

STORIES OF CHANGE



Jannat-o-nishad
Educate women,
Empower
a generation

Hailing from the Birua village in Uttar Pradesh, Jannat-o-Nisha had attended the *Madrasa* (Islamic educational institution) as a child. While her brothers were enrolled in formal education systems, the girls of the household were only permitted religious learnings. This, she always felt, was unfair on her. She, too, had the ambition to study and succeed in life. However, she could not transgress the boundaries of her community. When she got married in the village of Hasnapur, she expressed this desire to her husband. Sympathising with her situation, he promised that their children would not suffer the same fate. Jannat-o-Nisha had, obviously, crossed the age where anything could be done for her education. She was now an adult, a mother of five children.

On one of the monotonous days, Jannat-o-Nisha heard the neighbourhood women “giving their names” for something new in their village. Intrigued, she stepped out of the house once her husband left for work. Her face was covered – she could not risk anyone seeing her. She asked the women at the booth what they were enrolling for. They said in unison, “literacy”. Jannat-o-Nisha smirked, saying, “Oh, my children already go to school.” She was taken aback when one of the women retorted, “This is for us, not for our children.” Her trail of thoughts started: Literacy classes for women? At this age? In our village? How is that even possible?

She thought about it all day. And when her husband returned from work, she shared the absurdity with him. But to her surprise, he was delighted, and immediately walked down to the booth to enrol his wife in the programme. Overcoming initial hesitation, Jannat-o-Nisha began enjoying the classes. She also encouraged her daughter-in-law to pursue the course. Women, who had hitherto remained within their 'closed circles', were now going out, interacting with other women from the village. The feeling of sharing experiences itself was a new thing for Jannat-o-Nisha. The computer software that transformed daily life objects into letters of the Hindi alphabet fascinated her so much, that she wanted her already-literate daughter to experience this as well. She, thus, encouraged her to join as a TARA Saheli. The mother-daughter duo started making new memories every day, learning and teaching together. Jannat-o-Nisha recalls how they shared a laugh when her daughter once said, “I am your mother now!”

With Gyan Chapauli, Jannat-o-Nisha's life began changing. She started filling out withdrawal forms at the bank, and navigating her routes by reading signboards. She also travels to the marketplace, the Gausganj *chauraha*, alone to fetch groceries from the *kirana* store, and purchase medicines that she now reads out from the doctor's prescription. A few months later, she even travelled to the Lucknow city, all by herself. The happiness of not merely sitting at home, but actually going out with confidence, is

Her daughter shares the most significant change she has seen in her mother – her new-found patience and composure. She says, "Earlier, *maa* used to always yell at me for working slow. But now she asks me to do things at my own pace. I have seen a huge change in her understanding of individual differences and personalities, and her response to the little things."



EARLIER, I USED TO PASS ON THE DOCTOR'S PRESCRIPTION TO SOMEONE WHO WAS 'EDUCATED'. TODAY, I KNOW THAT 'SOMEONE' IS ME.

