

Unsung Heroes of Public Education Honoured at Shikshagraha Awards 2025 During InvokED 4.0

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The Shikshagraha Awards 2025, presented by The Shibulal Family Philanthropic Initiatives (SFPI), celebrated four extraordinary changemakers whose visionary leadership has transformed education in their communities, making quality learning more inclusive and equitable.



Shikshagraha Awardees Xavier Chandra Kumar, Rajitha N, Muskan Ahirwar & Ranjan Kumar with SD Shibulal, Kumari Shibulal & others at InvokED 4.0

Presented at InvokED 4.0, India's largest education leadership dialogue, organised by ShikshaLokam, established under the aegis of SFPI, the Shikshagraha Awards recognised those who have not only tackled systemic barriers but also redefined education through innovation and resilience. The dialogue brought together 1,000+ civil society, government, market players, and media leaders to honour individuals driving grassroots change in public education. Each winner will receive INR 10 lakh to further their efforts in creating a lasting impact in their communities.

Meet the 2025 Shikshagraha Award Winners

Rajitha N, a supervisor at the Women and Child Development Department in Mysore District, Karnataka, has dedicated her efforts to improving early childhood education in remote tribal areas. She has significantly increased preschool enrollment through culturally sensitive strategies and

technology-driven interventions while fostering stronger community engagement.

Ranjan Kumar, the school leader of Rajkiya Middle School in Begusarai, Bihar, transformed a struggling institution into a model school, increasing enrollment by 169%. His innovative initiatives, including a multimedia virtual classroom and student-run publications, ensure a vibrant learning environment for all students.

Xavier Chandra Kumar, a school leader, led the holistic transformation of Vallalar Government Higher Secondary School, Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. Xavier addressed severe infrastructural damage due to a development project in the area, and social divisions within the school, towards restoring community trust and engagement and achieving significant improvements in student discipline and academic performance.

A special mention was made for **Muskan Ahirwar's efforts**. At **just 17-years-old**, she has become a beacon of hope for underprivileged children in Bhopal's Durganagar slum. Her Kitabi Masti library provides free access to books and structured learning opportunities, empowering young minds and reshaping the future of her community.

"The Shikshagraha Awards have shown us that everyone can introduce micro-improvements to achieve sustainable long-term impact – if they put their heart into it. We are proud of these awardees and hope this recognition inspires more education leaders on the ground to go the extra mile," said **Mr. SD Shibulal, Co-founder and Former CEO, Infosys, and Founder, The Shibulal Family Philanthropic Initiatives (SFPI)**.

InvokED 4.0: Charting the Future of Education Equity

The InvokED 4.0 dialogue explored the 'collective action' and 'leadership at all levels' themes – emphasising that the education crisis cannot be solved in isolation but requires

coordinated efforts from all actors.

As the Indian public education system grapples with high dropout rates and widening learning gaps, the dialogue posed crucial questions: How can stakeholders collaborate to achieve education equity? What leadership is needed to transform education systems effectively? How can a people's movement be built to ensure education for all children?

In his keynote speech, **Shri Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India**, stated, “*When we talk about vision to reality the Shikshagraha way, everyone in the community must be connected to education. The community connection, along with teachers and students, has to be restored. Connecting thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people can trigger a non-linear chain reaction, much like nuclear fission.*”

Why Dialogues like InvokED Matter

With over 143 million children enrolled in public schools but only 1 million schools to accommodate them, the gap in access to quality education is stark. Ensuring that each child has an environment that nurtures their potential requires urgent systemic intervention and collective action.

High-impact discussions featured leaders like Anshu Gupta, Founder of Goonj; His Highness Yaduveer Wadiyar, King of Mysore, Karnataka; Sudha Varghese, Padma Shri Awardee and Founder of Nari Gunjan; Ashraf Patel, Co-founder of Pravah & ComMutiny-The Youth Collective; Dr. Francois Bonnici, Director of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship; Reshma Anand, Regional Director of the Ford Foundation; Samar Bajaj, Director of Michael & Susan Dell Foundation India, LLP; and Amuleek Singh Bijral, Founder and CEO of Chai Point, among others.

While addressing the audience on the second day, **His Highness**,

King of Mysore, Karnataka, Yaduveer Wadiyar, said, “*The central theme of InvokED and Shikshagraha is the idea of collective action for education equity. The idea of all of us coming together as one will ensure that we reach better and faster outcomes, at scale.*”

Additionally, the Innovation 4 Education Equity Hackathon showcased the power of collective action first-hand, with 1300+ participants developing open-source solutions that address some of the most pressing challenges in education.

“Integrating technology and innovation into education is not just about improving learning outcomes; it is about creating scalable, inclusive solutions that empower communities to drive meaningful change together. When harnessed effectively, technology becomes a catalyst for collective action, ensuring that solutions are not isolated but part of a broader movement toward education equity,” said **Khushboo Awasthi, Co-founder & COO of ShikshaLokam and Co-founder of Mantra4Change**, both organisations that are co-building the Shiksagraha movement.

About Shikshagraha

Shikshagraha is a people's movement aiming to improve 1 million public schools in India by 2030, ensuring every child has access to quality education and the opportunity to dream and succeed. The movement brings together government, civil society, markets, and media-to collaboratively address the challenges in the public education system through the micro-improvement approach. By promoting decentralised decision-making in the education system, enabling leadership across levels and fostering collective action, Shikshagraha aims to create an inclusive learning environment where every student, regardless of background, gender, or abilities, can thrive in the 21st century.

