

Welfare Politics and Electoral Promises-A Study on State- Society Bargaining in Kalahandi, Odisha

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Abstract

An inquiry is attempted here on the role of welfare politics and electoral promises in the state-society bargaining in Kalahandi, Odisha. Once synonymous with poverty and hunger, Kalahandi has witnessed rapid transformation through state-led welfare schemes, including Mission Shakti, KALIA, Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, and the very recent Subhadra Yojana (Newsroom Odisha Network, 2023; Sahoo, 2024; Vidhan Bharat, 2024). This paper analyses how welfare promises are used by political parties in their manifestos to invoke voters, and how local society—particularly women and marginalised communities—use welfare delivery as bargaining tools. Using qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and analysis of manifesto content, the study covers electoral cycles from 2019 to 2024.

The findings of the study indicate that welfare offerings by the state become a trade: for votes, the voters expect delivery, and the parties make promises accordingly. Established mechanisms of the BJD for welfare, especially older ones involving women self-help groups (Mission Shakti), have always ensured a secure voting base (India Today, 2024; SwarajyaMag, 2024). Meanwhile, the BJP's 2024 Subhadra Yojana gave direct individual benefits to the women to counter this (SwarajyaMag, 2024; Vidhan Bharat, 2024). The study shows that state-society bargaining in Kalahandi is mediated by gender, caste, and economic status. These results foster the consolidation of welfare institutionalisation and the populist flexibility in electoral politics. The same has implications for democratic accountability, welfare sustainability, and how future electoral promises will be constructed in poverty-ridden areas.

Keywords: Welfare Politics; Electoral Promises; State-Society Bargaining; Kalahandi; Odisha; Mission Shakti; Subhadra Yojana.

1. Introduction

Welfare politics has come to be an electoral issue in India with parties utilising targeted distribution schemes for voter mobilisation and shaping state–society relations (Wired, 2024; Indian Express, 2024). Kalahandi district of Odisha, marked by recurring droughts, hunger deaths, and abject poverty, deserves honour as an apropos setting for explaining how welfare schemes like Mission Shakti, Subhadra Yojana, and nutrition schemes have brought about complete changes in citizen-state relationships (Guardian, 2024; Telegraph India, 2025). From being a neglected state Kalahandi today stands as an epitome for how welfare promises condition negotiation between citizens and elected representatives.

The essence of this state lies in state–society bargaining with citizens, particularly women and marginalised groups, utilising welfare delivery as a reciprocal political exchange. State actors align manifesto pledges and service delivery to garner votes while voters expect real benefits from them to exchange their electoral support (Indian Express, 2024). This dynamic is especially visible in Kalahandi, where women’s SHGs set up under Mission Shakti are witnessed as welfare channels as well as political mobilisation networks (Indian Express, 2024). In the 2024 Odisha elections, these well-entrenched Mission Shakti networks of the ruling BJD confronted an electoral challenge in the BJP, which had instituted the Subhadra Yojana of ₹50,000 per woman cash transfer for two years for a target population of above one crore women voters (Wikipedia, 2024; Times of India, 2024). In no time, Subhadra became a political issue: BJD accused BJP of trying to undermine the legacy of Mission Shakti, while BJP equally posed Subhadra as a game-changing step for empowerment (Statesman, 2025; Telegraph India, 2025).

Understanding this case is significant for contemporary welfare politics, rendering state provisions a unilateral act. Instead, the process of welfare provisions involves a negotiated exchange established on local power bases. Migrant patterns in Kalahandi, caste relations among tribals, and rural-elite networks further make the link between promises and bargaining into contingent outcomes (Guardian, 2024; Bhattacharya et al., 2023). This study therefore concentrates on Kalahandi and its environs to explore:

- How electoral promises (Mission Shakti vs Subhadra) shape state-society bargaining on the ground;
- How identities (gender, caste, migration status) mediate beneficiary expectations and political behavior;
- Whether and how the transition from institutionally based SHG welfare to cash transfers affects democratic accountability and sustainability.

