



## Analysis of Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal: A Journey Toward Women's Empowerment

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### Abstract:

*The issue of 'Women's Empowerment' has gained a lot of focus and limelight in recent times. Genderization is a deep-rooted social phenomenon, while the huge disparity in male-female ratio, the severe gender gap in their literacy rates, early marriage of girl children, low female participation rates in politics, etc., are some of the indicators of highly unequal gender relations prevalent in our society. The West Bengal government introduced one such Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program in 2013 under the name "Kanyashree Prakalpa" (KP). This Prakalpa is the brainchild of the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. This scheme was implemented to empower adolescent girls, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged families, by decreasing the child marriage rate, incentivizing them to continue their education, to make them independent, and skillful to improve the status and well-being of girls. This scheme also increases the social strength and self-esteem of girls. The present study tries to find out the impact of KP on the perception of women empowerment among the beneficiaries in West Bengal. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the distribution pattern of grants and the effectiveness of this policy. The paper also tries to highlight some social issues of this policy. The study reveals that this policy has been successful in reducing child marriage as the percentage of dropout's falls and the number of girl's children having formal education increases in the state throughout the year.*

**Keywords:** Child Marriage, Education, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Self-Employment, Social Awareness, Women Empowerment.

### Introduction:

Girls in India have been neglected at this age. Gender discrimination against female children is extending across India, as well as the world. West Bengal is not an exception. Any society or nation cannot develop without the development of women. Women's empowerment and gender equality are critical to society's long-term viability. Various international and national organizations take this as a serious matter. To meet the Sustainable Development Goals, many nations are committed to taking steps to empower women. Govt. of West Bengal took a step towards women's empowerment by launching the Kanyashree Scheme on October 1, 2013. It is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme for socio-economically backward adolescent girls between the ages of 13 to 18, which aims to improve the status of girls, promote healthy development, reduce school dropout rates, and discourage child marriage. August 14 is designated as "Kanyashree Day".

This scheme is available for unmarried female students whose income is below Rs.1, 20, 000. It has three components, names K1, K2, and K3 for those in school, after school, and post-graduation, respectively. This scheme has many positive impacts on women's empowerment by preventing child marriage, reducing the school dropout rate of female students, enabling girls to continue their school education, developing decision-making power among girls, etc. This Government initiative received much national and international recognition due to good design and governance.

### **Objective of the Study**

The following are some objectives of the study-

1. To explore the understanding of KP introduced by the West Bengal Government.
2. To determine the effectiveness of KP among Kanyashree beneficiaries for women empowerment.
3. To identify the change, if any, in social attitude towards daughters after KP.
4. To observe the attitudinal change towards the marriage of the beneficiaries and the society after KP.
5. To identify the success stories of this unique program so that they can be an inspiration to other growing girls.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative study. The present study is purely based on the analysis of secondary data due to the limited time. The secondary data have been collected from the government's official website of West Bengal, other organizations, newspaper reports, policy statements, research papers, and relevant documents. The method used in this study is the document-based logistic analysis. For the analysis, I mainly used tables.

### **What is the Kanyashree Prakalpa**

The Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP), the flagship scheme of the Government of West Bengal, was announced on 8 March 2013, and launched on 1 October 2013, and is fully funded by the Government of West Bengal. It aims to reduce the chances of child marriage and increase the employability of girls by educating them. This scheme is a two-tier conditional cash transfer scheme for girls aged from thirteen to eighteen with a family income of less than Rs 1.2 lakh per annum. The income ceiling does not apply to girls with special needs or orphans, or those residing in J.J. homes. Some local authorities must certify income. The first component consists of an annual grant of Rs 1000 for unmarried girls between 13 to 18 who are enrolled in grades VIII – XIII or equivalent in some educational institution (K1). The second component is a one-time grant of Rs 25,000 on completion of 18 years, subject to her remaining unmarried and undergoing education/ vocational training/ technical training/ sports training until that age (K2).

The scheme requires girls to open a zero-balance savings account in some banks, and the authorities have simplified the process of opening such accounts. The money is directly transferred to these accounts, and this ensures the financial inclusion of these girls and promotes their self-esteem. The application forms are available at schools, and the enrollment and opening of bank accounts are facilitated by the school. The application, scrutiny, and sanctioning are done through an e-portal, and this reduces paperwork and reduces the response time at each stage. It ensures transparency, efficiency, and zero leakage. The awareness is spread through schools, mass media, celebrity endorsements, street plays, and the 'Kanyashree Fair'. The program was publicized through ASHA newsletters by the Department of Health and Family Welfare at libraries of the Department of Mass Education and advertisements by the Department of Consumer Affairs. All these, coupled with a very strong political will, have ensured that the awareness about this scheme is very

high. This scheme has received a huge response from the grassroots and has received a lot of media attention from its very inception.

