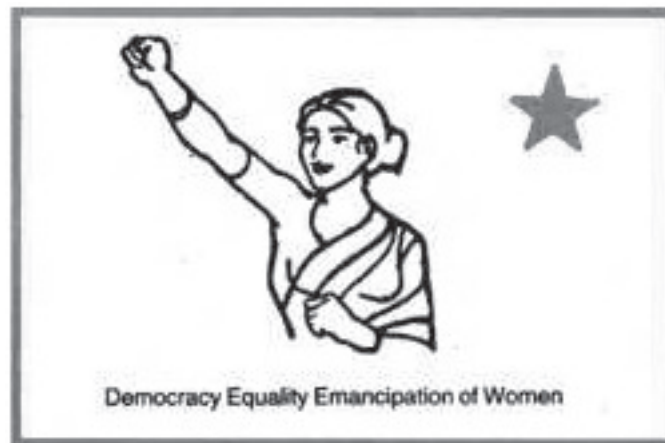


Status Of Women in India Experience of the Last Decade (2014-2024)



AIDWA PUBLICATION

Towards a Democratic and Secular Government to Strengthen Women's Struggle for Equality and Emancipation

We, the women of India, regard the 18th General Elections to be held in 2024 as a challenge before all secular democratic forces in the country, and at the same time an opportunity to dislodge the nightmarish regime of violence, fear, hunger and unemployment unleashed by the BJP-RSS government in the last ten years. Faced with its deliberate policy of destruction of the democratic, secular, and federal fabric of our Constitution, and the dreams of equality and emancipation for all sections that inspired our freedom struggle, AIDWA urges all women to unitedly defeat this government for its misrule.

The latest scandal that has enveloped this government is that of the electoral bond disclosures, which clearly expose its massive extortion, quid pro quo, and corruption.

It is a good time to recall the list of broken promises and to review the larger economic, political, social damage done by this regime. We shall concentrate mainly on the impact of the policies of the BJP government on women. This is seen in the ever-increasing threat to food security, the spectre of hunger and malnutrition, rising unemployment, back-breaking price rise, escalating communal and casteist attacks, and an alarming increase in violence and brutality against women, especially girl children.

The BJP Government has failed India's women. This booklet brings out the impact of the past 10 years of the BJP government's rule on women's lives and livelihoods.

We are grateful to Dr Archana Prasad, Krithi S and Surangya Kaur whose help was very valuable in bringing out this booklet. We thank Sandhya Shaily who has translated this booklet into Hindi.

P. K. Sreemathi
President

Mariam Dhawale
General Secretary

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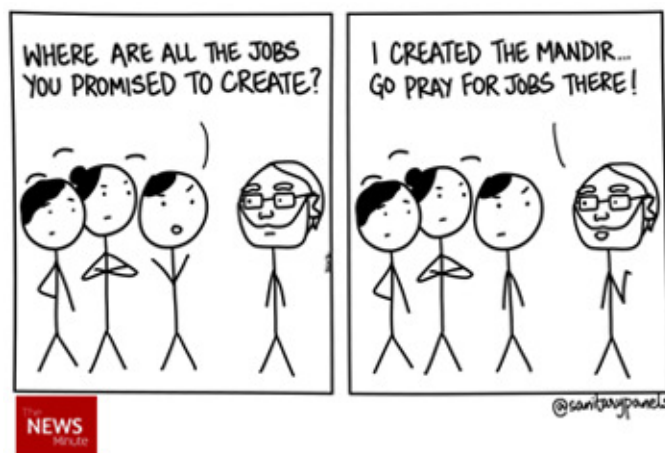
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Promises and Achievements

The BJP has been projecting itself as pro-women in its manifesto of 2014 and 2019. As the promises for the 2024 elections are being made, this report looks at how the life of women has changed in the past 10 years under the Modi government, and whether the government has lived up to their promises. During the 2019 election campaigns they claimed that they had already achieved a dignified life for women through the Beti Padhao Beti Bachao, Jan Dhan, Ujjwala and Swachha Bharat schemes in their first term. Promises in the 2019 election manifesto were no less grandiose.

Some key promises were:

- Financial inclusion of women
- 33 percent reservation for women
- Equal rights for Muslim women by enacting a law against triple talaq and nikah halala



- 10 percent of the government purchases to be done through MSMEs with 50 percent women employees
- Creches to be opened in all enterprises with more than 50 employees.

Through this booklet we will see how the BJP government has not only failed to deliver on these promises, but it has also worsened the conditions for women across the country.

Impacts of Neo-liberalism

The past decade has been significant in the economic distress faced by Indian women. Despite claims on improvement in the situation of Indian women, data from the World Economic Forum shows that India has one of the worst Gender Gap Indexes in the world. The neoliberal policies followed by the Modi government have been solely for the benefit of a few large corporate houses and at the cost of the vast majority of our population.

Gender Gap Index: How Does India Fare?

Year	2014	2018	2022
Number of Countries Surveyed	142	149	146
Overall Rank	114	108	135
Economic Empowerment and Participation	134	142	143
Educational Attainment	126	114	107
Health and Survival	141	147	146
Political Empowerment	15	19	48

In India, today, just 15 corporate houses control 90 percent of the profits. The profits of corporate monopolies like Adani and Ambani have sky-rocketed by over \$ 15 billion per year, especially during and after the pandemic. Corporates reported a 70% increase in profits in 2021-22 compared to the previous year while 84% of households saw a decline in their incomes.

