Prof. Sunaina Singh
The Powerhouse Educational Leader

Awe, adulation, admiration, respect from peers and colleagues alike, make a beeline for women with substance. And this has best been established by none other but the sterling persona of Prof. Sunaina Singh who has brought content, quest, quality, skills, and results to the table with her acumen, perseverance and foresight. A role model for many, she comes across as a woman with a clearly defined purpose in life. Her compassion reflects in her zeal for ensuring that the youth should be part of an inclusive yet diverse education system which helps explore their true potential. Nalanda, being nurtured by this dynamic woman, is set to transform into an epicentre of excellence.

As a renowned Professor of English, Prof. Singh enriches the turf of academic excellence with her exemplary blend of scholarship, integrity and administrative acumen to effectively chart the intellectual landscape of the Nalanda International University.

Envisioned as the torch bearer of ancient Nalanda Mahavihara’s heritage, Nalanda University came into being at Rajigir as “an international university of national importance” in November 2010. Placed at the crosswires of the global learning networks, like its illustrious predecessor, Nalanda University has the historic mandate to carry out higher education for world peace, harmony and sustainable development. Presently, this hallowed institution is making giant strides towards living up to its inheritance and mission under the indomitable leadership of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Sunaina Singh. Her passion for reviving Indian traditional knowledge systems, within the ambit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, (World as a family) Matri (fraternity) and Santi (peace), together with the creative drive for perpetual reinvention, is fast developing the University into an eminent seat of interdisciplinary knowledge focussed on Religion, History, Heritage, Culture, Philosophy, Buddhism, Peace studies, Environment and Sustainable Development Management. The Vice Chancellor has also proudly, in track record of time of two years has opened the gate to the University’s new campus. Its new landscape-matching ancient Nalanda in all its glory and splendour- serves as a powerful visual reminder of India being the Vishwa Guru in knowledge domain, a constant source of inspiration.

To her “it is a rare privilege to be entrusted with preserving and propagating the legacy of the universally-renowned ancient Nalanda and the challenge of recreating it”. These formidable tasks rest squarely on the shoulders of the genius Prof. Sunaina Singh not only because of her visionary zeal and leadership, but also for the fact that she is highly regarded as a distinguished academician and administrator in the field of higher education.

The idea of reviving Nalanda University was the vision of Bharat Ratna, the late former President of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, who first proposed it in his address to the Bihar State Assembly in March 2006. The proposal was taken up in full earnestness by the Bihar Government vide the Nalanda University Act, 2007, (Bihar Act 18 of 2007). Since the hallmark of the historical Nalanda was its internationalism, the Government of India shared the proposal of reviving and setting up an International University with the leaders of the East Asia Summit (EAS). Foreseen as a symbol of Asian renaissance and resurgence, Nalanda University eventually got the nod from the sixteen member Countries of East Asia. The final endorsement of the university’s establishment came from the Union Government through the Nalanda University Act of 2010. The Act was passed on 25th November, 2010, a historic moment for India, Asia and the world. The University opened its doors to the first batch of students in the fall of 2014.

Prof. Sunaina Singh has with her impeccable and
proven track record of a compelling leadership in higher education was entrusted with the challenging task of restructuring and recreating Nalanda University's pedagogical and administrative systems and integrating it within a comprehensive global knowledge ecosystem. Thoughtfully summing up her vision for Nalanda University, Prof. Sunaina Singh says, “From time immemorial India opened up novel paths of learning. Wherever Buddha traversed, seeds of knowledge sprouted and flourished. For centuries Nalanda was a beacon of learning which attracted scholars from all over Asia and became a symbol of intra-Asian wisdom and interaction. It is now poised to embark on a similar journey on an expanded scale with Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean countries joining in. If the world’s future lies in achieving a multipolar system, it is necessary that an institution such as Nalanda recreates the narrative of new knowledge system for the 21st century.”

Widely known for her commitment and leadership acumen, she has worn multiple hats with ease and élan. She currently holds the position of the Vice President of Indian Council for Cultural Relations apart from serving on the Executive council of a number of Central Institutions as Visitor’s Nominee, including Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute; Member Governing Council Association of Indian Universities (AIU); Member Board of Trustees India Foundation; Board of Governor Divi’s Labs, to name just a few of her additional responsibilities. An eloquent orator, Prof. Sunaina Singh, had the unique honour of presiding the Hon’ble President of India’s Address on ‘Building a Happy Society’ to 126 Central institutions of the country through the e-platform NKN on 10 January 2017, which won her wide applause.

Some noteworthy awards conferred on Prof. Singh
Rabindranath Tagore award 2019 conferred by Governor of Bengal; International Education Award-2018 (NWSI) awarded in British Parliament, House of Lords, London; Bharat Shiksha Ratan Award, 2018; Education Leadership Award, 2017 (World Education Congress); Bharat Gaurav Award 2016 (IIFS); Chanakya Award for Excellence in Good Governance 2014 (Public Relations Council of India); Woman of the Year Award, 2014-Citizens Council of A.P.; Award for Outstanding Contribution to Education, 2014 (World Education Congress); Education Leadership Award, 2014 (Dewang Mehta Business School); Awarded International Leadership Certificate, National College, Nottingham, U.K. (2013), Rashtriya Gaurav Award, 2011, IIFS; Citation by the India-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCCI), Calgary, for her initiatives in strengthening bilateral ties and collaboration in higher education, in 2011.

Her achievements also include the distinction of being the first Indian woman to head as the President of the Shastri Indo Canadian Institute, a bilateral research institution headquartered in New Delhi and Calgary under the MHRD and the Foreign affairs Canada. As the former Vice Chancellor of English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), a Central University Prof. Singh had yet again shown her calibre by deftly streamlining the administration, reinvigorating the academic culture, and bringing about transparency and accountability into the university system. It is widely accepted the University has emerged out of a critical period in his history largely due to her determine leadership.

It is due to her indefatigable leadership and dynamic vision that the University is gaining prominence since she joined Nalanda in mid-2017. Her crucial interventions have helped the University steer forward and asset itself as an important institution of higher learning in the Asian region.

Prof. Singh firmly believes that the work must speak for itself, she constantly endeavours in raising the bar of excellence both in personal and public sphere. Her professional and social endeavours are inspired by the towering persona of her mentor and father Prof. Satyanarain Singh, a value-driven scholar and a humanist with an innate compassion. She touches many hearts and inspires many minds. Inspired by her sterling leadership and a commitment to philanthropy a group of citizens have established a Foundation for the Girl Child after her name in 2015. It is based on Prof. Singh’s vision of building a better society and nation by funding the education of the girl child from the economically challenged sections.

At Nalanda University some of the more recent endeavours being launched under Prof. Singh’s leadership, such as Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies and the Common Archival Resource Centre, are crucial testimonies to the fact that Prof. Singh has not only been instrumental in reviving ancient knowledge networks but also creating alternate pathways for Asia to learn and grow together. Nalanda University, under Prof. Singh’s unflinching commitment as well as focussed and humane leadership is now emerging as a vibrant campus that can be proud of its vigorous pedagogy and a deep engagement with creating and sharing knowledge. After all, isn’t the gift of knowledge Na Alam-Da at the core of Nalanda.