

IMPACT OF KANYASHREE PRAKALPA ON THE URBAN BENEFICIARIES IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The issue of 'Women Empowerment' has gained a lot of focus and limelight in recent times. Genderisation is a deep rooted social phenomenon while huge disparity in male-female ratio, severe gender gap in their literacy rates, early marriage of girl children, low female participation rates in politics and labour force, etc. are some of the indicators of highly unequal gender relations prevalent in our society. There have been significant interventions by the Government of India to address this practice of gender discrimination and uplift the position of women in India. In the same tune, 'Kanyashree Prakalpa', a conditional cash transfer scheme, has been introduced by the Government of West Bengal in the year 2013 to simultaneously encourage girls to continue their education on the one hand and defer their marriage on the other. The present study sought to find out the impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa on the urban beneficiaries of West Bengal and whether it is ushering in any significant changes in their situation or in the attitude of their parents towards them. On the basis of data collected from randomly chosen urban beneficiaries by means of interviews based on structured questionnaires, the study found significant impact of the scheme on the surveyed population.

Keywords: women empowerment, gender discrimination, conditional cash transfer scheme, Kanyashree Prakalpa

INTRODUCTION

The issue of 'women empowerment' has evoked a lot of attention and discussion in contemporary times. It cannot be denied that women have been subjected to severe patriarchal subordination for ages. Our society has got structured in such a way that makes the women victims of social, political and economic inequalities and severe gender discrimination.

The situation, although was not the same for the women in all ages. There were times in ancient India when the women were accorded high places in the society. For eg., there were the women during the times of Indus Valley Civilization in India where they were worshipped as Prakriti, the Mother Goddess. The civilization has witnessed the emergence of the Shakta ritual where Goddess were worshipped as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the whole universe. Matriarchy was also prevalent in many societies.

Although there are disagreements amongst some historians regarding the superior power of the womenfolk in ancient India, the majority of them have spoken about the important status and position that women used to enjoy at those times.

The advent of the Aryans in India at around 15th century B.C. marked the pre-Vedic period and with it came the patriarchal culture. The women, particularly enjoyed immense respect in the Vedic period.

They gained respect and honor for their position in society and were considered to be the creator and the true guardian of their children. They used to have full access to education and other religious activities. Women sages like Maitreyi, Gargi alongwith Lopamudra, Sikta, Apala and others were given extremely important position in the society.

With the passage of time, the position of the women also underwent severe changes with the later Vedic ages witnessing gradual decline in the status of women. There were discrimination primarily with regard to acquisition of education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, Sati, polygamy, purdah system further worsened the situation in the days that followed. *The women were primarily equated with property in the epics and the puranas* (Rout, 2016)¹.

The position of the women in the medieval period remained the same with severe signs of deterioration. It was during the British rule that several social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Pandita Ramabai among others raised their voices for the rights and the betterment of the womenfolk. This led to the enactment of several laws like Abolition of Sati, Widow Remarriage Act, etc. that provided some respite to the women.

¹Kapur, R.,2019, "Status of Women in Ancient India". Retrieved from <https://www.research.gate.net>

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Government of India, after gaining independence has made several interventions to uplift the position of women and to eradicate the practice of gender discrimination. But despite the provisions made by our Constitution to guarantee gender equality and upliftment of the position of women of our country, gender discrimination still continues and the position of the women still remains subdued in majority of cases.

Male-female inequality and gender discrimination continue to prevail in almost every aspect despite efforts by the Government to control the situation by uplifting the position of the women in the society and eradicating gender discrimination. Our Constitution has made several provisions to ensure gender equality through various Acts and Amendments and by enacting several laws and policies from time to time. From the 5th Five Year Plan, the focus of the Government has been transferred to Development from Welfare and finally to Empowerment. In 2001, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed and the year was also highlighted as the Year of Women's Empowerment by the Government of India.

But inspite of the Government's best efforts, it is saddening to say that gender discrimination still prevails and women continue to remain the victims of violence. A report in the leading daily, The Telegraph on 2nd January,2022 has stated that around 30,864 complaints of crimes against women have been received by the National Commission for Women (NCW) in the year 2021 (highest since 2014) with a 30% rise in such complaints in 2021 as compared to 2020 which saw 23,722 complaints being lodged. The NCW data further revealed that of all these complaints made last year, a maximum of 11,013 were related to the right to live with dignity taking into account the emotional abuse of women. This was followed by cases lodged against domestic violence (6,633) and dowry harassment (4,589). Thus women continue to suffer from several discriminations. Amidst this situation, it cannot be denied that provision for education could be a potential driver towards the improvement in the condition of the women. It is well known that educating girls is an important factor towards economic growth which again is capable of improving the social welfare of women, resulting in delaying the age of marriage and birth of fewer and healthier children.

