

**Kamla Bhasin Award (South Asia) 2022-**  
***Driving the World Towards Gender Equality***

**26 November 2022**

**by Azad Foundation, i-Partner and National Foundation for  
India in Delhi**

***Greatly loved, deeply missed Kamla!***



***Kamla Bhasin was a women's rights and peace activist, mostly remembered as a Feminist, challenging capitalist patriarchy and structured violence. She is remembered as a poet, writer, singer, song-writer and composer, a pillar of support to marginalised women, a voice advocating for education and a gender-just society who penned her activism often.***

*“Par laga diya hai humne toh pinjare mein kaun bethege..toh pinjare mein kaun bethege..zara sunlo”*

*Kamla was the soul of a gathering and was fondly remembered by some as a great friend, philosopher, companion, mentor, chottu and mito's mother. She was the one who filled life in a rally, always full of motivation and courage, a great orator, broke out into songs. She was our lively and colourful Kamla...she was everyone's Kamla. She left us all coloured in her songs, poems, thoughts, ideas and memories. This award is a humble attempt to rejoice her ideologies beyond borders.*

*The Kamla Bhasin award is dedicated to South Asia, as Kamla believed in one South Asia - a piece of earth with cultural diversity and sharing several commonalities. She was instrumental in strengthening the bond of love and sisterhood across South Asia and the world. Her slogans, poetry, songs, writings and speeches resonated with many and made her stand out uniquely as a leader in the feminist movement all over the region. She believed in a form of advocacy that combines feminist theory and community action. She worked with underprivileged women from tribal and working communities, often using posters, plays and other non-literary methods to get through to communities with low literacy rates. She had always maintained that in order to usher effective change, sloganeering must be accompanied by community mobilization. Her poem “Kyunki main ladki hoon, mujhe padhna hai” resonated with many. In 1995, she recited a refurbished, feminist version of the popular poem Azadi (Freedom) in a conference. She was also the South Asia coordinator of One Billion Rising.*

*She supported Azad's work with her ideas and energetic participation that inspired hundreds of women and men trainees. Kamla was a leading feminist who advocated for engaging with men towards gender equality. She believed that toxic masculinity dehumanises men, and she came up with the popular slogan “Men of quality are not afraid of equality”*

*In her fond memory, Azad Foundation has constituted the Kamla Bhasin Award for Driving the World Towards Gender Equality and aims to advance Kamla's legacy of recognising and supporting grass-roots change-makers who are fighting against the patriarchal norms and structures in society. The award is in the memory of Kamla Bhasin, who was a friend and guide.*

### ***Coming Together for Kamla Bhasin***

Lights, colours, laughter, slogans, poetry, songs, dance, emotions and memories, much like the life of Kamla, was the evening of Kamla Bhasin Award Ceremony. Azad Foundation, National Foundation for India (NFI) and i-Partner inaugurated the Kamla Bhasin Award Ceremony in the memory of our beloved friend, mentor and feminist Kamla Bhasin.

Kamla Bhasin (24 April 1946–25 September 2021) was an icon of feminist movements in India and South Asia. Boundaries were meaningless to Kamla Bhasin. Born in Shahidawalli village in Gujaranwala district in Punjab, one of six siblings, she moved with her family to Bharatpur in Rajasthan, where her father worked as a doctor; her mother was a homemaker. Kamla was educated in Jaipur. She resigned from her job at the U.N. in 2002, to work with Sangat -A Feminist Network, of which she was a founder member and adviser. Kamla co-founded Sangat, a South Asian women's network, in April 1998. She was also a co-founder of Jagori, a women's rights NGO in India. She was connected with South Asia through Sangat and its regular gender training course. Kamla Bhasin began her work in 1970 and when she left us at the age of 75. She was a leading spirit of the women's movement, her lifetime work of feminism, activism, work, poetry, writing, songs and slogans had travelled across India and the South region and continued to inspire more work. She wrote and published books, booklets, songs and stories, many of which have been reproduced in about 30 languages. An integral part of the global One Billion Rising movement, she was one of the coordinators for the '1000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize' initiative in 2005.

