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IMPLEMENTATION OF KANYASHREE PRAKALPA IN WEST BENGAL A STEP TOWARD THE INCLUSIVE GROWTH THROUGH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS

Malay Das

Assistant Professor , Department of Philosophy , Chandernagore Government College , West Bengal.

Abstract:-A nation without empowering women cannot attain an inclusive growth through sustainable development. The socio-economic development of a nation has an integral relation with the status of women in its society. The justification of the claim will be found if we go through the past history of development around the world. It would be found that those countries had taken sincere and effective initiative to empowering women attained an inclusive growth and the progresses of those countries in all verticals of civilization are much stable. After independence, in spite of taking several measures, India is still lagging far behind comparing to developed nations in the question of women empowerment. Till today a significant percentage of girls in India do not have elementary education. Study reveals that the tendency of dropout from school and the prevalence of child marriages are the primary factors which restrict women basic literacy in India. The state of West Bengal is no exception of it. The state since last three decades has performed worse in question of prevention of girl child marriage, expansion of elementary education among girls specially in backward community and some other aspects relevant to women empowerment in comparison to some states in India. Lack of women empowerment also drags the state down in the ranking of economic development in national level. The newly elected government realizing this lacuna introduces Kanyashree Prakalpa in the year 2013. The implementation of this social welfare scheme not only ensures the basic literacy to all girls in the state, it would also be an effective tool to attain the inclusive growth through sustainable development.

Keywords:Sustainable development, Women empowerment, Kanyashree Prakalpa.

INTRODUCTION: (A Bird-Eye View on Women Status in India during Different Periods)

VEDIC PERIOD

the status with men in all aspects of life and used to It is found in the works of ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana that women had access to education in the early Vedic period. As the evidence of it we found in Vedic literature expressions such as,

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as their will Maitreyi,

In the Vedic age there was both the custom of 'Kanyavivaha' where the marriage of a pre-puberty girl was arranged by her parents and 'praudhavivaha' where the girls were married off after attaining puberty. There was also the custom of 'Swayamvara' where girls, usually of royal families, had the freedom to choose her husband from among the eligible bachelors invited to her house for the occasion. Rigvedic verses suggest that women at that time generally used to marry at the mature age. It reveals that during ancient India women used to enjoy a free and liberal life. They had the right to education, the right to choose life partner and most importantly they had the right to opinions regarding each and every aspects of society. There was no gender discrimination in the society at that time. Women during those days used to enjoy a dignified and respectful status in the society.¹

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The study found that the status of women began to decline since 500 B.C. The status of women in Indian further deteriorated in the society during the medieval period. At that time it became a norm in the society that a girl should be married before reaching her age of 16. The custom was so rigid that if a girl in a family remains spinster above the age of 16, the members of the family had to face various social impediments. In order to protect themselves from societal ire the parents of a girl used to arrange the marriage of the girl much before she reaching at the age of 16. In many cases the marriage might be against of the wellness of the girl. In that way girl child marriage becomes a norm in the society. It was the first nail of women freedom. Parada pratha was imposed. Women movements had been restricted. Their movements primarily centralized at the house. It practically made women prisoners at their own home. Gradually, women had lost their access to education and simultaneously lost their right to opinions. During that time widow remarriage was banned and in the name of sanctity, cruel satidaha pratha (burnt alive young widow with her dead husband) was introduced in the Hindu community. Widows who did not choose to be sati used to live her entire life with a great agony. They used to shave heads, live in isolation, and being shunned by society. In that way, women gradually loosing each and every freedom what they once used to enjoy. Gender discrimination became the part of the society which ruled every aspect of social life. Women became marginalized in the society and their life completely governed by the irrational and cruel rules of the patriarchy society.²

BRITISH COMMUNAL PERIOD

During the British Raj many social reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Swami Vivekananda, Jytirao Phule and some other enlightened persons realized that what is going on in the society in the name of religion and custom not only inhumane to women but adversely affects the larger interest of the society. They argued for women's freedom and fought for it. Some improvements were made. Satidaha pratha abolished, women got back their right to education, widow remarriage law was introduced, and some other positive developments occurred at that time.³

STATUS OF WOMEN AFTER POST INDEPENDENCE

After independence in 1947 under supervision of some eminent Indian scholars and personalities the Constitution of India had been formed. A special attention is given in the

constitution to prevent gender discrimination and in order to keep women's interest. The Constitution of India by its article 14 guarantees to all Indian women equal status with men, by article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity and guarantees equal pay for equal work by Article 39(d). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)), and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief. (Article 42).