THE RICH ARE GETTING RICHER

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BILLIONAIRES IN INDIA INCREASED FROM 102 IN 2020 TO 166 BILLIONAIRES IN 2022 AND THE COMBINED WEALTH OF INDIA'S 100 RICHEST HAS TOUCHED INR 54.12 LAKH CRORE.¹⁹ THE WEALTH OF THE TOP 10 RICHEST STANDS AT INR 27.52 LAKH CRORE – A 32.8 PER CENT RISE FROM 2021.



Despite this growing inequality, the withdrawal of the state from its welfare function continues. Since 2014, the size of government spending has become much smaller than ever before: in 2017-18, the total expenditure of the Union government was 12.5 percent, i.e., about 1.5 percent lower than the expenditure in 2013-14. This proportion rose slightly during the pandemic but came down to remain below 15 percent. Any increase was mainly on account of the subsidies and infrastructure given to corporates and not to the working people and women. Disastrous policies like Demonetization and GST have worsened the conditions of poor and marginalized sections. Women particularly have faced the brunt of the crisis.

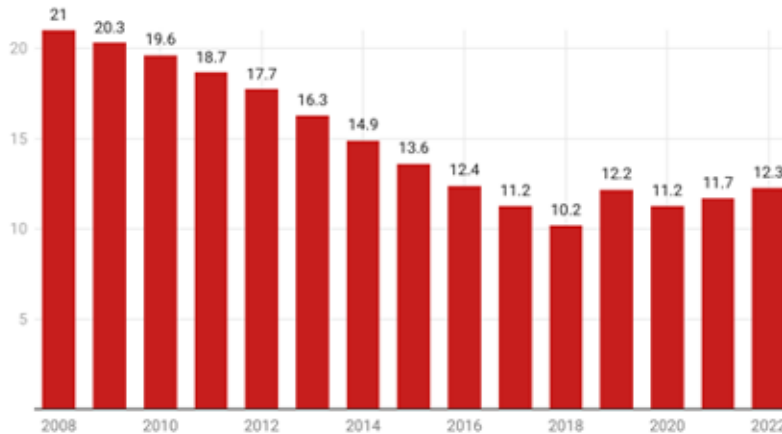
Rising Unemployment and Unpaid Work

The Modi government's promise of having a women's workforce plan has failed.

- In 2017-2018, India faced one of the highest unemployment rates in the last 40 years. This unemployment was largely driven by the fact that women were being pushed out of the workforce, especially in the rural areas.
- According to the NSSO, in 2017-18, around 40 lakh women were pushed out of work and had to stay at home.
- The CMIE data shows that by 2022, 8.8 crore women were willing to work but could not get jobs.
- During the period of demonetization, almost 1 crore jobs were lost; it is estimated that 88 lakhs of these were women's jobs.
- The promise of 10 percent of contracts to MSMEs with 50 percent women workers has not seen the light of day.

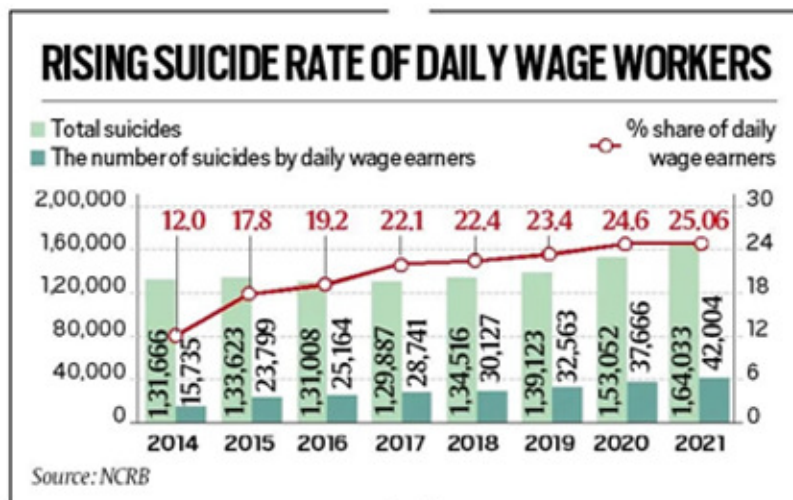
Female Labour Force Participation Rate

(% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)



Source: World Bank • Created with Datawrapper

- GST and demonetization also led to the closure of small businesses, which worsened in the COVID lockdown period. One-third of the paid workers in these enterprises are women.
- According to the NCRB data, suicides amongst daily wage workers went up by 170 percent for male workers, and 137 percent for women workers between 2014 and 2021.



Instead of providing some relief through the creation of jobs, the government passed the four labour codes which have reduced job security. More than 90 percent of the women in paid employment in India work as informal labour and will not get the recognition or social security benefits for which they have been struggling for a long time.

The basic demands of contractual scheme workers in anganwadi programmes, midday meal programmes, health, banking and education sectors - regularization and a minimum salary of Rs 26000 - remain unaddressed. Though the E Shram portal claims to have registered many women domestic, MGNREGS and home based workers, it does not provide them any social security support. Women can only register for existing pension schemes which will give them benefits, if at all, after they are 60 years old.

Agrarian Crisis and its Impact on Women

The lack of employment opportunities is worsened by the crisis in the agrarian sector. Instead of helping the farmers out of their crisis, the government promoted the Kisan Fasal Bima Yojana which cheated the farmers. Claims were not processed under the scheme and only a third of the farmers received any compensation. According to CAG, 84 lakh farmers withdrew from the scheme in the first year itself because they could not pay premiums.

In the name of doubling farmer's income, the Modi government has made a major push towards corporatisation of agriculture, especially in agricultural infrastructure fund, where big corporates like Adani and Ambani are the two major players. This has resulted in misery for farmers and agricultural workers, many of whom are women.

