

# THE ASIAN AGE

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## With some help, women weave dreams into reality

**THE ASIAN AGE.** | SANJAY BOHRA

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Bimla Devi from Aspura village had been to Frankfurt to collect a 2018 German Design Award for her rug, Kamal.



 Women weavers from Rajasthan display a rug.

**Jaipur:** Tara is waiting for EMI of a vehicle loan to be over. She will then avail a new loan to buy a refrigerator and get pakka roof over her house. The 25-year-old carpet weaver in Manpura Macheri, 40 km from Jaipur, is also looking forward to send her son to a “good” private school next year.

Her senior by few years, Shanti Devi, has already got her elder son admitted to a hostel in Sikar.

“There is no good school in the village. I want to give the best possible education to my kids that I couldn't myself get because my parents were poor,” said Shanti Devi.

There was no scope for her education as childhood was mostly spent on brick kilns in Punjab where her parents worked for eight months a year and returning to their village during monsoon when the kilns were closed. Shanti Devi wanted to become government officer — a dream that remained unfulfilled.

But now, she and many of her rural colleagues associated with a rug weaving company, Jaipur Rugs, are getting a second chance to realise their dreams.

She is already a step closer to become a branch manager in couple of years having been promoted as “bunkar sakhī” (weaver companion) with the help of an initiative by Kavita Choudhary, designing director and the youngest daughter of Nand Kishore Choudhary, the founder of the company.

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Behind success of the rural women are efforts by Mr Choudhary who created a unique business model that scouts, trains, and converts rural women into entrepreneurs. He had started with setting up base in remotest villages dealing mainly with untouchables and tribals.

The risk paid off nicely. Founded at the age of 22, with ₹5000 borrowed from his father, Mr Choudhary's venture, Jaipur Rugs, has outgrown from two looms and nine workers in his hometown Churu to 7,000 looms in 600 villages in Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand creating five lakh rugs every year. Its annual turnover is ₹130 crore of which 90 per cent comes from exports to 50 countries. There is now a separate company Jaipur Living for overseas market that is managed by his elder daughters Asha and Archana in the US.

More impressive than the growth of the company is the social impact it has made to the lives of 40,000 weavers of which 85 per cent are women from dalit, adivasi and other socially and economically marginalised groups. The company's idea was to augment family income by utilising skills of non-earning members of the family.

“Women workers are naturally more receptive, patient and know how to put care in all their activities unlike their male counterparts who usually waste time and take leave anytime without concern for anything,” Mr Choudhary said.

After basic education and honing traditional skills of artisans, the company sets up looms at their homes, doorstep facility of dropping and picking up raw material and finished product removes middlemen who used to exploit weavers. The women workers now get timely payments without any deduction for a mistake and also earn incentives for good work.

**Tags: women weavers**