

# 9TH MARTHA FARRELL AWARD



EXCELLENCE IN  
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

20 SEPTEMBER, 2025  
INSA, NEW DELHI

HONOURING INDIVIDUALS AND  
ORGANISATIONS CHAMPIONING  
GENDER JUSTICE  
AT THE GRASSROOTS



# DR. MARTHA FARRELL

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Dr. Martha Farrell (1959–2015) was a dynamic and deeply respected voice in civil society, celebrated in India and beyond for her pioneering work in women's rights, gender equality, and adult education. Her life's mission was to embed feminism and gender justice into everyday practice, empowering women and men to challenge inequality at its roots.

On 13 May 2015, while in Kabul, Afghanistan, conducting a gender training workshop for the Aga Khan Foundation, she lost her life along with 14 others killed in a terrorist attack on a guest house. She died doing the work she believed in the most.

**WE NEED TO QUESTION ALL THOSE BELIEFS  
THAT KEEP WOMEN FROM MAKING PROGRESS.**

**~DR. MARTHA FARRELL**

Born in Delhi into an Anglo-Indian family, Martha studied English Literature at Delhi University before earning a Master's degree in Social Work from the Delhi School of Social Work. Her career began in 1981 at Ankur, an NGO championing women's literacy in Delhi, where she developed an enduring commitment to participatory learning methods.

In 1991, she co-founded Creative Learning for Change, dedicated to research, training, and the development of learning resources for non-traditional educational spaces.

Her leadership extended to distance education, and from 2005 she built the Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) International Academy into a vibrant hub for global learning. She also held teaching assignments at the University of Victoria and Royal Roads University, Canada.

Martha's advocacy on workplace sexual harassment took root in the wake of the Vishakha Guidelines of 1998. She pursued a PhD from Jamia Millia Islamia on the subject, culminating in her influential 2014 publication *Engendering the Workplace: Gender Discrimination and Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Organisations*. The book distilled decades of experience and remains a practical reference for organisational change-makers.

She was not only a visionary leader but also a leader who nurtured a safe, inclusive, and values-driven space within PRIA. She urged colleagues to "walk the talk" and live the principles they espoused.

To those who knew her, Dr. Farrell was both an inspiring public figure and a warm personal presence, a fearless activist, generous mentor, steadfast friend, beloved mother, devoted spouse, and compassionate soul. Her absence is keenly felt, but the ideals she championed continue to inspire action around the world, especially within the values that the Martha Farrell Foundation carries forward.



# THE MARTHA FARRELL AWARD



The Martha Farrell Award for Excellence in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality was established in memory of Dr. Farrell and her values. This pioneering initiative seeks to identify, celebrate, and honour mid-career professionals and dedicated organisations making significant contributions to women's empowerment and gender equality.

Presented annually in two categories—Most Promising Individual and Best Organisation for Gender Equality—the award carries a prize of ₹1,50,000 in each. Since 2020, a Special Jury Award of ₹1,00,000 has also been presented in both categories to recognise outstanding finalists.

## MOST PROMISING INDIVIDUAL

- Open to professionals of any gender, aged 25–40 years, working in government, business, industry, or civil society organisations in India.
- Must have at least five years of consistent work promoting women's empowerment and/or gender equality in workplaces, communities, educational institutions, or society at large.
- Demonstrates innovative, practical, and comprehensive approaches to advancing social change in these areas.
- Leads by personal example, practising feminism in everyday life.

