

## **Kanyashree Prakalpa — An Umbrella Welfare Scheme to Support Economically Backward Young Women in West Bengal**

**Dr. Siddhartha Chatterjee, Assistant Professor in Political Science  
Vivekananda College, East Udayrajpur, Madhyamgram  
Kolkata – 700129, West Bengal, India.  
Email- s.c2@rediffmail.com / [sidd.chatt81@gmail.com](mailto:sidd.chatt81@gmail.com)**

**Abstract** - Kanyashree Prakalpa was launched in 2013 to eradicate poverty and achieve social equality in West Bengal. It is a state government sponsored umbrella welfare scheme to empower economically backward young women in the state. The scheme provides financial assistance to adolescent girls aged 13-18 years for education and vocational training. To date, the scheme has directly benefited over 1.5 million girls and in the process released over ₹ 4,000 crore for their welfare. This money is allocated for several purposes including education related expenses, health care and providing employment opportunities. Kanyashree Prakalpa is a unique example of how the government can use policies to improve the state of the nation. It has made an impact in the lives of millions of young girls by providing financial support and enhancing development opportunities. This scheme has set a precedent and has inspired many other states to implement similar policies. It is undoubtedly an ambitious and successful social welfare program that can help to reduce poverty and create a hopeful future for young girls in West Bengal.

**Keywords-** Women's Development, Sustainability, Welfare, Government

## **Introduction**

Kanyashree Prakalpa, a West Bengal government sponsored umbrella welfare scheme, was launched in 2013 to eradicate poverty and achieve social equality in West Bengal. It is a conditional cash transfer scheme designed to empower the lives of economically backward women in the state. It is an ongoing effort to bridge the gaps between rich and poor and improve the overall socio-economic environment of the state.

Kanyashree Prakalpa provides assistance in the form of a one-time financial assistance to socially and economically backward young women for their education, vocational training and other activities to ensure their economic independence and self-shouldering of responsibilities. Under the scheme, the amount of assistance provided is Rs 25,000 annually.

Kanyashree Prakalpa seeks to bring about an all-round development for economically backward women. By providing them with financial aid, the scheme is focused to improve their quality of life, build their confidence and enable them to become self-reliant. The financial assistance provided by the scheme goes towards their educational fees, medical treatments, purchase of books and stationery, payment of examination fees and issuance of certificates. In addition, the scheme also provides monetary benefits for setting up of businesses and self-employment ventures.

## **Success**

The success and effectiveness of this scheme has been tremendous in West Bengal. As per records, the state has seen a revolutionary rise in the number of students being enrolled in schools and colleges. Moreover, the large number of women being employed in businesses and other ventures has reduced the rate of unemployment and poverty, which has resulted in an overall improvement in the socioeconomic condition of the state. In the last 5 years, the state has seen a rise in GDP growth and GDP per capita has increased significantly.

Kanyashree Prakalpa, the welfare scheme introduced by the West Bengal government, is an exemplary step towards the welfare and empowerment of economically backward young women. It has not only improved the enrollment of girls in schools and colleges, helping them to become economically independent, but has also contributed to the state's overall economic growth and development.

Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP) is a state government-sponsored scheme launched by the West Bengal government in 2013. It is designed to provide assistance to adolescent girls between the ages of 13 and 18 who come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The primary aim of the scheme is to reduce the TFR (Total Fertility Rate) of the state by providing them with financial assistance to help them continue their studies and progress to higher levels of educational attainment.

Since its inception, Kanyashree Prakalpa has gained widespread acceptance in West Bengal as well as across India. As of 2020, over 16.5 million girls have benefitted from the scheme.

The main features of Kanyashree Prakalpa are as follows:

1) Eligibility: the scheme is open to adolescent girls aged 13-18 years who come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

2) Financial Assistance: beneficiaries of the scheme receive a one-time grant of Rs 25,000 which can be used for educational expenses including school fees, books, uniforms, and other related costs.

3) Monitoring of Beneficiaries: The West Bengal State Government monitors the progress of each beneficiary and presents annual reports providing information about the educational progression of the girls under the scheme.

4) Awareness and Education: The scheme also provides awareness and educational programmes on health and nutrition, reproductive health and rights, gender equality and other social issues.

### **Reports**

A variety of independent reports and assessments of the Kanyashree Prakalpa have been conducted to evaluate its effectiveness.

One such assessment, conducted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in 2017, found that the scheme had a positive impact on the educational attainment of adolescent girls in West Bengal. The report found that the scheme improved the girls' confidence and motivated them to continue their studies. It also found that the scheme had a direct impact on their academic performance, with a significant improvement in grades.

Similarly, in 2015, the World Bank gave Kanyashree Prakalpa high marks for its commitment to gender equality and contribution to increasing the educational attainment of adolescent girls.

Moreover, a report conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2016 found that the scheme has had a positive impact on the health and nutrition of the girls covered under the scheme. The report found that there had been a significant increase in the enrollment of girls due to the scheme, which had in turn led to improvements in their overall health and nutrition.

