

tata steel tribal leadership programme — 2018

# first among equals



Samvaad - A Tribal Conclave

Organised by Tata Steel







a **small body of determined spirits fired  
by an unquenchable faith in their mission  
can alter the course of history.**

**mohandas karamchand gandhi**  
**(1869 - 1948)**



Samvaad - A Tribal Conclave

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# a change whose time has come

sourav roy, chief of csr

■  
**21**  
states

**It is a fact.**

The tracts of our country that face the most acute developmental challenges, and, at the same time, bear the greatest burden of our developmental excesses, are regions where our indigenous people live. Consider it against the global discourse on sustainability, which is all about going back to a more organic and empathetic world — a quest for the tribal way of life in no uncertain terms; the richness of its nature-oriented knowledge and life systems.

It is only apt then that the voices of change that define the future of our country emanate strongly from our tribal populations, but not emerge from a position of anger or vulnerability. With this context in mind, we have embarked on the journey of the Tribal Leadership Programme (TLP).

TLP, now in its second year, harnesses the voices of emerging indigenous leaders from every corner of India, who wish to make a positive difference in terms of issues they feel closest to, and guide them towards what they believe to be the ideal conclusions.

The attempt is to collectively inculcate and incubate values and concepts that

■  
**58**  
tribes

find inspiration in humble and rooted indigenous traditions.

We are amazed to see that TLP has moved beyond the realm of discussion; our young leaders have come together, organically and region-agnostically, to focus on critical issues, such as malnutrition, forest rights and livelihoods. We have learnt so much from their perspectives, some of which we have presented in this book.

Tata Steel has over a hundred years of shared context with tribal communities; it sees a clear strand of kinship and common belief in tribalism. We are concentrating on tribal identity as a leitmotif, and rolling it out through TLP, and Samvaad, which is an entire ecosystem of programmes culminating in an all-India tribal conclave in Jamshedpur every year.

We do not have the next year in mind. We do not even have the next five years in mind. We are looking 15 to 20 years from now, at a bold transformation in the voice of tribalism, and how best we can play our part in it. ■

■  
**92**  
participants

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

**rob siltanen**

Founder and Chief Creative Officer  
of advertising agency  
Siltanen and Partners



**we are  
a brave,  
new world**



# leaving **my veil behind,** **i walked** **a road** **less taken**

What would I have done without my sisters? The friendship between women is a special thing. We nurture each other, share our lives and help the one who is in trouble.

Women of the Bhabra tribe in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, traditionally, stayed under the veil and inside the home. Change has slowly arrived.

I am not educated, I barely went to school for a couple of years. I was so shy and withdrawn, if someone knocked on the door when I was alone, I would leave from the back door. Over the years, with the encouragement of my husband, and Archana Singh of the Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), a civil society organisation that focuses on grassroots development with disadvantaged women, I began to attend public meetings. Then, I started to address gatherings on social issues, became member of village committees, learned to organise people and even manage finances.

The first time I spoke to the District Collector, I was a nervous wreck. But the villagers supported me. I told him we had no water for irrigation; that we must build small mud channels. The administration responded immediately and we could bring river water to our fields.

This success spurred me to think about the development of my village, how women can be a part of it. Women spend so much time working on the land. Yet, the land is not in our names. We formed groups and took up focus areas. We trained ourselves to survey lands and assess what kinds of structures are viable.

Under our social initiative, the Rani Durgavati Federation, which has over 400 members, we have built irrigation channels for farms. We have established a school and built a nice road. We also raise awareness about health and sanitation, and construct bathrooms and toilets for the community.

One of our key initiatives is a poultry business, Rani Durgavati Murgipalak Samiti (RDMS). In 2006, we started with 15 members and a government grant of ₹28,000. This was not enough to buy hatchlings and feed. Archana Singh helped us again. She gave us ₹1 lakh from her personal funds. It was our first business venture. We made mistakes and almost lost our capital. We were also not able to grow beyond a point. On the brink of closure, we decided to take another government loan. After a long struggle, we finally broke even and began to expand.

Today we are 450 sisters working together. We have a self-sufficient business. We have our own chicken-feed production unit. We have collaborated with a market leader in processed poultry products, Venky's.

Our growth has been phenomenal. Our turnover for the last financial year was over ₹12 crore.

**chandrakali marakam**

bhabra tribe, madhya pradesh

**deputy chairperson, rani  
durgavati murgipalak samiti**

We have bank accounts, we save money, each of us has independent financial resources. Our group meets regularly to plan budgets and expenditures in collaboration with the village council and the district administration.

Women are not just daughters and daughters-in-law, with nothing to their name and no ability. Every village we have worked for has benefited. My sisters and I have earned the respect of people. We can say with pride that we have arrived. ■

Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them,  
They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

**maya angelou (1928 - 2014)**

American poet, singer, memoirist,  
and civil rights activist



# losing my language is like losing life itself

The paddy is swaying, the grains showing,  
The wind is blowing, the birds flying.  
Listen, in your field is a Mahua tree,  
Mynas and parrots sit there, see?  
Don't hit them with a stone!  
Hit them, they'll trouble you more,  
Take nectar from the flower of your Mahua tree,  
A drop in their name and you'll be free!

This is a Bhili song about building relationships. In the harvest season, we sing it during all-night sessions of storytelling and performances. These traditions hold in them our cultural and linguistic legacy.

Most adivasis, who go through mainstream schooling, are taught to think that the official language of the state is their mother tongue. Children from tribes in Gujarat say their mother tongue is Gujarati because at school that is the language of instruction. What we speak at home is not considered equal to what we are taught in school. This is how much the indigenous people are looked down upon.

If you cause us to forget our language, you will wipe out all the ancient learning and wisdom contained in our songs, our folklore; everything we know about symbiotic life with nature, our sustainable practices, our stories, mythology, history; all of this will be gone.

In 2007, I began to work with the BHASHA Research and Publication Centre, created with the purpose of giving 'voice' to tribal communities. My work focused on the creation of multilingual learning materials for tribal school children in their languages. It was a very difficult project and many of my colleagues left the organisation after two-three years. Eight years into it, the founder of BHASHA resigned. We were in a quandary.

I wanted to continue the work. That was when some tribal professors came forward; they too wanted to only work on tribal languages and literature. We began.

The Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters, is dedicated to the recognition and promotion of the country's literature in its languages. Taking inspiration, yet breaking away, in 2013, we established the Adivasi (Indigenous / Tribal) Sahitya Akademi to promote and recognise tribal writings and languages. It had been a dream of mine for a long time and it has come true.

At the Akademi, we rigorously document oral, and thereby nearly extinct, tribal literature, not just of the Bhils or Gonds of Gujarat, but of all tribes. We also archive all kinds of literary and linguistic information related to tribal cultures.

Our biggest feat so far been the creation of learning materials, in multiple tribal languages, for children in standards 1, 2 and 3.

**jitendra vasava**  
bhil tribe, gujarat  
**founder,**  
**adivasi sahitya akademi**

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), that sets the academic syllabus and teaching framework for schools, has taken cognisance of our work. The officials have decided to support our cause; they too feel tribal children, at the primary level, must learn in their own languages. We are very encouraged and are planning to connect with similar organisations countrywide to take this initiative forward.

I think of language as a seed, a seed that contains the potential of a magnificent tree. It also contains the wisdom of the Earth. Given the fractured state of our world, we need these indigenous seeds for our revival. ■

If you talk to a man in a language he understands,  
that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his  
language, that goes to his heart.

**nelson mandela (1918 - 2013)**  
President of South Africa (1994 - 1999),  
Nobel Laureate for Peace (1993),  
and anti-apartheid revolutionary





# from **within us, the revolution will begin and grow**

I was in my second year of graduation when I began to work on human rights violations against tribal women who live in nondescript hamlets and villages. Interning with the Women's Helpline and the Adivasi Women's Network, I learnt how dark the road was. At home, most women face domestic violence. Outside, middlemen lure them with job offers and sell them in big cities. Job agencies place them as domestic help in cities; bound by a term, with no money to return, many of them face unimaginable torture.

A girl from a nearby village, who I knew, was sold in Dubai. We couldn't trace her for a few years. This February, she managed to contact me. I told her, 'Your home is here, your land is here. Please come back!' She was rescued and brought to the village. But, she felt lost and wanted to be engaged in some work. In that village, tomato grows in great abundance and is available for one-fifth the market rate. With the assistance of an NGO, I helped her network with a few village women and start a small unit that produces ketchup, sauce, puree, and other variations. Within six months, they are thriving. It just takes a little bit of imagination and application to find a way out, even when you think all doors are shut.

When I was working with the NGO, Society for Participatory Action and Reflection (SPAR), in the Saranda forest area, I experienced the deep divide between city-based tribals and those who live in remote villages. Not only are rural tribals economically and socially marginalised, they are invisible to the political powers; they have no say in the plans and policies that affect their lives directly.