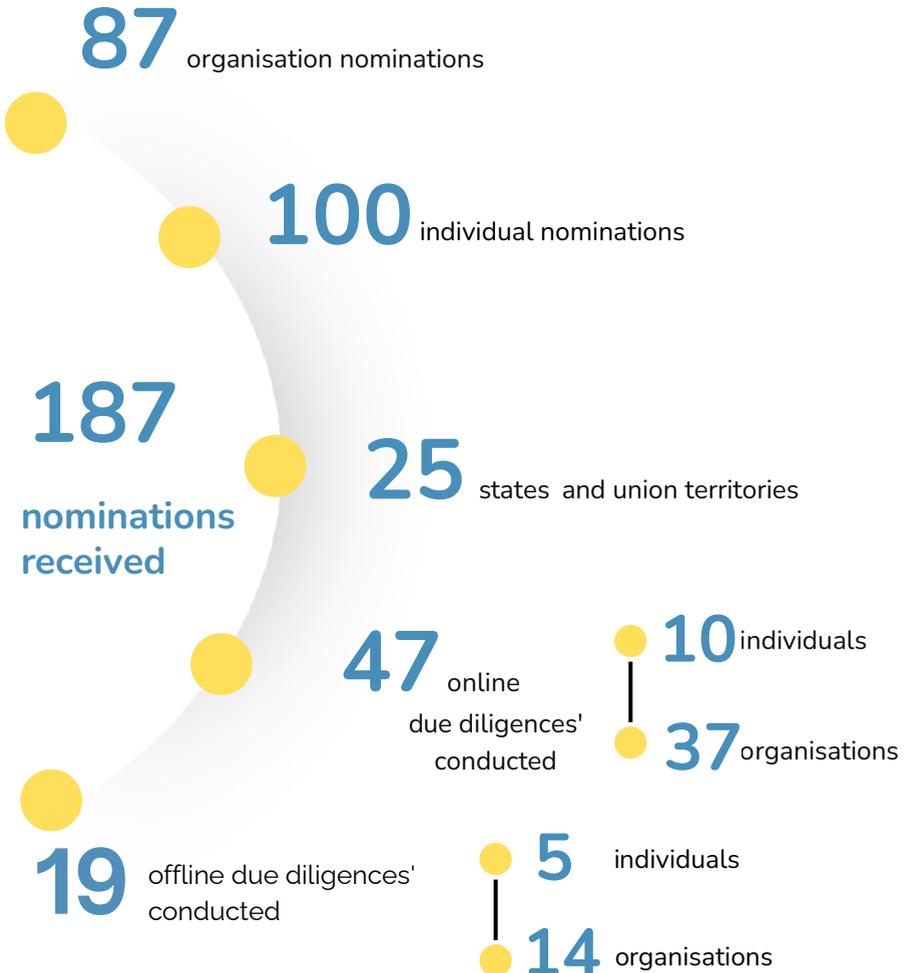
## BEST ORGANISATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

- Open to any organisation, including those in government, business, industry, education, health, media, trade unions, federations, or civil society registered in India, or functioning as a department/centre under a registered Indian organisation.
- Must have been consistently implementing systems, policies, and practices that foster a gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace for at least five years.
- Demonstrates innovative, practical, and comprehensive efforts to bring about cultural and political change within the organisation towards women's empowerment and gender equality.

Now in its ninth year, the Martha Farrell Award is being presented in partnership with the Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA).

For the 2025 edition, nominations opened on 6 January 2025 and closed on 31 March 2025. A total of 187 nominations were received from 25 states and union territories of India, with 100 in the individual category and 87 in the organisation category.

All entries were shortlisted based on Dr. Martha Farrell's values, life mission, and vision, with the final awardees selected by our eminent six-member jury.



# AWARD JURY

## FEISAL ALKAZI



Feisal Alkazi, a distinguished theatre director and documentary filmmaker, has directed more than 300 plays and 30 documentaries. A counsellor and trainer with Sanjivini for over 35 years, he counselled Kashmiri children impacted by terrorism (2004–11) and served as a UN Master Trainer in HIV/AIDS prevention (2002–07).

## DEEP JYOTI SONU BRAHMA



Deep Jyoti Sonu Brahma, founder of the Farm2Food Foundation, champions the idea of making agriculture an aspirational livelihood, particularly for vulnerable youth in Assam. With over two decades of experience, he has led initiatives in youth mentorship, education, climate change action, and building collaborative coalitions.

## MIRAI CHATTERJEE



Mirai Chatterjee, a senior leader of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), heads SEWA's Social Security team as its Director and chairs the SEWA Cooperative Federation. She has also served as SEWA's General Secretary, playing a key role in advancing the organisation's mission and leadership.

# AWARD JURY

## DR. BHAVANI RAO

Dr. Bhavani Rao serves as Dean of the School of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham and leads two research centres, AMMACHI Labs and the Center for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. Since 2016, she has also held the position of India's UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality.



## SUDHA SRINIVASAN

Sudha Srinivasan leads Gender Practice at Samyak, Collective Good Foundation, where she advances women's health through community and public health interventions. Co-founder and advisor at 2nd Careers, she supports professionals in finding purposeful work and has provided leadership to The Nudge Institute in the past.



## DR. RAJESH TANDON

Dr. Rajesh Tandon is the Founder-President of Participatory Research in Asia and serves as Chairperson of the Martha Farrell Foundation. Since 2012, he has also been the Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.



