**Smt.Ruma Devi**

**Recipient of the 27th IMC - Ladies' Wing Jankidevi Bajaj Puraskar - 2019**

**for Woman Rural Entrepreneurship**

Ruma Devi is the President of Gramin Vikas Evam Chetna Sansthan, (GVCS) situated in Barmer, Rajasthan, a non-governmental, non-profit and social welfare association established in 1998 for the upliftment of women, Dalits and marginalised communities in the region. The core area of focus has been livelihood generation for the women of the region.

An expert craftsman, Ruma Devi has trained 22,000 artisans from 75 villages, working in the Thar region of Rajasthan. As President of GVCS she has brought international fashion designers to the doorsteps of rural women artisans, proving to be a direct link between the two.

Born in an underprivileged family, she lost her mother at a very young age. She dropped out of the school in standard 8th because of the paucity of money and household responsibilities. At the age of 16, she was married to a small farmer. She continued her applique work for the love of it and also for her family’s livelihood. For Ruma Devi embroidery was a part of cultural inheritance from her grandmother like it is for most women in Marwar region of Rajasthan.

When GVCS was conceived to preserve the craft and to uplift the lives of women artisans, Ruma Devi found her cause. She joined GVCS as a member in 2008 and went on to become the President of the NGO in 2010. She started encouraging other women to take up the craft again and made them aware of their rights, fair trade and wages. It also became a platform for her to address social problems like child marriages, domestic violence, malnutrition, girl child education.

Today she is successfully leading artisans, imparting training to them and making them small scale entrepreneurs in their own right through self-help groups. The artisans have gained financial security, better health and education facilities, and a promise for a better tomorrow for them and their children.

Her business model in the field of innovation has won her critical acclaim at the national and international level and has helped women artisans reach out new clientele. GVCS under her guidance participates in various fashion shows and exhibitions held at national and international level as it finds a growing market for its exquisite handcrafted products.

In patriarchal Barmer, where women are veiled and stepping out of the house to work is unheard of especially in the rural areas, Ruma Devi’s initiative in setting up a small scale enterprise is noteworthy. She had the courage to break out from a culture of silence that the whole community had been submerged in and has tried to give recognition to the women of her community and their traditional art form a new lease of life.

A role model and initiator of change she has been successful in generating continuous income for artisans and their families. A crusader for justice Ruma Devi today is the face of women empowerment. Her story has inspired numerous other women to stand up and exemplify gender equality.