It is true that the condition of women in India has been improved comparing to that of eighteen or nineteen centuries, but there are lots of concern still remain in the question of women education and social issues. Child marriages have been traditionally prevalent in India and it continues to even today. Although child marriage was outlawed in this country but till today it is a common practice. According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18. In rural areas it is as high as 56%. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.⁴

The constitution of India calls for free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, in spite of that illiteracy is the major problem of India, particularly in rural India even today. There are many barriers to overcome this problem but at first gender disparity and gender inequality need to be addressed with special efforts on an urgent basis. Significantly, there are dozens of causes which keep the children away from schools and the quantum of these causes emerges more from girls' side than that of boys. Problems of illiteracy among girl children vary from place to place and region to region and across the groups as well. At all levels enrolment status of girl children is lower than that of boys and this difference goes on increasing as we move towards higher level. Though participation of girls at all stages of education has been increasing steadily, yet the girls' participation is still below 50 percent at all stages of education. It is also reported that dropout rates among girls are at higher side than that of their boy counterparts.⁵

BACKGROUND OF IMPLEMENTATION OF KANYASHREE PRAKALPA

In order to address and to change the present condition of girls specially belong to lower income group in the state of West Bengal the present State Government has introduced the Kanyashree Prakalpa, a direct cash transfer scheme for underprivileged girls, in the year 2013. Many girls in the state leave schools even without completing elementary education. There are many socio-cultural, economic and educational barriers, which hinder their participation in education. The state government identifies some issues which are believed to be primary reasons behind slow and weak progress of women literacy in India as well as in the state.

Poverty: The rate of illiteracy is closely linked with poverty. Owing to poverty or lower family income, if parents are not in a position to send both boys and girls to school, they usually send boys to schools and retain girls at home to do house-hold work. India is a one of the poorest country in the world. As per the economic data less than 6 percent of Indians, which comprise just 7 cores people, belong to middle class and only 1.5 cores people belong to upper middle class. Together, they account for just 8.5 cores people out of total 110 cores population. The rest belong to lower income group. That is almost 100 cores. For the financial year 2009- 2010, the official poverty line in rural India is Rs. 672.8 per capita per month and the urban poverty line is Rs. 859.6 per capita per month. As per the economic survey on that financial year almost 354.7 million people lived below India's poverty lines. It signifies that a major section of Indian population struggling for survival.⁶ The economic condition of the state of West Bengal is even worse. Where parents are struggling to fulfill their daily needs of living owing to extreme poverty it is nothing but a dream to imagine that the girl of a poor family would be encouraged to attain school to pursue education. Members of such a family much prefer to encourage girls to do the day to day household work or involve in such a kind of activities which earns money for the family. ⁷

Child Marriage: a significant numbers of girls in many states of India still get married at an early age, which affect their education to a great extent. Child marriage is a common practice

throughout the country but it affects girls in rural areas (48%) more than in urban regions (29%). Disparities may also be seen across different groups. Girls from poorer households and scheduled castes and tribes in addition to girls with less education tend to marry at a younger age. Child marriage has adverse effects for the child and for the society as a whole. For both girls and boys, marriage at early age has a strong physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impact, cutting off educational opportunities and chances of personal growth. However, it impacts upon girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity. The consequences for girls are especially dire, as they are usually compelled into early childbearing and social isolation. Child brides will frequently drop out of school and be exposed to higher risk of domestic violence and abuse, increased economic dependence, denial of decision-making power, inequality at home, which further perpetuates discrimination and low status of girls/women. Child marriage is associated with several health risks for the young mother, as early marriage may translate into repeated pregnancies at a tender age when the body is not fully prepared for child bearing. The study finds that girls age of 15-19 are more likely (66.6%) to experience delivery complications compared to 30-34 year-old women (59.7%) and neonatal, infant and child mortality rates are much higher for younger girls.⁸

