

Vidhya Parshuramkar wins 4th Rohini Nayyar prize for making nutrition sustainable, community-driven

Parshruramkar was given the award at the Capital's Indian International Centre by chief guest Prof. S Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister as well as economist Deepak Nayyar.



DHNS

Last Updated : 31 October 2025, 22:30 IST



(L-R) Vidhya Parshuramkar and Prof S Mahadev
New Delhi: Pune social entrepreneur Vidhya
Parshuramkar was on Friday awarded the 4th
Rohini Nayyar Prize for Outstanding Contribution to
Rural Development.

The annual prize, instituted in 2022 in memory of former economist, bureaucrat and Padma Shri Dr Rohini Nayyar, comes with a cash prize of Rs 10 lakh, a citation and a trophy. Parshruramkar was given the award at the Capital's Indian International Centre by chief guest Prof. S

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Parshuramkar, who worked on an innovation in food nutrition, is the first woman and at 24 the youngest recipient of the award. She was selected by an eminent jury from civil society and academia consisting of Dr Ashok Khosla, Founder of Development Alternatives, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder of PRIA, Renana Jhabvala, National Coordinator, SEWA and Professor Seeta Prabhu of Institute of Human Development, Delhi and TISS, Mumbai.

Deepak Nayyar noted that while every year, the Prize is awarded to an individual under the age of 40 who has made an outstanding contribution in the field of rural development in India, the age of the recipient has been on a downward trend. The previous awarded include Sethrichem Sangtam from Nagaland, Chhattisgarh-based Dinanath Rajput and Odisha-based Anil Pradhan.



(L-R) Dhiraj Nayyar, Deepak Nayyar, Vidhya Parshuramkar and Prof S Mahadev

Parshuramkar, a food technologist from IIT Kharagpur, leads Agrozee Organics and its flagship initiative is Millets Now, through which she has provided nutritional food to over 4lakh school children in Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh. She is also in talks with governments in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh to take her nutritional food there.

She says that the “personal pain” of facing anaemia as a child goaded her to come up with the innovation. “After college, I decided to work on the innovation and not go ahead with campus placements. I started with a small team, and after I won my first grant of Rs 7 lakh, I came up with the technology. I started selling laddoos and other products and put the profits back into the initiative,” Parshuramkar said to DH.

She came up with a technology called HydroNIR which increased the shelf life of the nutrient dense pearl millet or bajra. “I realised that I could fix my anaemia through supplements but there was no natural way. Bajra is a great source but it’s shelf life is only a fortnight. I devised a way of increasing it to six months,” she added. She also came up with a product called Nutribox which contains 7 items made from bajra which is distributed in government schools now.

“Through the Nutri Dabba programme, Vidhya and her team address nutritional deficiencies among school children by combining sustainable agriculture with community health. Their initiative delivers nutritious millet-based snacks to schools, empowers women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and supports over 7,000 smallholder farmers, strengthening both livelihoods and food security,” a release by the Rohini Nayyar Foundation stated.

The Rohini Nayyar Prize has been instituted by the family

of the late Dr Rohini Nayyar, an eminent scholar administrator who spent much of her professional life working on issues related to rural development in India. She made key contributions to the formation of the MNREGA and was the driving force behind the development of Human Development Report nationally as well as statewide reports.