



**'IT WAS TIME SHE STOOD UP':
AFSAR'S STORY**
Cholapur, Uttar Pradesh, January 2017





As a KBC leader, 20 year old Afsar Khatoon believes strongly in the power and the abilities of young people to influence change and the power of collaborative youth action to lead it. As a KBC leader, she has in the past year, led several campaigns in her community designed to question the cultural taboos and deep-seated gender biases that hampers severely in girls the ability to dream and aspire for an equal and better future for themselves.

Afsar dreams of a world that is equal and safe. The task she has set for herself is fraught with challenges, she knows, but her determination and motivation are compelling. It helps that her family supports her in this.

When girls in her village were not being allowed to study, her father a taxi driver in *Varanasi* city made sure that all his five children got equal opportunities for quality education. Afsar was 10 years old when she was selected for the Vidyagyan Scholarship from the *Rajiv Gandhi Foundation* with the help of SSK (Sahbhagi Shiksha Kendra). With a scholarship of ₹500 per month, she not only managed to complete her education, but also saved money to buy a bicycle, which was her dream as a young girl.

Afsar joined the Kadam Badhate Chalo (KBC) Program through SSK's womens' literacy and empowerment program in Cholapur block when she was 17. Afsar shares that the objectives of KBC resonated very deeply with her. According to her, no girl and woman in her community is free from violence and she herself is a survivor of several incidents of severe public harassment when she was in middle school. Her mother who knew about these incidents had advised her to ignore it and stay out of danger. So even though she wanted to do something about it, she says she was unable to because she was young and did not have the strength to address it alone.

The KBC program, Afsar believes gave her courage and strengthened her understanding on the issue and means for redressal. Soon, during a learning circle, she was sharing how she had handled a fresh incident of harassment. Armed with new knowledge and renewed resolve, she excitedly shared:

“Two boys passed unwanted remarks on my clothes when I was returning home from Varanasi with my friends by. Where I would have normally kept silent and either changed my seat or gotten off the bus, this time I stood my ground and told them off loud enough for everyone else to hear. The boys became aggressive and persisted so I turned around and slapped him. My friends were scared of the repercussions, but I thought that if today I let them go unpunished, they will treat me and other girls the same way for their entire life. After getting slapped, the boys threatened me and said this wasn't over and vowed to get back at me when I am alone. I told them that I don't think I'm alone, as I have people who will support me - so I am not scared of your threats. The bus conductor then intervened and asked the boys to leave the bus”



Art, theatre, sports and music are popular mediums of expression among KBC leaders. Afsar loves sports and had not previously had the opportunity of playing. All activities in

KBC are conducted in mixed gender teams and brings together young people of all gender. Myths that previously disallowed girls from mingling with boys are very quickly forgotten and creates safe equitable spaces for partnerships. The KBC sports leadership workshops created the perfect opportunity for Afsar to build her group and plan action driven campaigns with them.

Afsar is a role model for other young girls in her village. Her personal journey has been tremendous and she continues to inspire as she grows and leads.