Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas - Supaul Incident

What is the issue?

Several girls were recently brutally thrashed in their school compound, in Supaul, Bihar, by local boys for opposing their sexual advances.

What happened?

- The boys are from the same village where the KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya) is located.
- Reportedly, the girls were attacked because they resisted vulgar messages conveyed on their hostel walls by the boys.
- They threatened to harm the girls and finally did it, and the girls got badly injured.
- The girls had earlier complained to the school authorities regarding this but nothing came of it.

What is the KGBV scheme?

- The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme forms a successful chapter of SSA.
- Residential schools like the KGBV were set up all over India under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
• KGBV schools aim at giving rural girls who had dropped out of school, before ending the primary stage, a second chance.

• Instead going through the primary stage again, Kasturba schools offer a full-time residential opportunity to start at grade 6 level and finish grade 8 when everyone else does.

• Kasturba schools have made notable success and progress in achieving this goal, despite extremely modest financial support.

• KGBVs specifically retained the girls they admit from marginalised sections.

• These include the Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes, the minorities and upper castes below the poverty line.

• Moreover, a common element among the girls in the recent incident is poverty.

• Their parents prefer to let them stay at a poorly funded hostel because conditions at home are more worse.

• Their parents value the opportunity in these rural residential schools which they cannot otherwise afford.

What are the policy shortfalls?

• The official website of the Supaul district presents an impressive list of measures taken by the police to ensure security and peace.

• But these measures did not suffice to help those 10 to 14 year-old girls.

• This is not the first time that a KGBV has faced a security breach.

• As it happens in all schemes meant for the poorest sections, the infrastructure and services are minimal and KGBVs are largely insecure.

• Until a few years ago, the state government ran some of the KGBVs with help from the Mahila Samakhya.

• It is a reputed women’s empowerment programme, which imparted
efficiency and institutional capacity to the KGBVs under its care.

But sadly, KGBVs have lost their special status now and, the larger umbrella of SSA has been shrinking, both financially and spirit-wise.

Compromised provision for basic needs like food, healthcare and security has restrained many KGBVs' progress, especially in northern India.

Poorly trained staff and vulnerability of employment have also weakened the scheme.

There is lack of motivation and inadequate funds to keep up with inflation.

What lies ahead?

KGBVs certainly serve the poor, and play a role in improving gender parity.

They will remain in demand and will need a longer-term plan and infrastructure.

Temporary arrangements like supply of smart boards and digital devices may not do.

Financial and pedagogic inputs will have to be radically enhanced for schooling to have effects on poverty.

Source: Indian Express