Indicators of agrarian distress are:

- In the first three years of the Modi rule farmers suicides went up by 42 percent and approximately 12000 farmers have been committing suicides each year.
- In 2019, more than two thirds of the suicides were in BJP ruled states. There has been no policy for support to the widows of



these farmers and agricultural workers.

- Between 2013 and 2019, NSSO database shows that the annual debt of a peasant family increased from approx. Rs 47000 to Rs 78000. For small peasants, the annual debt could be over one lakh.

Depriving Women of Land Rights

Women lack access to many agricultural support systems as they are not recognised as farmers and do not have land rights and control. Women play an important role in collecting firewood and other products from forest and common lands which sustain the livelihoods of the most marginalised sections, particularly in distress periods.

However, the NDA government's policies have led to a new wave of land grabs due to the privatisation of common lands, non-implementation of the forest rights act and rising cost of production in agriculture. In many cases, small and marginal women farmers are forced to lease lands for contract farming from rich farmers and landlords, which perhaps, their families had once owned.

Central Government's changes in the National Monetisation Pipeline, Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act, Mines and Mineral Amendment Act, Environmental Impact Assessment Rules have opened all common and public lands to corporate land grab. More than 30 percent of the claims under the Forest Rights Act have been rejected. Between 2017 and 2021, more than 50,000 hectares of forest land has already been diverted for big projects, thereby leading to land loss for adivasi families. In addition, there have been targeted evictions of minorities in BJP ruled states such as Assam, where Muslim women have been left displaced and destitute.

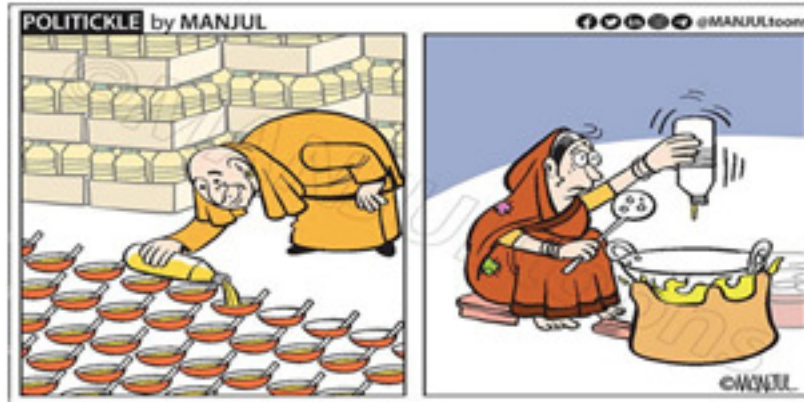
Price Rise

The loss of employment and income has been accompanied by spiraling prices because of imposition of GST on food items by the present Modi government. Instead of taxing the rich, it is taxing the poor, by imposing more indirect taxes. In addition, it has diluted and changed many parts of the Essential Commodities Act that allow hoarding and price rise.

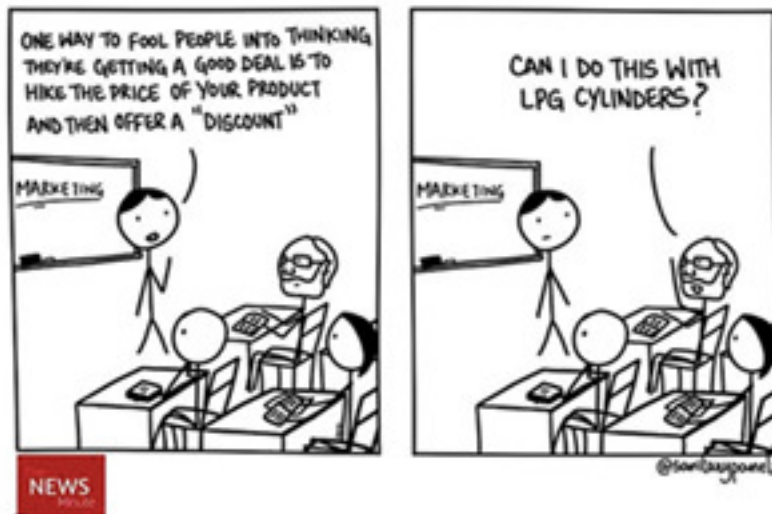
**IN 2020-21, THE PROJECTED REVENUE
FOREGONE OF THE GOVERNMENT IN
THE FORM OF INCENTIVES AND TAX
EXEMPTIONS TO CORPORATES IS
INR 1,03,285.54 CRORE,⁸⁶**

Rise in basic commodity prices: In the last ten years, the prices of food items have sky-rocketed: cereals prices have gone up by 24 percent, wheat flour by 28 percent, pulses by 20-30 percent, groundnut oil by 42 percent, mustard oil by 71 percent, Vanaspati by 112 percent, sunflower and palm oil by 101-128 percent, potatoes by 65 percent, onions by 69 percent and tomatoes by 115 percent. This rise is a result of a combination of factors including the unraveling of the PDS system.

Rise in Fuel Prices: The Modi government has set records with respect to increasing fuel prices. When the import prices of crude oil fell by Rs. 10 per litre between 2014 and 2021, the Modi government



did not allow the price within the Indian market to fall. Instead, it increased the excise duties on petrol by more than 250% and on diesel by 820%. In 2014, the central excise duty on diesel and petrol ranged from Rs. 4 to Rs. 10 per litre. By 2021, it has gone up to Rs 31.80 per litre for diesel and Rs 32.90 for petrol. Government revenue from petrol and diesel has gone up by 277%. Of this the State governments got only 32 percent, and 68 percent was gobbled up by the Central government. Today 65 per cent of the fuel prices being paid by common citizens go to the government as taxes. The government makes 50 percent of its total income from excise duties just by hiking taxes.



