

# Unlocking Potential: Empowering Women Through Digital Literacy



In the heart of Lalitpur district, there exists a remarkable tale of empowerment, one that underscores the profound impact of education and digital literacy on the lives of women in rural communities. Sapna Jha, a beacon of hope in her village, emerged from humble beginnings in Khera, Uttar Pradesh. Her journey is a testament to resilience, determination, and the transformative potential of knowledge.

Born into a modest family, Sapna faced formidable obstacles on her path to education. Financial constraints and societal pressures conspired against her dreams, but she refused to surrender. She defied the odds and completed her education up to the tenth standard, an extraordinary feat in a district where few women are fortunate enough to get formal education.

In the year 2020, a turning point arrived in Sapna's life when she joined a Self-Help Group (SHG) and was chosen to be a 'Vidyut Sakhi' as part of the UP Bijli Sakhi Yojana. This innovative employment initiative sought to blend utility services with digital literacy training for women, offering a gateway to economic empowerment. Sapna, the sole member of her SHG with a secondary education, embraced this opportunity with open arms. However, to excel in her new role, she needed to conquer the realm of digital literacy, a challenge that initially daunted her. Nevertheless, Sapna's determination remained unshaken. She enrolled in the 'Digital Saaksharta' classes organised by Development Alternatives in Lalitpur in 2022 under the WE ADD project (Women Empowerment through Annihilation of the Gender Digital Divide). This initiative received crucial support from the Reliance Foundation (RF) through Round 1 of RF & USAID's WomenConnect Challenge India program. Astonishingly, she completed her digital literacy course in 24 days. This training not only empowered her to carry out her Vidyut Sakhi responsibilities with efficiency but also emancipated her, bestowing upon her a profound sense of self-reliance and exposing her to a world of new possibilities.

Sapna's triumphant journey rippled through her community, inspiring approximately 70 women to embark on their own digital literacy journeys. In turn, these women formed collectives to share their newfound skills with others. Sapna's unwavering commitment to learning, earned her a nomination for a mobile journalism course, where she now captures and shares empowering narratives of community development issues from a feminist perspective.



Beyond her professional achievements, Sapna's digital literacy efforts had a tangible social impact in her village. By collecting electricity bill payments door-to-door, she made life more convenient for families, reducing late fees, and, in the process, transforming the perception of women's work and their relationship with technology within her community.

Sapna's story illuminates the power of peer mentorship, the value of integrating utility schemes with digital skill-building initiatives, and the influence of role models in effecting behavioural change. Her remarkable journey stands as a shining example of how education, digital literacy, and women's empowerment can catalyse enduring transformation in rural areas, providing a beacon of hope and inspiration for countless others.