Using qualitative approaches, including interviews with SHG members, local political leaders and bureaucrats, and manifesto content analysis between 2019 and 2024, the study considers three electoral cycles in Kalahandi. The results reflect that the welfare intervention in this region is not necessarily developmental; it becomes a deeply political environment wherein voters barter electoral support for material gains, and consequently, political parties adjust their rhetoric and schemes.

This study furthers theoretical discussions on welfare populism, targeted schemes, and state–society linkages. It also provides policy insights into implementing welfare schemes—whether to actually promote democratic agency or to serve as populist instruments in lieu of genuine structural reform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In welfare politics, state–society bargaining entails a reciprocal exchange between political actors and citizens. Electoral promises set expectations, and their delivery becomes an object of negotiation (The Federal, 2024). The welfare populism literature stresses how parties use targeted welfare schemes as strategic instruments, not just for development but also for electoral mobilisation (Subhadra Yojana overview, 2024). Such programmes serve a double purpose: addressing developmental deficits and building electoral vote banks (GetOdisha, 2025).

Research into gendered welfare politics demonstrates how schemes aimed at women, such as Mission Shakti, work to empower and build political support. These long-term SHG processes maintain state–society connections, breeding dependency and loyalty (Devdiscourse, 2025). Subhadra Yojana cash-

transfer models, however, represent thefts of cash by putting money in the hands of singular persons as opposed to an institution, possibly reconfiguring the dynamic of bargaining (The Federal, 2024).

Existing distributive political paradigms hold that informational asymmetries and monitoring capacity affect bargaining capacity (Ramamurthi and Khadse, 2022), whereas SHGs provide a communal basis, peer-monitored, while direct cash transfers require administrative checks that are often less personal (Odisha Plus, 2025). The distinction is important insofar as it means that communities such as tribal groups, women, and migrants in Kalahandi will mobilise and respond differently from one another.

2.2 Empirical Literature

2.2.1 Mission Shakti: Structure and Impact

Mission Shakti, initiated in 2001 and implemented over the long duration of two decades, had more than 60 lakh SHGs across 70 lakh women as its members by the year 2021, specifically covering Kalahandi district as well (IIPA, 2023). Affirmative microfinance and livelihoods generation, as well as providing community leadership skills, are a few of the opportunities that it has presented. An IJFMR report of 2024 concerning Khordha district demonstrates the transition of SHG women to entrepreneurial activities and income independence (IJFMR, 2024).

Recent developments include restructuring governance to ensure that every household is attached to SHGs, an auditable reform so opposed to the previous politicisation of leadership roles and thereby bringing in transparency and inclusivity (Odishabytes, 2025)⁸. However, opposition parties and SHG federations contested the clauses limiting consecutive terms and family representation in committee positions, which were stayed by the High Court in mid-2025 (Times of India, 2025).

Also, Mission Shakti has been strategically pushing for heritage-based livelihoods: in July 2025, an MoU was signed for the modernisation of weaving with SHG women, for design development and market access, thus attesting to the continuous commitment towards institution-based welfare (Times of India, 2025).



Figure 1. Mission Shakti SHG members discussing loan utilization and welfare scheme awareness in Bhawanipatna block, Kalahandi.

2.2.2 Subhadra Yojana: Electoral Promise and Implementation

Subhadra Yojana, a flagship scheme, was started in September 2024 by the Odisha government led by BJP and targets one crore women with ₹50,000 over a period of five years in annual installments of

₹10,000 through direct bank transfer (The Federal, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025). The scale of first-year budget allocation was that of a whopping ₹10,000 crore, and the pot of money for the period 2024–29 was ₹55,825 crore (Wikipedia, 2025).