Overall, the independent reports and assessments of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme found it to have had a largely positive impact on the educational attainment, health and overall well being of adolescent girls in West Bengal. The scheme has been instrumental in increasing the educational attainment of adolescent girls in the state and is thus seen as a successful and sustainable model of welfare.

### **Prohibition of Child marriage**

Child marriage is a serious problem in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries. It violates the rights of children to be protected from all forms of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental harm. Although there have been some measures taken by states to ban this heinous practice, it still exists in large parts of the world and has taken a devastating toll on society. In India, one of the most effective methods to prevent such marriages is by introducing the Kanyashree Prakalpa.

Introduced in 2013 by the government of West Bengal, the Kanyashree Prakalpa or the Kanyashree Scheme is aimed at improving the lives of young girls by preventing child marriages, stopping dropouts and promoting the education of women in the state. The scheme

provides financial assistance to young girls between the ages of 13 and 18. Depending on the family's economic situation, girls can receive up to Rs. 25,000 (\$350) as a one-time grant and a fixed amount of Rs. 750 (\$10.5) every year for as long as they stay unmarried.

This scheme has made a tremendous impact in reducing the number of child marriages in West Bengal, which in turn has enabled more girls to gain access to avenues of education. According to an official government report, the scheme has kept close to 3.6 million girls from getting married before that age of 18. It has enabled more girls to be educated and pursue their dreams, with over 5 million of them having benefited from the scholarship. The West Bengal government is currently planning to expand the scheme across other states in India.

Although this scheme has been address the issue of child marriage in India, there are other legislative measures which are necessary to ensure that such occurrences do not take place. In particular, the enactment of a law making child marriage completely illegal is necessary for states to take strong and positive action against perpetrators. There should also be legal action taken against adults who encourage or facilitate such marriages.

Child marriage is a serious impediment to the future of underprivileged children and needs to be curtailed at all levels. While the Kanyashree Prakalpa has been successful in reducing the numbers of child marriages in West Bengal, there is still much more to be done. Laws must be enacted and enforced strictly to ensure the end of this heinous practice in all parts of India.

### **Fighting Against School Drop-outs**

School drop-outs are a serious problem across the world but in India especially, it is an issue that needs urgent attention due to the lack of proper education and social neglect. There are an estimated 11 million children in India who are drop-outs, and of this figure, the majority are girls due to financial constraints, social stigma and numerous other reasons.

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a historic welfare scheme introduced in 2013 by the Government of West Bengal, which seeks to ensure that girls stay in school and continue their education till they graduate. This scheme provides financial aid to poor families by directly transferring the money to bank accounts opened in the name of the girl child. This money can then be used to finance their educational needs like transportation, books, food, etc.

The aim of Kanyashree Prakalpa is to reduce school dropouts by encouraging parents to educate their daughters and incentivizing them with financial commitments like monthly allowances, one-time grants and also rewards for continuing their education up to the graduation. The scheme also provides for skill development of the girls, helping them become financially independent.

The success of Kanyashree Prakalpa has been widely appreciated and evident from the impressive results achieved in West Bengal alone. The overall education drop-out rate in the state decreased from 6.4% in 2013 to 2.4% in 2018. This phenomenon is especially visible in the rural and suburban parts of the state, where the drop-out rate decreased from 2.6% to 0.2%.

Kanyashree Prakalpa is an inspiring and revolutionary approach towards increasing female education, and more and more states are adopting such schemes as part of their respective

government policies. Studies have also revealed that with increased parental income and awareness, the drop-out rates have further gone down.

However, concerns remain with regard to the implementation of such schemes. For example, the majority of the families that are eligible for Kanyashree Prakalpa may not be aware of the scheme which makes it difficult to ensure that the maximum number of girls benefit from it. Furthermore, there is limited regulation on how the money can be spent, which leaves open the possibility of misuse and exploitation. Thus, it is important to plan and execute such schemes carefully, with all the pros and cons taken into consideration.

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a great initiative that has shown promising results for female education in terms of decreasing drop-out rates. Nevertheless, there must be a greater effort to spread awareness about such schemes and to ensure proper implementation in order to leverage the maximum benefit and reduce the number of school dropouts.

### **Rewards Achieved by Kanyashree Prakalpa**

Kanyashree Prakalpa, a girl child welfare project of the West Bengal government, is a comprehensive and innovative scheme dedicated to the economic and social advancement of adolescent and unmarried girls belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged families. The scheme provides direct financial assistance for the girl child's higher education and marriage expenses, along with other incentives such as uniforms, bicycles, and vocational training scholarships. Alongside the tangible benefits, Kanyashree also aims to bring in direct and indirect social change in West Bengal.

Since its inception in 2013, Kanyashree has been acknowledged by both national and international organizations as an exemplary project motivated by the government's commitment to holistic girl child welfare. This is reflected in the awards the scheme has received since 2019.

In the International Save the Children Award 2019, Kanyashree Prakalpa achieved the Runners-up award among a total of 700 applicants from around the world. The awards panel appreciated the scheme's concept, execution and results achieved, particularly for its simplicity and efficiency.

