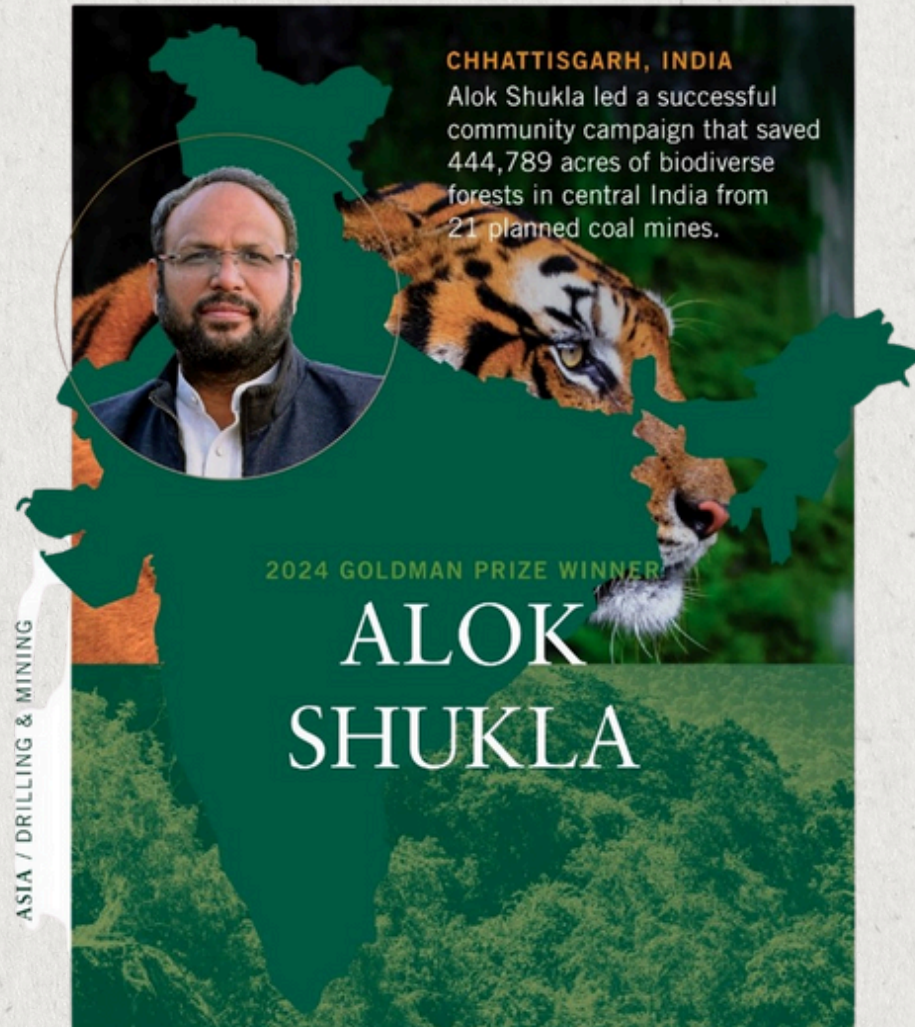


# 'Green Nobel' honors the struggles of Indian tribal groups from northern Chhattisgarh

**SRUTI**  
**Fellow Alok Shukla receives the prestigious 'Green Noble' Award for Environment Protection**



PC: The Goldman Environmental Prize

On April 29, 2024, Alok bhai (as we fondly call him) was honored for his exceptional leadership in a community campaign aiming to preserve 4.45 lakh acres of biodiversity-rich forests in Hasdeo Aranya, Chhattisgarh by preventing the establishment of 21 planned coal mines.

SRUTI is proud to have been associated with our fellow Alok Shukla to implement the provisions of Forest Rights Act, and build awareness on constitutional rights, environmental issues, legal community rights, and climate change.

The Green Nobel Award, also known as Goldman Award, celebrates grassroots environmental champions from six inhabited continental regions around the world: Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands & Island Nations, North America, and South & Central America. Recipients are recognized for their sustained and impactful efforts that involve local initiatives or citizen engagement to safeguard and improve the natural environment, often in the face of significant personal risk.

Six grassroots environmental leaders, spanning six countries, won this year's Prize.





## Other winners include

- A lawyer from Spain who secured legal rights for Europe's largest saltwater lagoon;
- A journalist from Brazil who uncovered the connection between beef supply chains and illegal deforestation, leading major supermarkets to boycott illegally sourced meat;
- A young Indigenous Wirldi woman from Australia who played a pivotal role in halting coal mining on her community's land;

### PC: The Goldman Environmental Prize

- An activist from the United States who advocated for the reduction of carbon emissions from freight trucks and trains in California;
- Indigenous activists from South Africa who fought to protect their marine environment by preventing destructive seismic testing for oil and gas off South Africa's Eastern Cape.

