

Celebrating
stories of

COUTAGE,
Inspiration
& Change



On International Women's Day 2017, NITI Aayog, in partnership with MyGov and the United Nations in India, launched the second edition of the 'Women Transforming India Awards' to recognise exceptional women across India who are affecting positive change in their communities to further the Government of India's mission of inclusive economic growth.

Women Transforming India was launched with the aim to celebrate the indomitable spirit of women working tirelessly to break barriers and empower communities. The campaign is another example of the government's deep commitment to advancing gender equality. The government's many interventions, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, are testimony to its resolve to empower and educate girls, and to tackle discrimination and violence against girls and women.

Launched on 8 March, the contest was hosted on MyGov.in and ran till 1 June. The contest was supported by an extensive outreach campaign, including social media, WhatsApp, Facebook live sessions, posters and more. A number of prominent individuals -- including Smriti Irani, Minister of Textiles, Government of India; Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog; Sania Mirza, tennis player; Aishwaryaa R Dhanush, UN Women Advocate for Gender Equality; and Milind Soman, actor -- delivered special messages in support of the campaign, which were shared extensively on social media.

STORIES CAME POURING IN...

The campaign received nearly 3,000 entries of exceptional girls and women across India who are breaking new ground by empowering themselves and others. After a rigorous process of shortlisting, 28 stories were presented to a high-powered jury.

The jury, comprising Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog; Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog; Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator; P.T. Usha, track and field Olympian; Pooja Thakur, Wing Commander, Indian Air Force; Nirupama Rao, Indian Foreign Service officer; declared 12 finalists based on their combined score.

ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET

The finalists were felicitated by NITI Aayog, the United Nations in India and MyGov at an event on 29 September 2017 in New Delhi.

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

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Laxmi Agarwal Uttar Pradesh

Laxmi was attacked in 2005 when she was 15-years-old by a man more than twice her age, who she refused to marry. The incident - which took place in broad daylight in one of Delhi's busiest markets - left her physically and emotionally scarred. It led her to file public interest litigations in India's highest court to restrict the sale of acid.



Subasini Mistry West Bengal

Having lost her husband at a young age due to lack of medical care, Subasini Mistry toiled for two decades to realize her dream of building a hospital for the needy. She is living proof that one does not need to be young, rich or educated to be an achiever, but that immense hard work and the audacity of hope can go a long way.



Safeena Husain Maharashtra

Safeena Husain, is the founder and executive director of Educate Girls, a non-profit organization working for girls' education in some of the most educationally backward districts of India.





Arunima Sinha Uttar Pradesh

From being thrown out of a train, losing her leg and facing an uncertain future to becoming the first female amputee to scale the highest mountain in the world, Arunima Sinha's awe-inspiring story is one of fortitude, perseverance and conviction.



Kamal Kumbhar Maharashtra

Kamal Kumbhar broke free from the shackles of poverty and a suffocating marriage to create a micro-enterprise network, enabling women like herself to realise their dreams of a brighter tomorrow.



Jamuna Tudu Jharkhand

Jamuna Tudu and her band of women activists have managed to conserve 50 hectares of forest land around her village in Jharkhand, taking on encroachers with little more than bows and arrows and a whole lot of courage.



Rajlakshmi Borthakur Karnataka

Her young son's severe epilepsy had left Rajlakshmi Borthakur devastated. His seizures would come suddenly without warning. Living in constant fear, she never knew when the next seizure would strike. And neither did the doctors.



Kiran Kanojia Faridabad

Survivor of a horrific accident, Kiran Kanojia, is a champion blade runner, constantly pushing the limits on her quest for the next challenge.



Harshini Kanhekar Maharashtra

In the 46 years of its history, the National Fire Service College of Nagpur never saw a uniform-clad woman walk out of its gates. Harshini Kanhekar rewrote the college's history and the country's fire services to become India's first woman firefighter.



