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ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT/SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMMES OF ODISHA AND WEST BENGAL

Debajit Goswami* and V Anil Kumar**

Abstract

This paper explores the crucial aspects of promissory representation in India, particularly attempting to analyse the degree of electoral accountability in the domain of education, as manifested by the BJD (Biju Janata Dal) and TMC (Trinamool Congress), two incumbent regional parties in the states of Odisha and West Bengal. Political parties make numerous electoral pledges when contesting elections; however, after forming the government, there is a perceived lack of political will and effective policy formulations to fulfil the pledged promises, thus eroding the notion of electoral accountability.

This paper undertakes a survey research approach with the collection and analysis of responses from a sample of 200 beneficiaries of the educational accessories' support / scholarship programmes (Gangadhar Meher Shiksha Manukbrudhi Yojana and Kanyashree Prakalpa) of the two states. By investigating the party's degree of fulfilment of electoral pledges, and the consequent beneficiaries' perception of the party's accountability, this paper endeavours to provide insights on the relation between accountability in education, the degree of political awareness of voters and their consequential relation to the electoral accountability of parties. This in turn reflects the status of accountable governance in Odisha and West Bengal, from which broader generalisations may be drawn for the Indian context.

Keywords: Electoral Accountability, Odisha, West Bengal, Accountability in Education.

Introduction

Within the framework of a democratic political system, the elected party and its representatives are expected to be accountable to their pre-election commitments, and the implementation of concrete policies or steps towards the fulfilment of the electoral pledges is both fundamental and essential. The party's ability to deliver on the electoral promises reflects their political will to uphold electoral accountability and justifies the mandate given to the political parties. In the context of the Indian democratic landscape, it is a public as well as academic perception that most political parties, in their pursuit of garnering mass support, make numerous claims and electoral pledges when contesting elections (through party manifestos as well as the party's other media handles). However, once elected and after forming the government, there is a perceived lack of political will, thus eroding the notion of electoral accountability of the elected parties. This apparent disparity between the promises made by the parties prior to elections and the subsequent inertia in the implementation of the promises raises serious questions about their electoral accountability and the upholding of promissory representation which is expected within a framework of accountable governance.

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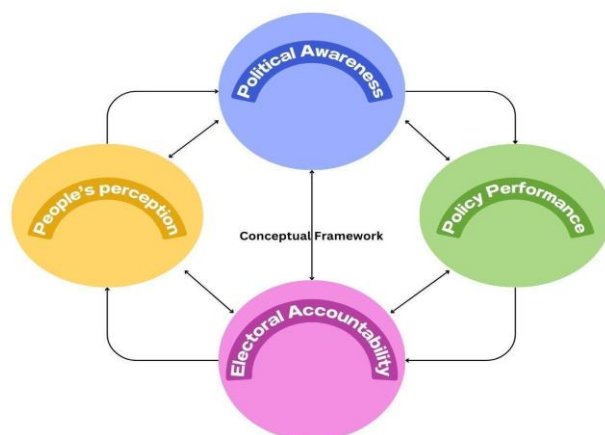
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This paper is significant from the standpoint of promissory representation and accountable governance in Indian democracy, as it examines the perceptions of electoral accountability in education, albeit at the state level. By critically investigating the dual aspects of electoral promises pledged during the elections and consequent actions taken for their realisation, this paper endeavours to provide insights on promissory representation and accountability in two eastern Indian states- Odisha and West Bengal, which in turn can reflect the state of accountable governance in India. Such an analysis, moreover, carries the potential to decipher the various factors that contribute to the making or breaking of pledges, and expose the dynamics of policy formulation as well as the obstacles that hinder its execution. This provides for a holistic analysis of the dynamic interrelation among the pre-election promises and post-election policies, electoral accountability of the parties and the evaluation of subsequent programmes.

Conceptually, a general framework of electoral accountability has been proposed in terms of its direct relationship to the political awareness of the electorate, where the increase or decrease in the latter directly results in corresponding change in the perceptions of electoral accountability of the governments (as visualised in Figure 1 below). Electoral accountability in education would mean that the parties must have fulfilled the promises made in the education domain (specific education policy promise as identified from their manifestos). Simply fulfilment of the promise by means of a policy is not enough and the beneficiary perceptions about the same, whether they believe the specific education policies have led to the upholding of accountability in education, is vital to this study. At the same time, the political awareness of the people is an important factor, as it considerably affects their ability to evaluate the policies and form perceptions regarding the electoral accountability of the party. The political awareness of the masses in democracies provides an incentive to the incumbent or elected party to satisfy the people's demands, or fulfil the party's promises to the people during the elections, thus making the government more accountable to the electorate. Therefore, through the examination of the interplay between electoral pledges, implementation of programmes, and perceptions of the beneficiaries of specific policies, this research may contribute to the strengthening of democratic processes, encouraging accountable governance, and augmenting the accountability of democratic institutions and parties in India. Therefore, this paper has the potential to contribute to a broader discussion about democratic consolidation, accountable governance, and public empowerment through the promotion of electoral accountability across our political and policy landscapes, particularly in the domain of education.

Figure 1: Pathways of Political Awareness and Perception of Electoral Accountability



Source: Authors' illustration

The above diagram displays a direct relationship between the degree of political awareness of the masses and their consequent scrutiny of policy performance and perceptions of electoral accountability of the government.

Some of the questions on electoral accountability in education this paper seeks to address are as follows:

- What were the promises made by the BJD and TMC in the domain of education, as reflected in their manifestos, and what were the corresponding policies made to fulfil them after the respective parties formed the governments?
- What is the extent of actual penetration (public cognisance, perception and attested assistance received) of the selected educational support and scholarship programmes of BJD (2014-19) and TMC (2016-21) amongst the inhabitants of Khordha and Kolkata districts of Odisha and West Bengal?
- What is the perception of electoral accountability of the BJD and TMC respectively, through the analysis of responses of beneficiaries of select education policies and whether their political awareness has any relation to their perception of the government's electoral accountability in the two states.

Review of Literature

Political awareness, in Zaller's (1992) understanding, would indicate the degree to which a person is politically attentive or engaged with politics and comprehends what she has experienced. So, an awareness would mean the intellectual ability or capacity of an individual to engage with matters of political life or public affairs. Political awareness could be a valuable tool that influences public participation, articulation of demands and active recognition of rights, entitlements, and legitimate claims, which in turn also encourages the scrutiny of accountability and responsiveness of the government. Politicisation, in its broadest sense, refers to the demand for, or act of, transferring a problem or an institution into the realm of politics - turning previously unpolitical issues into political

issues (Zurn, 2019). As a result, politicisation can be broadly described as bringing a degree of active participation or awareness into the arena of public choice or politics. Electoral accountability means there is a relationship of accountability between the policy makers or the government and the people, whereby the former fulfils, or attempts to realise, the promises made to the latter or, through public policy decisions, satisfy the needs of the people.