Child marriage in India provides a very grim picture which shows a surge of child marriage by 50% in 2020 as compared to 2019 as per National Crime Records Bureau, 2020. As per the NCRB data, 2020 the number of cases registered under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was 785 with the highest

number of cases being registered in Karnataka (184), followed by Assam (138), West Bengal (98), Tamil Nadu (77) and Telangana (62).²

²Child Rights and You (CRY),2019,"Girl Child Education: Role of Incentivisation and other enablers and disablers", New Delhi

NAME OF STATES	NO OF CHILD MARRIAGE CASES
KARNATAKA	184
ASSAM	138
WEST BENGAL	98
TAMIL NADU	77
TELANGANA	62

Child marriage: state wise data

Fig: (i)

The following are the number of cases registered under the Act for the last 5 years.³

YEAR	CASES
2020	785
2019	523
2018	501
2017	395
2016	326
2015	293

NCRB data, 2020

Fig: (ii)

³Press Trust of India, September 18, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in>

UNICEF in its "Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in India" has provided a severely shocking picture of child marriage in India. It showed that while one in every three child bride of the world live in India, half of the child brides in India live in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. All the more, over 40% of female children who get married before

18 years live in Bihar and West Bengal. According to Census 2011, 7.8% of the females in West Bengal were married before 18 years as compared to the all India average of 3.7%.⁴

With respect to education it may be said that although literacy rates for female have increased and showed considerable improvement, yet it still lags behind their male counterparts.

The following table shows the “effective literacy rate” in India from 1901 to 2011.⁵

Serial No.	Census Year	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	1901	5.35	9.83	0.60
2	1911	5.92	10.56	1.05
3	1921	7.16	12.21	1.81
4	1931	9.50	15.59	2.93
5	1941	16.10	24.90	7.30
6	1951	16.67	24.95	9.45
7	1961	24.02	34.44	12.95
8	1971	29.45	39.45	18.69
9	1981	36.23	46.89	24.82
10	1991	42.84	52.74	32.17
11	2001	64.83	75.26	53.67
12	2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

“Effective literacy rate” in India from 1901 to 2011

Fig: (iii)

The above table clearly shows that there has been improvement in female literacy rates. But as per the national statistics, the bigger and the tougher challenge is to keep those enrolled retained in schools and thereby in colleges.⁶

⁴Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org>

⁵2011 Census of India. Retrieved from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

⁶Child Rights and You (CRY), 2019, “Girl Child Education: Role of Incentivisation and other enablers and disablers”. New Delhi

KANYASHREE PRAKALPA

In this backdrop, the Kanyashree Prakalpa is introduced by the Government of West Bengal in 2013 that aimed to simultaneously encourage girls to continue their education on the one hand and defer their marriage on the other. The main objective of this scheme is thus to secure enhanced status and well being of girl children especially those coming from poor socio-economic background by means of conditional cash transfer. The scheme is composed of 3 segments as is depicted in the table below:

Scheme	Amount	Age	Eligibility
K1	Rs 750 per year	13-18 years	Unmarried girls of the age group studying in classes VIII-XII in Government recognized(regular) or equivalent open school or equivalent vocational/ technical training course
K2	Rs 25000	18-19 years	Unmarried girls who, at the time of application,

			have turned 18 years and are enrolled in Government recognized regular or open school or college or pursuing vocational or technical training or sports activity or is an inmate of Home registered under J.J. Act,2000
K3	Science stream: Rs 2500 per month Arts stream: Rs 2000 per month		Girl students registered under K2, having 45% marks in graduation and currently pursuing a regular post-graduate degree in Science/ Arts/ Commerce under any University. However, students studying under Open/ Distance University are not eligible for K3.

Fig: (iv)

The present study is designed to explore the perception level of the beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa from the urban community of West Bengal because they are expected to show higher expectations and aspirations as compared to their rural counterparts which might lead to women empowerment in the future.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the perception of the urban beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal.
2. To find out whether the scheme is really leading towards women empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey was conducted with the randomly selected sample from the urban community of West Bengal. Comprising of the sample size of nearly 100, primary data was collected through interviews by means of structured questionnaire schedules.

