



Ved Arya

EDITORIAL

In a country as complex and diverse as ours, systemic transformation doesn't arrive overnight—it unfolds quietly, as determined individuals take bold steps toward a shared vision. The Buddha Times' February–April edition offers a vivid snapshot of such transformation in motion.

We begin with the Building a Community of Changemakers event in Mumbai—a rare confluence of government leaders, financiers, and grassroots entrepreneurs. More than a gathering, it was a call to align the three engines of impact: finance, development, and government. Through shared stories, especially those of the Buddha Fellows, the event reaffirmed that collective action, rooted in empathy and long-term vision, remains our best bet at real change. >>



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From there, we journey to Begusarai, where Employment with Dignity takes the shape of Rani Devi's story with INDIJAN. Her transition from irregular farm labor to stable, skill-based income at a local processing unit reflects how decentralized enterprises can reshape not just livelihoods, but lives—with agency, freedom, and pride.

In Reflections from the Field, mentor Sandip Bhatia provides a deeply human window into the challenges and triumphs of our fellows—from building retail stores in Guwahati to pivoting business models after setbacks in Dantan. It's a poignant reminder that development entrepreneurship demands both clarity of purpose and resilience under pressure.

Finally, the Enterprise Profiles of the 2024–26 cohort showcase a new generation of entrepreneurs tackling urgent problems across agriculture, climate, health, and craft. These businesses—from AI-powered grading to artisan revival—signal what's possible when innovation is anchored in community.

As we turn these pages, may we be reminded that change is not an abstract ideal. It is here—in the conversations that spark collaboration, in the quiet dignity of a working woman, in the lived experience of mentorship, and in the vision of new-age entrepreneurs. All connected by a shared belief: that grassroots entrepreneurship is the heart of a more just and inclusive India.

Warmly,

Editorial Team

Building a Community of Changemakers

In a world where individualism often overshadows collective action, the recent gathering at The Quorum Club in Mumbai stood out as a quiet but powerful testament to what is possible when people come together with shared purpose. On March 9th, a diverse mix of government leaders, social entrepreneurs, financiers, and changemakers gathered for “Building a Community of Changemakers”—an event that celebrated not just the spirit of entrepreneurship, but the bonds of belief, mentorship, and collaboration that sustain it.

At its core, the event was about one question: *How do we build a community of people who believe in the promise of development entrepreneurship—and are ready to support those doing the hard work of uplifting communities?*

The morning opened with warmth and familiarity, as old friends reunited and new conversations unfolded over coffee. Our gracious hosts, Rajesh Dahiya and Nimesh Sumati, set the tone for the day with words that emphasized belonging and purpose. With the presence of dignitaries like Mr. Eknath Dawle (Principal Secretary, Rural Development, Maharashtra) and Mr. D.K. Jain (former Chief Secretary, Maharashtra), the message was clear: this was not just a private gathering, but a collective call to action across sectors.

The narrative of the day was woven with the story of the Buddha Institute itself. Founder and Director Ved Arya took the audience through its humble beginnings—through stories, reflections, and the premiere of *Idam Na Mama*, a short film that captures his journey and the values that underpin the Institute. It reminded the audience that meaningful change doesn't come from quick fixes but from long-term, value-driven commitment.



Left to right - Rajesh Dahiya, Ved Arya and Nimesh Sumati at the Mumbai event - talking about the genesis of Buddha.

But the heart of the event lay in the stories of the Buddha Fellows—entrepreneurs building livelihoods, dignity, and resilience in underserved communities. They spoke of their struggles and triumphs, the systemic challenges they navigate, and the support they’ve found in the Buddha ecosystem. Their stories illustrated the critical need for something more than individual effort. They underscored the necessity of alignment between three key sectors—**finance, development, and government**—to create a social impact that is holistic, scalable, and sustainable.



Left to right - Buddha Fellow and mentee Sathishkumar and his mentor NV Ramana, Mentor Sanjay Guha and his mentee Buddha Fellow Suhas Ramgowda - talking about their mentorship experience at the Mumbai event.

The Winning Trifecta: Finance, Development, and Government

“Both these sectors - the NGOs and the government can not do without each other. The government has all possible resources but it lacks the flexibility and agility to customize the program to the evolving needs, which is the strength of the NGOs. I believe this (collaboration) is the right approach. There are perhaps gaps in the government program and Buddha institute can provide the missing gap in the implementation department.”

– Dinesh Jain, Former Chief Secretary, Maharashtra

Lasting social change demands synergy. Development brings insight, finance fuels scale, and government enables reach. When these three spheres align—when government enables, finance fuels, and development anchors—**change becomes not just possible, but inevitable**. Without one, the others fall short: finance without development is blind; development without finance is limited; and government without either often remains distant from impact.

It was this spirit of integration that the event so beautifully captured. Whether it was in the mentorship panel—featuring Suhas Ramegowda, Sanjay Guha, Satishkumar CAV, and NV Ramana—or in the spontaneous Q&A with fellows, the emphasis was clear: support systems matter. And diverse, well-aligned support systems are what empower entrepreneurs to move beyond survival and into true social innovation.

The unveiling of the new Buddha Institute website symbolized not just digital progress, but a growing ecosystem—an open invitation for more stakeholders to join, support, and walk alongside.

In his closing address, D.K. Jain reflected on decades in public service and reminded everyone in the room why gatherings like this are essential: *they remind us of the work still to be done, and of our collective responsibility in doing it.*

As the conversations spilled into the Mumbai evening, there was a shared sense that this wasn’t just an event—it was the laying of a foundation. For a community that believes. For an ecosystem that supports. For a trifecta that, when aligned, has the power to shift the narrative of development in India.