“Promissory representation” expects that there will be a clear list of policy commitments and pledges made by the political parties during their election campaigns, which should be kept by means of public policy formulation, when the respective representatives and party gets elected to power (Mansbridge, 2003). This notion of promissory representation is essentially examined by the present research, examining particularly the pledges made in education, and how the performance of select policies in these two domains is essentially considered by the people, especially in terms of their electoral choices as well as perceptions of the party’s accountability. Elections should therefore, ideally, function as a selection tool, filtering out underperformers or promise breakers. In this sense, it is assumed that there is a relation between information available to the people and their political awareness for the latter’s control over politicians and parties, otherwise the pre-election promises made by the party and politicians would not be credible (Dogan, 2010). Considering a model where a representative voter and politician are examined, where the former’s interests conflict with the latter, Dogan observes that the voters’ electoral preferences are influenced by the outcomes of observable and unobservable policies implemented by the politician. This is in tune with the premise of the present study, where it is hypothesised that a politically aware electorate (i.e. those considering available policy information) can hold the parties more accountable for their actions or inactions. Dogan’s study shows that such representative voters replace politicians more often when they do not consider the voters’ choices. In other words, aware voters can act as incentives to the politician or the party; to fulfil the pledges it had promised during the election campaigns. Through the application of a structural approach to measure the control and selection effects of elections, the political agency model of electoral accountability consolidates the perception that voters are inadequately informed principals who use the electoral mechanism to enhance the performance of elected policymakers and the rate of fulfilment of their democratic demands (Aruoba, Drazen & Vlaicu, 2019). In the realm of public service delivery, the degree of electoral accountability directly influences the quality and accessibility of services provided by the state (Przeworski, Stokes, & Manin, 1999). This in turn has an impact on other socio-economic life outcomes of the people. Thus, it is likely that successful fulfilment of electoral promises will translate to a higher perception of accountability in the eyes of the people. Furthermore, it is expected that the degree of accountability of the elected representatives, specifically in critical domains that impact the quality of life (like education), influences their choices during the elections and there may be a relation between the levels of fulfilment of electoral promises (or degree of accountability) and the voters’ electoral choices. The literature on electoral accountability has established that elected officials are incentivised to prioritise public goods and services when they are accountable to voters, as electoral success often hinges on their performance in these areas (Besley, 2006). However, this relationship is far from uniform and can vary widely depending on local political dynamics, institutional arrangements,

and voter behaviour (Chhibber & Nooruddin, 2004); and the perception of the people varies when evaluating accountability through the performance of policies that fulfil the electoral promises.

A comparative study on the fulfilment of parties' election pledges explains the variables that make some parties more likely to fulfil the promises made during their electoral campaign, although it is mainly derived from the studies of advanced capitalist democracies of Europe and North America. In some cases, more than eighty percent of all campaign promises were fulfilled where single majority party governments are the norm. In comparison, lower rates of electoral pledge fulfilment have been observed where the government is usually formed by coalitions (Thomson *et al*, 2017). Similarly, it was found that the likelihood of an electoral promise being fulfilled or given priority increases when similar promises have been floated by competing political parties. This can be insightful for the present study because in India, coalition politics has been the norm for quite some time. In the case of both the BJD and TMC, they formed coalition governments in Odisha and West Bengal respectively during their initial assumption of power, and later went on to form single party majoritarian governments, so we may examine the degree of fulfilment in the coalition and single-party majority government in both the states. However, in the case of India, this is not the exact scenario of accountability. Here, single party majority governments may be found less accountable to the electorate than coalition governments, on account of their overwhelming mandate. The fear of breakdown or instability in a coalition makes coalition governments more likely to be accountable. Thus, the Indian scenario does not accurately reflect the trends found in advanced capitalist countries. Furthermore, education has been a significant developmental issue, raised by competing parties in the states; however, it has not been taken up as a critical electoral issue by the opposition, more so in the case of Odisha and to a lesser extent, West Bengal. It remains to be examined whether this may have resulted in greater prioritisation of education related electoral promises and policies by the BJD and TMC after assuming power.

Encouragingly, another study on the parties' electoral accountability linked with their performance on electoral pledges finds that voters are more likely to credit government (incumbent) parties for fulfilling more promises during their tenure. A party in power that fulfils a greater proportion of election promises is more likely to avoid electoral defeat (Matthieß, 2020). This research suggests that voters react at the polls to party pledge fulfilment, emphasising the critical function of promissory representation in democratic regimes. Taking this forward, she also investigates whether breaking commitments results in a governing party's electoral punishment in addition to lower performance ratings. Taking it a step further, Matthieß goes on to argue that voters lose faith in the party's ability to act assertively and competently as well as the anticipated policy gains if an election vow is broken (Matthieß, 2022). This is more significant as the voter-party connection starts with a promise in promissory models and the electorate have little reason to think that a party will be a capable and reliable actor in the future if it has not fulfilled its promises in the past.

The challenges faced in the domain of education in both Odisha and West Bengal are somewhat similar in nature. In the Educational Index, India has a value of 0.569, while Odisha and West Bengal both fall behind the national average, with 0.520 and 0.551 respectively (Custom set of indicators 2022 – Subnational HDI Table – Global Data Lab). Though there has been a steady rise in primary school enrolment as well as attendance in primary classes, there has been a steep decline in

school enrolment in recent years, with school enrolment in India dropping by 37 lakhs in 2023-24, i.e. the population of students in 2022-23 was 25.17 crore, while it dropped to 24.80 crore in 2023-24 (UDISE+ 2023-24). This is particularly alarming when it comes to the retention of learners up to the higher secondary and further academic levels. This increasing rate of dropout not only reduces opportunities for individuals but also demonstrates the state's failure in forging a skilled workforce that could contribute towards economic development at large. Moreover, the Union government's expenditure on education was reduced to 2.67% in the 2021-2022 budget with the Department of School Education and Literacy being allocated Rs 54,874 crore, while the Department of Higher Education had been allocated Rs 38,351 crore (Demand for Grants, GoI 2021-22). This truncated expenditure on education is a major threat considering that the unequal allocation of resources in primary and secondary education further exacerbates the situation. A comparative study of the literacy rates of both the states projected a consistent disparity in terms of gender. Considering the last census data of 2011, the section of non-literate people in the 15-19 age group demonstrated a significant gender based gap in literacy rates, with females falling behind males in both the states- 17.6 gender gap in Odisha and 11.2 in West Bengal (Office of the Registrar General, India), while the gender gap in literacy rate in India (rural + urban) was the highest in the age 15 and above category -23.8% (NSS 71st round, 2014). This widening gap in the literacy rates is symptomatic of implicit societal issues that stress the requirement for concentrated efforts to establish parity of gender in education. There is a well-known difference in annual schooling costs between government and private schools in India, as is the case in the two states of study- with private education expenditures rising approximately five times since the 1950s. However, it may also be noted that concerns regarding quality of public education, and the growing needs of the population led to the rise of private educational institutions. Motkuri and Revathi (2024) raise critical questions about educational equity and the quality of public education. This disparity potentially reinforces socio-economic divisions, and limits upward mobility for disadvantaged groups.

