Women who are touching lives!

* Unique traditional festivals

* Steadfast conservation efforts

* Uplifting tales from the Himalayas

RUSTIC STORIES that you’ve never read before
Corona curfew: The sense of protection of life and livelihood

The fight against the corona epidemic continues across the country. While the rest of the states took recourse to the policy of complete lockdown in their bid to contain the spread of coronavirus, Uttar Pradesh implemented the policy of corona curfew.

With the spirit of protecting and preserving both life and livelihood at the core of this innovative system, essential activities like medical as well as industrial units, sugar mills, cold storages, grocery shops, agricultural and construction work, fruit and vegetable shops, fertilizer & seed shops, wheat procurement centres continued to operate in the state.

In fact, a record was made in wheat procurement during the corona curfew. In this period, there was no restriction on the movement of people for essential work, an e-pass facility was provided for special circumstances. The State Transport Corporation buses also continued to ply within the state, so that citizens did not have to face any problem in commuting. Even though there was no total lockdown, UP registered the best recovery rate in the country and also ranked among the states with the lowest positivity rate.

We are committed to saving the lives and livelihood of our citizens. We are regularly marching toward in the direction of defeating Corona virus with our dedicated, unidirectional service-oriented approach, I hereby commend all health workers and Corona warriors associated with this mission.

Yogi Adityanath,
Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

Experts earlier feared that UP would be having a minimum of one lakh positive cases every day in May, and by the end of the month, there would be more than 17 lakh active cases in the state. However, the scenario turned out to be quite the opposite. The Corona situation in UP remains better than the situation in states with half or one-third of its population like Delhi, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan, etc.

The state is also ready to face the challenge of a possible third wave and the new Delta Plus variant. The state government believes and professes that the Corona wave is under control but not decimated. That is why the preparations are still on to improve facilities at all PICC, CHCs and larger medical centres in the state.

Aggressive Testing: Record Testing of more than 5.81 crore people

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised on aggressive testing since the first wave of Corona. Whether it is the establishment of new laboratories or the need to equip them all with necessary facilities, he has always accorded top priority to it. Last year, Uttar Pradesh had to send the sample of the first case of Covid-19 for testing to the National Institute of Virology (Pune).

On March 23, 2020, only 72 tests were done at BGMU’s lab. But soon all steps to create resources were taken up on war footing and in no time Uttar Pradesh emerged as the state conducting maximum number of Covid tests. This also became the core of Yogi Adityanath government’s 3T strategy of ‘Trace; Test and Treat’ that helped contain the pandemic outbreak in the state. At present, the state has more than 300 testing laboratories and the health department has been almost every day breaking its own record of conducting maximum tests in a day.

As on June 30, Uttar Pradesh had conducted a total of 5,521,746 tests. This number of covid tests is highest among all Indian states and Union Territories. Tests conducted on June 30 were 2,67,658.

WHO lauds door-to-door screening and testing in the villages

The World Health Organization (WHO) has praised the UP government for its move to protect villages from the deadly pandemic. While launching a special campaign to kick-start its implementation, the Chief Minister had stressed that a massive testing campaign should be conducted in all the 57,000 revenue villages of the state. This massive testing campaign got underway on May 5 under which four lakh members of 73,000 monitoring committees went door-to-door in the villages to screen people. If any symptomatic or suspicious person was found, the rapid response team was immediately contacted to get the testing done.

Under this campaign, facility for home isolation and institutional quarantine of the patients was provided as per the need. Medical kits were also provided to the patient and his family members. A review of the campaign was conducted after May 9, where it was found out that 68 per cent of the villages were free from any infection. The campaign has since continued, and its report has been useful in charting out the future strategies.

UP has done a commendable job with regard to tracing and surveillance. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath says that constant contact tracing and surveillance is the most important aspect in breaking the chain of coronavirus. During the pandemic, the Chief minister has been personally assessing the district-wise reports of contact tracing on a daily basis.

Better Consultation facilities

During the pandemic affected period, people in the state have also availed of facilities like helpline, telemedicine, and e-consultation. The state was ranked second in the country in taking medical advice through the E-Sanjeevani app of the health department. A dedicated phone line was given to this service at all Integrated Command and Control Centres in the state.

No dearth of Oxygen

Henceforth, Uttar Pradesh will never face unavailability of oxygen for patients, a situation caused by sudden onset of second wave of Covid. The state has now approved 528 oxygen plant and 121 of those are now functional. When there was sudden rise in the demand for medical oxygen in April this year, the state had only 25 working plants. However, in near future it will be having 528 functional plants.

121 Oxygen Plants now functional out of 528 sanctioned

Elderline No. - 14567
Psychologist Helpline
1800-419-9020
Early Treatment—Early Recovery

While interacting with different sections of society during the corona period, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath always appealed to the people not to hide the disease. Reiterating that Covid-19 is not a disease but an epidemic, he told them that the sooner they got the treatment, the faster they could recover. With this spirit, quality treatment was provided to all the corona patients in a convenient manner. It underlined the determination in the war against coronavirus of state, which had no arrangement for the treatment when the first case was detected last year.

At that time, the patient had to be rushed to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. Today, UP has 2.5 lakh isolation beds, 170 lakh ICU/HISU beds. All the districts have adequate numbers of ventilators with trained staff to run them. The government also set up L-1, L-2, L-3 hospitals for patients with mild, severe and critical conditions respectively. Doctors/Paramedical staff were trained for the treatment of Covid-19. Be it medicine, oxygen, equipment or manpower, each hospital was monitored 24x7 and quick diagnosis of the patients was ensured. As a result, the situation remained well under control.

On the one hand, the government-run medical institutions provided free treatment to the patients whereas in private hospitals acquired by the government, the cost of treatment was covered under the ‘Ayushman Bharat’ scheme, which brought great relief to the people from the weaker income groups.

Free treatment of post-covid complications

In view of the reports about mental and physical problems faced by some people who recovered from covid, an innovative effort to set up Post-Covid Ward was made by the Chief Minister. The Government at speedier diagnosis of post-covid complications, post-covid wards started operating at all the 75 district hospitals. The government also posted psychiatrists and physiotherapists to help people get counselling, if needed. The government also made arrangements for free treatment of such patients.

Deploying senior officers, continuous monitoring was ensured

In his constant endeavour to improve the system in the state during the pandemic, the Chief Minister fielded the secretary and other senior-level administrative officers in the field. Nodal officers were posted in all 75 districts. In all, 59 officers were sent as nodal officers of 75 districts across the state. Senior IAS officers were selected for the mission. These nodal officers were made responsible for covid-19 management and had to stay in their respective districts.

With planned effort and commitment, UP tops in vaccination drive

"Vaccination is a security cover for protection against coronavirus. This security cover will be given to every citizen of the state.” The Chief Minister has reiterated it on different occasions. His statement underscores the importance of vaccination in his policies.

It is because of such commitment that the statewide vaccination drive in UP is no less than a mega event at a time when even resource-rich states like Delhi and Maharashtra have been stopping vaccination one by one. In UP, vaccine-cover is being provided to 0.5 lakh people on an average every day from June 1 onwards. Earlier, within a few hours of the Central government giving the nod for vaccinating people in the age group of 18-44 from May 1, the Chief Minister announced to implement it in UP, with the state government bearing the entire cost.

The vaccination drive started from the due date and has been going on smoothly in the entire state. Separate booths have been set up for the media, court, government employees, etc. Besides “Parents Special” booths for the parents of children below 12 years of age have also been established to give a fillip to the vaccination drive. UP tops in the vaccination drive in the country. Vaccines for the 45+ age group are being provided by the central government while the 18-44 age group is getting vaccinated from the state government resources. The state government had also issued global tenders to ensure an adequate supply of vaccines for the people. Several other states followed UP in this regard.

Each drop of oxygen used to save patients, NITI Aayog hails the UP model as brilliant

In the midst of the second wave of Covid-19, when the country was suffering from acute crisis of oxygen, Uttar Pradesh took a step which was highly appreciated everywhere. In view of the increasing demand for oxygen, it streamlined the distribution system to ensure easy availability of oxygen. The NITI Aayog also put its stamp of approval on the steps taken by the UP government.

A ‘Oxygen Monitoring System for UP’ was launched on April 23. As a result, a record supply of 1,000 metric tonnes of oxygen per day was available in just 10 days, which was merely 250 metric tonnes till a few days ago. UP became the first state to implement an online monitoring system for oxygen supply. The Food Safety and Drug Administration, Medical Education Department, Medical Health and Family Welfare Department, Transport and Home Department were all connected with the digital platform. The location, status of oxygen supply and demand for the oxygen tankers were monitored round the clock on the ‘Oxy Cracker Dashboard’ in the special control room set up in the Home Department.

With online tracking of vehicles pressed into service for oxygen supply, arrangements were made to send the nearest vehicle to the hospital, so that the demand could be met in the shortest possible time. Its success also became a trendsetter for other states. To ensure that every drop of oxygen is used for the treatment of the patients, an adequate quantity of oxygen was brought from the states of West Bengal, Gujarat, Orissa, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, etc. Of course, the Government of India extended special cooperation to the state in this mission.

The UP model earned the appreciation of NITI Aayog. Not only this, an audit of oxygen expenditure was also done by the seven technical institutions, which reduced its overall consumption by 10 per cent. To overcome the shortage of oxygen tankers, argon tankers were also converted for the use of oxygen with technical support.
In the midst of the Corona pandemic, CM Yogi Adityanath was always present on the frontline. The promptness and commitment with which the current leadership of Uttar Pradesh has worked for the health security and livelihood management of the common man has impressed even the critics. The strong will, commitment and foresight shown by the Chief Minister to defeat the second wave of Corona is an example worth emulating for the Chief Ministers of other states.

On 14 April, the Chief Minister himself got infected with Corona. The doctors advised him to take proper rest and isolate himself for some time. All the officials also appealed to him to take rest till his recovery, but the ‘Karmayogi’ did not take any rest. Although he stayed in home isolation due to the covid protocol, he continued to work and monitor the situation. While in home isolation, he not only held daily review meetings with the officers but also continued the virtual interaction with various sections of the people, including farmers, health experts, sportspersons and members of the monitoring committees.

On April 30, as soon as his report came negative, he returned to ground zero and inspected the progress of the Dedicated Covid Hospital to be built by IIDc at Aush Shalpi Gram in Lucknow. Chief Minister Yogi, who has adopted the formula of Trace, Test and Treat (Triple T) to contain corona, not only took stock of the overall situation by visiting the districts along with the officials, he also went to the hospitals and directly asked the patients about their well-being. He also toured the villages to interact with the common man in order to their problems.

Yogi Adityanath is the first Chief Minister who knocked at the homes of the corona-infected people and inquired about their health and their needs, and also about the facilities they were getting in the middle of a raging pandemic. During his 26-day tour, the CM met health workers, policemen, ASHA workers, Anganwadi sisters and appreciated their work while encouraging them to infuse new energy to win the war against coronavirus. Also, by conducting surprise inspections at Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCC), he oversaw all the arrangements and gave necessary guidelines if any improvement was required.

Chief Minister Yogi has called the integrated system the backbone of covid management. Such control centres have been set up in every district. All the activities were carried out from these centres, which remained active round the clock. Whether one had to undergo a test, be admitted to a hospital, required medicines or any other essentials during home isolation, or if the patient needed an ambulance at the time of admission and discharge, everything was updated on the Covid portal through monitoring of surveillance and surveillance teams. Skilled and trained personnel were deployed at the centre. Yogi officials of the district also held meetings every day to take stock of the situation.

Team-11/Team-09: Decentralisation of the System - Responsibility and Accountability

In the battle of Covid, the CM adopted the policy of decentralisation of the system. Responsibilities and accountability of top officials were fixed. During the first wave of covid, Yogi’s team-11 earned kudos for its excellent planning despite the fact that the state was faced with multiple challenges like the return of migrant workers, ensuring the availability of PPE kits, etc.

During the second wave, the CM formed a 9-member team. This team oversaw the work related to covid management at the state level, made policy decisions and implemented them at the ground level. The biggest challenge in the second wave was the arrangement of beds and oxygen for the rising number of patients. However, he formed Team-9 which planned brilliantly to tackle the situation. Team-9 reports directly to the Chief Minister. The entire work, from the availability of covid beds, human resources, training and immunisation work, medical kits, testing and health facilities augmentation, monitoring of ICC and CM helpline, smooth availability of oxygen, sanitization, fogging, sanitisation, containment zones, law and order, weekly closures, compliance with the Covid protocol, etc. was divided among the members of this team. This arrangement yielded positive results. On the same lines, similar teams were formed in the districts as well.
Support of 'Uttar Pradesh Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojna' to orphaned children

The children who have been orphaned during the pandemic are being provided support from Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The government will provide all the resources for their welfare including upbringing, education and other necessary things. Under the scheme, the government will take care of children who have lost their parents or legal guardian during the pandemic.

A financial assistance of Rs. 4,000 per month will be provided to the guardian or caregiver of the child until the child becomes an adult. Not only this, the children studying in schools will be given tablets or laptops, and the government will also make proper arrangements for the marriage of girls. A sum of Rs. 1,01,000 will be given by the state government for the marriage of the girl child.

Convenient teleconsultation-e-consultation in times of disaster

Be it patients undergoing treatment in home isolation during the corona period, or non-covid patients, the government provided proper medical consultation to all. While Uttar Pradesh stood second in the country in consultation with doctors through e-Sanjeevani App of the Health Department, a separate phone line was set up for it at the Integrated Command and Control Centre. The Chief Minister himself appealed to the doctors seeking their cooperation in this work. Such services were operated by government as well as private hospitals.

Team of health experts strengthened the fight against covid-19

A team of health experts was also formed to strengthen the fight against Corona in the state. Doctors from reputed medical institutions such as SGPGI, IGMC, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, RML Institute have been included in the advisory committee. This team is making the strategy for effective control of covid.
The hands of the artisans fluidly craft their thoughts into beautiful artefacts. They aspire. They inspire. The arts and crafts of Madhya Pradesh are reflections of its legacy and richness. They are the embodiment of the skill and tenacity of its people. Come and celebrate its culture and people.

