STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

# All about Padma Awardee Dr. Armida Fernandez, founder of Human Milk bank

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Dr. Armida Fernandez is a pioneering Indian neonatologist and social activist, renowned for her contributions to maternal and child health, particularly among underprivileged communities in urban India. On January 25, 2026, she was conferred the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian honors, in the field of Medicine by the Government of India.

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## Early Life and Background

Born of Goan origin, with roots tracing back to Divar island in Goa, Dr. Fernandez pursued her medical education and specialized in pediatrics and neonatology. She earned her MD in Pediatrics and DCH (Diploma in Child Health), later becoming a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (FIAP) and the National Neonatology Forum (FNNF).

Her career has been centered in Mumbai, where she served as the former Dean and Head of the Neonatology Department at Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital (commonly known as Sion Hospital).

## Key Achievements

India's First Human Milk BankIn 1989, Dr. Fernandez established Asia's first human milk bank at Sion Hospital, a groundbreaking initiative to provide safe, pasteurized breast milk to premature and sick infants whose mothers could not breastfeed.

This was a response to high infant mortality rates in India due to malnutrition and infections, especially in low-resource settings. The milk bank not only saved countless lives but also played a crucial role in advocating for breastfeeding while combating the harmful promotion of commercial infant formula. Her efforts helped popularize human milk donation and set a model for similar facilities across the country and continent.

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## Other Contributions

Founding SNEHA: In the early 1990s, she founded the Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA), a non-profit organization focused on reducing malnutrition, neonatal mortality, and gender-based violence in Mumbai's slums.

SNEHA works with marginalized mothers and children, providing healthcare, nutrition education, and community empowerment programs.

As a former President of the National Neonatology Forum, she has conducted extensive research on low-cost neonatal interventions, palliative care for terminally ill children, and urban health disparities. Her work emphasizes affordable, community-based solutions to improve baby survival rates.

## Broader Impact

Dr. Fernandez has been a vocal campaigner against the commercialization of infant feeding and has influenced national policies on maternal health. She has also expanded her efforts into palliative care and holistic support for families in distress.

Her recognition with the Padma Shri in 2026 places her among 113 recipients in that category, highlighting her as one of 19 women awardees in the overall list.

Dr. Fernandez's legacy continues to inspire advancements in public health, proving that innovative, low-cost interventions can transform lives in resource-constrained environments.

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