

Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal: The empowerment of Adolescent Girls

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Abstract: *The study of women empowerment has been an important topic of social science. Women have been victimizing in different spheres of life. Negligence of women is undermining the socio economic, cultural and educational aspects of our society. So far the overall development of a country and the well being of life and society the empowerment of women is very important. In develop country women are much empowered in every aspect of life but a reverse case is found in developing and under developing countries. In India much emphasis is being given on women empowerment. After a half century of the freedom with as many as 14 constitutional guarantees and provisions, the status of women in India continues to unsatisfactory. To alleviate the condition of women, both adults and children, a lot of schemes are run by the government or the state government. The government of West Bengal runs a number of schemes for the development of women. These schemes relate to education and to the economic rehabilitation of women and also to women with physical disabilities. One of the most ambitious schemes for women in India has recently been started by the government of West Bengal. It is called Kanyashree Prakalpa or Kanyashree scheme and is aimed at providing some relief to the poor girls students and their empowerment through improved education.*

Keywords: *Kanyashree, Empowerment, Poverty, Education, Drop out.*

Introduction: without empowering women a nation cannot develop. A nation can move to progress only by utilizing its all human resources. It may possible only when women in a society may give equal opportunity as their male counterpart in every aspect of social life. So, to achieve a sustainable development in the society, women empowerment is essential. After independence special attention was given in the constitutions to prevent gender biasness. In spite of that, the girls participations is still below 50 percent at all stages of education. The girls drop out rate is higher than boys drop out rate, specially after post elementary education. Due to poverty and insecurity the parents withdraw their girls children from school. As a result 32.1% of girls, aged 18, are already married in West Bengal. In India this rates is 22.1%. To reduce this rate and empowering the girls children the historic Kanyashree Project was launched by the Chief Minister of West Bengal on 1st October, 2013 and 14th August is celebrate as “Kanyashree Day”.

Status of Girl child in West Bengal

West Bengal has an adolescent (10-19 years) population of 1.73 Crores, out of which 48.11% are girl. The age group 10-14 years from 9.3% of the total population while 15-19 years from 9.7% of the total population(SRS report based on Census 2011). WHO has identified this age group as the period of preparation for adulthood during which several key developmental experiences occur like acquiring social and economic independence, development of identity, the acquisition of skills needed to carry out adult relationship and roles and the capacity for abstract reasoning. Child marriage is one such social concern and a violation of children’s rights. According to the District Level Health Survey(2007-2008) West Bengal shows the fifth highest prevalence of child marriage amongst all the states with 54.7% currently married women being married before 18. The district of Murshidabad(61.04%), Birbhum(58.03), Malda (56.07), Purulia(54.03), Bankura, South Dinajpur, South 24 Parganas, Nadia and Cooch behar see the highest incidences of child marriage in the state. The incidence is even higher in rural areas(57.9%).

There are also districts with high incidence of trafficking, significantly, child betrothal and marriage is completely gendered practice- and an overwhelmingly large percentages of girls are married at before reaching adulthood- and only a miniscule percentage of boys are subjected to the same fate. This phenomenon adversely affects the education, health, nutritional status, growth of development of girls. The selected Educational Statistics (2010-11) published by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India shows that for the state of West Bengal, the Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER) has been gradually decreasing for high school(IX-X) and higher secondary(XI-XII) which means that more children, including girl are leaving school in the adolescent group. The drop out rate between class I-X was 63.5% for girl and 64.9% for boys which are relatively higher in comparison to all India average(Fig-1).

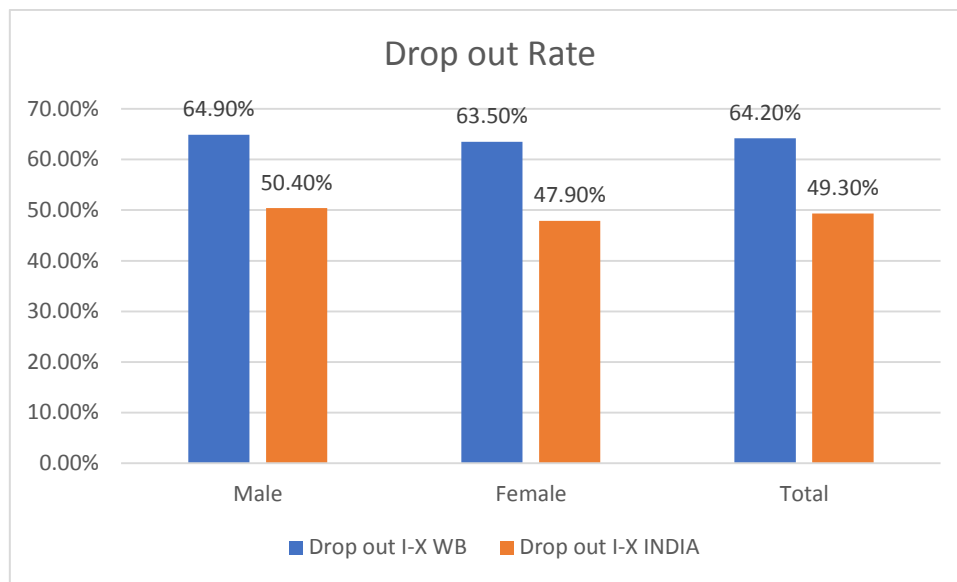


Figure 1: Percentage of Drop out boys and girl students(class I-X) in West Bengal and India.

Source: SRS report based on census 2011.