When Kamla physically left we had organised a memorial in Delhi and Jaipur, further we dedicated the Azad newsletter but we wanted her to remain in spirit with us forever. This is how the idea of coming together for the KB award was conceived and shared with the board members of Azad. Everything that followed fell in place organically once the co-organisers Sumedha Sharma Country Director, I-partner and Biraj Patnaik, Executive Director, National Foundation of India came along and finally the invite process started. There are several alluring moments since the conception till the final execution of this award that makes us believe that love for Kamla in South Asia lead us throughout this event. One such moment is the source of prize money for the awardees, which was not available at the beginning was contributed by the board members eventually. Interestingly all the jury members were selected within two hours' time and they all readily agreed to volunteer due to their fondness and camaraderie towards Kamla.

The members of the jury were chosen from different countries and represented different skills. Jury was headed by Anu Aga. She is currently Chairperson of Teach for India. She was nominated to Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of Indian Parliament on 26 April 2012, by President Pratibha Patil. She is a Indian billionaire businesswoman known for her social work. She led Thermax, an energy and environment engineering business from 1996 to 2004 as its chairperson. According to Forbes magazine, she was among the eight richest Indian women, and in 2007 was part of 40 richest Indians by net worth. After retiring from Thermax, she took

to social work, and in 2010 she was awarded the Padma Shri for Social Work by the Government of India.

26 November 2022 was the day decided for the launching of Kamla Bhasin Award in Delhi by Azad Foundation, i-partner and National Foundation for India in Delhi. Each of the three co-organisers strategically divided their roles for the event, like venue booking, travel arrangements, process execution etc. The nomination forms were translated to 8-9 languages. KB Award Organising Committee received 64 nominations from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Two categories of awards were announced: 1. A woman (cis/trans) practitioner of Non-Traditional Livelihood (NTL) Celebrating Change-Makers 2. A male (cis/trans) who has worked towards enabling a gender-just ecosystem that



encourages women to take on livelihoods with dignity. 26 were selected based on discussions and finally 10 candidates with their details were shared with the jury members. The interview board for selection comprised native language speaking members including Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam. Several team members were included under the advisorship of Rita Sarin (Advisor KB Award), Country Director of the Hunger Project

in India. Candidates' works were verified using their social media platforms. The final icing on the cake was when i-partner and NFI announced a one lakh fellowship for 7 finalists as three stood rejected for receiving other awards. They concluded by saying that we planned to increase the number of candidates and the award amount.

### **About the Organisers-Azad Foundation, I-partner and NFI**



Biraj is the Executive Director of NFI. Prior to joining NFI, Biraj was formerly the Principal Adviser to the Commissioners of the Indian Supreme Court in the Right to food case. He has been part of the right to food campaign in India since its inception. Currently, he is also an Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry University.



Bina Rani is the founder and CEO of i-Partner India, UK. She has over three decades of experience and understanding of the philosophies behind Asian philanthropy practices, and the voluntary sector in India, Kenya and the UK. She founded i-Partner India in 2007 with the aim to disrupt the philanthropy sector and make it an empowering and engaging experience for philanthropists and organisations receiving funding.



Meenu Vadera is the founder of Azad Foundation, a social enterprise that supports resource poor women to gain “Livelihoods with dignity”. She is presently the chief Mentor to the National Lead Team of Azad Foundation. She has a work experience of over 20 years as a grassroots worker, trainer, implementer and a leader. She has been involved in development initiatives as the Country Director in ActionAid Uganda (1998-2003).

### Introducing Esteemed Jury Members



Anu Aga introduced the Jury members for the Award, leaders of their respective fields across South Asia, were – Binda Pandey from Nepal, Khushi Kabir from Bangladesh, Anu Aga, Namita Bhandare and Salil Shetty from India - found it difficult to select the awardees as every nomination was powerful and unique in their own way.



Binda Pandey is from Nepal. She is a political activist and a former member of the First Constituent Assembly of Nepal.



Namita Bhandare is an award winning journalist who writes frequently on gender issues.



Khushi Kabir who hails from Bangladesh is a social activist.



Salil Shetty is a long term activist on poverty and justice, who has served as the Secretary General of Amnesty International.

### The Award Ceremony Begins...

As the evening commenced, the Stein Auditorium hall in Indian habitat Centre filled with 450 attendees. All eyes sparkling in anticipation and memories of Kamla at the award ceremony as the event encapsulated the liveliness of Kamla and was witnessed by 11 organising team

members and friends of Kamla, 116 guests from various national and international agencies, grassroots level organisations and 220 community members from Azad intervention sites of north, south and eastern Delhi and Sakha cab drivers.



