



NAI DISHA

Freedom through Literacy

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This is a collection of stories told, mostly by women, who moved into the light of literacy from darkness, and about the people who made this transition possible.

Humana People to People India (HPPI) launched Nai Disha in 2017, which was supported by Tata Consultancy Services, which helped to incorporate the CBFL (Computer Based Functional Literacy) methodology to the programme.

The efforts were further supported by GAIA-Movement Trust Living Earth Green World Action by providing Solar Lanterns for illuminating the evening classes, and for training and promoting the use of renewable energy among women.

Nai Disha was aimed at empowering 100,000 women, 14+ years of age, in 11 identified districts, a total of 1163 villages, in the four states of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

The programme used a mix of teaching software, multimedia presentations and printed material to develop reading, writing and functional arithmetic skills, in a fraction of time.

The Nai Disha programme was delivered by preraks, who facil-

itated the programme. These were young, educated women, from the same communities as the learners. A total of 1,536 preraks were engaged in Nai Disha.

Trained and equipped with a laptop, the preraks (volunteers) worked with 50-60 women in a span of 90 days, delivering a minimum of 50 hours of learning, through sessions made up of lessons, practice, formative and summative tests. The result was the development of functional skills relevant to the lives of the women.

A total of 1,32,362 women graduated from the Nai Disha programme, as Neo-literates, by 2020, crossing their set target of 100,000.

As we revisit the learners, the preraks, and their community, two years later, we see a larger picture of positive differences and empowerment the programme could bring in their lives. They might seem small, but they are very important. Things like counting money, using mobile phones, reading newspapers, and checking on their children's homework, has given them confidence and enabled them in many ways to have a better life.

We see how a literacy programme like Nai Disha made



Interoction

life easier for them, gave them confidence, and set them off on journeys and careers previously unimaginable.

The following case studies introduce us to the women impacted by Nai Disha, their experience of being part of the programme, and how their life has altered, for the better, since then. We get to hear about the changes observed by preraks, and how the programme impacted the direction of their lives as well.

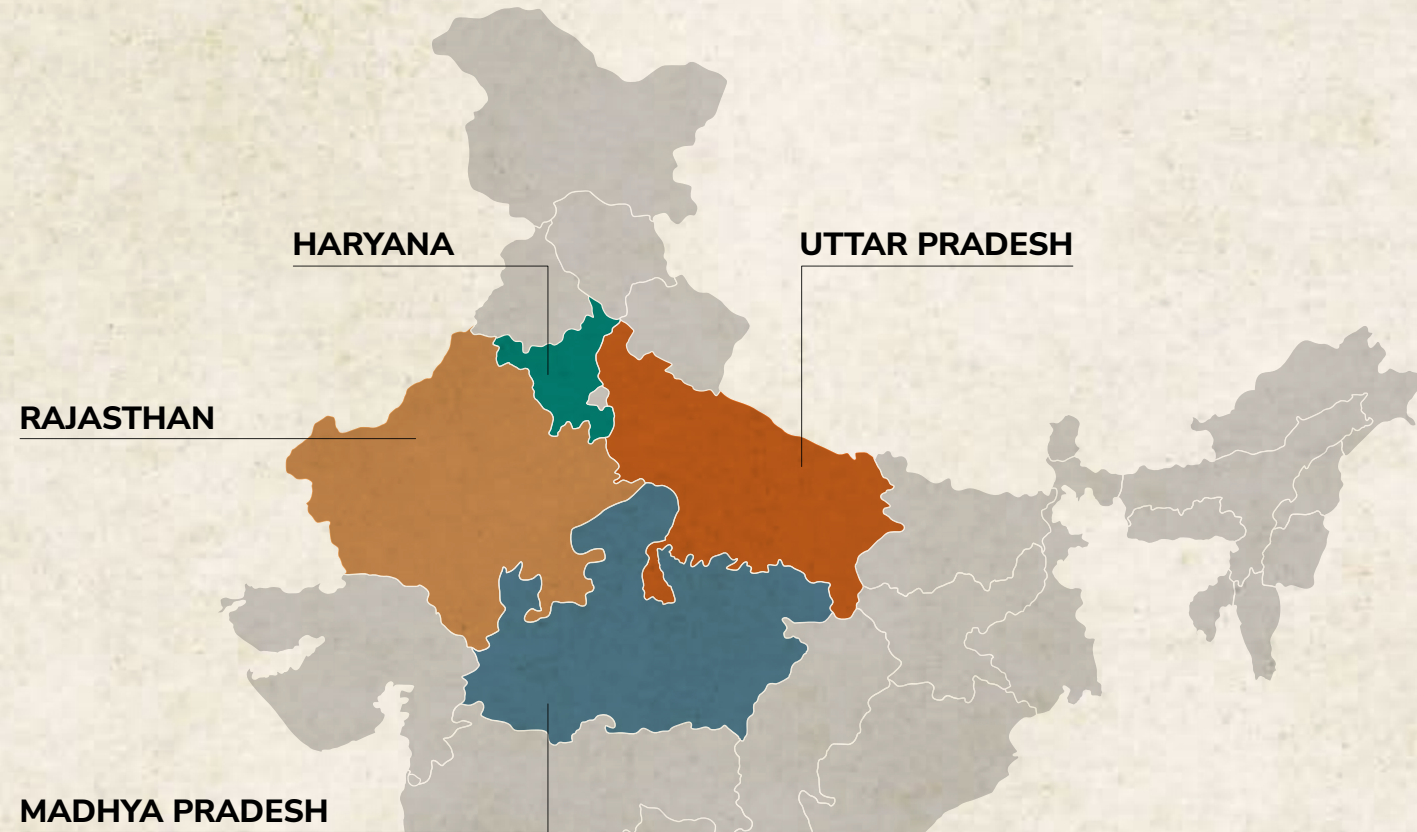
These testimonials tell us how initiatives like Nai Disha are needed in India, a country with the largest population of illiterate adults in the world.

Amongst India's 1.4 billion people, only 778,454,120 are literate. Of that, only 334,250,358 are women. There remain several women yet to be touched by the light of literacy.





