ROYAL ENFIELD

2024-25

SUSTAINABILITY JOURNAL

CONTENTS

Foreword

Royal Enfield may have its origins in the UK, but it found its Indian soul – and second home – in Chennai, Tamil Nadu in 1955. However, it was the challenging terrain of the Himalayas which solidified its place as the motorcycle of choice in the most majestic and rugged mountain range in the world. What began as a testing ground soon became our "spiritual home" – shaping the way we explored, the stories we told, and the responsibilities we grew into.

The Himalayas have never been just a backdrop. For many across the country, they are deeply personal. I went to school in the foothills of the Himalayas, and spent most summers in the cool gorgeous beauty of Himalayan towns with family and friends. But our connection ran deeper still. Our ancestors once corresponded with yogis in the high reaches – and their letters shaped our family's way of thinking for generations. Similarly, the Himalayas remain a collective source of inspiration and reverence for Royal Enfield, the rider community and for many people residing in different parts of the country and the world. It is this deep and varied relationship with the mountains that underpins the need for shared responsibility and commitment to safeguarding the region. And it is with this thought that Royal Enfield's Social Mission was grounded in the commitment to work in the Himalayas and partner with 100 Himalayan communities to build long-term resilience. While the region is among the most vulnerable in the face of climate change, it is believed to receive less than 3% of India's CSR funding – a staggering gap that highlights the urgency of our work.

When we released the first edition of Royal Enfield's Annual Sustainability Journal last year, we described it as a compendium of early stories. It documented the first steps towards building a growing ecosystem of collective action of people moved by the same Himalayan connection. Since then, we've seen what's possible when this ecosystem is nurtured.

Over the past year, individuals and organisations from across geographies and disciplines have come together to engage closely with Himalayan communities. That spirit was palpable at 'Journeying Across the Himalayas' – a ten-day gathering at Delhi's Travancore Palace that brought together over 50 communities, 100 partners, and 200 artists, practitioners, and experts. Contemporary artists collaborated with local communities to creatively interpret grassroots projects, sharing Himalayan stories across languages and media. Curators introduced urban audiences to Himalayan produce and craftsmanship straight from the source. The intent was clear: 96% of participants from Himalayan communities felt the festival accurately represented their identity, while also challenging existing narratives.

Our goal isn't simply to support Himalayan communities from afar, but to walk alongside them, adapting, learning, and building resonance. This is not CSR as an afterthought, but an approach that sits hand-in-glove with Royal Enfield's ethos: creative, free-spirited, and grounded in community-building. We look for ways to grow ideas organically, letting the brand's journey across the Himalayas inspire how we contribute to this space.

This journal is a record of that journey, the partnerships we made on the way, data and reflections – but also a bank of inspiration. It is open-source by intent, collaborative by design. Whether you are a craftsperson, a conservationist, a researcher – or someone who rides to understand – we hope you find something here that compels you to act or contribute in your own way.

To everyone who has walked with us on this path – thank you. And to those we've not yet met – consider this an open invitation. There is room for everyone here.

Sid Lal
Executive Chairman,
Eicher Motors Limited

Rebalance at RE

At Royal Enfield, we have always believed that our motorcycles are more than just machines. They are allies to lifelong adventures, storytellers and often, a bridge between the rider and the world around them, inviting them to explore, connect, engage, and zone out from what wears them down. And when you have the power to create something that powerful, you realise your responsibility goes far beyond engineering. Sustainability, for us, is rooted in this realisation. Not as a mandate, but a mindset. It means not just doing less harm, but doing more good. To build motorcycles that last generations, create an ecosystem that gives back more than it takes, and nurture communities and cultures that grow alongside us.

In today's fast-paced business environment, incorporating sustainability as part of business strategy is no longer a topic of deliberation. It is a critical and imperative part of business strategy itself. We are constantly striving to bring sustainability into every aspect of our motorcycles – right from design, manufacturing and value chain, reducing our lifecycle footprint, material use, strengthening internal processes and governance, enabling employee engagement, promoting responsible travel and enabling community resilience. It is our endeavour to achieve harmony between man, machine, and terrain.

This belief continues to shape everything we do. In many ways, FY 2024-25 was a year of clarity and conviction for us, we did not chase just profits and success, we paused to ask the tougher questions, set more ambitious goals, and led with greater intent. Our Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) efforts helped us move closer to more conscious ways of operating, minimising our footprint, making thoughtful choices, and staying rooted in the values that define us.

Today, 84% of our operational energy is sourced from renewable sources – a 2.4x leap from the previous year, which is a clear marker of our progress towards a sustainable future. Additionally, we brought down our emission intensity by 53%, from 58 kg CO_2 per motorcycle to 29 kg CO_2 per motorcycle which reflects the care and consistency with which we are reshaping our value chain, from the way we power our manufacturing operations to how we think about every finished motorcycle. We also sustained our benchmark of water positivity, replenishing over four times the water we consume, with a water positivity index of 4.3.

This approach, where energy, emissions, and resources are viewed as one interconnected system has helped us build future-ready operations in the true sense. It also earned us meaningful recognition, with our manufacturing facility at Vallam Vadagal being named 'Sustainable Factory of the Year' at the India Manufacturing & Sustainability Awards 2024 by Frost & Sullivan. We are also laying the foundation for a more sustainable future with our first electric motorcycles now in development, under our endorsed brand Flying Flea. They will be timeless and evocative, like every Royal Enfield, but built for the next generation of riders and the roads that lie ahead.

Our commitment extends far beyond our operations, products and facilities. It extends to the landscapes we ride through and the communities that have shaped us. No region has influenced us more deeply than the Himalayas, which have always been our spiritual home. Their rugged beauty has shaped our motorcycles, our culture, and even our conscience. What began as a deep respect for this fragile terrain has evolved into a long-term commitment to conservation, to cultural preservation, and to building resilience in the communities that call these mountains home.

Our efforts in the Himalayas have grown into a long-term, multi-pronged Social Mission, led not by token gestures but by decisive and impactful action. Including Royal Enfield Social Mission and other community projects, initiatives have directly benefitted more than 1.5 lakh people, of which 83% belong to vulnerable or marginalised communities. The secondary impact extends to over 37 lakh people, including families, local networks and associated communities. Our CSR footprint reached 14 states, one UT and 15 aspirational districts across the country, engaging over 70 communities. Through all these efforts, our belief is simple: we do not want to just ride through places — we want to leave them better.

Another area we are proud to be transforming is our workplace. We believe that a truly sustainable organisation is one that is equitable and inclusive. Just a few years ago, our gender diversity ratio was low and today, it stands at 20%, and is still growing. Our Cheyyar plant will have an all-women assembly line, and our Vallam facility has the highest number of women in any Royal Enfield site to date.

Looking ahead, we are laying the foundation for the next phase of our journey. Over the new fiscal year, we aim to introduce our Net Zero roadmap, bringing greater clarity to our long-term decarbonisation plans. Our Cheyyar facility is on track to become our next Green Factory certified site, strengthening our manufacturing ecosystem. We are also embedding circularity into the earliest stages of our product thinking. The future of motorcycling must be built on platforms that are not just innovative and exciting, but also thoughtful and future-facing. With this thought, we are developing electric motorcycles that are true to our DNA; pure, evocative, and purpose-led. In doing so, we are reimagining every element of the product, from battery systems and ride feel to manufacturing and sourcing. The road to electrification, for us, is not about abandoning the past but honoring our legacy while meeting tomorrow's expectations.

And this is just the beginning. We know the road ahead won't always be easy. But based on the strong foundation we've built, with the people who power our journey, and the communities that stand beside us, we are confident in the direction we are heading. Our purpose remains clear: to build motorcycles and systems that are not only timeless, but also responsible. And as always, we will move forward with determination, honesty and an unwavering intent to do better, for our riders, our world, and for generations to come. Thank you for being an incredible part of this journey.
Ride Pure,
BGR

B. Govindarajan

Managing Director - Eicher Motors Limited
& CEO - Royal Enfield

Introduction

Last year, when we put together the first edition of Royal Enfield's Annual Sustainability Journal, it was a record of beginnings. The work was still exploratory and varied – marked by experimental partnerships, pilot runs and the courage to try. One year on, and encouraged by the overwhelming response to the first edition, this second edition arrives at a decisive moment, where these efforts are beginning to cohere, not as a top-down plan, but as an intentional ecosystem.

With a global rider community, and expertise and credibility built over decades, Royal Enfield is uniquely positioned to connect the dots. This year has been about seeing how projects across culture, conservation and circularity feed into each other, and using our circle of influence to extend the reach of our Social Mission.

At the centre of this work is the **Himalayan Hub**, *designed to initiate and empower Himalayan youth into conservation and climate action through fellowships and grants – some housed at the Hub and others spread across Himalayan geographies. Since 2022, the Social Mission has supported 316 fellows and grants; we trace some of their stories through the 'Fellows spotlight'. A key turning point was the opening of the Himalayan Hub's physical space in Theog, Himachal Pradesh. Conceived as both campus and commons, it anchors our work while offering an entry point for collaborators and like-minded actors. Last year, the Royal Enfield x Green Hub Western Himalayas Fellowship completed its first cycle at the Hub with 21 fellows, guided by alumni from the Eastern Himalayas. Similar programmes now engage youth from 13 Himalayan states, creating an emerging ecosystem where filmmakers, creative practitioners, community entrepreneurs and conservationists learn from one another and carry each other's work forward.*

The Hub is more than a single project; it is the operational heart that intentionally links our initiatives to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. This is where our core ideas – like Responsible Tourism – take root. A growing network of Responsible Travel sites, supported by our fellows and partner organisations, now demonstrates how local communities can earn an income while enabling mindful travel. Circularity is now being applied as a key principle across projects. In places like Zemithang and the Greater Manas landscape, materiality initiatives are pushing beyond waste collection toward innovations that close the loop – cultivating alternative, sustainable livelihoods in the process.

Through the Hub, we are seeing an emerging self-reinforcing cycle where Fellowships, Responsible Tourism and Circularity are interconnected. Our partnership with BehaviorSMART integrates into this system. The Hub itself becomes our living lab, where we apply behavioural science in real-world contexts. Here, we study how small nudges and design interventions can influence the choices of riders, travellers and communities, deepening engagement through research-backed approaches.

This model of Responsible Travel is best illustrated by **Green Pit Stops**. *Following the launch of our first – Pit Stop Kharu, Ladakh, seven local women of a dedicated Self-Help Group have already hosted a full season of travellers. Putting their training into practice, these women have turned the facility into a place of connection, where the footprints of riders and the encouragement of visitors have validated both the model itself and the women's leadership.*

That experience has now grown into the ambitious Babeli Pit Stop in Himachal Pradesh, where a Cluster Level Federation of more than a thousand

local women will be at the forefront of an ecosystem that brings together livelihoods, responsible travel, cultural heritage, sustainable architecture and rider engagement. A core part of this integration is the wool value chain. The Babeli Pit Stop will provide a physical showcase for handicrafts and handlooms, featuring products created by women at the various centres we support across the wool value chain in Himachal Pradesh. The platform creates a direct market for their work, right on the busy Kullu-Manali highway.

The collaboration with eco-architect Rahul Bhushan of NORTH for the Babeli Pit Stop carries our intent forward. The space explores what it means to "build in the Himalayas" – to design for climate resilience and shape region-specific responses that speak to both community needs and environmental pressures.

The integrated approach is extended through The **Himalayan Knot**, *our textile and pastoral land conservation project. Following the launch of the first set of capsule collections under The Himalayan Knot, early signs are promising. Products co-created with the Action Northeast Trust (The Ant) and the Bodo community in collaboration with Countrymade, as well as those with Looms of Ladakh in collaboration with Eka, debuted at major festivals. In fulfilling the demands of a newer audience, community artisans even reported exhausting all raw material.*

A second set of capsule collections is set to launch, spotlighting lesser-known textiles and innovating with craft forms from Kashmir (with Raffughar for Commitment to Kashmir) and in Himachal Pradesh (with Countrymade for The Woolknitters). The expansion is designed to build resilient livelihood opportunities, particularly in these regions facing significant challenges, from geopolitical tension to repeated climate crises. Following from sheep wool interventions in the first collection, the next cycle brings fresh innovations with Ladakh's Pashmina. Notably, the upcoming collection from Ladakh includes an innovative approach by designer Suket Dhir that brings together the intricate weaves of Jamdani from West Bengal with the luxurious Pashmina. Perhaps, a first-of-its-kind, this pairing could test the potential to reach new markets and create higher value for craft communities.

By positioning crafts not as static heritage but living practices, The Himalayan Knot also aims to support communities in safeguarding their cultural heritage as skills with a viable future, passed down through generations. Towards this, we collaborated with Vogue India for the Himalayan Knot Design Prize, bringing visibility to emerging designers and students working directly with Himalayan craftsmanship.

The Great Himalayan Exploration, *our collaborative project with UNESCO, has been documenting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) across the region since 2022. To date, the initiative has documented over 90 practices, mapping them not only as cultural symbols but as critical repositories of knowledge for climate adaptation. In its third edition, rider-researchers engaged with highland communities – the Pashmina goat herders of Ladakh and yak herders in Sikkim – investigating how disappearing ways of life are also a loss of early warning systems against environmental change. Amongst other things, the experience brought together voices from urban and local contexts, using food heritage to discuss deep links between culture and land.*

The critical step now is not only to deepen this work, but to bring its significance to a larger audience – here, our partnership with National Geographic became crucial to amplify the message. By showing how ICH is alive in lesser-known landscapes and by taking pressure off tourism hotspots like Pangong and Nubra, the approach also aims to distribute travel in ways that support communities and biodiversity alike. Towards this, all documentation is open-source by design, created as a shared resource for those who wish to learn more and build upon this work.

The Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League in Ladakh and Spiti Cup in Himachal Pradesh returned for their second season with renewed local participation, spotlighting the cultural and intergenerational dimensions of **Winter Sports** *in the Himalayas. These local developmental leagues are designed to nurture homegrown talent at every level, with the focus extending beyond players to include coaches through the 'Train the Trainer' programmes. Guided by international coaches, local trainers return to their communities to develop the next generation of instructors along with athletes, creating an enduring structure for the sport from within.*

Since the launch of 'The Gamechanger: Blueprint for the development of Ice hockey in Ladakh' last year, we have been working with different stakeholders towards developing this winter sport, eventually enabling a national team at the Winter Olympics 2042. It has been heartening to see the milestone

achievement of the Indian Women's National Ice Hockey Team winning bronze at the 2025 IIHF Women's Asia Cup in Al-Ain, UAE.

Meanwhile, **Biodiversity Conservation** *initiatives launched last year are finding continuity within this larger Himalayan story. In the span of a year, a major milestone was reached with the snow leopard population assessment, covering over 8,500 sq. km. Keystone species have emerged as symbols of regional pride and cultural legacy, fundamentally changing local perceptions to encourage not only community-led conservation but active celebration. This shift is visible as scientific efforts like camera trapping are accompanied by mainstream cultural integration. The snow leopard now inspires the trophies designed by local artists for our winter sports leagues and serves as a central motif in art installations and folklore exhibitions. Shan, the snow-leopard inspired custom motorcycle by Bobbee Singh, marks the intersection of motorcycling culture with conservation.*

In addition, local youth are driving awareness and safety initiatives in Himalayan brown bear habitats. Conservation work has expanded across landscapes – Tar village in Ladakh has been declared a 41 sq. km Community Conserved Area, and around Manas National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, communities are creating homestays and training as nature guides.

Through **Helmets for India**, *our road safety programme, artists and storytellers transformed helmets into canvases for self-expression – touching upon subaltern narratives from within the space of road safety. Through helmet art installations, the initiative spoke to the power of art as a tool to change mindsets and challenge perspectives on social issues and communities.*

Echoing this message was the inaugural **Journeying Across the Himalayas** *– our first-ever Himalayan festival, which brought together artisans, riders, conservationists, researchers and entrepreneurs into one multidisciplinary space. These included over 200 artists and creative practitioners, 100+ speakers and 200+ institutional and individual partners.*

Designed to bring remote voices closer to the centre, it suggested that the Himalayas cannot be understood through spectacle, data or nostalgia alone – but through lived experiences of its communities. An encouraging 96% of attendees from Himalayan communities felt their identity and challenges were accurately represented, while 87% of audiences reported deepened awareness of local artforms and cultural practices. The festival further aimed to create a tangible living network of collaboration – exemplified by the Himalayan Bazaar, a marketplace for local products, which saw great interest among audiences.

From the outset, the festival was envisioned as an annual affair. To build accountability into that vision, a full report and impact assessment was created to allow the team to reflect on both successes and challenges while setting benchmarks for future editions.

As part of our **Legacy Projects** *in Alwar, Rajasthan, where the company once had its manufacturing footprint, educational programmes saw communities overcome social barriers to build a school in Tawrala Badala. The programmes, as part of a partnership with Bodh Shiksha Samiti, continues to support 32 schools to this day. Another decades-old partnership, ongoing work with Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital in Daryaganj in Delhi emphasises our commitment to taking the long view. In our local area community development, we continue to work across technical skilling, solid waste management, health and education in Tamil Nadu. In the coming years, we will expand on these initiatives, giving back to Royal Enfield's first home on Indian soil and where its manufacturing facilities are set up.*

Royal Enfield's entry into the EV market marks a radical shift – one full of purpose and excitement about what the future holds. The story of the **Flying Flea** *– the city+ mobility brand inspired by the World War II-era motorcycle – connects the heritage of Royal Enfield with newer ambitions and responsibilities. The move to EVs has garnered significant global attention and media recognition even before the actual launch.*

Looking ahead, we are building resilience in our operations by cutting our carbon intensity by over 50% since 2021, with a target of 80% reduction per motorcycle by 2030. Like in our Social Mission, circularity is built into our operations through zero-waste manufacturing, end-of-life design for motorcycles and by keeping materials in use longer through recycling and recovery.

It is this integrated thinking that drives our Green Business Operations as well as our Social Mission – both forming a key pillar of our REBALANCE strategy.

Even as the Royal Enfield Social Mission and Sustainability journey matures, its approach remains unchanged: open, collaborative and willing to take creative risks. The work continues to be led by local contexts, with no fixed templates. But that's part of the process – staying responsive, meeting people where they are and backing ideas that reflect their lived realities.

With every edition of the journal, we look forward to bringing in more voices and collaborators. And even as we work within a compliance-driven space, we'll keep doing it with curiosity and a commitment to the future.

Bidisha Dey
Executive Director,
Eicher Group Foundation

ROYAL ENFIELD SOCIAL MISSION

By 2030, 100 Himalayan communities and landscapes are resilient and thriving even in the face of climate change. Alongside, a movement of one million riders is catalysed to explore sustainably and ‘Leave every place better’.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS - FOR FY 2024-25

83%
from vulnerable and marginalised communities

The Himalayan Knot

Generated
₹ 56 lakh+
Sales for participating communities

>580
Artisans and craftspeople upskilled

Ice Hockey Initiatives

11,000+
Audience engaged

750
Players participated across 30 teams and two leagues

600
Children trained across ten villages through Learn To Play camps

Keystone Species

50 sq.km
Under community conserved areas

500+
Olive Ridley nests protected

36MT+
Ghostnets recovered

275+
Marine fauna rescued and released

8500 sq.km
Snow leopard population survey

250+
Camera trap sites

20
Community Champions

119
Nature Guides trained and > 1 NR Cr. generated in livelihoods

The Great Himalayan Exploration

26
ICH practices documented

56
Rider-researchers engaged

14
Communities supported

Overall, across three years:

54+
Communities engaged across Eastern and Western Himalayas

90+
ICH practices documented

Social Mission Footprint

Engaged with
>70
communities

Secondary Impact Extended to
> 37 lakh
People, including families, local networks, and associated communities

>1.5 lakh
people directly benefited (up by 20% from last year)

Helmets for India

1500+
People engaged to adopt safe riding behaviour

30,000+
People reached through festivals

30+
Artists activated

Himalayan Hub

141
Fellows

19
Conservation grants

8
RT Sites

Overall, across three years:

278
Fellows

38
Conservation grants

17
RT Sites

>80%
Fellows return to work with communities

Circularity initiative highlights

>880MT
Waste processed
(3.55 MT CO_2 emissions saved)

>₹ 10 Lakh
from sale of recycled material

Green Pit Stops

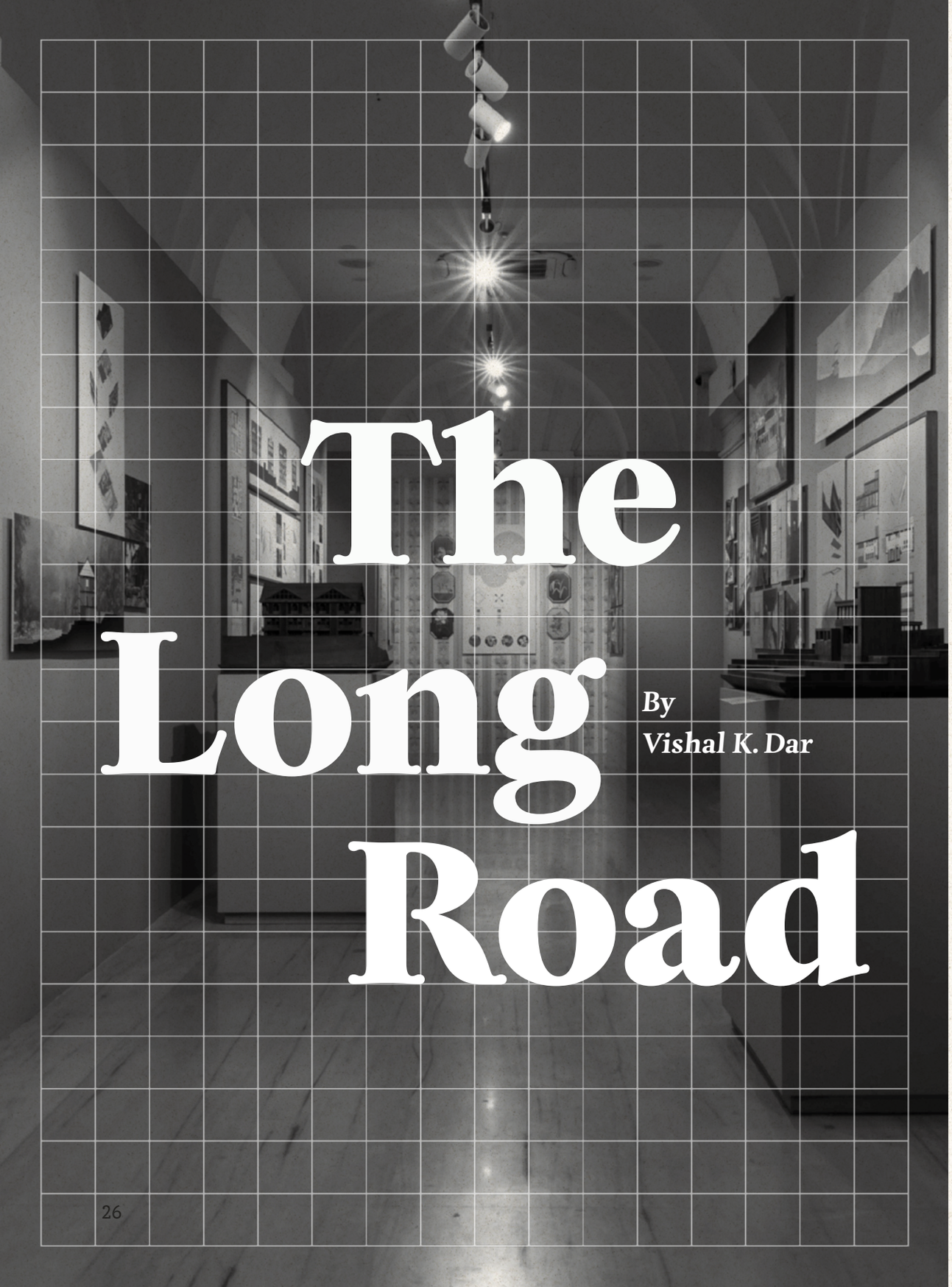
An initiative to create livelihood opportunities for local communities, Green Pit Stops (GPS) bring environment friendly amenities such as sanitation, tourist information, and local culinary and cultural experiences for riders and travellers.

Green Pit Stops have been planned on popular travel routes and allow for meaningful interaction between the traveller and the Himalayan communities. A community-led project, the centres are managed by Self-Help Groups of women and designed sustainably, using local material and architecture. They also act as a showcase and marketplace for local handicrafts, art and culture.

Since opening to the public in August 2023, Pit Stop Kharu – the first Green Pit Stop launched under Royal Enfield's Social Mission – has seen over 4,500 visitors. Just outside Leh city on the Leh-Manali highway (NH3) and a 10-minute ride from the Hemis Monastery, it has become a model for community-led infrastructure in high-altitude regions. Built using rammed-earth walls that blend into the surrounding landscape, the all-weather structure reflects Ladakh's vernacular building practices and the local knowledge embedded within them.

The Green Pit Stop was officially launched during an immersive three-day event in June 2024, bringing together media, artists and local communities to explore the intersection of intangible cultural heritage, climate resilience and responsible travel. Run by a vibrant Self-Help Group of local women, trained in everything from bookkeeping and baking to hospitality and traditional crafts, the women have moved beyond the kitchen and home, becoming entrepreneurs whose work supports their families. Their journey is one of growing confidence and skills, showcased through pop-ups at Motoverse, the Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League, the 7th Khelo India Winter Games and at Royal Enfield Social Mission events in New Delhi and Mumbai, bringing the flavours of Ladakh far beyond its borders.

A second Green Pit Stop in Babeli, Himachal Pradesh is set to launch in 2026, as construction nears completion. Built in the style of Dhajji-Diwari, a seismic-resistant and sustainable building technique, the site honours local architecture while promoting long-term resilience. The project is a collaboration between Royal Enfield, Block Development Office Kullu, Himachal Nayi Umang (a registered Cluster Level Federation), and grassroots partners like The Woolknitters and People for Himalayan Development. The Babeli Pit Stop aims to support over 200+ women from 175 Self-Help Groups in the region, who are being prepared to run the facility. The women have begun training in spinning, knitting and creating value-added products that spotlight traditional craftsmanship and local produce.



The Long Road

By
Vishal K. Dar

Green Pit Stops explore architecture as an expression in the history of community-making.

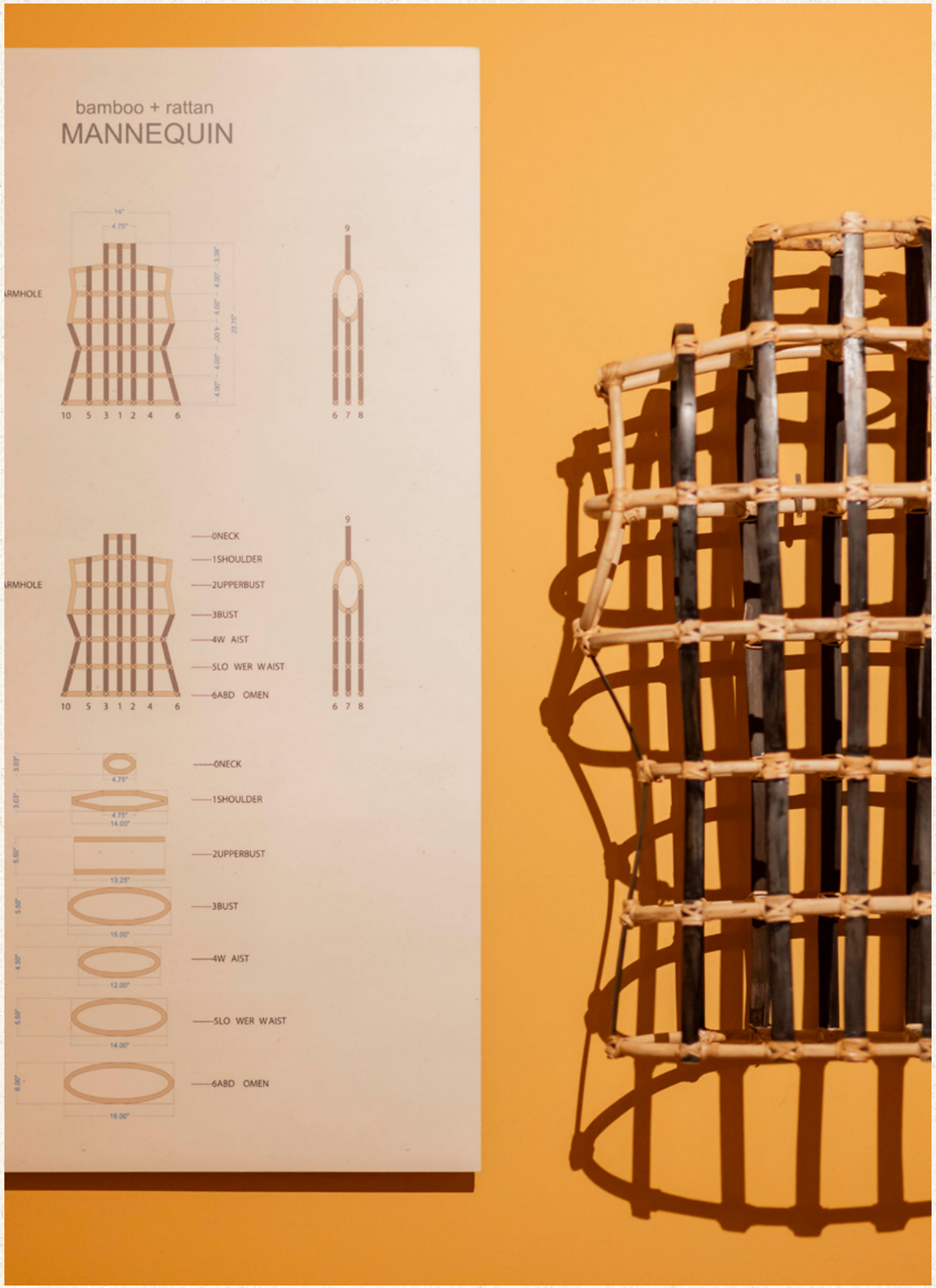
Highways play a pivotal role in integrating national landscapes into public imagination. They speak of a democracy of movement and macroeconomies. But they also remind of all that gets left behind. Somewhere, models of development in their megalomanic ambition and speed bypass the human condition.

Across time, architecture has been many things – a document of its times, a mirror of its makers, a time-capsule. Green Pit Stops explore architecture as an expression in the history of community-making. Royal Enfield Social Mission's groundbreaking initiative is deeply invested in circular economies at the intersections of traditional building techniques, community partnerships and local ecologies – where we find ourselves reconnected to the theme of discovery.

The ambition of this journey is to share a glimpse of how vernacular architectural pedagogy can give rise to regional development. Here, we are introduced to the Royal Enfield Social Mission's expanded architectural commissions – the two Green Pit Stops, one at Kharu (Ladakh) and the other in Babeli (Himachal Pradesh) – that play an active role in expressing overlapping concepts of intangible cultural heritage, regional economy, public hygiene, etc.

In the town of Kharu in Ladakh – the location of the first Green Pit Stop, the original public toilet facility fell beyond use due to poor operation and maintenance. However, in terms of footfall, Kharu is one of the busiest pit stops in Ladakh because it is the main junction that leads to popular tourist destinations such as Pangong, Tso Moriri, Tsokar, Hanle, Umling La, Wari la, etc. Located along the National Highway-3 (Leh–Manali Highway), Kharu sits at a critical transit point on one of India's highest and most iconic motorable routes. It is a key node in the movement of people, culture, and commerce in Ladakh, a region with a history of movement dating back to the ancient silk route.

Pit Stop Kharu was then conceptualised as a space for an improved public amenity that will have washrooms, a café with local food, and a handicraft/souvenir outlet. The GPS initiative is a collaboration amongst many stakeholders, key being the Leh Development Authority who authorised Royal Enfield to dismantle the already existing structure and construct the GPS from scratch. The land was allotted on the condition that the GPS will be used for the benefit of the local community. After meeting with the local representatives and key stakeholders, an SHG group consisting six members was identified, and gradually trained, to run and operate the facility.



The focus of the GPS at Babeli is to provide modern amenities to tourists, showcasing local Dhajji architecture and design and to support local livelihoods and promote local crafts and agricultural produce.

This inaugural Green Pit Stop has demonstrated its objectives through the year, i.e., to promote responsible travel by providing access to clean drinking water, traveller facilities and cultural experiences, while helping the local community sustain their livelihood through income generation opportunities. It becomes a marker of how infrastructure along highways can be rooted, reciprocal and regenerative.

The second Green Pit Stop has been planned at Babeli, a small town among the beautiful valleys of District Kullu in Himachal Pradesh.

It lies on the bank of the Beas river, on the Kullu-Manali highway, which is a popular riding route. The centre aims to engage and employ 200+ women from six neighboring panchayats, namely, Biasar, Bandrol, Banogi, Kothisari, Jindor, Nahlach. Babeli is often passed through rather than paused at. But within its layered landscape, it carries tremendous cultural heritage and economic importance, waiting to be re-centred. It has 25 temples that offer spiritual experiences and an opportunity to explore the region's cultural heritage. It is also the starting point for river rafting adventures.

The centre will be sustained by a Cluster Level Federation constituted by eight village-level organisations (VOs), which in turn is composed of 125 SHGs of these eight Panchayats.

As part of The Himalayan Knot project, Royal Enfield's Social Mission will work with these women as well as with other organisations in the region to support local handlooms and crafts in the Kullu region, with the GPS providing an outlet to showcase their work and as an outlet for sale. This unique intervention will spotlight products distinct from the products available in the numerous local shawl shops, with works (TBC), with works of local weavers supported by reputed designers under The Himalayan Knot. The restaurant, on the other hand, will focus local recipes and promote the local millets of the region.

Aligning with the Royal Enfield Social Mission initiatives focusing on Responsible Travel, the Green Pit Stops aren't only resting points but spaces to promote practices that aim to protect the environment in locations that riders and travellers pass through. In other words, they can enable the future generation of travellers, especially riders, to continue to explore sustainably, engage meaningfully with the local ecosystem, while enjoying a distinguished ride experience.

- The author is an artist and architect whose site-specific projects create iridescent overlays upon diverse kinds of public spaces that are often abandoned and disused sites, and sometimes well-known landmarks.

Architect's Note

Harmony by Design

By Rahul Bhushan

For us, it is an ode to the strong bonds shared by our community, the intangible cultural heritage of the Western Himalayas, and the wisdom of our ancestors.

Pit Stop Babeli is the spark of a movement in Himachal Pradesh, of conscious architecture. It is the first structure in the last five decades, to be made using natural materials, in collaboration with the government of Himachal Pradesh, designed by *North* and brought to life by Royal Enfield.

The ground floor of the building was already constructed in Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) for another project when we got on board. This gave us a chance to balance this out with indigenous techniques and bring in the best of Himalayan vernacular knowledge. Hence, the structure that was already finalised in RCC, became our canvas.

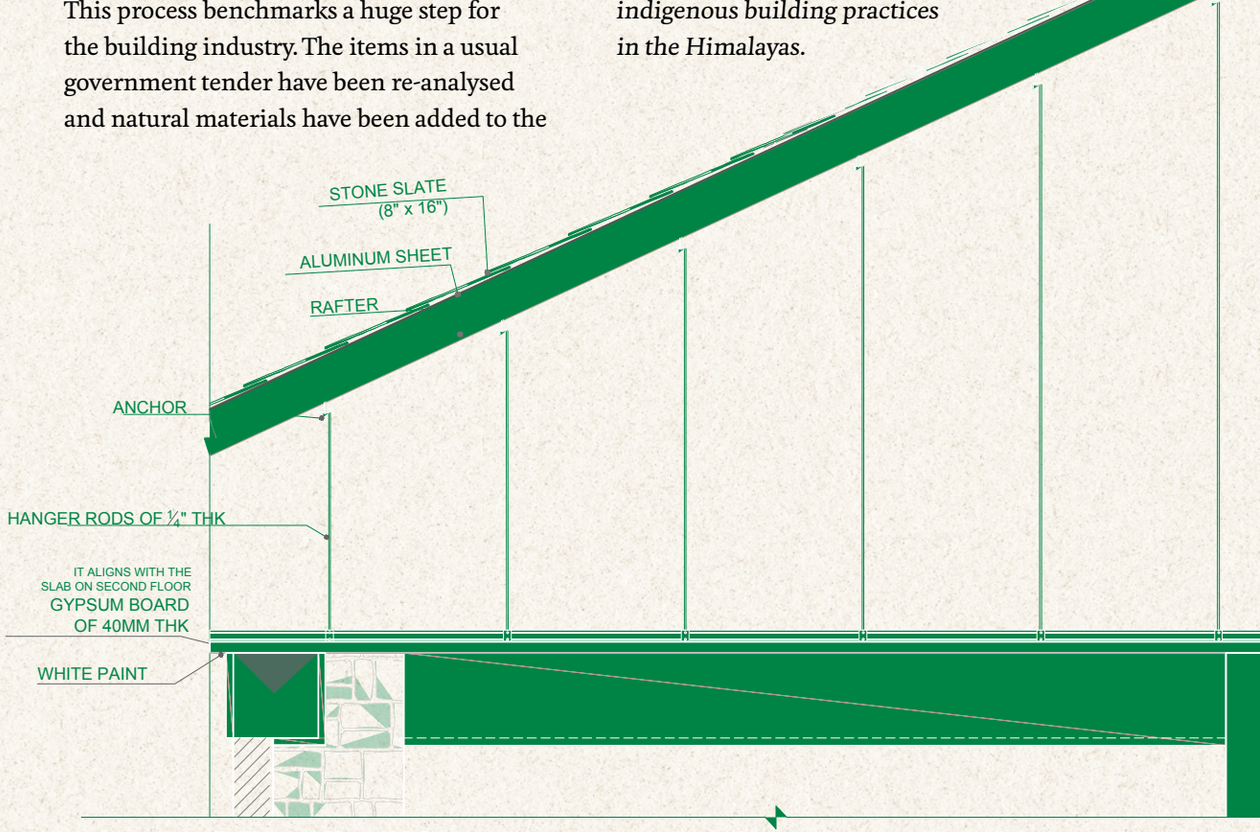
Our intention was to create an ecosystem for the community, reminiscent of trade fairs from the Silk Route era, to showcase the crafts of Himachal to the world. Surrounded by pine and cedar trees, the building sits next to the gushing Beas river. Bridging the building with the river is a community gathering space from where visitors will enter. The naturally terraced, open area with scattered boulders, created for craft workshops, lectures or community activities also acts as a flood barrier.

Planned to be run entirely by Himachali women, travellers will enter a space with the charm of vibrant colours and the rhythmic sound of women working on the hand loom. The walls are made using the 'Dhajji Dewari' technique, that grounds the open-plan market space, while the wood, stone and slate flooring are designed to instantly make one feel at ease. The timber is locally-sourced and sustainably-managed, providing flexibility. River stones have been used that act as the thermal mass helping to insulate the space. Pit Stop Babeli will be run on solar powered systems set into the slate stone roof, as an essential part of this regenerative model.

The spaces are purposefully fashioned to be raw and authentic, where every detail is handcrafted by local artisans to blend perfectly into the environment, such as the artistic wood-carved balconies that take inspiration from ancient temples in the valley. The precise craft of nailless wooden joinery can be seen in all the furniture while supple pure wool made into cloth on the hand looms and dyed with natural pigments make up our soft furnishings. Metal beating, a celebrated craft of the region, is used to showcase brass and copper masks of deities that locals revere.

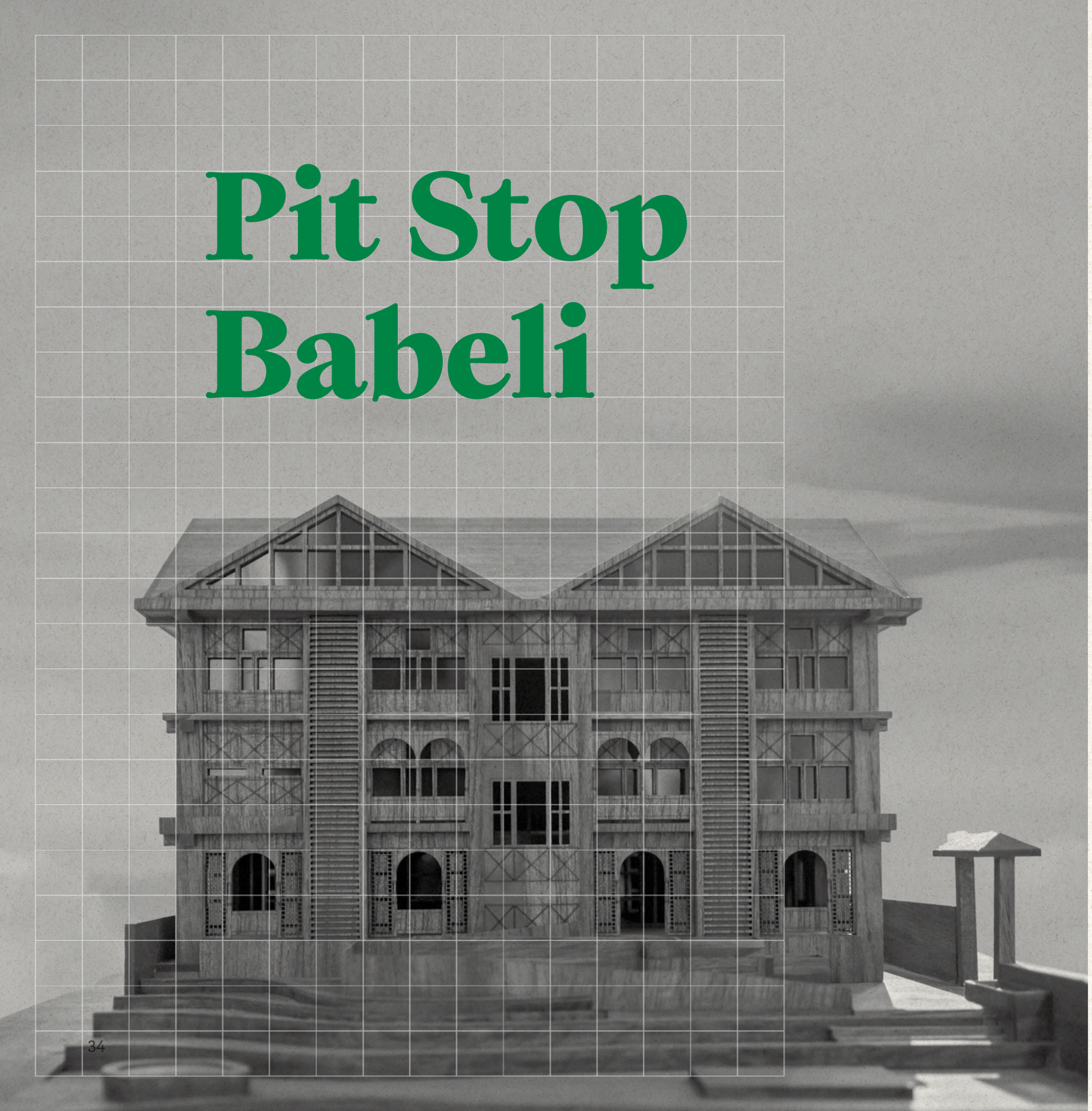
This process benchmarks a huge step for the building industry. The items in a usual government tender have been re-analysed and natural materials have been added to the list. Thus, the completion of this project will become a model for many more government-based projects to follow the same steps in natural building, shifting the perception of masses into adopting this conscious approach to living.

The author, a Himachali eco-architect, entrepreneur and educator, is the visionary and driving force behind NORTH, a creative, cultural, and social organisation in Himachal Pradesh. Leading a diverse community of artists, local craftspeople, designers, and business professionals, Rahul adopts an alternative approach, treating the organisation as an ecosystem. His efforts centre around innovating Kathkuni and Dhajji Dewari indigenous building practices in the Himalayas.



DETAIL AT A- ROOM 1
SECTION AA'

Pit Stop Babeli



A Case Study in Public-Private Collaboration

On a stretch of the Kullu-Manali highway, a partnership between the Kullu District Administration and the Royal Enfield Social Mission is testing a new model for responsible tourism. The Green Pit Stop (GPS) at Babeli, Himachal Pradesh currently under construction and slated to open in October 2026, represents a working model of what is possible when there is an alignment of government priorities and corporate capabilities in challenging terrains with local governance at the centre.

Fresh off establishing Pit Stop Kharu – the first community-run GPS in Ladakh, the Royal Enfield Social Mission approached the DC office with plans grounded in grassroots experience, market expertise and sustainable tourism business models. Integrating these into the She-Haat concept, an agreement was reached to revisit the space as the next GPS.

Building on Common Ground

A notable feature of Pit Stop Babeli is how the project's operational backbone came from systems already established by the Kullu administration. The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) Kullu, with the support of local Panchayats, identified the potential in leveraging the National Rural Livelihood Mission — a government programme that organises women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Shedding light on the concept of the She-Haat programme, the DRDA proposed working with the Cluster Level Federation (CLF) Himachal Nayi Umang comprising over 175 SHGs across eight panchayats. Building on the government's prior investment, the pool of 1,000 SHG women became the natural operators for the new Green Pit Stop.

The project was formalised as a joint initiative between Royal Enfield Social Mission and Kullu Administration, with construction costs shared between the two. The government provided the land, while the latter took on responsibilities such as interiors, signage and visual merchandising. Royal Enfield Social Mission is also preparing the women to operate such a facility through capacity-building workshops and additional training on spinning/knitting programmes, producing value-added goods etc. These efforts, of spotlighting local crafts, produce and experiences, aim to introduce travellers to the region's intangible cultural heritage while creating livelihoods. The Block Development Office serves as the nodal agency for implementation.

Eco-architect Rahul Bhushan was brought on board by Eicher Group Foundation, whose firm NORTH has spent years championing vernacular Himalayan design from their base in Naggar. Bhushan, well-versed in region-specific architecture, designed the structure in the traditional *Dhajji Dewari* techniques.

Critically, the architectural approach mirrored the ethos of Royal Enfield's Green Pit Stop, especially considering how the first such facility in Kharu, Ladakh applied rammed earth techniques, honouring local building traditions. The commitment to employing local architecture was adapted for Himachal's context with the use of Dhajji Dewari timber-laced masonry – a natural choice for both seismic resilience and vernacular authenticity. This alignment with regional building practices not only served functional needs but also resonated with broader responsible tourism objectives, shared by the local administration.

Preparing for the Future

With site selection finalised, women's groups identified, and architectural plans in place, construction officially commenced in May 2023. The initial phase focused on laying the groundwork - both literally and administratively, with the Executive Engineer of the Rural Development Department, Mandi Circle overseeing the meticulous tendering process. As work progressed, the design evolved organically, expanding to include: three specialised shops (local crafts, farm produce, tourism services), a 34-seat restaurant showcasing regional cuisine, four guest rooms and a hall that would double as a community space.

Progress faced inevitable hurdles, especially with the devastating 2023 floods in Himachal Pradesh, which caused delays, but also informed design changes. When disaster tested the structural integrity of Pit Stop Babeli, the team responded with evidence-based upgrades and modifications planned with the support of Fire Safety officials, Himurja (the state renewable energy agency), among others.

The project also developed a collaborative governance model. Monthly review meetings brought together the Block Development Officer, DRDA representatives, Royal Enfield Social Mission's team and district officials. These sessions covered everything from construction timelines to the design of furniture for the guest rooms.

As construction enters its final phase, attention is turning to operational readiness. Self-Help Group members are undergoing training in hospitality, digital bookkeeping, and inventory management – skills that go beyond typical NRLM curricula. By building on the foundation laid by the existing scheme, Pit Stop Babeli strengthens government frameworks to enhance women's economic agency. Participants – most of whom had never travelled beyond their village – now report greater confidence in their decision-making and financial independence. These early outcomes offer a strong case for how community-managed tourism infrastructure can serve as a scalable model for women-led development across the district and beyond. The Pit Stop's financial model, which includes revenue from shops, a restaurant, and guest rooms, is designed to be self-sustaining within three years.

If the model proves viable, it could offer a template for other mountainous regions seeking to balance tourism development with local women empowerment. For now, all eyes remain on Babeli, where a network of public, private and community partners are building something quite revolutionary.

POST CARD.

"The Green Pit Stop is meant for slow travel, making one savour local experiences."

- A visitor from Mumbai, Maharashtra

For Address Only.

POST CARD

"The Royal Enfield Social Mission team has helped us bring in many new visitors. We are meeting a lot of interesting people – from international riders to Bollywood stars!"

– Jigmet, an SHG member

Lorem Ipsum Dolor Sit Amet, Consectetur Adipiscing Elit, Sed Do Eiusmod Tempor Incididunt Ut Labore Et Dolore Magna Aliqua. Ut Enim Ad Minim Veniam, Quis Nostrud Exercitation Ullamco Laboris Nisi Ut Aliquip.

POST CARD.

"Pit Stop Kharu is one-of-a-kind and also the first of many to be built." -
Team Member, Royal Enfield Social Mission

POST CARD

"You can catch a break at Pit Stop Kharu with a cup of hot butter tea paired with tagi pulli (Ladakhi cookies), or dig into a bowl of thenthuk while gazing at the mystifying views of the river Indus and the Zanskar range."

- Rider travelling from New Delhi to Pangong

"Before working at the Green Pit Stop, I would have a lot of time to sit at home and relax. Nowadays, work has made me so busy that I have actually begun to miss those days."

- Urgain, an SHG member

THE HIMALAYAN KNOT

The Himalayan Knot is Royal Enfield Social Mission's textile conservation project and a tribute to the intricate artistry and craftsmanship of the Himalayas. Launched in 2023, it brings together artisanal communities, designers, pastoralists, conservationists and riders – knotted together by shared values of heritage and human creativity.

Project Overview

Design interventions are grounded in collaboration: local artisans work hand-in-hand with contemporary designers to co-create capsule collections that honour their heritage while adapting to new markets. These limited-edition pieces are available through the Royal Enfield website and craft organisations, with proceeds reinvested into the communities through partners.

The first set of collections include: Royal Enfield x EKA x Looms of Ladakh (Ladakh sheep wool), Royal Enfield x Countrymade x The Action Northeast Trust (Bodo weaves), and Royal Enfield x Sonam Dubal x The Action Northeast Trust (Eri silk). These collections have travelled far – from Motoverse, Royal Enfield's annual festival, to Dastkar Winter Mela and exhibitions like Journeying Across the Himalayas – bringing regional textiles to national audiences. The initiative has generated over ₹45 lakhs in revenue for community organisations.