Customs and cultural practices: Many customs and cultural practices make obstacles in the path of pursuing higher education of girls. For examples many parents of a certain community do not send their daughters to schools when they attain puberty. Purdan system is also affecting education of girls.⁹

Gender differences: Most of the time gender differences are observed in home, in society, schools, at work places and in political decision-making within the democratic process itself. More specifically it is reflected in the distribution of care work, household responsibilities and the decision-making powers at home and also this discrimination is seen in the parents' behaviors and choices as well as in total school environment. In specific situations, both the socio-cultural and the physical environments continue to create barriers to girls education, social malpractices, such as child marriage, while hardly affect the education of boys, they have a prominent adverse effect on the girls' education. These factors adversely contribute to creating unattractive environments in which girls must run the gauntlet of difficulties to remain in school, as a result of which their learning is severely compromised. A discriminatory attitude builds up among teachers and other members of society resulting in girls dropping out in large numbers.¹

The Aim of Kanyashree prakalpa

Kanyashree prakalpa has been introduced for sustainable development and larger interest of the state of West Bengal. A state or a country can move to progress or attain a growth path only by utilizing its all human resources. It is possible only when women in a society have been given equal opportunity as their male counterpart in every aspect of social life. Women empowerment thus is essential to achieve a sustainable development. So kanyashree prakalpa was introduced in order to empower women.

Women empowerment means to ensure their participation in various walks of life. It aims at bringing a radical change in perception and attitude of people to place women on an equal footing in our male dominated society. Women living in the society need to be independent in their thinking and decision making processes. Majority of population below poverty line are comprised of women. Programmes related to eradication of poverty must address the needs and problems of such women on one hand and its effective implementation to achieve the target on the other hand. Poor women can be motivated and mobilized by offering them a series of alternatives for their economic and social empowerment. It certainly enhances their potentialities to be self-independent in making decision. At the same time contribution of women as producers and workers must be recognized to enhance their motivation. Economic empowerment of women is an essential requirement for effective implementation of policies, Programmes and interventions to enhance their capacity to meet the negative social and economic impacts.¹¹

It is only education that can make women really empowered and encourage them to extend their hands with men in the process of national development. As Swami Vivekananda said “What was the way out to save and elevate Indian woman? Education is the answer.” Education is the instrument of growth and development to create an awareness of oneness on one hand and useful for the service of mankind on the other. Education of women is an important aspect for boosting the social and economic development of the country. Promotion of Girls Education particularly at Elementary Level is to bring certain benefits for the Society in the form of social development and reconstruction.

BENEFITS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

An inclusive social development would not be possible ignoring women and leaving them in dark. Gandhiji has rightly said that “Man should learn to give place to woman. A country or community in which women are not honoured cannot be considered as civilized”. Empowerment of women in the society is considered to be the key resource for educating girls and realizing numerous benefits for betterment of society. In the light of reducing gender disparity at elementary level, empowering women is not an option rather a compulsion to achieve the target. It helps in providing following benefits to our society:

Improving health and sanitation: It is believed that women’s education is associated with longer life expectancy, lower infant and maternal mortality and lower fertility. Education of women aims at improving access to the use of information, health services and increasing income of family. Women’s access to income can be beneficial to children’s health and education as well.

Delayed marriage: Early marriages still a norm in many part of our country, particularly in rural areas. Even today parents consider educating daughter as burden. It is found that educated women tend to marry later, with implications for their economic opportunities and choices.

