



AKHRA

The theme for Samvaad 2020 is Coming Together for Social Change which is a reprise of the 2018 edition as the concepts and means for coming together have seen seismic and possibly permanent shifts in the last few months, while many today are yearning to overcome a world of social distancing.

The theme represents a belief that there are inherent aspects of tribalism that places seamlessness as a core value of society as well as our experience of some inspiring stories of tribal communities coming together to positively influence their core developmental challenges. We hope to deepen an understanding of a) tribal social and cultural norms that organically create seamless societies, b) tribal groups that come together united by a common cause without any external frameworks, c) tribal groups that come together vide external stimuli through civil society and public action and d) appropriate interfaces between dominant contemporary narratives with imperatives of tribal communities.

Under this overarching theme, we intend to deep dive into specific sub-themes:

- a) **Governance in challenging times:** to recognize how traditional models of governance have worked during challenging times, to explore innovative ways of governance to bring communities together, and to understand sync between parallel governance systems in resolving crisis.
- b) **Conservationists at Heart, Dibang Valley:** Dibang valley is one of the 34 biodiversity hotspots of the world. Dibang valley's pristine forests and the Indigenous tribes face an unknown fate as the government is planning to construct more than 16 dams in the valley, two of which are mega dams - Etalin Hydroelectric Project 3097MW and Dibang Multipurpose Dam project 2880MW. Conservationists, environmentalists and concerned citizens continue to oppose these ill planned policies.
- c) **Tribal voices in the virtual world:** to know of digital mediums which bring community together, to understand reasons for celebration and apprehension, and to comprehend the scope for digitization within tribal communities.
- d) **Ideas that bring people together:** to appreciate the courage it takes to experiment with new ideas, to understand the innovative methods that can bring positive social change in the community and to explore and exchange ideas that grow a culture of innovations.

IN CONVERSATION WITH

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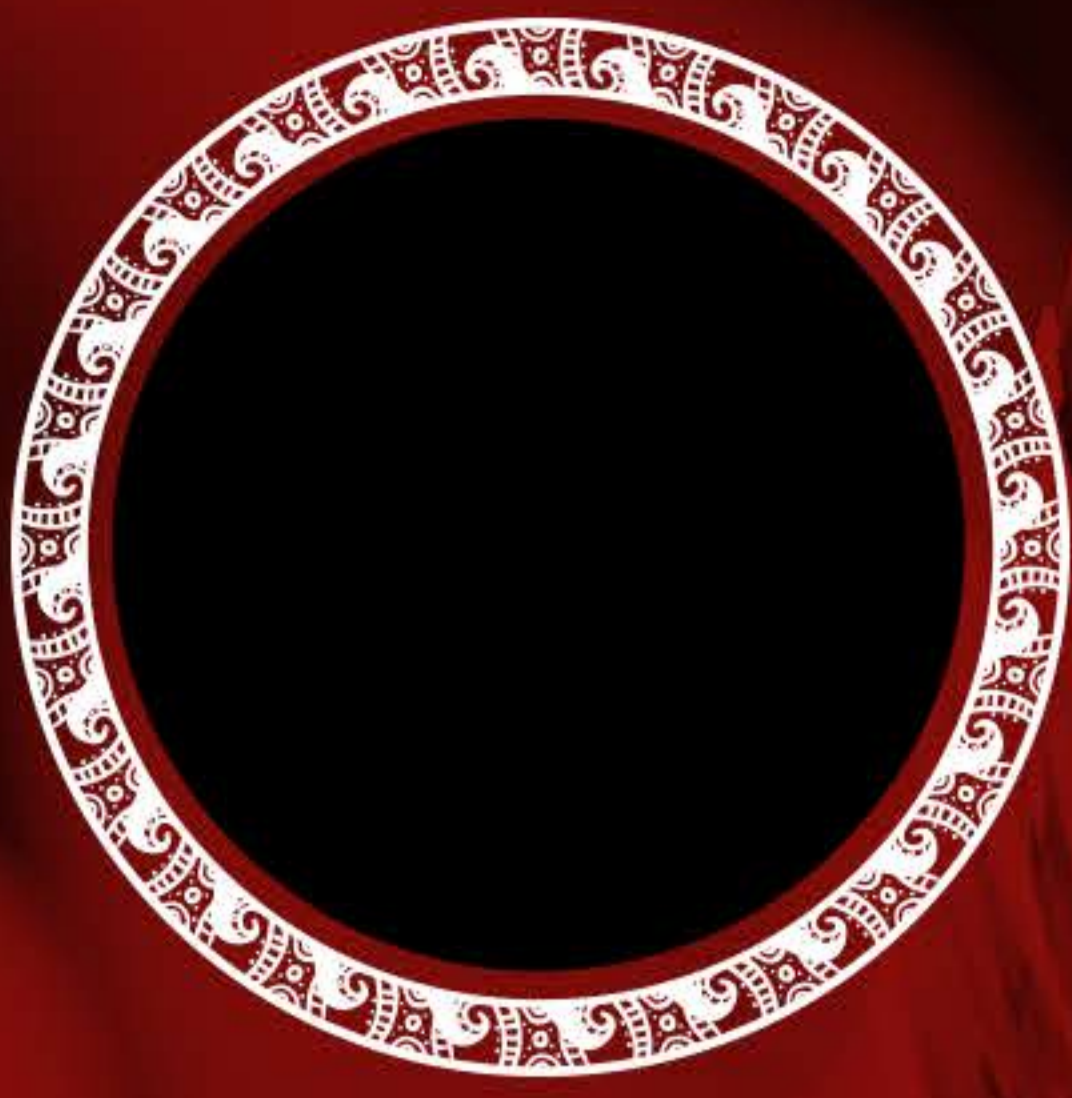
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Devaji Tofa

