

Research Article

Inclusion of Socially-Marginalized Adolescent Girls in School Education: Role of KGBV Scheme

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ABSTRACT

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) were conceptualized to address the inequity in education of adolescent girls who face intersection disadvantages of gender, caste, and class. This paper highlights the role of KGBV scheme in ensuring 'inclusion' of all girls and providing them 'quality' education. A National Residential School Program, KGBV is a critical component of the newly introduced "*Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*". The study was conducted in 18 KGBVs in four districts of Rajasthan. It used a mixed-method approach to understand the satisfaction of the end-users and implementers of the scheme, including students, hostel wardens, and teachers. KGBVs were found to adopt a structural and multi-dimensional approach in fostering inclusion and increasing access of rural/tribal and low-caste adolescent girls. The paper also addressed the limitations of residential schools in their optimum implementation at ground level; presenting a valuable addition to future researches and education policymakers.

Keywords: Adolescent girls, Education inequity, Education, Inclusive education, KGBV, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is the primary factor hindering enrolment, retention, transition from primary to secondary level education, and learning outcomes. It gets worsened for children from socially marginalized and indigenous communities, leading them to consistently underachieve (UNICEF, 2007). In 2017, MHRD projected the enrolment population

Table 1: Depicts the enrolment rate of female children in school education

Level of education	Caste based enrolment (%)		Total (%)
	SC	ST	
Upper primary	8.1	4.4	45.9
Secondary	8.1	4.3	46.8
Senior Secondary	8.0	4.2	47.3

Source: MHRD, 2018

of India in school education. At upper primary level, 49 percent of female children were enrolled, out of which, only 8.14 percent females belonged to SC community and 4.45 percent females belonged to ST community (Table 1).

The data depicted a decline in enrolment of girls belonging to SC and ST communities at higher levels of education. Thus, it can be recognized that gender inequalities are interlinked with several other forms of social inequalities in education attainment, notably caste, class, ethnicity, and religion. This leads to a huge disparity in rates of enrolment and out-of-school girls belonging particularly to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other minority communities. Rajasthan has 11 percent minority population. The overall percentage of enrolment of minorities at primary level was 8.8 percent which further reduced to 6.6 percent at upper-primary level. Girl children from OBC communities recorded highest progress through a fall in dropout rate from 12 percent in 2014-15 to 9 percent in 2016-17 (ASER, 2017).

High dropout rate and low transition rate at secondary level is the key challenge to girls' education (Kundu, 2019). The major factors influencing educational access and quality of learning for girls include:

- **Cost to attend school:** There are four types of costs that parents invest in educating their daughters: (i) Direct Fees (ii) Indirect Fees (iii) Indirect costs associated to send girls to school (iv) Opportunity Costs. Because of cost barrier, girls from poorer families are more at risk of not attending or completing school education.
- **Poor learning outcomes:** Some schools exhibit such poor quality of education and education resources that many children pass out of primary school without learning to read. Though the schools do not charge tuition fees, but the additional costs of buying uniform, textbooks and stationery, and the opportunity costs of losing their daughter's time and labour create barriers for parents to send girls to school.
- **Safety and Security:** It has been well documented that distance to school has a major impact on enrolment, especially for girls. The safety concerns within

school premises also create a barrier for parents to send their daughters to school. This is influenced by additional factors like lack of female teachers and lack of separate toilets for girls.

- **Lack of secondary schools:** The absence of secondary schools in vicinity inhibits parents to send girl children to schools situated at distance. The fear of violence additionally influences the high dropout rate of girls after elementary education.
- **Forced withdrawal of married adolescents:** Adolescent girls are exposed to multiple layers of vulnerability in virtue of stringent patriarchal social norms, which in turn affect their access to health, educational attainment, marriage, and social relationships. Estimates suggest that at least 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 get married in India each year, which makes it home to largest number of child brides in the world (World Bank, 2018). Early marriage leads to forced withdrawal of adolescent girls before they even complete their elementary education. Thus, the transition rate of elementary to secondary level education descends.

