

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

18-year-old Prapti hails from the Thakor Samaj, a marginalised community in the tribal area of Banaskantha in northeast Gujarat. She lost her father when she was barely 12 years old which turned her world upside down. Her mother toiled as a part-time labourer in the nearby fields and also reared cattle to support four children. The shock of seeing their extended family turn their back on them was a major setback. However, her mother managed to put Prapti and her brothers through school.

Prapti enjoyed her studies but pressing domestic challenges forced her to take long leaves of absence. Her mother started keeping ill health and often Prapti had to look after the house or substitute for her mother to work in the fields. When the class teacher called mother and daughter to school urging them to not let Prapti drop out of school, they jointly decided that she could appear for the board exams as a private student. Prapti loved school and she could not adapt to the change. She failed to clear her examinations and decided to quit her studies. She said yes to a marriage proposal sent by her relatives in a neighbouring village. Even though she was underage, the marriage was solemnised with the condition that she would join her husband and in-laws once she turned 18 as per the norms of her community.

"I have faced many disappointments and it was such a pleasant surprise to get the rare opportunity to complete my studies and begin to hope again. Now, I stand on the threshold of an exciting future. I am happy that my family is by my side and takes equal pride in seeing me embrace this new phase of life."

**18-year-old Prapti
Banaskantha
district, Gujarat**

Prapti immersed herself in married life though she often thought sadly about the way destiny interfered with her desire to study and pursue a career. One day while running some errands, she came in contact with an outreach worker from the Children and Adolescent Resource Centre (CAARC) in Amirgadh block who shared information on health, nutrition, life skills and career aspirations with her. When she discussed this chance meeting with her husband and mother-in-law, she was pleasantly surprised to find that they encouraged her and told her to find out more.

Prapti contacted the outreach worker and visited the ICDS centre to gather more information on the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

programme for distance learning. Within a week, she enrolled for a Bachelor Preparatory Programme offered by NIOS (equivalent to any higher secondary degree). Last year, she completed the course and is all set to take up a job after getting three offers! Her parents and in-laws are proud of her and happy to see that she could complete her childhood dream and avail of opportunities that came knocking at her doorstep.



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¹ The community is categorised as OBC or 'Other Backward Class' as defined by the Government of India.