

Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes and Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal

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Abstract: *The concept of “Women empowerment” has become a burning issue for quite some time. Our society is severely gendered and there exists unequal gender relations such that women for ages have remained the victims of marginalization, inequality and oppression. To combat this practice of gender discrimination and improve the status of women in India, the Indian government has taken several actions, introduction of Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes being one of them. The West Bengal government, too, has launched such a scheme, namely “Kanyashree Prakalpa”, in 2013 to encourage girls to continue their education and delay their age of marriage and make them empowered. The present study aims to determine how successful Kanyashree Prakalpa has been in bringing about the true empowerment of women, a decade after it was first introduced, in two socioeconomically different districts of West Bengal, namely Kolkata and Purulia, the former being the capital and a megacity and the latter a backward district of West Bengal. By collecting data from randomly selected beneficiaries of both Kolkata and Purulia with the help of a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule and then statistically analyzing them for uncovering the patterns and trends of the impact of such programs on its recipients and finally by comparing the results of the scheme between the two districts via T test, the researcher found that while the Prakalpa yielded positive responses from both the districts, it made a greater impact in Purulia in its overall aspects.*

Keywords : Imagination, Literature, Indigenous, Space, Dimension

INTRODUCTION

Gender is very deeply embedded in our social system and highly unequal gender relations are prevalent in our society. Denigrated as the lower sex, women are frequently discriminated against and are perceived as less deserving than the males. Our societies, deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions, societal norms, power imbalances and cultural beliefs cast a very detrimental effect on the women and impede their advancements in life.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) (2023) India witnessed a surge in crimes against women by 4% throughout 2022, the number of reported crimes escalating from 3,71,503 cases in 2020 to 4,45,256 cases in 2022. The most alarming part was that out of this about 31.4% crimes were reported to be inflicted on the women by their husbands or relatives.

The practice of child marriage is also very widespread in India. As per the report of National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) (2019-21), 23.3% women were found to have been married before the age of 18 years and nearly 7% women in age 15-19 years were reported to be mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.

With respect to education, the research of World Economic Forum on Global Gender Gap (2024) exhibited that in matters of educational attainment gender inequality is still persistent in India as the country ranked 129th in the category with a male-female literacy rate gap standing at 17.2%.

In this respect our Government of India has introduced a number of Acts, laws and programs from time to time to facilitate the much needed and desired empowerment of women and to improve and elevate their status. One such program is the Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme (CCTs), which may be regarded as a financial tool that gives the targeted population direct cash payments upon meeting specific requirements.

Pathak (2021) has focused on various Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes that the Union as well as many State Governments of India have introduced with the aim of giving financial assistance to girl children and their families in order to raise their status and importance in both the family and the larger society.

D’Addato (2015) feels that the core idea behind this is to strengthen human capital as a developmental tool by providing financial incentives to families so that they are able to make investments in themselves by addressing their particular needs like health and education.

The Government of West Bengal, too, has introduced Kanyashree Prakalpa, a Conditional Cash Transfer scheme in the year 2013 with the dual objectives of motivating the girl children to pursue their education for long and to push their marriages at least to 18 years of age.

Mandal (2021) considered Kanyashree Prakalpa to be the future and not merely a social welfare scheme, providing an impetus to the long drawn thought of empowerment of the girls and being an answer to stop the age old prevalent practices of several derogatory customs and traditions.

The objective of the present study is to find out whether Kanyashree Prakalpa has been able to meet its primary objectives after a decade of its implementation in two socio-economically different districts of West Bengal, namely Kolkata and Purulia where the former is a megacity and the capital of West Bengal while the latter is one of the backward districts of the same. It seeks to compare the impact of the scheme in these two districts with respect to various parameters of women empowerment including the ability of the women to voice their opinions in the family, self-confidence, self-esteem, family pressure to get married and attitude of their parents towards them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review is organised into three main sections: International Perspective, National Perspective and State Level Kanyashree Prakalpa.

International Perspective

Khandker et al. (2021) have tried to assess the long-term impact of the Female Secondary Stipend and Assistance Program (FSSAP) of Bangladesh, a Conditional Cash Transfer program launched by the Government of Bangladesh in the year 1994 with the objectives of uplifting the status of women living there. With the help of longitudinal surveys of individuals and households, spanning across a couple of decades and using difference-in-differences method and instrumental variable regressions, they found the scheme not only to have significant impact on a large number of aspects related to the women such as their age of marriage, education, choices of occupation, employment, preferences of gender, etc., but also to have immense relevance during and beyond the time of Covid 19 pandemic.

