

## EDITORIAL



**Ved Arya**

Founder,  
Buddha Institute

What Bob Dylan said half a century ago... "The Times they are A'Changing" literally holds true in the current context. For regular recipients of the Buddha Times, it has been a longer wait to receive this issue. Hopefully its added 'weight' will make this July 2024 Special Edition worth it. The longer interval has given us more to report, and we have treated each capsule in greater depth.

Our lead article features the closer ties Buddha Institute is forging with the Government, especially the National Rural Livelihoods Mission of the rural development ministry of the government of India at the centre. We have held several landmark events in the first half of 2024... ushering in a larger and more diverse cohort of 28 Buddha Fellows through orientations and clinics... deliberations and dialogue among an expanding array of seasoned professionals as Mentors for our Fellows (every Buddha Fellow gets a mentor, by the way, dedicated to making her successful) ... the preparation of an IIM Ahmedabad teaching case study about the Buddha Fellowship model for building a more inclusive India... introductions to a new look young Buddha Institute team...and revealing a freshened, more secular, logo adopted for the organisation.

The Buddha Institute also received rousing reception at various recent meetings in several cities of the US among the friends of Buddha, particularly in Texas (Austin, Dallas and Houston) and New York. I was delighted to meet and discover people who were interested in listening to our story - the story of how Buddha Institute is impacting the lives of marginalised populations of India. I dedicate this meatier edition, especially to such a growing band of enthusiasts and supporters who are indeed the lifeblood of our cause.

## Buddha Institute's Collaboration with Government of India:

### RATIONALE & RESULTS

At the Orientation for new Buddha Fellows (February 29th 2024), Shri Shailesh Kumar Singh, Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development, was the keynote speaker. He highlighted the myriad possibilities ripe for exploration in the collaboration between MoRD and The Buddha Institute and showed keenness in understanding the work of the Fellows.

- What is in it for the government?
- Why would they come and speak to Development Entrepreneurs?
- Why are they interested in their story?
- And what is in it for us, The Buddha Institute?
- What are our expectations?



Shri Shailesh Kumar Singh addressing the Buddha Fellows

There are six areas of win-win partnership or collaboration:

- 01 Innovation:** The Buddha Institute identifies and supports social entrepreneurs who develop innovative solutions to social problems. So far, we have identified 46 such entrepreneurs. This links with the need of the Indian government for innovation and for market-facing sustainable enterprises to support millions of 'didis' organized under 10 mn SHGs
- 02 Cost-effectiveness:** Collaboration with Buddha Institute is cost-effective for the government because social enterprises have lower operational costs than traditional NGOs. Buddha Fellows' enterprises start with small grants and are then mentored to attract private capital, making this model more capital-efficient than grant-dependent NGOs.
- 03 Complementary Skills:** The government has experience in large-scale implementation, while the Buddha Institute brings depth of experience serving grassroots communities in Tier-3 and Tier-4 towns, and surrounding villages.
- 04 Systemic Change:** The Buddha Institute is looking for a long-term systemic change, rather than short-term interventions. This aligns with the government's goals for sustainable development such as creating jobs under NREGA. The 2022-24 cohort of 13 Fellows created 130 jobs in their first year, at the rate of 10 jobs per social enterprise.
- 05 Data and Impact Measurement:** The government is naturally interested in impacting the greatest number of people in the maximum possible way. We measure the success of our programs and the social impact created by Buddha Fellows. Metrics include jobs, income enhancement, and carbon footprint. So far we have created 2000 jobs and impacted 500,000 marginalised people.
- 06 Scalability:** The government is concerned about the scalability of solutions. Depending on the focus, BI can identify scalable enterprises in priority sectors, or labour-intensive enterprises with the potential to create the greatest number of jobs.