NAI DISHA PROJECT COVERAGE



THE JOURNEY



PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE
YEARS ACTIVE **2017-2020**

04
Number of States

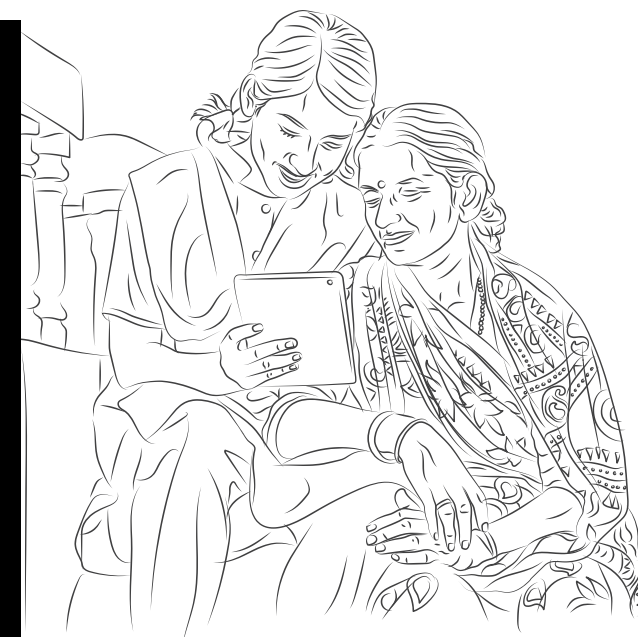
11
Total Districts

1,163
Total villages covered

1,32,362
Total women reached

1,536
Total number of preraks

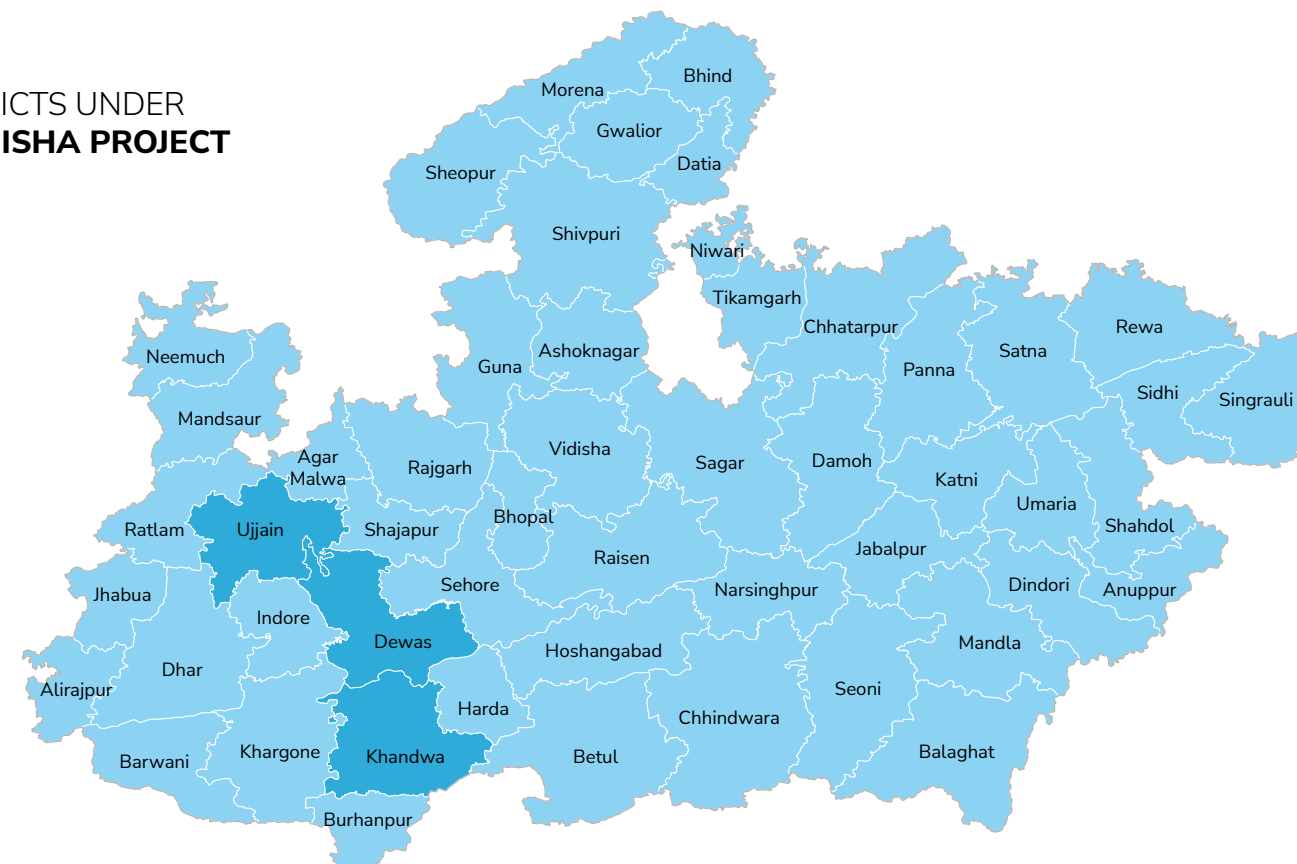
500
Total number of laptops





Madhya Pradesh

DISTRICTS UNDER NAI DISHA PROJECT



59.20%
FEMALE LITERACY RATE

3
TOTAL DISTRICTS REACHED

333
TOTAL VILLAGES REACHED

38,701
TOTAL WOMEN REACHED

The central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh is the second largest Indian state by area and the fifth largest state by population with over 72 million residents. The economy of Madhya Pradesh is the 10th-largest in India, with a gross state domestic product (GSDP) of ₹9.17 trillion (US\$120 billion) and has the country's 26th highest per-capita income. Madhya Pradesh ranks 33rd among Indian states in the human development index.

Madhya Pradesh has one of the lowest literacy rates in India and the gap between male and female literacy in the state stands at 78.70% and 59.20% respectively.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Nai Disha programme was implemented in the districts of Ujjain, Dewas and Khandwa, with a female literacy rate of 51.10%, 51.60% and 50.60% respectively; districts with a lower literacy rate compared to the national average of 65.46%.

Now I am in business of tailoring and beauty

“Recently, I joined a beauty parlour course. I got hired to do a client’s makeup. Let me show you,” Rehaana says as she takes out her smart-phone to show us photos of her work. “I earned 2200 rupees from this.”

“And this is usually where I spend most of my time during the day,” pointing to the stitching machine and the pile of clothes on the table. It is also here, Rehaana has been teaching other young women to stitch.

Around two and a half years ago, Rehaana went through one of the darkest periods of her life. Her husband of several years, with whom she had 3 kids, took advantage of her inability to read and write. He forged

Rehaana 38 years
VILLAGE: TARANA | DISTRICT: UJJAIN

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Through literacy, Rehaana not only became a businesswoman, but also a guiding beacon for the other women in her neighbourhood to study and work



Nai Disha

Rehaana’s signatures on divorce papers and left her without any explanations. All the responsibility of looking after her children, their education and keeping their home afloat landed on her head, while her husband remarried and started another family.

“I went to court, but they told me nothing could be done. ‘These are your signatures, are they not?’ They would ask me. I tried explaining to them that they weren’t my signatures but they wouldn’t believe me.”

“It was a very difficult time for me and had it not been for Nai Disha, I don’t know what would have become of me and my children. It was a month or so after the divorce that I heard about Nai Disha. I immediately wanted to join. I had to quit school after class 3 because my family couldn’t afford it. So, after all these years being able to learn again, made me happy. Being amongst other women, I started feeling hopeful again, like I had a say in the direction my life takes. I wanted to move ahead. And I did.”

When Rehaana finished Nai Disha, she had an idea to start her own tailoring centre and train others to stitch. “I want other girls to succeed too and I want to help them in any way I can.”

