



A Study of the Impact of Cash Benefit Schemes on Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections in Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract

This research studies the impact of cash benefit schemes on the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh. In recent years, the state government has provided direct financial assistance through schemes like Ladli Behna and Samagra Samajik Suraksha (Comprehensive Social Security). The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which these schemes have influenced electoral trends among voter groups, especially women, farmers, and socio-economically disadvantaged classes.

The research uses an analytical research method, employing Content Analysis of pre-election and post-election media reports. The conclusion, summarized through content analysis, reveals that the direct transfer of money to bank accounts without any requirement of work is more of a political tactic than a contributor to holistic development. Such announcements were mostly made with elections in mind. Furthermore, it was observed that due to the fiscal deficit, the government is holding back on several essential tasks, such as improving the poor condition of roads, tackling malnutrition, and reducing crime. An indirect consequence of such schemes is the growing complete dependence of people on the government for basic necessities, leading to a noticeable decrease in the working class's interest in employment.

Keywords: Direct Cash Benefit Schemes, Madhya Pradesh Politics, Women Voters, Social Welfare Policies, Political Economy, Ladli Behna Yojana, Samagra Samajik Suraksha Yojana.

1. Introduction

In the name of public welfare, the trend of governments directly transferring cash to the accounts of the public has rapidly increased in most Indian states over the past few years. In Madhya Pradesh, the Ladli Behna Yojana and Samagra Samajik Suraksha Yojana are major examples of such schemes. While providing direct cash benefits doesn't significantly change the common person's standard of living, the resulting fiscal burden increasingly impacts basic development projects. There is a fear of several harmful outcomes in the short and long term, signs of which are gradually becoming visible.

This research studies the impact of these schemes on elections. The study focuses on the context of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly Elections 2023 and the Lok Sabha Elections held in 2024 for the state's constituencies. The current study involved analysing news published in the Dainik Bhaskar and The Free Press Journal newspapers and websites, along with discussions with subject matter experts, using an analytical method to determine how these cash-for-no-work benefit schemes have influenced the electoral landscape. Like most states, the Ladli Behna Yojana was launched in Madhya Pradesh close to the elections. This timing has raised several questions. Moreover, in some cases, it was observed that the government formed after the election, while retaining the scheme, reduced the number of beneficiaries by adding new conditions or through verification processes.

2. Literature Review

To study the effect of cash benefit schemes on elections, news reports related to the topic published in Dainik Bhaskar and The Free Press Journal during 2023-2024 were collected and analysed. Additionally, interviews with subject matter experts and related research papers were reviewed.

"Shivraj Singh Chouhan placed great faith in the Ladli Behna Yojana in Madhya Pradesh. When Shivraj Singh was asked if the state assembly election was a 'tough fight (*Kante ki takkar*)', he replied, 'Ladli Behna has removed all the thorns.' Shivraj gave the full credit for the BJP's victory in the state assembly election to the Ladli Behna Yojana." (Press, 2023)

"The then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, said, 'The Ladli Behna Yojana is not just a scheme but a movement to improve the standard of living of women.' According to information provided in the same news report, Shivraj Singh transferred Rs. 1269 crores as the fourth instalment to the accounts of 1.31 crore women. He promised that the Old Age Pension Scheme would be increased from Rs. 600 to Rs. 1000." (Charaiveti, 2023)

"Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced an increment of Rs. 2,000 in the amount given to farmers under the Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana. The total amount will now be Rs. 12,000 (with Rs. 6,000 from the central government and Rs. 6,000 from the state government). He also said that women whose households own a tractor would now also benefit from the Ladli Behna Yojana. Furthermore, he changed the age condition for beneficiary women, allowing 21-year-old women to also receive benefits. Chouhan also mentioned increasing this amount to Rs. 3,000 in December." (FPReporter, 2023)

"Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, announcing changes to the Ladli Behna Yojana, stated that unmarried women aged 21 would now also benefit from the scheme. Additionally, the amount provided under the scheme would be increased from Rs. 1,250 to Rs. 3,000. With this change, the number of beneficiaries is expected to reach 1.32 crore. The government stated that it would spend Rs. 60,000 crores on the Ladli Behna Yojana over the next five years." (Sikarwar, 2023)

"Women Voters Mega-Survey: A survey was conducted before the elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh, in which 10,955 women participated. According to the survey results, 46% of women believe that 'freebie' announcements can get parties more votes, while 39% disagreed, and 15% offered no conclusion. 35%

of women considered self-reliance a bigger issue than security and inflation for them. Only 14% of women were satisfied with their safety."

"Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may interact with women on August 27, before Raksha Bandhan. During this interaction, a gift of Rs. 250 for Raksha Bandhan might be announced for women. This announcement could be made in Rewa while releasing the scheme's instalment. Chouhan called the scheme a social revolution and said the money was being given to women as a token of respect." (FPReporter, 2023)

"Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed full confidence in the Ladli Behna Yojana, which provides Rs. 1,250 per month. Congress criticized it as merely an electoral gimmick implemented just before the elections. While BJP leaders called it a significant step towards women's empowerment, Congress labelled it an electoral tactic by the BJP. Shivraj Singh Chouhan quipped that while there was talk of a tough fight, Ladli Behna removed all the thorns and paved the way for their victory." (FreePress, 2023)

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, claiming a return to power in Madhya Pradesh with the support of women power (*Narishakti*). Modi said the state government had worked extensively for women's empowerment. He asserted that the people of Madhya Pradesh had complete faith in the BJP. He also stated that only the BJP's 'double-engine government' could deliver in 21st-century Madhya Pradesh. He added that the Congress lacked a roadmap, and the public was tired of their dynastic politics." (PMTweetsOnLadli, 2023)

"The amount given under the Ladli Behna Yojana had a significant impact on the elections. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan connected emotionally with women in his rallies, addressing them as 'Meri Pyari Behna' (My dear sisters). This scheme was considered the answer to the anti-incumbency against the state's BJP government. Electoral politics experts believe that the Ladli Behna Yojana was a major factor that strengthened the BJP against the opposition. The BJP succeeded in winning 163 seats based on this." (KhushbooBatta, 2023)

"With Lok Sabha elections due in five months, there is speculation that Shivraj Singh Chouhan might be appointed as Chief Minister again, considering the success of the Ladli Behna Yojana in the state. It is believed that the Ladli Behna Yojana garnered significant support for the BJP among women voters. This women's support could also benefit the BJP in the state's Lok Sabha elections." (FPElectionCoverage, 2023)

"A statement from the Leader of the Opposition in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, Congress leader Umang Singhar, was published. In it, he said that the Ladli Behna Yojana would also disappear with Shivraj Singh Chouhan from Madhya Pradesh. He claimed that the BJP had removed the scheme from its *Sankalp Patra* (manifesto), and the new Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mohan Yadav, had not given a direct answer to questions related to it." (Umang Singhar Free Press, 2023)

"Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav addressed the house during the Assembly session, stating that no scheme, including Ladli Behna, would be stopped, and the government had sufficient funds for all schemes." (CM Yadav, 2023)

"Umang Singhar, the Leader of the Opposition in Madhya Pradesh, questioned the recent order issued by the Women and Child Development Commission regarding the 'eligibility' of Ladli Behna Yojana beneficiaries. He

highlighted an order issued by the commission regarding eligibility criteria for the scheme and asked if the money had been distributed for the last five months without any verification. He said the language of the order raised questions about Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's intentions regarding the scheme. He alleged that the CM was trying to reduce the number of beneficiaries in the name of eligible and ineligible. (UmangSingh, 2024)

"During elections in India, political parties often promise free facilities. While such schemes greatly attract voters, they create long-term economic problems for the government. Although freebies help the poor, many believe they come at a heavy cost. Such schemes divert attention from essential infrastructure like hospitals, schools, and roads. They also distract from core issues during elections, which harms democracy. On the other hand, the public's dependence on the government increases. After elections, these schemes worsen the government's financial problems. The government's fiscal credibility may fall, debt may increase, and spending on other vital development projects may decrease. Therefore, leaders should find an immediate solution to establish a robust, sustainable, and fair democracy for all." (SWARGIARY, 2024)

"The Madhya Pradesh government borrowed Rs. 26,849 crores in the year 2022-23. A subheading in the news report, 'Debt is necessary because promises must be kept,' stated that parties coming to power had either launched or promised several populist schemes to lure voters. Thus, states have no other means besides debt to raise funds for essential expenses." (Gurudutt Tiwari, 2024)

