

Regional Samvaad 2019 reaches Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: With views to engage with new perspectives, the North-East regional edition of Samvaad travelled to Rajiv Gandhi University in Itanagar for yet another one-and-a-half-day conclave that brought together 110 participants from 31 tribes.

A prayer song from the Igu Mishmi tribe symbolising peace and prosperity opened the session followed by an address by Jiren Topno, Head, Tribal Cultural Society, CSR, Tata Steel and Professor Saket Kushwaha, Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University.

After having covered topics like health, education and livelihood in its two earlier editions, the conclave in the North - East explored conversations around preservation of tribal languages and solutions to climate change through the indigenous way of life.

Professor Tomo Riba, belonging to the Galo tribe from the university demonstrated the intricacies and overlaps between a few tribal languages with an interactive presentation. Speaking at length about the threat the community



faces, he said, "Dong, is the site where the first rays of the sun touch. It would be a tragedy, then, for this area to lose its language, which in many ways shows the route to tribal identity. We need to popularise these languages, use them when speaking to our children."

The first day of the conclave broadly explored three questions: how can one preserve language via cultural references, folklore and literature? The nature of data and research that is required for tribal identity and languages to thrive and how technology could be leveraged to preserve the same.

Emerging out of the rigorous discussions were suggestions on collecting data from older generations that could be passed on to the youth, mapping of tribes scattered in different locations, creating online dictionaries and translations to make the languages more accessible, using cartoons to introduce the languages to children at young ages, advertising tribal songs or alphabets on placards. Outlining an important role of education in promoting tribal languages, the participants commented on creating community schools in villages and towns to teach folk songs

and converting the same into nursery rhymes.

During the course of the discussion, initiatives to prevent 'Sendra' - a hunting tradition, were shared by Kalicharan Basumatary of the Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society. Other suggestions included restricting the area of 'Jhum' cultivation and inventing symbolic ways to preserve tradition when they interfered with environmental issues, finding an alternative to holding religious festivals in the forests that brought in plastic, the issues eco refugees face. Questions were also proposed around incorporat-

ing scientific mining instead of unhealthy methods. The various perspectives across the 31 tribes echoed one belief: the power of community action to overcome environmental issues.

Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University, Professor Saket Kushwaha, as he spoke of the importance of dialogue said, "Most of the documentation on the indigenous people is from colonial period. It is the need of the hour that our own people rewrite their narratives. Dialogue is the way forward. Let the vibrations emanating out of this platform be so strong that they reach policy makers."

Samvaad introduced its regional editions as one-and-a-half-day conclaves in 2016. Since then, engaging sessions have been hosted across Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Nagaland, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh in partnership with reputed institutes. This year, it is touching Coorg (Karnataka), Kalahandi (Odisha), Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh), Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh), Gadchiroli (Maharashtra) and Gumla (Jharkhand).

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