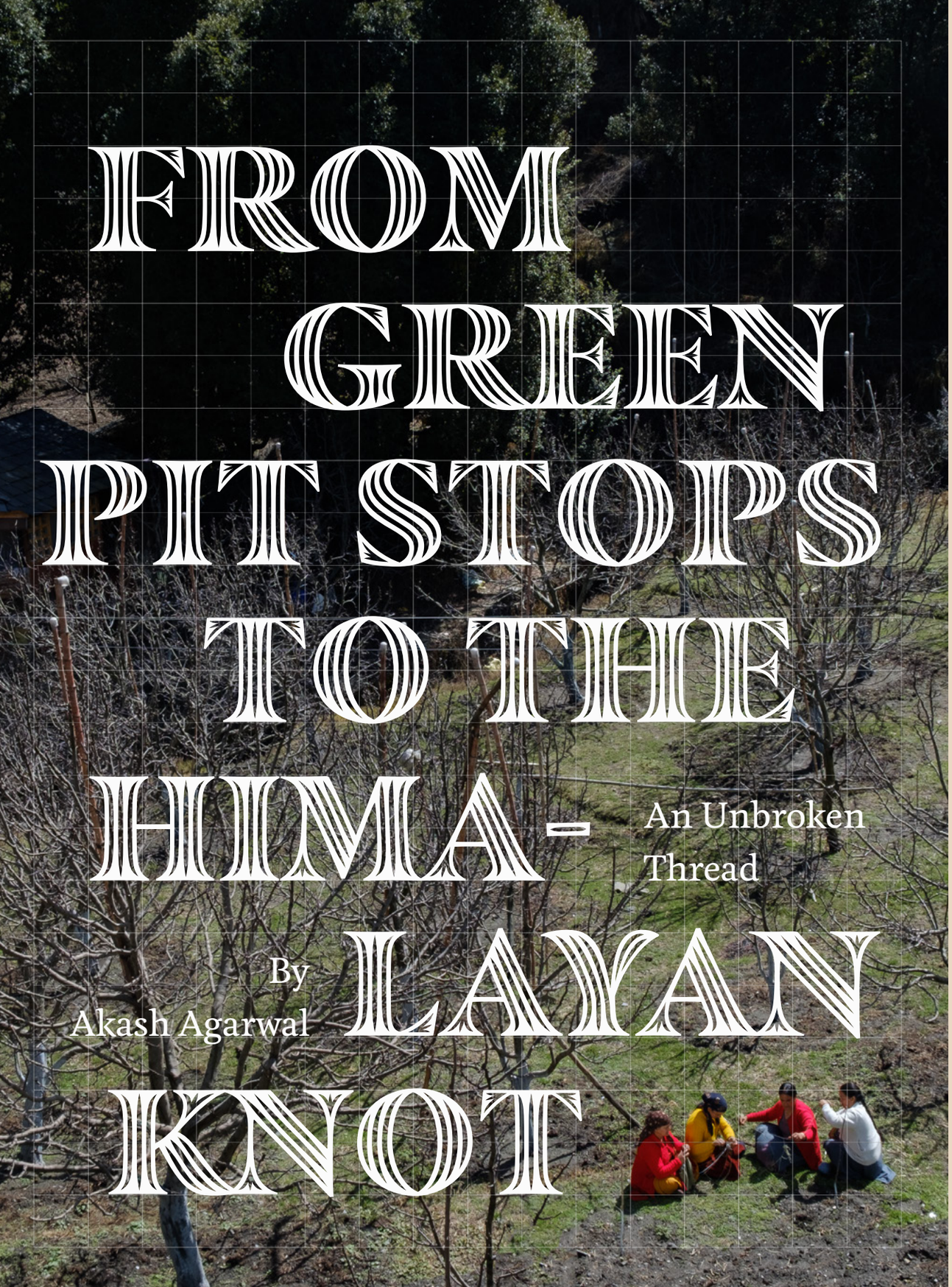
New collaborations are set to launch in 2025, focusing on Aari embroidery revival in Kashmir with Raffughar x Commitment to Kashmir, Ladakhi pashmina with Suket Dhir x Looms of Ladakh, knitwear collection Royal Enfield x Margn (Design prize winner) and wool fibre innovation with The Woolknitters x Countrymade in Himachal Pradesh.

Beyond apparel, the project invests in equipment and training for Himalayan communities. It strengthens the wool and pashmina value chain across Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. In Kullu, The Woolknitters have established Himalayan Knot centres, training over 100 women in hand-knitting, spinning and carpet-weaving.

At its heart, the project promotes and safeguards living heritage and craft ecosystems through pastoral land conservation. In Ladakh, where winters and predation threaten livestock, Royal Enfield partnered with the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) to build winter corrals across Khera Pullu, Kargyam Sato, and Sumdo, now protecting nearly 9,000 animals. The Nature Conservation Foundation and local leaders are also integrating wildlife awareness with culture storytelling, with initiatives like the folkore exhibition held in Ladakh in October 2024.

As part of the project, two key interventions were showcased at the Sā Ladakh Festival. These were an art installation created from local fibres by recipients of the Himalayan Textile Art Residency, and a performance by the Omaggio Group tracing the journey of local fibres through movement and expression. Royal Enfield Social Mission also collaborated with the Serendipity Arts Festival 2024 to commission Abundance in Scarcity: Exploring Ladakh's Sustainable Ingenuity, curated by Sandeep Sangaru. The exhibit explored the intersection of tradition, creativity, and sustainability – spotlighting Ladakh's indigenous crafts and the ingenuity of Himalayan communities working within ecological limits.

Leading up to the first edition of **Journeying Across the Himalayas,** Vogue India and Royal Enfield Social Mission came together for 'The Himalayan Knot Design Prize'. This initiative invites the next generation of emerging designers and fashion students with two coveted spots to engage with sustainable Himalayan textiles.



FROM GREEN PIT STOPS TO THE HIMA-LAYAN KNOT

An Unbroken Thread

By Akash Agarwal

High up in the mountains of Himachal Pradesh, a story of wool is shaping, bound by the stories of women, tradition, community, and care.

With the support of Royal Enfield's Social Mission, The Woolknitters is breathing new life into Himachal's timeless wool traditions. By embracing community-led, decentralised models, we are weaving together a regenerative system – one that honours local knowledge, supports women's livelihoods and places craft at the centre.

Our efforts are anchored in three visionary projects: Pit Stop Babeli, The Himalayan Knot interventions in Badhai and a newly activated Lahaul Centre. Each one plays a crucial role in this interconnected wool journey.

Himachal Pradesh has always been blessed with natural resources – indigenous sheep wool, Merino varieties, and unparalleled hand skills passed down through generations. But what was missing was a connected system – a supply chain that would link artisans to markets while ensuring fair livelihoods for those involved.

As part of The Himalayan Knot project, three centres – Babeli, Badhai, and Lahaul (Ghoshal, Jispa, Darcha) – are each taking a unique approach, but they are all interconnected through shared training, materials and goals. Together, they form a dynamic, self-sustaining ecosystem.

In Badhai and the Green Pit Stop at Babeli, we began by bringing together local women – many of whom have always knitted or woven at home – and structured a programme to help them refine their skills. They learned advanced craft techniques, worked with Merino and indigenous wool, and began creating new products with the potential for wider markets. In the process, we established a production and training hub not only to increase output but also to revive the lost art of Himachali knitting and weaving. Here, traditional patterns are being brought back to life while adapting them for contemporary designs.

THROUGH THIS NETWORK, WE'VE ALREADY TRAINED AND EMPLOYED OVER 110 WOMEN ARTISANS, AND THIS NUMBER CONTINUES TO GROW.

Nestled in the Kullu Valley, the women of Badhai once wove only for their homes. Traditional looms stand side by side with simplified beginner-friendly ones, enabling both seasoned weavers and newcomers to find their rhythm. The centre also handles yarn sorting and preparation, ensuring that knitting and weaving units in Babeli and Lahaul always have the materials they need.

A craft that was on the brink of fading is now being carried forward with pride and precision. This interconnected model means:
• Raw wool is processed in Badhai and turned into yarn.
• This yarn travels to Babeli, Badhai and Lahaul for knitting and weaving.
• Finished textiles and products are assembled across the centres.

In Lahaul, we are reviving another invaluable tradition – Tibetan-style carpet weaving. Once a common craft in the trans-Himalayan region, carpet weaving had begun to fade from local life. Through The Woolknitters' training programmes in Ghoshal and Jispa, this intricate craft is being brought to life again.

Women from surrounding villages have learned everything from yarn preparation and quality control to weaving on vertical looms using the Tibetan knot technique. As a result, Tsug-den carpets – thick, high-pile, and rich with bold geometric motifs rooted in the region's Buddhist culture are being made again. So far, 20 women have been trained in this art, with looms and materials provided to help them continue weaving independently.

And then there's the wool itself. Wool is a naturally climate-resilient material- renewable, biodegradable and perfectly suited to the Himalayan environment. By restoring traditional wool-processing methods and reducing reliance on synthetic fibers, we are creating a craft economy that aligns with the planet's needs.

What began as a handful of local efforts is now evolving into a living, breathing network – a system of shared tools, skills and stories. We are already planning the next phase of training, along with new design collaborations to create a distinct identity for products coming from these centres – one that embodies transparency, authenticity and fair pay. Interest is growing, and new partnerships are emerging with design schools, conscious fashion brands and cultural forces coming together to support and celebrate these crafts.

The author is the project manager with The Woolknitters for The Himalayan Knot project

ROYAL ENFIELD RAFFUGHAR *for* COMMITMENT TO KASHMIR

A New Generation of Woman Artisans

Laughter and chatter fill the second-storey workshop in Noor Bagh where The Himalayan Knot collection is gradually coming to life. Insha, Mehak, Fouzia, Sumair, and Kousar are at work–five young women hand-picked to be trained in garment construction as part of The Himalayan Knot programme. Living in and around the neighbourhood, these women–all in their twenties–have been selected from a pool of 20 aspirants, their determination to learn making up for the lack of professional experience in tailoring or garment designs.
Several months, and intensive training programmes later, all five are trained in sewing and machine-stitching, and design development skills. Along the way, they have also found camaraderie among each other, discovering that many of them were in the same school, college, or tuitions. When not at work, they often seek out each other's company for impromptu shopping trips or a day out around Srinagar. They speak of their learnings with The Himalayan Knot x CtoK x Wajahat Rather and their hopes for the future.

I've been interested in design since I was young – my father is a tailor and taught me how to stitch. As I have grown older, I started stitching more often and also pursued diploma programmes in fashion design. Apart from honing my cutting and stitching at the centre, I have also learnt khaka making which has been a wonderful experience because I really enjoy sketching too." - Mehak Shabir

“My father is a street vendor, and I have always wanted to be an entrepreneur. I have a Bachelor’s degree in commerce, but I have no capital to start up. However, working on the Himalayan Knot project has offered a lot of new opportunities to acquire new skills – from tailoring to pattern making. I still want to start my own business some day. In the meantime, I hope to tailor menswear soon, especially pantsuits and blazers. With such programmes, we can continue learning and growing.” - Kousar Jahan

Commitment to Kashmir

Launched in 2011, Commitment to Kashmir (CtoK) is a charitable trust that supports handicrafts artisans in Kashmir by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. Its roots trace back to an earlier initiative during the height of political instability when artisans were cut off from markets due to the collapse of tourism and restrictions on mobility. “There was an imperative to create a bridge between the beleaguered craftspeople of Kashmir and potential customers who had an emotive connection with these crafts,” says Laila Tyabji.

Despite decades of political and economic instability, Kashmiri handmade crafts have retained their finesse. Established in memory of economist and Planning Commission member LC Jain, CtoK builds artisan capacity through skill development, design, and market interventions. It also focuses on training and upskilling women, helping them enter crafts traditionally dominated by men.

Raffughar by Wajahat Rather

For designer Wajahat Rather, founder of the label Raffughar, 2025 marked a homecoming. Kashmir – its craft, culture, and landscape – has shaped his design sensibility for over a decade. Though his label was based in Delhi-NCR, he collaborated regularly with Kashmiri artisans. Over time, the call of home grew stronger. “Every summer, I would miss home and wish I was there,” he says. “Shooting campaigns in Delhi’s parks never matched the beauty of Kashmir.” At the start of 2025, he made the move to Srinagar – fulfilling a resolution to root his practice where it belongs.

ROYAL ENFIELD

COUNTRYMADE for THE WOOLKNITTERS

HANDMADE IN INDIA

In Janjehli, women artisans are trained in advanced knitting, design, and quality techniques through The Woolknitters. In Badhai, local women – many of whom previously wove only for their households – are now part of a collective production unit that supplies handwoven textiles for wider markets. In Lahaul, women in villages like Ghoshal and Jispa have been trained in carpet weaving after the near-disappearance of this complex, heritage-rich tradition, resulting in the reemergence of Tsug-den carpets.

For the women involved in this journey, this work is as much about being seen as it is about livelihood. For many, this is the first time they've been recognised as professionals – people with valuable skills, ideas and voices. Training is closely tied to leadership development. Women are taking on roles in planning, pricing, quality control and marketing. Their growing recognition is shifting household dynamics while making use of what the region already offers through sustainable materials and local knowledge systems.

The Wool knitters

The Woolknitters is a regenerative craft initiative that works to revitalise the traditional wool economy of Himachal Pradesh through a decentralised, community-led model that foregrounds indigenous wool, women's leadership, and environmentally responsible practices. Women artisans from across the region have been trained and employed in knitting, weaving and carpet-making techniques across the hubs, supported by Royal Enfield's Social Mission. The work focuses on environmental sustainability and artisanal craftsmanship by promoting wool as a viable alternative to synthetic fibres.

"Before joining the training programme, I spent my days at home with nothing much to do. Learning the skills, I am more and more excited to commit long-term to becoming a skilled artisan. I've learned so much, from taking measurements, creating finished products, and making new toys. I think it is my determination and consistency that help me improve every day. My husband and daughters are proud of me – I even taught my daughters how to crochet! They love making small objects while studying." - Phoola Devi

"I'm the youngest in this group. I've always loved learning new skills and gaining knowledge. I'm a fast learner and now I can be proud to say I am financially independent. Recently, I bought a new smartphone with my own earnings, and I'm so excited to continue working, continue learning something new every day." - Dolma

Countrymade

Sushant Abrol, fashion designer and founder of the label Countrymade, is known for integrating memory, loss and landscape into his collections. His work draws from poetry, nature and the legacy of his late brother, an Indian Air Force pilot. Abrol's creative ethos aligns with deeply personal storytelling and a reverence for heritage.

Previously, Abrol collaborated with the Action Northeast Trust (The Ant) and the Bodo community in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam to create a capsule collection for the Himalayan Knot. Inspired by the tradition of Bodo weaves, the collection incorporated motifs from nature to express a journey through the countryside.


L007
L010
L019
L018

Partnering with Royal Enfield Social Mission for a collection with The Woolknitters, Sushant translates some of his label's distinctive design thinking into a collection, rooted in mountainscape and memory.

Expert Speak

WEAVING AIR WITH JAMDANI - PASHMINA

By Shefalee Vasudev

A first of its kind textile innovation project of weaving wool on the jamdani loom aims to give indigenous pashmina a directional new identity. Done right, it could foster an acculturation model for other indigenous textiles.

Like in psychotherapy, when the verbal expression of a sentiment gives a repressed feeling an existence, converting it into a reality, in design, innovation is first seeded as a fuzzy, untried idea. It is first about designing a parachute that will open in the sky before writing a code for a rescue mission.

This may be one way to describe fashion designer Suket Dhir's project with pashmina woven in the jamdani tradition for the next edition of The Himalayan Knot. The former winner of the International Woolmark Prize, Dhir has long been invested in the personality, wearability and resilience of wool as a fibre. For this project, under his guidance, karigars from Ladakh who understand wool as part of their artisanal existence worked with Jamdani weavers from West Bengal to jointly create textiles the world has not yet seen or touched.

Ladakh Pashmina x Jamdani

Select craftspeople were invited from Ladakh and West Bengal respectively to work collectively at Dhir's atelier in Delhi where a Jamdani loom has been installed. The democratic, two-way flow of skilling and oral knowledge – between the designer, textile workers who fill, wind, spool and warp yarn as well as senior weavers, including a project coordinator from Kullu – taught Dhir a thing or few about the nuances of Jamdani weaving and why wool, when in the hands of Ladakhi artisans, is a tool of resistance and rootedness. Unlike in fashion, when it is innovated, it expresses modernity and luxury as a high cost product to generate high value business.

Some will call Dhir's project with craftspeople from Ladakh and West Bengal a three way bridging. But that's the obvious.

Let's not unspool the story so fast.

Why Pashmina Matters

Pashmina's primary identity as a handspun-handwoven textile woven in the Himalayan regions of India gives it an indigenous gene. Yet, its evolving importance through artisanal weaving over the centuries, its presence as a cultural symbol in the history of design, in museums and the world's most respected textile collections make pashmina a rich, textured metaphor. The regions of Leh and Ladakh interpret the fibre through nature, animal-human co-dependency, and how local skills evolved as a response to the unrelenting challenges of mountainous terrains. In Kullu, wool is a lifeline for the indigenous industry of hand-knit creations. In the Northeast of India, wool and other indigenous materials are a survival kit for women craftspeople for whom working with textiles ensures their therapeutic and financial well-being.

In Kashmir though, under the world's most skilled weavers, pashmina's sophistication and influence is poetic and powerful. Nowhere else is pashmina carded, dyed, woven and patterned like it is in Kashmir. Whether it is a plain shawl, a multi-hued kani woven with arithmetic knowledge or a traditional jamavar with imprints of historical eras. "One kilo of pashmina wool will be turned into five excellent products in Kashmir; in Ladakh, the same quantity may be used to make one product. Our project is to first consider the optimum utilisation of pashmina and reassess its thickness as a yarn before it is pre-dyed or readied for weaving," says Dhir.

But that's the rescue mission part of Dhir's work. Not to undervalue it.

Arguing for The Rescue Mission

In the face of the climate crisis, saving indigenous textiles today is not just an ethical obligation for designers and crafts communities. It is about saving a culture. The deculturation which the world is currently experiencing, where communities are formed and fragmented by internet algorithms, technology and by "othering" through religion, caste, class or war, makes saving an indigenous textile which is a culture by itself – a rights issue.

Now consider Dhir's work with artisans from Ladakh and West Bengal through that prism. He opened a walking-talking textile symposium. The project gathered language, discussions on climate disparities between Ladakh and West Bengal, ways of thinking, eating, dressing, believing, fearing, skilling, knitting, patterning and weaving into it. Both groups of artisans travelled physically to each other's regions. Bengali weavers had never experienced such freezing cold in their lives and for Ladakhis it was hard to understand how West Bengal's humidity contributes to the woven finesse of Jamdani.

The language exploration here was not just spoken mother tongues or regional dialects. It was the language also of Jamdani, its floral patterning, the double-sided wondrous warp and weft it creates. Dhir calls it "ethereal". "I was always compelled by the fact that Bengal's muslin jamdani was called woven air. It is that super light pashmina that I want to create, I am still experimenting with the motifs," he adds.

Then there is the interlinked language of vegetable dyed wool, an integral part of this project. Vegetable dyeing is no small skill set in Indian crafts and fashion houses – it is advanced both as a science and craft. It brings beneficial heft to the global sustainability discourse and is potentially course changing for India's fashion industry.

Opening The Parachute

The result of this cross-cultural, cross textural, cross material and multi-skilled project will bring to Indian fashion and hopefully to other centres of the world, tailored clothes and drapes, says Dhir. There is a demand for indigenous textiles everywhere, he believes. Presently he has only focussed on stoles and scarves as saris are their own institution, he argues, and with Jamdani and wool into the interventionist mix, he needs time to experiment.

Prized as expressions of identity, tourism and the creative economy of communities, indigenous textiles need a lot more than mere sustenance. While innovation works best when it remains close to the fundamental ecosystem to avoid disruptive fractures or losses in the minds of craftspeople, it is only when a parachute opens in the sky that we can say a leap of faith was taken. That's what Dhir aims for.

It will be equally important to question the project for its future proofing. What about the risks and hazards to people and materials. Who gets the copyright, what about the non-economic loss and damage if a project like this were to fail? Who will safeguard authenticity, artistic impressions of designers and artisans involved? What about cultural identity and heritage? Most importantly, was the creative process and the dialogue, its language, gender representation of participating karigars and their comments documented?

When a textile is innovated as a gathering of skills, transferring community knowledge to the next generations, with a clear commitment to climate-related responsibilities and material authenticity – it has the potential to foster acculturation. Social, psychological and cultural transformation – instead of the deculturation that threatens several individuals, institutions and movements in the present world.

Indigenous textiles need a parachute as well as a rescue plan.

The author is a journalist, author, narrative psychotherapist and the Editor-in-chief of The Voice of Fashion

FROM FOLK TO FABRIC

A visual rhetoric, textiles in the Himalayan tradition serve as canvases for recording myths and legends, sharing folktales, and passing on values and systems from one generation to the next.

In the northern and northeastern stretches of India, textiles are living expressions of oral storytelling, cultural values, and community identity. Across these geographies, mythologies explain why women weave. In a tale recounted in Ladakh, demons once roamed the earth causing destruction. A lama, in an attempt to pacify them, taught the male demons religion – but the female demons remained untamed. So, he taught them to weave, and through the act of weaving, they transformed into women. But they had to keep weaving – or risk becoming demons again. This story, both cautionary and powerful, reveals how craft can be used to encode moral instruction, reinforce gender roles, and enshrine the domestic as a stabilising force in society.

Among the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur, the intricate traditional textile Zingtai Kashan was born of a legend where a fairy taught a gifted girl, Mansingla, the sacred designs that define their textiles today. In another tale, Yonangla Kashung Philava dreamt the recipe for the dye of the Luirim Kachon textile. Even today, these textiles become devices for transmitting stories, marking identity, and capturing histories that have never been written down.

Among the Bodo of Assam, weaving is traced to two fairy sisters, Asagi and Bwisagi, who drew motifs from nature, ferns, pigeon eyes, and the wink of a peacock. The Dokhona, a traditional wrap worn by Bodo women, contains these designs, where each hue has its own identity and even the near absence of black itself becomes a cultural code.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Tsug-den rugs carry symbols like dragons and snow lions – ancestral guardians that narrate tales of Tibetan craft heritage and embody values of protection and power. In Kashmir, Namda felted carpets, said to have been brought by the Sufi saint Shah-e-Hamdan, are steeped in the pastoral life of Himalayan shepherds, speaking to the folk intimacy with the land.

The Folk to Fabric exhibit at Journeying Across the Himalayas showcased the material culture of Himalayan communities as representations of the region's storytelling traditions

Similarly, the Loi shawl of Uttarakhand tells a story of pastoral life and emphasises local hospitality. Woven by hands calloused with labour and dyed in earthy hues, the Loi is offered to guests as a gesture of warmth, used by shepherds as a protective second skin and treasured in village homes for generations.

These objects also embody belief systems. In the Buddhist worldview of Lahaul in Himachal, weaving is seen as a metaphor for the cosmos – bringing warp and weft together in harmony. The weaver is not just a craftsperson but a problem-solver, one who brings order to chaos. In folklore, a weaver's role becomes sacred, marked by discipline, patience and interconnectedness.

In Mizoram, the Tawlhloh Puan – a warrior's cloth – speaks to ancestral strength. Legend holds that a Mizo warrior named Darhnawka asked his wife to weave a shroud large enough to cover him if he fell in battle. "Tawlhloh" means "to never turn back." Only warriors could wear it. Draped in its threads, the cloth became a marker of social status, honour and memory but also stood for the immense value placed on bravery and resistance.

And truly, textiles hold defiance. Among the Khiamniungan Nagas, the Sheh Nujam emerged from an act of self-defense: a woman used her loom's shuttle to kill an intruder. In a society that once dismissed women's bravery, her act challenged norms. Women began to wear mekhelas embroidered with shells as a symbol of courage. These were met with resistance, even punishment. But through it, protest seeped into public memory.

Use of local materials is ubiquitous among the textile traditions across the Himalayas. In Sikkim, the Lepcha Dum-Praa, once woven from stinging nettle known as kuju, reflects a sacred bond with nature. These garments echo the mountain and river spirits the Lepchas revere, binding cosmology to everyday life. The Nehemok Phaloi, a waistcoat of Nagaland, too, woven from wild orange rhea and nettle, speaks of resourcefulness and ecological intimacy, where nothing is wasted and everything is connected.

In many Himalayan communities, where little is written, and much is sung or spoken, textiles are the archive. Memory doesn't sit in museums but are draped on shoulders, laid on floors, wrapped around waists. From stories of love, defiance and bravery, lineage or ecological philosophy, textiles become pedagogical tools through which younger generations learn not only to weave but as memory pieces of identity.

THE HIMALAYAN KNOT DESIGN PRIZE

by Rochelle Pinto

The seed of The Himalayan Knot Design Prize germinated – as all the best ideas do – over food. As baskets of steaming dumplings jostled for table space with bowls of spicy dipping sauces and garlicky noodles, we asked ourselves: How do we build curiosity and connection around Himalayan textile traditions to ensure they don't fade into obscurity, another victim of the ravages of hyperconsumerism? Was there a way that Vogue India and Royal Enfield, two cultural vanguards committed to the pursuit of excellence, could leverage their influence and light the spark?

Blame it on the post-meal serotonin surge, but the answer was a resounding yes. And so The Himalayan Knot Design Prize began to crystallise. We envisioned a platform that would serve dual purposes – spotlighting and supporting the next generation of design talent, while also enabling skill development to create a sustainable pipeline of work for local craft clusters. After some debate, we settled on two categories for competition. The first would be limited to bright-eyed fashion students eager to make a mark in the world, offering the winner a four-month paid internship with an established designer, travelling to key craft centres in Delhi, Ladakh and West Bengal as they learnt the finer points of developing a collection.

The second category would encourage participation from emerging designers as they competed for a Rs 20 lakh grant to develop a 10-garment collection with a Himalayan craft of their choosing. They would also be mentored by Royal Enfield's Social Mission team and a panel of industry experts.

The initiative, the first time Vogue has partnered with a CSR initiative, was met with enthusiasm from all quarters. Sifting through hundreds of entries from fashion colleges and young designers country-wide, the Vogue team settled on a shortlist for both categories.

On a crisp December morning, the hopefuls gathered at Delhi's Travancore House to present their ideas to a jury including Vogue's Head of Editorial Content, Rochelle Pinto, sustainability advocate Bandana Tewari, and fashion designer, Rahul Mishra. Rounding up the judging panel were Monisha Ahmed, author, textile anthropologist and co-founder of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO) and Manvi Sinha, independent director at Eicher Motors Ltd.

As the students kicked off the day's proceedings, I was relieved to see the passion and energy that infused their plans. As someone who routinely reads headlines about Generation Dread and encounters enough students who seem to think everything worth doing has already been done, I couldn't help but feel inspired by how deeply these young creatives cared for craft. Many had spent months in small towns and tribal areas as part of their course, learning these ancient traditions from their generational custodians. Picking a winner from amongst such a talented bunch proved to be a harder task than the jury had bargained for.

The emerging designers followed the students, and presented their proposals for integrating Himalayan artistry into their design philosophy. Beyond pledging their allegiance to specific craft clusters and the inventiveness of their brand vision, they were also challenged to create a sustainable business plan that would ensure an uninterrupted pipeline of work for the local community.

After an intense day of judging and spirited debate over who truly deserved the opportunity, the judges picked the two winners who would be crowned later that evening at the finale of Journeying Through The Himalayas, Royal Enfield Social Mission's 10-day celebration of art, music, cuisine and community.

As the evening drew to a close, the winners were announced. Saurabh Maurya of menswear label Margn had impressed the judges with his sophisticated design aesthetic and sharp business acumen, while fashion student Himani Sharma's unfettered ardour for the art of knitting, one she learnt from her Himachali grandfather, earned her top marks from the judges.

In the ensuing months, both Maurya and Sharma have returned to the mountains where it all began. Sharma is assisting designer Suket Dhir in developing a collection for Looms of Ladakh, which sees rich pashmina find creative expression in jamdani weaves. Maurya is working with female artisans across Ladakh and Spiti Valley to craft a capsule collection that will be unveiled at the second edition of Journeying Across The Himalayas in December.

Initiatives like the Himalayan Knot Design Prize remind us that true creativity is borne from purpose. Craft – a joyful expression of our identity as Indians – isn't a stalactite calcified in the depths of some dark cave. It is as full of life as the artisans who rely on it for their livelihood, as the connoisseurs who patronise it, as the seekers of beauty who derive pleasure from experiencing its various forms up close. To nourish it, we must all do our part.

The author is the Head of Editorial Content at Vogue India

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN EXPLORATION

unesco

In 2022, UNESCO and Royal Enfield came together to document and safeguard the living heritage of the Indian Himalayas. The result was The Great Himalayan Exploration (TGHE) – an ambitious, long-term project to map 200 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) practices across the Eastern and Western Himalayas through rider-researchers. The initiative creates opportunities for travellers to see the country through a new lens, allowing them to fully immerse in the culture of Himalayan communities. Their stories have been brought to life through audio-visual content, publications and art exhibitions, inviting wider audiences to explore the Himalayas more sustainably.

Even as the project offers unique experiences, it is building a national inventory for ICH practices. The aim is to foster knowledge exchange and maintain the sense of cultural continuity that enables communities to pass on traditional wisdom to future generations and across geographies. Over three years, 164 riders traversed the Himalayas, documenting over 90 unique practices and engaging with 54 remote Himalayan communities.

In 2024, TGHE Edition III began the first Western Himalayas documentation with 12 practices from Ladakh. Leading up to the flag off, a capacity-building session was held at UNESCO House and Triveni Kala Sangam – bringing together thought leaders like Tim Curtis, Director and Representative for UNESCO India, filmmaker Imtiaz Ali and other experts.

From Leh, Ladakh, rider-researchers embarked on four routes, documenting 16 ICH practices through immersive community engagement, covering a diverse array of practices, from culinary traditions and sports to traditional craftsmanship and pastoralist lifestyles. Experts like chef Prateek Sadhu, sustainability advocate Bandana Tewari, rider-entrepreneur Maral Yazarloo, and actor Gul Panag joined in, adding perspective and depth. The journeys were captured in a four-episode series produced in partnership with National Geographic for OTT platforms.

The Eastern chapter of TGHE Edition III began in Sikkim in March 2025. Over 30 days, 14 riders explored 10 ICH practices across the state, including nomadic lifestyles, Lepcha healing practices, Himalayan mask making and more.

Together with TGHE, Royal Enfield's Social Mission has also been working with the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO) to document the cultural landscape of Changthang in Ladakh. The project has already completed in-depth research in Hanle and Chumathang, recording over 40 ICH practices and unearthing previously undocumented petroglyphs and ancient fortresses. A series of walkbooks, catalogues, and maps is in development to help both locals and travellers engage more meaningfully with the region.

Expert Speak

LEVERAGING HERITAGE FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN HIGH -ALTITUDE REGIONS

By Tim Curtis

Traditional knowledge systems represent centuries of accumulated wisdom that indigenous communities have developed through sustained environmental engagement providing invaluable perspectives for modern disaster risk reduction strategies. These comprehensive knowledge frameworks encompass sophisticated early warning systems based on environmental indicators, innovative indigenous engineering solutions and robust community governance structures that collectively enable effective disaster preparedness and response mechanisms.

The effectiveness of traditional knowledge systems in disaster prediction and response emerges through localised environmental observations, including detailed monitoring of animal behaviour patterns, atmospheric changes and natural cycles. These community-based indicators often provide more trusted and contextually relevant early warning information than conventional scientific methods, as they are deeply embedded in local cultural practices and have been refined through generations of direct experience with environmental hazards.

A yak herder in Lachen, North Sikkim

Disasters in high-altitude regions, whether sudden events like glacial lake outburst floods or gradual processes such as climate-induced environmental changes, pose a dual threat that endangers both human lives and the tangible and intangible heritage that defines local community identities. Recent catastrophic events in Sikkim and Ladakh have demonstrated that community resilience often depends critically on the ability to mobilise traditional knowledge and practices that have evolved over centuries in direct response to environmental hazards.

The urgent need to document preserve, and integrate these indigenous systems into formal disaster risk reduction planning has become increasingly apparent as climate change amplifies both the frequency and intensity of natural hazards affecting these vulnerable regions. This integration represents not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for enhancing community preparedness and response capabilities.

The practical application of traditional knowledge in disaster preparedness is exemplified by the remarkable construction techniques employed by indigenous communities. The Lepcha community in Sikkim has developed sophisticated cane and bamboo bridge construction methods, creating *ru-soam* bridges from parallel canes (*soamgyang*) and bamboo decking (*soamgur*) that can span distances up to 100 metres and be rapidly deployed during emergencies.

The effectiveness of these traditional engineering solutions was dramatically demonstrated during the 2023 glacial lake outburst flood that devastated conventional infrastructure in Dzongu. Local communities responded swiftly by constructing these traditional bridges, successfully restoring access to vital resources and reconnecting isolated settlements. This response illustrates how cultural heritage can function as a form of “cultural insurance”, providing adaptive, community-controlled solutions during crises.

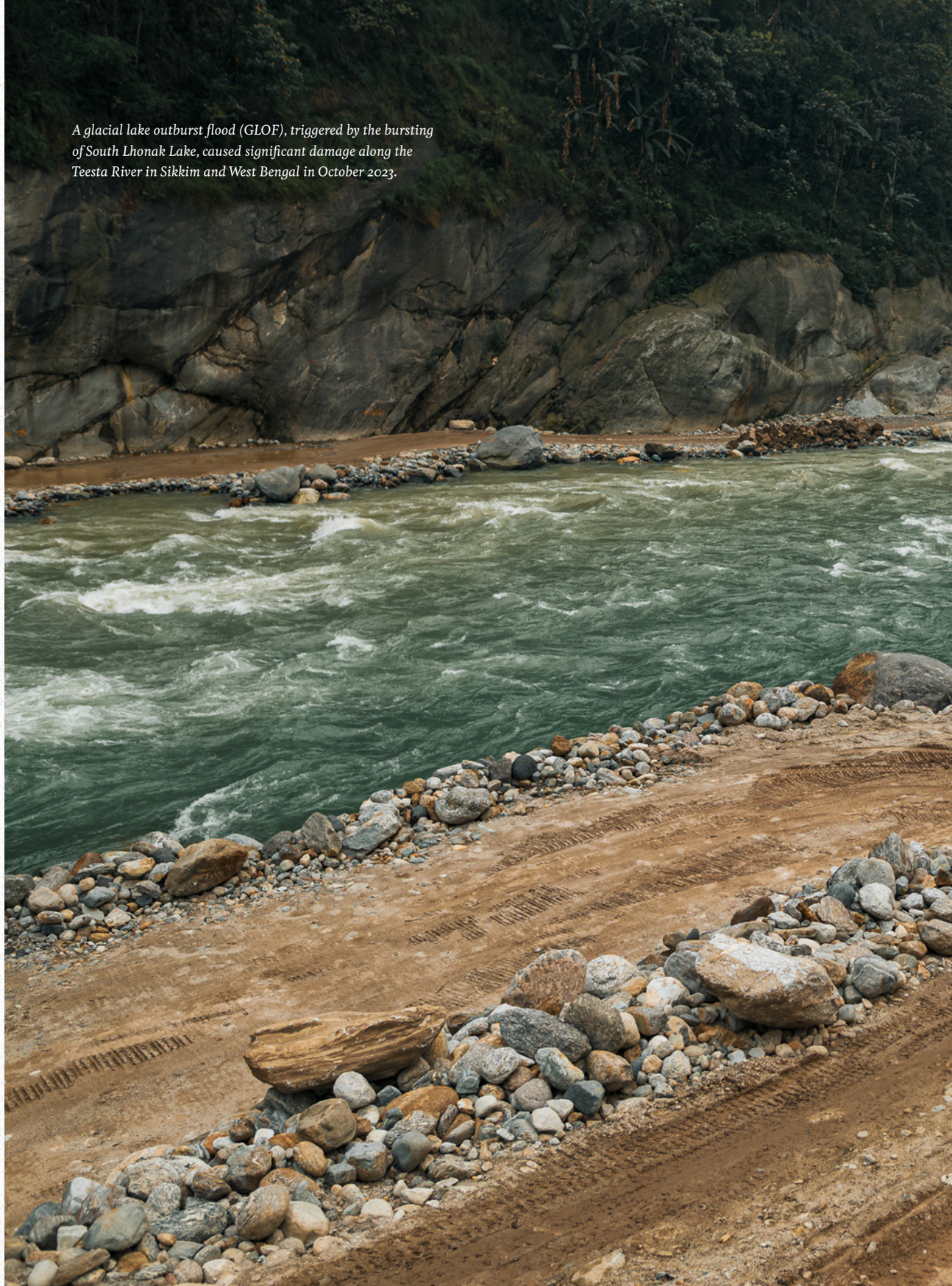
Similarly, Ladakh's traditional rope bridges, constructed from yak hair and birch twigs, have historically enabled mobility across challenging mountainous terrains. While modern infrastructure has replaced many of these traditional structures, their underlying design principles, which are carefully adapted to local materials and environmental conditions, reflect a sophisticated understanding of resilience and sustainability that remains relevant for contemporary disaster preparedness.

Beyond engineering applications, indigenous communities have developed sophisticated early warning systems rooted in comprehensive environmental observation, oral traditions, and accumulated communal experience. These multifaceted systems integrate three distinct but complementary knowledge categories:

Transmitted knowledge: Information passed down through generations via stories, rituals, and cultural practices that encode environmental patterns and hazard indicators

Experiential knowledge: Insights gained through direct, lived experiences with various hazards and environmental changes
Empirical knowledge: Understanding developed through systematic observation of environmental cues, including animal behaviour changes and water level fluctuations.

The life-saving potential of indigenous knowledge in disaster scenarios was dramatically highlighted during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Communities such as the Simeulueans in Indonesia and the Moken of Thailand and Myanmar successfully survived by heeding oral traditions and ancestral wisdom preserved in local legends and songs that warned of oceanic disturbances. Similarly, residents of India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands relied on their deep-rooted understanding of natural signs – including changes in wind patterns, sea behaviour, and animal movements – to relocate to safer areas before the tsunami impact.



A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), triggered by the bursting of South Lhonak Lake, caused significant damage along the Teesta River in Sikkim and West Bengal in October 2023.

These widely recognised examples underscore the broader value of traditional knowledge systems. At the same time, countless other communities worldwide have drawn on similar insights to navigate various disaster scenarios, offering crucial lessons for disaster management professionals and policymakers seeking to enhance community resilience.

Traditional knowledge systems offer unique advantages through their holistic approach that fundamentally interconnects human communities and natural environments, promoting sustainable development practices and environmental stewardship while simultaneously building social cohesion and collective resilience. Unlike conventional technological approaches that often focus on immediate hazard response, traditional knowledge emphasises relational and community-based strategies that systematically address underlying vulnerabilities and root causes of disaster risk.

The integration of traditional knowledge with scientific approaches has proven particularly effective in enhancing early warning systems, where local environmental indicators complement meteorological forecasts to provide comprehensive and culturally relevant disaster preparedness information. This hybrid approach leverages the strengths of both knowledge systems, creating more robust and contextually appropriate risk reduction strategies.

However, full utilisation of traditional knowledge systems remains limited due to significant documentation and integration challenges. Much of this knowledge is transmitted orally and is highly context-specific, making standardisation and integration into scientific or policy formats particularly difficult without a proper understanding of cultural and environmental contexts. Growing recognition of technological limitations in disaster management, combined with increasing climate change impacts on vulnerable communities, has sparked renewed interest in developing comprehensive disaster risk reduction strategies that effectively integrate traditional knowledge systems with modern scientific capabilities.

To successfully bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and formal disaster management structures, comprehensive documentation efforts, supportive policy frameworks, and targeted capacity-building initiatives are imperative.

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To successfully bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and formal disaster management structures, comprehensive documentation efforts, supportive policy frameworks and targeted capacity-building initiatives are imperative. Disaster risk preparedness in high-altitude regions such as Ladakh and Sikkim cannot be effectively separated from the cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems of local communities. Traditional practices, exemplified by innovations such as the Lepcha cane bridges, represent not historical relics but living, adaptive strategies that actively enhance resilience and sustainability in contemporary contexts.

By systematically documenting, respecting, and integrating these knowledge systems into comprehensive disaster risk management frameworks, policymakers and practitioners can create more robust, culturally grounded approaches for safeguarding both human communities and cultural heritage in the face of growing environmental uncertainty. This integration represents a critical pathway toward developing disaster risk reduction strategies that are both scientifically informed and culturally authentic, ensuring that community resilience is built upon the solid foundation of accumulated wisdom and proven adaptive capacity.

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FOLLOWING THE LAST HIMALAYAN NOMADS: STORIES FROM LADAKH TO SIKKIM

The Great Himalayan Exploration – Edition III took rider-researchers to Ladakh to document the intangible cultural heritage practices of the Changpas as part of its Western Himalayas documentation. The Eastern Himalayas ride explored the highest reaches of North Sikkim, home to the nomadic Drokpa tribe. The lives of these agro-pastoralist communities mirror each other in various ways – including their reliance on their faithful animal companions and threats to their nomadic grazing patterns.

Ladakh's Changthangi Goats and Changpa Herders:

By Samrat Som

The wind never stops in Ladakh.

It whips across the ochre plains, rattling prayer flags strung between stones, sweeping the scent of cold earth, sun-baked rocks, and something ancient. Somewhere past Rezang-La and before Nyoma, where the road thinned into nothing and the sky turned the colour of faded denim, we slowed down, eased off the throttles of our dust-caked motorcycles. Behind us was a zigzag trail through a moonscape of sand, gravel, and light. Ahead, on the left was a small lake with no name and on the right a full herd of Bharals, the Himalayan blue sheep, dancing down a steep cliff. But this was not the caprine variety we were riding to meet, just distant cousins. So we rode on.

We were riding from Aranoo village at the far-end of Nubra valley to Korzok on the banks of Tso Moriri – through the high-altitude wilderness of eastern Ladakh, one that would take us through the land of the Changpas and their treasured Changthangi goats, the source of the world's finest wool: Pashmina.

The Changthangi goat is a breed native to these high plains sitting athwart the Indus and Ladakh ranges of mountains and their outlying ridges. The intense cold of the region causes the goats to grow a double-layered coat, a fine, soft, downy under-layer covered by an outer coat of coarse hair. Rearing these goats, in this windswept cold arid desert where little grows, is a complex specialised practice and at the heart of it are the Changpas. The Changpas are a nomadic pastoralist community that has lived in harmony with the plateau's harsh climate and fragile ecosystem for thousands

But the Changpas' relationship to their goats is not transactional, it is symbiotic. Without the goat, the nomad cannot be. Without the nomad, there is no Pashmina.

of years. Their intimate knowledge of the land and livestock, passed down over generations, has shaped a highly sophisticated indigenous system of animal husbandry that sustains not only their livelihood but also an ancient cultural legacy.

Ladakh contributes less than 1% of the global production of cashmere but the Changthangi goat is treasured for the finest quality of hair it produces, both in terms of softness and long fibre-length which translates to finer yarns and lighter fabrics. The quality is credited to the breed, the nutrients in the vegetation of the region: essentially, to the Changpas' traditional ways.

On average, a single goat yields about 500 grams of Pashmina annually. Pashmina is the family's wealth. The fibre might fetch ₹ 8000–10,000 per kilo, depending on its fineness. But the Changpas' relationship to their goats is not transactional, it is symbiotic. Without the goat, the nomad cannot be. Without the nomad, there is no Pashmina

A few kilometers past the Korzok monastery, where the road ends into rolling meadows, at *Phoo*, by a small rivulet with light glassy frozen bits announcing winter's arrival, we found a small settlement of Changpas. There were no permanent constructions, just some *rebos* (tents made out of fabric spun and woven from yak-hair) and some animal pens. The pens were made out of rocks, carefully arranged together, without the use of any mortar, balanced like the bones of the earth. There were a couple of half-finished brick structures too; we were told they were government efforts in providing temporary storage facilities to help the itinerant Changpa.

We met Dhondup Dorjay who at thirty-six was heading a young family and had already been raising these goats for twenty years. Herding is an intergenerational community practice for the Changpa. Each family tends to herds of a fair size ranging from 200 to 700 animals, mainly goats, along with sheep, yaks, and horses. Goats are especially valued for their higher milk yield, meat, and the prized Pashmina, although they require more attentive care due to their higher kid mortality rate compared to sheep.

Children, both boys and girls, grow up observing elders, learning the skills of grazing management, milking, birthing, shearing, and first aid. By the age of 16 to 18, they begin taking herds out independently. Marriage, often around the age of 20, marks a pivotal moment, when both bride and groom receive a number of animals to start their own herd. Often families with smaller herds band together to take turns tending the animals out to graze, while the other members take care of gathering firewood, cooking, and looking after children back at the camp. Each family marks their animals with vegetable dyes for easier identification.

The Changthang plateau, though arid and seemingly barren, holds vital pasturelands around its lakes, rivers, and marshes. The goats feed on native grasses – *nima* (short grass) and *trama* (bushy grass) nourished by the melting water from the glaciers. These pastures are not infinite, and the Changpas tread lightly. They follow rotational grazing patterns to avoid overgrazing, as the goats' sharp hooves tear through the turf, exposing topsoil to Ladakh's ruthless wind, leading to soil erosion and degradation. They often travel 10-15 km everyday to different grazing grounds, allowing the land time to regenerate. Their mobility is crucial. In summer, herds graze around Korzok near Tso Moriri Lake, while in winter, the Changpas migrate to lower-altitude pastures near Chumur chasing grazing grounds not yet sealed by frost. Despite the challenges, this nomadic rhythm sustains both the herders and their environment.

Yet, something is shifting and the Changpas know this. Their children now go to boarding schools, maintaining smaller herds are increasingly difficult, the glaciers are retreating. The grass that depends on the slow bleed of the ice is thinning. For how long can they dance on shifting ice?

The author is a creative strategist based in Bangalore, India.

Yak Herding in Sikkim

By Chong H.

Holding a mirror to the lives of the Changpas of the Western Himalayas are the nomadic Drokpas (also known as the Doksas or Dokpas) of the Eastern Himalayas, who rely on the sure-footed yak for transportation as they move between pastures and cold deserts. For generations before, the nomadic pastoralist Drokpa community moved freely between North Sikkim and the Tibetan plateau, temporarily settling in Tibet in the winter months, where their yaks got green pastures to graze when the valleys at home were buried under snow.

After access to Tibet was sealed in 1962, the grazing patterns and routes of the yaks underwent a massive change. Interestingly, today, the yaks are no longer brought down from the high altitudes for winter. It's easier for the herders to take them up to the higher slopes, where the wind blows hard, clearing away the snow and frost from the ground, exposing grass on which the animals can graze.

Earlier, their migration calendars were informed by indigenous knowledge of the surrounding flora and fauna, gained from total immersion and observation of age-old practices. Rotational grazing patterns involved movement from place to place according to the Tibetan lunar calendar, allowing the vegetation to regrow for the next grazing season.

In 2019, the increasingly extreme climate occurrences in the region resulted in heavy snowfall, blocking roads and forcing the yaks and herders to stay put in areas without fodder. About 300 domesticated yaks were said to have perished due to starvation. Due to thinning snowfall and rising temperatures in Sikkim over the past 15 years, yak herders are shifting to higher pastures earlier in the year and stay longer in search of suitable grazing lands. They are relying more on stall feeding and facing declining yak health and productivity. Traditional grazing cycles are

A yak herder from the Lachenpa community with his herd

disrupted, leading to smaller herd sizes and a gradual move away from pastoralism by younger generations.

Virtually all Drokpa families now send their children to boarding schools to receive their formal education. Thus, the youth can no longer pick up the skills required to sustain life in the harsh living conditions of mountains that stand at altitudes between 4,500 and 5,500 metres. Today, only a dwindling number of ten to twelve Drokpa families carry on the traditional pattern of yak grazing, migrating and building houses from the hide of yaks. The skill of weaving tents is almost lost as most of the community has set up permanent houses in Thangu, about 4,000 metres above sea level. Members of the agro-pastoralist Lachenpa community in Thangu have also been engaged in the upkeep and herding of yaks through government programmes for alternative livelihoods. Tsering, a herder, shares that they earn Rs 9,725 per month on average for the gruelling work – barely enough to sustain the herd and their families.

More and more Drokpas are leaving the mountains, and the faithful yaks have only followed suit. Already on the brink of extinction, it may only be a matter of time until the whistles of young Drokpa herders calling out to their yaks become echoes of a tradition long lost in the depths of the Himalayas.

Whether the Drokpas of Sikkim or the Changpas of Ladakh, the slow fading of these highland ways of life has meant the silencing of one of the world's oldest early warning systems. As frontline witnesses to climate collapse, nomads of the high Himalayas are often the first – even among Himalayan communities – to sense the subtlest shifts in a landscape they have known intimately. Once an intrinsic part of the mountain ecosystem, their disappearing trails add to the increasing uncertainty in the changing world.

The Last Potters of Likir

By Clifton Shipway

The scent of wet earth mingled with the thin mountain air as Lamchung's weathered hands spun the clay wheel, shaping each vessel as though it held the essence of Ladakh's ancient soul. Nestled in the remote corners of the Himalayas, Likir's thousand-year-old craft still lingers, kept alive by the last practitioners of an ancient pottery tradition.

This extraordinary journey – supported by Royal Enfield's Social Mission, in collaboration with UNESCO – brought a team of eight riders, including myself, to one of the world's most breathtaking and culturally rich landscapes. Our mission: to document and help safeguard a tradition practiced by Lamchung and his son, Rikzin: the Last Potters of Likir.

As with most journeys in Ladakh, ours started with some acclimation to the thin air in the city of Leh. Once we could breathe with some semblance of normality, we set off toward Likir, a village perched beneath the shadows of snow-capped peaks and centered around a centuries-old monastery. The journey itself was an adventure, riding through the rugged terrain, with towering mountains on one side and steep drops on the other. As we approached, the village revealed itself like a hidden gem – whitewashed houses with prayer flags fluttering in the wind, each whispering blessings over the valley below.

Likir's claim to fame was once its skilled potters who crafted wares for kings, farmers, and monks alike. But today, this legacy has dwindled to a single household striving to maintain its ancestral craft. In Lamchung and Rikzin, the fragile link to Ladakh's pottery heritage endures – though how much longer it will survive remains uncertain.

The potters' home is as modest as the craft they hold dear. The whitewashed stone walls and wooden door frames speak of a simplicity that is almost timeless. Nearby, the open-air workshop is where the magic happens – an earthy space where clay is spun into intricate forms, where tradition takes shape through the skillful hands of a master.

When we first met Lamchung, his smile was shy but warm, eyes twinkling beneath a weathered brow that told stories of decades spent working with clay. He spoke softly, as though each word was shaped with the same care he gave to his pottery. "We are the last ones," he said, his voice tinged with a quiet resolve. "When my hands can no longer mold the clay, who will carry on our work?"

Over the following days, we were immersed in their world, watching Lamchung spin clay on the wheel, shaping it into pieces that seemed to come alive. His tools, hand-carved from juniper roots, were stories in themselves – each one a reflection of the region's deep, symbiotic relationship with nature.

Together with Rikzin, we ventured into the mountains to collect the raw materials for his craft. We scrambled over rocky slopes, navigating hidden trails known only to those born to these lands. In a secluded gorge, we found veins of the rich clay-rock, embedded in the earth like forgotten treasure. There we began to dig.

Back at their workshop, we joined in the backbreaking work of pounding the hardened/caked mud into powder using heavy wooden mallets. As we laboured alongside Rikzin, our hands blistered and our muscles ached – a visceral reminder of the physical toll this craft demands. The powdered stone was mixed with sand and water so they could be kneaded. "The clay must feel just right," Rikzin explained, his hands covered in the thick, wet substance. "Too soft, and it will collapse. Too hard, and it will crack – it tells you when it's ready."

One of the most unforgettable moments came when we helped build a makeshift kiln on the mountainside using stones, river moss, and dried yak manure as fuel, as it had always been done. The air was thick with the scent of burning moss, and as the flames danced in the twilight, they cast an ethereal glow on the surrounding peaks.

There was a hushed reverence as the first rays of dawn revealed the kiln's contents. Each pot, now hardened by fire, had taken on a deep, earthen hue.

On the final day of our stay, we carried one of Lamchung's finished pots to the Likir Monastery, where monks have used this pottery in daily worship for generations. The monastery, with its ancient murals and the scent of incense wafting through its halls, was the perfect culmination of our journey. There, amidst the chanting of monks, we offered the pot – a symbol of the enduring connection between the earth, the craft, and the spirit of Ladakh.