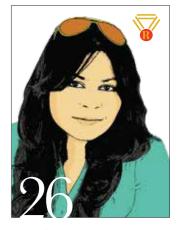
Shima Modak Meghalaya

For almost a decade, Shima Modak has been working relentlessly for the welfare of the distressed. Albeit with very little financial assistance, Shima has helped improve the future of children in her community by taking free education to the doorstep of the vulnerable.



Sunita Kamble Maharashtra

Sunita Kamble fought the odds to become the first woman goat doctor in a severely drought-affected region, working with her team to protect the community's livestock and create alternative and sustainable livelihood opportunities for women.



Kanika Tekriwal Madhya Pradesh

A self-made aviation entrepreneur and cancer survivor, Kanika Tekriwal exemplifies the power of positive thinking and strategic risk-taking.

2 Women Transforming India: The 2017 Awards



Rising from the Ashes

In 2005, a shy 14-year-old Laxmi Agrawal, who nursed dreams of being a singer and participating in reality TV shows, was waylaid by her 32-year-old stalker and his friends. Laxmi had rejected his advances and turned down his proposal days before the incident. The man and his friends threw acid on Laxmi's face to teach her a lesson for her 'arrogance'. Laxmi was left to die on a busy road, with cars hitting her unconscious body, till a Good Samaritan helped get her to a hospital.

Despite the trauma, the nightmarish months spent in the hospital and the reactions from people, Laxmi's spirit remained indomitable. Acid had melted her skin but not her being. Her family's unwavering support also helped her get back on her feet.

Gradually, the braveheart took back control of her life and used her experience to help other survivors like her. She became an activist campaigner for Stop Acid Attacks and also realized her childhood dream of being in front of the camera by becoming a television host.

In 2014, she received the International Women of Courage Award by the former US First Lady Michelle Obama. She was also chosen as the NDTV Indian of the year.

Laxmi continues to challenge artificial and misogynistic stereotypes thrust upon women by society and inspires survivors like her to take the world by the horns.





Bridging the Gender Divide in Education

Safeena Husain Maharashtra

SAFEENA HUSAIN, IS THE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATE GIRLS, A NON- PROFIT ORGANIZATION WORKING FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION IN SOME OF THE MOST EDUCATIONALLY BACKWARD DISTRICTS OF INDIA.

Safeena Hussain has been involved in development projects across South America, Africa and Asia for the past decade. In India, this London School of Economics graduate has built on a cause closest to her heart: ensuring girls have access to quality education and equal opportunities to better their future.

Safeena with the help of a local team successfully conducted a 500-school pilot in Pali, Rajasthan and established Educate Girls as an NGO in 2007. Educate Girls focuses on community mobilization to increase girls' enrollment and retention and improving learning outcomes for all children in government schools.

The organization works with community-level volunteers in each village called Team Balika, who serve as the

champions for the cause. These volunteers go door-to-door to identify out-of-school girls and convince their parents to send them to school, conduct village meetings, work with school management committees to prepare school improvement plans, and facilitate the use of Educate Girls' creative learning and life skills kits to improve learning quality and create girl leaders.

With a focus on enrolment, retention and learning, Educate Girls has evolved into a 12,000+ schools programme, with over 1,50,000 girls enrolled in schools till date, reaching over 3.8 million total beneficiaries.

Safeena's efforts to bridge the gender gap in education in India have been widely recognised. Under her leadership, Educate Girls has received the prestigious 2015 Skoll

Award, 2014 WISE Award, the 2014 USAID Millennium Alliance Award and the 2014 Stars Impact Award and the India Development Marketplace Award in 2011 from the World Bank. She also received the British Asian Trust's Special Recognition Award from HRH Prince Charles for outstanding contribution in education. Safeena won the 2016 NDTV-L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth Award in the Education Category.

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Hatching a Thousand Enterprises

KAMAL KUMBHAR BROKE FREE

Daughter of a daily-wage labourer, Kamal Kumbhar walked out of poverty and a failed marriage to set up Kamal Poultry and Ekta Sakhi Producer Company.

