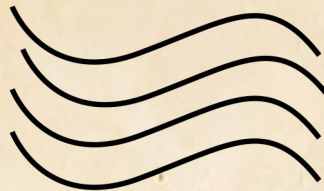


# SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



**MA in Rural Management**

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**Student Profiles**

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**2024-26**

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# INTRODUCTION

Latest UN projections show that even in the year 2050, there will be 800 million people living in rural India. Over the last 3 decades more than 350,000 farmers have committed suicide, a phenomenon unprecedented in Indian history. Rural India faces a crisis of very serious proportions. It is also clear that the “rural” is itself undergoing a profound transformation. This is an ever-changing, very dynamic economy and society.

Even as this crisis deepens and rural reality changes rapidly, the human resources required to tackle these new and emerging challenges, as also the old unattended ones (like health and education) are missing in action. A review of all comparable rural management, development studies and social work programs shows that none of them appear to offer the multi-disciplinary understanding and skill-sets required by rapidly changing rural India and its primary stakeholders, whether they be farmers, governments, corporations or civil society organisations.

Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence (Shiv Nadar IoE), therefore, decided to launch a first-of-its-kind 2-year MA in Rural Management program in September 2023. The aim of this multi-disciplinary program is to create a cadre of 21st century professionals, with a holistic understanding of the multifarious challenges of rural management.

What is unique about our program is that it not only provides students with an in-depth multi-disciplinary understanding of the problems of rural India but it also nurtures their capacity to find innovative and far-reaching solutions. The program is based on a unique pedagogy, combining innovative class-room and studio teaching, with two full semesters devoted to field education, including internships with the very best practitioners in rural India. All students have mentors through and beyond the program. Another distinguishing feature of the program is that all its courses not merely aim to build professional competencies

but pay equal attention to cultivating the necessary value-systems that develop compassionate human beings, with the capacity for deep listening and necessary sensitivities to the world-views of those they will be working with in future.

There are many talented young people in rural India who, with the appropriate training, can lead this dynamic, rapidly transforming region in the years to come. These are the professionals our program aims to create: gen-next innovators and creative leaders with the requisite understanding and skill-sets demanded by the emerging challenges and opportunities of rural India, which no other comparable program offers.

We are now ready to launch the second year of the program. From the hundreds of applicants for this program, we have selected 48 students after a very rigorous multi-stage selection process. We consider ourselves deeply fortunate that we have such an excellent second batch of students, who have the qualities of head and heart demanded by this program. We believe that their unique life experience, values and insights will make the classroom a powerful learning arena for all of us, students and teachers alike, and contribute to making Shiv Nadar IoE an even more vibrant university.

Many of these students have already been working in the remote areas of India, having dedicated their lives to the upliftment of those left out of the mainstream development process. These 47 students represent the diverse richness of this country, coming as they do from across 28 districts in 10 States of India. 22 of them are women and 17 belong to India's neglected *Adivasi* communities. For us, these are the future leaders of our country, providing a new vision for participatory, sustainable and inclusive development based on an ethics of care, not only for India's deprived regions and communities, but also for the country and even for the planet as a whole.

We are thrilled to bring to you a brief introduction to these 44 gen-next leaders.

29<sup>th</sup> July 2024



# AASIKA MADAN DHURVE

Amravati, Maharashtra



Aasika Madan Dhurve (extreme right) performing a play on substance abuse in the Primary Health Centre of Nakapardi village, Yavatmal, Maharashtra

BSW from Savitri Jyotirao Social Work

College, Yavatmal, Maharashtra. Gender

champion, who has actively engaged in

promoting gender equality through street plays

Aasika Madan Dhurve hails from the Gond Adivasi (ST) community of Koylari village, Amravati, located in the Melghat region of Maharashtra. As a first-generation learner, Aasika faced numerous challenges. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in her village, her parents migrated to another town for wage labour, leaving Aasika and her younger brother in the care of their maternal grandparents. Her maternal grandfather, who worked as a sokari (farm keeper), earned very little, making it difficult to support the education of two children. Aasika and her brother assisted their grandmother with labour in the mornings and selling grass in the afternoons.

Aasika attended primary school in her village and joined another school in Std. 6th which was located in Achalpur, 2 kilometres away from her home. She often felt unsafe and scared walking alone to school, frequently crying and blaming her fate. The journey was particularly arduous during the rainy season. With no electricity, studying was a struggle, yet she persevered and completed Std. 12th amidst significant hardships. Her grandfather initially forbade her from pursuing higher education due to its expense. However, upon learning about a Social Work college in Yavatmal, 200 kilometres from Melghat, Aasika convinced her grandfather to allow her to attend, promising to fund her education independently. She sold her school textbooks and bicycle to travel to Yavatmal, where she secured admission to a state-run hostel for Adivasi students. Since then, she has continued to advance her education.

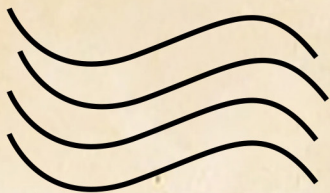
During her college years, Aasika actively engaged in promoting gender equality through the Bahujan Hit Society, using street plays to raise awareness. Her dedication to education drives her mission to change societal attitudes in her region. She advocates for ensuring every child receives an education instead of being forced into labour. Aasika is particularly concerned about young women and girls, who are often deprived of secondary and higher education due to early marriages. She recognizes that few young people in her community overcome financial and societal hurdles to pursue their education.

Aasika's story is one of resilience and determination, underscoring her commitment to improving educational opportunities for future generations.

She loves to learn about new cultures, people and enjoys performing street plays.

# ABNAIJAR RAIKA

Gajapati, Odisha



Abnaijar (standing) conducting a workshop with the women of Talamunda village, Odisha

BA from Berhampur University, Odisha. An implementation expert in multiple areas of development practice including Farmer Producer Organisations and Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

Abnaijar wants to contribute to various developmental aspects of the Soura Adivasi (ST) community from which he hails. Abnaijar's home is in Talamunda village in Gajapati district of Odisha. His father farms their small piece of land in Talamunda while his mother is a homemaker. Abnaijar's main hobby is to sing Odiya songs whenever he gets time from his work involving the empowerment of rural communities in the remote regions of Odisha.

Abnaijar's journey in rural development began in 2018 when he joined Gram Vikas, an NGO working on various aspects of rural development across Odisha. As a volunteer, Abnaijar was involved in conducting Status Assessment Surveys of water and sanitation projects. While doing so he was able to gain insights into community perspectives and various challenges in developing community level decisions in the field of water and sanitation. Subsequently, he got engaged in relief work after the Titili cyclone that hit Gajapati district in 2018. He conducted systematic surveys for delivering food and shelter related relief to the interior habitations of the district. He was later able to bring this experience to bear upon the relief work during the COVID pandemic and then in his work on Social Security Scheme with village communities.

Abnaijar is now a thematic coordinator with Gram Vikas. His current work deals with village institutions and rural livelihoods in Kalahandi and Gajapati districts of Odisha. He is actively involved in capacity building of Village Development Committees in these two districts. Abnaijar has a lot of experience in facilitating the formation of Farmer Producer Organisations in these two districts. His field expertise also extends to implementing water and sanitation projects in Odisha. This background helped him undertake the six-month long Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation Capacity Building programme of interacting and working with rural communities across nine states in the country.

Abnaijar became interested in pursuing a Master's in Rural Management from Shiv Nadar IoE because of his desire to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical insights gained from the field. He is aspiring to explore innovative approaches to address rural challenges, including sustainable development, community empowerment and policy implementation during his studies here. On completing his studies, Abnaijar hopes to work in strengthening farmers' access to the market while promoting rural entrepreneurship and youth skill development. Abnaijar is eager to contribute to the university's academic community and collaborate with fellow students to explore innovative solutions to real-world challenges.



# AKSHAY PAWAR

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



Akshay (right) working with hospital officials as a Gandhi Fellow in Sheikhpura, Bihar

BSW from SGB Amravati University, Yavatmal.

Selected for the prestigious Gandhi Fellowship  
in 2022 to improve public health systems in

Bihar

Akshay Digambar Pawar would constantly observe how people from his village, Fattapur in Ner block of Yavatmal district, would leave for the big cities in Maharashtra in search of work. Like most of the people in his village, he belongs to the Gopal nomadic community. His parents too left for Mumbai to work as labourers but he feels fortunate to have been left behind with his paternal grandparents. It was his mother and grandmother who believed that a good stable education would transform his life and those around him. This transformation was essential as Akshay and his family were constantly dealing with the consequences of his father's alcohol addiction.

Akshay attended local government schools and performed well in his academics. After school, he would enjoy swimming, playing cricket and picking seasonal fruits from the nearby farms with his friends. It was in high school that he met a Village Social Transformation Fellow who guided him towards pursuing a career in rural development. Akshay enrolled himself for a Bachelors in Social Work at Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University. During his undergraduate degree, he volunteered at various institutions where he carried out surveys, conducted health camps and assisted street beggars in urban areas. According to him, the most impactful experience for him was the flood relief work he did in Kolhapur-Sangli in 2019. The depth of his work and his commitment helped him secure the prestigious Gandhi Fellowship in 2022.

Posted in Sheikhpura district of Bihar, Akshay worked with the Piramal Foundation on public health systems strengthening. He carried out a gap analysis of health systems at the village, block and district levels and collaborated with frontline workers to improve the delivery of health services. He also worked on other projects like aiding the government's digital transformation project for health where he developed new skills like non-violent and effective communication.

At the MA in Rural Management program, Akshay wants to focus on developing newer skills of research and writing and wants to use them to understand the effects of migration on the health of women. He is excited to be a part of a diverse cohort and looks forward to learning about the experiences and cultures of his fellow students.



# ALOSHIKA LAKRA

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



Alohika in her village carrying out a survey to identify dropouts in her village

BA in History from University of North Bengal.

A development practitioner experienced in  
projects on safer migration for low-income  
migrants and development among youth

Alohika comes from Khaldhura Line in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and belongs to the Oraon Adivasi (ST) community. She completed her school education by staying in a hostel. After completing her graduation in History from Government General Degree College, Gorubathan, she became associated with Himalayan Prayatna Foundation, an organization that has been working with the youth in the tea gardens of North Bengal. Her role in the organization was to identify dropouts and high school students in the tea garden area and make them aware of higher education and scholarship opportunities. She worked in teams and conducted surveys to identify students. She loves working in the social sector because it allows her to remain rooted to the communities and constantly come across new stories and people. Her working with the organization has enabled her to see the challenges that plague her community and region.

