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A Study on *Kanyashree Prakalpa* at Community Block Level in West Bengal

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Abstract

Empowerment of women is a continuous process with many dimensions. One of the conditions of human development is equality of men and women and empowerment of women. The overall development of any country is impossible without the empowerment of women. There is a long history of discrimination and deprivation against women in different countries of the world. The contribution of women in the socio-economic development of every country is important. They play an important role in the family. Despite the significant presence of women in various sectors such as agriculture, industry, services, etc., most women in developing countries are among the poorest of the poor. Empowered women would be the plausible solution to all these inequalities and questions. If we can make women economically self-sufficient, it will be possible to eliminate this inequality between men and women. In this study, we have tried to analyze the perception about *'Kanyashree Prakalpa'* and its effect towards women empowerment, if any. For this study, a particular block named Chakdaha Community Block in Nadia district of West Bengal has been selected for rigorous quality assessment. During the assessment, a structured schedule consisting of 34 different questions was placed in front of the 100 female respondents who received a scholarship of Rs. 25,000/- (Twenty five thousand) from *Kanyashree Prakalpa* after attaining age of 18 years. After data collection, they have been statistically analyzed with the help of SPSS software. The study shows that the concept of women's empowerment depends largely on higher education, self-determination, economic and social development, and ultimately employment. Such studies will be able to comprehend the significance and authenticity of women empowerment, existing in the society.

Keywords: *women empowerment, Kanyashree Prakalpa, higher education, self-determination*

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Introduction

History tells that women were very ordinary and lead a traditional life. They lived in an environment where their thinking was forced to be narrow and controlled. It was beyond their imagination to think of an outside world. They did not even think about what they had to give to the world. Women living in such orthodox societies were told that marriage was their destiny and husband their lord. Their job was to serve the lord and obey the family. The male-dominated society and its anti-woman ideology are the main reasons for the backwardness of women. This society played a hostile role in the spread of women's education because their idea was that if women became educated, it would be a great loss for the society. That is why many girls were deprived of education. But now the situation has changed a lot. Society has realized that the overall development of the country is not possible only in a male-dominated system of governance. Women make up half of the world's population. So the involvement of this huge female race is needed for economic development. And this economic development will become the main source of women's empowerment. Women empowerment is the only solution to all their problems. The status of women in societies around the world is completely different from place to place. Some social and geographical cultures have largely influenced the status of women. In order to gradually improve the status of women, the UNO observes International Women's Day on March 8 every year.

In India, the state and central governments have taken a number of measures for the advancement of women. They have adopted various plans, programs and policies for the empowerment of women. Several projects have been launched so far. For example, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Shikshashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa etc.The main objective of this study is to understand the Kanyashree Prakalpa, one of the public services initiated by the Government of West Bengal since 2013. The subsidiary objective of the study is whether *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is able to contribute towards women empowerment. The *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is an initiative taken by the Government of West Bengal to improve the lives and conditions of girls by providing cash assistance initially to economically backward families but afterwards it has been extended to all female children after attaining age of 13 years, till they continue their education up to Master's level. The objectives of *Kanyashree Prakalpa* are to i) bring all female children back to school campus; ii) reduce the dropout rate; iii) reduce the early child marriage; iv) promote girls education; and v) encourage entrepreneurship as the first step towards women empowerment.

This scheme has three components:

- Annual scholarship of 1000 rupees for girls students having 13 to 18 years of age;
- One time scholarship of 25000 rupees after attaining the age of 18 years for unmarried girls students; and
- After 18 years, if girls continue their higher studies, they will receive a higher scholarship amount up to 2500 rupees.

The eligibility criteria for the annual scholarship are:

- The student must be over thirteen years of age and under eighteen years of age;
- The student must be literate in at least eighth grade;
- The family income of the student should be not more than one lakh twenty thousand rupees per annum; at present this condition has been removed. Any student studying in a government or government approved or government aided school will get this opportunity. At present private schools students are also being given this opportunity;
- The student must be unmarried.

The one-time scholarship eligibility criteria are:

- The student must be over eighteen years of age and under nineteen years of age on the day of application;
- The student should be studying in any subject of secondary, higher-secondary, technical, vocational, sports, etc. in a registered institution.

The scheme has received multiple national and international recognitions for its design and good governance features. In June, 2017 this public service of *Kanyashree Prakalpa* had received international recognition and the United Nations honored *Kanyashree Prakalpa* with the highest public service award. Kanyashree was ranked the best among 552 such social sector schemes from across 62 countries that were nominated for the coveted award. The success of these public services is based on the following components:

- Improve lives and status of the adolescent girls in the State;
- Provide financial help to girls from disadvantaged families to pursue higher studies (now it will cover every girl from state);
- Prevent child marriage;

- Improved outcomes in terms of their health (especially facilitate the prevention of infant and maternal mortality);
- Contribute towards empowerment of girls in the state to address the immeasurable benefits for the larger society as a whole.