The program is supported by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and has participated in designing and planning communication strategies across the state. The UN organization has also participated in designing the MIS (Monitoring and Information System) of KP. They provide dedicated consultants to the program and take a progressive part in sharing good practice modules across the districts. Their assistance has provided excellent technical support for the government's entire KP endeavor.

On July 28, 2017, the third component was announced to motivate girls to pursue higher studies and to become self-independent. A scholarship of ₹2500 per month for the Science stream and ₹2000 for the Arts stream will be provided to girls pursuing Master's degrees in any university, irrespective of their marital status and the annual family income. However, the girls should already be enrolled in the first and second components and should have achieved 45% in their undergraduate degree. This program has no upper age limit. This dissertation will only consider the first and second components for studying the impact of the program because, after the implementation of the third component, no nationwide household-level survey that can assess its effects has been carried out in India. The last survey was conducted in 2015-16.

### **Objectives of Kanyashree Prakalpa**

The Kanyashree Prakalpa has the following objectives:

**Promote Education:** Encourage girls from socio-economically disadvantaged families to continue their education and complete secondary or higher secondary education with technical or vocational streams, improving their economic and social prospects.

**Delay Marriage:** Prevent early pregnancies and the health hazards that come with them by discouraging marriage before the legal age of 18.

**Empowerment and Financial Inclusion:** Direct financial support to the girl's bank account to empower them to make independent financial decisions.

**Behavioral and Social Empowerment:** Use targeted communication strategies to enhance girl's social power and self-esteem through events, competitions, Kanyashree clubs, and role models.

**Economic Independence:** Enable girls to acquire skills and knowledge, making them economically independent and better prepared for adulthood, thereby contributing to the elimination of child marriage and the promotion of women's health, education, and socio-economic equality.

### **Status of Girl Child in West Bengal**

In West Bengal, 48.11% of the 1.73 crore adolescents (10–19 years old) are female. 10-14-year-olds are 9.3% of the total population, and 15-19-year-olds are 9.7% of the total population (Source: Census 2011; [www.censusindia.gov.in/vitalstatistics/SRS\\_Report](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/vitalstatistics/SRS_Report)).

World Health Organization (WHO) identified this age group as a period of preparation for adulthood in which several key developmental experiences occur, such as gaining social and economic independence, developing identity, acquiring skills necessary for adult relationships and role-playing, and capacity for abstract reasoning. Adolescence is a time of great promise and progress, but it is also a time of significant risk, and social settings play a significant role.

Child marriage is a social concern and a violation of children's rights. According to DLHS-3 (2007-08), West Bengal shows the fifth highest child marriage among all the states, with 54.7% of currently married women (aged 20-24) married before the age of 18. In rural areas, the frequency is higher (57.9%). Every second girl in the high prevalence child marriage districts of West Bengal [Murshidabad (61.04%), Birbhum (58.03%), Malda (56.07%), and Purulia (54.03%)] was married off before they reached 18, the legal age for girls to get wedded.

These are also districts with a high incidence of trafficking. Significantly, child betrothal and marriage are a completely gendered practice, and an overwhelmingly large percentage of girls are married before reaching adulthood, and only a minuscule percentage of boys are subjected to the same fate. This phenomenon adversely affects girl's education, health, nutritional status, growth, and development. The Selected Educational Statistics (2010-11) published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MOHRD), Government of India shows that for the state of West Bengal, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has gradually declined for high school (IX-X) and higher secondary (XI-XII) which means that more children, including girls, are dropping out of school by the teenage years. This leads to a high dropout rate. The dropout rate in class I-X was 63.5% for girls and 64.9% for boys, which is relatively higher than the Indian average. According to the ASER 2012, compared to the 15-16 age group, just 4.2% of girls in the 11-14 age group are not in school. The percentage increases significantly (14%), which shows that the girls become more vulnerable in this age group.

While several factors contribute to girls dropping out of school, human rights research shows that the greatest obstacles to girl's education are child marriage, pregnancy, and domestic chores, and that ensuring that girls stay in school is one of the most effective safeguards against child marriage. In the above context, the Government of West Bengal has decided to create an enabling environment to improve the education, health, and nutritional status of women and children through an innovative project, **"Kanyashree Prakalpa"**.

