

CSP Breaks Gender Barriers & Raises Aspirations of Participants: The Story of Archita Rout

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Archita Rout is a 13-year old girl studying at Vivekananda Shiksha Kendra school in Patrapada slum of Bhubaneswar. Her family resides in Patrapada itself, where her father runs a small tea shop. Archita was always interested in sports, but never got the opportunity at her school. She laments, “Our school did not have proper facilities for us to play sports.” However, this changed two years back when Pro Sport Development (PSD) initiated the Community Sports Program (CSP) at her school, in collaboration with Tata Trusts. Archana was quick to grab the opportunity to sign-up to the program, and never looked back!

The thing that attracted her most to the program was the fact that both girls and boys played together. She says, “Earlier girls and boys used to play separately. But since we have been playing together, I have learnt about teamwork, how to speak with each other as well as how to cooperate with each other.” This, in her opinion, has diminished the everyday discrimination between girls and boys, at her school and among her peers. She recalls, “Previously there was a general opinion that boys are better at sport whereas girls are weak; but now children in our school don’t think like that as they see girls and boys playing equally. This is what I like most about this program.”



Archita further built on this positive experience by participating in two of the mixed-gender sports competitions



organized as part of the CSP. This gave her the chance to venture out of her school to meet and interact with several other students from different schools. Participating in the competitions provided her with confidence, and refined her skills of working together in a team. Her best memory of the competitions is the fact that girls and boys were competing together, an uncommon practice in schools across India. Her main learning from participating in these

competitions was, “It’s not important to win or lose, but what’s important is that we learn something from our experiences for the future.”

The program has also had a positive impact on Archita's academics and personal behavior. She credits the CSP in increasing her interest in and seriousness towards her school studies, particularly the educative games part of the curriculum. She is of the opinion that the program has reduced her laziness and her procrastination, as she now organizes herself better by waking up on time, giving enough time to her studies as well as taking time out to play everyday in her community. This positive change in her behavior has also been observed by her teachers and parents.



Rasmita Rath, a teacher at Vivekananda Shiksha Kendra school, who has known Archita for the past 10 years, has seen tremendous change in her. Rasmita confirms Archita's previous laziness, as well as low confidence and general nervousness. She says, "Earlier, if Archita did not understand something in class, she would not have the confidence to ask questions. She also did not speak much with the other children. But, in the recent past her self-confidence has increased significantly, allowing her not just to ask questions in class, but also respond to others' questions. I now observe her freely interacting with other students. She has also improved in her studies." Indeed, Archita's improvement in her academics is confirmed by the increase in her total average exams scores from 50% in 2017 to 76% in 2018, with a significant increase in language and mathematics scores.

Archita's mother, Jayanti Rout, is extremely pleased with the progress her daughter has made in her personal and academic life. She is most happy with the fact that Archita is now organized, waking up on time, attending tuition classes regularly and giving sufficient time to her studies at home. She is proud of the fact that Archita now easily mingles with others her age, something she was not able to do earlier. This is seen in the leadership abilities shown by Archita in her community. Jayanti says, "Archita gets the neighbourhood children together and leads different games with them. She also discusses various learnings from the games that the children can take away."

Archita's leadership dreams are not confined to her neighbourhood. In the future, she aspires to join the Indian cricket team and also become its captain. She says, "Cricket is my favourite sport. I have learnt a lot from it. I have learnt to respect myself as well as others. Moving forward, I want to focus on both my studies and sports." Archita certainly has a bright future ahead of her, whether in sports or any other path she pursues.