

## Jnana Prabodhini Competitive Examinations Centre, Pune.

### Celebrating journey of its alumnus on account of Tridashakpurti Varsha 2025-26 (30 years of establishment)

#### **Smt. Kiran Musale - Kulkarni**

- Presently working as Additional collector & Joint Managing Director, Sarthi Kolhapur in the Government of Maharashtra
- Deputy Collector, 2002 Batch
- JPCEC - 2000 Batch
- M.A, B.Ed
- Earlier worked at Nagpur, Wardha, Gadchiroli, Kolhapur, Sangli in different responsibilities.



Kiran Musale-Kulkarni's story is one of perseverance, dedication, and a steadfast commitment to public service, marked by significant challenges and innovative administrative efforts across diverse regions of Maharashtra.

Kiran hails from Parite, a village near Pandharpur. Her early education up to the sixth standard was in Parite, after which her mother sent her to Maharshi Karve Education Institute in Pune for the seventh standard. Later she continued her education in Sangli up to her MA, and then pursued her B.Ed in Mumbai, indicating a geographically diverse educational background. Kiran openly shares her birth into the Kolhati community, a society where women traditionally work as Tamasha and Lavani artists to earn their livelihood.

Her mother harbored an extraordinary dream for Kiran: to become a Collector. Kiran admits she had no prior understanding of what a Collector entailed. Given the Kolhati community's background, characterized by a lack of emphasis on education and societal issues where

women often bear the burden of work while men's livelihoods depend on them, her mother's decision was particularly visionary. Kiran's mother desired a change within their community and believed that a Collector held a decisive, decision-making role, having observed a Collector at a village common. This personal observation fueled her mother's ambition for Kiran. This profound aspiration was instilled in Kiran from a young age. Even later, when Kiran faced disappointments during her competitive exam preparations, her mother encouraged her to continue, emphasizing that becoming an officer was a distinct form of service that could bring about significant change in their community. Kiran expresses immense joy in witnessing her mother's foresight materialize, with approximately 30 to 35 officers emerging from their community, including one IAS officer, one IPS officer, a CDPO in the Women and Child Development Department, a judge, and a large number of youth in the police department. She likens her mother's role to that of Jijabai in Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's life, who envisioned and inspired the swaraj. Kiran emphasizes that charting a different path for her community was her mother's legacy, and Jnana Prabodhini played a crucial role in her ability to realize this.

She believes she might not have become an officer without Jnana Prabodhini's guidance and support, which provided direction to her efforts.

### **Association with Jnana Prabodhini**

Kiran's association with Jnana Prabodhini began in 1999, not through its competitive examination center, but through the 'Rupapalatu Shikshanache' (Transformation of Education) shivir/ camp of its Chhatra Prabodhan division of Jnana Prabodhini. While studying in Sangli, she attended a lecture by Mahendra Bhai Sethiya, a member of Jnana Prabodhini's Chhatra Prabodhan division and currently Secretary of Jnana Prabodhini, at the Nagar Wachanalaya (city library). This meeting introduced her to Jnana Prabodhini's activities across various fields. Her actual entry into Prabodhini was almost accidental; passing by the Sadashiv Peth premises, she mistook it for a temple and wished to explore it, coincidentally meeting Mahendra Bhai at the entrance, who then invited her to one of the education training related camps. This marked a pivotal moment that transformed her life, giving it new direction. During the camp, she gained various experiences, including participating in a scheme where five individuals, including herself, were selected as educational outreach workers. Their role was to disseminate information about Jnana Prabodhini's educational programs in different

schools and districts. After a selection process involving tests, Kiran was assigned to Sangli district, tasked with promoting programs like 'Vidyavrat Sanskar' and ensuring their implementation in schools. She balanced this work with her competitive exam studies, gaining invaluable diverse experiences.

Kiran was already preparing for competitive exams before her contact with Jnana Prabodhini and had even appeared for the exams twice. Her interactions with Savita Tai and Viku Sir at the competitive examination center were significant. She gained access to Prabodhini's study hall and library after approaching Savita Tai with a request. Savita Tai also encouraged her to attend classes whenever possible. This allowed Kiran to balance her work at Prabodhini with her studies. She attended classes by Shirish Shitole sir for current events and Vidyut Madam for English, with permission from Mahendra Bhai. Her introduction to Viku Sir was through the daily reading of Richard Bach's 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull' during the 'Rupapalatu Shikshanache' camp, a book translated by Swarnalata Tai and Patwardhan Sir. She notes the profound influence of Viku Sir and his reading of this book, which served as a constant source of inspiration, encouraging her to achieve her chosen goals despite any setbacks.