V o i c e s  o f  R u r a l  I n d i a

The future of India lies in its villages”

july

Voices of Rural India

VOLUME 21 ISSUE 7

A 63-year-old Radhamani shares her joy of reading with fellow villagers

20 Spiti
A journey of sacrifice in search of truth and knowledge

26 Gjiu
Mystery around the ancient mummy of Lama Kambo

32 Zanskar
The bridges connecting Ladakh's remotest villages

women

38 The Walking Library
Making books accessible to all in Kerala's Wayanad district

44 Reaching for the Stars
A young astronomy enthusiast smashing gender stereotypes

46 From Darkness to Light
A journey of solar-electrifying Ladakhi villages

www.mptourism.com

M A D H Y A

PR A D E S H

The heart of Incredible India

Kolhapuri Chappal
Zardosi, Bhopal
Carpet Weaving, Gwalior
Metal Craft, Tikamgarh
Terracotta Craft, Chhattisgarh

SHUTTERSTOCK
Conservation

S4 MEGHALAYA
Ancient traditions and tribal culture preserving biodiversity

62 KERALA
Saving India’s largest lake by setting up fish sanctuaries

Photo

30 NOMADIC ROOTS
An ecosystem for local artisans

52 CRAFT OF LUKHAI
Wood carving in the Kumaon range

68 CREATIVE CRAFT
Sustainable creativity (pic above)

Festivals

72 SUMMER EMBRACE
74 DEER AT THE DOOR
78 FLYING SAVIOURS
Celebrating crows across Kumaon

82 EUPHORIA IN
TRADITION
An affair of food and togetherness

Throught the Rural
Lands to Your Heart

It’s just hours before this issue is going to be sent to print that I’m writing the editor’s note — causing many in the design and production teams to endure anxiety attacks! Those of you who understand the operational aspects of publishing would know that it is a borderline scary scenario. I couldn’t have done differently.

When we first discussed that we’ll bring this one out as a spotlight issue, the main thought was on magnifying the efforts of a group of individuals who united for an initiative called Voices of Rural India — or VoR, as you’ll find mentioned in the folks of the magazine.

Several virtual handshakes and digital letters later, things were in place. This, everyone agreed, would be a nice one! And it is.

These pages — of the July 2021 issue that you’re holding — aren’t merely carriers of words from the rural parts of India; they are gleaming recollections of memories of the people who inhabit those lands.

There’s no denying that COVID-19 has been a dreadful reality in the rural regions have suffered beyond comprehension but their tenacity makes them triumph over adversity eventually.

To assist them in regaining their way of life, the team of VoR embarked on a not-for-profit mission to create a tangential opportunity of livelihood for the rural dwellers. They set up a storytelling platform where people from local communities can publish narratives which are unique to their respective lands. These are enchanting tales from the deepest corners of the country which will echo in the hearts of everyone who reads them.

The enchanting tales from the deepest corners of the country will echo in the hearts of everyone who reads them.

The members of VoR run training modules to prime the local storytellers and the ones that make the cut are subsequently published on www.voiceofuralindia.com (do give them a visit). There are several ways that you can support this initiative — become a volunteer, partner with them in some meaningful capacity, or if you can’t be physically present but still want to support their noble work, contribute financially.

I’ve heard many, many beautiful stories of lands afar but there are countless more that I am yet to discover. VoR, I discovered a few while putting together this month’s magazine!

With this special issue, I, too, have embarked on a special journey with the title that I’ve admired as a reader for years. Wish me luck as I join hands with others in the team to take Outlook Traveller on newer, fulfilling and exciting journeys.
A passage through India

In Wanderers, Kings, Merchants, a brand new book I’m reading on the roots (and routes) of Indian languages, author Peggy Mohan writes, “When languages die, it is an omen, of things to come that are still beyond our range of vision.” But if dying languages are doomed canaries in a coal mine, what about stories and storytelling? Do they speak of invisible threats too, of impending loss, when they evaporate from our lives, our imagination? Do they also foretell the death of languages, the loss of dialects? (They do.)

This special issue that you hold in your hands though, is not about cautionary tales, or words brined in regret. It’s about hope and joy, and celebrating stories (and storytelling) across the diverse states of India. It’s about handing over the mic to the local communities, and listening to their stories, in their voice. It’s about taking pride in the oral traditions of India, and hoping earnestly that we can hold on to them for a little while longer...

This special issue that you hold in your hands is about hope and joy, and celebrating stories from rural India.

Experiences or sustainability, responsible tourism or dekho apna desh, our intrepid editors and writers sought out people and places that mattered in their own country. They did so, not only on airplanes and trains, but also on foot, and in jalopies that were barely held together by fearlessness and faith. And at least in one instance, a legendary editor traipsed across hills and dales, ‘mythical’ roads and rivers, for four straight days to reach a place in eastern Arunachal Pradesh that Salman Khan (and you) can now cycle up to in a fraction of that time. Such epic trips were made by the early tribe of travel writers if only to seek out the company of new friends and listen to their stories over a shared cup of chang. In time, we inherited their legacy, their phonebooks, and sometimes, their friends in faraway places.

So, when we decided to finally formalise our commitment to people- and planet-friendly travel, and launched the Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative in 2015, we knew we would be a sturdy new branch of a fabled, native tree. Today, whether we run national level awards or outreach programmes in the states, work with the Ministry of Tourism (India) or affiliate global organisations like the UNWTO, we fall back on 20 years of insights, and plenty of chang-aided goodwill. We celebrate and support some of the most inspired travel communities across India and South Asia.

And we do so, because we always have.

The voices of rural India that you hear between these pages are no canaries in a cage. They are proud emissaries of resilient communities that also host responsible travellers in unpandemicked times. They are independent, digitally empowered storytellers, who sing of worlds that they hope to protect and honour. And so do we.

Soity Banerjee
Project Editor,
Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative

Let our Uttarakhand be your new workstation


Incredible India

Work from Uttarakhand

Come, place yourself in the lap of the Himalayas in Uttarakhand and enjoy inspiring views to bring sparkle to your work. Destress by indulging in refreshing walks and the pleasures of unhurried life.

Uttarakhand awaits you. Redefine WFH

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board
Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya Paryatan Bhavan Near ONGC Helipad, Gaighat Cantt, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 248001
Ph: 91-135-2559898, 2559987

@uttarakhand_tourismofficial @UttarakhandTourismOfficialPage @outlooktourismdevelopment-board

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board
of insights about any destination and the people who inhabit it. At the heart of travel — between memory, the windows into the past, and imagination that open out into the future — lies stories. India, with its diverse landscape and cultures, is a land of infinite stories with a great spectrum of people who tell them. At one end live those who are in a temporal wrap (some that are ancient yet surviving); and at the other are people who are so modern that they are leading the way of living lightly and have the smallest ecological footprint. It is this spectrum of people that makes travel what it is meant to be: understanding ourselves and our place by experiencing the other.

As travellers, we pay the landscape for the gold of a travel blogger, a community leader, and a digital wizard entrepreneur. VoRi was born through the coming together of a travel blogger, a community leader, and a digital wizard entrepreneur, and driven by the desire to give rural voices their rightful place.

Voices of Rural India is currently working with rural communities in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh; Uttarakhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, and Gujarat, through on-ground community-based tourism organisations: Himalayan Ark, Global Himalayan Expedition, Spiti Ecosphere, Himalayan Ecotourism, Kabani, Grassroutes Journeys and Cherish Treks like maize are rooted deep in the culture of rural India.

In the short term, Voices of Rural India is creating a revenue stream for remote communities through digital journalism. Funding from the Digital Empowerment Foundation helps pay storytellers directly in their bank account for every story published, as is the case when these stories are republished by our media partners.

In the long run, Voices of Rural India will continue to develop digital storytelling skills at the grassroots level. And for our communities themselves, it is a coming together of storytellers from diverse landscapes in the creation of a repository of their local culture, knowledge systems, and a celebration of rural life, documented in local voices.

For the rest of us stuck at home, this is a chance to explore remote corners of India virtually through the words, photos, and videos of the very people we travel to meet, in their language, if you choose to. While tele tours are becoming a popular way to teleport and travel virtually, here we invite you to a more personal delving, deeper into the intimate space of stories shared by the tellers who belong to and own those landscapes. It is also an open invitation to come to experience these inspiring, amazing villages in India in the post-covid phase of travel!"
Into the Rural Artscapes

Kaushalam is ensuring the flow of creativity and taking an active step towards keeping the Indian art traditions alive

“Being a woman, the journey had its own struggle and working in a niche segment had its own challenges. From wandering through narrow alleys of small cities in hot sunny afternoons, long nights spent working at the exhibitions to managing within the tight financials and the uncertainty of future prospects, a passionate entrepreneur can overcome it all. Never give up, have the courage and vision to change the adversity into an opportunity. That’s the way to success for me.”

MRINALIKA (JAIN) BHRDJWJ
Founder, Kaushalam

Founded in 2012, Kaushalam is the brainchild of social entrepreneur and artist, Mrinalika Jain Bhardwaj. Driven by the aim of creating a niche in the world of art and craft, the central focus with Kaushalam has always been to revive the regional, folk, and traditional art of India.

Having gradually declined due to the rapidly accelerating popularity of the modern interpretations / concepts of contemporary art, it is imperative to bring back the time honoured practices and creations to their deserving pedestal. With the backdrop of causing a complete transformation to make traditional art more desirable in the business world, Kaushalam ventured on a journey of showcasing traditional art on especially designed artefacts. The resultant efforts have been appreciated by art lovers as well as by the people scouting for colourful objects.

The voyage of painting utility items by hand began from a 600 square feet studio space in Jaipur. With Kaushalam, the traditions and cultures stretching centuries back are being kept alive today, and the creations are well known across the globe.

With insufficient funds and lack of good artisans being the main roadblocks, Mrinalika turned challenges into opportunities by single handedly managing the operations, and onboarding skilled craftspeople who forged their skills of indigenous art in lure of money, but were stuck doing menial daily wage jobs.

As of today, several artists’ livelihoods have been restored thanks to the support of Kaushalam, and they are actively assisting our movement to revive the traditional arts of India. The institution has grown robustly to become a habitat for artisans from Kashmir, Ladakh, Bihar, and several parts of Rajasthan.

ABOUT THE TEAM:
With a sharp eye on quality, the team at Kaushalam works tirelessly to ensure that only the most authentic work with finest details of each of the traditional arts is shipped. Maintaining the originality of regional art and fusing it with modern concepts to give it a fresh and new look is what makes Kaushalam unique, and the artisans’ pursuit to paint each piece of work to perfection gives the art pieces soul and texture of emotions.

THE PRODUCTS — KAUSHALAM ARTSILS:
Known for hand painted kettles and every kind of utensil, which are called Artsils, Kaushalam takes inspiration from the rich Indian heritage, diverse cultures, and day-to-day life. They are not merely products; they’re reflections of the past and present. They are bearers of art and history with a sprinkle of modernity. Every piece is created with great love and care, with artisans investing their heart and soul into every creation.

Handicrafts and hand painted products for home and garden is Kaushalam’s area of expertise and artists can paint any artwork on any surface. With the intent of bringing together art styles of every state of India, and customisation based on specific requirements, make the products stand out in the h andicraft industry.

KAUSHALAM IN 2021:
* The venture is a source of livelihood for many women as well as artisans of rural India, and Kaushalam is constantly looking to hire more artisans, with focus on rural areas, for its manufacturing facility in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

* Kaushalam successfully runs its retail store in Jaipur which is extremely popular and visited by Indian and foreign travellers alike.

* Thanks to the increase in exports, Kaushalam’s product range is visible all across the globe.

* With overseas demand on the rise, Kaushalam intends to offer greater convenience to its customers by forming exclusive alliances for brand outlets.

* Each year, Kaushalam introduces a new art form collection which is showcased to the clients at various festivals and exhibitions. So far, Mughal art of Jaipur, Madhubani art from Bihar, Thangka and Bhuddist art from Ladakh, Pichhwai art from Nathdwara, Phad from Bihlawa, and Kashmiri art from Kashmir have been proudly presented.

ABOUT THE FOUNDER:
Mrinalika is not only its founder, but a parent who has nurtured Kaushalam to great heights of success. With her passion towards the mission of preserving and growing traditional art of India, she’s afforded a rewarding platform for the artisans to showcase their work reflecting art, heritage, and culture. Having invested herself wholeheartedly in it, Mrinalika has made Kaushalam a globally recognised name in the realm of hand painted traditional art work.

A post graduate in Fine Arts, she hails from Jaipur, and is a disciple of legendary artist, Pandit Dwarka Prasad Sharma, to whom she credits her foundation in painting and for turning her into an artist who thrives on experimenting with colours and creates masterpieces.

She worked as a freelance artist for almost a decade in New York, USA and has travelled to several countries, learning about their traditional art forms. Her global exposure and unique perspectives facilitated the setting up (in April 2012), and moulding, of Kaushalam.

Being mentored by an Army officer allowed her to explore vivid regions of India, and it was during her time in Ladakh that she was given an opportunity to take Ladakhi artisans to Jaipur. The influence of the beautiful heritage city of Jaipur is amply reflected in her work. Mrinalika is a social entrepreneur and intends to uplift rural women by giving them basic training in art and colouring, therefore paving way for a respectable and sustained livelihood for them, and establishing a strong workforce of women artists.

In times when rural art forms are shifting into obscurity, Mrinalika’s venture ‘Kaushalam’ strives endlessly to bring back those art forms to life. Through Kaushalam, the continued efforts to grow the legacy of the crafts have reached global landmarks. Not only are the voices of rural India being heard through the display of these traditional arts, it is also providing an opportunity to the craftspeople to sustain, with dignity, what their elders have left behind.

Visit: www.kaushalamcreations.com
In this time of kalyug, a man embarks on a journey of sacrifice and penance in search of truth and knowledge.

In this time of kalyug, a man embarks on a journey of sacrifice and penance in search of truth and knowledge.

Destined TO BE

About 1.5 kilometres north of Demul village in Spiti, where I was born, is a very old cave named Khabsa. Over thousands of years, in this very cave, many dedicated men from Demul and other regions of the Himalaya have achieved wisdom and enlightenment through extreme penance.

One wise man among them is 'Tenzin Lundup', also known as the 'Yogi of the Himalaya'.

On April 20, 1962, in a Gongma home in the village of Pooh in Kinnaur district, a baby boy named Govind Singh was born. While pregnant, his mother Sonam Chhodon felt a divine presence and had a vivid dream — that an enlightened being is going to be born to her. So, when the baby arrived, the family visited the local Guru in the area and asked about what's in store for his future.

