



JIJABAI

JIJABAI is regarded as the epitome of motherhood who imparted excellent values to her son Shivaji, later Chhatrapati Shivaji, against many personal odds. She was herself a great warrior and administrator and she instilled in her son a sense of duty and courage to overcome any hardship.

JIJABAI ACHIEVERS AWARDS

Shivaji College has instituted the *JIJABAI ACHIEVERS AWARDS* as a celebration of the development that can be unleashed with the privileging of genders and these are given annually to a select number of people who work at the grassroots level for the empowerment of women. They provide education for women and create opportunities for their economic independence. They enable women to subvert patriarchy and live in a state of social equality. The struggles and efforts of the awardees have been put together in *SAMTULYA* to enable readers to know about them since they have made it a mission of their lives to better the lives of others.

TENTH JIJABAI AWARDEES- 2019:

- Lakshmi N. Menon
- Shyam Sunder Paliwal
- Manisha Gupte & Ramesh Awasthi
- Sister Annie Jesus Mary
- Vidya Nambirajan

Path towards Pure Living

LAKSHMI N. MENON

Ms. Lakshmi N. Menon has put in tremendous work for society by providing a better way of living to women of all ages, while protecting the environment at the same time. Ms. Menon lives in the company of her mother and grandmother, in a quiet home in Kerala, where together they try to save every bit of waste they can for a healthier planet. A designer at heart, she attained a degree in home science and went to the United States of America to pursue a career in designing. She had an excellent career there and also designed jewellery for models in the New York fashion week. Ms. Menon often used to visit Kerala and during one such visit she taught orphaned kids the craft of rolling paper to make a pen, an art she already practiced in the USA and even sold such pens at art galleries. It was then that she thought of embedding a seed in the paper pen to make it grow into a plant after it had been used up. This was the beginning of her organisation **PURE LIVING** in 2012.

PURE LIVING is a social enterprise which aims to find sustainable, eco friendly and innovative solutions to modern day problems, and extends a life of dignity and economic independence to elderly women and disabled people. Ms. Menon decided to leave her well-settled life in the USA as an artist and designer and return home to contribute towards a greener, cleaner environment. Since then, she has consistently worked towards innovations in eco products, projects and campaigns which question every pen we purchase and every fan we leave switched on.



Harbinger of Gender Parity Through Environmental Conservation

SHYAM SUNDER PALIWAL

Piplantri is a small village located in Rajsamand district in the state of Rajasthan in India. Shyam Sunder Paliwal of Piplantri was happy farming and taking care of his family until a personal tragedy changed his life. Mr. Paliwal lost his daughter Kiran to dehydration. He planted a tree in her memory and remembered his daughter through it every day. Later, this idea of planting trees for a girl child was extensively popularised by Mr. Paliwal in his village of which he was Sarpanch¹. In this way he smartly combined the missions of protecting the girl child along with caring for mother earth. People in Piplantri village now identify so much with the idea of trees that trees are planted to commemorate each milestone in a person's life.

In India the child sex ratio is heavily in favour of boys and the gap between the number of boys and girls is a major cause of concern. This is because of the existing social mores and beliefs that boys advance the family legacy and honour and girls are considered as liabilities, making their birth undesirable. Contrary to this, people in Piplantri celebrate the birth of each girl child and mark it by planting trees. On an average, 55 girls are born in the village each year. Mr. Paliwal's colossal mission to plant 111 trees at the birth of each girl child in his village began in 2005. After planting the trees, villagers nurture them just as they ensure the survival of the girls in their village. Using the metaphor of trees for the survival of the girl child, the villagers have planted and nurtured over 3 Lakh trees of neem (Nimtree or Indian Lilac), sheesham (Indian Rosewood), aam (Mango) and amla (Indian gooseberry)² on the common pasture land of the village.



Committed Towards Social Equality

MANISHA GUPTÉ & RAMESH AWASTHI

"Do what you love and you will find the way to get it out to the world"-Judith Collins¹

The yardstick of a person's success in society is measured in terms of salary earned and position achieved in the professional sphere. This idea of success, however, is not shared by everyone. Some people in this world envisage a life that defies or subverts traditional conventions and perceptions. Dr. Manisha Gupte and Dr. Ramesh Awasthi are such outstanding examples who gave up the comforts of a settled life in order to change the lives of those less fortunate. Together, Dr. Gupte and Dr. Awasthi run the **Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM)**, an organisation that aims to create an equal world.