Millan et al. (2019) sought to determine the impact of a Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme on two groups of children, one who received the benefits of the program while still in their mothers' womb or at the start of their childhood, and the other who received the same benefits after they reached school age, at a later stage of their lives, namely school age for the former and adolescence for the latter. By using both experimental and non-experimental datasets and a difference-in-difference method of intervention, they discovered that education had a lasting positive influence everywhere, while the intellectual, social, and emotional skills were somewhat less affected. In contrast, there were inconsistent outcomes regarding employment and income, and in certain situations, there was no effect at all.

National Perspective

Bera and Bandyopadhyay (2024) have explored the impact of several women oriented developmental programs and schemes implemented by the Government of India for the tribal population in India with special emphasis on the

tribal women belonging to the Lodha community which is a very vulnerable and weak tribal group and one of the most backward among the entire tribal community living in India. The study conducted in Goidalhi, a village in West Midnapore district of West Bengal, analysed the prevailing paradigm of development and the role of state in it to comprehend the evolution of development practices among a denotified, historically foraging tribe in modern India and found a dismal picture with respect to the realization of the objectives from the view of millennium development goals.

Suri (2023) has examined the impact of Ladli Laxmi Yojana, a Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme (CCTs) introduced by the Government of Madhya Pradesh in 2007 with the objectives of providing monetary help to families having girl children on meeting certain requirements for preventing sex selective abortions, early marriages of the daughters and to improve their health and education. On the basis of a thorough survey of literature, collecting relevant data from the governmental records of the scheme and from the National Family Health Survey, the study found the scheme to be mostly successful in achieving its objectives.

Parmar and Sharma (2020) have tried to find out the impact of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, a CCTs initiated by the Government of India in January, 2015 on the empowerment of girl children and society. Analyzing the data collected by means of a questionnaire, the scheme was found to contribute significantly towards the empowerment of women inflicting a positive shift in the mindsets of the people towards gender equality, acknowledgement of the rights of the girls and a marked decrease in pre natal sex determination.

State Level Kanyashree Prakalpa

Sarkar (2022) has examined the impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa in the district of Bankura in West Bengal with regard to different parameters like awareness of the rights, employability, etc. Using substantial surveys, interviews, questionnaires, and case studies, as well as both primary and secondary data, he found that certain actions like revising the income ceiling, improving collaboration among implementation bodies, raising the amount of the scheme, etc., could be undertaken to ensure better effectiveness of the scheme.

Karim et al. (2021) have analysed the effects of Kanyashree Prakalpa, on the learning and empowerment levels of its beneficiaries in West Bengal. The study also shed light on the challenges faced by the girls during the Covid-19 outbreak. Using document based logical analysis, they discovered that even though a number of problems seriously interfered with the girls' schooling, the Kanyashree beneficiaries mostly remained unaffected in this aspect and continued their studies.

It may thus be stated that all the above mentioned reviews although dealt with Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes, none of them including Kanyashree Prakalpa have compared the effect of the scheme between two socio-economically different districts, namely Kolkata and Purulia of West Bengal. Moreover, none of the above studies dealt with the changes brought in the perception of empowerment of women in different parameters like voicing opinion, increased self-confidence, enhanced self-esteem, reduced family pressure to get married, change in the attitude of the parents after a decade since the implementation of Kanyashree Prakalpa

METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to make a comparison regarding the impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa between the districts of Kolkata and Purulia of West Bengal.

The researcher required both qualitative and quantitative tools to arrive at the holistic assessment and as such adopted the Mixed Method Approach. All the data cannot be quantified as the researcher has to take recourse to focus group discussions with the beneficiaries of the Kanyashree Prakalpa and interview the parents of the beneficiaries of the scheme; hence the study had to adopt Descriptive Survey Method as well.

All the recipients of Kanyashree Prakalpa in the entire state of West Bengal constituted the population of the study, while a total of 500 Kanyashree beneficiaries (250 each from the two districts of Kolkata and Purulia), representing the total population comprised the sample of the same.

All the beneficiaries were aged between 23- 25 years as the study sought to find out the impact of the scheme on its beneficiaries after a decade since its implementation in the year 2013.

