

The Barefoot College: In like a Grandmother, out Like a Tiger
a one-hour documentary Series



“I THINK ALL CHANGE COMES OUT OF CONFLICT. WE ARE ENGINEERING A CONFLICT BY TRAINING A **GRANDMOTHER** TO BE A **SOLAR ENGINEER**. “
-BUNKER ROY

Summary

BUNKER ROY, an Indian social activist, goes to remote villages all over the world—in Africa, in Central America, in the Middle East—and offers to help train local women to become change agents. He invites them to leave their villages for six months and travel thousands of miles away to India to attend THE BAREFOOT COLLEGE in the middle of the dessert in Rajasthan, India, 500 miles southwest of Delhi, where sometimes it does not rain for five years. The grandmothers, most of whom are 35-50 years old, then take that new skill back to their villages around the world, changing them forever.

Talent

Host

Bunker Roy

5-7 grandmothers from around the world (ages 35-50)

Market

India, global

About Bunker Roy

www.nytimes.com/2014/04/06/opinion/sunday/sanjit-bunker-roy.html?_r=0

Highlights from TED Radio Hour - January 17, 2014

www.npr.org/2014/01/17/261092945/can-grandmothers-change-the-world

[Note, all highlights and italics are added by me. -CBS]

[In studio]

HOST: These women are flown in from around the world to—“the middle of nowhere” is really the only way to describe where we are right now. It must be so disorienting when they arrive.

BUNKER ROY: For the first month, it is disorientating. They miss their family, they miss their land. My biggest bills are their mobile bills, because they say “what am I doing here?” But gradually, they adjust. When people say, ‘Why don’t you send people to Africa instead of bringing the African woman to India?’ I tell them, ‘She has to come out of her environment. **She has to come out in a situation where she is challenged.** So we actually create an environment where people can find something within themselves which they never thought they had, and then go back to the community they come from and **show what they’ve learned.** That is how **leaders are born.**



BUNKER ROY [live on the TED stage.]

*It’s the only college in India where if you have a PHD or a Masters you are disqualified to come. And it’s the only college where we don’t give a certificate. You are certified by the community you serve. You don’t need a paper to hang on the wall to show that you are an engineer. One lesson we learned in India was **men are un-trainable.** Men are **restless.** Men are **ambitious.** And they all **want a certificate.** Why? Because they want to **leave the village** and go to the city looking for a job.*

*So we came up with a great solution: **TRAIN GRANDMOTHERS.***

[TED Radio Hour]

HOST: And when you say “grandmother,” you’re not talking about a white-haired, old lady. I mean **these are women in their mid-thirties, early forties, who are grandmothers simply because they had their first child when they were 12 or 13.**

BUNKER ROY: **Grandmothers are the IDEAL CHANGE AGENTS** in any traditional society or community that you want to change. When people consider grandmothers they think of a woman sitting in the house, looking after the children, cooking food... maybe *occasionally* going to the fields. But grandmothers are also **respected, natural-born leaders.** And then they perform **miracles.**

BUNKER ROY [live on the TED stage.]

*I went to select a grandmother in Gambia. Called the husband. Husband came—swaggering, politician, mobile in his hand. “Not possible. Look how beautiful she is. What if she runs off with an Indian man?” I calmed him down. “She’ll be happy, she’ll ring you up on the mobile every day....” **She went like a grandmother... and came back like a tiger.***

When she returned, she walked out of the plane and spoke to the whole press as if she was a veteran—she was a star. When I went back six months later and asked “where’s your husband?” She said, “oh, somewhere, it doesn’t matter.” Success story.

[TED Radio Hour Studio]

HOST: But all these women need people to follow them, right? They can’t be leaders unless people are willing to follow them. So how do they do that? How do they find those people?

BUNKER ROY: She has already proved that she has a skill that no one else has in the village, including the men. She is a solar engineer. **She solar-electrified each one of the hundred houses in that village.** And when we’ve gone back and spoken with some of these grandmothers we’ve found that they have gone back and found someone in the process to take her place.

If we want to make a leader out of someone in a very poor community, give her or him a skill that is useful for that community. There you have it. There you have your leader.

BUNKER ROY [live on the TED stage.]

*When we went to Afghanistan for the first time. We kept seeing women and would say, ‘we want to take them to India.’ And they would say, “impossible. They don’t even go out of their **rooms**, and you want to take them to **India?!’** Six months later, a woman went back and solar electrified her village—the first village ever to be solar electrified in Afghanistan.*

HOST: Not only do they go back and lead, but they disrupt. They are upending their traditional roles in those communities where they came from.

BUNKER ROY: Yes. The man-woman relationship is changed forever. When this woman went back and solar-electrified the first village in Afghanistan, she went and sat with the men. And the men said “what do you think you are doing? You should be sitting three kilometers away, with all the women there. And she very quietly said “today, I am not a woman. I am an engineer. And I have solar-electrified this whole village for you.” And for the first time it hit the men between the eyes and they said, “My god. She is an engineer.”

HOST: Do you ever worry that the disruption is going to be SO disruptive that these grandmothers will return to these villages and feel so empowered that, I don’t know, things just kind of fall apart, things just start to break down when they get back?

BUNKER ROY: I think all change comes out of conflict. We are engineering a conflict by training a grandmother to be a solar engineer. There is bound to be some hostility in the village, which is good. Because this is making people think. What is politics? **Politics is about making people THINK differently.** This is a political act, also. Making them solar engineers is a political act. So yes, we are disruptive. Yes, we are already factoring in hostility and tension. But she is capable of handling that. I THINK THAT IS THE **BEAUTY OF IT ALL.**

I think you don’t have to look for solutions outside. Look for solutions within. And listen to people—they have the solutions right in front of you. Listen to the people on the ground. They have all of the solutions in the world.

I’ll end with a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi:

FIRST, THEY IGNORE YOU.
THEN, THEY LAUGH AT YOU.
THEN, THEY FIGHT YOU.
AND THEN, YOU WIN.