As part of a 'Safe Migration' project, she also conducted surveys of migrants in the tea gardens around her. At a time when many were migrating out of the Dooars, 'Safe Migration' aimed to make migrants (or aspiring migrants) in tea gardens aware of background checks on their employers, enquiring about salaries and other benefits, etc. so that migration would be a safe experience for migrants from tea garden areas. Being aware of the inadequate health and education challenges in her region, she wishes to work with organizations that focus on the same and she hopes that her two years in Rural Management will help her learn about strategies to better the situation in the Dooars region particularly among tea garden communities.



# ALPANA MINJ

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



Alpana taking a capacity building workshop amongst women in the Karbi Anglong region of Assam

BA in Sociology from Ambedkar University, Delhi. A grassroots development practitioner working on finding sustainable livelihood solutions for small-scale tea growers

Alpana comes from Samsing Tea Estate in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and belongs to the Oraon Adivasi (ST) community. Both her parents work in the tea garden. Her association with Himalayan Prayatna Foundation, an organization that has been working with the youth in the tea gardens of North Bengal helped her secure admissions for her Bachelor's in Sociology from Ambedkar University, Delhi.

Her work in the organization was to identify and talk to students in the area and convince them to pursue higher education. She loved her work as it enabled her to empower other young people like her in the community and make them understand the importance of higher education in transforming people's lives. She says, in tea gardens, it is common for young people to drop out post Xth or XIIth standard and work in the gardens. Her dream is that young people in her community realize and dare to have other dreams and the resources to fulfill them.

She is currently working in Grassroots Tea Corporation, Assam, an organization that works with small tea growers. Her work there exposed her to common issues that are plaguing tea garden laborers across the country, one of which is the low wage rates. She believes that small tea growers where collectives of laborers are owners of small tea gardens can be a sustainable solution to this.

She loves fieldwork and the possibilities and challenges that the field throws up and it is that which attracted her to the Rural Management programme with its field-based focus. She feels surrounded by a world of problems and her intention to join the programme is to find solutions to them.



# AMAN KUMAR

Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh



BA, English Literature and Education,  
University of Allahabad. Involved in help-  
ing youth of his community to pursue higher  
education

Aman Kumar is a first-generation learner from the Shahjahanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. His family comes from the Valmiki (SC) community who are engaged in sanitation work. He completed his BA in English Literature and Education from Allahabad University.

Having experienced caste-based discrimination and biases from a very young age and throughout his education, Aman not only learned about the realities of caste and the difficulties that his community has to go through but also the under-representation of his community at all levels. He is very keen on the educational empowerment of the community and emerged as the first person from his community and his district to gain admission to the MA in Rural Management program.

He brings passion and commitment to be a change-maker. He is already involved in helping members from the community at multiple levels where he supports the students and youth to pursue higher education. Aman looks at the Master's in Rural Management programme as a big opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to work for the educational and other upliftment of his community and emerge as a leader and work towards the educational and overall development of the marginalized groups in India.

Aman enjoys reading all kinds of books, and he has a particular interest in books on politics, inequality and caste. His favourite book is the Annihilation of Caste, the seminal text written by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.





# ASHVINI KISHOR CHAVHAN

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



Ashvini speaks to junior students at Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College, Yavatmal, Maharashtra

BSW from Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College,  
Yavatmal, Maharashtra. A college-topper with  
experience in working with Adivasi communi-  
ties on women's health and nutrition

Ashvini is passionate about supporting young women from marginalised communities to help them acquire higher education. She is a resident of Umari Village in Darwha Taluka of Yavatmal District in Maharashtra, where her family grows cotton and pigeon pea (toor) on their small farm for a living.

The eldest of three sisters, Ashvini belongs to the Banjara community. She completed her schooling at a government-run Ashram School in the district. According to her, girl children in the Banjara community are married early and discouraged from pursuing higher education. However, a determined Ashvini enrolled for a Bachelor's degree in Social Work (BSW) at the Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College, Yavatmal. She excelled at her studies and topped her class throughout.

As a part of the BSW programme, Ashvini conducted a study on women's nutritional and health status among the Gond and Kolam Adivasi communities of her region. This led her to realise the importance of education, especially higher education, for young women, and motivated her to apply to the Rural Management programme at SNIOE. She dreams of establishing an organisation of her own to motivate and support Adivasi and Banjara women in her region.

Ashvini has been closely involved as a volunteer for several initiatives and studies. Most recently, she participated in a survey on farmers' suicides in Yavatmal District for the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), India, to understand how and why suicides are happening. As a paralegal volunteer (PLV), she has been working among women in the Kolam and Pardhi communities to create awareness of and help address domestic violence. Prior to this, she has participated in the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) survey and volunteered with Ovee Trust and the Department of Women and Child Development, on projects imparting education to children of vulnerable and marginalised communities.

An enthusiastic kabaddi-player, Ashvini derives inspiration from books. Her favourite book is Findri, a Marathi novel about a Dalit girl from Maharashtra, who struggles against all odds, including resistance from a violent father, to pursue higher education and eventually becomes a college professor with her brave mother's support.

# AVINASH PARASRAM MADAVI

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



Avinash with his grandfather in Muchhi Village, Yavatmal District, Maharashtra

BA in Economics from Fergusson College,  
Pune. The first graduate from his village and a  
medal-winning innovator for his 'Grain-cleaning  
machine using solar lamp'

Avinash belongs to a family of landless agricultural labourers. His village is Muchhi in Maharashtra's Yavatmal District. It is a pod or settlement of the Kolam PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) Adivasi community. The residents of Muchhi depend upon a combination of forest resources such as the sale of mahua flowers and tendu leaf, and agricultural wage labour for a living.

Avinash completed a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Fergusson College, Pune. Thereafter, he was part of a study on a protest by the employees of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) against poor working conditions and lack of social security. More recently, Avinash was nominated to discharge the responsibility of Secretary, PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act Committee, by the Gram Sabha of his village. He was also chosen to be a member of Muchhi Village's Forest Rights Committee. Avinash believes that these two committees will play an increasingly important role in enabling the Gram Sabha to secure control over their forests, increase the accessibility of government schemes, and reduce the dependence of villagers on moneylenders.

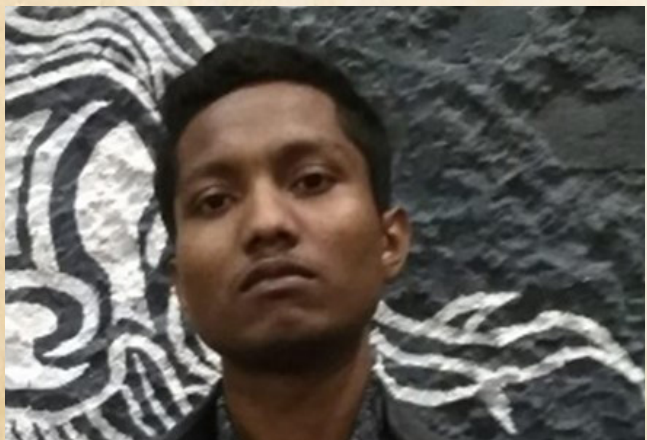
The difficult circumstances of his household served as the anvil on which Avinash's life was forged. He has worked as a shop assistant and store cleaner, as a security guard, and a housekeeper in a restaurant to support his family and continue his education. Avinash also remembers vividly how he and his family were once taken to a court where they were asked to take an oath in the judge's presence to attest to their identity. Since then, he has carried a burning passion to address the powerlessness and penury of the Kolam and other Adivasi communities. This is the reason why he applied to the Rural Management program. He wants to contribute to policymaking especially in the education and forest sectors because these are crucial to the lives of the Kolam community. "Given a chance, I would like to modify the forest laws to include Adivasi perspectives that will help protect both Adivasi culture as well as biodiversity," he says.

In his free time, Avinash plays cricket and kabaddi. He likes to read about iconic personalities such as APJ Abdul Kalam, whose book Wings of fire is a favourite. Avinash is also a regular visitor of the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), which he finds a source of great inspiration.



## BIBASH MUNDA

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



BA in Sustainable Urbanism from Ambedkar  
University, New Delhi. Experienced in urban  
policy and creating access to higher education  
for marginalised groups

Bibash comes from Chalsa, Deou pani basti of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and belongs to the Munda Adivasi (ST) community. His area being close to tea gardens, he got associated with the Himalayan Prayatn Foundation, which has been working with the youth in the tea gardens of North Bengal. He worked with them to identify dropout students and help other economically marginalized students to pursue higher education by making them aware of scholarship opportunities. It was with the help of the organization that he managed to secure admissions and scholarship for his Bachelor's in Sustainable Urbanism in Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi.

Though his course focused on the urban, all his projects were intentionally designed to study the marginalized in the urban. It was through such projects that he saw the interlinkages between the urban and the rural as the urban poor were the migrants from the rural areas. It hit him then that the marginalized remained so despite a change in location. In future, he wishes to work on the area of migration from rural areas of tea gardens and generate livelihood opportunities in the rural areas so that the rural poor are not forced to migrate and face more marginalization in urban areas. Besides, if all migrate to the urban, "what will happen to the culture, tradition, knowledge and the beauty that is stored in the villages of our country," he says.

And while he is interested to work in the policy process for the overall development of the poor and marginalized, he wishes to do that by working at the grassroots level so that the policies are informed by the ground's realities. In the future, he wishes to establish his own organization to help his community. He believes that a course like Rural Management is the right programme for him to achieve such goals of his life.



# BINITA ORAON

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



BA (Hons.) in Social Work, Mangalore  
University. Worked on trafficking and migration  
from the tea garden labour community in north  
Bengal

If anything, determination is the word that characterises Binita. She belongs to the Oraon Adivasi (ST) community of tea garden labourers from Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. Her household in Batabari Village consists of her mother, younger brother, and cousin sister. Her mother and late father strived hard to impart a good education to their children. Binita remembers the hardships of travelling 15 km to Malbazar town, where her school used to be, covering a part of the distance on foot through a forest in which tigers would be about.

Towards the end of school, Binita decided that she wanted to explore the world beyond the tea gardens. She learnt about a girl from her region who had travelled to Karnataka for a college education. Binita established contact with her, figured out the details, and decided to enrol for a Bachelor's in Social Work in Mangalore University. This required much persuasion on her part to convince her parents, but she eventually succeeded. In Mangalore, Binita overcame the initial sense of intimidation of being in a new land. She learnt Kannada, the local language, and improved her English. As a BSW student, she conducted fieldwork among HIV+ patients in a hospital, taught young schoolchildren, and worked in a Gram Panchayat, all of which required an intense degree of interaction with local people. Binita learnt from these experiences and enjoyed meeting new people. Upon returning to her native village, she started working as a field investigator with Aajeevika Bureau to understand the status of migration and trafficking in the tea gardens of north Bengal.