The Guru stated that in his previous birth, Govind Singh was a devoted yogi. He predicted that even in this birth, the boy would renounce his household responsibilities and travel in search of truth and knowledge. The boy's father, Gelek Pasang (alias Gurdayal Singh), was disappointed to learn this. He wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and become a farmer and businessman.

A few months after he was born, a prominent Ladakhi lama (monk), through his meditative power, realised that the child born in Pooh village, on the full moon day of April, is the reincarnation of a great yogi. He sent a search team of lamas and representatives to the village. However, his father, who did not want his only son to renounce the world and become a lama, told the Ladakhi team that no child had been born in their home!

Govind had three sisters and a younger brother, and his childhood was full of love and affection. As a young boy he was compassionate, loved music and felt eager to serve others. He pursued his graduation in Chandigarh.
and returned to his village with an increased interest in spirituality. He would discuss the teachings of the Buddha with his grandfather, and go to Ta-Lang Temple, to Mani Dung Gyur, for circumambulation. There he would sit among the elderly to receive blessings from him.

Upon seeing his interest in Buddhism, his family worried that the prediction about his future might come true. They decided to get him engaged against his wish at the age of 25. In a traditional Kinnauri ceremony, he was married to Ringzin, the daughter of his grandfather, and went to Ta-Lang Temple, to receive the blessings of the renowned lama Ringzin Chhetan in Rampur Bushahr, where again no one was permitted to meet him. Finally, he met him at his birthplace. I had the opportunity to discuss many different subjects with him, and left the meeting feeling inspired, with a growing interest in spirituality and social work.

Going ji underwent deep, solitary penance for four years in Maling and during this time, he did not meet anyone. Important messages were conveyed through letters which, in 2004, he began walking for nearly 450 kilometres, to Dehradun. This journey on foot became a historic event as hundreds of people joined him on the way. Wherever the group took a break, the locals would arrange for their dining and lodging. Everyone shared their individual problems with Govind ji and received blessings from him. Govind ji by now has set foot in pretty much every village in upper Kinnaur and Spiti, gained followers in every Himalayan region and has been on a pilgrimage to Nepal, Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Sarnath, Varanasi, Vaishali and Bhutan. He urges people to follow the path of truth and non-violence, and imparts knowledge on the topics of Buddha Consciousness and Space Consciousness. Even the local priests request people to implement his teachings in their everyday life.

No one has seen such a yogi in this age, and I consider myself lucky to have met him at his birthplace. I had the opportunity to discuss many different subjects with him, and left the meeting feeling inspired, with a growing interest in spirituality and social work.
Even though his father tried to send him on the path of business and family life, he was fated to become a great yogi. It makes one wonder: did he choose his destiny or did his destiny choose him?

*Samyang Hangrang Valley, Kinnaur, is among one of many famous pilgrimage sites, with five grand caves whose roofs are etched with symbols of the Master Buddha, guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) and Dakini.*

**info DESK**

**How to reach**

There are 2 overland routes to reach Spiti.

Via Manali or Shimla:
- **By Air:** Flights from Delhi and Chandigarh.
- **By Train:** Chandigarh and Shimla are both connected by train. From Manali, keep aside another day (approx. 7 to 8 hrs) to reach Spiti.
- **By road:** Regular AC/Non-AC buses are available from Delhi and Chandigarh.

**What to do**

Ecosphere offers a range of travel programs and experiences in Spiti, some of which explore the mystical and hidden virtues of the Valley. Their journeys not only leave an everlasting impression, but are carefully designed to support the culture, environment and economy of Spiti Valley.

**How to get involved**

- Ecosphere is a social enterprise and by travelling or volunteering with them, you directly support and contribute towards various community initiatives in the valley.
- Support them by travelling to Spiti and getting involved in one or many of their initiatives.
- For more details, you can write to them on discover@spitiecosphere.com or visit their website www.spitiecosphere.com

**ABOUT THE STORYTELLER**

**CHHERING NORBU**

is a dynamic individual with a vast array of experience in various fields ranging from tourism to mountaineering, solar energy, hydrogeology, medicinal plants and the list can go on! He belongs to a family of Amschis (traditional medicinal practitioners) and is now one of the few remaining practicing Amschis in Spiti. He is also the life-force of Spiti Ecosphere managing day-to-day operations seamlessly. Supported by Spiti Ecosphere.

The designs of their verandas—colourful and printed—are based on traditional learning. Although the tribe follows Hinduism and its traditions, the women here have a stronger right and hold when it comes to property.

Dudhwa National Park which, together with Kushanpur and Katamghat wildlife sanctuaries, forms the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, is among the most famous wildlife destinations.

**TRAVEL PROMOTION**

The government of Uttar Pradesh has outlined a plan to connect Tharu villages across the districts of Balmuwar, Bahasut, Lakshmipur and Pilibhit bordering Nepal with the homestay scheme of the UP Forest Department. Aimed at preserving the tribe’s unique culture, but also allowing others to witness and learn from it, the scheme will allow travellers to go to the Tharu villages and live among the members of the tribe, and understand more about their way of life.

Not only will it create employment opportunities for the tribe but will also help them preserve and showcase their culture to the world. All income generation under the scheme will also be given directly to the homestay owner.

The landscape of the northern part of UP is breathtaking and there great places to explore near Dudhwa National Park. You can pay a visit to the Shiva temple at Gola Gokaranath, or the famous and magnificent Mendoruk Mandir (Frog Temple) in the town of Oel in Lakshmipur, while there’s also the impressively build Nasouruddin Memorial Hall to give you a glimpse into India’s past.

The Tharu tribe belongs to the Kayastha caste. Inhabiting Terari — which is teeming with the designs of their verandas — colourful and printed—are based on traditional learning. Although the tribe follows Hinduism and its traditions, the women here have a stronger right and hold when it comes to property.

The Tharu tribe has been known for preserving cultures, traditions, history, tribes and beliefs for many years now. While cultures and traditions reside in every nook and corner here, many tribes, populated across the state, also call it home. One such tribe is Tharu, residing in the lowlands of the Terai region, in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Lovers of nature and followers of Theravada Buddhism, these tribal people of the forest are eco-friendly, survive on minimal forest produce, and are mostly engaged in farming activities or forest dwelling, and till date inhabit forested areas.

People of the Tharu tribe mainly follow the teachings of Lord Buddha. The tribe is also closely linked and has a deep, longstanding respect for the environment and they worship a large number of deities residing in the forests.

Each village belonging to the tribe is governed by a council and a headman. The tribe can often be seen converging in multiple Tharu dialects — including Hindi, Awadhia and Malthish.

The tribe is deeply rooted in tradition and it is evident in the construction and decoration of their houses. While the outer walls of their house are made of clay, dung, mud and grass, the design of their verandas — colourful and printed — are based on traditional learning. Although the tribe follows Hinduism and its traditions, the women here have a stronger right and hold when it comes to property.
flanked by Tibet to the east and Ladakh to the north, is surrounded by snow laden peaks in the trans-Himalayan region of Spiti. Giu is famous the world over for the mystery around the ancient Mummy of Lama Kambo. Home to roughly 250 people, Giu remained cut off from the world with barely any road access until recently. I grew up in the village of Demul in Spiti and since childhood I enjoyed sitting with the village elders, listening to ancestral stories. I’m lucky to have once visited the mummy of Giu with my father — and numerous times since — and heard the extraordinary story of it from our local friends.

In the 14th century, an extraordinary child was born in Giu. He was named Sangha Tenzin. After excelling in studies, he embarked on the path of Buddhism and gave up all worldly pleasures to become a lama (monk). He spent years meditating in a cave and ultimately gained enlightenment. Back in those days Giu was a happy place, but the surrounding mountains were home to demons who constantly harassed its people and put a curse on the entire village. The elders of the village urged Lama Sangha Tenzin to save them. He agreed and spent the next few years engaged in chanting sacred mantras and practicing tantric rituals. He gained the skill to take control of any kind of evil power and on a full moon night, the lama destroyed the demons. He reassured the people that whenever the need arose in the future, he would come to protect the village. He expressed a wish for three stupas to be constructed atop his cave so that people could view them collectively as a symbol of good triumphing over evil. The village residents agreed to his wish in gratitude.

As hundreds of years passed, people gradually forgot about the lama and his cave. In 1975, an earthquake caused destruction in the entire Himalayan region, also destroying the lama’s stupas. During the construction of a road in the region under the
supervision of the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.

As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow. It was that of Lama Sangha Tenzin, the beloved protector Lama Sangha Tenzin. The team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the mummy was none other than their spiritual leader and deity, and learned that Lama Sangha Tenzin continued to meditate in the valley.

When the news was relayed to the Indian Army, one of the broken stupas was discovered. As the rubble was being cleared, a worker’s equipment hit a skull, out of which blood started to flow.

People first thought it was the head of a dead calf but as it was pulled out in its entirety, they were in a state of shock and awe – the Giu mummy had been unearthed!

When the news was relayed to the Indian government, an investigation team was sent to Giu. They confirmed that the Giu mummy dated back to the 14th century. It was 550 years old. Everyone was amazed and puzzled upon discovering that the mummy’s hair and nails continued to grow even after all these centuries!

The residents of Giu requested the Indian and Tibetan border police for custody of the mummy, so that a temple could be constructed in the lama’s honor. Their request was granted, and today, visitors from around the world come to Giu to pay their respects and learn about this unsolved mystery of the Giu mummy.

Lama Kambo continues to meditate in the seated posture, keeping his promise to guard the village.
A sleepy town with a history sprinkled with stories of great kingdoms in the past, Koraput is wrapped in the soothing embrace of nature at its brilliant best! There’s much to explore here.

The perfectly paved blacktop that flow through the inviting landscapes in Koraput reveal the texture and vibe of the place. Journeying through roads — it lifts up the spirit, and offers great many learnings, too.

Koraput is a geographical gem. Historical studies suggest that it was a thriving region, abundantly rich in resources. It is among the most scenic and fulfilling places to explore in Odisha; tenderly encased by rich forests, vigorous waterfalls, terraced valleys and swift springs.

Spreading out a canvas of freshness with bright green landscape all around, the beautifully inviting roads make Koraput easily accessible from most parts of Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh.

It is a part of the tribal belt in southern Odisha, with Gadaba, Diyadi Paraja, Saura, and Bhottadas being some of the major tribes.

Koraput offers a great balance between adventure and calmness, making it ideal for thrill seekers and families alike, and can be reached from Bhubaneswar via the enigmatic landscapes of Rayagada, and from Visakhapatnam via the Araku Valley. There are several immersive experiences that await you all across this beautiful land.

Deomali: Standing proudly tall at 1,672m, Deomali is the highest peak in Disha and is situated near Doodhari village. The peak surrounding the peak is rich in flora and fauna and has a thick layer of forest all around it. The Deomali hill range has rich reserves of minerals and is peppered with breaks and valleys. It is also home to tribes such as Kandhas, Bhutnia, and Bhotas among others.

Duduma Waterfall: Located at the border of Koraput in Odisha and Vishakapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Duduma is a zestful waterfall that falls down a height of 125 metres and emerges out of the Machikund River. Duduma is also home to Bonda, Gadama, and Paraja aboriginal tribes.

There is also a hydroelectric project located near the falls which has a capacity of 120MW.

Gupteswar Temple: Located at the banks of the Kolab River, it is an important shrine of Lord Shiva and is situated on a limestone hill. The temple’s cave is massive and serves as the abode to Lord Shiva who sits there in form of a big 'lingam'. According to popular belief, Lord Ram is supposed to have passed through this region enroute Panchabati in Dandakaranya.

Jeypore: Among the largest towns in the Koraput district, Jeypore has immense historic significance and was established by Maharaja Vir Vikram Dev of the Suryavansdi kingdom in the mid 17th century. Jeypore is enveloped by Eastern Ghats and Araku Hills on the three sides. It is encircled by an imposing old fort which is a big attraction for visitors. Odisha’s largest man-made pond, Jagannath Sagar to the eastern part of the town, hosts water sports activities to indulge adventure seekers.

As you waft along the road and the wind glides over your skin — lifting your spirits, sending a gentle, refreshing shiver of excitement through your body — you’re reminded that the meandering ribbons of black are not just to take you from one place to the other; they are the constant, eternal companions in the journeys that evolve you. Come, hit the road in Odisha and explore more such wonderful places and yourself.

For more information, visit odishatourism.gov.in
The Hanging Lifeline of Zanskar

I still remember that evening.

My friend Stanzin and I had to cross the Tsetaan wooden bridge to reach Marling, the oldest hamlet of the Lungnak Valley of Zanskar, for an electrification project. It was already dark, and before we lay probably the longest wooden bridge of Zanskar, precariously hanging above the gushing Tsarap River!

By the time we reached the middle, it was nearly 10 pm. All we could hear were the sounds of the water flowing swiftly and the wind lashing. Darkness fell all around us. The bridge had a lot of cracks, and the other side seemed too far away. Stanzin began panicking, thinking the bridge might be breaking. Eventually we retreated to the starting point to wait for sunlight. We spent the entire night outdoors, trying to survive without a roof or food.

The next morning, we walked across the bridge, reached the village and slept for the entire day.

These hanging bridges are the lifeline of Zanskar. Since there are no big willows in Ladakh, the people of Zanskar built these indigenous structures by putting together small twigs and shrubs in a dense formation. They were made in the olden times, with no modern architectural techniques, but the bridges serve the villages well. Each one can last for decades, with villages on both sides of the river contributing to the maintenance effort every few years.

In 2015, in the Lungnak valley of Zanskar, the landslides and floods washed away all bridges except one. Now that wooden bridge, also above Tsarap River (which finally becomes Zanskar River), is the only lifeline that connects the grand old monastery of Phugtal with the village of Yougar on the other side. During the electrification of the monastery, I remember the tremendous effort made by the villagers and monks to get the solar panels and batteries transported across the bridge – perhaps the most risky in Zanskar due to its height—and to the top of the hill.

The most remote monastery and village in Zanskar now run entirely on their own solar power grid – only because the old hanging bridge made it possible to transfer materials across the roaring river.

Things are changing quickly though. The old hanging wooden bridges are now being replaced by motorable ones. Only five hanging wooden bridges remain in Zanskar, all of them in the Lungnak Valley. The hanging wooden bridges might be old, shaky, and scary after dark, but they always make for interesting memories. They are usable throughout the harsh winter, but interestingly no one uses them. The Tsarap River freezes over in winter and people do not need bridges to commute. They simply walk on the frozen river to get from one village to another.