In a study on electoral accountability, it was examined how in various districts which are unequal in development and compete over scarce resources, the voters' expectations of targeted spending in specific sectors drives competition among the political actors to perform in those specific arenas to meet the test of electoral accountability and in turn the voters adopt reelection incentives when they are satisfied with the spending and distributive politics of incumbent politicians (Zudenkova, 2018). However, it may be too optimistic to assume such consciousness or political awareness in the case of the electorate in India, where competition is driven not only through distributive developmental politics but also identity-based distribution and divisions amongst the people. The most crucial public services for the poor are also the most vulnerable to three political market distortions; They are- lack of voter awareness, increased social polarisation, and the lack of legitimacy of political party agendas (Keefer and Khemani, 2003). In this study, the concern of lack of legitimacy of party agendas is examined through the education specific promises made by the party in their manifestos. Keefer and Khemani (2005) further correlate the relationship between public expenditure and services available to the poor. Ruling parties in India are often inclined to devote resources to secure political profits and private transfers that enrich a few groups at the expense of the majority. These inequalities can be

traced back to flaws in political markets, which are more pronounced in some nations than others. The present research does agree with the authors that the relationship between public expenditure and services to the poor is important, and this study, while analysing the accountability in education, considers the public expenditure behind the education accessories support and scholarship policies of Odisha and West Bengal respectively.

Elections should essentially function as a selection tool, filtering out underperformers or promise breakers (Smart and Sturm [2013], Duggan and Martinelli [2015]). The composition of other institutions of legislation, like parliamentary committees and their efficacy, and qualitative aspects of portfolio allocation also needs to be considered while developing a holistic understanding of criteria of electoral accountability (Martin and Vanberg, 2011). Through the application of a structural approach to measure the control and selection effects of elections, the political agency model of electoral accountability consolidates the perception that voters are inadequately informed principals who use the electoral mechanism to enhance the performance of elected policymakers and the rate of fulfilment of their democratic demands (Aruoba, Drazen and Vlaicu, 2019).

Mansbridge (2003) points out that there ought to be a proper list of policy commitments and pledges made by the political parties during their election campaigns, which should be kept by means of public policy formulation, when the respective representatives and party get elected to power. The list of policy commitments in India is reflected in the Common Minimum Programme and other documents, which list the policies the government intends to fulfil or implement once in power. This line of argument is aligned to the present study as we seek to identify electoral promises made by the Biju Janata Dal and Trinamool Congress in their election manifestos, and thereafter examine the performance and accountability of the government, post elections, in the fulfilment of those promises. For example, the BJD's 2019 manifesto had promised 'free education for girls, STs/SCs, minorities, backward classes and poor meritorious other caste students' under its declared agenda of "Empowering our Students". The same sort of promises is also found in the 2016 manifesto of the TMC in West Bengal where they declared "Kanyashree Plus is going to be implemented. The programme will be expanded in the future...." Thus, it is clear from the manifestos of BJD (2019) and TMC (2016) that they have made substantial pledges in the domain of education, and as of 2024, it has been found that they did implement specific policies towards the end. When understanding the formulation of policy initiatives, we may apply three elements of populist logic to understand the institutional discourse as a reflection of styles of governance. The first is the logic of difference- which allows those in the power bloc to selectively accept specific democratic demands separately from each other. The second is the logic of governance- which implements state-sponsored welfare programmes that are not a product of popular demand, rather they are curated by the bureaucracy to obstruct the aggregation of democratic demands. The third is the logic of accountability- where the party after coming to power, attempts to meet the unfulfilled democratic demands by adopting multiple public policies, as committed in their election manifesto etc. (Das and Goswami, 2022). The logic of accountability applies to the fulfilment of pledged policy promises and aligns with the present study. Examining the logic of accountability can essentially shed light not only on the degree of fulfilment of promises but also reflects accountability in the domain of education.

Sanyal (2007) examines the nature of the post-colonial capitalist state and governmentality in the country. The Indian state preserves the need economy or subsistence economy to sustain a large section of the masses. For this purpose, the true culprit and string-puller is an entity- 'welfarist governmentality,' which ensures the bare minimum for the sustenance of the masses. Policy making is a means of the government's way of supporting and preserving the needed economy. Upliftment of the downtrodden or eradicating class differences is not a concern, but rather the maintenance of a subsistence economy that provides the bare minimum. This essentially maintains the status quo. His logic of non-corporate capital necessitates populist policies which are adopted and democratic demands of the people are met, thus reflecting some sort of accountability. This research draws important insights from Sanyal's observations and does agree that welfarist governmentality has led to a sort of subsistence economy; however, we must also keep in mind that welfarist governmentality, although it does not aim at emancipating the people, is needed for the basic access to essential services, especially for the underprivileged classes. In the case of the domain of education, we can see that there is more to it than just welfarist governmentality, as there is an effort to fulfil the promises made in education by the parties under study, and as such an intent at accountable governance may be found.

Posani and Aiyar (2009) critically expose the systemic crisis of accountability that lies at the heart of governance. In terms of the institutional apparatus, India seems to be well placed if examined by global institutional standards. With the presence of multiple parties, free elections, free press, independent judiciary, autonomous institutions and civil society groups, Indian democracy ought to perform responsively and with accountability. However, in reality, there is a paradox of accountability since, despite the presence of all the necessary institutions, the implementation of welfare policies, the delivery of services and the fulfilment of promises are often found wanting, which exposes the incompetence and failure of accountability of the parties.

Behera (2022) writes on the future of education, democratic state, and the school rationalisation policy in Odisha to suggest that the school rationalisation policy and the consolidation of schools in the state of Odisha have many sociological consequences. It has increased school dropouts among the most marginalised communities, including Dalit and tribal communities, and has had a greater negative impact on girls' education. Children stopped going to school because of the long distance from their home to the new school due to the amalgamation of schools. To address such issues, the BJD government launched the Gangadhar Meher Shiksha Manukbridhhi Yojna to stimulate school enrolment and retention through the transfer of educational accessories to the learners. On the other hand, under the TMC regime, the focus of electoral accountability in education is exemplified by initiatives like Kanyashree Prakalpa for incentivising the education of the girl child and preventing early marriage, which also won the United Nations Public Service Award in 2017. By 2021, the scheme had benefited over 60 lakh girls, showcasing a tangible policy impact that resonates with voters. However, disparities in school enrolment and literacy rates in West Bengal, particularly among backward classes, underscore the need for targeted educational policies to enhance educational outcomes across scheduled tribes and non-scheduled tribe communities (Biswas & Sharma, 2022). While this is true, it is also true that the inequalities in literacy status are not limited between scheduled tribes and non-

scheduled tribe groups, but also among the different genders, and even the learners from the different parts of West Bengal- The hilly North and the South plainlands.

