

From Indian Forest Services Officer to Education Reformer State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Rajesh Sharma honoured with ET Leadership Excellence Award

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Himachal Pradesh has emerged as one of India's leading states in education reforms. Under the leadership of Shri Rajesh Sharma, IFS (2000 batch), the state has moved from Rank 21 in PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2021 to being among the Top 5 in PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024. Under his leadership, Himachal Pradesh has also achieved near-universal enrollment

and one of the lowest dropout rates in government schools across the country.



Shri Rajesh Sharma receiving award from Anupam Kher

Sharma's focus on data-driven governance, global collaborations, and student learning outcomes has positioned Himachal Pradesh as a model of education reforms for other states.

In recognition of these achievements, Sharma was conferred the ET Leadership Excellence Award – North 2025 by the Times of India Group at a ceremony in New Delhi. The event was graced by Chief Guest Anupam Kher. The award celebrates leaders across India for their contributions in governance, corporate leadership, social service, and public administration.

Sharma's career reflects a rare blend of academic depth and administrative experience. He holds a degree in Forestry from the Indian Forest College, Dehradun, and an MBA in Public Policy and Management from MDI Gurgaon with an international

module at George Mason University. He has also attended training programs in Japan, the UK, and Singapore, giving him valuable global exposure.

Before becoming State Project Director in 2023, Sharma held diverse roles including Regional Passport Officer (MEA), Managing Director of HP Skill Mission, Chief Conservator of Forests, and Director of Youth Services & Sports. These roles gave him a 360-degree perspective on governance, combining fiscal discipline with people-focused reforms.

As State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, Himachal Pradesh, Sharma has ensured 100% fund utilization under flagship schemes like STARS, PM SHRI, and Samagra Shiksha. He has championed international partnerships with UNESCO, Cambridge University, and the Principal Academy of Singapore, and tied up with IITs and IIMs for training government schools teachers in pedagogy and assessments. He also pioneered India's largest tablet-based diagnostic assessment for nearly 50,000 students, embedding remedial learning for students in government schools through strong education data-governance systems in Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK) Himachal Pradesh.

His tenure has also seen a utilisation of ICT infrastructure in schools, reducing the urban-rural divide through digital classrooms and technology-based monitoring. He has further strengthened institutions by activating School Management Committees, decentralizing leadership, and aligning state and national education priorities.

From conserving forests to shaping classrooms, Sharma's journey reflects a consistent vision-whether protecting trees for a greener tomorrow or shaping schools for a brighter future. Just as he nurtured ecosystems for sustainability in his early career, he now brings the same commitment and innovation to shape the future of education and prepare the next generation of India's leaders. The Leadership Excellence Award is therefore not only a personal honour but also a

recognition of Himachal Pradesh's enduring success story in education governance.

