

Research Article

Bridging Exclusion of Girls at the Secondary Stage of Education: An Analysis of the Status of KGBV Girl's Hostel Scheme in Assam, India

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Date of Submission: 27/05/2020; Date of Acceptance: 11/08/2020

ABSTRACT

There has been a deficit of girls in education historically and especially at the secondary stage. Secondary stage of education is an important part in the educational hierarchy and this stage often witnesses girls dropping out or discontinuing with their education. Several socio-cultural factors contribute to the gender disparity in terms of access and participation in the educational processes. The Government of India has come up with several schemes to foster educational inclusion of girls. This current paper is based on one such scheme - the KGBV girl's hostel scheme under Samgra Siksha, which mandates setting up of 100 bedded hostels for girls studying till Standard XII. So as to gather perspective on the status of the performance of the hostel scheme, two KGBV type IV girl's hostel in two districts of Assam— Morigaon and Goalpara, were selected for an empirical study. The objective of the paper is to build an understanding of the factors that affect the educational participation of girls in these two districts and how far the scheme has been successful in bridging their educational exclusion at the secondary stage in Assam. A mixed research methodology comprising research tools like questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion was used for field work. Findings of the study suggest that there has been an increase in the enrolment of girls at the hostel in the two districts. Based on the interaction with the students, parents, hostel authorities and the state authorities, a threefold framework was adopted to analyse the performance of the hostel in terms of addressing educational exclusion. Factors such as distance from home and school, safety concerns,

flood situation and financial constraints governed the enrolment of girls at the hostel. In the end, the paper suggests inclusive strategies that could be adopted by these two hostels for better implementation and functioning of the scheme thereby fostering educational inclusion.

Keywords: Access, Drop out, Educational exclusion, Gender, Inclusion, Secondary stage

Abbreviations: **BPL** = Below Poverty Line; **EBB** = Educationally Backward Block; **KGBV** = Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya; **MHRD** = Ministry of Human Resource and Development; **OBC** = Other Backward Communities; **OECD** = Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; **RMSA** = Rasthriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan; **SSA** = Sarva Siksha Abhiyan; **SC** = Scheduled castes; **ST** = Scheduled Tribes; **UNESCO** =United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

INTRODUCTION

Access to educational opportunities is a fundamental right of every child, whether it is a boy or a girl (UNESCO, 2015). In India, there is a glaring gender disparity in terms of access to education. Often, girls are excluded from the process of attaining education due to widespread prejudices (Bandyopadhyay, 2012). India being an example of classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988), the well-being and educational needs of boys are preferred over girls. The participation of girls is thus skewed as they are mostly excluded from the educational processes, especially at the secondary stage of education. The table below shows level wise enrolment of males and females in schools and higher education in 2015- 16:

Table 1: Level wise enrolment in schools and higher education, 2015-16

Level	Female ('000)	Male ('000)
Primary	62250	66873
Upper Primary	32874	34720
Elementary	95124	109593
Secondary	18598	20547
Senior- Secondary	11733	13002

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

The data shows that the population of females enrolled at any stage of education is lower than the population of males. Besides, the enrolment of female students is seen decreasing drastically from the elementary to secondary stage.

The secondary stage is an important part of the educational hierarchy, as it helps to prepare the students for higher education and impart skills for competing in the global employment market. Secondary education includes two years of secondary and two years of higher secondary education. A workforce with an appropriately designed secondary education is increasingly being considered as integral to the economic development of a country (World Bank, 2003). With so much importance given to secondary education, it is about time to address the ground reality that affects access and participation of girls at the secondary stage. In India, several socio-cultural factors such as caste, class, age, gender roles and responsibilities act as a barrier for girls to access education and as a result they are excluded at the secondary stage. The Government of India over the years has been taking several measures in the form of policy and programmes such as the National Education Policy 1968, National Education Policy 1986, District Primary Education Programme, Girl's Hostel Scheme, Mahila Samukhya, Rasthriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Samagra Siksha etc., to address gender disparity and differential access to education. The centrally sponsored Girl's Hostel Scheme was launched and implemented till 2004-05 to address the problem of access to secondary education for girl students. It was later subsumed under RMSA from 2009 with the aim to set up a 100 bedded girl's hostels in the all the Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB) of India. Recently, this scheme has been merged with the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya under the Samagra Sikhsha Scheme to provide hostel facilities for girls till standard XII. In this context, this paper has been drawn from an empirical study on two such girl's hostel in two districts of Assam, which were running under the erstwhile RMSA scheme and are currently functioning as KGBV type IV hostel under *Samagra Sikhsha*. The paper attempts to understand and analyse performance of these two hostels in Assam within the ambit of providing educational inclusion to girls. By drawing from extensive interaction with the stake holders of both the hostels, this paper aims to build an understanding of the factors that affect the educational participation of girls in these two districts and how far the scheme has been successful in bridging their educational exclusion at the secondary stage.