Binita applied to the Rural Management programme following the realisation that she wanted to work at the community-level among the tea garden residents of north Bengal. She believes that the Master's in Rural Management will help her acquire the insight and skills that will help her address the plethora of problems relating to education, health, and water that she perceives in her native setting.

Under her pleasant personality lies a quiet sense of purpose. "In our community, girls are not allowed to travel far from home and face many restrictions. But if you want to change something then one has to take risks," she says with resolve.



# DEVID GULAB SHIVANKAR

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



Devid with his sisters at his farm in Kharad Village, Yavatmal District, Maharashtra

BSW from Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College,  
Yavatmal. Wants to work on education for his  
Kolam Adivasi community

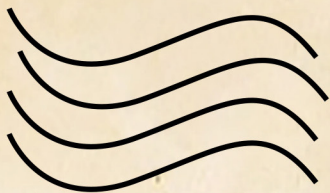
Devid comes from a family of Adivasi farmers in Maharashtra's Yavatmal District. He belongs to the Kolam Adivasi PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) community, which comprises 60% of the residents of Kharad, his native village. He and his neighbours engage in farming, but this is only four months in a year since their farms are rain-fed and do not have a source of irrigation. For the rest of the year, they work as agricultural wage labour while the Kolam youth work on construction sites farther off.

Belonging to a close-knit family of three sisters, a younger brother, and his mother, Devid completed his schooling at an Ashram school, a residential school for Adivasi students run by the Maharashtra government. Thereafter, he was inspired by one of his elder sisters to follow in her footsteps, and enrolled for a Bachelor's degree in Social Work (BSW) at Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College, Yavatmal.

Studying for a BSW proved to be an awakening for Devid. He grew more sensitive to the challenges that Adivasis face because of their inability to articulate their concerns clearly and firmly. Devid keenly felt the lack of access to quality education that his own Kolam community suffers from. This realisation sowed the seeds of a desire to work for social change among Adivasi communities.

After completing his BSW, Devid worked as a community mobilizer for two years on a project of the Tribal Research and Training Institute, Pune, in rural Yavatmal. He formed self-help groups (SHGs) among Kolam women and linked them to the State Rural Livelihoods Mission. However, despite his best efforts, he felt that he was not able to help the SHGs enough, and that he required more training and clarity of thought. Thus, when he heard about the Rural Management programme through his college professor Dr. Ghanshyam Darne, he enthusiastically decided to apply.

In his free time, Devid loves singing songs in his native Kolam tongue. He particularly likes singing for children. He is an excellent cook, and plays kabaddi and cricket. Devid is also fond of reading; his favourite books are Jaanta Raja by Babasaheb Purandare, and Shaamchi Aai by Sane Guruji, both written in Marathi.



# EKTA GOSWAMI

Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh



Ekta in discussion with women to understand the condition of their children in Balaghat district

BA and MA in English Literature from  
Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalay, Jabalpur.  
Experienced development practitioner from the  
renowned NGO PRADAN and youth leader  
working on tackling structural issues that lead  
to oppression in rural societies

Ekta comes from Dongariya, a village in the Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. She works in the well-known NGO PRADAN and is the only regular breadwinner for her family. Her father has taken leave from work due to ill health. Ekta is keen to fulfil her elder sister's dream of becoming a teacher and helping her younger brother continue his studies. She is keen on higher education and has a postgraduate degree in English where she was introduced to and loved the poetry of feminist poets like Kamala Das and classic sonnets of Shakespeare.

In the past she has also worked as an English teacher in a local school. Growing up, Ekta saw deteriorating conditions of children's education in the schools in her area, domestic violence in the families and discrimination against women in the village. She was deeply troubled by such problems around her and was curious about finding solutions. Conversations about solutions started at home as her own mother was working with women farmers with the aim of gender empowerment. This also inspired Ekta to think about working for society. At first, her plan was to become a journalist – visiting people's homes and listening to their stories, but the family's financial situation proved to be a hurdle. Later she joined the PRADAN as a youth leader whose task was to find education and employment opportunities for the youth and counsel them. After one year of work experience where she met with people from many communities, she understands that there are many structural problems plaguing people everywhere and her aim of joining the Rural management course is to understand them better and find solutions for them.



# HANNA DAIMARI

Udalguri, Assam



Hanna explaining the importance of sericulture to a Rabha woman in Udalguri, Assam

BA in Bodo Literature from Udalguri College,  
Guwahati University. Experienced as an educa-  
tor and livelihoods practitioner in the Bodoland  
Territorial Region of Assam

Hanna Daimari is a Bodo Adivasi (ST) girl from Phuhurabari village of Udalguri district in Assam. She comes from a farming family. After completing her graduation in Bodo literature, she started working as a teacher in an English medium school in her area where she taught Hindi and Bodo to students. Later she joined Action Network Trust (ANT), a capacity building organization based in Bodoland Territorial Council, Assam. There, at first, she worked with the 'Shiksha Project' where she provided educational services to young students and currently, she is associated with a project which reaches out to Bodo and Rabha women to train them to sell their traditional handloom products in the market.

She confesses that before joining ANT, she was a very shy girl and hesitated to talk to strangers. However, her experience with ANT has helped her in opening up. She enjoys working with local women in the communities as she has realized that women in any community are the treasure-holders of knowledge. Working in the field with women from indigenous communities has made her learn a lot and she values those relationships that she built in the field.

She joins the Rural Management programme with the desire to not just explore herself better but use the opportunity to take a deep dive into the development sector with a particular focus on rural communities. She is confident that she will bring her work experience of working with the youth and indigenous communities (mostly women) into the classroom.

Hanna also loves reading Bodo novels and poetry. Some of her favourite Bodo writers are Ishan Mushahary, Komal Kumar Brahma and Satish Chandra Basumatary.



# HARBHAJAN SINGH

Sagar, Madhya Pradesh



Demonstrating soil and pest management techniques to progressive women farmers in Sagar District, Madhya Pradesh

B.Sc. in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics,  
Government Rajiv Gandhi College, MP. Worked  
with MS Swaminathan Research Foundation on  
organic farming outreach

Harbhajan comes from a farming household in Papet Village of Sagar District, Madhya Pradesh. The village has a diverse mix of different social groups, including Hindus, Jains, and Muslims. “Papet Village has two distinguishing characteristics,” he says, “communal harmony but also an acute water scarcity.” Harbhajan belongs to the Lodhi community which is known for its agrarian expertise. His agrarian background has played an important role in drawing him towards the Rural Management program.

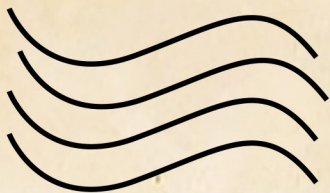
Harbhajan’s father passed away at a young age, and some years later, his elder brother had to undergo treatment for mental illness. His mother supplemented the income from their small farm by rolling beedis. Upon completing his schooling, Harbhajan briefly took up casual employment in Indore to contribute to the household, but then returned home to enrol for a Bachelor’s degree in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. Thereafter, he migrated to Hoshiarpur, Punjab, to work in a brick kiln for a few months. Upon returning to his village, Harbhajan taught in his village school as a guest teacher for some time while studying to be a stenographer in the hope of securing a government job.

The MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) began an organic farming programme in Sagar District, and Harbhajan joined them as an animator. This involved carrying out baseline surveys and identifying farmers who were willing to part with a portion of their land for organic farming. Harbhajan himself underwent training in Andhra Pradesh to demonstrate to farmers how to carry out seed treatment, soil management, and pest management. While many farmers were initially sceptical, their perceptions changed by the end of the season. The experience proved to be a turning point for Harbhajan in more ways than one. He started applying organic farming techniques with success on his own farm. Harbhajan also grew deeply interested in water conservation given the water scarcity in his village. Meanwhile, through MSSRF’s wider network of individuals and organisations, he learnt about Shiv Nadar IoE’s unique rural management programme. By then he was undergoing an inner transformation and began to aspire towards making a difference to society at large. In his opinion, agriculture that is both regenerative and remunerative can be a way forward for social change. Believing that the RM programme would help him further clarify his thoughts and ideals, he put in an application. Harbhajan draws inspiration from the Bhagavad Gita. He used to be an athlete in school and was a typical cricket-crazy youth until a few years ago. Now, however, he spends time meditating, which he says gives him inner peace. He likes to spend his free time on the farm.



# HARISH SAHEBRAO DONGARE

Wardha, Maharashtra



At a felicitation programme for successful students of classes ten and twelve, Bondarthana Village, Wardha District, Maharashtra

B.Sc. Industrial Science, Yashvantrao Chavan  
Maharashtra Open University. Voluntary work  
on education and water conservation

Harish is an avid sportsperson and embodies a remarkable sense of perseverance. He belongs to a marginal farming household from Maharashtra's Wardha District. His village is separated from Wardha, the district headquarters, by the expansive Bor Tiger Reserve, rendering it isolated, especially in the monsoon. Sports have played an important role in Harish's life. He studied in a government school that helped him nurture his sporting talent. Harish excelled in kabaddi, kho-kho and cricket, and went on to lead sports teams for his school and college. After completing school, he developed a passion for badminton, mastered the game, and narrowly missed the chance to play at a state-level competition. However, he went on to join as a coach at a prestigious badminton academy in Nagpur, where he trained several aspiring players, preparing them for state- and national-level competitions.

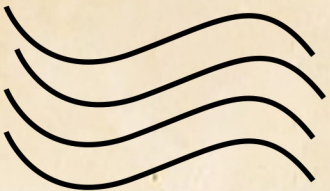
Given the economic hardships at home, he moved on from his job as a badminton coach to take up a supervisor's job in a manufacturing company. However, out of a strong desire to strengthen the educational capacities of rural youth, he joined the newly-formed Intellectual Collective Social Responsibility (ICSR) group comprising like-minded friends in his village. The group set up a Mahatma Phule library in the village to help young students prepare for competitive examinations. Harish also actively participated in a drive by the ICSR group to plant trees and nurture them. This further led him to volunteer with WOTR, one of India's leading civil society organisations, working in his village on water conservation, soil moisture conservation and natural farming.

Harish's increasing voluntary involvement with civil society groups and activities led him to an appreciation of the Rural Management programme at Shiv Nadar IoE. He had begun to increasingly think about solutions to the problems that afflict rural India – the lack of basic health and good education facilities, and poor transport and communication infrastructure. Harish perceived the RM programme as one that would help him equip himself to fulfil his desire to contribute to social transformation in rural India.