"BJP focuses on Empowerment, Congress wants to win trust with Cash: The BJP announced giving interest-free loans to women under the 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme, while the Congress announced giving Rs. 1 lakh to the oldest woman in a poor family under the 'Mahalakshmi Yojana' (or to the senior-most member if there is no woman)." (Manifesto Comparison Lok Sabha, 2024)

"The Ladli Behna Yojana was considered a game-changer in the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, following its impact on the Madhya Pradesh Assembly Elections 2023. Seema Bai, a resident of Jabalpur, commenting on the benefits from government schemes, said she only receives the Ladli Behna money and ration. Pointing to her house, she said she had applied several times but didn't get a house (referring to the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana). According to the same report, Mantu Kol, a *panch* (council member) from Samda Tola in Pakeriya village of Shahdol district, said his wife receives the Ladli Behna money, and he currently favours this government. The report noted that the scheme, started on January 28, 2023, provides monthly cash benefits to about 1.29 crore women in Madhya Pradesh." (Rajesh Sharma, Santosh Singh, 2024)

"Despite voting for Shivraj Singh Chouhan due to the Ladli Behna Yojana, some women residents of Ward No. 30 in Saispura, Shivpuri, protested against the government. Their protest was against the 15-day long power cut. The protesting women said they had supported the previous government's schemes but were now grappling with a shortage of basic amenities like electricity. Hema Batham, while raising slogans against the electricity department, said that about 50 houses near Chira Baba Temple had no electricity, making the situation worse than in villages and affecting children's studies. They claimed the electricity department ignored this critical issue despite multiple complaints, forcing them to protest." (ShivpuriFPNews, 2024)

An article by Money-9 Editor Anshuman Tiwari was published in Dainik Bhaskar in January 2024, titled "Government Debt Equals GDP!" It mentioned that in August 1949, during the Constituent Assembly debate (Article 292, formerly 268), Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that Parliament should set a limit on government debt by law. However, this did not happen in India, and the debt situation has become dire. The article also mentions the International Monetary Fund (IMF). According to it, two years ago, when the debt crisis was brewing in Sri Lanka, the IMF raised the first alarm about India's debt as well, but the voice was drowned out in the government noise. (Tiwari A. , 2024)

"Freebie schemes have now become a trend in all Indian states. Every political party is trying to lure voters with free facilities. Gradually, these schemes are increasing the financial pressure on states. Although free facilities started decades ago, the DMK changed the election game in 1967 by announcing rice at Re. 1 per kg. This announcement was considered a game-changer then. After this, a competition to provide free facilities began in the state. AIADMK announced free rice, color TVs, grinders, fans, and laptops. This sequence then started across the country." (Nidhi Sharma, 2025)

"The Women and Child Development Department has once again reduced the number of Ladli Behna Yojana beneficiaries. This time, 1.63 lakh women from the existing beneficiaries will not receive the scheme's benefit. Currently, 1.26 crore women will receive the benefit. No new applicants have been included, and old names have been cut again. Initially, 1,32,35,985 women applied for the scheme. Out of these, 2,18,858 names were removed after objections. Former Chief Minister Kamal Nath accused the Mohan Yadav government of cheating the 'Ladli Behna' sisters and stated that the government wants to shut down the scheme. He said the BJP had announced an increment in the amount to Rs. 3,000 per month before the election, but now, contrary to that, the number of beneficiaries is being reduced." (Brijendra Mishra, 2025)

"Let's Gather the Ashes of Political Morality: Political parties are inventing new ideas to lure voters. These ideas can in no way be called honest. Most states are giving cash. There is no written rule or law to stop this campaign. If political parties truly desire women's empowerment, their conduct should be consistent. If we look at Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, all applications were approved, and everyone received benefits before the election, but the number of beneficiaries is being reduced after the election. This clearly implies that even ineligible people were being given benefits before the election. If the government did not have time to verify applicants, why was the scheme implemented in a hurry? The government could have taken its time and implemented the scheme after verification." (Navneet Gurjar, 2025)