From a political standpoint, this scheme was historically significant as it was a calibrated counter-narrative to BJD's Mission Shakti and signalled a shift from community-based to an individual-centric delivery of welfare services (News24Online, 2024). By mid-2025, on occasions of Raksha Bandhan, third instalments were being paid, although certain hurdles in implementation occurred: some two lakh beneficiaries were excluded on account of eligibility criteria around land ownership and land-based taxation, leading to door-to-door surveys and post-hoc adjustments (Times of India, 2025).

The Subhadra also attempted enlargement efforts, called "Subhadra Plus" and "Subhadra Sakhi": these added entrepreneurial, savings, and social linkage components, effectively hybridizing cash transfer with institutional support but under BJP political framing (OdishaBytes, 2025).



Figure 2. Beneficiaries of the Subhadra Yojana lining up at a local Panchayat office in Dharmagarh block to verify eligibility before the Raksha Bandhan disbursement.

2.2.3 Comparative Dynamics: Institutional vs Transfer Models

The literature maintains that institutionalized delivery mechanisms, such as SHG programmes, nurture local accountability structures, social capital, and sustained engagement, whereas cash transfers tend to bypass these institutional layers and weaken the capacity for collective bargaining, thereby reinforcing transactional politics (New Indian Express, 2025).

The Lakhpati Didi movement in Odisha, which aims at enlarging the life scope of SHG women into entrepreneurs having an annual income of ₹1 lakh and thus is part of Mission Shakti, suggests that empowerment becomes durable when there is institutional presence (Times of India, 2025). The cash-transfer scheme of Subhadra, on the other hand, though initially popular, may not empower women to beyond the extent that institutionalised empowerment does.

2.2.4 Relevance to Kalahandi

Although district-specific studies on Kalahandi welfare politics are rare, these trends are quite visible through state-level programmes: Kalahandi's socio-economically backwardness continued in spite of the early irrigation projects, and its eventuation through welfare measures has been rather hampered (Wikipedia, 2025). With Kalahandi's huge tribal population, migrant dependence, and its infection of structural vulnerabilities, negotiation regarding welfare delivery is likely to go by the same patterns seen

elsewhere, back with an even greater dependence on both schemes and lending itself to electoral-level dynamics.

3. Research Gap and Contribution

Existing literature describes the institutional framework and political dynamics for welfare schemes all over Odisha, but very few delve into micro-level interactions between electoral promise, local negotiation, and societal response in a district context like Kalahandi. This paper fills that gap by looking at the evolution, reception, and outcomes of bargaining related to Mission Shakti and Subhadra in Kalahandi in relation to the larger literature on 4. Methodology

The methodology used is a qualitative case study, situated in the district of Kalahandi in Odisha, with the objective of looking into the state-society bargaining as mediated by welfare politics and electoral promises. Known historically for its deep-rooted poverty and systemic deprivation, Kalahandi now offers a dynamic site for the interaction of welfare schemes and political mobilization (Around Odisha, 2025; The Print, 2024).

3.1 Research Design and Area Profile

With the existence of 13 community development blocks with 2,253 villages, Kalahandi district is basically an agrarian setting with a high tribal population density (Mission Shakti official, n.d.). It is one among the top performers in Odisha in areas of health and education under the aspirant district programme of NITI Aayog (Around Odisha, 2025). These contrasting realities make it a fertile terrain for an analysis of how various welfare interventions influence the bargaining process between the state and society.

3.2 Data Sources

3.2.1 Primary Data

- **Semi-structured interviews with about 30 participants:**
- SHG women members from blocks of Bhawanipatna and Dharmagarh;
- People's representatives at the Panchayat level and party functionaries;
- Commissioners and officers engaged in the launching of welfare schemes at the district level.
- **Two focus group discussions (FGDs):**
- Women beneficiaries under SHG;
- Women who qualify for the Subhadra Yojana but are not part of SHGs. Interviews covered expectations, experiences of welfare delivery, and perception of electoral promises.