The emcee for the evening, Neharika Mahajan, Nirantar opened the event with a warm welcome of the guests and salutation to the courage of attending community members. We reminisced about Kamla through the beautiful lines of Amrita Pritam "*Mein Tenu Phir Milangi*" as Neharika recited them and weaved the entire event through her beautiful words.

We lived Kamla's colourful journey of life through a movie on her. We lived her through her inspiring words in the video towards gender equality and women empowerment like

Josh ki nayi unchai chulungi" and "Hum victim nahi survivor hain, Sikandar hai mast kalandar hai. Yu toh dil markar bhi nibhate hai riwazo ko, par dekh mauka unki dhajjiya udane mein maza bahut aata hai", her songs, slogans, singing, poetry, her style of communication mesmerised all of us. The movie included some warm messages about her from the esteemed award jury members also. Anu Aga, Chairperson of the Jury shared how Kamla was against the concept of capitalism and how she admired her fight for underprivileged women. Other jury members, Salil Shetty shared that he was a fan of Kamla's work and he shared his appreciation for the award and the nominated members and the awardees. Khushi Kabir shared her message with disappointment of not being able to join physically due to visa restriction and also about her four decade relationship with Kamla. The video ended with the words "chalna hee jeevan, badna hee jeevan jeevan hee hai parivatan".



### Moments of Excitement

As the slogans from the community members echoed the air

***Nari andolan ..Zindabad..Kamla ji..Zindabad...Awaz do..Meri Beti Mange..Azadi...meri Behne mange.. Azadi.***

Anita Mathur, NLT, Azad Foundation

welcomed the chief guest of the day Syeda

Hameed jee, former member of the National Commission for Women and the chief guest of the day.



Syeda Hameed is an educationist, writer and a former member of the Planning Commission of India. She chaired the Steering Committee of the Commission on Health which reviewed the National Health Policy of 2002. Syeda ji is the founder trustee of the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) and the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation and a former member of the National Commission for Women. In 2007, The Government of India awarded her the fourth highest civilian honour of the Padma Shri. "Shayad kahin Kamla ki nazare kisi aasman ke kisi ufaq pe shayad

aapke chehre dekh rahi hain, aapke naare sun rahi hain. Bahut Bahut Shukriya". If Kamla was here she would insist that I speak in Hindi, Urdu Hindustani but also include English in between. She thanked the institutors of the Award as she felt humbled to be part of this and she continued to share the storm of feelings within her for Kamla. She was mesmerized as she said "when i think of Kamla, her face arises in front of me and recited "Gumm humko diya, gumm usko diya sabse jo muskil nazar aya" and stated that Kamla was person who resonates with lines "Zindagi mein kitne lamhe ho woh zaruri nahi ..har lamhe mein zindagi honi chahiye"

She recalled how her life changed when she met Kamla in 1995, in Canada when in 1980's people were suffering from immigration issues and had no idea about the gender spectrum. Meeting her opened a new chapter for her as she said" mein kamla k kunbe ka ek hissa bangayi". She called kamla an iconic south Asian visualised South Asia to be a power of love and not a hegemonic power. As Kargil war was at its peak, under the Women Initiative of South Asia, 43 women travelled in a bus from Delhi to Lahore under the guidance of Kamla, Mohini and Nirmala. It was the charisma of Asma and Kamla that they opened their doors for us and when we met President Nawaz Sharif, one of the young women told him "We don't want to haul the baggage of the past, that is your past, we youth don't want that". This was inspired by Kamla. What followed was, 2 Buses filled with Pakistani women travelled back to Delhi with us as a symbol of peace. Once back, we released 2 pigeons in the dramatic spirit of peace and we felt the words of Kamla's favourite poet Kunwar Mohinder Singh Bedi Sahar "*Aao dil se dur karde sab sharare inteqam, ao duniya ko pahunchadein muhabbat ka pegam ..reh sakein amno-sukun se..*"