In February 2017, the United Nations awarded the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, a special citation for "her vision and mission of development, particularly for women and child" and for the "outstanding implementation of the Kanyashree Prakalpa." (Dutta & Sen)

With the help of World Bank's assistance, Kanyashree Prakalpa launched its initiative 'Quarterly Check', innovative technology software to track school attendance of Kanyashree girls, in June 2015. This software received the 2015 "CGAP Technology Award", an award given annually to the most creative and innovative initiatives in the field of financial technology.

Kanyashree Prakalpa has also been recognised by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust & the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust by awarding a cheque of Rs 2.5 crore to Mamata Banerjee in October 2016.

The World Bank's 2016 Forbes India Leadership Awards recognised the contribution of Kanyashree Prakalpa in the "Social Impact category" acknowledging the innovative structure of the project.

The latest in the list of awards is the Innovation & Impact Award, 2018 from South Korea based Seoul International Business Advisory Council (SIBAC). The jury appreciated Kanyashree's core concept and recognised its effectiveness in reducing poverty.

### **Criticism**

The Kanyashree Prakalpa is an initiative by the West Bengal government to provide financial assistance to adolescent girls in the state. This scheme aims to improve the socio-economic status of girls and support their education so as to improve their chances of employment and financial stability. Since its launch in 2013, the scheme has been successful in raising the standard of living for many adolescent girls in the state. As a result, it has attracted both praise and criticism from various quarters.

The most common criticism of the Kanyashree Prakalpa is its coverage area. The program is currently available only to residents of West Bengal, leaving out girls from other states and districts. Consequently, it has been argued that the scheme does not have enough impact to make a calculated difference in the lives of girls across India. Other critics have argued that the focus of the scheme should be shifted from overall economic welfare to more specific and direct socio-economic issues faced by girls. They believe that such a strategy would lead to more visible and direct changes to the lives of adolescent girls in the state.

Apart from the scalability of the scheme, there have also been allegations of mismanagement and fraud during the implementation of the scheme. These critics allege that large amounts of money sanctioned for the scheme is often misused or siphoned off by influential people in the state administration. In addition, there have been reports of low-income families being denied the benefits of the scheme due to improper paperwork or negligence. Such reports are further evidence of pervasive mismanagement during the implementation of the scheme.

The Kanyashree Prakalpa has also been criticized for its inability to identify the most deserving candidates and ensure that the benefits reach the people who need it the most. Widespread corruption and manipulation often result in people with lesser economic means being overlooked for the scheme despite meeting the eligibility criteria. Moreover, the non-existent monitoring of the funds allotted for the scheme leads to unnecessary waste and misappropriation of resources.

Overall, the Kanyashree Prakalpa is a well-intentioned initiative that has been successful in providing a better life for many adolescent girls in West Bengal. However, the scheme has been criticized due to the lack of scalability, lack of proper management, and the lack of monitoring of funds allotted under the scheme. To ensure successful implementation of the scheme, these criticisms should be taken into account to tackle the potential challenges. This will help the Kanyashree Prakalpa reach its full potential and make a larger difference in the lives of girls in the state.

## **Conclusion**

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a novel and ambitious scheme initiated by the state of West Bengal in 2013 to combat poverty, specifically for adolescents. The scheme provides financial support to young girls in the state and focuses on encouraging them to continue their education.

In essence, what the scheme does is provide monetary awards for those who are 13-18 years old and below the poverty line, and a scholarship for those who have finished 10th standard. Girls from poor families who are enrolled in schools and have proof of their family's financial status are accepted into the scheme. The scholarship is structured with amounts granted in two distinct phases. The first phase awards a one-time payment of ₹ 25,000, while the second phase awards a yearly allowance of ₹ 750 to ₹ 1000, depending on the family's income. This money is put toward future education and other basic goods.

What makes the scheme so revolutionary is that the added financial support is used to empower young girls and their families. By doing this, the scheme generates a feeling of security, confidence and economic stability in young girls, which in turn can lead to a reduced dropout rate as well as better students' performance.

The target of the scheme is to benefit around 2 million young girls and change the lives of the disadvantaged and underprivileged communities of the state. Over the past six years, the scheme has made immense progress and achieved major milestones. To date, the scheme has directly benefited over 1.5 million girls and in the process released over ₹ 4,000 crore for their welfare. This money is allocated for several purposes including education related expenses, health care and providing employment opportunities.

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a unique example of how the government can use policies to improve the state of the nation. It has made an impact in the lives of millions of young girls by providing financial support and enhancing development opportunities. This scheme has set a precedent and has inspired many other states to implement similar policies. It is undoubtedly an ambitious and successful social welfare program that can help to reduce poverty and create a hopeful future for young girls in West Bengal.

## **References**

- "Kanyashree Scheme For Girls In Bengal Wins UN Award". *NDTV.com*. Retrieved 12 October 2017.
- "UN honours Mamata Banerjee with highest public service award for girl child project Kanyashree". Retrieved 12 October 2017.
- "Kanyashree Status".
- 'Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India: Justification and Evaluation'. International Growth Centre, <https://www.theigc.org/collections/kanyashree-prakalpa-west-bengal-india-justification-and-evaluation>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2023.
- [wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp\\_scheme.php](http://wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_scheme.php)
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/>