# 9TH MARTHA FARRELL AWARD

## FINALISTS - 2025 MOST PROMISING INDIVIDUAL



**NAMGAIL ANGMO**

Social Activist  
Ladakh



**DR. KAVITA NAMDEO WARE**

Local Leader and Social  
Activist  
Maharashtra



**JAYANTI BURUDA**

Journalist and Social  
Activist  
Odisha



**ARCHANA KR**

Social Activist  
Karnataka



**TANYA KHERA**

Social Activist  
Uttarakhand

# ABOUT THE FINALISTS 2025



**Namgail Angmo** is a social activist from Ladakh who promotes menstrual hygiene and self-reliance among women in rural Ladakh. She documents the voices of Ladakhi women by transforming traditional folk songs into storybooks, capturing experiences of resilience and resistance against patriarchal norms, also recording the feminist history and culture of the region. Through these initiatives, Namgail is directly impacting the lives of over 2,000 children and 500 women across 25 villages in Ladakh.

**Jayanti Buruda** is a journalist and social activist from the Koya tribe of Malkangiri. She has spent nine years advancing menstrual health, gender rights, and community empowerment across 20 villages of rural and tribal Odisha. Founder of Bada Didi, a volunteer network which amplifies tribal women's voices and the community's forest rights, she is transforming personal struggles into grassroots change in rural Odisha.



Hailing from Uttarakhand, **Tanya Khara** left her city job in 2019 to follow a deeper calling. Travelling across the state, she found purpose among the forest communities of Van Gujjars and Taungyas in the Chhidyapur ranges between Haridwar and Dehradun. Through her organisation, Samanta Foundation, she works on education, menstrual health, and reproductive awareness. Today, she has empowered over 2,000 community educators, ensuring 100% school enrollment and making education accessible for every child in these remote areas.





**Archana KR** is a social activist from Karnataka. Her own lived experiences, including lack of access to sanitation and hygiene, have inspired her to dedicate herself to advancing sanitation, menstrual hygiene, and gender justice for Dalit, Adivasi, and transgender communities. Founder of Stand4SHE, her grassroots and policy work has transformed civic infrastructure. She supports leaders from marginalised communities and challenges systemic inequalities in the urban slums of Karnataka. Her efforts have led to the allocation of ₹100 crore for school toilets' maintenance in Karnataka.

**Dr. Kavita Namdeo Ware** is an academican and local leader from Pune, Maharashtra. Belonging to the Mahadev Koli scheduled tribe, Dr. Kavita's research is driven by the experiences of tribal communities, focusing on the neglect in tribal ashram Schools and the socio-political implications of landholding patterns in Raigarh district, she has successfully trained 10,000 women sarpanchs across Maharashtra, reached out to 5,000+ women and 200 children and youth to raise awareness on issues like gender based violence, legal protections and their constitutional rights.



# 9TH MARTHA FARRELL AWARD FINALISTS - 2025 BEST ORGANISATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY



ASSOCIATION FOR ADVOCACY  
AND LEGAL INITIATIVES TRUST (AALI)

Uttar Pradesh



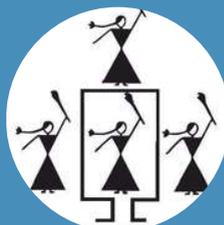
BREAKTHROUGH TRUST

New Delhi



DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA  
COMMITTEE

West Bengal



EKAL NARI SHAKTI SANGATHAN

Himachal Pradesh



MOITRISANJOG  
SOCIETY

West Bengal



RURAL WOMEN DEVELOPMENT  
TRUST (RWDT)

Tamil Nadu



SUTANUTIR SAKHYA

West Bengal

# ABOUT THE FINALISTS 2025



**Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives Trust (AALI)**, founded in 1998, AALI is a rights-based organisation committed to advancing women's rights through legal empowerment, advocacy, and social transformation. They directly work across 35 districts in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Uttarakhand, and indirectly in 97 districts through partnerships and support marginalised communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minorities, providing pro bono legal aid and training to over 1.5 lakh stakeholders.

**Breakthrough Trust** was founded in 1999 by human-rights advocate Mallika Dutt. Through strategic media campaigns and grassroots interventions, this organisation mobilises community and youth leadership to counter and eliminate gender-based violence. They combine evidence-based programming with youth-centric digital storytelling to drive social change across 13 districts of Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, engaging over 1 lakh adolescents annually. Their campaigns have reached out to over 200 million people globally.



**Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee** is a collective of 40,000+ sex workers (male, female and transgender) based in West Bengal, India. Formed by sex workers, the collective is fighting for the dignity, and rights of sex workers on their 3Rs principle :

- respect for sex work,
- reliance on community wisdom, and
- recognition of occupational rights

Their strong networks such as regulatory boards also prevent minors from being forced into sex work and in combating human trafficking.



**Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS)** Himachal Pradesh, founded in 2005, began by uniting 105 single women across caste and class against exclusion and injustice. By 2024, it had grown to 19,445 members, including widows, divorced women, unmarried women, women with disability, and trans individuals across eight districts. Starting with street theatre, ENSS led a 2008 padyatra in which 2,638 women marched to the Himachal Assembly, demanding policy change. Today, its grassroots methods: padyatras, music, and dance mobilise women and push reforms in land rights, pensions, and employment, making Himachal a leader in inclusive laws for single women.

**Moitrisanjog Society** is a grassroots, community-based organisation based in Cooch Behar, West Bengal, with operations extending to Alipurduar and Siliguri. They work towards ensuring dignity, safety, and rights for trans\* and gender-diverse individuals. They have fostered a safe space where people can reclaim their dignity, rebuild their lives, and find a chosen family. To date, they have reached out to over 12,000 community members, led 238 advocacy and 10,800+ telephonic counselling sessions and meetings.



**Sutanutir Sakhya** is a community-rooted feminist organisation based near Madhyamgram in West Bengal, which supports women, adolescent girls and other marginalised groups through a survivor-centric approach. They offer legal aid, psychological counselling, and rights-based awareness sessions on issues like domestic violence, child marriage, and gender-based abuse. Multiple adolescent leaders from Sutanutir Sakhya have been nominated for the Virangana Puraskar for their courage and activism. In the past five years, they have reached out to 3,000+ women and 1,600+ children conducting legal awareness and vocational trainings.



Since 2005, **Rural Women Development Trust** has empowered Dalit Arunthathiyar women, children, and families across 70 villages in Tamil Nadu. Founded and led by Dalit Arunthathiyar women, the organisation identifies, rescues and rehabilitates bonded labourers and works to eliminate human trafficking, and caste- based exploitation. They foster education, livelihoods, and political participation to ensure holistic transformation of the survivors into leaders driving dignity, equality, and systemic change within their families and the Dalit Arunthathiyar community at large.



# WINNERS 2025

## MOST PROMISING INDIVIDUAL



**ARCHANA KR**

Karnataka

## BEST ORGANISATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

**RURAL WOMEN  
DEVELOPMENT  
TRUST  
(RWDT)**

Tamil Nadu



# WINNERS 2025

## SPECIAL JURY AWARD-INDIVIDUAL



**JAYANTI BURUDA**

ODISHA

## SPECIAL JURY AWARD - ORGANISATION

**EKAL NARI SHAKTI  
SANGATHAN**  
HIMACHAL PRADESH



# MOST PROMISING INDIVIDUAL



“

THIS AWARD WILL HELP ME CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE FACING SIMILAR KINDS OF ISSUES. MY JOURNEY MAY INSPIRE THEM TO KEEP GOING.

”

ARCHANA KR  
(Karnataka)



## Fighting social exclusion by inspiring leadership in Karnataka

Archana KR is a social activist from Karnataka whose life and work are deeply rooted in her lived experiences of social exclusion.

For over 15 years, she has championed the causes of sanitation, menstrual hygiene, and gender justice, working at the intersection of caste, gender, and class to empower Dalit, Adivasi, and transgender communities, primarily in Bengaluru and across Karnataka.

She is the founder of Stand4SHE, a grassroots initiative bridging the voices of marginalised communities with policymakers to drive systemic change.

Archana grew up in an economically disadvantaged Dalit family, without access to basic sanitation. Until the age of 14, she had never used a toilet. For her, this was not just a health issue, it was a stark reminder of India's entrenched caste and gender inequalities.

She saw how the absence of safe toilets caused girls to drop out of school and how menstruation was surrounded by silence and stigma.

In Bengaluru's Bapuji Nagar slum, she has mobilised women, youth, and sexual minorities to address pressing sanitation and civic issues, raising ₹25 lakh to invest in local leadership development and ensuring that community members could sustain the change themselves.

Archana's strategic use of participatory toilet audits, assessing 148 public toilets for safety, cleanliness, and accessibility, helped make the case for large-scale improvements. Her advocacy contributed to the Karnataka government allocating ₹100 crore for the maintenance of toilets in 49,000 state-run schools.

Through Stand4SHE, she has trained over 100 women and transgender leaders in personal branding, public speaking, and rights-based advocacy, enabling them to represent their communities in civic and political spaces.