Her organisation has enabled 3,000 women in the drought-prone region of Osmanabad, Maharashtra to set up small poultry ventures for a premium variety of chicken. This initiative has helped provide an alternative and sustainable source of livelihood to women trapped in poverty like Kamal herself was once.

A serial entrepreneur. Kamal today owns six different businesses and is a role model business leader. Kamal was also a winner of the CII Foundation Women Exemplar Award 2017 in the field of micro-enterprise.

A role model in her community, Kamal has actively mentored more than 5,000 women to set up micro-enterprises. With an inspiring life story that started from the very rock-bottom, the only way Kamal's headed is up and ahead.





Decades of a vegetable seller's savings, saves lives of thousands today

Subasini Mistry

West Bengal



HAVING LOST HER HUSBAND AT A YOUNG AGE DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL CARE, SUBASINI MISTRY TOILED FOR TWO DECADES TO REALIZE HER DREAM OF BUILDING A HOSPITAL FOR THE NEEDY. SHE IS LIVING PROOF THAT ONE DOES NOT NEED TO BE YOUNG, RICH OR EDUCATED TO BE AN ACHIEVER, BUT THAT IMMENSE HARD WORK AND THE AUDACITY OF HOPE CAN GO A LONG WAY.

Subasini Mistry's husband, a vegetable vendor, died at a young age because he could not get medical help for a common ailment. Within a month of his death, his illiterate wife and four children were on the streets. Like her late husband, Subasini too started selling vegetables to make ends meet. She vowed that one day she would build a hospital for the poor and needy in the very village her husband breathed his last in.

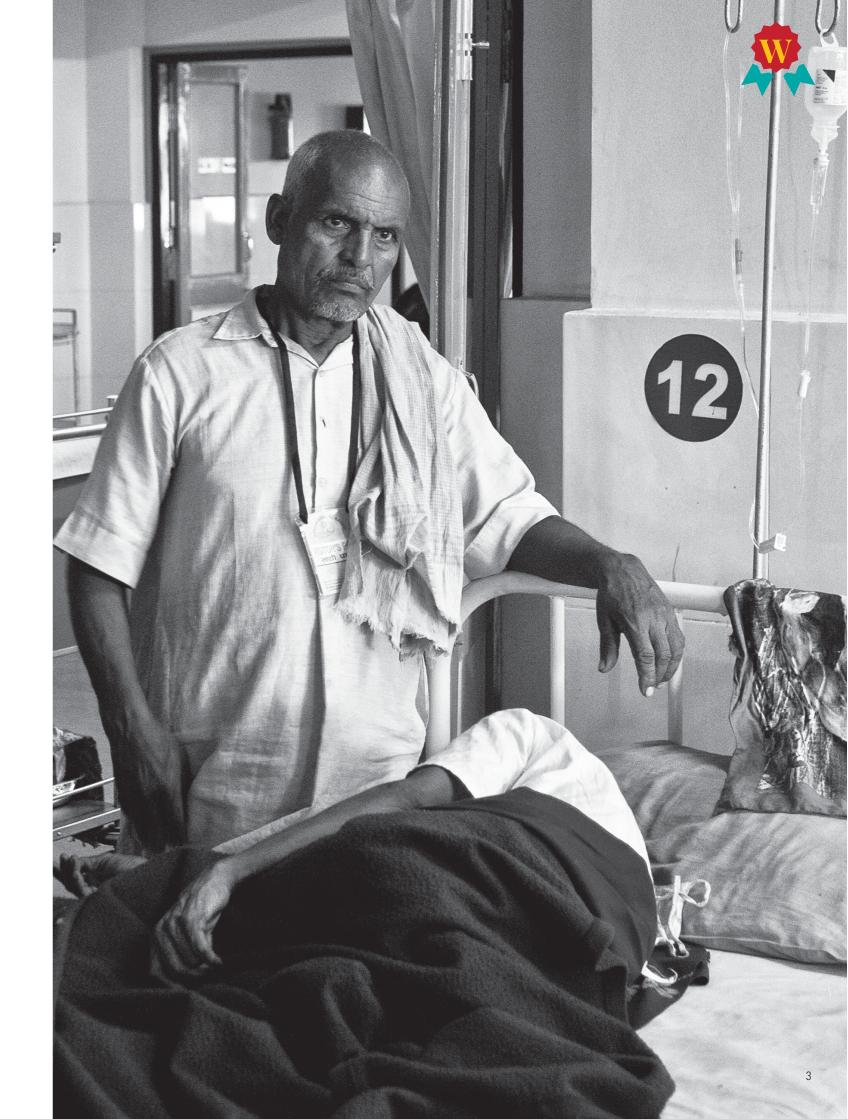
People laughed at her impossible dream. But Subasini was no ordinary woman. For the next 20 years, she worked as a domestic help, manual labourer and vegetable vendor. She saved most of her earnings for her dream hospital, while spending the rest on raising her four kids.

