RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNVEILING THE IMPLEMENTATION WOES OF SPMRM: A CASE STUDY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN INDIA

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*

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Creating public policy in a nation as large, populous, and diverse as India is inherently more challenging than in smaller political entities. This underscores the importance of studying its policy formulations and the organizations involved. Public policies often fail, and this article explores the reasons behind such failures, focusing on the intricate systemic structure of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM). One major challenge is the difficulty in accurately predicting or managing multifaceted structures. As a developing nation, India has room for improvement in economic growth and human development targets. Implemented in 2016, the SPMRM aims to fortify rural communities and promote sustainable regional development. This paper highlights the policy's setbacks and proposes ways to make it robust and functional. It specifically addresses the crisis faced by SPMRM beneficiaries, based on the field study conducted across four selected clusters in Tamil Nadu (Thiruvallur, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Krishnagiri districts) providing a detailed analysis of the policy's implementation challenges and offering practical recommendations for improvement.

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Introduction:-

Policymaking is an intricate subset of activities to achieve desired outcomes by applying institutions, values, norms, and principles governing public affairs. It encompasses key pillars such as participation, accountability, openness in decision-making, the rule of law, and predictability, integrating elements of sociology, politics, economics, and law to address contemporary issues and explore potential solutions (Jes Weigelt and Alexander Müller,, 2019). Effective rural governance is crucial for realizing rights, ensuring inclusivity, and sustaining rural development initiatives. However, this essential aspect of governance often receives inadequate attention. Each rural region's unique political, social, and economic history shapes its rural governance, blending higher-level administrative regulatory choices with locally driven processes. Policymaking is not just an act of decision-making alone, but it entails a series of challenges at different stages of implementation, functionality, participation, accountability, and understanding of the policy audience.

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The Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) policy,a Government of India initiative launched in 2016, was designed to transform rural areas into sustainable regions across social, economic, and physical dimensions. By providing economic, social, and infrastructure support, this policy aimed at fortifying rural communities and promoting balanced and sustainable rural development. The policy launched to bolster rural communities and foster balanced regional development, exemplifies both the aspirations and the pitfalls of Indian policymaking.Despite its seven years of operation, the policy has faced significant implementation difficulties, which include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient training outcomes, inconsistent support for local units, etc. This paper focuses on the challenges encountered in implementing this policy in Tamil Nadu's four districts: Thiruvallur, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Krishnagiri. It examines issues related to SPMRM skill units, skill development training, and infrastructural facilities, drawing on empirical evidence collected through curated questionnaires in these districts.

Objectives:-
1. To critically examine the implementation challenges of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) in Tamil Nadu, focusing on infrastructural deficiencies, operational inefficiencies, and policy outcomes.
2. To identify practical recommendations for improving the functionality, inclusivity, and effectiveness of the SPMRM in achieving sustainable rural development.

Hypothesis:
1. SPMRM's implementation challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited training outcomes, and inconsistent support mechanisms, significantly hinder its effectiveness in fostering sustainable rural development.
2. Addressing gaps in stakeholder engagement, financial support, and infrastructural development can improve SPMRM outcomes and reduce rural-urban migration.

Methodology:-
This paper is based on the field study conducted across four selected clusters in Tamil Nadu: Kuthambakkam (Thiruvallur District), Madukkarai (Coimbatore District), Kovilpappagudi (Madurai District), and Alasapalli Batvarapalli (Krishnagiri District). An empirical analytical approach and survey method were adopted, utilizing both primary and secondary data. A pilot study was conducted to finalize the questionnaire, which was subsequently administered to 177 respondents ensuring that opinions and perspectives from different groups of respondents were captured.

