



Politics of Social Welfare

SHALLU JINDAL

Art collector, classical dancer and social activist

A

well-known personality in the social circuit and the wife of industrialist-politician Naveen Jindal, Shallu Jindal has certainly used her position – to benefit society. Her pet causes range from population stabilisation, unemployment, food security, child and women’s healthcare, to women’s empowerment.

“Definitely the reach is bigger when you come from a well-connected family,” admits this multi-faceted social activist. “This is more applicable when people, especially in the rural segment, see me as a successful politician’s life partner. It is not so much my social stature that works in this case, but my political affiliation.”

Associated with various non-profit organisations – Jindal Welfare and Education Society, Openspace Jindal Foundation for Development, ASHA school for the mentally and physically challenged, the Flag Foundation, amongst others – Shallu has worked tirelessly towards various causes for over a decade, from



“Definitely the reach is bigger when you come from a well-connected family,” admits Shallu Jindal. “This is more applicable when people, especially in the rural segment, see me as a successful politician’s life partner. It is not so much my social stature that works in this case, but my political affiliation.”

supporting more than a hundred villages in constructing temples, schools, borewells and encouraging local crafts like ‘*dokra*’, to creating self-help groups for women. Jindal Welfare and Education Society works towards township planning, building of schools in all Jindal plant locations, constructing hospitals, community centres and workers’ housing. Openspace is a platform for the development of cultural, artistic, educational, intellectual expression; they have organised talks on climate change, screened documentaries on urban India and *kavi sammelans* (poetry meets), and sponsored a monthly magazine called *Parvatiya Bal Manch* that goes out to 13,000 children in 600 villages.

An art patriot, a fashion and interior design graduate, a professional Kuchipudi dancer and a social activist, Shallu nevertheless has her family on top of her priority list: Her husband, the award-winning head of Jindal Steel and Power, skeet shooter, polo player and twice elected Member of Parliament; her sixteen-year-old son Venkatesh, an avid sportsman;

and thirteen-year-old daughter Yashasvini, who is following her mother’s footsteps learning classical dance. “With the burden of various welfare, social, corporate and family responsibilities to juggle, add to that my dance performances, it gets really tough and challenging at times to manage it all... But all commitments are equally important. One is left with no option but to learn to manage one’s time judiciously,” she shares.

Haryana, where her husband’s constituency falls, has been the focal point of her welfare endeavours. Shallu was actively involved in the beautification of the OP Jindal Parks, which are now sought-after public recreation spaces. She also executed the mid-day lunch scheme with the Haryana government; held eye camps in various villages and launched mobile medical vans in far-flung villages. She is also involved in the OP Jindal Scholarship fund that supports poor children, and the OP Jindal Technical Institutes and Personality Development Programmes, which prepare rural youth for the challenges of an IT-powered future. The upliftment of women is a pet cause; her organisation helped establish vocational institutes for women; constructed lavatories for women and girls; held regular camps to create awareness about female foeticide; and initiated a women’s pension scheme.

Even so, dance remains one of her passions. Though she was an award-winning Kathak dancer as a child, she took up Kuchipudi at the age of thirty-three, and now gives performances in this age-old dance form. “I was inspired by the beautiful motion and elegant poetry of dance from a very early age,” she says. “Then I got busy in further studies, marriage and motherhood. However, I am a firm believer that what is destined, will happen. After a fortuitous meeting with my gurus, Padmabhushan Raja Radha Reddy at Tirupati, *guruji* asked me to become his disciple. I think it was Lord Venkateshwara Himself who showered upon me a divine light to pursue my love for dance. And age cannot get in the way of passion.”

Despite her achievements, Shallu has an endearing humility about her. “I firmly believe, ‘service onto mankind is service onto God’. If I can help anyone to a better tomorrow, I would gladly do so.”