Lower fertility: Educated women have lower desire and aim at actual family size. They likely to use contraception and have longer interval between birth. Children of educated mothers, especially daughters are more like to get education. It helps in reducing gender disparity in the field of education. Education of mother has a greater positive effect on education of children. One of the important concern of women empowerment is changing family perception of investment i.e. perception of parents that the economic return for educating daughter is lower. Empowered women can contribute substantially to overcome such blind beliefs and superstitions from society.¹²

EFFECTIVENESS OF KANYASHREE PRAKALPA

Swami Vivekananda had introduced Kumari Puja in the Belur Math hundred years ago. It was not just a religious ritual. It was actually a message to the society regarding the significance of a girl child. It was a humble gesture of reverence toward women in the society. Kanyashree prakalpa has been introduced with the true spirit of Swami Vivekananda’s concept of Kuamai puja. Swamiji said, “Where women are respected, there the Gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and efforts come to naught. There is no hope of rise for that family or country where they live in sadness.” The government introducing Kanyashree Prakalpa addresses two major challenges in the society, a girl’s dropout from school and the prevalence of a girl child marriage, which are believed to be the most influential obstacles in question of women education and empowerment.

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a conditional direct cash transfer scheme for young girls of lower income families. It has two categories: K--1 and K--2. K-1 is applicable to Girls aged between 13 – 18 years and studying in a Government or a Government undertaking school. K-2 is applicable to girls who are enrolled in a government or a Government undertaking college aged between 18-19 years. As per the scheme K--1 Rs 500/- has been credited to the beneficiary account in each year up to the age of 18. The amount in some extent will meet the recurring expenses of education but more

importantly it will prevent girls of poor families to discontinue the study, which reduces the tendency of drop out from school at early stage of education. Moreover, as per the scheme K-2 a beneficiary will receive Rs 25000/- as a onetime grant. Which is Rs 8333/- per year. It motivates girls of poor families to pursue higher education after completion of school education. A college girl with this amount can easily bear it recurring expenses in gradation level. So a girl who at the age of 13 comes under the purview of Kanyashree Prakalpa can easily continue her study up to Graduation without facing any financial obstacles. It relieves parents of economical weaker section to bear the expenses of girls' education and also motivates them to encourage girls to attend the school and after completion of school education to pursue higher study.¹³

CREATING A LARGE NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES

Another important fact is that the annual family income is decided Rs 1.20, 000/- per annum which is well above the national status of lower income group. In West Bengal the annual income more than 90% families are lower than the income which is stipulated in the scheme. It results that a large number of girls would come under the purview of Kanyashree Prakalpa and able to continue their study with the help of public money. The effectiveness of the Prakalpa immediately appears just after the implementation of Kanyashree Prakalpa-2013 across the state. The number of girls almost 26 lakh have been registered in the Prakalpa (including both K1 and K2) and presently studying through public money. It obviously reduces the tendency of girls in weaker section to discontinue the study and drop out from school.¹⁴

PREVENTING GIRL CHILD MARRIAGE

Kanyashree Prakalpa not only minimizes the tendency of girl students to dropout from schools at early age at the same time it will make a positive impact of the prevention of girl child marriage. A precondition of the Prakalpa is not being married. A girl who gets the benefit of the Prakalpa (K-1) will enjoy the benefit till she is reached at the age of 17. Survey reveals that during a significant percentage of girl child marriage occurs during the age of 15 to 17. In most of the cases the marriage is organised by family. Parents of the girl through this marriage off load a liability. But after implementation of Kanyashree Prakalpa families think twice to marry their girl at early age. After that marriage the girl will not be a beneficiary. The amount of Rs 500/-per month means a lot to a poor family. Moreover, after completion of the school when the girl enrolls herself with a college she will get another opportunity to get the benefit of the scheme (K-2). The benefitted amount this time is higher than the previous one and its preconditions are

(a) being unmarried and (b) the minimum age should be 18 and not more than 19. For obvious reasons the girl herself and her family would like to get the benefit and its result is that the family would not arrange the marriage of the girl before her age of 18. It obviously reduces the prevalence of child marriage in the state.¹⁵