When Kiran passed her preliminary MPSC examination, Vivek Sir and Savita Tai advised her to focus full-time on her studies and attend all relevant classes at Prabodhini. This proved immensely beneficial for general studies, answer writing techniques, and participating in group discussions that helped her articulate her views on various subjects. Prabodhini also guided her in selecting her optional subjects, History and Sociology, the latter taught by Tushar Thombre Sir. Her mock interviews were conducted at Prabodhini, where Rajiv Ranade Sir advised her to be authentic and fearless, stating her honest thoughts. Kiran found this comprehensive support at every stage of her preparation to be extremely useful.

The day of her selection as a Deputy Collector in 2002 was unforgettable. She learned the news from Viku Sir at Prabodhini, who called her village landline. The joy was overwhelming and inexpressible. Her family celebrated by distributing sugar and sweets throughout the village, a common tradition. Initially, her mother and other family members found it hard to believe. However, they were delighted that she had become a Deputy Collector, fulfilling a significant part of her mother's aspiration.

## **Administrative service journey begins**

Kiran was eventually posted to the Nagpur division, not a preferred choice for many, as individuals usually get to select their departments. However, she credits Jnana Prabodhini's emphasis on working where there is a need and its "study tours" for mentally preparing her to work anywhere. Her mother accompanied her to Nagpur. Despite feeling lost, they were aided by Sangeeta Chaurewar, another Jnana Prabodhini alumna who was then an Assistant Sales Tax Officer in Nagpur, making her joining process smoother. This experience reinforced Kiran's belief in the pivotal role of Jnana Prabodhini in her life.

Her initial posting in the Nagpur division was in Wardha. She immediately drew upon her experiences from Jnana Prabodhini's Chhatra Prabodhan division, particularly the daily routine of **उपासना** (prayer), physical exercise, and group reading of texts like 'Dasbodh' and Vinoba Bhave's books, which instilled a deep appreciation for Vinoba Bhave. This prior exposure meant that upon arriving in Wardha, she already had a connection to places like Wardha and Pavnar Ashram. She had also read Vinoba Bhave's 'Geeta Pravachane', 'Madhukar', and 'Ekadash Vrat' during her time at Prabodhini with Mahendra Bhai.

In 2003, Kiran was appointed as Tehsildar in Arvi, Wardha district, for six months. Subsequently, she served as Taluka Prant (Sub-Divisional Officer) in Ashti, a place where people generally avoided postings. From 2005 to 2008, she worked as District Rehabilitation Officer in Wardha, spending five years there. Wardha, she notes, is a district affected by farmer suicides, with distinct social and economic characteristics compared to Western Maharashtra. She observed the challenge of land ownership alongside a lack of strong cooperative movements and general poverty in Vidarbha.

As Tehsildar, Kiran learned significantly from her Collector, IAS Chockalingam Sir, who emphasized efficient and honest delivery of services, stressing that officials should focus on what they can control to ensure public services reach people promptly and properly. Kiran applied this principle by ensuring caste and income certificates were issued in chronological order, avoiding favoritism. To tackle irregularities in land records ('Ferfar'), she implemented a system where 'Index 2' documents (records of property transactions) from the Sub-Registrar's office were sorted at the Tehsil office and given to the respective 'Talathis'

(village accountants). She held meetings where Talathis were required to immediately record these changes in the 'Ferfar' register, curbing the option to delay or manipulate entries. She then appointed Naib Tehsildars for each circle to monitor whether these 'Ferfar' entries were certified by the 'Mandladhikaris' (Circle Officers) within 15 days, receiving fortnightly reports. While acknowledging this didn't eradicate all irregularities, it was a significant step within her authority as Tehsildar.

Kiran also focused on the public distribution system (PDS). She noticed irregularities where grains were directly sold from warehouses instead of reaching fair price shops. To address this, she mandated that records of grain dispatch to shops be submitted to her office on the same day. Crucially, she would send her vehicle to follow the grain trucks, increasing inspections at fair price shops. This increased vigilance significantly improved the proper delivery of grains to shops. She also activated dormant Gram Dakshata Samitis (Village Vigilance Committees), educating them about their powers and the village's grain quota, ensuring proper monitoring of grain distribution. Kiran strongly felt that her actions were guided by Jnana Prabodhini's pledge for competitive exam aspirants: to be pure, efficient, and work for the development of all. She believed that addressing basic needs like proper grain distribution and land record management could bring significant relief to the public.