Her eldest daughter is now in college and Rehaana is making sure nothing stops her from succeeding. “I am never going to force her to marry. Seeing her succeed makes me so happy. There were times when she asked me if she should quit to save money, but I refused. I don’t ever want her to face the problems I have faced. My daughter worked for a private company for a few months, and every time she got her salary, she gave it to me. My husband never did that, but she has. She makes me very proud.”

Rehaana has also encouraged other women in her family and neighbourhood to go back to school and college, or to start their own business.

“I will never lose faith in myself. I may

“I want other girls to succeed too and I want to help them in any way I can.”



not be an important person but I know I have made a difference by my work, by helping others and by supporting my children’s education. I wish other women get the chance to benefit from Nai Disha, like I have. It rescued me.”



I used to take the wrong bus. I don't anymore

Phool Kuwar 52 years
VILLAGE: JHALARA | DISTRICT: UJJAIN

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Once unable to travel alone, Phool now runs a self help group at her home because of the skills she developed through Nai Disha.

“We are 18 members and we meet at my house regularly. They trust me because I am able to keep a detailed record for everyone and help them find ways to save money.” Phool Kuwar recently began running a samuh, a self help group where members save

small sums of money, on a regular basis. They pool their resources to become financially stable, taking loans from their collective savings in times of emergency or financial scarcity, important life events or to purchase assets. Phool was able to take this

initiative because of the education she gained during her time with Nai Disha.

“Earlier I couldn't even take a bus by myself. I would have to ask others to tell me which bus to get on. This one time I had to take a bus to Agar so I asked a man for his assistance. He pointed at the bus I was supposed to take. An hour into the journey I got suspicious about the route so I asked the driver. He told me this bus was headed to Badod, which was in another direction altogether. I got off the bus and had to walk all the way back. They didn't give my bus fare back either.”

“I have had a few experiences in my life where someone took advan-

ing each stroke. And whenever we had any confusion our prerak Prathiba would always help.”

Phool enjoyed learning alongside other women. “We would go to each other's houses and then go study together. This made sure we were consistent with the programme. But the educated women of our neighbourhood would make fun of us for wanting to learn now. They would see us going together and they would say ‘what will you achieve now by studying?’”

“Everyone needs literacy. Assuming that a woman's life is only limited to the house is a delusion. All I knew was farming but even that requires me to

“We did not have control over our education as children, but now we do. And we should take it. Nai Disha is that opportunity and it has changed my life.”

tage of my illiteracy and there have been times when I have had to suffer because of my own mistakes. Once I threw away this paper which I thought was insignificant, but that was the compensation for our land.”

Phool heard of Nai Disha when her prerak, Prathiba told her about it. “She told me I could learn how to read and write, sign my name on documents, that I would get some books and notebooks, and that they'll be teaching through a laptop. I wanted to join Nai Disha, because I didn't want to be the fool anymore.”

“I was really anxious about studying after all these years. But the laptop made it easy. It would say each alphabet and we would repeat after it. And it would teach us how to write, show-

be able to calculate and read. There have been so many times when I went to sell milk and I didn't get the exact change because I couldn't count. And times have changed, women are going places so they should be given all the support they can get to reach those places.”

“Women my age might feel embarrassed to study. They might feel that there is no point learning now, but I don't think their age should dictate that. I think no matter how long you might have left on this earth, one should take the opportunity to learn. We did not have control over our education as children, but now we do. And we should take it. Nai Disha is that opportunity and it has changed my life.”

I helped my mother become literate



It is interesting to be working next to each other. I see how proud she is when she sees me sell something or when I make quick calculations and write things down." Today Meera, a student of the Nai Disha programme, works at

her ration store in Jhalara, where her daughter Pratibha, who was a prerak, runs a common service centre as well.

Pratibha is the only woman in her family that was educated. Her mother, Meera was unlettered because there was no school in her village. "In villages earlier they didn't see the use of educating girls. The situation was such that women weren't allowed to step outside the house, and the purdah system was a prevalent practice," explains Meera. "Society would question, what will a woman do with an education, since all she has to do is run the house and cook."

Pratibha pitches in, "It's not the same anymore yet there continues to be constraints to how much a girl can study. There is a fear of what she will do and what kind of people she will meet if she leaves home."

When Pratibha was selected as a prerak for the Nai Disha programme, she went back home and convinced her mother to join the programme. "She was the first person I got to sign up to Nai Disha," Pratibha tells us.

It wasn't as easy to convince other women, however. "It would take 4-5 days of convincing. Overall there were 50 women. I would tell them that I would come to their homes to teach. I would take two batches of 10-15 women

in a day if I had to."

"The laptop was a great help when it came to convincing my students to join the programme. Lots of women joined Nai Disha because at home, many are not allowed to watch TV, but if they were to attend classes, at least they would get to study from a laptop. On the screen each alphabet would be shown, and how to make the strokes to write it, so the ladies would also imitate the strokes with their hands. When they watched videos, they found it easier to remember."

Speaking of her students, Pratibha tells us of the changes she has observed. "Before there were several things that they couldn't talk about frankly in their homes. When they would all come together for class they'd talk about the issues they each faced at home. That helped build their self esteem. They would then go back and try to change the situation at home, for the better. They started speaking up. Once that started happening, other things followed: some decided to start their own businesses or they started sitting in their family's shop, they started speaking out in panchayats."

"It was profound for me to help my mother become literate. She made sure I studied as much as I could, she fought with family members over it. So to be able to give something back to her was very important. I wouldn't

have been able to do this, if it wasn't for her," Prathiba tells us of the experience of teaching her mother.

For Meera, the experience was emotional as well. "I won't deny it, it was a little strange to call my daughter madam, but I got used to it. I never would have thought that I would be able to read and write in this lifetime, and I absolutely did not imagine my daughter would become my teacher. But I am grateful for it, and I'm very proud of Pratibha for helping so many women, including me."

It has been two years since the Nai Disha programme ended, and with that went an important aspect of Pratibha's life: the laptop. "You could say that I sort of fell in love with the laptop. After the programme ended, I wanted to start something of my own. So I bought my own laptop and decided to open a common service centre. My mother had already started working at the shop by then, and when I told her of my plans, she suggested opening it at her shop. So I did."

Nai Disha not only helped boost self esteem for women like Meera, but also preraks like Pratibha. Programmes like Nai Disha are significant and much needed to improve literacy amongst women in India, but its impact is multifaceted. It helps with employment, it changes family dynamics, it transforms communities, and it passes that on to the next generation.

"The laptop was a great help... Lots of women joined Nai Disha because if they were to attend classes, at least they would get to study from a laptop. When they watched videos, they found it easier to remember."



Pratibha
23 years



Meera
50 years

VILLAGE: JHALARA | DISTRICT: UJJAIN

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

As a teacher and a learner, both daughter and mother, respectively, have started their own small businesses after being part of the Nai Disha programme.



Nai Disha has taken away their fear of the unknown

Anil Rawal is the Sarpanch of Rupakhedi, where he also runs an English medium school which he is very proud of. "We have 650 children and our school is the best in this district."