Child Marriage across the Districts of West Bengal is cited below in a table:-

District	Rural Area		Urban area	
	Male Married (10-19) %	Female Married (10-19) %	Male Married (10-19) %	Female Married (10-19) %
Darjeeling	13.02	50.04	8.87	44.78
Jalpaiguri	11.20	60.37	7.94	55.33
Cooch Behar	11.49	71.21	5.83	52.21
Uttar Dinajpur	9.91	64.16	7.38	52.65
Dakshin Dinajpur	12.43	72.64	5.75	55.32
Malda	13.10	70.84	10.77	61.40
Murshidabad	17.84	76.78	13.57	67.09
Birbhum	13.65	74.20	9.83	62.75
Bardhaman	11.76	72.87	8.63	55.25

Nadia	12.30	74.39	6.86	60.79
North 24 Paraganas	12.94	73.41	5.87	47.05
South 24 Paraganas	13.07	72.09	8.72	56.75
Hoogly	8.43	69.42	6.64	51.09
Bankura	9.65	70.22	6.06	55.29
Purulia	12.43	66.09	8.99	55.61
Howrah	7.87	66.67	7.03	52.12
Kolkata	NA	NA	7.60	39.44
Paschim Medinipur	9.80	72.21	6.60	53.47
Purba Medinipur	8.53	75.97	8.44	74.84
Mean	11.63	69.64	7.97	55.43

\*Source: Census of India, 2011

### **Why was the Kanyashree Prakalpa Needed**

The Kanyashree Prakalpa has come as a much-needed intervention at a time when the percentage of underage marriage among girls in West Bengal is the highest in India, and the average years of schooling for females is lower than the national average. According to the 2011 Census, West Bengal had the highest rate of marriage of girls before the age of eighteen in the year before the survey. In this state, 7.8% of the females were married before eighteen compared to the all-India average of 3.7%. This is unexpected because West Bengal, or Bengal as it existed before India's partition, has long been at the forefront of the nation's struggle for women's empowerment and emancipation. It was Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Bengal who first raised his voice against child marriage in India. Under pressure from nationalists and social reformers, the British Government introduced the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929, which fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 and for boys at 18. The minimum age of marriage was increased from time to time, and finally, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was passed in 2006, which fixed the minimum age of marriage at 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

The high incidence of child marriage transforms into teenage pregnancy, high anemia among women, and child stunting. To counter this discomfort, adolescent girls in the state needed some form of support and encouragement from the state so that they could remain unmarried and continue their education to develop proper skills and eventually enter the labor market. KP is one such program that can satisfy both the targets of reducing child marriage and adolescent dropouts from school.

### **Kanyashree Prakalpa Different From Other Schemes**

Over the past two decades, several schemes have been implemented in India to improve the overall quality of life of the girl child. They have targeted different social evils like female feticide/ infanticide leading to low sex ratio, lack of empowerment and health care facilities for women, lack of education, and for the girl child and child marriage.

Many scholarships like the Balika Samriddhi Yojana (BSY) in Gujarat, the Bhagyalakshmi Scheme in Karnataka, the Kanya Jagriti Jyoti Scheme in Punjab, and the Beti Hai Anmol Yojana in Himachal Pradesh

aim to improve the education of the girl child. These schemes assist girls belonging to poorer households at various levels of education to try to lessen the burden on the girl child and motivate families to educate them.

More effective are the conditional cash transfer schemes related to the education of girls like the Vidya Laxmi Yojana was launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of Gujarat in 2002; the Delhi Ladli Scheme was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development of the Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi on January 1, 2008; the Bangaru Thalli (Golden Mother) introduced on May 1 2013 by the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Kiran Kumar Reddy. The Bangaru Thalli provides an annual transfer to girl children upon enrollment, and Vidya Laxmi Yojana pays Rs 20,000 to a girl child after every standard is met and then stops at the age when girls are most vulnerable to child marriage. In Delhi's Ladli Scheme, girls can claim maturity if they are eighteen years old after completing the tenth grade. While all these schemes do promote the education of the girl child, they are all conditional upon the girl completing each stage of education, and thus may not be sufficient to motivate the weak students or those who are first-generation learners who have to struggle to pass the examinations. Moreover, these schemes are not directly conditional upon the girl remaining unmarried till eighteen, though indirectly they do delay child marriage by promoting education.

In 2007, Bihar introduced the Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana, which provides an amount at the age of eighteen to help a girl get married, provided she remains unmarried until then and has no dowry at the time of marriage. However, it has been observed that girls who drop out of the education system are most vulnerable to early marriage, and this scheme does not require a girl to continue her education until eighteen. Excluding continuing education pathways within this framework has limited implications for both of these projects.