Living and growing up in Ranchi city, I was a tribal on paper; I had a certificate from the government that categorised me so. Finally, I was waking up to the reality of tribal India.

As I continued my work on poverty alleviation and upgradation of rural health systems, I began to meet young men and women, who, like me, were looking for a platform to work as a collective on tribal issues. In 2015, we formed the Jharkhand Bachao Andolan Manch (JBAM).

In 2016, our organisation challenged the new Domicile Policy of the Jharkhand Government. The policy laid down the following as criterion for people to be considered local inhabitants and worthy of government jobs:

1. Those living in Jharkhand since or before 1985,
2. Those who hold constitutional posts or government jobs, and their families,
3. Those who have land records dating back to 1932,
4. Those who were born in the state and have passed Standard X,
5. And, landless farmers and labourers identified by village heads on the basis of cultural and traditional ties.

Jharkhand is the most mineral-rich state of India. As it industrialised, more and more people migrated and settled in our cities and towns. It upset the demographics. In 1951,

**deepa minz**

oraon tribe, jharkhand

**chairperson, jharkhand  
bachao andolan manch**

tribals were two-thirds of the population. Now we are barely one-fourth, pushed out of 'developed' areas, rendered landless and pitted in terms of job opportunities against people who have barely lived here a few decades.

We, at JBAM, travelled to many villages informing people about the pros and cons of the new policy. These villagers began to connect with us and we began to get involved in their lives. We helped a Self-Help Group revitalise their government-run school and crèche. We helped another group grow and market mushrooms. We rescued many girls who had been trafficked.

Every small step we take is a step towards assertion. We continue to fight for fairness in the Domicile Policy, accessible healthcare, quality education and livelihood opportunities. Without these, we will remain poor and powerless. Let's keep the social revolution alive. ■

Every human has four endowments — self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change.

**stephen covey (1932 - 2012)**

American educator,  
author and businessman



# growing up in scarcity, i can touch the pain of hunger

I know hunger. I know how helpless it can turn a man.

June 1997. I was in Standard VIII. Ethnic violence had broken out between the Paite and the Thadou Kuki tribes. (The conflict lasted over a year, destroyed 50 villages and displaced 10,000.) Our Churachandpur town would be shut for days on end. I remember coming back home from a football game after school, ravenous. There was no food at home and my parents were too scared to venture out into the market area to buy supplies. I was so angry. I told my mother she shouldn't have given me birth if she couldn't even feed me!

That day I realised how remote Churachandpur is and how critical food shortage could be in conflict-affected areas. I promised myself that I would leave for the city and receive a good education so that I can do something to alleviate the suffering of my people.

After I finished school, I convinced my parents to sell a piece of land. With the money we raised, I went to Shillong for my graduation. Thereafter, I completed my post-graduation via correspondence from the Indian Institute of Human Rights, Delhi.

I came back from Shillong and started the Northeast FoodBanking Network. Our organisation assuages hunger by soliciting, collecting, packaging and growing food, which we distribute through a network of service agencies.

The raison d'être of our intervention derives itself from two large gaps. One, there are many Non-Governmental Organisations in this region that work on education, health, and community development. None of them focus on food security. Two, after disasters strike remote locations, the government organises surveys and collects data efficiently. But, its mechanisms take too long to reach food and water.

We play the role of the first responders in times of floods, landslides and earthquakes. We also respond to calls for food from orphanages, widowed and aged women with no sources of income and HIV patients. There is no criterion actually; we go with food to anyone who calls us.

We are unique in that we don't have investors or sponsors. We run on community support with the help of 34 active volunteers. We regularly receive donations of foodgrains and other supplies from individuals. In times of crises, we run social media campaigns to mobilise the community and raise relief materials.

If we truly have to make ourselves food secure, we have to strengthen agriculture. All of us own fertile land, but none of us have upgraded farming techniques. Providing ready food is only a temporary solution.

So, we are bringing in modernised farming, to create sustainable and organic agriculture practices that will result

**khams zotal**  
zou tribe, manipur  
**founder, northeast  
foodbanking network**

in higher yields. With skilling and technology, farmers can easily increase productivity.

I am looking at that long-term solution that will help initiatives like ours receive larger donations and buffer stocks so that we can better attend to natural disasters that our region is prone to and tectonically will always be. ■

I went to the bed hungry many a nights as a child. It was a Dream that dressed me up when I was ragged, and it was a Dream that filled me up when I was hungry. Now it's my Dream to see that no child in this world ever goes hungry, certainly not here in America, the most bountiful country in the world. We can do better... we must!

**dolly parton**

Singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, actress, author, businesswoman, and philanthropist



# i am unknown and unseen in my own india

I was a college fresher when I chanced upon Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe. It is an autobiographical account by social activist A. R. Foning of the sociocultural decline of our centuries-old tribe. He didn't mean we are dying out in numbers; he said our culture is dying. His words were epiphanic.

Couple of months later, when I had to wear the traditional Lepcha dress for an event, I didn't know how to drape it. It made me take a close look at myself. What makes me a Lepcha? In what ways do I belong to my community? What do I do for my people?

The culture of any people needs protection, promotion and preservation. It is a repository of our values and principles that guide us through life. It provides us with an identity, a sense of community.

The Lepchas have been plagued by economic adversities. It is difficult to network with businesses in mainstream India because our hilly terrain allows no train or flight connectivity. We are an agrarian community and agriculture has been our only strength for a very long time. Black cardamom was an important crop for us; profitable. But the crops began to fail and there was no market left. Most of the community is literate, but it wasn't enough for us to sustain ourselves.

Our land is rich with diverse flora and fauna. Some parts of it have been declared World Heritage sites. People all over the world are interested in our history and topography. So, the Sikkim Government began to promote tourism. Many Lepchas have since moved into the profitable business of home stays.

The Government also declared Sikkim as the first fully organic state in India in 2016. (Since 2003, over 75,000 hectares of land have been converted into certified organic farms following the guidelines as prescribed by the National Programme for Organic Production, which ensures environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and better agricultural products. The primary crops are cardamom, ginger, turmeric, off-season vegetables, flowers, Sikkim mandarin, kiwi, buckwheat, paddy, maize and millets.) This has revived some amount of interest in agriculture. Many people grow organic vegetables and make organic wine. Our economy has stabilised somewhat.

Tourism works in Sikkim because the Lepchas have protected the land by living close to it and working on it. This is something India should learn from its indigenous people: how to live in harmony with the environment. However, we require quality education opportunities and exposure to a multiplicity of options for economic advancement.

I have been working in the field of supplementary education, helping children with potential (but little means)

**premulla lepcha**  
lepcha tribe, sikkim  
**entrepreneur,  
youth leader**

find good schools. Some of these children end up attending the best schools in India with the help of the Chief Minister's Scholarship.

I work to preserve Lepcha culture because it connects us to our roots. I have modernised our traditional dress so that young women can wear it every day. I wear my Lepcha identity with pride. I wear my Indian identity with pride. Those who call me Japanese and Chinese, become aware. This country belongs as much to me as to you. ■

We should feel empowered by where we came from and who we are, not hide it. It is important to acknowledge that everything we do affects our ancestors as much as they have affected us

**lorin morgan-richards**  
American author and illustrator,  
primarily of children's literature



# my **abject poverty** **taught me** **absolute** **honesty**

You would have heard about Melghat, the place I come from. Except, you would have heard about it in one context alone: a place where an unusually high number of children die of malnutrition-related illnesses every year.

It angers me that our identity before the nation has been pigeonholed thus. The health of people in Melghat is intricately related to the systems of governance. If anything, malnutrition is a symptom of an inefficient healthcare delivery system.

The tribe I belong to, the Korkus, never step into a Primary Health Centre because they don't trust it. Our people are very poor and many of them are not educated; they remain largely cut off from the outside world. We are, in fact, apathetic in many ways. So many infrastructure schemes, health plans and social benefits that the government announces for tribal people don't reach us because we don't know of their existence. But the money goes somewhere, right?

As the new village council head, this is the first problem I have decided to tackle. Government contractors try to bribe me so that I look the other way when they construct poor-quality infrastructure. Sometimes, powerful officials pressurise me to spend on ambiguous projects. I just put my foot down and stop the work. My parents struggled so hard to educate me. They skipped meals every day, even migrated to work as daily-wage labourers. I lost a brother to poverty. I don't fear having less, but I won't support those who steal from the poor.

When a development, health or education project appears questionable, I call a meeting of the entire community. I ask the officers from the concerned government department to discuss everything transparently with us.

The first community governance meeting we conducted was about education. All the village health workers, teachers, crèche workers and government officers were present. I made them sit on one side and the villagers on the other. I told the village council that we would only intervene as mediators; no more, no less.

One after the other, the villagers came up and stated their problems. The teacher doesn't come to school. The students are not served the compulsory mid-day meal. The children's health worker does not monitor their weight and height as is compulsory for children between 0 and 6 years. It was a long list.

