

Popular Welfare Schemes in Telangana State: A Study of Kalyana Lakshmi/Shaaadi Mubarak

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Introduction:

Initially, the functions of the state were confined to the protection of its people and maintenance of peace and security within the society. In the course of time, the welfare of the populace came to be incorporated into the responsibilities of the state. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the significance accorded to welfare increased substantially. Globally, states came to recognise welfare as an indispensable means of fostering unity and cohesion among their citizens. In this context, welfare may be defined as the provision of necessary support to enable socially, politically, and economically disadvantaged sections of society to achieve development on par with others.

The Concept of Welfare and the Indian Constitution: The idea of the welfare state is clearly reflected in the objectives of the Indian Constitution. These principles are enshrined in Part IV of the Constitution, namely the Directive Principles of State Policy, covering Articles 38 to 51. Article 38, in particular, mandates the State to strive to promote welfare of the people by securing and protecting a social order in which justice – social, economic, and political – shall inform all institutions of national life. It further directs the State to minimise inequalities in income, status, facilities, and opportunities, not only among individuals but also among groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different occupations.¹

Article 39 focuses on policies aimed at ensuring an adequate means of livelihood, equitable distribution of material resources, prevention of the concentration of wealth, and equal pay for equal work. Article 41 directs the State to provide the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, and other contingencies. Article 43 emphasises the obligation of the State to secure for all workers a living wage, decent standards of life, and full enjoyment of social and cultural opportunities. Article 46 is intended to promote the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other socially and educationally backward classes. Article 47 outlines the duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition, improve the standard of living, and enhance public health.²

The above-mentioned constitutional provisions underscore the importance accorded to various welfare measures. In accordance with these directives, for the past seventy-six years, both the Central and State Governments have initiated and implemented numerous public-oriented welfare schemes. Several well-known schemes implemented at the national level have yielded significant positive outcomes.

Popular Central Government Schemes: Over the decades, the Central Government, particularly during extended periods of Indian National Congress rule, introduced numerous welfare schemes aimed at poverty alleviation, employment generation, and social development. These programmes, classified thematically hereunder, highlight the evolving priorities of the Indian welfare state, ranging from immediate employment generation to long-term rural development, social security, and gender empowerment.³

1. Urban Poverty Alleviation and Employment Generation Schemes

These schemes were designed to address unemployment and poverty in urban areas by creating wage employment and self-employment opportunities.

- Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY)
- Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY)
- Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Yojana (PMRY)

2. Rural Employment and Wage-Based Livelihood Programmes

This category includes schemes focused on providing employment opportunities and income security to rural populations, particularly the landless and economically vulnerable.

- Food for Work Programme (FWP)
- National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)
- Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP)
- Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)
- Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS)
- National Food for Work Programme (NFWP)
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

3. Rural Development and Self-Employment Initiatives

These programmes emphasised asset creation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihood development in rural areas.

- Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
- Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)
- Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY)
- Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)

4. Women-Centric and Gender Empowerment Schemes

Focused on improving the economic participation and social empowerment of women, especially in rural settings.

- Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
- Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)

5. Social Security and Welfare Assistance Programmes

These schemes aimed at providing basic social protection to vulnerable sections such as the elderly, widows, and the destitute.

- National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

6. Region-Specific and Vulnerability-Focused Programmes

Targeted interventions for geographically or environmentally disadvantaged regions.

- Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP)

Popular Welfare Schemes Introduced by the Bharatiya Janata Party Led Government: The welfare initiatives introduced by the government presently in power, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are primarily oriented towards financial inclusion, social security, basic infrastructure provision, health and nutrition, and livelihood enhancement. These schemes, classified thematically, are as follows:⁴

1. Financial Inclusion and Social Security Schemes

These programmes aim to integrate economically marginalised populations into the formal financial system and provide social security coverage.

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)
- Atal Pension Yojana (APY)
- Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)
- Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY)
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)

2. Housing, Sanitation, and Basic Utilities Schemes

These schemes focus on improving living conditions through access to housing, sanitation, clean water, and energy.

- Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) and Urban (PMAY-U)
- Swachh Bharat Mission
- Jal Jeevan Mission
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

3. Health and Nutrition-Oriented Schemes

This category includes programmes designed to ensure healthcare access and food and nutritional security for vulnerable sections.

- Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)
- Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Abhiyaan (PM-POSHAN)

4. Agriculture and Livelihood Promotion Schemes

These initiatives seek to enhance farmers' incomes, strengthen allied sectors, and support traditional and self-employed occupations.

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KSN)
- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)
- PM Vishwakarma Scheme

These schemes demonstrate a policy shift towards direct benefit transfers, infrastructure-led welfare delivery, and targeted livelihood support, reflecting a contemporary model of the Indian welfare state.

Popular Welfare Schemes of Telangana State Government: State governments, following the policy trajectory of the Central Government, have also introduced several prominent welfare schemes. After the formation of the state of Telangana, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) formed the government and remained in power for a decade, during which it implemented a wide range of welfare programmes. Some of the most significant among these include Rythu Bandhu, Aasara Pensions, Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak, KCR Kit, Rythu Bima, Dalit Bandhu, Mission Bhagiratha, Double Bedroom Housing Scheme, and Arogya Lakshmi, among others.⁵

In 2024, the Indian National Congress, which assumed power in the state, began implementing various welfare schemes under the banner of the Six Guarantees. Key initiatives under this framework include the Maha Lakshmi Scheme, Cheyutha Scheme (under Rajiv Aarogyasri), Rythu Bharosa, Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak, Yuva Vikasam Scheme, and Indiramma Indlu / Gruha Lakshmi, among others. In addition to these, the government has announced nearly forty-eight popular welfare schemes.⁶

Across the country, it is commonly observed that when political power shifts at the national or state level, the names of ongoing welfare schemes are often changed. However, previously introduced schemes are rarely abolished altogether. If modifications are made, they are generally intended to enhance benefits for the beneficiaries. This practice underscores the enduring significance and political centrality of welfare programmes.

Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak Scheme: The Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak Scheme, which was introduced by the previous government in Telangana and is being continued by the present Congress-led government, has been selected as a case study for examining its benefits and limitations. Government welfare schemes should ideally bring about not only improvements in the conditions of beneficiary families but also broader positive transformations in social structures. Any scheme that merely satisfies individual needs without advancing the collective welfare of society is unlikely to deliver the outcomes envisioned by the state. Moreover, such schemes tend to become a substantial financial burden on the public exchequer.

In Telangana, if there exists a welfare scheme that prioritises individual benefit over social welfare, it is the Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak Scheme. The scheme was introduced on 2 October 2014 with the objective of attracting poor and middle-class voters. Its primary aim is to provide financial assistance to the parents of brides from economically weaker sections to meet marriage-related expenses. At the time of its introduction, the assistance amount was fixed at ₹50,000. Over time, this amount was gradually enhanced to ₹1,16,000.⁷

As a result, the scheme now imposes an annual financial burden of over ₹3,000 crore on the state exchequer. Details regarding the budgetary allocations, actual expenditure, and number of beneficiaries since the inception of the scheme are presented in the table below.⁸

S.No	Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Budget Allocation (₹ in Crores)	Expenditures (₹ in Crores)
1	2014-15	13,030	330	66.45
2	2015-16	75,616	---	385.64
3	2016-17	96,290	738	440.07
4	2017-18	1,27,969	---	823.74
5	2018-19	1,63,902	1,450	1,403.27
6	2019-20	1,66,432	1,450	1,629.06
7	2020-21	2,10,013	1,350	2,093.51
8	2021-22	2,31,372	2,750	2,314.79
9	2022-23	1,91,003	2,750	1,912.02
10	2023-24	1,66,276	3,210	1,664.66
11	2024-25	24,038 (till August-25)	3,585	240.65
	Total	12,99,869	17,623	12,973.86

Who Benefits? Over the past eleven years, an amount of ₹12,973 crore has been spent under this scheme, benefiting nearly thirteen lakh individuals. In effect, the scheme has turned into a curse for girls. For beneficiaries seeking assistance, financial support is not provided before marriage but only after the marriage has taken place. The process itself takes nearly a year, and eventually the cash is handed over to the girl's parents. In many instances, however, the newly married husbands, rather than the parents of the bride, end up appropriating the amount.