Thus, the study adopted a two - stage sampling:

- Kolkata and Purulia districts were selected by the process of Stratified Random Sampling from the respective lists of advanced and backward districts of West Bengal.
- 250 recipients of the Prakalpa from each of the two districts were then selected by means of Simple Random Sampling.

The urban population of West Bengal is concentrated in Kolkata which is a megacity and the capital of the state having an average literacy rate of 87.14% of which the male and female literacy rates are 89.08% and 84.98% respectively. Out of all the districts of West Bengal, Kolkata is the second highest in terms of literacy rates in the state.

Purulia has been the recipient of Backward Regions Grant Fund in 2006 and is considered as one of the backward districts of West Bengal as well as India. With an average literacy rate of 65.38% where male literacy rate is 78.85% and that of female is 51.29%, Purulia ranks 17th amongst all the districts of West Bengal as regards literacy rate.

These clearly highlight the differences between the districts of Kolkata and Purulia of West Bengal and explain the reasons behind selecting these two districts as the area of present research.

The tools that were used for collecting data and constituted the primary sources included:

- Structured Questionnaire for the 500 beneficiaries of the Kanyashree Prakalpa, 250 from each of the two districts of Kolkata and Purulia of West Bengal, comprising close ended items validated by academic experts and reliability calculated by Cronbach's Alpha (0.70).
- Semi - Structured Interview Schedule for the parents of the recipients of the scheme to find out the opinions of the stakeholders and also duly validated by academic experts and reliability calculated by Cronbach's Alpha (0.70).

- Focus group discussions were also arranged by the researcher where the beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa in Kolkata and Purulia were made to sit together and discuss the impact of the scheme on their lives in various parameters. This was specifically done to find out any missing gap, if there was any at all, in the collection of data and also to compare and cross check the data gathered from other different sources.
- The researcher also acted as a silent observer, where necessary, at the scene of activities that were supposed to prove beneficial for the area of research.

Besides, the researcher relied on some secondary sources also that included books, journals, periodicals, internet, newspapers and government data and records to arrive at the conclusion.

The frequency analysis of the questionnaire samples was analysed and interpreted to deduce the substantial findings. The raw data that was collected from several primary and secondary sources was also presented in a tabular form to arrive at the results according to each domain of the formatted questionnaire. The resultant data was then put in the excel format and the statistical package of the google form exhibited the raw data in numerous statistical formats and assisted in additional data interpretation. Then to arrive at the final conclusion of the study, the results of the interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observations were also evaluated and illustrated.

Finally, the difference in the data obtained from the above mentioned two districts of West Bengal was statistically analysed further by means of T test of difference to determine any considerable difference between the two sets of data.

RESULTS

The study conducted on a total number of 500 beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa aged between 23-25 years, 250 beneficiaries belonging to each of the two districts of Kolkata and Purulia of West Bengal, found that several beneficiaries were not only married but also have endorsed motherhood at the time of the survey. Several of them were employed also. The following table gives a clear picture of the same.

Table 1: Status of the Respondents

Variables	Kolkata	Purulia
Pursuing Studies	164	148
Married	170	221
Mother	132	193
Employed	194	169

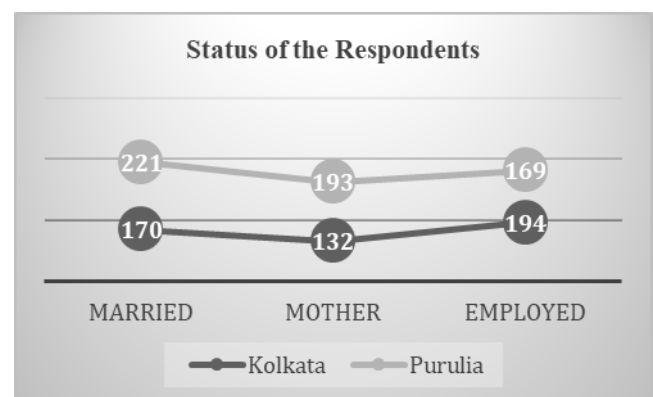


Figure 1: Status of Respondents

Results of the Questionnaire

The impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa on these beneficiaries as already mentioned was sought to be assessed by means of a structured questionnaire that was designed covering a number of parameters. The following responses were received from the respondents:

