

**“I never waited for help from above or below; I helped myself.” Nikita Saha**

*Siliguri, West Bengal, February 2018*



NIKITA SAHA

Nikita Saha, a 15-year-old female participant on the Kadam Badhate Chalo program in Siliguri, West Bengal, is someone who challenged her own family at the age of 14, a young woman who has already stood up against the world to protect herself. Nikita is currently a student in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Sree Deshbandhu Balika Vidyapeeth school in Siliguri. A resident of New Jalpaiguri, she cycles about 45 minutes to reach her school every day.

Nikita has had to face significant problems already in her life, but has shown considerable strength and resilience. A victim of abuse from a family member when she was still young, now she intends to help others who face similar

situations. Talking with PSD about her life, she said, *“I lost my father at the age of 5 and my mother remarried. Unfortunately, that man turned out to be a drunkard and doesn’t want to work at all. My mother works as a domestic worker and she is the sole earner in our family. I recently had a fight with my mother and went to live at my grandmother’s home. While I was living there, I noticed a change in my uncle’s (father’s brother) behaviour. During the day he used to behave very well, taking care of me like a daughter, but at night he was completely different, and he tried to inappropriately touch me many times.*

*“I did not wait for help from above or below, I helped myself. I took a stand and told him not behave that way, when it didn’t work I called CINI Child Line and requested them to help me join a hostel. After my mother learned about this she called me back home. Now I stay with my mother, step-father and step-brother.”*

Nikita was a very active participant in the *Freedom To Play* camp held in Sree Deshbandhu Balika Vidyapeeth. She displayed good leadership skills during the camp and was selected for the next step of KBC, the *Gender Through Sports* workshop, in which Nikita again performed exceptionally well, never hesitating to express herself. Nikita’s questions often made other participants stop and think, for instance during the *Gender*



Nikita delivering a debrief during a Sports Leadership Workshop





*Through Sports workshop she asked her fellow participants, “Why do women always have to listen to someone? They must listen to their fathers when they are young, their husbands when they get married and their sons when they grow old? Why?”*

Although Nikita is still young, she has a thirst for knowledge and a zeal to work for equality, and she has taken inspiration from the KBC workshops. *“These workshops make me feel very confident, even though normally I cannot just strike up a conversation with people. After coming here [for the Gender Through Sports workshop] I did not talk to people much on the first 2 days but now that I’ve seen everyone sharing their*

*stories and learned that this happens with everyone on different levels, I have felt more confident in speaking.”*

Speaking about the contrast between what she had been taught growing up and how the lessons of the KBC

workshops, she said *“All I was told from my childhood was that talking to boys is bad. A conversation between boys and girls is always seen as wrong. But here things are different, the trainers encourage everyone to talk to the opposite gender and no one gets any bad ideas here. This place and people are so ideal, and our society will develop a lot if everyone starts to think this way.”*



Through the *Gender Through Sports* workshop, Nikita Saha got an opportunity to learn and understand about gender, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes. The workshop not only gave her an opportunity to learn about gender but

also provided a stage to share her story and encourage other youth to face the situations in their lives with courage.

Nikita was an active participant in the *Sports Leadership Workshop* and showed exceptional leadership skills and dedication. From planning for the games all through the night, adding progressions with careful thought and ensuring equal participation, Nikita really stood out during the 3-day workshop. Raj Chhetri, a 16-year-old male participant, who was also the team leader of Nikita’s group, said, *“She is a very good team player, she understands her role and effectively delivers it. She never hesitates to give a feedback. She contributed a lot for the team.”*

After participating in the *Sports Leadership Workshop*, Nikita has been equipped, like many other participants, with the leadership skills and knowledge to both understand how to deliver KBC games, but more importantly to become a youth leader within her community, where she intends to take the lessons on gender equality learned through the KBC workshops and teach them to others. While KBC is trying to raise youth leaders throughout the country, Nikita stands out as remarkable. As she once stood up to her abuser, now she will stand up for others who have been abused.