Critiquing higher education policy-making in India, Tilak(2012) exposes how education has come to be a 'non-merit good' in the country. The neo-liberal nature of policies in India led to a cut in public expenditure on higher education and it came to be defined as 'non-merit good' that did not deserve to be financed by the state. On the whole, education has suffered in the last couple of decades, including in the areas of policy making and planning. The observations of Tilak may not be far from the truth, as the conditions of education across many states remain alarming, Odisha being one such state that causes concern. Though, of late West Bengal has fared slightly better in terms of primary school education, the assessment of higher secondary and secondary levels of education indicates considerable need for improvement.

Gap in Literature

The present research study is not only trying to establish the extent of electoral accountability in education, of the ruling parties in West Bengal and Odisha, but also seeks to provide an understanding of how the political awareness of the beneficiaries of state-sponsored policies and their evaluation of performance of selected educational support/ programmes of the Trinamool Congress and Biju Janata Dal affect electoral accountability and affirmative policy making. In connection to the questions on the state government's accountability, this study also seeks to understand the extent of effective realisation of the education-scholarship policies of the BJD and TMC, by examining their penetration and effects (public cognisance, perception of beneficiaries or enrolled individuals and outcomes) among the people of West Bengal and Odisha. For this purpose, the performance of Gangadhar Meher Shiksha Manukbridhhi Yojna has been examined, which was a policy promise in BJD's 2019 manifesto. For West Bengal, the performance of Kanyashree Prakalpa has been evaluated which was promised in TMC's 2016 manifesto. This research aims to examine the above-mentioned variables and establish the nature of their relation to the governments' performance in the selected education policies. The existing literature to this end is wanting, as it mostly deals with the status of education, as well as politics in the two states. Some literature also deals with accountability in general. The present study seeks to address this gap and contribute to domain knowledge, specifically drawing linkages between electoral accountability in the two states vis-a-vis the performance of the policies promised by the ruling parties (BJD and TMC respectively) and the political awareness of the beneficiaries of the selected educational support policies.

Methodology

The research is based on a survey approach with the collection and analysis of data from a sample of 200 respondents from the two states (100 from each policy in each district of study) by means of a structured interview. A survey has been undertaken with a mix of open and close-ended questions to gather the beneficiaries' perception of electoral accountability in education. The sample population consists of beneficiaries (parents) of the child included under the two state-sponsored programmes- Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal and Gangadhar Meher Shikshya Manukbruddhi Yojana in Odisha.

Sampling: A purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) technique was employed to interview the participants (parents) whose children were beneficiaries of the state-sponsored programmes from the Kolkata district of West Bengal and the Khordha district of Odisha. This strategic approach allows the researcher to focus on individuals with direct experience and knowledge of the programmes, ensuring that the findings are grounded in authentic and relevant perspectives. By focusing on individuals with direct experience, the researcher was able to collect data that was more likely to be valid and reliable. This combined approach also allowed for the interview of participants more efficiently, making optimum use of time and resources. Sample Size: A total of 200 respondents were selected, with 100 participants from each of the aforementioned programmes in each state. Open-ended responses were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to programme satisfaction, problems, and perceptions of electoral accountability. Closed-ended responses were analysed using comparative percentages to summarise the data and identify key trends. Comparing the findings from the two state-sponsored programmes to identify similarities and differences in beneficiary satisfaction, problems, and perceptions of electoral accountability exposed findings that help in examining the role of political awareness and policy performance in shaping beneficiary experiences and attitudes, in the similar but different policy context of Odisha and West Bengal.

Table 1: Comparison of Features of Educational Scholarship/Support Policies of West Bengal and Odisha

Educational support / scholarship programmes	Kanyashree Prakalpa	Gangadhar Meher Shikshya Manukbruddhi Yojana
State	West Bengal	Odisha
Purpose	Increasing the mean years of schooling of the girl child and prevention of child marriage through financial aid	Providing educational supplies and transportation facilities to learners to increase mean years of schooling
Beneficiary	Children studying in government and government aided schools, including madrasa and other minority institutions	Children studying in government and government aided schools, including madrasa and other minority institutions
Eligibility	Girl child (Class VIII-XII) from families below a certain income threshold (annual family income not more than Rs.1,20,000)	All students of public schools and government-aided schools up to Class IX
Benefits	Conditional cash transfer of scholarship of Rs.1000 for every standard and one-time Rs.25,000 upon enrolment in college	Free uniforms, shoes, schoolbags, textbooks and bicycles (free bicycles exclusively for class IX)

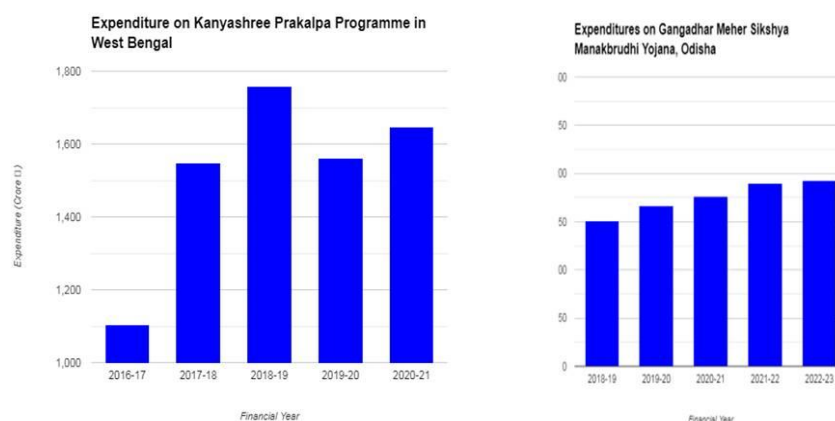
Source: Compiled by research scholar from official websites of the programme <https://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/> and <https://sme.odisha.gov.in/>

Findings

Figure 2 presents a comparison of state governments' actual expenditures on Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojana (GMSMY) in Odisha and Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal. The time frame of analysis for Odisha's GMSMY is for a period of five years, starting from 2018, a year after the GMSMY was launched by the then Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. Similarly, the time frame of analysis for West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa is from 2016 to a period of five years, launched by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in 2013. The preceding terms of both regimes, BJD in Odisha (2019) and TMC in West Bengal (2016) has been considered. However, the comparative analysis of state expenditure behind their respective educational support programmes presents a contrasting picture.