Devaji Tofa is a social entrepreneur and forest rights activist. A champion of grassroots democracy, he led tribal groups of Maharashtra in the push for the drafting and enactment of the Community Forest Rights Act. A school drop-out, Devaji has been spreading word on his community's (Gond) struggle to get the forest laws implemented in its true spirit. Due to his movement, Mendha (lekha), villages in Gadchiroli district became the first in the country to attain rights to issue transit passes for bamboo. It enabled tribal reclaim their rights over forest produce, on which their traditional livelihoods depend. Devaji's own village sustainably manages 1,800 hectares of forests, deriving and selling its natural resources as a community business. Over 1,300 other Gram Sabhas in the district have adopted the model. This has improved the socio-economic dynamics of the area. It has also curbed tribal support to Maoist insurgency, which is largely triggered by poverty and underdevelopment. Most importantly, it has secured the forests against indiscriminate extraction.



22 Padha, Jharkhand

22 Padha system of governance focuses on battling to get the PESA Act implemented in their region. Even during the pandemic the team did not cease to put in efforts to advocate for the PESA Act in their region. They organised meetings (keeping social distancing norms in mind) with Mundas & Mankis of the panchayats. During the pandemic, the Padha has worked vigorously to promote & conserve traditional health practices and medicines.



Naren Bhai & Team, Gujarat

Young sarpanch from a remote village of Gujarat has done exemplary work in his panchayat, even during the pandemic. As a sarpanch of a tribal village, he mobilized the youngsters of his community to help migrant workers reach their villages. With a zeal to help the needy, he leveraged the platform of WhatsApp to get people to help returning workers. Starting with a team of 8-10 members, he sought permission from the authorities during lockdown, and began arranging transport facilities and other essentials for the workers.



Garasiya Tribe, Rajasthan

Patel is a traditional governance system of the Garasiya tribe. They fought against the traditional system of Mohatana - a system where if someone kills others, the family of the victim is killed in revenge, resulting in a lot of violence in the community and bloodshed. Patel of the Garasiya tribe came together to end this social evil. They also have tales of battling the early marriage system in their community. This governance model has set an example in the Garasiya and other communities, resulting in strong governance ideologies around.



Nicobari Traditional Governance Model, Andaman & Nicobar

Shri. Rashid Yusoof belongs to the Nicobari tribal community of the Central Nicobar Islands in the UT of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Currently, he is the State president of the 'Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parishad' and 'The Tribal Development Council'. He has also been the Chairman, President, Founder and Advisor of many tribal organizations and cooperative societies.

Rashid Yusoof has kept the Cooperative movement alive in the islands, which was started by Rani Lachmi. He founded the Tribal Development Co-operative Society Ltd., which was handed over to the people of Central Nicobar, for the economic upliftment of the Nicobarese people. He has been instrumental in forming various co-operative societies in the remote villages of Nancowrie group of islands, for his selfless service to the community. He has also been instrumental in encouraging the women folk of his community to form the first ever women cooperative society in Nancowry Island. Shri Rashid Yusoof has been working hard to preserve the Nicobarese culture and improve sports and education among the tribal youngsters of Nicobar group of islands. He founded various Nicobar Youth Associations/youth clubs in the tribal villages of Central Nicobar.

