



# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN WEST BENGAL: AN ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

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**Abstract:** This study explores women's empowerment in West Bengal through selected government welfare schemes, such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar. These initiatives have been introduced to address various socio-economic challenges faced by women and girls in West Bengal. The research adopts a qualitative approach based on the analysis of secondary data collected from government websites, academic research articles, and newspaper reports related to these schemes. The study evaluates the objectives, impacts, and limitations of these programmes in promoting women's empowerment. The schemes operate through various mechanisms, including promoting girls' education, providing financial assistance for marriage, and offering direct financial support to women. The findings suggest that these welfare initiatives have contributed to enhancing women's empowerment in West Bengal; however, certain implementation challenges and limitations remain.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Government welfare schemes, West Bengal, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, Lakshmir Bhandar

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women are one of the fundamental pillars of society. Therefore, their empowerment is essential for overall societal development. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), women's empowerment is the process by which women become aware of gender-based unequal power relations and gain a greater voice to speak out against inequality within the home, workplace, and community. This implies that women's empowerment is not only a social goal but also an essential requirement for the sustainable development of society.

Despite the importance of women's empowerment, in countries like India, including the state of West Bengal, women continue to face various social-economic and educational challenges. To address these issues, the Government of West Bengal has introduced many welfare schemes for women, such as Kanyashree Prakalpa (2013), Rupashree Prakalpa (2018), and Lakshmir Bhandar (2021). This study focuses on assessing the impact of these schemes on women's socio-economic conditions and their empowerment in West Bengal.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine the welfare schemes for women in West Bengal, such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar.
- To analyse the impact of these schemes on women's socio-economic and educational conditions.
- To assess the role of these schemes in promoting women's empowerment.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined the concept of women's empowerment and state that it refers to providing women with economic, social, and educational rights without discrimination (Pahari, 2025). Thus, women's empowerment is a multidimensional process. Building on this concept, the Government of West Bengal has implemented various welfare schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar to enhance women's socio-economic conditions and empowerment.

Researchers show that the Kanyashree Prakalpa policy has successfully reduced child marriage rates and increased girls' access to formal education in West Bengal. This policy has also promoted economic self-dependence and social awareness among girls (Chattopadhyay, 2023).

Rupashree Prakalpa is a welfare scheme introduced by the Government of West Bengal to provide financial assistance to economically disadvantaged families at the time of their daughter's marriage, thereby reducing financial burden and supporting women's social security (ddinajpur.nic.in & bankura.gov.in).

Several researchers show that the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme plays a significant role in reducing poverty and promoting gender equality. This scheme also empowers women economically (Senapati & Ghosh, 2024).

Overall, existing studies highlight the positive role of welfare schemes in improving women's socio-economic and educational conditions in West Bengal.

### IV. RESEARCH GAP

Despite these findings, most studies focus on individual welfare schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar. There is limited research examining the combined impact of these schemes on women's overall socio-economic empowerment in West Bengal. Some studies also have a specific geographical focus while examining these schemes. Additionally, certain studies have limitations related to sample size. Moreover, most researchers primarily focus on the positive impacts of these schemes, leading to a lack of critical analysis.

### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative research approach based on the analysis of secondary data. Information has been collected from government reports, newspaper articles, and academic research papers related to schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar.

### VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Before analysing the impact of welfare schemes, it is essential to understand the overall socio-economic and educational condition of women in West Bengal. Women's status can be assessed through various indicators such as literacy rate, employment opportunities, financial independence, and participation in social spheres. Although there has been noticeable progress in these areas over time, significant challenges still persist, particularly in terms of economic dependency, gender inequality, and limited opportunities. This context highlights the importance of government interventions aimed at improving women's overall empowerment. The Government of West Bengal has introduced several welfare schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar.

#### 1. KANYASHREE PRAKALPA

West Bengal has a large adolescent population between the ages of 10 and 19 years, with a population of 1.73 crore, out of which 48.11% are girls. During this period of adolescence, child marriage and trafficking are issues of major social concern, which can detrimentally affect the education, health, and overall development of girls. In this context, Kanyashree Prakalpa emerged as a significant initiative of the Government of West Bengal, introduced in 2013 to address these challenges (wb.gov.in).

##### 1.1 Key Features of Kanyashree Prakalpa:

The scheme aims to address several socio-economic challenges through the following key features. It promotes the education of girls at the secondary and higher secondary levels and discourages early marriage. The scheme also works to eradicate malnutrition among the girl child. It helps to reduce the incidence of dropouts, especially among girls from poor families. Additionally, it seeks to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of the girl child.