The future of this craft is uncertain. The rise of cheap, mass-produced goods has made pottery like Lamchung's a rarity, deeply personal but increasingly unprofitable in a world driven by convenience. Lamchung and Rikzin's struggle to keep this craft alive is symbolic of a larger challenge facing cultural preservation worldwide.

As we spoke with locals, it became clear that young people are drawn to the allure of modern jobs, leaving behind the labour-intensive crafts of their ancestors. It's not just pottery; Ladakh's entire cultural landscape is fraying at the edges, threatened by the unrelenting march of progress.

The author is an Australian photographer and adventure rider who has spent 22 years exploring the hidden corners of India. His work bridges remote places and untold stories to audiences around the world through powerful, human-centered storytelling.

People Stories

Mayel Lyang: The Distinctive World of the Lepchas at the Cusp of Climate Action

By Chong H.

In March 2025, as part of The Great Himalayan Exploration (TGHE), rider-researchers visited Dzongu in North Sikkim to explore two intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practices of the Lepchas and a Lepcha museum founded by a recipient of the Royal Enfield x Green Hub Grants for Conservation.

Dzongu, in the upper reaches of Sikkim, is home to the indigenous Lepcha people. The origin of the Lepchas is shrouded in myths, but it is established that they were the earliest inhabitants of the land. Born and raised in the lap of the alpine Himalayan forests, the Lepchas were a food-gathering tribe who claim they came from Mayel Lyang, a legendary kingdom on the slopes of the Khangchendzonga.

In 2023, this serene enclave was violently shaken when a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) swept through the Teesta river, washing away the only bridge that connected Dzongu to the rest of the state and the outside world. It was one more disaster in a series of climate crises Sikkim has faced in recent years – floods, landslides and erratic weather. The rooted Lepcha community has always been at the forefront of citizen movements for a more sustainable future for the state and when disaster struck, they responded with indigenous cane bridges – a form of climate action shaped by ancestral wisdom.

Lepcha Healing practices:

The Lepcha worldview is one of intimate ecological reverence, but equally welcoming to other cultures, beliefs and ideas – it is an evolving and progressive worldview. Every mountain, lake, and forest has a guardian spirit. Healing, in this system, is as much about the body as it is about restoring harmony between the human spirit and the surrounding natural forces.

Titi Gyatso, a Bongthing, or shaman, performed an elaborate healing ritual, facing the direction of the sacred peak and state guardian deity – Khangchendzonga.

With offerings of puffed rice and dry meat, he invoked a pantheon of nature gods – beginning with the ancestral deity of the household, then expanding outwards to include the gods of rivers, forests, and finally the great mountain deity.

Some afflictions call for the intervention of the Bongthing or the Mun. Unlike the Bongthing, the Mun – often women – are considered to have a stronger supernatural connection. Other times, the traditional herbal healer, known as the Mandoak, will prescribe natural herbs as a treatment for disease. Modern medicine has penetrated most parts of Sikkim and the Bongthing will refer the patient to the nearest doctor upon finding no sign of supernatural causes.

Science and parallel beliefs easily make their way into the lives of the tolerant and peace-loving Lepcha community. Jayjay Lepcha, a school headmistress from the region, is as much a practicing Buddhist as she is a scholar and advocate for the ancestral Bongthing and Mun systems. “Here, belief isn’t bound by a single religion,” she explains. “Our practices are rooted in coexistence, a deep respect for what we see and what we can’t.” Unique knowledge of their environment have long enabled the Lepchas to identify by name every animal, insect, and plant to find healing in nature; their vocabulary, however, had no word for “war”.

Lepcha Weaving:

“Nettle, locally known as Kuju, once grew abundantly in the wilderness”, says one of the craftswomen of the Self-Help Group Amusakchum “but since they’ve disappeared over time, we have to grow them in fields near our homes.” Nettle weaving, rooted in the indigenous knowledge systems of the Lepcha people, uses the raw material – *sisnu* (wild nettle) – native to the region, once gathered by the ancestors from nearby forests and spun into threads.

Efforts are ongoing to secure a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for the craft, which showcases the symbiotic relationship of the Lepchas with their surroundings. The deep interdependence between Lepcha culture and their ecology has helped earn Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) its distinction as India’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Mixed category (recognising both Nature and Culture).

The women demonstrate the Dum Praas – the traditional Lepcha men’s attire made from coarse, undyed nettle yarn. “It doesn’t take on any colour,” says Tuemit Lepcha, who now lives in Gangtok and visits Dzongu a few times a year to meet her mother and other weavers at the centre. Asked if the fabric itches, a weaver laughs and replies, “No, nettle is good. It keeps you warm in winter and cool in summer.”

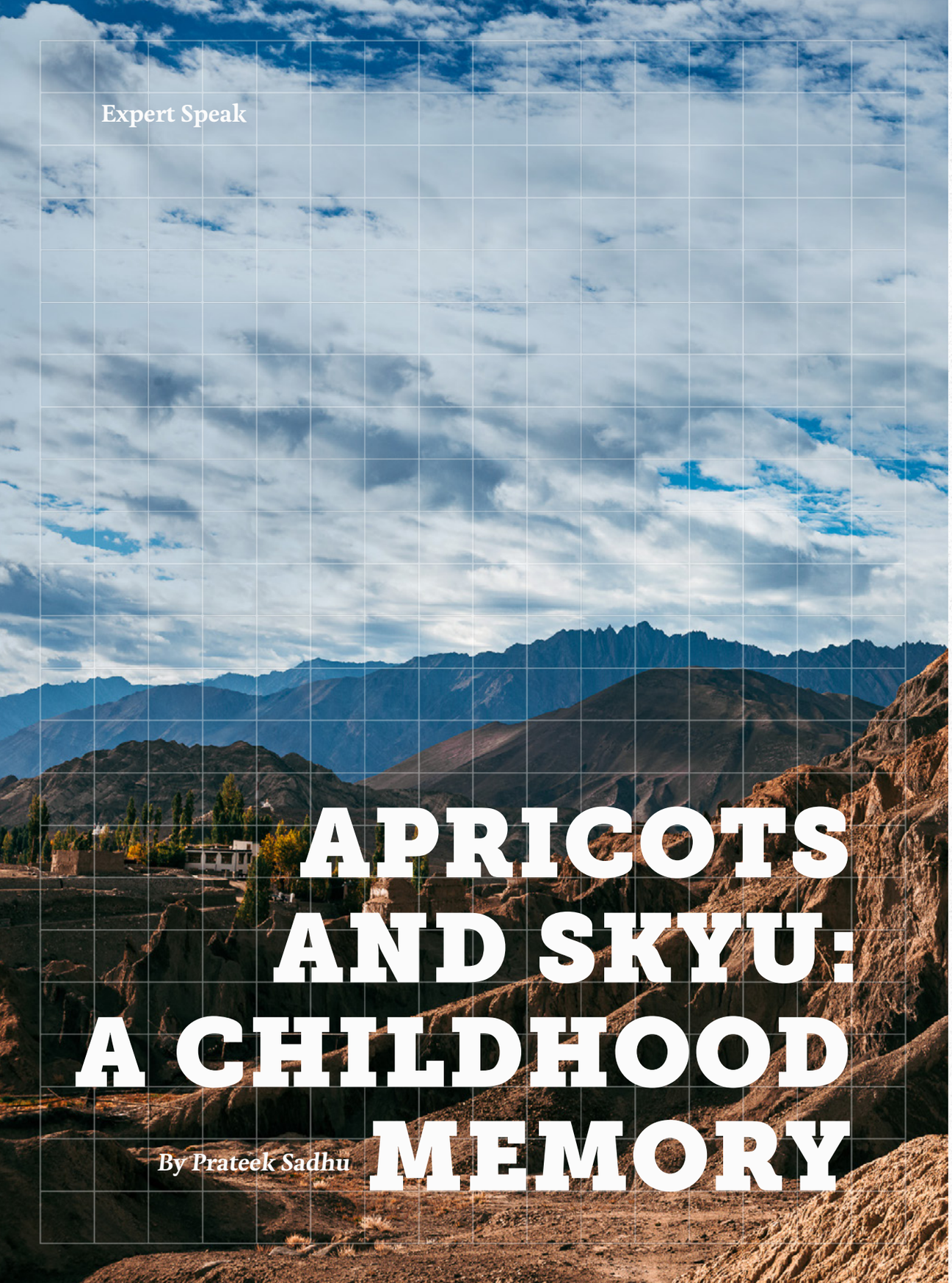
Lepcha House of Stories

Sungsa Lee, translated to mean “House of Stories” in the Lepcha language, sits atop a hill in Dzongu valley – a living museum housing heirlooms, books, agricultural tools belonging to generations of Lepcha families in the surrounding villages. Founded by local youth Seela Lepcha, an alumna of the 5th Green Hub Fellowship, this community-led initiative has been supported by the Royal Enfield x Green Hub Grants for Conservation.

Work on the Sungsa Lee began in October 2022, but progress has been slow. Flash floods in October 2023 and June 2024 – set off by the devastating Lhonak lake outburst – delayed construction, disrupted the transport of materials and cut off even basic necessities.

Locals tell us that Dzongu had once been home to another Lepcha museum. Located at the confluence of the Teesta and Rongyoung rivers, it was tragically swept away along with homes near the river banks, two bridges and the main highway to Dzongu. In the wake of this loss, Sungsa Lee has come to represent much more than pieces of Lepcha culture. The wooden Lepcha house, which holds the lived histories of the people, now stands as a symbol of rebuilding with community and survival in a world shaken by climate change.

FROM THE HIMALAYAN KITCHEN



APRICOTS AND SKYU: A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

By Prateek Sadhu

There are places that change you. Ladakh, for me, is one of them and that's not just because of its landscapes that stretch wider than the sky, but because of what it awakened in me: a deep, lingering nostalgia tied to food, tradition and the strength of the mountains.

My earliest memories of Ladakh take me to a tiny village called Sanjak in Shakar Chiktan Subdivision of Kargil district. The village, situated right on the banks of the Indus River, is known for producing a famous fruit – apricot, locally known as *chulli*. My father, an engineer, was posted there, and every summer our family would pack up for this little settlement between Leh and Kargil. Sanjak was the kind of place that looked like a dot on a map but filled our hearts with more adventure than any city could offer.

We didn't just pack clothes; we packed life. Bags stuffed with groceries, badminton rackets, cartons of Frooti juice, chocolates – and sometimes even live chickens. We had to carry everything. There were no shops waiting with stocked shelves. We lived off what we brought, what we grew and what the land and the people generously offered. It was simple and beautiful.

Apricot trees lined the road as we drove in, the branches so heavy with fruit it felt like nature was giving us a warm welcome. I'd eat them by the dozen, despite my mother's constant warning: "You'll get a stomach ache." I usually did. But it was worth it.

Years later, in October 2024, I returned to Ladakh with a different purpose. As part of The Great Himalayan Exploration. This time, I wasn't just a child tagging along on family trips. I was there as a participant-observer, documenting living heritage, culture, and food. It felt like digging into the past while stepping into the future.

That journey took me to parts of Ladakh I had never visited before. Each village held its own story, its own recipe for survival and joy. I learned something that most outsiders don't realise: Ladakh is not monolithic. Every region – Nubra, Kargil, Zanskar – has a slightly different language, a distinct rhythm, and, of course, its own unique flavours.

We visited Likir, where the hands of potters shaped stories from clay. In Chilling, the air rang with the sound of hammers shaping metal. It was here that generations of craftsmanship passed down in every stroke. We watched women spin wool by hand, weaving together threads on ancient looms, and marvelled at the intricate *tsepos*, hand-woven baskets of Nubra. It was all heritage – alive and breathing.

Food, though, was the pulse.

I remember the *skyu*, thick wheat dumplings simmered in soup with local vegetables or meat – served steaming hot in homes across Ladakh. During the expedition, what was a staple in Sanjak became a symbol. This single bowl held the essence of winter comfort, community, and culture.

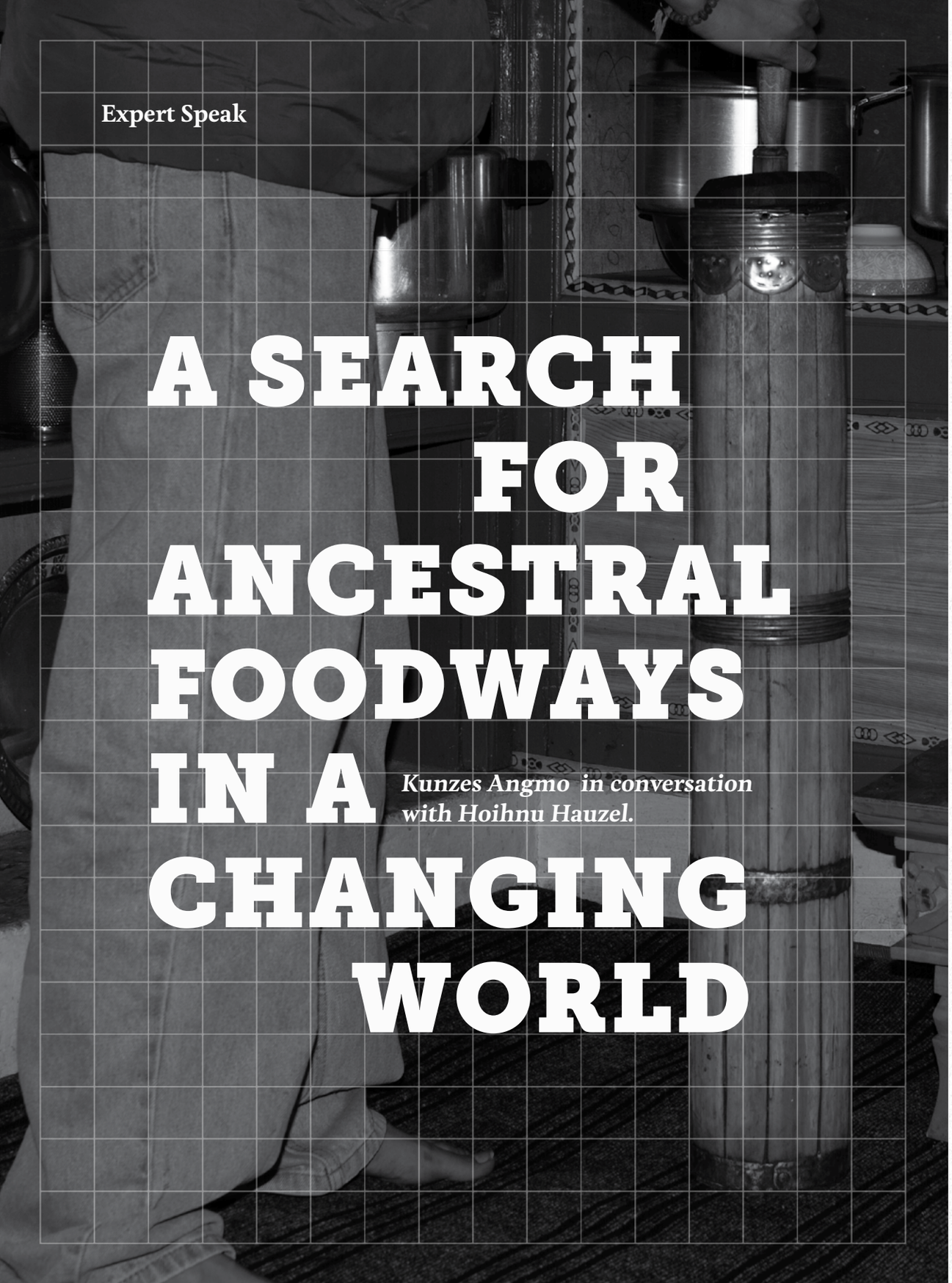
It was winter comfort community, and culture in a single bowl. We shared gurgur cha (butter tea) with the elders, its salty warmth becoming a conversation starter in cold rooms. Every meal became a story, and every story had a flavour.

As a chef, these experiences weren't just inspiration, they were grounding. I had forgotten the taste of turnips pulled fresh from the earth, the sharp clarity of radish that hasn't travelled a thousand kilometres to reach your plate. There was something sacred about how food connected to land, to season, to community. Ladakh still holds that purity.

I dream of a day when Ladakhi food takes its rightful place on the culinary map of India, not just as a novelty, but as a culture in itself. I can see it in restaurants in Bombay or Bangalore, serving not just dishes but stories from mountain homes, from apricot orchards, from the winding roads of Sanjak. Because food is never just food. It's a way of remembering who we are, and where we come from.

And for me, every bite of Ladakh, be it from a childhood apricot to a hand-served bowl of skyu – tastes like home.

The author is the executive chef and founder of Restaurant NAAR, located in Amaya, Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, India. A Kashmir-born culinary innovator whose farm-to-table philosophy is deeply inspired by his roots.



A SEARCH FOR ANCESTRAL FOODWAYS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Kunzes Angmo in conversation with Hoihnu Hauzel.

Kunzes Angmo grew up with the firm voice of her mother echoing in her ears: "No matter how far you travel from home or how high you rise in life – no matter the success you achieve – you should still be able to return to Ladakh and light a traditional Ladakhi *thap* (traditional cooking hearth). Because that's where you come from. And no matter where life takes you, you must never forget your roots. They ground everything you become." Her mother, a doctor posted across various Indian states on deputation, instilled in her a deep love for Ladakhi food early on.

Remarkably, even while living outside Ladakh, their family often ate more traditional fare than those back home. It wasn't out of rigidity, but a quiet insistence on staying anchored to their roots. That belief now guides Kunzes' life work: preserving Ladakh's culinary heritage and making it meaningful in today's world.

Kunzes founded Artisanal Alchemy in 2017. Her culinary pop-ups and intimate dining experiences – hosted just ten times a month, for half the year – are immersive, sensorial journeys. Dishes like Skyu, Gur Gur Cha, and local cheese called *churpey* made using traditional methods become entry points for broader conversations on climate, biodiversity, identity, and displacement. "My lunches often stretch from three to six hours – not because of the number of courses, but because every dish comes with a story, a slice of history served alongside the food," she explains.

"It's not just a change in diet," Kunzes says. "It's a fading of stories, rituals, and resilience."

One such dish is Skyu, a hearty stew made with thumbprint-shaped wheat pasta and seasonal vegetables, traditionally eaten year-round. It was once prepared using indigenous wheat varieties like *toh-kar* (white wheat), grown in the breezy mid-altitudes of Nubra and Sham. But over time, this agricultural diversity has declined. The combined impact of army provisioning needs, changing farming practices, and the introduction of subsidised Public Distribution System (PDS) staples – such as rice, wheat, and sugar in the 1960s and 1970s – gradually pushed out native crops like barley and buckwheat. This shift marked a deeper transformation beyond the culinary. Earlier, Ladakhi families relied on subsistence agriculture; each household was a self-sustaining unit, resilient and deeply connected to its environment. But with the growth of government jobs, tourism, and the service sector, people moved away from farming. As Kunzes observes, "Where you live and how you interact with

“What we eat shapes who we are,” she says. “And if we forget our food, we forget ourselves.”

the land around you – along with what that land can naturally sustain in terms of plant and animal life – shapes everything: what you grow, how you grow it, how you process it, and ultimately, what and how you eat.” With the increasing availability of market foods and imported goods – from Korean ramen to European cheeses – Ladakh’s palate is changing. “You now find families eating bread, Maggi, and pasta instead of *paba* or *SKYU*,” she says.

“To cook Skyu properly is to respect the rhythm of the land,” she adds. At her Artisanal Alchemy pop-ups, Kunzes serves a spring version made with sun-dried turnips preserved through the harsh winter – reviving the Ladakhi practice of seasonal preservation. She sees each meal as a medium to discuss sustainability not as a trend, but as an inherited instinct born of necessity in a cold desert with scarce biodiversity.

Another centerpiece is Solja Shrushma in the local dialect, though it’s also commonly known as Cha Tsaku or Cha Khante.

Tourists often refer to it as Gur Gur Cha – the iconic butter tea that was once a daily fixture in Ladakhi homes and monasteries. Traditionally churned in a wooden *dongmo*, it was made using Tibetan tea bricks, salt, and butter sourced from local or Jersey cows reared locally. Rich in antioxidants, fats, and minerals, it offered warmth, energy, and a sense of continuity. “Monks sipped it between chants. Guests drank it in silence. Refilling the bowl was an unspoken act of welcome,” Kunzes explains. Some families even had a dedicated markhang (butter room), and Ladakh once had the highest per capita butter consumption in India.

Today, though, the *dongmo* are decorative artefacts, replaced by quick stove-brewed versions using packaged butter and Darjeeling tea. The taste has changed – and so has the memory. “It’s not just a change in diet,” Kunzes says. “It’s a fading of stories, rituals, and resilience.” She

draws a connection between the decline of subsistence agriculture and self-reliance – which has led to the loss of native grains, vegetables, plants, and herbs, and with them, the unique Trans-Himalayan Ladakhi terroir – and the rise of lifestyle diseases that were once uncommon in Ladakh’s high-altitude communities.

Kunzes takes her food outside Ladakh – but only in winters. “Winter is when Ladakhis traditionally slow down, reflect, and eat from what they preserved. So I bring that season of stillness and introspection to cities like Mumbai,” she says. In doing so, she also highlights the tension between Ladakh’s seasonal rhythms and the ceaseless speed of urban life.

She’s especially committed to reconnecting children with ancestral foods. “Kids are growing up on ramen and European cheese but have no idea what *paba* tastes like,” she says. Through her storytelling dinners, she introduces them to dishes once made with indigenous grains like tohkar. Grains like barley, which has low gluten, and buckwheat, which is gluten-free, don’t bind easily – they need to be blended with wheat to form workable dough. That very challenge, she explains, deepens your understanding of both the ingredients and the land they come from.

Ultimately, Kunzes, much like Margaret Mead, a cultural anthropologist who recognised food as a powerful cultural force, believes that food is far more than sustenance. It is geography, memory, identity, and survival.

ON THE ROAD WITH MANOU

Manou is a photographer based in India. A graduate of the National Institute of Fashion Technology, his work explores identity, self-expression, and street fashion across the country. In 2010, he launched Wearabout, a blog that has since been featured in The New Yorker, The Guardian, The Hindu, Economic Times, the Museum at FIT New York, and Zeit Magazin. Since 2013, Manou has led a peripatetic life, travelling widely within India and documenting its diverse cultural landscape.

"Travel Sketches /
In Ladakh's villages, fields grow where the water flows, herds move with the seasons, and days are shaped by work that's stayed the same for centuries.

The herders talk about winters that don't freeze like they used to. Farmers point to harvests out of step with the old rhythms. The change has been slow, gradual, and visible to anyone who has been here long enough. What happens when the land can't keep up with the world being built on top of it? No one really knows. Some call it progress. Others call it loss.

In photos, it's still all postcard perfect – the bluest skies, endless plateaus, the Milky Way across the night, long winding rivers." - Manou

Arrived in Aranu, a village of 40 families in Nubra Valley, to document Skyu, a traditional soup-based dish.

In the photo: Sonam Yangzes, Dorje Sangma, Tsewang Dolma (the eldest, 64), Phuntsok Angmo, Pema Yangchen, Dechen Chodrol (the youngest, 32), and Lobzang Lasket.
What do they cherish most? Their village – the bonds between them. They work side by side in the fields, pray together, and share a deep love for the land and summer's fleeting warmth. If someone needs help, the others step in without hesitation. This is their closeness: a community woven tight by labour, faith, care, and songs and dance.

Skaldang (72)

Father of seven – all sons, all in the army. For years, he transported supplies on horseback to the India-China border near the Saser Kangri glacier. Each trip took 15 days. The pay was good. But he's always been a farmer at heart. He got married at 25 and has been looking after his land all his life. It's been five years since he last made those trips. Now, he and his wife, Dolma, focus on their homestay, fields, and cows. Life here moves slowly, rooted in the land's rhythms.
Photographed at his house in Aranu, Nubra.

Tsewang Dolma spreads 20–30 kilos of tomatoes to dry – a process that takes 10–15 days.

Higher up the mountain, she tends wheat and turnip fields. Turnips will be ready in 20 days. The climb takes an hour on foot, part of her routine once or twice a week.
The family's livestock – two cows, two sheep, and five goats – graze in high pastures, 1–2 hours away by vehicle. They'll stay there for 3–4 months, until the family brings them back before winter.
Photographed in Garkone, the Aryan village.

Water-powered grain mill, Aranu.
A traditional mechanism still in use today.

Tsering Dolma collects grass from the fields to weave a *tsepo* (traditional basket). Next, she'll check if the water-powered mill is working.

We first met a month ago while documenting Skyu. She'd invited me home – we shared tsampa with thick homemade curd and handfuls of juli (apricots). I photographed her with her favorite bag, which she carries every day. Photographed in Aranu, Nubra.

Rigzin Namgyal, potter, with his family.

He learned pottery from his father, Lamchung Tsephel (67). They work in a studio built in 2005 using local materials – shagleb (rock) and dhasa (clay) sourced from Tarutse, a village 30 minutes from Likir.
Likir, home to about 180 families, is where Rigzin and his brother Lobsang live. "Thirty years ago, snow would reach our kneecaps," Lobsang recalls winters of the past. He left school after 7th grade and now helps at home.
Photographed in their garden, Likir.

Tsewang Rinchen (83) – farmer from Hargam village
Tsering Kunzom (83) – farmer from Taksha village

Tsewang Rinchen built most of his 40-year-old house himself. A life of movement has taken him to Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and many pilgrimages to Delhi. "It's clean here," he says. "You can drink water from anywhere." But he notices a change: "It wasn't this hot before. More people, more vehicles, more pollution. People are less honest now."
He's been a mason, carpenter, and later a road contractor – he even built one near Aranu. Now, he spends his days in prayer.
His wife, Tsering Kunzom, reflects: "I like that we are paired together in this life."
Photographed in Hargam, Diskit.

Nima Tsering (born 1959) stands beside the village's water-powered mill. "Two quintals a day," he says. "Feed it grain in the morning; by evening, the flour is ready."

Each 100 kg sack lasts him 3–4 months. Behind him, the Tulum Puti Tokpo stream and meltwater from the Siachen glacier – sources that sustain life here.
He's been to Saser Kangri. "The glacier has receded by kilometers," he says. "It's melting – not just naturally, but also because of the army's presence."
Photographed in Aranu, Nubra.

"If there's snow in winter, there'll be good grapes."
Before 1999, snowfall reached 8–9 inches. Now? Barely 4–5.
Since then, the summers have grown hotter too.
"Now If we bend down we can smell the heat. Before, we'd freeze in the snow."

"Even Yaldor Nala, an hour from here, would get 4-5 feet of snow. Not anymore."
Photographed in Garkone.

Tsering Norphel (74)

Amar (27), Ashish (23), and Puran (34) from Piparkoti village – 2–3 hours from the India-Nepal border, or 1.5 hours from Tikunia crossing.

All three dropped out of high school and used to work construction in Likir. Now, they're in Alchi, helping repair parts of the monastery.
Amar reflects: "There are more apricot trees now – more trees mean more oxygen. Before, just carrying bricks made you pant."
Back home, they rotate crops: mustard and masoor dal, then wheat, then potatoes, gobi, chili, garlic, ginger, spinach. "The only things we buy are salt and sugar," Amar says.
They used to receive urea fertiliser from the government. "It spoils the soil at first, but then the land adjusts." Amar thinks aloud: "Maybe I'll buy a buffalo when I go back."
Photographed in Alchi during a tea break.

Rajan, from Tikapur, Nepal. Dropped out in the second year of his BA.

This is his first season building telecom towers in Atting, Zanskar.
"I've done 15 already – five more to go.
Should finish by October," he says.
He's been living in Sani. "Don't like it much there," he shrugs.
Photographed in Atting, Zanskar Valley.

Dhundup Dorje (33)

Shepherd. One wife, four kids, 200 goats. Like many others here, he makes a living selling pashmina wool.
Photographed in Phu, Korzok (Changthang).

Construction work by the river, Zanskar.

Dry compost toilet in Chilling.

Traditionally, all houses in Ladakh used a dry compost toilet. Built close to the main structure, it served as an ingenious solution to managing human waste sustainably in the water-stressed landscape.

The weaver ladies: Namgyal Dolma (left), Dorje Dolma, and Pema Chodon (right) from Phu.

What do they need most? Phone network and Sixth Schedule.
Where do they go in winter? Down.
Earnings? ₹4,000/kg for pashmina, ₹200/kg for sheep wool.
Wool per goat? 50–80–250g, depending.

Photographed in Phu, Changthang.

A glacier on the way to Aranu in Nubra Valley.

Shrinking year by year, it affects both the landscape and the water systems that depend on glacier-fed streams.

RURAL SPORTS, EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Royal Enfield Social Mission is building a grassroots-led ecosystem for Ice hockey in high-altitude regions of the Western Himalayas.

As part of its initiative to elevate **Winter Sports** in the Indian Himalayan region, Royal Enfield Social Mission is building an ecosystem for Ice hockey from the grassroots level in high-altitude regions like Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. By supporting coach development, training, access to equipment and developmental leagues, the programme nurtures local talent and builds community engagement. The long-term vision is to help the Indian national team to compete at the Winter Olympics and to position Ladakh as a coveted winter tourism destination. In addition to Ice hockey, initiatives also support the development of grassroots football in Changthang and provide impetus to alternative education and increased healthcare across these remote regions.

Ice hockey has long been intrinsic to winter life in Ladakh. Building on the deep-rooted cultural connection, Royal Enfield Social Mission is working to transform the sport from a seasonal pastime into a structured pathway toward national representation and global recognition.

Following the launch of 'The Gamechanger: Blueprint for the Development of Ice hockey in Ladakh', and the successful implementation of the Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League and Spiti Cup, the sport is moving towards a prominent position in the trans-Himalayan sporting landscape. The sport's growing institutional backing – from the formation of a dedicated Steering Committee to structured coaching and talent development – marks a significant shift. Local players now have access to trained coaches, better equipment, and national exposure. With their second season, the Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League in Ladakh and the Spiti Cup in Himachal Pradesh Powered by Royal Enfield have become regular fixtures in the Himalayan winter calendar, creating a steady rhythm for scouting, training, and competition.

More than 800 children across Ladakh and Himachal have participated under the Learn to Play programme, and the next generation of coaches is being trained with support from international experts. Through structured progression and long-term investment, the Social Mission aims to support the emergence of a national Ice hockey team capable of competing at the Winter Olympics in 2042 – a collective aspiration that is steadily taking shape.

Indian women's Ice hockey national team clinched the bronze medal at the 2025 IIHF Women's Asia Cup held in Al-Ain, UAE.

In a significant milestone for Indian women's Ice hockey, the national team clinched the bronze medal at the 2025 IIHF Women's Asia Cup held in Al-Ain, UAE. This breakthrough comes alongside the inauguration of a newly renovated Olympic-sized ice rink at Maharana Pratap Sports College in Dehradun, Uttarakhand – a development that signals meaningful progress for the sport both in the Himalayan region and at the national level.

FOOTBALL

The Changthang Football Initiative, in partnership with Pel Drukpa Charitable Trust, is building a strong foundation for grassroots football in remote villages in Changthang in Ladakh. By focusing on coaching quality, student participation and early exposure to professional-grade facilities, the initiative is embedding the sport into school life and offering aspirational pathways for children in underserved communities. With coaching camps, exposure matches and inter-school competitions, the programme is already delivering results – including national-level selections and strong performances in zonal tournaments.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Alternative learning and education programmes across Ladakh, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh are rooted in a belief that learning must be both locally relevant and creatively engaging. In Kargil, the Project-Based Learning approach, implemented with rZamba Trust, is transforming the classroom into a space of curiosity and interaction. Similarly, Alternative Learning Centres across Ladakh, implemented by Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, are equipping local youth to deliver quality education in areas where formal systems remain limited.

With environmental literacy as another priority, initiatives like The Himalayan Sustainability Championship- Zero-Waste School programme, implemented with Nature Science Initiative in Uttarakhand, introduces students and educators to waste audits, plastic literacy, biodiversity walks and sustainable living practices.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Shiksha Learning Centre project addresses the specific needs of pastoral communities – integrating sustainability, health and education through experiential models such as educational street plays, menstrual health campaigns and public art installations.

To safeguard intangible cultural heritage, the Royal Enfield Social Mission also supports winter Bhoti language classes across Lahaul, allowing over 200 learners to reconnect with their linguistic and cultural roots.

Access to healthcare remains a significant challenge in high-altitude, remote regions of the Himalayas, where one of the most pressing concerns is vision-related health, with high UV exposure and limited eye care services placing communities at elevated risk. In response, the Royal Enfield Social Mission, in partnership with CEVA, MUSE, Dr Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital and Lady Willingdon Hospital, has launched targeted health interventions through specialised eye care and general health camps.

In Pangi alone, over 10% of the population – approximately 2,300 individuals – received critical eye care services. Across Pangi and Spiti, a total of 2,790 patients benefited from comprehensive medical attention, including major surgical procedures and cataract operations.

Then and Now

ICE HOCKEY IN LADAKH

1960s

Ice Hockey Match played at Tangste - Durbuk, Changthang, between teams from the Vikas Battalion, Indian Army.

Ladakh Scouts begins to play ice hockey.

1966 Ice Hockey Match played at Durbuk between Ladakh Scouts & Sikh unit.

1970s

Indian Army discovers potential of Karzoo pond as an ice rink.

Ice Hockey Match played between Ladakh Scouts & Vikas 3 Unit. Ladakh Scouts wins.

Local interest grows, informal games held on natural ice surfaces, frozen lakes & ponds.

Equipment is makeshift, ice skating blades are procured from Shimla & nailed to army boots.

Ice skating blades nailed to army boots.

1980s

Ice hockey becomes more popular, especially among Ladakhi youth who start forming unofficial teams.

Informal games become more organized, with people gathering for hockey matches on Karzoo pond.

Cosmos team, Trishul Ice Hockey Tournament 1982. Photo courtesy Gyal Wangyal, Moses Kunzang , Tashi Morup

1982

Civilian teams play matches for first time.

Trishul Ice Hockey Tournament held, for army & civilian teams.

1983

Ladakh Ice Skating Club players go to Shimla for first time to learn about the game & procure equipment.

Farooq Abdullah, chief minister of J&K, attends an ice hockey tournament at Karzoo zing, Leh, 1983.

Photo courtesy Moses Kunzang

1984

Marshal Tito Ice Hockey Trophy, Shimla; Men's Jammu & Kashmir State team, of which several players are from Ladakh, wins gold.

1986

1st National Ice Hockey Championship, Shimla; J&K State team wins gold.

1990s

Players begin acquiring better equipment. A more formal structure is put in place.

1995

Ladakh Winter Sports Club (LWSC) is established.

1996

LWSC begins to organize regular tournaments in winter.

1998

1st National Winter Games, Gulmarg. Finals played between Army Red & JK Red, game canceled because the ice on the rink melted, both teams declared winners.

1st Chief Minister's Ice Hockey Cup played.

First local teams in Leh formed, Spituk & Skara Sports Club.

2000s

2nd National Winter Game, Shimla, J&K Team wins Gold.

Ladakhi players begin to be recognized nationally.

2001

1st National Ice Hockey Championship, Leh; JK Red wins gold.

Canadian High Commission Team travels to Leh

ladakh Scouts in Shimla

Photo courtesy, Chhering Motup

2002

2nd National Ice Hockey Championship, Leh; Army team wins.

Women play competitive ice hockey for the first time, compete in Chief Minister's Cup, Leh; SECMOL wins.

Canadian Embassy team visits to play first Indo-Canadian Friendship Cup, this has been held every year since.

Indian Winter Games officials travel to

Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City to learn more about ice hockey.

Cosmos team felicitated at karzoo zing after winning national game against Shimla Ice Hockey Club at Shimla, 1986.

Photo courtesy Gyal Wangyal

2004

Coaches from New Zealand Ice Hockey Federation visit Leh to coach boys for ice hockey & girls for figure skating.

4th National Winter Games, organised by Indian Olympic Association,Gulmarg; Army team wins Gold, JK Red silver & JK Blue bronze.

2005

Indian Army Red win Men's National Ice Hockey Tournament, Leh; JK Blue wins silver.

Canadians donate skate sharpening equipment to Leh.

Local government donates land to LWSC for a permanent ice hockey rink.

National interest grows for Ladakhi players as they begin to excel, the sport gains popularity.

2006

National Ice Hockey Championship played in Kargil; Indian Army Red wins.

2007

National Ice Hockey Championship, Leh; Rimo Club wins.

Montreal Canadiens sponsor coaches to travel to Ladakh to host ice hockey camps.

2008

CEC (Chief Executive Councilor) Cup Ice Hockey Championship begins.

5th National Winter Games, Gulmarg, JK Blue wins gold.

Ladakh Ice Hockey team plays in Challenge Cup of Asia, Abu Dhabi.

Design for permanent indoor all-season ice hockey rink begins.

2009

Ladakhi women organize themselves into teams, begin to compete in local & national level tournaments.

Adam Sherlip (founder, Hockey Foundation) becomes first coach of Indian Men's Ice Hockey team.

Referees in Leh receive training on the rules of ice hockey from Sherlip.

4th National Ice Hockey Championship, Leh; Indian Army Red wins.

2nd IIHF Challenge Cup of Asia, Abu Dhabi; 26 players on men's national team are from Ladakh.

2010s

1st Drass Ice Hockey Championship played.

Ladakhi players start representing India internationally. Growing global interest in Ladakh as a venue for ice hockey games.

2011

IIHF Challenge Cup of Asia, Kuwait.

As international interest & support grows, there is an awareness in Ladakh for the need for structured training.

1st South Asian Winter Games, Dehradun.

2012

Ice cleaning machine, "Zamboni", donated by Marshall (UK). Never used because of apprehensions that its' weight may be too much for the frozen natural water bodies.

Men's National team of all Ladakhi players has its first international victory at Challenge Cup of Asia 2012 against Macau.

2013

More international teams travel to Ladakh to play in tournaments- Spitres from England, Geronimo from Germany & Finland.

2014

IIHF Ice Hockey Challenge Cup of Asia, Bishkek; team from Ladakh represents India.

2015

Ladakh Women's Ice Hockey Foundation (LWIHF) is established. National Men's team plays in Challenge Cup of Asia, Thailand.

2016

Women's National Ice Hockey team, composed largely of Ladakhi women, plays their first international match at Challenge Cup of Asia, Taipei. Noor Jahan is awarded Best Goalkeeper of the tournament.

IIHF Ice Hockey Challenge Cup of Asia, Bishkek; team from Ladakh represents India.

2017

Men's National team plays in Challenge Cup of Asia, Kuwait, wins silver.

National Women's team, of largely all Ladakhi players, has its first international victory in Thailand at Challenge Cup of Asia against Philippines.

2018

Men's National team plays in Challenge Cup of Asia, Malaysia.

Guinness Book of World Records recognizes Ladakh for playing the highest ice hockey game at an altitude of 14,308 feet at Kargyam, Changthang.

Coaches from LWIHF travel to Kaza, Himachal Pradesh, to train youth from there.

2019

Women's National team participates in Challenge Cup of Asia, Abu Dhabi; wins bronze.

First games in Leh are held on an ice hockey rink at the still under construction NDS (Nawang Dorjay Stobdan) stadium, & not on a pond.

Both men & women national teams have several players from Ladakh. They regularly take part in IIHF tournaments, winning several games.

2020s

The administration of the Union Territory of Ladakh promotes Ice Hockey in the region.

LG (Lieutenant General) Cup begins.

Plans for an all-season artificial ice rink in Leh begin.

2021

Increased government & private sector support is directed towards Ice Hockey in Ladakh for training programs, scholarships, & equipment procurement.

2022

Ladakh women's team wins the 9th National Ice Hockey Tournament, Kaza, Himachal Pradesh.

2023

Royal Enfield & UT Ladakh release a Blue Print for an Ice Hockey League.

2024

The Nawang Dorjay Stobdan (NDS) Stadium Ice Rink opens.

First time Khelo India Winter Games held in Leh. Ladakh men's team makes it to seminals, women's team wins silver.

Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League Season 1 held.

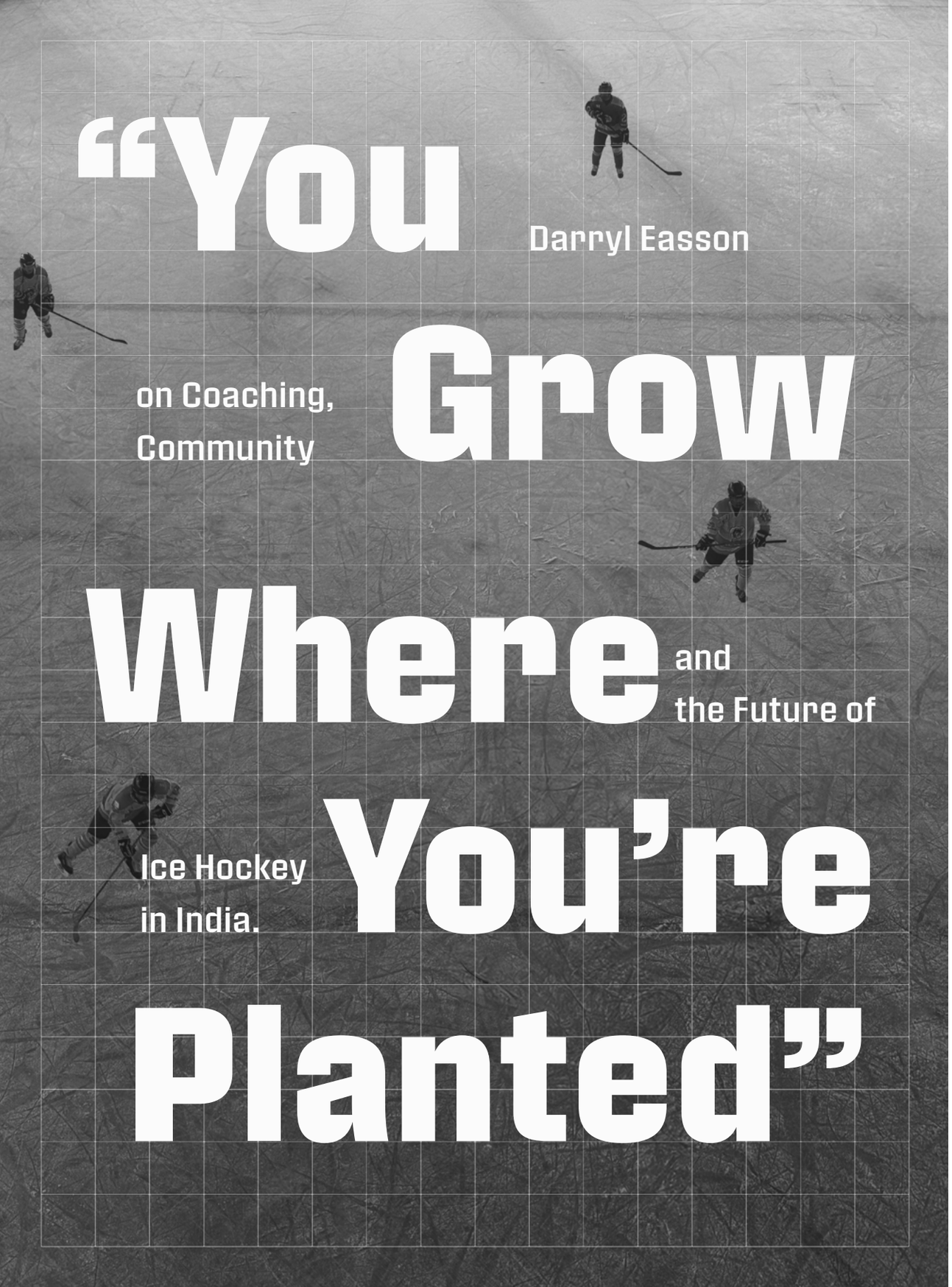
2025

Royal Enfield conducted a 'Train the Trainer' programme, led by IIHF certified instructor comprising of 18 coaches from Ladakh.

Royal Enfield expanded its 'Learn to Play' programme, reaching 600 children across 10 villages.

Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League Season 2 held.

This timeline was curated at Journeying Across The Himalayas by Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation



“I Found Hockey People”

“When you’re invited to a country that’s not traditionally a hockey power, you wonder what to expect,” says Darryl. “But what I’ve always found, including in India, is that the people who show up are hockey people. We may be separated by geography, but we speak the same language: passion for the game.”

The “Train the Trainers” initiative supported by Royal Enfield Social Mission brought together a diverse mix – some were stepping onto the ice in a coaching capacity for the first time, while others brought prior experience. “It was great to see that blend,” Darryl reflects. “You could already identify a few coaches who weren’t just learning but actively passing on knowledge – exactly what a programme like this aims to spark.”

Darryl emphasises the long-term vision behind training coaches first. “There’s an old saying we used in the IIHF: Teach a player, and you reach one person. Teach a coach, and you reach 20 or 30. That’s how we build something sustainable.”

Despite being an emerging nation in the sport, India’s Ice hockey community surprised Darryl with its sheer enthusiasm and scale. What stood out was not just the numbers, but the mindset. “In some places I’ve worked, people are resistant – they think they know it all. But in India? People were like sponges. They were hungry to learn, eager to take what they’d absorbed and bring it back to their villages and communities.”

This willingness to learn, combined with a do-more-with-less mentality, left a strong impression. “It’s easy to say ‘We don’t have money or rinks’ and do nothing. But here, people are saying ‘Let’s use what we do have – and keep building.’”

Darryl draws parallels with the growth of hockey in the U.S., where the sport first took root in colder northern states. “In India, the Himalayas are that northern stronghold,” he notes. “Natural ice is the great equaliser, and the region has become a natural incubator for the sport.”

He adds, “The exciting part? You’re not working across a fragmented geography yet. Most of your players are in one zone. That gives you a real chance to grow in a focused way before expansion.”

“I was honestly amazed to learn how many active players there are – particularly in Ladakh and the Himalayan belt. India likely has more registered players than the bottom six or seven countries already in the IIHF system.”

Even without indoor rinks, he sees innovation in how the sport is being sustained. “They’ve started putting roofs over outdoor rinks. It’s not just about survival – it’s about creating the best possible experience, even outdoors. That’s the right attitude.”

From his recent engagement in India, Darryl observed gaps, but also great potential. “Some coaches knew the game well, but missed key fundamentals like historical context, for instance. It’s not just about teaching drills; it’s about giving them the whole picture.”

He also saw signs of strong internal leadership. “A few had already started leading Learn to Play programmes. Some of the women players were coaching as well, which is fantastic. That’s how you build holistically – not just bottom-up, but all around.”

What’s next for Indian Ice hockey? Darryl believes it’s about cultivating a culture of professionalism, not in a corporate sense but in mindset.

“Professionalism isn’t about money – it starts in your heart and your head. It’s about how you prepare, how you communicate, and what you expect from yourself and others.”

He urges organisers to articulate those expectations clearly. “When players and coaches know what’s expected, that’s when things start aligning. That’s when you can scale up.”

India’s next big step, Darryl believes, should include a structured development pattern – integrating coaching courses, referee training, off-ice conditioning, and long-term planning. “Right now, during the long off-season when ice isn’t available, there needs to be a plan to keep people engaged and learning.”

And yes, indoor rinks are a game-changer. “You’re never going to get rid of natural ice – and you shouldn’t. But indoor facilities will give kids multiple pathways to grow.”

With nearly 2,000 players in the region and international support growing – “It’s not a hidden secret anymore,” he smiles – Darryl sees a strong future for Indian Ice hockey. “You’re not starting from ground zero. You’ve already got momentum. Now it’s about steering that momentum with purpose.”

The author is a long-time mentor and coach instructor affiliated with the IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation). He has spent much of his career developing Ice hockey in non-traditional hockey nations. His recent stint in India as part of the Royal Enfield Social Mission’s- ‘Train the Trainers’ programme for Ice hockey offered him yet another reminder of the sport’s universal language – and the power of grassroots momentum.

Players Spotlight

Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League

Tsewang Chuskit

Age: 30
Position: Forward
Team: Changla Lamos
Region: Tangtse Village, Ladakh

Tsewang Chuskit's journey into Ice hockey began on the frozen lakes of Tangtse village near Pangong Lake in Ladakh. Born into a region where winter transforms the landscape into a vision of ice, she first laced up makeshift skates at the age of 10. Her older brother and local boys would gather to play on the ice, and though girls weren't expected to join, Tsewang Chuskit was resolute. She watched intently, learned by observing, and slowly began to join in – often the only girl on the ice.

In her early years, proper equipment was a luxury. She recalls playing with borrowed skates, sometimes shared among five girls. But everything changed in high school, when the Indian Army and SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) stepped in with structured training and donated gear. It was at SECMOL in 2014 that her talent truly began to take shape. With no dedicated girls' team in her area, she trained and competed with boys, which toughened her game and sharpened her skills.

Her big break came in 2016, when she was selected to represent India in its first-ever Women's Ice Hockey Team. Since then, Chuskit has not only represented the country but has also taken it upon herself to change the game for others like her. She co-founded the Ladakh Women's Ice Hockey Foundation to address gender barriers, raise awareness and ensure that girls have access to proper training and equipment.

In the 2025 Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League (REIHL) Season 2, Chuskit emerged as a standout performer. She scored five goals in a single game, followed by a hat-trick in the semifinals. But beyond her stats, it was her leadership and confidence on the ice that truly made her a role model for young players across Ladakh.

Today, the 30-year-old is not only the captain of the national team but also working in the Indian Army and is a grassroots coach. She's nurturing the next generation of girls from Ladakh, who now step onto the ice with proper gear, structured programme and a belief that they belong there. With the growing support of initiatives like Royal Enfield's Social Mission, *Chuskit's dream is bold yet grounded: to see Ladakhi girls training from an early age, competing on international platforms, and one day, representing India at the Olympics.*

Ghulam Mustafa

Age: 27
Position: Defender
Team: Kang Sings
Region: Leh, Ladakh

Ghulam Mustafa, 27, hails from Sheynam in Leh and has emerged as one of the most dependable defenders in Ladakh's growing Ice hockey community. His journey began in 2010, sparked by curiosity when his sister brought home a pair of figure skates gifted by a Canadian traveller. Fascinated, young Ghulam would secretly wear them and glide on the ice, unknowingly laying the foundation for what would become a lifelong passion. His dedication led him to buy his first pair of hockey skates – oversized and ill-fitting, but symbolic of his determination. Within two years, he was playing for Ladakh's oldest Ice hockey club, Skara Snowstorm, and continues to represent them even after more than a decade.

In the Royal Enfield Ice hockey League Season 2, Ghulam played a key role for Team Kang Sings, helping them secure back-to-back championship titles. As a defenceman, he went through the entire tournament without conceding a single goal – a rare and commendable feat.

Mustafa is a certified government coach and an active participant in Royal Enfield's Train the Trainers programme. He now strives to be a guiding force for the next generation of athletes, offering structured training informed by empathy and emotional support.

For Ghulam, limited rink time, lack of equipment and minimal guidance marked his early years. Although he was selected for the national team as early as 2015, academic obligations kept him from participating. Even now, he often sacrifices personal time during the hockey season to prioritise coaching and mentoring young athletes.

Despite these struggles, Ghulam has been part of several historic moments, including UT Ladakh's gold medal win at the Nationals in 2024 after a 14-year gap, and India's first-ever victory at the Asian Winter Games in 2025. Looking ahead, he aspires to represent India again in the 2029 edition of the Asian Winter Games and continue nurturing new talent through his coaching.

