



PAVING THE WAY Tarun Wig, Madhav Krishna, Pranav Vempati, Navya Naveli Nanda, Bodhisattwa Sanghapriya, Raj Chengappa, Genelia Deshmukh, Mona Singh, Jishnu Dev Varma, Nalinikanth Gollagunta, Mehtab Ali Niazi, Radhika Gupta, Sarah Sham, Niraj Rahmohan, Narayan Subramaniam

MEET THE DOERS

THE INDIA TODAY GROUP'S 'DRIVERS OF CHANGE' AWARDS RECOGNISED THOSE WHO HAVE MADE LANDMARK CONTRIBUTIONS TO FIELDS AS VARIED AS INTERIOR DESIGN, HEALTHCARE, MILITARY TECHNOLOGY AND MORE, THROUGH HOME-GROWN INGENUITY AND SKILL

By **Dhaval S. Kulkarni**

Photographs by MANDAR DEODHAR, MILIND SHELTE

Individuals across India, who have quietly been reshaping their milieus by creating new employment opportunities, advancing healthcare and preparing the military for next-level conflicts, were felicitated at the 'Drivers of Change' awards, held on March 24 in Mumbai. Organised by the India Today Group (ITG) and Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd, India's leading SUV manufacturer, the third season was about achievements in corporate India after previous editions focused on women leaders and heritage development. ITG's Auto Today team travelled 10,000 km across the country to find this year's winners on home turf, driving the XUV 7XO.

"We are honouring 17 remarkable young founders who have transformed their ideas into extraordinary enterprises," said Jishnu Dev Varma, governor of Maharashtra, at the keynote address. "History reminds us that extraordinary achievements are often born in youth." The award show highlighted a staggering statistic. More than 100 Indian companies have achieved unicorn status, that is, they have been valued at more than \$1 billion (Rs 9,354 crore). Last year clocked the registration of 44,000 startups, which is the highest single-year addition since the Startup India programme was launched in 2016. These ventures have generated more than two million jobs.

Among the honourees at this year's awards was Pranav

Vempati, CEO of Makers Hive, a bionic startup that has developed KalArm. One of the world's cheapest bionic hands, as well as India's first, it costs a tenth of the \$43,000-\$64,000 (Rs 40-60 lakh) that it costs abroad. A beneficiary who lost his hand as a schoolboy and was once dependent on his mother and on a government pension, but now drives his bike to office and supports his own family, demonstrated the use of the assisted device on stage.

Bodhisattwa Sanghapriya, another awardee, was recognised for contributions to military technology. He is the founder and CEO of IG Defence, a company specialising in unmanned strike systems and kamikaze drones. He emphasised that low-cost, agile and mass-scale drones, as well as electronic warfare measures, are reshaping battlefields. Tarun Wig, CEO and co-founder of Innefu Labs, was honoured for similar achievements. He has worked on AI-driven security systems for the army and said that India's eastern border could



JISHNU DEV VARMA
Governor of Maharashtra

"We are awarding 17 remarkable young founders who have transformed their ideas into extraordinary enterprises"

be guarded entirely by humanoids within the next five years.

Sarah Sham, principal designer of interior design firm Essajees Atelier, was also felicitated; she stressed that her ambitions weren't limited to being the best in India. "I want to be the best design studio, full stop," she said.

The awardees have made a genuine "difference to people's lives," said Rajesh Jejurikar, executive director and CEO of Mahindra & Mahindra's auto and farm sector division. They are not just building companies but "institutions that we will look back on years from now", said Nalinikanth Gollagunta, CEO of the automotive division. The award has been "a journey to discover the people who are consistently shaping the nation's future," said Neha Anand, vice-president and head of the XUV brand portfolio and international marketing division. "What makes this journey truly unique is how we do it," said Yogendra Pratap, editor, AUTO TODAY. "We do not wait for these stories to come to us, we go to where these stories are." ■



WHY THE CHANGE MAKERS WON



RADHIKA GUPTA

MD and CEO, Edelweiss Mutual Fund

For leading India's financial services journey



MONA SINGH

Actress and restaurateur

For delivering a punch with her diverse roles and restaurants



NIRAJ RAJMOHAN

CTO, Ultraviolette Automotive

For speeding up India's e-vehicle journey with a home-grown company, achieving both technical and design breakthroughs



