

“Top 25 Canadian Immigrants 2023” – Award Acceptance Speech, Archana Medhekar

I am deeply humbled and honored to accept the prestigious Top 25 Canadian Immigrants award 2023. My special congratulations to team *Canadian Immigrant* magazine for the 15th anniversary of these awards. Heartiest congratulations to my fellow awardees and the top 75. It feels great to be in your company!

My heartfelt thanks to the distinguished panel of judges, all of you who voted for me and especially my nominator Dr. Ferzana Chaze, who helped change the course of my life by broadening my legal lens with a social angle. To my family, friends, and loved ones, thank you for standing by my side through every challenge. To my parents in India - my role models - thank you for reminding me that dreams are meant to be chased. To my husband and life partner Atul and our son Setu - you are the pillars of my strength.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my colleagues and mentors who have guided me along the path of social justice advocacy. This award is not just a testament to our efforts but also a recognition of the urgent need for change in our society.

I want to dedicate this award to my late grandmother (my Aaji) - Manubai Medhekar - who immigrated to Canada as a Permanent Resident way back in 1976 (47 years ago)! Wearing her traditional 9-yard saree, she made the long flight to Canada alone. She did not speak a word of English but communicated using double-sided cue cards in Marathi and English. In Canada, she built deep community connections through food and fashion - teaching her neighbours to cook Indian food and drape sarees. She embraced Canada to the fullest and followed English TV soap operas such as “Another World”. She travelled to various Canadian provinces and even flew in a helicopter to the *Moose Factory Island*, traditional *Cree First Nations* settlement in Northern Ontario, for my aunt’s medical residency. I strongly believe that I am blessed to have inherited her curiosity, tenacity and courage. I wish to acknowledge the community building efforts of our previous generations of immigrants, on whose shoulders we stand tall today.

I want to draw your attention to the pressing issue that requires our urgent attention: domestic violence and the adverse impact of family conflict on children. These dark corners of our society cast long shadows and silently affect countless lives. But darkness can only prevail until we shine a light upon it. We, as a compassionate and inclusive nation, must ensure that no one lives in fear.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to Canada for welcoming us with open arms. Beyond just a land of opportunity, it offers us a chance to build a better future for ourselves and our families.

Once again, thank you to all who have contributed to my journey and to those who continue to fight for justice, peace, and equality. Together, we hold the immense power to shape a brighter tomorrow. Let us recommit ourselves to the ongoing pursuit of a safer, brighter future for all Canadians, newcomers as well as those who have lived here through generations.

Thank you, and may our dreams never cease to guide us.
