



EMPOWERMENT OF GIRLS AND KANYASHREE PRAKALPA: THE PRESENT SCENARIO

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Abstract

Empowerment of girls stands for the capacity-building and reorientation of roles played by them in our society. Education is the main weapon in the hands of the girls to attain empowerment. But at present, educational institutions (except some classes at the school level) are closed nationwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this situation girls' access to education has become more difficult. The **objective** of this paper is to make an analysis of the impact of the scheme **KanyashreePrakalpa (KSP)** on girls' education and capacity-building in the State of West Bengal. This study also **aims** to trace and focus the difficulty faced by the girl-students during the pandemic. Data have been collected from policy statements, newspaper reports, journals and relevant documents. The **method** used in this study is the **document-based logical analysis**. Through an extensive investigation, the researcher has identified some **major issues** and **challenges** like poverty, digital divide, domestic work pressure, lack of nutrition that are posing serious threats during the institutional closure in this pandemic situation. But **it has been found** that the girls, enrolled in the KanyashreePrakalpa, are able to continue their education and are paving their way to capacity-building and self-empowerment.

Keywords: KanyashreePrakalpa, MDGs, SDGs.

1. Introduction

At the breaking of the current Century the world leaders had set up certain goals called the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals)-2020 comprising following promises:

1. Ending poverty and hunger
2. Achieving Universal Primary Education
3. Promoting Gender equality and Empower women
4. Reducing child mortality
5. Improving maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other disease
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development

The year 2015 was the deadline and the global community failed to achieve many of the above in the true sense and that paved the way to SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)-2015 as follows:

- 1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reducing Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

The deadline for achieving the above is 2030 and in the 6th year of adoption of the above targets it is realized that women's empowerment remains a vital issue besides education, health and employment. For this, girls' education should be a priority area and a vital component of development in the 21st century world.

Capacity-building of girls lead to their empowerment and the reorientation of roles played by them in our society. Education is the main weapon in the hands of the girls to attain empowerment. Several factors like child marriage, domestic responsibility, early pregnancy etc. create obstacles against girls' empowerment and their equal participation in education.

2. Objectives

- To make an analysis of the impact of KSP on girls' education and capacity-building in the State of West Bengal,
- To trace and focus the difficulty faced by the girl-students during the pandemic.



3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Data have been collected from policy statements, newspaper reports, journals and relevant documents. The method used in this study is the **document-based logical analysis**.

4. Empowerment of girls through KSP

4.1 Empowerment of girls in Independent India

Nowadays 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' is a tagline of the Union Government. India shall be Atmanirbhar when we make our women atmanirbhar(independent). Education can pave the way of such independence. Education acts for better capacity building which in turn gives empowerment towards independence. There is no denying the fact that Education and National Development have the relationship of a rising spiral touching each other at every point. In West Bengal, the Kanyashreeprakalpa, the United Nation's 'best public service' awarded incentive scheme for girls is a step forward to ensure the regular and formal education of girls up to the post Graduate level, withering the possibility of child marriage and also mortality of mother and child.

4.2 The Kanyashree Scheme

To overcome these problems, the Government of West Bengal on 8th March, 2013 initiated a scholarship scheme, the **KanyashreePrakalapato**improve the life and status of the 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 is discouraged, it would automatically lead to a better life. The bestway to deal with the grave problems like early marriage, premature mother hood, related health hazards and mortality is tohelpgirls pursue formal education. This Project has been given recognition by the United Kingdom's Department of International Development and the United Nations.

Kanyashree Prakalpa has three components K1,K2 and K3. K1 provides for an Annual scholarship of Rs. 1000/- per head for unmarried girls studying in Classes-VIII to XII (13-18 years of age) in any formal educational system. K2 provides Rs.25000/- to an unmarried girl as a onetime stipend as she crosses 18 years of age, provided she is in regular studies. K3 provides Rs. 2500/- per month to an unmarried girl student for pursuing post graduate studies in Science having 45% marks in the undergraduate level. For Arts& Commerce stream the amount is Rs.2000/- per month under the same condition. The bar of annual family income has been removed since 2017 to extend thecoverage of the Scheme.The simplicity of design, easy accessibility, targeted communication strategy, convergent implementation and focus on raising the financial, social and self-worth of the girls are supposed to be the striking features associated with the project. The modalities are straightforward and the girl child feel empowered getting a Bank account in her name.

4.3 Efficacy of the scheme

The scheme was initiated in 8th March, 2013. It is found that during the course of last five years, girls dropout decreased and in the terminal Board examinations the girl candidates outnumber the boys in 10th and 12th standard in the different Districts. Child marriage is now a rare phenomenon in West Bengal. Early marriage, premature motherhood related health hazards and mortality of both mother and child have also decreased.

In accordance with the Annual State of Education Report (ASER)-2020 the school dropout rate in the State of West Bengal declined from 3.3% to 1.5% while it went up from 4% to 5.5% at the National level. West Bengal occupies the top position in the decline of dropout rate among school students during 2018-2020.The school dropout rates have been arrested in rural area of the state across various age groups but it appears to be the highest in the 15-16 years of age group where the decline is 4.8%. Across 7-16 years of age group girls have taken a lead in opting for school admission.

4.4 Effect of the Pandemic

But this unforeseen and unfortunate pandemic situation due to COVID-19 and long closure of educational Institutions have posed a serious threat to the regular studies of the girl children. Being confined at their houses they are bound to bear the brunt of household chores. Digital divide especially in the rural areas has deprived them of e-learning at least in the form of a WhatsApp group due to either lack of a smart phone at home or absence of a reliable internet service provider. They are deprived of the nutritional guarantee of cooked mid-day-meal programme and also, they are deprived of the weekly iron and folic acid supplement tablets which are provided through the schools nationwide to fight anemia. As regards quality education, such long absenteeism makes them almost equivalent to 'out of school children'. Moreover, disbursement of the amount of stipend to the beneficiaries is often disrupted by the Bank for KYC issues, which they cannot address due to home confinement.



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5. Conclusion

The situation, as it is prevailing now, the education of the girls has to be managed in special manner without calling them back to schools. Thus, the State Government at School Education Department has taken steps to distribute rations of mid-day-meals and WIFS tablets to the parents of the school goers maintaining appropriate health and hygiene protocols. Also, plan has been adopted to send activity tasks to the students by hand of the parents, so that they remain in practice and exercise. The KanyashreePrakalpa being a portal based online programme, the schools and the Community Development Blocks are indulged in registration and renewal process of the scheme. The stipend of the Prakalpa may enable them to buy smart phones etc. to attend online classes. The Banks also are hoped to consider the KYC issues of the girl student with sympathy in this pandemic situation. Be it COVID or a morbid, girl students must be taken care of our pre-pandemic, during pandemic and post-pandemic and KanyashreePrakalpa is an important tool in that.

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