The Role of Politics in Policy Making and Its Success:
The correlation between politics and policy is a fundamental aspect of governance. India is a prime example to explore this connection, given its extensive history with democracy and its reputation for engaging in robust public discourse on significant policy issues. The Indian population and the political landscape are diverse across various dimensions like ethnicity, income, occupation, beliefs, region, and age. As of 2024, India's per capita income is approximately $2,670, and the United States has a per capita income of around $78,328. (World Bank, 2024). The concept of transitioning from interest-based to societal-based politics isn't fixed by a specific dollar threshold, but economic studies suggest that as countries' GDP per capita increases, they tend to shift from politics driven by economic interests to those focusing on broader social issues. For instance, India's income level is below the typical threshold of around $3,000 where such a transition often begins. In contrast, higher-income countries like the United States generally experience this shift earlier. (Inglehart Ronald, 2005). This transition is influenced by various factors including economic stability, governance, and cultural aspects. The willingness of Indian politicians to prioritize the long-term welfare of all citizens over narrow interests showcases their commitment to the greater good. (Lauren A. Alati, 2023). Highlighting the stark differences in the approach to public discourse and policymaking between countries like Denmark, New Zealand, the UK, and the US, compared to India highlights the fact that while the former engage in active consensus-building to drive policy advancements, India's political process is marked by a trial-and-error approach, leading to unimplemented reforms and short-term solutions. (Meghna Sabarwal, 2020). This environment of 'politics as conflict' can potentially cause delays in reforms and hinder the country's development. India needs to shift towards a more consensus-driven approach to achieve meaningful and impactful policy outcomes. (Kapil Patil, 2020). Policymaking is how the politico-bureaucratic system addresses the issues facing society. It is inevitably impacted by individual ideologies, constituent demands, public sentiment, and special interests. From the planning stage through the implementation stage, there are several players and conflicting

objectives. Stability is the main goal because policy decisions must be justified in a clear and transparent political process. Good policy will possess proactive, creative, and collaborative qualities. Effective policymaking will require institutional arrangements known as structures, and the politics involved should be a smart synthesis of philosophy, politics, and evidence.

Accountability and Stakeholder Engagement:
To be productive, beneficiaries of the Policies must acknowledge that decision-making is flexible, chaotic, and always changing. The ability to make strong policies is essential to the general welfare of the government as well as the nation. Despite the lack of sufficient information and data, there is a rush to accept inadequate layouts due to the temptation to implement regulations rapidly. After the policies are implemented, process monitoring and impact evaluation are necessary to assess their effectiveness. This is the area in which Indian policymaking falls short. The pace and scope of impact evaluation are insufficient, and there is hardly any willingness to admit shortcomings. Problem definition and problem discovery are the basic steps in the process of developing policies. Therefore, policies cannot be ideas; they must be designed. Problem diagnosis is so crucial that problems are mis-defined when only a preliminary grasp is obtained. Policy changes and possibly redefining the problems should result from the evaluation. Evaluation and policy-making timelines are typically not in sync. Departments are further urged and given the chance to downplay negative results.(Mohanty, 2020). Not only does a large rollout occur because big gestures are made possible by a large scope, but it also hinders the process of seeing what is likely to work, and what will not work through a pilot implementation. Minimal accountability paired with mediocre leadership and understaffed positions emerges like a lack of implementation support. The state uses policymaking as a tool for population control, and in the process, the state is reconstructed. If a state finds it impossible to protect its programs against extraction, it becomes a weaker state and weaker policies follow.A bureaucrat's role in government is not limited to guiding it through procedures; they also aim to create long-lasting, practical policies that improve welfare. To reach the rare policy sweet spot, enlightened cooperation is essential. False narratives have the power to cloud opinions about how beneficial policies are, which can result in poor choices and unproductive outcomes. The adoption and efficacy of policies often get hampered by a poor comprehension of the intended audience (Agrawal, 2024). The deficiency of extensive stakeholder engagement and audience research emphasized how crucial it is to comprehend user demands and preferences to guarantee the success of scaling initiatives. Failures in the Implementation stage, stability challenges, inadequate layouts, and lack of impact evaluation are some of the other crucial reasons for policy failure. Shortcomings of officials and their unwillingness to admit faults, minimal accountability, and limited knowledge of the respondents and unintended consequences pose challenges to Indian policymaking as well. Overall, policymaking shouldn't be a prisoner of the present short-term priorities, time restrictions, or implementers' conveniences, even while it still needs to be grounded and mindful of implementation issues. Therefore, a good framework for policymaking should allow for a suitable division between the functions of policy and implementation. (O.P. Agarwal, 2005).