Rise in LPG prices: While women are supposedly getting relief on cooking gas through free connections under the Ujjwala scheme, in reality the scheme only provides the connections and no further support. Subsidies have been reduced almost to zero and the price of LPG cylinder has risen from Rs 414 in 2014 to Rs. 1200 in 2022 – by almost three times! Right before the elections in 2023, the Central government announced a Rs 200 rebate, bringing the price down to about Rs. 910-950. This is still a more than 120 percent increase from earlier periods. A recent CAG report unearthed a big scam where 2.98 lakh fraud connections were used to buy multiple cylinders at subsidized rates on a single day. Black marketeering of LPG continues while women struggle to make ends meet.

Micro Financial Institutions (MFIs) and Indebtedness

Rising prices and unemployment, reinforced by job loss during the COVID 19 lockdowns, has driven many households into debt for managing their basic needs. Many surveys, including that by AIDWA, show how indebtedness amongst poor households is growing. Most of these debts are taken from private microfinance institutions and banking companies.

The Modi government opened over 3 crore Jan Dhan accounts and claimed that the percentage of women owning accounts had gone up from 43 percent to above 70 percent between 2014-2022. This has not translated into increased access to banking services for most of the population. As the Global Finex Index 2021 shows, many of these accounts had no deposits; at least 43 percent of women's accounts were inactive.

The Modi government also claimed that Mudra loans were giving cheap credit to women SHGs to start businesses. Between 2014-2021 the percentage of Mudra accounts held by women came down from 76 percent to about 70 percent, and the average loan amount was between Rs. 47000 to 49000. In 2022, more than 59 percent of the loans came from private sector small finance banks. Public sector banks gave only 15 percent of the loans.

Private sector banking companies and MFIs have been supported by the policies of the Central government, with the Reserve Bank stipulating that at least 40 percent of the loans of public sector banks should be given to private banks and MFIs. Cheap loans to MFIs by public sector banks went up by 60 percent between 2014-2022. Lending to MFIs was given as priority sector lending, getting loans at interest rates of 4-5 percent, while women were obtaining loans at 20-36 percent interest rate. The government refused to even put a ceiling on interest rates: in most cases interest rates charged by MFIs were above 20 percent and would even go up to 36 percent or more.

Women were charged additional fees and are harassed because they are unable to pay their debts. Many of them have borrowed from more than one MFI. Women have been forced to sell off their household belongings to pay loans. Some of them have committed suicides.

Redrawing the Terms of Welfare

Every year the government prepares a gender budget which shows its commitment towards women. Between 2014 and 2023 the allocations under this head hovered around 5 percent of the total expenditure and below one percent of the total GDP. The allocations for Ministry of Women and Child Development continued to be much lower than 0.5 percent of the total GDP.



Expenditure on expansion of infrastructure for women's safety, like one stop crisis centres for rape victims, shelter homes for women etc., has been largely left to the State governments. Central expenditure on these schemes has been less than 0.05 percent of the total budget throughout the two terms of this government. We must remember that BJP-RSS led government had promised that it would spend money to operationalize the One Stop Crisis Centres for rape victims. Allocations for the National Assistance Programme giving pensions to widows and the elderly have also seen drastic cuts. Despite significant inflation the amount of widow pension has not been increased.

Food Security and Nutrition

In 2014, India ranked 63 in the global hunger index and this position came down to 101 in 2021 and by 2023, India ranks 111 out of 125 countries. Reports of starvation deaths, particularly in the adivasi regions, began to be noticed from 2016 onwards. This situation has been a direct result of Modi government's policy.

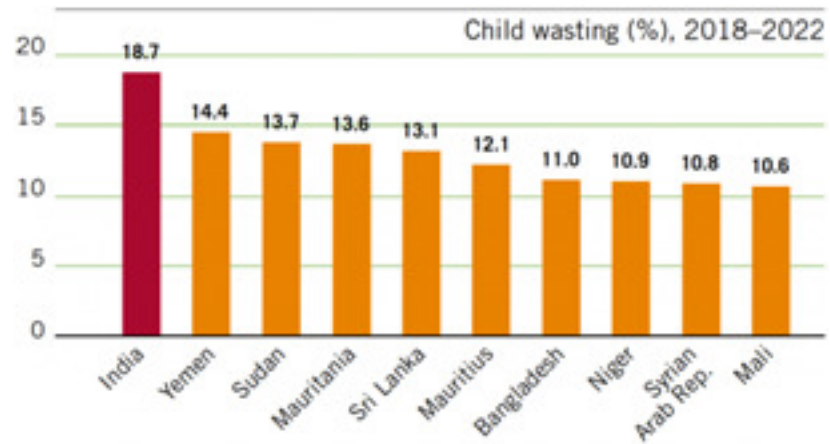
The PDS has been weakened systematically:

- Though the targeted PDS system had started after the enactment of the National Food Security Act, in 2016, the Modi government limited the number of Antodaya cards.
- The linking of ration cards to Aadhaar has led to the cancellation of large number of cards at a time when starvation is increasing.
- Digitisation and the online One Nation, One Ration Card System has also led to exclusion of women, many of whom have to pay fees to middlemen to even apply for ration cards. A survey by Dalberg of five states, in April 2022 showed that 59 percent of the people who tried to update their cards were unsuccessful.
- Most migrants who tried to make use of the portable card had an authentication failure. In other words, the ONORC scheme is not successful because it only digitalises the existing exclusionary system and does not expand coverage of ration.
- Central government support for PDS has come down by more than 40 percent in the last 10 years.