65 year-old Subasini used her lifelong savings to buy an acre of land in her husband's native village. She appealed

to the community to help in any way they could and they did. Her son, Ajoy, managed to raise Rs 50,000 from acquaintances, friends and organizations. A one-room clinic came into being, the beginning of the hospital-to-be. Three doctors from adjoining areas were persuaded to attend to the sick for free. Patients started streaming in and Subasini became a household name.

In 1995, the foundation stone for the hospital was laid and was open to the public a year later. Today, the 45-bed hospital spreads over three acres and has the best of doctors and medical equipment. Major surgeries for the poor are done for less than Rs. 5000 and minor ailments are treated for under Rs. 10.

The Humanity Hospital is testament to the iron will and tenacity of Subasini Mistry, a truly extraordinary woman.



Transcending Adversity to Make History



FROM BEING THROWN OUT OF A TRAIN, LOSING HER LEG AND FACING AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE TO BECOMING THE FIRST FEMALE AMPUTEE TO SCALE THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN IN THE WORLD, ARUNIMA SINHA'S AWE-INSPIRING STORY IS ONE OF FORTITUDE, PERSEVERANCE AND CONVICTION.

Arunima Sinha Uttar Pradesh

Arunima Sinha, 24-year-old national level volleyball and football player, dreamt of joining the Central Industrial Security Force and was on her way to take the examinations, when she was thrown off a train by a group of hoodlums for refusing to part with her gold chain. She lost her left leg, and with it, seemingly, her chance of making a mark in the world of competitive

of an average person. Arunima, however, seemed to draw strength from the incident, and even as she was being resolved to climb the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest. Fund raising helped procure a prosthetic leg for Arunima to realize her mission.

After being discharged, Arunima enrolled for the basic mountaineering course from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, which she excelled at. She then contacted Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb Mount Everest, and trained under her at the Uttarkashi camp of the Tata Steel Adventure Foundation (TSAF) 2012. In 2012, Sinha climbed Island Peak (6,150 metres) as preparation.

On April 1, 2013, two years after her horrific accident, Arunima, along with Susen Mahto, TSAF instructor,

started the ascent to Mount Everest. After 52 days of hard climbing, Arunima reached the Everest summit at 10:55 am on 21st May. She has made history by becoming the first female amputee to scale the mighty

Arunima has since received several awards and financial aid for her inspiring achievement. She is donating all the financial aid that she has received to open a free sports Pandit Chandra Shekhar Viklang Khel Academy. In 2015, the braveheart was awarded the fourth highest civilian with the Tenzing Norgay Highest Mountaineering Award

Arunima has rightfully secured her place in history as a person who overcame extreme adversity to achieve glory





Jamuna Tudu

Maturkham, Jharkhand

JAMUNA TUDU AND HER BAND OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS HAVE MANAGED TO CONSERVE 50 HECTARES OF FOREST LAND AROUND HER VILLAGE IN JHARKHAND, TAKING ON THE FOREST MAFIA WITH LITTLE MORE THAN BOWS AND ARROWS AND A WHOLE LOT OF COURAGE.