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission: Bridging Rural and Urban
The Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission is a centralized policy that aims to cater to this rural-urban migration that is prevalent in rural patches that are adjacent to urban cities. Around 833 million people according to the census report of India are rural citizens making them 68%of the overall population. In addition, between 2001 and 2011, there was a 12% hike in the rural population and a 2279 unit increase in the total number of villages. A significant portion of the nation's villages are not communities that are cut off from the urban world, but rather bigger communities spaced into villages. These can be categorized as clusters, clusters with growth potential and economic drivers often gain competitive and geographic advantages, evolving into 'Rurban' communities.

The Indian government aimed the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) in 2016, to facilitate growth in villages, to blend rural traditions with urban amenities, fostering equity and inclusivity. This project aims to enhance the socio-economic fabric of the rural regions to reduce migration. It seeks to facilitate agricultural activities within the villages which will in turn increase the production and employment that the villagers seek in cities. It also seeks to improve facilities in the fields of education, medicine, infrastructure, economic development, and skill training. This policy is implemented by a process called clusterisation in which villages are joined together as a cluster, A clusterification approach treats a group of villages as a single unit (Supratim Guha, V.R.Mandla, Dilip K.Barik, 2018).Policies targeting rural-to-urban migration often assume that migrants, mostly rural poor, bring their poverty to urban areas. However, this overlooks the diversity of migrants, their motivations, and migration patterns. Many urban migrants come from other cities, not just rural areas. Evidence suggests that permanent rural migrants are often wealthier, seeking employment or education opportunities. Meanwhile, the poorest rural groups

engage in seasonal migration for agricultural work, often to areas specializing in high-value production. Remittances from migrants support rural economies (Tacoli, 2011). Yet, rural-urban migration is also driven by escalating risks and limited rural prospects. Circular migration, moving in and out of urban centres, is prevalent, reflecting urban poverty and informality in economic activities and living conditions. (Cecilia Tacoli, 2015). The swift expansion of urban populations stands as a pivotal factor shaping Asian development in the 21st century, although with diverse features and implications across countries. With its substantial population and evolving urbanization patterns, India has been recognized as a significant driver of this urban surge. (Kundu, 2014).

Villages in India stand as essential pillars of the nation's socio-economic framework. Beyond their traditional roles in agriculture, these rural settlements are hubs of cultural heritage, community resilience, and economic diversity. Recognizing their significance is paramount for fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development across the country. As we delve deeper into understanding the importance of villages in India, we uncover not only their inherent strengths but also the invaluable contributions they make to the nation's progress and identity.

Critical Analysis of Implementation and Shortcomings of SPMRM Policy in Tamil Nadu:
SPMRM policy faces significant failures impacting its effectiveness and sustainability. These issues, ranging from inadequate business orders to lack of beneficiary engagement, underscore the critical need for effective policy implementation to ensure the program's success and support rural development. Below are a few major shortcomings collected from the research conducted across Tamil Nadu in the districts of Thiruvallur, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Krishnagiri, providing a detailed analysis of the policy's implementation challenges.

Figure 1:- Tailoring Unit, Krishnagiri.

Facilitating and Regulating Orders–
The Rurban units across the four districts are comprised of tailoring, Marachekku oil extraction, bakery, canteen, millet goods, herbal products,etc. The common setback faced by the employees of these units is the lack of orders for their business and authority to regulate these business orders to keep the units running successfully and eventually ensure a steady income for the workers. The private market in these villages poses a huge threat to these

humble businesses which are mostly run by women with limited knowledge in business management. Figure 1 indicates the picture of aTailoring Unit situated in the Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu.