NARAYAN SUBRAMANIAM

CEO, Ultraviolette Automotive



NAVYA NAVELI NANDA

Entrepreneur and philanthropist

For nurturing women-led enterprises around India



SARAH SHAM

Principal designer and founder, Essajeess Atelier

For breaking the glass ceiling in interior design



GENELIA DESHMUKH

Actor, producer and entrepreneur

For bridging cinema and healthy lifestyle choices



TARUN WIG

CEO and Co-founder, Innefu Labs

For advancing cyber warfare technologies



SHLOKA NATH

CEO, India Climate Collaborative

For mobilising philanthropic funds for climate action



RAJWANT RAWAT

GHAZAL ALAGH

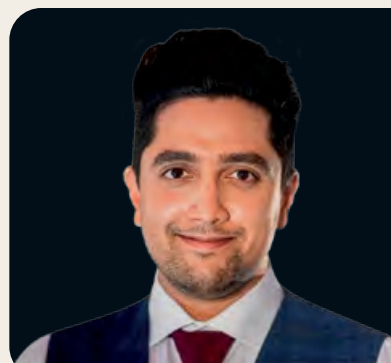
Co-founder, Honasa Consumer Ltd

For revolutionising India's personal care industry



VARUN ALAGH

Co-founder, Honasa Consumer Ltd



AGNISHWAR JAYAPRAKASH

Founder and CEO, Garuda Aerospace

For widening drone use across sectors like defence and agriculture



PRANAV VEMPATI

CEO, KalArm

For making India's first bionic arm at minimal cost



BODHISATTWA SANGHAPRIYA

Founder and CEO, IG Defence

For building a leading arms manufacturing company



MADHAV KRISHNA

Founder and CEO, Vahan.ai

For building one of India's largest employment platforms



BANDEEP SINGH

AVARNA JAIN

Vice-Chairperson, Saregama India and Chairperson, RPSG Lifestyle Media

For advancing global lifestyle and music brands



MEHTAB ALI NIAZI

Sitarist and composer

For redefining classical music for younger generations



▼ THE DEFENCE DIALOGUE: THE INDIA STORY

“Modern warfare has shifted from heavy tanks and expensive missiles to low-cost, agile drones and electronic warfare”

BODHISATTWA SANGHAPRIYA

Founder and CEO,
IG Defence



“During Kargil, intelligence processing took nearly two-and-a-half days. Today, AI can compress that cycle into 30 minutes”

TARUN WIG

CEO and
Co-founder,
Innefu Labs

▼ DESIGN: REDEFINING MODERN CRAFT



“You have to accept that your home is to live in, not a showpiece to show guests how rich you are. Design needs to be friendly to people of all ages living in it, the staff, animals...”

SARAH SHAM

Principal designer and
founder, Essajees Atelier

▼ JUGGLING THE ROLES OF PRODUCING, ACTING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

“In life you always get two options. One is to go ahead and grow, one is to sit back and be comfortable and safe. For me, it was to glamourise growth and figure it out”

GENELIA DESHMUKH

Actor and
entrepreneur



▼ THE RIGHT RECIPE: MASTERING THE ART OF REINVENTION

“Reinvention is the main ingredient to longevity. If I hadn't done that, I'd have been a nostalgic favourite, not a current favourite. One has to surprise themselves and do things that scare them”

MONA SINGH

Actor and
restaurateur



▼ THE NEXT-GEN CHANGE MAKER

“Gen-Zs have grown up wanting to give back to society. I don't think they are lazy. The sheer ambition I see in them inspires me every day”

NAVYA NAVELLI NANDA

Entrepreneur and philanthropist





ON THE SIDELINES

1. Yogendra Pratap, Manjari Upadhye, Abhay Kulkarni, Ashutosh Vidwans, Meenakshi Priyam and Neha Anand **2.** Manjari Upadhye, Nalinikanth Gollagunta, Jishnu Dev Varma **3.** Rajesh Jejurikar, Neha Anand, Yogendra Pratap **4.** Mona Singh and Navya Naveli Nanda **5.** S. Sahaya Ranjit and Mehtab Ali Niazi **6.** Raj Chengappa, Nalinikanth Gollagunta and Rajesh Jejurikar

