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CELEBRATING WOMEN CHANGE MAKERS IN INDIA

WOMEN TRANSFORMING INDIA AWARDS 2016

Celebrating Women Change Makers in India

Women Transforming India Awards 2016

On International Women's Day 2016, NITI Aayog, in partnership with MyGov and the United Nations in India, launched the *first-ever 'Women Transforming India'*, an online contest seeking stories of women making a difference, in form of essays.

Women Transforming India was launched with the aim to celebrate the indomitable spirit of women working tirelessly to empower communities and transform India. The campaign is also consistent with the government's renewed commitment to advance gender equality. The many interventions, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and Janani Suraksha Yojana are testimony to its resolve to empower its girls and women, and tackle discrimination.

Launched on 8 March, the contest was hosted on MyGov.in and ran till 15 April. The contest was supported by an extensive outreach campaign, including social media, print ads in local newspapers, talks on MyGov, posters and more. A number of prominent individuals, including Smriti Irani, Minister of Textiles; Dr Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog; Saina Nehwal, Olympic medalist in Badminton; Sania Mirza, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador; Aishwaryaa R Dhanush, UN Women Advocate for Gender Equality; Helen Clark, UNDP

Administrator delivered special messages in support of the campaign, which were shared extensively on social media.

Stories Came Pouring in...

The campaign received nearly 1,000 entries of exceptional girls and women across India who are breaking new ground by empowering themselves or others. After a rigorous process of shortlisting, 25 stories were put to poll on MyGov to select the top 12 stories.

A high-powered jury comprising of Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog; Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog; Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator; Chanda Kochhar, CEO, ICICI Bank; Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairman, Biocon and Gaurav Dwivedi, CEO, MyGov also ranked each of the 25 stories.

Finally, 12 women were declared winners based on the combined score of the jury and the online poll.

Rolling out the Red Carpet

The winners were felicitated by NITI Aayog, the United Nations in India and MyGov at an event on 9 September 2016 in New Delhi. Other shortlisted women received certificates of appreciation.

NITI Aayog, UN in India and MyGov congratulate all the winners of the Women Transforming India Awards!

Deepa Malik

Ability Beyond Disability

Arjuna Award winner, Deepa is paralyzed below the chest and has been undergoing treatment for a spinal tumour for the past 17 years, but in her avatar as an international sports person, she leaves many able-bodied people in the dust. She has 57 national and international medals and is currently representing India at the Rio Paralympics 2016 under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). She is India's first paraplegic woman swimmer, biker and rally car driver and holds four Limca World records for adventure sports.

Based on her inputs, India's sports policy now includes the provision of equitable sports facilities and rewards for para-sportspersons. Deepa personally assists physically challenged persons to take up sports, including rally car driving.

A vocal advocate of '*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*,' she promotes gender equality on national media even as she motivates women to overcome the 'double stigma' of gender and disability. Deepa's belief

in empowering people of disability also manifests in helping both physically challenged men and women secure jobs and earn their own livelihood. Several corporate organizations rely on her expertise to make their businesses more inclusive for staff and clients. To encourage the younger generation, she conducts workshops for inclusive education, disability sensitization and para-sports awareness in schools and colleges across India.

Deepa is a torch-bearer for the Accessible India Campaign. Her efforts resonate with the disability inclusion mandates of the Sustainable Development Goals 8, 10 and 11. She is transforming India into a more inclusive society both in terms of mindsets and accessibility.

Overcame disability to become India's first paraplegic woman swimmer, biker and rally car driver. An Arjuna awardee, she holds four Limca World records in adventure sports as well

WINNER





Kuwarbai Yadav

Age is just a number

Souvik Pal, a student of 10th standard in a school in Delhi has written a paean to the 104 year old, diminutive Kuwarbai, who sold her only assets – a few goats – to pay for building a toilet. She has set an example for 450 residents of her village that despite the deprivations of poverty, it is very important to have clean and hygienic living conditions.

Kuwarbai's action was based on information she received at a community event. She learnt that open defecation not only led to a host of diseases but also had a negative impact on the environment. She immediately decided

to sell her goats to fund the building of a toilet in her home. Kuwarbai exhorted other villagers to do the same. Inspired by her enthusiasm and spirit, the Dhamtari administration redoubled its efforts under the Swachh Bharat Mission and using MNREGA provided a subsidy for building toilets in the village. In July 2015, Kotabharri was declared an open defecation free village.

In February 2016, the Prime Minister felicitated Kuwarbai and acknowledged that despite her age and limitations she was a marker for how India is changing.