3.2.2 Secondary Data

- Manifestos and policy analyses: BJD and BJP manifestos for 2019 and 2024, official instruction manuals of schemes and States Budget documents (Subhadra, Mission Shakti).
- Scheme performance data: From the Mission Shakti district portal, from the press (SHG reach and third instalment of Subhadra-the Times of India, 2025).

3.3 Analytical Approach

- Thematic coding of qualitative data along with prompt categories: scheme awareness, bargaining narratives, and identity mediation.
- Comparative document analysis that juxtaposes promise-actuality gaps presented in electoral manifestos with scheme implementation.

- Triangulation through cross-checking of secondary data (e.g., NITI Aayog health nutrition rankings, Anganwadi coverage) with interview narratives (Around Odisha, 2025; Times of India, 2025).

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

- Informed consent was taken from all members, following gender-sensitive protocols during the FGDs.
- To protect anonymity, both SHG members and bureaucrats are referred to by pseudonyms.
- The limitations include possible biases on the part of interviewees and non-participation of migrant households that remain away during the election cycle (The Guardian, 2024).

4. Methodology

This research takes the form of qualitative case studies centered on Kalahandi district, Odisha, to study welfare politics and state–society bargaining. The metamorphosis of Kalahandi from an area of chronic deprivation to that of vigorous rural development makes this area a complex site for analysing welfare delivery and political negotiation (Around Odisha, 2025; IIMB Digest, 2023).

4.1 Research Design and Area Profile

The district of Kalahandi comprises 13 blocks for community development spread over 2250 villages, mostly agrarian with a large tribal population (Mission Shakti department, n.d.). Having been chosen as a NITI Aayog aspirational district, it progressed in health and education, with the economy still largely reliant on welfare schemes—a perfect candidate for this study (Around Odisha).

4.2 Data Collection Methods

4.2.1 Primary Data

- Semi structured interviews: About 30 interviews with SHG women members from blocks such as Bhawanipatna and Dharmagarh; Panchayat representatives and local party cadres for welfare outreach; district welfare officials, and implementers of schemes.
- Focus group discussions (FGDs): One group with SHG beneficiaries and one with eligible women who had not joined SHGs but were beneficiaries under Subhadra Yojana.

The guides for interviews and FGDs concentrated on welfare delivery experiences; the promises made in the election; their perception of those promises; expectations; and the dynamics of negotiation.

4.2.2 Secondary Data

- Manifesto and policy documents: BJD and BJP manifestos from 2019 and 2024, official scheme guidelines (Mission Shakti, Subhadra), and Odisha budget announcements.
- Programme performance data: SHG coverage data (Mission Shakti portal) and third instalment Subhadra disbursement details (Times of India, 2025).

4.3 Analysis Approach

- Thematic coding of qualitative narrative for core themes: scheme awareness, voter expectations, bargaining narratives, identity mediation.
- Comparative manifesto analysis assessing promise-delivery gaps between 2019 and 2024 pledges and implementation outcomes.
- Triangulation through comparison of interview claims with publicly available implementation data and district-level rankings (e.g., NITI Aayog metrics, scheme penetration) (Around Odisha, 2025; IIMB Digest, 2023).

4.4 Ethics and Limitations

- Informed written consent was sought from all participants; FGDs were moderated by women for the comfort and agency of women participants.
- Anonymity was preserved: respondents were only identified via pseudonyms.
- Limitations pertain to biases through social desirability, language translation from some tribal areas, and the non-inclusion of migrant women who were away during the data collection due to seasonal labour patterns (The Guardian, 2024; IIMB Digest, 2023).

5. Contextual Background: Kalahandi and the Welfare State

Kalahandi—once notorious for droughts, hunger famines, and mass-scale migration—has seen significant policy-contoured transformation over the past few years. The district has long stood for extreme agrarian distress, then media-mediated hunger crises in the 1980s and 1990s, and finally, systemic state neglect (The Print, 2024). Since the early 2020s, with Kalahandi becoming part of the NITI Aayog’s Aspirational District Programme, some quantifiable levels of achievement have been scored in maternal health, Anganwadi coverage, and school retention (Around Odisha, 2025).

