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## NIRANTAR, NEW DELHI

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A new wave is sweeping the barren lands of Bundelkhand — synonymous with acute poverty, feudalism, banditry and class and gender-based violence. A Bundeli fortnightly *Khabar Lahariya* written, edited, produced and marketed by the Dalit women of Chitrakoot, is highlighting cases of violence against women, Dalit atrocities and local issues.

This field intervention by Nirantar, a resource centre for gender and education, demonstrates how education can empower rural, Dalit and newly-literate women to move into an arena traditionally occupied by upper caste men. The organization works towards fulfilling its mandate of empowering women through education by enabling access to information, promoting literacy and engendering education processes. The women, who were given the Chameli Devi Award in 2004, tour villages for gathering news and personally sell copies to a wide cross-section of people. For instance, Shanti of Manikpur is hugely popular as she does the rounds selling 300 copies to paanwallahs, doctors, grocers, bank managers, coolies, railway officials and even the head constable who provides her with stories of dowry harassment.

Accessed by people outside the loop of information, *Khabar Lahariya* strengthens grassroots democracy by emboldening its 1500-odd readers. A report on quarrying in Bharatkup led to farmers' inquiries on environmental damage.

Another innovative field intervention is the Sahjani Shiksha Kendra in Lalitpur district. In 20 villages women and adolescent girls are discovering the power of the word and acquiring analytical skills on gender and development through residential literacy camps, letter writing exercises and by producing broadsheets. At the literacy and education centres they learn to seek information on health and food security.

Thus, besides being a resource agency, Nirantar has conceptualized and initiated both interventions and provided the support for building local capacities like that of Gyasi of Korvas village. She was made a facilitator because of her inherent potential to teach. She now cycles five kilometres every day to teach and motivate several others. Investing in her is the way to create more waves.

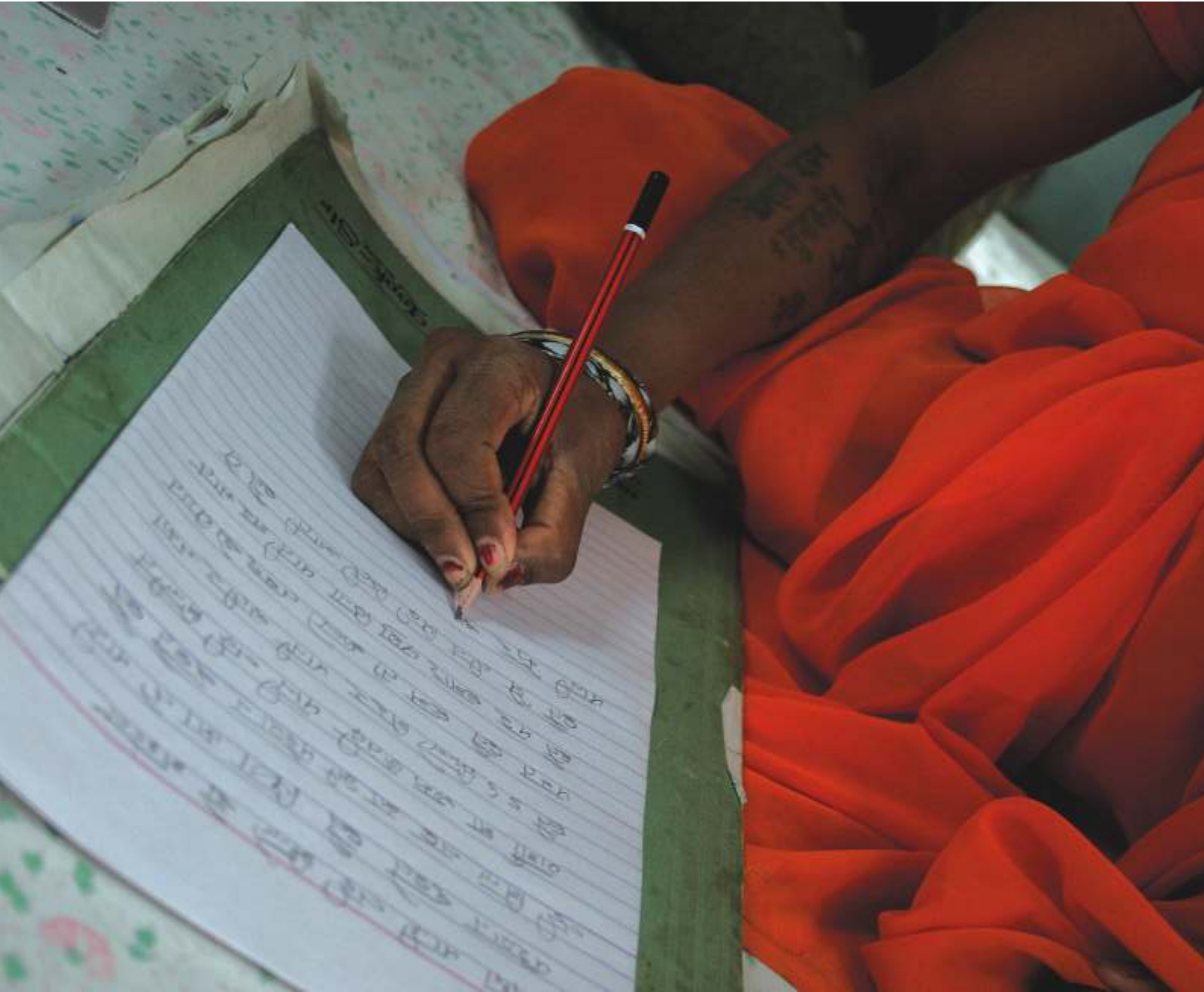
A grant of Rs 23.80 million was sanctioned in 2006-2007, for three years.

*Women and adolescent girls at the Sahjani Shiksha Kendra residential camp*





*A class in session*



*Writing for the Khabar Lahariya newspaper*



*Distributing Khabar Lahariya in the village*



*Reading the newspaper is an integral activity of the village community*