Sold her only assets – a few goats – to pay for building a toilet in her village. Inspired by the 104-year-old's enthusiasm and spirit, the village is now free of open defecation

WINNER

Lalithabai

Stove Mother (Volli Amma)

Lalithabai never envisaged the scale of the impact she would have on the lives of rural women in Karnataka when she was working as a quarry and agricultural labourer. But after she joined the Bharati Agro Industries Federation as a health worker to train Self Help Group members, her life began to change. Her journey to becoming an inspiring role model and winner of the Woman Exemplar Award 2007 for Micro Enterprise truly began when TIDE trained her in the construction of a smokeless and fuel efficient household *choolah* called Sarala Stoves.

She saw building Sarala Stoves as a means to earn a good income, while simultaneously improving the lives and health of rural women like her. Lalithabai has since been instrumental in setting up an enterprise that constructed more than 10,000 Sarala Stoves in three years and created a new revenue stream for the women of her community. Travelling from village to village for her stove installation business, Lalithabai has built more than 25,000 Sarala Stoves all over

Karnataka with the support of the Forest Department and other NGOs - a feat that has earned her the affectionate moniker of *Volli Amma* or Stove Mother in rural Karnataka.

Despite being socially active in many welfare activities, Lalithabai participates in all stove construction training programmes of TIDE to motivate women to take up stove construction and become self-empowered like her. Her transformational leadership has enabled livelihoods, independence and financial security for rural women in Karnataka.

Enabled livelihoods, independence and financial security for rural women in Karnataka, all through smokeless cook stoves

WINNER





Naheed Aqueel

When Social Work Becomes Social Activism

Naheed's childhood dream was to follow in the footsteps of her grandfather, a freedom fighter, and fight for the rights of the disadvantaged. In 2004, after reading about the incarceration of a 13 year old boy for patricide, she took it upon herself to delve into the matter and mount a defence when she found out that the murder was triggered by his father's incestuous relationships with his sisters. She was successful in having the boy released from prison. This event gave her the impetus to give up her job and start a NGO called Prayatna Foundation in 2005.

Two years later, she instituted a platform called *Akel Mahila Manch*, which brought together 100 organizations affiliated with the 12 districts of Uttar Pradesh to give voice to the issues faced by single women. She uses the platform to fight for the rights

of women who are widowed, divorced, abandoned by their husbands or simply want to live alone. Single herself, she believes that she is a practical example of how to deal with life's challenges in such circumstances.

Naheed challenges all limitations that society places on single women, including adoption. She has personally adopted 10 children and is fulfilling all her parental obligations with great aplomb. In addition, she is deeply involved in educating women, housing the homeless under the MSDP program, helping the landless become landowners and providing vocational skills to youth for better employment opportunities. The number of people benefitting from her activism and largesse are staggering and amply demonstrate the power of one.

Founded *Akel Mahila Manch*, which gives voice to the issues faced by single women - widowed, divorced, abandoned or by choice - and fights for their rights

WINNER

Nirmal Chandel

A widow's peak

Nirmal's life in the remote Sarkaghat village of Himachal Pradesh changed dramatically when she was widowed at 23 years of age, just two years after her marriage. Her saving grace was that she was a matriculate. A year later she broke the taboos surrounding her widowhood and escaped to work independently with an NGO, Social Uplift through Rural Action (SUTRA) in Solan district.

She did not envisage that this would be her first step towards the empowerment of single women, especially poor, jobless widows, divorcees and deserted women - women who are often cursed, harassed and abandoned by the traditional hill society. She shared the distress of the single and widowed women she encountered - the denial of rights, the exclusion from inheritance, the inability to fight or push themselves out of their circumstances. Essentially, the common denominator was they had no voice. Himachal has around 300,000 single women, most of them widows.

In 2005, motivated by a meeting Rajasthan, Nirmal formed the Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS) in Himachal with support from SUTRA.

From the initial 120 women, ENSS has grown to 14,369 members and covers seven districts of the state. In 2008, Nirmal led a 45 km march of 3538 rural widows, divorcees and deserted women, some in their 70s and 80s, to the state headquarters in Shimla. This effort shook up the system and instilled confidence in the women to fight for their rights and dignity. For the first time, the political leadership recognized them in policy matters, incorporated them as an entity in budget schemes of the state, instituted a scheme to provide financial help to single mothers for their children and gave them preference in certain jobs.

ENSS has received the Ashoka Change Maker Award in 2011 and the women are petitioning the government for land on lease for a collective venture for self-sustenance. Nirmal now also heads the national forum fighting for rights of single women.