Her work has extended beyond sanitation to civic and political empowerment, enabling over 75,000 people to obtain essential documents and social entitlements. These formative experiences fueled her determination to address both the physical infrastructure gaps and the deep-rooted social attitudes that perpetuate marginalisation.

Leaving behind a consultancy career, Archana committed herself fully to community work. She recognised that the voices of Dalit, Adivasi, and transgender populations, especially women, were largely absent from public discourse and policymaking.

Her approach blends grassroots mobilisation, data-driven advocacy, and digital storytelling in Kannada to make campaigns both relatable and inclusive.



She has also resolved more than 600 civic and environmental issues through community action. In the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections, she helped 30 marginalised leaders actively engage in the political process. A strong advocate for trans inclusion, Archana has supported the formation of a transgender wing in Bapuji Nagar, with over 300 members leading rights-based campaigns.

As a single woman in a society where early marriage is the norm, she has faced judgement and scrutiny, and fundraising has been an uphill battle, with her character often questioned due to entrenched gender biases.

Yet she continues to persevere, relying on individual donors and networks of trust to sustain her work. Despite these challenges, she has built Beyond One, an initiative aimed at nurturing women's leadership for long-term political and social transformation.

Her work continues to blur the line between grassroots leadership and policy advocacy, proving that systemic transformation is possible when the most excluded voices lead the movement.



# BEST ORGANISATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY



“

MARTHA FARRELL AWARD HAS NOT JUST RECOGNISED THE WORK OF RURAL WOMEN DEVELOPMENT TRUST, BUT ALSO THE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE DALIT ARUNTHATHIYAR COMMUNITY IN THE SOCIETY.

”

ALAMELU BANAN, FOUNDER  
RURAL WOMEN DEVELOPMENT TRUST (RWDT)  
(Tamil Nadu)



## From Bondage to Freedom : A Dalit Women's Movement in Tamil Nadu

Rural Women Development Trust (RWDT), founded in 2005 in Salem district, Tamil Nadu, is a grassroots organisation dedicated to dismantling systems of bonded labour, human trafficking, caste and gender-based exploitation among Arunthathiyar families. Arunthathiyar Over the last 20 years, RWDT has expanded its outreach to 70 villages, working with Dalit Arunthathiyar women, children, and their families to advance dignity, self-reliance, and systemic change through social, economic, and political empowerment.

At the heart of RWDT is the remarkable journey of its founder, V. Alamelu Bannan, whose own childhood was marked by extreme hardship and resilience. Born into a family of bonded labourers, Alamelu was forced into servitude at the age of 10, along with her younger brother, after her parents fell gravely ill from smallpox. The family's small debt of Rs. 250 and 100 kilograms of millet bound the children to a life of relentless work cleaning animal stalls, shovelling manure, enduring violence, harassment, and even sexual exploitation.

RWDT began with a small team of four to five people and has grown into an influential institution with offices in Tharamangalam, Edappadi, and Sankagiri. The organisation rescues and rehabilitates Dalit Arunthathiyar bonded labourers, manual scavengers, and children working in garment factories, mills, and agricultural fields. They provide legal redress, organise women into collectives, and mobilise them to demand minimum wages, protection from sexual harassment, and the prevention of child marriage.

For women, RWDT builds livelihood skills in tailoring, animal rearing, coir making, bamboo crafts, and digital skill training, creating pathways to economic independence for Arunthathiyar women.

RWDT's approach is participatory and culturally rooted. Field officers, almost all Dalit Arunthathiyar women who are themselves survivors of bonded labour, use songs, games, street theatre, dance, group discussions, and art-based activities to make information accessible to communities with low literacy levels.





This fosters pride in Arunthathiyar identity while connecting local struggles to broader social justice movements. The journeys of these field officers, from exploitation to leadership, are living testimonies of the organisation's transformative impact.

From 2002 to 2024, RWDT has achieved a significant milestone in empowering Arunthathiyar women and the Arunthathiyar community in Tamil Nadu. A total of 180 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been formed and led by Arunthathiyar women, engaging 2,520 members in collective development. Through these efforts, 2,896 families have been rescued from bonded labour, including the rehabilitation of over 10,000 women and 380 children.

Over 10,500 women have become part of the Arunthathiyar Women's Liberation Movement through RWDT, a powerful collective which is working across 23 districts of Tamil Nadu to mobilise and uplift Dalit Arunthathiyar women.

Child development has been a core focus, with over 15,000 children receiving quality education and nutritional support through community-based child resource centres. More than 4,000 women workers have been supported to access social security benefits, minimum wages, and safer working conditions. Leadership is fostered through the employment of 14 women field coordinators and four mid-level village administrators.

