

INCREDIBLE STORIES: CHANGEMAKERS OF BHARAT**Editor: Niraj Kumar**

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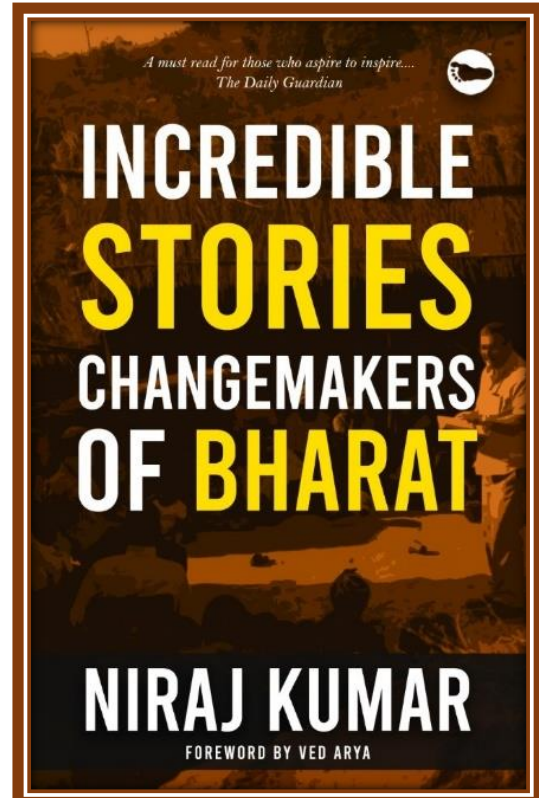
While there is no dearth of stories on rural transformation, what particularly drew me to *“Incredible Stories: Changemakers of Bharat”* edited by Niraj Kumar is the positivity that every story in it radiates. And I must confess that this was evident right after the first three chapters (Prelude and two stories), compelling me to conclude that the book is different and deserves a thorough read.

Each of the stories in *“Incredible Stories: Changemakers of Bharat”* is new, and, more importantly, presented with a highly engaging narrative. Set in a rural Indian tribal background, the twelve true stories of ordinary people like us take the reader through a journey of socio-economic complexities, struggles of development professionals, frustration and sufferings of the community and their difficult passage from despondency to success. However, what stands out is their zeal, dedication, perseverance, and commitment to development.

What brings the stories to life is their depiction of the unique collaboration between practice and academia. Although every story is different – with different situations, challenges and players – there’s a unifying thread and message that binds them: don’t lose heart, think out of the box, engage the community and their natural leaders and let them play the lead roles. The message is clear -- one does need to be superhuman to bring about positive change.

The protagonist in each story is confronted with a unique challenge, which may be social, technical, economic, natural (climate-related) or a combination of two or more factors. As each story unwinds along a chain of setbacks and solutions, of hopes and despair, defeats and victories, readers find themselves relating to and identifying with the settings and characters. The presentation is so natural that you never want to leave the story midway, and instead cherish their journey to the final triumph.

Most of the stories in the book are set in tribal-dominated villages, with the social and economic factors responsible for their suffering typical of any underdeveloped or poor village in rural India. However, the empowered women, the main characters in most of the stories, bravely break free of the boundaries of social taboos and rituals



and take on their male counterparts whenever they come in the way of their socio-economic freedom and development.

Even at the risk of being termed a spoiler, let me say that potential readers will find that the book covers a wide spectrum of issues dealing with the subjugation and struggle of tribal women, villagers' collective efforts to overcome their common problems, the role of local leaders in influencing government agencies, discovery of innovative ways to find sustainable livelihood options, and women taking the lead in extricating an entire village out of economic suffering. The stories are not only real and natural but impactful and enriching as well.

The dialogue form of relating stories in the book lends it a natural touch. In a few instances, the conversations become too long. The stories are pretty straightforward. While the successes achieved by the protagonists may appear relatively easy, in reality, it is not always possible. The book succeeds in meeting its objective of telling true and inspiring stories on social transformation, rural development, agriculture extension and community empowerment. A book worth reading and preserving.

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