A significant number of adolescent girls discontinue their education midway due to poverty. In the state, the dropout rate among girls from Class IX to Intermediate level stands at 6.3%. Currently, around 2.5 lakh girls are enrolled in Class X, and approximately 1.5 lakh girls are pursuing Intermediate education across the state. In terms of demographics, the total population of girls aged 5-14 years stands at about two million, while those aged 15-19 years number around 1.9 million. A large proportion of these girls suffer from malnutrition, resulting in poor physical development and a range of health and psychological problems.⁹

The introduction of the Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak schemes has fostered a social tendency wherein parents feel compelled to marry off their daughters immediately upon attaining the age of eighteen and thereby absolve themselves of responsibility. Although child marriages are legally prohibited, among tribal hamlets there has been a growing eagerness to conduct marriages as soon as girls reach marriageable age, primarily to avail themselves of the scheme's financial benefit. Within the Muslim community as well, the scheme has generated an adverse social climate, reinforcing attitudes that favour early marriage. Overall, the scheme has emerged as a significant obstacle to the long-term growth and development of girls.¹⁰

Lack of Long-Term Vision: Schemes intended for the welfare of girls must necessarily contribute to their holistic development and well-being. However, gender discrimination continues to persist in many families even today. It remains common practice to send boys to private schools while girls are enrolled in government schools. Schemes such as Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak offer no meaningful solution to such deep-rooted inequalities. On the contrary, by promoting these schemes, the state itself becomes complicit in reinforcing gender-based discrimination.

Therefore, the government must seriously consider replacing such schemes with alternative interventions. Any welfare programme should aim to eliminate social pathologies rather than exacerbate them. Instead of allocating funds to marriage-related assistance, the government should rethink its priorities and focus on improving girls' education, sanitation facilities, and nutritional support. What benefit is derived from spending thousands of crores of rupees on welfare schemes that ultimately destabilise social progress?

Do Welfare Schemes Secure Electoral Gains?: If the Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak scheme were indeed capable of securing votes, the previous government should have been re-elected. While it is true that welfare schemes can influence electoral outcomes, they are by no means sufficient on their own to ensure a return to power. The Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak scheme contains no elements that promote social welfare or transformative change. Instead, the government assumes the role of a ceremonial patron in marriages, thereby undermining girls' aspirations for a secure and progressive future.

Moreover, the selection of beneficiaries under these schemes is itself farcical. At a time when the government struggles to provide even basic facilities in public schools and colleges, allocating thousands of crores of rupees to a scheme that offers no tangible benefit to girls' futures is

deeply unfortunate. Such schemes may temporarily win public approval, but the belief that popular welfare programmes alone determine electoral success is illusory.

Education and healthcare are the primary drivers of social transformation. Public expenditure in these sectors serves as the true measure of governmental performance. Consequently, the government must devote focused attention to the welfare of girls, who constitute half of society. Rather than persisting with schemes like Kalyana Lakshmi / Shaadi Mubarak that push girls into regression, it would be far more prudent for the state to prioritise initiatives that genuinely support their long-term growth and empowerment.

Conclusion: In recent times, new trends have emerged in the country. Over the past few years, political parties – driven primarily by the objective of electoral victory – have been offering freebies to the public as inducements. Under the guise of such giveaways, numerous schemes are being introduced. This practice inevitably leads to the depletion of the public exchequer and raises the risk of governments becoming fiscally unsustainable. There is a looming danger of economic systems collapsing under this burden. Furthermore, by treating everyone as equally eligible, such schemes risk exacerbating inequality, rendering the poor poorer and the wealthy even wealthier.

Freebie-driven welfare schemes thus pose a serious threat to the nation’s future. Governments must instead accord due priority to welfare, which is one of the core objectives enshrined in the Constitution. Welfare schemes should indeed be formulated and implemented, but they must be designed in such a way that they promote not only the development of the intended beneficiaries but also the well-being of society as a whole. Only such an approach can ensure comprehensive social development and the realisation of equality. In turn, this will foster fraternity, strengthen unity and integrity, and nurture a deeper sense of national consciousness.

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