Conceptualizing Exclusion in Education

Exclusion is a process of 'othering' whereby a group of people or a particular community is discriminated against by a more powerful group of people, leading to a systematic disadvantage in terms of livelihood, resources and economic assets. The idea of a 'male breadwinner' is a classic example of exclusion wherein women are structurally excluded from income generating opportunities which in turn affects human life and social inequality (Sayed *et al.*, 2007).

The process of exclusion is thus complex and multi-layered. In education, exclusion occurs primarily in the form of denial or restriction of access to and meaningful participation in educational institutions and processes (Sayed *et al.*, 2007). When we speak of access it is not only the physical access that matters, but also the socio-cultural practices that govern the access, the quality of education that is imparted, the governance of the educational institutes etc. The Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018 presented a data indicating the reasons for dropout among males and females. Factors like marriage and engagement in domestic activities listed in the table were cited as the major reasons for drop out among girls whereas boys dropped out due to engagement in economic activities. These factors intensify the gendered process of educational exclusion.

Table 2: Major Reasons for Drop-out

Major Reasons for Dropout	Males (%)	Females (%)
Child not interested in studies	23.80	15.60
Financial Constraints	23.70	15.20
Engage in Domestic Activities	4.80	29.70
Engage in Economic Activities	31.00	4.90
School is far off	0.5	3.40
Unable to cop-up with studies	5.4	4.60
Completed desired level/ Class	5.7	6.50
Marriage	-	13.9
Other reasons	5.1	6.2

Source: The Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

So as to address the multifarious ways in which exclusion operates and manifests through education, more inclusive policies and programmes needs to be formulated. ‘Inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ often treated as binaries, are actually intertwined. Exclusion can be bridged by adopting inclusive strategies in education. This paper based on an empirical research on the KGBV Girl’s Hostel Scheme in Assam, seeks to build an insight on how educational exclusion of girls in the two districts of Assam have been addressed and attempts to assess the scheme’s performance towards retaining girls at the secondary and higher secondary stages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literatures suggest that exclusion in education and at the secondary stages occur due to multiple reasons. It has been widely documented that poor access to secondary education causes lower enrolment of girls. The geographical distance from the

household and schools often discourages parents to send their children for pursuing education. Concerns of safety and security loom over the need to continue education (OECD, 2012). Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) in their paper have discussed how quality of schooling affects exclusion. Based on their research in Madhya Pradesh, they reported that poor physical infrastructure of schools, unavailability of electricity and lack of educational resources like computer labs create limited opportunities for girls to excel in education. This also affects their participation in the schooling processes. Bandyopadhyay and Subramanian (2008) and the 75th Report by the National Sample Survey (2018) suggest that maximum girls drop out from educational institutions due to domestic chores and responsibilities both in the rural and urban areas. This continuous dropping out of school causes exclusion of girls from mainstream education. Besides, the culture of son preference also aggravates the process of exclusion. Subramanian (2005) in her paper talks about the gender disparity that exists in terms of providing educational opportunities to children in the families. She discusses that parents often underinvest in educating the girl child, as they believe it has no returns. This form of social control reinforces the patriarchal idea of domestic socialization of girls. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) explained all these factors affecting the process of exclusion of girls from the school education with the help of the conceptual model of 'zones of exclusion' developed by Lewin (2007). All the researches reviewed, has helped in conceptualizing exclusion of girls in education, for this paper and provided a framework to analyse the findings from the field.