In the district of Nadia in West Bengal, about 26,482 approved applications for *Kanyashree Prakalpa* were released every year and the figure has been increasing.

Literature Review

Empowerment may be defined as the process of removing the factors which cause powerlessness. Empowerment has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. The term has been used more often to advocate for certain types of policies and intervention strategies than to analyze them, as demonstrated by a number of documents from the United Nations (UNDAW 2001; UNICEF 1999). Kabeer (2001), whose definition is the most widely accepted, defines empowerment as "the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". Bennett (2002) described empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them." Keller and Mbwewe (1991) described women empowerment as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination". The core of the meaning of women empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. Almost all definitions of women empowerment include some reference to an expansion of choice and freedom to make decisions and take the actions necessary to shape life-outcomes (Malhotra and Schuler 2005).

Moser (1993) focused on the interrelationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and the implementation of gender planning and practices. The work of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective, with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. Anand and Sen (1995) tried to develop a measure of gender inequality. Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998) mainly emphasized on the methodology of construction, composition and determinant of GEM. Bardhan and Klasen (1999) criticized GEM as an inadequate index of measuring women empowerment at the aggregate level. Malhotra *et al* (2002) in their paper prepared

for the World Bank highlighted methodological issues of measurement and analysis of women empowerment.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) in their paper used a policy of political reservation for women adopted in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions. They found that women were more likely to participate in the policy making process if the leader of the village community happened to be women. Mahanta (2002) sought to explain the question of women's access to or deprivation of basic human rights as the right to health, education and work, legal rights, rights of working women's, besides issues like domestic violence, all the while keeping the peculiar socio-cultural situation of the north east in mind. A workshop organized in 2003 by the Institute of Social Sciences and South Asia Partnership, Canada addressed the issues like "Proxy Women" who after being elected to Panchayat bodies were merely puppets in the hands of their husbands, relatives and other male Panchayat members; and emphasized on training program for their capacity building. Parashar (2004) examined how mother's empowerment in India is linked with child nutrition and immunization and suggested women to be empowered simultaneously along several different dimensions if they and their children were to benefit across the whole spectrum of their health and survival needs. Sridevi (2005) in her paper provided a scientific method to measure empowerment. Study of Cote de Ivoire revealed that increased female share in household income leads to increased spending on human development enhancing items (as quoted by Ranis and Stewart, 2005). Blumberg (2005) viewed that economic empowerment of women was the key to gender equality and well-being of a nation. This would not only enhance women's capacity of decision making but also lead to reduction in corruption, armed conflict and violence against females in the long run.Karat (2005) in her work discussed the issues of violence against women, their survival, political participation and emancipation.

Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on the factor like women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence and opined that if development means expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress. Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment. Deepa Narayan (2007) made an attempt to measure women empowerment for different countries and regions by using self assessed points on a ten steps ladder of power and rights, where at the bottom of the ladder stood people who were completely powerless and without rights and on the top stood those who had a lot of power and rights.

Figueras (2008) in her work studied the effect of female political representation in State legislature on public goods, policy and expenditure in the context of India and opined that a politician's gender and social position matters for policy. Barkat (www.goodgovernance.org) while discussing the present status of women in Bangladesh opined that although women as mothers are held in high respect at the individual level, there was an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making and control over her own life. Thus, from the above review of literature it is evident that a number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related issues. The World Economic Forum (2005), in its first gender gap study placed India at 53rd position among 58 nations, which shows a significant gap in male and female achievements. In the same study, the rank of India in terms of political empowerment was 24th at both primary and grassroots level. The National Population Policy 2000 specifically identified the low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of goals towards maternal and child welfare (G.O.I., 2000). NFHS-III (G.O.I., 2005-06) collected information on large number of indicators of women empowerment such as relative earnings of wives over their husbands', control over the use of these earnings, participation in household decision making, freedom of movement, gender role attitude, freedom from domestic violence, etc. Development of Alternatives with Women in a New Era (DAWN) has identified six pre-requisites for empowerment namely: resources (finance), knowledge and technology, skill-training and leadership on one side, democratic process, dialogue, participation in policy and decision-making and techniques for conflict resolution on the other (Sen and Grown, 1988).