What to do
The route offers innumerable activities which cannot be completed in a short journey. Here is a list of the activities:

- Explore Leh-Kargil route
- You will find Indus-Zanskar confluence, Moon Land, Patthar Sahil parvathara, Lamayuru Monastery, and the Maitreya Buddha statue of Mulbekh
- Kargil war memorial
- You will cross the origin of the Tsarap River on this journey
- Glaciers Nun-Kun, Parkachik, Drang Drung
- Pensi La
- Rangdum Monastery, a preserve of the history of the region
- Karsha Monastery, the old structure is situated on a hill, immediately before Padum. You can witness the breathtaking panoramic landscape view from the top
- Trek to Lungnak Valley
- Petroglyphs sites
- Phugtal Monastery, a 2500-year-old structure

How to get involved

- GHE has brought solar energy to more than 20 villages in the region through its impact expeditions, engaging hundreds of travellers in the process. You can join one of the impact expeditions that will empower you to leave behind a legacy of your visit to the valley.
- The team has also set up several homestays and has been able to stitch together authentic cultural experiences which can be booked at www.mountainhomestays.com

How to get involved

- GHE has brought solar energy to more than 20 villages in the region through its impact expeditions, engaging hundreds of travellers in the process. You can join one of the impact expeditions that will empower you to leave behind a legacy of your visit to the valley.

- The team has also set up several homestays and has been able to stitch together authentic cultural experiences which can be booked at www.mountainhomestays.com

- GHE has brought solar energy to more than 20 villages in the region through its impact expeditions, engaging hundreds of travellers in the process. You can join one of the impact expeditions that will empower you to leave behind a legacy of your visit to the valley. The team has also set up several homestays and has been able to stitch together authentic cultural experiences which can be booked at www.mountainhomestays.com
crystal clear waters cascading down birds is a treat for sore eyes. One of with the cacophony of the chirping Khandadhar, coupled unexplored terrain makes it ideal for the intrepid traveller. Approximately seven hours Beingumaha, Kaddigdapa, Pisibrunda, treasure trove of rare medicinal plant forests, the Mandasaru ecosystem is a station is also tagged as the 'Kashmir surprise that this quaint little hill picture-perfect. Stretching across the world's longest earthen dam. Located the Mahanadi River, Hirakud is the HIraKud the falls drops to the ground from a height of 244 metres. However, the uneven stone floors, it derives its Valley' of Mandasaru; and Hirakud, the world's longest earthen dam. The basic value proposition of BRLF lies doubling of income of small and marginal households. In 2017, the Springshed Rejuvenation program was launched in four districts of West Bengal in partnership with the Commissioner, MGNREGA, Govt of West Bengal. A total of 294 springs were treated at an expenditure of around generating 291,180 person-days of employment. This was followed by Ushar Muki ('freedom from barreness', an MGNREGA-based mega-watershed program) in 55 blocks of 6 districts in West Bengal in partnership with the MGNREGA Cell of the state. A total MGNREGA and convergence leverage of Rs. 1070 crores has been achieved, creating 5.28 crore person-days of employment. BRLF also entered into a partnership with the Government of Jharkhand to implement a mega-watershed project in 26 blocks of 12 districts, co-created and co-financed with the Axis Bank Foundation. Under the project, an estimated 1,388 Micro-watersheds are being taken up for area treatment - checking soil erosion and runoff reduction over 6.94 lakh hectares of land. Projects worth Rs. 315.62 crores have already received administrative sanction, of which schemes worth Rs. 234.54 crores have been completed, creating more than 21 lakh person-days of employment.

In 3 years and at least 6 lakh families will be impacted. A truly exciting feature of these state partnerships is the capacity building of thousands of frontline state functionaries in the course of implementation. A project funded by the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj is being implemented in about 279 villages of 4 blocks in 3 districts of Madhya Pradesh viz., Shivpuri, Sheogur and Guna and two blocks of two districts in Jharkhand viz., Latehar and Palamu to transform the lives and livelihoods of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups and Dalits of Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. The project is working towards enhancing the quality of outcomes of the grassroot interventions in the areas of water and clean energy in the wake of climate change, building capacities of CSOs in resource mobilization, advocacy and policy dialogues and driving innovations. Under its Capacity Building vertical, to build young leadership, BRLF has begun grooming adivasi youth as development professionals through a one-of-a-kind, rigorous six-month Certificate Program in Rural Livelihoods (CPRL). The course is conducted in partnership with IIMR, Jaipur and is a much-needed intervention at bridging the capacity gap at the grassroots. 146 adivasi youth, identified by our CSD partners as people with leadership potential, have completed this intensive 6-month, field-based course successfully in the first five batches. During the course, the candidates work with CSOs and CBOs for firsthand experience. BRLF has also sponsored 16 tribal youth to study MBA in Rural Management from IIM and Welthungerhilfe. BRLF expects that the leverage of government funds in these four states for programmatic expenses will be upwards of Rs. 3,000 crores over the next 3 years and at least 6 lakh families will be impacted. BRLF has also signed an MoU with the Commissioner, MGNREGA, Govt of Jharkhand to implement a MGNREGA-based mega watershed project in 26 blocks of 6 districts of the state. The project is co-financed and co-created by Hindustan Unilever Foundation and Welthungerhilfe. BRLF expects that the leverage of government funds in these four states for programmatic expenses will be upwards of Rs. 3,000 crores over the next 3 years and at least 6 lakh families will be impacted.
I was born into a semi-nomadic family of herders in Teri village in the Changthang region. During my schooling I learnt about the cultural diversity of Changthang, which is also home to a nomadic tribe called the Changpas, who rear the famous Changthangi goats or the pashmina goats.

Sometime in 2003, I was selected for a crash course by the Ministry of Textile, in collaboration with Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. During the 15-day training we learnt about textile machinery and the super-fine cashmere. I soon realised that majorly raw pashmina was being exported but I believed we could also make handmade products.

In 2010, I left my job as a technician. My mother is from a nomadic family and to honour my heritage, I started my own venture — Nomadic Woollen Mills. My sole aim was to utilise all my learnings to create an ecosystem that offers employment to local artisans, besides creating beautiful pashmina products.

I began by training local women in pashmina spinning, knitting and weaving, organising designing and sizing so that we could make products for commercial purposes. I started with a small shop and when business grew in 2016, I opened a new, bigger one.

A few years ago I had promised to donate wool-shearing machines to the nomadic sheep-rearing families in the remote Samad Rockchan region. However, upon reaching there, I realised they had no access to electricity. I wanted to keep up my promise by giving them something useful and ended up donating solar lanterns to 69 families the next time.

I think it’s time we find ways to develop a robust universe where nomads, weavers, craftsmen and locals flourish financially and creatively – and the rest of us remember our nomadic roots.
For as long as I can remember, reading has been one of my greatest joys. The way authors build a world through their writing and manage to capture a reader’s imagination never fails to amaze me. I believe that reading stays in our minds far longer than what we see.

When I was a child, I would read all kinds of stories to my father, who loved listening to them. He did not get much of an education and therefore, couldn’t read. I took it upon myself to read entire books to him and give him updates about events around the world by reading the news. I would write letters to our relatives and friends on my father’s behalf, and then read them out loud so that he could check what I had written. That was perhaps how my love for reading began, and it grew with age.

It was the same love that made me choose the job of a ‘walking librarian’ at Pratibha Public Library — an offshoot of Library Movement in Kerala. The library was built in 1961 in my village Mothakkara, in the Mananthavady taluk of Kerala’s Wayanad district. This region is home to beautiful rivers, small waterfalls, farms and a wide diversity of birds and plants, and is surrounded by lush green mountains.

Although the library has been around for almost 60 years, people in the village — women in particular — had no easy access to books until a few years ago. Despite their love for reading, their tight schedules, busy farming lives, and the distance and time to commute to the library made it difficult for them to visit regularly to borrow books.

Since 2012, when I started working at Pratibha Library, I have been delivering books to the homes of the library members six days a week. I give them two new books each time, collect them after eight days, and keep a record in the library register. I work based on the guidelines that the library council provides for book distribution and delivery.

By now, I have become familiar with the tastes of various members through continuous interaction. Every week, I look at the library’s collection of books and try to find titles that would appeal to the members’ tastes. The library has...
Yet, it’s been heartening to see the positive effect that reading has had on some people amidst the chaos that the pandemic has brought along. Most members who were feeling stuck at home and low during the lockdown find peace through reading the books that I deliver to their homes.

During THIS PHASE,

I also started providing books to all the indigenous tribal children. It is a delight to see their excited faces when they see me with new books. Some children call me over the phone to confirm my next walk towards their houses.

Over time, I have developed strong bonds with all the reading members. Some give me wonderful reviews on books that they find interesting and urge me to read them. I note down the titles of those books and make sure that I take them home next time. In a way, these members create opportunities for me to nurture my passion for reading.

On a member’s recommendation, I recently read a book titled Aadujeevitham by Benyamin. It impacted me deeply, and Najeeb—one of the characters in the book—will live forever in my mind, giving me strength and motivating me not to give up but fight in adverse situations.

I love everything about my job. It gives me an opportunity to expand my worldview by having interesting conversations and discussions about books every day. I love sharing books and daily life with people. My job has taught me the most important lesson of life—what you give is what you reap.

I treat all the library members with affection and care, and I earn respect from all in return.

My EXPERIENCE AS A

I was recommended a book titled Aadujeevitham and reading it inspired me to fight any adversity and never give up.

The hilly terrain of Wayanad is wonderfully green and rich. It is The hilly terrain of Wayanad is wonderful, full of greenery and rich in flora and fauna. In the Wayanad hill station, there are several small hills like Kuruvakadu, Laxmidungri, and Chinnar, which are covered in lush forests and flowers.

Wayanad makes it conducive for walking in the mountains and getting some fresh air. The Wayanad hill station is also famous for its tea plantations, with hills covered in greenery and the cool weather makes it ideal for walking. The Wayanad hills are also a nature lover’s paradise, with several small hills like Kuruvakadu, Laxmidungri, and Chinnar, which are covered in lush forests and flowers.

I am now able to access all areas, as some have been declared containment zones. I am now able to deliver only 300-350 books in a month.

Over time, I have developed strong bonds with all the reading members. Some give me wonderful reviews on books that they find interesting and urge me to read them. I note down the titles of those books and make sure that I take them home next time.

I also started providing books to all the indigenous tribal children. It is a delight to see their excited faces when they see me with new books. Some children call me over the phone to confirm my next walk towards their houses.

Over time, I have developed strong bonds with all the reading members. Some give me wonderful reviews on books that they find interesting and urge me to read them. I note down the titles of those books and make sure that I take them home next time.

I also started providing books to all the indigenous tribal children. It is a delight to see their excited faces when they see me with new books. Some children call me over the phone to confirm my next walk towards their houses.

Over time, I have developed strong bonds with all the reading members. Some give me wonderful reviews on books that they find interesting and urge me to read them. I note down the titles of those books and make sure that I take them home next time.
to me, I extended my love for reading to travelogues, travel books and books about different destinations across the globe. The confidence that I gained by interacting with members of the library helped me in my interactions with guests from around the world. That, in turn, helped me improve my English.

Some people hesitate to take membership in our library as it costs them 25. Those who can afford the registration fee pay for themselves. But there are also those who love to read but cannot afford the fee. I pay their registration fee from my earnings so that everyone with a passion for reading gets books to read.

Some members feel that I should be paid an additional amount for walking to their houses, but the excitement on the faces of readers when they see me with my books are my rewards. I feel very content that at 63 years of age, I am able to walk up to 4 kilometres every day, delivering books to people and being their ‘walking library’.

info DESK

www.voicesofruralindia.org

How to get there

Mothikkara is a small village located in the Wayanad district in the state of Kerala, Wayanad is part of the Western Ghats.

Nearest airports are Kannur at 88 km (2.5 hours by road) and Kozhikode (CALicut) at 107 km (3 hours by road).

The nearest railway station is at Kozhikode (CALicut). The town closest to Mothikkara is Mananthavady.

How to get involved

Volunteer with Kabani to help in research, campaigns, community tourism initiatives, and technology programs.

Support Kabani’s sustainable community travel efforts by visiting Wayanad and joining the activities organized by Kabani.

For more details visit www.kabaniour.com

Things to do

The Banasura dam and Banasura spice gardens are the main tourist attractions.

Kabani has developed and trained a cluster of homestays, storytellers, and transporters in Mothakkara to promote sustainable community tourism. The activities that Kabani organizes give you an opportunity to enjoy the local culture and nature. These include a day-long walk in Wayanad through villages and paddy fields, a hike to Banasura hills, a visit to cake-making and Ayurvedic medicine-making units, and a visit to Athikkoli hamlet of indigenous tribe.

JAIPUR RUGS: WEAVING KNOTS OF COMPASSION

To express what is in one’s heart sounds really simple, yet it is a complex pursuit. In the Hindi language, this desire of expression is defined aptly by the word — Manchaha. And much like the blend of simplicity and intricacy that this word represents, it is also an effort in the universe of sustainable development by the popular carpet manufacturer, Jaipur Rugs.

The Manchaha initiative isn’t only about creating handmade rugs, it is about evoking the innocence of the rural people who make them, and the craftsmanship that hides behind each creation. Jaipur Rugs initiated this effort to tap into the endless and untamed creativity in rural India and gave the raw beauty a platform of creative expression and empowering them by telling their stories through the rugs they create.

Each of these rugs is handmade and has more than 200,000 knots — each knot telling the story of its maker one word at a time. One of the most celebrated rugs is called Machine ki Dunya. It is a weaver-designer Sundari’s depiction — through unconventional motifs — of her desire to fly, as well as her gratitude to the farming machine that yielded greater harvest. Her rug was awarded the Carpet Design Award, 2021 for its incredibly unique design and concept, beating several big design houses.

For tourists and aficionados alike, Jaipur Rugs, along with Airbnb, offers day-long excursions to the villages where you can learn the craft of weaving directly from the weavers. Looking at the detailing and intricacies that go in their work, and enjoying joyful conversations full of wisdom and inspiration is going to make you feel humbled. The barriers of language and culture fade away as you become part of their simple lives for a few hours.