Figure 2:- Certificate of a Tailoring unit Respondent, Madurai.

Failures in providing necessary licenses, certificates, and stipend post Training–
The training given under SPMRM is often left without proper certification, which hinders the respondents while they search for jobs. The lack of a stipend discourages people from participating in these months-long training programs.Figure 2 indicates the picture of the 'Certificate' of a Tailoring Unit respondent belonging to the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu.

Figure 3:- Closed meat shop in Chettikulam Panchayat, Madurai.

Lack of principal amount to invest in buying Raw materials–
The units running under SPMRM often face a money crisis when it comes to buying raw materials to initiate production, this slows down the business at a very early stage causing unemployment and unwillingness among respondents.Marachekku units, herbal products units, flour units, and canteen units are some of the units that are highly affected by this crisis. In the case of millet bakeries and Milk product units, these perishable goods face higher threats of loss when not used in due time. Figure 3 indicates the picture of a meat shop situated in the Chettikulam Panchayat of the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, which was closed due to the lack of principal amount to buy the products required to run the meat shop.

Figure 4:- Incomplete set up of a Flour Unit, Coimbatore.

Inefficient implementation and services of set-up units -
The setting-up of units is often left without proper completion and faces major functionality problems such as plumbing, electrification, and flooring. This hinders the functioning of the units, for example,the tailoring and dry wash units in Kovilpappagudi in Madurai face malfunctioning electrical lines which causes excessive electricity bills, and the lack of plumbing connections in the dry wash unit has caused its temporary shutdown. The tailoring unit in Karunakarchery in the Thiruvallur districtis non-functional as 15 tailoring machines are cramped up in a small room leaving no space to operate. These problems leave people with no option but to quit or look for other job opportunities making this scheme a failure. Figure 4 indicates the incomplete setup of a Flour Unit situated in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

Lack of Sufficient Infrastructure in Villages and SPMRM Units–
The SPMRM policy not only promotes employment through skill training but also promises infrastructural facilities equivalent to urban cities which will reduce migration, even after being operational for more than six years SPMRM has failed to equip the panchayat's infrastructures. For instance, the panchayats in Madurai face a severe transport crisis, and theschools lack basic facilities such as sufficient pieces of furniture, compound walls, and Separate head rooms. The e-seva centres do not have proper internet connections leading to their dysfunctionality. Figure 5 indicates the picture of the houses that were damaged and lacking proper infrastructure facilities, situated near the panchayat office in Alasapalli in the Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu.

Figure 5:- Shows the houses near the Panchayat Office in Alasapalli, Krishnagiri.

Figure 6:- Failed set up of a Tailoring Unit in Karunakarchery Panchayat, Thiruvallur.

Delay or Failure in setting up of units post-training–
The various skill training given to different panchayats across the Madurai and Thiruvallur districts take place between three to four months, during this period the respondents receive stipends to encourage participation. The units corresponding to the training received are often set up after years leading to a drastic reduction in trainees who make employment out of the training. This gap between the setting up of units and training causes problems such as respondents forgetting the training received, moving to other villages due to marriages, getting placed in better employment opportunities, etc. Figure 6 indicates the failed setup of a Tailoring Unit situated in the Karunakarchery panchayat of the Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu.
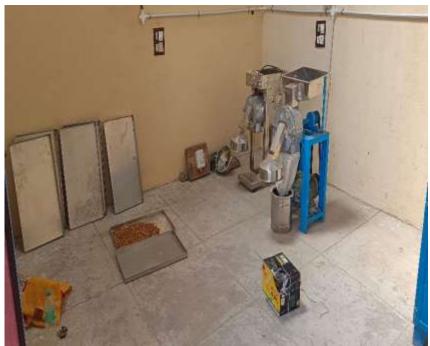
Figure 7:- Herbal Unit in Madurai, which lacks a market.