The GMSMY in Odisha, the Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojana, received a nominal allocation of Rs. 150.7 crore in the year 2018 initially, representing 0.125% of the total state expenditure. This allocation demonstrated an intent towards the programme's implementation. In contrast, West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa received a significantly higher allocation of Rs. 1,102.6 crore in 2016-17, representing 0.689% of the total state expenditure. This demonstrates an intent to the programme's implementation. The second-year expenditure in GMSMY increased by 10.29% to Rs.166.2 crore but its share of total state expenditure decreased to 0.119%. For Kanyashree, the second-year expenditure increased substantially by 40.33% to Rs. 1,547.3 crore. The third-year expenditure for GMSMY rose by 6.03% to Rs.176.23 crore while for Kanyashree, the upward trend continued in the third year with expenditure reaching its peak at Rs. 1,759 crore, representing 0.898% of the total state expenditure. This is the highest share of state expenditure behind the educational support programme, for both Odisha and West Bengal, across all five years under consideration. In the fourth year, GMSMY expenditure increased by 7.79% to Rs. 189.95 crore, but its share of total state expenditure decreased to 0.111%. This decline could be attributed to budget constraints, policy adjustments, or changes in government priorities, especially due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fifth year, GMSMY expenditure increased nominally by 1.73% to Rs. 193.23 crore; however, again its share of total state expenditure continued to decrease to 0.103%, indicating a clear trend of increasing actual expenditure but a lower share within the overall state budget for Odisha's GMSMY. In contrast, West Bengal's Kanyashree's expenditure decreased in the fourth year by 11.28% to Rs. 1,560.6 crore, accompanied by a decline in its share of total state expenditure to 0.655%. This decrease could be attributed to factors such as budget constraints, especially due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fifth year, Kanyashree's expenditure increased slightly to Rs.1,648 crore in 2020-21 with an increase of share in total state expenditure (0.701%), suggesting a stabilisation of the programme's funding and potentially a renewed focus after the decrease during the COVID years. However, the allocations immediately after the pandemic remain low compared to the pre-pandemic period.

Figure 2: Comparison of Actual Expenditures on Gangadhar Meher Sikshya Manakbrudhi Yojana (Odisha) and Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal)



Source: Gender Budget and Child Budget, Department of School and Mass Education, Government of Odisha 2019-20, Child Budget Government of Odisha 2020-21 & 2022-23 (in million) in 2011–12 prices and Expenditure on Kanyashree Prakalpa by Department of Women and Child Development, and Social Welfare, West Bengal during 2016–17 to 2020–21, in 2011–12 prices.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=200)

State Educational support Programme	Odisha	West Bengal
	GMSMY 100	KP 100
Gender		
Male	57	0
Female	43	100
Transgender	0	0
Total	100	100
Age group		
13-14	68	46
15-16	32	33
17-18	0	21
19-20	0	0
21-30	0	0
31-40	0	0
41-50	0	0
51-60	0	0
61 and above	0	0
Total	100	100
Income group (monthly income in rupees)		
<2500	24	37
2501-5000	17	12
75001- 7500	15	17
7501- 10,000	33	25

10,001- 15,000	9	5
15,001>	2	4
Total	100	100
Income source		
Salaried	4	7
Land/ agricultural income	3	2
Wage labour	69	54
No Income	24	37
Total	100	100
Type of Housing		
Kaccha (clay/ mud/ informal)	5	7
Pucca(brick & mortar)	14	19
Semi-pucca (asbestos/ tin/ informal)	52	46
Slum(including street dwellers)	29	28
Total	100	100
Religion		
Hindu	44	41
Muslim	19	32
Christian	11	19
Buddhist	7	6
Other	19	2
Total	100	100
Caste		
SC	7	16
ST	14	0
SEBC (OD)	40	0
OBC A (WB)	0	24
OBC B (WB)	0	7
UR	39	53
Total	100	100

***Source:** Primary survey by research scholar conducted in 2023

Assessing the political awareness of respondents regarding the political party and CM who launched the educational support programme, we find that 47% of respondents from Odisha could correctly identify that the GMSMY educational accessories support programme was launched by the Biju Janata Dal under Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. However, 11% mistakenly assumed that Indian National Congress launched the policy while another 42% were associating the policy with other parties, thus showing some degree of political unawareness. However, in West Bengal, 100% of respondents accurately identified Kanyashree policy with Trinamool Congress party under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. This shows a higher degree of political awareness as well as greater outreach of CM Banerjee and her party. Similarly, examining the respondents' awareness regarding the education promises of BJD and TMC respectively showed differing levels of awareness. In its 2019 assembly elections manifesto, BJD had promised 'Empowering the students' but only 37% of respondents were aware of

the pledge, while 39% were not aware, and another 24% were not sure. This implies that there is a lack of political awareness amongst the respondents.

In the 2016 assembly elections manifesto, TMC had promised 'expansion of educational scholarship through Kanyashree Plus', and 77% were aware of the pledge, while 23% were not aware. Again, this reflects a greater degree of political awareness amongst the respondents of West Bengal in comparison to Odisha. We also find in Odisha, 72% of the respondents' children receive the educational support of accessories in the form of school bags (Class I to V), school uniforms (Class I to VIII), school text books (Class I to VIII) and another 28% additionally received bicycles (for class IX only) at the government's fully sponsored schools. This is primarily because the majority of the respondents' children are currently in school within class VIII and only 28 of them are pursuing secondary school education in class IX. In West Bengal, 100% of the respondents' children receive the educational annual scholarship of Rs.1000 for every class up to XII. It also provides further impetus for the continuation of the schooling of the child and delay marriage till higher secondary levels.

In the case of Odisha's GMSMY, an overwhelming majority of beneficiaries i.e. 71% reported no problems or complaints with the programme. This suggests that the accessories transfer is being administered efficiently, and is reaching its intended recipients without significant obstacles. However, nearly one-third i.e. 29% of respondents encountered problems in receiving their support benefits. This percentage represents a group of students who faced challenges that could potentially impact their educational opportunities. We can infer that the programme is more or less successful in its implementation, but there may be room for further improvement to address the concerns of those facing issues. In sharp contrast to this, in the case of West Bengal, where 96% beneficiaries of the Kanyashree Prakalpa reported no issues in receiving the annual scholarship while only 4% reported issues like delay in receiving the scholarship benefit.

This reflects the relative success of the educational support in West Bengal compared to Odisha. This can be attributed to the scheme of benefit transfer, where West Bengal follows a direct scholarship benefit transfer policy, to the account of the beneficiaries, the accessory transfer in Odisha is administered through public schools, and thus, creates an additional unnecessary level of mediation between the state's support and the beneficiary. This obstacle may be addressed by adopting a direct benefit transfer model. Multiple issues faced by the respondents were reported in the form of overlapping concerns, as they encountered more than one problem in receiving the benefits of given schemes. The most reported issue faced by Odisha's GMSMY and West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa respondents is regarding the lack of trained teachers in government schools, with 51% of GMSMY and 37% of Kanyashree respondents reporting the same. This is followed by 43% of GMSMY respondents expressing concern regarding the quality of education imparted in government schools and 31% of Kanyashree Prakalpa respondents reporting the same. Another major issue for GMSMY beneficiaries is regarding procedural issues in receiving accessory benefits, with 29% in Odisha but only 4% in West Bengal reporting the same for Kanyashree. This is reflective of previous findings where the procedure of benefit transfer is causing issues for the beneficiaries in Odisha, while the direct scholarship transfer in case of West Bengal provides more seamless transfer to the beneficiaries. 28% who are in the Kanyashree Prakalpa programme express concern regarding the amount of scholarship (750 rupees

annually) and might be benefited if the amount was increased. Similarly, 19% of GSMY respondents expressed concern regarding the support accessories being inadequate; this is especially concerning considering the GSMY only provides educational support accessories up to class XI and the students may be benefitted by extending the benefits up to class XII.