SIGNIFICANT STEPS TAKEN IN ORDER TO SUCCESS KANYASHREE PRAKALPA

Female teachers in schools: The study finds that girls feel free with female teachers in the school. They are more comfortable and more vocal with female teachers so under the supervision of a female teacher it would be easier for girl students actively focusing and participating in the learning processes. In rural areas specially in underprivileged and backward community parents prefer to send their girl children to school if female teachers are present. If qualified female teachers are teaching in the school they feel more secured towards their girl children. They may be hesitating to send their girl children in male environment based school. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) recommended the need for having a female teacher in every primary school. It is to promote girls towards education by raising the sense of security and providing them a role model. The Government of West Bengal has already taken sincere initiative to appointment female teachers in

Government and Government sponsored primary schools, which supports and ascertains enrollment of girls at elementary level.

Awareness Generation programme: Gender inequalities have instrumental impacts through creating constraints in their achievement of a number of development goals. Studies have shown that gender inequality in education and access to resources may hamper the process of reduction of child mortality and lowering of fertility, which in turn impacts the expansion of education for the next generation. Gender inequality also has a negative impact on economic growth. There is now overwhelming evidence that countries that adopt specific measures to protect women's rights and increase their access to resources and schooling have less corruption and achieve faster economic growth than countries that do not. The government of West Bengal has planned to sensitise the society specially in backward communities in rural areas and slum areas in urban locality about the necessity of providing equal access and opportunities for growth and development, including education to both boys and girls'. For that purpose government sponsored various types of awareness generation programme had been organised from village level to state level throughout the years. Special initiative has been taken by visiting nearby village or town, interact with parents and local community and discuss with them the need and ways to promote gender equality and girls education.

Transport facility: One of the barriers for girl education may be the location of schools which some cases far away from their homes, particularly in rural areas. Adequate transport system is needed for girl to attend the schools. It will be more convenient for them to attend school if they access some mode of transport to attend school. Government has taken note of that matter and in various social welfare and cultural programmes by-cycle had been presented to girls of poor families. No doubt in comparison to crisis it is just a baby step. Nevertheless it reflects the good will and true intention of the government to success the Kanyashree Prakalpa.

RELATION BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The prime and foremost challenge to India is to remove poverty and so also to the state of West Bengal. Eradication of poverty is not an overnight affair. It requires an effective policy which leads to a sustainable development and growth. Swami Vivekananda said, to He stated further that

The modern statistics and socio-economical analysis also support it. As stated by Pradhan and Abraham "Recent empirical advancement in growth economics emphasized that the key factors in modern economic growth is the productive and efficient use of human resources..... the role of women's status is very crucial, as they constitute an important supply of human capital".¹⁶ It is found in a study by using an econometric model that the economic development of a nation and women status of it moves simultaneously. Where the social status of women is lower, the economic development is also lower. Its contrary is also true, i.e., the nation economically progress where women enjoy more decision making power in the society. It is found in the study that those states in India occupy higher ranks in the index of economic development over time more or less achieved women empowerment but those states unable to make any successful step to empower women lags far behind in question of economic development. On the whole the ranks in economic development and ranks in women's status too are highly correlated to each other.¹⁷

CONCLUDING REMARK

The state of West Bengal in the last decade have been found to be at the lower rung of the ladder both in terms of overall development as well as women's status index. The state need to

perform better and for that a special policy is required to enhance the status of women in the state. A country or a state leaving one half of the human resources unutilized and underdeveloped cannot attain its maximum growth potential nor its higher growth path will be sustained discriminating women in the field of knowledge, information, skills, purchasing power, income earning capacity and health status. A policy should be framed which lays stress on the issues of growing feminization of poverty, inequality in access to health, education, training, and productive employment. Such a policy would have a direct bearing on the improvement of socioeconomic status of the state or a nation. Efforts should be made to increase the access of women to education and training (both technical and non-technical) and to increase their economic empowerment to gain control over their resources and available technologies both at home and workplace. A scheme like kanyashree Prakalpa is thus essential to the state of West Bengal, which has the immense potential to uplift the state to an inclusive growth in the long run with sustainable development by empowering women.

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