The study has adopted a mixed method research methodology. A questionnaire survey was used as a quantitative research tool to assess the condition of the hostel in terms of the physical infrastructure, services, sanitation and healthcare facilities, in-house teaching, vocational training. As a part of the qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were held with various stakeholders in the girl's hostel scheme – the students, the parents, the hostel warden and the state authorities. Focus group discussion held with the students at the hostel helped to generate an understanding of their experience at the hostel. The in-depth interviews with the parents helped to gather insight on their perception of the girl's hostel scheme and factors that affected admission of their daughters at the hostel. The interviews with the state authorities and the hostel warden helped to understand the aspects of governance and monitoring of the hostel scheme. The study was conducted in two hostels located in two Educationally Backward Block (EBBs) of two districts of Assam- Morigaon and Goalpara. Both the hostels were sanctioned under the RMSA scheme and were recently merged to form Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) Type IV under the Samagra Sikha programme (MHRD, 2018).

RESULTS

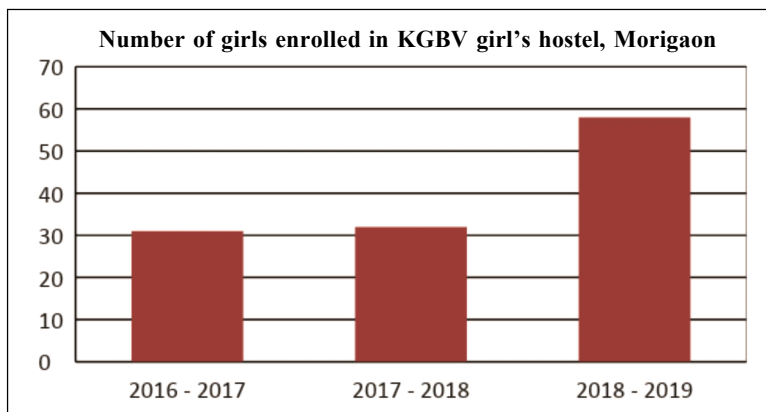
The two hostels selected for field visit provided only residential facilities for female students at the secondary and higher secondary stages. Both the hostels housed students belonging to the age group of 13 to 18 years. The students did not come from a financially strong background as most of their fathers were working as small scale farmers, mechanics or were into small scale businesses like rice dealerships. Few of the mothers were engaged as cultivators, house-helps, anganwadi workers, and the remaining were home-makers. The students belonged to diverse class - caste communities (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Class, Below Poverty Line, and General) and religion, and co-existed harmoniously. The students and the parents interviewed during the field visit had expressed unanimously that staying in the hostel had enabled them to afford and continue their education.

Both the hostels had satisfactory physical infrastructure in terms of room size, fans, lights and bathrooms with proper ventilation. No issues of alienation or discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, colour, disabilities were observed among the students. The students and parents were satisfied with the food and the facilities provided to them in the hostel. The parents had also stated that provision of hostel facilities have helped the girls to have better academic achievements. Since the hostel scheme provided food and lodging facilities for the girls, the parents felt safe and comfortable keeping their daughters at the hostel. This in turn, has helped in checking the drop-out rates of the girls in that area. We shall briefly look into the performance of both the hostels in terms of enrolment, individually.

KGBV, Morigaon (Gerua Secondary Girl's Hostel)

The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) girl's hostel taken up in this case study, comes under the Laharighat Block of the Morigaon district. The name of the girl's hostel is Gerua Girl's Hostel which has been functioning since 2016. The hostel is situated about a kilometre away from Gerua Secondary School. Interview with the hostel warden revealed that the number of students staying at the hostel increased significantly over time from 31 girls in 2016-17 to 58 girls in 2018-19, as shown in Graph 1.