Sajjad Khan

Age: 28
Position: Defender
Team: Purig Warriors
Region: Kargil

Sajjad Hussain, 28, is an Ice hockey player and coach from Pashkum, Kargil, in Ladakh. He began playing seven years ago, inspired by senior players in his village. Despite limited resources – no proper equipment, lack of rinks, and financial challenges – Sajad pursued his passion with determination. He trained in extreme winter conditions, waking at 6 a.m. to practice in -25°C temperatures. After leaving school in the 10th grade to support his family, he remained committed to the sport, balancing personal responsibilities with regular training.

His leadership skills shone through when he captained his team in Season 2 of the Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League, an experience he describes as transformative. Support from local leaders like Showkat Kacho and Councillor Feroz Kacho helped him and his team progress. Over time, community perception shifted – Ice hockey is now seen as a serious sport, drawing more youth every year.

Representing India at the Asian Championships in China stands as a proud milestone in his journey. Having also completed the RESM's "Train the Trainer" programme, *Sajad now mentors young players. His message to them is simple: work hard, respect your parents, and maintain balance between sport and studies.*

Nawang Lamo

Age: 21
Position: Forward
Team: Tod Zone
Region: Spiti, Himachal Pradesh

Nawang Lamo, a 21-year-old Ice hockey player from Kuang village in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, began her journey in the sport in 2019 when it was first introduced in the region. Having recently completed her Bachelor's degree, Nawang plays as a forward and has been part of the Himachal Pradesh women's team for events like the Khelo India Winter Games.

Her introduction to Ice hockey came through a training programme initiated by the local administration, where she received coaching from national-level players from Ladakh. The early days were marked by limited equipment, unfamiliar rules, and numerous falls on the ice, but the journey has only made her more resolute.

Though she has not yet participated in national team selection trials, she aspires to represent India someday. *Nawang sees and believes that Ice hockey has significantly impacted her community by inspiring younger children to take up the sport.* With better infrastructure, especially year-round rinks and regular training camps, she hopes Spiti will one day become a stronghold for Ice hockey in India.

HIMALAYAN HUB

The Himalayan Hub is a collective learning centre focused on developing solutions for environment sustainability in the Indian Himalayan Region. It serves as Royal Enfield Social Mission's nerve centre, working through its three pillars: fellowships and grants, labs and solutions centre and responsible tourism. The project focuses on youth and community-led conservation of natural resources and biodiversity in the region as well as propagating green and circular practices.

Launched in early 2024, the main campus of the Himalayan Hub in Theog, Himachal Pradesh, is now fully operational. A Himachali home renovated to retain its vernacular character, the campus infrastructure has been designed to accommodate spaces for workshops, training, shared meals, and deep dialogue. The addition of a café, an electric campus bus, and a waste management system marks steady progress toward a sustainable cross-learning environment.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

The Himalayan Hub hosted the inaugural Western Himalayas edition of the Royal Enfield x Green Hub Fellowship, bringing together 21 fellows from Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Guided by mentors from the Green Hub network, the fellows produced short films on biodiversity and community action. The curriculum also introduced modules on climate resilience and systems thinking, in partnership with Forum for the Future – helping fellows place storytelling within the realities of a changing Himalayan ecology.

The year culminated in the first Green Hub Festival in the Western Himalayas, where fellows showcased their work and engaged with conservationists, educators, and filmmakers. As the second cohort begins training, alumni from the first batch return to their regions equipped with new tools, networks, and a sense of direction. At the same time, the Royal Enfield Conservation Grants supported eight youth-led projects in the Western Himalayas, strengthening local efforts around conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

In the Eastern Himalayas, outreach from Tezpur in Assam continues to grow. For Cohort 8 of the Green Hub Fellowship, 269 applications were received – a sign of rising interest in the model of conservation storytelling. Twenty-two fellows from 19 communities began their training in May 2024, building skills in photography, videography, sound, and natural history.

The Responsible Travel Fellowship, now in its third edition, also saw steady momentum. Sixteen fellows from six Northeast states worked to develop tourism projects grounded in local culture and ecology. Four new sites – Majuli and Rangapani in Assam, Shergaon and Simong in Arunachal Pradesh – joined the network. Over 5,000 community members engaged with these initiatives, underlining the potential of tourism shaped by local voices.

The year also marked the launch of the Future Ready Leaders Fellowship, in partnership with Roots to Branches, where 20 youth leaders emerged from 14 communities across the Northeast. Meanwhile, the Living Labs – interdisciplinary spaces led by experts and rooted in local communities – began shaping real-world experiments in conservation and culture through initiatives like The River Project, Youth for Forests, the Canopy Collective, and the Wellness Lab.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Across the Himalayas, Royal Enfield's Social Mission continues to work with local communities to shape a more mindful, community-led tourism ecosystem. In Ladakh, field surveys across ten villages contributed to a Well-Being Index – a tool to track quality of life through health, connectedness, and satisfaction. In Himachal, Panchayat Tourism Committees now guide tourism in Sissu, Koksar, and Palchan, with 52 homestays adopting co-created guidelines – printed on handcrafted bamboo baskets from Kullu. In remote Pangi, local guides were trained, biodiversity documented, and homestays made more visible through maps and storytelling boards.

In Munsyari, Uttarakhand, the partnership with Himal Prakriti led reforestation efforts, reaching 28 villages. In Kumaon, Cholia dancers prepared for a contemporary stage through a workshop that culminated at Journeying Across the Himalayas. Meanwhile, in the Hima Malai Sohmat region of Meghalaya, cycling and Gibbon trails, signages, and an adventure site are taking shape under a low-carbon eco-tourism model.

Royal Enfield Social Mission's partnership with MUSE led to the Spiti Water Security Initiative. In June 2024, 14 volunteers rode from Chandigarh to Lidang village in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, to help build a winter water storage facility that now supports 224 residents. It not only addressed immediate needs but also built deeper ties between riders and communities, demonstrating how responsible travel can support long-term resilience in high-altitude deserts.

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CIRCULARITY AND SOLUTIONS LAB

A Circularity Roadmap is being shaped with Development Alternatives to pilot local, scalable solutions in waste, textiles, and water, in collaboration with partner organisations.

In Uttarakhand, the three-year partnership with Waste Warriors around Jim Corbett National Park concluded in November 2024, empowering 23 ‘Paryavaran Sakhis’ – local women leading cleanliness campaigns while overcoming social and caste barriers. The success of the initiative has been recognised by the state government, which has now allocated dedicated funds for its continuation and expansion into other nearby panchayats and towns, ensuring its long-term sustainability.

In Arunachal’s Zemithang Circle, the Himalayan Fringes Project by Further and Beyond Foundation worked with the Monpa community and monastery leaders to reduce festival waste by 30% at this year’s Gorzam Festival, despite large crowds.

In Sikkim, families affected by the 2023 Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) were supported with health services and a GLOF Observation Day brought communities and officials together.

LOOKING BACK : A YEAR AT THE HIMALAYAN HUB

Green Hub founder Rita Banerji describes the essence of the Green Hub fellowships as "nurturing a nursery, growing a forest." When we spoke to the graduating batch of the first-ever Western Himalayas Fellowship, the fellows referred to themselves as "lab rats". In truth, they represent the first seeds of a movement sustained by community youth-led conservation storytelling.

"Home", Mohammed Arif, a graduating fellow from Ladakh, replies when asked to sum up his experience at the Himalayan Hub in just one word. A year ago, this eclectic cohort made up of graduate students, ex-corporate professionals, an outspoken YouTuber and a passionate activist among others, landed at Theog, Himachal Pradesh as near-strangers. Bonded by muddy boots, late-night editing struggles and the shared thrill of discovering stories hidden in their own backyards, many of them seem to have found family and familiarity despite coming from diverse backgrounds.

Launched in early 2024, the Western Himalayas campus of the Himalayan Hub in Theog came to represent Royal Enfield's Social Mission nerve centre, a space envisioned to equip young changemakers with skills to document, safeguard and advocate for their ecological and cultural landscapes. The launch was marked by the first Western Himalayas fellowship, a collaborative initiative with Green Hub, which uses filmmaking as a powerful tool for conservation and social change.

Green Hub has a history of running similar fellowships in Central and North East India, but this was the first foray into the Western Himalayas. This meant learning on the go and adapting to the unique challenges of the region, in addition to navigating regular struggles of youth changemakers – from mastering technical equipment to overcoming self-doubt.
"Nobody is born a conservationist," Issa Malik, a fellow from Kashmir tells us, recalling his early days with self-awareness. "I used to take a loudspeaker to the forest and play music. I knew nothing about conservation. Then I came here and realised that noise is harmful to the animals around us." His outlook towards tourists flocking to the Himalayas each summer may be influenced by his own past. Issa claims that while noisy tourists still do come, many are becoming increasingly mindful now that there is more awareness around responsible tourism on social media and other platforms. He leaves us with a hopeful thought: perhaps people haven't been shown another way. And if we rush to judge instead of offering the right tools, we may never give change a chance.

For Mohammed Arif, the programme changed the way he engaged with the world. Naturally quiet and reserved, he learned to interact with communities and even picked up birding from a fellow cohort member. "I had never even thought about birds before this," he admitted. "But now, I can't unsee them. I notice them everywhere, even back home in Ladakh."

For many fellows, especially the young women, orientation day marked the first time they had ever held a camera. Himanshi Rawat from Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand described how intimidating it was – how the buttons and dials felt like hurdles rather than tools.

"Most of the boys knew things, but the girls were blank slates. Confidence was an issue." This disparity mirrors a broader trend: a UNESCO study saw a significant gender gap in the field of filmmaking, where men dominate technical roles by a 3:1 ratio. (UNESCO, 2021)

When she first saw the call for applications, it piqued her interest. But as she scrolled through questions like "Do you own a camera?" and "Any prior experience?", her enthusiasm gave way to hesitation. "I assumed they wanted experts," she says. "I didn't realise the questions were just to assess our needs."

She closed the form midway, convinced she wasn't qualified.

Luckily, a follow-up call clarified that prior skills were not nearly as important as curiosity. The fellowship, supported by Royal Enfield's Social Mission, would equip them with everything – from cameras to mentorship.

One of her most striking photographs was of an elderly woman, who the villagers lovingly referred to as 'Aachi'. In it, 'Aachi', a nomadic grandmother from Munsyari, could be seen gathering grass near her home. Himani's lens becomes a window into people's lives, and her story of self-doubt and inexperience a reminder of all the stories that may have been lost to the world for want of encouragement.

If the first batch was a test run, the biggest marker of success was the presence of mentors who had once been in their shoes. Atam Wangsa, an alumnus of the Green Hub Fellowship in Northeast India, played a crucial role in guiding the inaugural Western Himalayas batch. As Rita Banerji welcomed him onstage, she said: "This is a full circle moment. We had only imagined something like this could happen – that one of our own fellows would become a mentor."

Atam helped shape the very films that were screened at the graduation ceremony. This passing of knowledge – from one region to another, from one cohort to the next – is exactly the ripple effect the Himalayan Hub envisions.

The first 12 months of the Himalayan Hub have set the stage for what's to come. The incoming second batch will have a precedent – a group of young people who started with uncertainty but left with skills, stories, and a sense of belonging. As one of the graduating fellows put it: "The new batch will be just as anxious as we were. But they have something we didn't – the proof that this works." And with that, the forest keeps growing.

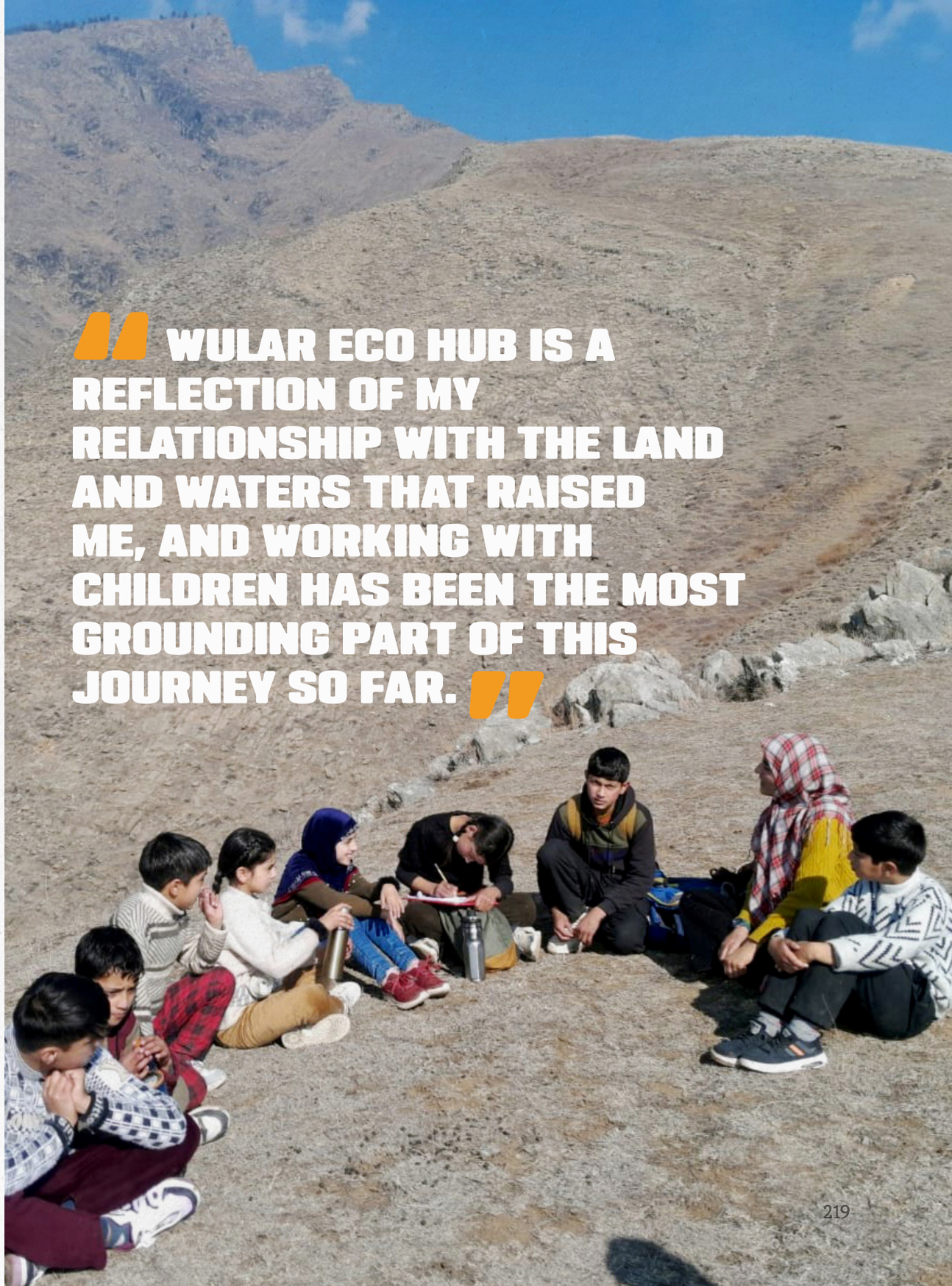
FELLOWS SPOTLIGHT

NUSRAT FAROOQ

Bandipora, Kashmir
MOOL Fellowship

For a young woman from Bandipora, where Wular Lake breathes beside the town, Wular is not a lake but life. And when Nusrat Farooq saw its quiet suffering, a deep stirring took root: to protect what was being lost and reimagine how the young generation could live with the Earth, not just on it.

Nusrat joined the MOOL Fellowship in 2024 and her project, Wular Eco Hub, emerged as a grassroots learning space in Bandipora, Kashmir. A response to the slow forgetting of our ecological memory, here, children learn about the natural world, with nature as a living teacher. Through treks, local storytelling, art, and sensory-based learning, they are invited to notice, feel, and question. The pedagogy draws from place, season and emotion. Children build relationships with birds, soil and stories. They return home with muddy hands, curious minds and open hearts.



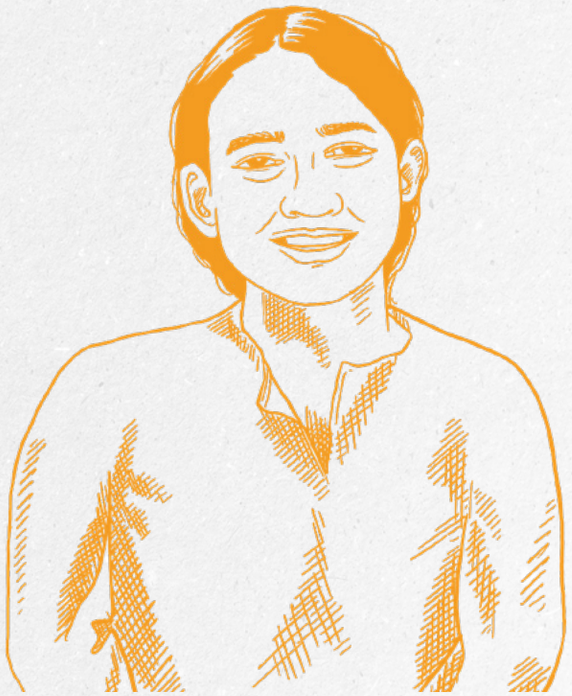
HARSHITA BISHT

Peora, Uttarakhand
Margshala Fellowship

Harshita, from rural Peora, discovered her love for art early, inspired by her cousin, an art teacher. At school, Harshita was the go-to person for anything creative. However, pressured by society and her family's concerns about her future, she chose to study science. ***"People used to say, 'You'll end up herding goats if you study arts',"*** she recalls. Unable to resist her calling, she pursued fine arts, her parents relenting only after her aunt and uncle highlighted teaching job prospects. In 2023, she attended Business ki Udaan, a month-long workshop by Margshala and Aarohi focused on youth entrepreneurship. There, she met Neeraj and Pankaj, peers who helped name her enterprise Kumaoni Chitrakala Sangrah – blending Kumaon, art, and the idea of 'collective'. Later, Harshita joined Margshala's Swarozgar Fellowship programme for early-stage youth entrepreneurs, where over nine months, she built her entrepreneurial skills and received guidance in areas like networking, pricing, and visioning. Today, Kumaoni Chitrakala Sangrah operates with the principle of giving a platform to independent artists, while earning a 25% commission to ensure sustainability. Harshita is also piloting a learn-and-earn model, where young artists gain both skills and income.

She hasn't yet told her parents, who expect a traditional job after her Master's.

"I didn't want to leave the hills to find work. I wanted to create something here, with my art, and for others like me."



TENZIN LODEN

Zanskar, Ladakh
Royal Enfield x Green Hub Western Himalayas Fellowship

Tenzin Loden grew up in Zanskar, Ladakh where winters are long, connectivity is limited, and change arrives slowly. With a degree in Agriculture from Banaras Hindu University, Tenzin was always drawn to local knowledge and had a sensitive awareness of local flora. Through his student years, he built a small YouTube channel in the Ladakhi language, sharing local stories and educational content. One could say that even before joining the inaugural cohort of the Western Himalayas Fellowship, he had always seen film as a tool for communication and to document what is fast being lost.

The fellowship helped sharpen his skills and consolidated his belief that filmmaking can be a powerful tool for social change. His documentary explores how traditional medicinal knowledge is being reshaped by modern practices – and what this means for Himalayan communities.

ZAINAB GANI

Handwara, Kashmir
Royal Enfield x Green Hub Western Himalayas Fellowship

Hailing from Maidan Chogal Handwara in Kashmir, Zainab Gani is an explorer and documentary filmmaker whose lens is grounded in the lived realities of home. With a bachelor's degree in social work and experience working with NGOs in the fields of gender, education, and women's empowerment, Zainab brings a strong foundation of empathy and activism to her storytelling.

"I chose filmmaking and social work because of the decades of conflict in Kashmir – the trials and tribulations faced by its people, the growing drugs related issues among youth, and theworsening environmental crisis," she says. Her commitment to society, she believes, is inherited; her father was a human rights advocate. She is the first in her family to become a filmmaker.

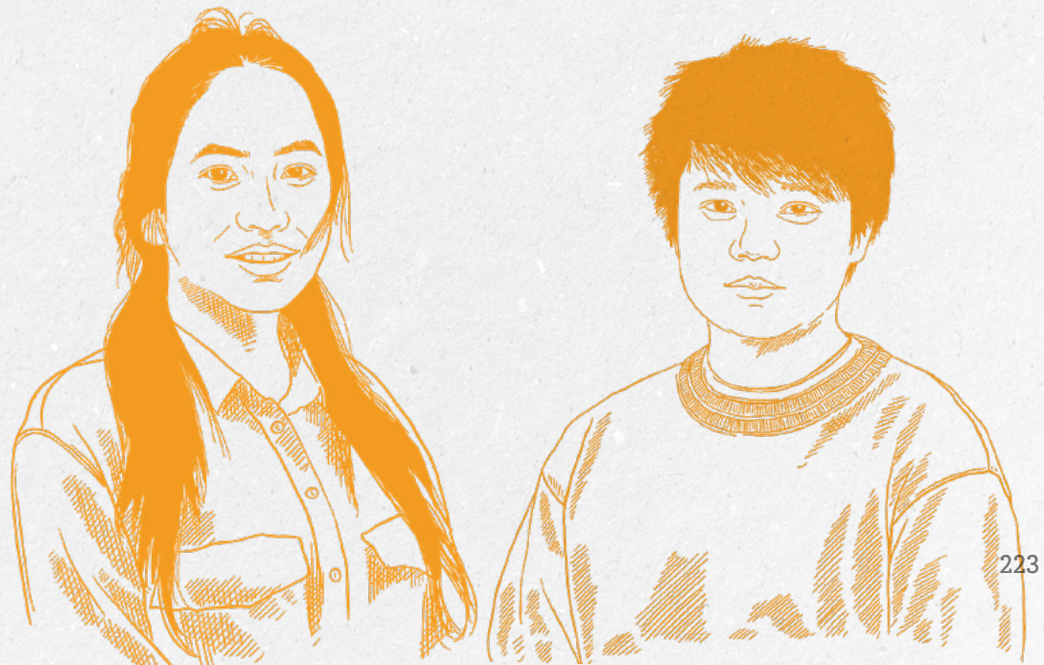
In 2024, Zainab was selected for the inaugural Western Himalayas Fellowship. As part of the fellowship, she worked with the Nature Conservation Foundation to document the lives of villagers in Kibber, Spiti. She was moved by the transformation she witnessed of how a community once fearful of the snow leopard came to embrace it with pride and reverence. It inspired her to see how conflict and hatred gave way to love. **"I don't want to depend on anyone,"** she says, underlining her pursuit of self-reliance and expression as she finds a language to tell urgent stories through film.

CHAJO LOWANG & SARA KHONGSAI

Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh
Conservation Grantees (Eastern Himalayas)

Chajo Lowang and Sara Khongsai met at the Green Hub campus in Tezpur, Assam in 2021, coming from two different corners of Northeast India. Chajo, from the Nocte tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, was already a self-taught photographer – one of the first women photographers in the region – covering community events in her village. Sara, from the Kuki tribe in Churachandpur, Manipur had been working on a microfinance project with Milaap in Bengal, where she first began asking deeper questions about development.

At Green Hub, the two bonded over a shared curiosity – and concern – about what was disappearing around them. Their interest in conservation took shape through video, leading to a joint book project, 'Unexplored Tirap: A Bio-Cultural Portrait', which documented the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Tirap district. The duo came together again to apply and were selected for the Royal Enfield x Green Hub Conservation Grants in 2024, under which they are currently executing their project titled 'Green Tirap', a conservation initiative focused on youth engagement and sustainable livelihoods in New Tupi village. They now work with schools and youth groups to raise awareness about hunting and logging, and are exploring local income alternatives rooted in conservation.



SHALEENA PHINYA

West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh
Green Hub Fellowship (Eastern Himalayas)

Shaleena Phinya is from Singchung in Arunachal Pradesh and belongs to the Bugun community – one of the smallest tribal groups in India. When she joined the Green Hub Fellowship, her community had recently become known for a rare bird, the Bugun Liocichla, named after the tribe. Shaleena saw film as a way to document not just the bird, but the broader story of a people and their relationship with their land.

Her film, The Bugun and the Liocichla, has won several awards and was screened at major festivals, but Shaleena's work goes beyond the screen. She became the first woman to join the forest patrolling team of the Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve and now supports researchers, maps forest areas, and trains other youth – especially girls – to take part in conservation. In 2024, she presented the story of Singchung's community-led conservation model at COP16 in Colombia.

JABID KASAM

Haridwar, Uttarakhand
Royal Enfield x Green Hub Conservation Grants

Jabid Kasam, a naturalist and educator from the Van Gujjar community, is helping a new generation of forest dwellers reconnect with the land.

In October 2024, Jabid, with the help of the Royal Enfield x Green Hub grants for conservation, launched Education for Biodiversity Conservation across three Van Gujjar villages in Uttarakhand's Haridwar district. At the centre of the effort are eight to ten Van Gujjar youth who lead weekly activities for children – nature walks, storytelling, art and basic language learning. They teach kids to identify birds, trees and insects using field guides and binoculars, making learning both playful and grounded.

Calendar days like Moth Week and World Sparrow Day become particularly lively, as the youth celebrate the environment through creative expressions like theatre, poetry, and village gatherings. These events create space for shared memory and intergenerational dialogue.

To deepen their skills, the youth undergo training in nature guiding and participate in global bird counts, contributing data from their own backyards to international platforms. They've also travelled outside their communities for exposure visits and on foot alongside migrating Van Gujjar families, learning the rhythms of traditional life and ecology.

MAHESH KUMAR NEGI

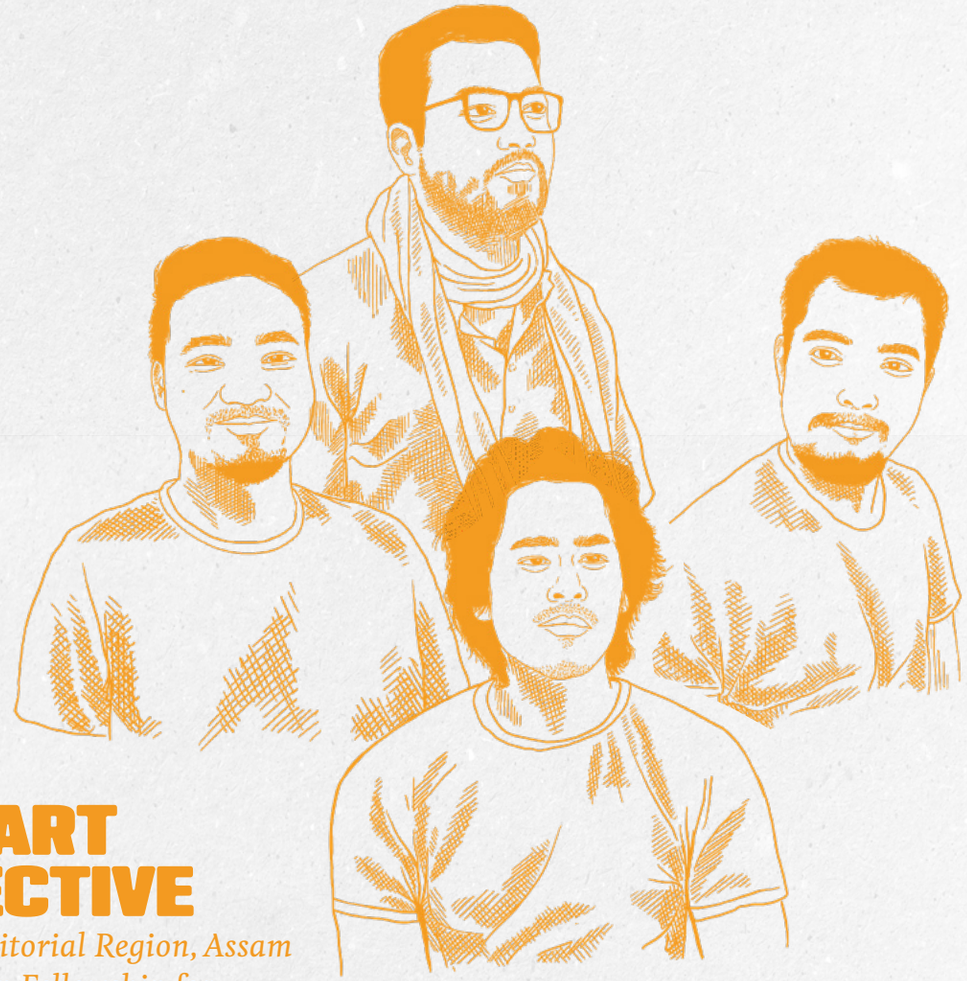
Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh
Royal Enfield x Green Hub Conservation Grants

In the mountain district of Kinnaur, Mahesh Kumar Negi listens closely to elders, to children and to birds, realising that the stories are interconnected like the chapters of a book.

A farmer and educator, Mahesh has spent the past year building The Bird Book of Kinnaur – an archive of 160+ bird species documented through field notes, oral histories, folk beliefs, and local names passed down through generations.

"This isn't just a birdwatcher's guide," Mahesh says. "It's about how people here have lived with birds – what they've observed, what they remember, what they believe." Each bird comes with layers of memory: a species that signals the first snow, another that arrives with the apple blossom. In one standout moment, the rare Yellowhammer was sighted – likely a visitor from Central Asia.

Alongside documentation, Mahesh has led walks and events with forest staff, schools, and village elders. At the Himalayan Bird Count, young students sketched, observed, and shared their own stories – some passed down, others newly discovered. Their notes and drawings are now part of the book.



BERE ART COLLECTIVE

Bodoland Territorial Region, Assam
The Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners

In the quiet stretch of Bodoland's Dheer Beel Lake, a group of artists, educators, and local practitioners came together as a collective of eco-conscious practitioners, committed to raising awareness about the ecological importance of the Baokhunguri hills and the Chakrashila ecosystem. Calling themselves the Bwiswmuthi Eco Reverence Ensemble (BERE), the group undertook a year-long engagement that included conversations with local communities, creative workshops with children in government schools, and collaborations with village leaders, festival committees, and NGOs in the region.

Their deeply embedded socially-engaged processes culminated in a site-specific installation on the banks of Dheer Beel – a fence-like structure woven from local materials and embedded with collective memories. This participatory artwork serves as both a symbolic and tangible reminder of interdependence; holding fragments of community stories and ecological wisdom, it stands as a bridge and reminder that the health of the hills and the lives they sustain are deeply entwined.

SOUJANYAA BORUAH AND SHYAM LAL

Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh
The Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners

Shyam once walked the high meadows of the Himalayas as a shepherd turned mountaineer, bringing intimate knowledge of pastoral life and its disruptions amid climate change. Today, alongside researcher and filmmaker Soujanyaa, he retraces those steps differently. Their collaborative work – Project Tension aims to document the Gaddi community's resilience in the Dhauladhar range of Himachal Pradesh.

Project Tension, unfolded as a collaborative and discourse-based process exploring the psychological toll of environmental degradation on Gaddi herders and their deep ties to grasslands and animal kin. Grounded in ethnographic research and developed with anthropologist Dr. Nikita Simpson, the work captures lived anxieties and fading traditions in a transforming Himalayan landscape, while also attempting to return research to the land through methodologies that are inspired by Gaddi values of rest and mobility.

MENTORS

BELA

Bela Negi is a Mumbai-based filmmaker, writer, and founder trustee of the Leafbird Foundation, working at the intersection of storytelling and grassroots change. Originally from Uttarakhand, Bela brings the sensibilities of her Himalayan roots into both her cinematic work and her commitment to empowering rural communities.
An alumna of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, with a specialisation in film editing, and a graduate in English Literature from Indraprastha College, Delhi University, Bela has over two decades of experience in the film industry. She has written, directed, and edited numerous ad films, corporate films, and notably, the critically acclaimed Hindi feature film 'Daayen Ya Baayen' (2010). Set in a remote Himalayan village, the film explores serious social themes like migration, unemployment, and environmental degradation through a comic narrative. Her dual engagement, with films that raise awareness and development work that drives change, makes Bela Negi a unique and powerful voice for the mountains and their people.

MAIBAM AMARJEET SINGH

Amar is an award-winning filmmaker, a producer and cinematographer from Imphal, India, known for his deep-rooted storytelling. His commitment to independent filmmaking was ignited while assisting his late father. His critically acclaimed documentary, Highways of Life has garnered international recognition, including Best Film at the 8th Liberation Docfest 2020, Best Indian Documentary at the 26th Kolkata International Film Festival. Beyond directing, Amar has produced films like City of Victims, Nawa – Spirit of Atey, My Generous Village. Since 2022, he has mentored Green Hub fellows, offering creative guidance and hands-on support in filmmaking, helping them structure their stories, check their footage, and in overall completion of their final films before graduating. His approachable style encourages fellows to share and reflect, bridging their learning with the professional world of visual storytelling.

A COMMUNITY LED MOVEMENT FOR WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE HIMALAYAS

By Sonia Garga

In the past 18 months, Saahas has worked across 11 gram panchayats (100 villages) in Keylong Block of Lahaul and Spiti district, starting from Sissu to Darcha along the Manali-Leh highway. The Pahadi Pahel programme, a community-driven waste management initiative, was launched in the region in partnership with the Royal Enfield Social Mission.

The snow-capped peaks of Himachal Pradesh continue to draw tourists, nature lovers, trekkers and photographers from across the country and beyond. But behind the postcard landscapes lies a growing problem – waste. Packaging waste, plastics, tin cans, broken glass, used diapers and sanitary pads, and even construction rubble now lie scattered across slopes, riverbeds, and forests. As tourism and urbanisation rise, so does the footprint they leave behind, threatening the fragile ecosystem.

WHY WASTE SYSTEMS OF PLAINS DON'T WORK IN THE HIMALAYAS

Solid waste systems that work in plains rarely translate well in the Himalayas. In Lahaul, the terrain is unforgiving, with limited road access, harsh winters, and scattered settlements. Add to that population spikes during the peak tourist season, short working windows and irregular waste services with no waste process infrastructure. Let us understand the key points:

Collection: Door-to-door collection, the backbone of many models, simply isn't feasible in most villages. Instead, we're experimenting with localised drop-off points for dry (non-biodegradable) waste that residents can access at their convenience. The wet (organic/ bio-degradable waste) is still managed traditionally – either composted or fed to cattle, hence does not need any collection.

However, the situation is different with cafes, camps, hotels, and newer housing clusters that neither have the space nor any cattle for feeding the wet waste. Moreover, in these relatively denser areas, waste generation is seasonal and higher. Hence, they need structured systems for both wet and dry waste and at a frequency catered to their needs, which also means increased collection frequency during tourist seasons.

Land: Finding land for waste storage / processing is another hurdle. Much of Lahaul is forest land, and flat plots are rare. Hence the use of temporary structures like refurbished shipping containers as modular dry waste storage units – mobile, compact, and suited to mountain conditions, could be tested.

Costs: Cost per kilo of waste management in the Himalayas is multiple times that of plains. Higher transport, labour and storage expenses, far off end destinations and waste processing systems that become complex due to rough local conditions push up costs significantly. Add to this, waste generation is lower for most parts of the year. Hence, for financial sustainability, innovative ways by means of tourist fee/taxes, special government schemes need to be catered or developed.

COMMUNITIES AS THE HEART OF THE SYSTEM

From day one, the Pahadi Pahel approach has been participatory. We began with deep listening – mapping not just geographies, but also the social landscape. Over 60 stakeholder discussions helped us understand gaps and possibilities. We engaged with panchayats, hoteliers, shopkeepers, SHGs, and youth volunteers to design systems they could own. This ownership has been the backbone of the effort. Villagers have stepped up as waste monitors, collection volunteers, and awareness drivers. While the panchayats and local bodies like SADA (Special Area Development Authority) are responsible for delivering services, it's the community who will keep the system alive and accountable.

Equally important has been building a local workforce. We're training youth and women as waste champions, giving them skills, confidence, and a potential livelihood. Waste is not just an environmental issue – it can also be a socio-economic opportunity.

TOURISM AS CHALLENGE AND PARTNER

There's no denying the pressure that tourism places on the region. Visitors often bring with them a disposable culture – single-use bottles, food packaging, wet wipes, much of which is left behind.

But we believe tourism can also be part of the solution. Saahas is working with homestay owners, café operators, taxi drivers, and trekking guides to promote responsible practices. When they model small actions – like using cloth bags, segregating waste, or saying no to plastic – it sets an example for hundreds of travellers.

We're also helping tourist-facing businesses adopt better waste systems: clear signage, colour-coded bins, pictorial segregation guides, and communication materials that encourage guests to reduce their waste footprint.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

One of our key learnings has been that behaviour change cannot be forced. People here live close to nature. Their resistance isn't due to apathy – it's about broken systems. When no collection is available, burning or dumping becomes the fallback.

Our teams engage continuously – with street plays, school sessions, tea-circle chats, village meetings and one-one interactions. Conversations happen informally, patiently. And change is happening. Youth are joining clean-up drives. Elders are backing waste segregation.

Panchayats are slowly agreeing to allocate land. And SADA is taking corrective actions. These may seem like small steps, but in fragile ecosystems, even small shifts matter

THE HIDDEN WASTE STREAM

Alongside tourism, another quieter threat is emerging – construction and demolition (C&D) waste. With more guesthouses, roads, and homes coming up, broken tiles, cement sacks, bricks, and rubble are often dumped in rivers or forests. This kind of waste may not be as visible, but it wreaks long-term damage on ecosystems.

Currently, Pahadi Pahel focuses on household and tourism-related waste. But mountain states urgently need policies and systems for C&D waste: on-site segregation, reuse of materials, use of eco-friendly alternatives, and safe disposal mechanisms.

SCALING WHAT WORKS

At its heart, Pahadi Pahel is not just a project, it is a shared journey towards cleaner horizons. In the year ahead, our focus is to reach all villages, strengthen local teams, build the system and hand over the reins to the Local Administrative Bodies and the community.

The Himalayas have given us peace, wonder and life. It is time we give something back – by keeping them clean, strong and thriving for generations to come.

The author is the Chief Strategy Officer at Saahas, a non-profit organisation that works on solid waste management with a focus on resource recovery.

FROM WASTE TO WISDOM – LESSONS FROM A SHARED JOURNEY IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

By Merwyn Coutinho & Shirshendu Sekhar Das

It began at the edge of a river.

One of us was knee-deep in silt, pulling out sachets and plastic bottles while the other stood nearby, watching the clean-up from a distance. That chance meeting would lead to a collaboration that was transformational. We both aspired to create effective self-sustaining waste management programmes but our directions were somewhat different – in more ways than one.

The Himalayan Fringes Project took the Further & Beyond Foundation towards the remote mountains of Zemithang Circle in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Midway Journey's Root Connect Project saw them move towards the Greater Manas landscape of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. Neither of us had arrived with blueprints but we were willing to listen and learn.

With the support of the Royal Enfield Social Mission, the Midway Journey team began by creating what became the first Detailed Project Report (DPR) in the eco-sensitive zone of Manas. From outlining the magnitude of the challenge to a detailed action plan, the DPR became the start point of a roadmap towards sustainable waste management in the villages around the Manas and Raimona National Parks and was shared with the Forest Department, Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), Green Bodoland Mission and the district administration. The DPR, in fact, was a turning point, for it revealed that household waste was as big a challenge as tourism-related waste. From non-recyclable packaging to fast fashion and electronics, the issue of waste wasn't just a case of poor systems but also reflected a change in people's lifestyles.

In the Greater Manas landscape which had seen ethnic tensions and conflict in the past, the Root Connect Project looked at waste management as an opportunity to build relationships between different local communities – Bodo, Santhal and Assamese, to name a few. The Midway Journey team was intentionally inclusive, across both gender and ethnicity. Over time members of the youth became local waste leaders and encouraging partnerships evolved.

One insight that has stayed with us since the onset is the importance of clean waste. In remote mountains or forested areas, daily pick up of waste is rarely feasible. So, for all practical purposes, dry waste needs to be cleaned, sorted and stored till there is enough to be transported out in batches to a distant recycling centre. However, in a country where waste is often associated with “dirty” and is left to the invisible hands of underpaid contractors and Dalits, its management also throws up a social design challenge. Dignity could not be an outcome but had to be the starting point.

The approach of The Midway Journey in the Manas landscape has been to create a shift in the mindset of the people where the youth involved in waste management do not see it as menial but mission-driven. They have grown into resource persons like Dipankar Roy who trains others in dry waste

FROM THOSE EARLY DAYS OF ARRIVING WITHOUT A BLUEPRINT WITH OUR KEENNESS TO LISTEN, MUCH WATER HAS FLOWED UNDER THE BRIDGES OVER NYAMJANG CHU AND MANAS RIVERS. IN ZEMITHANG, 75 PER CENT OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS NOW PRACTICE DRY WASTE SEGREGATION AT SOURCE. IN MANAS TOO, 50 PER CENT OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS IN BARENGABARI NOW PRACTICE DRY WASTE SEGREGATION AT SOURCE AND STORE THEM.

management or Junika Basumatary who leads the way in vermi-composting. Similarly, in Raimona, Birenthuish Besra and Bidintha Basumatary are playing critical roles in raising awareness.

In Zemithang, Further & Beyond's philosophy has been to avoid creating a new caste or class of waste handlers or collectors. Management of waste had to be done by everyone in the community. It had to be a collective effort. As a result, in Zemithang, it is practiced visibly by monks, schoolchildren, units of the Armed Forces, households and shopkeepers. After all, cleanliness here is a matter of pride and not apology. Interestingly, it was observed that the local community had no direct word to denote 'waste', indicating that both literally and as a notion – it was an import into the region.

Here, the Himalayan Fringes Project put together a multi-village community-led waste management system from scratch. Village-level waste monitoring groups were formed, led by a central committee, a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) was set up at a building allotted by the Circle Officer and a monthly user-fee system was instituted.

In spite of the promising starts in Zemithang and Manas, we now understand that waste is an outcome of a deeper issue – a linear, disposable economic system that pushes materials into remote regions without accountability. Waste is not just what ends up in a bin; it is what happens when systems lose sight of resource value, local knowledge, and care.

This perspective has helped us see that change doesn't begin with infrastructure, but in fact starts with people.

Merwyn Coutinho is Co-founder of Further & Beyond Foundation and Shirshendu Sekhar Das is Co-founder of The Midway Journey.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SITES

As connectivity across the Eastern Himalayas has increased over the last decade, tourism has grown – bringing income and opportunity, but also raising questions about the sustenance of traditional lifestyles and the region's fragile ecology. In light of the changing tourism landscape, local youth are working in remote areas, creating place-based, community-led, and nature-linked models of responsible tourism

The Green Hub x Royal Enfield Responsible Tourism Fellowship is a six-month residential programme that equips youth from the Himalayan region with tools to reimagine local futures through responsible travel, guided by inherited ways of life. At the heart of this approach is hands-on training, immersive fieldwork, and community dialogue. The programme nurtures young conservationists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders while supporting tourism models through community networks, government departments and potential investors.

Hebamlo, Nagaland

Each year, the Green Hub - Royal Enfield Responsible Tourism Conclave serves as a platform for fellows to present action plans for projects in ecologically and culturally significant sites. In Hebamlo, Peren District, Nagaland, fellows Jitendra Deka, L. Mohbo Nelina and Martsuba Kichu have focused on safeguarding Zeme culture through hospitality training, food processing and setting up tourist infrastructure, including a community-managed lodge set up with the help of the fellows.

Hebamlo – officially known as Bamsiakilwa – was established in the late 1980s by the Zeme Naga people. Although young as a settlement, the village draws from older inheritances of oral history, rotational farming and a lifestyle informed by the land. According to Pungri Pame, ex-chairman of the Village Council, the area has been settled and resettled over time, with movements from Old Ngoulong to Hebamlo taking place at least twice. The name “Hebamlo,” meaning “abundance,” reflects the village’s rich biodiversity but also reminds of the deep reserves of community knowledge.

Hebamlo is an 8-hour drive through rugged terrain from Jalukie in Peren District, Nagaland. Hebamlo is home to the Zeme Naga people .The nearest railway station and airport to Peren are both located in Dimapur. Dimapur Railway Station is approximately 62 kilometers away, and Dimapur Airport is approximately 57 kilometers away from Jalukie.

HEBAMLO *Destination*	**PEREN** *District*	**NAGALAND** *State*
ZEME NAGA *Community*	**10-12 HOURS** *Duration of Travel*	**DIMAPUR** *Nearest Railhead & Airport*

From Dimapur, head to Jalukie in Peren district for the turn off towards Hebamlo. It takes about 2.5 hours (approx) to cover the 60-65km from Dimapur airport or railway station to Jalukie. The exact distance from Jalukie to Hebamlo is not measured but it takes about 8-9 hours by road and rough tracks over extremely rugged terrain accessible only by 4x4 equipped vehicles.

Today, Hebamlo comprises around 30 households and a population of 300–320 from the Zeme Naga community. While most villagers are Christian, three households continue to follow the indigenous Heraka faith. The decline of traditional belief systems has impacted cultural practices tied to nature. In response, the locals have formed a cultural club within the Tening Circle to safeguard their intangible heritage.

In collaboration with the local community, fellows successfully organised the Hebamlo Cultural Meet. The event was hosted in January 2023 and again in January 2024. The site, as part of the Green Hub - Royal Enfield Fellowship initiative, and the efforts of the community in Hebamlo were recognised with an award for ‘Best Community Conservative Practice’ at the Nagaland International Conference on Tourism, Transport and Logistics. The community is now ready to host artists’ and writing retreats, while astronomy tourism is being viewed as a potential avenue, given the village’s clear night skies.

Chongri, Sikkim

At the Responsible Tourism Conclave, Talabya Rai Tanti, Lemdumong T Shui, Dawa Sangpo Bhutia, Lakpa Dandu, Nima Tshering and Nikhil presented an invitation to experience 'The Herder's Way', an innovative hike that allows visitors to travel and live with the yak herders of Chongri, West Sikkim. The business model for responsible tourism focused on developing this tourist trail to combine cultural preservation and environment sustainability with adventure. The fellows also produced a documentary as part of the programme, featuring the local people, their culture and conservation ethos rooted in the natural beauty and rhythms of the region.

The village of Chongri sits at over 6,800 feet and was once a part of a seasonal pastoral route. The primary tribes in Chongri are Limbu, Bhutia, and Nepali, with Nepali being the common language. Geographically, the village covers an area of 631.73 hectares and, due to its location surrounded by the high Himalayas, is a preferred destination for adventurers, especially trekkers and mountaineers.

CHONGRI *Destination*	**GYALSHING** *District*	**SIKKIM** *State*
NEW JALPAIGURI *Nearest Railhead*	**BAGDOGRA** *Nearest Airport*	**6-8 HOURS** *Duration of Travel*
LIMBU, BHUTIA & NEPALI *Community*		

From Bagdogra Airport or the railway station in New Jalpaiguri, the route to Chongri goes through Geyzing, which is approximately 4 hours away. If you are travelling in shared transportation then you'll need to switch vehicles at Geyzing. From Geyzing the route to Chongri goes via Sankhola. Given the altitude and the terrain, a 4x4 equipped vehicle with high ground clearance is recommended. Also, proper acclimatisation is recommended since Chongri sits at an altitude of 3,800m.

Between 2005 and 2009, the government issued a notice to ban grazing due to concerns such as overgrazing and loss of flora in the Khangchendzonga National Park. Many herders abandoned their traditional livelihoods and turned to daily wage labour and porter jobs. By the time grazing rights were restored in 2019, only 10-20% of the original herders had returned. Today, just 12 active yak herders continue to uphold their customs. Their diet still revolves around locally prepared food such as Timo (made from wheat flour), Thukpa (Tibetan noodle soup with meat and vegetables), Roti, Rice, and Daal, which they happily offer to anyone visiting and staying with them.

SETTING THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR SUSTAINABLE & RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

By CB Ramkumar

The history of tourism can be traced back to ancient times, when wealthy Greeks and Romans would travel for leisure to visit famous landmarks or attend cultural events. Tourism has been a part of human history for centuries, as people have always been drawn to different destinations for various reasons.

The twentieth century saw a boom in international tourism, with advancements in air travel making it easier and more affordable for people to visit far-flung destinations. The advent of the internet in the late 20th century further revolutionised the tourism industry, making it easier for travellers to research and book trips online.

Sustainable tourism and responsible tourism are concepts that have gained popularity in recent decades, as awareness of the environmental, social, and cultural impacts of travel has increased. In the 1970s and 1980s, organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) started to address the environmental impact of tourism and promoted the idea of responsible tourism. The concept gained further momentum in the 1990s, with the publication of the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in 2002, which set out principles for responsible tourism and called for tourism that benefits local communities and respects the environment.

Tourism is a definite contributor to employment generation and the economic growth of countries. Over time, though, it has been observed that tourism consumes resources that are disproportionate to the value it adds to economies.

To address this drain of resources, in 2007, the UN Foundation, UNEP, UNWTO, and a host of private sector players came together to form the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The GSTC was charged with developing sustainable tourism standards for the industry (hotels and tour operators), destinations, etc., to address this disproportionate resource consumption. It was tasked with developing a framework – a set of guidelines for all to follow – so that tourism becomes sustainable and does not deplete resources and degrade destinations.

Sustainability was once a term that was only attached to the natural environment. Today, there is a need to look at sustainability through a more holistic lens to include the socio-economic and cultural dimensions alongside the ecological.

Tourism is the backbone of many local economies. It creates jobs, fuels entrepreneurship, and shapes the development of entire regions. But the long-term viability of tourism businesses is directly tied to the resilience of the places and people they rely on. To thrive, tourism must be managed ethically aligned with legal frameworks, fair labour practices, and a strong sense of responsibility toward both community and environment.

TYPICALLY, A GUEST IN A RESORT OR HOTEL USES SEVEN TO NINE TIMES MORE WATER THAN RESIDENTS OF THE AREA JUST AS THEY CONSUME MORE ENERGY AND GENERATE MORE WASTE.

Cultural sustainability, in particular, is inseparable from tourism. People don't travel just to stay in hotel rooms – they travel to experience culture. This makes it essential for tourism businesses to engage with and contribute to the cultural fabric of the communities they operate in. Supporting local traditions, crafts, languages, and ways of life should be seen as central to the business model.

THE SOONER THE TOURISM INDUSTRY REALISES THE URGENCY OF THESE CHANGES AND ADAPTS TO THIS NEW AND INFORMED AUDIENCE, THE BETTER IT IS FOR BUSINESS GROWTH, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE. THE PIVOT TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IS NOT JUST A NICE THING TO DO, BUT A MUST-DO!

Without a doubt, environmental sustainability is critical for the survival of life as we know it. The climate change crisis and its resultant extreme weather events need to force us to decarbonise our businesses and push us to protect biodiversity for our own survival. In the post-COVID world, tourists have become more contemplative even in their travels. However, most of the tourism industry – destinations, hotels, and tour operators – have not kept pace with this change.

Luxury at one time meant Persian carpets, Italian marble, champagne, and caviar. Today, travellers are no longer enamoured by these luxury amenities when they travel. Rather, there is an upward trend of tourists seeking new experiences – not of tokenised dance performances or innocuous local bands crooning in the corner of the bar while they have a drink, but authentic, real experiences from the ground, presented in a respectful manner, where culture is not simply commodified for passive consumption. While slow, governments have surely begun demanding businesses to move towards sustainable tourism. Countries like Turkiye and Singapore now have definitive goals. The European Union has published draft laws for all businesses, including tourism, to adhere to high standards of sustainability. Before penalties in the form of laws kick in, it is the tourism industry itself that must make sustainability a business practice.

The author is the Vice Chairman of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Sifung Harimu Afad: The Sound of the Bamboo Flute Through Generations

Sifung Harimu Afad (SHA) is a cultural troupe formed with the support of The Action Northeast Trust (the ant), a grassroots organisation working in Assam since 2000. What began with the training of 25-30 young musicians and dancers now reaches nearly 100 villages, engaging over 600 children and youth between the ages of 7 and 25. Led by the spirited youth of the Bodo community, Sifung Harimu Afad - has taken the step to set up the Sifung Academy supported by wellwishers, and the Royal Enfield Social Mission through its responsible tourism initiatives.