WEAVING KNOTS OF REDEMPTION

After the success of the Manchaha initiative in rural Rajasthan, Jaipur Rugs is now bending bars and getting the prisoners in Jaipur, Dausa and Bikaner Central Jails into its fold under the Freedom Manchaha program.

It is a livelihood opportunity for inmates which will encourage their creative expression, and healing. This initiative is not only about getting trained in the art of carpet weaving making rugs. Through Freedom Manchaha, the intention is to turn disengaged inmates into creative individuals capable of making handmade works of art, thereby providing livelihood opportunities to them.

For Jaipur Rugs it is a way to give a sense of purpose to the inmates and the appreciation of their work stand proof that beauty can manifest from a place of gloom. Jaipur Rugs aims to create unique works of art by nurturing the latent creativity of the inmates, turning them into artists and creating a lasting and easily replicable solution.

Conceptualised by Kavita Chaudhary (Design Director, Jaipur Rugs), the Manchaha and Freedom Manchaha initiatives have won numerous prestigious global design awards such as the German Design Award, EDIDA (ELLE DECOR Design Award), Carpet Design Award, iF Design Award, Kyoorius Design Award and European Product Design Award, all while going up against mega design houses and billion-dollar product companies from across the globe.
I’VE ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS ABOUT THE STARS

Growing up, my elders narrated beautiful stories about the Pole Star and his children. Losar, the Ladakhi New Year, is also a festival associated with the stars.

My village, Maan, on the shores of Pangong Lake in Ladakh, is a special place for stargazing, free of clouds, light or air pollution. I was excited to be trained in the basics of astronomy, the technicalities of operating a telescope and interacting with travellers. I was thrilled to hear that the first telescope of the project would be installed in my village.

Since then, our group of five women have been conducting stargazing sessions every night on the shores of Pangong Lake. On a regular night in Ladakh, we can see constellations like the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia, and the Pole Star. Sometimes we can also spot the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, zoom into the craters of Earth’s moon and identify numerous other stars and constellations. During the sessions, we like to share stories about the stars that we heard growing up.

We try to learn continuously and keep our knowledge up to date. Our supporting partners share documents, websites and practical applications for us to expand our understanding of the night sky.

We now also have a network of homestays called Astrostays through which we have found employment — a steady source of income and a path towards independence.

Today when I look at young girls in my village, I realise how things have changed for the better. Girls have now started attending school regularly. Whether in astronomy or other fields, I hope that one day, the stars will align for them too. ☁️

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

STANZIN DOLKAR is a resident of Maan village, where she is part of the astronomy team. She completed her primary education till 5th grade in Maan, then moved to a nearby hostel till 10th grade. She is currently pursuing her 9th grade from IGNOU. Dolkar loves to sing and dance to local Ladakhi music. She is also known as the knitting expert in her village.

How to get involved

Simply book an experience or homestay through GHE’s Mountain Homestays initiative. You can book the Astrostays and the Astronomy experience. The homestays at Maan are carbon neutral and your stay at Maan will be eco-friendly. You will find the astro team on ground explaining the constellations and planetary positions during their sessions at night. Support the initiative by booking your travel at www.mountainhomestays.com

How to get there

Maan is a hamlet, on the shores of the Pangong Lake, Ladakh. It falls under Changthang region. There are two ways to reach Maan — either by crossing the world’s second highest motorable pass, Chang La, or via Shayok if you are coming from Nubra. The nearest airport is Leh which is well connected with Delhi. Alternatively, you can also travel by road to Leh via either Manali or Srinagar.

How to book

You can book through www.mountainhomestays.com or by contacting the village’s astro team.

Things to do

The village is located on the shores of the Pangong Lake and is the world’s first community run astro-village.

- Stargazing through a 10" telescope
- Hike to a hidden lake
- Yoga at Pangong, archery
- Buy authentic yak wool carpet
- Understand the impact of climate change by locals
- Trail through Merak-Chushul-Hanle-Tsomoriri

A young astronomy enthusiast from a remote Ladakhi village shares how she is smashing gender stereotypes

Star trail over the Pangong Tso

info DESK

www.voicesofruralindia.org

A young astronomy enthusiast from a remote Ladakhi village shares how she is smashing gender stereotypes
A young girl from Sumda Chenmo, a remote village in Ladakh’s Markha region, shares her journey from growing up without electricity to solar-electrifying over 50 such villages.
I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME

I saw a light bulb on a trip to Leh — I was 11, and drawn towards it like a moth. In its milky brightness, some of the biggest challenges of our daily lives back home materialised all at once. We lived in a remote village like ours, it’s a luxury to find a school with permanent teachers, forget about computers, internet or high-tech classes. So, after completing my primary education in the village, I had to move to Leh to study further.

I was always interested in science, which has stood me good stead over the years, eventually supporting my quest to help the community. At the time, however, I had no intentions of enrolling for higher studies, even though I wanted an independent life. I couldn’t get the jobs I wanted, and a couple of years later I got married. But the idea of being independent never left me and my plans materialised after my second child was born.

It WAS AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS

That led me to Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE), and to a career in clean energy access. My brother, who was a part of the organisation already, told me about the opportunity to train as a solar engineer. The first hurdle though, was an unexpected event of leaving my family behind and travelling to a new place with unfamiliar language and food. But my husband encouraged me to take the plunge.

Eventually, the fear of uncertainty gave way to dreams and I got going. I was at the Barefoot College in Tilonia and the first month was tough thanks to the soaring temperatures and spicy food. It was here that I held a screwdriver in my hand for the very first time, and soon learnt how to repair LED bulbs, charge controllers and solar lanterns. Later, I also picked up more information on solar panels and batteries.

Apart from the technical knowhow, we also learnt the basics of finance, weaving techniques and soft skills at Barefoot that I’ve put to good use ever since. I joined GHE after I returned to Leh from Rajasthan, and soon after, I headed out for my very first assignment with my colleague, Achen, to electrify the sacred Lingshed monastery in Leh District, which is nearly 1,000 years old, and 97 households in its adjacent village. The Head Lama told us that he was pleased to see Ladakhi women setting an example for others to follow.

It feels great when women of my own community consider me a role model. It makes me aware of my responsibilities. Next was GHE’s first project beyond the borders of Ladakh. It was also the first time I was travelling alone to a place as far away as Meghalaya.

After landing at the airport in Guwahati, we drove to Garo Hills, winding our way up right into the clouds. We stayed in the villages of Rongmegre and Rongrasimp, and electrified more than 50 households. The trip was quite an adventure for me.

Right from the landscape and the climate to the language and food, everything was completely unfamiliar. But I soon realised that all villages in India have at least one thing in common — its people are full of gratitude and warmth for visitors.

How to get involved

GHE has electrified several villages in the Markha valley and created livelihood opportunities through tourism for the villages in the region. The team has also setup boutique homestays which can be accessed through trained guides in the region, who will give you a great experience of local culture and the wildlife.

Incase you would like to be part of one of the electrification expeditions, visit www.ghe.co.in.

The team has also setup village experiences in this virgin and unexplored region of Ladakh and you book them at www.mountainhomestays.com

There is another big perk of my assignments — financial independence. I think it’s very important for women to earn. It boosts confidence, and helps support our families in achieving their dreams. I remember buying an earthen lamp for the temple in our house and some clothes for my kids with my first pay cheque. So far, I have contributed to the construction of our house and to my children’s education. They study in one of the best schools in Ladakh, where they don’t have to worry about permanent teachers, or about leaving home for higher education. And to me that counts for a lot.

I HAVE COME A long way from living in the dark to setting up solar microgrids in remote villages, and I hope to keep going. I also hope other women in rural areas have a journey as beautiful as mine. To them I’d like to say, “Start small. Don’t wait for a big break or a government job. Instead, learn solar engineering, handicrafts, or any other skills you can. And in the end, do what you can, with what you have, from where you are.”

# Angmo would go on to electrify villages near the Pangong Tso

GURMET ANGMO is from the Markha region of Ladakh. She is a solar engineer, entrepreneur and mother. Her dream is to work for the upliftment of the Himalayan community. She has electrified more than 50 villages in Ladakh and Meghalaya with the Global Himalayan Expedition. She is a strong advocate of women empowerment and likes to lead from the front. She lives with her husband and two young daughters. Gourmet wants them to acquire the necessary skills through education to serve the rural community.

Supported by - Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE)
LEELA BORDIA’S JOURNEY WITH JAIPUR BLUE POTTERY

CRAFT IN INDIA
Craftsmen are the backbone of India’s rural economy. Historically, crafts have held a special patronage in India. However, rapid industrialisation has slowly led to people pursuing alternative job opportunities to enhance their economic conditions. Indian craftsmen face many challenges in the face of modernisation. A majority of craftsmen continue to operate in informal settings, have poor exposure to market intelligence, lack education and struggle to operate in the fragmented value chain.

In the face of such adversity, Leela Bordia emerged as a pioneer and mentor leading many village craftsmen towards entrepreneurial transformation. Her continual efforts not only resuscitated the craft of Blue Pottery in Rajasthan but also altered the fortunes of hundreds of villagers. She single-handedly brought prosperity and a sense of pride in craft to the craftsmen.

PASSION FOR CHANGE
Inspired by her mother’s work with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, Mrs. Bordia set out in search of an opportunity that would help her make a change in society by helping those in need. In 1976, she visited a settlement of craftsmen in Jaipur and was shocked to see their poor living conditions. She found a few workers huddled in a room working on traditional blue pottery and was amazed to discover that their work was intricate, time-consuming and rich. Most of these craftsmen belonged to the villages around Jaipur and had migrated to the city in search of employment, ending up living in squalor and isolation from their families and community. Mrs. Bordia decided that this was the opportunity she had been looking for and decided that she would make the craft of blue pottery a medium of bettering lives and creating a sustainable livelihood for its craftsmen. Not wanting to simply dol out money, she saw an opportunity here to give the artisans themselves the power to earn their own livelihood.

CREATING CRAFT ENTREPRENEURS
Mrs. Bordia said, “I pursued my passion for blue pottery and simultaneously searched for avenues to benefit not only this exquisite craft but also the craftsmen. It was not me that chose this craft but the craft itself that chose me to be its voice.” This journey began with one craftsman and one product and from there more and more craftsmen began to discover the true value of their work and started to join hands with her.

The first change that Mrs. Bordia made was to set up production units in the villages. In the beginning this was a difficult task as the craftsmen did not believe that working from their villages could provide them with a substantial enough income. However, with time they began to realise the benefits of her vision. By going back to the villages, they were able to not only make pottery but also farm their land and teach their skill to their families and communities so as to become self-reliant craft entrepreneurs. Aside from helping avoid needless nomadic labour in the cities and displacement of people, self-reliant units also helped preserve the traditions and culture of the villages and contribute to the overall development of the area. Today, these villages have an effective infrastructure with schools, hospitals and basic amenities, all developed through the efforts of the craftsmen that live and work there.

INNOVATION IN THE CRAFT: UTILIT Y FROM ART
Neerja International was born out of necessity. A means to an end, the company was created to provide a platform for the craftsmen of blue pottery to be able to showcase and sell their work. Very early on, Mrs. Bordia realised that the traditional products created from blue pottery were beautiful art objects with no real-life applications. "If art is only used for beautification, and no utility is derived from it, fewer pieces will be made. How will the craft survive?" says Mrs. Bordia. Often criticised for the change in colours that she brought about, she did not lose heart and only thought about what would benefit the craft and its people. She encouraged the craftsmen to innovate with blue pottery to create everyday utility products. Despite their initial hesitation, the craftsmen learnt to innovate and work beyond the limitations of traditional blue pottery items like vases and bowls, to bring about a twist to appeal to the modern masses. Once they were made to realise the value of blue pottery in the modern market, they began creating utility objects like beards, pen holders, door knobs, tiles, to name a few. The growth of Neerja International is synonymous with the growth of the craftsmen it engages. Presently, the company produces over 500 different items, each with hundreds of different design variations using traditional and adapted blue pottery techniques.

WHF AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – WORK FROM HOME IS NOTHING NEW FOR NEERJA
Today the company under able guidance of Mrs. Bordia and her family, continues to work with over 1000 craftsmen and affiliated artists either directly or indirectly. Neerja International works with specially-abled persons who are gainfully employed with the organisation after being trained in the craft of blue pottery and also provides a source of financial independence to women. One example of this is the women of the ‘Patwa’ community in Rajasthan. All the weaving and threadwork for the jewellery collections made at Neerja at done by the women from this traditional community who have been trained in this skill and can now be gainfully employed and earn a living from within their homes and family units.

Artisans working with Mrs. Bordia’s company work in their home villages which helps avoid displacement of labour. Their work is contractual. They deliver the finished products to the central office in Jaipur upon completion. An example of the power of self-reliance that Mrs. Bordia has imbibed in her team is the way that the craftsmen of blue pottery and the company itself have dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic in the last two years. During a global phenomenon like Corona, when industries were forced to come to a standstill, Neerja International only shut its doors for the first mandatory lockdown in India in 2020. Post which, the company which has been a pioneer of what is today being recognized globally as the new ‘Norm’ of Work From Home continued to keep its craftsmen busy and engaged. Saving livelihoods and continuing essential activities like research and development on important aspects of blue pottery like the strengthening of the ceramic, the company continued to support the artists working with them by ensuring that orders kept coming in and new innovations were made during this period. On an average, at least one new product per day was being designed and manufactured and the company continued to support the artists. This helped keep everyone busy and their spirits up. Idle hands and idle minds can lead to anxiety and depression. At Neerja, this was avoided so that every craftsman and every member of the Neerja family stayed employed, productive and positive.

Another great advantage of self-reliant units is that handmade crafts like blue pottery are labour intensive and time consuming. Therefore, working in a self-reliant unit gives the craftsmen the freedom to decide how much work they wish to undertake and allows them the ability to be in control of the income they can generate. Also, more and more young people are encouraged to pursue the craft when employment becomes available in their home towns and villages.

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES
Mrs. Leela Bordia is the first Indian lady ceramist to write a book on blue pottery titled - A Tribute to Blue Pottery. She presented the first copy of this work to Late Shri Pranab Mukherjee (then President of India).

Her work has been an inspiration for many and she features as a case study in the publication Business in Asia and in author Rashmi Bansal’s book, ‘Follow Every Rainbow’, a popular read. NCERT has also incorporated a chapter about her work in their syllabus on Entrepreneurship.