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Namita Wahi

Namita Wahi is a fellow at CPR, where she leads the Land Rights Initiative, and a visiting fellow at the Centre for Law and Social Transformation in Bergen. She holds an SJD (doctoral) degree from Harvard Law School, where she wrote her dissertation on "The Right to Property and Economic Development in India". Namita's doctoral dissertation traces the historical evolution of the right to property in the Indian Constitution from the colonial period until 1967. Namita's research interests are broadly in the areas of property rights, social and economic rights, and eminent domain or expropriation law. She has written



Dibang Resistance Team, Arunachal Pradesh

The hydropower project would soon come up in Arunachal's Lower Dibang Valley. Arunachal's Dibang Valley, home to the minuscule Idu Mishmi tribe, borders Tibet and China. The project would displace several members of the Idu Mishmi tribe from their community land, which includes both rice fields and forest land, their primary source of livelihood. The Siang People's Forum (SPF) and Lower Siang Dam Affected Peoples' Forum (LSDAPF), have been spearheading the anti-mega dam movement in the Siang valley. The Dibang Resistance team continues to fight the situation on ground.



Papum Reserve Forest, Arunachal Pradesh

Papum Reserve Forest contains one of the few remaining areas of low-elevation forest in the region and is considered among the best remaining nesting areas in South Asia for three hornbill species: the great hornbill, the wreathed hornbill and the oriental pied hornbill. Jorjo Tana Tara, 48, a member of the indigenous Nyishi community and an anti-logging activist, discovered illegal loggers and poachers at a large salt lick that often hosts elephants from nearby Pakke Tiger Reserve and Kaziranga National Park in the town of Lower Seijosa. Since then, he has been working in the Papum reserve forest to conserve the hornbill species and this leads to an interesting tale of moving from hunting the hornbills to co-existing and conserving them.



Rajaram Katara

After graduation in Geography, Rajaram Katara joined the conceptual team of Shivganga in 2001. A Bhil from the Dhar district of Jhabua, he's been crucial in taking the message of Shivganga to the local tribal people, decoding them in the local language with appropriate improvisation. Shivganga initiated a water conservation movement on Halma's concept, basis which, the tribal villages were mobilized. Tribal communities from all around gathered to resolve the water scarcity problem. It was later developed as a yearly event of coming and working together for rain water harvesting. Halma which started off with 1500 volunteers in 2010 expanded to 15,000 volunteers in 2018.



Chipko Movement, Balaghat, MP

The tribal community came forward to protect their forest in a small village of Balaghat. Forest rangers had come in to clear forest area for a developmental project. The forest was rich in terms of bio diversity and the damage was irreversible. People of the community came forward and hugged the trees and started protesting against the forest rangers. They did not allow them to cut the forest and thus, saved 10 acres of forest land.



Melghat Team

Ramlal Kale is a forest rights activist from Melghat. He is a powerful example of collective action through the medium of fruit cultivation. Ramlal is working on custard apple cultivations with large groups to conserve forests and generate livelihoods. In the restored forest, residents of Payvihir have also nurtured 192 hectares of Indian gooseberry, bamboo and custard apples, that have sprung up in the previously barren land. In turn, the forest has become a safe haven for wildlife, which provides a field for the community-led wildlife census. Residents don't only restore and protect their flora and fauna, but also document it.

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Sachin Malhan

Sachin Malhan is the Executive Partner of Changemakers. He leads the program in its efforts to search, convene and catalyse high-potential changemakers and their ideas, through the power of collaborative competitions and partner networks. Before Changemakers, Sachin was an entrepreneur, where he co-founded three ventures - Inclusive Planet, a venture working to enable online collaboration amongst the world's visually impaired; Law School Tutorials, the leading law test prep outfit that became an Indian School of Business case study in 2009, and Rainmaker, the leading talent advisory firm for the legal industry and manager of India's Bar examination. Sachin is an INK Fellow (2010). In his ventures, Sachin has worked extensively with design, technology and learning, and has been appalled by the power of young people to bring change. Sachin is a graduate of the National Law School in Bangalore



