

Publication	Hindustan Times
Language/Frequency	English/Daily
Page No	06
Date	12 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2018

# Child marriage survivor honoured by Canada

**Sadia Akhtar**

■ Sadia.Akhtar@htfive.com

**GURUGRAM:** Dressed in a business suit, the 21-year-old Baby Kumari confidently walks across the stage as she introduces herself to a crowd of 600 students. To an audience listening in rapt attention, she narrates her journey from escaping the social evil of child marriage to spearheading a movement against the same.

Baby Kumari first fought against her own marriage and now fights for others, all the while facing threats and harassment from locals back home.

"People do not understand the gravity of child marriage or its effects on the lives of young girls. Back home, neighbours tell my parents that I have ruined my life by not getting married, and that I was doing the same by preventing the marriage of their daughters," said Baby Kumari, who hails from a village called Titahiya in Jamui district, Bihar.

On the occasion of the United Nation's International Day of the Girl Child, on Thursday, she took over as high commissioner of Canada for a day. She was honoured for her bravery and later introduced as the High Commissioner by Amanda Strohan, min-



■ Baby Kumari (centre) was given a chance to become the High Commissioner of Canada for a day on the occasion of the United Nation's International Day of the Girl Child. SANJEEV VERMA/HT PHOTO

ister counselor and counsel general, High Commission of Canada, at a programme that took place on the campus of Suncity School in Sector 54. She is one among the 17 girls who have been shortlisted for their outstanding leadership qualities to be the ambassadors of various countries.

Talking about her journey from a remote village in Bihar to the city of glass and chrome,

Baby Kumari said, "I can't imagine that I have been given an important responsibility of representing a country. This opportunity is important, since it gives me a chance to raise my voice against child marriage."

Advocating against the discriminatory practice of child marriage, she has prevented 24 such marriages including her own. She is currently working with a humanitarian organiza-

tion as a crusader, but her own journey was fraught with troubles. In 2014, while she was still in class 9, her parents floated the topic of her marriage.

"My parents said that they'd get me married. 'You should get prepared to marry now. You can't stay at home forever. What will you do by going to school? You will have to run a kitchen eventually,'" they told me," said Baby Kumari.

However, a determined Baby Kumari stuck to her guns and requested her parents that she be allowed to complete class 10. "They told me that they would not get me married if I cleared my tenth grade examination. They never thought I would, and hence put this challenge before me. For me, this was the only opportunity to escape from early marriage and continue my education," she said.

Baby Kumari not only passed the examination but also convinced her parents to put her marriage on hold. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Hindi from Bhagalpur University. She aspires to become a teacher. She has taken it upon herself to raise awareness about the repercussions of child marriage and travels across her district Jamui to disseminate her message through street plays.

Baby's message resonated among the students who said they were inspired by her bravery. "I didn't know that child marriages continue to happen in the country. The numbers and the prevalence are alarming. I hope to imbibe the same spirit as Baby Kumari in tackling this menace," said Advait Mahadev, a class 10 student.

Publication	The Times of India
Language/Frequency	English/Daily
Page No	06
Date	12 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2018



# City girls get a pep talk from 'Baby' high commissioner

Rohit.David@timesgroup.com

**Gurgaon:** The 'International Day of the Girl Child', on Thursday, was commemorated in the city in a unique way, courtesy the high commission of Canada. Bihar's **Baby Kumari** (21) was invited to don the role of the Canadian high commissioner to India for a day. As part of her activities, she visited Suncity School in the city, where she spoke about breaking gender stereotypes and the importance of educating girls.

Kumari's day started at the Canadian high commission in Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, where she was welcomed by staff at 8.30am. Her next assignment was to meet students of Suncity School, followed by a meeting with the women staff at the high commission. Speaking on the occasion, Canadian high commissioner Nadir Patel said, "International Day of the Girl Child gives us an opportunity to highlight the needs and rights of girls. This year, we are focussing on girls' education."

"I have never been to Canada, but I have seen on YouTube that it's a beautiful country. I felt elated at being given an opportunity to become the high commissioner of Canada," Kumari said. She had successfully stopped her own marriage at 17, and has since been a crusader against child marriage in and around her village. She has repeatedly initiated police and legal action against those who act against the Child Marriage

Act, and has been instrumental in conducting camps, sensitising families, reaching out to over 5,000 people. "I come from a poor family in Bihar. My father is a farmer. In 2013, when I was studying in Class IX, my father decided to get me married. I was adamant I didn't want to tie the knot with someone whom I had never met. So I stood up for myself," she said.



Kumari made a deal with her father that if she cleared her Class X exams, he wouldn't marry her off. "I cleared my exams and my father had to keep his promise. My parents are traditional and they considered me a liability," said Kumari.

In 2016, Kumari was elected community leader of her village in Bhagalpur. She worked to spread the message of the importance of sanitation and girls' education. "I can proudly claim that today, almost 100% girls in my village are receiving higher secondary education," she added.

She said she is also determined to narrow down the gender divide. "I have three younger sisters and one younger brother, who are in school. What I did has set a tone for others to follow, including my siblings. My parents' thinking has also changed. They don't plan on early marriages for my sisters now," she added. Kumari is studying at Bhagalpur University, and aspires to become a teacher. "I want to teach because in my village, there aren't many people who are educated," she said.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/city-girls-get-a-pep-talk-from-baby-high-commissioner/articleshow/66172073.cms>

## City girls get a pep talk from 'Baby' high commissioner

GURUGRAM: The 'International Day of the Girl Child', on Thursday, was commemorated in the city in an unique way, courtesy the high commission of Canada. Bihar's Baby Kumari (21) was invited to don the role of the Canadian high commissioner to India for a day. As part of her activities, she visited Suncity School in the city, where she spoke about breaking gender stereotypes and the importance of educating girls.

Kumari's day started at the Canadian high commission in Chanakyapuri, New Delhi, where she was welcomed by staff at 8.30am. Her next assignment was to meet students of Suncity School, followed by a meeting with the women staff at the high commission. Speaking on the occasion, Canadian high commissioner Nadir Patel said, "International Day of the Girl Child gives us an opportunity to highlight the needs and rights of girls. This year, we are focussing on girls' education."

"I have never been to Canada, but I have seen on [YouTube](#) that it's a beautiful country. I felt elated at being given an opportunity to become the high commissioner of Canada," Kumari said. She had successfully stopped her own marriage at 17, and has since been a crusader against child marriage in and around her village. She has repeatedly initiated police and legal action against those who act against the Child Marriage Act, and has been instrumental in conducting camps, sensitising families, reaching out to over 5,000 people. "I come from a poor family in Bihar. My father is a farmer. In 2013, when I was studying in Class IX, my father decided to get me married. I was adamant I didn't want to tie the knot with someone whom I had never met. So I stood up for myself," she said.

Kumari made a deal with her father that if she cleared her Class X exams, he wouldn't marry her off. "I cleared my exams and my father had to keep his promise. My parents are traditional and they considered me a liability," said Kumari.

In 2016, Kumari was elected community leader of her village in Bhagalpur. She worked to spread the message of the importance of sanitation and girls' education. "I can proudly claim that today, almost 100% girls in my village are receiving higher secondary education," she added.

She said she is also determined to narrow down the gender divide. "I have three younger sisters and one younger brother, who are in school. What I did has set a tone for others to follow, including my siblings. My parents' thinking has also changed. They don't plan on early marriages for my sisters now," she added. Kumari is studying at Bhagalpur University, and aspires to become a teacher. "I want to teach because in my village, there aren't many people who are educated," she said.