The KP is not the first conditional cash transfer scheme to target both dropouts at the secondary level and child marriage together. One of the first CCTs to do this was the Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) scheme launched in Haryana in 1994 for families belonging to backward social castes and below the poverty line. In this, a bond of Rs 2500 was distributed on the birth of a girl child and could be redeemed at the age of eighteen on the condition of remaining unmarried and passing class 10. ABAD beneficiaries viewed the CCT as a means of covering dowry and marriage costs.

Additional data shows that more than half of the families tended to or spent the cash transfer amount to cover wedding expenses. With education emerging as the single most important pathway to curb child marriage, ABAD beneficiaries have demonstrated a high likelihood of completing primary education and higher education aspirations; but as it was not conditional upon continuing a girl's education until 18 years, these effects were not strong enough to create a program effect for ABAD. Although this program is closest to KP, it differs in two very crucial points. Firstly, KP identifies two simultaneous eligibility criteria: continued education and remained unmarried till the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, thus internalizing the pathway of education for reducing under-age marriage, while ABAD left out the condition of continuing a girl's education till that day (clearing secondary education was enough for the scheme). The girls who dropped out of school after class 10 had a far higher chance of getting married at an underage age. Secondly, the implementation was different. In KP, girls had to register at the age of 13, but in ABAD, parents had to register their daughters at birth. This was done in the hopes of producing much more powerful motivating effects. Creating awareness among the parents was much more difficult than creating awareness among school-going children, as is done in KP.

The Ladli Laxmi Yojana was started in Madhya Pradesh in 2007 and later in states like Jharkhand and Goa, another CCT where a girl gets more than Rs 1 lakh at the age of 21, provided she does not get married before eighteen and completes her secondary education. However, it is difficult to verify whether someone married before eighteen or not when she has already reached twenty-one years of age. In addition, the emphasis on the girl's completing her education (instead of just continuing until eighteen as in KP) acts as a deterrent.



Girls may be enrolled in an institution, but are retained in a class more than once. A similar scheme is the Girl Child Protection Scheme introduced in 1997 in Andhra Pradesh, where girls receive Rs 20,000 at the age of twenty if they remain unmarried until eighteen. This scheme, however, did not link education to child marriage, and again, verification of the age of marriage would have presented a problem at twenty.

Two years after the KP, the Maharashtra government launched the Majhi Kanya Bhagyashree Scheme in 2015. It provides families with varying cash incentives to ensure the girl child receives an education and a healthy diet. After the age of eighteen, the girl receives Rs 1 lakh per annum for continuing her studies if she is not married before that. This scheme is unique as it also provides incentives for the grandmother to eliminate male bias among the elderly. However, to get a substantial amount of Rs 1 lakh, the girl has to continue her education beyond the age of eighteen, which may not be feasible in many families.

The complexities of the KP are likewise distinctive. The females are at their most vulnerable when it starts, at thirteen years old. It requires the girls themselves to apply for the scheme and spread awareness through schools. This, coupled with very high political will, ensured that the awareness about this scheme is almost complete. The small annual stipends cover at least part of the cost of education and encourage girls to continue their studies. The lump sum amount provided at eighteen requires them to have continued studies and remain unmarried until that age. The small portions, albeit little, are supposed to give the teenage girl a sense of self-empowerment and enhance her aspirations to reach eighteen. As there is no requirement to complete any level, girls, regardless of their qualifications, are encouraged to continue their studies and postpone their marriage. In addition, the entire process, starting from the application to receiving the amount, is electronically managed, and the girls receive the money in their bank accounts. This ensures very little leakage in the system and low administrative costs. In other words, the scheme enforces the financial inclusion of the entire band of adolescent girls, who otherwise would have remained outside the net of the formal banking system even at this age of JAM Trinity.

### **Empowerment of Girls Through Kanyashree Prakalpa**

These days, the Central Government's slogan is **"Atmanirbhar Bharat"**. India shall be atmanirbhar when we make our women independent. Education can pave the way for such independence. Better capacity building through education leads to increased independence. There is no denying the fact that Education and National Development have a relationship of a rising spiral touching each other at every point. In West Bengal, the Kanyashree Prakalpa, the United Nations 'Best Public Service' award-winning incentive scheme for girls, has taken a step forward in ensuring regular and formal education for girls up to Post-Graduate level, reducing the likelihood of child marriage and mortality of mother and child.

To overcome these problems, the Government of West Bengal on 8 March 2013 initiated a scholarship scheme, the KP to improve the life and status of school-going adolescent girls belonging to economically backward families with conditional cash transfer support so that the families do not arrange early marriage of the girl children before 18 years of age. If early marriage were discouraged, it would automatically lead to a better life. The best way to deal with grave problems like early marriage, premature motherhood, related health hazards, and mortality is to help girls pursue formal education. This Project has been given recognition by the United Kingdom's Department of International Development and the United Nations.