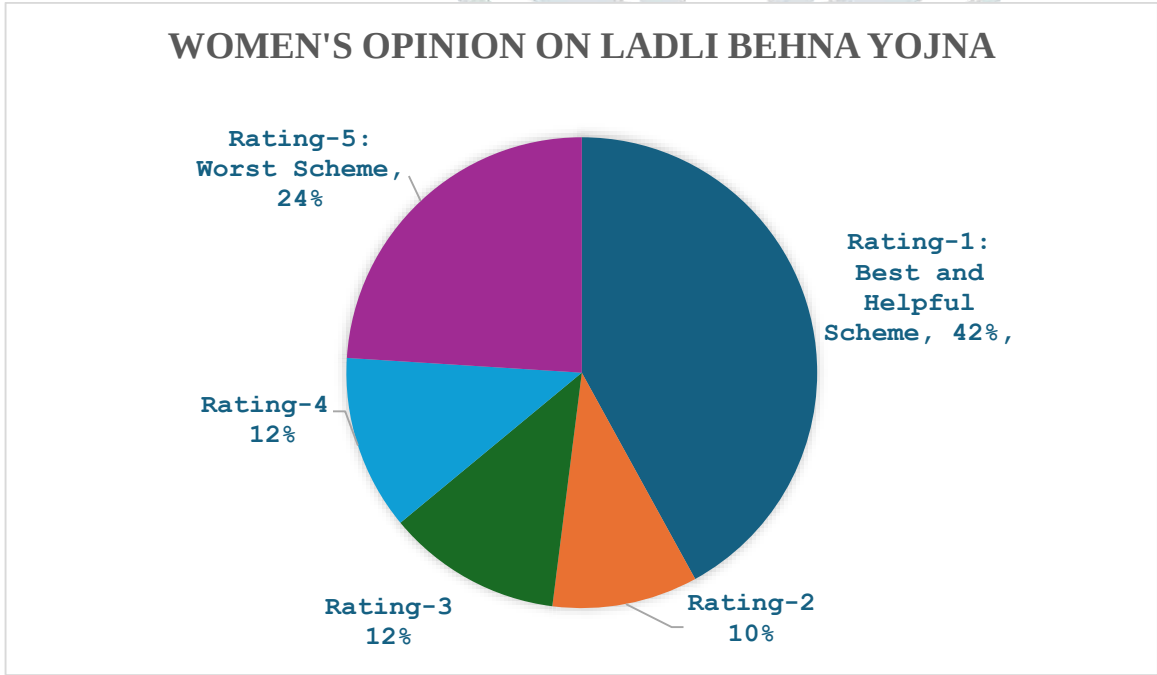
3. Data Analysis and Results

During the Madhya Pradesh Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, most politicians and electoral experts considered the Ladli Behna Yojana a game-changer. Former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who launched the scheme, also acknowledged that the Ladli Behna Yojana played a crucial role in his victory. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also mentioned the support of women power in one of his tweets. Some surveys conducted during the elections also indicated that most women reported being influenced by the Ladli Behna Yojana when casting their vote.

A survey conducted just before the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections asked for women's opinions on various schemes. Opinions were sought on five women-centric schemes. According to the results, 42% of women rated the Ladli Behna Yojana as a 'very good scheme'.