The number of girls in the scheduled caste (SC) category had increased from 5 in 2016-2017 to 6 in 2017-2018 and then again dropped to 5 in 2018-19. The number of girls from the scheduled tribe category (ST) however had increased massively from 23 in 2016-2017 to 26 in 2017-2018 to 41 in 2018-2019. In the academic year 2018-2019, 5 students from Other Backward Communities (OBC) had also taken admission to the hostel. This clearly shows that awareness regarding the hostel



Graph 1: Graph showing the trend of the number of students enrolled in the KGBV Morigaon from the academic year 2016-2017 to 2018 - 19

Source: Data collected during field visit to Assam, March 2020

scheme for girls has successfully percolated among families of all socio- economic backgrounds and more households are coming forward to admit their daughters at the hostel. All the students admitted to the hostel are selected from the permissible catchment area as per the rules of the hostel scheme. The hostel receives 55 applications from students per year and the students are admitted through oral interviews.



Figure 1: The Gerua Girl's Hostel, Morigaon

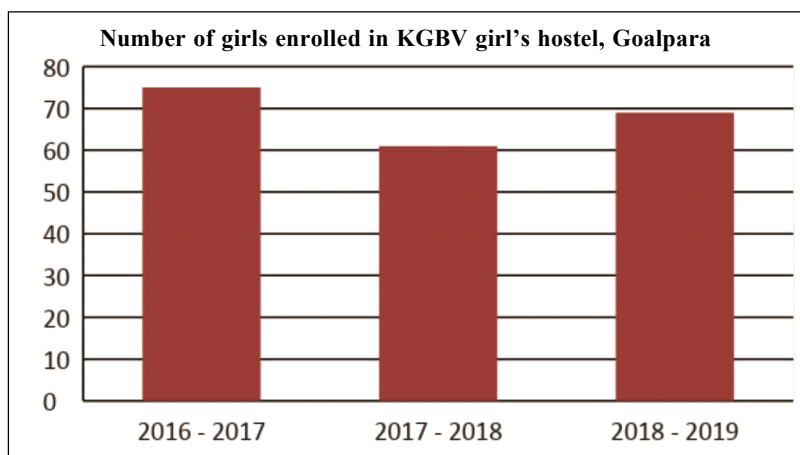


Figure 2: The hostel students going for their classes in the nearby model school.

KGBV, Goalpara (Lakhipur Girl's Hostel)

The girl's hostel scheme in Goalpara district was initiated in 2015 – 16. The girl's hostel girl's visited for this study, Lakhipur Girl's Hostel, was located in the Lakhipur block of the Goalpara district. The Lakhipur Girl's Hostel is situated in close proximity (about 1 kilometre) to the girl's school and the residents commute by foot to the school. The hostel houses students from standard IX to XII.

Below, shows a graph that bring about interesting findings concerning the enrolment of the girls at the Lakhipur Girl's Hostel. The number of girls enrolled at the hostel had dropped drastically from 75 in 2016-2017 to 61 in 2017-18.



Graph 2: Graph showing the trend of the number of students enrolled in the KGBV Goalpara from the academic year 2016-2017 to 2018-19

Source: Data collected during field visit to Assam, March 2020

However, as seen from the Graph 2, 2018-19 shows an increase in numbers (69) which is more than the previous year. Though there has been a fluctuation in the intake of girls at the hostel, the table suggests that the hostel houses students from diverse social backgrounds and all of them reside in complete harmony. The hostel caters to not only students from Scheduled castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Communities (OBC), but also minority and Below Poverty Line (BPL) students. One student from the BPL category had taken admission in 2018-19. The number of minority students had also increased sharply from 38 in 2016-17 to 39 in 2017-18 to 53 in 2018-19. The hostel receives around 40–50 applications every year. All the students are selected from the permissible catchment area surrounding the hostel.