In his free time, Harish likes to explore new places and read books. He rates Pachmarhi in Madhya Pradesh as his favourite place, and Who will cry when you die by Robin Sharma as one of his favourite books.

# HIMANSHI TIRTHRAJ BHALADHARE

Gondia, Maharashtra



Himanshi (centre) as part of the orientation to students at ashram schools in Melghat

BA in Economics, Sociology, and Geography  
from Nagpur University. Started an NGO  
Movement for Progress Organization to attract  
children in her area towards education

Himanshi Bhaladhare belongs to Gondia district, one of the most deprived districts in the country in the north-eastern part of Maharashtra, bordering Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. She belongs to the Mahar caste (SC), which Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was born in. She completed her BA in Economics, Sociology, and Geography from N.M.D. College, Gondia affiliated to the Nagpur University.

Himanshi has successfully overcome several challenges while growing up, primarily owing to her family's economic condition and her father's alcohol addiction. Coming from a family of daily wage earners, her family situation forced her to work on a farm as a child. However, she did exceptionally well in her studies and became her school captain. Having seen issues like addiction very closely and experienced how that impacts the education and development of children, she was determined to save the next generation from such issues and started an organization called MFPO (Movement for Progress Organization) to attract children in her area towards education. Under the banner of this organization, they held classes every Sunday doing group studies. They also taught children about leaders like Bhagat Singh, Savitri Phule, Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, etc. Along with that, they also conducted surveys about India's constitution and created awareness among people about their fundamental rights.

As an intern in the Melghat region, she worked with the Eklavya India Foundation. She went to Melghat, stayed there, and educated children about the importance of education among students who had completed their 12th grade. Her team stayed in Melghat for 7 days and conducted workshops on higher education for students at the ashram schools and visited the students' villages and homes to invite them for the 3-day workshop. In this workshop students were oriented about courses in Pune, Mumbai, Delhi, APU, TISS, etc. The biggest result of this was that a girl from Makhlya village of Melghat was selected for the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work in Mumbai.

She learned about the SNU Rural Management program from Eklavya. She is very excited that this program will act as a bridge for her, supporting her passion for working in rural areas and being able to grow much more independently. She feels the program will also help to learn and connect in the field enhancing her knowledge and skills. Himanshi loves to listen to songs and draw sketches during her free time.



# JAYA PARAMANAND MOHITKAR

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



BSW from Chhindwara University. Daughter of a widow, fought the pressure to get married and completed her undergraduate degree. Passionate about working with widows and their children on education and livelihoods

Jaya Paramanand Mohitkar hails from Zari Jamani village in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, where she grew up in a Kunbi farmer family. Tragedy struck when Jaya was in Std. 10th; she lost her father in an accident, leading to severe financial hardships for her family. Farming, the family's primary livelihood, became increasingly difficult to sustain.

Jaya completed her primary education in her village. However, due to the distance and lack of good colleges nearby, she had to enrol in Mukutban, a small town near her village, for her secondary education. After completing her 10+2, Jaya faced pressure from her mother to marry, primarily due to safety concerns in the absence of her father. In her village, most young women pursued their Bachelor's degrees through distance education due to the scarcity of quality higher education institutions.

Determined to pursue her undergraduate studies in Social Work, Jaya aspired to attend a college in Yavatmal, about 140 kilometres from her village. Despite her family's initial resistance, Jaya's persistence and reasoning convinced her mother and grandfather of the importance of her education for the family's future.

During her BSW fieldwork, Jaya became acutely aware of the issues faced by widows, particularly the disruption in their children's education following the death of their fathers. She is committed to working for the betterment of widows and ensuring the continuation of their children's education.

In her free time, Jaya writes poetry and prose, drawing inspiration from the social and personal challenges she encounters.



## JAYSHRI THAKRE

Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh



BA from Chhindwara University. Passionate  
about gender education and awareness, inspired  
by her mother's grassroots gender training  
work

Jayshri Thakre hails from the Binjhar Adivasi community in Newargaon village, Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh. As the eldest of four sisters, she has taken on significant responsibilities within her family. Her mother works as a gender trainer with the well-known NGO PRADAN, while her father is a daily wage labourer.

Jayshri completed her primary education in her village and her secondary education in Samnapur. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Sociology, and Hindi Literature from Kamla Nehru Arts College, Balaghat. Additionally, Jayshri holds a postgraduate diploma in Computer Education.

The poverty and lack of opportunities in Adivasi communities deeply concern Jayshri. She is determined to use her education to develop interventions in health and livelihood sectors. Due to limited local employment opportunities, many from her community migrate to cities like Nagpur for work.

Inspired by her parents' resilience in facing hardships, Jayshri is motivated to create positive change. Jayshri's dedication to her community and her drive to address systemic issues highlight her potential as a future leader in rural development.

In her free time, she enjoys sewing, reading storybooks, and singing.



## KM FIRDAUS

Ballia, Uttar Pradesh



Firdaus (on the left) together with her two female students from the local village school.

BSc from Jananayak Chandra Shekhar University, UP. Keen on female empowerment among minority communities, first woman from her village to pursue a post-graduate degree

KM Firdaus is a young Muslim woman born and brought up in the village of Chak Usraila, Ballia in Uttar Pradesh. Growing up as a sensitive individual amidst the serene yet challenging rural environment, she developed a profound understanding of the unique obstacles faced by herself and those around her, early on in life. Coming from a close-knit community, she witnessed many girls around her being married off at a very young age without their proper consent. Firdaus, as a child, became determined to challenge this social normative. Firdaus has always been an exemplary student, maintaining a consistent academic record throughout her educational journey. She completed her schooling with the Uttar Pradesh State Board of Education. Driven by her commitment to gaining education, in 2020 she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Science from Jananayak Chandra Shekhar University, Ballia. Completing an under-graduate degree still remains a distant dream for many of her female cousins and friends. During her graduation years, she aspired to appear for the UPSC examination and become an IAS officer to bring about foundational change in rural societies. However, despite her family's support, societal constraints prevented them from allowing Firdaus to leave the village and stay in the city for her preparation. Such setbacks would not stop Firdaus from moving forward. Recently, she enhanced her qualifications by acquiring a diploma in elementary education, reflecting her dedication to contributing to rural education. In addition to her academic pursuits, Firdaus enjoys reading literature and poetry. She is fluent in Hindi and Urdu.

Her professional aspirations to address the multifaceted challenges of rural India are deeply intertwined with her personal experiences and values. She has received valuable training and support from organizations such as the Society for Promotion of Educational and Environmental Development and the Supporting Association for Thematic and Holistic Initiatives. During her training, she participated in various surveys, camps and study trips, gaining practical insights into rural issues and the importance of community participation. Her work background involves engagement with issues of women and children, health, sanitation and environmental protection. Apart from professional engagements, Firdaus has always been actively involved in her community, seeking opportunities to make a difference. One memorable story involves organizing an educational workshop in her village, where she taught children basic reading and writing skills. Seeing the eager faces of the children and the gratitude of their parents reinforced her belief in the power of education to change lives.

By gaining advanced knowledge and practical skills through the MA-RM program, Firdaus hopes to work closely with government initiatives and local communities to improve the quality of life in rural areas. Her vision includes creating environmentally sustainable development plans for villages and promoting education among women, particularly within the Muslim communities. Firdaus faced initial resistance when expressing the desire to apply for the MA-RM program. Her father, concerned about future prospects and her marriage was hesitant. But due to her unwavering determination and perseverance, this time he eventually had to support her decision. Being the first woman to ever get out of her village to pursue a post-graduate degree, Firdaus is a flag bearer, a shining ray of hope for many other women coming from marginalized minority communities.



# MANDEEP KUMAR

Rohtas, Bihar



Mandeep Kumar interacting with speakers on the youth question at a G20 event in New Delhi

BSc Physics from Veer Kunwar Singh University,  
Ara, Bihar. Recognised youth leader working on  
creating awareness about anti-caste philosophy,  
fundamental rights and reproductive health

Mandeep Kumar is a first-generation learner from Kaithi village in the Rohtas district of Bihar. He hails from a historically marginalized SC community. Due to social and economic constraints, his parents were unable to pursue formal education. His father is a daily wage worker and his mother is a homemaker. Despite these challenges, Mandeep has demonstrated remarkable perseverance in his educational journey. Growing up in a village without basic amenities such as schools, Anganwadi centres, hospitals or transportation, Mandeep faced significant obstacles. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Physics from Sher Shah College in Sasaram.

Mandeep actively participated in activities of The Youth Parliament Foundation, forming a group of 20 adolescents and youths to spread awareness about sexual and reproductive health, STI, HIV, and AIDS. He then became a fellow with the Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum (BASF), working with Dalit students in his village, conducting weekly meetings on education, fundamental rights, gender issues and more. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he volunteered with Jan Adhikar Kendra and BASF, distributing essential supplies to impoverished families, including sanitary napkins for girls.

Mandeep led the Samvidhan Express initiative, addressing issues such as lack of water, toilets, quality education and mid-day meals in government schools. He organized career guidance workshops at the block level.

Mandeep was recognized for his contributions and was selected to participate in a G20 co-branded event (Health of Youth, Wealth for Nation) with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. He also trained at the Phule Ambedkar Centre for Philosophy & English Training (PACPET), where he learned about anti-caste philosophy, equality and equity and picked up teamwork skills.

Mandeep interned as an assistant teacher at Eklavya India Foundation in Nagpur, Maharashtra, teaching English and utilizing his knowledge of Excel and Google Forms. His ambition is to work in the area of higher education for underprivileged youth, focusing on marginalized groups, first-generation graduates and education for girls in rural areas. He wishes to open a free library in his village. In his free time, Mandeep likes to sing and play cricket and badminton.



# MAYA SEN

Dewas, Madhya Pradesh



Maya sitting among her peers (front row, fifth in sequence from the left) at the Baba Amte Centre for People's Empowerment, MP.

BSc in Biotechnology from Barkatullah University, Bhopal. Committed to female empowerment, Worked with the well-known NGO Samaj Pragati Sahayog.

Maya Sen is a driven and empathetic woman from Khategaon town in Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh. With a profound desire to tackle oppression and promote girl child education, and coming from a rural background where early marriages and discrimination against women are prevalent, she aspires to make a significant impact in these areas. Despite the challenges faced by her farming family due to water scarcity and exploitation by middlemen, Maya is the only girl from her village to pursue higher education outside of MP. Her primary schooling was at the local government school, where she was admitted through the efforts of teachers rather than her parents, underscoring her self-motivation and commitment to education. She graduated with a BSc in Biotechnology from Harda Degree College, affiliated with Barkatullah Vishwavidyalaya, Bhopal. She has also completed her MSc degree in Botany from the same institution.