Figure 3 provides further information into the recommendations made by respondents (overlapping responses) for improving the Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojna and the Kanyashree Prakalpa. The percentage reflects overlapping responses as the same respondents have given more than one recommendation.

Figure 3: Major Recommendations of the Respondents (parents) of Gangadhar Meher Sikshya Manakbrudhi Yojna (Odisha) and Kanyashree Prakalpa (West Bengal)



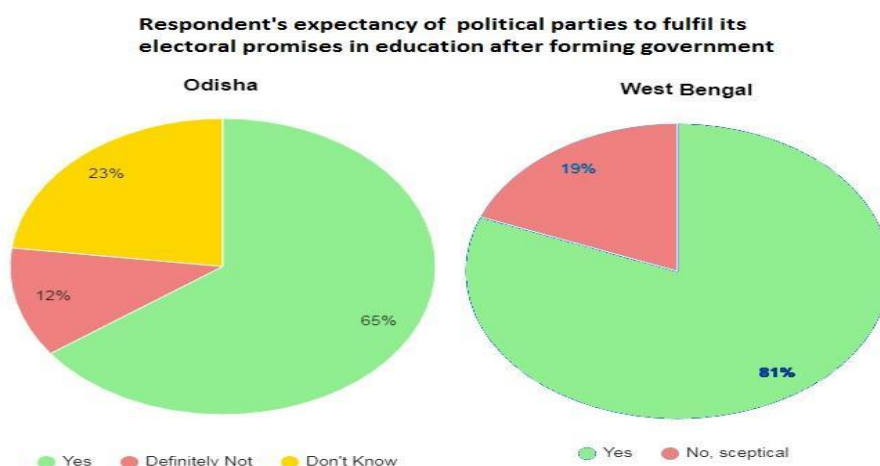
Source: Primary survey done by research scholar conducted in 2023

The most frequent suggestion, made by 56% of GSMY respondents, is to increase the number of trained teachers in government schools while the same suggestion comes from 41% of Kanyashree respondents. A close second, 47% of GSMY respondents recommend improving the overall quality of education imparted, which was also expressed by 38% of Kanyashree respondents; this aligns with the previous concerns about trained teachers and quality of education. In Odisha, educational support accessories' considerations are also significant, with 29% suggesting an increase in benefits while 35% of West Bengal respondents suggest an increase in the amount of the scholarship received annually. Additionally, 31% of GSMY respondents and 20% of Kanyashree respondents recommend establishing more public schools, potentially to address issues of universal access. Interestingly, 29% of GSMY beneficiaries also suggest streamlining the process of availing the accessories transfer benefits, which is consistent with earlier data showing lower satisfaction with the programme's implementation. In contrast, 4% of Kanyashree beneficiaries suggested streamlining of the scholarship transfer process.

These overlapping responses from GMSMY and Kanyashree respondents reflect moderate satisfaction with the GMSMY policy compared to greater satisfaction with Kanyashree. However, both states have significant recommendations focused on increase in the number of teachers and improvement of the quality of education in public schools. However, it must also be acknowledged that these problems are not unique to these states, but rather prevalent in many states across the country.

Figure 4 shows the respondents' opinion on how far they expect political parties to fulfil their electoral promises in education, after forming the government. This also reflects the level of political awareness of the people. While 65% of Odisha's respondents were expecting that political parties would keep their promises in education after winning the election, 12% of respondents were skeptical and doubted that parties would fulfil their promises. Meanwhile, a significant 23% of respondents were unsure about whether parties were expected to keep their promises in education. This percentage highlights a lack of certainty or clear expectations among the population. In the case of West Bengal, an overwhelming majority of 81% respondents expected parties to fulfil their promises in education after elections, whereas only 19% of respondents said they did not expect the parties to fulfil their promises in education. This contrast may hint at a greater degree of political awareness amongst the respondents of West Bengal.

Figure 4: Respondents' Opinion on Whether They Expect Political Parties to Fulfil their Electoral Promises in Education, after Forming the Government

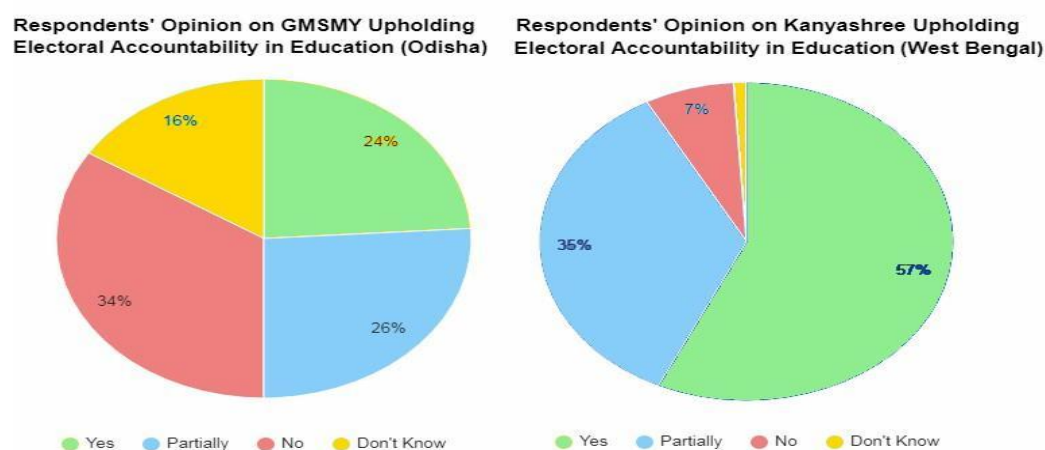


Source: Primary survey done by research scholar conducted in 2023

Figure 5 deals with the opinion of the respondents on whether implementation of Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojna and Kanyashree Prakalpa educational support programmes by the ruling regime (Biju Janata Dal / Trinamool Congress) has led to the upholding of electoral promise in education. Only 24% of respondents from Odisha believe that through Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojana, BJD upheld its electoral promise in education. However, a majority of 57% respondents from West Bengal believe that through the implementation of Kanyashree, TMC upheld its electoral promise of education. This reflects a greater perception of accountability for TMC, translating to fulfilment of electoral pledge in education, compared to BJD. In Odisha, another 26%

believe that the GMSMY partially fulfils the promise in education, whereas 35% believe partial fulfilment through Kanyashree in West Bengal. However, a large section of respondents of both states also believe that implementation of the education support programmes did not lead to the fulfilment of the electoral promise in education. While 34% believed GMSMY did not lead to upholding of accountability in education, only 7% of Kanyashree respondents believed that the policy failed to fulfil the electoral promise in education. This reflects a greater section of respondents in Odisha who believe that the implementation of GMSMY did not translate to electoral accountability in education. The main difference lies in the section of respondents who are not sure, or do not know whether the policy implementation leads to electoral accountability in education: 16% of respondents from Odisha but only 1% in the case of West Bengal. This reflects an uncertainty, or a lack of awareness or understanding of the policy performance and accountability for nearly one-fourth of the respondents of Odisha. In West Bengal, the degree of political awareness and linkage of policy performance with education accountability is more direct, suggesting a greater onus on the state government to fulfil its promises in education.