Mr Rawal has faced the dark shroud of illiteracy; due to circumstances he was unable to finish his schooling. He therefore made it his life's mission to provide the best education possible to the children in his village, so that when they go to cities for higher education or work, they don't feel inadequate.

"It is without a doubt, that the women who were part of Nai Disha are more focused on the education of their children, especially their daughters. They know that if the issue of illiteracy is not addressed, the problems pile on; they don't want the next generation to face the same problems in this fast paced world. This realisation is perhaps the most significant outcome of the Nai Disha project. They will be the force behind the curve in their children's future."

“When I first heard of the project I immediately recognised its importance. Women who were of a greater age and unlettered could not go to a regular school, like the one we run. They needed a programme like Nai Disha that was convenient to their life and schedule. School education is step by step, structured, where the level of knowledge increases gradually. They already know everything, just not systematically. Nai Disha has tried to work on that in a short duration.”

“Since the Nai Disha programme concluded, I’ve noticed women carrying their own phones, they are working in their family shops and checking on their children’s homework.”

Mr Rawal was most impressed by the ingenious use of laptops in the project. "People from my generation were not even educated through laptops, but through Nai Disha these women have. They have not only touched laptops with their own hands but also learned to use them on a basic level. These are women mostly in their 40s and 50s, and this experience has taken away their fear of the unknown because they know they can master it."

"Nai Disha has also helped to change the image of these women in her family's eyes. They recognise her independence and capabilities. They are stepping out in public more than they ever did before. I have seen these women attend the gram panchayat

and raise questions and voice their concerns with a sense of authority, something they did not do earlier."

"Surprisingly, another gift this project has given our society is a sense of inter-community harmony. Women of all ages, from all communities learning together and having fun has brought about friendships that previously no one could imagine."

Mr Rawal is convinced that programmes like Nai Disha are essential to improve the state of India's education, which has a long way to go. "Nai Disha has not only helped and empowered the women who were part of it, but also has had a ripple effect across our community, which future generations will continue to benefit from."

Anil Rawal Sarpanch

VILLAGE: RUPAKHEDI
DISTRICT: UJJAIN

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

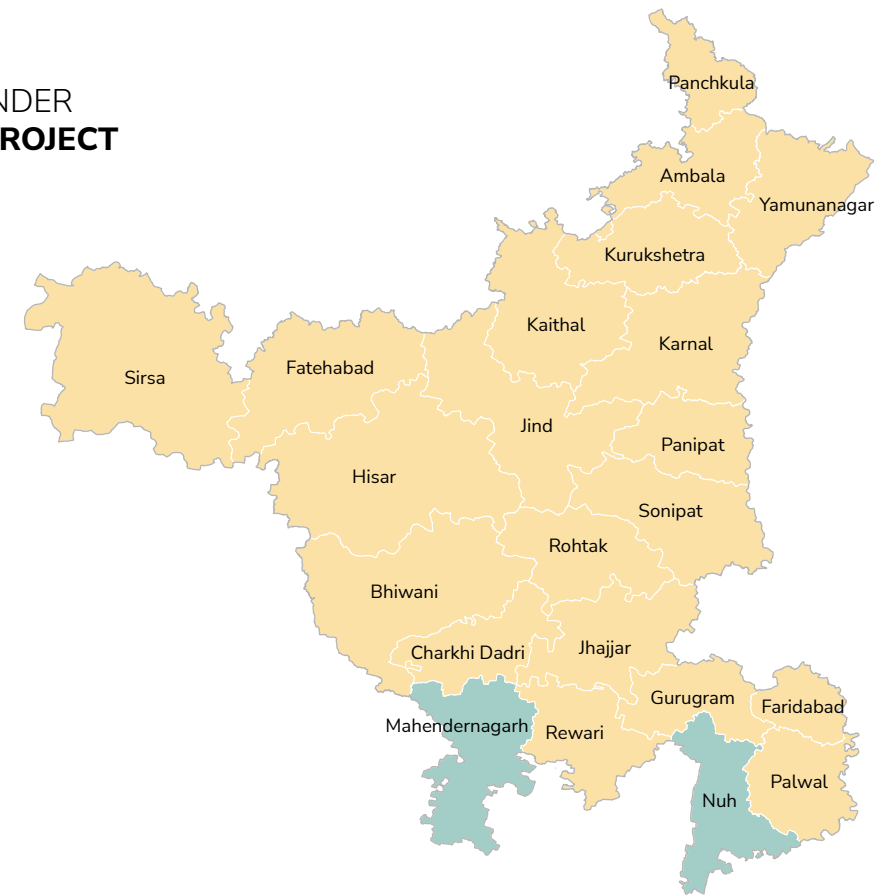
A stakeholder in his community, Mr Rawal has seen the many benefits of Nai Disha, which he is certain will continue to make an impact.






Haryana

DISTRICTS UNDER NAI DISHA PROJECT




65.90%
FEMALE
LITERACY RATE

2
TOTAL DISTRICTS
REACHED

260
TOTAL VILLAGES
REACHED

30,751
TOTAL WOMEN
REACHED

The northern state of Haryana is estimated to have a population of 28.9 million for the year 2021. The economy of Haryana is the 13th largest in India, with a gross state domestic product (GSDP) of ₹7.65 trillion (US\$100 billion) and has the country's 5th-highest GSDP per capita of ₹240,000 (US\$3,100). Despite its close proximity to New Delhi and rapid development in certain parts of the state, Haryana's literacy rate stands at 75.60% according to the census report of 2011, and has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

With Haryana ranking 22nd in terms of literacy in India, it has a wide gap between male and female literacy, which stands at 84.10% and 65.90% respectively.

The Nai Disha programme was implemented in the districts of Nuh and Mahendernagar; districts with one of the lowest female literacy rates within the state of Haryana.



Now, I teach my children at home

Nai Disha has had a greater impact on Rekha than she had expected. “It has given me this energy to do more and learn more. It has changed the way I view myself. I don’t see myself as a submissive housewife anymore. I see myself as a strong mother, unafraid and unembarrassed. This is the funda-

mental change Nai Disha has made to my personality.”

“There was an uneasiness when I couldn’t read or write. But that has been replaced with a hunger to learn more, to do more with my life.”

The 30 year old Rekha Devi did not always feel this way about education.

“There was an uneasiness when I couldn’t read or write. But that has been replaced with a hunger to learn more, to do more with my life... The laptop was like a friend to me.”

As a child, she was only able to attend school for a short while. “At the time, I didn’t understand the importance of studying. So I was indifferent when I was pulled out of school.”

But as an adult, Rekha often regretted being deprived of her schooling. “It is paralysing to not be able to do basic things like read or count money. My husband would often ridicule me for not knowing this or that. I would be so embarrassed.”

When Rekha became a mother, she realised something: “I didn’t want to be a mother to 4 boys and not be able to guide them properly. So when I learnt of Nai Disha, I knew this was my opportunity to change things for myself and my boys.”