This scheme achieves these objectives through the provision of financial incentives to eligible beneficiaries, thereby encouraging continued education and social empowerment. Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided in the form of an annual scholarship for girls aged 13 to 18 years to support their continued education. Furthermore, a one-time grant of ₹25,000 is awarded upon attaining the age of 18, subject to the condition that the beneficiary remains unmarried and continues her education (kanyashree.wb.gov.in).

## 1.2 Impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa on Women's Empowerment:

The Kanyashree Prakalpa has significantly impacted women's empowerment by increasing female enrolment in education. After the implementation of this scheme, enrolment rates rose from approximately 43.94% to 59.04% at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Nandi et al., 2024). The scheme has contributed to a decline in child marriage rates, which is significant for empowering women and ensuring their educational continuity (M.,2023). The Kanyashree Prakalpa has also decreased the school dropout rate among girls by providing a one-time grant after attaining the age of 18 (Mondal & Deb, 2023). The scheme has particularly benefited girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby enhancing their capacity to participate meaningfully in society ("Kanyashree Prakalpa –Prosperity Towards Right to Education for Women," 2023).

## 1.3 Limitations and Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa:

Despite its significant achievements, the scheme is not free from certain limitations and challenges. Socio-cultural barriers, such as the persistence of child marriage in some areas, continue to limit the full effectiveness of the programme. Studies and policy discussions indicate that financial incentives alone cannot completely eliminate deeply rooted social practices related to early marriage (Dutta & Sen, 2021). Another important challenge is limited awareness and accessibility, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, which restricts the participation of eligible beneficiaries. Implementation issues, including bureaucratic delays and inadequate coordination among administrative institutions, may also hinder the timely delivery of benefits (Ali & Ali, 2024).

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that demand-side interventions such as cash-transfer schemes should be complemented by improvements in the broader educational system and social infrastructure in order to produce long-term results (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2020). Finally, the absence of a comprehensive long-term evaluation makes it difficult to fully assess the sustained impact of the scheme on women's empowerment. Addressing these structural, implementation, and monitoring challenges is therefore essential to ensure more equitable and lasting outcomes.

## 2. Rupashree Prakalpa

The Government of West Bengal introduced Rupashree Prakalpa in April 2018 as a social welfare initiative aimed at supporting economically disadvantaged families. Under this scheme, a one-time financial grant of ₹25,000 is provided for the marriage of an adult daughter of these families, subject to the condition that the annual family income does not exceed ₹1.5 lakh (wb.gov.in & myscheme.gov.in).

### 2.1 Key Features of Rupashree Prakalpa:

Rupashree Prakalpa aims to address certain socio-economic challenges. It seeks to prevent child marriage and reduce the financial burden of marriage expenses. The scheme provides a one-time financial aid of ₹25,000 to beneficiaries who must be at least 18 years old, and the groom must be at least 21 years old. The beneficiary must be a resident of West Bengal. The amount is directly transferred to the bank account of the beneficiary to ensure transparency and prevent exploitation. The amount is received before the date of the social marriage. This grant is applicable only for the first marriage of the girl. Furthermore, the implementation of the scheme involves local administrative bodies, which assist in verifying eligibility and facilitating the distribution of benefits to the beneficiaries (Biswas,2019 & myscheme.gov.in).

### 2.2 Impact of Rupashree Prakalpa on Women's Empowerment:

Rupashree Prakalpa has had a limited but specific and significant impact on women's empowerment. This scheme has contributed to preventing child marriage among girls and has helped reduce the financial burden of marriage for economically disadvantaged families. In addition, the scheme requires the beneficiary to have her own bank account, which promotes a sense of financial awareness and inclusion among women. These conditions also encourage women to understand the importance of money management. Furthermore, having an individual bank account may contribute to increasing their social acceptance and visibility within the family and society (Biswas,2019& myscheme.gov.in).

### 2.3 Limitations and Assessment of Rupashree Prakalpa:

Despite the positive impact of Rupashree Prakalpa on the socio-economic aspects of women's empowerment, the scheme also has certain limitations. As it focuses mainly on reducing the financial burden of marriage for adult girls (wb.gov.in 2018 district portal), it does not provide a long-term empowerment solution for women. The scheme does not offer any assistance for women's higher education and primarily focuses on marriage-related support. It can be argued that the scheme provides short-term relief rather than ensuring sustainable empowerment.