The need for government interventions is imperative to educate girls. For parents, the cost of educating girls seems higher and the benefits seem distant and hard to capture (Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). Thus, the challenges to achieve quality education are far greater. There has been a failure in acknowledging the complexity of barriers disrupting children's access to school, an inclusive environment, engaging parents and local communities in supporting the cause- a holistic approach to embed schools as vibrant places to ensure social development (UNICEF, 2007).

The gender focus needs to be enhanced in national systems. An inclusive education system would indicate a seamless integration of different types of education methods and provision of equitable educational resources. Developing strategies to bridge the gaps will allow dropout and never enrolled girls to get enrolled in formal education (UNICEF, 2002). Making education compulsory and free of cost is the underpinning strategy of any national plan to achieve universal education and eliminate gender disparity in education. Since families economically prefer sending sons to school than their daughters, offering a financial support to send girl children to school as well as sharing the advantages of sending girls to school can make a real difference. Many researches highlight various strategies that have been adopted to ensure elimination of gender gap in education. Gathering gender-specific education statistics helps in measuring enrolment of boys and girls. Analysis of data disaggregated by not only gender but several other factors like urban or rural location, caste, class; helps to highlight disparities within disparities. Taking special measures to reach the most

disadvantaged girls is another key strategy to combat multiple disadvantages faced by girls because of their gender. Providing alternative education to girls and over-aged children is another way to reach out to children who have dropped out of school, including groups of working children and children residing in conflict situations (UNICEF, 2004). The rapid increase in girls' schooling can be attributed to the policy focus on bridge schools and residential camps that provide temporary measures aiming to integrate out-of-school girls into formal schools (NITI Aayog, 2015). Providing residential facility as well as introduction of bridge course to ensure smooth transition of out-of-school and never enrolled girls in formal schooling, KGBV scheme sets an exemplary model to ensure better enrolment and retention rates of adolescent girls in India (Government of Assam, 2016).

The 2030 global agenda of achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was set in motion through the United Nations in 2015. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, all countries announced temporary closure of schools, affecting more than 91 percent schools worldwide (United Nations, 2020). Though India has made substantial progress in enrolment rate and equity in education enrolment, there is still a long road to achieve quality parameters (Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2018) (Figure 1).

The KGBV scheme was merged with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) with effect from April 2007 and has been further subsumed under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) since 2018. The SSA framework for school education recognized 'gender' as a critical component to attain equity in education (MHRD, 2018). The primary objective of KGBV scheme is to ensure access to quality education to adolescent girls belonging



Figure 1:
 Source: GVI, 2020

to disadvantaged communities by setting up residential facilities in Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) of the country. Educationally Backward Blocks refer to blocks (an intermediate geographical cluster between a village and a district) where the Female Literacy Rate is below the national average of 46.1 percent and Gender Gap in literacy is higher than the national average of 21.5 percent (NITI Aayog, 2017). Initially, a list of 3073 EBBs was formulated in relation to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Subsequently, the list was expanded to include 406 more blocks, extending the total EBBs in the country to 3479 (MHRD, 2018). 186 out of 254 blocks in Rajasthan are designated as EBBs (NUEPA, 2016).

Under the newly launched integrated scheme of education- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, effective from 2018-19, the KGBVs have been upgraded to senior secondary level. The former component of residential facility under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) has also been subsumed under KGBV scheme. A total of 1232 KGBVs have been upgraded under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan since 2018-19. The four types of KGBVs introduced under SMSA are: (a) Type-I for class VI-VIII (b) Type-II for classes VI-X (c) Type-III for classes VI-XII (d) Type-IV for standalone girls' hostels for classes IX-XII. In Rajasthan in particular, 68 KGBVs have been upgraded from class VI to VIII to class VI to XII (Table 2).

Table 2:

	KGBVs sanctioned				Total KGBVs sanctioned upto 2018-19	Number of operational KGBVs
	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV		
Rajasthan	132	0	68	118	318	316
India	2473	729	503	2265	5970	4791

Source: MHRD, 2019

Besides education, vocational training is also provided to the students in KGBVs envisioning to foster self-reliance and self-dependency in terms of economic independence.