“My family was very supportive of me joining Nai Disha. But I can’t

me for wanting to learn at this age. They thought I couldn’t do it because according to them an illiterate always remains an illiterate.” But they didn’t know how set Rekha was to reach her goal.

“The most exciting thing about the programme was the laptop. It would speak to me, telling me how to pronounce each alphabet in Hindi. It would teach me things about farming and other things that were related to my life. It taught me to identify important documents, like property papers, which I would have otherwise thrown away. The laptop was like a friend to me.”

Today, Rekha has proved her neighbours wrong. She converses comfortably in front of the men in her village, teaches her children during the day, reads the newspaper in the afternoon, and saves her earnings from stitching clothes in her personal bank account.

“My kids are too young to go to school right now, but I am trying to teach them everything I know. I don’t want them to be ignorant of the significance of their education, like I was. I want them to know that being literate is the only option.”

“I only wish more women are able to have such experiences with Nai Disha. I wish all women are given this opportunity. Of course this literacy has made my life easier, but I also learned so much about myself and I think every woman deserves that.”

Rekha Devi 30 years

VILLAGE: NEWANA | DISTRICT: NUH

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Today, Rekha Devi converses comfortably, reads the newspaper and teaches her children. This was made possible by her dedication to be part of Nai Disha

say the same for the people in my neighbourhood. They would mock

I taught them how to dial, save numbers and check messages on their phones

Rajni, is a 26 year old with a bachelor's degree, who joined the Nai Disha programme as a prerak, educational volunteer, and facilitated the programme. After being interviewed and selected, Rajni underwent training to become a prerak. Besides learning how to teach the women part of the Nai Disha programme, Rajni also learned how to operate a laptop.

"The role of the prerak was to reach out and teach the women, but it was also to motivate them, to support them. It is a relationship that has lasted longer than the programme itself."

"I first conducted a door to door survey of my community in Nuh district's Newana. I informed the unlettered women I met during my survey about the Nai Disha programme. I found that most of them were very excited to become part of the programme."

It's been two years, but Rajni still recalls the excitement in their eyes every time she turned on the laptop. "The laptop helped sustain their initial eagerness to learn. All 60 of them had the same reaction of joy."

"Nai Disha was special because it was entirely focused on the women, their lives and the community around them. That is why women like myself were picked to be preraks, because we belong to the same community, my students were my neighbours and relatives. They weren't being forced to change their schedule in order to

*Rajni 26 years
Prerak, Nai Disha*

VILLAGE: NEWANA | DISTRICT: NUH

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Two years later, Rajni recalls how the laptop not only aided the learning process but also helped sustain her students' eagerness to be consistent.

attend the classes, it was my job to find a time and a place that was convenient for them."

"What I taught my students was relevant to their lives, it was supposed to help them practically. For example, we helped them identify important words, like makan (house), so that if they see that word on a document they know it's important. I also taught them how to open a bank account. With modernisation, it was important for them to be able to use their phones beyond just picking it up. I taught them how to dial, how to save numbers and later find them. I taught them how to check their messages." As a result, Rajni saw more women carrying their own phones.

"A lot of women used to face problems at home with their husbands making them feel less than for being



unlettered. I have witnessed how their dynamics, with their husbands, changed within a month of being part of the programme. They became more confident the more they learned."

"The women with younger children are now entirely committed to the education of their children, especially their daughters. They sit with them and help them study. I have even seen some

mothers giving their children extra homework. The mothers will go through their children's textbooks and notebooks to study by themselves even."

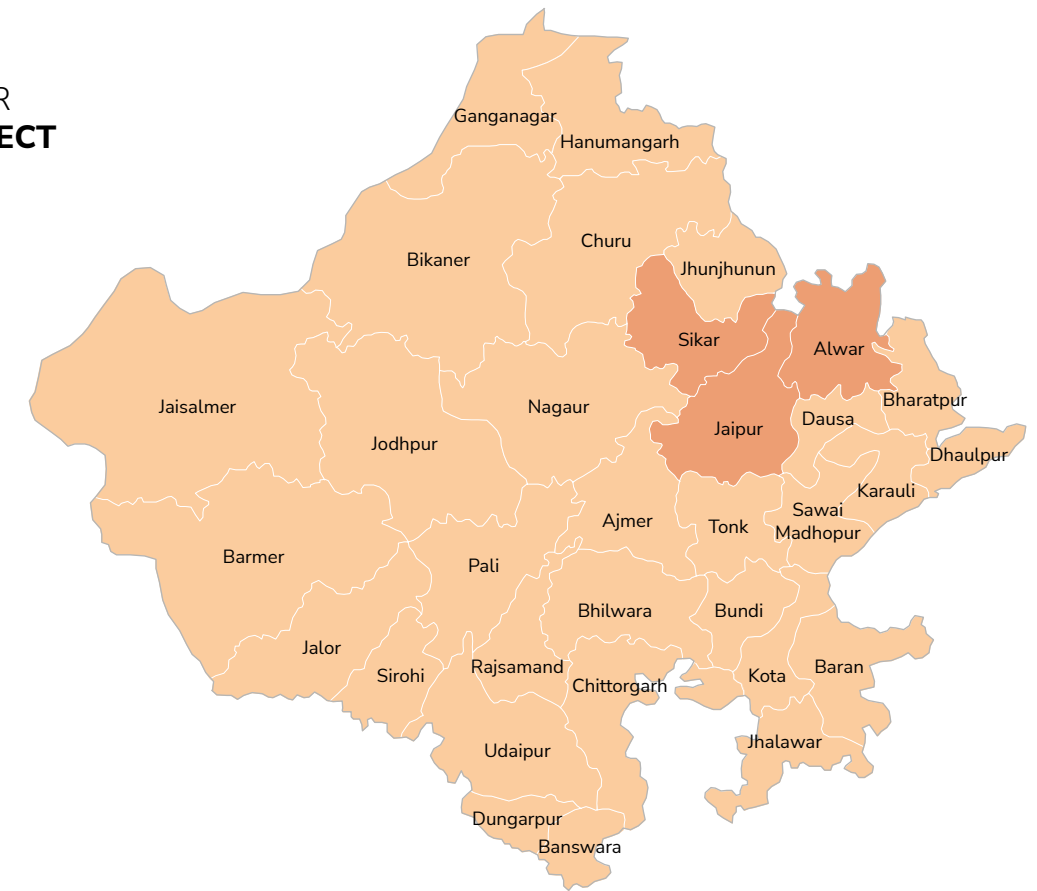
"I believe that the Nai Disha programme should be continued so that it can reach more women who will undoubtedly benefit from it. We need to spread the light of literacy to all the dark corners."

"Nai Disha was special because it was entirely focused on the women, their lives and the community around them. I have witnessed how their dynamics, with their husbands, changed within a month of being part of the programme."