Maya's work experience includes serving as a Data Entry Operator at Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS), one of India's leading grass-roots organisations, where she maintained accurate records for female farmers using specialized software. According to her, this experience has not only honed her technical skills but also provided her with insights into rural management and the challenges faced by rural communities.

Her hobbies include working with computers, learning new technologies, reading books, and dancing. Maya's commitment to making a difference, particularly in advocating for women's opportunities, is reflected in her proactive approach to education and community service. With her educational background and practical experience, Maya is well-prepared to further her knowledge and impact in the field of rural management through the Master's in Rural Management programme.



## MD SANTAJ ANSARI

Gumla, Jharkhand



Santaj conducting a meeting for physical verification of applications under the Forest Rights Act

BSc Mathematics from Kartik Oraon College,  
Gumla, Jharkhand. Worked with renowned  
NGO PRADAN on securing rights under the  
Forest Rights Act

Santaj Ansari comes from the Gumla district, one of the most disadvantaged districts in the country located in the southwestern region of Jharkhand. His father works in farming and does small local jobs.

He completed his graduate studies in Mathematics from Kartik Oraon College, Gumla, in 2020. Since childhood, Santaj has dreamt of contributing to the development of society at large and communities in his district, particularly working for the Adivasi and Dalit communities in his region. In December 2023, he got an opportunity to work with the NGO PRADAN on the Forest Rights Act (FRA). This gave him a better idea about how legislations such as FRA work on the ground and how communities can be mobilized to benefit from such legislation. He worked very closely with the Adivasi communities during this period. During this time, he also observed that due to the lack of livelihood and education in rural and tribal areas, children start working as labourers and get into substance abuse at a young age. This raised the question in his mind: Can't we do something for their development and education? Is the development of our rural areas not possible? What are the hurdles for the development of the rural areas? Considering this, he decided to pursue further education in the field of Rural Management and is determined to make every possible effort to advance education, livelihood, agricultural development and health in disadvantaged communities, and to eradicate addiction, gambling, and unemployment.

He is eager to learn and grow, and self-reflective at the same time where he feels it's important to professionally work for the development of communities, along with his personal development. He believes that self-transformation is very important along with social transformation and self-transformation is a part of the social transformation. During his free time, he loves to play cricket and likes to read fiction and non-fiction and travel to new places.





# MITHUN KUMAR

Patna, Bihar



Mithun Kumar (extreme right) organizing a health camp in a low-income settlement in Patna, Bihar

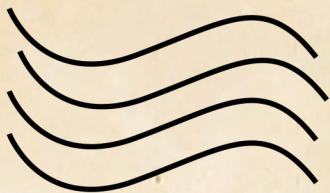
BSW from IGNOU. Took up multiple jobs to fund his education from 6th grade onwards. Currently works in low-income settlements on public health and social issues

Mithun Kumar hails from Patna, Bihar, where he resides in a low-income settlement. He belongs to a historically marginalized SC community. His mother performs paid domestic labour, and his father, due to poor eyesight, is unable to work. Together with his mother, Mithun manages the household expenses. He studied in a government school and from the 6th grade onwards, financed his education by taking on various jobs such as newspaper delivery and waiting tables. Mithun completed his Bachelor's degree in Social Work (BSW) from IGNOU.

Currently, Mithun is working with the Diksha Foundation, where he is also an alumnus, which aims to provide joyful learning to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. He began his work with the Foundation during the COVID-19 pandemic as an Outreach Worker. As part of the Patna Social Smart City Project, Mithun conducted awareness campaigns in low-income settlements, educating residents on protecting themselves from COVID-19 and maintaining hygiene. He also organized monthly meetings on issues such as HIV/AIDS, child marriage, child labour, government schemes and livelihoods. Additionally, he facilitated health camps in low-income settlements, connecting people with Urban Primary Health Centres (UPHCs) who were previously unaware of their services and helped re-enrol drop-out children in schools.

After joining as a worker in the Diksha Foundation and experiencing the conditions in low-income settlements first-hand, he realized the importance of development interventions in less-served areas. He is passionate about raising awareness and bringing positive change to communities living in low-income settlements. This passion has motivated him to consider pursuing a program in rural management, aiming to continue his efforts in improving the lives of those in underserved areas.

In his free time, Mithun loves to travel and ride his bike.



# MONIKA PARTE

Harda, Madhya Pradesh



Monika in the centre while interacting with young children of a public school at Harda, Madhya Pradesh.

BSc from Barkatullah University, Bhopal. Passionate to work on health, education and child rights. Experience of working with the Synergy Sansthan and AIGPPA, Bhopal

Monika Parte is a committed and aspiring individual from Harda, Madhya Pradesh. She belongs to the Gond Tribe, one of India's largest Adivasi (ST) communities, with a population of over 13 million, spread across several states of central India, primarily MP, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra.

Monika has a strong academic background in the sciences, having obtained her B.Sc. degree in 2021. She has demonstrated a consistent and commendable academic record, reflecting her dedication to her education despite facing significant family hardships. Raised in a family where her father is a farmer and her mother works as an Anganwadi worker, Monika understands the challenges and aspirations of rural communities. She is one of eight siblings, and both she and her elder sister play a significant role in managing their household expenses. This background has fuelled her desire to make a meaningful impact in rural lives. Monika's professional journey is marked by her experience as a field facilitator with Synergy Sanstha in Harda, where she worked extensively in health education and child rights during 2022-2023. Additionally, she was part of the Youth Internship Programme at AIGGPA in Bhopal for the year 2023-24.

Her hands-on experience in these roles highlights her commitment to social work and her passion for contributing to rural development.

Her goal is to become a social leader specializing in natural farming, health, food, and nutrition, as well as child and women's rights in rural India. Monika believes that change begins from home, with the aid of her education under the RM programme she aims to first encourage her family to stop the excessive use of chemical fertilizers in their fields. Her resilience and heartfelt commitment to improving the lives of those in the rural community have prompted her to further her education and skills.



# NISRAT NISHA

Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh



Nisrat Nisha (centre) as part of a street play at her college

MA in Political Science from the Government  
Kamla Nehru Girls College, Balaghat. Worked  
with the renowned NGO PRADAN's Youth Ser-  
vice Provider program in MP on career guidance

Nisrat Nisha is a Muslim woman from a small village called Kochewada in the southeastern region of Balaghat district in Madhya Pradesh. Her father works with PRADAN, a leading non-governmental organization in the country, raising awareness on women's empowerment, livelihood, and gender inequality. Inspired by her father's work, from early on, Nisrat dreamt of contributing to societal development. She completed a Master's in Political Science from the Government Kamla Nehru Girls College in Balaghat in 2022.

During her master's she undertook a three-month internship on child labour in the context of child protection. During the internship, she realized that due to a lack of livelihood opportunities in rural areas, children often end up working at a young age. She is exploring what can be done about these issues and how she can contribute to the development of rural areas in general. However, due to her family's economic circumstances, she had to work as a teacher in a private school for two years in between. Despite the challenges, she never forgot her dream and worked for some time as a Youth Service Provider programme of PRADAN in Madhya Pradesh, where she provided support and guidance to rural youth regarding career and job opportunities.

Nisrat looks at the RM programme as an opportunity to learn and develop her skills and dreams of becoming an empathetic and compassionate leader from her community, inspiring other rural youth, and working towards rural development. Nisrat loves to do the traditional Gond Dance.

# NITIN BHANGU PAWAR

Jalgaon, Maharashtra



Nitin (right) during his fieldwork on education with students of Bhamragarh in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra

BSW from KBCNM University, Jalgaon. A men-  
strual health educator and co-founder of an  
NGO working with child and youth develop-  
ment in his area

Nitin Bhangu Pawar belongs to the Banjara community, historically classified as a criminal tribe under British law. His village - Khedgaon in the Erandol block of Jalgaon district, Maharashtra, witnesses large-scale out-migration every year between September and April. Bulk of this migration takes place to fulfil the immense labour required by the sugarcane plantations in the state. The production of sugarcane in Maharashtra has been notorious for the widespread labour exploitation it involves as well as its negative cascading effects on various dimensions of social life. Nitin's parents, and his grandparents before them, would migrate to Daund near Pune as sugarcane harvesting labourers for a period of 6 months each year. Being away from school for such long periods meant that his learning loss grew larger with every passing year. It was only when he reached his 9th year of schooling that he gained some stability in his learning as his family decided to buy a small piece of agricultural land in their village to break away from this cycle of distress migration. This was a turning point in Nitin's life. He invested himself completely into making up for all the years of learning loss and performed well in his studies.

While in high school, he learnt about the option of studying social work at the undergraduate level when he encountered a group of students doing their summer rural immersion in Khedgaon. He secured a seat at the College of Social Work in Jalgaon to pursue a Bachelors in Social Work which he funded by working as a library assistant and as a health communicator. As a health communicator, he was trained in delivering sessions on menstrual health, menstrual hygiene and on busting the myths and taboos around menstruation. He carried out these sessions for girls of various ages across 8 schools in Jalgaon. He talks passionately about being a catalyst in ending harmful traditional practices of isolating menstruating girls in rundown outhouses (called Kurmaghars) every month.

Nitin houses a great amount of empathy and has a great resolve for creating change. He realises that he is an exception to the rule in his village as most youngsters of his age did not get to pursue education and are now involved with daily wage labour. To provide the coming generation with greater exposure and opportunities, he has set up his own NGO - Gramearth Foundation - along with 6 of his friends. Their NGO organises various cultural and sports events for the youth in his village as well as spreads awareness about social and environmental issues to village communities at large. At the MA in Rural Management program, he is excited about learning from various academic disciplines and linking them to the ground reality through field-based education.



## PARIMAL ORAON

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



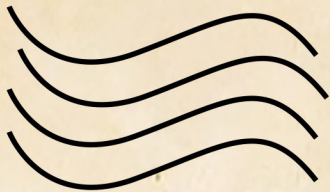
BA in Psychology from KISS, Bhubaneshwar.

Passionate about mental health support initiatives among low-income rural communities focusing on tackling alcoholism

Parimal lives in Ellenbari Tea Estate in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and belongs to the Oraon Adivasi (ST) community. He has completed his graduation in Psychology from Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Bhubaneshwar. Parimal's mother is a tea garden labourer. He could not fulfil his wish to pursue a higher education straight after his high school due to the financial burden he had to shoulder after his father's death in 2019. For a few years, he migrated to Hyderabad and worked there in a restaurant. It was around this time his friend introduced him to Himalayan Prayatna Foundation, an organization that has been working with the youth in the tea gardens of North Bengal. The organization helped him in securing funding to pursue his bachelor's in KISS. Having worked hard to stabilise his family's financial situation, Parimal decided to follow his dream of pursuing further studies.

