68.8% (World Economic Forum, 2025). This international assessment underscores persistent gaps, particularly in **economic participation and political empowerment**.

One major issue is the **regional disparity** in the implementation and outcomes of women-centric schemes. While urban and progressive states show better indicators, many remote and rural areas, especially in parts of North and Central India, lag behind due to lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, and weak administrative reach.

Low workforce participation of women remains a structural concern. Deep-rooted Social norms, family responsibilities, and lack of supportive workplace policies often limit women's economic engagement, particularly in high-growth industries. Although India showed marginal improvement in the GGGI's economic

participation subindex (40.7%), women still earn less than one-third of what men earn, and labor force participation remains dismally low.

Patriarchal social norms continue to restrict women's mobility, educational choices, and employment. The **decline in women's political representation**, as highlighted by a fall in parliamentary representation from 14.7% to 13.8%, further illustrates the structural limitations in decision-making spaces.

Furthermore, **digital access and financial inclusion** gaps continue to prevent many women, especially in rural areas, from benefiting fully from digital governance, online banking, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Bridging these gaps will require sustained policy attention, community-level engagement, and collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector to ensure that no woman is left behind in India's development journey.

XII. Recommendations

To further advance women empowerment in India, it is essential to address the existing gaps and enhance the impact of current initiatives. First, there is a critical need to **strengthen ground-level monitoring** of women-centric schemes. Regular audits, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and real-time evaluation can ensure better implementation, especially in underserved regions.

Second, the government should **foster partnerships with the private sector and NGOs**, which can bring in innovation, grassroots connectivity, and capacity-building expertise. Public-private collaborations can enhance outreach, skill training, employment generation, and awareness campaigns, creating more inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Third, **expanding digital and financial literacy** among women—especially in rural and semi-urban areas—is vital. Equipping women with digital skills and financial know-how can empower them to access government services, engage in entrepreneurship, and participate in the digital economy.

Lastly, there should be a strategic push to **promote women's participation in emerging sectors** such as Artificial Intelligence, green technologies, and the digital economy. Incentives for women-led start-ups in these sectors, targeted skill development programs, and mentorship networks can bridge gender gaps in high-growth industries.

These recommendations, if effectively implemented, can create an ecosystem where women's empowerment is not just a policy goal but a lived reality for millions across India.

XIII. Conclusion

The leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought about a paradigm shift in the way women's empowerment is approached in India. Moving beyond symbolic representation and welfare-based models, the Modi government has introduced a range of transformative policies, programs, and campaigns that aim to uplift women in all spheres—social, economic, educational, political, and health-related. From flagship initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Ujjwala Yojana*, and *Mission Shakti*, to financial empowerment schemes like *MUDRA Yojana* and *Stand Up India*, the emphasis has been on creating sustainable change and breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Health and sanitation programs such as *POSHAN Abhiyaan*, *Janani Suraksha Yojana*, and *Swachh Bharat Mission* have directly improved women's quality of life. Similarly, the push for digital literacy, skill development, and entrepreneurship has opened new avenues for economic participation, especially for women in rural and semi-urban areas. Social campaigns like *#SelfieWithDaughter* and menstrual hygiene initiatives have begun to reshape public attitudes and address long-standing taboos.

However, the journey toward true empowerment is far from complete. Regional disparities in implementation, deep-rooted patriarchal norms, and challenges in formal employment and digital inclusion persist. These gaps highlight the need for sustained and inclusive strategies, stronger ground-level monitoring, and the active involvement of the private sector and civil society.

The future of women's empowerment lies in aligning national development goals with gender-sensitive policies, ensuring that women are not just beneficiaries but active participants in India's growth story. Special attention must be paid to emerging sectors such as green energy, AI, and digital entrepreneurship, where women's representation remains limited.

In conclusion, the Modi government has laid a strong and strategic foundation for empowering women. With continued political will, cross-sectoral partnerships, and societal engagement, India is well-positioned to become a global leader in gender equity. A nation that empowers its women empowers its future—and under Prime Minister Modi, India is taking decisive steps in that direction.

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