Her wall is decorated with the awards she has received but what gives her the most satisfaction is overcoming the challenges that blue pottery throws in her way, like making the biggest blue pottery plate in the world, a record registered in Limca Book of Records.

Keeping the craft of blue pottery alive is her dream today as much as it was in 1976. It is her ardent wish that more and more people talk about blue pottery and what makes her happiest is when people refer to this craft as Jaipur Blue Pottery. That to her is the very best accolade.
**A guide from Shankhdhura village visually documents the intricate craft of Likhai (wood carving), which was once found abundantly in villages across Kumaon.**

www.voicesofruralindia.org

---

**Owing to COVID-19**

Tourism in our village, Shankhdhura, came to a sudden halt. I worked as a high-altitude trekking and birding guide, so the income I earned to run my house also suddenly dried up.

We have been engaged with tourism and homestays in our village for the past 16 years. For the past year and a half, we have been retrofitting these homestays with wood carvings through Shilp Studio, a collaborative project between Himal Prakriti and IIT Roorkee.

The doors and windows in our village are made in the traditional style, with wood carvings on them. I always wondered about their creation. It was only recently that I got the chance to learn about Hindi likhai – the craft of wood carving.

Wood from the akhrot (walnut) tree is preferred for carving as it is dense and has a fine grain that suitable for minute designs. Upon drying it also takes on a dark and beautiful colour. Walnut likhai was earlier done by the master craftsmen of the Oar community. Once the design is carved onto the wood, it has to be further refined using sandpaper to give it a smooth finish. The carved wood panels are then nailed onto the existing frame of doorways. Today, most of our homestays have beautiful likhai carved wood panelling added to their doorways.

And now our local artisans are capable of keeping the old designs alive in this region.

---

**About the Storyteller**

**Trilok Singh Rana**

Like all able bodied young men, he grew up dreaming of joining the army. In 2008, he went on his first high altitude trek as a crew member of a Himalayan Ark trek and never looked back. From hunting birds with the village boys till he was 14, he is now a respected bird guide of Uttarakhand. He sees himself grow old, exploring and photographing these grand mountains and the wildlife they nurture.

Supported by - Himalayan Ark
A social worker from Meghalaya’s Chiringmagre village shares how ancient traditions and tribal culture helped preserve a pristine patch of biodiversity.

TO REACH THE SMALL VILLAGE OF Chiringmagre in Meghalaya’s South Garo Hills where I live, one has to endure slow and gruelling progress on foot for six hours crossing a river and a jungle. The path skirts around the densest area of the woods—a section that is sacred to us. The sacred forest is called Aong Kost.

This is a special place. Outsiders are forbidden from entering the sacred forest and no one, not even a member of our tribe, can cause any harm to the trees, flowers, or animals here. It has been this way for as long as I can remember, and my forefathers before that. Like any ancient tradition, this, too, has a story behind it.

The ancient indigenous Garo people had faith in one supreme spirit—one who is the creator of all the universe and the preserver of all living beings. It is believed that man is unworthy of calling him by his name, so he is known by his manifestations and work. He’s called Kalkame. The Garo people offer a sacrifice to him once a year, thanking him for his work and praying for his continued protection.

According to traditions, the place where the sacrifice is offered is the sacred forest. It is strongly believed that if anyone causes harm to any living being here, they will get sick, so nobody harms that part of the jungle in any way.

Chiringmagre’s sacred forest was established in the 17th century when Shri Wanding Ch. Marak, his wife Mejing M. Sangma, and the villagers who bought our village land offered the first sacrifice here. It is situated about 10 kilometres from Chokpot Block in south Garo Hills district, west of Bongmevre village, and covers an area of ninety seven bighas.

The practice of offering sacrifices continued till 1989, when it was stopped as most members of our tribe converted to Christianity. Though we no longer offer sacrifices to Kalkame, we have continued to preserve the forest as a village tradition. A variety of birds, animals, insects, and over a thousand varieties of trees (even those with medicinal properties) and plants bearing wild fruits are found in the sacred forest.

One sentiment that all tribes have in common is the respect for nature. In our tribe, the elders make decisions for the community and we all abide by them. The forest is our inherited wealth, and everyone in the village must follow the rules made for its protection or face penalties.

Lastly, I also try to conduct programs to inform the people of my village about global warming, the impact of cutting trees, and the need to preserve our biodiversity.

Our tribe has created a village group, which I preside over to maintain and protect this reserve. We want to look after the forest so it can be a home for a variety of animals, birds and plants. The forest is also our water catchment area that helps us ensure that we will have resources for the future. This way we can also preserve the stone monuments that were erected here by our forefathers.

Our tribes live in the forest and understand the value of using its resources wisely as our survival depends on it. I believe that ancient traditions can play a huge role in designing modern sustainability practices. From them, we can learn to live in harmony with nature.

GHE has led several development interventions in the Garo region and is also now looking at setting up homestays in the popular villages near the Nokrek National Park. If you would like to get involved, connect with them at  www.ghe.co.in and the team will get in touch with you to explore possible impact and volunteer opportunities.

The vision is to leverage sustainable tourism as a force for development for these communities living in the most beautiful environments.

The ancient indigenous Garo people had faith in one supreme spirit—one who is the creator of all the universe and the preserver of all living beings. It is believed that man is unworthy of calling him by his name, so he is known by his manifestations and work. He’s called Kalkame. The Garo people offer a sacrifice to him once a year, thanking him for his work and praying for his continued protection.

According to traditions, the place where the sacrifice is offered is the sacred forest. It is strongly believed that if anyone causes harm to any living being here, they will get sick, so nobody harms that part of the jungle in any way.

Chiringmagre’s sacred forest was established in the 17th century when Shri Wanding Ch. Marak, his wife Mejing M. Sangma, and the villagers who bought our village land offered the first sacrifice here. It is situated about 10 kilometres from Chokpot Block in south Garo Hills district, west of Bongmevre village, and covers an area of ninety seven bighas.

The practice of offering sacrifices continued till 1989, when it was stopped as most members of our tribe converted to Christianity. Though we no longer offer sacrifices to Kalkame, we have continued to preserve the forest as a village tradition. A variety of birds, animals, insects, and over a thousand varieties of trees (even those with medicinal properties) and plants bearing wild fruits are found in the sacred forest.

One sentiment that all tribes have in common is the respect for nature. In our tribe, the elders make decisions for the community and we all abide by them. The forest is our inherited wealth, and everyone in the village must follow the rules made for its protection or face penalties.

Lastly, I also try to conduct programs to inform the people of my village about global warming, the impact of cutting trees, and the need to preserve our biodiversity.

Our tribe has created a village group, which I preside over to maintain and protect this reserve. We want to look after the forest so it can be a home for a variety of animals, birds and plants. The forest is also our water catchment area that helps us ensure that we will have resources for the future. This way we can also preserve the stone monuments that were erected here by our forefathers.

Our tribes live in the forest and understand the value of using its resources wisely as our survival depends on it. I believe that ancient traditions can play a huge role in designing modern sustainability practices. From them, we can learn to live in harmony with nature.

GHE has led several development interventions in the Garo region and is also now looking at setting up homestays in the popular villages near the Nokrek National Park. If you would like to get involved, connect with them at www.ghe.co.in and the team will get in touch with you to explore possible impact and volunteer opportunities. The vision is to leverage sustainable tourism as a force for development for these communities living in the most beautiful environments.
It was an afternoon unlike any other. After completing the work at our farm, my wife and I headed to the forest adjoining our village — Baradpani — to forage for wild vegetables. Midway we saw a King Cobra blocking our path. It was staring at us and didn’t want us going any further.

Snake sightings are not unusual in our village. Our ancestors have worshipped nature and its creations for a long time, including the Naag Devta (the Snake God). Neither were we startled nor wanted to hurt the cobra. We tried to shoo it away, but it didn’t budge. Generally it’s enough to make a snake slither away, so we wondered why it wasn’t moving out of our way.

We, the Dang people, believe that snakes can sense danger, and maybe it lurked ahead, we wondered. But getting vegetables from the forest was essential, so we bowed to the cobra and took a different path towards the forest. In the woods, walking in search of the vegetables, we were oblivious to the likelihood of any danger.

Suddenly, the unmistakable roar of a leopard tensed up the air. We didn’t see it, but it must have seen us, or heard our voices, and probably roared to protect itself. Fearing that it might attack us, my wife and I ran back to a safer place.

That’s when we realized that Naag Devta – the cobra – had tried to stop us from going into the forest that day. It was perhaps warning us of the danger ahead, which we chose to ignore.

A guide from the Dang tribe of Baradpani village in Gujarat shares how a snake tried to save his life, and why he feels responsible for protecting the species.
The stone where the snake left an impression is our shrine. On the day of Naag Panchmi, one of the oldest festivals in our community the Dang people make small idols of snakes using the soil in their fields. In Saputara and other parts of Dang, snakes are worshipped because they are regarded as the embodiment of the deity Shiva. This is an ancient tribal ritual that dates back centuries.

There are many varieties of snakes still found in-and-around Saputara, including rat snakes, pit vipers and cobras. When a snake is spotted, an official at the local zoo is informed, who carefully catches the reptile and releases it in the jungle. However, the fear of snakes has been growing in Saputara. When a snake accidentally enters a house, sometimes it is killed mercilessly.

The DANG COMMUNITY has traditionally worshipped snakes and therefore never hurt them. Unfortunately, these days snakes aren’t valued as much as before. Neither the listeners nor the storytellers are interested. Due to this lack of awareness, some people get very scared if they see a snake. They believe that if a snake sees you once, it will come to your home to kill you.

In an effort to eliminate this fear from the minds of people, Grassroutes conducted a training about the different types of venomous and non-venomous snakes in the region, and the need to protect them. I attended the training and use my learnings from it to spread awareness among the tourists visiting this area.

Personally, I feel that snakes are our friends. They safeguard our crops by hunting rats, and in situations of adversity, they show up to protect us – like that day in the forest. In turn, we are responsible for protecting them.

On the day of Naag Panchmi, the Dang people make small idols of snakes using the soil in their fields.
Of Culture & Unexplored Lands

Home to various indigenous art forms, Bihar today attracts travellers, art enthusiasts and patrons alike

Bihar has been a cultural, spiritual and travel hub for a long time. It is home to various art forms and unexplored naturalscapes, and attracts enthusiasts and explorers alike.

Many indigenous art forms, like Manjusha, Madhubani, Tikuli amongst others, exhibit rich cultural lineage, and their knowledge have been passed on from generation to generation.

MANJUSHA

They are traditional temple shaped boxes, generally made of bamboo, jute and paper. The art form was on the verge of extinction in the 1980s, but was revived by the state government and was widely publicised, making it on travellers’ and art lovers’ bucket list.

MADHUBANI

Capturing geometrical patterns, artists use fingers, twigs, matchsticks, natural dyes and pigments to create these vibrant masterpieces. This art mostly depicts man’s association with nature. Practiced across the Mithila region — mostly by women — the art form can also be found in Darbhanga and the Ranti village.

TIKULI

Unique to the state of Bihar, Tikuli art is usually bright, colourful and dotted. Dating back almost 800 years, it originated in Patna and included the Mughals as its patrons. From being manufactured and designed in the local streets, the art form has flourished into a major source of attraction for travellers.

These art forms depict India’s culture, history, traditions, and folklore. While artists, enthusiasts and patrons dive into Bihar’s art scene, in today’s time travellers are also making their way to understand and cherish India’s — especially Bihar’s — long standing affair with history, traditions and culture.

There’s another thing that pulls the travellers to Bihar — exploring some of the most fascinating and largely unexplored places.

With its lands echoing mythological tales and serving as the nursery of pilgrimage, Bihar is a traveller’s dream. The unexplored destinations hide stories from its glorious past, and you will get immersed in the folklores and traditions that make this state a unique experience.

GRIDHAKUT HILL

One of the most serene places in the state, the Gridhakut Hill is also known as Vulture Peak, as it appears in the shape of a vulture head, owing to a natural stone formation. One of the most ancient sites in the state, it is here that Lord Buddha preached his Lotus Sermon. A statue of Lord Buddha was also found here, which is currently stationed at the Archaeological Museum of Nalanda.

KAIMUR HILLS

An air of mystery surrounds the Kaimur Hills as various antiquities are still dispersed in the deep jungles here. Significant from social, ecological and historical points of view, they are characterised by deep gorges, waterfalls and dense jungles. These hills are also one of the oldest rock formations in India, and are a visual treat during the monsoons.

KASHISH WATERFALL

The Kashish Waterfall is one of the 200 waterfalls that are said to appear in Bihar during the monsoons. Almost 800 feet high, this waterfall is a visual treat. If the locals are to be believed one can witness four waterfalls falling in three different directions from the mountain.

TUTLA BHAWANI WATERFALL

Two mountain ranges converge at a green valley and in the middle of their convergence springs the Tutla Bhawani waterfall. Covered by mountain ranges all across, this waterfall makes for a spellbinding visual treat. It is also from this waterfall that the Kachuar river originates.

Bihar is a state of many talents, folklores, and natural wonders. Be it your keenness for culture and art, the intent to immerse yourself in spiritual learnings, or to satisfy your spirit of adventure by visiting some unexplored places, Bihar will leave you spellbound.
A fisherman-conservationist, who is part of a community setting up fish sanctuaries in Vembanad Lake says that the belief that a rising tide will lift all boats, will help save India’s largest lake. 

SAVING INDIA’S LARGEST Lake

Migratory birds visit the marshes surrounding the Vembanad Lake.
I was born in a traditional fishing community along the Vembanad Lake, a wetland system that connects 1.6 million lives across three districts of Kerala. My earliest childhood memories are those of sitting by the lakeside near my home and dropping the net in to catch different varieties of fish. It was the time when the lake was home to over 150 species of fish.

Even as a child, I was aware of the challenges that the fishermen in my community faced to make ends meet. Over the years, as the fish population in the lake declined, the problems of the fishermen inflated multifold. There are many factors that contributed to the impoverishment of the Vembanad Lake ecosystem.

One of the major factors was the construction of Thanneermukkom salt-water barrier in 1975 across the Vembanad Lake. It prevented the flow of salt water from the tidal waves of the Arabian Sea into the lowlands of the Kotkanad region. This was done to help paddy cultivation that needs fresh water. This barrier divided the 36,000 hectares lake into two parts, the north and the south.