The ASER 2012 shows that while only 4.2% girl are out of school in the age group of 11-14 the percentage goes up considerably(14%) for the age group 15-16 years shows that the girls become more vulnerable in this age group(Fig-2)

	2010	2011	2012
7-10 Years	2.1	2	1.5
11-14 Years	5.5	4.3	4.2
15-16 Years	17.5	14.2	15.8

Figure- 2: percentage of drop out school girl students in West Bengal(2010-2012).

Source: The Selected Educational Statistics (2010- 11) published by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

In the above context, the government of West Bengal has decided on creating and enabling environment for elevating the education, health and nutrition status of women and children through an innovative scheme-“ Kanyashree Prakalpa”.

Features of Kanyashree Prakalpa:

In West Bengal there are several Central Government – sponsored schemes specially garget towards women empowerment such as **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls(RGSEAG), Swabalamban, Support to Training and Employment Program for Women(STEP), Swayamsidha, Sukanya Scheme and Swadhar**. At present the most attractive and beneficial scheme of West Bengal government is the **Kanyashree Prakalpa**.

Department and Women Development and Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal(DWD&SW) has designed this Kanyashree Prakalpa-a conditional cash transfer scheme with the aim of improving the status and well being of the girl child in West Bengal by incentivizing schooling of all teenage girls and delaying their marriages until the age of 18, the legal age of marriage. In order to encourage and ensure the education to all the girl-children and to discourage early marriage, the Government of West Bengal introduce the Kanyashree Prakalpa on 1 October, 2013 where money is directly credited to the bank account of the beneficiaries. The scheme was rolled out to prevent child marriage in the state, where about 54 percent girls are married off before they turn 18. The scheme provides scholarship to girl from economically-backward backgrounds, has been given international recognition by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development(DFID) and UNICEF. State representatives have been invited to the Girl Summit 2014 in Landon, in June, and talk about the scheme to a global audience(The Hindu, Kolkata, 22 June 2014).

The scheme has two components:

- Annual Scholarship of Rs.500/-(Rupees Five hundred only)
- One time Grant of Rs.25,000/-(Rupees Twenty Five thousand only)

Annual Scholarship of Rs.500/-(Rupees Five hundred only)

Eligibility Criteria for Annual Scholarship

- Age of the applicant should be between 13 and 18 years.
- The applicant is not married.
- The application is enrolled between class VIII and XII in government recognized regular or equivalent open school or equivalent vocational/ technical training course.
- The annual family income of the applicant is less than Rupees 1,20,000/- but is waived if the applicant has lost both parents or is physically handicapped.

One time Grant of Rs.25,000/-(Rupees Twenty-Five thousand only)

Eligibility Criteria for Annual Scholarship

- The applicant must have completed 18 years on or after 1st April 2013 but not completed 19 years during the time application.
- The applicant pursuing education, vocational training or sports activity or is inmate of any home registered under J.J Act.
- The applicant is not married.
- The annual family income of the applicant is less than Rupees 1,20,000/- but is waived if the applicant has lost both parents or is physically handicapped or is inmate of any home registered under J.J Act.

West Bengal government Kanyashree scheme has benefited almost 9 lakh girls, since its launch in October 2013. The state government has allocated Rs.287 crore for the Kanyashree programme for the years 2013-2014. The target of the government is to bring 18 lakh girls students for annual scholarship and 3.5 lakh girls for one time grant each year. Table -1 shows the number of Expected Beneficiaries of one time grant(70% of unmarried girls) till 31st March 2014 in West Bengal. The Table -1 reflects that the number of beneficiaries of one time grant is found to be highest in North 24 Parganas followed by the South 24 parganas, Bardhaman, Hugli and Kolkata. The lowest number of beneficiaries of one time grant is found to be in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur.

Table -1: One time Grant in Kanyashree Prakalpa till 31st March 2014 in West Bengal

District Name	Total Population	Approx. No of Expected Beneficiaries of one time grant(70% of Unmarried Girls)
Darjiling	1842034	9469
Jalpaiguri	3869675	21333
Koch Bihar	2822780	10062
Uttar Dinajpur	3000849	12333
Dakshin Dinajpur	1670931	5700
Maldah	3997970	11937
Murshidabad	7102430	18137
Birbhum	3502387	9968
Bardhaman	7723663	31382
Nadia	5168488	20485
North 24 Parganas	10082852	48880
Hugli	5520389	26909
Bankura	3596292	12029
Puruliya	2927965	9366
Haora	2841638	22312
Kolkata	4486679	24138
South 24 Parganas	8153176	32585
Paschim Medinipur	5943300	21421
Purba Medinipur	5094238	20699
Total	91347736	369146

Source: Department of Women Development and Social Welfare(2015).

Problem of the Prakalpa:

Although Kanyashree Prakalpa is an important tool of improving the status and well being of the girl child in West Bengal by incentivizing schooling of all teenage girls delaying their marriages until the age of 18 the benefits of this good scheme have not been reached to every school or college going girls. The fact is that all eligible names for Kanyashree Prakalpa are not enlisted in respective institutions such as schools and colleges due to lack of manpower. There is no separate official personnel to look after this scheme in such institutions. So schools and colleges face the entry problem due shortage of manpower and so many girls are being deprived of getting the benefits of this scheme.

Conclusion:

In conclusion it is necessary to say that Kanyashree Prakalpa is an important tool of improving the status and well being of the girl child in West Bengal by incentivizing schooling of all teenage girls and delaying their marriages until the age of 18. The scheme provides scholarship to girl from economically-backward backgrounds. Therefore the problems mentioned above should be eradicated as early as possible to get the fuller implementation of the programme. Steps should be taken by the government so that every eligible poor girls get its full benefit. In fact Kanyashree Prakalpa the present government of West Bengal is a new role model in India which can easily be implemented in other states.

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