In the first four years of the Modi government, the quantity of grains supplied to families had reduced from 35 kg per family to 5 kg per person. An additional 5 kg were to be provided at a subsidised price. But during the pandemic, in the name of providing 80 crore people with free grains, the Modi government stopped the distribution of 5 kg of subsidised grains under PDS system. According to an affidavit, more than 4 Crore ration cards have been cancelled between 2013 and 2021. 1.9 Crore ration cards have been cancelled in the last three years alone. The central government also stopped transferring sufficient food grains to opposition ruled state governments.

The NFSA mandates a maternity benefit of Rs 6000 to pregnant women for their nutrition. But the government has restricted this to the first child. There are deliberate delays in implementing this provision. The number of ration shops has decreased and even those that continue don't open regularly or there is black marketeering of food grains. Amidst growing hunger, the Food Corporation of India is being forced to sell grains to corporates for making ethanol for biofuels.

In India, the ICDS and Midday meal programmes are essential to tackling growing malnutrition. Between 2016-2020, severe malnutrition in children between 0-5 years of age increased in 341 out of 707 districts in 36 states. Instances of anaemia in women between 15 and 49 years of age have grown by 4.1 percent between 2016 and 2021.



Despite growing malnutrition concerns, the ICDS and the Mid-Day Mealschemes have been combined into the PM POSHAN programme and their Central allocations have been severely cut back. In 2015-2016 itself, there were 33 percent cuts in the allocation. Ever since then, there have been cuts to the tune of 40 percent. The Central government is now only paying capital costs in the programme and leaving all other expenses to state governments.

In 2016, the Government signed an agreement with the World Bank to build Public Private Partnerships in ICDS and Midday Meal Programmes. The Ministry of Women and Child Development signed a memorandum with Cairn India Ltd (a subsidiary of the MNC Vedanta) in 2016 to develop and modernize 4000 ‘next gen’ Anganwadi Centres across the country. These Centres are to be renamed ‘NandGhar’ and will run as Anganwadis during some part of the day, and then as “women’s skill development centres”. It seems that the target to create 2 lakh smart anganwadis is based on this model of corporatization of ICDS.

Taking cue many state governments like UP and Gujarat have contracted corporate formed NGOs like Akshaya Patra to provide pre-cooked meals to schools. The government has been insisting on pre-packaged and fortified foods instead of hot cooked meals. This will not only help big food providers and corporate backed NGOs, but these



are also less nutritious. Needless to say, it will also have a devastating impact on the millions of women who work in this sector.

The jobs of one crore anganwadi workers and helpers and midday workers are also at stake. After multiple protests, the BJP had promised a 50 percent increase in the salary of anganwadi workers and helpers. But this promise has not been fulfilled and their salaries have been made the responsibility of state governments. Further, the Central government is reluctant to meet their main demand of being recognised as a government employee. Instead, the government is moving towards dismantling the entire system.

Attacks on MGNREGA

MGNREGA plays an important role in ensuring food security by providing minimum wages in the off-season and its importance was seen in the COVID period when there was a sudden crisis of no work during lockdown periods. Women workers are more than half the beneficiaries of MGNREGA work; in some states about two thirds of the applicants are women, and in the wake of a severe employment crisis, more and more work continue being demanded under the scheme.

However, under the Modi government, even as per official figures, the average number of days of MGNREGA work has been reducing.

- In 2013, the average number of days which one household engaged in was a little above 60.
- Between 2014-2021 it has come down to less than 40 days of work.
- Between August 2022 and March 2023, the average person's days of work was just about 30 days.

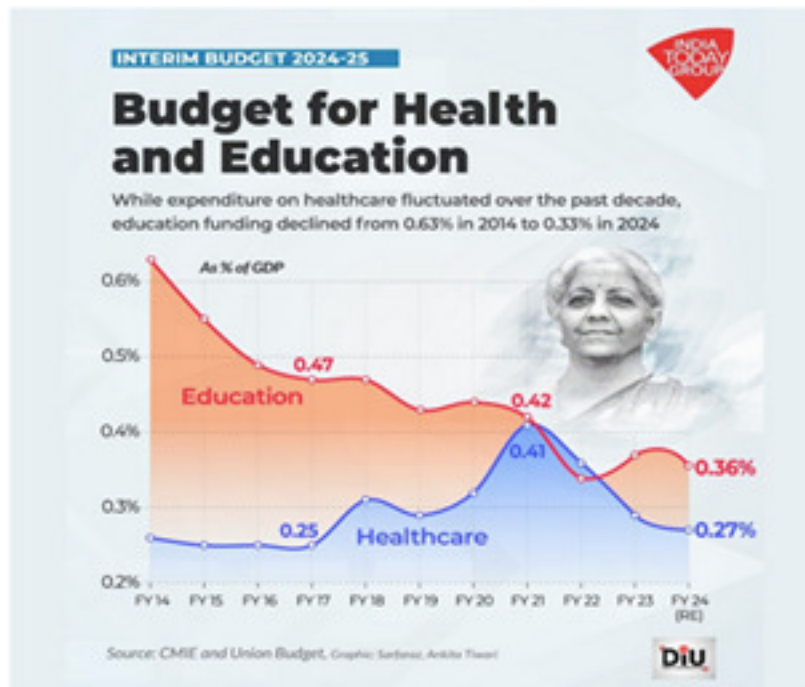
This is largely because the Central government has decided to kill the scheme and the budgetary allocation for the scheme has seen a drastic cut in actual terms. By August 2023, most states had exhausted 91 percent of the funds for the scheme. Their expenditure is more than the allocations by the Central government. The central government

owes 18 states more than 6000 crore of pending wages and 30 states more than 6000 crores for Central share in pending material costs (Hindu 2 August 2023). Because of this, women are not getting wages on time: many have not got paid for months.

