

L. C. Tyagi Fellowship

Laxmi Chand Tyagi, or fondly known as Tyagi Ji by all who knew him, was born in a farming household in a small village of Western U. P. in India in 1945. After his basic schooling in the village, Tyagi Ji moved to Agra University for his higher education, from where he completed a Masters degree in agriculture science. Since the very early years of his life, Tyagi Ji had been inspired by rural development and social activism and had a desire to spend his life to improve the lives of people living in rural India. With this in view, he started working with noted social activists Vinoba Bhave and Jay Prakash Narayan in late 1960s.

Between 1970 and 1979, Tyagi Ji remained associated with an organization called Banwasi Sewa Ashram in Eastern part of U. P. At the Asram, Tyagi Ji played an important role in implementation of several programmes focusing on the welfare and empowerment of tribal groups. In 1979, Tyagi Ji was given the responsibility of leading block development planning for the government of U. P. for the hilly areas of Uttarakhand. Development of an extremely arid region was a matter of great interest for him, and this interest brought him to the Great Indian Desert of Thar in 1979. After understanding the features of Thar through foot marches and meetings with the community, he pioneered community development in Thar with the foundation of GRAVIS in 1983.

A staunch Gandhian, he devoted his entire life for the cause of desert poor and the concept of Sarvodaya. Tyagi Ji worked with passion to reach out to socially and economically deprived amongst the marginalized communities in rural India, especially in the great Indian Desert of Thar. Tyagi Ji would never enter a village with the presumption that he knew the answers to the problems, but rather would speak to the villagers, listen to their concerns, and ask them how they could solve the problem together. Following Gandhian philosophy, Tyagi Ji firmly believed in the concept of *Gram Swarajya* or village self-rule. He worked to empower the community, regardless of religion, caste, creed and gender, to ultimately make them self-reliant and self-supportive.

The organization founded by Tyagi Ji, GRAVIS, currently is the largest NGO in Thar Desert and serves nearly 1 million people living in over 850 villages. The organization has done substantial in the areas of water and food security, livelihood, health, education and community empowerment.

In the later part of his life, Tyagi Ji suffered from high blood pressure and gout and as a result was plagued by other health problems. He was treated in different cities of India. During this time, it became increasingly apparent to him that many essential services, including that of healthcare, were lacking in rural areas and not reaching the poor. Likewise, he was greatly concerned lack of child care, education, and sanitation and women empowerment in villages.

In 2005, Tyagi Ji succumbed to kidney failure post renal transplant at the premature age of 60. A visionary left us with a lot of unfinished work to be carried forward.

To cherish his memory and to keep his thoughts and philosophy alive, GRAVIS and L. C. Tyagi Memorial Trust has taken the initiative to launch a fellowship in his honor and to continue his legacy. The aim of the fellowship is to address the serious issue of the lack of skilled professionals in rural areas. Tyagi Ji believed in educating the youth of today so that they could

become the enlightened leaders of tomorrow. He placed special emphasis on the need for the education of women. Keeping above facts in view, about which Tyagi Ji was greatly concerned, we are looking for dynamic youths to work as fellows to bridge the gaps and to produce village professionals for the good of rural masses, so as to continue with the legacy of Tyagi Ji. The fellow will be expected to complete his/her education and return to villages to work for the community.

Purpose of the fellowship:

Support deserving candidates with education and mentoring in the field of community development in order to create knowledgeable and mindful leaders for tomorrow who will dedicate their lives to improve the lives of impoverished communities in rural India.

Duration and coverage

The fellows will get assistance for one to two academic year/s. The support may continue for one sub-sequent year depending on the academic need and performance in the preceding year.

Each year, two following awards will be given:

Junior fellowship

Senior fellowship

Candidates are free to select the school of their choice, but their area of study should be related to community development. Fields of study may include (but are not limited to) Sociology, Science, Social Work, Engineering, Environment, Languages, Management and Medicine.

Eligibility

To be eligible, applicants should:

- For the senior award, must have completed a graduate degree. Candidates for the junior award can apply after basic schooling (12 grades).
- Be in pursuit of college/higher education in the areas of community development and sustainability, preferably masters or doctoral level education, or a graduate degree in the case of those applying after schooling.
- Demonstrate commitment to community development and community building in rural India.
- Have current employment in a position involving community development and at least one year of experience working in this sector (optional).
- Preferably be from a rural community
- Employees of GRAVIS and/or L. C. Tyagi Memorial Trust and their family members are ineligible to apply.

Additional Criteria:

- Preference will be given to candidates with low family income. Applicants will need to obtain certification from their community of their financial need. (Could be in the form of a written letter).
- Women and disabled are strongly encouraged to apply and will be given high preference.

Level of Aid:

Junior fellows may receive up to Rs. 15,000 annually. Senior fellows may receive up to Rs. 30,000 in a year. During the academic year, the selected fellows will also receive mentoring support through the fellowship. Renewal of the fellowship for an additional year is possible based on the performance of the candidate in year 1. Each year, in both categories one fellowship will be awarded and assistance for up to 1 award may continue from the previous year.

How to Apply:

Students should compile each of the following to be mailed together to the L.C. Tyagi Memorial Trust:

- A complete Application Form as per the prescribed format
- A letter from the community certifying the candidate's financial need
- Marks in school/college
- Personal Statement explaining how the candidate's participation in the fellowship program will help both the candidate and the community. (Up to 500 words)
- Current Resume highlighting experiences in community development (optional).

Dates to remember

Applications called – by 31st March

Application due – by 15th May

Selection made – by 1st July

Award given – in July