The Sifung Harimu Afad began by gathering in football fields and under trees, listening to elders and watching archival footage to learn almost-forgotten forms of Bodo music and dance. These early efforts have grown into a bigger vision for the Bodoland Territorial Region, shaping it into a site that is readying itself for responsible tourism founded in identity and cultural assertion. In 2024, thirteen elements of Bodo culture received the GI Tag from the Government of India's Geographical Indication Registry - among them, the Sifung flute, the distinctive Dokhona textile and the reviving practice of Eri silk rearing - marking a sign of renewed relevance.

Across the Himalayas, permanent and seasonal migration have become a norm due to limited livelihoods and aspirations, but initiatives like Sifung are shifting the narrative. As cultural pride grows, so does the desire of young people to stay.

Passed down and learned through observation and imitation, performance art in the Bodo tradition underwent its own evolution due to the informal nature of transmission. However, some changes were intentional. Traditionally, music and dance in Bodo culture were gendered practices, where men played instruments and women danced. But the Sifung troupe has upended that norm with girls now mastering the Sifung (bamboo flute) and Kham (drum) with the same ease and authority as their male counterparts.

At the Sifung Ac\ademy, collectively set up by the youth, more and more women are reclaiming agency through cultural expression. Sifung offers a different way forward, where cultural revival, skill enhancement and local livelihoods are helping build opportunities for youth, bringing dignity and resilience to counter the threats that accompany out-migration.

This is what makes the Sifung initiative particularly remarkable – it revives the old but also reimagines the future. Many of the current members are the first in their families to learn and teach these traditional art forms. Where once this knowledge was orally transmitted across generations, Sifung Harimu Afad creates structured opportunities for intergenerational learning, through peer-

led workshops and performances that bring elders and youth into the same conversation. With the help of the Royal Enfield Social Mission, they have developed physical spaces and even expanded to create six branches covering nearly 100 villages. Five of these branches are located in Chirang, with one in Kokrajhar.

The dances at the centre of the initiatives – Bagurumba, Bwisagu Mwsanai, and Nagurnai – go beyond the artistic and carry stories as they re-enact village life: of women gathering vegetables, weaving, fishing, or tilling the soil. Movements mimic the flutter of butterflies or the cadence of farm work. Costumes, especially the Jwmgra (scarf) evoke nature and memory. Traditional Bodo instruments like the Sifung (bamboo flute), Kham (long drum), Serja (stringed instrument), and Jotha (cymbals) hold knowledge that is artistic, methodical and even spiritual. The Sifung, with its five holes, is said to represent the elements of nature.

Alongside music and dance, Sifung is nurturing traditional livelihoods such as Eri silk rearing, supported by the Himalayan Knot project under Royal Enfield's Social Mission. Unlike resource-intensive sericulture, Eri silk is a practice with minimal ecological impact and one that holds deep historical ties to Bodo communities. With castor cultivation and eri rearing already begun in homes, it has now also been initiated at the Sifung campus.

INSTRUMENT-MAKING, TOO, IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE PROGRAMME. WITH DWINDLING NUMBERS OF ARTISANS AND RISING COSTS OF RAW MATERIALS, THE CRAFT WAS NEARLY LOST. THROUGH SIFUNG'S OUTREACH, LOCAL MAKERS HAVE FOUND SUPPORT AND PURPOSE, WITH PLANS TO PRODUCE SOUVENIR VERSIONS – AFFORDABLE, AUTHENTIC, AND IDEAL FOR CULTURAL TRAVELLERS WHO WANT TO TAKE A PIECE OF BODO HERITAGE HOME.

In December 2024, the Sifung Troupe travelled to New Delhi to perform at Royal Enfield's Journeying Across the Himalayas, presenting the possibilities when young people are seen as more than passive recipients of culture and are entrusted with the future. Increasingly, movement and music is bringing attention to the region and the Bodo story of resilience. In a landmark move, the state government of Assam has announced that 10,000 Bodo youth will perform the traditional Bagurumba dance in Guwahati in October 2025.

MAATI: A WAY OF LIFE

By Malika Virdi

It's May, and it's peak tourist season in Sarmoli, our high-altitude village in the border district of Uttarakhand. A young tourist recently asked, "Why don't you have hoardings advertising your tourism enterprise like the others now dotting this village?" Hesitantly, Bina Nitwal,who has run her homestay with Himalayan Ark for over two decades, replied, "Frankly, I feel these hoardings mar the landscape. And we don't accept walk-in tourists. After all, they are entering our homes, a private space. We need to make sure they understand the kind of experience and homestays we offer."

Sarmoli lies in the wide Munsiari valley, across from the snow-clad Panchachuli massif, near the tri-junction of India, Nepal, and Tibet. Once an active trade hub with Tibet and a waypoint for pilgrims en route to Mansarovar, the village today thrives with the rhythms of rural life and Himalayan beauty.

Since 2004, Himalayan Ark has welcomed travelers seeking more than just a getaway. Guests have the option to immerse themselves in the slow, rich pulse of community life, moving with the rhythm of the seasons, or to explore and understand the area's natural heritage through guided and structured experiences.

COMMUNITY & THE COMMONS

Sarmoli was recognised by the Government of India as one of the top rural tourism villages in 2023. This recognition, however, has come with a cost. As tourism booms in what was once a quiet mountain village, it has become increasingly challenging to regulate and sustain a form of tourism that benefits the local community without damaging the mountain landscape.

Starting an enterprise is the easy part; sustaining it is where the real work lies. While individual families have gained livelihood opportunities through homestays and benefited economically, the broader community and environment often bear the hidden costs. Even community-based tourism presents the classic challenge: how do you balance private profits with the collective costs that are borne by all those who inhabit the landscape – the community and the natural environment. Clearly, economic betterment of some alone does not equate to community well-being. In fact, it can often deepen existing inequalities and degrade a fragile mountain ecosystem.

Do livelihood projects bring people together,or does a strong, community-based solidarity organisation underpin the success of such ventures? At its heart, the tourism enterprise run by Himalayan Ark is embedded in the ideals of Commons and Community. It is deeply linked to the Van Panchayats (village forest commons) and Maati Sangathan, a mountain women's collective.

In 2004, all the village right holders of the Sarmoli Jainti Van Panchayat were invited to join the homestay initiative, conditional on their active involvement in the upkeep of the forest commons. Linking livelihood needs with conservation enabled the village community to once again become active stewards of their forests through participatory direct democracy, regulating use and protecting it, and contributing a small percentage of all earnings from tourism back into the Van Panchayat.

FROM CRISIS INTERVENTION TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

Maati Sangathan is a grassroots solidarity network formed by mountain women across the region, held together by a shared vision that spans more than three decades. Maati is committed to gender and intersectional justice and to securing a life free from violence – whether domestic, sexual, or structural, such as that rooted in identity politics of caste or religion. No amount of economic gain can compensate for threats to one's bodily integrity or survival.

The crisis intervention work engages not just the affected individuals, but also their families, the wider community, local governance bodies, and, when needed, the state's justice systems. Without this kind of community cohesion, rural societies risk further fragmentation – making sustainable well-being even harder to achieve. This broad-based approach – what we call our dukh-sukh formula – has enabled us to build a vast solidarity network and foster an environment that supports not just food and livelihood security, but also theprotection and conservation of the forests, rivers, and land that sustain us.

LIVELIHOODS ROOTED IN LOCAL ECONOMIES

All our livelihood initiatives – whether in wool work or food production – are deeply rooted in the local economy. Ownership and agency rest with the community, grounded in the principles of equity, fair play, and shared benefit. Maati Tana Bana, the Self-Help Group (SHG), provides the framework – the warp and weft – of all income-generating projects. It has created the fertile ground that allows people and projects to collaborate within time-bound project cycles, and then evolve, gaining strength and independence over time.

Maati focuses on core traditional livelihoods like farming and wool – skills that Himalayan communities have long mastered. But they've also evolved with the changing economy, shifting from subsistence to market-based models, and responding to the challenges of growing climate instability.They've embraced ecological farming, diversified tourism revenues, and launched initiatives like the Nature Café.

A WAY OF LIFE: THE GRASSROOTS ETHOS

Food sovereignty is essential to sustaining mountain communities. From growing diverse, locally sustaining crops through regenerative agro-ecological practices to running the Nature Café, Maati has embraced economies of care to lead a people-driven response to the existential threats and multiple crises facing mountain communities. The Café has become a symbolic commons – a space of conviviality – where community members, homestay owners, guides and visiting tourists come together to engage with vital issues of food, governance, equity, and ecological sustainability. It fosters dialogue, supports dignified livelihoods, and strengthens the shared commitment to conserving the mountain landscape.

Maati is more than just a collection of struggles and triumphs by change-makers. It is a way of life – rooted in conservation,

solidarity, and community. Like grass, we are everywhere. And like grass, we weather each storm – sometimes battered but seldom broken. Beneath the surface lies a deep network of interconnected roots that nurture and support one another, forming a quiet, subterranean solidarity that strives toward the larger well-being of mountain communities and building their resilience.

The author is founder-member of the women's collective Maati.

ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY REQUIRES HUMAN REALISM

By Milena S. Nikolova, PhD

People generally want to do the right thing. However, they do not readily change their behaviour simply because they are told what is right. This is especially true when we step out of our daily routine and enter into a holiday mode. When we enjoy a riding adventure through amazing landscapes or hike through forests, we are not in learning mode; we are enjoying ourselves. In this context, no posters on climate change or pamphlets on local sourcing can have much effect on our hearts or minds.

For years, the model being followed was to educate and point travelers to the right things to do, with the belief that once they know what is right, they will choose well. Studies persistently reveal that the majority of vacationers state that they recognise the importance of making responsible choices and confirm their desire to be more responsible. And yet, this does not translate to real action and change in behaviour.

Why? Opting for responsible options while we are in leisure mode requires effort. Effort during a short getaway or a craved holiday feels like a sacrifice that most of us are just unwilling to make. Even if at home we try to be good consumers who reduce waste or prioritise local shopping, during an escape, we give ourselves a break, enjoying the leisure flow and opting for choices that are effortless.

Here are three practical illustrations of undesired travel behaviour and what we can do to tackle it better than current approaches:

1. DESIGNING BUFFETS FOR LESS FOOD WASTE

Think of an all-inclusive resort with a rich breakfast buffet. Guests stack their plates high with croissants, eggs, and all sorts of fruits, half of which remains on their plates and ends up in the bin. Why? The design of the service makes this behaviour easy, and the visual cues say “take as much as you want and do not worry about it.”

In this reality, telling guests to “take only what you will really eat” can hardly solve the problem. However, if one were to use smaller plates that make it difficult to stack up, present food in smaller portions, and place signs that invite guests to feel free to return for more and as many times as they would like, it can influence actions without much effort. These small changes in the design of the service work not because they change values, but because they change behaviour.

2. MAKING LOCAL FOOD CHOICES MORE LIKELY

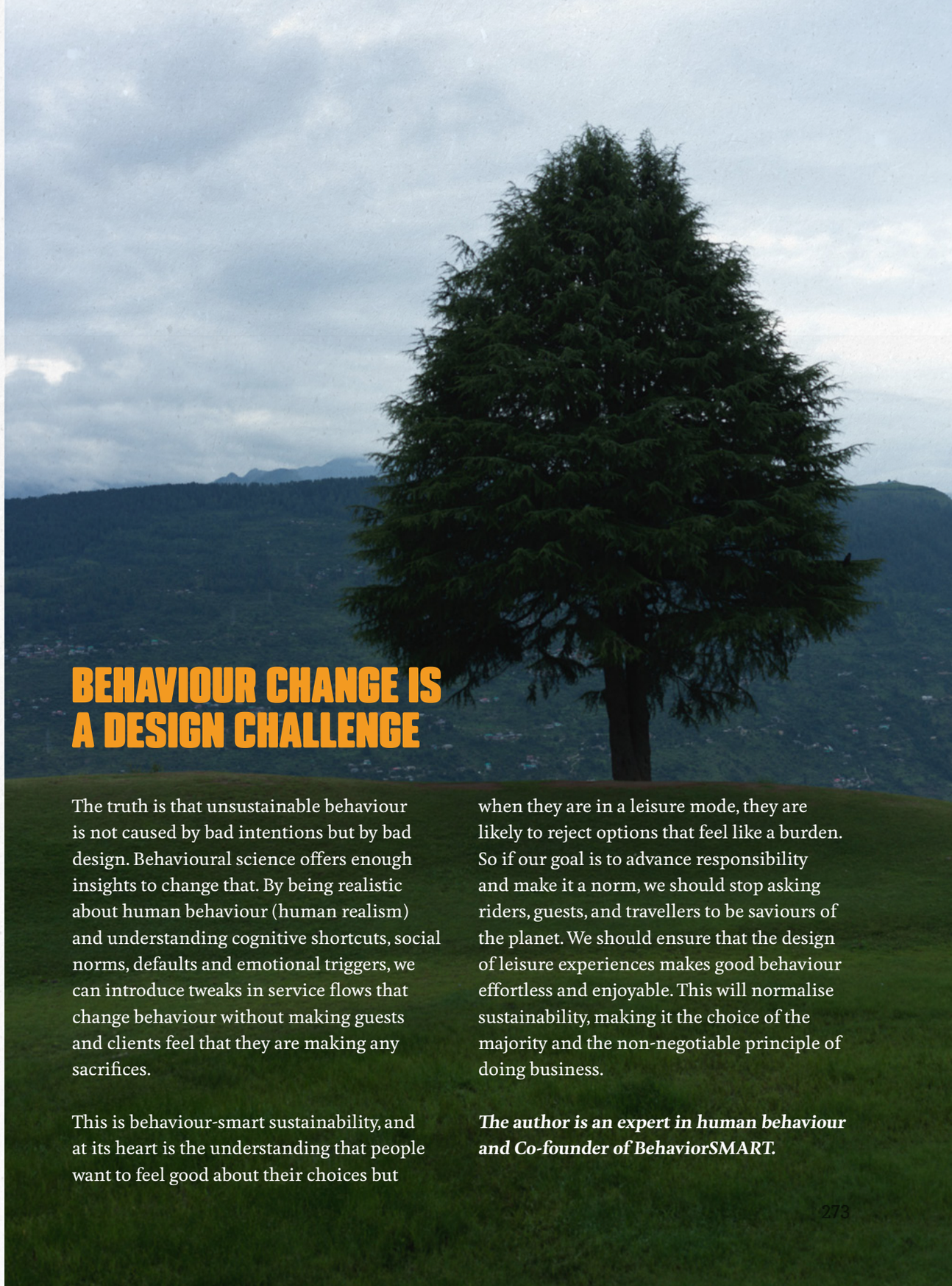
Imagine a couple that arrives in Italy dreaming of "real Italian food" and ends up eating club sandwiches and spaghetti bolognese. Why? Because the menu in the restaurant did not highlight local dishes, and the couple went with what they assumed was Italian. Because they did not really know what Pasta alla Norcina meant, they did not want to risk ordering something that was completely unfamiliar.

Now, imagine if the menu had a section titled "Taste Our Seasonal Local Treasures," featuring irresistible and engaging descriptions of some local seasonal dishes. And what if there was a table card with gorgeous photos and a short story about the local farmer who supplies the truffles for the delicious and creamy Pasta alla Norcina? Suddenly, local food becomes easy to identify and select, and impossible to resist. Again, that is not a shift in values but a shift in behaviour based on choice design.

3. NATURE EXPERIENCES: LEAVE NO TRACE MADE EFFORTLESS

Now, picture a tour group on a hike that has stopped at a rest point to enjoy a picnic lunch. Some of the guests decide to leave uneaten food behind for the wild animals. Their actions are by no means driven by evil intentions; they simply do not think about the fact that there is no waste collection out in nature or the harm that leaving food can cause to wild animals.

What could be a better approach? One way would be to provide some timely information, before the outdoor adventure begins, which makes guests aware of the expected norms of behaviour in nature. Another is to make it easy for them to do the right thing – in this case, by providing them with a small waste bag right before the hike, with a friendly statement: "You will need this. We are proud to keep the trails pristine, and we know you will help us do the same." So again, a small adjustment to make good behaviour easy and effortless is enough to change the pattern.



BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IS A DESIGN CHALLENGE

The truth is that unsustainable behaviour is not caused by bad intentions but by bad design. Behavioural science offers enough insights to change that. By being realistic about human behaviour (human realism) and understanding cognitive shortcuts, social norms, defaults and emotional triggers, we can introduce tweaks in service flows that change behaviour without making guests and clients feel that they are making any sacrifices.

This is behaviour-smart sustainability, and at its heart is the understanding that people want to feel good about their choices but when they are in a leisure mode, they are likely to reject options that feel like a burden. So if our goal is to advance responsibility and make it a norm, we should stop asking riders, guests, and travellers to be saviours of the planet. We should ensure that the design of leisure experiences makes good behaviour effortless and enjoyable. This will normalise sustainability, making it the choice of the majority and the non-negotiable principle of doing business.

The author is an expert in human behaviour and Co-founder of BehaviorSMART.

Bio-diversity Conservation

Royal Enfield Social Mission's conservation efforts extend from keystone species and critical landscapes in the Himalayas to Indian coastlines, with a long-term vision of helping build human-animal harmony through wildlife conservation and nature-linked livelihoods.

Vital to maintaining the ecological balance in fragile ecosystems, **Keystone Species** are embedded in the natural heritage and cultural identity of local communities. To promote coexistence and sustainable livelihoods in wildlife habitats, Royal Enfield's Social Mission continues to collaborate with a range of partners, focusing on the protection of three key species:

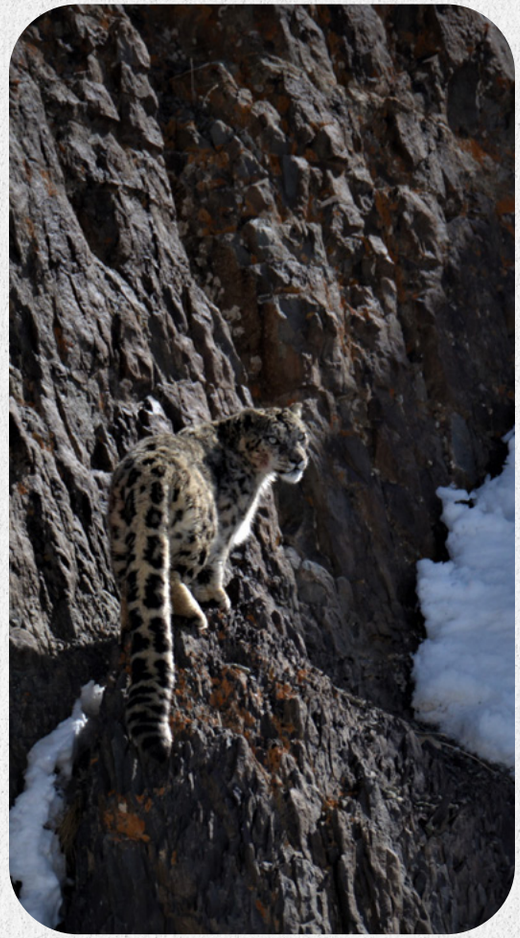
Snow Leopard

Known as the "ghost of the mountains," the elusive snow leopard plays a critical role in regulating prey populations and maintaining mountain ecosystem stability. In Ladakh, a partnership with the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust led to the designation of Tar village as the region's first Community Conserved Area spanning 41 sq. km dedicated to protecting snow leopards and the broader biodiversity, including the Ibex and Golden Eagle.

Across Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, camera traps and community-based monitoring by the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) are helping paint a clearer picture of snow leopard presence. Community members involved in human-wildlife conflict mitigation are being trained at the local level, while outreach programmes in Kashmir are engaging school students.

Together, efforts in Himachal, Kashmir and Uttarakhand will assess snow leopard population over a cumulative area of over 8,500 sq. km

In Sikkim's Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, conservation strategies are being co-designed with local yak herders, who now use solar-powered corral fencing to reduce livestock predation.



Himalayan Brown Bear

In the upper reaches of Ladakh and Uttarakhand, the Himalayan Brown Bear, once viewed solely as a threat to livestock, is now at the heart of community-led conservation efforts. Local youth have been trained as nature guides and provided with solar lighting, while bear-proof corrals are being tested to reduce nighttime livestock losses.

A baseline survey in Drass and Suru Valley gathered first-hand insights from communities living in human-wildlife conflict-prone zones. The information is helping design better deterrents, including bear-proof containers and caches, offering hope that cohabitation can be made safer for both humans and bears.

Golden Langur

A rare primate found in the forests of the India-Bhutan borderlands, the Golden Langur faces a shrinking habitat. Partnering with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), surveys have been completed across all known langur habitats in the Greater Manas landscape. Through grassroots mobilisation, local students and teachers have been engaged, while international experts and stakeholders have come together to shape a long-term strategy for the langur's survival.

Yak heading back to station in Letchen Gurudongmar, Lachen.

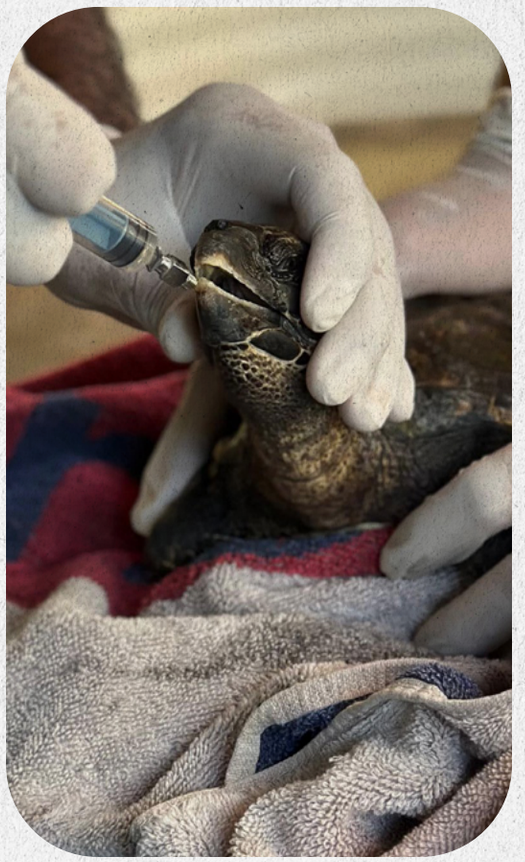
In addition to iconic key species, wildlife conservation initiatives include bringing attention to India's lesser-known wild cats. Working with the Wildlife Trust of India and the Sherdukpen community in Arunachal Pradesh, camera traps placed across community forests near Shergaon have revealed the presence of four rare species: the Clouded Leopard, Marbled Cat, Leopard Cat and Golden Cat.

In Uttarakhand's Gangotri landscape, birding is making way for local livelihoods through the Conservation and Livelihood Programme with Titli Trust. Youth trained as nature guides identified over 60 species, and mobilised to form the collective – the Taknaur Hills Conservation Society, which hosted the first Gangotri Nature Festival.

In Arunachal's Siang Valley, ten newly recorded moth species from Gobuk village have been published internationally, while a Community Conserved Area is taking shape through youth-led biodiversity work near the Mouling National Park. In Meghalaya, 100 birds and 250 butterflies have been recorded so far. Homestay owners, school eco clubs, and nature guides are being trained to carry this momentum forward. Meanwhile in Assam's Greater Manas region, trained youth now guide visitors through Manas and Raimona National Parks.

Along India's coasts, nearly 9,000 traditional fisherfolk have participated in marine studies and ghost net recovery – removing over 36 metric tonnes of marine debris. Efforts are going to explore how the retrieved nets could be potentially repurposed into circular economy products.

Community-led Sea Turtle Protection Forces in Goa and Tamil Nadu have helped release over 300,000 Olive Ridley hatchlings into the ocean, safeguarding more than 500 nests. Their efforts have also rescued and rehabilitated 275 marine animals across Goa and Tamil Nadu.



Expert Speak

FROM THE HOME OF THE HOOLOCK GIBBON

Lessons on Responsible Travel

By
Divya Vasudev

Across the globe, we find examples of species whose conservation has been bolstered by tourism and vice versa. The iconic wolf of Yellowstone National Park is a noteworthy example. Wolves, once locally extinct, were reintroduced into Yellowstone in the 1990s, eventually attracting the attention of tourists. By the 2020s, wolf tourism in Yellowstone was bringing an estimated USD 82 million into neighbouring villages.

An ocean away, up in the mountains of central Africa, the mountain gorilla clambers back from near-extinction to find itself a relatively safe future, partly due to conservation tourism. I myself have wrestled through stinging nettle in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forests, happy with memories of seeing a massive silverback – the dominant adult male – and the rest of the gorilla family on a guided tour. Profits generated from tourism feed back into protection of these very animals and their habitat.

Here, I thought, was the blueprint of Responsible Conservation Tourism, where tourists have an experience in the wild, learn more about species and ecosystems, and are shown a clear pathway to contribute back to conservation.

In India too, we have an ape species roaming our forests in the Northeast – the western hoolock gibbon. Unfortunately, this charismatic species remains unknown to many of us. Once common throughout its range in parts of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, it is now a rare sight. Some years ago, conservation experts declared this gibbon to be one of 25 most endangered primates across the world. The reason they provided was a suspected 90% decline in gibbon populations; in other words, we have lost 9 out of 10 gibbons in the past few decades, to forest loss and fragmentation, and hunting.

Female gibbon with infant

Northeast India, home to the western hoolock gibbon, has one striking characteristic that makes it unique as compared to other parts of our country. Forests in the hill tracts of this region are largely community managed, and people depend heavily on forests for their day-to-day needs. Communities have historically set aside forest land for resources such as water and food, and while forest cover is high, threats to forests and biodiversity still exist; forests continue to be lost to agriculture and infrastructure, driven by broader socio-economic environments and aspirations we all share. The key question that arises is: how do we balance economic necessities with a very real need to preserve nature?

Our organisation, Conservation Initiatives, has been working in one such community-managed area at the Indo-Bangladesh border, Hima Malai Sohmat, for nearly a decade now. A Hima is a traditional chiefdom of the Khasis, comprised of multiple villages. The Hima Malai Sohmat still retains rich biodiverse forests on its cliffs, and in the cloud-laden valleys below, which are home to gibbons. These forests also support other wildlife, such as the mountain-loving serow, and night-animals like civets and small wild cats.

The Hima leadership and community are largely supportive of conservation efforts, and over the years, community youth have been trained and have worked with us to become effective conservation leaders. The Hima has welcomed our nature awareness programmes, engaged with government schemes that incentivise forest conservation, instituted village rules to protect forests and wildlife, and collaborated with us to generate knowledge about their forest. For instance, in 2023, we partnered with a village tourism society for a community biomonitoring exercise where we used remotely triggered cameras to photograph elusive forest denizens, and create a calendar showcasing wildlife of the Hima. Behind the community's motivation to preserve nature is also a sense of pride in the rich natural heritage of their land.

We have now expanded to Mawrapad village with support from the Royal Enfield Social Mission. Here, we are implementing a low-carbon gibbon-centric ecotourism initiative by developing an outdoor camp site.

The camp will be ideal for tourists with a sense of adventure and a love for the wilderness, providing a sense of peace and promising a morning orchestra of forest birds and gibbons. Just beyond are breath-taking views of cliffs, typical of the karst ecosystem of this region that makes for forests on rocky cliffs, extensive limestone cave networks, and crystal clear rivers. Every morning, these cliffs resound with the booming hooru hooru calls, that are characteristic of the 'duet' of gibbon groups, each comprising an adult male and female and their young. Through the years, we have identified locations where gibbons are more frequently sighted, and with some luck and a bit of effort, tourists can catch a glimpse of gibbons swinging gracefully through the tree canopy. The site also offers treks, ridge walks, waterfalls, mountain biking and peaceful settings that bring you at one with nature.

The author is a conservation ecologist. She co-leads Conservation Initiatives, an organisation working towards science-based conservation of endangered species and ecosystems, focused in Northeast India.

Expert Speak

WHERE WILL SNOW LEOPARDS GO?

Ghosts of the Mountains:

By *Shahid Hameed*
& *Akshata Anand*

Snow Leopards are perfectly adapted to the rugged terrain of high altitude Himalayas.

Climate change is widely acknowledged as one of the most urgent global challenges of our time. It is a far-reaching socio-ecological crisis that continues to reshape our planet. While iconic species like tigers in the forests and whales in the oceans have helped illustrate the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss, there are lesser-known, equally vulnerable ecosystems that demand our attention.

Among these are the Asian montane, rangelands vast high-elevation regions defined by their stark landscapes and low plant productivity. These fragile ecosystems, occurring above the tree line and near glaciers, are warming at rates faster than the global average. Their resilience to environmental changes is limited. And yet, it is in these inhospitable terrains that one of the planet's most elusive and charismatic big cats survive – the snow leopard, or as many call it, the ghost of the mountains.

Snow leopards *(Panthera uncia)* are facing mounting threats. These include climate-driven habitat shifts, prey base depletion, human-wildlife conflict, often leading to retaliatory killings poaching and the illegal wildlife trade. Our understanding of how snow leopards respond to these threats is still developing. Their elusive nature, large home ranges, and low population densities make long-term, large-scale monitoring both challenging and crucial. Without robust ecological data, conservation efforts risk being short-sighted or ineffective.

At the High Altitude Programme of the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), we have been conducting long-term monitoring of snow leopards and their prey in the Upper Spiti landscape (USL) of Himachal Pradesh for over 13 years. While this might seem extensive, for a long-lived, slow-reproducing species like the snow leopard, it represents barely a couple of generations.

Between 2018 and 2020, we, in partnership with the state Forest Department's wildlife wing, led the first large-scale, systematic assessment of snow leopard populations across Himachal Pradesh, covering more than 25,000 square kilometres – a region larger than the areas covered by any previous snow leopard studies globally. This is an area nearly 20 times the size of Delhi city. This pioneering effort revealed new areas of snow leopard presence and also helped lay the foundation for expanding our work beyond Spiti to other parts of the Indian Himalayas. With the support of Royal Enfield Social Mission, we have extended our monitoring efforts into unexplored snow leopard habitats of Jammu & Kashmir and the Pangi region of Himachal Pradesh. In 2024, our camera trapping across Paddar and Kishtwar High Altitude National Park, captured snow leopards at 14 different locations. The camera traps also recorded a rich diversity of other high-altitude fauna, including brown bears, musk deer, Himalayan wolves, red foxes, and stone martens.

Back in Upper Spiti, our recent camera trap monitoring exercise showed a better snow leopard population in terms of numbers compared to our previous endevours. However, conservation is not just about data. It is about people.

In Kashmir, we partnered with the Wildlife Research and Conservation Foundation (WRCF), a local NGO, to conduct outreach programmes in various schools and colleges to introduce children and youth to the unique high-altitude wildlife this region harbours, with the aim to foster a culture of conservation from an early age.
Alongside awareness efforts, we also focus on capacity building. We conduct training programmes for frontline forest staff in both Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir to equip them with the knowledge and tools necessary for effective wildlife monitoring and protection.

(LHS) Field team during camera trapping in Pangi, Lahaul. Credit: Akshata Anand, NCF

(RHS) Field team on the way to retrieve cameras from Paddar, Kishtwar. Credit: Shahid Hameed, NCF

In Dacchan, a remote village inside Kishtwar High Altitude National Park, we trained two local youth (Nishu & Kishu) during 2022-23. During 2024-25, they conducted camera trapping independently with remote supervisors and guidance from experts at NCF.

One of our key initiatives in Himachal Pradesh involves building local capacities and creating space for locals to engage, learn and address various conservation issues in this diverse landscape. These are locals who are fast becoming conservation Champions in their respective regions. To strengthen this growing network, we brought together Champions from Lahaul, Kinnaur, and Spiti for a dedicated workshop. Through a series of interactive activities, the workshop fostered rich discussions and meaningful exchanges of ideas. During these conversations, the Champions emphasised the need to address conservation challenges at the landscape and ecosystem levels. They highlighted that arriving at long-term solutions requires a systems-oriented approach – one in which all stakeholders come together to co-create a future action plan. This includes establishing shared rules, frameworks for benefit-sharing, and mechanisms for accountability. To make such efforts effective and inclusive, it is essential to collaborate with local NGOs and organisations that share common goals and values.

(LHS) Buzunu Valley in Paddar, Kishtwar.
(RHS) Snow Leopard illustration by Sartaj Ghuman

One of the Champions shared insightfully- "a snow leopard is like air, it keeps flowing and doesn't stick around in one place". (referring to its elusive nature)

At the heart of this initiative are the local Champions – community stewards who are stepping up to lead conservation efforts in their own regions. As climate change continues to reshape the Himalayas, our efforts must evolve from isolated interventions to integrated, long-term strategies. Conserving the snow leopard landscape and empowering the local communities will be essential to build a climate resilient future.

There is still much to be done. But with continued support, a dedicated forest department, community engagement, and scientific rigour, we can envision a future where wildlife and people not only coexist but flourish together.

The Nature Conservation Foundation is a non-governmental wildlife conservation and research organisation based in Mysore, India.

The author is a conservation ecologist. She co-leads Conservation Initiatives, an organisation working towards science-based conservation of endangered species and ecosystems, focused in Northeast India.

Our Eyes in the Wild

Camera trapping is a non-intrusive method used to study wildlife in their natural environment. It is effective across different habitats - from dense forests to high altitude areas, and even urban spaces. Camera traps are automated devices equipped with motion / infrared sensors triggered by body heat, and record images every time movement is detected.

Camera trap surveys are used for identifying species presence and abundance in a habitat, activity patterns etc. The conservation objectives of a particular programme will decide the survey design and protocol used. This is an important and effective tool in the study of reclusive species like the Snow Leopard, which is the flagship species of the Keystone species project.

Camera traps are set up on sturdy surfaces like trees and overhangs in potential habitat and along animal movement routes to maximise line of sight and chances of capturing footage. Effective surveys need understanding of the species and its behaviours, the landscape and field protocol. Large amounts of visual data is generated and periodic checks are required to collect data, swap batteries etc.

The data and images retrieved can be processed and analysed to even help identify individuals of a species based on their markings. Since the images are also linked to location and time, it helps inform statistical models and help build conservation strategies for a particular area. For e.g. camera trap studies carried out as part of the Forgotten Cats programme in Shergaon have identified the presence of important small cats such as the Clouded Leopard (based on a photograph by Shibani Chaudhury.

Community participation is an essential requirement for the success of conservation programmes. The Royal Enfield Social Mission actively engages with communities, especially youth, to harness their traditional knowledge, co-create conservation plans and build technical capacity in conservation skills, including camera trapping. This ensures community stewardship of critical landscapes and implementation of long-term strategies.

250+ camera trap sites have proved to be our eyes in the wilderness in several programmatic interventions under the Keystone project, in diverse Western and Eastern Himalayan landscapes. Snow Leopard populations are being studied in Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir and Uttarakhand over an area spanning > 8500 sq.km while community conserved areas are being mapped in Arunachal Pradesh. These surveys are also revealing the species richness of these landscapes, indicating high conservation potential.

Illustrations by Debashish Nandi, Green Hub Fellow

Expert Speak

THE MAKING OF SHAN

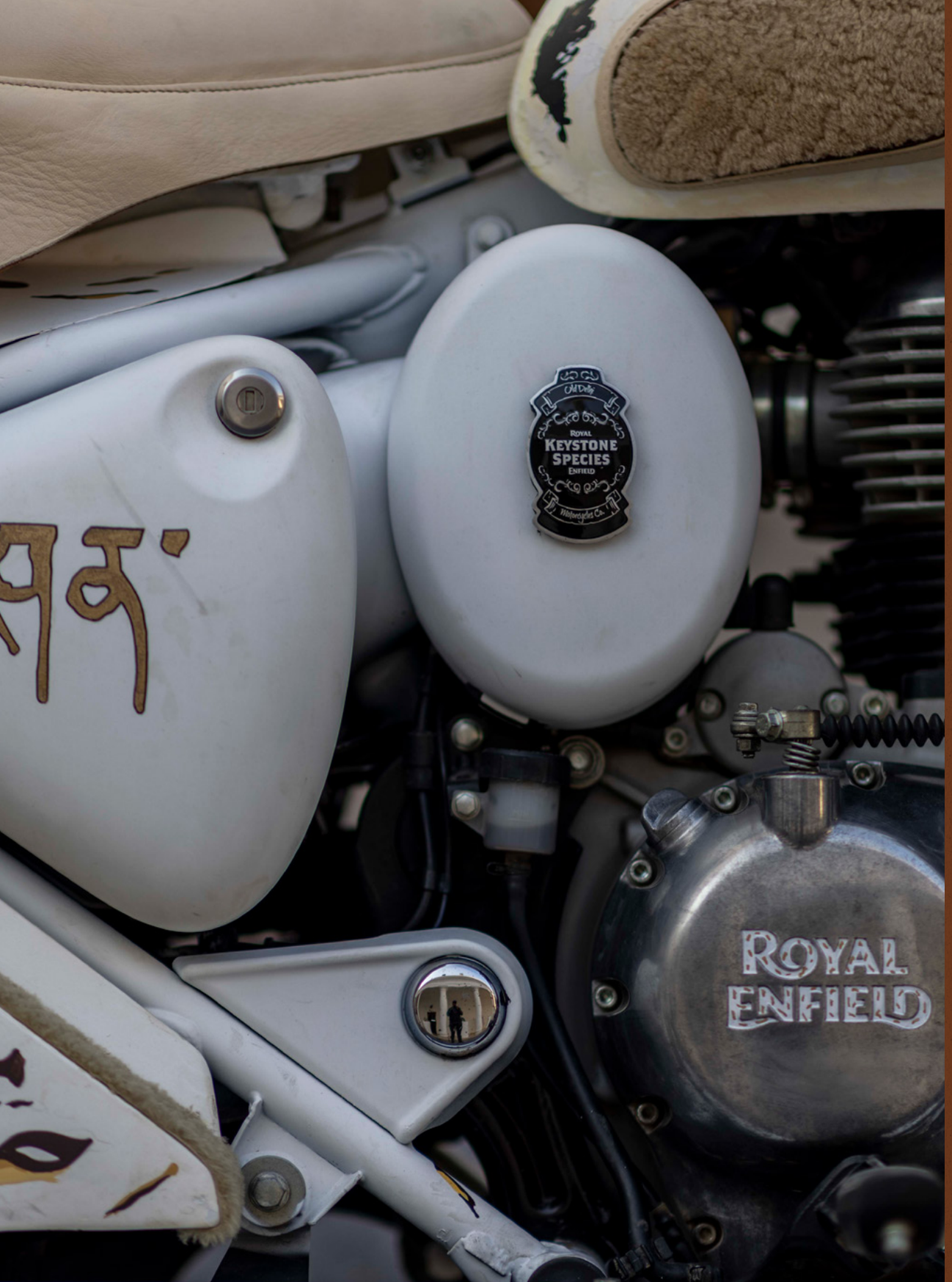
By
Bobbee Singh

When I was first approached by Royal Enfield Social Mission to create a custom motorcycle inspired by the snow leopard, I knew this wasn't just another modification job. Royal Enfield is expanding its conservation efforts to keystone species in the Himalayas, with a long-term vision of supporting human-animal harmony in the landscape and furthering the mindset of responsible tourism. The snow leopard sits at the heart of this effort. As a keystone species deeply affected by climate change, its survival is critical not just to its own kind, but to every other species in the ecosystem, and to the health of the land itself.

SHAN IS A CUSTOM MOTORCYCLE INSPIRED BY THE SNOW LEOPARD

Such is the nature of this majestic creature that it demands a certain respect; an almost reverent attention to detail. The task at hand was to not just capture the physicality of the animal, but its spirit. Notoriously camera-shy and increasingly vulnerable, the snow leopard moves like a whisper across some of the toughest terrain on the planet. A creature that doesn't need to be seen to command presence. And yet, to make that presence manifest, I had to see it — or at least, see where it lives. So I set off to Ladakh.

In conversations with locals who generously shared their folklore and their relationship with the majestic animal, I learned that the snow leopard is called *Shan* in Ladakhi. Immediately, the Hindi connotation of the word came to my mind – brilliance, grandeur and splendour. Such is the trickery, the slippery slope of associations that the mind draws, of memories that superimpose themselves onto facts, layering meaning and emotion onto it all. So naturally, *Shan* stuck with me. The name has weight. The animal, and what it stands for, carries that weight too. It isn't loud. It doesn't ask for attention. It simply exists – regal, rare and rooted. That's what I wanted the motorcycle to feel like.



Upon my return, I decided that I did not want to make something obvious or too loud. It had to hold your gaze in silence. I chased the eerie stillness of the snow leopard in the stance – low, powerful, and poised. The motorcycle's long, low profile echoes the cat's graceful form, capturing its compact strength and elusive presence. I designed the motorcycle to carry itself the way my muse does: steady and grounded, yet always ready to pounce. While the front had to be focused and intent, the back needed a certain sensuality that carried the bulk like a secret, in the form of a thick, elegant tail. Not decorative, but essential.

The colour palette for the paint and the upholstery scheme was borrowed directly from the mountains: muted greys, soft whites, tones that blend into stone and snow, arranging themselves in a monochromatic camouflage, which is the defining feature of the animal. But I didn't want the bike to wear the leopard like a costume. The leopard had to be 'in' the bike, not on it. The motorcycle had to feel like it came from the same soil, the same ridge, the same stretch of earth. The details had to reveal themselves slowly. No gimmicks. No flash. It couldn't look like a toy, because the subject demands more serious consideration. In keeping with Royal Enfield's legacy of blending timeless design with modern, functional performance, it had to carry the snow leopard's power, its aggression, and its stillness.

Even the helmet followed this intention. It wasn't an accessory, but a part of the story. It wasn't designed to match the bike, but to help the rider become part of the landscape the bike belonged to.

I named the motorcycle *Shan*, as a tribute to the snow leopard telling its own story, in its own quiet way. But more than that, it's a tribute to the land, the people, and the delicate balance that holds everything together high up in the mountain passes.

This build is my way of listening and showing respect. A way of saying that some things are too fleeting to capture, too rare to replicate, but far too important to forget.

The author and Old Delhi Motorcycles reimagine the Classic 350 as a homage to the snow leopard: the elusive guardian of the Himalayas as a powerful lens into the environmental challenges unfolding across the region.

ROYAL ENFIELD

HELMETS FOR INDIA

ROYAL ENFIELD'S ROAD SAFETY INITIATIVE, HELMETS FOR INDIA FOCUSES ON CHANGING MINDSETS AND TURNING THE CONVERSATION AROUND ROAD SAFETY INTO SOMETHING MORE VISUAL AND COLLABORATIVE.

An Artists' Collective focused on encouraging safe riding practices, **Helmets For India (HFI)** aims to bring together the global motorcycling community to spread awareness and encourage helmet usage, where the helmet serves as a canvas for self-expression. Royal Enfield's road safety initiative, *Helmets for India* focuses on changing mindsets and turning the conversation around road safety into something more visual and collaborative.

In 2024, Helmets For India's four-city roadshow took to the streets in Gurgaon, Pune, Indore, and Bengaluru, where helmet-themed art workshops welcomed participants to try miniature helmet painting, calligraphy and digital design. The sessions ended with the *#ArtOfSafety* ride, where riders took their message to the roads, engaging directly with fellow commuters.

The initiative found a new stage at Ziro Festival in Arunachal Pradesh, where a striking helmet installation made of sustainable materials became a focal point. Visitors took part in hands-on customisation workshops, adding their own colours and ideas to the cause. Similar interventions followed at events like Motoverse and the Homegrown Festival in Mumbai.

At another intersection of art and impact, HFI partnered with the *India Foundation for the Arts (IFA)* to exhibit large helmet installations made from mycelium and a collection of 18 custom helmets, each telling its own story. Among the artists was the *Aravani Art Project* – a collective of trans and cis women who use public art to challenge stereotypes and make marginalised voices visible.

Through HFI, local community members are also being engaged for more hands-on training in road safety and first-aid. In the high-altitude region between Manali and Darcha, HFI worked with Lady Willingdon Hospital to train villagers as first responders.

INDU HARIKUMAR

Mix media, 2024
All rides, all rights

Indu captures in graphic stories the trials and triumphs Indian women navigate as they revel in and reclaim their right to all roads.

Harikumar is an award-winning artist, author and educator. Her work is about giving shape to what remains unsaid in society – stories of body, desire, love and belonging. Her work has been exhibited globally and in India. She has written and illustrated several children's books and is currently working on her first book of comics on relationships. Beyond building online communities through her work, Indu has used art as a tool for healing and protest in physical spaces.

JUSSI PAKALEN

Mix media, 2022

Using vivid colours paired with the otherworldly fantasy, the artist brings out a sense of carefreeness everyone yearns for.

Born in Helsinki Finland, Jussi Pakalén is a graffiti artist. He brilliantly portrays his nostalgia for the early graffiti of the 80s on the finished helmet.

ARAVANI ART PROJECT

Murals of Identity and Belonging

By Poornima Sukumar

Art has long been a voice of hope, community and social change. In the hands of collectives like the Aravani Art Project, the powerful language of art has been used to tell stories of gender identity, fluidity and celebration. Across city walls and village corners, they take the form of murals and art projects that make a statement on identity and belonging. In a society where transgender people have often been denied visibility, street art is a radical act of self-affirmation. Unapologetic and grounded in lived experience, vibrant and visual – the marginalised are taking up space through the project.

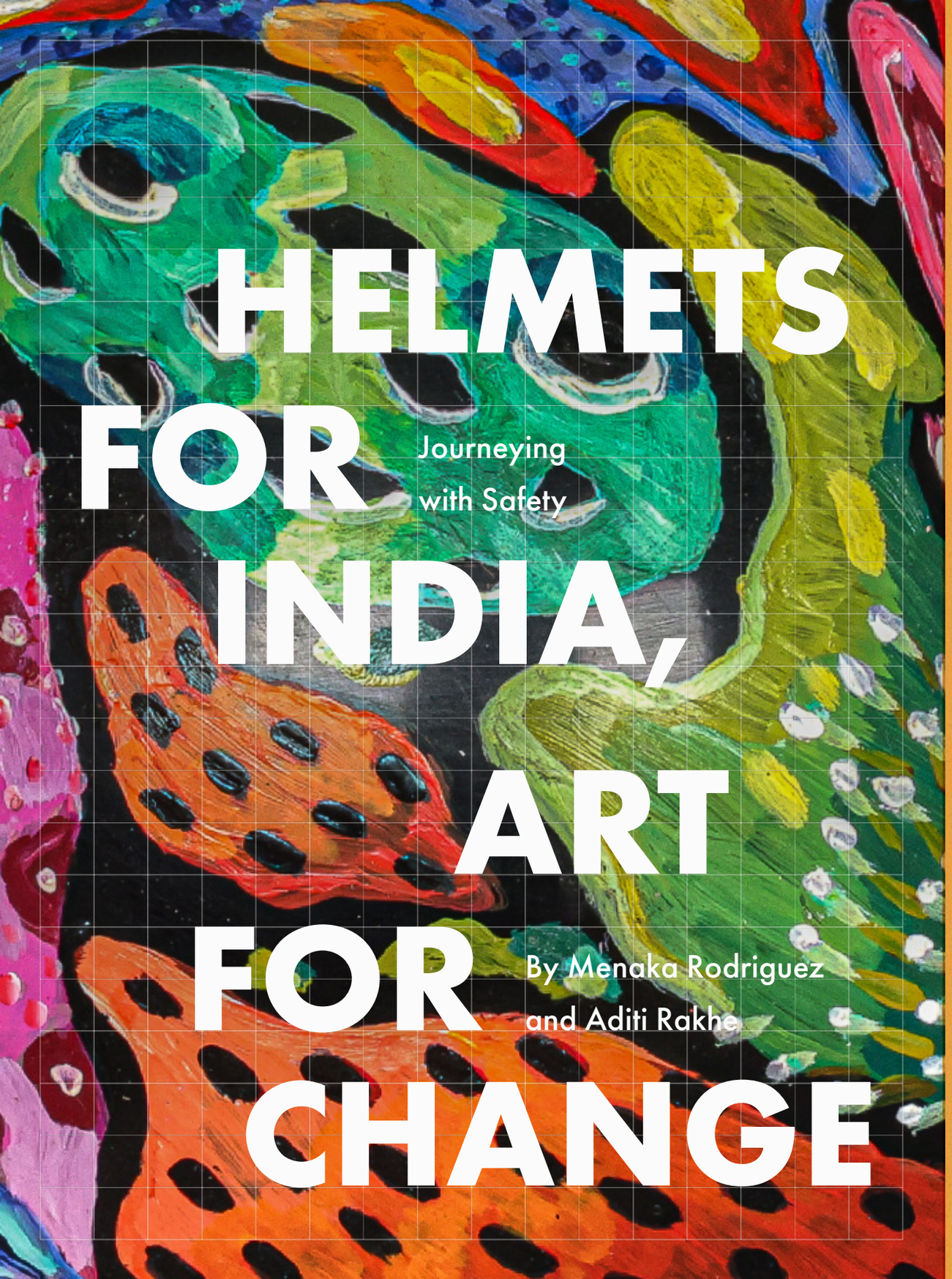
Art becomes a mirror and a window to reflect the artist's inner world while inviting others to view a reality they may never have encountered. Gender is expressed not only through the representation of bodies but also through movement, colour, symbolism and storytelling. These visual narratives combat reductive binaries and offer a more expansive understanding of identity. They say: we are here, we are many, and our stories deserve space. Art allows for the spontaneous participation of bystanders, who inevitably become part of the storytelling process. Conversations that begin with curiosity often evolve into meaningful exchanges. As scaffolds rise and brushes move, gender politics unfold in real-time, accessible to all. Each mural leaves behind pigment, and with it questions, conversations, and often, new ways of seeing.

The success of community murals lies in collaboration between the artists, the subjects, and the larger public. When these collaborations are deepened through partnerships like the one between Aravani and the Royal Enfield Social Mission, the result is an inclusive platform for co-creation. Working together to envision and create art dissolves social hierarchies and builds mutual respect. It encourages and enables trans women and other marginalised voices, not as token participants but as equal collaborators.

IN A SOCIETY WHERE TRANSGENDER PEOPLE HAVE OFTEN BEEN DENIED VISIBILITY, STREET ART IS A RADICAL ACT OF SELF-AFFIRMATION.

In our collaboration with Helmets For India, the art on both helmets symbolises a profound journey– a Gender Journey. It reflects the transition into womanhood, a path marked by transformation, self-discovery and a spectrum of emotions. These emotions, much like nature, are vast and uncontainable– sometimes as turbulent as the waves of the sea, and at other times as radiant and untamed as blooming wildflowers. The journey of gender expression and affirmation is often difficult to put into words, much like the mysteries of nature itself.

The author is the Founder and Creative Director of the Aravani Art Project, a Trans and Cis women art collective. It seeks to empower transgender individuals and create visibility for the transgender community by involving them in public art installations, murals and performances. Through these collaborative art projects, Aravani Art Project fosters social participation, challenges gender stereotypes and promotes inclusivity. Working with diverse communities, including children, young adults, and people from underprivileged backgrounds.



HELMETS FOR INDIA, ART FOR CHANGE

Journeying with Safety

By Menaka Rodriguez and Aditi Rakhe

How can art foster conversations about personal and collective experiences and impact social change? The Helmets for India project saw artists transform helmets into canvases that captured personal stories, reflections and connections to motorcycling while reaffirming the idea of road safety.