His interest in joining the Rural Management program is to better the situation of tea garden communities in his region. At a time when alcoholism is rampant among tea garden communities, he wishes to start conversations surrounding mental health among such communities in rural areas. Though a career in psychology would have been able to give him a 'lucrative' job, Parimal is not interested in that. His experience of marginalization has made him determined to use his time for the betterment of the entire community. He believes that with the conceptual, methodological and skill-based understanding of the rural in the program, he can work for a holistic development among his community in North Bengal.

Parimal loves cooking and harbours a secret dream of opening a small restaurant of his own in his area someday.



## POOJA

Rampur, Uttar Pradesh



Pooja with students from her village's primary school who she teaches during her summer break

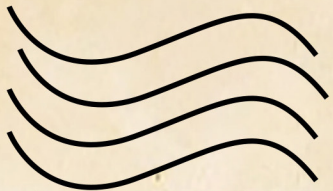
BA in Sociology from Shiv Nadar University. A  
consistent academic achiever, passionate about  
working on multiple social inequalities, with a  
focus on gender

Having grown up in a small village Ladpur in Rampur district of Uttar Pradesh, Pooja has witnessed the inherent socio-cultural problems faced by women in her neighbourhood. Not having borne a son, her mother did not receive any support from the gender-biased community and was asked to leave her marital home. But her mother persevered through all the odds, and it was her determination that made Pooja learn that an empowered matriarch can influence how other members of the family perceive the world around them. Drawing strength and inspiration from her mother, Pooja is a visionary of an equal society.

She has completed her schooling as a Vidyagyan student and finished her Bachelor's in Sociology from Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence receiving a full scholarship. In grade X, she was selected for the Kennedy Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Abroad programme and received a full scholarship by the US government.

Pursuing a master's degree in Rural Management, she wants to enhance her analytical, methodological, and conceptual capacities that are needed to address the challenge of gender discrimination and the intertwined problems. Engaged in the rigorous training module of the program, she is keen on honing her research skills and applying them to the analytic study of rural communities.

In her role as a change-maker, she is determined to shape public policy and bring about a systemic change in society where gender does not determine availability and accessibility. Immersed in the diverse and inclusive community of Rural Management, she seeks a "transformative experience" that extends beyond the classroom, learning particularly from a diverse set of her peers.



## PRATIK DNYANDEO BHAGAT

Washim, Maharashtra



Pratik, sitting first from right, doing enrollment of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission accounts and creating awareness

BSW from Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University, Maharashtra. Received prestigious Gandhi Fellowship. Committed to inclusivity and innovation to enable sustainable progress in underserved communities

Pratik comes from a landless farming family in the Washim district of Maharashtra. His family originally belong to the village of Chincholi of the same district but for many years now his family has resided in Washim city. His family belongs to the Mahar Buddhist (SC) community, a group that converted to Buddhism as part of the anti-caste movement led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

He completed his BA in Bachelor of Social Work in 2022 from Ramrao Sarnaik College of Social Work of the Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University. After that, to gain more experience and insight into social issues, he got selected for the prestigious Gandhi Fellowship. He worked for two years in the Sheohar district of Bihar under the Digital Bharat Collaboration program. In this program, he learnt about public and private health systems and conducted fieldwork with ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwives) and ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists). Additionally, he identified malnourished children in villages, educated their families, assisted ANMs in using online apps at Primary Health Centres, and provided training.

Pratik aims to promote higher education opportunities, facilitate intellectual and physical growth, and enable sustainable progress in underserved communities. Committed to inclusivity and innovation, he strives to bridge educational gaps, empower local leaders, and act as a catalyst for holistic development. He is dedicated to enhancing grassroots leadership and empowering communities. While Pratik is passionate about the larger socio-economic development of rural areas, he also has a particular interest in the development of his own village.

In his spare time, Pratik loves to read books and play outdoor sports like kabaddi and cricket.



# PUNAM KANDEYANG

West Singhbhum, Jharkhand



Punam Kandeyang organizing a children's march for the environment in Khuntpani block, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand

BA in Hindi from Kolhan University, Chaibasa,  
Jharkhand. Ran a small store to fund her higher  
education and worked on tackling malnutrition  
in her area

Punam Kandeyang, a 22-year-old Ho Adivasi (ST) woman from Basakuti village of West Singhbhum district in Jharkhand, is an inspiring example of resilience and determination. Basakuti, a hamlet 17 kilometres from Chaibasa district headquarters, is surrounded by the Saranda forest, an area long impacted by Maoist violence. Punam, the third of five sisters, grew up in a family where her parents worked as daily wage labourers. Despite numerous hardships, she aspired to transcend her circumstances and make a difference.

Punam completed her schooling in her village before pursuing a BA degree in Hindi from Tata College in Chaibasa, cycling 17 kilometres each way to attend classes. With her ageing parents unable to work and her elder sisters married, Punam took on the responsibility of supporting her family and funding her younger sisters' education. When her family pressured her to quit her studies and take up full-time employment, she opened a neighbourhood shop to meet her family's needs and repay educational loans. Balancing her time between college and her shop, she faced continuous pressure to quit, but her passion for higher education prevailed.

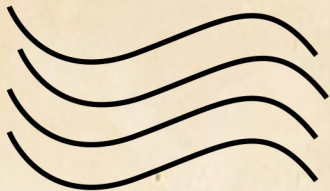
Punam's six-month stint with WorldVision, where she worked on the Johar Poshan program to identify malnourished children, shows her dedication to social issues. Growing up amidst illiteracy, poverty, hunger and superstition, she witnessed her community's struggles and developed a resolve to find lasting solutions. Her firsthand experience of her people's plight, forced migration, and the unrelenting cycle of poverty, fuels her commitment to addressing these challenges.

In her free time, Punam enjoys engaging with children and finds joy in both traditional community songs and Hindi film music. Her story is a testament to the power of determination and the pursuit of education against all odds.



# RADHA NARESHRAO DESHMUKH

Yavatmal, Maharashtra



BSW from Amravati University, Maharashtra.

Keen on addressing farmer and water issues.

Worked with the Paani Foundation and the

Gramhit Organisation

Radha Naresh Rao Deshmukh is a dedicated and ambitious woman from the Yavatmal district in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region, an area ironically known as the "White Gold City" despite having one of the highest numbers of cotton farmer suicides in the country. As the first girl in her family to pursue higher education, she has set a commendable example in a region where educational opportunities for girls are limited. Radha completed her secondary and senior secondary education at her village school due to various social and financial constraints. Pursuing her passion for social work, Radha enrolled herself in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) from Amravati University, Maharashtra. Her academic journey is a testament to her commitment to rural development and social change.

Radha's hands-on experience includes volunteering with various organizations such as Paani Foundation, Gramhit Organisation, NSS, and ASER Survey, where she has served as a community field worker for more than four years. These roles have provided her with valuable insights into community challenges and development strategies, particularly in addressing water scarcity and agricultural issues.

Radha's decision to apply for an MA in Rural Management is driven by her aspiration to bring sustainable solutions to rural communities. She aims to focus on water management, agricultural development, and empowering women through education and community engagement. Her dedication to rural development is further evidenced by her involvement in village self-help groups and educational initiatives for children.

With a strong foundation in social work and practical experience in rural settings, Radha is poised to leverage her skills and knowledge to make significant contributions to rural management and inspire young women for higher education. Her goal is to become a catalyst for change, addressing critical issues such as water conservation, agricultural sustainability, and social empowerment in rural India. She is already raising the bar and fuelling aspirations for the women in her area by securing an admission into the Master's in Rural Management program.



# RAHUL KUMAR CHATURVEDI

Bemetara, Chhattisgarh



BSc in Biology from Government P.G.  
College, Bemetara. An enterprising farmer with  
experience of youth volunteering with the NGO  
Yumetta

Rahul Kumar comes from village Karhi (Bahinga) in Bemetara district, Chhattisgarh, and belongs to the Satnami (SC) community. He grew up with his grandparents as his parents were separated and his mother is a migrant worker in Pune, who supports his family and education. His family includes his mother, grandparents, maternal uncle and aunt, their child, and maternal aunt's family.

Rahul completed his primary and secondary education in his village and graduated with a BSc in Biology from Government P.G. College, Bemetara. He was the first in his family to study beyond the 12th grade. Rahul also supported his education by doing odd jobs and later he requested his family to allow him to use their land and started farming paddy and growing some vegetables for household consumption. He gradually realized his interest in farming and how he would want to focus on farming in the future. However, he didn't want to stop his education. Subsequently, he participated in the "Go to the People" (GTP) youth camp by Yumetta, a local NGO. This experience changed his perspective on social problems and challenges and made him think about society at large.

Through a connection at this organization, he learned about the MA in Rural Management. When he got selected for the program, all his acquaintances were very happy, and he is thrilled by the idea of studying at Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence. Once he completes the program, he plans to work on the educational empowerment of his community and his region. Additionally, with his interest in farming, he wants to work on the development of agriculture including areas like water, and groundwater, and improvement and regeneration of soil fertility.

Rahul enjoys traveling to different places, meeting new people, making new friends, and reading books outside of the syllabus.



## **RAHUL MARUTI KALE**

**Dharashiv, Maharashtra**



Ending the daily study session for young students with a prayer for wellbeing. Sunderwadi Village, Dharashiv (Osmanabad) District, Maharashtra

BCom from SMP College, Murum, Maharashtra.

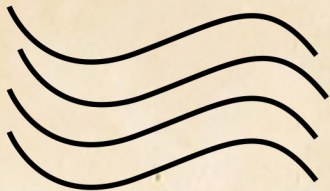
Voluntarily teaches young school students in his native village Sunderwadi

Rahul is driven by a passion for learning. He grew up in Sunderwadi Village of Dharashiv (formerly known as Osmanabad) District in Maharashtra's drought-prone Marathwada region. His mother is an agricultural labourer. To support his family which includes two younger siblings, Rahul started working as a farm labourer since the age of 13. He also apprenticed himself to a mason and learnt to be an expert bricklayer.

While studying for his BCom degree, Rahul taught the children of migrant sugarcane workers near his village for four months. The experience influenced him deeply. He realised more than ever the value of education and that there were people even less fortunate than him. Motivated by his experiences of working closely with children, he started teaching students free of cost with the help of some like-minded friends in his own village to help them with their studies.

