



Beyond Welfare: Redesigning Mission Shakti

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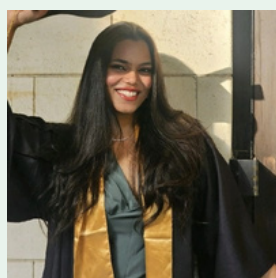
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I. Executive Summary

Mission Shakti is the Ministry of Women and Child Development's flagship umbrella scheme for women's safety, security, and empowerment, structured into two verticals: Sambal for protection and crisis response, and Samarthya for welfare, care, and empowerment programs. While overall resources to women and Mission Shakti have increased in the Union Budget for 2026-27, the internal balance between the two pillars represents key policy concerns.

The majority of Mission Shakti funds are allocated to Samarthya welfare schemes, whereas safety and autonomy-oriented interventions under Sambal receive a fairly smaller share. Feminist critics of the gender budget for 2026-27 claim that, while allocations are significant, funding is targeted toward welfare and basic services rather than structural measures.

This brief suggests that the existing version of Mission Shakti reinforces women's identity as beneficiaries and caregivers rather than as independent rights-holders and economic agents. It recommends three strategies for reforms: rebalancing allocations towards safety and structural empowerment in Mission Shakti, integrating Sambal and Samarthya interventions



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through life-cycle-based program design, and strengthening monitoring systems to track budget increases against safety and autonomy outcomes. These improvements can shift Mission Shakti from a welfare-focused platform to a more progressive mission for women's rights and freedoms.

2. Background and Problem Statement

During the 15th Finance Commission, the Indian government launched Mission Shakti as an umbrella programme to provide an integrated women's empowerment framework for safety, security, and empowerment. Under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD), it consolidates several earlier schemes into two verticals: Sambal, which focuses on women's safety and security through interventions such as One Stop Centres, Women Helpline, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalat, and Samarthya, through maternity benefits, care services, and institutional support such as PMMVY, Shakti Sadan, Sakhi Niwas, Palna, and the Hub for Empowerment of Women.

The 2026-27 Union Budget raised Mission Shakti's allocation, framing it as a key instrument for "women-led development" in a gender budget that now accounts for 9.37% of total Union expenditure.

Despite this quantitative expansion, there is growing concern that the scheme's architecture still prioritizes welfare and care functions over safety and structural empowerment. This design asymmetry disadvantages women and girls who rely on crisis response infrastructure and demand greater autonomy and economic agency.

2.1 Problem Description

According to available data and secondary assessments, Samarthya receives much more Mission Shakti funds than Sambal. In FY 2025-26, Sambal components (OSCs, helplines, BBBP, and Nari Adalat) accounted for approximately ₹629 crore, while Samarthya components (PMMVY, shelter homes, hostels, crèches, and related projects) received approximately ₹2,521 crore. Mission Shakti is mostly focused on welfare, care, and economic support, with safety, crisis response, and protection and was allocated around one-fifth of the funding.

This imbalance highly limits resource access as insufficient funding for Sambal interventions leads to understaffed OSCs, helplines, and Nari Adalats, impeding the state's ability to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. In contrast, Samarthya's emphasis on maternity benefits and basic care, while crucial, primarily presents women as mothers and

caregivers in need of aid, rather than individuals entitled to safety, mobility, and economic opportunities. As a result, Mission Shakti's current design may not adequately address the structural constraints that women experience

2.2 Why Existing Frameworks Fall Short

It can be argued that the existing policy and financial frameworks for Mission Shakti and the gender budget are welfare-focused rather than transformative. The 2026-27 gender budget prioritizes nutrition, basic services, and cash transfers over investments in structural empowerment like land rights, labour protections, and large-scale care infrastructure. Mission Shakti has consolidated existing schemes under a unified umbrella, rather than introducing significant new components or institutional reforms to transform power dynamics or broaden women's choices.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, this means that Mission Shakti, even with enhanced funding, continues to treat women primarily as beneficiaries and dependents. The design does not sufficiently tackle barriers such as unpaid care work, unsafe or informal labor markets, or restrictions on mobility and public participation. Moreover, outcome-oriented monitoring for Mission

Shakti remains limited: budget documents and public communications emphasize allocations and coverage but provide less clarity on how interventions under Sambal and Samarthya are affecting rates of violence, women's time use, or their participation in paid work and decision-making. In this sense, the existing framework falls short of the government's own narrative of "women-led development".