A survey of MGNREGA workers in five states by Azim Premji University shows that 41.1 percent of the 2.6 crore workers are not eligible for the Aadhaar Based Payment System which has become mandatory from 31 August 2023. This is one way of squeezing the scheme. Women are required to use attendance App to get work: in many states this is not working.

Ignoring Women's Health

The National Health Policy, 2017 states that 2.5 percent of the GDP should be spent on health. But, under this government, spending has remained around 1 percent on health.



It is well-known that more than 70 percent of the paramedics in the health system are women. Their stellar role was evident during the pandemic. There are also about 10.52 lakh ASHA workers who work on the frontlines and connect the remotest parts of the country to health infrastructure. They have been termed as 'community volunteers' and their demands of recognition as workers have not been met. This despite vacancies in the health system, increasing the workload on existing workers. By 2023, there has been a shortfall of 25 percent of auxiliary women regular nursing staff and 74.1 percent male and female health assistants.

By 2019 the health budget for Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) programme and the Maternity Benefit programme saw almost a 30 percent cut. The RCH programme has now been merged into the National Health Mission, which also saw budgetary cuts. The Maternity Benefit Scheme was merged into Mission Shakti and saw at least a 20 percent cut in budget by 2022-2023.

This clearly means that the government is not investing in health. Its biggest health programme is Ayushman Bharat, a large part of which benefits private health insurance companies. Fraud worth crore of rupees has been detected by the CAG; for instance, 7.5 lakh Ayushman Bharat accounts have been linked to one single number. The Central Government itself detected fraud worth 286 crore in 2023.

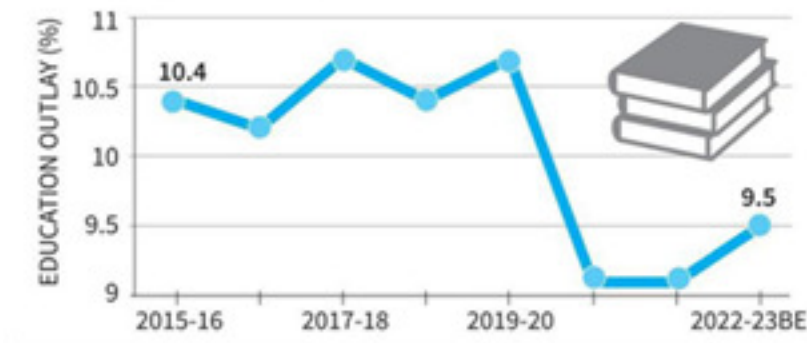
Education

The demand for an increase in spending on education to the tune of 6 percent of the GDP is a pipe dream. The Modi government has been spending less than 0.5 percent of the GDP on education: between 2018 and 2023 this proportion came down from 0.46 percent to 0.37 percent.

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has led to privatisation and communalisation of education. In many states, thousands of schools have been merged in the name of rationalisation under the NEP. Approximately 2 lakh government schools have been closed all over the country. It has been reported that

Lower spending

The chart shows the budgetary allocation for education as a share of total expenditure. Allocation for the sector declined from 10.4% in FY16 to 9.5% in FY23



as many as one third of girls are not enrolling into school. Promotion of online learning has led to further dropouts.

In higher education, the fees for board exams and the BA courses have been increased and girls from economically and socially backward classes are not able to access public education. Scholarships for girls and women from minorities, dalit, adivasis and other vulnerable sections have been stopped.

Under this BJP-RSS regime, education for girl children and women has been under attack. Targeting of students from minority communities was especially evident in the case of the ban on hijab in Karnataka schools. Textbooks have been changed to remove references to anti-caste movements and movements of women for right to dignity, equality, freedom of choice and right to their bodies. BJP ruled states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh led the way to give manuwadi orientation to textbooks. Projects and research are being promoted on Manusmriti to propagate the idea of a patriarchal Hindutva Rashtra. There is a direct attack on scientific methods and values and increasing attempts to spread superstition in the name of education. The LDF government in Kerala has refused to teach these doctored textbooks in

their schooling system.

Targeting Women's Rights

The women's movement has been struggling to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed for the past 27 years through regular protests and memoranda and building a larger consensus in support of the bill. This government has finally passed the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' (new name for the Women's Reservation Bill) on 19 September 2023. Yet, this remains a farce and will not be implemented during the 2024 general elections as the government has linked the bill to the census and delimitation process which may easily take another 10 years to complete. The insincerity of the BJP government in ensuring Women's Rights is crystal clear. In the last 10 years in power, the government did not pass this bill. In a cynical attempt to exploit women voters for electoral gains, it chose to bring it just months away from the general elections in 2024, and that too, in a way that it cannot be implemented.

Attacks on Women's Rights as Citizens and Dilution of Laws

The resurgence of social conservatism and the political support for the Hindutva brigade has led to a push towards weakening of the citizenship rights of women and dilution of the laws for their protection against violence. The legal changes weaken constitutional guarantees and fundamental right to life and liberty.

The introduction of amendments to the Citizenship Act and the push for making a National Register of Citizens poses danger to the minority communities, particular the vulnerable sections within them. Widespread anti CAA protests where women stood in the forefront was met with the arrests of several activists. Already, the creation of the NRC in Assam resulted in the exclusion of many women who did not have the required documents. Despite resistance across the board, in these last weeks before the 2024 general elections, the government has pushed on implementing this Act clearly revealing its priorities.