RESULTS

The following table shows the responses of the urban beneficiaries of the scheme:

Serial no.	Items	Yes	No
1	Parents or guardians should control the money obtained from Kanyashree Prakalpa	53(56.38%)	41(43.62%)
2	The fund received has been utilized for some	21(22.34%)	73(77.66%)

	non-academic purposes in the family		
3	The money is being spend for academic purpose	77(81.91%)	17(18.09%)
4	There is pressure within the family to divert the money received for some other domestic purpose	11(11.70%)	83 (88.30%)
5	Enjoy the freedom to spend the money received from the Prakalpa all by themselves	82(87.23%)	12(12.77%)
6	Boy child of a family should also get a similar financial support	88(93.62%)	6(6.38%)
7	Kanyashree Prakalpa has improved the position of the beneficiaries with regard to household decision making	61(64.89%)	33(35.11%)
8	Confidence level has increased because of Kanyashree Prakalpa	84(89.36%)	10(10.64%)
9	Position in the society has improved in the aftermath of Kanyashree Prakalpa	65(69.15%)	29(30.85%)
10	Capable to be the breadearner of the family	75(79.79%)	19(20.21%)
11	Minimum age of marriage for girls need to be 21 years	75(79.79%)	19(20.21%)
12	There is pressure from the family to get married even after receiving the benefits from Kanyashree Prakalpa	12(12.77%)	82(87.23%)
13	Ready to get married before securing any employment	18(19.15%)	76(80.85%)
14	Employment is more important than getting married	87(92.55%)	7(7.45%)

ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION

1. 56.38% selected beneficiaries think that parents or guardians should control the money obtained from Kanyashree Prakalpa while 43.62% beneficiaries does not think so.
 - T test of difference could not prove any significant difference between these two sets of data proving the lack of self confidence of young girls in this sample.
2. 22.34% of the said beneficiaries have stated that the fund received from the scheme has been utilized for some non-academic purposes in the family while 77.66% beneficiaries did not say so.
 - This shows that the fund of Kanyashree Prakalpa is being utilized for academic purposes in majority of the cases and the non-academic utilization of the same is present in the case of a very small portion of the population.
3. 81.91% of the beneficiary sample said that the money received from the Prakalpa is being spend for the academic purpose while only 18.09% of the said population reported otherwise.
 - The present data also supports the earlier interpretation.
4. 11.70% of the population under study agreed that there is pressure within the family to divert the money received from Kanyashree Prakalpa for some other domestic purpose while 88.30% of the said population reported that there is no such pressure.
 - This data also supports the earlier two interpretations.
5. 87.23% of the surveyed beneficiaries are found to enjoy the freedom to spend the money received from Kanyashree Prakalpa by themselves while 12.77% of the said sample reported that they don't enjoy such freedom.
 - The present data shows that liberty of spending the money received from the Prakalpa by the majority of the sampled beneficiaries. This gives a very good sign of self-confidence of young girls which might lead to women empowerment in the future.
6. 93.62% of the said population thinks that the boy child of a family should also get similar financial support while 6.38% does not think so.
 - This data reflects the gender neutral liberal views of girl children of the family that shows the love and affection for their male siblings. This, however, does not reflect the practical awareness of the objectives of the Prakalpa among the surveyed beneficiaries.
7. 64.89% of the surveyed beneficiaries feel that Kanyashree Prakalpa has improved their position with regard to household decision making while 35.11% of the population does not feel so.
 - This result shows the success of Kanyashree Prakalpa towards future women empowerment.

8. 89.36% of the beneficiaries surveyed reported that their confidence level has increased because of the said Prakashpa while 10.64% of them does not feel any such change.
 - This result also reflects the interpretation mentioned earlier.
9. 69.15% of the sampled population feels that their position in the society has improved in the aftermath of Kanyashree Prakashpa while 30.85% of the said population does not feel the same.
 - This result also shows the success of the Kanyashree Prakashpa in improving the conditions of women in society.
10. 79.79% of the surveyed population consider themselves capable to be the bread-earners for their families while 20.21% of the said population does not think so.
 - This reflects the self confidence among the majority of the sampled population which is a good indication for future women empowerment.
11. 79.79% of the population under survey think that the minimum age of marriage for girls need to be 21years while 20.21% of such population does not think so.
 - This shows the awareness and careeristic attitude of the girl children in comparison with their household responsibilities.
12. 12.77% of the beneficiaries surveyed admitted that there is pressure from their families to get married even after receiving the benefits of Kanyashree Prakashpa while 87.23% of those beneficiaries said that they don't have any such pressure.
 - Though the above result shows a positive indication in the society, it also indicates that the ignorance and deprivation of girl child is still not eradicated fully from our society, which may cause a barrier, even minor, to our future women empowerment.
13. 19.15% of the said beneficiaries reported that they would like to get themselves married before getting any employment while 80.85% of the same beneficiaries said that they would not like to get married before getting any employment.
 - This result also reflects the interpretation mentioned earlier.
14. 92.55% of the surveyed beneficiaries considers employment to be more important than getting married while 7.45% of the same sample of beneficiaries does not think so.
 - Aspiration for employment of the sampled beneficiaries reflected clearly from this data which is a very good sign for future women employment.

CONCLUSION

The present research has successfully fulfilled both the objectives of the study in identifying the perceptions of the urban beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakashpa in West Bengal analytically as mentioned earlier which shows a positive indication towards the success of the scheme and that the said Prakashpa is positively leading the future progress in the field of women empowerment.

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