3. Regulatory and Analytical Framework

Mission Shakti is a centrally sponsored umbrella scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) that follows Union budget allocations, scheme guidelines, and gender-based budgeting frameworks. It is one of the three core missions that guide MoWCD's spending on women and children, alongside Mission POSHAN 2.0 and Mission Vatsalya. The Mission Shakti guidelines, which are available on state government websites, specify the objectives, target groups, implementation plans, and funding patterns for the Sambal and Samarthya components. Additionally, the union government's gender budget statements and think tank analyses give an interpretive framework for determining how Mission Shakti contributes to gender equity and women's empowerment.

3.1 Key Definitions and Classifications

This analysis relies heavily on a few distinct definitions:

- Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS): A Union government project in which the Centre and states share funding and execution duties, with design guidelines given by the relevant ministry.
- Budget Estimate (BE): The amount set aside for a scheme at the start of the fiscal year based on predicted needs and policy goals.
- The Revised Estimate (RE) is an updated estimate of expenditure given later in the financial year, reflecting actual spending trends and revised projections. It corrects the initial BE and sometimes indicates underutilization or re-prioritization of funding for projects like Mission Shakti.
- Sambal: Mission Shakti's safety and security vertical, includes interventions such as one-stop centers, women's helplines, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and Nari Adalat, aimed at safeguarding women against violence and providing access to justice.
- Samarthya: The empowerment and care vertical, includes programs like PMMVY, Shakti Sadan, Sakhi Niwas, Palna, and other institutional support

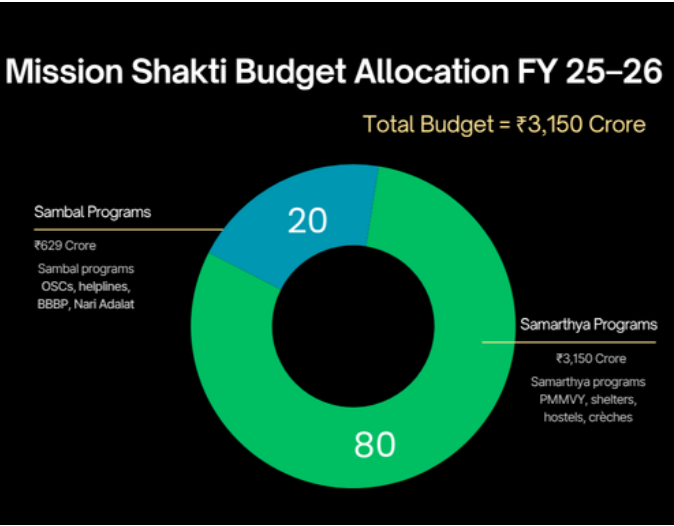
for women's welfare, childcare, and economic inclusion.

The mission's classifications distinguish between welfare-oriented and autonomy-enhancing components, allowing for evaluation of whether the existing design promotes transformative empowerment or mainly provides compensatory support.

3.2 Relevant Legislation and Rules

Mission Shakti is based on a set of policies and institutional programs rather than a single parent act. The mission's key milestones include its start during the 15th Finance Commission period, the merging of prior schemes into the Sambal and Samarthya verticals, and succeeding Union Budgets that raised allocations and presented the mission as crucial to women-led development. The Mission's rules outline the duties of the Union and state governments, funding criteria, and convergence mechanisms that will allow safety, welfare, and empowerment services to function together throughout the life cycle.

Union budget records, particularly the Expenditure Profile and the Gender Budget Statement, serve as the statutory foundation for tracking budget estimates and revised estimates for centrally supported programs such as Mission Shakti.



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3. Policy Options Analysis

This section looks at three policy approaches for addressing the design disparity between Sambal and Samarthya. The analysis used four evaluation criteria: legal and institutional consistency with existing Mission Shakti guidelines, simplicity of implementation, equity impact for women with intersecting vulnerabilities, and scalability across states with various capacities.

3.1 Option 1: Re-balance Allocations within Mission Shakti

This alternative allocates more Mission Shakti finances to Sambal-type safety and autonomy interventions, such as OSCs, helplines, and Nari Adalats, while maintaining core welfare commitments under Samarthya. Over a medium-term period, intra-scheme reallocation will be guided by risk- and need-based factors, such as gender-based violence prevalence, OSC coverage, and helpline

helplines, and Nari Adalats, while maintaining core welfare commitments under Samarthya. Over a medium-term period, intra-scheme reallocation will be guided by risk- and need-based factors, such as gender-based violence prevalence, OSC coverage, and helpline utilization.