Anu Aga began on a note of thanks for inviting her to the Award ceremony. Introducing the members of the jury which she headed, Anu stated that they were chosen from different countries and represented different skills. Briefing about the award and the selection process, Anu mentioned that out of the several applications received, the jury was presented with 12 shortlisted applicants which comprised 10 from the women's category and 2 from the men's category. Applications were received from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. She went on to explain the selection criteria given to the jury and admitted that "The jury had a tough time selecting the winner as most of the candidates had done remarkable work". Further she informed that the jury decided to not give an award to any applicant in the men's category, not because the jury was anti-men but because none of them met all the criteria such as having worked in the field for minimum 3 years. She also mentioned about the jury unanimously deciding to give two awards instead of one in the women's category. Moving forward, she announced the two winners as Natisara Rai from Nepal and Vidya Rajput from India and congratulated them for not only transforming

their lives but also that of others in the community against all odds and becoming role models to emulate. Finally, she ended on a note of hope stating that “for the next year’s Kamla Bhasin Award, we hope to get more applications under the men’s category from cis and transmen who are working towards creating a gender just society”.

### Announcement of the Awardees

Vidya Rajput from Chhattisgarh and Natisara Rai from Nepal were unanimously selected as the winners for their merits and contributions to the society at large. Both are from category one.



### About the Winners

#### Natisara – Nepal



As Kamla Bhasin often said “Rise and not fall in love...Natisara embodies that spirit of celebration. Our award winner Natisara Rai hails from Nepal, is the co-founder and Executive Director of Shakti Milan Samaaj (SMS), an organization that supports over 1000 HIV+ women in Nepal to access dignified healthcare, literacy and livelihood education. Natisara herself is a HIV+ woman, and survivor of forced sex work. Natisara shared that she is returning back to India after 26 years. She shared her story in Nepali. She smilingly said trafficked at a very young age by a couple who she met at a place of work. She was transported into the dark world of human trafficking and found herself in a brothel in Mumbai. She finally got rescued from there and returned to her native country Nepal but had contracted HIV by then. She taught that human grit and determination can overcome many odds that life throws at us. In Natisara we found a person who is positive, curious, excited and is wishing every moment of her life to be spent in helping those women whose voices get muffled and drowned one because they are women and two because they have the health challenge of HIV.



“The doctor just gave me 5 years to live but look here I am travelling to India to receive the Kamla Bhasin Award for my work with HIV positive people.” ..Natisara

”mero lago chai kamla didi guru lago chai”.

For me Kamla didi is a guru



Natisara returned to India after 26 years of victimhood of human trafficking, a proud moment for her to receive the prestigious award for women empowerment in the country. Extending her deepest gratitude to the organisers of the Award - Azad Foundation, i-Partner, NFI and the jury members, she said that after being rescued back to Nepal, she started Shakti Milan Samaj for the empowerment of women living with HIV AIDS. She admitted that establishing an organisation at that time was very much challenging owing to the perceived stigma towards HIV infected women.

According to her, there was discrimination even among women living with HIV, among the survivors who were living with HIV and housewives who were living with HIV. To address these issues, the organisation was established by her with three other HIV infected women and the numbers have since then grown to over hundred. The organisation has strived to provide

	<p>various kinds of support to HIV infected women as well as their children which has now empowered them to come out of their homes and lead independent lives. She expressed her immense joy of feeling honoured and blessed to receive the prestigious award in the name of Kamla Bhasin in the same place where she was trafficked 26 years ago. She concluded her speech by solemnly vowing to carry forward Kamla ji’s vigorous advocacy for human rights as she ended her speech in her native language “Nepalese”.</p>
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**Vidya Rajput- India**



Our award winner, Vidya Rajput, a transwoman from Bastar, Chhattisgarh, who co-founded Mitwa in 2009 to collectivize trans community, advocate and raise awareness for their rights, including the right to self-identify, right to education, housing, employment, and healthcare. Vidya’s work with Mitwa is rooted in her own life of struggle, hardship and discrimination.

