



## PRESS RELEASE

### Announcing Winners of the

### CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award 2024

**17 May 2024, New Delhi:** The CII Foundation announced the Woman Exemplar Award 2024 winners at the CII Annual Business Summit 2024 held in New Delhi today. The Award recognises grassroots women leaders from rural and resource-poor areas who have faced poverty, social and gender-based discrimination but with their firm resolve, emerged as community leaders who are driving social change.

The award was presented by Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, Hon'ble Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Government of India to Ranjita Pawar from Osmanabad, Maharashtra, in the Education category; Rumi Perween from Kishanganj, Bihar, in the Health category; and Saraswathi Malluvalasa from Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh, in the Micro-enterprise category. Each winner received a trophy, a certificate, and a cash award of Rs 3 lakh.

For the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of the award, over 300 nominations were received from across India. After a multi-level selection process which involved telephonic interviews and visits to personally meet the nominated women and see the impact of their work, 16 finalists were identified. In the Education category, the finalists were Basmati Gagrai from Jharkhand, Bideshini Patel from Odisha, Pramila Chouhan from Madhya Pradesh, Ranjita Pawar from Maharashtra and Sandhya Devi from Odisha; in the Health category, the finalists were Chandravati Nigam from Uttar Pradesh, Khiroda Mahto from Jharkhand, Maina Jaat from Rajasthan, Meena Singh from Uttar Pradesh and Rumi Perween from Bihar and in the Micro Enterprise category, the finalists were Amitaben Patel from Gujarat, Anuradha Bharadwaj from Uttar Pradesh, Godavari Maravi from Madhya Pradesh, Lilabati Mohanta from Odisha, Sangita Gaikwad from Maharashtra and Saraswati Malluvalasa from Andhra Pradesh.

The 3 winners were selected by an eminent jury drawn from Indian industry, civil society, media, and the social development sector.

**Ranjita Pawar** born into the stigmatized Laman Banjara tribe, rose as a bold advocate from Osmanabad. To overcome the language barrier and the label of being a criminal tribe, she introduced foundational education in the local dialect, Gormati, empowering 27,000+ children, 1000 youth leaders and 20,000 adults from Nomadic Tribes and De-notified Tribes. This led to notable academic and psychological progress among Laman children.

"Every child deserves the right to education. By guiding them on the right path and providing quality education, they can achieve great things. My goal is to transform the children of the tribal communities into responsible citizens and significantly improve their literacy rates."

*Ranjita Pawar*

**Rumi Perween** Battling poverty and an abusive marriage, Rumi decided to stand her ground to pursue higher education, a decision that unfortunately marked the end of her marriage. Being outcasted from her own family, Rumi started volunteering at the young age of 14. Striving to improve the health indicators in rural Bihar, Rumi identified and tackled the prevalent issue of Tuberculosis and is advocating for increased awareness on menstrual and reproductive health through her NGO, impacting over 1,70,000 women and children through her work.

"I have been working since 2012 to break the stigma around menstruation and create a safe space for women and girls. Many girls skip school during their periods due to fear of staining clothes and societal judgment. Through my efforts among adolescent girls, mothers, and teachers, I aim to change this mindset and raise awareness about reproductive health and menstrual hygiene. I am dedicated to abolishing taboos and myths surrounding periods and ensuring every woman feels empowered and confident."

*Rumi Perween*

**Saraswathi Malluvalasa**, Drawing from her own experience with domestic violence and gender discrimination, Saraswathi recognized the correlation between food insecurity, economic dependence, and violence against women. In response, she established the “Millet Sisters,” a network of small-scale women farmers working together to ensure food security through livelihood enhancement, improving the income of over 20,000 women. Her work exemplifies the "five E's" for women's empowerment: Education, Equality, Employment, Economic development, and Empowerment.

"For the past 25 years, I have dedicated myself to empowering Dalit, tribal, and vulnerable communities. My goal is to uplift our communities both socially and economically. Through our Farmer Producer Organizations, we collectively pursue various livelihood activities to strengthen our bargaining power and create a robust supply chain."

Saraswathi Malluvalasa

The CII Foundation has been identifying, recognising and empowering grassroots women leaders through its Woman Exemplar Program to promote women-led development. The women are recognised at a national platform which highlights their work and helps them garner further support. The program also helps build their capacity through training and mentoring, and promotes them on various platforms to help amplify their work and social impact.

The 16 women comprising the 2024 cohort now become part of a nationwide network of more than 120 Woman Exemplars. These women are at the forefront of driving transformative social change at the grassroots level, making a tangible difference in the lives of 3 million people every year.

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For additional information about the CII Foundation Woman Exemplar Award, please visit [Woman Exemplar Program \(cifoundation.in\)](https://cifoundation.in).

For media inquiries, please contact:

Priya Shirali, Lead- Communication, CII Foundation  
E-mail: priya.shirali@cii.in

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