Before the barrier was commissioned, 429 tonnes of prawns were obtained from the lake as per the government records. A year after its completion, the number declined by 27 tonnes. Studies revealed that this decline was a result of reduced salinity in water in the southern part of the lake. Prawns need salty water for breeding; clams, too. A clam lays about 5 lakhs eggs, which the salty water facilitates the hatching of. The population of crabs and shrimp that used to come from the sea into the lake water also declined. Half of the 150 species of crabs have been wiped out since the barrage was built and it has resulted in community and government losses amounting to hundreds of crores.

Half of the 150 species of crabs have been wiped out since the barrage was built and it has resulted in community and government losses amounting to hundreds of crores.

The Craft of Emotion

Born out of a candid conversation about two people's passion, Ikai Asai has been the bridging structure for the creative artisans in the rural India to showcase their gift of crafts making at the world stage.

Job interviews can sometimes be very interesting and life altering. Had it been the typical interview format, Kanupriya may have been sitting in a very structured corporate setting, gazing endlessly at revenue projections and presentations with colourful animations. But it wasn't, so she isn't.

Kanupriya Verma — a young and dynamic CEO of what is not only an organisation, but a community movement — did not plan this journey. Her interview with Ananya Birla caught the wind of passion and drifted towards a heartfelt conversation that eventually birthed Ikai Asai.

In addition to being a platform to magnify the grace and subtlety of Indian artisanal work on a larger canvas for the world to appreciate, Ikai Asai is also a platform to exalt the way of life of the people who are behind the creations. Ikai Asai works with the craftspeople for not only sourcing products, but also gives them useful knowledge of market trends through workshops.

The functions that afford the organisation its uniqueness are material library and R&D. There's constant investment of thought and capital in bringing up the quality, and the commitment is aptly showcased in Ikai Asai's growth intentions. The catalogue was introduced in Paris in 2020, and Ikai Asai has made ravishing impressions in the whole of European, and American markets. China is also expected to become a profitable centre of business in the coming years.

Ikai Asai products are categorised into a heartfelt conversation that eventually birthed Ikai Asai.

Practiced hands display their skill in crafting the perfect pot. With the binding layers of emotion and passion, and the intrinsic character of the artisans reflecting in each of the products, Ikai Asai proudly blends the colour of passion, and the intrinsic character of the artisans reflecting in each of the products. Ikai Asai proudly blends the depth of Indianess to the international tonality of each creation.

The growth of the industrial sector caused industrial waste to trickle into the lake. Also, increased tourism brought more boats than the lake could carry. All these factors contributed heavily to polluting the water of the lake and resulted in the disappearance of fish species. Moreover, the consumption of fish from the pesticide-laden water caused health hazards.

The functions that afford the organisation its uniqueness are material library and R&D. There's constant investment of thought and capital in bringing up the quality, and the commitment is aptly showcased in Ikai Asai's growth intentions. The catalogue was introduced in Paris in 2020, and Ikai Asai has made ravishing impressions in the whole of European, and American markets. China is also expected to become a profitable centre of business in the coming years.

Ikai Asai products are categorised into a heartfelt conversation that eventually birthed Ikai Asai.

Practiced hands display their skill in crafting the perfect pot. With the binding layers of emotion and passion, and the intrinsic character of the artisans reflecting in each of the products, Ikai Asai proudly blends the depth of Indianess to the international tonality of each creation.
targeted as well. If you catch a clam when it is 6 months old, it does not have reproductive capacity. So, reproduction of clams stopped. A single spot of the lake was left untouched.

To address these ever-increasing problems, the Vembanad Nature Club was formed working together with the local fishing communities and institutions to address the conservation issues the lake faced.

1. Jopind Vembanad Kayal Samarakshana Samiti, or the Lake Protection Forum (LPF), at a young age. LPFs use traditional ecological knowledge to govern and manage fishery resources. They study the challenges of the fishing community, come up with localised solutions, find people who are interested in supporting the initiatives, and work with them to bring about real change. I started participating in LPF initiatives and organised many awareness programs for fishermen, general public and government officials. To prevent the problems associated with overfishing, we started building fish sanctuaries by using bamboo fencing and branches of cashew and mango trees. These sanctuaries were declared no-fishing zones to help fish breed and LPF members took turns to keep vigil.

Through the continuous and combined efforts of organisations such as ATREE and Cherish Expeditions, local bodies such as Lake Protection Forum, and also some foreign student groups, we have been able to raise funds and establish 30 fish sanctuaries. The evaluation of these sanctuaries by fishery experts has shown an increase in the fish stock. We have also managed to get the government to establish 24 fish sanctuaries over an area of two hectares. Additionally, five Panchayats manage five sanctuaries.

The FISHING COMMUNITIES

A set of wrinkled yet determined fingers working tirelessly next to a pair of young and excited hands - this is the unadulterated traditional practice of passing knowledge and skill from one generation to the next. Madhya Pradesh has a strong connection with its beautiful and creative past which continues to spark in modern times. Be it a craftsman holding a gouge gently against the wood, tapping it tenderly with a hammer to shape it to the perfect depth, or the mindful play of fingers of an artisan to make intricate designs from praxis past on a piece of cloth - this is legacy being delivered for a beautiful future. Here, traditional practices thrive.

Chanderi has always been very desirable for travellers, but at the heart of MP reside many more long-established art forms which will leave you amazed.

PATALKOT CHIND ART
This traditional art form originated in the Patalkot, around 80 kms from Bachmarhi. With the use of wood, bamboo and chind leaves, the craftsmen make ornaments, traditional headgear for weddings as well as artefacts. Passed on from generation to generation, this traditional art form involves cutting the leaves first, then peeling, chopping and ultimately hand painting it with vibrant colours.

BHEDAGHAT’S MARBLE ART
While the Dhauhar falls might be the highlight of Bhedaghat in Jabalpur, the incredible craft of marble sculpting is what travellers take back from here. The sculptors here make use of the mighty marble rocks by the Narmada river and convert them into deities with intricacies or quirky sculptures. These sculptures can be found working full swing by the ghats or along the shopping streets.

BHERUGAHAR’S BATIK PRINTING
With a legacy of over 2,000 years, Batik printing was practiced in Egypt and Japan as well. In Ujjain this art form finds its home in the small village of Bherugarh, by the banks of the Shipra river. This craft of antiquity is essentially wax-resist dyeing and printing. The fascinating part? There is not just one single way to do it, rather vivid techniques are used to make the craft more appealing.

BETUL’S DHOKRA ART
Practiced by the local tribal community in Betul, this metal moulding craft is created using the lost-wax casting technique. Dhokra art is created using beeswax, saras, mud and cow dung, and undergoes the processes of mixing, collecting, straining, drying and then baking to create the final masterpiece. The products generally include lamps, photo frames, bells, animal figurines etc.

UJJAIN’S PAPEER MACHE
Regenerating waste into pieces of art, this popular art form uses paper pulp and adhesive to create masterpieces. With the bare minimum usage of energy and resources, this art form’s precision is pure craftsmanship. The whole process involves soaking, mashing, drying the paper, soaking it with glue and plaster of paris, putting it in moulds to create the desired shapes, drying them out and ultimately hand painting it with vibrant colours.

How to get there
The Muhamma village and the Fish sanctuaries built at the Vechoor Panchayat are near Thanneermukkom Bund (Thanneermukkom Salt Water Barrier), which is a part of Vembanad Lake – the largest lake in India located in the Alleppey district in the state of Kerala. Thanneermukkom Bund is the only coastal reservoir in India. The nearest airports are Cochin at 60 km (1.5 hours) and Thiruvananthapuram at 174 km (2.5 hours by road). The nearest railway station is at Alappuzha. The town nearest to Thanneermukkom is Cherthala.

How to get involved
Travel with Cherish Expeditions to be a part of awareness campaigns, community tourism activities, experiential educational programs and much more for immersive, sustainable and transformational experiences. For more details visit www.cherishexpeditions.com.
A teacher from Maharashtra’s Purushwadi village visually documents the craftsmanship of two brothers and their imagination to create sustainable vessels, ornaments and more.

www.voicesofruralindia.org

IMAGINATION AND Beyond

COME FROM PURUSHWADI, a small adivasi village near the Kurkundi river, where there are several types of trees, grasses and weeds, whose uses are still unknown to many.

This story is about Kahandal grass and Shindi trees that grow abundantly and the importance of which was discovered by my childhood friends — the brothers Goraksh Savreram Baramte and Tukaram Savreram Baramte. Kahandal grass grows in the month of June and matures in November or December and turns bluish, yellowish or copper in colour.

In Purushwadi during Diwali parents buy toy guns and firecrackers for the children. Taking inspiration from the chakra (ground spinner) and serpent fireworks from the market, Goraksh and Tukaram made one using the Kahandal grass.

Slowly they realised that using such layers, they could make rounded hats too. Then, purely using their imagination, they learnt to make flower vases, plates and models of temples, bullock carts, birds and owls. They even began weaving kurkula, used for storing bhakri (rice flatbread).

Before this, we were getting used to plastic products from the market. Another tree in our village is the thorny Shindi, the leaves of which village folks rarely pluck to make brooms. But Goraksh Baramte began using the leaves from these clumps and crafting them with his imagination. He plucks and brings the bunch home, and after it dries up, he makes caps, flower vases, and shapes like trees out of them.

From the craftsmanship of the brothers, I learnt that everything in nature has value. Every plant, tree and even wild grass that seems useless, can enrich our lives, create livelihoods, replace store-bought plastic and make us proud of our creativity.
GOCOOP – GLOBAL MARKETPLACE FOR HANDLOOMS AND CRAFTS OF INDIA

GoCoop is a social organization dedicated to the socio-economic development of weavers, artisans, co-operatives, micro and small entrepreneurs. It’s with a belief that technology can drive social change GoCoop.com began its journey in 2012. It is India’s first National award winning global marketplace platform for handloom weavers, artisans and other craft-based organisations. The marketplace brings together the producers to collectively market their products online and enable buyers and consumers across the world to discover these unique products and buy them.

From pochampally ikats, Kanchi silks in south, to Bandhini, Ajrakhs from the west, crewel embroidery, tussars and woollens from the north and Sambalpuri ikats, Jamdanis and Muga silks from the east, the artisans showcase over 400 crafts on the platform.

Over the last 9 years, GoCoop has developed a strong marketplace platform completely designed for enabling and supporting multi-channel eCommerce for weavers, artisans, micro-enterprises and collectives. GoCoop platform includes web portal, multi-lingual mobile app for artisans, and a backend open-source ERP system to manage the supply chain and process the orders seamlessly.

This platform has won many national and international recognitions as a Top Technology Innovator by DST, Govt of India, National award for eComm by Ministry of Textiles, GoI, as a Sustainable eCommerce case study by UN ESCAP.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS
- GoCoop is validated and recognized as TOP 50 Innovators in the India Innovation Program 2012 by Dept. of Science and Technology, Govt of India and FICCI.
- Providing online and offline Marketing services for over 350 weaver co-ops and artisans in Handloom and Handicraft Sector.
- Completed 40+ projects under the Integrated Handloom Development Scheme (IHDS), Govt. of India which includes Marketing Intelligence, Buyer Seller Meets, Forming Consortium of Weavers.
- Successfully implemented an Online ERP system for APCO and TSCO, the APEX weaver organizations of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- GoCoop was showcased as a case study at the UN ESCAP eCommerce for Sustainable development conference at Bangkok in Nov 2017; GoCoop’s founder and CEO Siva Devireddy is a member of the UN ESCAP task force on Digital economy.
- GoCoop is winner of Govt. of India’s first National Award for Handlooms Marketing [eCommerce] 2016!
- GoCoop was recognised as a “Champion of Change” by Niti aayog and Hon’ble Prime Minister of India in 2017.

CRAFTING CHANGE TOGETHER
GoCoop has over the past 9 years created a strong supply chain of 350+ weaver and artisan co-ops and other producer organizations from 50+ important handloom clusters across India.

Over the years, we have seen a significant social change in the life of our artisans who are not only getting higher prices for their produce but are also empowered by technology which is allowing them to participate in an open marketplace without any intermediaries. Our vision is to enable and empower 1 million artisans in the next 7 years.

Join us in #CraftingChange together!

Every craft has a story.
explore the world of Indian craft, handmade and handwoven by artisans from across the country, only at GoCoop

shop on www.gocoop.com
use coupon code LOVEFORCRAFT and get 10% off on your first order!

Winner of the 1st NATIONAL AWARD for Marketing of Handlooms (e-commerce)
content
The Himachali children celebrate Haran, featuring a deer, music and long walks in the dark, during the renowned Kullu Dussehra.

The Kullu region in Himachal Pradesh comes alive with these words and the beats of drums — dhol and nagada to be precise. Children roam about the mountain villages, loudly singing songs like this to celebrate their favorite event — Haran.

A part of the famous week-long Kullu Dussehra that symbolises victory of good over evil, Haran is primarily celebrated by Himachali kids. The pure joy of it, however, manages to draw participation from the elders too.

I was aged 9 when I first attended Haran. My overprotective mother was against the idea of me participating in it and convincing her was tough. She relented only when a few friends from the village decided to join me. I never missed any opportunity to attend the celebration thereafter.

According to popular folklore, Haran has its origin in the Hindu epic, Ramayana. It is believed that prior to his exile to the forest, Lord Ram wore the deer costume to take Sita, his wife, to the forest in a disguise.
Before taking the Haran costume out into the village, the kids decorate it. They make antlers from maize stems, decorate the costume with flowers, adorn it with Kulluvi pattu, handloom shawls, and wrap it with a white stole. They also make marigold garlands, and place them around the neck of the Haran.

Two kids — one standing and the other stooping — alternate turns. They wear the Haran costume and dance in tandem to the rhythm of various local percussion instruments. As the Haran progresses to every household in the village, more kids join the celebration, and sing and dance in unison.

Although the Haran is taken out only during the night, it never deters the participants — aged mostly between nine and 16 — from happily agreeing to walk in the dark. My fear of darkness was always overcome when the older kids strategically placed me in the middle of the group.

With a vacation for all seven days of the month, the enthusiasm to participate in the festival runs high. Each day, two villages, spread almost across an area of five kilometres, are chosen for the procession, which begins at around six in the evening and lasts till ten at night. While kids are the highlight of the procession, elderly folks accompany them to ensure safety. As the deer makes a stop in front of every household, the residents give grains such as maize and wheat along with coins to the kids. Some people also throw walnuts which the kids are happy to catch.