Figure 3: The residents of the KGBV Goalpara, in front of the main hostel building

DISCUSSION

It is worth mentioning that the residential capacity as mandated by the girl's hostel scheme is 100 students, whereas the current occupancies of both the hostels in Morigaon and Goalpara are 58 and 69 students respectively. The state authorities and the warden stated that since both the hostels were of recent origin (established in 2016), there were less number of students enrolled. They said that with the passage of time, they expect a full occupancy of the hostel. The state authorities expressed that they are taking necessary steps to reach out to more households from the nearby villages and disseminate the importance of educating the girl child. This is a positive step towards bridging exclusion of girls at the secondary stage of education. The findings from the field can be discussed with the help of a three-fold analysis to understand the how the hostel scheme in Assam has been successful in addressing educational exclusion of girls:

- **Access:** Understanding how far the hostel scheme has been successful in boosting access to education of girls at the secondary stage.
- **Participation:** Assessing engagement of the students in the hostel activities.
- **Curriculum:** Understanding if the hostel has an inclusive curriculum



Figure 4: Residents of the Morigaon Hostel filling questionnaire surveys



Figure 5: Residents of the Goalpara hostel putting up a cultural programme during the field visit

Access

The fact that both the hostels houses students of diverse caste communities, is reflective of the idea that girls from the marginalized communities are being encouraged to pursue education at the secondary stage. The data gathered on enrolment at the hostel in Morigaon shows that in the academic year of 2018-2019 a massive enrolment of girls (58) was witnessed, which was almost twice the base year 2016-17. Such instances show that the scheme has been successful in increasing institutional access of girls. The hostel in Goalpara too shows an increase in enrolment in 2018- 19 after a drastic dip in 2017-18. The warden of the hostel reported that nearly 33 students had left the hostel before completing the secondary or the senior secondary stage. Marriage and medical reasons were cited as reasons for leaving the hostel. It is a matter of concern, that factors like marriage still affect the dropping out of girls at the secondary stage. The warden informed that the hostel authorities in Goalpara are taking required steps to prevent the girls from leaving the hostel. They have arranged for recreational activities, discussions on the importance of having an ambition in life, importance of employment- so as to raise awareness and motivation among the students to complete their education. The physical infrastructure of the hostel in terms of provision of separate beds, timely meals, recreation opportunities have

helped in increasing the participation of girls from the nearby village community. However, the hostel could improve on certain areas such as setting up of a reading room to encourage the students to study; setting up of a generator facility so that the frequent power cuts are taken care of; maintaining a health profile of the hostel residents to keep a check on their health; installation of a CCTV camera for monitoring safety and security of the girls. Working on these areas can help the hostel to adopt a more inclusive approach to secondary education, which in turn can help in checking the retention rate of the students.

Participation

Interaction with the students during the field visit, generated an understanding on the level of harmony that prevailed in the hostel environment. The hostels provided a conducive environment for the students to interact and participate freely in all kinds of activities. The hostel celebrated all the major festivals like Hostel Founder's Day, Rongali Bihu, Holi, Independence Day, Diwali etc, and the students actively participated in all the events. The students expressed that none of them experienced any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, class, colour, age during their stay at the hostel. The parents of the students had expressed that they have observed a positive transformation and better academic performance of their daughter ever since they have been enrolled at the hostel.

Curriculum

Both the hostels lacked in addressing curricular concerns. Discussions held with girls during the field work revealed that they had good academic aptitude but were unaware about the career choices that they could avail in the near future. Thus career guidance and counselling services could be provided to the girls so that they can pursue and excel in a career of their choice. Besides, the hostel could also introduce classes for academic support beyond school. It could be very helpful for the girls as they were approaching their secondary and senior secondary board exams and any academic assistance from the hostel would help them to excel in the exams. Most of the students also expressed that they were inclined towards acquiring sewing and toy making skills. However, there was no provision for imparting the students with the required vocational training at the hostel. Vocational training can aid and empower the students with necessary skill sets for becoming financially independent. Apart from arranging for career counseling services, academic support and vocational training, the hostel should also address issues of adolescence through discussions. Since the hostel houses adolescent girls, organizing regular discussion for them with experts on issues related to sexual harassment, menstrual hygiene, adolescent issues, drug

abuse, bullying etc. stand pertinent. Local people from the community can be approached to deliver motivational talks for the students.

Interaction with the parents also generated an understanding of the factors that affected the educational participation girls at the secondary stage in the two hostels of Assam.

