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Social Worker from Bastar Wins Second Annual Rohini Nayyar Prize for Rural Development

Prize winner Deenanath Rajput has helped more than 6,000 tribal women sell and market their produce in the Naxal-affected state of Chhattisgarh.

WIRE

Yasmeen Saadi

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New Delhi: Growing up in an ordinary farming family, 33-year-old Deenanath Rajput was aware of the critical challenges impacting the farming communities in his state, Chhattisgarh. After surveying tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, Rajput became dedicated to the upliftment of women who often faced the brunt of exploitation and hardships.

The engineer-turned-social worker was awarded the second Rohini Nayyar Prize for an Outstanding Contribution to Rural Development on Tuesday evening. This prize is awarded annually to a person under 40 and comes with a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh, a trophy and a citation by this year's chief guest, N.K. Singh, chairman of the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

Rajput's work has included creating self-help groups for women, teaching efficient farming methods, building cold storage infrastructure, connecting women with national and international markets for their products and helping women diversify their products and services. Rajput led the

In a conversation with *The Wire,* Rajput said he hopes to expand the scale of his organisation moving forward, connecting more women across the industry and expanding the reach in Chhattisgarh.

The prize awarded was in memory of the late economist-administrator Rohini Nayyar who contributed various academic journals on rural development and served as principal advisor in the Planning Commission.

N.K. Singh addressed the importance of rural development institutions in the third tier of government and recounted the contributions made by Nayyar in the field.

"What you do, it is said, is history. What you set in motion is legacy. Rohini set in motion many parts, endeavours, and these constitute her legacy. It is this legacy that we celebrate today," Singh said, ending his address.

The jury of Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives, Rajesh Tandon of Participatory Research in Asia, Renana Jhabvala of the Self-Employed Women's Association and Professor Seeta Prabhu selected the winner. Tandon said the jury received 92 nominations this year.

Deepak Nayyar, director of the Nayyar Foundation and Emeritus Professor of Economics at JNU, said while going through applications, he and the jury were greatly impressed by the quality of work being done across rural India.

"In times to come, we hope that the Rohini Nayyar Prize will become the gold standard for persons working in the world of rural development in India and that it would motivate the

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