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**EVENTWATCH**

# EMPOWERING WOMEN

Anishaa Sahijwala | TNN

**L**ike every girl who dreams of getting beyond a mere graduation, 20-year-old Naz Yasmeeen, from Patna, too wanted to complete her MBBS and become a cardiac surgeon. Had it not been for the Fair and Lovely Foundation's scholarship, Naz's dreams would have never been fulfilled.

The foundation awarded 219 girls from financially underprivileged backgrounds a scholarship to help them complete their higher education.

Twenty-five girls were awarded the scholarship in person by a panel of eminent women achievers. Sharing her experience, mountaineer Santosh Yadav, the lady who scaled Mount Everest twice, expressed how important education is. "Every individual must have a goal. Most of us have gone through financial crisis that break our hopes. However, I realise that hard work helps us seep through our times of crisis. The biggest asset we invest in is education, whose profits are far more than other investments," she said.

Equal to her diligence was Khadeeja Khan, the daughter of a farmer who wishes to be a pharmacist. Her father, Mohammed Asif Khan, the sole earning member of the family, draws an annual salary of Rs 60,000. He could not afford paying his daughter's pharmacy fee, that totals to Rs 55,000 a year. The foundation helped Khadeeja by offering her the scholarship that would not only cover her college fee, but also pay for her books.

Mohammed Shaikh, a taxi driver in Mumbai, faced a similar issue. His daughter Fauzia Shaikh, wished to become a software engineer. A girl, with an excellent academic record, fell short of finances, when her father had an eye surgery recently.

Shaikh, due to his eye ailment, drove the taxi short distances, which brought him an income of less than Rs 5,000 a month. "I wished to provide her with the best. However, that was not possible with such a meagre income. When we heard of the scholarship, my only hope was to see her receive it. Today, I know and believe that my daughter will make me proud someday," said a teary-eyed Shaikh.

Education plays an important role in empowering women, giving them the means to be a part of the country's development thereby contributing to promoting gender equality

The foundation, through detailed evaluation procedures, identified academically exceptional girls across India. These girls, who came from financially challenged backgrounds, were offered scholarships up to Rs 1 lakh per candidate, depending upon their course fee and academic requirement. To maintain integrity and fairness, a panel of eminent personalities from diverse fields did the selection.

The scholarships, awarded to the girls, totaled to Rs 88 lakhs.

The foundation believed that education plays an important role in empowering women, giving them the required means to be a part of the country's development process, and thereby contributing to promoting gender equality.

> [anishaa.sahijwala@timesgroup.com](mailto:anishaa.sahijwala@timesgroup.com)