

How they upheld truth, honesty in public life

The nominees for this year's award include a village revenue officer, a forest officer and a homoeopathic doctor

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BANGALORE

A village revenue officer who ignored orders and ensured that a government bailout package reached debt-ridden farmers, an Indian forest service officer who fought to protect forest land and against the misuse of public funds, and a homeopathic doctor who launched a civil rights movement in a remote village near the Indo-Nepal border have been nominated for the third annual Manjunath Shanmugam Integrity Award.

The award honours and encourages those working to uphold values of truth and honesty in public life. It was instituted in memory of Manjunath Shanmugam, a young **Indian Oil Corp. Ltd** officer and alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow, who was murdered in the line of duty while fighting corruption.

The award will be presented at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, on Saturday. *Mint* spoke to the three nominees.

Vinod Adhau

In 2005, at the height of the farmers' suicides in Vidarbha, the heart of Maharashtra's cotton belt, Vinod Adhau started his revolt. The government had announced a bailout package for farmers who had lost their kharif or summer crops. Adhau, a village revenue officer in a small taluka in Amravati district, was listing the



Rural warrior: Vinod Adhau, a village revenue officer in Maharashtra's Amravati district, ensured that the farmers got their rightful dues.

names of eligible farmers in his zone when he got a call telling him that the government has decided to reduce the original cash allotment of Rs2,000 for two hectares.

"I protested. I had a written order from the government on the aid scheme and stuck to it," said Adhau. The 43-year-old, who had joined service at 19, ensured that 518 farmers in the affected Gawandgaon circle got complete financial aid totalling Rs5.23 lakh. Soon, farmers from other zones came asking for help. He taught them to use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to gather information about their dues from the government.

This wasn't the first time Adhau had raised his voice for the farmers. In 1997, when a killer pest destroyed crops in large parts of Vidarbha, which has nearly 400,000 farmers, Adhau had fought a similar battle to ensure that the farmers got their due of the bailout package that was announced then.

Kishore Tiwari, a member of advocacy group Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, which reported 10,000 cases of farmer sui-

cides in five years, said farmers in Vidarbha want easier means of getting credit. So far in 2009, there have been 352 farmer suicides, said Tiwari.

"It's not easy when you work at the lowest rung of the ladder and with many people above you," said Adhau, who draws a monthly salary of Rs14,000.

Sanjiv Chaturvedi

This Indian Forest Service officer helped halt illegal poaching and the construction of an irrigation canal in Haryana's Saraswati Wildlife Sanctuary. He also brought to a stop the creation of a herbal park in Fatehabad, Haryana, on private land with government money.

Sanjiv Chaturvedi, 34, a 2002 batch Indian Forest Service officer, joined the forest service in October 2006. Soon, he noticed that 5-10ha of forest land on the periphery of the Saraswati Wildlife Sanctuary had been shaved of its tree cover. Earth movers and heavy trucks were busy constructing an irrigation canal in the forest, home to the hog deer, a rare and endangered species.

Chaturvedi filed a first in-

vestigation report that was escalated to the Supreme Court, which ordered the work to be stopped. He was then transferred to Fatehabad, where he prevented the diversion of public funds for the development of a private herbal park. This got him suspended but he was later reinstated to service by the President.

Ask him what drives him, and Chaturvedi, currently deputy conservator, forests, at Jhajjar, Haryana, says, "I always try to do my duty. My inner conscience drives me."

Jitendra Chaturvedi

A homeopathic doctor, Jitendra Chaturvedi returned to his home district of Bahraich, on the Indo-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh, after graduating from the National Homeopathic college in Kanpur.

"...my dream was to do social work and ended up becoming a homeopath because my father wished that I become a doctor," says Chaturvedi.

At 23, he began to serve as a homeopathic doctor in the eight peripheral villages around the Katarnia Ghat Wildlife Reserve. In less than a year, Chaturvedi, now 41, realized that the eight forest villages needed a lot more than his medicinal remedies.

Being located on forest land, the residents of the village were not entitled to form a panchayat or receive government grants or schemes. They didn't even possess ration cards and could not apply for government jobs. The only indication of their identity as citizens of India were voter identity cards.

After failed attempts to start a school and a youth club in the area, Chaturvedi realized the need for a dedicated and strong voice. In 2000, he registered DEHAT (Development Association for Human Advancement) as a non-profit organization focused on educating and empowering the villagers and helping them break out of the exploitation of money lenders and forest officials.

"Now they have ration cards, get resident certificates and some even have government jobs," says Chaturvedi.

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