Initiated by Eicher Group Foundation and facilitated by India Foundation for the Arts under its Arts Services, Helmets for India featured works of 12 artists using helmets as a unique and unconventional canvas to express their individuality, emotions, experiences and perspectives.

What does safety mean to you? What does safety mean on the road? How can safety be facilitated? These were some of the key themes that the artists responded to through their artworks for Helmets for India. This project went beyond the mere creation of artwork, allowing for deep reflection and impactful storytelling.

From the abstract, playful, ritualistic, profoundly political to the biographical, each helmet held a unique story. The invited artists created artwork on helmets that represented their artistic practice and reflections on road safety. The artwork, at times personal and individual, also drew from collective experience of riders, memory, connections to justice and equality, gender, representation, ecology, and the state of mind as we experience the road. Many of the helmets expressed distinctive expressions of the artists' perception of safety on the road and in travel, and some specifically engaged with the idea of societal safety.

The helmets evoked a sense of freedom associated with riding, the transformative power it can have on self-discovery, identity and an expression of the rider's internal registers and mindscapes. They offered a canvas for not only artistic expression, but a platform to explore diverse themes, making these topics accessible to a wider public through these artworks .

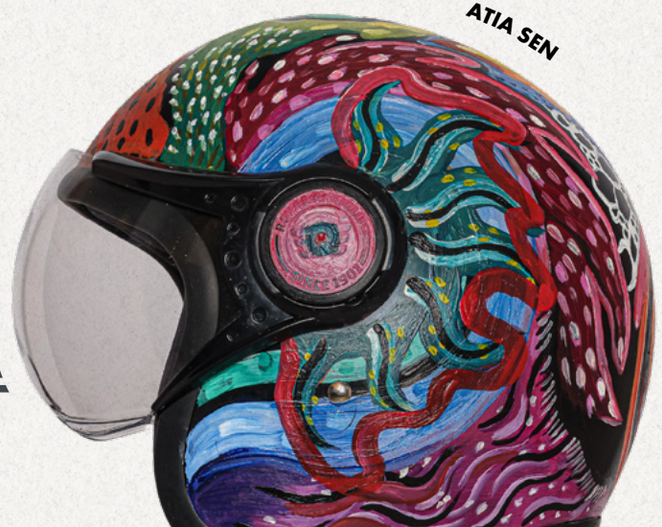
MANY OF THE HELMETS EXPRESSED DISTINCTIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THE ARTISTS' PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ON THE ROAD AND IN TRAVEL, AND SOME SPECIFICALLY ENGAGED WITH THE IDEA OF SOCIETAL SAFETY.

The stories and artwork created in this project traversed many themes, offering points of pause, introspection and conversation. The helmet designed by the Aravani Art Project for example showcased a Gender Journey- the transition into womanhood *"a path marked by transformation, self-discovery, and a spectrum of emotions."* Another helmet designed by Siddhesh Gautam reflects upon our journey towards freedom through constitutional equality. His work *"honours and celebrates this complex legacy, paying tribute to the visionaries who championed the movement for justice and equality."*

DEBANSHU MOULIK

GAGANDEEP SINGH

ATIA SEN



In Devika Sundar's work, the unfurling of a journey is represented in textures and patterns of oceanic forms. Artists like Atia Sen, Osheen Siva and Nirupa Rao explore the journey of the rider through the lens of nature and the landscapes they encounter. Sabari Venu's intervention focused on material we associate with safety in our lives. Debangshu Moulik claims his own journey as a motorcyclist, aptly reflecting why the helmet is synonymous with safety on the road. Gagan Singh and Aditi Mali look inward to the rider and home. Indu Harikumar's collected stories of women motorcycle riders amplify the need for safety on the road for women riders. Indu Antony honours the freedom and journey of women who navigate paths of resilience and seeks to inspire those who continue to push against barriers, embracing riding.


NIRUPA RAO

The artworks went beyond representation of physical safety on the road and powerfully represented an embodied idea of safety–emotionally and socially. It was fascinating to witness the artists weave stories from their own experiences, or from communities close to them, on the helmets. The collection of helmets showcased at the exhibition evoked conversations and curiosity around creating safe spaces on the road and otherwise, most importantly, for marginalised voices across gender, caste and class. And this was an important aspect of the project—the power to spark conversation and to spotlight road safety. The commitment of Royal Enfield Social Mission to affect change through creative storytelling is inspiring, and, through this project, allowed us to reflect on the people, friendships, kinships and community that make safer riding practices critical for all of us.


DEVIKA SUNDAR


OSHEEN SIVA

India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) is an independent, nationwide, not-for-profit organisation that makes grants and implements projects across research, practice and education in the arts and culture in India, since 1995. As a facilitator, catalyst and provocateur in the field, we support critical investigations, explorations and experiments that push boundaries of knowledge and practice, and challenge dominant narratives.

Menaka Rodriguez is the Executive Director for India Foundation for the Arts
Aditi Rakhe is Manager, Individual Contributions and Corporate Engagements at India Foundation for the Arts

Journeying Across the Himalayas

"In 2025, look to the Himalayas"

The debut edition of *Journeying Across the Himalayas* took place at Travancore Palace, New Delhi, as a celebration of stories from and of the Himalayas. Bringing together over 50 communities, 100 partners, 150 experts, and 200 artists and creative practitioners, the festival served as a reclamation of narrative – anchored in the voices of those who have inhabited the land for generations. Through storytelling and immersive experiences, it spotlighted the region's heritage, ecological challenges and creative resilience.

Project Overview

Journeying Across the Himalayas was designed to encourage collective action, drawing inspiration from the idea of conscious travel, where every participant plays an active role. As visitors moved through the space, a festival of acts unfolded through multi-sensory exhibits, climate conversations, and musical performances by the likes of Bipul Chhetri, Parvaz, Taba Chake, Rewben Mashangva, and more. One standout feature was the Himalayan Bazaar, a thoughtfully curated retail space to showcase craftsmanship and produce from the Himalayas. It generated over Rs.20 lakh in three days, laying the foundation for a growing ecosystem that supports artists, craftspeople, and cultural practitioners from the region.

Through the festival, artists, conservationists, and filmmakers converged to reimagine how we engage with the Himalayas, bringing to life Royal Enfield Social Mission's individual projects.

Green Pit Stops

The long-term vision behind the *Green Pit Stops* was reflected in artist Vishal K. Dar's installation, *The Long Road*. Through drawings, models, and photographs, the large-scale artwork explored the intersections of climate, architecture, and community. The documentation was part of a broader effort to build open-source resources for responsible infrastructure and travel in the Himalayas.

The Himalayan Knot

Through *The Himalayan Knot* space, Royal Enfield's Social Mission brought traditional craftsmanship into focus. Highlights included '*Risha*', an exhibit by Aratrik Dev Varman and Jisha Unnikrishnan, paying tribute to Tripura's Risha textile tradition. '*From Folk to Fabric*' was a textile exhibition that spanned nine Himalayan regions, featuring contributions from Dr. Monisha Ahmed, The Woolknitters, Aagor, and others. This exhibition served as a living document of Himalayan storytelling traditions, shedding light on textile heritage through the voices of those who continue to practice and safeguard these crafts.

Additionally, the *Himalayan Knot Design Prize* was launched in collaboration with VOGUE India, receiving interest from 7,200+, of which ten finalists were selected. One emerging designer was awarded a grant to develop a Himalayan crafts capsule collection, while a student secured an internship for the Himalayan Knot collection by Suket Dhir for *Looms of Ladakh*.

The Great Himalayan Exploration

The Great Himalayan Exploration (TGHE) exhibit showcased Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) practices across the Indian Himalayan region to create awareness and appreciation for these practices. The exhibit featured a curated selection of artifacts and narratives documenting traditional crafts, oral histories, and indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting the diverse cultural expressions that define the region.

A video display by National Geographic presented the experience of rider-researchers engaging with the living heritage of Ladakh, offering visitors a visual journey through the landscapes and traditions covered under the project. Alongside, the space featured '*Ehipassiko / Come and See*', a photo exhibition by Manou, a compelling exploration of Himalayan traditions and daily life. Through visuals and personal narratives, this exhibit underscored the interconnection between culture and environment in the Himalayan way of life.

The Himalayan Hub

Over 3,000 visitors engaged with *'Through the Lens of Community, Conservation and Culture'*, an immersive multimedia space created by 70+ Himalayan youth and alumni from across fellowships, grants and living labs, as part of the partnership with *Green Hub*. The exhibit drew on forest ecosystems as a metaphor for interconnected conservation efforts and community engagement across the Himalayas.

In addition, a contemporary art exhibition titled *'the shape of the wind is a tree'* showcased the work of fellows from the inaugural edition of *The Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners (2023 - 24)*. The exhibition gathered the projects and processes supported by the fellowship, reflecting on elemental connections, sites of remembering, and paths of return.

Winter Sports

An archival exhibit by the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation traced the roots of Ice hockey in Ladakh, from the 1950s to the present, highlighting its historical and cultural relevance and the sport's journey into contemporary recognition.

Helmets for India

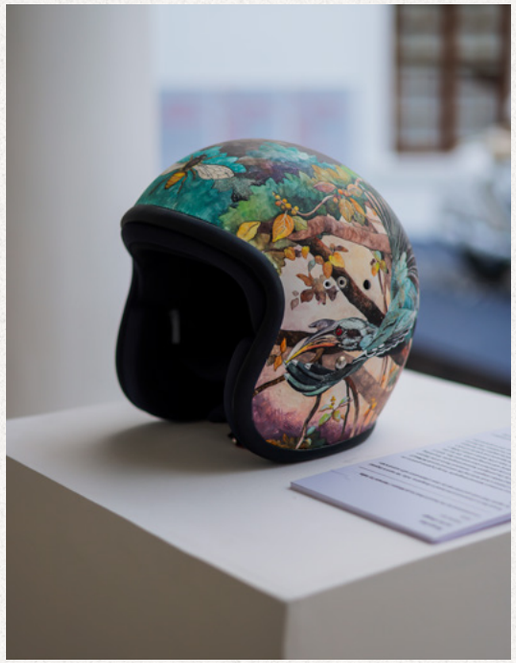
Giant helmet installations made from sustainable mycelium stood alongside 18 custom helmets – each telling a unique personal story. Presented in collaboration with India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), the initiative brought together 12 artists who used helmets as canvases for diverse visual expression.

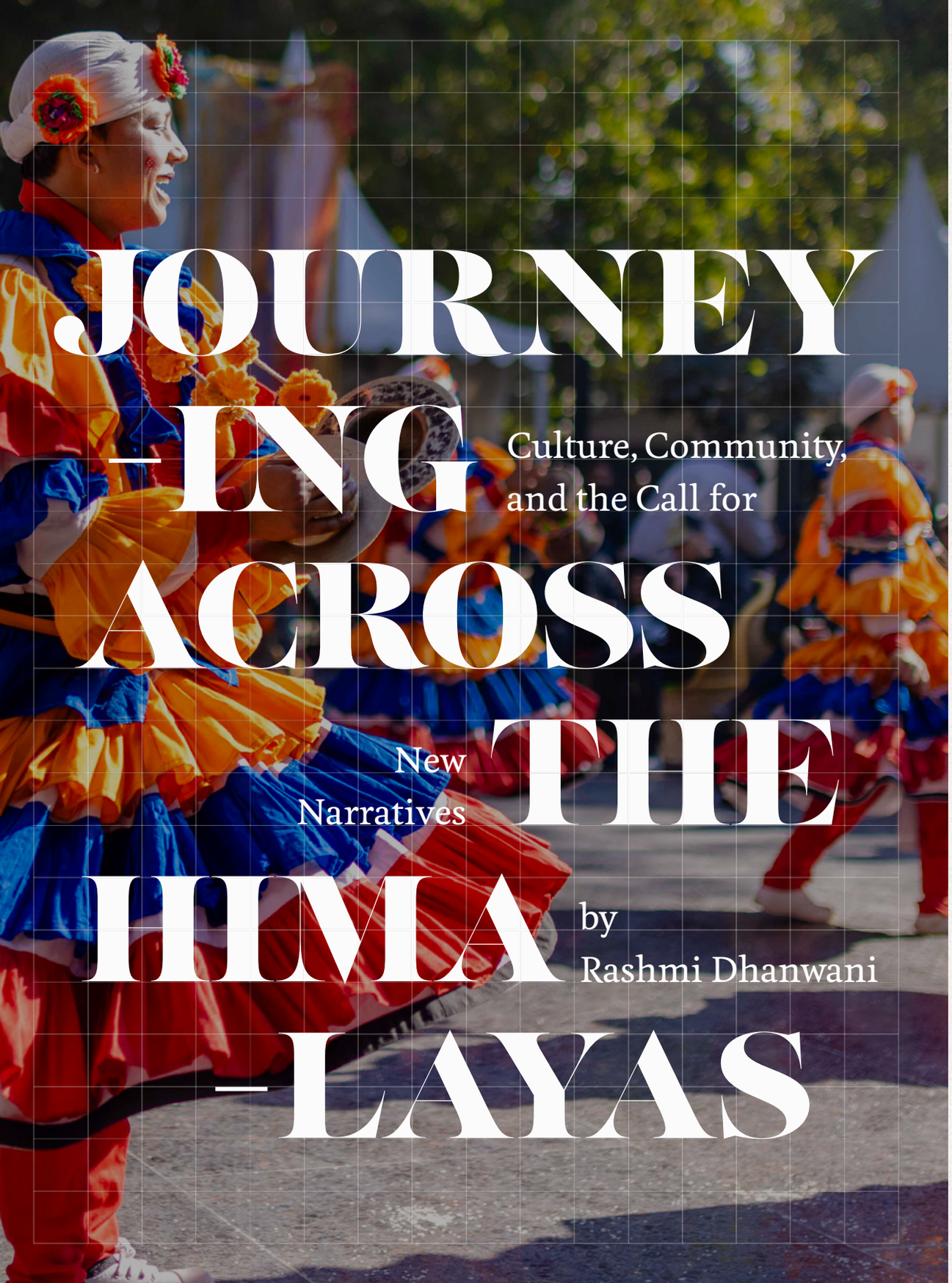
Among them was the *Aravani Art Project*, a collective of trans and cis women that empowers transgender individuals through public art installations, murals, and performances, advancing inclusion and equity through creativity.

Keystone Species

The festival spotlighted keystone species through a curated set of immersive exhibits. Installations of the Snow Leopard, Golden Langur, and Himalayan Brown Bear by artist Manveer Singh were made from waste plastic and ghost nets, drawing attention to both species conservation and plastic pollution.

Riverbank Studios presented a 360° VR wildlife experience, offering rare close-range footage of Himalayan wildlife. Complementing the exhibit was a custom Snow Leopard-inspired motorcycle by Bobbee Singh and Arjun Raina, and a bespoke riding jacket by fashion designer Suket Dhir – bridging textile design, exploration and conservation storytelling.





JOURNEY-ING ACROSS THE HIMA-LAYAS

Culture, Community, and the Call for New Narratives

by Rashmi Dhanwani

This festival required no trekking gear or travel itinerary, but asked for only open ears and a willingness to reconsider how we relate to place. *Journeying Across the Himalayas*, a multidisciplinary festival by Royal Enfield Social Mission, sought not to represent the mountains as postcard-perfect terrains or romanticised frontiers, but as complex, inhabited worlds – sites of memory, resilience, fragility, and imagination. It was a proposition: that travel can be thoughtful, that storytelling can be a tool for preservation, and that community voices must be central in any conversation about the future of the Himalayas.

As a cultural strategist and researcher engaged with the impact and design of such platforms, I experienced *Journeying Across the Himalayas* not only as a festival but as an invitation to reframe how we engage with mountain spaces – not as tourists or outsiders, but as stewards and listeners.

Between extraction and imagination

The Himalayas hold a contradictory place in the Indian imagination – both sacred and consumable. They're invoked in nationalist mythologies, ecological discourse, and the language of leisure. Yet few of these narratives contend with the realities of those who live there: communities navigating climate change, infrastructural shifts, political marginalisation, and a desire for self-determined futures.

Journeying Across the Himalayas stepped into this tension between the idea of the Himalayas and the lives lived within them. It resisted the tendency of cultural events to aestheticise hardship or flatten difference. Instead, it made space for multiplicity – bringing together artists, researchers, environmentalists, riders, and communities to explore what it means to encounter a region respectfully.

The fact that the festival was held in Delhi only underscored its urgency: to place the Himalayas in the national imagination as a dynamic network of cultures, ecologies, and conversations requiring solidarity and care.

Curating complexity

The strength of the festival lay in its interdisciplinary approach. Its core featured projects supported by the Royal Enfield Social Mission across the Himalayan belt, including textile conservation collaborations (*The Himalayan Knot*), community-driven *Green Pit Stops* for sustainable travel infrastructure, the *Himalayan Hub* for climate resilience, and *The Great Himalayan Exploration* rider-research initiative with UNESCO. These weren't presented as abstract case studies. You could trace a weaving cluster in Ladakh grappling with modernity, or hear from riders mapping climate vulnerability through their routes. The festival's three themes-sustainable travel, cultural preservation, and market linkages–came alive through exhibitions, fellowships, and curated discussions, making visible the infrastructures and relationships behind each story. For me, this was one of the strongest contributions: offering a systems view of the region without jargon, and allowing culture to be a lens through which complexity could be understood.

The exhibitions were tactile, the installations multi-sensory. Visitors weren't just seeing cultural artefacts. They were being asked to consider the infrastructure, economy, ecology, and relationships that produce them.

As a researcher, I was struck by the festival's commitment to community representation. Several featured voices were not institutional or academic, but lived–riders who had traversed Himalayan roads, weavers from Ladakh, young fellows from 13 Himalayan states sharing digital storytelling projects. The curation avoided romanticising the mountains or simplifying their challenges. Instead, it created space for nuance, for plurality, and for respectful dissent. In doing so, the festival resisted the extractive tendencies that often accompany storytelling about the margins.

Audience, space and the question of access

Held in Delhi, the audience at *Journeying Across the Himalayas* was largely urban, educated, and curious—and that made it a strategic intervention. This, perhaps, was both its strength and limitation. In a moment where the average traveller to the Himalayas may not pause to consider their impact, the festival became an opportunity to reframe. On the other hand, the urban frame of the festival naturally excluded those without the cultural capital or financial means to participate.

This tension, between representation and accessibility, haunts many cultural initiatives of this nature. Yet to its credit, the festival seemed aware of these contradictions, and did not attempt to resolve them through tokenism or spectacle. Instead, it positioned itself as a prototype–one edition in what could evolve

into a longer, more decentralised series of engagements, potentially hosted in or with Himalayan communities themselves. That said, the festival also opened up important questions. How can we deepen accessibility – linguistic, spatial, and financial? Can such a model travel to the Himalayan states themselves, enabling reverse flows of exchange? What does long-term engagement with the communities represented look like beyond the festival format?

These are design questions that every cultural platform serious about sustainability and equity must ask of itself.

The role of cultural practice in times of crises

We often speak of festivals as platforms, but *Journeying Across the Himalayas* reminded me that they can also be bridges. Bridges between the margins and the mainstream, between communities and institutions, between cultural knowledge and public consciousness.

In the context of the Himalayas – a region increasingly at the frontlines of climate change, political upheaval and displacement – such bridges are urgent. But they must be built with integrity, reciprocity, and accountability. The festival took steps in that direction. It centred lived knowledge. It avoided tokenism. It asked audiences to engage, not just observe.

The festival did not offer solutions. What it offered instead was a shift in perspective. It asked: What if we viewed the Himalayas not as a distant resource to be consumed, but as a shared space of kinship and responsibility? What if we understood travel not as escape, but as encounter? These are not rhetorical questions. They have consequences – for how we move, build, buy, and tell stories. In a time of overlapping crises, whether ecological, cultural, or civic, festivals like Journeying Across the Himalayas make a quiet but powerful case for the role of culture in meaning-making.

Journeying Across the Himalayas is not the first festival to focus on the region, nor should it be the last. But its emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, and interdisciplinary dialogue offers a model worth studying – one that we have framed into a festival assessment Framework (AEAE)*.

The mountains are changing. Our ways of engaging with them must change too.

A prototype for what's possible

Journeying Across the Himalayas was not a perfect festival – no meaningful one ever is. But it marked a significant moment in the cultural discourse around the region. It suggested that the Himalayas cannot be understood through spectacle, data, or nostalgia alone. They must be engaged with through listening to those who know the mountains not as metaphor, but as home.

In a time when the pace of crisis outstrips the pace of change, festivals like this offer something rare: the possibility of pause. As someone who has worked at the intersection of culture making, festival practice and systems thinking, I saw in the festival the kind of shift we need, one that is away from extractive programming and toward intentional, collaborative ecosystem building.

The mountains are changing. Our ways of engaging with them must change too.

***The Author* is Founder-CEO at Art X Company and festivals**

LEGACY PROJECTS & LOCAL AREA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Photo Credit: sephibergson.com

LEGACY PROJECTS

Eicher Motors Ltd.'s social initiatives have consistently grown through long-term partnerships, where the focus has been on building systems that work and are lasting. In Alwar, Rajasthan, once home to Eicher's manufacturing units, early community initiatives have evolved into enduring programmes in education. Though the manufacturing footprint has ceased to exist in the region, the partnership with the community has continued to grow. Likewise, Eicher has been supporting Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital in Daryaganj, Delhi to provide best-in-class eyecare since the past three decades.

SHIKSHAK PAHAL PROGRAMME

In Thanagazi and Umrain blocks of Alwar, Rajasthan, Eicher has partnered with Bodh Shiksha Samiti for over two decades. The programme now supports 32 schools, with a focus on improving learning outcomes and providing access to equitable quality education.

Over the past 25 years, the Shikshak Pahal Programme has transformed education access for first-generation learners in rural Rajasthan, creating a ripple effect across entire communities, breaking barriers of caste and gender. The curriculum goes beyond textbooks, with space for music, art, physical education and digital literacy. Teacher training remains a core part of the programme, alongside infrastructure upkeep and health check-ups for students.

In 2024, a new school building was inaugurated in Tanwarla Badwala – drawing support not only from the organisation but also from the local community, which turned up in large numbers.

Midday meals and fruit breakfasts are served daily under the Poornma initiative, and remain an important reason for consistent attendance, especially in younger age groups.

DR. SHROFF'S CHARITY EYE HOSPITAL

Since 1996, Eicher has supported Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital in New Delhi. The partnership was started to strengthen governance and institutional capacity and has continued into ongoing support for infrastructure and innovation.

Renovation of the outpatient wing was completed in late 2024, with additional upgrades underway, including an optical shop, pharmacy and expanded OPD block. Meanwhile, the hospital's research arm continues to grow, with advances in treating childhood eye cancers, new patents filed and a bilateral Indo-Japan grant awarded for collaborative research in oncology.

THE SHIKSHAK PAHAL PROGRAMME

Over 25 Years Of Educational Impact

Just a few hours from Rajasthan's capital, Jaipur, the Umren and Thanagazi blocks in Alwar district once lived a starkly different reality from that of their urban counterparts. Until the early 2000s, local communities had minimal access to education, falling behind in economic progress and overall quality of life. Government schools, where they existed, were often non-functional.

The Shikshak Pahal Programme began as a partnership between Bodh Shiksha Samiti (hereafter Bodh) and the Goodearth Education Foundation in 2000, long before the CSR mandate in India. The programme was then inherited by the Eicher Group Foundation, which built on the long-term partnership with the Jaipur-based non-profit to improve access to education in the region.

In its early years, the partnership focused on strengthening existing government schools. But as the work deepened, it became clear that model schools were needed to demonstrate the core principles of Bodh's pedagogy. This realisation led to the development of nine community-rooted schools known as Bodhshalas, set up under the Shikshak Pahal Programme (SPP). Nearly 90 percent of the students enrolled were first-generation learners.

In a historic step, communities that once resisted social cooperation set aside long-standing divisions to secure a brighter future for their children.

Community involvement is central to the Bodhshala model, with members actively participating in both the setup and operation of the schools. But it has not always been easy.

A notable example comes from the Tanwarala and Badala hamlets of Thanagazi, home to the Gujjar and Meena communities. Deep-rooted cultural and social differences initially made a common school unfeasible, resulting in separate makeshift schools in each hamlet. However, steady progress over the next few years drew increasing interest from both communities, as well as a need for a larger, formal school. After extensive dialogue and negotiation, they established the Samudayik Bodhsala – Tanwarala-Badala. In a historic step, communities that once resisted social cooperation set aside long-standing divisions to secure a brighter future for their children. A family from Tanwarala donated five bighas of land, while Eicher facilitated the construction of a state-of-the-art school building with 12 classrooms. Today, the school serves students up to Class VIII, and has an impressive student-teacher ratio of 1:22.

One of the most significant changes ushered in by the Bodhshalas was the shift in attitudes towards girls' education.

At the outset, entrenched social norms and biases meant that educating girls was not a part of the community's aspirations. However, the schools' persistent engagement and trust-building changed this outlook. The influence extended to the team and teachers as well. Coming from the same region, they had to adopt and internalise new ideas about society, childhood and education. More importantly, they had to take a public, progressive stance on issues such as girls' education.

‘Many girls from our schools have secured government jobs, some have become doctors or joined premier institutions such as IITs,’

- Surjan Singh, Programme Manager
Bodh Siksha Samiti

Surjan Singh, Programme Manager at Bodh Siksha Samiti, has been part of the initiative since its early years. Child marriage was prevalent at the time, and like many in his community, he had his daughter engaged at a young age. However, working with Bodh made him question that choice: ‘I was encouraging families to educate their daughters, yet mine was already promised in marriage.’

He enrolled her in a Bodhshala and slowly began changing mindsets in his own family. His daughter went on to finish Class XII and now works as a lecturer in a government institution. ‘Many girls from our schools have secured government jobs, some have become doctors or joined premier institutions such as IITs,’ he adds.

Many Bodhshalas are located in remote areas. One in Kraska, a village within the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Alwar, offers yet another standout example. Living in close proximity to wildlife, children often recount encounters with leopards near their homes. Daily life is far from easy – homes lack features such as doors, electricity or water, and the nearest shop is a 90-minute journey away. Yet, the children have outperformed expectations, demonstrating high literacy and strong cognitive skills.

Two students from Kraska have secured government jobs, and for the first time, a girl from the village was able to pursue higher education outside the sanctuary.
For over three decades, Bodh has served as a Key Technical Resource Agency to the state's Education Department. Innovations developed in its Bodhshalas have been adapted and implemented in over 70,000 schools across Rajasthan and other states. The World Bank's comparative study of three Indian states highlighted the Bodh model as one of the country's best practices. Numerous organisations have also studied the model and replicated it in their respective contexts.

"I have been part of the journey of the Shikshak Pahal programme from its inception. Bodh is not just teaching children but using education as a way to transform communities. Bodh has a vision of bringing equity in society, so most backward communities can become resilient and thrive.

For over three decades, Bodh has served as a Key Technical Resource Agency to the state's Education Department. Innovations developed in its Bodhshalas have been adapted and implemented in over 70,000 schools across Rajasthan and other states.

What is special and very effective is that learning happens through lived experience. For example children, and for that matter adults, learn about everyone's right to express views, by always being heard. People learn about gender equality through seeing women always having the same place as men.

This kind of transformation can only happen with long term engagement and sharing of this vision by people who have more education, more financial resources, more influence. Confidence then flows easily empowering the last person in the group. Long term partnership between Bodh and Eicher is a testament to this shared vision and commitment," says Dr. Divya Jalan, a member of the steering group for the Shikshak Pahal programme.

Eicher Group Foundation continues to support Bodh's evolving journey, even as it expands its own vision for social impact. It has become tradition for Mr. Vikram Lal, founder and former CEO of EML, to attend Bodh's annual planning meetings. 'Even this year, he visited the schools to see firsthand how things are progressing. His level of ownership and involvement, especially in technical aspects, is exceptional,' shares a representative of Bodh.

Now, in its fourth decade, Bodh is reimagining its programmes and rethinking the purpose and form of its schools. 'What should Bodhshalas stand for?' is a question they continue to explore. For both Bodh and EGF, this journey remains a labour of love, a long-term commitment steadily uplifting thousands of children and their families.

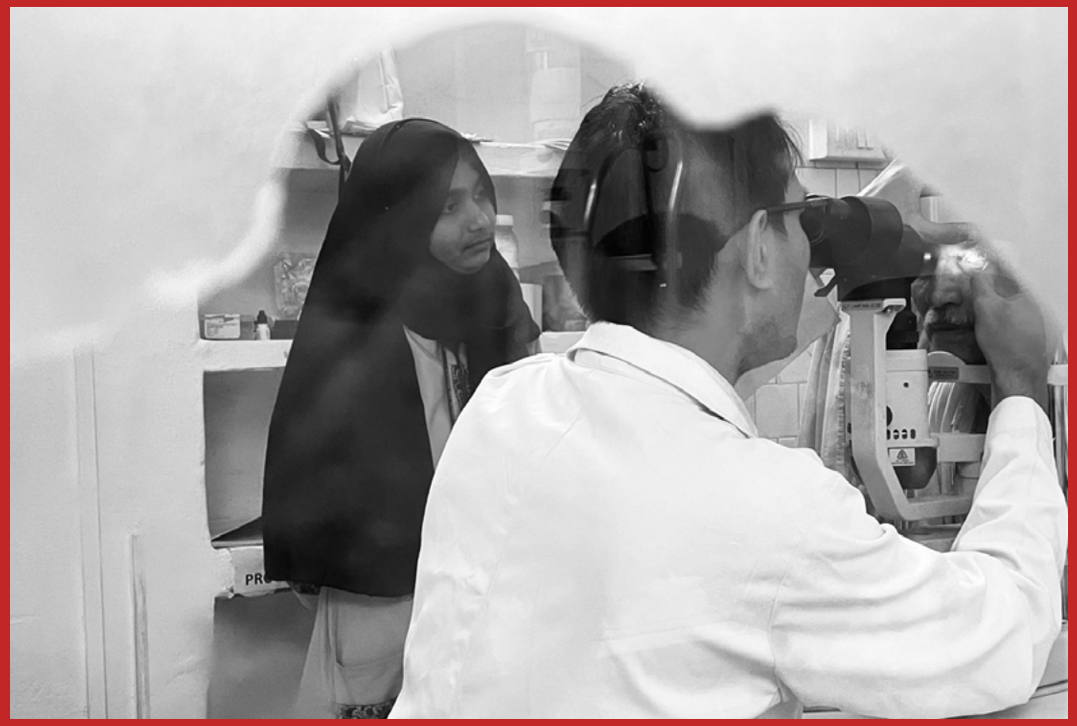
DR. SHROFF'S CHARITY EYE HOSPITAL

Old Prosthetic Eyes Tray

Patients waiting for their eye surgeries in Operation Theatre at Darya Ganj Centre

Allied Ophthalmic Paramedic (AOP) Trainees

Dr. Shroff's Charity Eye Hospital staff examining a patient



Patient waiting for pre-surgical checkup

Eye cancer patients enjoying their free time in the children's ward

A patient pre surgery, contemplating in the corridor

Men doing laundry for hospital patients with one washing machine

Aerial view of washed linens

LOCAL AREA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In 1955, Royal Enfield made its first manufacturing base in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, which is now the location of its global headquarters. Local area community development work continues around this region, especially in the districts surrounding its three manufacturing plants at Oragadam, Vallam and Cheyyar. From sanitation and water security to education, skills training, waste management and disaster relief, the focus has been on supporting local communities with holistic development programmes.

The Royal Enfield Academy for Technical Skills in Padappai continues to deliver strong outcomes in skilling and placement – training over a thousand candidates this year, with 100% placement.
In Vallakottai, menstrual health and WaSH initiatives have improved sanitation and sparked more open conversations among adolescent girls.

In Eraiyur, Chennai, the focus is on climate resilience through water conservation. This comprehensive programme looked at augmentation of water supplies, flood mitigation, improving water quality and promoting groundwater recharge by rejuvenating water bodies and restoring traditional water drainage paths that had been lost over time.

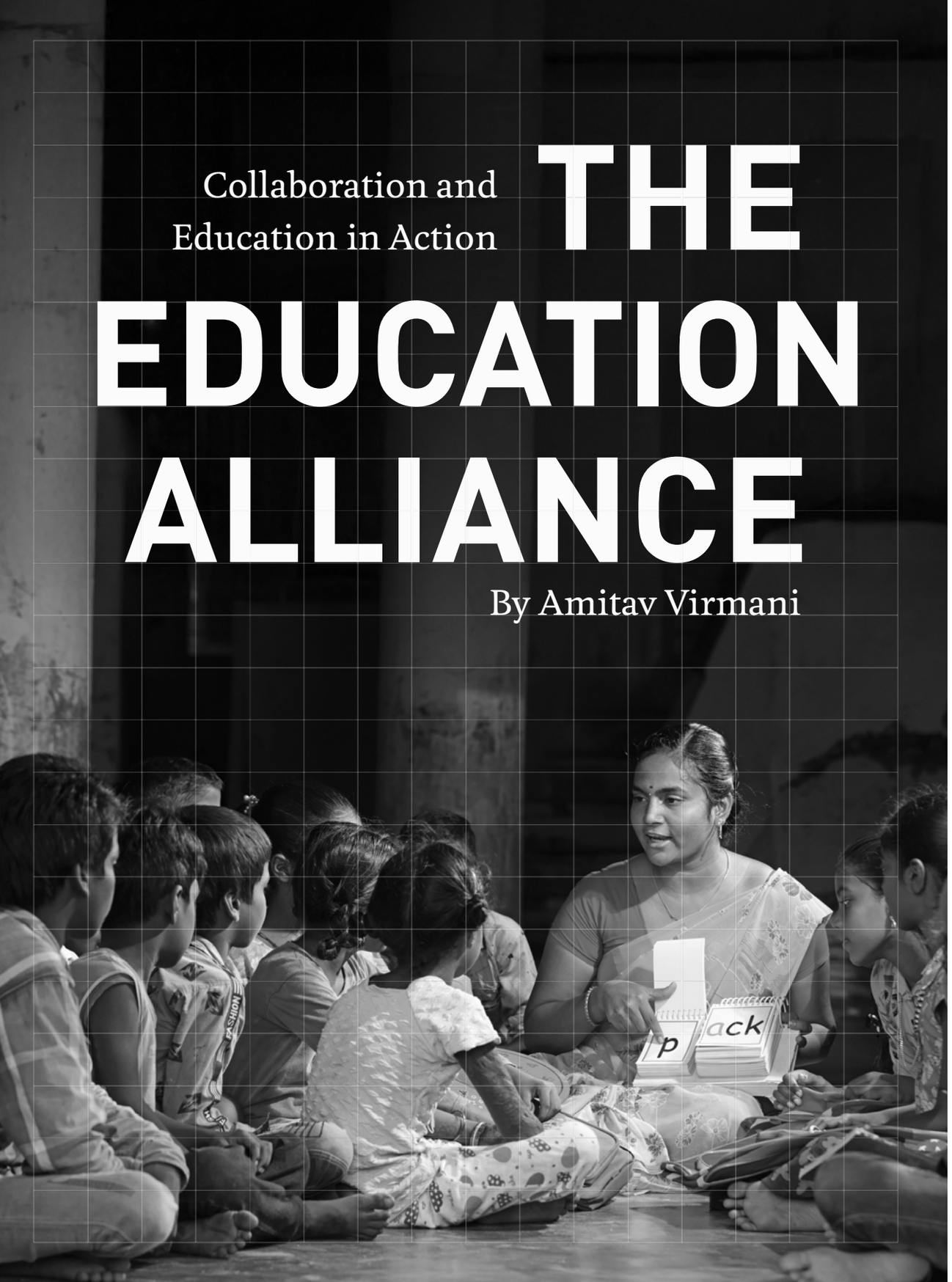
A Solid Waste Management (SWM) project at Masinagudi, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve earned the Clean Village Award from the state government and has become a model for other districts, while lifeguard towers on the East Coast Road have helped save lives, prompting their extension to other locations.

Education reform efforts, carried out with The Education Alliance, reached 37,500 schools, 18 lakh students, and 2.5 lakh teachers across Tamil Nadu and are now being adopted in Punjab. In Mysore, two school buses now ensure children from Below Poverty Line families don't miss school because of distance.

Collaboration and Education in Action

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE

By Amitav Virmani



Transformation in Tamil Nadu's education system is unfolding in real-time. From hamlets to classrooms, from hesitant whispers to confident conversations, the state's public education system is seeing transformation with collaborative action at its centre.

Since its inception, TEA has worked closely with the Tamil Nadu School Education Department as a Project Management Unit (PMU) for several critical interventions. One such intervention is Illam Thedi Kalvi (ITK), a large-scale learning recovery programme launched in response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The other is the Mozhigal Lab, a dynamic Spoken English programme designed to build language confidence among students in government schools.

Take the story of Sudarshan, a Class IV student who attends an ITK centre in his village. During a Namma Ooru Kadhai (Story of Our Place) session – a storytelling activity to encourage creativity and self-expression – Sudarshan confidently narrated how he and his friends decided to write about their school. "We all agreed to write about our school because it's where we spend most of our time," he said, beaming with pride. For many children like Sudarshan, ITK is more than an academic bridge; it's a space that nurtures curiosity, communication and community bonding.

Launched in the aftermath of school closures, ITK operates through over 92,000 community-based centres and engages more than two lakh trained volunteers. These centres offer daily 1.5-hour sessions that provide academic reinforcement in small, focused groups. With over 35 lakh children participating across Tamil Nadu, ITK has become a lifeline for learning continuity – especially for students from low-income families with limited access to digital resources. TEA, as the PMU, plays a crucial role in coordinating between government departments, volunteers, and community stakeholders to ensure smooth implementation.

Tamil Nadu's story offers a compelling example of what's possible when vision meets execution – and when different sectors come together with a shared purpose.

Started in 2021, post-pandemic, this programme has received recognition from people across the country for the impact it has made on students. According to a study by Professor Karthik Murlidharan, ITK contributed nearly ~25% to overall learning loss recovery, maximising overall recovery to 67% of the state. With around 2% of the annual budget, ITK achieved a gain of 3.4 % per $100 spent becoming an exceptionally cost-effective model. A key contribution of ITK was reducing inequity by enabling access to marginalised communities. Around 90% of surveyed households were aware of ITK, with 57% sending their children to the programme, demonstrating its widespread acceptance and reach.

The Illam Thedi Kalvi (ITK) programme has received national recognition, having been highlighted in the book Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future by Prof. Raghuram Rajan and Rohit Lamba, as well as featured in the National Economic Survey of India 2024–25.

Complementing this initiative is the Mozhigal Lab under the Spoken English Programme, focused on students in Grades 6 to 8. The lab introduces a tech-enabled, personalised learning approach to improve spoken English. Shribala, a Class 8 student, shared how the lab changed her perspective, "I used to feel shy speaking in English, but now I feel more confident. The games and lessons make learning fun. I even try speaking English at home with my siblings."

Designed to build communication skills through practice and peer interaction, Mozhigal Lab is currently impacting teachers and students across more than 6,000 government schools in the state. Both ITK and Mozhigal Lab showcase how targeted, well-managed programmes can uplift student learning and engagement. But such success requires more than good ideas – it requires strong partnerships.

Eicher Motors has consistently supported TEA in scaling these initiatives, contributing a shared vision of equitable education. This alignment between government intent, civil society expertise, and corporate support is central to what makes these programmes work. Eicher's other significant contributions include support for initiatives such as Teacher Professional Development and Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, reflecting a holistic approach to education.

We are not just responding to gaps but are actively reshaping how public education can evolve – making it more inclusive, participatory, and rooted in local context. As more students find their voice and confidence in classrooms and outside, with the active participation of government and non-government entities can we realise a better, stronger, and more resilient public education system for Tamil Nadu. In a country where systemic change in education is often slow and scattered, Tamil Nadu's story offers a compelling example of what's possible when vision meets execution – and when different sectors come together with a shared purpose.

The author is the Founder and CEO of The Education Alliance, a non-profit organisation focused on improving the quality of education in Government schools. TEA works with the state governments of Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, NCT Delhi and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi on education reform initiatives.

Green Business Operations

FY 2024-25 marked a pivotal year in Royal Enfield's sustainability journey, with quantifiable milestones reached and a steady shift in approach adopted. Guided by long-term thinking and sharper intent, sustainability was embedded deeper into business operations. This translated into tangible outcomes in energy use, emissions, resource efficiency, water stewardship and workplace safety, reflecting an organisation-wide commitment to environmental responsibility as well as inclusive growth.

In a global context of mounting climate challenges, Royal Enfield's actions in FY25 aimed to move beyond regulatory compliance, striving to bring broader systemic change in the automotive sector.

Flying Flea and the Future of Mobility

Royal Enfield is building a new legacy of future-ready innovation with its city+ mobility brand- the Flying Flea. A conversation with B. Govindarajan, Managing Director, Eicher Motors Ltd. and CEO, Royal Enfield.

What is Royal Enfield's long-term vision for sustainability in the transition from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to EVs? And how does the EV strategy align with overall corporate sustainability goals?

Our electric vehicle strategy integrates seamlessly with our long-term vision for sustainability. It is not a transition, but a natural progression of how we approach motorcycling. Our ICE motorcycles are already manufactured in an operating environment that is net water positive, and we have drastically lowered our Scope 1 and 2 emissions at an absolute level. We have also adopted renewable energy in a big way. On the product side, whether it was BS6 or earlier transitions, we implemented compliant motorcycles well before the mandated timelines. We were the first OEM to have undertaken the R-R-R studies as per AIS 129 and have now implemented them across our 350 / 450 / 650 cc ICE platforms. Our motorcycles are on average ~97% recyclable and ~99% recoverable by mass, indicating a commitment to circularity at the design stage itself. Our comprehensive approach aims to include our entire value chain and every touchpoint.

Customers today are aware and responsible, and they also want to know how committed we are towards the environment. Therefore, we see sustainable mobility as something that customers expect and we can genuinely offer. That is where the Flying Flea brand comes in with an electric powertrain, which ticks the box on alternative sustainability mobility.

Continuous development has always been the goal, and for the Royal Enfield brand, that applies as much to the development of our Electric Himalayan Test Bed, which has been instrumental in helping us better understand and develop EV technology for the future.

In a world rushing toward electrification, what does Royal Enfield hope to preserve and intend to reinvent with Flying Flea?

While Royal Enfield stands for legacy and timelessness, Flying Flea represents lightness, sophistication, and smart technology. Even though it carries the pioneering spirit of the original 1940s icon in name, it comes with its own distinct identity- a brand built for a new generation of riders who are urban, design-conscious and digitally savvy, seeking intuitive, stylish, and sustainable mobility. With Flying Flea, we are not just making electric motorcycles; we are rethinking and reinventing urban mobility for a new generation.

The Flying Flea C6 is a perfect example of that reinvention. It is beyond an electric vehicle; it's a seamless integration of hardware and software, built on our in-house OS powered by Qualcomm. The interaction layer, through UI, UX, and AI-driven insights, is designed to make every ride smarter, more intuitive, and more personal. Whether it's managing range anxiety more intuitively or helping one find the right mode, we have drawn on a wealth of insight from our community and built a system that truly listens and connects to the rider.

So while we preserve the joy of riding from Royal Enfield, which is the emotional connection to the road, the machine, and the freedom it brings, how we deliver that experience is entirely reimagined with Flying Flea.

How was the name 'Flying Flea' chosen for Royal Enfield's brand for electric vehicles?

When we started thinking of creating a new offering for the new generation of customers, the requirements were clear. We wanted something nimble, easy to ride and still be loads of fun, and the name had to represent this philosophy as well.

We looked within our rich Royal Enfield history, and realised that we had something with similar characteristics, though built for a completely different purpose, as part of our legacy. Flying Flea was designed to be light, nimble and easy to ride. We merely reimagined it and adopted the ethos to build a new brand around it to make it relevant for today's customer needs and road conditions, layered with smart technology.

Like the original Flying Flea, which was a landmark in automotive engineering and design, the new brand carries forward its legacy with its philosophy deeply embodied in its debut model, the Flying Flea C6, a first-of-its-kind motorcycle that reimagines the original icon with next-generation engineering.

The original Flying Flea was a war machine, light enough to be dropped from the sky. How does that spirit of resilience, lightness, and defiance carry forward into this new avatar?

The original Flying Flea's designers were focused on weight and durability for very different reasons than us, but the spirit still endures. The Flying Flea brand is heavily inspired by it, and the core philosophy of Flying Flea products will also be lightweight, agile and focused on City+ with sophisticated design. Our Flying Flea C6 has been designed to keep the weight more accessible for new riders, crafted using advanced materials and lightweight designs wherever possible, including forged aluminium frames and magnesium battery cases. This means that it is manoeuverable in tight city streets, light enough not to be intimidating.

The electric two-wheeler market today is gravitating toward generic low-cost motorcycles, but we continue to maintain what we stand for at Royal Enfield and that will continue in Flying Flea as well.

How is the Flying Flea going to be different from competitors in terms of innovations for sustainability, including the use of alternative and lightweight materials and energy-efficient technologies? Will hybrid models also play a role in your transition strategy?

Weight management and materials used on the FF.C6 are the key to creating differentiation from other EV products. When it comes to sustainability, we have taken a full lifecycle approach with Flying Flea as our catalyst in building future-ready technology for riders. With FF.C6, we have tried to create a lightweight vehicle in its category with the entire chassis made of aluminium, which makes it lighter without compromising on its durability. This lightness also means less energy consumption for every kilometre covered.

The battery assembly itself becomes a stress member, hence providing good stiffness at a lower weight. The magnesium casing is lighter than aluminium and a good thermal agent which keeps the temperature of cells lower. This helps in better thermal management and enhances efficiency.

EVs in general are way more efficient than the ICE technology. We also use a highly efficient powertrain, which consists of an omnipotent motor capable of generating very high torque at even lower speeds. The efficiency of the motor is > 94% and this, with the software controls, makes it possible to lower consumption by enabling Sleep Modes.

Another important aspect of energy-efficient technology is the use of Regenerative features like Coast Regen, Forced Regen and Braking Regen, which allow the mechanical energy to convert into electrical energy and store it for charging the battery while on the move, reducing energy loss and maximizing consumption and efficiency.

There's a minimalism to the EV aesthetic — how do you see that influencing the riding culture Royal Enfield has nurtured over the decades?

Minimalism isn't new to us—it's deeply rooted in Royal Enfield's design and engineering ethos. We have always believed that "less is more". For us, it's not about stripping things away or adding technology or features unless they genuinely enhance the riding experience. It has always been about being purposeful.

Flying Flea continues this approach as well. The design is clean, sculptural, and intuitive—not minimal for minimal's sake, but because that clarity allows the rider to feel fully in sync with the machine- the man-machine connection. And that is the essence of riding culture at Royal Enfield. And now, with EVs, UI and UX are core to that connection and a space where we are innovating, which deepens the rider's overall experience.

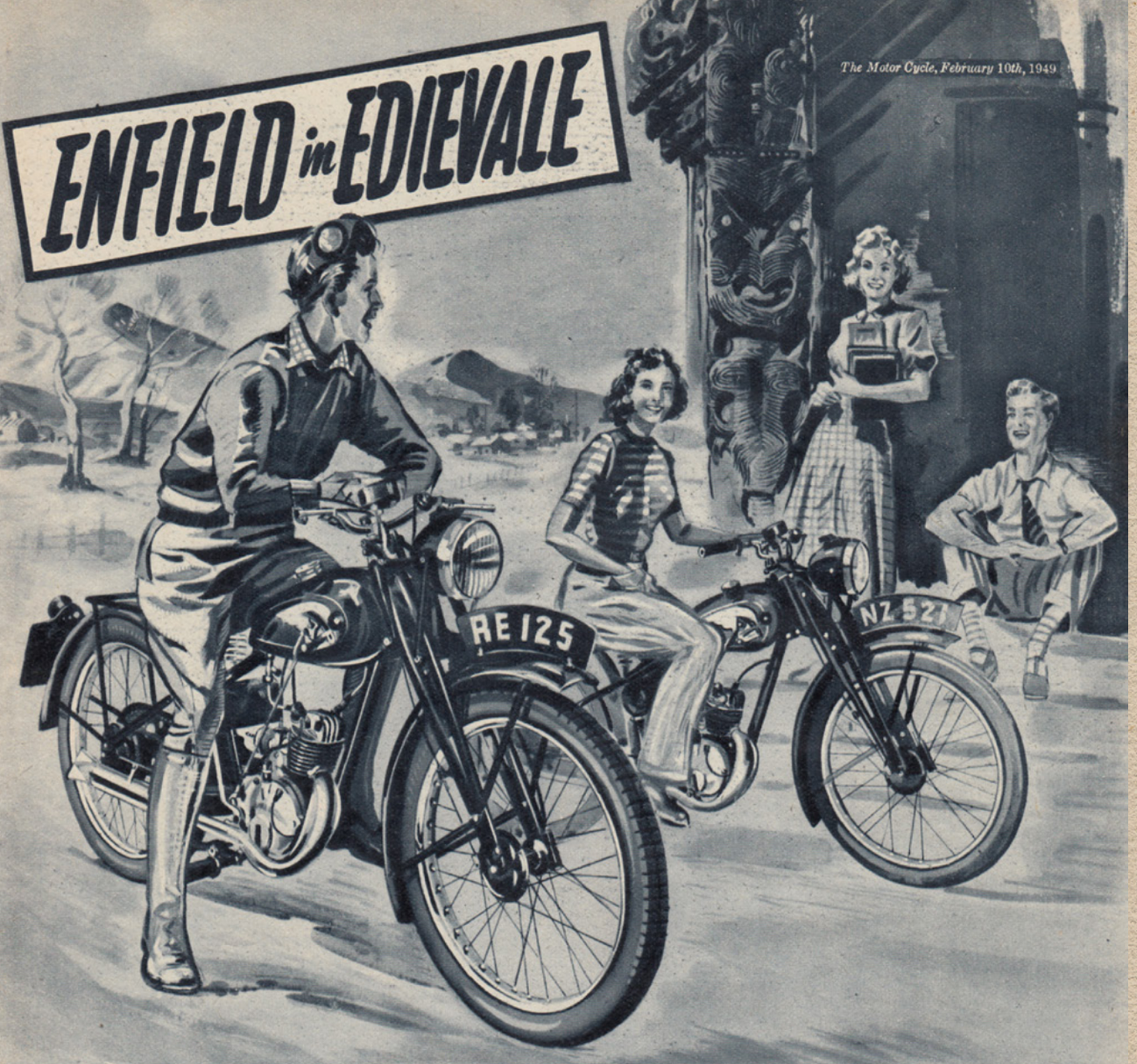
Is Flying Flea a commuter's ride, a collector's piece, or a revolution in mobility?

Flying Flea is a bold new chapter in Royal Enfield's legacy—an entirely new brand born from our history, and designed for the future. It is deeply rooted in lightness, sophistication, and smart technology, which follows a category-defining approach.

Therefore, with Flying Flea, we are not just introducing new vehicles; we are introducing a feeling that riders have never experienced before. It is developed in-house within the innovative 'Flying Flea Tech Center', and these motorcycles integrate proprietary technology, cutting-edge software, and seamless connectivity that is set to take City+ mobility to the next level, creating an entirely new category in mobility.

If the Flying Flea could speak for itself, what story would it tell?

"I am the motorcycle that learned to fly before I learnt to be silent," it might say. "Born from necessity in 1940, I return again with the same engineering principles and dedication to innovation, to once again transform how the world moves."



