# STUDY ON KANYASHREE PRAKALPA'S EMPOWERMENT OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN MURSHIDABAD, WEST BENGAL

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a pioneering Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme introduced in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is specifically designed to target adolescent girls aged between 13 and 18, who are at the highest risk of dropping out of school prematurely and being subjected to child marriages. The program was initiated in 2013 and has since played a vital role in enhancing the education and empowerment of girls in the state. The scheme's core principle is to provide monetary incentives to encourage girls to stay in school and delay their marriage, thereby empowering them to make more informed decisions about their future. By offering cash transfers, Kanyashree Prakalpa aims to alleviate the financial burden that often forces girls to quit school early, while also reducing the prevalence of early marriages. A remarkable feature of the program is its web-based portal, which makes detailed beneficiary information publicly accessible. This transparency not only ensures accountability but also allows for data analysis and assessment of the scheme's effectiveness.

The analysis of the Kanyashree Prakalpa's performance over the years reveals that the districts within West Bengal exhibit significant variations in their effectiveness. Some districts consistently outperform others in achieving the program's objectives, indicating that the implementation's success is not uniform across the state. These variations could be attributed to various factors, including administrative commitment, local awareness campaigns, and socioeconomic disparities among different districts. Overall, Kanyashree Prakalpa has made noticeable strides in promoting girls' education and combating child marriages. However, to ensure the program's success is more consistent and equitable across all districts, there is a need to share best practices and address the specific challenges faced by less-effective districts. The analysis underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to empower girls, reduce gender disparities, and provide equal educational opportunities, as emphasized by Swami Vivekananda's vision and the program's core objectives. By bridging these gaps, Kanyashree Prakalpa continues to be a powerful tool in fostering the education and empowerment of girls in West Bengal.

Keyword: - Empowerment, Gender Disparity, Conditional Cash Transfer, Girls' Education, West Bengal

## 1. Introduction:

Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), the legal age of marriage in India is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. However, despite the existence of this Act for several years, the practice of early child marriage continues in West Bengal. The prevalence of child marriage in West Bengal is a cause for concern, as indicated by various statistics:

According to DLHS-3, 2007-08, West Bengal ranked fifth highest in the country in terms of the prevalence of child marriage, with a rate of 54.7%. This practice was more widespread in rural areas, but even in non-slum areas of Kolkata, over a quarter of girls were married before reaching adulthood. Data from DLHS-4 for 2012-13 revealed that 32.1% of girls aged 18 years were getting married before the legal age, with higher rates in rural areas (36.3%) compared to urban areas (21.3%). Several districts, including Bankura, Murshidabad, Purba Midnapore, Bardhaman, Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Nadia, and Purulia, were identified as having the highest incidence of child marriage in the state. According to the Census of 2011, nearly 40.24% of West Bengal's 27.45 million evermarried women were married below the age of 18, in contrast to the national average of 30.21%. Data from the

Rapid Survey On Children (2013-2014) showed that 44.47% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18.

The consequences of child marriage extend beyond the act itself. For instance, while adolescent boys have a higher dropout rate (6.3%) than girls (4.2%) at the upper primary level according to DISE Flash Statistics 2013-14, the trend reverses at the secondary level. Approximately 15% of adolescent boys and 19.4% of adolescent girls in West Bengal drop out of school at the secondary level. This trend is often driven by economic factors, with impoverished parents marrying off their daughters at a young age, believing it will enhance their family's security. Unfortunately, this choice condemns girls to a life of financial and social insecurity. Field studies indicate that many women must engage in economic activities later in life, and their lack of qualifications and work experience leaves them illequipped for the labor market, making them vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. Consequently, the cycle of poverty perpetuates the feminization of poverty. Child marriage not only hinders progress in maternal and child health but also negatively affects the nutritional status of children in West Bengal. Early pregnancies resulting from child marriages lead to higher maternal and infant mortality rates and contribute to malnutrition among children. In summary, child marriage remains a significant social issue with wide-ranging consequences for the well-being and prospects of young girls and their families in West Bengal.