Then, the 'accused' stood before the congregation and narrated their side of the story. Believe it or not, after having heard the woes and the troubles of the villagers, something shifted in their hearts. Most of them profusely apologised and promised to return to work with integrity.

The meeting went on for seven hours. The discussion was

**kalu betekar**

korku tribe, maharashtra

**sarpanch, hatru panchayat,  
amravati distict**

solution-oriented. And people had taken the lead. It was an experiment to bring about a peaceful resolution, and it succeeded.

To honestly listen and discuss issues is very important for any community. We use this tool in our meetings to raise awareness, educate villagers about their rights and how they can build accountability in the system. Some day, this will lead to our upliftment. ■

Let no pleasure tempt thee, no profit allure thee,  
no persuasion move thee, to do anything which  
thou knowest to be evil; so shalt thou always live  
jollity; for a good conscience is a continual  
Christmas.

**benjamin franklin (1706 - 1790)**

Founding Father of the United States  
Polymath, scientist, author, political theorist,  
and politician





# we fought guns with peace and power of enterprise

Fear is poison; it cripples your soul. We have been terrorised for decades. It has held us back in so many ways, especially our women.

Ours is a traditional farming community. We live in a mountainous terrain. Maoist insurgents have held sway over this region for a long time. They live undercover in our hills and forests and run their operations. People are afraid of them.

Maoists sustain their insurgency against the government in the name of underdevelopment and backwardness in tribal India. Even though they have become extortionists, smugglers and oppressors with time, on the face of it, they are still fighting against our political, social and economic marginalisation. They won't survive if we are not 'marginalised'.

When some of us women formed a Self-Help Group (SHG) to upgrade and expand agricultural activities with advanced methods, they arrived at our doorsteps. They threatened to kill us all if we continued. The men stopped working altogether. They had sowed the seeds, but were too scared to harvest the crop. It was an impasse.

We, the women's group, decided to challenge the insurgents and returned to work. The men joined us later. The Maoists left a note outside my door, telling me I will be punished severely for my disobedience. We didn't stop.

That year, we harvested a good Kharif (monsoon) crop and wanted to sow a Rabi (summer) crop as well. But irrigation water was short in supply. We realised we needed to create rainwater harvesting infrastructure. So, our SHG joined the Tata Steel Rural Development Society and we learnt how to build ponds and reservoirs.

Today, we have 53 ponds across our cluster of villages. We also breed fish and rear ducks. We work with 300 hundred farmers on fish breeding and 50 on duck rearing. We have partnered with a local Non-Governmental Organisation to work with 3,000 families on animal husbandry and other livelihoods. My group and I analyse their needs and necessities and plan ahead in a way that every family is assured a minimum income of ₹1.2 lakh every year.

Nearby is a village called Jeean, a Maoist stronghold. To counter insurgency, the police administration symbolically adopted the village. But to succeed peacefully, they needed the villagers on their side. Jeean faced an acute water shortage. So the police asked us to build the village three reservoirs.

Now, our model of development requires us to collect some financial contribution from the community. The police thought it was counter-intuitive to ask villagers in a Maoist bastion to pitch in. But I thought it was imperative. That is the only way they would own their progress; if they got it for

**akli tudu**

mahli tribe, jharkhand

**founder, jumid tirla gawnta  
(ekta mahila samiti)**

free they wouldn't take responsibility for it. Once we explained everything to them, the villagers not only contributed money, they also supported the work. The Maoists had to bow out.

The Maoist threats continue, but their influence has waned. Entire villages and the local administration saw how we women got together and beat fear. We are leaders in our villages. It has taken time, but we have won. ■

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along!'

**eleanor roosevelt (1884 - 1962)**

The First Lady of the United States (1933 - 1945)  
Political figure, diplomat and activist



# why shouldn't village jobs be modern or inventive?

The city is the biggest danger to my community. Young people from the Bhilala tribe migrate to urban centres in droves. They want to dress and live and work like the city folk. While I understand their desire for a better life, it breaks my heart to see them ashamed of their history. They adopt the attitude of the mainstream; they think village people are useless, backward. They shed their past, even their names. The city of Bhopal is just 25 kilometres from my village, Kekadiya. The youth leave us, even if they have to work as truck and cab drivers.

The Bhilala tribe was born out of the marriage between the Rajputs and the women of the Bhil tribe. We have a distinct identity from the Bhils; different language, different customs, different culture.

Disturbed by the continuous exodus, I decided to create promising jobs for qualified youngsters in the village itself, so they can live in the modern world, yet not lose their historical identity. I wanted to offer something that would fit their aspirations. They clearly do not want to work as farmers on their ancestral lands. So, with the advice and guidance of the Non-Government Organisation Abhedya, which works in the fields of education, livelihood, water management and governance, to bridge the rural-urban gap, we decided to launch an infotech company.

We founded Willage Quest. We trained a group of Bhilala youth, graduates and postgraduates, for a month or two, in e-book and e-form creation, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), which is the standard template for creating web pages and web applications, and computer programming languages.

Today, we receive IT-related projects from multinational companies based in Delhi, Bangalore, Indore and the USA. We work out of nearby colleges so we have continuous access to electricity and Internet facilities. These companies give us work because we always complete the projects well in time. Tribal people have great concentration and patience. They can work three days straight with minimal breaks if the deadline demands it. They are also sincere and trustworthy. Our clients always return to us; sometimes we have to keep them waiting.

However, because our company is small, we are allotted work in instalments. This allows the team to work as and when projects arrive. When the computers are free, any villager can use them.

Bhilalas own the company. Bhilalas run the company. Bhilalas will expand the company.

Right now our projects are basic, but we are growing. In the future, we hope to diversify into web design and artificial intelligence applications in the agriculture sector. We want our youth to return to farming, modernised farming that they can feel proud of.

**kanhaiya ningwal**

bhilala tribe, madhya pradesh  
**founder,  
willage quest**

We have faced a lot of hurdles, but we have worked very hard and are seeing some success. To scale up, we have begun to train more people. There is growing interest in what we do among district-level authorities and private companies. Profit-making is not our primary motive. We want the venture to be sustainable and strengthen our community. ■

One of the newest figures to emerge on the world stage in recent years is the social entrepreneur. This is usually someone who burns with desire to make a positive social impact on the world, but believes that the best way of doing it is, as the saying goes, not by giving poor people a fish and feeding them for a day, but by teaching them to fish, in hopes of feeding them for a lifetime. I have come to know several social entrepreneurs in recent years, and most combine a business school brain with a social worker's heart. The triple convergence and the flattening of the world have been a godsend for them. Those who get it and are adapting to it have begun launching some very innovative projects.

**thomas l. friedman**

American journalist, author of *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, and three-time Pulitzer Prize winner



# crushed, humiliated, i resolved to **fight** for all women

I married at 17, became a mother at 18 and a divorcee at 22.

I was brought up to cook, clean and remain as invisible as possible. Our boys are educated, but girls are not even sent to primary school. When I begged and pleaded with my family, I was allowed to go on one condition: I would never participate in any extracurricular activities. I was brought up to submit to everyone and owe nothing to myself.

After marriage, I found out that my husband had run up a huge debt. His family pressurised my father to repay it. Then he started cheating on me and was not even apologetic about it. When I took the matter to the village council, my mother-in-law said to me in front of everyone, 'He is a man. He can be with any number of women he wants to. We give you enough food to eat. We give you a place to stay. What are you complaining about?' I was shocked. To them, I was even less important than cattle. To them, I was ungrateful. I wanted out. The village elders decided I could not keep my child.

When I went back home, my mother said I didn't try hard enough to save the marriage. But, I had decided not to suffer in indignity. I divorced my husband with my father's support. The whole experience took a heavy toll on me. I went into depression. I shut myself indoors for months, refusing to interact with the world.

Around that time, the Swayamsiddha Mahila Utkarsha Foundation, which empowers women through training in self-defense, was enrolling. My father and his friend, worried about my mental state, forced me to sign up. The camp offered judo, stick fighting, taekwondo, yoga and karate. I chose judo. The training turned out to be a great outlet for my piled-up rage, anguish and frustration.

I had no women students to practice with. So, I practiced with male peers. People from our community made a big deal of it, called me names. It was so hurtful, but I never shed a tear. In the end, I excelled. I finished the 17-month course in nine months.

Now, I am a judo instructor for girls in residential tribal schools. Sexual harassment and abuse are common in these institutions. Earlier men used to be self-defence trainers. But around the time I started, a new Government Resolution mandated that girls be trained only by women.

I teach them not to suffer in silence, not to take abuse lying down, be firm with men, know the difference between good touch and bad touch. I tell them, 'Do not be frightened, even if the violator is a family member; say no. Don't be shy in public places. Convince your families to let you go out and support you to follow your dreams. Study hard. Get married, but not too early.' I don't train them to respond to situations with violence; I teach them self-defense. There is a huge difference between the two.

