

STORIES OF CHANGE



**Pratap Singh Parihar
Preparing
Orchha's Youth
for a Digital World**

In the busy marketplace of Orchha, with vegetable shops, eateries, banks and garment shops, Pratap's computer service enterprise stands out. The colourful banners and the sleek modern look of his enterprise make it stand out against the traditional brown architecture of the marketplace. A confident, twenty-five year old Pratap unwinds the shutters of his enterprise, and starts another busy day.

Pratap's journey as an entrepreneur started back in 2017 when he had the idea of starting his own computer service enterprise, on realising that no other shop in the area offered quality internet and information services - the rates were always high and the quality low. Prior to this, he worked as an office assistant and accountant to supplement his household income from time to time. In November 2017, Pratap left his job to venture into setting up his own computer service enterprise two hundred metres away from the central marketplace. Being proficient in computer operations, he was able to start off by providing services such as filling online forms, internet browsing, and photocopying services. However, like any new entrepreneur, Pratap faced the challenge of low startup capital, which limited his access to new and efficient equipment. He reflects into the past and shares, "In spite of fair prices, I was unable to capture a large customer base because my equipment was outdated and my enterprise was not on the main road owing to the high rent...". After facing losses for three consecutive months, he shut down his enterprise in March 2018, and went back to work as an office assistant.

He shares, "Even though my job was giving me sufficient income, I did not feel as happy at the end of the day. I talked to some friends about this, and they motivated me to give it another shot." In July 2018, Pratap started participating in enterprise development training sessions, during which he regained his confidence to set up a computer service enterprise again - this time with improved business acumen, a clear business plan, and better equipment. To overcome the limitation of less startup capital, Pratap decided to apply for a loan at a micro credit facility. His application was processed in a month, and he invested the amount in purchasing faster equipment. In October 2018, Pratap re-opened his enterprise in the same marketplace, but this time right opposite three major banks, ensuring a regular customer base. His enterprise is advertised at various points in the market, and he makes sure to drop in his business card with all his customers. As he flips through records of daily sales and cash flow, his passion

towards his work is demonstrated by his energy and commitment. Pratap proudly declares, "Customers who come to my enterprise once, keep coming back."

Pratap has invested an amount of sixty thousand rupees in his new enterprise, and even though the distance between his old enterprise and the new one is just hundred and fifty metres, it has a new outlook, way of business, and a new orientation towards customer servicing. There are three other similar shops on his street, but Pratap accepts this as healthy competition. He has also hired an employee, Manoj, on an incentive based salary plan, to gain help in servicing all customers in time. Pratap and Manoj maintain a proper record keeping system of customer details and daily sales. Pratap says that having such an organised system for his employee, customers and sales gives him an edge over other computer service enterprises in the marketplace.

Even though he has invested twice the amount in his new enterprise as compared to the old one, Pratap is confident that the returns from it are likely to grow over time, as he analyses the sales trend from the last six months. Pratap's new enterprise is already giving him fifty per cent more revenue than his first one. With pride in his voice, Pratap states, "The success of this endeavour is the first step towards achieving my dream of setting up a computer training centre for young boys and girls of my community. I want to provide them the opportunity to connect globally from my small town." Pratap continues to participate in business and skill development trainings with other entrepreneurs for building his skills and network.

The most recent one was on video mixing and animation, after which Pratap joined a social media network to stay in touch with other participants from different states. Pratap likes to call it 'The Tech Network', in which members share ideas with each other.



THE SUCCESS OF THIS ENDEAVOUR IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS ACHIEVING MY DREAM OF SETTING UP A COMPUTER TRAINING CENTRE FOR YOUNG BOYS AND GIRLS OF MY COMMUNITY.