Preservation and promotion of Handicraft through GIS Technology

Since 1999, based on experience and observation, they started with casual activities supporting tribal students. After continuing for several years they realized the need for a dedicated platform for tribal youngsters. With a vision to strengthen youngster's role in Adivasi empowerment activities, they started social networking activities in 2007 and then carried on with on field activities for several years. To make it more organized, they registered under the society act in 2011. After working for several years with individual contribution, they are taking shape of a *collaborative social entrepreneurship model where community, volunteers, government, privates (CSR), sponsors, will work together for strengthening the adivasi empowerment initiatives.*



Circle of Caregivers, Nagaland

Circle of Caregivers is a mental health initiative by a group of individuals who gleaned the issue amongst the people who were returning homes during the pandemic. They leveraged the CM Corpus fund to accelerate the initiative. The group was trained to proactively deal with mental health counselling. They organised a dialogue with representatives of the state to help understand the importance of dealing with this issue.



Culture preservation through digital means

Bikram Biruli hails from the Ho Tribe. A conservationist at heart, he started a website www.hosamaj.com and a news channel "HosamajIve" to digitalize all knowledge and wisdom of the Ho tribe. He has been working towards conserving stories, folklores and songs through these mediums, to prevent them from disappearing, with advancements in digitalization.



Sarna Today YouTube Channel, Jharkhand

Sarna Today YouTube channel was set up to bring dialogue around tribalism into mainstream media. The initiative was started to cover the history, way of life and the cultural richness of tribal communities of Jharkhand. They have successfully covered numerous stories on tribal communities and heritage till date.



Kotda times: Voice of the Tribes, Rajasthan

Binod hails from the Bhil tribe of Rajasthan. He runs his own YouTube channel called "Kotda Times". Currently he is working on spreading awareness among tribal communities through his channel. He has collected information pertaining to government schemes, from the block and district offices. Moving forward, he has been successfully translating the schemes in the regional languages and propagating information on the same through his channel. This has ensured deeper access penetration of important information to the communities.



An initiative towards universal access of tribal languages, Jharkhand

"TriLingo", is his brainchild, which aims to bring all tribal languages under one roof, by organising them to be universally accessible and usable. Their work and language conservation extends across education and research & technology. The group has been running language classroom programmes on four major languages of Jharkhand, with a group of 65 students, 4 teachers and 10 teaching assistants.

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Language connects, Tripura

Nijer hails from the state of Tripura. The Halam community of Tripura comprises of 12 sub tribes which have been in conflict with each other. Also, with the increasing population of Bangladesh residents, the threat of losing the regional languages has increased. Nijer started the initiative of spreading awareness amongst the tribal communities for conserving their languages. He gradually gathered individuals from across the sub tribes and has been walking the path of language conservation since then, by starting a journey of "language movement".



Ara- Keram a model village, Jharkhand

The villagers of Ara and Keram decided to become self reliant by taking charge of their own development. They came together with an idea of conserving water and reviving agriculture with the help of NREGA scheme. This further led to initiatives like open defecation free and an alcohol free village, resulting in an increase in the village revenue by five times. Now the village has become a model village for rest of the world.



Abhay with Sahariya young leader

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JAYS: A social movement through Facebook, Madhya Pradesh

JAYS (Jai Adivasi Yuva Shakti) is a brilliant example of leveraging social media platforms like Facebook for spreading awareness amongst tribal communities. JAYS is a thought which has now become the voice of tribal India. It works towards creating a platform for tribal voices to be heard and towards creating awareness about constitutional rights amongst the tribes of India.

Amongst a bucket of things, JAYS has been instrumental in working towards conserving land, forest and nature, to spread awareness on global warming, migrating tribals, reducing population of the tribes etc. JAYS also strives to work towards conserving the rich culture, existence and identity of the tribes in the country.



Baal Samvaad, Maharashtra

Ashok Dhikar has been instrumental in propagating the idea of "Samvaad" in his own region. By attending Samvaad, he initiated editions of Samvaad (Anand Melava) for children in his area. 250 children attend this program for 5 days, which fosters practice of story-telling, sharing agricultural practices etc. The platform is hosted under the ownership of the panchayat.



Neidonuo Angami, Nagaland

Neidonuo Angami is an Indian social worker and one of the founders of the Naga Mother's Association, a non-governmental organisation, working to address the social problems in Nagaland, India. She is reported to have been selected as one of the 1,000 women shortlisted for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2005. She was honoured by the Government of India, in 2000, with the fourth highest Indian civilian award of Padma Shri.