Dr. Gupte comes from a simple Maharashtrian family of national level trade-unionists and is a microbiologist and sociologist by training. She was actively involved with the Jayaprakash Narayan Movement in the 1970s and worked with the **Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini**, an influential student organisation. Dr. Ramesh Awasthi hails from a Punjabi family of doctors. His brothers are settled in the USA and he studied for his B.Tech and M.Tech from IIT Delhi and later did his doctorate from Mumbai. He was active in the Rationalist and Anti-Corruption movements from the beginning and later decided to quit his well paying job to work for social justice for all. Both of them left their well settled lives and secure jobs to accomplish their common mission of transforming the society. They had the full support of their families when they decided to get married and subsequently live in a small space, on a modest honorarium. They lived their first five years post marriage in a small village and brought up their children there. According to Dr. Gupte, "unless you have a partner who supports you and who doesn't have traditional gendered expectations (men earning big salaries, women having to do household work and look after children), you can't fulfill your aspirations".

Drs. Gupte and Awasthi moved to Malshiras town in Solapur, Pune in 1987 and started MASUM. The organisation aims to establish equal rights and awareness about gender equity. They believe that real democracy is possible only through strengthening the voices of local people. They are hopeful that by providing better education and spreading awareness about rights, irrespective of caste and gender, they will be able to transform the community.



They were asked if it was difficult to make the shift of leaving secure jobs to work for society. They responded,

"Not at all! It's like changing your watch to a different time zone when you travel outside the country. You have to shift to a different pace, different cultural milieu and become friends with the people you work with. The fact that we didn't have a phone, quick means of transport, or even electricity sometimes for days or weeks gave us the opportunity to stay put in the semi-accessible village, and not keep coming to the city frequently".

MASUM is currently running six programmes which relate to:

- women's rights to emotional and physical health,
- women's rights to a violence free and discrimination free life,
- women's rights to political participation,
- women's rights to economic empowerment,

- rights of children,
- rights of adolescents and youth.

Every programme in MASUM is right-based. The community programmes work for women in about 20 villages in Pune and Ahmednagar districts in Maharashtra. Their Health Initiative works with three Primary Health Centres and covers almost one lakh people. In order to empower women economically, MASUM has installed eight looms where weaving is done by women of Malshiras and of eighteen neighbouring villages. This not only allows women to earn an income, it also makes them confident, independent, and capable of standing for themselves. Women have thus become truly active participants in the process of social change and not just its beneficiaries.

Not everybody is willing to accept this change. Helping women who face emotional and physical violence sometimes pits the organisation against the perpetrators of such acts. The couple remain

Knight Against Human Trafficking

SISTER ANNIE JESUS MARY

Sister Annie Jesus Mary is an empowered, determined woman who fights tirelessly against the evil of child trafficking in Chhattisgarh. She takes care of women, rescuing them from human traffickers and empowering them by engaging them in income generating activities through various initiatives.

She was born in Sinnandipatti village in Tiruchirapalli district of Tamil Nadu. Being the only girl child of the family, she was showered with love and affection; nevertheless, she learnt the meaning of personal dignity at an early age. At a very young age she made up her mind to work towards the betterment of the economically weaker sections of society and ensure equal opportunities for girls. This decision came to define her future life.

Against strong opposition from her family, she joined the **Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM)**, a congregation that is part of the Christian Roman Catholic Church. She took her initial vows in May 2002 and her final vows in November 2008. To meaningfully serve the society, she chose to pursue a master's degree in social work from Chennai. During the course of her degree she had to interact with child beggars, many of whom were trafficked to Chennai from northern India. Such was her commitment to the cause that she also did a diploma in Hindi in order to communicate directly with these children.



Shattering the Stereotypes

VIDYA NAMBIRAJAN

"Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength."

These words of G.D. Anderson¹ truly underline the charisma of Ms. Vidya Nambirajan, a crusader against gender inequality and one who has carved a niche for herself and for many other women in the servicing and technical training segment of the automobile sector. She has honed her skills to suit the requirements of her job, and has provided numerous platforms for the potential of other promising talents to thrive.

The second of three siblings, Ms. Nambirajan was born on 12th April 1966. She completed her schooling from Delhi and Hyderabad and graduated from a government institution with Zoology, Botany and Chemistry as her subjects. She could not pursue further studies and was forced to take up a teaching job due to family constraints. Subsequently, she started her decade long corporate career in HCL (Hindustan Computers Limited) and rose to elite positions of Regional Manager and General Manager in Annapoorna Foils and with the Shalivahana Group.

In 2001, when her father developed a severe ailment, Ms. Nambirajan relocated to Hyderabad to take care of her parents. It was then that for the first time she ventured into the field of automobiles, overseeing the operations at her father's workshop, the **Paramount Auto Bay Services**². The truism of S. Truett Cathy's³ words, "Love your work and you will never have to work again" was best reflected in her supervisory work.