**varsha rahase**

bhil tribe, maharashtra

**judo trainer, swayamsiddha  
mahila utkarsha foundation**

An alcoholic male teacher in one school was harassing some of my students. One day, when he tried to break into their hostel room, they gave him a good beating. He was suspended. In a similar case, another group of girls installed a camera and filmed the teacher entering their room. He too was punished.

We all have to fight, big battles and small. We don't need to pick up a gun. But, we must definitely know how to protect ourselves if we are facing one. ■

I am a black woman  
tall as a cypress  
strong  
beyond all definition still  
defying place  
and time  
and circumstance  
assailed  
impervious  
indestructible  
Look  
on me and be  
renewed

**mari evans (1919 - 2017)**

African-American poet, writer, and dramatist  
associated with the Black Arts Movement



# we **must stay deeply connected to earth's breath**

I've always pondered. Who am I? How much does my being indigenous matter in this country? Does being a tribal separate me from other Indians?

I am part of a civilisation that existed before the idea of India, before our relationship with nature changed, before religion divided people. Our way of life is ancient and deeply enmeshed with the breath of the planet.

We honour the intricate relationship between all sentient beings. The Earth makes it possible for us to grow our food. That's the principle of *Cunserrri*. We worship the grain and the land. It's 'voiceless' creatures — animals, birds, trees and many extraordinary beings; we respect and protect them. We hunt to feed ourselves. We never kill for sport. That's the rule of *Gautari*.

We also recognise how deeply the wellbeing of an individual is dependent on her or his connection to others. Togetherness in work and play is crucial to our sense of self.

We thought our education system brought out the best in us. It is not so, anymore. We study for a certificate and then stand in the line with that certificate for a job. We gain no insights into how to live for others as much for oneself. Where do centuries of indigenous and non-indigenous wisdom, knowledge and life skills find space in our education?

Change is inevitable and we must welcome it. But we also must question change. How will we retain our relationship with Mother Nature and continue to live in a world that is driven by profiteering? The answer lies in finding humane ways to live and work. When humanity is at the centre of problem-solving, we begin to see things holistically.

Humanity is the key to understand the relationship between the Self and the Other. The same blood flows in all our veins. We all need a mountain, but to exhaust all of it in one day can only serve a few. When we teach a forest-dweller to read and write, but rid him of his fishing skills, it endangers his survival. When tribes adopt new customs to conform to the mainstream, it erodes community living. Spending thousands on a DJ for a wedding night lands you in debt. It disrupts the laws of sustainability.

Many people in my tribe are painters. We are the creators of the famous Warli art. The form originated around 3000 BC. It is wall 'graffiti', common in our homes and community structures — detailed geometric patterns of flowers, wedding rituals, hunting scenes and everyday activities.

Warli is very popular these days, but since the line drawings are simple, they are easily replicated. Warli paintings are screen printed on a large scale and embossed on lifestyle products for huge profits. But, the painters who create the original designs get no share in the profits.

**dr. sunil parhad**  
warli tribe, maharashtra  
**health professional,**  
**social activist**

We have created the Adivasi Yuva Shakti (Ayush) to organise all the artists. In 2014, after a protracted battle, we finally won the Intellectual Property Rights to the art form. Ayush was granted the status of proprietor of the Geographical Indications (GI) of Warli. Today, we hold the propriety of its use in books, stationery, decorative items, clothes, linen and furniture. We have got our due with a peaceful and humane approach.

Humanity is the foundational principle of our work, be it related to developmental rights, natural resources, education, or health. ■

When a tradition gathers enough strength to go on for centuries, you don't just turn it off one day.

**chinua achebe (1958 - 2012)**

Man Booker International Prize winner in 2007  
Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic





# local **livelihoods and farm-based trade need a big push**

The biggest issue in tribal Nagaland is the disagreement and feud that angrily pulsates between one tribe and the other; a lack of unity that thwarts our collective development. Ninety-nine per cent conflicts occur because of our egos and misplaced pride.

I could have stayed back in Delhi, where my parents sent me to study, even settled there. But I came back to learn more about my people, connect with them at the grassroots level. I enrolled to the North East Institute of Social Science and Research for a post graduation in Social Work.

After a while, for internships, I was placed in government offices. During these brief stints, I saw the deep-rooted corruption in the system.

So, when I decided to become an entrepreneur, I chose a social business model, which won't consider money-making as its guiding principle.

When I had to decide on the business, I chose to create the critical link that is missing between small producers and the big markets. Otherwise, middlemen indulge in profiteering, at the cost of making farming unsustainable in general, and hurting small farmers in particular.

I am a farmer's daughter. I know the barriers. So, I figured out a solution.

We run a website called Cold Barn, on which we sell local farm produce, seasonal vegetables, and fruits and spices that are specialties of Nagaland, such as kiwi, turmeric and bamboo shoot. Our virtual shop window throws up a lot of variations. Hand-stitched shoes. Hand-woven or embroidered shawls and stoles. The earrings I am wearing have been created by a talented designer. Arts. Crafts. Organic teas. And pickles — ginger, wild eggplant, prawn, tasu, fermented soya bean — and, of course, our top sell, Naga king chilli.

Ours is a young enterprise; we are in our tenth month of operation. Till now, we have been able to promote about 40 entrepreneurs. We are positive about the strength of our idea and the potential it holds for all the stakeholders.

The decision to start Cold Barn is way beyond my pride in my indigenoussness and my desire to exhibit before the world Nagaland's crafts and culture. I did it to create an economic channel for us in the mainstream.

I also did it because I firmly believe social entrepreneurship is a good way to bring about change. It offers us a clean slate to work on. Our team hasn't restricted the portal to our Ao tribe; any tribal entrepreneur of the state can sell on it. This can be a small way to improve the poor dynamics between different tribes of Nagaland.

Of course, we want our culture to be recognised globally.

**limasenla jamir**  
ao tribe, nagaland  
**social entrepreneur**  
**co-founder, cold barn**

Selling our art and products is one way of doing so. We have started to export with the help of tie-ups with shipping companies. We are always looking out for reliable distribution channels. We are also in talks with Universal Tribes. It is India's first B2B e-commerce platform for tribal arts and crafts.

How did I connect with them? Well, I met its founder Rajat Raghatwan at the Tribal Leadership Programme! ■

What made traditional economies so radically different and so very fundamentally dangerous to Western economies were the traditional principles of prosperity of creation versus scarcity of resources, of sharing and distribution versus accumulation and greed, of kinship usage rights versus individual exclusive ownership rights, and of sustainability versus growth.

**rebecca adamson**  
American Cherokee businessperson and  
indigenous rights advocate



# let **down by partisan politics,** **i built an alternative**

Politics has destroyed my state. The Tripuri society is in shambles. Our indigenous identity is at stake.

We were a peaceful, agrarian people of an independent princely state, ruled by Tripuri kings. In 1949, after the death of the last ruling King, Bir Bikram Kishore Debbarman, Tripura's sovereignty was threatened from all directions. Left with no choice, it merged with India. We survived that transition. But, in 1971, everything changed forever. The Bangladesh War, in which India helped Bangladesh wrest freedom from Pakistan, created millions of refugees. They came into India via border states like ours, and continue to come, even 47 years later, in search of economic opportunities. We have become a minority in our own land.

Thus cornered, our youth demanded separate statehood for tribals, who constitute one-thirds of Tripura's population and occupy two-thirds of the Tripura's territory. Ironically, those who led the agitation and gave our youth guns to fight for the cause, have abandoned it for political gains.

Now, political parties force their ideologies on us, which are not in sync with tribal philosophies. They also manipulate and use our separatist youth to win elections at gunpoint. About 550 years ago, our ruler married a Hindu princess from Gwalior and we accepted Hinduism. Many of us have also converted to Christianity. Our belief in spiritualism, related to animism, continues to live, but in a dwarfed form. Modern schools and colleges were built in 1949. But they function as fiefdoms of those who have political clout. In tribal villages, schools have two teachers where they need five. In the cities, they have 60 teachers where they need only 30.

It took us until 2012 to introduce our mother tongue, Kokborok in colleges. 23 colleges in Tripura offer one elective subject in Kokborok. Schools still do not use it as a medium of instruction. The quality of education remains poor because we are taught in languages that are alien to us.

Looking within, I find us superstitious and averse to change. Those of us in government jobs have become corrupt. The globalised world has made available to us smart phones and social media, which should connect us to the world at large, but we remain clannish.

I wanted to work for my people and I thought joining politics would be a good way to transform our society. Over the years, however, I saw how political parties duped voters by promising them a better life; once elections were over, they turned their backs.

In 2017, disappointed with the lack of just leadership in big political parties, I, with like-minded tribal youth, floated the Twipra Dophani Sikla Srwngnai Mothra (TDSSM) Party.