Political History and the Mobilisation of the Welfare

Mission Shakti schemes were used by the ruling political elite under the BJD regime to mobilise grassroots constituencies, especially women and tribal groups. The scheme today covers more than 70 lakh women across 6 lakh SHGs across the state, including Kalahandi, for credit, livelihood, and leadership (Odisha Economics, 2025). District-level initiatives like Project Sakhi in Lanjigarh and Muniguda blocks strengthen the SHG networks—4,638 women from 444 SHGs increased their monthly income by an average of Rs 9,600 (Mahashakti Foundation, 2024).

The Lakhpati Didi Programme set up in 2025 envisages increasing the SMG women income to more than Rs one lakh a year, with Kalahandi helping put Odisha on the map as the first state in India with almost 16-17 lakh Lakhpati Didis already (Times of India, 2025). Moreover, in July 2025, Mission Shakti signed an MoU with the Weavers' Service Centre to revive traditional weaving SHG businesses under modern design and marketing, thereby strengthening institutional support networks (Times of India, 2025).



Figure 3. SHG women in Lanjigarh block working on heritage-based weaving livelihood projects under Mission Shakti’s MoU with the Weavers’ Service Centre.

Welfare Schemes: Subhadra Yojana and Mission Shakti

In September 2024, the Subhadra Yojana was launched with the biggest show of coordination under the erstwhile BJP-led government. This direct cash transfer scheme was designed to give ₹50,000 over five

years to women aged 21–60 (The Federal, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025). By March 2025, the amount of ₹5,000 crore had been dispersed among 1.18 crore women (Orissa Economics, 2025). The Odisha budget for 2025–26 set aside ₹10,145 crore for Subhadra rollout (Reddit, 2025), and the third instalment of ₹5,000 was to be paid on Raksha Bandhan in August 2025, barring the unfortunate exclusion of almost two lakh women due to ineligibility (Times of India, 2025)⁸.

On the other hand, Mission Shakti is institution building: SHGs provide peer-based monitoring, community investment funds, and interest-free loans for economic resilience and social capital. Over ₹5,000 crore will only be rotated through SHG credit systems in FY 2024–25, facilitating entrepreneurship and political mobilization (The Rural Pulse, 2024).

District Implications: Kalahandi at a Glance

Kalahandi experiences geographical orientation with welfare activities, identity being its axis. Under Mission Shakti, SHGs have become mechanisms for tribal and women collectives towards local leadership and into micro-enterprises with a focus on agriculture and food-related livelihood activities. For example, the ginger-growing enterprise shared by the SHGs of Subai village in Koraput district demonstrated credit and enterprise coming together to yield an income of 42,000 rupees in just one season, incidences found to be replicated in some parts of Kalahandi as well (IIPA, 2020).

On the other hand, schemes such as Subhadra are able to grab attention fast: in migration-prone villages, women who are not part of SHGs and who live in households where men migrate absentee rely on the cash transfer for household sustenance. Yet, critics assert that Rs 833 is way too less (Rs 5,000 twice a year) in the face of inflation, and that it cannot serve as the instrument that brings about inching towards autonomy (OdishaConnect, 2024).

Infrastructure and Service Delivery

Kalahandi still lags in providing Anganwadi infrastructure: out of 794 centers identified for upgradation under the Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, 23 do not have pucca buildings, six do not have drinking water, and 1,254 do not have toilet facilities—deficiencies in state infrastructure militating against a more holistic approach to welfare (Times of India, 2025).

These two tracks of welfare services—one through collective institutionalism (SHGs), the other through direct individual transfers—coexist and frequently collide. State agencies adjust scheme rollout to suit electoral cycles: Subhadra Instalments are often released around festivals like Raksha Bandhan and Women’s Day, whereas SHG occasions tend to be major events in local public life. It is precisely these bargaining dynamics, whereby local leaders mediate between disharmony in delivery and voter expectations, that make Kalahandi an exciting site for studying state–society negotiation.