## A young environmentalist in action

Alok bhai's journey as an environmental activist began in 2005. After his graduation, he started to work on the detrimental effects of industrial pollution in Raipur and Raigarh districts. During his early days of activism, he worked closely with social movements to address concerns of workers safety and environment pollution along sponge iron industries in Chhattisgarh.

The pioneering work of former bureaucrat Brahmdev Sharma on self-rule and veteran activist Medha Patkar on proper rehabilitation of displaced communities allowed him to work on addressing various crucial issues of non-consent and social-environmental concerns around various development projects. Across the state of Chhattisgarh, progressive laws like FRA and PESA hugely contributed to the many struggles for community ownership and management of natural resources. By 2011, Alok bhai had become actively involved on the issue of allocation of coal mines in the Hasdeo forest and the related environmental impacts.

His pivotal role in convening the Chhattisgarh Bachao Andolan (CBA), an umbrella organization uniting citizen groups across the state, provided strength, support, and solidarity to indigenous communities striving to protect their forests and community rights. Alok Bhai's dedication and leadership have been instrumental in advancing environmental conservation efforts in Chhattisgarh.





# The struggle to protect Hasdeo Forests

Upon his arrival in the Hasdeo forest area, he realized that people were concerned about the loss of forests in their region, and the growing pressures of coal mining projects was taking a toll on local lives and livelihoods. It became clear to him that raising awareness within the community about their legal rights was crucial. Alok bhai started working more closely with local indigenous leaders, and took initiatives to organize local communities, and trained



Hand bag and Rangoli designs to express solidarity in Save Hasdeo campaign

them to explore legal avenues and constitutional protections available to them. He also worked with local officials, bureaucracy as well as media organisations - in order to educate the larger public about the impact of mining activities.

The communities in Hasdeo, along with Alok bhai - were deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and adivasi leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda, Birsu Munda, Tantiya Bhil, Tilka-Manjhi, Veernarayan Singh and many others. Through sustained efforts by Alok bhai and indigenous community leaders, the 'Hasdeo Aranya Bachao Sangharsh Samiti' was established. Over the past decade, the Samiti, led by adivasi women, has overcome numerous challenges, including bribery attempts, threats, and legal warnings, as they engaged in grassroots mobilisation and outreach to urge the government to reconsider its decision.



General public standing in solidarity with Hasdeo Forest

The indigenous community's outreach initiatives for their rights and environmental conservation gained momentum, with support pouring in from various sectors across Chhattisgarh. Artists, singers, students, and community leaders joined the movement, contributing innovative ideas and vibrant social media campaigns. Many young couples even used their own marriage ceremonies to promote these initiatives through making rangolis or innovative wedding cards. The hashtag #SaveHasdeo gained widespread traction, attracting national and international solidarity for the cause.

**As a result of these collective efforts, in July 2022, the Chhattisgarh state legislature passed a resolution to halt all mining activities in the region.**



PC: Times of India

Wedding Couple holding Save Hasdeo placards to extend their solidarity



Painting by famous artist, Pramod Sahu on Save Hasdeo



## Undermining the Rights of Gram Sabhas (village assemblies)

The allocation of coal blocks in Hasdeo began in 2014, sparking discontent from 20-gram sabhas. Hasdeo, falling under the fifth schedule of the Constitution, is governed by the PESA Act of 1996, which grants self-governance to gram sabhas. However, these provisions were consistently disregarded, with the Coal Bearing Act of 1957 taking precedence in land acquisition of mining areas.

Please see video by clicking [here](#) to know more about the issue in Hasdeo region and Alok's contribution to the movement for forest protection.

The struggle to protect Hasdeo forests, initiated in 2012, was rooted in the fight to preserve constitutional rights of communities that are being constantly eroded. This struggle in Hasdeo revolves around two key objectives: the conservation of natural resources following constitutional provisions and the defense of laws and provisions that are under threat of legal dilution.

The struggle in Hasdeo Aranya has been characterized by peaceful and democratic means, shedding light on issues of development and the constitutional obligations to safeguard the rights of adivasis and other forest-dwelling communities.

Alok bhai, in his interviews and speeches, has emphasized the pivotal role played by tribal communities in Hasdeo, particularly the women, in the prolonged peaceful struggle on the issue of unchecked coal mining.



Please click [here](#) to watch the full speech



Forest dwelling community from Hasdeo region using forest resource for their livelihood