METHODOLOGY

To capture the efficacy of targeted interventions for adolescent girls' education, this paper specifically focuses on effectiveness of KGBV scheme and its role in furthering the objectives of ensuring inclusive and quality education.

The four key concerns addressed in the present paper:

- KGBV Schools are functioning effectively to promote education of adolescent girls from hard-to-reach communities.

- Infrastructural facilities influence the girls' enrolment and retention in KGBVs
- Both students and teachers perceive these schools as an opportunity to overcome educational barriers.
- Quality of education and equity of opportunity are valuable to promote education of girls.

The study was conducted in four districts of Rajasthan- Jaipur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, and Bharatpur. Rajasthan was purposely selected for the study as it displayed least female literacy rate of 52.1 percent as compared to national average of 65.4 percent (Census data, 2011). 300 students from 18 KGBVs were selected for the study. An exhaustive sample was selected from the senior-most class of each school. Since three types of KGBVs function in Rajasthan, six schools of each type were selected to maintain equitable representation.

The data was primarily collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with students and school staff including teachers and hostel wardens. A satisfaction survey was conducted with the students using a three-point scale. It helped highlight the student's satisfaction around education resources and infrastructural facilities available in the KGBV schools they were studying in. An in-depth interview schedule was prepared in advance that guided the interviews with the aforementioned respondents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Equity Framework

Berne and Stiefel (1984) highlighted an Equity Framework which has been extensively adapted to measure the equity of school finance systems that can be applied to broader analysis of educational equity. The present study adapted the equity framework to find answers to four guiding questions: for whom, what, how and how much?

- (i) **The targets of equity concerns:** The adolescent girls are the targets of KGBVs because they spend most of their time in the residential education setting. Their experiences at the school and hostel are believed to be equitably distributed.
- (ii) **Objects:** This category broadly highlights different indicators that need to be equitably distributed. The author identified inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Table below lists the identified indicators that were used while applying the equity framework.
- (iii) **Equity Principle:** The three principles embodied by the Berne and Stiefel Equity Framework- horizontal equity, vertical equity and equal opportunity entail

Table 3:

Access	Resources	Results
Enrolment	Average class size	Achievement test scores
Retention	Pupil-teacher ratio	Transition from upper primary to secondary level of education
Progression	Per pupil expenditure Quality of school facilities Satisfaction with school facilities Teacher education level and experience	Occupational status of alumni students

Source: Adapted from UNESCO-UIS, 2007

determining whether the distribution of educational resources are equitable. KGBVs in particular focus on both Vertical and Horizontal Equity. Vertical Equity involves recognizing the particular group of socially-marginalized adolescent girls who face differential education treatment in virtue of their gender, ethnicity, social status, and fiscal capacity. Horizontal equity on the other hand, helps ensuring equal treatment of adolescent girls who are equally situated. It introduced a horizontally equitable education system that treats students who are alike equally, thereby ensuring that they get access to similar educational resources and achieve similar positive results. Since all the girls eligible to enrol in Kasturba Gandhi schools belong to similar socio-economic backgrounds, there is little or no variation in the dispersion of access, resources or results. The study applies the premise of horizontal equity to analyse education access and resources. It also highlights the necessity of differential treatment to make the education system more equitable.

ASSESSED INDICATORS

Access to Enrolment

The gender gap in enrolment has been a chronic problem in Rajasthan in virtue of the gender bias of parents (Educate Girls, 2010). The residential facilities set up at KGBVs in all districts provide an opportunity for girls to break the pattern of an inferior status at home and complete their upper primary and secondary education. In Rajasthan, around 200 KGBV residential schools have been set up in 13 identified focused districts. KGBVs were set up to particularly enhance the enrolment trends in the country, especially at upper primary levels. Though the coverage of KGBV scheme extends to 24 states in the country, the norm of enrolment in each school is up to 100 girls. It was observed that the enrolment rate of students increased each year. The adoption of mobilization methods by school staff to reach communities

helped them achieve the predetermined target of enrolling 100 students in most of the schools. At a broader level, while 16.2 lakh adolescent girls are reportedly out-of-school in India, KGBV program caters to only 3.78 lakh adolescent girls (Pandey, 2018). Thus, the focus needs to shift towards reaching out to more vulnerable groups, meanwhile not losing the quality of education services and infrastructural facilities provided.