Table 1. Key demographic and infrastructural features of Kalahandi district

Indicator	Value
Population (2011 Census)	~1.58 million
Population density	~199 per sq km
SC population	~18.2%
ST population	~28.5%
Literacy rate	~59.2%
Community development blocks	13 blocks, 2,253 villages
Urban centres	1 Municipality, 3 Notified Areas

Anganwadi centres (2025)	2,377 centres; 23 without pucca building; 1,254 lack toilets (Poshan Tracker)
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6. Findings and Analysis

6.1 Electoral Promises and Manifestos

An analysis of the BJD's 2019 and 2024 manifestos foreshadows the prominence of Mission Shakti: proposals had been made for enhancing SHG outreach, raising loan limits, and supporting heritage-based livelihoods (Mission Shakti MoU 2025). In comparison, Subhadra Yojana featured prominently in the BJP's 2024 manifesto—a direct cash transfer of ₹50,000 over a period of five years to the tune of one crore women (The Federal, 2024; The Hindu, 2024). With an allocation of ₹55,825 crore, its phased disbursement schedule only helped in increasing the scheme's electoral visibility (New Indian Express, 2024; Subhadra Yojana wiki, 2025).

Between the column of promises and on-the-ground action, what appears to be quite stark is the promise–delivery gap: the BJD had made a number of claims of success in the area of SHGs but appeared vague about any assault on scaling up on an annual basis, while BJP's Subhadra had staged very visible phased allocations that coincided with key public festivals—Rakhi Purnima and International Women’s Day—to bring in maximum electoral effect (New Indian Express, 2024; OMMCOM News, 2025).

Table 2. Comparison of manifesto commitments (BJD vs BJP, Odisha elections 2024)

Political Party	Scheme Referenced	Nature of Promise	Budget Allocation
BJD (2019 & 2024)	Mission Shakti	Expand SHGs, increase credit limits, support w/ livelihoods	Institutional expansion; no fixed amount in manifesto
BJP (2024)	Subhadra Yojana	₹50,000 support per woman over 5 years, cash transfer biannually	₹55,825 crore (2024–29 budget)



Figure 4. A local street awareness drive displaying posters of both Mission Shakti and Subhadra Yojana ahead of the 2024 elections in Bhawanipatna.

6.2 The Bargaining Process in State and Society

Mission Shakti (Institutional Framework)

Mission Shakti leaders and Panchayat members reported that Mission Shakti enhances the capacity of individuals—especially women—in negotiating for the credit and subsidy through collective pressure. For instance, one SHG leader from Bhawanipatna stated that a panchayat official had explained that support through the nodal agency to germplasm distributions depended on active voting blocs of SHGs in the polls—a tacit bargaining channel.

Furthermore, the July 2025 MoU with the Weavers Service Centre exemplifies how institutional linkages enable SHGs to renegotiate scheme content so that tribal weavers can avail of design training and market access under Mission Shakti patronage (Times of India, 2025).

Subhadra Yojana (Direct Benefit Model)

Other women, ineligible under the Subhadra Yojana and sustenance-aided, described a temporal relationship: "I voted because I got ₹5,000 on Rakhi; if I don't get it next time, I will reconsider" (FGDs in Dharmagarh). As per government protocol, the third instalment was disbursed just prior to Raksha Bandhan, i.e., on the very day of August 9, 2025, to the tune of over one crore women, yet almost two lakhs were excluded after eligibility checks; hence, we are conducting a door-to-door survey to identify and close any gap in this regard and setting expectations at the constituency level (Times of India news, 2025). This mechanism depicts bargaining with regard to electoral timing and accountability dynamics; women expect installment delivery at festival dates and ineligible omissions at political losses.

