

Seven Gujaratis bring home the Padma glory

Jain spiritual guru receives Padma Bhushan, six others get Padma Shri

The prestigious Padma awards were conferred on seven Gujaratis on Tuesday. Jain spiritual guru Ratna Sundar Maharaj was awarded the Padma Bhushan – the third highest civilian award. While six others – Purushottam Upadhyay

(Art-Music), Subroto Das (medicine), Genabhai Patel (Agriculture), Devendra Patel (Medicine), VG Patel (Literature and Education), Vishnu Pandya (Literature) – have been conferred the Padma Shri.

The focus of this year's Padma

awards, according to the officials in the Home Ministry, was on recognising talent of unknown and unsung heroes of the country. *Mirror* profiles the awardees and their extraordinary contribution to the society which has earned them one of the highest civilian honours in the country. **AM**

PADMA BHUSHAN RECIPIENT

Shri Ratna Sundar Maharaj, 69, Jain Monk

Shri Ratna Sundar Maharaj is hailed as a visionary monk who has written more than 304 books for the social and cultural upliftment of an individual. These books have been translated into several languages including English, Urdu and French. He has also travelled

throughout India propagating the ideals of spiritualism. His lectures on morality and spirituality-based personality development have been a hit among the youth. From being a spiritual leader, he is well-known in the Jain community as a motivator whose teachings have inspired several youths.



PADMA SHRI RECIPIENTS

Purushottam Upadhyay, 82 Singer



A huge proponent of Sugam Sangeet (Classical music), this 82 year-old calls the Padma honour a 'lifetime achievement award'. He believes that his

life-long and unwavering devotion to music is what has won him this honour. "Once, I received an offer to work in Hindi films. But my love for Gujarati sugam sangeet was so great that I turned down the offer so that I could concentrate on my music." Upadhyay has even gathered quite a fan following among the Gujarati music lovers through his albums *Gulmohar*, *Satya ni Sugandh*, *Irshaad*, *Ma Amba Garbawalli* to name a few. "I am immensely happy that the government has recognized my work. This is my lifetime achievement award," he smiles.

Dr Subroto Das, 52 Provides medical help to accident victims on highways



Subroto Das is the pioneer of the highway emergency medical service. Das along with his wife Sushmita Das had co-

founded Lifeline Foundation, the Vadodara-based non-profit organization that created the highway accident helpline 98250 26000. It was a personal tragedy that showed the doctor his true mission in life. Das and his wife were travelling on Ahmedabad-Vadodara highway a few years ago when they met with an accident. They had to wait for more than seven hours for medical help. This prompted Das to establish his foundation which delivers emergency medical service to accident victims of highways,

especially Ahmedabad-Vadodara highway. Since then, he has been working incessantly for a legally mandated EMS as a right for every citizen in India.

Genabhai Dargabhai Patel 52, Agriculture



This farmer from Golia village in Banaskantha is popular among the locals as Anar dada, a loving reference to the bountiful crop

of organic pomegranates that he grows on his farm. His experimentation with various methods of cultivation and successful use of drip irrigation to turn his drought-hit village into a major pomegranate producer. His story of a common man taking control of his destiny and through sheer fortitude helping his entire community is what has earned him one of the highest civilian honours. Genabhai told *Mirror*, "When I got a call from Delhi informing that I had won the Padma Shri, I couldn't believe my ears. Who would have thought that a handicap farmer like me would have won such a prestigious award? It finally sunk in when I got call from media persons. I started my farming experiments in 2003. Today, every farmer in my village earns at least Rs 2 lakh for the crop grown in 1 bigha land."

Devendra Dayabhai Patel, 84 Cancer Specialist



Dr Devendra Patel has been treating cancer patients for more than 50 years and is not a stranger to awards and laurels being bestowed upon him. He is considered to be among the best surgical oncolo-

gists in the country. He says, "I have received more than 14 awards for my contribution as a surgical oncologist. What makes this special is that only a handful of doctors have been honoured with this award."

VG Patel, 77 Economist



This Padma Shri recipient is the Founder and director of the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India. He has also authored

books such as *The Seven Business Crisis & How to Beat Them*, *Managing India's Small Industrial Economy and Entrepreneurship Development Programme in India and its Relevance to Developing Countries*. Patel, said "I got a call from PM's office, this morning and it made my day. From the morning I have been watching celebrities or cricketer's names among the awardees and their interviews flashing on the screen. But as we are academicians, the limelight is seldom on us. Anyways, I am glad that this year grass-root level people who actually worked for a cause got recognised by the HMO and it is really appreciated."

Vishnu Pandya, 72 Journalist



He is a multi-talented personality who is a journalist, author, poet, historian, lecturer all combined into one! Vishnu Pandya who hails from Junagadh became the editor of a weekly magazine at the age of 22. He is known for using his freedom of speech to raise awareness on various social issues and also for his reportage on the forced censorship in India during the Indian emergency. **ALSO SEE PAGE 13**