India faces macro-economic challenges and The Buddha Institute wants to align its efforts with that of the government in addressing these. The country is experiencing large-scale unemployment (8%). A large part of its population is below the poverty line (165 million people are earning less than \$2.15), and one-half of the tribal population migrates. Farmers are demanding and agitating for minimum support price for their farm or forest produce. To address the macro level changes, entrepreneurs can bring in new and innovative solutions. They can set up sustainable enterprises. Nano, micro and small enterprises can alone create jobs; large manufacturing companies, prone to use numerical machines and AI, cannot. The entrepreneurs disintermediating the supply chain can alone extract a larger margin from various nodes of the value chain, and offer even more than the MSP. This is already evident in millet, tamarind and custard apple.

# How are we doing it?



- We invite senior government officials to Buddha Fellows' Business Exposure Camps (BECs) to build familiarity with our model and Fellows. Officials, including Joint Secretary Swati Sharma, see Fellows' potential and their market-facing entrepreneurship.
- We facilitate partnerships between state governments and Buddha Fellows to fill gaps in government systems. For instance, Rajeevika in Rajasthan collaborates with Buddha Fellow Rajesh Oza to market custard apple, leading to better prices for tribal women. In Maharashtra, Buddha Fellow Mahesh Londhe works with Ummed SRLM to promote and market millet cultivation.
- We advocate for Buddha Fellows to utilize government subsidies. Since 2020, the National Horticulture Board has subsidised 50% of the cost for polyhouse construction for Buddha Fellow Kolli Madhu.
- Buddha Fellows proactively seek partnerships. Devika partners with Kudumbashree in Kerala to provide drone services to farmers, reducing costs and increasing yields.
- Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) seek Buddha Fellows for marketing support. Gramya, established by Buddha Fellow Jaspal Singh, helps Baiga Chak Company in Madhya Pradesh market millets procured from farmers.

## Key Takeaways

- a. Indian government is looking for innovation and for market-facing sustainable enterprises to support the SHG women. Buddha Institute fulfills that need.
- b. MoU with the government of India is a way to legitimize an organisation's efforts in states.
- c. State governments themselves are seeking support in farm inputs as well as in marketing. It appears that Buddha Fellows come in handy, where NGOs don't.
- d. Range of efforts and wide geographical outreach help such as the one Buddha Institute has in 15 states.
- e. The government is looking for scale. It is worth Buddha Institute's effort to identify solutions that could be scaled up using the vast resources available to the government.

# Orientation Camp for The New Buddha Fellows Cohort



Buddha Fellows along with the BI team and mentors

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## Learning

Through interactions with experts, mentors, and government officials

## Sharing

Among and between fellows through large and small group interactions, with external parties through a product 'haat'

## Immersive Experience

Through simulation games and visioning exercises

## Fun

Informal engagements, activities and games

## DAY-WISE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

# Day 1

was largely focused on introductions, and to expand the thinking of Fellows' by exposing them to larger possibilities and support within the ecosystem.

**Welcome address & warm-up:** Ved Arya welcomed all participants and external resource people by sharing the Buddha Institute's journey so far. He introduced the cohort broadly, while highlighting two factors that distinguish the incoming cohort – age diversity, as well as gender diversity. This was followed by a warm-up exercise where Fellows shared one special thing about their hometown. Fellows and experts enjoyed this pattern of welcoming and getting to know each other.

**Keynote address** by Shri Shailesh Kumar Singh, Secretary of the Department of Rural Development with the GOI. His session focused on Gols initiative - 'Lakhpati Didis' - and how Buddha Fellows along with the Buddha Institute could become a key catalyst in building an ecosystem, to enrich the lives of women at the bottom of the pyramid.



Shailesh Kumar Singh, Secretary, Department of Rural Development, highlighted the PM's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 and the goal of creating 3 crore 'Lakhpati Didis' (women entrepreneurs) through SHGs.



