Mirzapur women in Rajasthan's Alwar take charge, gives push to female education

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JAIPUR: Mirzapur village in Alwar’s Kisengarh Bas had recorded a female literacy rate of less than 10% in the 2011 Census. The tables have turned since Zahida Khan became the first girl in Bagdora region (a cluster of 52 villages sharing the same lineage) to have completed her graduation degree in 2015.

She has been able to change the mindset of the conservative Meo Muslim community forever. The secondary school in Mirzapur now has 300 girl students. Almost 70% eligible girls from the houses are set to change the destiny of the village. The latest change-maker being Shabnam Khan, who is an engineering final year student at Modern Institute of Technology and Research Centre, Alwar. She has become the first Meo girl from the region to have grabbed a government job by clearing junior engineer (civil) examination.

Mirzapur village had zero literacy among its females until the 2001 Census. It touched 9% literacy rate in 2011 and is expected to touch a 30% literacy rate among females in the 2021 Census. In a bid to give back to the society, Shabnam has opened a learning centre in Mirzapur that teaches 30 girls, who cannot afford to study.

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“I had almost dropped out after my Class 10 exams as my school was a secondary one. My father showed courage and enrolled me in a senior secondary school in Alwar,” said Khan, who is working towards attaining a 50% basic literacy among the women in her village by 2023. Losing her father and elder brother in a span of five years did not affect her strong determination. “My mother had to face taunts from relatives and villagers for supporting my education after losing both earning members. I told her that one day all these people will honour you,” said Shabnam, who is seen as a role model now. The relatives, who attempted to assassinate her character had recently organised a programme to honour her and projected her as a role model for the girls.
The Meo dominated village is a part of the Bagdora region, which has poor socio-economic conditions. The region has 52 villages under two tehsils, Tijara and Kishangarh Bas.

“The conservative mindset of Meo Muslims shaped by the bloody history of the last 400 years has never allowed the women to step out of their houses without a male chaperone,” said Noor Mohammed, director of Alwar-Mewat Institute of Education and Development. “Formal education was out of the question until a collaborative movement was started involving religious, social and political leaders resulting in the success story of Zahida,” she said.