Many BJP-RSS led state governments like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have introduced anti-conversion laws, which target both



Muslims and Christians. The BJP's ghar wapasi campaign is targeted at adivasis and incorporates them into an upper caste Hindu society. The BJP government brought in the triple talaq legislation which has resulted in the targeting of Muslim men and abandonment of Muslim women. Simultaneously, the campaign on 'love jihad' has been used to attack inter-faith marriages and women's right to choose their partner. The campaign was part of the official agenda of the BJP in UP for the 2017 elections. The BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath is on record saying, "If they take one Hindu girl, we will take 100 Muslims girls." Many BJP ruled states have passed laws against inter-faith marriages. Section 498 A of the IPC, giving protection to women against domestic abuse has been diluted and now no arrests are being made under this law. This means that women have to remain in unsafe conditions as no immediate action is taken against the accused. And to get any relief under the Domestic Violence Act is also a very big struggle for women. The Criminal Law Amendments and undemocratic legislation of the data protection bill also targets privacy and dissent. These are very dangerous in their ability to curb freedom of expression and any opposition to the government. Several women activists and journalists have already been indiscriminately jailed under UAPA etc.

The abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35 A leads to the violation of rights of Kashmiri women. The impunity of security forces through indiscriminate application of AFSPA in North-East was evident in killings in Manipur, Nagaland etc. The promise of removing and repealing AFSPA remains a pipe dream. On the other hand, the governments move rapidly on the laws they want to pass. The Uttarakhand BJP government has successfully passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) this year bypassing all objections that have been raised against it. It directly attacks women's autonomy and denies equal rights to them. The BJP has reasserted that if re-elected to power, it will impose the UCC across the country, which is a threat to minorities and women.

Despite opposition by right wing groups, the Supreme Court ordered the repeal of section 377 which has now decriminalized same sex relations. Disappointingly, the judgement of the SC for recognition of same sex marriages has held that there is no fundamental right to marry or to live together in a civil union. This has been left as a decision for the legislature which, under BJP majority, is unlikely to ever take this step forward. This legal non-recognition means that couples continue to face various forms of discrimination such as violence and oppression in their daily lives.

Marital rape is still not recognized as a crime despite the recommendation of the Verma Commission. Post-COVID there have been regular reports of increased forced child marriages and trafficking of minors. The bill passed by the BJP government fails to provide viable solutions to these rising crimes. Dilutions to the SC and ST Prevention of Atrocities Act has also been attempted by the BJP government which have been strongly opposed. The agenda of right-wing organisations to oppose any form of social change that alters patriarchal authority and puts women in charge of their own lives is strongly supported by this government.

Rising Atrocities and Violence Against Women

Since 2014, violence against women has seen a tremendous rise under this regime.

The graph of violence against women started rising from 2014 onwards which can be seen clearly from the NCRB data:

- According to NCRB in 2014 the rate of crimes against women was 52.5 per lakh and this rose to 62.4 in 2019. By 2021 the rate of atrocities against women had gone up to 64.5 per lakh.
- In 2014, around 37 crimes were committed against women every hour, but, by 2021 this number had gone up to 49, i.e., an increase of more than 30 percent.
- The conviction rates for almost all crimes have hovered around a mere 23-25 percent.
- By 2021, the number of daily rapes remained at an average of above 90 rapes per day. The number of rapes of ST girls went up from 2.5 per day in 2014 to 4 per day in 2021. For SC girls the number of daily rapes went up from 6 to 11 in the same period.



- Uttar Pradesh topped the list in crimes against women for six consecutive years from 2017 to 2022. Rajasthan was placed second for crimes against women from 2019 to 2022.
- The NCRB data has recorded a 94.47 per cent surge in sexual offences against children since 2017. Uttar Pradesh has recorded the highest crimes in this category as well, with 8,136 cases out of a total of 63,414 cases recorded in 2022.

These figures show that BJP-RSS's Hindutva politics has led to an atrocious rise in violence against women, particularly in the last five years. Furthermore, the violence has become even more gruesome and powerful people connected with the Hindutva brigade are getting away with murder and rape. The BJP ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh lead the list of states with extraordinary increases of crime rates against women.



From the early days of the BJP-RSS led regime, couples in inter-faith and inter-caste marriages have been attacked by gangs belonging to the Sangh Parivar. In 2015, there were 251 recorded 'crimes in the name of honour' and in the last three years between 2018 and 2021 this number went up to 300, i.e., an increase of 40 percent. The states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh topped the list, along with Punjab and Rajasthan. This increase can be attributed to the targeted attacks by organisations like the VHP and Bajrang Dal, as well as the social and political support for Khap Panchayats. The BJP government has refused to pass a law against 'honour killings' which has been a long-standing demand of AIDWA.

Violence has also taken the form of moral policing by self-appointed vigilantes of social behaviour from right wing organisations. In many places, young people have been harassed, shamed, and even beaten up for being found with members of the opposite gender in public spaces. In August 2015, the Mumbai police arrested 13 couples from a hotel in the suburbs claiming that they were indulging in "indecent behavior." The fact is that they were consenting adults. The police later apologized for having "overstepped" their limits.

On the other hand, in several instances, culprits who were either BJP MPs, Ministers or functionaries were accused of sexual assault and rapes, and in some cases even murder, but no credible action was taken against them. Yogi Adityanath's government took lead in protecting BJP ex-MP Chinmayananda who is accused of raping a law student and Unnao MP Kuldeep Sengar, accused in the rape and murder of a minor child. Public protests have led to the imprisonment of Kuldeep. In 2018, a Hindu priest was accused of rape and murder of a child in Kathua in Kashmir. Shamelessly, the Hindu Ekta Manch and a Minister of the Government took out a march in favour of the accused.