In Ashti, where she served as Taluka Prant, Kiran faced a challenging situation with widespread alcoholism among staff, leading to absenteeism and poor work. While she took disciplinary action, she also initiated weekly collective book reading sessions of Vinoba Bhave's 'Geeta Pravachane' to foster a positive environment. This initiative encouraged honest staff members, who felt supported, to report irregularities, which proved very helpful. As District Rehabilitation Officer for the Lower Wardha and Upper Wardha projects, Kiran addressed the complex issues of project-affected persons (PAPs). She recognized that the old compensation laws offered inadequate compensation for land and homes, especially for rural houses built of mud and tiles, making it difficult for PAPs to rebuild. She raised this concern with the Principal Secretary of the department. Drawing on Jnana Prabodhini's network and its emphasis on integrated development, she explored low-cost housing solutions. She facilitated the presentation of Sunil Deshpande's bamboo houses to the Collector, leading to the construction of such homes in Salod and another village near Wardha, with a small contribution from the villagers and the rest from the government. She insisted on high-quality

civic amenities in resettlement colonies, even demolishing a poorly constructed school wall to ensure proper building standards. She personally learned to scrutinize estimates to ensure quality.

For employment generation, Kiran persuaded the Collector to allocate sand mining leases and brick kiln contracts to unemployed youth from project-affected villages directly, without auction, for a nominal fee. She organized camps to connect villagers with various corporations that provide loans for different communities (e.g., Anna Saheb Vasantrao Naik Mahamandal). Here, the empathy ("Empathy") taught at Prabodhini, of understanding people's perspectives, proved invaluable in convincing them to relocate. Through these efforts, eight villages were successfully relocated for the Lower Wardha project. Kiran recalls a particularly challenging incident during the 2005 floods where she walked five kilometers through mud to convince the residents of Bhadod village, who were resisting relocation due to land disputes, to evacuate. She specifically appealed to the women, arguing that they would be more vulnerable during a nighttime flood. This experience, though difficult, later led to successful rehabilitation. Overall, as a District Rehabilitation Officer, she strove to work in favor of the people and influence government policies for their benefit.

Kiran admits that joining the service was initially daunting, but proper training alleviated her fears and uncertainties. She found that having a good intention simplified the complex issues, even those as stressful as dealing with project-affected people's issues, which often involved protests and agitations. Her strong ideological and experiential foundation from Jnana Prabodhini made handling these situations manageable.

### **Gadchiroli Experience**

From 2008 to 2013, Kiran was posted in Gadchiroli. This move was a conscious decision made with her husband, Subodh Kulkarni, a Jnana Prabodhini Gram Vikas (Rural Development) volunteer, inspired by the Prabodhini's teaching to serve where there is most need, and accounts of social workers like Bhimrao Gasti and Rambhau Godbole. Her initial appointment was as Deputy District Election Officer, followed by Sub-Divisional Officer.

Gadchiroli presented unique challenges, particularly in election management. She was responsible for the 2009 Lok Sabha and Assembly general elections amidst a Naxal boycott

and a significant incident where 15-16 police personnel were martyred in Laheri in October 2009. She worked closely with the District Collector and Superintendent of Police. Measures were taken to reduce polling time to 3 PM to mitigate Naxal attacks. Polling stations were strategically structured, with younger teams sent to base camps for long walks to remote booths, and older teams sent by bus to more accessible locations after "road opening" procedures (checking for landmines). Comprehensive provisions for polling staff included food (from murmura to two days' meals), and first-aid kits with specific powders for quick blood clotting, supplied after demand from the government. Training for polling parties was rigorous, like preparing for war, emphasizing physical readiness and mental fortitude. Despite randomization, some teams would refuse to go to Naxal-affected areas, prioritizing the right to life over the right to vote. Kiran expressed pride in the staff's courage in successfully conducting the elections, noting their physical exhaustion upon return.

Beyond elections, Kiran worked to address the lack of documentation among the tribal populations, particularly the Madia Gond community. She organized camps with the help of organizations like SEARCH (Abhay Bang and Rani Bang's organization), training their 40 village workers on topics like the Forest Rights Act and various certificates. The goal was to achieve "100% certified villages" by helping people prepare necessary documents and issuing certificates on the spot.