**david murasing**  
murasing tribe, tripura  
**founder, tdssm**  
**(tribal youth organisation)**

While we are fighting against illegal immigrants, our core demands are that Kokborok be introduced in schools, and infrastructural development be brought to tribal villages without any delay. Our ground water levels are high, yet there are no water supply facilities in most villages. There are no functioning schools, no quality healthcare centres.

No institution truly works for the people of Tripura. All of them are mired in corruption and self-interest. The youth of Tripura have always had to resort to guns to negotiate with the government for their rights.

How can I even begin to help the country or the world if I cannot help the people I have grown up with? ■

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy!

**john adams (1735 - 1826)**  
Founding Father of the United States  
and its second President (1797 - 1801)



# education without relevance is no education

We are a small community, up in the remote Himalayas. During winter, as snow closes the mountain passes, we are cut off from everything and everyone for six months. We survive on potatoes, pulses and green vegetables that we harvest and dry during summer. Perhaps it is this isolation that makes us a silent people. We are not loud and we are very shy.

This geographical isolation aside, we are also politically isolated. We are part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Because of the protracted territorial conflict and associated militancy in the valley, Kashmir receives all the developmental and budgetary attention. Then comes Jammu. Ladakh is always the last on the list. Even something as basic as roads come to Ladakh not for us; the Army needs to be connected to strategic border locations.

There are no earmarked governmental educational funds for Ladakhi tribes. There are common funds, but they go to other students in other parts of the state. When I finished school, I wanted to go out for higher education. My father is a poor farmer. He didn't have the money. I would call education offices for help, but they were not interested in the future of a Ladakhi tribal girl. I was lucky because a Member of Parliament helped out. He sent me and 22 other tribal girls to study in the Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bengaluru. We were placed in seats reserved for the children of parliamentarians and army people.

We grow up marooned, feeling invisible. So, when we first step out into mainstream India, it's difficult to connect with it. Everywhere I went, I was deemed either Chinese or Tibetan and, definitely, stupid. A class teacher shamed me because I am a farmer's daughter. Nobody accepted me. Nobody respected me. Not till I went to Mumbai to study at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. There, people are different. They listened to me, they gave me space, they gave me friendship and they gave me respect.

The openness of the education system made me question what I had learnt in school and college. I realised my education only prepared me to get a job. I remember, in school I memorised everything, even mathematics. My books referred to trains. We don't have any in Ladakh. My books referred to festivals and fruits and clothes I had no idea existed except on paper. I never learned to think for myself. School education gave me no understanding of my abilities, entrepreneurial or creative.

At the same time, my education outside Ladakh has alienated me from my community, my traditional occupation of farming, history and culture. I neither belong in Ladakh nor elsewhere.

So, I have decided to bring alternative classrooms to Ladakhi tribal children, which will teach them to think and innovate independently.

**dechen dolker**

bhot tribe, jammu and kashmir  
**education activist,  
peacebuilder**

They will become self-driven individuals who can hold their own, rather than invisible job-seekers.

First, I must see my country and its people. I have seen Karnataka. I have travelled and lived in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. I have worked briefly in Bihar. Currently, I am a volunteer with the Initiatives of Change, a non-profit peace-building initiative, travelling across India.

On the road, I am rediscovering myself. I am not just a drop in the ocean but I am the entire ocean in a drop. I am the change. It all starts with me. ■

Humans aren't as good as we should be in our capacity to empathise with feelings and thoughts of others, be they humans or other animals on Earth. So maybe part of our formal education should be training in empathy. Imagine how different the world would be if, in fact, that were 'reading, writing, arithmetic, empathy.'

**neil degrasse tyson**

American astrophysicist, author,  
and science communicator

Frederick P. Rose Director, Hayden Planetarium,  
Rose Center for Earth and Space, New York City



**power  
of positive  
defiance**





# we can work for them, but we can never be them

What is tribal leadership?

If you look at the societal changes facing indigenous tribal communities, they need to be mobilised. Who will create this mobilisation? Till now, we thought people like me would do it. That thought is fundamentally flawed. However much we sympathise, understand and empathise with this population, we can never be them. What they have gone through is so unique, we can at best narrate it, but we cannot live it.

We have never understood them. We have systematically dismantled everything indigenous. Traditional wisdom is looked down upon. Traditional medicine is never encouraged. So, what have we done to actually facilitate this shy, reticent community to come out and express itself? Our true failure is not recognising them as people with enormous abilities, skills and knowledge. It is not just social marginalisation; it is a tremendous amount of intellectual marginalisation.

I am not romanticising. I am not saying all the solutions for the world's problems lie in indigenous wisdom, but a substantial amount could emerge from it.

Unless we engage with these communities in management of local natural resources, unless we make them part owners of the wealth that is going to emerge from it, we will abuse it. Tribal people have an interest in retaining that wealth, and not exploiting it to a point where we lose it forever. I am not even protesting the extractive industry. We need our steel, we need our oil, we need our mineral, but maybe they can help us understand how to balance extraction with real need.

Indigenous people across the world have survived thousands of years of anthropological history and civilisational onslaught. Something in their culture and way of life has made them survive. They are the positive deviants in this world today. Can we learn from the positive deviants?

Equally, the indigenous people need to understand that society cannot be limited to just 8.6% of a population. They have to think of the remaining 91.4%. This programme is an investment in tribal youth to contemplate and understand that they also need to belong to the larger world, share the concepts and visions of what they can do and what they need to accomplish. That is true inter-connectedness, to understand that the whole world needs you; that is true leadership. ■

**dr. r. balasubramaniam**  
development scholar,  
**founder, grassroots research  
and advocacy movement**

dr. balu is a development activist, social innovator, writer and leadership trainer. He is a medical doctor by training, with a specialisation in Public Administration from Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA). He is the founder and chairman of the Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement (GRAAM), a public policy research organisation that believes in development through advocacy.

Inspired by the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda, he founded the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement at the age of 19. Then, he went on to work with the displaced and dispossessed forest-based tribes in H. D. Kote Taluk of Mysore District for 25 years.

He is a Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor at Cornell University (Ithaca, New York, USA).

There is not one big cosmic meaning for all; there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, an individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each person.

**anaïs nin (1903 - 1977)**  
French-american diarist,  
essayist, novelist and writer



# we are rulers of our village and makers of our destiny

We can talk endlessly about the power of community governance in indigenous areas. But who is part of this governance? Our educated youth regularly migrate to the cities for better opportunities. Undoubtedly, cities offer better lives and better incomes. However, what if, our villages could offer the same? What if our villages could generate equally lucrative opportunities in terms of health, forest and traditional and organic farming management?

Of course, our youth should go out for higher education to the best institutes in India and the world. They must garner a broader worldview to be able to bring in a different template of development. We cannot stop them from going anywhere. We must not. But what if we fund their higher education from the community governance funds and inculcate in them values that will make them think, 'I come from this village. The villagers have educated me so that I can have a better life. Now, how can I help my community?'

So many non-profit organisations come to our villages to serve, why won't our own children, if we show them a way to return? We have begun an on-the-ground study to this effect.

Every village has given birth to some doctors, engineers, teachers and government officials. They have migrated. One out of ten may even think of his village, but he does not know how to connect or help.

In one village in Gadchiroli district, we found 50 professionals in government and private jobs. The community government called them for a day and organised a meeting with all the workers in the village — farmers, local entrepreneurs and health and social workers who don't receive any income. Each one got to know the other's struggles. Finally, those who have migrated took a decision that they will give back to the community that made them who they are, that they would return home once a year to start, grow and fund developmental activities.

Once these kinds of support structures fall into place, we can, in right earnest, work on the next step. We can create agrarian market channels directly from the villages to the big buyers, bypassing all the exploitative middlemen. Let our youth come back to our villages. The markets will come too.