## 3. Lakshmir Bhandar

"Lakshmir Bhandar" is a flagship program launched by the Government of West Bengal in February 2021 to provide monthly financial assistance to women aged 25 to 60 years belonging to economically weaker sections of society, to promote women's economic empowerment. At present, the scheme provides ₹1,700 per month to women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes categories, and ₹1,500 to women from other categories. The amount was increased from the initial provision, reflecting the government's effort to strengthen financial support for women (Ghosh,2025).

### 3.1 Key Features of Lakshmir Bhandar:

The Lakshmir Bhandar welfare scheme aims to promote women's economic empowerment through direct cash transfer. The targeted beneficiaries are women aged 25 to 60 years who are not employed in a permanent salaried government job. Beneficiaries must be residents of West Bengal and enrolled in the Swasthya Sathi health scheme. Funds are directly deposited into the applicant's Aadhaar-linked single bank account, which ensures transparency and reduces unnecessary delays. The scheme also provides regular financial support, which helps women manage their basic household needs (Ghosh,2025).

### 3.2 Impact of Lakshmir Bhandar on Women's Empowerment:

The Lakshmir Bhandar scheme has significantly impacted women's empowerment by providing monthly financial assistance to women. It encourages greater participation of women in socio-economic activities and contributes to improving their quality of life (Senapati & Ghosh, 2024). A study conducted in districts such as Jhargram indicates that beneficiaries have experienced positive changes in their economic conditions and living standards (Senapati & Ghosh, 2024). In addition, the scheme promotes financial inclusion by encouraging women to maintain active bank accounts in their own names, which has increased the social participation of women and helps them understand financial management, an important aspect of women's empowerment. Furthermore, this financial support enhances women's roles in household decision-making as they gain greater control over certain expenditures and daily needs (Government of West Bengal,2021).

### 3.3 Limitations and Assessment of Lakshmir Bhandar:

The scheme has played a significant role in women's financial empowerment. However, it can be argued that while the scheme provides important financial support, reliance on cash transfers alone may not address deeper structural issues such as the lack of employment opportunities and skill development, which are essential for long-term and sustainable development (World Bank,2014). Moreover, the amount of financial assistance may not be sufficient to meet essential household needs in the absence of a stable source of income. Studies on cash transfer programs also suggest that while such schemes provide short-term relief, they may not ensure sustainable economic independence without skill-based initiatives or employment opportunities (UNDP,2016). Limited awareness in rural areas and among marginalised women further restricts access. Additionally, the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation makes it difficult to measure the scheme's long-term impact on women's economic empowerment. A recent Times of India report notes that about 7,000 rural women in Moyna Gram Panchayat have not received benefits, prompting the Calcutta High Court to seek an explanation(timesofIndia.indiatimes.com).

## VII. COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF SELECTED GOVERNMENT SCHEMES ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar have all played a significant role in women's empowerment. Each scheme has its own features and works differently in promoting women's empowerment in West Bengal. In this study, the key features, limitations, and impacts of all these schemes have already been analysed. A comparative analysis shows that Kanyashree Prakalpa has a strong impact on long-term empowerment as it focuses on the education and skill development of girls, helping them achieve socio-economic independence in the future. By contrast, Rupashree Prakalpa mainly provides financial support at the time of marriage, which reduces the financial burden of families but has a limited impact on long-term empowerment. On the other hand, Lakshmir Bhandar provides monthly financial assistance, which supports women in managing household expenses and increases their participation in economic activities. However, it does not fully ensure sustainable development as it does not directly address employment opportunities or skill development. Therefore, it can be said that while Kanyashree Prakalpa contributes more significantly to long-term empowerment, Lakshmir Bhandar also plays an important role at a later stage of a woman's life by providing continuous financial support. Thus, all three schemes contribute to women's empowerment in different ways and at different stages of life.

## VIII. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Lakshmir Bhandar have played an important role in women's empowerment in West Bengal. Kanyashree Prakalpa promotes girls' education and discourages early marriage, whereas Rupashree Prakalpa and Lakshmir Bhandar primarily provide financial assistance to support women and economically disadvantaged families. However, challenges and limitations remain, such as socio-cultural barriers, administrative delays, misuse of funds, limited awareness, and inadequate monitoring, which continue to restrict their full potential. Reports of missed payments in rural areas or incidents of fund diversion further emphasise the need for stronger implementation and accountability.

To improve the effectiveness of these schemes, awareness must be created in rural and marginalised communities. Strengthening monitoring systems, ensuring transparent fund management, and conducting regular long-term evaluations are also essential. Addressing these issues can enhance the efficiency and sustainability of these initiatives and further support women's empowerment in West Bengal.

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