Championing the rights of widows and deserted women to ensure their representation in government policies and budget schemes, a first in Himachal Pradesh

WINNER





Revathi Roy

A Driving Force

Revathi pioneered Asia's first ever women's taxi service, FORSCHE, in 2007. An established social entrepreneur, she trained more than a thousand girls to drive cars with the aim of employment as taxi drivers. She has since started three new companies to help Below the Poverty Line (BPL) families break the cycle of poverty through skill development and income generation. Revathi now envisions training 10,000 women in the next three years to become taxi drivers and delivery agents in the logistics sector.

Tapping into the large untapped resource of hardworking but under-utilised urban poor women, Revathi wants to not only elevate their status but also give access to a more public role in a predominantly male domain. She seeks to financially empower girls from BPL families to own their vehicle

and earn an income through delivery services, instead of working as domestic help.

One of the riders, Saroj Pethe, says, "I will earn a decent income and stand on my feet." These words vindicate Revathi's belief that skill development and provision of tools without the means to use them to earn a meaningful income is well intentioned but impractical. Her initiative is a holistic measure of female labour force generation and empowerment.

Steering India's first ever all-women taxi service, FORSCHE and empowering women to be independent and earn a steady income

WINNER

ElsaMarie D'Silva

Keeping Women Safe

The gang rape of a young medical student in Delhi in December 2012 gave ElsaMarie the impetus to give up her aviation career and set up Safecity to bring visibility to the issue of sexual violence.

Safecity is a platform that crowdsources personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces. This data is aggregated as hotspots on a map indicating trends at a local level. The intention is to make this local data available for individuals, communities and the administration to understand which factors lead to sexual violence and accordingly, develop strategies for their resolution.

Under ElsaMarie's leadership, Safecity is now working with partners in three countries and has impacted more than 100,000 people. The site has gathered more than 8,500 stories from 50 cities in India, Nepal, Kenya and Cameroon making it the largest crowd map on this subject. Six thousand plus people have attended its awareness workshops and more than 10,000 families have experienced the positive impact of its neighbourhood campaigns conducted in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Goa.

Safecity has demonstrated how crowdsourced data can impact institutional accountability and police vigilance. It seeks to work with and strengthen existing institutions, towards which it sends monthly trend reports on sexual violence experiences logged on the site to the police in Mumbai, Delhi and Goa.

Safecity has received extensive national and international press coverage and has been listed as one of 100 most inspiring social innovations in the world in 2015 by Nominet Trust. It has also been awarded the Manthan and Social Good for Empowerment Awards and is amongst 10 finalists at the UN Alliance of Civilization's Intercultural Innovation Award 2016.

Founder of Safecity, an online platform that crowdsources personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces, which is then aggregated on a map. SafeCity has impacted over 300,00 lives

RUNNER-UP





Dr. Meenakshi Nayar

Making Youth Employ-able

In 2006, Meenakshi founded ETASHA Society to function as a bridge connecting underprivileged youth to the growing organized sector of industry. Through its many programs, ETASHA has reached more than 10,000 youth, placing over 70 percent of trainees every year in jobs that help them break out of the cycle of poverty and create a better future for themselves and their families.

Armed with a doctorate in Organizational Behaviour from IIM Ahmedabad, Meenakshi focuses on training and placing underprivileged youth who have completed their schooling in entry level jobs in the customer service, retail and hospitality sectors, office assistance, data entry, accounting in ITES and the economic sector. This enables them to contribute

substantially to the family income. ETASHA also uses technology to its fullest extent, giving trainees the added advantage of ICT and social media skills.

ETASHA's differentiator from other vocational training institutes is that it goes beyond employability to the personality development of the individual. It also places a strong emphasis on changing the mindsets of the community through rallies, home visits and career melas. Initially, 70 percent of the girls who came for training dropped out for marriage. Now, about 57 percent complete their training. Many bright and capable young people from underprivileged backgrounds have been able to take charge of their lives because of Meenakshi's NGO ETASHA.

Helping youth break out of the cycle of poverty by connecting them with organised job. Her not-for-profit ETASHA has reached over 10,000 young people

RUNNER-UP

Muskan Ahirwar

A Budding Librarian*

Muskan Ahirwar is a sprightly nine-year-old girl from Durga Nagar Village near Bhopal. She is a living example of what young India aims at and can do when they put their mind to it. She is the youngest girl to run a library of her own in the slum area at the back of

Rajya Siksha Kendra, in Arera Hills. She calls it “*Bal Pustakalaya*.” This is her effort to empower the slum children with education. She also throws open discussions with other students and reads aloud various modules from educational books.

A sprightly nine-year-old who runs a library in a slum area and aims to empower and educate slum kids

**This story was selected to motivate and encourage young girls like Muskan across India.*



RUNNER-UP

A portrait of Dr. Lakshmi Gautam, a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark top, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white.