Wake up. Move back to your villages in ways you can. If your village remains weak, your country will remain weak. ■

**devaji tofa**

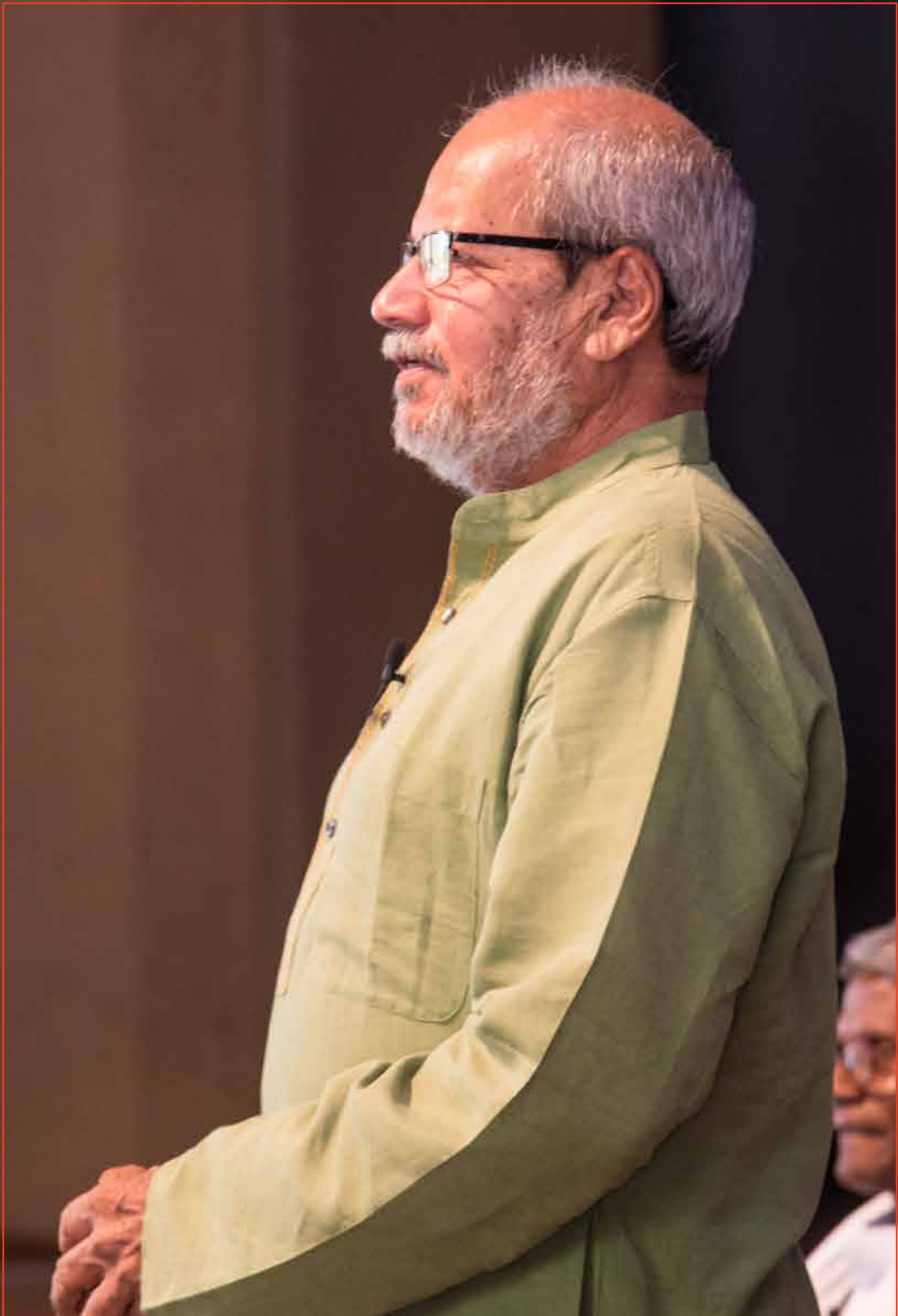
gond tribe, maharashtra  
**social entrepreneur and forest rights activist**

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. It enabled tribals 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.

Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance.

**ban ki-moon**  
Eighth Secretary-General  
of the United Nations (2007 - 2016)  
South Korean Diplomat



# great plans exist on paper, but where's the execution?

Today, tribal India is a place of fear and violence, of anxiety and destruction, of poverty and struggle. The root of the problem is their habitats. The areas where tribals live are forests. Since colonial times, they were considered trespassers; their claims to their ancestral lands were not recognised. They, who saved our natural resources for eons, were deprived of their rights to it.

Then came the much-awaited Forest Rights Act, 2006, that said, "...the forest rights on ancestral lands and their habitat were not adequately recognised in the consolidation of State forests during the colonial period as well as in independent India resulting in historical injustice to the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest-dwellers... who are integral to the very survival and sustainability of the forest ecosystems..." The Act recognised their rights to "sustainable use [of forest resources], conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance and thereby strengthening the conservation regime of the forests while ensuring livelihood and food security..."

To facilitate this, the government gave constitutional recognition to community governments or Gram Sabhas, so that they can collectively decide how to use, protect and manage forest resources. But the law remains ambiguous on critical points. It says a Gram Sabha administration will facilitate collective decisions. Except, a Gram Sabha, under the law, is a meeting of all voting members of the Gram Panchayat (Village Council). In case of tribal areas, many villages and hamlets together form a Panchayat. It is impossible for so many voters from so many villages to come together and hold a meeting and arrive at a decision. So, the food has been served, but you are not allowed to eat it. As a result, all political, social and economic benefits the tribal people should be receiving are not reaching them.

The opening of our Constitution says, 'We, the people of India...' We are a people's country; we are not a ruler's country.

The Gram Sabha unit should be so small that its people can get together when one calls out. If you want to discuss and arrive at a consensus, you have to discuss everyone's interests. The purpose of a Gram Sabha is that even the last person is heard, something the government cannot do. When the community government and its committees take decisions, if a poor, tribal woman is not agreeable to it, they will have to wait for a resolution. That gives that hitherto voiceless woman the power to be part of the democratic process. Without that, the schemes, the programmes, the decisions are bound to fail at some level.

Co-equality is everyone's birthright. ■

**mohan hirabai hiralal**  
gandhian, forest rights activist  
**convener,**  
**vrikshamitra**

mohanbhai, an active member of Jayaprakash Narayan's Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Wahini and a believer of Gandhiji-Acharya Vinoba Bhave's thesis of people's power, set up Vrikshamitra in 1984 in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra. Its objective is to take up the causes of environment, forest livelihoods and community governance.

During his search for participatory decision-making villages, he came across Mendha Lekha, where cooperation existed among the people. He guided them to make the Gram Sabha more inclusive, in other words, a model Gram Sabha.

He was awarded the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 2016 for his reformism and activism.

Unlike a drop of water, which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self.

**bhimrao ramji ambedkar (1891 - 1956)**  
Indian jurist, economist, politician  
and social reformer  
Father of the Indian constitution



# peace **is our inherent nature,** **wars are our politics**

Barring the Kashmir Valley, if you see the areas in India where people have opted for armed insurgency, it's along the tribal belt, which, due to Maoist presence, is infamously called the Red Corridor.

Where do these guns come from? They come from our hearts. If we demand something, and the government does not respond, we feel we must resort to destruction. We know we cannot win against the might of the Indian Army, yet we persist.

There was a time when, as a young man, I was also influenced by the philosophy of armed struggle. Then I began to question it. An ordinary man told me, if you want to bring about change, you have to raise the voice of non-violence higher than the cacophony of violence. The common man in tribal communities was tired after decades of violence. So, I joined like-minded forces and began to work on peacebuilding. We tell our youth that a hundred extremists couldn't be better than one good doctor, that one thousand violent minds cannot be better than one good politician.

Slowly, over the last three years, the thought-scape has changed. After the violent riots between the Bodos and 'illegal' Bangladeshi migrants in 2012, over land and opportunity rights, and then a spillover in 2014, we are witnessing a stabilisation.

While it is true that tribal people have picked up guns in anger, and it is wrong, our voices have not been heard for decades. In our country, only the poor and the marginalised talk about human rights. The national leaders don't; unless they are reacting to an unfortunate situation that has gone out of hand. If they do take human rights up as a national mandate and hear us out, violence would largely abate.

Remember what Mahatma Gandhi said. We must not react to our anger immediately; we must nurse it. We must ask ourselves why we are angry, how valid it is, who we are blaming and what we would gain by blaming them.

In the aftermath of the gang rape and subsequent death of medical intern Nirbhaya in 2012, the gang rape and murder of eight-year-old Asifa in January 2018, and the gang rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl in Surat, there were no riots. But the forceful waves of non-violent protests across the country reverberated across the world. The government had no choice but to respond with a legislation that recommends life imprisonment to death-penalty, on a case-to-case basis. People could have found and killed the perpetrators. It wouldn't have been difficult. But the voice of non-violence emerged stronger. ■

**promod bodo**

bodo tribe, assam

**president, all bodo students' union**

a **peacebuilder**, the current President of ABSU, Promod has guided the organisation towards non-violence. It is no mean feat considering that the Bodo demand for a separate state had been a bloody and protracted battle.

In times when most movements for self-determination are forged on aggression and destructive protests, ABSU, under Promod, has adopted the Gandhian way of peaceful agitation as its guiding principle.

Strong government doesn't mean simply military power or an efficient intelligence apparatus. Instead, it should mean effective, fair administration.

**raghuram govind rajan**

Indian economist, international academic, and the 23rd Governor of Reserve Bank of India (2013 - 2016)





# tribals **have in their hands the power of new media**

Our policymakers, many a times, design programmes without understanding the requirements of the people the policies are meant for.

Recently, I read a report by the UNICEF about the state of malnutrition in Nandurbar, a tribe-dominant district in Maharashtra. It talks about initiatives being taken to bring 12,000 children back from the brink. Looking at the images of these malnourished faces, I couldn't believe that we are in the India of 2018.