Table 2: Percentage of Beneficiaries Observing Changes post Kanyashree Prakalpa

Parameters	Kolkata	Purulia
Voicing Opinion	78	83
Increased Self-confidence	83.5	93
Enhanced Self-esteem	81	93.5
Reduced Family Pressure to Get Married	76.5	92
Change in the Attitude of the Parents	46	79

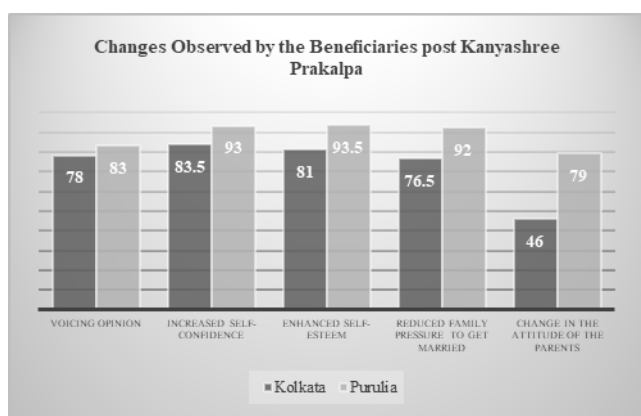


Figure 2: Trends Observed in the Perception of the Beneficiaries

Results Obtained from Focus Group Discussions and Non-participant Observation

The beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa mostly reiterated the same feelings that they expressed in the questionnaire provided to them.

Results Obtained from Interviews of Parents

Interviewing the parents of the beneficiaries the study found that Kanyashree Prakalpa has been successful in achieving its major objectives. Majority of the parents were found to have better views regarding their daughters and wanted better education and delayed marriage for them. They were more confident about their daughters' future and gave more importance on their employment than their marriage.

Results Obtained Via T Test

The results of the T test reflected that the scheme has greater impact in Purulia which is a backward region as compared to Kolkata, an advanced district of West Bengal.

DISCUSSION

Obtained data, tables and statistical calculations bear ample testimony that Kanyashree Prakalpa has been mostly successful in achieving its objectives after a decade of its implementation in both Kolkata and Purulia keeping at par

with the earlier research works on the same. However, a marked difference is seen in the efficacy of the Kanyashree Prakalpa between a socio-economically advanced district, Kolkata and that of a backward district of West Bengal namely, Purulia.

Analysis of all the data and information gathered revealed that this is to be attributed to the fact that the Kanyashree beneficiaries in Kolkata usually enjoy higher standard of living in comparison to their Purulia counterparts so that they often view the program's benefits as opportunities to make their existing conditions only better as against the beneficiaries of Purulia who consider the program a crucial tool for addressing their core problems. Hence the latter respond more to the scheme than the former. Being a backward area, Purulia experience a relative sense of deprivation in comparison to Kolkata, resulting in Kanyashree Prakalpa becoming potentially more successful in resolving the associated problems and enhancing the living conditions of its beneficiaries in Purulia. Moreover, the parents of the beneficiaries of Kolkata were found to be more progressive about their daughters than those in Purulia, so that the Prakalpa had a lesser impact on them than in Purulia.

However, the impact of CCTs on women empowerment in West Bengal may also be assessed by other currently active CCTs in the state like Rupashree Prakalpa, LakshmirBhandar, etc. which may be compared with the effect of Kanyashree Prakalpa in future research as this has remained beyond the purview of the present research. The present study has also restricted itself in dealing with only one advanced and one backward district of West Bengal. A comparative analysis between the effects of CCTs in all the advanced districts vis-a-vis all the backward districts of the state may thus also be taken up for further studies.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that Kanyashree Prakalpa has been instrumental in alleviating the position and status of its beneficiaries in the family and the society both in Kolkata and Purulia districts of West Bengal. The scheme is found to be successful in providing a sense of worth to the weak and help in providing them with the much needed sense of empowerment. However, it needs to be kept in mind that providing short term help is unlikely to keep alive the flame of success for long. It surely may provide the base for future success but that needs to be closely taken care of.

Besides making the girls educated, provision should be made to make them employable too. Financial independence along with education play the greatest role in bringing about the true empowerment of a woman which one can never achieve if she remains dependent on others specially her husband for financial matter. It also needs to be observed that the fund is utilized properly for the purpose it is intended too.

All these will make Kanyashree Prakalpa along with other CCTs all the more effective in achieving their intended objectives.

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