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Union Minister Sh. Nitin Gadkari Honours Winners of Job-Creating Micro-Entrepreneurs at JRD Tata Awards 2026

CHENNAI – 18 Nov, 2026 India's MSME sector is the backbone of the Indian economy, with over 9.90 crore micro enterprises accounting for over 99% of registered MSMEs.

The MSME sector has reported employment generation of over 44 crores, second highest to agriculture, underscoring its contribution to India's economic growth and job creation. Reflecting the employment potential of grassroots enterprises, fourteen BYST supported Grampreneurs® were shortlisted from across India for the JRD Tata Awards 2026, including five women entrepreneurs. Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Government of India, chaired the Awards ceremony organised by Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST) in New Delhi today and felicitated outstanding grassroots entrepreneurs. Vijay Chintakayala, Member of Parliament representing Andhra Pradesh in the Rajya Sabha, and Prof. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), also graced the special plenary as the Guests of Honour alongside the Minister.

The Award was instituted by BYST in 1995 as a tribute to its Founding Chairman, Bharat Ratna JRD Tata, to recognise outstanding first-generation entrepreneurs who have built growing businesses, generated employment and contributed to the local economy. Reflecting this year's theme, "Celebrating Grampreneurs®, Growing India," the Awards recognised entrepreneurial excellence across three categories: Entrepreneur of the Year 2026, Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2026 and Fastest Growing Entrepreneur of the Year 2026.

Addressing the gathering, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, said, "India's economic growth must create more employment opportunities especially in rural, tribal and semi-urban areas. Strengthening micro and small enterprises through technology, innovation and access to finance can help increase production, convert waste into wealth and create jobs locally, besides removing regional income disparities. The Grampreneurs® recognised through the JRD Tata Awards demonstrate how grassroots entrepreneurship under the handholding of experienced mentors can strengthen economically viable entrepreneurship ecosystems and contribute to the vision of Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat."

Prof. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), said, "Micro and small enterprises play a vital role in driving inclusive economic growth, generating employment and strengthening local economies. Recognising grassroots entrepreneurs is important not only to celebrate their achievements but also to encourage a culture of innovation, enterprise and self-reliance. With access to finance, technology, markets and structured mentorship, first-generation entrepreneurs can scale their businesses, create sustainable livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to India's vision of Viksit Bharat. Initiatives such as BYST's mentoring-led approach demonstrate the importance of nurturing entrepreneurial potential at the grassroots level."

Lakshmi Venkataraman Venkatesan, Founding and Managing Trustee, BYST, said, "Across India, we have seen micro entrepreneurs transform modest loans into thriving enterprises, often creating businesses worth hundreds or even thousands of times their initial investment. Their achievements go far beyond loan repayment or turnover figures; they generate employment, uphold responsible environmental and labour practices, and strengthen the social and economic fabric of their communities. Credit alone is not enough for enterprises to survive, scale and create jobs. They need sustained mentoring, market access, capacity building and institutional support alongside finance. National economic growth does not always translate into prosperity, increased incomes and employment opportunities in villages and small towns. We must look beyond top-line growth indicators. This was the philosophy of JRD Tata who believed in empowering small businesses to build resilient local economies and inspire others through their success."

The Entrepreneur of the Year 2026 Award was presented to J. Haja Funyamin, mentored by K. V. Nagabhushana Rao, founder of M/s. Hafa Foods & Frozen Foods and Hafa Frozen Foods International Pvt. Ltd., based in Redhills, Chennai, for building a ₹15.58 crore frozen-food enterprise from a street samosa vendor, exporting to the UAE, USA, Canada, Singapore and Sri Lanka, and generating employment for over 100 direct employees and 450 indirect livelihoods.

The Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2026 Award was conferred upon Sujata Manoj Ganage, mentored by Dr. Dilip Vairagade, who built S M Engineering specialising in recycling machinery and automobile-related components, and Madhavi Chandrashekhar Girnale, mentored by Dr. Anil Kausadikar, who established Girnale Programming Solution, in the precision manufacturing sector, specialising in CNC machining of dies and moulds, in recognition of their entrepreneurial achievements and contributions.

The Fastest Growing Entrepreneur of the Year 2026 Award was presented to Rupesh Hanumant Shivarkar, mentored by Soumitra Ghotikar, of Microtech Polymers, for exceptional business growth, with turnover increasing from ₹1.56 crore in FY 2022-23 to ₹2.58 crore in FY 2023-24 and further to ₹5.57 crore (provisional) in FY 2024-25, representing growth of 65% and 116% respectively, besides expansion of its precision injection-moulded plastic components business and exports to more than seven countries.

Beyond the award winners, other shortlisted Grampreneurs® represent diverse sectors, including manufacturing, food processing, agri-business, farm technology, recycling and industrial solutions. Many have overcome challenges in accessing formal finance to build businesses with an active support of BYST, are supplying to larger companies, generating local employment and, in some cases, serve international markets.

The JRD Tata Awards 2026 also provided a platform for strengthening institutional partnerships and advancing entrepreneurship through collaborative initiatives. As part of the conference, BYST exchanged Six MoUs with organisations across academia, government, civil society and the skilling ecosystem. The partner organisations included BML Munjal University - Institute of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (I2E), NAB India Centre for Blind Women & Disability Studies (National Association for the Blind), Skills Development Network (SDN), Wadhwani Foundation, Symbiosis Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation - Technology Business Incubator (SCEI-TBI), Sharda University, and AMRUT - Academy of Maharashtra Research, Upliftment and Training, Government of Maharashtra. These partnerships aim to strengthen entrepreneurship development through institutional collaboration, mentoring, skill development, training and expanded support for aspiring entrepreneurs.

The award ceremony also brought together policymakers, industry leaders, entrepreneurs and mentors to discuss the role of micro enterprises in India's economy. plenary sessions focused on women entrepreneurship, technology adoption, access to markets and the growth of micro enterprises into sustainable businesses. In addition, the Grampreneurs® booklet was released, continuing the initiative's efforts to showcase and celebrate the journeys and contributions of grassroots entrepreneurs.

The Awards jury consisting of nine members was chaired by Prof. S. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India, with Sunil Kant Munjal, Chairman, Hero Enterprise, serving as Co-Chair. The entrepreneurs were evaluated on parameters such as business growth, profitability, loan repayment, job creation, innovation, exports, and technology adoption. Based on this rigorous assessment, the winners were selected unanimously and recognized for their outstanding achievements.

Alongside the entrepreneurs, the Awards also recognise mentors who provide one-on-one business guidance. This mentoring approach, rooted in the age old "Guru-Shishya Parampara", complements BYST's support in accessing institutional finance and building sustainable businesses.

Since its inception in 1992, BYST has supported more than 72,000 entrepreneurs, helping first-generation entrepreneurs build businesses, create employment and contribute to local economic growth.