So, I visited a very remote village of Nandurbar. During my interaction with the 300-400 villagers, I asked if they knew who the Prime Minister of India was. They appeared introverted. I received just one unsure answer. None of them knew who the Chief Minister of the state was. I was told, let alone national politicians, even local MLAs had not visited their village in years. I offered to take their biggest concern to the powers-that-be. The same shy and unsure people didn't take a second to respond. They said their lives will improve if they can receive English education and interact with the world outside.

Will our policymakers ever think of this as a priority?

Some of the major concerns that tribal youth leaders have brought up at this programme, the nation echoes them too. They pertain to lack of quality education, unemployment, discrimination and loss of tribal identity due to economic and cultural marginalisation. They also are related to environmental degradation caused by deforestation, irrigation projects and other infrastructural ventures. They are also concerned about the growing acceptance of violence as a tool to get their voices heard.

We are moving away from the times when speeches were delivered and audiences listened in rapt attention. We are in the age of new media. So be it. Learn to use the evolving interactive social platforms to the best of your abilities to voice yourself to the world.

Since we are one of the 'youngest' nations, our youth has to take charge. Otherwise, our demographic dividend will become a huge liability. This climate offers a huge potential for thought leadership, creativity and new ideas. It offers the youth opportunity to take ownership of issues.

The power of social media is immense. The power of the Internet is immense. As a group, your powers will be multiplied. Meet policymakers, meet the government leaders and present your views. Continue to voice your concerns at every forum you can. Be proactive. Take action. I dream of an India that leverages its diversity. I dream of an India that is ruled by its most marginalised and vulnerable sections. Only then will we find ourselves as a country. Only then will our democracy be true. ■

**neerja chowdhury**  
columnist  
political commentator  
**veteran journalist**

neerja has been a political journalist, columnist and commentator for over three decades. She was the political editor of The Indian Express and the civil rights correspondent of The Statesman. She has been awarded the Prem Bhatia Award for Excellence in Journalism in recognition of her razor-sharp political analysis.

Currently, she is a columnist for The Times of India, Economic Times, The Scroll, DNA and Amar Ujala. In the last ten years, she has also become a dedicated advocate of the importance of combating the scourge of malnutrition in India.

In all my affairs, it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted.

**bertrand russell (1872 - 1970)**

British philosopher, mathematician, writer and Nobel Laureate (1950)



# never **say never, and the world will be your oyster**

Hurdles are a part of the journey. Only two things can happen when we are faced with adversity; we tide over it or we sink. We fail when we fit ourselves into limiting adjectives the world defines us with: disabled, poor, backward.

Being visually challenged, even getting admission to a regular school was a task. It didn't help that I was from a poor family. Once I got admission, every day I was told my capabilities are limited. I was made to sit in a corner of the classroom. Even after receiving a Masters degree in Economics and Psychology, I wasn't deemed employable.

I was not ready to take it lying down. I went to the National Association for the Blind in Mumbai to learn to make candles, but I was told I was not eligible as I am completely blind. I pleaded with them to offer me any course so I could make a living. I was offered admission to the newly-launched masseur course. But, my heart was in candle-making. So, I bribed a teacher with free head-massages and he taught me the basics of candle-making.

I came back to Mahabaleshwar and began to offer massages at local resorts and holiday homes. It wasn't much money, but it helped me get by. Finally, when I had saved up ₹5,000, I began to make candles. I sold them on a pushcart on the road. It was the beginning of Sunrise Candles.

That journey which started with a single design, in a single room and with twenty kilograms of wax, today has a turnover of ₹25 crore, 10,700 designs and 71 manufacturing units. We export to 68 nations and employ 2,300 blind friends across 14 states.

I have always been an advocate of self-reliance. It pains me to see blind people beg for a living. Wherever I came across one, I convinced them to join our company. As more people came in, we faced problems scaling up. People around me told me to not risk expanding the business.

We decided to fight. We identified people in the company who could be dedicated marketers and we set up a large number of pop-up shops. Around this time, a large corporate house awarded us for our unique entrepreneurship. It came with ₹51 lakh as a grant. We could have taken that money, but we decided to ask for work. They became our client. That day, we hadn't rejected Rs. 51 lakh, we had invested it. In the last 10 years, the company has given us business worth ₹83 crore. Their work employs over 450 of our blind friends for about four months a year. Many management colleges use our business decisions as case studies.

The road to where we are today was not easy. We tried, we failed, we fought and we conquered.

**bhavesh bhatia**  
entrepreneur and paralympian  
**founder,**  
**sunrise candles**

bhavesh's visiting card says, 'Let's not give sympathy but opportunity'. True to his tagline, he is a die-hard optimist.

He proved that nothing is impossible to himself and the world at 17, when he cycled, along with two friends, all the way to Kathmandu, a distance of 5,620 kilometres, in 45 days.

Then, he went on to win over 100 medals — including national golds — in shot-put, discus throw and the javelin throw. He also represented India at the London Paralympics.

Since 2007, he runs eight kilometres a day and chases it with 500 push-ups. He has set his sights as high as he dreams: Mount Everest. He is planning to climb it soon.

If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.

**frank a. clark (1860 - 1936)**  
American lawyer and politician



# our education doesn't teach us how to **find** our mission

Do you know which are the tribal districts of Maharashtra? They are Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, Palghar, Melghat, Nanded and Yavatmal. Do you see a pattern? Well, all of them are along the state boundaries. Our so-called civilisation has pushed the indigenous people to the extremities.

I come from Gadchiroli. Most people haven't even heard the name. Its inhabitants are Madia and Gond tribes. Thirty-two years ago, my parents, two young professionals trained in medicine and public health in the US, decided to come back to India and work here.

As I grew up in tribal India, I began to question our education system. I realised that it was making me job-ready, but not preparing me to find my purpose. In 2008, with a few like-minded people, I started NIRMAN. Today we have a team of over 1,000 members, drawn from Maharashtra and 11 other states. We are present across all the 36 districts of Maharashtra. We select 150 to 200 young people each year and get them to Gadchiroli. They go through a series of workshops that help them figure what interests them, fulfil them, and, at the same time how it can address some important need of the society.

Niranjan Toradmal was pursuing his BTech from Pune. He decided that he doesn't need a placement from college. He figured an interesting problem that needed a solution, but no one else had thought about. We have all seen porters, farmers and labourers lugging inhuman amounts of weight. It really affects their back and spine. We offered Niranjan a fellowship through NIRMAN. He designed a device, an exoskeletal contraption that transfers about 90% weight to the ground. We are trying to make it available at ₹2,000. This will make a difference to the lives of millions.

Amruta Pradhan, one of our associates at NIRMAN, worked tirelessly to stop the construction of a dam in Madhya Pradesh, which was being built in contravention of environmental norms. No one is against development, but rules must be followed.

Both Niranjan and Amruta broke away from the routine; they found their own path.

NIRMAN is a collective of many such courageous young people, who have conviction in their purpose. We are working on protection of tribal rights, crop and animal biodiversity, and minimising impact of development projects on the environment.

Happiness and sadness are ephemeral. Meaning or purpose is long lasting. Look at Nelson Mandela, the South African anti-apartheid revolutionary and the country's first black head of state. He spent 27 years of his life in jail, fighting for equality and justice. Was his life happy? We don't know. Was it meaningful? Yes. ■

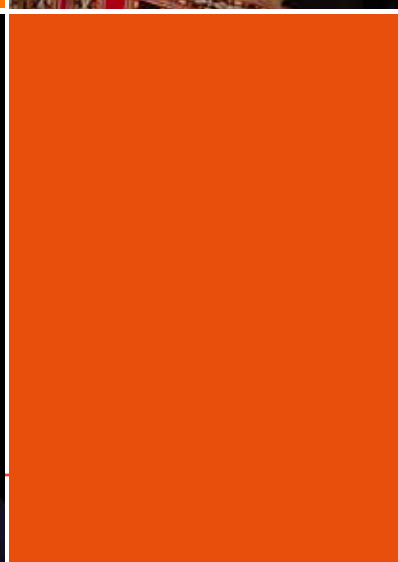
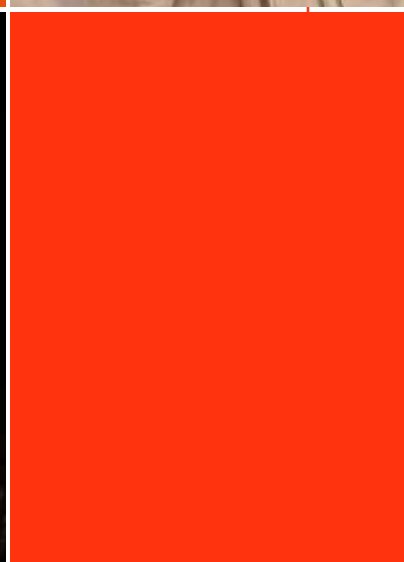
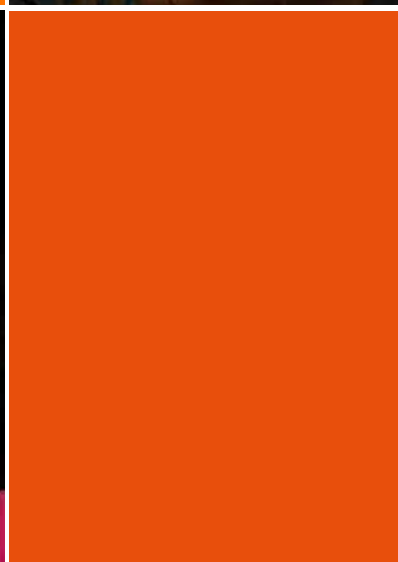
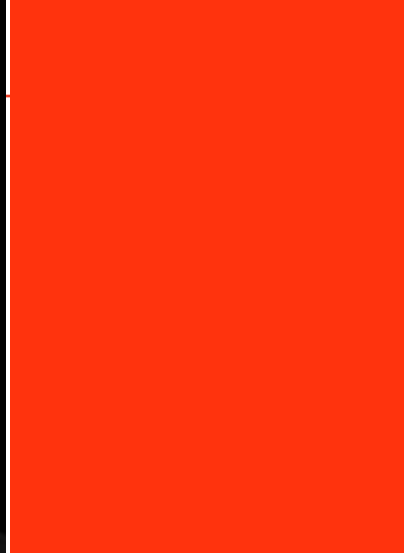
**amrut bang**  
social activist  
**founder, nirman youth  
for purposeful life**