The simplicity of design, easy accessibility, targeted communication strategies, convergent implementation, and focus on increasing girl's financial, social, and self-worth are considered attractive features associated with the project. The procedures are straightforward, and the girl child feels empowered to get a bank account in her name.

West Bengal has led the nation in reducing the school dropout rate from 3.3% to 1.5%, according to the Annual State of Education Report (ASER)-2020. West Bengal also holds the first position in the country in

terms of textbooks provided to students, with 99.7% coverage. The report also acknowledged WB's initiative to continue education during the COVID-19 pandemic through digital and other electronic modes.

### Target Beneficiaries

- About 3.5 lakh girls in WB receive a one-time grant every year.
- Girls attend institutions for regular education or vocational/sports training.
- Approximately 18 lakh female students are eligible for a scholarship each year.
- Girl child between 13 to 18 years of age with an annual income of up to 1.2 lakhs.
- Girls at Child Care Institute are registered under the J.J. Act between 18-19 years of age.

### Impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa

**Prevention of Child Marriage:** According to the Kanyashree Annual Report (15-16), the rate of child marriage has declined in West Bengal. According to DLHS-3 (2007-08), the state ranked fifth highest in the country when it came to the prevalence of child brides (54.7%). Most of these girls are married before reaching adulthood. Now the situation has changed. According to NFHS-3 (2015-16), 40.7% of women in the age group 20-24 years are married before their age. Although the decline rate is very slow, it is very significant. The rate of child marriage has been reducing since the launch of the KP. Girls say 'no' to child marriage. In every district of West Bengal, by the inspiration of our Chief Minister, the Kanyashree Yoddha Team has been formed from the local school girls, which also helps the local administration to prevent child marriage. Therefore, this scheme has a positive effect in preventing child marriage.

**Reduction of Dropout Rates:** The project has also contributed to a significant reduction in dropout rates among adolescent girls. Before the implementation of the KP, many girls in West Bengal dropped out of school due to financial constraints or social pressure to marry early. However, the project's conditional cash transfers have provided a strong incentive for families to keep their daughters in school. As a result, dropout rates have decreased markedly.

**Secondary and Higher Education:** Kanyashree Prakalpa has allowed bringing girls back to school. A fundamental and far-reaching change is slowly taking place in the society of WB. The parents have become believers in girl's education. When the Kanyashree girls reach the age of 18 years, they get a Rs. 25000 one-time grant that helps them study. Most Kanyashree girl can convince their parents to allow them to attend school and college. Parents do not need to collect money for their girl's education, which is why they are not afraid now. They are happy with this scheme. They are happy to allow their daughters to pursue secondary and higher education. Now the dropout rates are declining in higher classes.

**Psychological Empowerment of Girls:** This is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme, and the financial benefits are directly entered into the bank account of the girl's students from class VII-XII. This helps them decide on the utilization of the benefit. Besides this prevention of child marriage, the continuation of education develops self-esteem and creates a place in society for them. These all act as tools for the psychological empowerment of girls.

**Social Awareness:** Kanyashree girls have organized many social awareness programs like - Mission Nirmal Bangla, Safe Drive- Save Life, Child Protection Program, Child Rights, Health Awareness Program, Dengue Awareness Program, Capacity Building, Participation in Election Awareness, and Tree Plantation. They organized many seminars at the block level on cybercrime. Kanyashree girls create awareness among people about these issues. To prevent child marriage, the Purba Bardhaman district administration has made a short film. Birbhum Child Line organized an awareness program on girl child and women trafficking with the help



of Kanyashree girls. Many districts arrange various types of awareness programs in support of Kanyashree girls, and it is for them. KP increases the rates of social awareness, by which our society will become concussed, and alert, about the bad impact of child marriage. Kanyashree girls themselves have now become a medium through which block-level administration and district-level administration can reach out to the uninformed, poor people. The West Bengal government is successful in spreading the message about child marriage among Kanyashree girls.

**Social Improvement:** There are forty-two Kanyashree girls in West Bengal. They are working to improve their society. They are working to stop child marriage. They are fighting against various social evils. Kanyashree Prakalpa makes a deep impression in West Bengal. It is a well-known and popular scheme. Everybody appreciates it. Block level (BDO) and District level (DM) administration are avoiding many child marriages every day with the help of Kanyashree girls. There is a lot of change in the attitudes of parents; it is extended in the families and communities towards girls children. The attitudes are for honoring the girl. Now the Government of West Bengal is a bit successful in making people understand that girls are not our load, they are our wealth. The impact of KP has now permeated society and our culture. Now we have Kanyashree fairs, Kanyashree-themed puja pandals, music, recitals, and theatre.