Dr Lakshmi Gautam

The Angel of Brindavan

The daughter of a pujari and a professor of History, 53-year-old Lakshmi started the Kanakdhara Foundation when she saw the indignity with which the widows in Brindavan led their lives. Coming from different parts of the country, these women are deprived in every respect, including their right to a record of identity. Lakshmi took it upon herself to provide them with healthcare, food, shelter and financial help. All taxis, tempos, horse-drawn carriages have Lakshmi's number on speed dial. They can call at any time, day or night, to inform her if any woman needs her assistance, be it as a result of crime or an accident. She also ensures that women who die without any close relatives are given their last rites with due respect and dignity. Her home is like an ashram, where helpless and destitute

women are looked after like family members. Even the police sometimes drops off women who have nowhere to go. This has been Lakshmi's life for over two decades.

It is not surprising then that she has been recognized as one of 100 Women Achievers in India by the President of India. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited her to Delhi to discuss the plight of the destitute women in Brindavan and was brought to tears by the stories she had to tell. In 1997, Lakshmi was recognized as the 'Mother of Brindavan' for her services to women. In 2005, she was named 'Angel of Brindavan.' She has also been awarded the Real Hero, Jeejabhoy, Nari Shakti and Brij Gaurav Awards.

Provides critical life support systems like food, shelter, clothing and medical care to abandoned widows

RUNNER-UP

Dr. Mariazeena Johnson

Learn Today, Lead Tomorrow

To capture all that Mariazeena does in a short brief is to do her a disservice. She is revolutionary educationist, social reformer and humanitarian. As the Director of Satyabhama University, a leading Science and Technology University in South India, she has made higher education free and accessible for the disadvantaged and differently abled, including acid attack victims and under-privileged students who excel in sports. Through her Anbu Foundation, she has adopted seven panchayat schools, two villages and provides lifetime support to 40 NGOs. Mariazeena also conducts free coaching classes for civil service aspirants and runs skill development courses for school dropouts and government school students, to the benefit of 50 government schools.

In her role as social reformer, she has initiated several programs for the empowerment and uplift of under-privileged women in 45 villages. Her philanthropy extends to needy children, destitute women and providing free education to the children of war widows. Mariazeena has introduced satellite-based e-learning vocational courses for rural youth through Village Resource Centres that connect 300 villages across

the country. Each year, thousands of youth are trained to become plumbers, medical lab technicians, nursing assistants and electricians through these courses.

Mariazeena supports several foundations and trusts, sponsors monthly medical expenses for children affected by cancer and expresses her environmental concerns through advocacy for a Green India. She has undertaken tree planting with great zeal and initiated a beach cleaning drive under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. She organizes free health camps and several rallies and awareness programs for various social causes.

Although her primary work is in the area of education, Mariazeena is an active and committed contributor to the economic and social development of India through initiatives that provide employment and empowerment to the disadvantaged.

An educationist and director of a university that offers full scholarship to differently-abled and disadvantaged students

RUNNER-UP





Pavithra Y S

Marrying business with philanthropy

In the ten years since Pavithra founded Vindhya, a Bangalore-based BPO company, it has become India's first and only for-profit organization with a workforce of predominantly disabled persons, including physically challenged, hearing and visually impaired and borderline autistic employees. It also employs women from BPL families and members of the transgender community.

A first generation entrepreneur, Pavithra has grown the organization from five to nearly 1,300 employees and envisions employing 5,000 people by 2020. Her aim is to build the world's largest social enterprise in ITES that provides mainstream jobs and dignified lives to people with disabilities.

The corporate world is recognizing what Pavithra is trying to achieve with her exemplary leadership, vision and

determination. Clients are responding to the potential, talent and loyalty of the disabled employees by sending in more work and rewriting their hiring policies to be more inclusive, thereby opening up their own workplaces to disabled people.

Pavithra has led Vindhya's efforts to expand awareness on issues related to the education, employment and advocacy for people with disabilities across India and internationally. Families are now proud of their disabled members, as some employees have enabled them to become debt free. Many disabled employees have been able to start their own families and own houses, bringing elusive self-respect and dignity into their lives.

Pavithra places constant training and counselling at the core of her staff retention and loyalty policies. Her platform for counselling, *Dhwani*, has won the NHRD award for best HR practices for persons with disabilities. In 2016, Pavithra received the 'Top 100 Women Achievers in India' Award from the President of India.

Founded India's first and only for-profit organization with a workforce of predominantly disabled persons, below poverty line women and transgenders

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