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PRADHAN-NAYYAR-PRIZE

28-year-old Odisha engineer Anil Pradhan bags third Rohini Nayyar Prize

New Delhi, Nov 8 (PTI) Anil Pradhan, a 28-year-old engineer from Odisha, was awarded the third Rohini Nayyar Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Rural Development for his work in promoting STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education among students in rural India.

Pradhan, co-founder of the Young Tinker Foundation, came up with the idea of 'Tinker-on-Wheels' — a mobile learning lab that offered hands-on experiences in areas like robotics and 3D printing to school students in rural regions of Odisha, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu.

His work in STEM education and innovation has impacted over 2.5 lakh students to date.

Pradhan, born in Odisha's Baral village, said he had always dreamed of studying at IIT but was heartbroken when he couldn't make it.

"I pursued my engineering from a government college in Odisha. When I began working as an engineer, I realised there is a huge gap between what is being taught in schools and what is actually happening in the industry," Pradhan told PTI.

"While students in metro cities still have exposure to hands-on learning, it is very limited for students in rural areas. That's why I thought of starting this. We began with 200 students, and we have helped 2.5 lakh students so far," he added.

Pradhan said many schools lack the infrastructure to support such exposure and training, so his 'Tinker-on-Wheels' travels to these schools, setting up mobile labs in playgrounds.

He was also the chief designer of Asia's first university rocket team, VSLV, and built a team of students from India who ranked third in the world at the NASA Rover Challenge in 2021, making them Asia's first Under-19 team to achieve such a feat.

Pradhan returned to his rural roots in 2017, driven by his mission to bring hands-on education to underserved areas.

The Rohini Nayyar award, instituted in memory of Rohini Nayyar, one of India's esteemed economists, is conferred annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to rural development. Nayyar, whose illustrious career spanned roles such as teaching economics at Delhi University's Miranda House College, serving in the Indian Administrative Service for five years and retiring as the principal advisor for rural development, has left a lasting legacy in the field.

The award comes with a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh, a citation, and a trophy and is given annually by the Nayyar Foundation for Social and Economic Purpose to individuals under the age of 40. PTI GJS GJS ARD MNK

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