Average class size

As per the guidelines, the enrolment to a KGBV should be up to 100 students. The average number of students in each class was: (a) 27 for type-I, (b) 08 for type-III, and (c) 13 for type-IV. Class size for 12 percent schools was as low as three students. The major focus of teachers in type-I schools was to fill the vacant seats. This led to enrolment of students beyond the prescribed criteria; that is enrolment of students from the same block or even to take in a few students from general category but from poorer families.

Table 4: Pupil-Teacher Ratio in type-I KGBVs

Block	Number of Pupil	Number of Teachers	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
1.	106	4	26.5
2.	102	3	34
3.	103	7	15
4.	112	8	14
5.	74	2	37
6.	95	3	32

Pupil-teacher Ratio

KGBVs type-I were critical to be assessed for their pupil-teacher ratios as the students studied in the same campus. Table 4 represents pupil-teacher ratio of the six type-I KGBVs assessed in the study.

The pupil-teacher ratio of 50 percent of the KGBVs needed attention and a timely solution to maintain quality. One teacher for over 30 students created numerous challenges in the residential setup. This hampered the learning environment for the students who required focused attention, given the nature of the scheme. A high level of dissatisfaction was observed at the teachers' level, given the pressure of handling a large number of students, bridging the education gap, administering school facilities, and ensuring transparency and accountability at the district level. Most of the teachers in the schools were deputed from dark zones and displayed a lack of interest in the

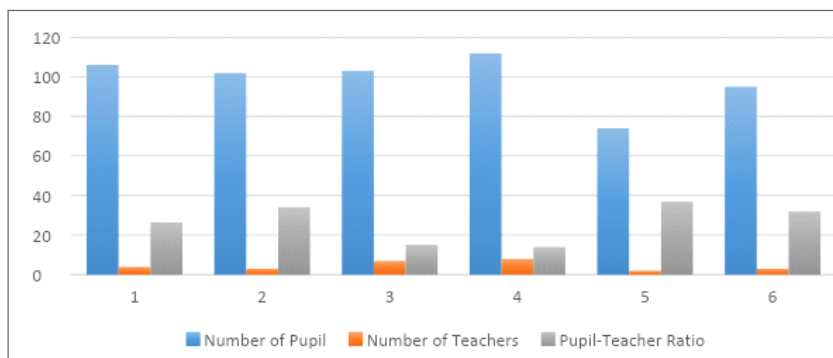


Figure 2: Pupil-teacher ratio in type-I KGBVs

Source: Author

current job role. Lack of teachers in KGBVs is a huge challenge that states face. Many innovative solutions have been proposed to minimize the gap but lower salary scales given to these teachers were a major impediment.

Per Pupil Expenditure

While the approved outlays for Rajasthan under SSA and RMSA was Rs. 7859 crore, it was Rs. 5746 crore under SMSA (MHRD, 2018). It can be observed that the central government's allocation of resources for SMSA is lower than its combined allocation for SSA and RMSA (Kundu, 2019).

There were significant differences found in the provision of infrastructure and financial resources between type-1, type-III, and type-IV schools. The foremost difference of per pupil expenditure was the key factor influencing the relative resource availability for different types of schools, with 1650 INR per pupil in type-I and 1500 INR per pupil in type III and IV. In addition, the school premises situated inside or outside the residential campus played a huge role in motivation of girls to join the secondary school. It was observed during the interaction that students preferred schools within the residential campus or at a walking distance. KGBVs with school facility situated more than 1 km away created inhibition amidst both students and their family members.

The guidelines of allocation of food resources varied in different types of KGBVs. Type-1 schools leveraged a fixed food menu and food quantity whereas secondary KGBVs (type-III and type-IV) were not bound to do so. Type-III KGBVs have been introduced with new financial norms and guidelines which concur with type-I KGBVs. Since the transition is cumbersome and would require time to put through, they have been following the former financial norms of type-IV schools (Table 5).