Targeted violence and impunity of the culprits persists in other states as well. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab are some of the states reporting increasing cases of violence, and some of the stark examples are noted here. In Mumbai, a female TV actor was stabbed thrice by her stalker for turning down his marriage

proposal. In Haryana, a young student was shot dead in broad daylight just outside her college in Ballabgarh after she resisted an attempt at abduction. In a horrifying incident, a six-year-old Dalit girl was raped, killed and set on fire in Jalapur village in Hoshiarpur district, Punjab; the accused were arrested for the heinous crime. In Delhi, a teenager Dalit domestic worker was found dead in her workplace, but the police refused to register an FIR. The political protection to perpetrators of violence is evident in almost all states where there is an increasing rate of crimes against dalit and adivasi women.

There are also high profile cases of sexual harassment of journalists, lawyers and others, with the Tehelka case being one of the examples. Brijbhushan Sharan Singh, a powerful BJP MP from UP and the former President of Wrestlers' Association has been accused by women wrestlers of sexual harassment – but he has been protected by the BJP.



Communal Violence and the Threat to Minorities

Communal polarisation is one of the key strategies for the expansion of the BJP-RSS's political base, and this has had a

devastating impact on the life of women from the minority communities, particularly Muslim women. Ever since it came into power, the BJP-led government has pushed for the Gujarat model of Hindutva; it is well known that women suffered horrendous crimes during the Gujarat riots of 2002, when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of the state. The BJP while in power at the centre is promoting the same strategy across the country by creating religious divides through targeted riots, as seen in the violence in Delhi (2020), Manipur (2023), Nuh (2023). Women have felt humiliation, been robbed of dignity, and suffered loss of family members as consequences of this violence. While some of them have been pushed into relief camps, others have become destitute without any relief due to lack of documents.

Sexual assaults have become common during communal targeting: a disturbing case is the viral video of the parading of naked Kuki women in Manipur. The culprits of the Bilkis Bano rape case were released by the Gujarat government and had to be sent back to Jail through a Supreme Court Order. Most of the culprits in the Naroda Patiya case, where gory sexual assaults took place, were linked to the Gujarat Government or the Bajrang Dal and have been released from jail, even if on bail.

Hindutva terror has been given a free hand with the sponsored killings of Narendra Dabholkar, Gauri Lankesh and Govind Pansare, who questioned the actions and ideology of Hindu organisations. Their killers are still absconding. Muslim women have been left bereft and seeking justice in cases of mob lynching like cases of Junaid, Akhlaq and Umar Khan and many others, very often in the name of cow vigilantism. Targeting of minority women through evictions is taking place in BJP ruled states, especially Assam, where land evictions of Muslim families is underway.

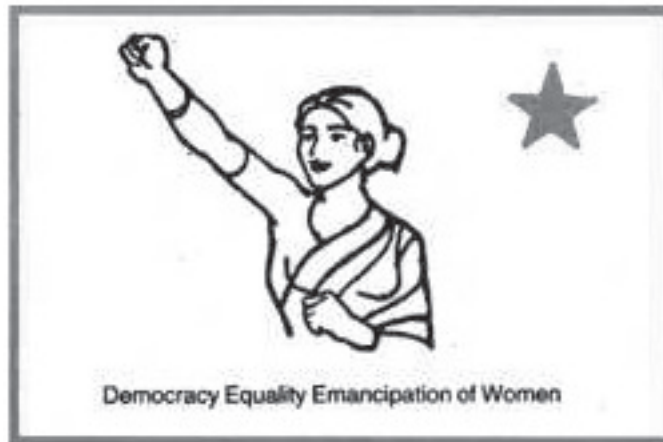
Attempts to incite communal divide among Adivasis is also evident. The Sangh Parivar has been consistently campaigning that the adivasis who convert to Christianity will not get benefits of reservations etc. Churches are regularly being vandalised by Hindutva brigade: one estimate suggests that 240 churches were destroyed during

recent Manipur riots. Adivasis are being incited to fight against each other and with the poor Muslim peasantry.

It is clear that the record of this government has been dismal on all economic fronts and perilous for women, particularly the minorities and marginalised sections. The Hindutva Rashtra they want to build has no space for economic development, equal rights, or self-determination for women. Instead, they manufacture the identity of a 'Hindu woman' vis-à-vis the others. In this sense, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti and its affiliates become the harbingers of the Manu Code and create deep polarisation within women, who are emerging as one of the target audiences for right wing groups. Countering this remains one of the biggest emerging challenges for the democratic women's organisations.

Defeat the Pro-Corporate-Communal BJP-RSS, Politics of Hatred and Unite to Defend the Constitution, Secularism and Democracy

For the upcoming 2024 elections, the BJP-RSS has evolved a new slogan to mislead us. Now the Prime Minister talks of "Modi ki Guarantee" as a promise for everything to improve. Indian women have faced the worst assaults under his regime. Looting the people and enriching their corporate friends has been BJP's agenda. Repression and attacks on democratic right to protest is the order of the day. Use of religion and caste for polarization and political gains has damaged the social fabric of our nation. The propagation of the regressive Manuwadi ideology threatens to undo the gains of the women's movement. Let us be united to protect our rights for equality and emancipation from poverty, unemployment, hunger, and violence. Defeat the BJP! Elect secular, democratic forces! Defend India, defend the Constitution!



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