Provision of training which does not have scope or market in a particular village–
The skill training provided under this scheme is not always apt for the respondents or the place where the units will be set up post-training. One of the trainings given in Karunakarchery panchayat in Thiruvallur was soap making but there was no unit set up as people feared the possibility of developing skin cancer issues. The paver block units in Chittukadu and Jamin Korattur panchayats were never set up due to a lack of space and unsuitable land. The steel vessel trainees in Vellavedu are provided with steel vessels, tables, chairs, and outlets that rent out these materials in their locality.This was an alternative employment venture provided for these trainees, as the steel vessel-making unit was not set up due to the fear of chemical contamination through this setup and the village also lacked space for the same and theherbal unit of Madurai lacked income due to the lack of market in its locality. Sometimes people are given trainings which have no scope or market in their respective villages which makes this initiative irrelevant.

Lack of Restoration Team (unused equipment left to rust)–
These units under SPMRM and the pieces of equipment in them lack timely inspection and restoration services which often results in the shutting down of the entire unit. The Marachekku oil extraction machine in Adalai panchayat in Madurai has been under repair for months which has caused the unit to be shut down leaving the respondents unemployed. A unit with 50 tailoring machines in Kovilpappagudi, Madurai, and 15 machines in Thirumanam, Thiruvallur has been left unused due to a lack of employees leading them to rust. Such problems in the implementation level of this policy often restrict it from reaching its optimum output. The few solar panels set up in different panchayats have been under repair since their installation and no one to restored them leaving them of no use. Figure 8 indicates the picture of the unused agricultural equipment situated in the Palathurai panchayat of the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

The unwillingness of Respondents to work in set-up units–
Sometimes this policy is challenged by not the administration or implementation failures but by the beneficiaries themselves. In some cases, the respondents show unwillingness to work in the set-up units or even participate in training programs due to a lack of interest, family pressure, having better work opportunities, or the extreme willingness to migrate to urban cities.

Figure 8:- Unused Agricultural Equipment's in Palathurai Panchayat, Coimbatore.

Figure 9:- Herbal Unit in Ambalathadi Panchayat, Madurai, lacking locks and proper compound walls for protection.

Fear of Theft and Damage -
The units lack proper safety measures and often face property damage and loss through theft. The lack of compound walls and security systems remains an unsolved issue in these units. The unused or abandoned units even face the threat of misuse by the villagers. Figure 9 indicates the picture of an herbal unit lacking locks and proper compound walls for protection.

Lack of efficient maintenance of Beneficiary Records-
The administrations in most panchayats fail to maintain records and lists of beneficiaries of the SPMRM policy, leading to a lack of accountability. The lack of accountability and regular checks extensively hinders the process of

tracking the progress of the policy and leads to inefficiencies in identifying and addressing the needs of the intended beneficiaries.

Limitations:
This study has certain limitations, the study looks only at four districts in Tamil Nadu, which might not show the full effects of the SPMRM across the country. The data collected might not show recent changes in policies, and using interviews with respondents can make the findings less objective. Also, gaps in official records can hinder the analysis, and any dissatisfaction from beneficiaries might overshadow possible benefits in some areas. These limits should be considered when interpreting the results.

Conclusion and Suggestions:-
Policymakers can more effectively manage the intricacies of policy implementation by challenging prevalent narratives, including stakeholders, and foreseeing unexpected repercussions. This will ultimately lead to positive social and economic outcomes, ensuring that laws address underlying issues, positively impact the intended audience, and account for unforeseen repercussions. India can steer toward significant, long-lasting transformation by adopting accountability, openness, and evidence-based decision-making. (Agrawal, 2024). It is vital to set incentives and restrictions that will affect the decisions and behaviours of the policy's implementers as well as the intended audience to properly create and implement public policy. Understanding how individuals behave and react to various stimuli is essential to designing those incentives and limitations appropriately. The initial model,the traditional approach to policy development is based on the theory of human behaviour known as rational choice theory, which describes agents as having a predetermined array of preferences that firmly control their decisions. This is a realistic strategy since; while operating in a pro-social manner, people still appear to have self-interest (Mueller, 2020). Deficits are inherent in how the implementing organizations, also called the 'field administration,' are set up and operated. (Sharma R. , 2022)