Figure 5: Respondents' Opinion on Whether Implementation of Gangadhar Meher Sikshya Manakbrudhi Yojna and Kanyashree Prakalpa by the Ruling Regime (BJD/TMC) has Upheld Electoral Promise in Education



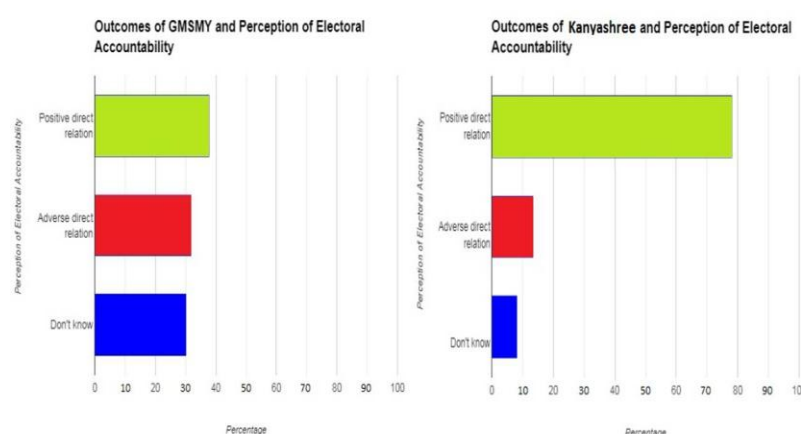
Source: Primary survey by research scholar conducted in 2023

Figure 6 shows the respondents' opinion on how the outcomes of GMSMY and Kanyashree Prakalpa affects their perception about the ruling regime (*vis-a-vis* electoral accountability). Like Figure 5, this too reflects the people's political awareness and assessment of performance of policy with the degree of electoral accountability of the incumbent party.

The largest group of respondents in both states believe that there is a positive influence in favour of the ruling regime, based on the performance of the educational support policy. 38% of respondents of Odisha have a positive perception of the party's accountability favouring the ruling regime due to the benefits they received from GMSMY, while 78% of respondents in West Bengal have a positive perception of accountability based on Kanyashree performance. This indicates that the programmes might be a factor in securing votes for the incumbent BJD and TMC governments respectively. Another 32% of respondents of Odisha indicate that a lack of benefits or negative

experiences with GSMY might lead them to an adverse perception of the party's accountability, while only 14% of the respondents of West Bengal suggested a negative perception based on Kanyashree outcomes. This suggests the programme's lack of performance could have an adverse effect on the government's accountability perceptions more in case of BJD and much less in case of TMC. Again, the difference lies in the percentage of people who are not sure about the performance of policy and linking it to the perception about the ruling regime (vis-a-vis electoral accountability). It was nearly one-third i.e. 30% in Odisha but only 8% in West Bengal, which again suggests the difference in political awareness and perceptions of accountability between the respondents of two states.

Figure 6: Respondents' Opinion on How Might the Outcomes of Gangadhar Meher Sikshya Manakbrudhi Yojna/ Kanyashree Prakalpa, Affect Perception about the Ruling Regime (*vis-a-vis* Electoral Accountability):



Source: Primary survey by research scholar conducted in 2023

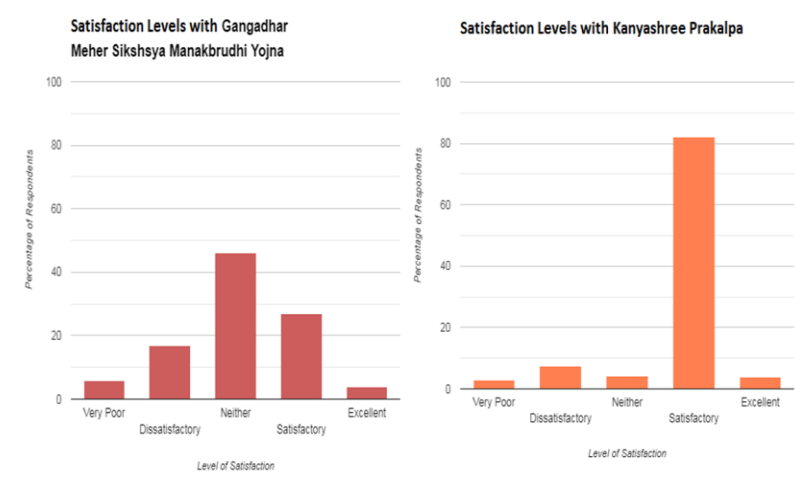
Figure 7 shows the respondents' level of satisfaction, on a 5-point Likert scale, with the Gangadhar Meher SikshyaManakbrudhi Yojna / Kanyashree scheme in meeting their educational needs.

A combined 23% of GSMY respondents of Odisha expressed dissatisfaction with GSMY, indicating the programme did not meet their educational needs well (Very Poor 6% & Unsatisfactory 17%). In West Bengal, a combined 9% respondents of Kanyashree rated dissatisfaction with the programme (Very Poor 2% & Unsatisfactory 7%). This reflects a greater dissatisfaction amongst respondents from Odisha but much less for West Bengal. On the other hand, a significant portion of 46% of GSMY respondents and only 5% Kanyashree respondents felt that the policy was neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory, suggesting a neutral experience.

However, the larger satisfaction percentages are at the positive end. Nearly one-third (31%) GSMY respondents (27% Satisfied + 4% Excellent) expressed satisfaction with BSKY while 86% Kanyashree respondents reflected levels of satisfaction (82% Satisfied + 4% Excellent). This suggests the Kanyashree programme has been largely successful for a significant portion of the population in addressing their education needs; however, a larger portion of the respondents of GSMY are either not satisfied or are neutral, thereby suggesting a comparatively lesser degree of satisfaction with the educational support programme in Odisha. However, this also exposes the failure of the educational

programme to bring everyone under its fold and meet their needs, which is consistent from the findings of previous figures.