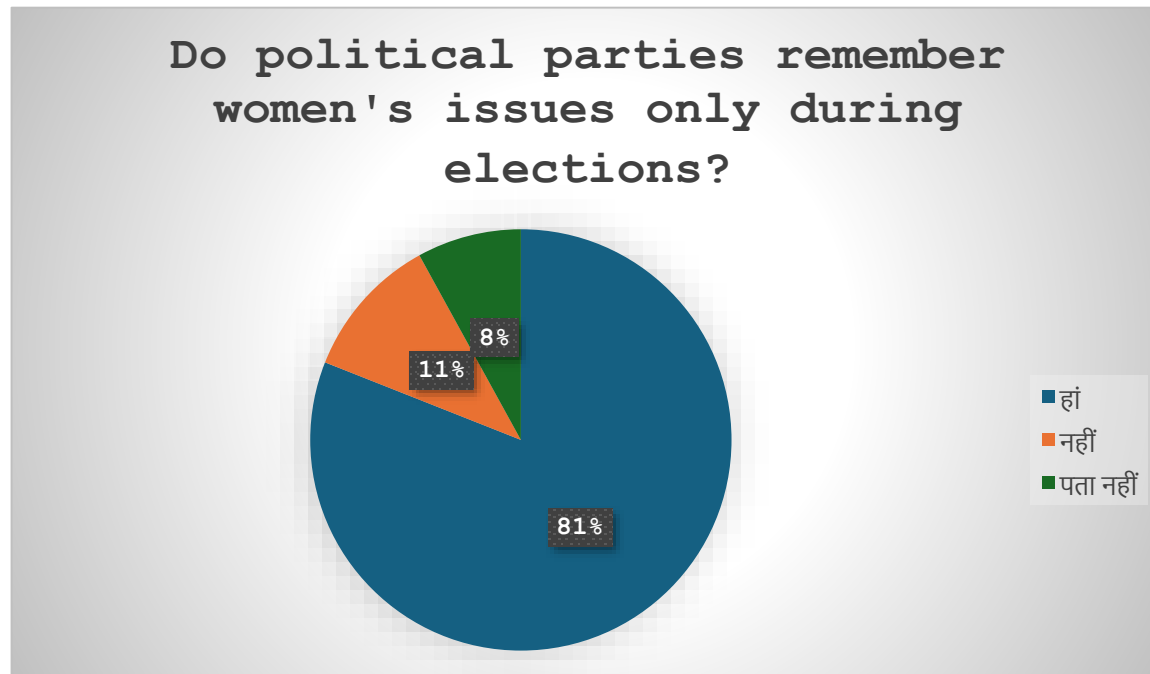
Dainik Bhaskar Survey: Women’s opinion on different schemes					
Scheme	1	2	3	4	5
Ladli Behna	42%	10%	12%	12%	24%
Ladli Laxmi	28%	11%	14%	17%	30%
LPG Cylider	36%	11%	14%	15%	24%
Free Scooty-Laptop	36%	11%	14%	16%	23%
Women Empowerment	30%	11%	15%	17%	27%
Girl Marriage	28%	10%	15%	18%	29%
Rating 1 – Very Good, Rating 5 Very bad (Source: (Bhaskar, 2023))					

If we talk about the Ladli Behna Yojana, 42% of women considered it a very good scheme (Rating 1), while 10% gave it a Rating 2. Similarly, the number of women giving Rating 3 and Rating 4 was 12% each. 24% of women considered the scheme to be very bad (Rating 5).

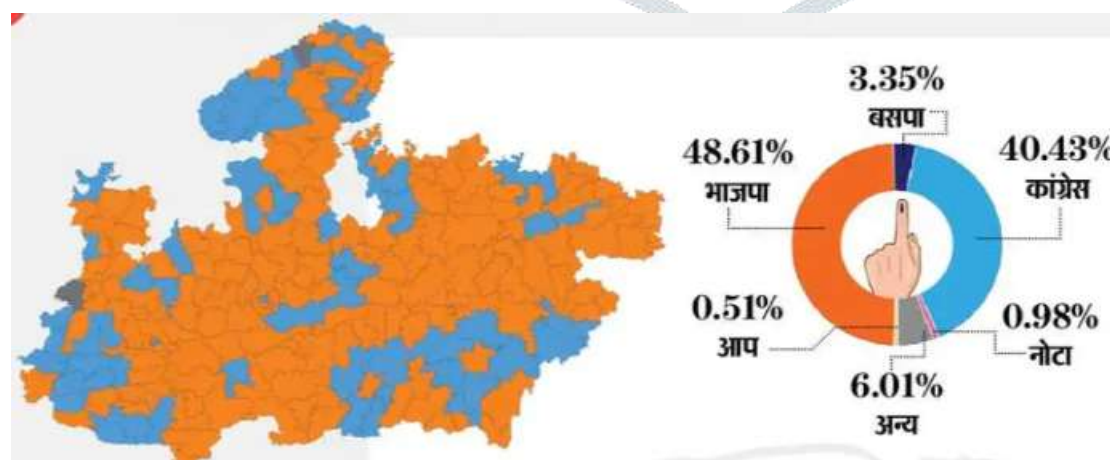


Source: (Bhaskar, 2023)

It is noteworthy that the first instalment of the Ladli Behna Yojana was released on June 10, 2023, just five months before the state assembly elections. Initially, Rs. 1,000 were sent to the accounts of 1,29,50,457 women. Moreover, an additional Rs. 250 was given as a Raksha Bandhan bonus about three months before the election. Later, the amount was increased to Rs. 1,250. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has also promised to increase the amount of this scheme to Rs. 3,000 per month by 2028, which is when the next Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections are due. The timing of these schemes can, thus, explain their purpose.