She also actively engaged in village visits with a team including the Tehsildar, BDO, Block Education Officer, and Taluka Agriculture Officer, to identify problems and utilize a special fund for Naxal-affected areas. She recounted an instance where villagers lacking water approached her at a camp; she immediately sent the BDO to install a handpump, and the villagers later invited her to see it, an experience she likened to a public representative being invited. She traveled to sensitive villages, sometimes by two-wheeler and on foot, without fear, driven by the desire to serve.

Kiran also highlighted the work in Mendha village, where Community forest rights were established, leading to holistic village development through empowered Gram Sabhas. She observed "Amchya Gavati Amhi Sarkar" (In Our Village, We Are the Government) initiatives, where villages like those in the Mission Human Development chose their own projects, even rejecting approved community halls in favor of women's houses. The concept of "Nirbhayata"

(fearlessness) and "Sahrudayata" (empathy) taught by Girishrao (Dr. Girish Bapat, Director of Jnana Prabodhini) at Prabodhini enabled her to work without fear in Naxal-affected areas. She traveled with her government vehicle, not resorting to clandestine measures, and effectively communicated with villagers using an empathetic approach. She continued her practice from her outreach days at Prabodhini by visiting schools, engaging with children in games, and teaching before inspecting ashram schools, which helped uncover the true conditions and identify areas for improvement. She believes these practical experiences and lessons from Jnana Prabodhini were immensely useful in her administrative work.

### **Back to Western Maharashtra**

After five years in Gadchiroli, Kiran moved to Kolhapur in 2013, serving as Deputy Collector Revenue until 2016. Her transfer was self-initiated by senior officials who observed her work in Gadchiroli. She then served in Sangli from 2016 to 2019 & further till 2021, working on the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), a role she enjoyed due to its potential for local development and providing comprehensive support to families through schemes like fruit orchards, wells, and cattle sheds. She later worked in Satara until 2021 and is currently posted in Kolhapur.

After 23 years in service, Kiran wishes to work at a policy-making level. She feels her current work is fragmented, like distributing "prasad" rather than providing a full meal. She desires to formulate integrated, comprehensive policies that truly uplift impoverished families, providing them with all necessary support for a dignified life. She recalls working in Gadchiroli where many villages still lacked basic amenities like electricity and roads, and people had to walk long distances for water. She believes that decisions should be made at a level where such fundamental issues are addressed holistically, considering what truly benefits families, such as providing necessary tools or materials (like electric motor pumps or pipes) rather than just standard aid.

Kiran states that she found the answer to how change can truly happen during her time in Gadchiroli: through empowered Gram Sabhas (village assemblies). She believes that if Gram Sabhas are strengthened and guided, they can effectively plan and implement their own village development, citing examples like Mendha village. She stresses the importance of truly realizing the 73rd constitutional amendment, which empowers local self-governance.

Having been associated with Jnana Prabodhini for over 25 years, Kiran offers her insights for its future. She emphasizes that the center should focus on developing "leadership qualities" and "fearlessness" (Nirbhayata) in students, enabling them to overcome challenges and stand by their convictions even under opposition. She feels it's crucial for students to develop the inner strength to continue working diligently even when unfairly criticized, as she experienced in Western Maharashtra. She believes such an inner "backup" is vital and notes that her interactions with Savita Tai and Viku Sir at Prabodhini have consistently provided her with strength and support. She advocates for maintaining this continuous chain of support and frequent contact between Jnana Prabodhini and its alumni, including senior officers, perhaps through activities like collective reading of inspiring texts or discussions, to foster ongoing connection and shared experiences.

### **Photo Gallery**



Kiran with daughter Ovi & husband Subodh Kulkarni.



Kiran with Dr. Vivek & Dr. Savita Kulkarni at JPCEC, Pune



Kiran Kulkarni receiving excellence award from then CM of Maharashtra Shri. Prithviraj Chavan.



Kiran with other officials reviewing the progress of essential public infrastructure at Mulkhandi village in Gadchiroli.



Kiran and officials distributing certificates during a camp in Gadchiroli.



Kiran Kulkarni with Dr. Vivek Sir, Dr. Savita tai and other JPCEC alumnus during a get-together at Kolhapur.