Moser (1989) emphasized that the "empowerment approach differs from the equity approach not only in its origins from the equity approach and structure of women's oppression it identifies, but also in terms of the strategies it proposes to change the position of Third World women". The concept of the empowerment of women as a goal of development projects and programmes has been gaining wider acceptance in the 1990s. According to Kate Young (1988) the concept of empowerment, as used by development agencies, refers mainly to entrepreneurial self-reliance. Taking a critical view of the use of empowerment terminology by development agencies, Young states the term echoes the general emphasis within the mainstream on unleashing the capacity of individuals, to be more entrepreneurial and more self-reliant. It is closely allied to the current emphasis on individualistic values: people 'empowering themselves' by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.The core of the women's empowerment framework is its argument that women's development can be viewed in terms of five levels of equality, of which

empowerment is an essential element at each level. The levels are welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control (Longwe, 1990). Keller and Mbewe (1991) defines empowerment as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self reliance to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination". This is a participatory process that begins at the levels of home and community. A women's movement of empowerment ultimately represents a challenge to the bureaucracy which is hierarchical, organized to impose decisions from the top down and is dominated by men anxious to preserve their power, both at home and in the larger society.

Sharma (1991) defines empowerment as 'a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context'. According to Marilee Karl (1995) "empowerment is a process both individual and collective, since it is through involvement in groups the people most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and bring about change". Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to a greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. Kiran Devendra (1994) empowerment of women means "equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in developmental activities and in the process of decision-making". Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action (Karl, 1995). Empowerment is "the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power".

Significance

This research will make women aware of their rights and how they can get out of their limited world. Those who thought that girls were confined to four walls would be corrected. Nowadays girls have achieved many prestigious positions in various fields. This work has given us many opportunities to observe in person, how girls have brought about change in themselves.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the *Kanyashree Prakalpa* in West Bengal;

2. To evaluate the socio-economic improvement among the individuals with the help of *Kanyashree Prakalpa*;
3. To identify the influence of various factors on women empowerment;
4. To analyze the impact of *Kanyaashree Prakalpa* programme towards women empowerment.

Methodology of the Study

A community development block named Chakdaha in Nadia district has been selected for this study. In terms of quality, we have selected 100 girls who have already received financial support from the West Bengal government for the *Kanyashree* project. Throughout the assessment, data was collected through structured scheduling consisting of 34 questions including interviews. The data collected in this way has been statistically analyzed using correlation, regression, step-down method through with the help of SPSS software. The entire data was collected during November, 2018 to March, 2019.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Correlation analysis between dependent variable effectiveness of Kanyashree one time grant (Y) and 21 casual variables

Variables	'r' Value
Educational status (X_1)	0.2019 *
Occupation of parents (X_3)	-.3120 **
Availability of Aadhaar card (X_9)	-.2047 *
Role of Schools in getting Kanyashree grant (X_{15})	0.2432 *
Access village library (X_{18})	-.2132 *
Role of public libraries towards public services (X_{19})	-.2251 *
Role of Gram Panchayats in getting Kanyashree grant (X_{20})	-.3141 **

Critical value (2-Tail, 0.05) = +or- 0.197 *Significant at 5% level
Critical value (2-Tail, 0.01) = +or- 0.256 ** Significant at 1% level

The above calculations show how the independent variables are being influenced by the Kanyashree. One Time Grant (Y) which is crucial to the effect of the interrelationship. Educational statuses (X_1), viewing constructive results means girls participate very dynamically in education. This is because parents persuade them to study. If they do not allow their daughters to study, they will not get an allowance.

Occupation of parents (X_3) shows the negative result because the economic position of the parents in this region is not good. In the case of Availability of

Aadhaar card (X_9) presents negative reflection due to inadequate Aadhar Kendra or they could not be aware of the importance of the Aadhaar card.

Role of Schools in getting Kanyashree grant (X_{15}), in that case shows positive result. This means that the school has explained the importance of Kanyashree grants. In this case, parents will also encourage their daughters to go to school. The main reason is that if they do not allow them to go to school, the daughters will be deprived of this allowance. Access to the village library (X_{18}) illustrates the negative outcome in this case. This is because most villages do not have a library. There are some libraries where there is no librarian. Most of the time, the library is closed. Role of public libraries towards public services (X_{19}) presents the negative effect as they do not contribute any inferences for getting Kanyashree one time grant.

Role of *Gram Panchayats* in getting *Kanyashree* grant (X_{20}) also confirms the negative figure. The idea of the *panchayat* members is that the *Kanyashree* project is entirely a school matter and they have no role, hence they did not show much interest in it. Thus, the negative result.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	"β" value	"t" value
Occupation of parents (X_3)	-.282348	-2.152 *
Availability of Aadhaar card (X_9)	-.242134	-2.166 *

Critical value (2-Tail, 0.05) = +or- 1.987 *Significant at 5% level
Critical value (2-Tail, 0.01) = +or- 2.637 ** Significant at 1% level

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.61193	0.37352	0.21741	2.00807

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	20	191.08108	9.55405
Residual	79	318.87892	4.03644

From Table 2 we can see that all twenty one (21) variables clarify their regression effects with â and subsequent t values. It was observed that all twenty-one causal variables could explain 37.35 percent of the total collective effect ($R^2 = 0.37352$) towards the usefulness of the Kanyashree one-time grant (Y). Two of these variables are very important, such as Occupation of parents (X_3), and Availability of Aadhaar card (X_9) which explicate the result of total regression and predictor variables.