	<p><i>Mein stree or purush ka sangam hoon, haa mein</i></p>	<p><i>Mein pita ki sahas aur maa ki mamta hoon, haa mein sansar hoon. Mein jal aur dhal se bani prithvi hoon, haa mein srishti hoon.</i></p>
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*“Haa mein kinnar hoon.  
Andhere ko cheerti hui ujala  
hoon, haa mein bhor hoon.”*

*ardhanarishwar hoon.*



*Mein na bhikari hoon, na hi  
farista hoon, mein toh sirf  
insaan hoon”  
...Vidya*



In her emotional speech, Vidya Rajput acknowledged that it was a day of pride for her community because the identity of her community members have always remained as those engaged in seeking alms on trains, clapping and begging at signals and even sex work in red light areas. They have often been portrayed as funny characters in films as well. She thanked Azad Foundation, National Foundation for India, i-Partner as well as the jury members from the bottom of her heart for accepting diversity and touching upon works of diversity. She believes that this Award would go a long way in creating a new identity for the community she represented. She firmly hopes that the world would now recognise that the transgender community has advanced in their life's journey from begging at signal points and is relentlessly engaged in mitigating social asymmetries. She expressed her feeling of meeting Kamla on receiving the award as well as her pride of being a recipient of the same. Further, she greeted everyone on the occasion of Constitution Day and ended by imparting a message that the wall of ignorance that we build across gender binaries can be demolished only by reading extensively on gender, sex and sexuality, as only through reading one can understand and accept the same.

## Sonam Kalra's Musical Tribute to Kamla Bhasin

Sonam Kalra is a multiple award-winning sufi singer and composer who has strived to blend the many voices of faith to create one universal voice of faith. A long-term friend of Kamla, Sonam emotionally recollected her as "a good friend and inspiration, whom every girl and every woman has in their hearts". Sonam brought out the sufi soul of kamla. With tears in her eyes and tribute to Kamla in every word, she shared how Kamla was a beacon of light and friendship. She

recollected that she was Azad all her life, Kamla went away singing, rejoicing and bringing people together. Kamla Bhasin, wherever she went, she made an impact. Her spirit was what one would first connect with. Any event of Kamla Bhasin is incomplete without Songs and slogans. She thanked the 3 organisers for having her and recalled her memory from One billion rising as she quoted the song she sang there **Bol ki lab Azad hai teri...**

Having associated with Kamla and sung at many of her events, Sonam identified her as "a beacon of hope who took everyone with her." Fondly acknowledging how Kamla influenced her musical career as she sang about equality and inclusion, Sonam began her rendition by reciting Kamla's famous poem.

***"Hawaon se ban rahi he ladkiyan, Unhe behichak chalne mein maza aata he...Hawaon se ban rahi he ladkiyan, Unhe behichak chalne mein maza aata he..." Unhe manzur nahi hai bewajah roka jana..phulon si ban rahi hai ladkiya..unhe mehakne mein maza aaraha hai.."***

Moving ahead, she made the entire hall dance ecstatically as she indulged them in a couple of sufi songs along with her companion Ehsan Ali on sarangi. Their words, rhythm and whose beats resonated with the themes of love, equality and fraternity that it took the audience to dance in joy thus making the evening worth cherishing a life-time.

The entire audience swayed and danced to her signature compositions.

***"Bolo Ek awaaz hain hum, bolo ek awaz hai hum." as she sung... "Bol k lab azad hai tere ... Bol k zubaan ab tak teri hai.."***





Dolon Ganguly, NLT Azad Foundation thanked Sonam for her sufiyana tribute.

### Thank you Note by Anuvinda Varkey....



Anuvinda Varkey extended her vote of thanks on behalf of the organising institutions by acknowledging that “it has been such an uplifting experience to be part of this wonderful programme.” She thanked Syeda Hameed for the keynote address delivered by her that spoke of what Kamla believed in thereby inspiring all to work further towards achieving gender equality. Thanking Anu Aga and other jury members, she expressed her gratitude to them for their support, wisdom and advice as well as for undertaking the responsibility of choosing the winners of the first Kamla Bhasin Award, South Asia. Further, she thanked all the 64 applicants to the Award for their participation and once again congratulated the winners.

