

*Dear All,*

**Greetings on World Social Justice Day!**

*On November 26, 2007, the UN General Assembly named February 20 as the annual World Day of Social Justice. The purpose of the day is to focus on the plight of social injustice throughout the world and to press for improvements and solutions (UN, 2014). World Day of Social Justice recognises the need to promote efforts to tackle issues such as discrimination, poverty, gender equity and access to justice for all.*

*For many of us ‘Social Justice’ remains a distant theoretical concept, a point of heated discussions. For Reeta Kaushik too, social justice was an alien concept. Being born as a Dalit in Uttar Pradesh meant that caste discrimination was a part of her life since childhood. From being bullied to being ostracised for wanting to go to school, caste came to haunt her at every turn.*

*It is not that Reeta was not an intelligent girl, or that she did not work hard. Though she was introduced to education only because she was chaperoning her*

*younger brother to school, Reeta toiled hard and scored the highest grades amongst all her classmates, as scoring less would inevitably invite-only humiliation and lewd comments from family and community members. But even after scoring the highest grades, she would very often be pushed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> rank, since a lower caste girl topping an exam was unacceptable to the school and the parents who sent their children to the institute. Such constant push back and struggle to create a space for herself set Reeta on the journey of pursuing social justice.*

*Inspired by Dr Ambedkar’s thought “**Education is the only way to achieve freedom and equality**” Reeta Kaushik started directly engaging with some of the most backward Musahar and Dalit communities in the Gorakhpur and Sultanpur Districts of Uttar Pradesh, working on providing access to quality education and raising awareness around schemes and programs. Since then, Reeta has been innovative in her attempts of breaking the caste dynamics in the villages where she has been working.*

*Reeta has reached 25,026 children and youth in the Musahar, Dalit and Muslim communities of Kushinagar and Gorakhpur districts of Uttar Pradesh and set up community systems to ensure that these children get quality education, free of discrimination at all levels. She has also enabled more than 2879 first-generation learners to stay in the system through bridge courses. Her work with the Panchayats has helped 118 families get their land ownership rights, a remarkable achievement in the face of upper-caste dominance and oppression.*

*At the CII Foundation, the Woman Exemplar Program has been continuously invested in fighting some of the social injustices by associating with exemplary women such as Reeta Kaushik. On World Social Justice Day, we wish her all the best and invite you to support her work*

*If you are in the region, want to learn more about her work, share her story with people or help her expand her work, please do reach out to*

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