

## Change Starts with the Family: Preeti's Story

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Preeti Parihar, aged 21 years, lives in Koniya village of Chitrakoot district in Uttar Pradesh. Her father is a general contractor and her mother is a home-maker. She comes from a very conservative family where interacting with the opposite gender in public was forbidden. Preeti used to have great disdain for the girls who talked to boys in her school and village.

After completing her high school studies, Preeti volunteered for **ABSSS** (Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan) on a project to find effective solutions to address water, hygiene and sanitation problems in her village. It was during this stint that Mr. Bhagwat Prasad (Director of ABSSS) introduced her to the Kadam Badhate Chalo (KBC) program. In February 2016, Preeti became a part of KBC program and attended the phase 1 Sports Camp organized in Chitrakoot. Preeti entered this camp with a lot of hesitancy, as it was the first time she was going to participate in any activity alongside boys. But to her surprise, interacting with the fellow participants, which included boys, helped her to sensitize different viewpoints to address situations. Preeti realized that it is necessary for young boys and girls of her age to interact and it is nothing to be ashamed of.



Preeti decided to take the learnings from this workshop and change her family's attitude towards gender. Preeti's family did not support her when she shared about the activities and learnings from the KBC workshop with them. Moreover, they stopped her from going for the KBC and ABSSS meetings. Preeti was in distress as she never imagined her family to behave like this way with her. She decided to share her turmoil with Mr.



Bhagwat Prasad, who after listening to her story, he went to talk to her parents and clarified to them about the work she would be doing in KBC program. With the help of Mr. Bhagwat Prasad, Preeti managed to prove to her parents that she was working together with boys towards a good cause. Gradually, she educated her family of the significance of having gender equality in everyday life and started questioning their archaic thinking. At present, Preeti positively interacts with boys, and her family supports the work she is doing in association with the KBC program.

Preeti mentioned,

“In my village, including my family, everybody had this thinking about having a boy as a child whenever any woman was pregnant. I find it very upsetting and I always correct such people and explain to them that a girl and a boy should be treated equally in all aspects of life”.

*\*The above quote has been translated in English, from Hindi, in which it was originally narrated.*

Being an active member of the KBC program, Preeti was invited to attend the 3-day Gender & Sports workshop held in New Delhi. With the help of this workshop, Preeti met many like-minded people working across 12 KBC sites in India. She gained a lot of information and confidence by learning with them about the topics of gender, equality and violence.

Preeti plays a significant role in her community by forming various youth groups in different villages. She conducts weekly meetings, rallies and sports gatherings with these groups. With the help of these gatherings, Preeti reaches out to the youth and mobilizes them to address the issues of gender discrimination, violence and illiteracy. She conducts half-an-hour to one hour sports sessions after school hours, where these young boys and girls play interactive games that teaches them valuable lessons of working together, being role models and communicating effectively amongst each other. She always encourages the youth of her village to follow the right path in their lives and believes that if these young boys and girls can learn to work together, then they will further educate their families and friends on the topics of gender and violence, which will create a huge impact in their community.