This article elucidates the shortcomings faced by panchayats, a disjointed administrative framework, and a limited understanding of the roles played by the implementing organizations. This reduced the ability to take coordinated, context-relevant action. While numerous panchayat delegates were aware of local concerns and motivated to tackle them, their potential remained untapped. (Sharma R. , 2022). This SPMRM policy which has an outlay of Rs.5142.08 crores is facing setbacks in the implementation and post-implementation stages of the policy. To enhance the effectiveness of the scheme, several key measures should be implemented. First, establish a centralized platform or marketplace to facilitate and regulate orders, strengthen networking with local markets, and ensure robust marketing support for products. Streamline the certification process post-training to guarantee that every participant receives a valid certificate and regulate stipends to encourage participation. Provide micro-financing or subsidies for purchasing raw materials and partner with local banks to address this challenge. Conduct thorough inspections and quality checks before declaring units operational and install regular inspections with dedicated maintenance teams. Improve infrastructure facilities by prioritizing basic needs first and expediting administrative approvals to set up units without delays. Perform detailed market assessments before initiating training programs to ensure they align with market demand. Implement a dedicated maintenance and restoration team for equipment and units under SPMRM and run awareness programs to highlight the scheme's benefits. Enhance security by installing compound walls, CCTV cameras, security guards, and insurance policies for property damage. Digitize beneficiary records, maintain a centralized database accessible to relevant authorities and conduct regular audits for accuracy and accountability. Additionally, provide training to panchayat staff on record-keeping and data management practices. The definition of 'work' in the field has changed because this policy is highly influenced by the centre rather than the state. Field officials are often occupied with instructing their subordinates, executing plans, and obeying mandates and instructions; they do not analyse local problems or start pertinent initiatives that could potentially enhance this policy and its functionality. Field officials depended on hierarchy and routinized routines rather than analysis and strategy formation. Many respondents claimed they were unable to confront higher-ranking officials or failed to point out the right officials to express their concerns. Educating people about their rights and duties about the policy will prove helpful in creating better awareness and functioning of this policy. While it is impossible to change the way the field works without also changing other levels of government, some general procedures may be devised and formalized for working methods such as scenario assessment, consultation, balancing pros and cons, and eliciting feedback. Even while technology use should be encouraged, slower progress that allows for the elimination of flaws would produce better results.

The results of this study support the primary hypotheses. Analysis reveals that the constraints that hinder the successful implementation of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) are comprised of inadequate infrastructure, low outcomes of training, and insufficient financial and administrative support, which severely hinders its effectiveness in bringing about sustainable rural development. Additionally, the proposed interventions of improved stakeholder engagement, focused financial support, and infrastructure improvement hold the potential to overcome these constraints. This supports the idea that fixing these gaps can make the policy much more effective and reduce rural-urban migration. The evidence shows that the identified problems are widespread but can be fixed, highlighting the need for targeted actions within the policy.

Policy Implications:
The findings of this study highlight a plethora of critical policy implications that could improve the effectiveness of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM). To address implementation challenges, policymakers should focus on improving stakeholder engagement and beneficiary inclusion, which would result in balanced and sustainable outcomes. Furthermore, the development of infrastructure, transportation, educational institutions, and e-governance services will be critical to realizing the program's objectives and reversing rural-urban migration. Aligning skill development program interventions with the needs of local labour markets through thorough pre-requirement market studies should increase the employment opportunities of trainees. In addition, the incorporation of financial support programs will help to overcome the shortcomings of resources by rural businesses due to microfinancing and subsidies. Regular examination, setting up maintenance groups, and proper security procedures of project structures can reduce failure in operations and misuse of properties. Further, digitizing beneficiary records and incorporating a centralized database would enhance accountability through transparent delivery and enable streamlined administrative processes.

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