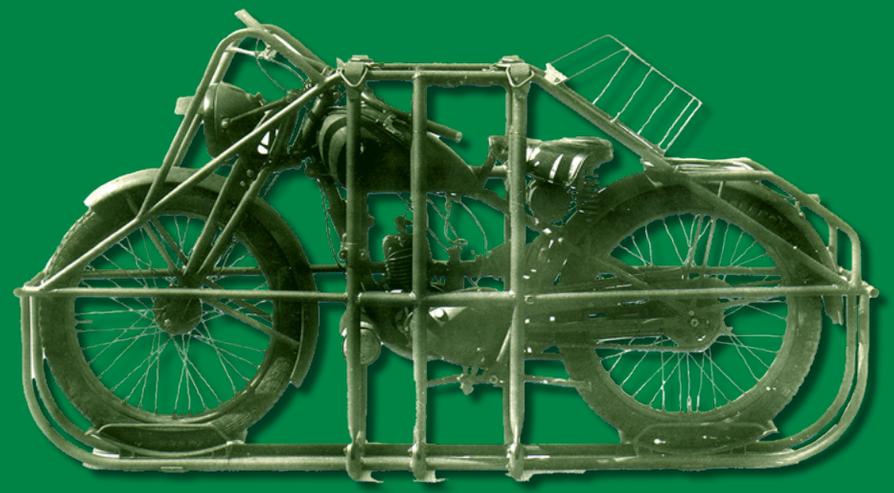
1943 THE FLYING FLEA HAS LANDED

History of Flying Flea

By Gordon May

Simple, tough and resilient, the Royal Enfield Flying Flea, or WD/RE to give it its official title, was deployed as a front line combat machine during the latter stages of the Second World War.

Britain had no airborne forces in 1939 but Churchill, impressed by the success of the FallschirmjÄger, German paratroopers, operations in Norway, France and Holland in the spring of 1940, ordered the formation of a 5,000-strong parachute and glider-borne force.



The British Parachute Regiment's first outings, Operation Colossus in Italy and Operation Biting in northern France, highlighted the need for rapid field communications.

Royal Enfield's new 2-stroke 125, called the Royal Baby, was transformed from lightweight commuter to airborne war hero largely due to one man, Arthur Bourne. Writing under the pen name of Torrens, Bourne was editor of the bestselling weekly magazine, The Motor Cycle.

He could see the benefits of a machine that a soldier could lift over a wall, carry across a river on his shoulder or easily manoeuvre over difficult terrain, and set about persuading the War Office of the little Enfield's merits by arranging a demonstration.

Major General Frederick Browning, commander of the 1st Airborne Division, was himself a motorcyclist. At the end of Bourne's demonstration he declared: "We must have these."

The future of the WD/RE was sealed. Very soon, the motorcycle acquired the moniker, the Flying Flea.

Tubular steel parachute drop cradles were commissioned to protect the Flea when it landed. These had to accommodate a parachute in two alternative positions so that it could be thrown out of an open aircraft doorway or suspended under its wings.

Royal Enfield set up an additional factory at Calton Hill in Edinburgh to produce drop cradles that could be carried by Dakota, Halifax, Lancaster and Albermarle aircraft. An initial order for 4000 WD/REs was placed with an additional 4000 to follow.

Once the Flea had landed, all a paratrooper had to do was unscrew the single wingnut that held the two halves of the drop cradle together, lift the bike out, rotate the handlebars ninety degrees and kick the engine to life, all of which could be achieved in a matter of seconds.

The Flea's primary roles were reconnaissance and to establish communications between dispersed Airborne units, a vital task in the days of unreliable portable valve radios. Many were dropped ahead of the D-Day landings and during Operation Market Garden, a daring Allied attempt to shorten the war by entering Germany from Holland over a series of captured bridges. It was the largest airborne campaign in history, which saw more than 34,000 men land behind enemy lines, and culminated in the notorious Battle of Arnhem where besieged and outnumbered paratroopers held out against German tank divisions for seven days.

However, not all Fleas were parachuted in this manner. A high percentage were transported alongside assault troops inside Horsa gliders and some were even carried ashore from Royal Navy landing craft during coastal assaults, especially the Normandy D-Day landings.

At the end of hostilities, Royal Enfield reverted to building Flying Fleas for use in Civvy Street, which essentially meant a change to black paint with chrome trimmings. They were then marketed worldwide as affordable, reliable transport, their frugal petrol consumption of over 100 mpg being a great selling point.

The Flying Flea - an airborne motorcycle that thanks to Royal Enfield Redditch, a visionary journalist and thousands of brave paratroops, helped win the war.

The author is Royal Enfield Brand Historian.

THE CURIOUS TALE OF THE FIRST ENFIELD EV

By Gordon May

Enfield EV 8ooo Car

When Royal Enfield Redditch folded in 1967, its diesel engine division, which made Enfield generators and marine engines from WWII onwards, was bought by Greek shipping tycoon, Giannis Goulandris.

Goulandris moved the business from Redditch to the Isle of Wight in 1969, taking 21 former Royal Enfield staff with him. His plan was to manufacture inexpensive Enfield diesel tractors for Greek farmers.

But that didn't happen. Instead, the newly formed Enfield Automotive built a prototype electric car, the Enfield 465. With a plastic body and sliding doors, it was the winning entry in an Electricity Council competition to create a practical electric town car. Further development led to the debut of the quaint Enfield 8000 electric car, its release coinciding perfectly with the 1973 oil crisis. Housed in the 8000's aluminium body were eight lead acid batteries and a 6KW electric motor. Its claimed top speed was 48mph and it had a range of around 40 miles.

This is when the story of the little Enfield EV, proudly bearing a Made Like A Gun cannon on its bonnet, took an unexpected turn. Goulandris decided they should be built in Greece for Greek owners and set up a factory on the small island of Syros, a two and a half hour ferry journey from Athens.

Quite incredibly, it was then discovered that there was no taxation class for electric cars in Greece, which made selling the Enfield 8000 impossible. Instead, and only part finished, they were shipped to the Isle of Wight where batteries were installed. Only 120 Enfield 8000s were produced, with 65 of them sold to the British Electricity Board where they gave excellent service for the following decade.

Prototype jeep-style Enfield EVs were also developed and California Governor, Ronald Reagan, wanted to set up a factory in The Golden State to build them. However, despite its innovative design and charming appearance, the Enfield electric car proved to be too ahead of its time and too expensive to appeal to a wider market. Production ceased in 1975.

The author is Royal Enfield Brand Historian.

Sustainability Performance Snapshot

Green Energy

Royal Enfield's energy strategy in FY25 focused on accelerating the shift to renewable electricity. As a result, 84% of its operational electricity was sourced from renewables – more than double from the previous year. This included 88,616 MWh of green energy out of 105,303 MWh consumed.

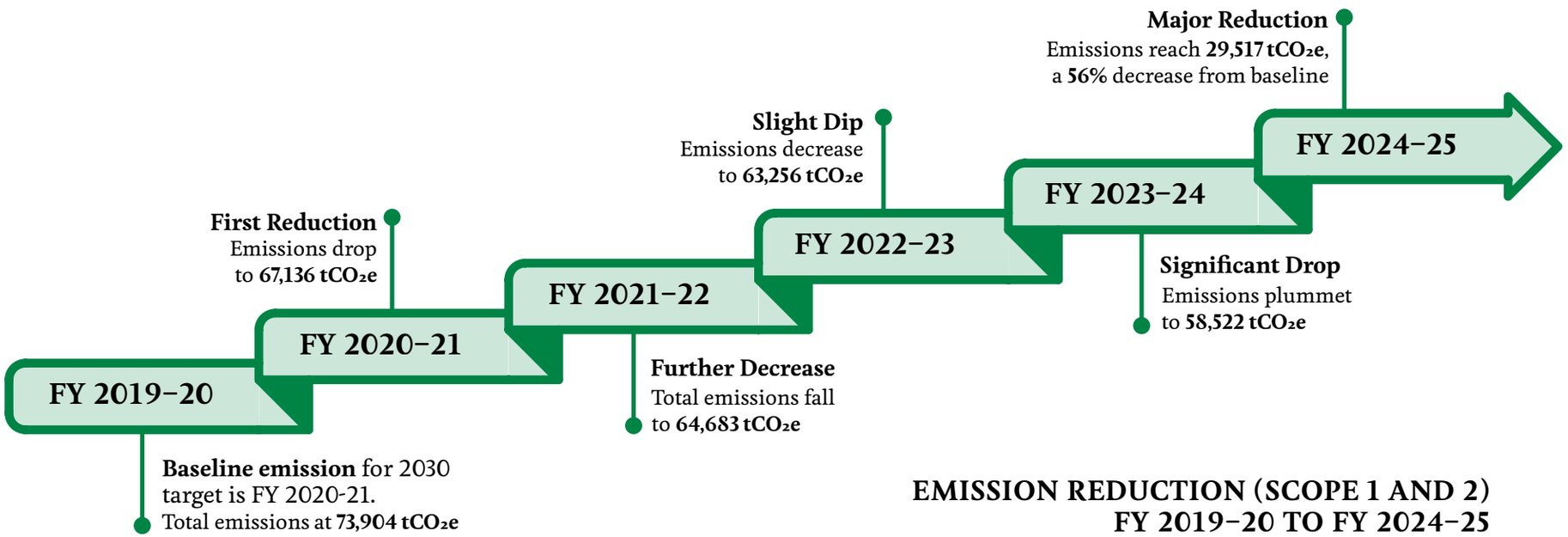
This transformation was enabled through group captive power (GCP) and rooftop solar installations. A 9 MW GCP facility in Tirunelveli was commissioned in May 2024, alongside the addition of 1 MW of rooftop solar. The company's total installed capacity now includes over 3 MW rooftop solar and 22 MW of GCP across locations.

These initiatives are part of a long-term decarbonisation roadmap, supporting resilience, energy independence and alignment with global shifts toward a cleaner industrial ecosystem, especially in the OEM space.

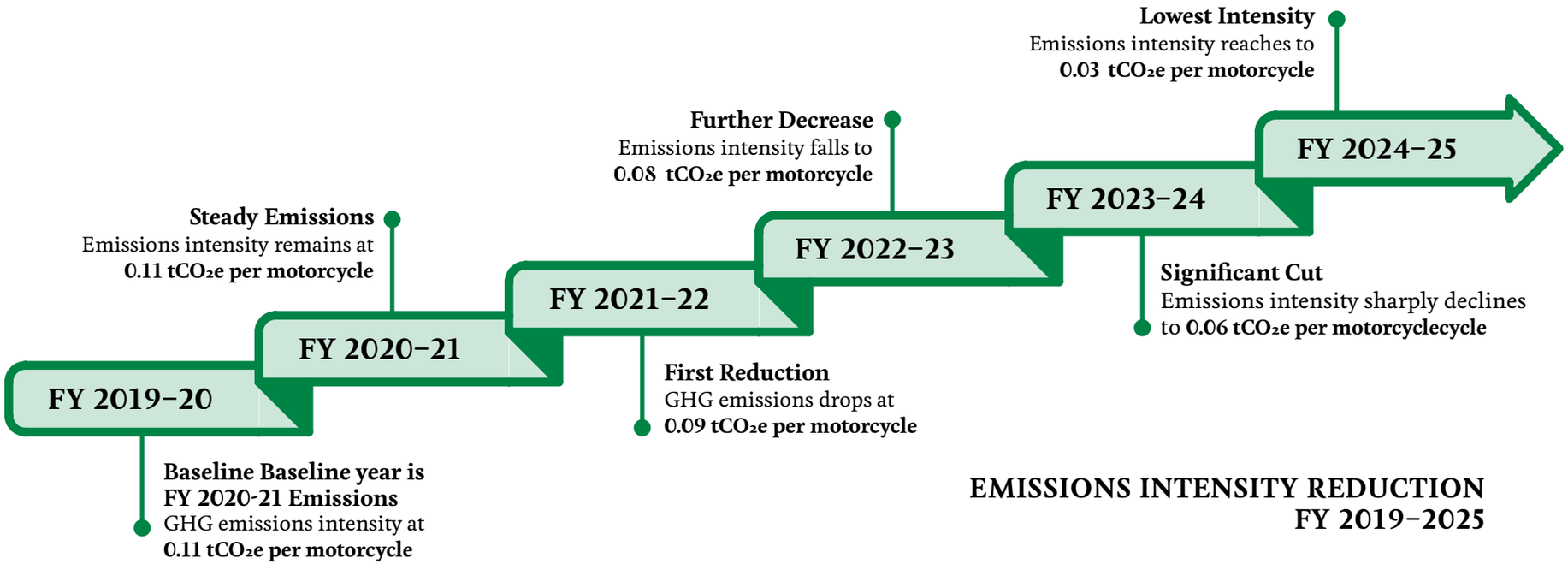
Emission Reduction

Emission intensity refers to the greenhouse gases released per unit of output – in this case, per motorcycle – and it's a key measure of how carbon-efficient a company's operations are. Royal Enfield has targeted an 80% emission intensity reduction (tCO2e/ motorcycle) by FY 2029-30 against a baseline year of FY 2020-21and there has been a concerted effort to achieve this. By optimising processes, design and resource use, emission intensity has been successfully reduced to 29.2 kg CO_2 per motorcycle produced, which amounts to nearly a 51% reduction over the previous year. This also means that the company is well ahead of the curve looking at its 2030 targets. Focussed interventions helped us reduce our Scope 1 & 2 emissions by 46% during the year.

This achievement is all the more notable given Royal Enfield's scale – over 1 million vehicles (1,011,126 units) were produced during the year. A >50% cut in per-vehicle emissions, even as production scales up, speaks to the company's focus on process optimisation, resource efficiency and energy management systems, including ISO 50001 certification. The efforts also directly contribute to India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.



EMISSION REDUCTION (SCOPE 1 AND 2) FY 2019–20 TO FY 2024–25



EMISSIONS INTENSITY REDUCTION FY 2019–2025

Water Stewardship

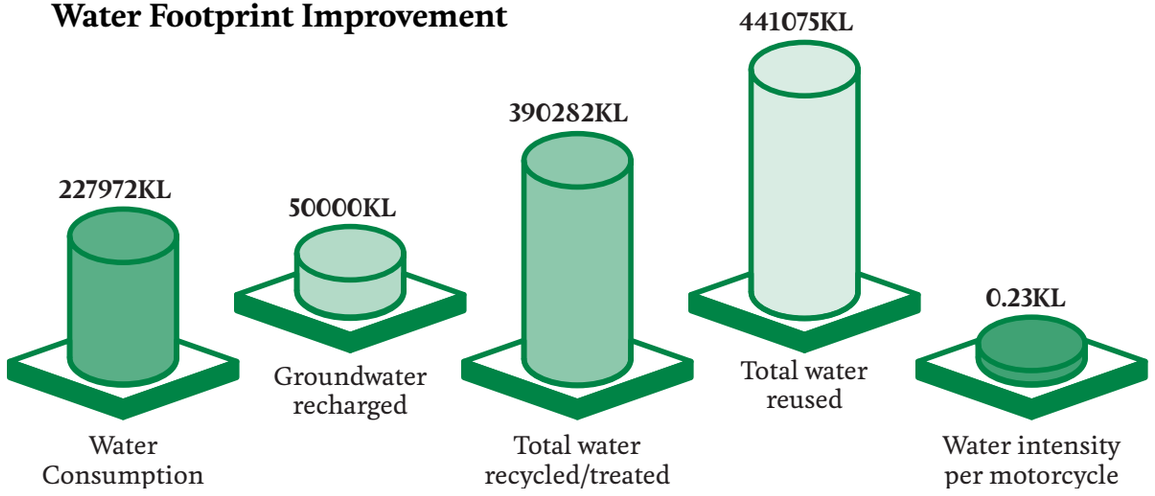
Water is an increasingly scarce and stressed resource, especially so in areas that have intense industrialisation and urbanisation. Royal Enfield continued to maintain water positive operations and achieved a water positivity index of **4.3,** meaning that the company replenishes over four times the water it consumes.

While working to reduce its own water footprint, Royal Enfield has also turned its attention outward, supporting local efforts to safeguard local water tables and build long-term resilience in communities near its factories.

The company's key water conservation initiatives included:

- **Rainwater harvesting using patented rapid recharge structures:** These systems increase water percolation up to 80%, compared to conventional rates of 3-5%.
- **Use of treated water from Sewage Treatment Plant and RO** systems for operations and landscape irrigation.
- **Irrigation through hydro-pump-fed sprinkler systems:** Minimising water loss and optimising distribution.

Water Footprint Improvement



Resource efficiency & circularity

Royal Enfield continues to drive zero-waste production by embedding circularity principles, optimising resource use, and enhancing recovery systems.
In FY 24-25, the company:

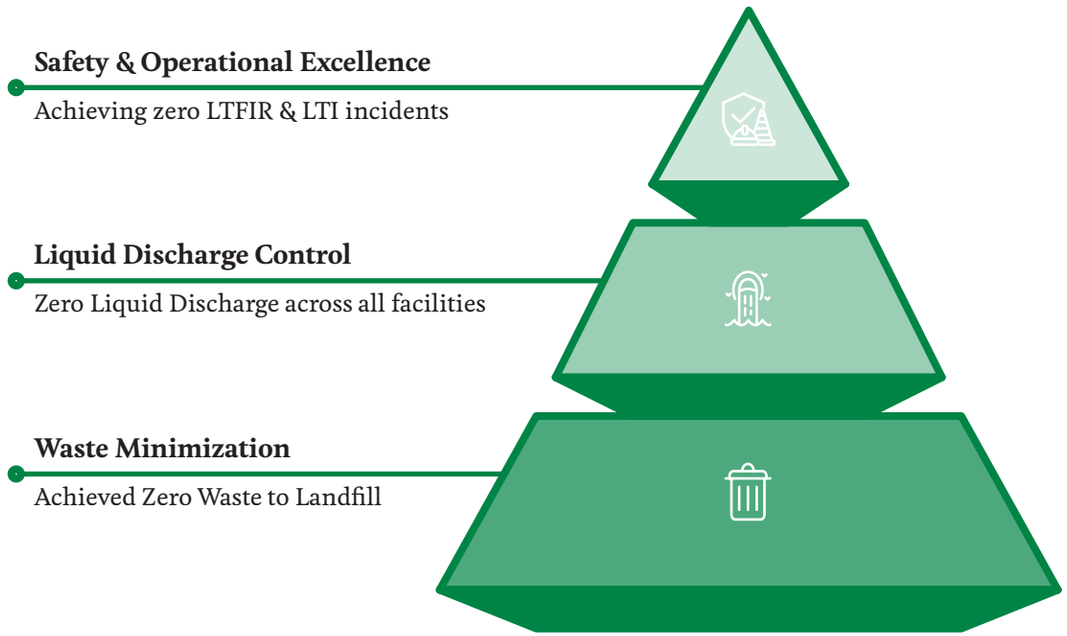
- **Recycled > 7600MT waste**
- **Co-processed 1,324 tons of hazardous waste**
- **Recycled 448 tons of hazardous waste**
- **12% of all steel used by mass is recycled**
- **74% of all aluminium used by mass is recycled**

This means nearly 8900 tons of waste were diverted from landfills and converted into usable material or energy. These efforts reduce soil and groundwater contamination and promote a circular economy by recovering value from materials.
The company had earlier set a target to achieve zero waste to landfill by 2030; this milestone has been met well ahead of schedule.

In addition to circularity being integrated into the company's design principles and material use in the product, the proactive stance ensures alignment with future norms while also reducing disposal costs and building supplier-side resilience.

Circular economy practices are becoming a compliance requirement in global automotive value chains (e.g. EU green deal). EML continues to work towards being a low-waste manufacturer by improving material recovery across the value chain, minimising reliance on virgin resources and designing products with end-of-life recyclability in mind.

Sustainability Commitment Pyramid



Commitment to Safety

In FY 24-25, decisive steps were taken to enhance workplace safety and embed a proactive safety culture across its facilities. A collaboration with DSS+, a global safety consultancy, was undertaken at Oragadam fabrication shop in this regard.

Key safety upgrades during the year included:
· Comprehensive **training and awareness programmes** for employees.
· Systematic **rectification of unsafe acts and conditions.**
· Strengthening of **Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)** processes.
· Rigorous **audit mechanisms** and tracking of near-misses.

As a direct outcome, the company achieved zero **Lost Time Injuries (LTIs)** across all sites, down from one LTI at the Vallam plant in FY24. Consequently, the **Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR)** fell to **zero.**

Safety measures, thus, focus on systematically rectifying unsafe conditions where the emphasis is on pre-emptive action rather than reactive fixes. The ripple effects of excellent safety metrics are wide-ranging: higher employee morale, stronger retention, reduced downtime etc.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

A few years ago, gender diversity ratio stood at just 5% across Royal Enfield's workforce – well below the industry standards of 16%. Today, that figure has risen to 18%, reflecting a conscious strategy to address gender imbalance. At the Vallam facility, women now represent 26% of the workforce, and the Cheyyar plant has launched its **first all-women assembly line**, with plans to transition the plant into a fully women-led operation within the current financial year.

This progress offers a sharper contrast to wider industry trends: between FY23 and FY24, the automotive sector's workforce expanded by 22%, yet female participation grew by only 3%.

In response, Royal Enfield has established its DEI platform, Open Road. While still early in its implementation, Open Road sets a clear agenda for accelerating gender inclusion and shaping a more diverse workforce.

Logistics Innovation

Logistics – often an overlooked aspect of sustainable operations – has emerged as a critical focus area in Royal Enfield's decarbonisation journey. The company has reengineered its outbound logistics chain with a sharp eye on reducing emissions, cutting costs and improving delivery timelines.

Outbound logistics at Royal Enfield follow a two-step model: motorcycles are first transported from the factory to regional warehouses using three Tier / deck trailers and then dispatched to dealerships using smaller trucks. Over the past year, this system has undergone a significant transformation.

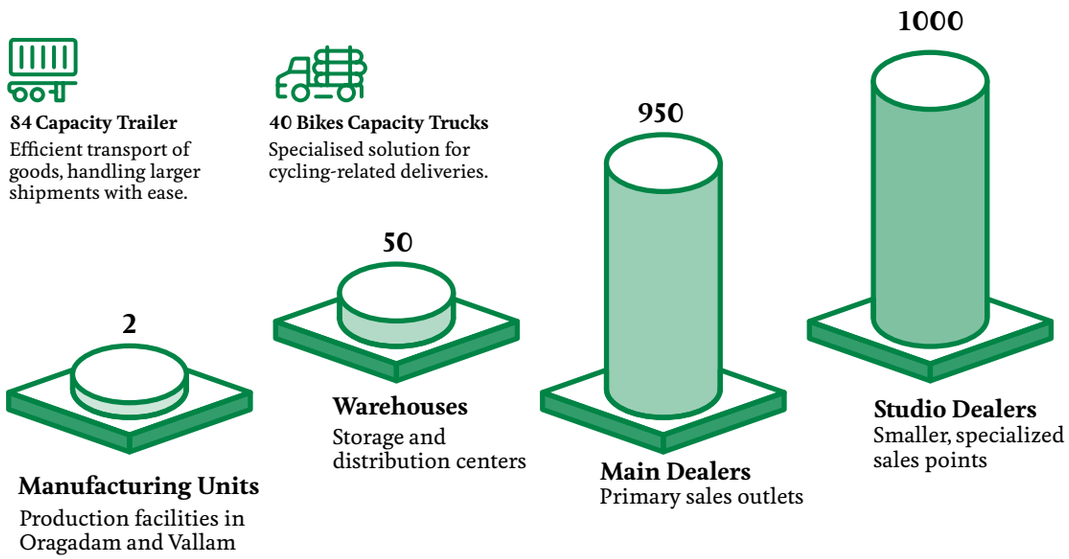
Three-Tier Trailers

Royal Enfield transitioned from two-tier to three-tier ttrailers for transporting finished motorcycles, enabling 2.2 times more volume and reduction in emissions by 22%.

• In FY24-25, this change led to a **CO_2 reduction of 7,574 tons.**
• Over the past three years, cumulative Co2 Reduction reached **16,675 tons**.

Today, **62% of Royal Enfield's outbound volume is dispatched via these three-tier trailers**, far exceeding the industry average.

Royal Enfield's Distribution Network



Green Delivery Fleet

To further reduce transportation emissions, Royal Enfield deployed CNG-powered trucks for deliveries to dealerships. Currently, 33% of dealer deliveries are conducted using CNG vehicles, reducing the reliance on diesel-powered transport and marking a transition toward low-emission alternatives.

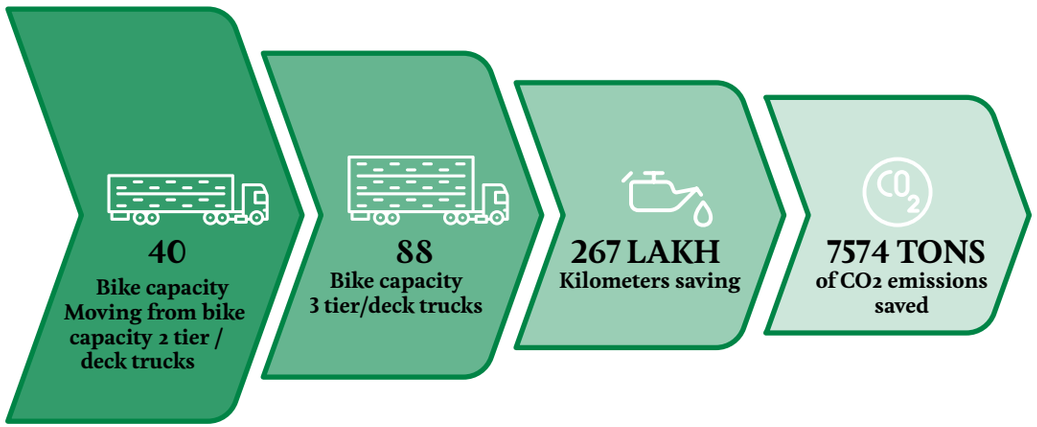
Design Interventions

In addition to direct action, the company has introduced design changes to further improve its sustainability footprint. Key interventions include:

• Reduction in plastic usage and material usage in packaging used for motorcycle transportation. Foam use, previously at 300g per motorcycle, has been almost eliminated. Five of the six main packaging components are now reusable.
• Royal Enfield is the first OEM to trial all three modes of rail wagon transport, i.e. through New Modified Goods Wagon, Two-deck Automobile Wagon and 40-foot Road Railer Containers.
• Export crate optimisation has led to a 15% increase in loading efficiency, saving 129 40-foot container loads last year and avoiding 650 MT of CO_2 emissions.
• These design-led efficiencies have also cut logistics costs by 17% and reduced warehouse space requirements by 14%.

Transportation is a major indirect emitter. Yet, only a few players, especially in India, have scaled up decarbonising logistics. Royal Enfield's 62% three tier trailer adoption exceeds the norm, showcasing operational foresight. These logistics efficiencies translate into lower cost per unit, faster deliveries, and a clear differentiator in a price-sensitive market.

Trailer Adoption Impact on Bike Transportation



Awards & Recognition

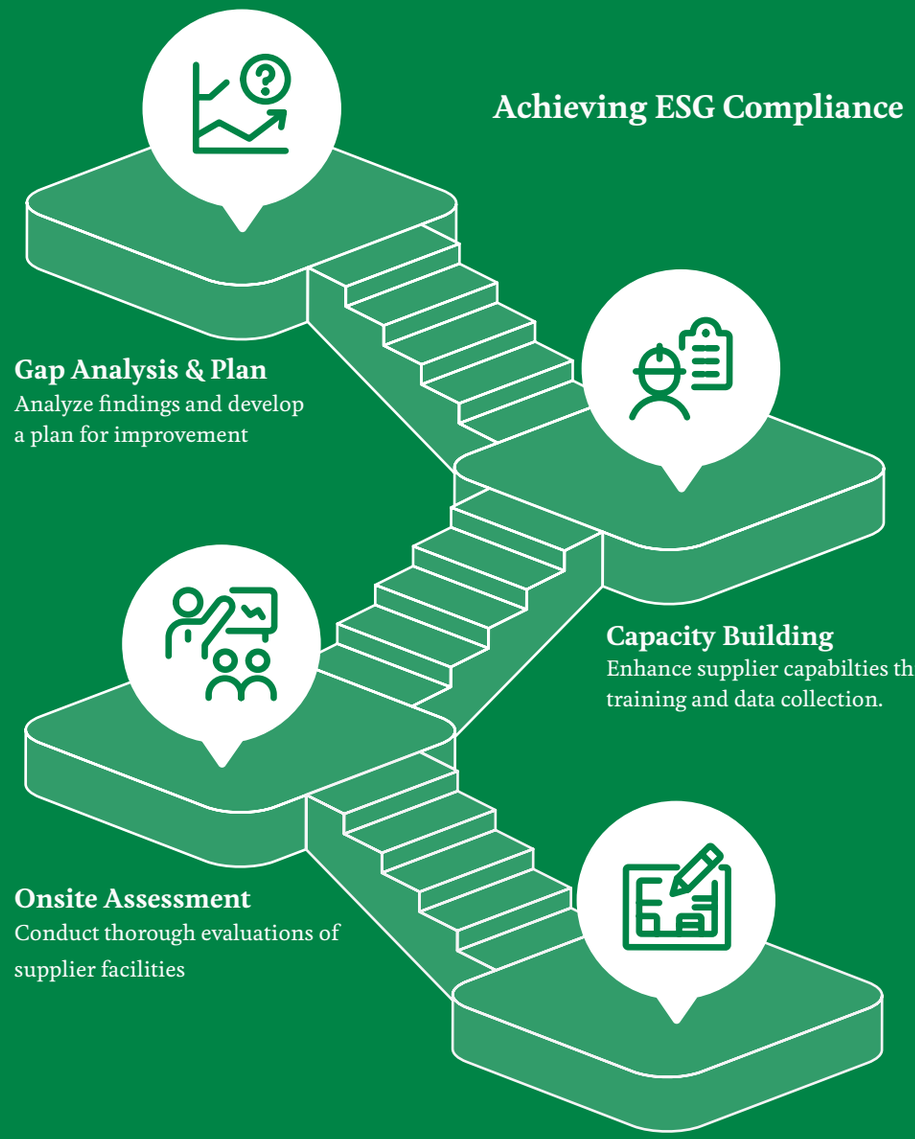
These tangible efforts across energy efficiency, water stewardship, emissions monitoring, and data-led operations have received global recognition, with the Vallam factory being named ***'Sustainable Factory of the Year'*** at the India Manufacturing & Sustainability Awards 2024 by **Frost & Sullivan.**

Sustainability in Sync with Supply Chain Partners

Royal Enfield has been working closely with value chain partners, acknowledging that business operations isn't a siloed effort. Today, over 76% of the company's materials are sourced from within 500 km of its manufacturing hubs, reducing emissions and improving supply chain resilience.

Royal Enfield has strategically embedded safety and sustainability frameworks into the supply chain. Focus areas include promoting Zero Accidents, use of renewable energy, driving water conservation efforts, embracing circularity, adhering to mandatory statutory requirements, ethical business conduct, best in class human rights policy, implementing green packaging solutions and leveraging digital transformation for better transparency and efficiency.

Progress in this area has been a direct result of strategic partnerships, ongoing capacity building initiatives and a shared vision across the entire value chain. Towards this, Royal Enfield has adopted a structured and collaborative approach to evaluating and enhancing the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance of its supply chain.

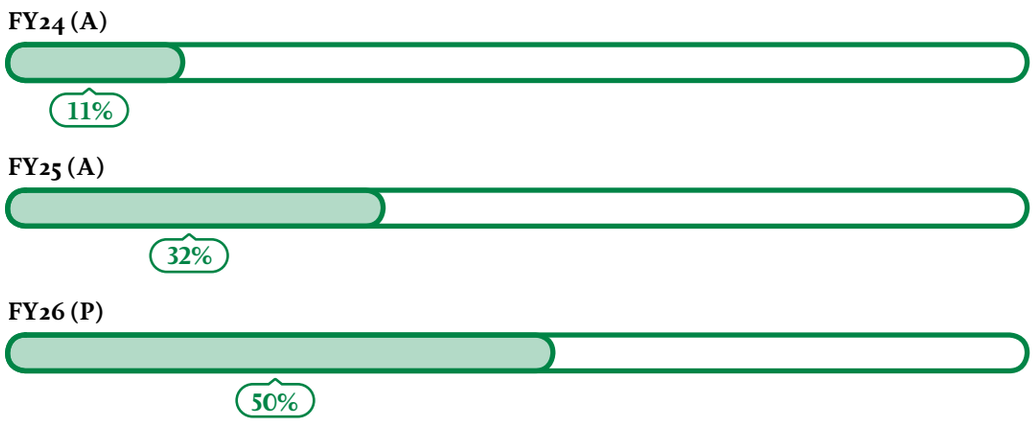


A Framework for Collaborative Sustainability

Royal Enfield's ESG assessments now reach over 80% of its supplier base (by purchase value), helping partners assess, align, and grow in their sustainability journeys. In parallel, third-party safety audits have been introduced for increased safety and transparency across the value chain.

Safety Audits

The company conducts onsite safety audits of prioritised suppliers through self and renowned third-party agencies. The audits span occupational health, workplace safety, employee well-being, and working conditions. As of 31 March 2025, 32.20% of the supply chain (by purchase value) has undergone this safety assessment process.

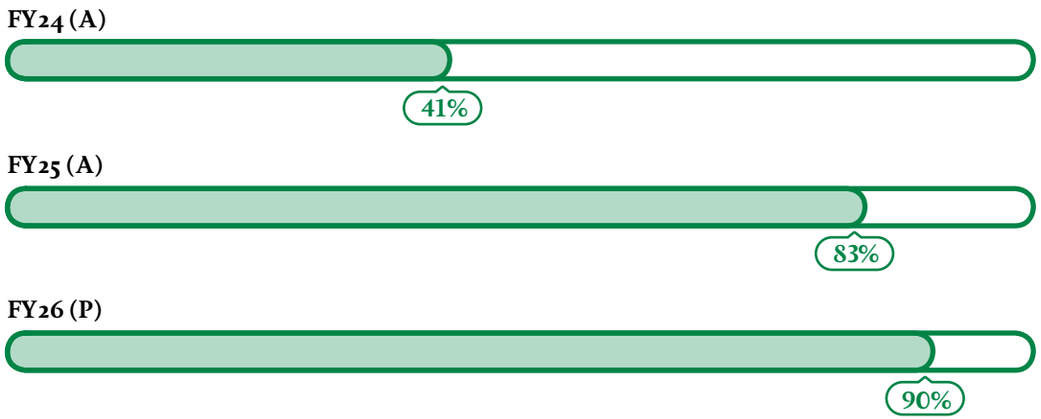


ESG Assessment

Some of the key areas covered under Royal Enfield's ESG assessment include:

- Environment Management System,
- Environment Compliance,
- Environment Initiatives & Targets,
- Occupational Health and Safety,
- Human Rights & Labour Practices,
- Diversity and Inclusion (D&I),
- Product Quality &Safety Ethical Business Conduct,
- Sustainable Procurement.

A total of 83.30% suppliers by purchase value have been assessed until 31-March-2025, out of which 41.95% suppliers were assessed in FY 2024-25.



Continued efforts over the past two years has shown a significant trend of engagement and improvement from suppliers. Some of the key achievements as a result of sustainable sourcing practices and effective collaboration have been seen in various areas:

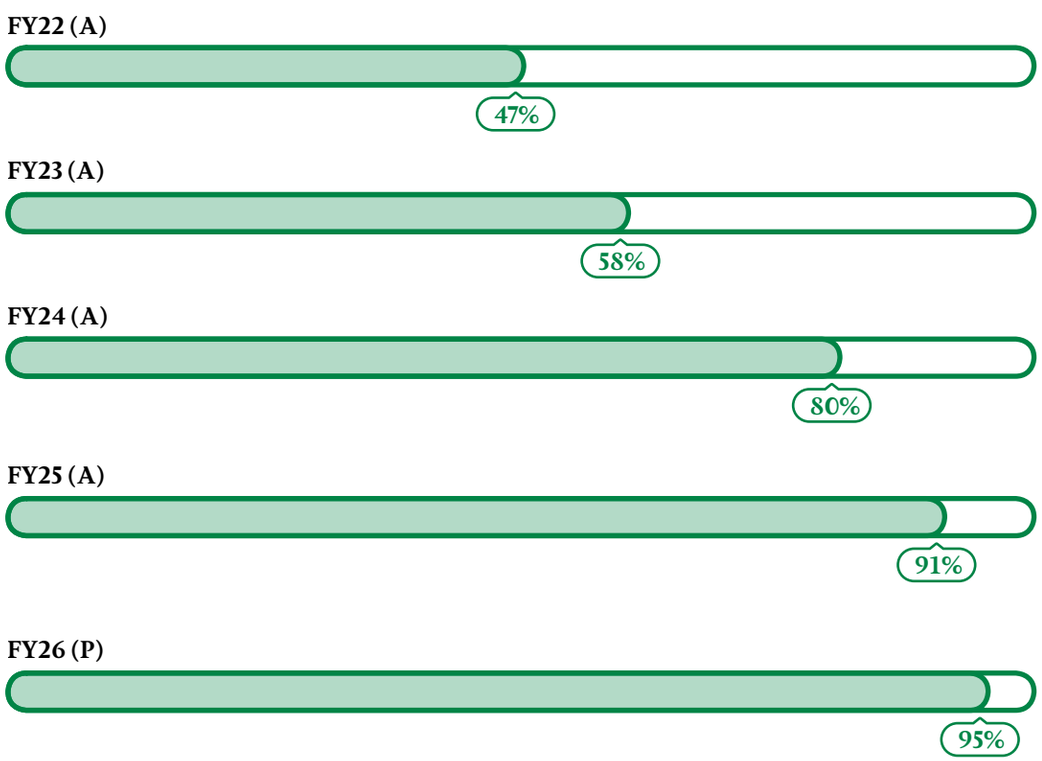
Green Energy
64% of suppliers by purchase value now utilise renewable energy in their operations. This represents a substantial step towards reducing collective carbon footprint and Scope 3 emissions for Royal Enfield.

Carbon Neutrality Commitments
30% of suppliers have committed to carbon neutrality or Net Zero targets.

ESG Management Certifications
71% of partners are certified with ISO 14001 (Environment Management System), and 63% hold ISO 45001 (Occupational Health and Safety Management) certification.

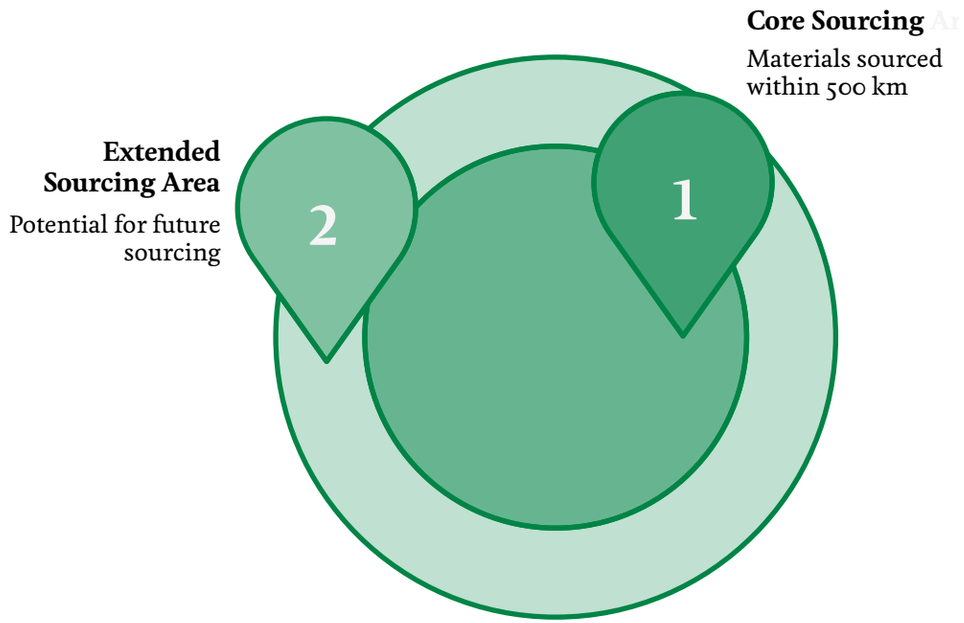
Supply & Packaging

In the push to reduce packaging waste, Royal Enfield worked closely with suppliers to phase out single-use packaging materials such as carton boxes, plastic covers, gunny bags and wooden crates, exploring green packaging alternatives. As a result, Green Packaging adherence has reached 91% in 2025.

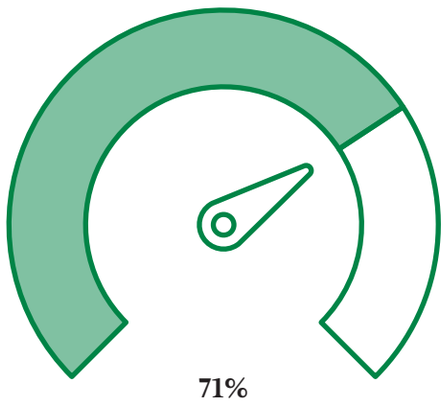


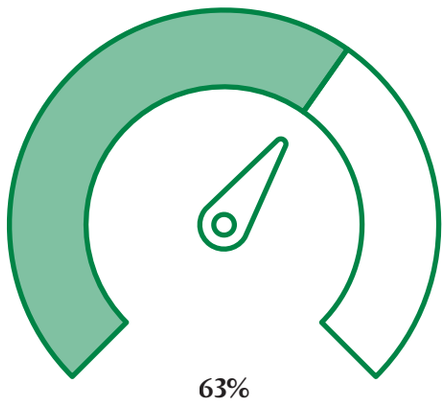
Powering Progress Close to Home

71%+ procurement from vendors in close proximity



Built on Standards, Driven by Purpose





Shared Stories of Success

From performance metrics to mindset and long-term commitment, Royal Enfield's partners across the supply chain are driving measurable change:

Thai Summit Autoparts India Pvt Ltd

In 2023, Thai Summit became the first partner onboarded into Royal Enfield's ESG Baseline Assessment Framework. At the time, there was limited renewable energy usage and no sustainability certifications in place. The journey was truly starting from the ground up.

By 2025, Thai Summit had achieved:
• 54% of total energy from solar and wind sources.
• In-house STP construction for zero liquid discharge.
• ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 Stage 2 audits completed.
• Nomination for Royal Enfield's Annual Sustainability Awards.

Endurance Technologies Limited

As part of the last year assessments and reporting across four of their plants, ENDURANCE, a key supplier, has committed to targets with following actions:

• Initiated Cradle to Grave Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for RE Products (Suspension and Brake Parts).
• On 9 September 2024, signed the SBTi commitment letter, with a roadmap to Net Zero by FY 2025–26 and validation to follow.
• Achieved GreenCo Gold Certification for their Suspension Business Unit manufacturing facility.

Pricol Precision Products Private Limited

Pricol's operations across biodiversity and afforestation initiatives include:

A remarkable green belt area of 10 acres at the Hosur plant, which houses a rich biodiversity of 140 tree varieties, 68 bird varieties, 40 butterfly varieties, 30 reptile varieties and 12 snake varieties.

Moreover, under their CSR initiatives, Sundaram Auto has undertaken significant afforestation efforts, with 6.4 lakh tree plantations completed and 14,000 acres of afforestation outside the campus.

Precitek: ZED Gold and Beyond

Precitek, a precision component manufacturer, exemplifies how MSMEs can lead in sustainability when given the right platform. In FY 2024-25 :

• Achieved ZED Gold Certification from the Ministry of MSME.
• 40% reduction in freshwater use through rainwater harvesting and water-based coolants.
• Adopted green packaging practices.
• Enrolled for MSME Lean Competitive Scheme (MCLS). Targeting to certified as MSME Lean by 2026.
• ISO 14001 preparation underway.

Beyond Compliance: Recognition and Culture-Building

Celebrating the Changemakers

In FY 2024-25, one of the most anticipated segments of the Annual Supplier meet was the awards ceremony, where supplier partners were honoured for their sustainability initiatives and their collaboration in the ESG assessment exercise.

Supplier Testimonials

"We are deeply honoured to have received recognition for our sustainability efforts and sincerely appreciate the support extended by Royal Enfield in enhancing our knowledge on sustainability through various programmes for vendor partners. Their initiative to assess and promote deeper understanding of sustainability has been both insightful and inspiring.

In line with our sustainability goals, we have taken a bold target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 33% in absolute terms by 2030, compared to 2021. To help achieve this, one of our key initiatives is to transition ARaymond India to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Importantly, this journey is not one we take alone but we are also actively engaging and empowering our partners to join us in this mission. For us, sustainability is a necessity. A necessity to secure a better, healthier world for generations to come."

- Manish Padharia
Managing Director, ARaymond India

"At Thai Summit, we believe sustainability is not just a goal but a fundamental responsibility as an automotive parts manufacturer. This is just the beginning, as sustainability is a continuous journey. We are committed to progressing on this path with a strong focus on innovation and through strong partnerships like the one we are proud to have with Royal Enfield."

- Dittavarong Gattaphan
Chief Executive Officer, Thai Summit India

"First, we would like to congratulate Royal Enfield in achieving the 1mn milestone last year – a truly remarkable achievement.

We thank Royal Enfield for recognising Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering for our commitment to sustainability. This acknowledgment is evidence of our focused efforts towards our mutual sustainability vision. Motherson has set an ambitious goal to achieve carbon Net Zero by 2040.

We are very happy to be part of the journey and wish Royal Enfield great success in the coming years."

- Amit Bhakri
President, Motherson Automotive Technologies and Engineering

Looking Forward: FY 2025-26 Goals

- Increasing Net Zero commitments across our top suppliers.
- Completing ESG assessments across 90 % of our suppliers in terms of Purchase Value
- Achieving 96% green packaging compliance.
- Empowering more MSMEs with ZED certification and ESG frameworks.
- Expanding digital ESG dashboards for real-time sustainability tracking.

Net Zero Commitments

Encouraging suppliers to commit to net zero emissions.

ESG Assessments & Improvement Plans

Conducting ESG assessments across a significant portion of suppliers and helping achieve improvement plans

Green Packaging Compliance

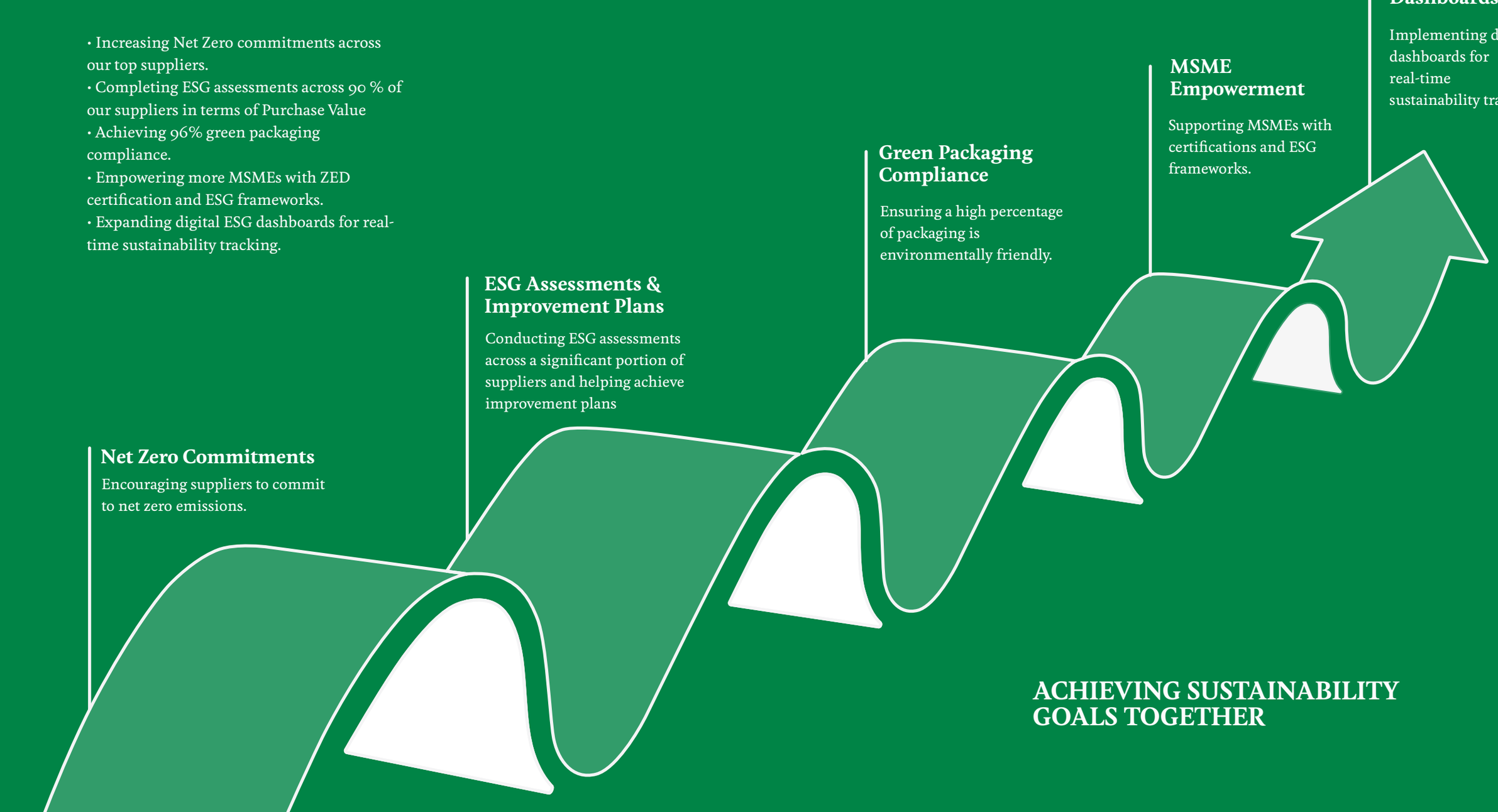
Ensuring a high percentage of packaging is environmentally friendly.

MSME Empowerment

Supporting MSMEs with certifications and ESG frameworks.

Digital ESG Dashboards

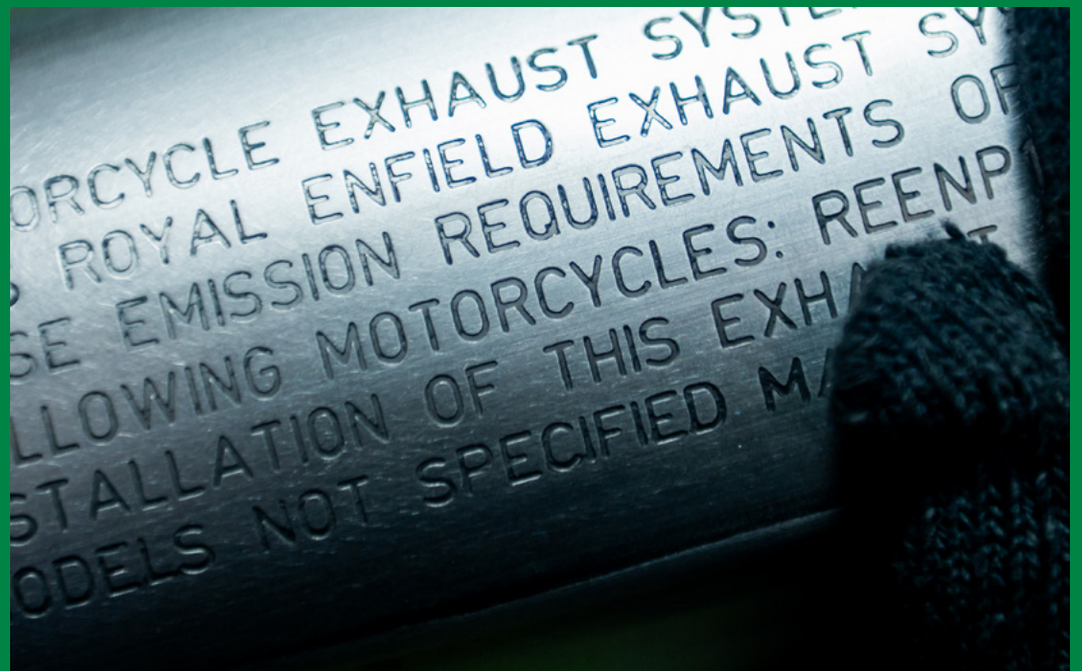
Implementing digital dashboards for real-time sustainability tracking.



ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY GOALS TOGETHER

The newest plant at Cheyyar has a 1 MW rooftop solar plant and has been a water positive and zero liquid discharge facility from day one.

Royal Enfield has won awards like the AmbitionBox Employee Choice Award for Mid-Sized Companies in 2025 and consistently gets positive reviews and overall satisfaction ratings on platforms for parameters like work-life balance, culture etc.



Royal Enfield is the first OEM to have undertaken R-R-R studies as per AIS 129 and have implemented them across 350 / 450 / 650 cc on our ICE platforms; with our motorcycles being on average 97% recyclable and 99% recoverable by mass. Royal Enfield has also been well ahead of timelines for product guidelines, whether it was BS6 or compliance to E20 fuels etc.

Image on the right: Royal Enfield has 3449 women in its workforce, increasing diversity among all employees and workers to 18%.

Common Hawk Cuckoo (Hierococcyx varius), also called as a brainfever bird, is more heard than seen.

Total no. of trees: 16,455
Area under green cover: ~ 7 Hectares
Miyawaki forests: 3, supporting ~5000 trees
>25 native species

A yellow carpenter bee (Xylocopa tranquebarica), one of India's few known nocturnal bees feeding near the medicinal Abutilon indicum. Carpenter bees stay with their daughters and sisters in holes bored in to wood, rather than hives!

White-browed bulbuls (Pycnonotus luteolus) are endemic to peninsular South India and often difficult to spot.

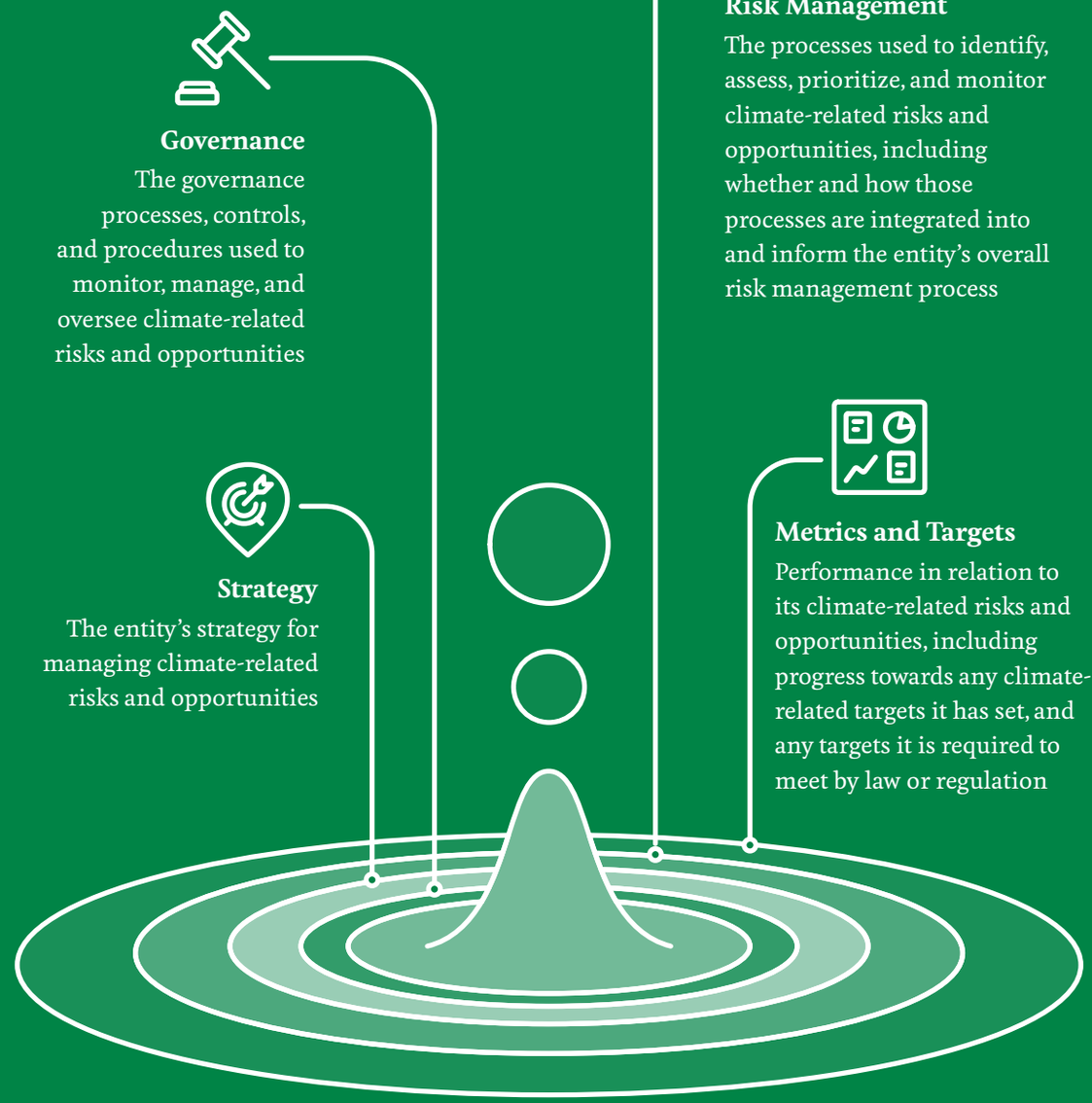
Rainwater harvesting ponds: ~ 61,000 KL

Pondicherry fan-throated lizards (Sitana ponticeriana) are shy but males show off their puffed out throat fans and they can run bi-pedal!

Climate-related risks and opportunities aligned with IFRS S2 disclosures

Royal Enfield acknowledges the potential impact of climate change on business, stakeholders, and the environment and is dedicated to mitigating climate-related risks and capitalising on emerging climate-related opportunities to ensure long-term resilience and value creation.

Royal Enfield is in the process of conducting a comprehensive climate risk assessment aligned with the recommendations of the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS S2- Climate-related disclosures) issued by the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB). This exercise covers manufacturing facilities, research centres, and corporate offices, and will be disclosing findings based on four content pillars of IFRS S2: (i) Governance; (ii) Strategy; (iii) Risk Management; and (iv) Metrics & Target.



Climate Governance

Royal Enfield has established a robust governance structure to shape climate change and sustainability strategies for driving related actions, addressing risks and opportunities, and ensuring accountability.

Sustainability is one of the four pillars that constitutes REBALANCE business strategy. At the apex, the Board-level Risk Management Committee oversees the identification, assessment, and integration of climate-related risks into the enterprise risk management framework. The Board receives quarterly updates on the progress of risks and opportunities.

At the management level, the ESG Council, which comprises CEO, CFO, and Executive Director of the Social Mission, supports and guides the Risk Management Committee. The ESG Council is responsible for identifying climate and ESG focus areas, defining ESG vision and setting goals & roadmaps, aligning climate goals with business objectives, monitoring and reviewing climate and ESG-related activities, overseeing identification and mitigation of climate and ESG- related risks, and ensuring compliance with evolving regulatory expectations.

Implementation of climate and ESG initiatives is driven by a cross-functional team with representatives from Finance, Operations, Sustainability, and Risk Management, etc. facilitating coordinated execution. Further, a dedicated Knowledge Centre tracks global regulatory and technological developments, supporting informed decision-making and capability building. This multi-tiered governance structure ensures accountability, transparency, and proactive climate risk management while reinforcing the company's commitment to sustainable growth.

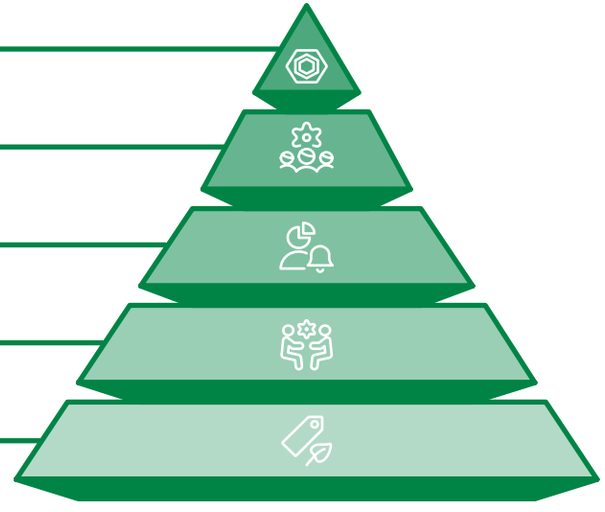
EML Board
Ultimate decision-making body for ESG

Risk Management Committee
Identifies and mitigates ESG-related risks

ESG Council
Oversees ESG strategy and initiatives

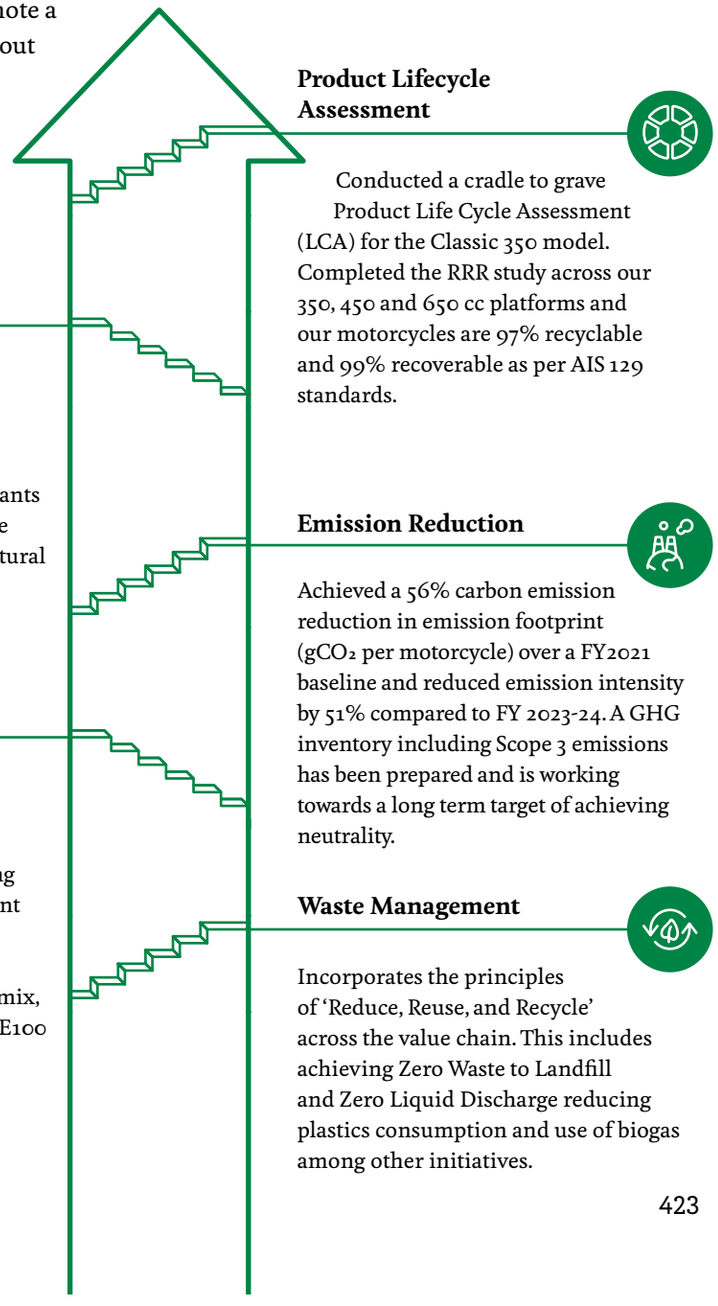
Cross Functional Team
Integrates ESG across departments

ESG Knowledge Centre
Central repository for ESG information



Climate Related Strategy

Sustainability strategy is built around reducing our environmental footprint while promoting a circular economy. Through the following initiatives, the aim is to minimise environmental impact and promote a culture of sustainability throughout operations, ultimately working towards a Net Zero future.



Product Lifecycle Assessment

Conducted a cradle to grave Product Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for the Classic 350 model. Completed the RRR study across our 350, 450 and 650 cc platforms and our motorcycles are 97% recyclable and 99% recoverable as per AIS 129 standards.

Water Conservation

Operations are Zero Liquid Discharge and have a net water positive index of 4.3. Initiatives include rainwater harvesting systems and sewage treatment plants and ensure access to water for the surrounding community and natural ecosystem.

Emission Reduction

Achieved a 56% carbon emission reduction in emission footprint (gCO_2 per motorcycle) over a FY2021 baseline and reduced emission intensity by 51% compared to FY 2023-24. A GHG inventory including Scope 3 emissions has been prepared and is working towards a long term target of achieving neutrality.

Energy Management

Implemented an Energy Management System (EMS) to monitor, control, and optimise electricity consumption, reducing carbon footprint. Made significant progress in transitioning to renewable electricity, which now accounts for 84% of our energy mix, and aims to transition towards RE100 in three years.

Waste Management

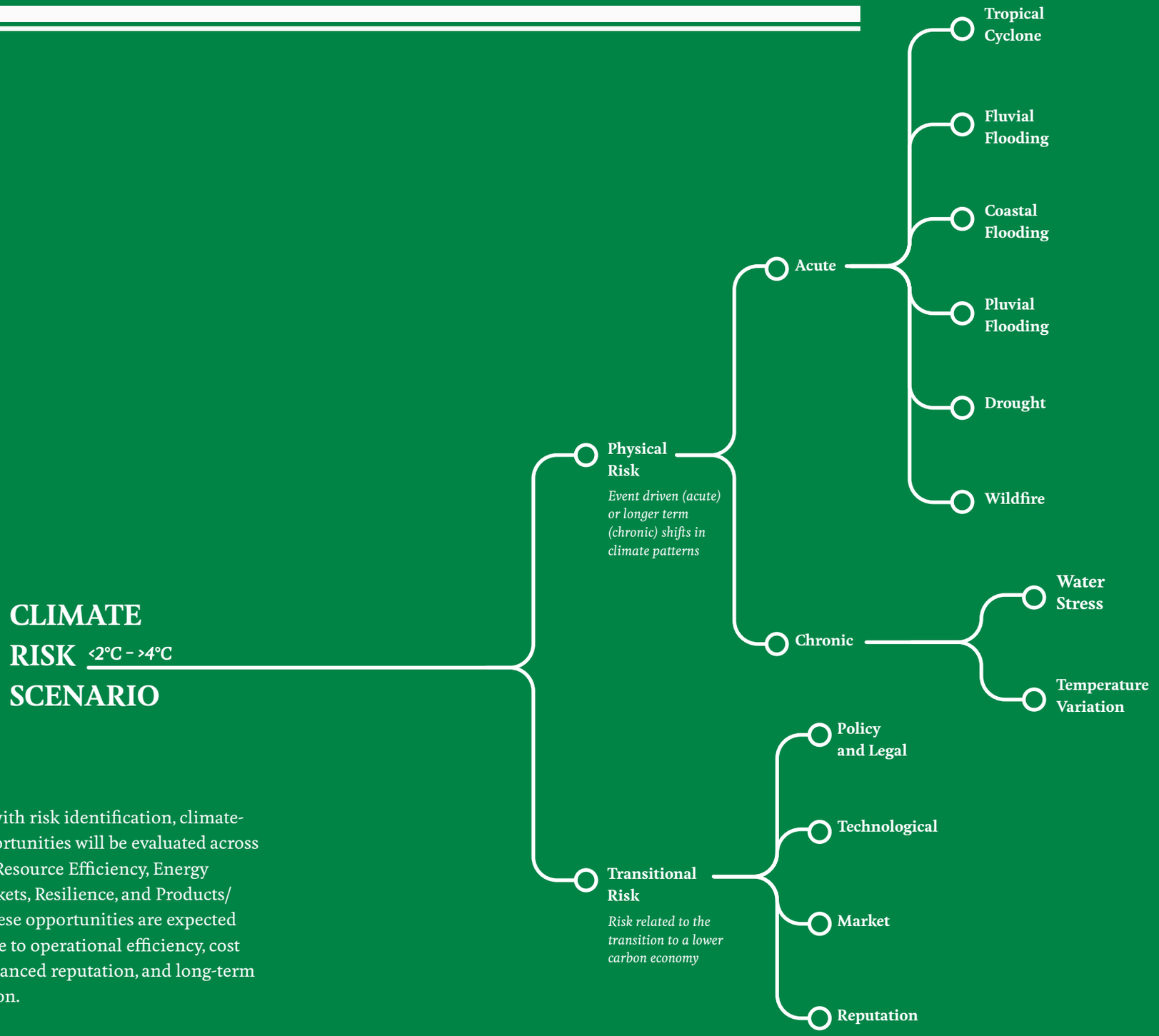
Incorporates the principles of 'Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle' across the value chain. This includes achieving Zero Waste to Landfill and Zero Liquid Discharge reducing plastics consumption and use of biogas among other initiatives.

Climate Risk Management

This climate risk assessment process aims to identify, analyse, and respond to climate-related risks and opportunities that could materially impact operations and long-term financial performance. Royal enfield is in the process of identifying and assessing climate-related risks for its manufacturing facilities, research centres, and corporate offices. This process focuses on analysing climate-related physical and transition risks, and opportunities.

Based on the above identified risks, scenario analysis will be undertaken. For physical risks, distinct scenarios will be evaluated (SSP1-2.6, SSP2-4.5, SSP3- 7.0, and SSP5-8.5) to capture a broad range of possible outcomes and account for varying levels of risks. To assess transitional risks across short, medium, and long-term horizons, various external factors, such as regulatory changes, market shift, evolving consumer behaviour, and reputational impacts will be carefully analysed. To ensure robust analysis, widely recognised frameworks like the International Energy Agency (IEA) scenarios, including the Stated Policies Scenario (STEPS), Announced Pledges Scenario (APS) and the Net Zero Emissions (NZE), will be used to guide the transitional risk assessment in accordance with 1.5-degree Celsius scenario (1.5DS) and Well-Below 2-degree Celsius (WB2C) scenario.

In parallel with risk identification, climate-related opportunities will be evaluated across categories- Resource Efficiency, Energy source, Markets, Resilience, and Products/ Services. These opportunities are expected to contribute to operational efficiency, cost savings, enhanced reputation, and long-term value creation.

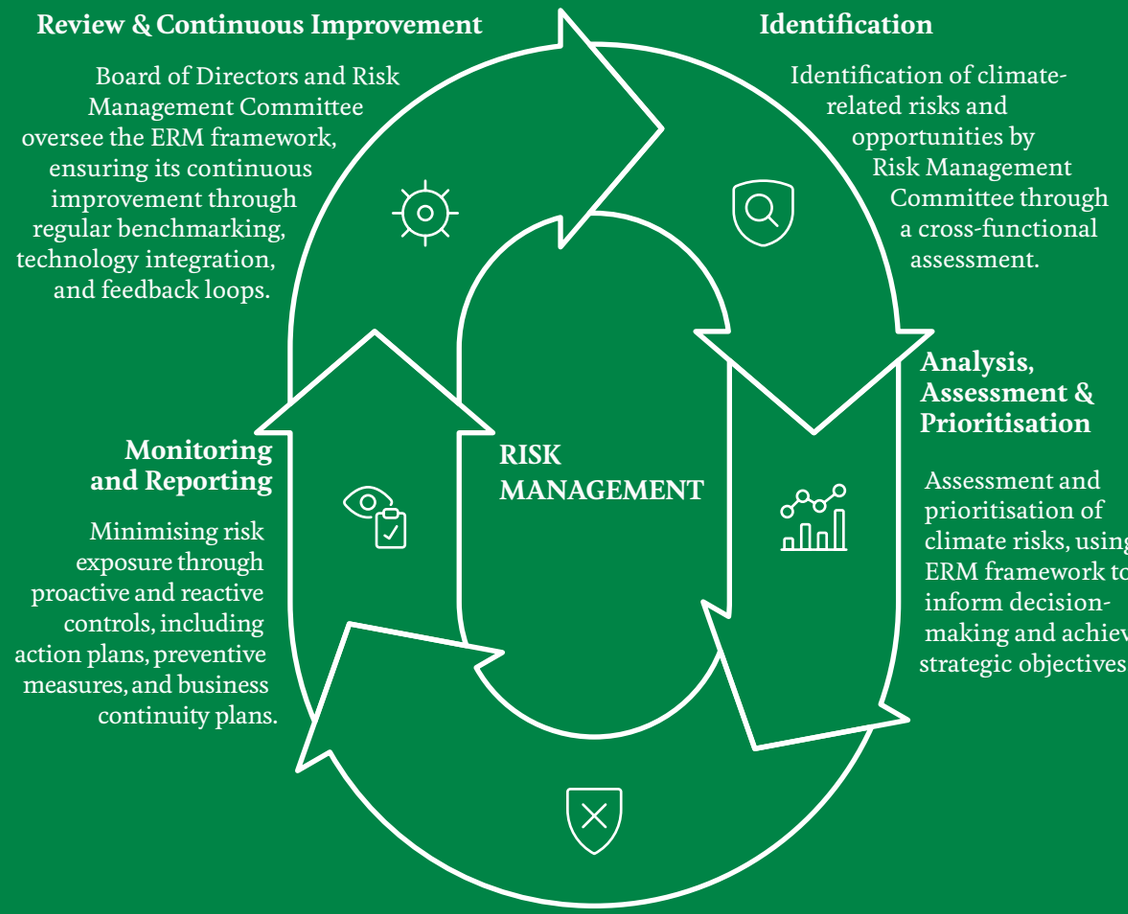


Climate change related Risk Management

Royal Enfield has a robust risk management framework in place to identify, assess, and mitigate climate change-related risks that may impact its business. This multidisciplinary approach integrates climate risk management into the overall Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) framework, ensuring a proactive and comprehensive response to emerging threats. The Risk Management Committee and senior management team prioritise key risks, including climate change and environmental impact on operations and products, and develop targeted mitigation strategies. Recognising the importance of transparency, the commitment is to conducting an independent assessment of climate-related risks to assets and disclosing risk assessment and action plans to external stakeholders, demonstrating dedication to responsible and sustainable business.

By proactively managing climate-related risks, Royal Enfield is positioning the business for long-term success, driving sustainability, resilience, and growth in a rapidly changing environment.

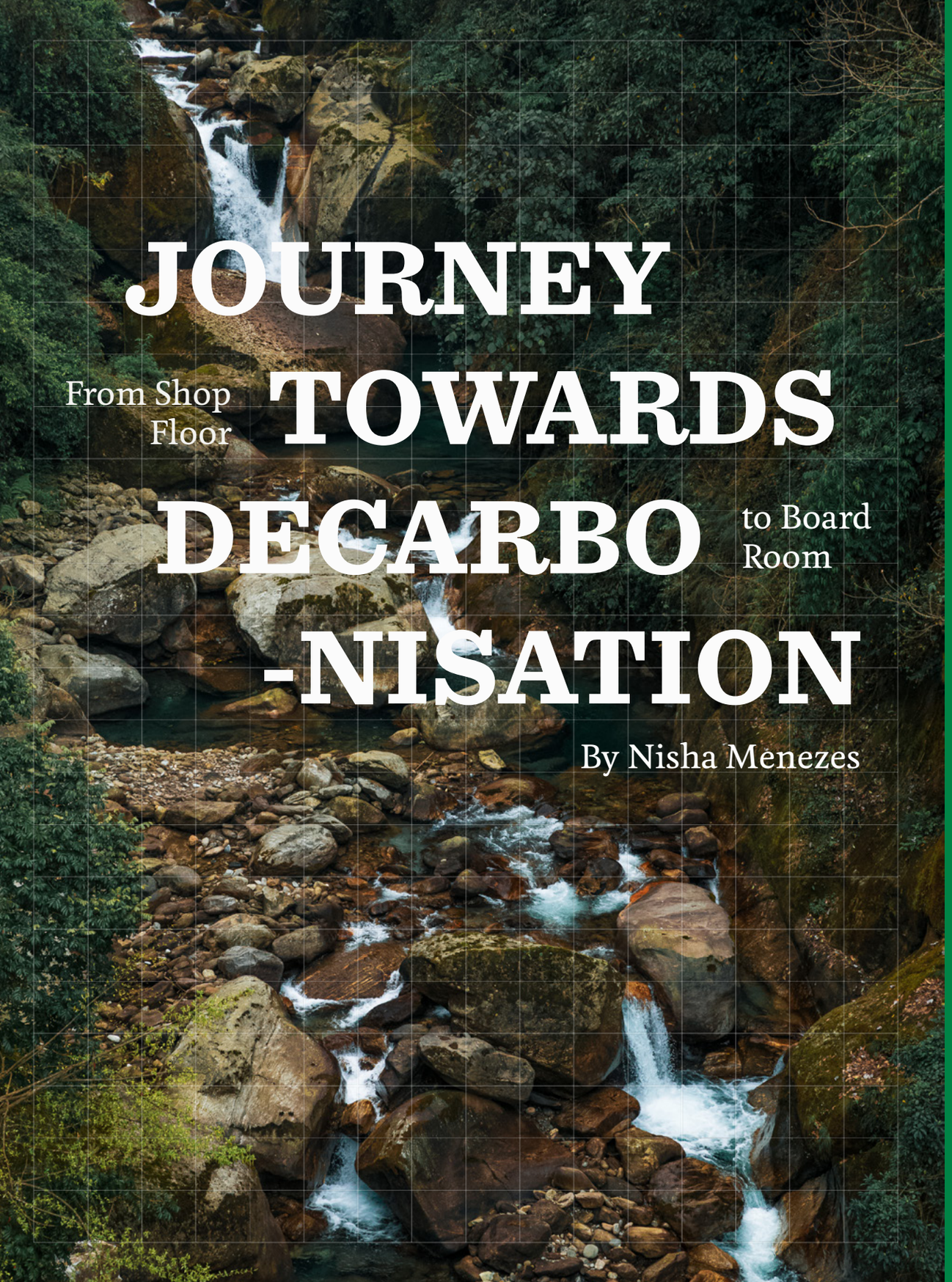
Through this assessment, Royal Enfield aims to ensure that assets and operations are resilient and well-equipped to mitigate climate-related physical and transition risks. The anticipated financial impacts associated with the identified risks and opportunities will be analysed at both site level and organisation level. As a result of this assessment, there will also be updates to existing site-specific mitigation strategies and Disaster Management Plan to protect the interests of stakeholders and ensure business continuity.



Climate Related Targets & Metrics

In the pursuit of reducing overall footprint, Royal Enfield is prioritising reduction in GHG emissions by deploying energy-efficient technologies, transitioning towards renewable energy sources, reducing water usage and implementing zero waste strategies.

Areas	Metrics	Targets	Performance in FY 2024-25
Climate Change	• Reducing scope 1 and 2 emissions and emission intensity • Shifting towards Renewable Energy	80% emission intensity reduction (tCO_2e/ motorcycle) by FY 2029-30 Shifting towards Renewable Energy	• 0.62 GJ/motorcycle energy intensity in manufacturing units • 51% reduction in emission intensity from FY 2023-24 • 84% renewable electricity mix in FY 2024-25 • 56% reduction in carbon emissions (FY 2020-21 baseline)
Water	Water positivity index	Maintain water positivity across operations	• Water positive for 7 years • Net water positive index of 4.3 across operations & HQ • Zero Liquid Discharge across units • >50,000 KL of groundwater recharge
Waste	Waste to Landfill	Zero Waste to Landfill by 2030	• Achieved Zero Waste to Landfill • 448 MT hazardous waste recycled • 1,324 MT co-processed • Adopted circular economy practices, including effluent and sewage treatment facilities at all plants • Implemented effective waste management solutions such as co-processing in cement kilns • Aligned with Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) norms • Integrated end-of-life (ELV) management into design and production to enhance recoverability and recyclability



JOURNEY TOWARDS DECARBO-NISATION

From Shop Floor to Board Room

By Nisha Menezes

Global leaders aim to reduce emissions and meet climate targets to limit warming to 1.5°C, but translating these goals into company actions is complex. PwC's 2023 Index shows that achieving this target requires a decarbonisation rate over six times higher than in 2022. Meanwhile, corporate sustainability is evolving from compliance to value creation, as more firms improve emissions disclosures.

The IPCC notes that 23% of energy-related emissions are from transport, mainly road vehicles. The Asia-Pacific market, especially India's motorcycle sector, adds complexity, offering opportunities for innovation and leadership in sustainability. In India, climate action within the automotive sector is shaped by environmental responsibility, regulatory mandates, market dynamics, and economic incentives. Two wheelers play a crucial role in shaping the value addition of the overall automotive sector. Leading motorcycle manufacturers are committing to achieving carbon neutrality and exploring targets governed by globally recognised frameworks like SBTi.

Clear mandates around reducing their scope 1 and 2 emissions through operational efficiencies and sustainable practices will help achieve carbon neutrality. Additionally, nature-based solutions like reforestation will further enable these companies to strive for greater emissions reduction. Decarbonisation and renewable energy adoption are central

to achieving sustainability goals, since these initiatives cut across various facets of manufacturers' value chain.

In addition to reducing emissions intensity, manufacturers are also focusing on material circularity, water conservation, and energy transition. Concerted efforts to shift away from fossil fuel to low carbon energy resources will aid in reducing their direct emissions attributed to scope 1. Similarly, shifting to renewable energy can help mitigate scope 2 emissions. Scope 3 emissions can be abated by critically examining their supply chain dependencies, motorcycle usage, and operations from franchise.

A cradle-to-grave life cycle assessment can help manufacturers gain a deeper understanding of product-level carbon emissions. Through LCA, inferences can be drawn to evaluate the impact of the products across environmental, land, water, and other areas. From raw material extraction to end-of-life, emissions that arise from a product's life cycle gets captured in this assessment. For a motorcycle manufacturer, typically, emissions reductions can be achieved through the use of lightweight and recyclable materials, sustainable sourcing, regenerative braking systems, and aerodynamic design improvements.

Developing a Net Zero strategy requires aligning emissions trajectories with long-term business growth of a company. The Net Zero roadmap includes reductions across Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions. For a motorcycle manufacturer, measures targeted around ethanol blending and improved fuel efficiency can help reduce emissions categorised in 'use of sold products'. Furthermore, supply chain decarbonised and use of recycled materials can play an effective role in addressing scope 3 reductions. On a select basis, to reduce emissions from scope 3 across pertinent categories, measures targeted around electric vehicles, biodiesel adoption, purchase of renewable energy certificates from markets can be considered. These measures can be implemented in accordance with the company's commitment to achieve short term and long-term goals.

It is prudent to consider external factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of these measures. For example, while fuel switching is technically viable, factors such as feedstock availability and infrastructure limitations remain beyond the company's control. As a result, decarbonisation efforts are prioritised based on feasibility, availability, and proximity for on-site implementation. Managing a green supply chain is essential for emissions reduction, involving sustainable sourcing, energy-efficient production, and recycling to minimise supplier waste. However, direct influence over supplier decisions remains limited.

Committing to net zero or carbon neutrality is critical for addressing climate change. Globally, motorcycle manufacturers are relying on three pillars to achieve their intended goals. These pillars are shifting towards electric vehicles, optimised lithium battery tech deployment, and policy-based accelerators to increase adoption. While governments establish climate goals, individual organisations must implement concrete actions to achieve them. As integral components of the economy, corporate efforts are essential in advancing toward a cleaner, more sustainable future.

The author is ESG (South and East) and Auto Sector Leader at PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers).

Glossary

A

Adaptation
The process by which local communities adjust their livelihoods, infrastructure and practices to cope with the impacts of climate change (including glacial melt, erratic rainfall and shifting agriculture patterns) to reduce risks and sustain their way of life.

Alternative Learning Centres
Community-run learning hubs that offer locally relevant, creative and experiential education in regions where formal schooling is limited or inconsistent.

Art for Change
A philosophy and practice that uses visual art, design and creativity as a tool for social commentary, awareness and transformation. This includes mediums like public installations, upcycled art or helmet canvases that combine activism with aesthetics.

Artisanal
Traditional method of production or work, typically passed down through generations and small in scale. In the Himalayas, this includes communities engaged in crafts, farming or resource-based livelihoods involving sustainable and locally available materials and traditional skills.

B

Biosphere Reserve
A designation by UNESCO that recognises ecologically significant regions balancing biodiversity conservation with sustainable use. In the Himalayas, biosphere reserves act as living laboratories where indigenous knowledge, community practices and conservation policies intersect to protect fragile ecologies while supporting local livelihoods.

Behaviour Change
The process of influencing and altering individual or community actions and habits to support more sustainable and climate-resilient practices. It involves studying how and why people's actions change, focusing on the factors that influence these changes and using this knowledge to develop interventions that promote positive behavior shifts. It draws on insights from psychology, sociology, and other fields to understand the complex interplay of individual, social, and environmental influences on behavior.

C

Community
A group of people geographically, occupationally, socially, culturally or traditionally linked, sharing an interest in and/or interacting with a common natural resource base (ecosystems and species).

The term is also used for indigenous people, non-human (wildlife) communities like Keystone species such as the snow leopard. A community does not necessarily indicate a homogeneous entity and could refer to a social unit like an entire village or a group or section of people (but not an individual or an individual family).

CAFE norms
Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency/Economy norms are regulations set by governments to reduce fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. In India, CAFE norms were first introduced in 2017 under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001. These norms aim to improve fuel efficiency and reduce reliance on fossil fuels by setting standards for the average fuel consumption of a manufacturer's entire vehicle fleet.

Capsule Collection
A limited curated selection of garments or products, each rooted in a particular geography or collaboration, offering a sustainable counter-narrative to fast fashion. Capsule collections under The Himalayan Knot project celebrate regional craft vocabularies.

Carbon Credit
A tradable permit referring to carbon emission reductions or removals, measured in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Carbon Neutrality
It refers to achieving a balance between carbon dioxide emissions produced and carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere through, often through carbon credits purchased on trading platforms. This balance aims to have no net increase in the overall concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Catalyst
An enabler or spark that accelerates change without overtaking ownership. Royal Enfield Social Mission positions itself as a catalyst – facilitating connections, enabling visibility, and supporting long-term local-led systems without displacing community leadership.

Circularity
A design and manufacturing philosophy that minimises waste by keeping materials in use through reuse, recycling and responsible sourcing across the product lifecycle.

City+ Mobility
A future-forward approach to urban commuting – lightweight, tech-augmented two-wheelers designed to navigate dense cityscapes while contributing to emission reduction targets.

Climate Change
Long-term shift in temperature, precipitation and weather patterns affecting the planet, often intensified by global greenhouse gas emissions. For Himalayan communities, climate change leads to melting glaciers, unpredictable weather, reduced water availability and threat to agriculture and livelihoods.

Climate Mitigation
Action taken to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases, aiming to limit the extent of climate change. In the Himalayas, this can include reforestation, adoption of clean energy, sustainable farming and improved waste management.

Climate Resilience
The ability of communities and ecosystems to anticipate, adapt, and respond to the impacts of climate change. Resilience is demonstrated through reviving traditional systems, biodiversity protection, knowledge transfer and building local infrastructure that can weather uncertainty.

Collective Action
When people, skills, knowledge systems and objectives come together – across disciplines, regions, and cultures – to tackle shared challenges. For the Royal Enfield Social Mission, collective

action includes designers co-creating with artisans, fellows and alumni from various disciplines and geographies engaging in knowledge-sharing, riders advocating for water access in high-altitude villages etc.

Conscious Travel
An approach to travel that centres environmental awareness, cultural sensitivity and ethical engagement. Within the Royal Enfield ecosystem, the principles of conscious travel are encapsulated in the motto “Leave Every Place Better”.

CCA (Community Conserved Areas)
Locally managed conservation zones where indigenous and local communities govern the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. In the Himalayas, CCAs like those led by the Gobuk, Sherdukpen, and Tar communities serve as vital models of cultural and biodiversity conservation, and self-determination, often preceding formal government protection mechanisms.

Community-Led Spaces
A space – physical or conceptual – designed and shaped by the people it serves. Community-led platforms prioritise local agency, storytelling, and benefit-sharing, becoming vehicles for long-term socio-economic and cultural impact.

Companies Act. 2013
A company incorporated in 2014/15 under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, is a non-profit organisation established to promote commerce, art, science, education, research, social welfare, charity or other similar objects for the public good. Its defining characteristic is that any profits or income it earns are reinvested into its charitable objectives and not distributed as dividends to its members.

CSR
CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility, refers to a business’s commitment to integrating social and environmental concerns into its operations and interactions with stakeholders, aiming to balance economic, social and environmental goals. CSR involves a self-regulated, voluntary commitment to acting in ways that are beneficial to society and the environment.

Creative Practitioners
Artists, artisans, storytellers, performers and tradition bearers who hold and transmit cultural knowledge. Across geographies, medium and disciplines, they keep local heritage alive, often without formal platforms or recognition.

Cultural Capital
The knowledge, language and access that allow individuals to navigate elite or institutional spaces.
Cultural Storytelling
A layered form of narrative expression that conveys identity, place and values. In Himalayan contexts, storytelling often weaves together oral traditions, lived experience, creative forms and ecological consciousness.

Curation
The practice of thoughtfully and responsibly selecting, organising and presenting content or objects in a way that respects stakeholders, avoids harm and serves a beneficial purpose. It involves making decisions based on moral principles, such as those concerning artists’ rights, audience well-being, cultural sensitivity, intellectual honesty and data privacy, ensuring the curated material is accessible, usable and contributes positively to local communities.

D

Documentation
The process of systematically recording and describing information about cultural items, whether physical objects or intangible heritage, to ensure their preservation, accessibility, and understanding for future generations, often using recognised international standards to maintain reliability and consistency. It includes collecting data like folklore, traditions and knowledge through various means, such as forms, transcriptions, books, audio-visual recordings etc.

DEI
It stands for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. It is a framework focused on creating fair, respectful and inclusive environments where all individuals, especially those from underrepresented groups, feel valued and have equal opportunities.

Design thinking
A human-centered, iterative problem-solving process that blends creativity, functionality, and contextual awareness. It involves deeply understanding users’ needs, defining design challenges, generating a wide range of solutions, prototyping concepts and testing ideas in real-world contexts. For architects, design thinking bridges the gap between form and function, allowing spaces to emerge not only from technical requirements but also from understanding of local ecology and communities, empathy, innovation etc.

Disaster Relief
The immediate actions taken to assist individuals and communities affected by natural or human-caused disasters. This includes providing essential services like food, water, shelter, medical aid and other support to minimise suffering and facilitate early recovery.

E

ESG
It stands for environmental, social and governance. ESG investing refers to an investing approach that prioritises how companies score on these metrics, considering factors like a company’s impact on the environment or its role in the community.

EGF
Eicher Group Foundation is a Section 8 company incorporated in 2014/15 under the Companies Act of 2013. It is the implementing partner for the Corporate Social Responsibility mandates of Eicher Motors Ltd. and VE Commercial Vehicles Ltd. Eicher Group Foundation is also the CSR arm of Royal Enfield, and has been working in the Himalayan region for the last few years, paying tribute to the land that Royal Enfield reveres as its “spiritual home”.

EV (Electric Vehicle)
A vehicle powered by electricity stored in rechargeable batteries instead of fossil fuels. EVs support carbon neutrality goals by reducing tailpipe emissions and aligning with low-carbon transition efforts in the automotive sector.
Exploration
An immersive and respectful engagement with the cultural, ecological and spatial narratives of the region. It is not merely about discovering landscapes but about understanding how communities have adapted, survived and shaped their environments over centuries.

F

Fellowships
Structured, immersive programmes designed to engage Himalayan youth in storytelling, environmental action, and cultural preservation. Fellows are equipped with tools like filmmaking or design thinking and supported to return to their communities as changemakers.

FF.C6
The debut electric motorcycle under the Royal Enfield Flying Flea brand. It combines intuitive software, lightweight materials, and regenerative tech for city+ mobility with reduced carbon footprint.

Flying Flea (FF)
Royal Enfield’s electric mobility brand, inspired by its 1940s namesake. FF channels minimalist design and lightweight engineering into a smart, zero-emissions motorcycle platform.

Flying Flea Tech Centre
Royal Enfield’s innovation hub where cross-functional teams build next-gen EV platforms – aligning with broader net zero roadmaps and decarbonization strategies.

Fragile Ecosystem
An ecological zone highly sensitive to climate shifts, extractive industries, and unregulated tourism. The Himalayas – with their steep gradients, rare species, and community-managed forests – are among the most vulnerable regions, requiring active care and attention.

G

Grants
Financial assistance provided to a non-profit organisation, community group or other entity for projects that align with the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals, which often focus on social, environmental or community development issues.

Grassroots-led Sports Ecosystem
A community-based structure supporting early-stage sports development through local clubs, coaching, competitions and infrastructure. It's typically where participation and talent discovery begin.

Green Pit Stop
A community-built and community-run structure located along travel routes. These pit stops offer basic amenities while modeling zero-waste and local enterprise. Every Green Pit Stop is a checkpoint for change – inviting travelers to pause and participate in intangible cultural heritage experiences and sustainable local practices.

H

Himalayan Festival
Royal Enfield Social Mission's annual Himalayan festival, Journeying Across the Himalayas, is a strategic space for showcasing, networking, market access and collective learning. It amplifies voices, supports livelihoods and builds visibility for Himalayan narratives and identities.

Human-wildlife conflict
Situations where interactions between people and wild animals lead to negative outcomes, such as crop damage, livestock loss, or threat to human safety. In the Himalayas, such conflicts are often intensified by habitat loss, changing wildlife patterns due to climate change and increased human activity.

I

Impact Assessment
A systematic process to evaluate the potential social, environmental and economic effects of a project, policy or intervention on Himalayan communities and ecosystems. It helps ensure that development is sustainable, culturally sensitive and minimise harm while maximising benefits for both people and the environment.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)
UNESCO defines the Intangible Cultural Heritage of a country as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups and individuals, recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Many of the practices and traditions, such as handicrafts, are directly linked to livelihoods, especially in regions with a fragile ecological balance, such as the Himalayas.

Intergenerationality
The transfer of knowledge, values, and responsibilities across age groups – often between elders and youth. In the Himalayas, this principle is vital to sustaining cultural memory, traditional practices and environmental stewardship. It ensures that heritage is not just safeguarded but actively carried forward and reimagined by younger generations.

Intersection
The point at which different social, environmental, cultural or economic factors overlap and influence each other within Himalayan communities. Understanding these interactions – such as between gender and climate vulnerability or tradition and modern development – is essential for creating holistic and effective solutions to local challenges.

K

Keystone Species
Wildlife species that help hold entire ecosystems together. Their presence – or disappearance – has an outsized impact on biodiversity and ecological balance. In the Himalayas, species like the Snow Leopard, Golden Langur, Himalayan Brown Bear and Red Panda are considered keystones – whose protection is key to the health of broader habitats.

L

Learn to Play
An introductory sports programme focused on building basic skills, team spirit and enjoyment for young children. It lays the foundation for future competitive pathways.

Leave Every Place Better
A guiding principle and call to action for responsible travel. Whether riding through, volunteering or documenting cultural heritage practices, the idea is to leave as a more mindful traveller while contributing to the landscapes and communities that one engages with.

LCA (Life Cycle Assessment)
A cradle-to-grave analysis that maps a product's environmental impact – from raw material extraction to end-of-life – helping optimise for emissions, water, and land use.

Living Heritage
The practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Beyond objects or places, it encompasses living traditions, customs, and knowledge passed down through generations, constantly recreated and adapted to their environment.

Living Labs
A user-centered, open innovation ecosystem where research and real-world experimentation are integrated through co-creation. It's a place where innovation happens in real-life contexts, involving users not just as subjects but as active participants in the innovation process.

M

Market Linkage
The creation of direct connections between producers and markets – often bypassing intermediaries. This strengthens income opportunities, supports craft sustainability, and enables scale with integrity.

Material Culture
The tangible, physical objects created and used by a society, reflecting its culture and values. It encompasses everything from tools and clothing to buildings and art.

MEL
MEL or Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, is an integrated system for systematically gathering data and information about projects and programmess to understand their effectiveness, impact, and progress.

Multidisciplinary
Events or initiatives that bring together diverse fields – art, ecology, storytelling, heritage, design – to enrich understanding and deepen engagement. It reflects the varied entry points for audience and participant involvement.

N

Narrative Shift
The process of challenging dominant perceptions and building new, more inclusive stories. In Himalayan contexts, this involves centering local voices, correcting misconceptions and positioning cultural identity as an asset.

Natural Ice Rinks
Outdoor frozen surfaces formed naturally during winter months in high-altitude areas like Ladakh and Spiti. These cost-effective rinks are crucial for keeping winter sports alive in the Himalayas.

Net Zero
A climate goal where emissions produced are balanced by emissions removed, typically through science based protocols. Automobile companies pursue this via shifting to clean energy sources, efficient operations and processes, using alternate materials, value chain engagement, Zero Emission Vehicles adoption etc.

P

Pahadi Pahel
A community-driven waste management initiative, launched in the region in partnership with the Royal Enfield Social Mission, the Pahadi Pahel approach has been participatory and co-created through deep listening. It addresses household and tourism-related waste through locally owned systems. Villagers lead as waste monitors and awareness drivers, while governance bodies provide structural support.

Partnerships
Partnerships are built on mutual respect, long-term vision and shared values. Whether with communities, artists, institutions or organisations, they prioritise co-creation over top-down implementation. In the Himalayas, meaningful partnerships are those that decentralise power, acknowledge cultural knowledge systems and commit to growing together through trust, listening and learning.

Pastoral lands
High-altitude grazing areas that support the livelihood of nomadic and semi-nomadic herding communities. These landscapes are part of a delicate ecological system and play a crucial role in sustaining traditional textile practices, seasonal migration patterns and the cultural identity of indigenous herders.

Peer Learning
Knowledge passed sideways – from one cohort to another, from alumni to newcomers, from region to region. In Royal Enfield's fellowships and community programmes, peer learning ensures knowledge stays in the region and evolves through lived experience.

Project-Based Learning (PBL)
An educational method that encourages students to explore real-world problems and solutions. In Ladakh, it transforms classrooms into spaces of curiosity and active learning.

R

Regeneration

The ability of an ecosystem to renew and recover from damage, or the process of actively improving the environment to a state where it can sustain and improve life. This can occur naturally through processes like the regrowth of forests after a disturbance, or it can be a result of human intervention, such as through sustainable practices that aim to restore and enhance ecological functions.

Responsible Travel
A pillar under the Himalayan Hub, Responsible Travel initiatives aim to build community-led tourism ecosystems, offering opportunities to travellers to experience the cultural and natural heritage of the Himalayas as they shift pressure off of tourist hotspots. These interventions include youth-led responsible tourism models, traveller experiences to engage with the living heritage of Himalayan communities, behaviour science-led interventions etc.

Rider Community
The global network of motorcyclists who journey through the Himalayas as potential ambassadors of responsibility and cultural respect. Through storytelling, volunteering and mindful presence, riders are being invited to leverage their routes for greater impact.

Rider-Researcher
A new kind of traveller – part explorer, part archivist. Rider-researchers contribute to cultural and ecological knowledge by documenting stories, interviewing craftspeople, mapping heritage routes and amplifying local voices.

Royal Enfield Ice Hockey League
A regional league initiated in Ladakh that brings structure to competition and scouting in Himalayan Ice hockey. It helps players gain exposure and develop professionally.

S

Safeguarding
The process of ensuring the viability of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills recognized by communities, groups, and individuals as part of their cultural heritage. This includes activities like identifying, documenting, researching, preserving, protecting, promoting, enhancing, transmitting (through education), and revitalizing various aspects of this heritage.

Schedule VII
Schedule VII of the Companies Act 2013 outlines the activities that companies can undertake as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These activities cover a broad range of areas aimed at social, economic, and environmental development.

Scope 1 / 2 / 3 Emissions
Classifications of greenhouse gas emissions: Scope 1 (direct from company operations), Scope 2 (from purchased energy), Scope 3 (indirect emissions from supply chains, product use, etc.).

Social Mission
Royal Enfield's commitment to work alongside 100 Himalayan communities – supporting sustainable, community-led efforts in conservation, heritage preservation, and livelihoods. The mission is grounded in participation and long-term partnership.

Spiritual Home
About seventy five years ago, the first Royal Enfield went up the Himalayas as companions to the Indian Army, and the Himalayas became revered as Royal Enfield's "spiritual home" ever since.

Spiti Cup
A competitive Ice hockey tournament held annually in Himachal Pradesh. It serves as a platform for emerging talent and community engagement in the trans-Himalayan region.

Sustainability Journal
Royal Enfield's annual documentation of its Social Mission. More than a report, it is an open-source resource, full of data, reflections, photographs and field learnings – offering transparency, accountability and a platform for partners and community voices.

Sustainable Exploration
A conscious approach envisioned by the Royal Enfield Social Mission to journey through the Himalayas – rooted in respect, reciprocity, and low impact. It invites travellers to leave every place better by supporting local economies, understanding cultural context, reducing environmental footprints and engaging with care.

Systems View
An approach that highlights interconnections between ecology, economy, infrastructure, and culture – avoiding silos.

T

Textile Conservation
Not only safeguarding old techniques but revitalising them through new partnerships – between design houses and artisanal communities, between traditions and contemporary design. The Himalayan Knot is Royal Enfield Social Mission's textile and pastoral land conservation project.

Theory of Change
A framework that outlines how a programme or initiative aims to achieve its goals and bring about intended change. It's a roadmap that connects inputs to activities, outputs, outcomes, and ultimately, impact.

Third Pole
A term used to describe the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. It's called the Third Pole because it holds the largest volume of freshwater ice outside of the Arctic and Antarctic regions, acting as a crucial water source for Asia.

Train the Trainers
A coaching model where select individuals are trained to become instructors, allowing knowledge to spread through local coaching networks. It ensures long-term sustainability in remote or resource-limited regions.

U

Underserved Regions
Geographies that receive little attention in terms of investment, infrastructure or policy support. In India, many Himalayan districts fall into this category despite their ecological and cultural significance.

V

Vernacular Architecture
The traditional, indigenous building style of a specific region, designed and constructed by local people using local materials, resources, and traditional methods to meet local needs. It often serves as an inspiration for sustainable modern design due to its climate-responsive nature and use of readily available materials. Eg: Dhajji Diwari in Himachal Pradesh and rammed earth construction in Ladakh.

W

Wellbeing Index
The Well-Being Index is a tool designed to assess and track overall well-being, covering mental and physical health, social connectedness and life satisfaction.

Western Himalayas and Eastern Himalayas
Two culturally and ecologically distinct parts of the Indian Himalayas. While both are part of the same mountain range, they differ in climate, species, languages and traditions – requiring tailored, place-based approaches to conservation and cultural work.

Winter Olympics Pathway
A long-term vision to develop competitive Indian Ice hockey teams capable of participating in international events like the Winter Olympics. In 2023, Royal Enfield Social Mission unveiled the strategic Blueprint for the development of Ice Hockey in the Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh as a roadmap for the holistic development of the sport, which includes training, infrastructure and exposure.

Wool Value Chain
Encompasses the entire process from raw wool production to the final consumer product, involving various stages like shearing, scouring, carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing and garment manufacturing.

This glossary provides a working compilation of frequently used terms contextual to Royal Enfield's Sustainability and Social Mission.

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