FOREST GUMPTION

Dr Nanditha Krishna is an environmentalist, historian, researcher and academician. But mostly, as Neeti Jaychander finds, she's a crusader for India's most precious resources: the Nilgiris. “They are terribly marginalised, there is heavy alcoholism and their numbers have dwindled to just a few thousands per tribe. And this is just in one area, the Nilgiris.” Due to unemployment, most of the tribals were becoming guides for poachers. “I studied traditional arts and crafts of the tribes, and found that their folk arts could be used to create a livelihood. Today, their products are sold across India at handcraft emporiums and exhibitions. With alternative means of income, they have given up poaching, and the number of tigers in the Nilgiris has also gone up.”

That’s not all there is to Nanditha. She founded India’s first school for children with learning disabilities in 1985 with the Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre for Children. She is also the author of several books on culture, mythology, folk arts and, of course, her beloved trees and animals.

With all these roles, Nanditha still believes her most important contribution is to animals and plants. “The harm we have caused to animals is unforgivable. I have tried to do my bit by restoring their habitats and reducing their suffering. I have given back to the earth what I have taken.”