Further breaking barriers, 30 women have been enrolled as police officers, redefining representation in law enforcement. Additionally, 140 Internal Committees (ICs) have been formed and trained under the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, ensuring protection across formal and informal workplaces such as mills and factories in 15 districts. These combined efforts reflect a transformative journey of dignity, rights, and empowerment.

Through two decades of tireless advocacy, rescue, rehabilitation, economic empowerment, and leadership building, RWDT has proven that systemic caste-based exploitation can be dismantled when those who have lived its injustices take the lead in transforming their futures.



## SPECIAL JURY AWARD - INDIVIDUAL



“ AWARDS LIKE THIS GIVE US HOPE, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREAS WHERE WE WORK; THEY HELP US GAIN MORE VISIBILITY. I AM MORE CONFIDENT NOW IN THE WORK THAT I AM DOING.

JAYANTI BURUDA  
(Odisha)



## Advocating gender justice and tribal rights in rural Odisha

Hailing from the Serapali village in Odisha's Malkangiri, Jayanti Buruda is a journalist and a social activist who has dedicated the last nine years to advancing menstrual health, gender equality, community empowerment, and community forest reserve rights in rural and tribal Odisha. As the founder of Bada Didi Union, she leads grassroots initiatives spanning 20 villages, challenging entrenched stigmas, building local leadership, and creating opportunities for women and girls to live with dignity and autonomy.

Born into the Koya tribal community, Jayanti grew up witnessing restrictions placed on girls by society, limited access to education in the community, restricted mobility, and deep-seated taboos around menstruation. Despite facing many odds, including economic hardship and access to educational infrastructure, Jayanti became the first student from her village to pass the tenth standard.



This milestone, fueled by her determination and encouragement from her mother and supportive teachers, laid the foundation of her journey as a changemaker.

She developed a strong sense of service from an early age and pursued her higher education in journalism at the Central University of Odisha to raise the issues of her community and amplify the voices of the tribal community through media advocacy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jayanti returned to her village and began engaging with adolescent girls. Through Bada Didi Union, Jayanti now leads an extensive volunteer-driven network across rural Odisha. The Union has distributed over 7,000 sanitary pads in just seven months through eight Pad Banks, ensuring stigma-free access to menstrual hygiene products.

She has supported the economic empowerment of fellow tribal women, secured fair prices for their forest produce and explored the establishment of producer cooperatives.

Her efforts are not centric towards health, but also about reclaiming dignity and fostering open dialogue on tribal and forest rights. Inspired by Jayanti, girls in her community have begun speaking about menstruation publicly, practicing safe hygiene, and even educating their peers.

She also intervened to help girls re-enrol in schools and provided emotional counseling during the pandemic. Her deep community engagement led to partnerships with organisations like the BeFriend Life Foundation, which now supports her Pad Bank project.

Together, they launched weekend language classes in hindi and english to bridge the communication gap for tribal youth and initiated toilet construction projects in villages, all coordinated by Jayanti. In the past five years, she has supported 150 villages and 2,500 women with health and education training and has directly aided 60 girls financially.

One of her most significant contributions is in the field of forest rights. Jayanti has trained over 150 community leaders from 14 tribal communities on the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, and supported communities to document and advocate for their forest land claims in more than 200 villages.



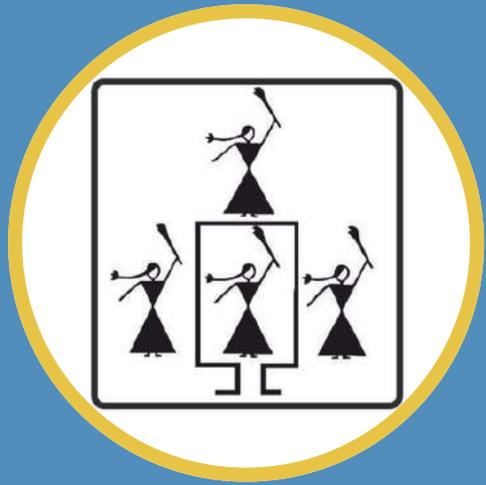
After her advocacy initiatives, in 2024, following a major tribal strike, 197 villages secured official forest rights titles (pattas), a landmark victory in the ongoing struggle for indigenous land rights.

Jayanti has also trained 70 tribal girls in media skills. These young changemakers now shoot videos, share stories, and speak at public meetings, sparking a cultural shift in how tribal youth engage with issues of gender, identity, and justice.