Rajasthan

DISTRICTS UNDER NAI DISHA PROJECT



57.70%
FEMALE
LITERACY RATE

3
TOTAL DISTRICTS
REACHED

253
TOTAL VILLAGES
REACHED

27,216
TOTAL WOMEN
REACHED

The state of Rajasthan is the largest Indian state by area and the seventh largest by population, estimated at 80 million for the year 2021. The economy of Rajasthan is the seventh-largest state economy in India with ₹10.20 lakh crore (US\$130 billion) in gross domestic product and a per capita GDP of ₹118,000 (US\$1,500). Rajasthan ranks 29th among Indian states in the human development index.

Although Rajasthan has made much improvement in terms of development in recent years, it continues to have the lowest female literacy rate in the country, and the gap between male and female literacy in the state stands at 79.20% and 57.70% respectively.

In Rajasthan, the Nai Disha programme was implemented in the districts of Jaipur, Alwar and Sikar with a female literacy rate of 64.02%, 56.25% and 67.37%.



At 70, I have come to manage our shop

We met Usha Mathur at her family's ration shop in Alwar district's Bamanwas, which she has been looking after since completing the Nai Disha programme. "From what I learned during the programme, I was able to apply here. Being able to manage the store by myself has been a very liberating experience."

Initially, Usha would help out at the shop when no one else was available. She liked organising the shop and keeping track of the sales in the registers and gradually she began spending more time working there. Today, it is she who attends the customers at the shop on a daily basis.

Usha, a septuagenarian, learned to read and write for the first time when she became part of the Nai Disha programme. I really enjoyed learning through the laptop. Because it would

I went from being unlettered to being in charge of my family shop. Before, if my husband or son were occupied with something else, we would have to close the shop. But now I can manage, and we have been earning more, since we rarely have to close the shop."

"Education is never wasted. Even though I am 70 years old, I am enjoying its benefits. At any stage of life, when given the chance to study, you get more choices, more opportunities."

show us things at a slow pace, like how to write a particular alphabet, it was easy to grasp. We would try to imitate the strokes with our hands. Sometimes the prerak would play some videos too, so I was always engaged."

At her age, there may be many reasons because of which Usha has to rely on her family, but illiteracy is no longer one of them. "I learned to speak with confidence, to write, to read, to be free from the anxiety of not knowing anything when I became a part of Nai Disha. It transformed my sense of self."

Usha's mobile phone usage has also changed. "I can now dial the numbers,

read the messages I get and check up on my kids whenever I like instead of waiting for them to call me."

Usha these days is looking forward to the wedding of her two daughters. Pointing at her name in the wedding card, she beams with pride as she reads her own name.

"Education is always a boon. Even though I am 70 years old, I am enjoying its benefits. At any stage of life, when given the chance to learn, you get more choices, more opportunities. I think that's why it's really important for women to gain literacy, no matter what age. There is always something to gain."

Nai Disha lit a hunger in Usha Mathur, a hunger to learn more. Just as we were leaving she asked us, "If you can teach me some more, that would be great!" with a laugh.

Usha Mathur ***70 years***

VILLAGE: BAMANWAS CHOGAAN
DISTRICT: ALWAR

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

After Nai Disha, Usha Mathur became free from the anxiety of not knowing anything. Now she reads, writes and can perform basic arithmetic skills.



Managing shops, selling vegetables and speaking in the panchayats



“You see these women shopkeepers? I taught them. Earlier there were only men shopkeepers here.”
Pooja Sharma, who recently completed her masters in Economics, had always wanted to do something about the elderly women in her community who were unlettered. “I can’t imagine

how it must feel for them, always having to rely on someone else for even the most trivial of tasks. I have grown up around such women and I know that they would get embarrassed because of this, they would avoid leaving their homes by themselves and not speak up.”

“One of the many reasons why I wanted to work as a prerak for the Nai Disha programme was because of the lack of education amongst the older women in my family. My mother went to school till 8th class whereas my aunt never went to school at all.”

When Pooja was given the opportunity to work as a prerak in this programme she knew this was her chance to change things within her own community. “The first thing I did when I became a prerak was to get the women in my family to join the programme. But unlike my family, it was hard to convince other families. They were skeptical. They would ask me, how could these women be taught when most of them haven’t even received any formal education. But I told them that was the exact purpose of the programme. Irrespective of how the family felt, most of the women were eager to learn and they convinced their families.”

“I believe that Nai Disha has made these women more confident, self-dependent, and happy. They now travel in the bus and buy tickets by themselves. They are managing shops, selling vegetables, and speaking up in the panchayats. It was really moving to see the newer and more open version of these women, especially my aunt. Even at that age, I have witnessed them grow.”

“Nai Disha was less rigid compared to other literacy programmes. It took

Pooja Sharma 25 years

VILLAGE: BAMANWAS CHOGAAN
DISTRICT: ALWAR

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Pooja taught her aunt as part of Nai Disha. As a result, Pooja saw her aunt, along with the several women she taught, change.

into consideration that the programme would have to adjust to the daily schedule of the women. The laptop was a great tool to attract the women to join the programme, as well as a medium for learning. I think Nai Disha is a very important initiative not only because it has made these women literate, but also because it changed communities, it brought them closer and made them more progressive. In the last two years, I have seen more girls going for higher education.”

Pooja’s work as a prerak also had an impact on her life. “When my family saw the work I had done as a prerak, my parents told me that they would support me no matter what I wanted to do in the future. Most women here get married after completing their Bachelor’s degree, but when I wanted to pursue a masters degree, they supported me. That is the influence of Nai Disha.”

“I believe that Nai Disha has made these women more confident, self-dependent, and happy. They now travel in the bus and buy tickets by themselves. They are managing shops, selling vegetables, and speaking up in the panchayats.”



Urmila 70 years
VILLAGE: DUHAR CHOGAAN | DISTRICT: ALWAR

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

When Urmila joined the Nai Disha programme, she became self-reliant and confident, along with learning to read and write. Now she works at her family's shop.

Newfound sense of ease and confidence

Before I couldn't even speak confidently in front of the men in my own family, like in front of my father-in-law. If he was still alive today he wouldn't let me sit here at the shop." But today, as Urmila sits at her shop, she interacts with her neighbours and community members, men and women, with a

sense of ease and confidence.

Urmila joined the Nai Disha programme, which lasted three months. "I joined the programme very casually. I am 70 years old so I didn't think that it would change my life significantly, but it has. Gradually my interest in the programme increased and it has add-

ed new layers to my personality."

"We learned how to read and write, but we also learned skills that were practically integral to our lives. They taught us how to use the phone, how to manage finances, and how to identify and look after important documents."

To be able to read and study, and then be able to work at her family's shop was a major boost to Urmila's self-esteem.

"Nai Disha has helped women to be more confident in public. I have seen the women who were with me in the

programme going out more and being entrepreneurial. These days you can't achieve anything if you just stay at home. One has to get out, meet people, have conversations, study and work."

"If I can reach out to my fellow sisters I would first like to tell them that I sympathise with the many problems they must have faced and that if they ever find themselves with an opportunity to study they must go for it. It is literacy that helps women get ahead, no matter the age."