For years, the dense Sal forest surrounding Maturkham village in Purbi Singhbhum district of Jharkhand was plundered by the forest mafia for its precious Sal timber and rare fauna. Till, a young woman from Odisha married into a family in the village.

Young Jamuna Tudu was incensed to see the mafia chopping down Sal trees with complete disregard for the law or the tribal tradition that bans the cutting of the trees. She was even more bewildered by the passive response of the community at their habitat being attacked. Seventeen-year-old Jamuna decided to take matters in her own hands. She mobilized a group of 25 women from the village, armed them with bows and arrows, lathis and spears, and marched into the forest to take on the intruders.

Over 15 years of many fierce encounters with the mafia and relentless sensitization of the community, Jamuna and the Van Suraksha Samiti she formed have succeeded in protecting and conserving 50 hectares of forest land and its flora and fauna. For her courage, passion and persistence in the face of odds, the community calls her, Lady Tarzan.

The Van Suraksha Samiti has about 60 active women members, who patrol the jungle in three shifts a daymorning, noon and evening. And sometimes even at night when the mafia set fire to the forests in random acts of vandalism and vengeance.

Jamuna's fight has not gone unnoticed. The President of India has awarded her conservation efforts. The Forest

Department has 'adopted' her village, which has led to Maturkham getting a water connection and a school. In 2013, Jamuna accepted the Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award in the 'Acts of Social Courage' category.

Maturkham and its nearby areas are deep in the heart of Naxal territory; Jamuna faces a dual challenge running an environment conservation campaign in the volatile region. Today, she runs awareness campaigns through various forest committees in Kolhan division. Around 150 committees formed by Jamuna, comprising more than 6,000 members, have joined her movement to save the forests.

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Lifesaver Device Designed



Rajlakshmi Borthakur Karnataka

HER YOUNG SON'S SEVERE EPILEPSY HAD LEFT RAJLAKSHMI BORTHAKUR DEVASTATED. HIS SEIZURES WOULD COME SUDDENLY WITHOUT WARNING. LIVING IN CONSTANT FEAR, SHE NEVER KNEW WHEN THE NEXT SEIZURE WOULD STRIKE. AND NEITHER DID THE DOCTORS.

Determined to save her child's life, Rajlakshmi channeled her inner researcher and innovator. She researched epilepsy obsessively for more than three years and came up with a simple wearable device, a smart glove, that can predict epileptic seizures before they happen. The sensors inside the glove get vital stats from the body and send these to the inbuilt processor. The processor works on the data immediately and sends it wirelessly to patients and caregivers anywhere, thus alerting them to a possible episode of seizure that could prove fatal.

Rajlakshmi's simple yet ingenious solution to her son's life-threatening condition has the potential of saving millions of others living with seizures.



India's First
Woman
Firefighter

IN THE 46 YEARS OF ITS HISTORY, THE NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE COLLEGE OF NAGPUR NEVER SAW A UNIFORM-CLAD WOMAN WALK OUT OF ITS GATES. HARSHINI KANHEKAR REWROTE THE COLLEGE'S HISTORY AND THE COUNTRY'S FIRE SERVICES TO BECOME INDIA'S FIRST WOMAN FIREFIGHTER.

Growing up, Harshini discovered her appetite for adventure after signing up for the National Cadet Corps Air Wing. Her ultimate dream was to don a uniform and serve the country. Fresh from university, Harshini applied to Nagpur's National Fire Service College (NFSC), an all-male bastion. When she qualified for NFSC, her parents were apprehensive. Harshini, however, was determined to overcome all obstacles.

Harshini worked at par with her male peers to clear the course. Her drills included working with heavy water hoses and suction hoses. As the first woman ever to take the course, the expectations from her were much higher;

she could not afford to make mistakes since her performance would set the benchmark for other young womer aspiring to join NFSC.