The survey also asked whether major political parties only remember women's issues around election time; 81% of women answered "Yes". This clearly indicates that one hidden motive behind introducing such schemes is to influence a specific voter group. The Ladli Behna Yojana was considered a new experiment by the government in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections. Electoral experts considered it a key factor in the BJP's victory. The BJP achieved its highest vote percentage in the history of state assembly elections this time, with 48.61% of people voting for the party.



(Bhaskar T. D., 2023)

Seats with Higher Women's Voting: "The contribution of the Ladli Behna Yojana was clearly visible in the BJP's big victory in Madhya Pradesh. Of the 34 seats where women's voting was higher than men's, the BJP won

24. However, of the 29 seats where the women's population was higher than the men's, the BJP could only win 11." (DB, 2023) Besides elections, such schemes also impact basic facilities and administrative functioning. There have been reports of delayed salaries and effects on basic development projects in many bodies due to a shortage of funds.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusion:

The study concludes that such schemes have had a significant impact on elections. However, the analysis of media reports suggests that the full effect of these schemes was seen in the Assembly elections, while the impact was visible in the Lok Sabha elections but was not discussed as widely. Nevertheless, the BJP won all 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state for the first time in history. This is significant, because the BJP's performance saw a decline at the national level. Thus, it can be assumed that Ladli Behna also played a vital role.

The survey showed a high percentage of women who agreed with three key points:

1. Such schemes affect voting.
2. The government only remembers women's issues during elections.
3. 46% of women considered the Ladli Behna Yojana a very good scheme.

The data clearly indicates that the BJP's winning percentage was higher in seats where women voted more. Therefore, for fair elections, it is crucial to change the pattern and timing of such freebie schemes. Basic facilities should take priority over freebies. This means that funding for basic facilities should not be reduced due to freebie schemes.

The data shows that the government reduced the number of beneficiaries after the election in the name of ineligibility. Ideally, the list of beneficiaries should be prepared only after thorough verification.

Running such schemes by taking loans rapidly increases the interest burden. This directly impacts the economy and indirectly affects everything. Due to the weakening of the fiscal system, the country is becoming weak on every front: electricity, water, roads, health, education, and employment. The slow pace of road construction affects all kinds of development. Transportation systems are not being developed in remote areas. The country's healthcare system is weak, and economic prosperity is essential to strengthen it.

4.2 Suggestions:

1. Freebie schemes should be prioritized after basic facilities. Budget allocation should ensure adequate funds for basic facilities first, followed by planning expenses for freebies.
2. Instead of recklessly distributing government funds to win elections without a solid strategy for welfare, the government, which is facing several economic problems, should systematically address the real problems of the beneficiaries. This requires that such schemes are not announced in haste.

3. Freebies compromise the fairness of the electoral system. Therefore, their timing is crucial. There should be a ban on announcing or launching such schemes in an election year.
4. Politically, such schemes affect the entire country. It is easy to start such a scheme, but no government can easily dare to stop it. These schemes are spreading from one state to another, gradually infecting the entire country. Every state government is trying to identify a vote bank and provide undue benefits in various ways.
5. Cash benefits without work increase dependence on the government and promote idleness. Instead of unemployment allowance, employment should be provided, and instead of cash benefits, basic facilities should be given. Freebies also negatively impact the labour force.
6. The direct impact of expensive labour is on small industries. The inability to get workers at reasonable rates increases the cost, which also leads to a rise in inflation. The situation is similar for large industries.
7. Instead of giving direct cash benefits through schemes like Ladli Behna, Anganwadi, and ASHA workers should be supported to fulfil women's needs like health check-ups, nutrition, and sanitary pads. The government cannot ensure that women's role in family decisions will increase just by transferring money to their accounts.
8. Only cooked food, medical facilities, and education should be provided for free without any labour. Medical facilities should focus more on disease prevention. For all other needs, the public's diligence and hard work are essential for their health and the nation's well-being.
9. Everyone is aware of the crumbling and corrupt PDS (Public Distribution System), where government officials, employees, shopkeepers, and even beneficiaries are involved in corruption. Instead of distributing raw materials, the government should start "Community Kitchens" in every village and city for the needy. Capable beneficiaries should be involved in managing them. There should be no cash transaction system in these.
10. Government money should be used to improve healthcare facilities and strengthen the existing system. By providing good facilities and teachers in government schools and colleges, efforts should be made to curb the exploitation by private schools and colleges.

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