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Dinanath Rajput receives Rohini Nayyar Prize for transforming lives of women in Bastar

Rajput's NGO helps farmers sell products by cutting out middleman

 (https://www.theweek.in/authors.Mandira.html) By Mandira Nayar (Https://Www.Theweek.In/Authors.Mandira.Html)

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Chairman of 15th Finance Commission N.K Singh presents the award to Dinanath Rajput | Sanjay Ahlawat

It was a celebration that late Dr Rohini Nayyar would have approved of.

Dr Nayyar spent her life to make rural India visible as an economist and keeping it in focus as an administrator at erstwhile Planning Commission. And on her 79th birth anniversary, a 32-year-old engineer-turned-social worker received a prize instituted in her name for transforming the lives of over 6,000 women in Bastar.

“Today, the women I work with are empowered,” said Dinanath Rajput after receiving the Rohini Nayyar Prize for 2023.

Rajput left his job in Bengaluru and returned to Chhattisgarh to give women farmers a chance to change their lives. His non-government organisation helps farmers sell their products by cutting out the middleman.

“When I started, there were only three people to work with me. Now, I have a team of 52.”

The Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, N.K Singh—who had worked with Dr Nayyar during her stint with the Planning Commission—presented the award to Rajput.

“Her contribution in the planning commission in the Human Development Division, from 1987 to 2005 left an indelible footprint in multiple ways,” said Singh.

“While we are constantly refining our Human Development Report, it was an endeavour first initiated by Rohini in the Planning Commission. It is equally true of several rural development programmes as well as the MNREGA...which is constantly undergoing refinement of multiple kinds.”

The Rohini Nayyar prize is unique in many ways. “Perhaps it’s the only such prize for the contribution to rural development in India,” said Dr Deepak Nayyar, emeritus professor of economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

“It’s also among the few prizes anywhere that are named after women. In times to come, we hope that the prize will become the gold standard for persons working towards development, and that it will motivate the winners to inspire more innovative work and disseminate best practices across India,” he said.

Instituted by her family to keep alive the legacy of Dr Nayyar—each winner is thoroughly vetted by an eminent four member jury—the award comes with a citation and a trophy and a cash prize of Rs. 10 lakhs.

This is the second edition of the award. What sets it apart is that it is aimed to encourage dreams of the young and reward the years of idealism, which often go unnoticed. The age limit for the prize is therefore 40 years.

“We have received applications from all over the country,” said Nayyar.

“That so many young people under the age of 40 are choosing to work in this space when they have so many career options to choose from fills us with optimism about the future.”

Ashok Khosla (founder of Development Alternatives), Rajesh Tandon (founder of PRIA) and Renana Jhabvala (national coordinator, SEWA) and Professor K. Seeta Prabhu (visiting professor at TISS) comprise the jury for the award.

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