"I joined the programme very casually. I am 70 years old so I didn't think that it would change my life significantly, but it has... it has added new layers to my personality."





Nai Disha gave me my missing limbs

would always accompany me. Seeing how self-reliant I have become, my husband and children are very proud.”

“My perspective on education has changed. Before I would have to struggle, always having to rely on someone else. I would face the lack of literacy everyday, mostly for trivial things. And I pretended to be used to my circumstances, but one can never really be used to something like that. It really does feel like not having limbs. You always feel left behind.”

Beena has had an interesting experience with Nai Disha. “The first few days I found it difficult to understand what was going on in class, but it was the laptop that made me want to go back each time. Gradually, I started making progress and if I got stuck somewhere, my prerak Pooja would hold my hand and patiently help me.

Beena is a 45 year old woman, who today works in her family’s ration shop in Alwar district’s Bamanwas. “After Nai Disha I am able to assist my husband at the shop and attend to the customers by myself.”

“I have three kids, one is a doctor, one is studying engineering, and one is still doing her bachelor’s. They are living their lives and I didn’t like the feeling of being a burden to them. Before, if I had to travel by myself or even go get vegetables-ration, my family would worry about me, so someone

“It is because of all that I have gained due to Nai Disha that I really understand the significance of literacy. There is so much I can do by myself now. Education is not just for the young. One can learn at any age.”

For Beena, being able to observe her own progress was the most exciting. “For example, I would walk by a billboard and be able to read the words. While still in the programme I started spending more time at the shop with my husband and I could calculate how much change I had to give to the customers.”

“I feel my life now is so exciting because of all the things I am able to do by myself. I read the newspaper every

morning and work at the shop till 7:00 pm. My family don’t worry about me as much as they did before.”

“I think it is because of all that I have gained due to Nai Disha that I really understand the significance of literacy. There is so much I can do by myself now. Education is not just for the young. One can learn at any age. I’m grateful for Nai Disha. They have given me my missing limbs by teaching me how to read and write.”



Beena 45 years

VILLAGE: DUHAR CHOGAAN
DISTRICT: ALWAR

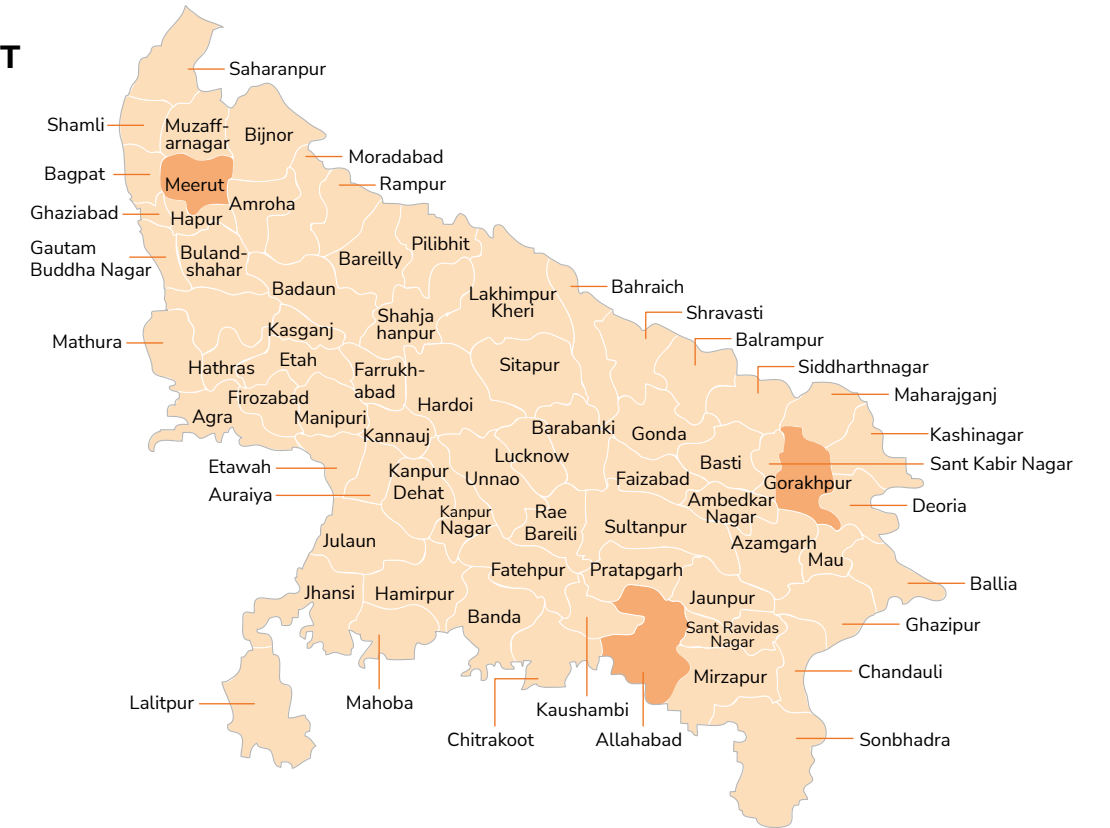
THE NAI DISHA EFFECT


Worried she was a burden to her family, Beena joined Nai Disha. Now she actively contributes to her family’s income and is proud of her achievements.



Uttar Pradesh

DISTRICTS UNDER NAI DISHA PROJECT




57.20%
 FEMALE LITERACY RATE

3
 TOTAL DISTRICTS REACHED

317
 TOTAL VILLAGES REACHED

35,694
 TOTAL WOMEN REACHED

The northern state of Uttar Pradesh is the most populated state in India, with over 200 million inhabitants. The economy of Uttar Pradesh is the third-largest state economy in India with ₹17.05 lakh crore (US\$220 billion) in gross domestic product and a per capita GSDP of ₹65,431 (US\$860). Despite it doing so well economically, Uttar Pradesh continues to be plagued by poverty. The state has one of the lowest ranks among India states in the human development index, which stands at 35th.

Uttar Pradesh stands at the fifth rank in the country when it comes to poor female literacy rate, and the gap between male and female literacy in the state stands at 77.30% and 57.20% respectively.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Nai Disha project was implemented in the districts of Meerut, Allahabad and Gorakhpur, with female literacy rates at 63.98%, 60.97% and 59.36%.

Nai Disha taught me the importance of educating girls

I have been saving most of my earnings from my electrical shop because I promised my daughter I would get her back in school.”

Reshma, 32 years old, opened an electrical shop in Bahadurpur block's Dharoli. After completing the Nai

Disha programme, Reshma joined a samuh, a self help group. In a samuh, members save small sums of money, on a regular basis. They pool their resources to become financially stable, taking loans from their collective savings in times of emergency or financial scarcity, or purchase assets.

It was because of the encouragement of Reshma's prerak, fondly called Sarita didi, she joined a samuh.

“Sarita didi, my prerak, really changed my life. She approached me and fellow unlettered women in my village, about Nai Disha. I didn't get to go to school as a child so being presented the opportunity to learn made me happy. Sarita didi paid so much attention to us.”