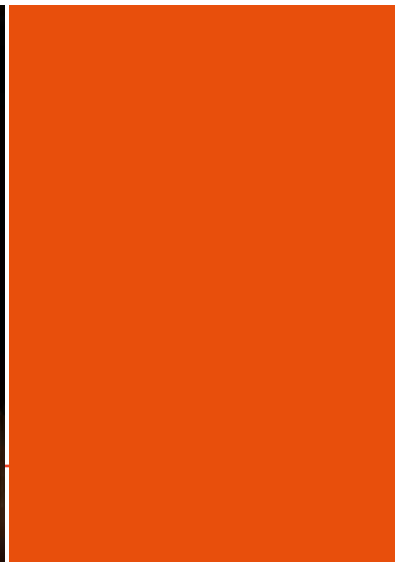
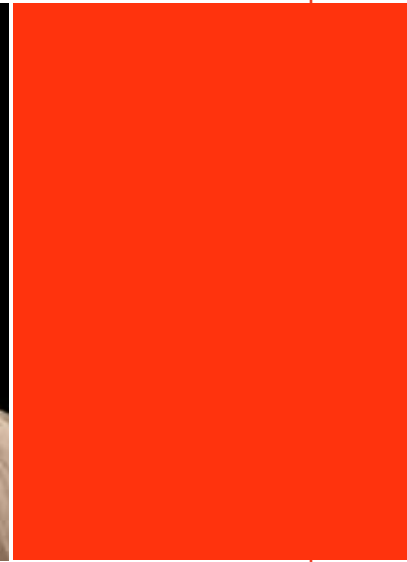
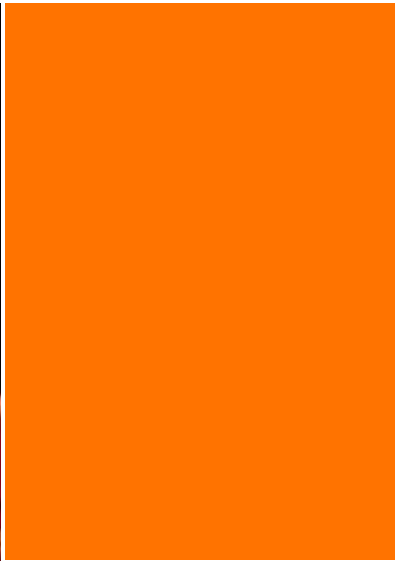
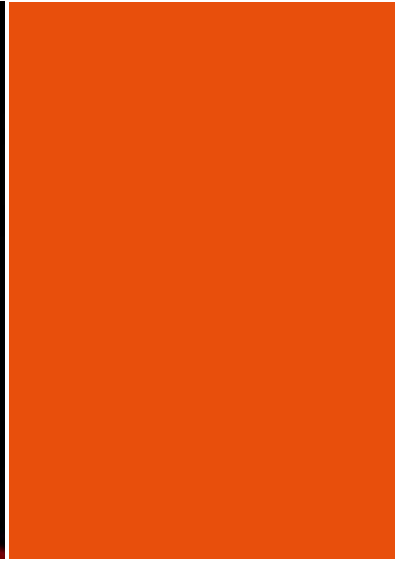
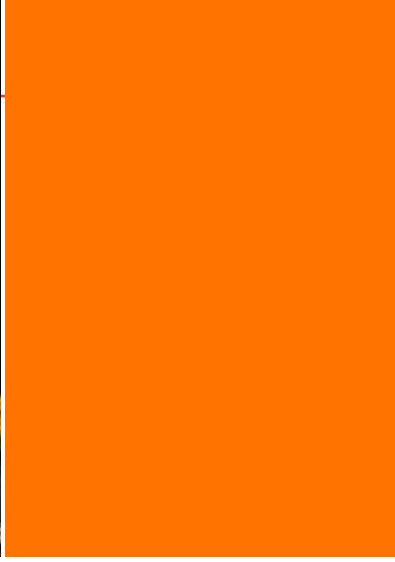
amrut, a postgraduate in Non-Profit Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania and a computer engineer, is the founding member of NIRMAN, a youth initiative he has led since 2008.

It is an educational process to nurture and organise young changemakers to take up crucial societal issues and become a part of the solution. NIRMAN provides guidance, expertise, and the much-needed environment to inculcate self-learning and mobilise social action. Amrut is involved in shaping strategy, project management, recruitment, content-creation and forging new partnerships for NIRMAN.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

**margaret mead (1901 - 1978)**  
American cultural anthropologist





## participants of 2018

### name

### tribe

abhishek c. oraon	oraon
ajay kumar	malayariya
akli tudu	santhal
akshay noatia	noatia
amgoth veeranna	lambada
amit topno	munda
amrita h. k.	gond
anant hembrom	santhal
anantha p.	kurumans
arun krishnan	kani
asha m.	irula
bapi murmu	santhal
basanti badara	ho
bhandari reang	reang
bhukyas anil	lambada
chaiti durve	agaria
chaituram	dhurwa
chandrakali marakam	bharia
chirag patel	dhodiya
dalaram bamniya	bhil
david murasing	murasing
dechen dolker	bhot
deepa minz	oraon
devi singh palthya	lambada
dhanni nareti	madia
dinesh kumar ahake	gond
dinesh kumar mandavi	gond
gabbar hembrom	ho
gaytri bachaniya	korku
gendmal kalasva	bhil
ghasiram manjhi	kond
hirendra tripura	tripuri
hiteshwar rabha	rabha
jairam hansda	santhal
jangminthang haokip	thadou kuki
jitendra vasava	bhil
jyoti lakra	oraon
jyotishbhai chaudhari	bhil
k. bowang kho	poumai naga

### name

### tribe

k. vyshak	mulлу kurumba
kalu betekar	korku
kanhaiya ningwal	bhilala
karthik yadagiri	yarava
kavita nag	gond
khams zotal	zou
krishnamurty	iruliga
lalramnghaki huanhar	mizo
limasenla jamir	ao
madhusmita majhi	raj gond
mahesh kujur	oraon
malti valvi	bhil
mehul patel	dhodiya
mithun mog	mog



## name

## tribe

mogili vijender	yerukala
mukund mudi	kora
nandkishor malwe	madiya gond
ngakuimi kumrah	tangkhul
nikunj vora	kokni
nisha s. choudhry	chaudhri
panjit kemprai	dimasa
phlorius nongrum	khasi
prabhakara p.	masa nyaka
prakash r. ghotekar	kolam
premulla lepcha	lepcha
priteshbhai chaudhari	chaudhri
rajat ramesh raghatwan	koli mahadev
rajesh korda	bhil
rameshwar dhurve	gond
ramlal punaji kale	korku
ramu soren	santhal
ravinder gilua	ho
roman boro	bodo
roopa ram garasiya	garasiya
sabin rongpipi	karbi
sadhu singh	kora
sanjay tirkey	oraon
santosh pada	madia gond
shain mon p. v.	malayariya
shalom l.	lai
shelva kumar	irula
shivnath munda	munda
sikandar h. chotiyara	siddi
sudershon bhengra	munda
sukanya r. gavari	mahadev koli
sukman baghel	halba
sumanti devi	oraon
sunil kasdekar	korku
sunil parahad	warli
sunny tayeng	adi
tongpang longchar	ao
umesh soy	ho
varsha rahase	bhil





as **I look around, I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilisation strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage.**

**rabindranath tagore (1861 - 1941)**

nobel laureate for literature (1913)