**Self-Employment:** One of the major and important impacts of KP is self-employment. It is not enough to keep the child girls in school or college. Girls from socio-economically disadvantaged families always struggle with poverty. Thus, they cannot continue their study. They want to earn and help the needy family. Kanyashree Prakalpa gives them the opportunity. Most district administrations in West Bengal organize food preservation and food processing training programs for Kanyashree girls. Marketing consultants from the district rural development cell coach them on aspects such as product marketing, capital investment, and cost-benefit analysis. After taking the training, many girls are now self-employed. Some girls opened a cyber shop with a one-time grant (Rs 25000); a stationery shop, and many others own businesses. Thus, KP enhances the girl's ability, skills, and confidence to find their place in different fields. There are 123 success stories of Kanyashree girls in the Kanyashree web portal of WB. Kanyashree Prakalpa fulfills the girl's dream.

**Political Impact:** The political impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa is now very deep-rooted. Today, Kanyashree Prakalpa has touched every Bengali. No doubt, Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress also reached every family with this Prakalpa. It has given her much popularity and, of course, a huge number of votes in her wallet. Kanyashree Prakalpa is a formidable tool in the fight for votes. Mamata Banerjee checked her mate over her political enemy. This gave her a huge advantage in the electoral field. Opponents cannot criticize this Prakalpa because the popularity of this project is unbelievable. If they oppose this project, it will be against their political interest. They know people will never accept criticism of KP. UNO recognition gave her international recognition. Therefore, it becomes 'Brahmastra' to win the election.

**Sustainable Development:** Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable Development means sustainability in the spheres of environment, the economy, and society (equity). In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There are 17 SDGs in all. The Goals of the Kanyashree scheme fulfill some of them.

### **Goal 1: No Poverty**

- Child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty by depriving young girls of education, pushing them into early and repeated pregnancies, and limiting their employment opportunities.
- Poor health, illiteracy, and deepening poverty perpetuate the generational cycle.

- A lifetime of socio-economic exclusion of child brides leads to the feminization of poverty.

### **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being**

- Child marriages lead to teenage pregnancies and associated risks of mother and child ill health/mortality. When girls survive childbirth, they can suffer devastating injuries such as obstetric fistula.
- Marriage and early childbearing can also be emotionally challenging for girls who are still children themselves. Delaying marriage and pregnancy to an age at which girls are ready is good for their physical and mental well-being as well as the health of their children.

### **Goal 4: Quality Education**

- Child marriage means the end of a girl's education. Once married, girls are burdened with their new responsibilities as wives and mothers and, as a result, often stay at home. Their husband or in-laws may not be supportive of their education, and in some countries, laws do not allow married girls to return to school.
- Field studies show that most women will have to take up some economic activity in later years. However, their lack of qualifications and work experience makes them unprepared for the labor market, and therefore susceptible to poverty and exploitation throughout their lives.
- On the other hand, secondary-educated girls have a six-fold lower marriage rate. Educated mothers are better able to provide for their children and are less likely to marry young.

### **Goal 5: Gender Equality**

- Child marriage happens overwhelmingly to girls because they are girls. Discriminatory norms around girls' values, sexuality, and role in society are powerful drivers of the practice. In many communities where child marriage is prevalent, girls are not valued as much as boys; they are seen as a burden.
- We know that marriage ends girl's opportunities for education, better-paid work outside the home, and leadership roles in their communities, and subjects them to violence.
- Sexual activity with a minor, even if it is within marriage, can be termed, as statutory rape child brides are more susceptible to domestic violence throughout life.
- Child marriage is used as a means of child trafficking.

### **Goal 8: Economic Growth**

- Girls will be able to support themselves and their families and contribute to ending the cycle of intergenerational poverty if they have access to the same economic opportunities as boys, attend school, and acquire the skills necessary to find employment.
- Current research shows that the costs of child marriage to national economies through the following pathways are very significant: increased population growth; reduced educational attainment, labor force participation, health, nutrition, violence, and reduced participation.

## Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

The negative impact of child marriage on education, health, safety, and economic productivity widens the gap between:

- Genders (significantly more girls are married than boys).
- Between communities, some communities have significantly strong traditions of child marriage, while many do not, or have given up the practice.
- Between countries, some countries have significantly strong traditions of child marriage, despite it being prohibited by law; in some countries, child marriage is not practiced at all.

## Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and construct effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- The scheme's purpose is the social inclusion of vulnerable adolescent girls.
- E-governance promotes the delivery of social protection measures, ensuring transparency and accountability, including multiple means of grievance redressal.

## Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize worldwide partnerships for sustainable development.
- Convergent implementation and monitoring amongst 14 government departments promotes gender mainstreaming.
- Partnerships between government, multi-lateral organizations, and non-governmental organizations.
- Knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices through strategic national and international platforms.

**E-Governance:** Kanyashree gets National E-governance Award- 2014-15. It wins the SKOCH SMART Governance Award-15 for its electronic and Cash Transfer Features. The entire process of Kanyashree is online. These are online enrollment from the school, online data approval, sanction, and disbursement. The benefits of the scheme are paid directly into their bank accounts. There is an e-learning portal for the beneficiaries of the Kanyashree Prakalpa. It enhances e-governance. Without a doubt, it will help our Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his goal of creating a Digital India.

**Towards a Social Movement:** The KP is now on its way to becoming a social movement. The movement is to stop child marriage, encourage child girls to higher education, become self-employed, and, of course, empower adolescent girls. 18,183 registered institutions, 9 thousand teachers, hundreds of BDO, DM, child line members, thousands of bank employees, and many other officers are engaging with this movement. They live with Kanyashree girls and help Kanyashree girls in various ways. Parents of Kanyashree girls are also fighters of this movement. It will be spread at the grassroots level day by day, and I hope will be successful.

**Creating a Large Number of Beneficiaries:** This scheme creates a large number of beneficiaries. To get the benefit of the scheme, the family income should be between Rs. 1, 20, 000 per annum, and in West

Bengal, more than 90% of families belong to the lower income slab mentioned in the scheme to get the benefit. Year-wise Statistics of the application of Kanyashree Prakalpa are cited below in tables:-

Scheme Type	2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016		2016-2017	
	Uploade d	Sanctione d	Uploade d	Sanctione d	Uploade d	Sanctione d	Uploaded	Sanctione d
Annual Scholarship (K1)	18,89,960	18,44,990	7,69,945	7,59,061	6,11,154	5,95,221	7,39,763	7,09,517
Renewal (K1)	0	0	12,22,942	12,04,921	15,83,074	15,76,218	16,05,615	15,79,703
One Time Grant (K2)	1,44,197	1,38,965	49,138	46,118	34,979	32,379	25,195	23,797
Undergraduate (K2)	0	0	2,56,737	2,49,266	3,01,874	2,96,969	3,29,533	3,21,028
Total Application	20,34,157	19,83,955	22,98,762	22,59,366	25,31,081	25,00,787	27,00,109	26,34,045

Scheme Type	2017-2018		2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021	
	Upload ed	Sanction ed	Upload ed	Sanction ed	Upload ed	Sanction ed	Upload ed	Sanction ed
Annual Scholarship (K1)	7,05,188	6,87,625	8,08,804	8,05,701	6,60,137	6,58,427	5,79,252	5,77,972
Renewal (K1)	17,48,332	17,36,146	18,42,334	18,41,566	20,17,436	20,16,894	20,61,882	20,61,463
One Time Grant (K2)	3,319	3,270	16,740	16,625	9,040	8,870	6,254	6,103
Undergraduate (K2)	3,94,772	3,89,392	4,29,577	4,26,289	4,90,223	4,85,998	5,21,980	5,18,056
Total Application	28,51,611	28,16,433	30,97,455	30,90,181	31,76,846	31,70,189	31,69,368	31,63,594

Scheme Type	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024		2024-2025	
	Upload ed	Sanction ed	Upload ed	Sanction ed	Uploade d	Sanction ed	Upload ed	Sanction ed
Annual Scholarship (K1)	5,95,531	5,94,186	4,43,261	4,42,312	6,05,773	6,05,293	1,09,703	74,444
Renewal (K1)	19,79,287	19,78,584	18,89,282	18,88,422	16,58,810	16,58,302	13,15,840	12,96,039

One Time Grant (K2)	3,890	3,840	3,987	3,948	6,065	5,999	0	0
Undergraduate (K2)	5,50,583	5,45,392	5,32,550	5,24,967	5,01,346	4,93,302	1,62,551	75,759
Total Application	31,29,291	31,22,002	28,69,080	28,59,649	27,71,994	27,62,896	15,88,094	14,46,242

Scheme Type	Till Date	
	Uploaded	Sanctioned
Annual Scholarship (K1)	85,18,471	83,54,749
Renewal (K1)	1,89,24,834	1,88,38,258
One Time Grant (K2)	3,02,807	2,89,914
Undergraduate (K2)	44,71,736	43,26,418
Total Application	3,06,29,754	3,17,34,895

\*Year-wise statistics of application of Kanyashree Prakalpa from the financial year 2013-2014 to 2024-2025 (till date). [source:[https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp\\_4.0/dashboard.php](https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/dashboard.php)]

### Some Success Stories

The Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal has helped many girls achieve their goals, including:

**Shatabdi:** - Despite a difficult childhood, Shatabdi's commitment to education allowed her to complete her schooling and pursue a master's degree. She now works with an NGO to raise awareness about the scheme in her village.