Her work is sparking a cultural shift in how tribal youth engage with issues of gender, identity, and justice. Confronting caste, gender, and linguistic discrimination, Jayanti has found purpose in transforming personal struggles into collective change. She is committed to building a more just, inclusive, and empowering environment for other tribal girls and women.



## SPECIAL JURY AWARD - INDIVIDUAL



“SINCE EKAL NARI SANGATHAN’S INCEPTION, THIS IS THE FIRST NATIONAL-LEVEL RECOGNITION WE HAVE RECEIVED. FOR US AT THE GRASSROOTS, SUCH AWARDS BRING GREAT MOTIVATION ESPECIALLY FOR THE YOUNG LEADERS WHO JOIN.

”  
NIRMAL CHANDEL, FOUNDER  
EKAL NARI SHAKTI SANGATHAN  
(ENSS)  
(Himachal Pradesh)



## From silence to strength: A single women's collective from the hills of Himachal

Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS) is a community-led and formed grassroots collective of single women, including widows, abandoned, divorced, unmarried, dalit, muslim, and trans women of Himachal Pradesh. The collective is dedicated to challenging social exclusion, dismantling gender bias, and advancing the rights and dignity of women who have been marginalised due to their marital status.

Founded in 1999 in Rajasthan, Ekal Nari Shakti Sansathan expanded to Himachal Pradesh in 2005 as Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS) when officially launched. The journey began with a baseline survey to identify single women in each gram panchayat. From six districts and 18 development blocks across Himachal over 105 single women participated in this initial gathering to demand for their rights.

Another pivotal movement in Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan's history was the 2008 *padyatra* movement organised where 2,638 single women marched to the Himachal Assembly to secure policy changes for single women.

In this movement, single women, including widows, divorced women, abandoned women, and unmarried women, all came together to demand equality, no discrimination, justice, and representation of single women as local and national representatives.

Participating and organising street theatre, folk music, and dance-related cultural events all became an important tool for Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan in raising awareness about gender-based issues and the cultural stereotypes against single women as “bad omen”. Started with only 105 single women, today ENSS has a membership of 19,445 women spanning across caste, class, gender, and religious lines.

The inspiration behind ENSS stems from the lived experience of its founder, Nirmal Chandel. Widowed at 23, she faced social discrimination, not only ostracised by her community but also shunned at family gatherings, from being told what to eat and what to wear wherever she went. Nirmal endured social exclusion and loneliness, even contemplating suicide. However, her turning point came when she connected with SUTRA, a welfare organisation working for women’s rights in Himachal Pradesh, which gave her a sense of belonging, a safe space, and the tools to rebuild her life. After passing her tenth grade, Nirmal left everything behind and started doing accounting at SUTRA.





Over the years, ENSS has implemented training programmes on gender justice, legal and land rights, enabling members to challenge societal stereotypes, access resources, and take leadership positions. They actively support women in contesting local panchayat elections and amplify their voices in governance and decision-making bodies. In 2020, around 448 single women associated with ENSS contested elections, with over 56% winning in their areas. Their advocacy work has focused on securing land rights, social security entitlements, and protection from discriminatory laws and societal practices.

With dedicated work in Himachal Pradesh and a robust statewide network, ENSS continues to be a lifeline and leadership platform for single women, building inclusive spaces for single women nurtured with sisterhood by them, for them.

Today, ENSS runs in eight districts, 22 blocks, and 546 gram panchayats in Himachal Pradesh. ENSS has significantly transformed the political and social landscape for single women in the state.

The collective also includes single women as young as 18 years of age to 90 years of age. Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan regularly organises various social and culture empowerment-based activities such as public hearings, interface meetings, Behenadooj diwas (a celebration of solidarity and sisterhood among all single women), International Widow's Day, Savitribai Phule Jayanti diwas, among others.

In state-level summits in Shimla to national-level consultations of Ekal Nari collectives from across India, ENSS in Himachal raises district and state-specific issues affecting single women with local and national leaders. These forums allow single women to share their concerns, strategise on solutions, and present memorandums of their demands directly to government departments and officials.

With unique challenges faced in the hilly terrain, including limited transport and restricted access to mobility, the collective has faced all odds and still united single women across Himachal, ensuring policy-level change in Himachal Pradesh, making the state a leader in having inclusive policies for single women.



# MARTHA FARRELL FOUNDATION

The Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) was set up in 2015, to support practical interventions, which aim to achieve a gender-just society and promote lifelong learning.