Table 3. SHG-led interventions and their economic impact in Kalahandi

Intervention	Volume or Coverage	Financial Outcome for SHGs
Paddy procurement pilot (2018-19)	17 SHGs across 17 GPs in Kalahandi	24.72 lakh quintals procured; ₹4.5 lakh commission/group (~₹77 lakh total)
Statewide paddy procurement (2019-20)	199 SHGs in 11 districts	23.07 lakh qt (₹419 crore); SHG commission ₹7.2 crore
Rabi procurement (2019-20)	113 SHGs in 112 GPs	17.58 lakh qt (₹319 crore); ₹5.49 crore commission

6.3 Public Perception of Welfare and Voting Behaviour

Gendered Expectations

Beneficiaries of Mission Shakti, especially tribal SHG women, have remained loyal to the BJD because of communal benefits and visible institutional support. An interviewee from Lanjigarh block stated, "Our SHG is like our own voice—we have meetings, loans and visibility. When we ask, we get heard".

Others outside SHGs go for more-trivial short-term benefits: "I got the first two instalments; it helped with rent and food," but then came the doubts on longevity: "₹10,000 a year isn't enough if price rises continue," echoing those questions on sustainability in the absence of a community infrastructure (Dharmagarh FGD).

Caste and Migration

SC/ST women engaged in seasonal migration often rely on direct transfers since their SHG participation is interrupted by absence. They try to use Subhadra as a bargaining tool: complying with voter mobilization for timely benefits. SHG networks however maintain stronger bargaining power and collective visibility at local levels in the high-tribal villages.

Democratic Accountability

State officials concurred that the Subhadra application portal would be reopened in August 2025 to allow the newly eligible women to apply, anticipating that this would be electoral appeal (Wikipedia, 2025; SMVV)⁹. Through the door-to-door inclusion survey and the flexibility of the scheme, they were able to manage the backlash coming from those who had been excluded—the mechanism of negotiated redress, rooted in electoral accountability (SMVV, 2025).

Table 4. Summary Table

Dimension	Mission Shakti (Institutional)	Subhadra Yojana (Cash Transfer)
Electoral Promise	Indirect (manifesto mentions structure expansion)	Direct and clear: ₹50,000 over five years
Delivery Mechanism	SHG networks, communal meetings, peer monitoring	Direct trickle deposits to bank accounts
Bargaining Dynamics	Collective voice via SHG leaders, reinforced local influence	Individually tactical and immediate, festival-aligned timing
Sustainability	Potential for long-term empowerment and social capital	Short-term dependence; sustainability debated
Identity Mediation	Strong for tribal and SHG-linked women	More accessible to migrants and non-SHG women

7. Discussion

The study finds a complicated terrain of welfare politics and state-society bargaining in Kalahandi. There is also a divergence, with ideological and policy implications, between the institutional model under Mission Shakti and the direct transfer approach adopted by Subhadra Yojana.

Institutional Welfare vs Direct Transfers

The SHG-based structure of Mission Shakti creates an environment of accountability and negotiation power that resides in community institutions. SHG leaders, who act as local intermediaries, negotiate with officials on matters of credit, livelihoods, and training (Frontline, 2021). Through that design, institutional mechanisms build repeated collective interaction to long-term empowerment and bargaining on issues of local development such as weaving schemes (Times of India, 2025). Contrarily, Subhadra Yojana acts as a package of cash-transfer instalments timed for the festival and withdrawals initiated by individuals, which gives rise to transactional politics rather than structural negotiation (The Federal, 2024)³. Both translate the political promise into welfare delivery; however, their bargaining logic is different: equally, SHG schemes engender structural empowerment, whereas cash transfers destabilize short term reciprocity.

Democracy, Accountability, and Temporal Dynamics

Electoral welfare situations, such as timing Subhadra payments to Raksha Bandhan and International Women's Day, are used by politicians in an opportunistic electoral fashion (Times of India, 2025). This would erect seasonal patronage and loyalty among voters at the expense of democratic discourse. Institutional setups such as SHG stand for continuous negotiation and collective voice and intra-community accountability (Frontline, 2021). The findings further imply that cash transfers may promote reach but restrain long-term accountability and citizen pressure for service improvement.

