

Where there is a will, there is a way



PaanKumari

In Aaswa village, there is a popular grocery store owned by a lady named PaanKumari. PaanKumari is a social and ambitious woman. She runs the shop on her own with the occasional help of her son ChhoteLal. She is thinking of expanding her business by opening another shop which her son will manage while she will continue at her present location.

Few months ago the situation was exactly the reverse!

PaanKumari, wife of RajbaliGautam, a resident of Aaswa village, is a member of the DeehBamba Baal Mitra Self Help Group. PaanKumari was illiterate and she would close her store when her son ChhoteLal was unavailable. Because of her inability to read, write or calculate, she had no confidence that she could manage her store on her own. Since RajbaliGautam was also illiterate he also felt that he could not help at the store. Since the store was the family's sole source of income, the frequent store closings caused undue hardship on her family. Within the village, PaanKumari's store was conveniently located and their neighbours also resented the frequent closings, having to go further to purchase their necessities. Rajbali and ChhoteLal had decided to put the shop on rent. Although she was completely against it, since she could think of no alternative solution, PaanKumari kept quiet. While the husband and son were looking for a tenant, PaanKumari was desperately praying for another solution. Her prayers were answered when it was announced that the TARA Akshar+ literacy programme was to be launched in her village.

On the first day of mobilisation PaanKumari registered for the course. In the beginning it was tough, as people used to make fun of her that she was studying at her age. But she paid no attention to what people said. She remained totally focused on her goal to be able to read, write and calculate. As a result, she never had to give her shop on rent. Rather, she has taken charge and even when her son is away the shop never closes, much to the delight of her customers.

"Initially I felt hesitant," Paan Kumari Devi says "but now I am more confident. I have to be, after all I am the owner of the shop!" ChhoteLal proudly adds, "Soon to be the owner of two shops".