“People would see us going to study and make fun of us. We told Sarita didi

Reshma 32 years

VILLAGE: DHAROLI | DISTRICT: ALLAHABAD

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

With her newfound sense of confidence and skills, along with the continued support of her prerak Sarita didi, Reshma is committed to her daughter's education.

“I consider myself lucky to have the support of Sarita didi and the Nai Disha programme... But it doesn't end with me, there are so many women like me.”

about it. She told us not to pay heed to their comments, and she encouraged us to learn diligently. She always treated us with so much care and respect. And all that effort did pay off. The same people who used to laugh at us now praise us.”

Reshma beamed with pride when she told us of all the things she can now do. “I can write, read, I can go anywhere,

her daughter's education.

“My daughter studied till class 5 in a government school in our village. For higher classes the school is 3 kms away. The boys of the village manage to go on to higher classes, but our girls suffer. We worry about her safety. We don't have enough resources to send her all by herself to that school, but I have promised her that no matter what I will



to buy anything and not worry about being cheated. Now I even know how to get a good deal for things. Earlier I used to struggle to pick up a call on the phone. But now I know how to dial a number, to go search for numbers in my contact list.”

Had it not been for Nai Disha and Sarita didi, Reshma's perspective on education, and life even, would not have changed. She wouldn't have joined the samuh, nor started her own business, nor made a commitment to

get her back in school. We have been saving money. I believe that one can eat one less roti, but one cannot compromise on their children's education.”

“We have faced the problems of illiteracy. I consider myself lucky to have the support of Sarita didi and the Nai Disha programme which has helped me grow. But it doesn't end with me, there are so many women like me who need such people and programmes like Nai Disha to help them grow, to help them make use of their potential.”

I love this book and I am never going to part with it



“Earlier I used to carry baskets of glass bangles, walking from village to village to earn money.

After that, I studied through Nai Disha and took a loan from the samuh and started my shop.”

Tahira Bano, 50 years old, owns a

ration shop in Bahadurpur block’s Lotwa. “My kids used to ask me why I wasn’t educated. I wouldn’t know what to tell them. I’d say that I had to earn money so that they could go to school.” Tahira had 5 sisters and 3 brothers. “My family was very poor.

Ammi sent her sons to school but not her daughters. Two of my brothers became doctors and the third became a school teacher.”

Tahira’s husband passed away 22 years ago and so she had to start earning money in order to keep her young kids in school. “I couldn’t study but I made sure they would. So I started selling bangles.”

“I have wondered since then, who I would’ve become if I also went to school. There have been so many small incidents that made me wish I was literate.”

Tahira heard about Nai Disha through her prerak, Kanchan. For her, it was an opportunity to learn, something she had been yearning for. “In the least I wouldn’t have to use my thumbprint at the bank anymore because I would be able to sign my name. I liked the idea of the programme so much that I went to my friends and neighbours to get them to join the programme.”

“In those three months my prerak taught me to read and write. I had seen a laptop before, but I didn’t know it could be used for studying. I really enjoyed the programme. I still keep my workbook here so that I can practise whenever I like,” Tahira tells us, as she takes out Nai Disha workbook from the shelf. “I love this book and I am never going to part with it.”

“I started carrying my own phone after I completed the programme. “The



Tahira Bano 50 years
VILLAGE: LOTWA | DISTRICT: ALLAHABAD

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

After Nai Disha, Tahira Bano joined a self-help group, took out a loan, and opened her shop, and she continues to practice her reading skills everyday.

keypad is in Hindi, so I can type and call my elder son, my daughter in law, my daughter. I now know how to use the phone because of studying.”

Tahira continues to keep the basket she used to sell bangles from, at her shop. When we asked her why, she told us, “It is a reminder for me, how life can flourish when given the opportunity of literacy. It is a reminder of my journey here.”

“In those three months my prerak taught me to read and write. I really enjoyed the programme. I still keep my workbook here so that I can practise whenever I like.”



I took a loan and bought goats after Nai Disha

From the samuh, a self help group, I took a loan of 20,000 rupees and bought goats, which have given birth to more goats. Once they grow, I will sell them. I have already found a few buyers.”

Madhuri, in her late 50s, was one

among five sisters. “My family was very poor, so my family could not afford to send me to school. And at that time they didn’t educate girls, only boys were sent to school, so it never occurred to our parents to educate us.”

“He (my husband) was skeptical at first about me joining Nai Disha, but I think he is quite glad I did. It changed the dynamics of our relationship, he now saw me capable of having a mind worth valuing.”

“I had always wanted my own business. So I thought of joining a samuh, but they wouldn’t allow me because I couldn’t read or sign my name.” A samuh is a self help group where members save small sums of money, on a regular basis. They pool their resources to become financially stable, taking loans from their collective savings in times of emergency or financial scarcity, impor-

tant life events or to purchase assets. Madhuri’s husband was also unlettered but as she made progress in the programme, so did her husband, since she began helping him learn the things she was. “He was sceptical at first about me joining Nai Disha, but I think he is quite glad I did. It changed the dynamics of our relationship, he now saw me as his equal.”

By learning how to read and sign her name, Madhuri was finally able to join the samuh, and get her goats.

“Other women in my neighbourhood look at me and see how well I have done for myself since finishing Nai Disha, and they want to do the same. I hope they are given the same opportunity to learn and make a difference. Most importantly I hope they too are able to fulfil their dreams of starting something of their own.”

“I really enjoyed studying. I had thought it would be very difficult, but it wasn’t. It made me realise that there is so much to learn about, and if we are unable to go to school or get educated, our lives remain limited.” Madhuri, has two daughters, a 15 years old and a 17 years old, on the cusp of beginning higher education. “I want them to pursue education for as long as they like. I want them to work and make a name for themselves. They are capable young girls and I want to help them find the opportunities to succeed. I want their lives to have fewer limitations than mine.”

Madhuri 56 years

VILLAGE: MUSTAFABAD | DISTRICT: ALLAHABAD

THE NAI DISHA EFFECT

Madhuri joined Nai Disha so that she could learn to read and write and join a samuh. In the process she also helped her husband learn.

tant life events or to purchase assets.

Being unlettered made it difficult for Madhuri to join the samuh. It was around the same time, Meera, Madhuri’s prerak approached her about the Nai Disha programme.

Madhuri found the programme quite exciting. “When I joined Nai Disha, Meera educated me. I learned how to write, sign my name, and read. I saw a laptop for the first time. It was very exciting for me, and one of the reasons I really wanted to join Nai Disha.”

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Humana People to People India (HPPI) is a development organisation registered as a not-for-profit company under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956 as of 21st May 1998. It is a non-political, non-religious organisation working for the holistic development of the under-privileged and marginalised people in rural and urban India through social development and poverty alleviation in-

terventions by coordinated and focused interventions in education, life skills, improved livelihoods, empowerment of women, health and sanitation, and environmental sustainability. HPPI has implemented around more than 160 projects all over the country in partnership with different international and national private and public partners.





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