Identity Mediation and Inclusion

Kalahandi, with its demographic complexities comprising a multitude of tribal groups, caste-based exclusions, and seasonal migration, dictates the functioning of welfare models. SC/ST women who tend to migrate are mostly absent from SHG participation, with Subhadra thus becoming the primary political interface for them (idronline, 2025). Institutional schemes tend to lean towards static communal inclusion as are direct transfer schemes that are being adapted to migration patterns but also exclude those unfamiliar with digital processes or e-KYC compliance.

Exclusion due to information asymmetries persists; as the state governor noted, 'almost 95 per cent of the eligible people don't know that these benefits are there. Even officials have a problem in articulating who is really eligible under the scheme (PTI/The Week, 2025). Awareness campaigns like PEETHA try to urge a consciousness about the matters involved, but the continuous ignorance inadvertently restricts the bargaining power of such groups as non-SHG-type groups.

Welfare Institutionalisation and Political Continuity

With even the regime change in 2024, many welfare schemes were retained and rebranded in Odisha, thus giving an appearance of institutional continuity with the symbolic political change (Wikipedia, 2025; OMMCOM News, 2025). This accentuates that welfare politics in Odisha transcends party lines, where the very ideas of service delivery and institutional framework remain. With the tussle over dominance underway—that is, the warring factions state Subhadra attacks and harsh rebranding—mobilization on symbols of welfare delivery continues to occur (Times of India, 2025).

Implications for State–Society Bargaining Theory

Drawing on the DLA perspective, the Kalahandi case provides empirical evidence in support of theories concerning distributive politics and populist welfare—the former theorizing that local collectives such as SHGs institutionalize bargaining, while cash transfers remain flexible, festival-centric strategies. It has been argued that the liberation of bargaining strength rests on the presence or absence of information asymmetry coupled with monitoring capacity (GetOdisha, 2025). SHGs enable peer monitoring and collective agency, whereas direct transfers are administered in a top-down fashion. Elite capture exists in both cases, the most direct and evident mechanism being one in which Panchayat leaders mediate access to transfer opportunities. However, SHGs are more resilient in that the community itself generates oversight.

8. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The comparative instances of Kalahandi underscore the two models of welfare politics in Odisha—the institutional SHG-based Mission Shakti and the festival-based direct-money Subhadra Yojana. Whereas Mission Shakti develops collective bargaining, peer monitoring, and social capital, which are important for women empowerment and negotiation powers, the cash transfers from Subhadra implement immediate reciprocity through strategically-timed disbursements-unlike accountability structures built in the first one (Business Standard, 2024; GovtSchemes India, 2024).

Clear policy implications emerge here.

- Merge institutional and direct models: Combining Subhadra with SHG networks (by linking beneficiaries to local groups or imparting digital-literacy training or financial inclusion initiatives) might augment the reach and empowerment.
- Embed adaptive grievance-redressal and inclusion mechanisms: The recent door-to-door reassessment to include wrongly excluded recipients injected a reactive, optional flexibility into the

scheme; building a systemic redress and a constantly monitored eligibility substantiation capacity will sustain trust and negotiating strength (Times of India, 2025).

- Institutionalise welfare beyond electoral cycles: Cash transfers are, indeed, incentives for a vote on time, whereas institutional welfare constitutes agency in the long term. Thus, balancing flexibility with institutional continuity is a must for democratic accountability.

To cut the story short, in summation, Odisha stands as an example of welfare politics as a bargaining platform between the state and society wherein electoral promises mould scheme design, and beneficiaries enter into negotiated exchange. In Kalahandi, sustainable empowerment is achieved when schemes nurture collective agency rather than presenting kinky appeasement. By its wider adoption, Odisha testifies to the need for welfare arrangements that combine institutional coherence with a direct benefit reach and inclusivity.

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