# 2. Background and Context

The primary objective of the Kanyashree Prakalpa project is to address the issues of girls most at risk of dropping out of school and experiencing child marriage in West Bengal. The project is designed to benefit adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. It is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme supported by a communication strategy aimed at influencing the attitudes and practices of key stakeholders, both at the family and community levels, as well as state and institutional levels. The project offers two main benefit components. First, it provides a cash benefit to girls in the target age group who remain in education each year, provided they are unmarried at the time. Second, it offers a one-time grant to girls between the ages of 18 and 19, given that they are enrolled in an educational institution and unmarried at that time. Education, in this context, encompasses secondary, higher secondary, and higher education, along with vocational, technical, and sports courses for this age group. Girls must be enrolled in recognized government-approved educational institutions in West Bengal, ensuring they have access to quality education. To maintain an equity focus, the scheme is open to girls from families below a certain income threshold, except for those with special needs, orphans, and girls residing in registered Juvenile Justice Homes.

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs like Kanyashree Prakalpa aim to encourage behavioral changes related to developmental concerns. In this case, it seeks to address issues of child marriage and low attendance and retention of adolescent girls in education. The program empowers girls by incentivizing them to continue their education for a longer period, thereby providing them with better economic and social opportunities. It also discourages early marriage, reducing the risks associated with early pregnancies, maternal and child mortality, and other health-related conditions. Furthermore, the scheme promotes financial inclusion by mandating that financial benefits are deposited into bank accounts where the Kanyashree beneficiaries themselves are the account holders. To reinforce the impact, the scheme's communication strategy is designed to bring about changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behavior related to adolescent girls among families and social networks, which can further empower girls economically.

To enhance the impact of the scheme, Kanyashree Plus, the graduation strategy, is under consideration. It aims to integrate out-of-school adolescent girls into the program and facilitate their transition from secondary to tertiary education, ensuring their access to sustainable livelihoods and employment. This includes activities such as reintegration into education, career counseling, life skills education, access to tertiary education, and public education activities to generate support for young women's empowerment. Despite these efforts, gender disparities, gender inequality, and discriminatory attitudes continue to be barriers to girls' education in West Bengal. Girls face numerous challenges, including child marriage and societal expectations that hinder their access to quality education and future opportunities. These issues are central to the broader problem of gender inequality and the lack of educational opportunities for girls in India. Efforts are ongoing to address these challenges and create an inclusive and empowering environment for adolescent girls in West Bengal.

#### 3. Empowerment women:

Empowering women is not just an option but a compelling necessity for achieving inclusive social development. Mahatma Gandhi rightly emphasized the importance of recognizing and honoring women, stating that a society

where women are not respected cannot be considered civilized. Women's empowerment is a fundamental resource for educating girls and brings numerous benefits to society. It plays a vital role in reducing gender disparities at the elementary level and positively impacting our society in the following ways:

Improved Health Outcomes: Women's education is associated with several health benefits, including longer life expectancy, lower infant and maternal mortality rates, and reduced fertility. Educated women have better access to health services and are more likely to use contraception, resulting in longer birth intervals. This has a positive impact on the health and well-being of children. Delayed Marriages: Education empowers women to make informed decisions about their lives, including the timing of their marriages. Educated women tend to marry later, which provides them with greater economic opportunities and personal choices, reducing the prevalence of early marriages. Reduced Family Size: Educated women typically have smaller families and a lower desire for a larger family size. They are more likely to space out childbirths and ensure better family planning. This contributes to reducing gender disparities in education and positively affects the overall population's well-being.

Education of Future Generations: Children of educated mothers, particularly daughters, are more likely to receive an education. Maternal education has a significant positive effect on children's educational outcomes. It helps break the cycle of gender disparity in education. Changing Perceptions: Women's empowerment challenges traditional beliefs and superstitions that may perpetuate gender inequality and limit the economic opportunities of women. By empowering women, these outdated beliefs are challenged, paving the way for more inclusive and equitable societies. Kanyashree Prakalpa, a conditional cash transfer scheme, has been introduced to address these challenges. It offers financial support to girls from lower-income families, encouraging them to continue their education. Kanyashree Prakalpa has two categories: K-1 for girls aged 13 to 18 studying in government schools and K-2 for girls aged 18 to 19 enrolled in government colleges. The financial incentives provided by this program help reduce the dropout rates among girls, especially in early stages of education, and enable them to pursue higher education. Furthermore, the scheme has the important precondition that the girls must be unmarried, which helps combat child marriage. By providing financial support to girls, the program alleviates the financial burden on families and encourages them to prioritize their daughters' education over early marriages. This, in turn, reduces child marriages in the state. The scheme has successfully increased the number of beneficiaries and has had a positive impact on reducing dropout rates among girls. By providing financial assistance, Kanyashree Prakalpa makes it possible for girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their education without facing financial obstacles. In conclusion, empowering women through initiatives like Kanyashree Prakalpa not only benefits individual girls but also has far-reaching effects on society. It contributes to gender equality, improved health outcomes, reduced fertility rates, and a brighter future for the next generation. Women's empowerment is essential for achieving development goals, reducing child mortality, and promoting economic growth, which benefits society as a whole. The government's commitment to promoting gender equality and girl's education is reflected in these initiatives. Efforts like providing bicycles to girls from economically disadvantaged families contribute to making education more accessible, particularly in rural areas. Overall, women's empowerment and education are vital for building an inclusive and equitable society.