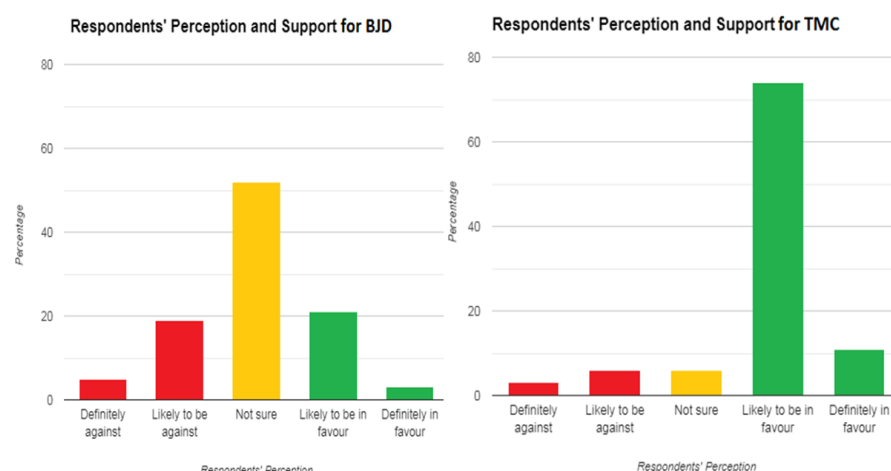
Figure 7: Respondents Level of Satisfaction, on a 5-Point Likert Scale with Gangadhar Meher Sikshsya Manakbrudhi Yojna / Kanyashree Scheme in Meeting their Educational Needs



Source: Primary survey done by research scholar conducted in 2023

Figure 8 reflects the respondents' perception and support for/against the ruling regime (BJD / TMC) based on the outcomes and impact of GMSMY/ Kanyashreeprogrammes. This is a direct linkage between the ability of the respondents to link the policy and its outcomes to their voting preferences. In the case of Odisha, a combined opposition to BJD (Definitely against + Likely against) was reflected by 24% of BSKY beneficiaries while combined support (Definitely in favour + Likely in favour) for BJD was 24%, which balances the support perceptions, but a substantial majority of 52% respondents are Neutral/Unsure of their support for/against the ruling regime vis-a-vis the impact and outcomes of the Gangadhar Meher SikshsyaManakbrudhiYojana. In the case of West Bengal, a combined opposition to TMC (Definitely against + Likely against) was reflected by only 9% of Kanyashree beneficiaries while combined support (Definitely in favour + Likely in favour) for TMC was an overwhelming 85%, reflecting a greater perception of support for the ruling regime based on the impact and outcomes of the Kanyashree Prakalpa. However, like previous figures, a considerable difference is found in the percentage of the section of respondents who are unsure of their support for/against the ruling regime. It was 52% of GMSMY respondents from Odisha, thus once again revealing a lack of political awareness and lesser degree of political activism and the ability to connect accountability of the party to electoral preferences, whereas unsure Kanyashree respondents were only 6% in West Bengal. This data on political support for/against the ruling regime aligns fairly closely with the satisfaction levels from the previous figures, suggesting a relationship between satisfaction with the educational support policy and political support for the Biju Janata Dal and Trinamool Congress respectively. The higher degree of political awareness (regarding policy performance) led to the more decisive electoral preferences amongst respondents of West Bengal, compared to a more circuitous preference for the people of Odisha based on the outcomes of educational support policies.

Figure 8: Respondents' Perception and Support for/Against the Ruling Regime Based on the Outcomes and Impact of Educational Support Policy



Source: Primary survey done by research scholar conducted in 2023

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings indicate that there is a linkage between the degree of people's political awareness and their perception of accountability of the party which in turn has a reflection on their electoral preferences, thus providing an incentive to the incumbent parties, to not only fulfil electoral promises in education through definite policy initiatives but also to effectively work towards its implementation and genuine realisation amongst the people or targeted beneficiaries.

During the time of the study, both Odisha and West Bengal were governed by charismatic, populist leaders - CM Naveen Patnaik and CM Mamata Banerjee, respectively - who adopted similar governance strategies to fulfil their pledged promises in the domains of education. At the same time, there is a disparity in the degree of political awareness of the people of the two states, which also affects their ability to evaluate the performance of policies and the consequent linkage to hold the party accountable for its actions. Higher political awareness amongst the respondents from West Bengal was evident, as higher percentages of people who could successfully identify selected education policies with the promises pledged in manifestos, associate the policies with the correct political party and Chief Minister, as well as opine on the performance and lacunas of the selected policies. The percentage was higher in case of respondents from West Bengal whereas there was a greater degree of ambivalence (and a degree of unawareness) amongst the respondents of Odisha. Thus, the socio-political characteristics of the people differ in this respect and to a greater extent also affects the people's perception of electoral accountability and their consequent electoral choices in the two states.

For the selected educational scholarship / support programmes under scrutiny, a combined 23% of Gangadhar Meher Sikshya Manakbrudhi Yojana (GMSMY) respondents of Odisha expressed dissatisfaction indicating the programme did not meet their educational needs well while in West Bengal, a combined 9% respondents of Kanyashree indicated dissatisfaction with the programme. This reflects a greater dissatisfaction amongst beneficiaries of education support/ scholarship programmes from Odisha but comparatively fewer from West Bengal. The research highlights that even well-

intentioned educational support programmes must be critically assessed from the perspective of their target beneficiaries. The varying satisfaction levels between Odisha and West Bengal indicate that state-specific contextual factors significantly influence programme perception and effectiveness. While the percentages of respondent's satisfaction with the programmes differ markedly, both states have room for improvement in their educational support initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of continuous programme evaluation and targeted interventions to enhance beneficiary experience and programme outcomes. Adopting simple strategies like implementing a comprehensive feedback system to systematically capture and address beneficiary concerns, simplification of the application processes and documentation requirements while providing offline kiosks for registration along with online channels, and enhancing transparency in scholarship/accessories allocation and disbursement mechanisms which can be tracked by all stakeholders, will go a long way in improving the accountability of the parties in the domain of education.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal demonstrates a substantially higher perception of electoral accountability, with 78% of respondents having a positive perception of accountability based on Kanyashree performance compared to merely 38% amongst the beneficiaries from Odisha for the Gangadhar Meher SikshaManakbrudhi Yojana (GMSMY). This gets reflected in terms of the political support landscape too, where West Bengal exhibits a remarkably cohesive political consensus, with an overwhelming 85% of Kanyashree beneficiaries expressing electoral support for the ruling party. In contrast, Odisha presents a fragmented scenario, with equal proportions of support and opposition (24% each) for the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) based on the performance of GMSMY.

A critical distinguishing factor emerges in political awareness and engagement of the people as 52% of Odisha respondents remain neutral or uncertain about their political choices, while only 6% of West Bengal respondents display similar ambivalence. This difference suggests significant variations in political communication, political awareness, and accountability perceptions. Therefore, this study illuminates the complex interplay between political awareness of the people and educational support and scholarship policies, their perceived governmental accountability, and consequent electoral preferences. West Bengal demonstrates a more effective alignment between educational support programme outcomes and political engagement, whereas Odisha reveals substantial challenges in translating policy manifestation into political support. The present research reveals a significant correlation between political awareness, policy performance, and electoral accountability perceptions among the respondents (policy beneficiaries) from Odisha and West Bengal. The findings substantiate the hypothesis that the beneficiaries' political awareness influences their ability to evaluate the performance of policies and shapes their perceptions of accountability.

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