Shri Pratul Shroff interacting with Shri Shailesh Kumar Singh at BFOC

**Grant Announcement** by Pratul Shroff\*: Mr. Pratul Shroff, Director of the KR Shroff Foundation announced his foundation's support of the Buddha Institute's vision in promoting impact-based entrepreneurship via Buddha Fellows. Mr. Shroff also spoke about his experience mentoring earlier Fellows and his keenness to support Fellows from the new cohort

**Experience sharing** by Arjun Malhotra\*: This engaging session by the co-founder of HCL Technologies, gave an insight into Mr. Malhotra's own journey, and his key mantra for success i.e. strong relationships. Mr. Malhotra shared that his focus was always on building teams, and developing strong trust-based relationships with all the various stakeholders of an enterprise; which ultimately led to organizational success.



Mr Arjun Malhotra, Founder of HCL, shared valuable lessons on prioritizing people, building trust, and positioning one's enterprise.

**Introductions**-Personal Journeys: Fellows introduced themselves in a new way! They could only talk about themselves and not their work. Sounds easy but was extremely challenging although very meaningful and interesting.



Buddha Fellows Kamallesh M and Immaculate Anthony at the Introductions Session



Buddha Fellow Ashok Gorre



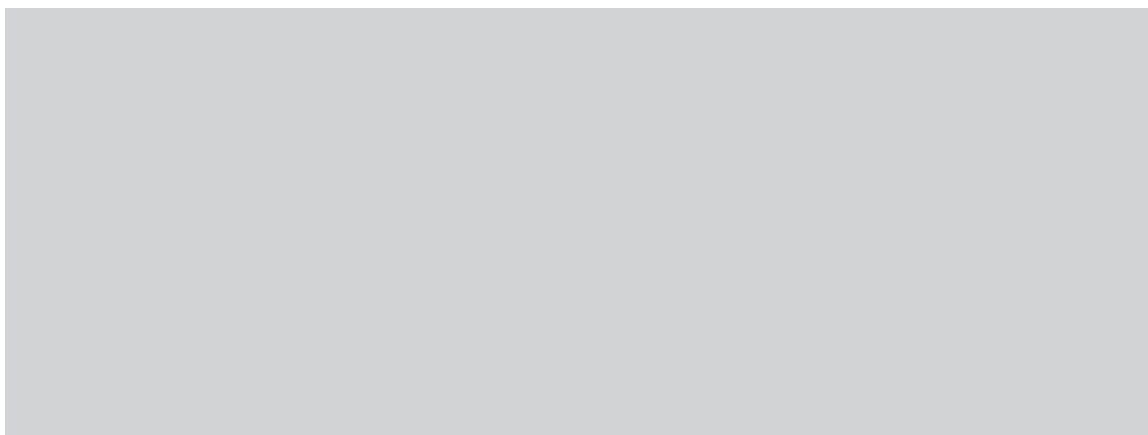


Buddha Fellow Devika Chandrasekharan talking about her social enterprise



Buddha Fellow JSRB Kalyani elaborates on her enterprise

**Special Session:** Next up on our list of government experts was Shri Balamurugan, Joint Secretary, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce & Industry. His session introduced the possibility of building long-term relationships and exponentially scaling up impact through partnerships with the SHG\*\* women, and alignment and integration with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM).



Shri D Balamurugan, Joint Secretary, DPIIT, emphasized the potential for Buddha Fellows to work with SHG women via FPOs, providing design and marketing support.

## DAY-WISE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**Day 2** of BFOC saw the gears shift towards the everyday realities of an entrepreneur, in particular a development entrepreneur who is optimizing for both business success as well as impact success.

**Critical Thinking Exercise:** The challenges and sensitivities required in working with community members, were explored through a thought-provoking reflective case study. In small groups, Fellows explored various nuances, debated with each other, and then shared their reflections in the larger group; bringing out some very interesting dimensions.