MFF takes forward the spirit and legacy of Dr. Martha Farrell, a renowned gender practitioner and civil society leader, and forwarding her path-breaking work towards gender mainstreaming and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in the private, professional and public spheres.

MFF believes that every individual and institution has the will and ability to facilitate change and invest in self-empowerment and growth. by integrating holistic, collaborative and participatory approaches to create safe, empowering spaces where every individual can be, learn and work safely, without the fear of sexual and gender-based violence or discrimination.

MFF's initiatives are carried forward in partnership with diverse stakeholders, facilitating change at the individual, community and institutional levels.

## VISION

MFF envisions a world in which all formal and informal learning and working spaces are safe and gender equitable.

## MISSION

To ensure that all individuals feel secure and valued in their working and learning environments through:

- Education: Co-design learning programs to inform, make aware and empower individuals and institutions on safety and gender equity
- Research: Develop new knowledge on gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence in learning and working environments
- Advocacy: Influence diverse stakeholders to design and implement effective policies, institutional practices and laws

# OUR PROGRAMMES



## KADAM BADHATE CHALO

A unique collaboration between adolescents, the community, civil society, and administrative systems to enable collective action against sexual and gender-based violence, MFF's Kadam Badhate Chalo (KBC)

programme aims to foster a new generation of adolescent leadership that is able to identify issues related to sexual and gender-based violence in their everyday lives.

Co-designed and co-implemented with adolescent leaders, the programme supports adolescents as they undertake a journey of discovering their inner potential, learning skills, knowledge and developing their individual and collective voice and agency, to take collective action to counter sexual and gender-based violence in their lives.

## #MAIN BHI



MFF's #MainBhi programme is one of the few programmes in the country which focuses on countering sexual and gender-based violence in the world of work for women informal workers, including domestic workers, home-based workers and construction workers, among others.

Given their contextual challenges, the #MainBhi programme is co-designed with informal worker partners and is being implemented in partnership with them. Through the programme, MFF supports women informal workers, providing them with the space, voice and agency, to collaboratively identify challenges to safety, co-create solutions and engage with institutions to strengthen mechanisms to ensure gender justice and safety in public, private and professional spheres.

## MAKING WORKPLACES SAFE

MFF is committed to working with organisations to ensure that workplaces are safe, gender positive and inclusive spaces for all. We do this by building capacity of organisations and strengthening institutional mechanisms to mainstream gender in institutions, and put in place mechanisms to create safe and gender equal spaces within workplaces.

We work across sectors, including corporates, non-profits, civil society, government department, higher educational institutions and schools, among others, for institutional gender mainstreaming and meaningful compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.



## SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS

MFF supports scholarships and fellowships to create new knowledge for the promotion of gender empowerment and prevention of sexual harassment.

Currently, MFF has partnered with the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) for the Martha Farrell Memorial Fellowship, which supports two staff members of universities in East Africa and Asia annually, providing training and support to institute safer and more conducive learning spaces on their campuses.



Previously, MFF had partnered with the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) to support Masters of Social Work (MSW) students in India in conducting research around sexual harassment at workplace.

# OUR REACH AND IMPACT

60,637

adolescents

collectivised and trained on  
gender, gender stereotypes and  
gender-based violence

3,59,336

lives impacted

Partnered with

96

institutions

- 199 schools, ITIs and colleges
- 32 civil society organisations and government

Trained

2,384

teachers  
and principals

Trained

50,151

EMPLOYEES AND

444

INTERNAL COMMITTEES

2,880

STUDENTS

PARTNERED WITH

293

corporates, civil society  
organisations, government  
and higher education  
institutions

Reached

67,416

WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS

150

COMMUNITY LEADERS (PEHELKARS)

23

LOCAL COMMITTEES

550

POLICE

trained on Sexual Harassment of Women  
at Workplace Act, 2013

PARTNERED WITH

26

government-  
based

52

civil society  
organisations

26

districts

# PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ASIA (PRIA)

Established in 1982, Participatory Research in Asia – PRIA is a global centre for participatory research and participatory learning based in New Delhi, India. It systematises locally contextualised knowledge to integrate in development policy and programmes.



PRIA is committed to promoting participatory and inclusive development and governance, ensuring gender equitable access to basic services by building capacities of the poor and marginalised.

Globally, PRIA is recognised as an intermediary support organisation developing capacities of civil society, non-profit organisations, elected representatives, government officials, and academia across the Global South. It is known for widely sharing through training and learning programmes its innovative methodologies to promote people's participation in development and governance.

For more information, visit PRIA's website [www.pria.org](http://www.pria.org).





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