Rationale: Redirecting a small amount of resources to safety and justice can greatly improve the state's ability to prevent and respond to violence without compromising existing welfare and care programs.

Advantages
- Aligns spending more closely with the “safety, security, and empowerment” mandate. - Improves access to high-impact services like OSCs and helplines in high-risk districts.
Limitations
- Politically sensitive, as any visible reduction in welfare allocations may face resistance. - Requires good data systems to identify needs and monitor the effects of reallocation.

3.2 Option 2: Integrate Sambal and Samarthya through Life-Cycle Design

This alternative will restructure Mission Shakti interventions around a woman's life cycle, resulting in integrated packages that connect safety, care, and economic empowerment. For example, survivors who use OSCs might be linked to childcare, skills, and livelihood programs, while PMMVY and childcare recipients could receive information and recommendations to legal and safety services.

Rationale: Treating Sambal and Samarthya as complementary rather than separate silos can enhance both welfare and autonomy outcomes, especially for women facing multiple, overlapping risks.

Advantages
- Increases the effectiveness of existing schemes without necessarily increasing total budgets. - Improves equity by ensuring that women who are most vulnerable can access a bundle of services.
Limitations
- Requires strong convergence across departments and front-line workers. - Demands additional training, referral protocols, and monitoring systems.

3.3 Option 3: Strengthen Outcome-Based Monitoring and Gender-Budgeting

This option would layer a robust outcome-monitoring and gender-budgeting framework onto Mission Shakti. It would involve defining a small set of core indicators, such as utilisation of OSCs, time to receive support, women's labour-force participation and time-use changes, and linking them to union and state-level reporting and budget discussions.

Rationale: Clear public data on results is needed to assess the effectiveness of the current Sambal-Samarthya balance in promoting women's development and justify rebalancing decisions.

Advantages
- Enhances transparency and accountability for both verticals. - Provides evidence for future redesigns and more targeted allocations.
Limitations
- Data collection may increase administrative burdens at the state and district level. - Risks focus on easily measurable indicators if not carefully designed.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Prioritise Safety and Autonomy within Mission Shakti Allocations

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, in collaboration with the

Ministry of Finance and state WCD ministries, should gradually increase the share of Mission Shakti money allotted to Sambal interventions in high-risk districts. Over the next two budget cycles, a proportion of incremental resources should be allocated to strengthen OSCs, helplines, and Nari Adalats, particularly in areas with high rates of gender-based violence and low current coverage.

4.2 Design Integrated Life-Cycle Service Packages

The MoWCD and state governments should revise implementation instructions so that beneficiaries of Samarthya schemes are routinely linked to Sambal services and vice versa. This could include standardised referral mechanisms between OSCs, Anganwadis, health facilities, and livelihood programs, as well as integrated training for front-line workers to identify and address both safety and care requirements.

4.3 Establish an Outcome-Oriented Monitoring Framework

The Union government should develop a concise dashboard of Mission Shakti outcomes, co-created with states and civil society, and publish it annually alongside gender-budget statements. This framework should track not only financial utilisation under Sambal and Samarthya but also outcome indicators such as time taken to access services, survivor satisfaction, and

changes in women's time use and labour-force participation.

4.4 Embed Intersectional Gender Budgeting in Mission Shakti

MoWCD, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and NITI Aayog, should deepen gender-budgeting practices by explicitly tracking how Mission Shakti resources benefit women facing intersecting vulnerabilities, including caste, class, disability, and rural–urban divides. This would allow budgets to move beyond aggregate allocations and towards more equitable distribution across groups and regions.

5. Conclusion

Mission Shakti's two-pillar design acknowledges that women's lives are influenced by their safety and care needs. The Mission's ability to produce transformative change is limited by the current balance between Sambal and Samarthya, as well as the welfare-heavy gender budget. With safety and autonomy interventions taking up a small portion of Mission Shakti's budget, the program risks reinforcing current gender norms rather than expanding women's choices and freedoms.

Rebalancing allocations towards safety and structural empowerment, integrating services across the life course, and increasing outcome-based monitoring can help Mission Shakti achieve its goal of

women-led development. These reforms do not call for the abandonment of welfare or care; rather, they view welfare as a basis for improved safety, justice, and autonomous institutions.

Implementing these measures could transform Mission Shakti from a welfare scheme to a mission that empowers women in households, labour markets, and public life. If they are not, increased budgets and aspirational narratives risk masking an underlying status quo in which women continue to be passive beneficiaries of support rather than active agents of India's development trajectory.

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