Table 5: Recurring Costs (INR)

S.No.	Activity	Type-I	Type-IV	Criteria
1.	Food and Lodging	1650 pm*	1500 pm	Per girl
2.	Stipend for girls	150 pm	-	Per girl
3.	Electricity/water charges	1500 pm	1000 pm	Per girl
4.	Medical Care	1500 pa*	750 pm	Per girl
5.	Maintenance	1000 pa /girl	32000 fixed/KGBV	-
6.	Miscellaneous	1500 pa	450 pm	Per girl
7.	Supplementary TLM, stationery, and other educational material	1000 pa/ girl	20000 pa/KGBV	-
8.	Vocational Training/Specific skill training	1250 pa	-	Per girl
9.	Preparatory Camps	7000 pa	-	Per KGBV
10.	School functions/PTAs	300 pa	-	Per girl
11.	Capacity Building	10000 pa	-	Per KGBV
12.	Self Defence Training	10000 pa	-	Per KGBV
13.	1 Warden	5000	5000	Per month
14.	1 Chowkidar	7000	7000	Per month
15.	1 Head Cook	6500	6667	Per month
16.	2 Assistant Cook	5000	5000	Per month per cook

pm*- per month; pa*- per annum

Source: Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Govt. of Rajasthan

Satisfaction with School Facilities

A three-point scale was used to seek student's satisfaction level with regard to education resources including learning material, infrastructure resources including residential facilities, and their personal experiences including safety at night and relationships with peers, teachers, and hostel warden. 82 percent school students were satisfied with the education resources and infrastructure facilities. 15.2 percent students feared for their safety at night and during their travel from school to hostel. 5.4 percent students did not wish to stay at the KGBV and were forced by their families to complete education at the residential school facility. The performance of schools was assessed on the basis of resources and infrastructure checklists prepared by the researcher. These checklists helped in assessing the quantity and quality of infrastructure and education resources. The performance of schools and the satisfaction associated with the resources determined whether a particular KGBV school was better functioning or low performing. It was interesting to observe that the students

studying in better-functioning schools could critically express their dissatisfaction with school facilities vis-à-vis students from low performing schools were more satisfied.

Transition from Upper Primary to Secondary level of Education

In all the 18 schools under study, the enrolment of girls was highest in class VI as compared to higher classes. The transition from upper primary to secondary level revealed a declining rate primarily due to absence of similar infrastructure and education facilities in type-III and type-IV KGBVs. While upper primary KGBVs were functioning since 2004, the strategy of introducing secondary KGBVs was brought in much later in 2018. The transition from upper primary to secondary level was a major challenge since parents did not want to send their daughters to non-boarding schools and pay the school fees. After the secondary KGBVs got introduced, the end users were still found to be slowly getting accustomed to the idea of getting adolescent girls enrolled in a co-education school setup.

The biggest contribution observed during the school visits was the change in girls' perception of themselves. Interaction with students in class VI vis-à-vis class VIII revealed the deep change in their personality. A sense of self-confidence was inculcated during their stay at KGBV. The constant encouragement to invest time on self and get involved in different activities like art, music, and sports truly helped girls achieve a sense of empowerment and master new skills.

CONCLUSION

While the access to education at the elementary level has considerably improved over the last decade, a number of factors need to be considered to ensure gender equality in education. KGBV scheme is one such innovative step that emphasizes to reduce gender disparities in the school education. Residential schooling has emerged as a major system to ensure access to education to adolescent girls. KGBVs have helped in increasing the representation of adolescent girls from educationally backward communities- SCs, STs, and OBCs though representation from Muslim communities was very low. KGBV schools have been functioning effectively to ensure increase in enrolment rate of dropout and never enrolled girls but the quality of education still needs more attention. The infrastructure facilities do influence the girls; enrolment and retention in KGBVs. The quantity and quality of food served in the hostel was the most influential factor in ensuring retention of students. There was a significant difference in satisfaction of students and teachers with education resources and infrastructural facilities.

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