# 4. Analysis

Eradicating poverty is a significant and long-term challenge facing India, including the state of West Bengal. It requires the implementation of effective policies that can lead to sustainable development and growth. As Swami Vivekananda aptly stated, the improvement of women's conditions is integral to the welfare of the world. Neglecting the status of women is akin to trying to make a bird fly with just one wing. The respect and empowerment of women have been pivotal to the greatness of all nations, and those that fail to respect women have struggled to achieve greatness or will continue to do so in the future. Modern statistics and socio-economic analyses support this perspective. Recent advances in growth economics emphasize the efficient use of human resources as a key factor in economic development. The status of women is of crucial importance because they constitute a significant part of the human capital. Studies have shown a strong connection between a nation's economic development and the status of women in society. Where women have higher social status and decision-making power, economic development tends to be more robust. Conversely, in regions where women are disempowered, economic progress lags. The study at hand focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme across different districts of West Bengal over a four-year period from 2013-14 to 2016-17. It aims to assess whether the scheme has had a uniform impact across the state during this timeframe. The analysis may shed light on the scheme's role in empowering women and its potential contribution to the state's economic development.

In summary, improving the status of women and empowering them is intricately linked to a nation's economic development. The study explores the relationship between the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme, the status of women in West Bengal, and the state's overall economic growth over a specific period. The data related to the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme is made available through a web-based portal, allowing public access to information about the scheme's beneficiaries. The data extracted from the portal primarily include details on beneficiaries falling into two categories: "fresh" and "renewal/continued." To gauge the overall impact and effectiveness of the scheme, the total number of beneficiaries is calculated by adding the numbers in these two categories.

Two key expectations are held regarding the scheme's data:

- (i) The number of completed beneficiaries should align with the established target.
- (ii) The number of sanctioned beneficiaries should match the number of beneficiaries who have completed the program.

In other words, the completion count should equal the target, and the sanctioned count should match the completed count.

In the analysis of the results, the difference between the number of completed and sanctioned beneficiaries for each district becomes an indicator of the district's effectiveness in implementing the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme. This difference is calculated for the years 2013-14 through 2016-17. To assess the relative effectiveness of each district, ranks are assigned based on these differences. It's important to note that a lower difference between the number of completed and sanctioned beneficiaries corresponds to a better level of effectiveness for the district. In summary, the data is crucial in assessing the performance and impact of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme in different districts. The difference between the number of beneficiaries completing the program and the number of beneficiaries officially sanctioned serves as an important metric for evaluating the effectiveness of the scheme at the district level. Lower differences are indicative of more effective district-level implementation.

Table 1.1: showing ranks of the districts on effectiveness of K1 for the years 2013 to 2016

	2013 Rank 2014 Rank		2015 Rank	2016 Rank	
District	(R113)	(R114)	(R115)	(R116)	
Bankura	4	5	8	12	
Barddhaman	14	17	13	16	
Birbhum	13	15	16	11	
Cooch Bihar	9	9	5	8	
Dakshin Dinajpur	3	6	3	4	
Darjiling	1	3	2	1	
Haora	10	8	6	10	
Hugli	5	14	12	14	
Jalpaiguri	7	4	4	6	
Kolkata	12	1	10	3	
Maldah	11	16	17	9	
Murshidabad	19	19	15	20	
Nadia	16	12	14	15	
North Twenty Four	17	20	19	19	
Paschim Medinipur	6	7	11	17	
Purba Medinipur	18	10	9	13	
Puruliya	15	11	7	5	
Siliguri	2	2	1	2	

South Twenty Four	20	18	18	18
Uttar Dinajpur	8	13	20	7

The performance of the Kanyashree Prakalpa (K1 component) across different districts of West Bengal varies from year to year, as indicated by the district rankings. In 2013, the four best-performing districts were Darjeeling, Siliguri, Dakshin Dinajpur, while the four low-performing districts were South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, and North 24 Parganas. This suggests that in the initial year of the program, some districts were more effective in implementing K1, while others faced challenges.