She thanked Sonam Kalra and Ehsan Ali “for always performing from the heart and uplifting the mood of the room through their exquisite music.” Gratitude was extended to Elizabeth Thomas for designing the artwork of the event, Alpana Khare for the citations and Niharika for emceeding the program as well. Moving forward, she thanked Nirantar for their collaboration with the programme and Rita Sarin for the relentless support, advice and guidance provided by her from the beginning of organising the award ceremony. Anuvinda also thanked those individuals,

organisations and networks who helped in broadcasting the information about the KB award across south Asia while also looking forward to their collaboration in the following years. She went on to commend Bina Rani and Sumedha Sharma of i-Partner, who were part of the organising team for the ownership of the idea and the spirit behind the award as well as for their effortless collaboration. Further, she thanked Biraj Patnaik and his NFI colleagues for being part of the organising team and demonstrating the power of collaboration in today's world to give wings to ideas and dreams. She also expressed her gratitude to Sakha for being the enthusiastic travel partner, the NLT of Azad Foundation, Meenu Vadera and Team Azad "for the undying enthusiasm and love for Kamla, which got them started on this journey." Finally, she thanked India Habitat Centre for providing the auditorium and a supportive staff, all those who partnered from the communities we work with, the dignitaries from national and international agencies as well as the different networks who made the KB Award a success.





### **Concluding Remarks**

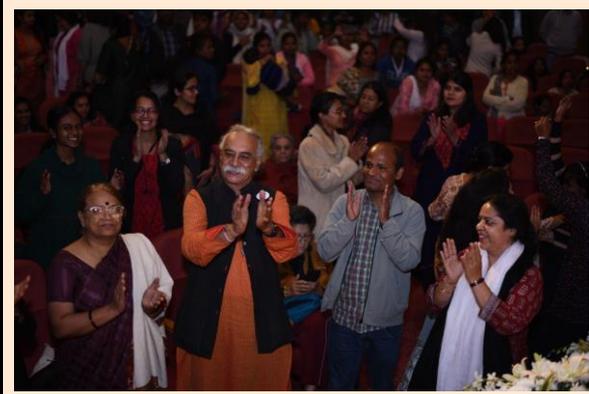
Azad Foundation thanks Advisors, collaborators, Elizabeth Cherian (Designer KB Award), staff of the organising teams and all the people who directly and indirectly contributed to this wonderful endeavour. We are showcasing the work of some of the selected candidates, trail blazers through our annual calendar and planner. Azad calendar reaches out to many stakeholders and every year carries a theme with learning and messages of change. We are glad that this year the content of the calendar is not limited within Azad's geographical areas, it carries stories from across South Asia which is our tribute to Kamla Bhasin and a salute to the work of these change-makers working quietly for social change, fighting all odds.

***Kamla, you are not physically with us but you will never be gone from our heart and you will remain the essence of all our work. We started this event with your name, people volunteered, more kept joining and we have been growing ever since “***

***Main akele hi chala tha jaanib-e-manzil magar, log saath aate gaye aur kaarwan banta gaya”-Majrooh Sultanpuri***

### **Photo Gallery**





## Annexures:

Youtube Video Link of the event broadcast-

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1\\_noJqpRlyU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_noJqpRlyU)

## Media Coverage-

1. <https://thewire.in/women/natisara-rai-and-vidya-rajput-win-first-kamla-bhasin-award-for-work-on-gender-equality>
2. <https://jandhara24.com/news/128763/natisara-rai-and-vidya-rajput-get-kamla-bhasin-award-for-work-on-gender-equality/>
3. <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/entertainment/2266092-natisara-rai-and-vidya-rajput-win-kamla-bhasin-award-for-work-on-gender-equality>
4. <https://www.latestly.com/agency-news/india-news-natisara-rai-and-vidya-rajput-win-kamla-bhasin-award-for-work-on-gender-equality-4510403.html>
5. <https://newsdrum.in/national/natisara-rai-and-vidya-rajput-win-kamla-bhasin-award-for-work-on-gender-equality>
6. [https://dailychhattisgarh.com/article-details.php?article=178397&path\\_article=24](https://dailychhattisgarh.com/article-details.php?article=178397&path_article=24)
7. <https://fb.watch/h32DV6FfSC/>
8. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/11/27/natisara-rai-vidya-rajput-win-the-inaugural-kamla-bhasin-south-asia-award>
9. <https://theruralpress.in/2022/11/27/chhattisgarhs-transgender-activist-vidya-rajput-honored-with-kamla-bhasin-award-2022/>

Know more about the organisers:

[Azad Foundation](#)

[I-Partner India](#)

[National Foundation For India](#)