Buddha Fellow Pranjal Modi talking about his enterprise 'Titli'



Buddha Fellow Kusum Tewari receiving 'The Book of Aspiration' from Ved Arya

**Simulation Activity:** The intent behind this activity too was to build empathy. By exposing Fellows to a simulation game where they, albeit briefly, role-played as cotton farmers. This helped them get a first-hand understanding of the various challenges a lay farmer has to face – from climate uncertainty, to market fluctuations, and financial distress.



The cotton farmers' simulation group activity

**Experience Sharing** by Pratul Shroff: This time Mr. Shroff wore the hat of an entrepreneur sharing with Fellows his journey in becoming a successful entrepreneur and thereafter his deep desire to make an impact through the work of the KR Shroff Foundation.

**Thinking Impact** Session by Prof. Ankur Sarin: Prof. Ankur Sarin of IIM Ahmedabad led a thought-provoking session on thinking and measuring impact. He spoke of the difficulties, as well as the allure, of measuring and reporting impact numbers. Rather than be prescriptive, Prof. Sarin proposed a more collaborative, authentic, and co-creative approach for impact measurement.



Prof. Ankur Sarin's session highlighted the need for social enterprises to focus on creating social capital and long-term returns for the country.

**Expectation Setting:** This session was led by the Buddha Institute team and was a two-way deep dive to match BI's offerings with Fellows' expectations. This also gave Fellows an opportunity to jointly reflect and share the support they require for their enterprises. This nuanced feedback has been recorded by BI and will be integrated into its various programmatic offerings.

## DAY-WISE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

# Day 3

by Dr. Jugnu Jain\*: Dr. Jain shared her journey – one marked by persistence, trail-blazing, and immovable commitment - right from the time of her graduation to building her own enterprise, Sapien Biosciences.

**Branding and Positioning** Session by Indranil Gupta: The focus was on how branding and accurate brand positioning can aid in building an enterprise, and what is the smartest way to arrive at it, cost-effectively.

**Visioning Exercise:** Fellows were asked to think about the vision, mission and goals of their enterprise, what are the gaps in achieving them at the moment and how can Buddha Institute assist in bridging the gaps.