To support his household, Rahul started working with an NGO Gyan Prabodhini Harali as a Gurukul supervisor for students of grades five and six. He would assist the students with their studies, conduct daily sports session, and was responsible for their overall wellbeing. He used the earnings from this job to complete BCom. However, he had to take a break after his undergraduate degree because of economic hardship. Rahul has an intense passion to work at the grassroots and improve the status of education for rural youth. He wants to motivate teachers to become more committed to teaching. In his ideal village, teachers would take their jobs seriously, young people would stay away from tobacco, liquor, and social media, and the lives of farmers would transform for the better. The desire to acquire necessary knowledge and skills to bring about these changes motivated him to apply to the Rural Management program.

Rahul is interested in books about child development and rural development. In his free time, he enjoys playing and teaching various sports like cricket, kabaddi, volleyball and handball.



## **RAJGURU PANDEY**

**Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh**



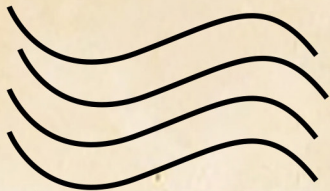
BA and MA in Hindi Literature from Allahabad  
University. Passionate about natural farming,  
raising social awareness and enabling access to  
government schemes in rural areas

Having grown up in a village in the Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, Rajguru was exposed early on to the socio-economic and political challenges endured by rural communities, which has significantly shaped his outlook on life and the opportunities he has encountered. As a child, he felt extremely disturbed at the discriminatory behaviour displayed by his school mates and even his elders towards specific communities and people because of their ascribed social identities.

Rajguru himself comes from a humble background, with his father being a small farmer. Due to numerous financial hardships, he completed most of his schooling at the village school. During this time, he felt a significant gap exists between rural and urban as well as public and private education. Determined to pursue his education, he obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degree in Hindi Literature from Allahabad University.

He now wishes to develop and utilize his skills to support rural lives and travel widely across the country. He identifies several major challenges facing rural India, including poverty, lack of access to electricity, inadequate healthcare facilities, poor quality of education, and limited technological awareness. He advocates for greater awareness and better implementation of government policies, improved teacher training, digitalization of schools, and enhanced healthcare infrastructure to address these issues.

As a volunteer, he has actively worked in villages of U.P. and Jharkhand, identifying critical issues such as the lack of awareness about government policies, gaps in policy planning and implementation, and corruption that hinders the effective use of allocated funds. He has taken the initiative to educate villagers on how to access government services and advocate for their rights. Rajguru believes that the Rural Management program, with its blend of theoretical and practical components, will equip him to understand the intricacies of rural India and drive meaningful change.



## RAMVILASH BHUSARIYA

Dewas, Madhya Pradesh



Ramvilash working on his farm in Beragada, MP

BA from Devi Ahilya University, Indore. Dedicated student with a background in the natural sciences and arts with a strong commitment towards tackling the unemployment crisis

Ramvilash Bhusariya is a Korku Adivasi (ST) from Beragada village in Satwas block of Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh. His family has been involved in agriculture and own a small farm. He is the youngest of six surviving siblings – 4 sisters and 2 brothers. Two of his siblings passed away when he was a child. Ramvilash's elder brother – Vijesh Bhusariya has been his guide and role model. Having done his Master's in Social Work, Vijesh has been working with Samaj Pragati Sahayog, a prominent NGO, for close to a decade.

Ramvilash's childhood was not an easy one. His father suffers from a hearing disability which limited his ability to financially contribute to the household. Further, a breaking up of his close-knit joint family led to Ramvilash's mother becoming the sole earner of the family. He remembers the precarity of how his mother managed the household finances through daily wage labour and loans from the private moneylender, all the while managing the responsibility of caring for 6 children. However, he recalls, she always remained hopeful about their future and encouraged her children to focus on their education.

With limited schools operating in the area, Ramvilash finished his schooling over 4 different government schools. He studied natural sciences in his high school and then went on to do a Bachelor's degree in Arts from Devi Ahilya University in Indore. He then returned to his village where he managed the family farm while applying for jobs and graduate programmes.

Ramvilash feels very strongly about the education and unemployment situation in his area. Having witnessed regular teacher absenteeism in school, ever-increasing costs of private schools, and the educated youth of his village being forced to take up daily wage labour due to dwindling opportunities, he wants to create a positive change for his community. He plans to use his education at the MA in Rural Management program to transform his village. His gaining admission to the program has already made him a source of hope and inspiration in his area.

## REKHA GOPE

West Singhbhum, Jharkhand



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Barjo, village-Mahudi

Rekha (standing on the right) working with farmers on planning for the Kharif season in village Mahudi, Jharkhand

BA in Political Science from Kolhan University,  
Chaibasa, Jharkhand. A rare female graduate  
from her village with extensive work experience  
as an educator and sustainable agriculture prac-  
titioner

Growing up in Mahudi, a village near the mining town of Noamundi in the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, Rekha Gope grew up with the idea that she too will end up in a mining related job. But Rekha's life took a very different path, one that was carved by her hard work and resilience.

Rekha belongs to the Odia community. In 2012, Rekha's father passed away. The responsibility to financially support and care for Rekha and her two younger siblings fell solely on Rekha's mother. Her mother worked as a contract labourer and supported all her children's education. After finishing 12th grade, Rekha was under pressure to quit her education and get married as her mother could not afford to pay her fee. Rekha convinced the principal of Noamundi College (Kolhan University) to give her a shot at higher education based on her academic performance and her passion to study. She received a two-year scholarship for her college fee to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Political Science. She would walk 14 kilometres daily to attend college. Having the confidence of becoming a graduate and an unquenchable thirst for learning, Rekha would then go on to do a Master's degree in Political Science as well as a diploma in financial accounting.

Rekha started contributing to her household by working as a computer trainer and then as a teacher at a private school during her master's degree. She then became Community Mobiliser for a local NGO called Aspire where she helped school dropouts in bridging their learning gap and rejoin school. She believed being an educator gave her a chance to give opportunities to more people like her. An opportunity to work as a Resource Person for the agriculture and livestock programme of the Tata Steel Foundation (TSF), however, made her work go beyond education. At TSF, she worked with farmers to practice agriculture with minimal use of chemical inputs, on farmlands already suffering from the detrimental effects of mining. She believes in the role of soil as the basis for all life as we know it.

Rekha wants her various areas of education to come together and her work to contribute to the creation of rewarding and dignified livelihoods for the farmers of our country. She finds the design of the MA in Rural Management program completely fit for this purpose.



## SAMIR NAG

Kalahandi, Odisha



Samir with children as part of a summer camp he organized

BSc and a Diploma in computer application from Sambalpur University, Odisha. Worked for over a year in PATANG, an NGO focusing on child rights and youth development

Samir Nag comes from a small village Kupurmal in Odisha's Kalahandi district, one of the most disadvantaged districts in the country. He belongs to the Dombo (SC) community that is mainly spread across the Koraput and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. Both his parents died when he was very young and he was taken care of by a pastor's family. He started working from an early age.

Samir finished his BSc degree and a diploma in computer application from Indravati Mahavidya Jayapatana, Sambalpur University. From 2022, he worked for a year and two months in an organization named PATANG, on child rights and youth development.

Samir is passionate about social justice and equality. He aims to understand complex rural issues such as poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, limited infrastructure, and environmental degradation and develop innovative solutions that empower rural communities to thrive sustainably. He chose the MA in Rural Management as he feels it provides a platform for poor children to progress in their careers. He dreams of establishing an organization and undertaking projects in his area to foster its development. A special focus of this organisation would be on creating a conducive environment for the growth of children and the youth. He loves to play cricket and badminton when he has free time.



## SANCHARIA ORAON

Jalpaiguri, West Bengal



BA in History from North Bengal University.

Worked on helping the youth in her area with  
rejoining formal education and created aware-  
ness on career opportunities

Sancharia comes from a Christian family and belongs to the Oraon Adivasi (ST) community. She lives in the Damdim tea garden estate in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Her mother is a tea garden worker while her father works in a factory. During her college years, she also worked as a tea garden labourer to better her family's financial condition. Later she started working with Himalayan Prayatna Foundation, an organization that has been working with the youth in the tea gardens of North Bengal. As part of her role, she used to visit the homes of dropouts and class XII pass outs in several tea gardens in the area and make them aware of higher education opportunities along with scholarships and encourage them to apply. She would even talk to their parents to convince them about the same.

She was deeply disturbed when her younger sister did not prioritize education and for the longest time remembered being angry with her. However, her exposure in the social sector has made her see why young girls in tea gardens did not prioritize education and either ran off to the cities or were married off. This helped her forgive her sister. She also recognizes how the desire for a 'permanent job' in the gardens has stopped the youth from aspiring higher, finishing their education and demanding better rights for them.

She wants to gain knowledge and skills from her two years in the Rural Management program that would help her to finally go back and work for the youth of the tea garden communities of North Bengal. She also wishes to take forward her work with Himalayan Prayatna post her post-graduation and inspire and make more young people aware of higher education opportunities and the vital need to pursue them.





# SHIVA SHARMA

Guna, Madhya Pradesh



Shiva (left) with a local woman from Khejra village in Guna, Madhya Pradesh during a voting awareness campaign.

BSc (Computer Sciences) and BEd from Jiwaji  
University, Gwalior,. Worked with AIGGPA, Bho-  
pal and served as 'Jan Seva Mitra' under Madhya  
Pradesh CM's Youth Internship Program

Shiva Sharma is a determined young woman who holds a robust academic background and a deep-rooted passion for community service and social causes. From an early age, she has been actively involved in social work, starting with volunteering work in the rural areas of Nashik, while she was in school. During her junior college years, she participated in various activities at the Nashik Kumbh Mela and provided voluntary services to the pilgrims. Born in Guna- a small town in Madhya Pradesh and raised in Nashik-Maharashtra, Shiva has been deeply attached with the rural cosmos. Her parents serve as a source of inspiration to Shiva. Her mother, a public school teacher who walked ten kilometres daily to her village school despite receiving a humble pay, instilled in her the values of dedication and perseverance. Her father, a voluntary social worker, has been actively helping farmers and assisting patients coming from adjoining villages in government hospitals. Inspired by her parents' life, Shiva's has deep commitment for the empowerment of marginalized sections of society.