**Saina J Khatun:** - Kanyashree helped Saina pursue her studies and face the challenges of her family's poverty. She is now studying BCA at the Tamralipta Institute of Management & Technology.

**Mou Das:** - Kanyashree helped Mou Das buy books for class IX, allowing her to continue her education.

**Sahanara Khatun:** - Sahanara was a school dropout who was forced to contribute to her family's income at a young age. She was able to return to school and complete her higher secondary education and is now pursuing a college degree. She also helps other children return to school.

**Pushpa Ghosh:** - Pushpa has been aspiring to join the police force since childhood. A few months ago, when she came to know that there was an opportunity for girls to learn martial arts under the Kanyashree club at the school, she readily enrolled herself in it. Within eight months, she learned enough to teach her juniors the art of self-defense. Soon, she will get a Rs 25,000 grant, which she will spend on higher education.

**Sonali Das:** - Her family was pressuring her to quit her studies. Now she is doing her graduation using her KP money. She wants to train as a teacher.

**Champa Gayen:** - Works as a domestic worker while simultaneously educating herself. Used the KP money to buy her a new bag and pay her tuition fees.



**Monami Chakraborty:** - A truck driver's daughter was looking for a loan to study medicine. The Kanyashree Prakalpa was a godsend.

### Challenges And Areas for Improvement

While the Kanyashree Prakalpa has achieved significant success, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Some studies have highlighted issues such as delays in fund disbursement and a lack of awareness about the scheme in certain remote areas. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for maximizing the project's impact. The KP had a profound positive impact on girl's education in West Bengal by increasing enrollment and retention rates, reducing dropout rates, improving academic performance, and shifting social norms. The project has made significant strides toward empowering girls and promoting education. Continued efforts to address existing challenges will further enhance the effectiveness of this pioneering initiative.

### Policy Suggestions

- The government should be more active in taking proper steps, where the parents and the girl child are still unaware of this policy and are not taking the proper steps.
- In interior rural areas, where there is no proper communication system, the government should be more active in those areas to properly implement this scheme.
- The government should arrange awareness camps, seminars, workshops in schools, blocks, districts, and state levels to aware the students, parents, teachers, and administrators benefit from the scheme.
- The government should observe at a regular interval whether the money is only spent for education purposes and not for any other purposes.
- The government should project this scheme not only as a monetary support scheme but also as a step towards women's empowerment.
- Parents should also be aware of sending their daughters to school and providing proper education after getting money from the government.

### Awards And Recognition Received by the Kanyashree Prakalpa

Awards received:-



West Bengal Chief Minister's Award for Empowerment of Girls, 2014.



Manthan Award for Digital Inclusion (South Asia and Asia Pacific) 2014 for Development under the e-Women and Empowerment category.



CSI-Nihilent Award, 2014-15.



National E-governance Award 2014 - 2015 awarded by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India.



Skoch Award and Order of Merit 2015 for Smart Governance.



United Nations WSIS Prize 2016 e-Government Category Champion (WSIS Action Line C7).



1st Place Winner in the Category “Reaching the Poorest and Most Vulnerable through Inclusive Services and Participation”, United Nations Public Service Award, 2017.

The Scheme was hailed as a good practice at:-

- Girls Summit organized by DFID and UNICEF (London, July 2014).
- Consultation on “Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies” organized by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Delhi, March 2015).
- Consultation on “Empowerment of Adolescent Girls” organized by the World Bank (Ranchi, May 2015).
- National Workshop on “Conditional Cash Transfers for Children: Experiences of States in India” organized by NITI Aayog, India (Delhi, December 2015).
- Trafficking in Persons (TIP) enclaves organized in the U. S. Consulate and Shakti Vahini (Siliguri, February 2016).

- Finalist in the GEM-Tech Award organized by ITU and UN Women, 2016.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the Kanyashree Prakalpa is an important tool for improving the status and well-being of the girl child in West Bengal by encouraging all adolescent girls to attend school and delaying their marriage until the age of 18. According to Mamata Banerjee, Kanyashree is BISWASHREE. She is not just happy with the impact of Kanyashree, she feels proud of her pet-brain child. Being inspired by the result of Kanyashree, she has declared another scheme for Kanyashree, which is RUPASHREE PRAKALPA. In this scheme, every Kanyashree girl will get Rs. 25000 at the time of her marriage.

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