Dr Jugnu Jain speaks on video-conference mode from Hyderabad

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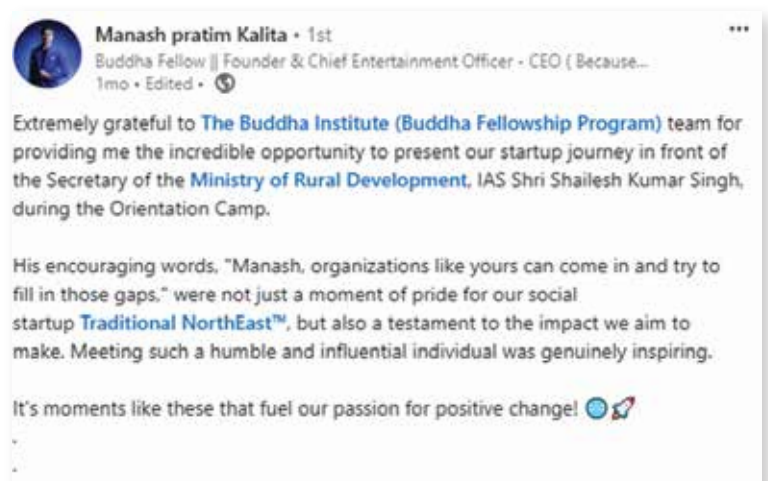
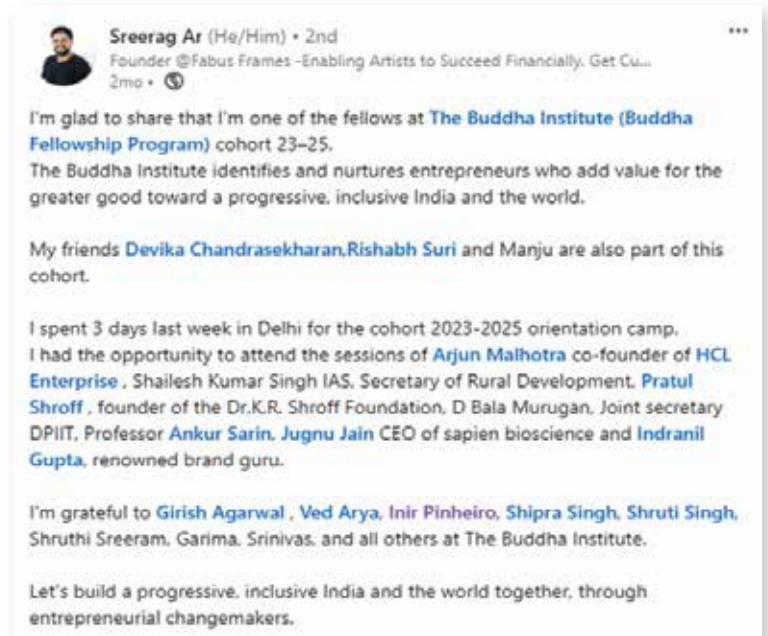
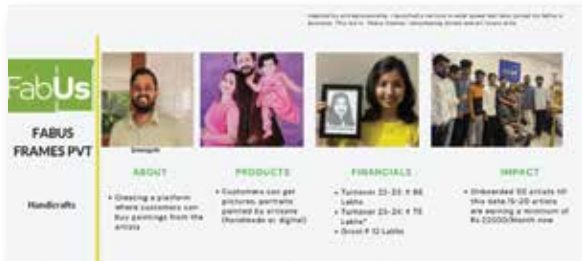
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Sourabh Johri provided insights on accessing loans from banks, prompting Fellows to seek further guidance on financial statements, available schemes, and investor interactions.

# BFOC Experience Sharing on Social Media by Buddha Fellows: A few snapshots

Few of the Buddha Fellows shared their experience of attending the Buddha Fellowship Orientation Camp on their social media platforms.







**Sheikh Ziaur Rahaman • 2nd**

Co-Founder & CEO, Paving+ | I-PAC | IIM-R

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It is with immense gratitude that I share a significant milestone in my journey. I have been selected as a Buddha Fellow, representing the ever-emerging East India, for [The Buddha Institute \(Buddha Fellowship Program\)](#)'s esteemed Fellowship Program Cohort 2023-25!

The recent Orientation program in Delhi (February 29th - March 2nd) was truly transformative. Meeting fellow Buddha Fellows from diverse corners of India filled me with warmth and a deep sense of connection. Each interaction highlighted the richness of our nation's cultural tapestry and the power of a shared purpose in driving positive change.

The program provided invaluable opportunities. I had the honor of learning from industry leaders like IAS Shallesh Kumar Singh and IAS D Bala Murugan, and visionary figures like [Arjun Malhotra](#), [Pratul Shroff](#), [Dr Jugnu Jain](#), and [Indranil Gupta](#). Their insights and guidance significantly enriched our collective understanding and aspirations.


A heartfelt thank you goes out to the Buddha Fellowship Team. They are not simply mentors, but cherished companions on this journey. Through their unwavering support and fostering a strong sense of camaraderie, they have empowered us to work towards our shared vision of positive societal change.

A special thanks to [Ved Arya](#) sir for his thoughtful gift of a book, a powerful symbol of encouragement and wisdom.

To my fellow Buddhas and the remarkable team, our connection transcends professional ties. We have become a close-knit family, united by our unwavering commitment to making a significant impact on society.

I am deeply optimistic about the transformative power of our diverse cohort in driving [#sustainability](#) and social change. Together, with compassion, determination, and a shared sense of purpose, we will continue to walk this path together.

# The Importance of Mentoring



Mentors stand at the very core of the Buddha Fellowship Program and have become the 'USP'. Most of the applicants were motivated to apply for the Program as they knew that there are highly qualified senior experts who would act as mentors.