- **Geographical Location:** The parents expressed that the schools are often located at great distances from their village and as a result commuting to and for everyday was a problem for their daughters. Besides concerns for safety and security of the girls during the travel often discouraged them to continue with their education. The hostel scheme in such times has helped to take care of the concerns for commuting and safety of the girls
- Few of the parents stated that Laharighat, Morigaon was flood prone area and during floods it becomes difficult to manage the children at home. Hence keeping their daughters at the hostel was a viable option for them.
- Discipline and a good study environment at the hostel acted as a stimulus for the parents to admit their daughters at the hostel. All the parents said that the hostel provided a conducive atmosphere for their daughters to live and study.
- Economic Reasons were also cited for admitting their daughters at the hostel. Since the hostel scheme provided food and lodging facilities free of any cost, the parents were often motivated to continue the education of their daughters.

CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted to understand if the girl's hostel scheme in Assam has been successful in bridging exclusion of girls at the secondary stage. Both the hostels have been able to foster educational inclusion of girls to an extent, as there has been an increase in the number of enrolled students at the hostel as well as participation of students from diverse backgrounds. The girls were very satisfied with the functioning of the hostel and they had expressed that the hostel has helped them to have better academic achievements. However, there are certain specific suggestions that can make the hostel more inclusive and help in better functioning and implementation of the scheme in these two districts of Assam. These suggestions have been mentioned under the following categories:

Infrastructural Facilities

- Bedding facilities (mattresses, pillows, bed sheets, quilt) should be made available to the girls staying at the hostel.

- Water treatment facility to treat high iron content should be provided to the KGBV hostel.
- There should be provision of refrigerators for the hostels to store perishable and non-perishable food items.
- Provision of hot water should be made available to the students, as it is difficult for them to bathe in cold water during winters. Solar heating facilities may be explored.
- The reading room should have proper infrastructure with adequate books on the subjects taken up by the students in the secondary and senior secondary classes.
- The hostels (especially KGBV Morigaon) should have generators installed as power cuts are quite frequent in that area.
- There is a budgetary provision in Samgra Sikhsha on setting up of nutrition garden in schools. The large grounds of the KGBV hostel premises can be utilized to set up a nutrition garden for the students.

Health Concerns

- The girls at the hostel are adolescents and thus there should be regular health check-ups organized at the hostel. The health profiles of the students should be maintained in the hostel.

Safety and Security

- A CCTV camera for regular surveillance should be installed in the KGBV Morigaon hostel.
- A provision should be made for installing a complaint/suggestion box at an appropriate place in the hostel, so that the girls can share their concerns without any hesitation.
- There could be a provision for two security guards in the hostel - one male and one female.
- The provision of self-defence training for the girls at the hostel can empower them.

Curricular Concerns

- There should be regular inter and intra state exchange programmes for the students of the KGBV. This could help in personality development and build confidence of the students

- Career guidance and counselling services should be provided to girls so that they can pursue and excel in a career of their choice.
- The hostel should organize regular discussion for girls with experts on adolescent issues.
- Vocational education is an important component for skill development at the secondary and senior secondary stage. There should be provision for vocational courses at the hostel.
- Teachers from the nearby model school can be recruited at the hostel to work as part time academic teachers to help the students with their studies. Financial incentives can be given to these teachers.

Training and Monitoring

- Regular gender sensitization programmes should be organized for both the administrative and other staff members, involved in the implementation of the scheme (District Education Officers, District Programme Officers, Principal of the schools, Warden, Security Guards, Kitchen staff etc.)
- Public- Private partnership can be fostered for quality improvement of KGBVs. Support can be sought from institutions/industries etc. for infrastructural facilities such as desks, chairs, fans, water purifier etc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is a part of a broad research study on the Status of Girl's Hostel Scheme conducted by the Department of Gender Studies, National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest involved in writing the paper.

FUNDING STATEMENT

The article being a part of an already existing research project at NCERT, all the funding for the research is granted by NCERT.

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How to cite this article: Ghosh, R. and Yadav, M. (2020) 'Bridging Exclusion of Girls at the Secondary Stage of Education: An Analysis of the Status of KGBV Girl's Hostel Scheme in Assam, India', *Journal of Exclusion Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 91-105.