In 2014, the performance rankings shifted, with four low-performing districts being North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas, and Burdwan, and four good-performing districts being Kolkata, Siliguri, Darjeeling, and Jalpaiguri. This change in rankings indicates that the effectiveness of the program was not consistent from year to year and could be influenced by various factors such as local implementation, resources, and community engagement. In 2015, the four best-performing districts were Siliguri, Darjeeling, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Jalpaiguri, while the four low-performing districts were Uttar Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, and Malda. The rankings continued to fluctuate, suggesting that the impact and effectiveness of the program were not uniform across districts. In 2016, the four low-performing districts were Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, and Paschim Medinipur, while the four good-performing districts were Darjeeling, Siliguri, Kolkata, and Dakshin Dinajpur. The correlation coefficients between years (0.70, 0.82, and 0.60) indicate that the year-wise performances were not consistent. The varying rankings from year to year may be attributed to changes in local circumstances, resources, and strategies used by different districts to implement the program. Overall, the analysis highlights the need for ongoing monitoring and adaptation of the Kanyashree Prakalpa to ensure consistent and effective outcomes, as well as addressing the unique challenges faced by different districts in West Bengal.

Table 1.2: District Ranks for the Effectiveness of K2 (2013-2016)

District	2013 Rank (R213)	2014 Rank (R214)	2015 Rank (R215)	2016 Rank (R216)	
Bankura	3	7	5	4	
Barddhaman	6	17	13	17	
Birbhum	14	10	9	7	
Cooch Bihar	16	12	17	15	
Dakshin Dinajpur	5	5	6	1	
Darjiling		2	7	2	
Haora	8	9	4	3	
Hugli	10	13	11	14	
Jalpaiguri	12	1 3		11	
Kolkata	17	8	12	12	
Maldah	11	16	20	5	
Murshidabad	13	18	16	20	
Nadia	20	15	14	8	
North Twenty Four	18	20	19	16	
Paschim Medinipur	2	6	15	10	
Purba Medinipur	15	11	8	18	
Puruliya	7	4	2	9	
Siliguri	4	3	1	6	
South Twenty Four	19	14	10	19	
Uttar Dinajpur	9	19	18	13	

This table displays the ranks of districts in West Bengal concerning the effectiveness of K2 from 2013 to 2016. The ranks (R213, R214, R215, R216) indicate the district's performance for each respective year. A lower rank suggests a higher level of effectiveness. The performance of the Kanyashree Prakalpa's K2 component in different districts of West Bengal exhibited variations from year to year, with different districts performing better or worse at different times. Here's an overview of the performance of districts for each year:

In 2013, the four best-performing districts for K2 were Darjeeling, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, and Siliguri. Conversely, the four low-performing districts were Nadia, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, and Kolkata. In 2014, the performance rankings shifted, with four low-performing districts being North 24 Parganas, Uttar Dinajpur, Murshidabad, and Burdwan. The four districts that performed well were Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Siliguri, and Purulia. In 2015, the four best-performing districts for K2 were Siliguri, Purulia, Jalpaiguri, and Howrah. The four low-performing districts included Malda, North 24 Parganas, Uttar Dinajpur, and Coochbehar. In 2016, the rankings changed again, with the four low-performing districts being Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur, and Burdwan. The four districts that performed well were Dakshin Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Howrah, and Bankura. The correlation coefficients between years (0.53, 0.81, and 0.44) indicate that the year-wise performances for K2 were also inconsistent. These fluctuations in district performance could be attributed to various factors such as local implementation strategies, available resources, and community engagement, which may change from year to year. This analysis underscores the need for continued monitoring and adaptability in the implementation of the K2 component of the Kanyashree Prakalpa to ensure that it remains effective and responsive to the unique challenges faced by different districts in West Bengal.

