

# Thumbs up to women literacy

● *Saroja, 35, who had never been to school, can now read and write Hindi as well as English. This mother of a six-year-old boy writes English so well that no one can detect errors.*

● *Sunita, 26, is fond of reading books. She too had never been to school but wanted to learn both Hindi and English for her children. She did it and wrote a letter to her relatives in Hindi.*

● *Prema, 29, who never visited a school before her marriage, says: "Now that I have learnt writing Hindi and English, my family members are encouraging me to clear other classes as well."*

● *There are at least 702 women in the age group of 15-35 who have carved out a niche for themselves after learning reading and writing in Hindi and English.*

Kapil Dixit | TNN

**Pratapgarh:** Women in four villages of Baghumar, Sarai Mahima, Bhojpur and Bhagwan Da ka Purwa of district



A group of women attending literacy class in Pratapgarh.

Pratapgarh have shattered the myth that rural women can't do well in adult literacy. These four villages have recorded cent percent women literacy rate even as the corresponding figure for the state is a dismal 43%. Moreover, out of the targeted 702 women of 15-35 age group, 60% in 21 villages have achieved minimum basic skills of reading, writing and computation, while 97.86% are able to read and sign. **P 10**

# Thumbs up to 100% women literacy

Kapil Dixit | TNN

**Pratapgarh:** The transformation has been brought about by ChildFund India (formerly CCF-India) and its partner Janpriya Sewa Sansthan (JSS), a local NGO, through an integrated programme launched in 2004. On April 25, district authorities and the secretary of district literacy committee appreciated the hard work of these womenfolk and the role played by the local NGO claiming "they have done a lot as far as literacy is concerned".

Secretary of District Literacy Committee Hemant Nandan said, "These women have created history by learning to read and write English and Hindi words/sentences despite the fact that they have never been to school. In fact, a total of 702 women, who were selected by the local NGO and CCF-India, worked hard and created an example for others to emulate," he told TOI.

"The Adult Literacy Programme for women was introduced here in 2004 and was backed by a feasible self-sustainable approach. Initially, 472 'non-literate' women were targeted but gradually the

number rose to 702 women in 21 villages," he added. Incidentally, with a mere 23% women literacy rate, Pratapgarh stands at the bottom in the state.

As a novel strategy to initiate the programme, a self-help group, Mahila Vikas Samiti, was formed to identify the problems related to illiteracy among the region's women. The SHG members worked as village committee representatives and sensitised other 'non-literate' women in the area. "Finally, a day came when education saw dawn of the day in the area with the group emerging as an 'empowered literate group' of the community," he said.

Head of the federation, 65-year-old Farida Begum, elaborates the revolution of the written and spoken words. "We used to feel ashamed as we could not write but only put the imprints of our thumbs. But literacy has worked wonders with our confidence level. Now we can sign and also manage our bank accounts," she said. "It is better late than never. We have understood the importance of education and I strongly promote the concept of girl edu-



**AGE NO BAR:** An aged woman taking classes.

cation," said Mithila, another local adding "Earlier, we could hardly save Rs 200 but SHG has helped us augment savings to Rs 2,000 through various programmes and money-saving tips."

Another local woman, Ramadevi, told TOI, "The divide between the girl and boy child no more exists in the area. We endorse our girls to study, be healthy, secure, confident and skilled individuals." Her assertion was backed by other women who spoke in unison "we love to come to Samiti's camp. The place is indeed a

stress-buster for us as it gives us a sense of empowerment." Many of the women also demand 'capacity building' to handle the issues concerning them in the area and to advocate for child rights.

Moreover, the team of ChildFund and JSS regularly interacts with SHG and involves them in implementation and monitoring of the programme. The programme's success could be attributed to the fact that literacy classes were scheduled in accordance with the convenience of the members. The space for running women adult literacy classes was provided in already existing Early Childhood Care & Development Centres in each of the 21 villages. Besides, the field workers maintained the progress record of each individual and developed a quarterly progress evaluation system. To inculcate reading habit, daily newspapers and periodicals were also provided. The records were submitted with the district authorities and district literacy committee officials. The committee verified the facts and awarded certificates to the NGO in this regard.