Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas - Supaul Incident

What is the issue?

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

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What happened?

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

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

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- 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.
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- Kasturba schools have made notable success and progress in achieving this goal, despite extremely modest financial support.
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- KGBVs specifically retained the girls they admit from marginalised sections.
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- These include the Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes, the minorities and upper castes below the poverty line.
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- Moreover, a common element among the girls in the recent incident is poverty.
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- Their parents prefer to let them stay at a poorly funded hostel because conditions at home are more worse.
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- Their parents value the opportunity in these rural residential schools which they cannot otherwise afford.
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What are the policy shortfalls?

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- The official website of the Supaul district presents an impressive list of measures taken by the police to ensure security and peace.
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- But these measures did not suffice to help those 10 to 14 year-old girls.
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- This is not the first time that a KGBV has faced a security breach.
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- As it happens in all schemes meant for the poorest sections, the infrastructure and services are minimal and KGBVs are largely insecure.
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- Until a few years ago, the state government ran some of the KGBVs with help from the Mahila Samakhya.
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- It is a reputed women’s empowerment programme, which imparted efficiency and institutional capacity to the KGBVs under its care.
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- But sadly, KGBVs have lost their special status now and, the larger umbrella of SSA has been shrinking, both financially and spirit-wise.
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- Compromised provision for basic needs like food, healthcare and security has restrained many KGBVs' progress, especially in northern India.
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- Poorly trained staff and vulnerability of employment have also weakened the scheme.
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- There is lack of motivation and inadequate funds to keep up with inflation.
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What lies ahead?

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- KGBVs certainly serve the poor, and play a role in improving gender parity.
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- They will remain in demand and will need a longer-term plan and infrastructure.
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- Temporary arrangements like supply of smart boards and digital devices may not do.
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- Financial and pedagogic inputs will have to be radically enhanced for schooling to have effects on poverty.
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Source: Indian Express

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