When the weather gets cold, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration.

Two kids — one standing and the other stooping — wear the Haran costume and dance in tandem to the rhythm of various local percussion instruments as more kids join the celebrations.

Kullu Dussehra, the kids’ enthusiasm to participate in the festival runs high.

Each day, two villages, spread almost across an area of five kilometres, are chosen for the procession, which begins at around six in the evening and lasts till ten at night. While kids are the highlight of the procession, elderly folks accompany them to ensure safety. As the deer makes a stop in front of every household, the residents give grains such as maize and wheat along with coins to the kids. Some people also throw walnuts which the kids are happy to catch.

When the weather gets cold, the participants generally halt for a break, start a fire and turn it into a celebration. To avoid walking long distances on an empty stomach, the participants are generally found with rotis or apples with them. It was the same with me and whenever hunger pangs hit, we’d take out the food and eat together.

On the seventh day of Kullu Dussehra, the Haran enters the native village where the kids dance and enact plays. The grains collected from people’s homes during the first six days are then sold and the proceeds are donated to organise a community feast where everyone from the village is invited — especially the participants of Haran.

After the community feast, people return to their homes, only to wait eagerly for next year’s Kullu Dussehra.

Each year everyone in the village looks forward to Haran. It feels as though an immensely entertaining play is being enacted for you. I hope this tradition that has survived many generations in my village will be passed down and will brighten up our lives every year with drum beats and the dancing deer.

info DESK

www.voicesofruralindia.org

How to get there

| Kullu lies in the picturesque state of Himachal Pradesh, it can be accessed both by road and rail easily. |

How to get involved

| Himalayan Ecotourism has an office in the village of Bihari and all the facilities for volunteers, interns or researchers to stay. You can help in one or several projects run by Himalayan Ecotourism including teaching local children, reforestation and women empowerment. You can find more information about volunteering, internship and research opportunities at himalayanectourism.com. |

Things to do

| Travellers can immerse themselves in local culture and traditions. At a walking distance from the village of Bihari, stands the incredible Chehni Kothi, the tallest building of Himachal made in a traditional style with no concrete but wood and stones. One can undertake various treks in the valley. |

| About the Storyteller |

| KANIKA MEHTA |

| hails from the Bihar village in the Banjar Tehsil of Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh. She is pursuing Arts in college and loves to read stories about culture. A nature lover, she enjoys trekking, and loves to teach children. She aspires to be a school teacher. |

Supported by Himalayan Tourism

Children eagerly wait to witness the procession.

Kids carry apples and rotis to beat hunger pangs.
For the festival of Ghughuti, locals prepare edible garlands and celebrate crows in villages across Kumaon in Uttarakhand.
V Mala khaale!

Children wake up early, bathe and get ready for the Ghughuti festival. Each year, as I make garlands of ghughuti wheat flour with jaggery and ghee in milk, deep frying in oil. Ghughuti garlands and when the family gathered at home, mother narrated the tale of how the Ghughuti festival began. Many moons ago, Kumaon was ruled by King Kalyan of the Chandra dynasty. He was childless and worried about who would be his heir to the throne. One night, Lord Baghaan appeared in his dreams in the form of Lord Shiva and said to the King, “If you build a temple in my name, a child will be born to you.”

The king and the queen were elated, and built a temple which is situated in Bageshwar and can be visited to this day. They bore a boy and lovingly named him Ghughuti. A garland of bells (similar to a ghungroo) was placed around the child’s neck and that too was called Ghughuti. Whenever Ghughuti, the boy, behaved naughtily, the queen would teasingly say, “Ghughuti! The trick worked!”

There was a minister in the king’s court who wanted to become the next king, and to fulfill his ambition, he hatched a plan to kill Ghughuti. One day he lured the child and took off to the jungle with him. A few crows saw the minister sneaking out of the palace with the child. The crows followed them deep into the forest. At one opportune moment, a crow swooped and snatched the garland off Ghughuti’s neck and flew away with it to the king’s palace.

Meanwhile, in the palace, the king and queen were extremely worried at Ghughuti’s disappearance. The king suspected that the minister — who was ambitious and seemed jealous of Ghughuti — must have planned an evil act. He sent all his ministers and royal guards in search of Ghughuti.

When the ministers caught sight of the crow with the garland of bells in its beak, they informed the king and queen, who were sure the crow bore good news. It guided them to where Ghughuti was hidden. The kingdom was overjoyed on having found the child. The king and queen bowed to the crow repeatedly, and punished the minister who had plotted to kill Ghughuti.

In celebration of Ghughuti’s return, the royal couple threw a lavish banquet. This was the last day of the month of Paush and the crows were to be fed first. But as evening descended, the crows could not attend the feast. They were especially invited for the feast the next day – the first day of the month of Magh. To this day, we show our appreciation to the black crows through the Ghughuti festival. The first dishes of the day are cooked in their honor, and fed to them when they answer the summoning calls across Kumaon. Children then roam the village with their edible Ghughuti garlands draped around their necks, nibbling away at it all day.

“Magh is the eleventh month of the Hindu calendar, which corresponds with January / February of the Gregorian calendar.”

Kamla Pandey has been running a charming homestay in Sarmoli village. She doesn’t consider herself a storyteller. Perhaps that’s why she feels surprised at the number of stories she now tells that reveal the secrets and knowledge of village life in the Himalayas.
CELEBRATING
Magh

A delightful account of how the mountain villages of Himachal Pradesh celebrate a month of food and togetherness during the Magh Mahina.
I grew up listening to wistful stories of my grandparents.

Every winter, as white snow enveloped the mountains of Bihar – our little village in the Tirthan Valley of Himachal Pradesh – all village families came together to cook local delicacies during the ‘Magh Mahina’. We celebrate local festivals almost every single month of the year. But Magh Mahina – each year from January 15 to February 15 – is a special month dedicated to local delicacies. In the cold mountain winter, it brings together the warmth of families, and our little village in the Tirthan Valley of Himachal Pradesh – our little village in the mountains of Bihar – our little village in the Tirthan Valley of Himachal Pradesh – our little village in the Tirthan Valley of Himachal Pradesh – our little village in the Tirthan Valley of Himachal Pradesh.

As a kid, my grandfather and his friends would go from one home to another, asking fellow villagers for walnuts to munch on. Every family would gather together in the evening to light a fire and roast the walnuts over it, warming up on chilly winter days, sharing stories, laughing and bonding.

Back in the day, families of the village always struggled with their finances. Cooking several dishes was not always practical. But despite the challenges, they would still come together to cook, even if it meant choosing only one dish. It was a time of celebration after all.

These days, women cook a variety of local dishes, including bhalla (fried lentil doughnuts), babru (sweet fritters), and lucchi and puri (sweet or salted fried breads) among others. Of these, bhalla holds a special place in our hearts because the recipe has been passed down by women of each family for generations.

For me, learning how to cook the perfect bhalla was quite a ride. This flavourful dish is made by soaking moongfali ki dal (white urad) or black gram overnight. It is then blended together with flour, rolled into tiny rotis and fried in either oil or ghee. The perfect bhalla is round, soft yet crispy, and slowly melts in your mouth with an explosion of spicy flavours.

The very first serving of any dish prepared during Magh Mahina is pledged to Kul Devta, the local deity. This is done by either throwing some food in the fire, or in between the slates of the roof. We believe that Kul Devta takes care of our family, home and village.

The three days following the end of Magh Mahina – known as Sajee – mark the beginning of a new month, so we pledge our respect to the deities. During this time, women place a walnut each in the four corners of their cowshed as a token of respect. Young children try to make the most of this opportunity by waking up early in the morning to steal the walnuts. As a kid, I would wake up well before sunrise – and before any other member of my family – just so I could run to the cowshed and steal the walnuts. Back in those days, there was no electricity so I would.statle my mother every time she came to the cowshed. These days, the availability of light bulbs has taken away some of the thrill of hiding in the darkness – but kids still have their share of fun.

When I reflect on my grandfather’s stories, I realise that the times have changed. We can afford to cook many more delicious dishes now, have access to electricity, and besides walnuts, we can also buy rabadi (sesame sweets) and moongfali (peanuts) in the market. But there is one thing that hasn’t changed – the way Magh Mahina brings us together and fills the cold mountain winter with the warmth of food and togetherness.

Women place a walnut each in the four corners of their cowshed. Young children try to make the most of this opportunity by waking up early in the morning to steal the walnuts.

Our Grandparents’ stories.

As kids, my grandfather and his friends would go from one home to another, asking fellow villagers for walnuts to munch on. Every family would gather together in the evening to light a fire and roast the walnuts over it, warming up on chilly winter days, sharing stories, laughing and bonding.
Voices of Rural India is a curated platform for rural storytellers and is helping build digital storytelling skills among rural communities, creating alternate livelihoods for rural storytellers, and preserving grassroots knowledge. For the rest of us, it’s a chance to explore remote corners of India without leaving home!

**Get Involved**

A team of passionate, dedicated volunteers help us with translation, text editing, video editing, social media, brainstorming ideas and developing training material.

If you would like to volunteer, please email voicesofruralindia@gmail.com with your interest, time commitment, past experience (if any) and motivation to volunteer.

**Voices of Rural India**

Voices of Rural India has been founded by a core team of passionate travellers, responsible tourism pioneers and digital empowerment advocates.

- **Shivya Nath** is the author of a bestselling travel memoir and runs one of India’s most widely read travel blogs, The Shooting Star. She is one of the co-founders of VoRI, and heads editing and social media.
- **Melika Virdi** is the founder-director of Himalayan Ark, a community-based tourism organization in the Munsiyari region of Uttarakhand. She is one of the co-founders of VoRI, and heads partnerships.
- **Osama Manzar** is a global leader on the mission of eradicating information poverty from India and global south using digital tools through Digital Empowerment Foundation, an organisation he founded in 2002. He is one of the co-founders of VoRI, and heads fundraising.
- **Namrata Shah** is a travel lover, amateur singer, books lover, yoga learner and movie buff. She oversees editing and word press at VoRI.
- **Janusa Sangma** presently writes freelance for social enterprises, non-profits and digital marketing agencies. She manages social media at VoRI.

**The Team**

- Shivya Nath
- Malika Virdi
- Osama Manzar
- Namrata Shah
- Janusa Sangma
A team of passionate, dedicated volunteers help us with translation, text editing, video editing, social media, brainstorming ideas and developing training material.

Lakshmi Jagad is a writer, editor and blogger based in Atlanta, USA and has a Master’s degree in Mass Communication from Georgia State University. She is a master translator at VoRI.

Farha Mukri is a software engineer and freelance writer from Mumbai, currently based in Chicago. She volunteers as a translator at VoRI.

Sooly Banerjee has been a travel and food journalist for over 17 years, engaging with questions of identity, evolution and sustainability. She volunteers as an editor at VoRI.

Richa Sonvanshi was an HR Profession and is now working with various NGOs in their program implementation. Richa supports translation at VoRI.

Ellie Cleary is the founder of Soul Travel Blog and co-founder of Soul Travel India. Originally from London, UK, she has worked in tourism since 2007. Ellie supports SEO at VoRI.

Churu Babbar earns her livelihood by helping organizations simplify their marketing. She supports SEO at VoRI.

Neha Dara is the business head at RoundGlass Sustain. She has been a travel writer and editor for most of her career and has a keen interest in sustainability and responsible tourism. She volunteers as an editor at VoRI.

Pallavi Garg leads Product Management at PATH, a global nonprofit organisation. She volunteers at many art-based organisations and supports translation at VoRI.

Shilpa Raina is interested in understanding the continuity of cultural heritage among refugees. Her words have appeared in The Indian Express, The Hindu and TAKE on Art magazine. She volunteers as an editor at VoRI.

Voices of Rural India is supported by dedicated financial, digital, tourism and media partners.

Financial and Digital Partner
Our Financial and Digital partner supports us in fundraising, strategic decision making and sharing its expertise, resources and legal infrastructure.

Community Tourism Partners
These community-based tourism organizations are our bridge to reach out to local communities and identify and support a new crop of digital storytellers.

Media Partners
Media partners occasionally republish stories from Voices of Rural India, to help build greater reach, exposure and alternate incomes for our storytellers.
READ WHAT IS RACY, RELIABLE AND IRREPRESSIBLE
Subscribe to Outlook magazines and get special offers*

![Image of Travelling Bag and Duffle Strolley]

Offer valid till stocks last

Yes, I would like to subscribe to the magazine(s) as indicated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>OUTLOOK WEEKLY</th>
<th>OUTLOOK TRAVELLER MONTHLY</th>
<th>OUTLOOK MONEY MONTHLY</th>
<th>OUTLOOK BUSINESS MONTHLY</th>
<th>OUTLOOK HINDI FORTNIGHTLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 YEAR</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 2000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 3500/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 3000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 3000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 3000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 YEAR</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 4000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 7000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 6000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 6000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 6000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 YEAR</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 6000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 11000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 9000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 9000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 9000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 YEAR</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 10000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 18000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 15000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 15000/-</td>
<td>☐ Rs. 15000/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spend Rs.9549/- and above: Get a Duffle Strolley Bag
Spend between Rs.6649/- to Rs.9549/-: Get a Travelling Bag

Name: ___________________________ Designation: ___________________________
Address: ___________________________________________________________________
Email: ___________________________
Bank: ___________________________ Account: ___________________________
Kindly remit enclosed Cheque/DD No: ___________________________ Dated: ___________
For Rs. ___________________________

Please fill in this Order Form and mail it with your remittance to: Subscription Deptt. OUTLOOK PUBLISHING (INDIA) PVT. LTD., A-16, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110 029

Date: _____________ Signature: ___________________________

*Terms & Conditions apply

Subscribe online: subscription.outlookindia.com or Call: 011-71280433, 71280462

The quest of greenest repose everlasts: until your reach here!
Incredible India

You can’t lose your way when there are no wrong turns. That was the feeling I got in Saputara. Here, every turn offered me new things. Like the meandering Ambika river. Each step brought me closer to nature. In the dense jungles of Dangs, I felt as if all the trees and shrubs were my old friends.

The local tribesmen, their art, culture and traditions made me experience a harmony we city dwellers miss. Saputara gave me the solitude I always craved for, with just clouds and fine weather for company. How can one even think about leaving a place like this?