

A Just Change – Adivasi Tea Project



Mari THEKAEKARA works with Just Change and is based in Gudalur, India.

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The Need for Change

Just Change has special relevance today as the economy is crashing globally and conversations are filled with depressing discussions about recessions, unemployment, lost pensions and savings. To start at the very beginning, however, Just Change was inspired by Fair Trade and created to help the Adivasis, the indigenous people of the Gudalur Valley in South India, get a fair deal for their tea, grown with sweat, hard work and heavy labour but also with dignity and pride.

In 1987 life changed for the Adivasis. They began a journey through small tea gardens, bondage and penury, to a life of economic dignity and self reliance. Suddenly in the late 1990s the

price of tea crashed and with it their dreams. “Why?” we asked, perplexed. “The consumer in India, Germany or the UK continues to pay the same price for the tea that they drink. Even the poorest, unemployed person in the West pays more. So why does the farmer get less?”

The company which exported the tea to the EU or British supermarket never lowered the price even if the worker on the tea plantation had to take a wage cut. Fair Trade organisations in Germany, GEPA and El Puente gave a better price, but led us to ask why our friends in Germany should pay more because they want to help?

We decided to link the farmer directly with the consumer so that both sides received a fair deal. A fair exchange seemed to be a much better idea. It brought “justice” into the act, taking it a step further from kindness, benevolence and charity. It made fair trade fairer. We called this Just Change.



Stan THEKAEKARA, an initiator of the Just Change concept, at Adivasi tea estate



A game with leaky buckets, which is used to help illustrate the concepts behind Just Change

In the Beginning

Just Change began in Gudalur, in the Nilgiri Mountains of South India, when Adivasis banded together in 1988 to form the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam to fight for their rights. We were joined by other groups intrigued by the idea of linking poor farmers, producers and consumers. Currently Just Change consists of five groups from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Orissa in India and several consumer groups in Germany and Britain.

One of these groups is the “Adivasi Tee Projekt” (ATP), a group of volunteers from the ESG (Evangelische StudentInnengemeinde in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) network all over Germany. These volunteers make Just Change work. Since 1994 their network of up to 50

volunteers has had a close personal as well as institutional relationship to the Adivasi in Gudalur valley. ATP organises informative events and programmes with the Adivasi and Just Change. They also regularly invite Adivasi to Germany to speak for themselves. In this way ATP connects the producers with the consumers in Germany and also cooperates with One World Shops, student companies and church communities as well as with families and friends of the Just Change idea.

Current Developments

Our first product was Gudalur tea and we have expanded to include handmade soaps, and plan to add spices, lentils, banana chips, cashew nuts and possibly coffee. In India we are trading tea, coffee, a basket of spices, black pepper, rice, coconut oil, umbrellas and a number of other products.

A millionaire friend pointed out that in order to succeed, Just Change needs to include concerned investors also. He then proceeded to fund Just Change for a year. This brought in the dimension of including investors who shared our ideals and vision. So Just Change is now a cooperative of producers, consumers and investors. It is a step towards dealing with globalisation on our own terms. In short, to Just Change it!

Watch for more information and get active. Participate in our global network as a consumer or investor or support our idea and practical work through your commitment. Let's change the world.



- Just Change India: www.justchangeindia.com
- Adivasi-Tee-Projekt, Germany: www.adivasi-tee-projekt.org
- Just Change UK (Großbritannien): www.justchangeuk.org
- Just Change France: www.justchangefrance.org