She completed a BSc degree in Computer Sciences from Government P.G. College, Guna, and her secondary and higher secondary education from Nashik. Shiva further enhanced her academic credentials by completing a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. During this time, she also served as a 'Jan Seva Mitra' (MP Chief Minister's Youth Internship Program), dedicating four hours daily to working in villages, gaining invaluable experience and understanding of rural issues. This was an internship at the Atal Bihari Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis, Bhopal, where she gained valuable experience in policy analysis.

Additionally, she volunteered with the 'Robin Hood Army' in 2023. Her technical skills include Exploratory Data Analysis, Project Management and Physical Analysis. She is proficient in English, Hindi, and Marathi. Her hobbies encompass community service, learning languages, art & design.

Shiva aims to work in an environment that supports social causes and promotes community welfare, leveraging her skills and knowledge to drive positive change and contribute to the betterment of society. Shiva's dedication, academic achievements and practical experiences make her a valuable asset to any organization focused on sustainable and inclusive development.



# SHUBHANK PATEL

Mandla, Madhya Pradesh



Addressing a women's meeting in Binjhi Village, Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh

BSc in Mathematics, Rani Durgavati College,  
Mandla, MP. Worked with the renowned NGO  
PRADAN to develop a baseline profile of ru-  
ral communities. Strong commitment to social  
change

Shubhank is fired by the thought of bringing about transformation in rural society. He is a resident of Munu Village in the Mohgaon Block of Madhya Pradesh's Mandla District. Shubhank himself belongs to the agrarian Kurmi Patel community. However, his village has a large number of Adivasi families. As a result, Shubhank's peer groups have been socially diverse since childhood, something that he is proud of. With strong roots in farming, he has had a strong experience of engagement with the social sector due to his mother who is a Community Service Provider with the renowned NGO PRADAN.

Even as he was completing his undergraduate degree in Mathematics in Mandla town, Shubhank joined a local organisation, the Budhner Narmada Sangh, as a youth mobilizer. While this helped him support his education it also brought him in close contact with youth across Mohgaon Block in his district. As a mobilizer, he discussed with them the various vocational courses and career opportunities they could pursue, such as hotel management, sewing and nursing.

After graduating, Shubhank joined PRADAN as a Community Data Collector, gathering data on the socio-economic status of village residents. While on the job, he had an intense experience. He came across an elderly couple in a remote part of a village, whose son and daughter-in-law had died the same day some months earlier, leaving behind two children less than ten years old. The couple was extremely impoverished but had taken on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren.

Shaken by the state of deprivation, Shubhank began to actively think about social and economic transformation. Putting in much effort, he organised a small rally to highlight the poor state of infrastructure and health facilities in the interior villages of the Chaugan region of his district. Subsequently, he heard of Shiv Nadar IoE's Rural Management program. Shubhank felt a strong connect with the program believing that it would help him find a path towards the social change that he wants to bring about.

Cricket is a favourite pastime for Shubhank. Of late, however, he has become more devout, spending time listening to puja-aarti songs. He also takes an interest in seeking out and meeting people with an altruistic bent of mind.



# SURESH KUMAR

Bikaner, Rajasthan



BA in Political Science from IGNTU, Amarkan-  
tak. Experienced as an educator and a banking  
professional with a strong commitment towards  
progressive social reform

Suresh Kumar feels that an education is only meaningful if it allows you to shed your prejudices and intolerance. Suresh belongs to the Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, a community known for their rich history of protecting the environment. Having grown up in Godoo village in the Kolayat block of Bikaner district, he observes that even the formally educated people from his community continue to discriminate based on caste and religion. This reality is disappointing to Suresh, but he is determined to be a catalyst for positive social change.

Suresh is the eldest sibling among two brothers and two sisters. While all of them have performed well in their studies, he feels particularly grateful for the priority that his sisters' education got from his grandparents and parents. Another reason for their solid academic performance, according to him, is their mother. She passed her own thirst for knowledge and love of books to them, a joy that she was denied after getting married.

Suresh comes from humble means. His is a farming family that owns a decent sized farm but it is not very remunerative due to the lack of water and adverse geographical conditions. He was mentored by his cousin brother who benefitted from the affordability of public universities and guided Suresh to pursue a similar path.

After a solid performance in his high school examinations, he secured admission for a Bachelors in Political Science at the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University in Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh. He thoroughly enjoyed the subject and the diversity of experiences and cultures he was exposed to by his fellow students.

Due to the COVID lockdown, he finished his degree remotely and simultaneously started working as a teacher and school manager in a private school in Jaisalmer. While teaching and his students gave him great satisfaction, an opportunity to work at a large private bank made him switch jobs. At the bank, he was able to use his extroverted and helping nature in not only achieving his own targets but also those of his colleagues. After a year of working to expanding the bank's reach in rural areas, he was convinced that private banks were not designed to cater to the needs of the rural. This led to him to move out of banking and into a volunteering stint at the renowned NGO Urmul Trust.

Suresh found the purpose and culture of working with NGOs aligned with his personal style and ethos. He thus feels completely aligned to the aim of the MA in Rural Management program and will work to develop his skills to deliver on his resolve of positively transforming society.



# SUSHMA IVANE

Harda, Madhya Pradesh



Sushma standing (last row in the background) among a group of young children she taught during her time served as an intern at the community education centre in Rani Jhiri, Madhya Pradesh.

BA from Barkatullah University, Bhopal. Keen on improving child education and youth empowerment in tribal areas. Udaan Fellow with the Synergy Sansthan. Runs a youth program 'Sajha Netratva'

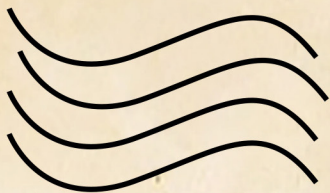
Sushma Ivane is a dedicated and passionate young woman from Harda, Madhya Pradesh, with a strong commitment to social work and community development. She belongs to the Gond Adivasi (ST) community. Despite facing various challenges with her education and personal life, Sushma has consistently demonstrated resilience and leadership in her efforts to improve the lives of women and children in her community.

With an academic background in the Arts, Sushma excelled in her high school examinations, standing first in her village. She obtained her B.A. degree in 2023 and also pursued a Master's degree in Sociology, showcasing her dedication to continuous learning and building her social understanding. Sushma's professional experience spans five years, during which she has extensively travelled across 25 villages in Harda district, out of which in 3 villages she worked closely with women and girl children. As an Udaan Fellow with Synergy Sansthan for two years and a participant in the Tribal Leadership Programme by Tata Steel Foundation, Sushma has honed her leadership skills and deepened her understanding of rural issues. Her involvement in the 'Jangal-shala' project, where she taught tribal students from 6th to 8th standard, underscores her commitment to education and empowerment. She also leads the 'Sajha-Netratva', a youth leadership programme with nine other equally driven people, both men and women with extensive field experience of working with national and State level civil society organisations.

Sushma has a clear vision for addressing rural issues such as health, water, unemployment, and education. She recognizes the importance of promoting current policies and social welfare schemes in local languages to make them accessible and comprehensible for rural communities. Her insight into the causes of social backwardness and her determination to overcome these challenges reflect her drive and leadership qualities. Her story is one of perseverance, leadership, and a deep-seated commitment to making a positive impact in her community and beyond.

## URMILA LAXMAN KASDEKAR

Amravati, Maharashtra



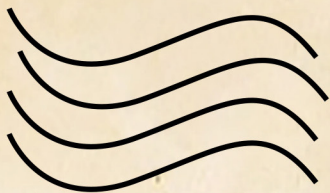
Urmila (right) being felicitated for her contribution as a volunteer in the ASER survey

BSW from Savitri Jyotirao Social Work College,  
Yavatmal, Maharashtra. Engaged with rural and  
tribal issues of health, education, youth and un-  
employment for over three years

Urmila Kasdekar, hailing from the village of Simori in the Chikhaldara taluka in the Melghat region of Amravati district, Maharashtra, is a dedicated and resilient student. Melghat is known for its significant population of Korku tribals and high levels of malnutrition. Urmila also comes from the Korku tribal community and is one of four sisters. Her family owns two acres of unirrigated land. Urmila completed her education up to class 12th at an ashram school designed for tribal boys and girls. Despite the challenges, she pursued higher education at a college in Yavatmal, facilitated by the Eklavya India Foundation.

Having lived in a hostel for tribal girls during her graduation, Urmila is known for her gentle demeanour and calm disposition among her peers. She possesses a robust passion for education and self-improvement. Despite the difficulties faced by tribal students from Melghat in a city like Yavatmal, Urmila remained undeterred and resilient. Actively participating in group work and community organization, Urmila is deeply community-oriented.

Over the past three years, she has participated in the ASER survey twice, contributing to a Pan India Survey, engaging in an NSS Rural Camp, conducting a baseline survey, assisting in a survey for flood victims, attending the Gandhi-Vinoba-Nehru-Thought Camp, and organizing an informal study trip with fellow students. To continue her growth, Urmila aims to enhance her understanding, writing and presentation skills, build her confidence, and improve her language proficiency. Urmila's story is one of perseverance and dedication, making her a valuable addition to any programme focused on rural and community empowerment.



## VINOD KUMAR VERMA

Ballia, Uttar Pradesh



BSc from PG College, Ballia, UP and Advanced Diploma in Computer Application (ADCA). A dedicated farmer with extensive field experience in agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, and animal husbandry

Vinod Kumar Verma hails from the village of Chilkahar in Ballia district, Uttar Pradesh. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree and has been passionate about nature and its relationship with society since childhood. His enthusiasm extends to understanding the socio-economic and cultural conditions of various sections of society. Influenced greatly by his grandfather, farming parents, and compassionate teachers, Vinod developed a keen interest in studying agriculture, ecology, environment, ethics and the polity of India.

He is dedicated to guiding and assisting students from vulnerable sections of society, including women, SC, ST, and disabled individuals, to help them achieve their ambitions. He is particularly concerned with women's education, representation, participation, and empowerment, advocating for women-led development and constitutional awareness among them. Vinod, along with his parents, practices sustainable integrated farming. He has hands-on experience in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries. He believes that integrated, mixed, and natural farming are sustainable practices that reduce input costs and focus on increasing farmers' income while preserving natural resources for better and resilient livelihoods.

Vinod enjoys cricket, badminton, gym and cycling. He also holds an interest in watching tennis, listening to the BBC World Service radio, and reading newspapers and magazines. Vinod's skills include strong communication abilities in English, Hindi, and Bhojpuri, and proficiency in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), having completed an Advanced Diploma in Computer Application (ADCA). Vinod has joined the MA in Rural Management to address socio-economic challenges faced by rural India. He aims to contribute to policy-making and rural development by leveraging the multidisciplinary and integrated nature of the RM program.



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