After graduating from NFSC, Harshini joined the fire fighter services at the age of 26. She was selected and designated as a fire engineer at the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC). Before joining ONGC, Harshini helped douse several big fires in Delhi and Kolkata. Her longest operation was in Delhi when a shoe factory caught fire, and she as part of her team had to fight fire for six hours at a stretch. As part of her service, she has also rescued civilians during floods, building collapses, wildlife attacks, and river swelling.

After joining ONGC in 2006, she was posted at the company's Mehsana station, where she was in-charge of one of the three fire stations. Owing to her bravery, Harshini was also granted access to offshore rigs recently and is currently the deputy manager, Fire Services.

From a typical teenager studying in all-girls college in Nagpur to becoming the first woman firefighter of the country, Harshini's story serves as an inspiration for millions of young Indian women who dare to dream.





From Accident Survivor to India's First

Female Blade Runner

SURVIVOR OF A HORRIFIC ACCIDENT, KIRAN KANOJIA, IS A CHAMPION BLADE RUNNER, CONSTANTLY PUSHING THE LIMITS ON HER QUEST FOR THE NEXT CHALLENGE.

On a December day in 2011, Kiran Kanojia, an Infosys employee, boarded the train from Hyderabad on her way home to Faridabad, excited about celebrating her upcoming birthday with her family. Kiran landing a job in Infosys was celebrated as a turning point in her family's fortunes.

She is hazy about what happened next but remembers two boys attempting to snatch her bag and pushing her out of the train. On the eve of her birthday, Kiran lay in a hospital bed catching snatches of conversation about 'saving the leg'. Life as Kiran knew it would never be the same again.

When Kiran returned to Hyderabad six months after the accident and her amputation, she fought to get back

control of her life. The Dakshin Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) helped her do just that. Mohana Gandhi, a consultant from DRC, got her and other amputees to form a running group. Mohana suggested Kiran try the prosthetic leg. When she first wore it, Kiran was unsure it could even support her. Gradually, the blade felt like second skin.

In 2014, Kiran attempted the Hyderabad Airtel Marathon and won her first medal.

Today, Kiran, 28, is a champion blade runner and is invited to Delhi and Mumbai to run and flag off marathons. Her immediate goal is to participate in the Paralympic Games and make the country proud.





A Beacon of Hope

for the Underprivileged



Shima Modak Meghalaya

FOR ALMOST A DECADE, SHIMA MODAK HAS BEEN WORKING RELENTLESSLY FOR THE WELFARE OF THE DISTRESSED. ALBEIT WITH VERY LITTLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, SHIMA HAS HELPED IMPROVE THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN IN HER COMMUNITY BY TAKING FREE EDUCATION TO THE DOORSTEP OF THE VULNERABLE.

Moved by the plight of the underprivileged, Shima Modak drew funds from her own earnings to start her NGO, SPARK, which helps educate and enable marginalised groups to lead lives of dignity.

In 2010, Shima started an educational centre (small school set up) in community spaces to take education to the doorstep of those kids who cannot make it to school. Today, there are five such centres staffed with 16 teachers across Shillong, who are paid Rs. 2,000 monthly, catering to nearly 450 students, mostly cowherds, wastepickers and domestic workers who have to work to support their family. These centres are run with minimum basic facilities through donations. Basic education (nursery to 10th grade) is provided free to children who could never have dreamt of going to school. Those who have completed their schooling are then linked to a formal school. Students from these centres have been participating in and winning state and national level sports tournaments. A key achievement has been a group of students who've been trained in animation and film-making skills participating in the Chicago Film Festival 2015. Starting with 73 underprivileged children, the centres run by SPARK have as of date been able to cover more than 3,000.

Recognising the importance of educating women for the development of society, Shima's NGO organises evening classes for women in Anjali, Shillong. Awareness and sensitisation programmes and health camps for women are some of the other praiseworthy initiatives undertaken by Shima and her team.

Shima continues to soldier on, using her own resources and the wholehearted support of the community, to improve the lives of the lesser privileged.