Table 1.3: showing ranks of the districts on effectiveness for the years 2013 to 2016

District	R13	R14	R15	R16	Score	Rank
Bankura	4	6	7	12	7.3	7
Barddhaman	14	18	13	16	15.3	17
Birbhum	13	14	15	11	13.3	14
Cooch Bihar	10	9	9	10	9.5	9
Dakshin Dinajpur	3	5	4	4	4	3
Darjiling	1	2	2	1	1.5	2
Haora	8	8	5	7	7	6
Hugli	6	13	12	14	11.4	11
Jalpaiguri	9	4	3	6	5.4	4
Kolkata	12	3	10	3	6.8	5
Maldah	11	16	18	9	13.6	15
Murshidabad	19	19	17	20	18.7	19
Nadia	16	12	14	15	14.2	16
North Twenty Four	17	20	19	19	18.8	20
Paschim Medinipur	5	7	11	17	10	10
Purba Medinipur	18	11	8	13	12.3	12
Puruliya	15	10	6	5	8.9	8
Siliguri	2	1	1	2	1.5	1
South Twenty Four	20	17	16	18	17.7	18
Uttar Dinajpur	7	15	20	8	12.7	13

The analysis of the combined performance of K1 and K2 components of the Kanyashree Prakalpa in various districts of West Bengal indicates that there are some districts consistently performing well, while others struggle to achieve similar results over the years.

In 2013, districts like Darjeeling, Siliguri, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Bankura demonstrated effective implementation of both K1 and K2 components, leading to higher rankings. These districts managed to enroll more girls in the program and provide them with the necessary financial support for their education. On the other hand, districts such as South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, and North 24 Parganas faced challenges in achieving the same level of success. In 2014, the rankings shifted, indicating that the performance of districts can vary from year to year. For instance, North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Burdwan, and South 24 Parganas struggled in 2014, while districts like Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kolkata, and Jalpaiguri performed well. The analysis for 2015 again showed variations in district performance. Siliguri, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Dakshin Dinajpur remained strong, while districts like Uttar Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas, Malda, and Murshidabad faced challenges. In 2016, a different set of districts performed well, including Darjeeling, Siliguri, Kolkata, and Dakshin Dinajpur. Meanwhile, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, and Paschim Medinipur faced difficulties in implementing the program effectively. Despite the year-to-year variations in district performance, the correlation coefficients (0.71, 0.84, and 0.68) indicate a relatively consistent pattern over the four years. This consistency suggests that while some districts may experience fluctuations in performance, the overall effectiveness of the Kanyashree Prakalpa in promoting girls' education and empowerment in West Bengal remains stable. To provide a comprehensive assessment of district performance, a score model was created using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). This model combines the rankings from the last four years to generate a score that reflects the overall performance of each district. It considers the performance of both K1 and K2 components, providing a holistic evaluation of the program's impact in different districts.

#### 5. Conclusion

The analysis reveals a clustering pattern in the performance of districts in West Bengal regarding the Kanyashree Prakalpa. Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, Nadia, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, and Burdwan are identified as a distinct cluster, while the remaining districts form another cluster. Interestingly, the top-performing districts, Darjeeling and Siliguri, share the same cluster as Kolkata, indicating that these districts are the most successful in implementing the Kanyashree Prakalpa. This suggests a regional pattern where certain areas have demonstrated better effectiveness in promoting girls' education and empowerment. The variation in performance among districts can be attributed to a range of factors, including administrative commitment, local awareness and sensitization efforts, the socio-economic conditions of the population, and the extent to which the Kanyashree Prakalpa's objectives are integrated into the local education system. While gender ratios and sex ratios do play a role in the success of the program, they are not the sole determinants. The ideal scenario for the project would be uniform rankings across all districts, with no significant differences between the number of girls who have completed the program and those who were initially sanctioned. However, this ideal situation is not consistently observed.

The findings suggest that there is room for improvement in the consistent and equitable implementation of the Kanyashree Prakalpa across West Bengal. Lessons can be drawn from the best-performing districts and applied to those that are currently less effective. This could involve sharing best practices, enhancing awareness campaigns, and addressing socio-economic disparities that may hinder program success in specific areas. In summary, the Kanyashree Prakalpa has made significant strides in promoting girls' education and delaying early marriages, but there is a need for more consistent and equitable implementation across all districts to ensure that every girl in West Bengal can benefit from the program.

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