Buddha Institute had scheduled an in-person meeting with all the mentors to understand their perspective of the 'mentor-mentee' model.

## Highlights from the Mentors' Circle Meeting:

Mentor Circle Meeting (MCM) was organized for two days, March 29th and 30th, 2024, to arrive at a greater understanding around mentorship, specifically the mentor-mentee relationship, to learn from each other's experiences, and build camaraderie.



The BI Mentors at the meeting

Reflections and discussions yielded various insights, some of them being as follows:

- Mentoring strategies may vary: but principally the mentor comes across as a Buddy - a sounding board and a friend.
- The mentors have to keep the Fellows motivated through this journey; others see the role as a **Business Mentor** - primarily providing business advice based on needs and contexts of the Fellow, and yet some others view it as **Expert Mentorship** - workshop and need-based sessions to support Fellows.
- Mentoring process varies in terms of **time commitment, field visits and check-in calls**.
- Mentors should work together to create a pool of expertise.
- The mentor cannot own the success (the person who owns the business owns the success).
- Mentors need skin in the game. Fellows are like teenagers, ready to fly and do their own thing.
- A safe space needs to be created where someone can say it is not working out - so let me choose another person as a mentor.
- A set of guidelines may be built for a mentor to follow; there is no need to formalise.





Mentor Sandip Bhatia shares his experiences with other mentors

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### Steps moving forward:

Few steps were decided amongst mentors based on the discussions

- a. Create a larger pool of sectoral experts, business advisors, industry stalwarts and successful social entrepreneurs.
- b. Set up a Trainer of Trainers system where senior/seasoned mentors train newer mentors.
- c. Institutionalize processes: 360 degree reviews, dashboards with business data of all the fellows and a reviewing system to ensure that problems were tracked and responded to by mentors.



The Mentors' Circle hybrid workshop in progress

# A Case in Point

The Buddha Institute in partnership with IIM-Ahmedabad is working on a case study tracing the evolution of The Buddha Institute since inception. The case study is authored by Shruti Sriram under the guidance of Prof. Ankur Sarin. Through review of existing BI memos and documents, field visits to 7 Buddha Fellows, and in-depth interviews with mentors and fellows, the case aims to delve into the critical aspects including the social enterprise model of the program, the selection process for fellows, support provided to fellows, and impact of both the program and the fellows. It also outlines a 4-pillar framework for the institute to scale to its lofty mission of touching millions of lives.

## A short excerpt from the case can be found below:

Buddha Fellowship is in the process of building a revised version, Buddha Fellowship 2.0 which aims to scale from 14 fellows in 2022 to 25 in 2024, and eventually to 125 in 3 years' time. As a short-term 3 year goal, the Fellowship aims to generate 10,000 new jobs, to impact 300,000 marginalized people.

To bring the vision to life, the Buddha Fellowship team along with the development sector consultants had proposed building 4 key elements of the Fellowship Program:

- i. Market Focus: Identifying entrepreneurs and enterprises that aligned with the ethos and vision of the organization.
- ii. Market Relevant Offerings: Concentrating on creating structured program offerings which were based on the identified needs of the fellows.
- iii. Delivery Engine: Sharpening the execution of the program offerings.
- iv. Ecosystem Building: Shed light on the ecosystem required to operationalise the vision.

The case is forthcoming as a teaching case at IIM-Ahmedabad and will help students explore concepts of organizational theory, social enterprise models and strategy.

# About The Buddha Institute

Buddha Institute is a programme under E2F. E2F supports local enterprises and local organizations in establishing profitable and viable linkages with markets, government agencies, financial institutions or any such institution that would enhance their sustainability. It also imparts employability skills through relevant training and capacity building inputs among disadvantaged youth, differently abled and other segments of society in order to improve their prospects for employment, quality of life and social status.