Table 3
Step-down Regression Model

Step I: X_3

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.35342	0.13307	0.12422	2.11919

Step II: X_{20}

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.45073	0.20414	0.18712	2.04563

By regression analysis from Table 3, it was found that after step 2, two variables are Occupation of parents (X_3), and Role of *Gram Panchayats* in getting *Kanyashree* grant (X_{20}) explained 20.41 percent of the total impacts, remaining nineteen (19) variables explain only about 17.16 percent of the overall effect.

Table 4
Correlation analysis between dependent variable the perception level of students on women empowerment (Z) and 22 casual variables

Variables	'r' Value
Monthly income of parents (X_4)	0.2390 *
Monthly income of family (X_5)	0.2187 *
Effectiveness of Kanyashree one time grant (X_{22})	-.2017 *

Critical value (2-Tail, 0.05) = +or- 0.197 *Significant at 5% level
Critical value (2-Tail, 0.01) = +or- 0.256 ** Significant at 1% level

It can be seen that both monthly income of parents (X_4), and monthly income of family (X_5) prove their positive figures. The income of the people of this region is not very high but they always encourage their daughters to study.

Parents know that if they study well, there are many government projects from which scholarships can be obtained. This scholarship will help their daughters a lot for higher education. After completing high school or 18 years of age, they get an allowance of Rs. 25000/- from *Kanyashree Prakalpa*.

Effectiveness of *Kanyashree* one time grants (X_{22}) demonstrates the negative image. This part shows the thoughts and realities of most parents. While collecting the data, it has been observed that a large part of Rs 25,000 was used by some

parents for their business, farming or house repairing.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	"β" value	"t" value
Effectiveness of Kanyashree one time grant (X_{22})	-.403848	-2.144 *
Role of public libraries in getting information towards women empowerment (X_{25})	-.232107	-1.998 *

Critical value (2-Tail, 0.05) = +or- 1.987 *Significant at 5% level
Critical value (2-Tail, 0.01) = +or- 2.637 ** Significant at 1% level

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.57259	0.32862	0.07664	0.99930

Analysis of Variance

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	27	35.13005	1.30111
Residual	72	71.86995	0.99819

F = 1.30347 Signif F = 0.1867

From Table 5 it is found that all twenty-two (22) variables display their regression effects with â and corresponding t value. This could explain the 32.86 keeping the 22 resulting variables together as a percentage of total cumulative impact toward students' perception level ($R^2 = 0.32862$) on female empowerment (Z). Two variables were identified, such as Effectiveness of *Kanyashree* one time grant (X_{22}), and Role of public libraries in getting information towards women empowerment (X_{25}) which are the most important and explain the entire regression effect on the predictors.

Table 6
Step-down Regression Model

Step I: X_4

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.24104	0.05810	0.04849	1.01410

Step II: X_{25}

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.33125	0.10973	0.09137	0.99099

Step III: X_{16}

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.40058	0.16047	0.13423	0.96733

Step IV: X_{27}

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
0.45165	0.20399	0.17048	0.94687

Table 6 represents the step down regression model which was applied to differentiate the important independent variables. In that condition it was found that four variables i.e. monthly income of parents (X_4), role of public libraries in getting information towards women empowerment (X_{25}), are there any Kanyashree association in your village (X_{16}) and village libraries can encourage about job related work (X_{27}) had explained 20.39 per cent of the total effect. Thus, the residual 18 variables clarify only 12.47 percent for total effect of students' perception level on female empowerment.

Conclusion

Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal is successful for many reasons. The DISE and UDISE data as collected and analyzed by NUEPA every year shows that there has been a gradual increase of female students since the inception of *Kanyashree Prakalpa*. UNICEF's study shows that the prevalence of girls getting married before age 18 has declined from 47 per cent to 27 per cent between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. National Statistics (NFHS) illustrates that the early child marriage incidences are declining. We are not saying that *Kanyashree* is responsible for that but it is obvious that *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is one of the factors behind such decline. From data as well as practical visits of the block, it is not visible that Kanyashree one time grant is directly helping girls in their financial empowerment, though we have received positive feedback in other blocks of the district. But indirectly it helps in improving the socio-economic condition of the family at large, while using this money for house repairing, family business, and other purposes. We have not seen or heard any incidences of early child marriage in this block whereas it was seen in Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. Finally, we may conclude that the *Kanyashree Prakalpa* is the benchmark for achieving its objectives, as far as public service is concerned. However, it can be said that the girls of West Bengal have been relieved from some of their hardships due to this project. This effort plays an effective role for those who want to pursue higher education in future, towards attainment of women empowerment.

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