Left to right - Buddha Fellow Satishkumar describing his mentorship journey with his mentor NV Ramana.



Left to right - DK Jain, Former Chief Secretary, Maharashtra and Eknath Dawle, Principal Secretary, Rural Development, Maharashtra.

Employment with Dignity: Rani Devi's Journey with Indijan

Sharad Nirala's Enterprise is Transforming Women's Livelihoods in Rural Bihar

In the feudal landscape of Begusarai, Bihar, where social norms tightly govern mobility and labor, women like 34-year-old Rani Devi have historically had few options. For years, her only means of livelihood was daily wage labor on others' farms—an occupation often considered undignified, irregular, and insufficient to support a family.

"We are from a lower caste - it made finding work difficult and even when we were given work - it never paid enough. Our life was marked with deprivation (abhaav)."

With no steady income, Rani struggled to provide for her children's education or envision a better future. But things began to change when Sharad Nirala, a Buddha Fellow, launched Indijan—a grassroots food enterprise focused on decentralizing food processing at the farm gate and empowering women and small food producers by providing them forward and backward linkages to the rural value chain.

"I knew that this company worked in our village and I approached them to find work. They employed me and trained me for 1 month to work at their flour mill - gave me a fixed income (bandha hua paisa). I told them I had the skill (qala) to make badis - I had been making it at home and selling it to people in our neighbourhood. They put confidence in me and my skill and helped me make an income from it. I was the first but today 3 other women work in badi-making with me from our area."



Rani Devi in the process of making badis.



Buddha Fellow Sharad Nirala - Founder of Indijan.



Women of Begusarai who have joined Rani Devi in her Badi making - owing to the market linkage provided by Indijan.

Through Indijan, Rani now has access to regular and dignified employment. She works 20 days a month, earning ₹5,000, and supplements her income by making badis for two hours a day during the four-month seasonal window, adding another ₹2,500 per month. Her annual income has risen to approximately ₹67,500.

“My son (14 years) and daughter (15 years) - both study in a private school. My husband is happy - that I am working - I don't come from a well off family and I never got formal education - he feels that this job provides our 2 children the opportunity to study - something that we never had. We don't have to ask for help from another to meet our basic needs (haath nahi phelane padte)”

Beyond the numbers, it is the dignity and consistency of the work that has transformed Rani's life. The processing unit provides a safe, women-friendly workspace close to home, eliminating the need to travel far or work under exploitative conditions. With her own income and a sense of self-worth, Rani is now able to support her children's schooling and make household decisions with confidence. She has broken the chains of

“My work at the factory wraps up by 3 PM, which gives me time to go back home to take care of things. But even on days when I am not able to show up due to urgent work or sickness, I do not lose out on my pay. I work without pressure (dabaav) with a lot of freedom (azadi).”

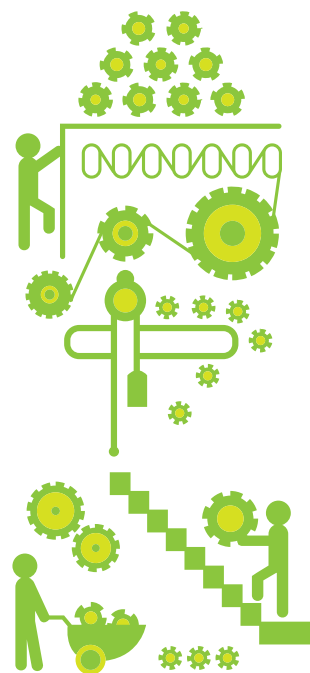
Sharad Nirala's Indijan is doing more than processing food— they are creating a change. By creating decentralized, small-scale processing hubs, it is making local employment accessible, especially for women, and enabling rural families to rise with dignity.

Reflections from the Field: A Mentor's Note by Sandip Bhatia

On the occasion of the Buddha Entrepreneurial Conclave (BEC), Delhi | April 10–12, 2025

As the Development Entrepreneurs complete one year of their journey with the Buddha Institute, the BEC in Delhi became a significant milestone—a moment to pause, reflect, and look ahead. Each fellow was invited to present their year-long journey, share key takeaways, and suggest how the Institute could better support them in the coming year.

I've had the privilege of mentoring four spirited entrepreneurs through this year: Manash, Sharad, Zia and Ranjan (jointly with Ashok), and Deepak. It has been nothing short of inspiring to witness the conviction, resilience, and innovation with which each of them is shaping their enterprise. Here's a window into their journeys:



Sandip Bhatia on a field visit to the Fellow's enterprise in Bihar.

Manash: Building Northeast India's Ethnic Legacy

When I first met Manash in June 2024 at his co-working space in Guwahati's innovation hub, ***I was struck by his clarity of thought and purposeful delegation.*** Along with his co-founder Pallavi and a tight-knit team, he was driving a venture to promote ethnic wear from the Northeast—not just as a product but as a cultural statement. What impressed me most was his blend of ambition and grounded strategy: having proven the market online, he wanted to now open a physical store for his higher-margin products and control the supply chain by cultivating eri silk.

A year on, Manash has executed almost every milestone he set out for himself. He's secured working capital, opened a physical storefront with integrated warehousing and residential facilities, and begun sourcing silk directly from farmers. His strength lies in building systems—he's implemented an online ERP that ensures seamless inventory and finance tracking across his team. It's rare to see such comprehensive planning and execution at this stage of an enterprise.

Sharad: Crafting a Micro-FMCG Model in Begusarai

Sharad's journey with INDIJAN has been a lesson in scrappy, market-driven entrepreneurship. When Anupam and I first met him and his co-founder Rehman, I was cautious about the business model—low margins, complex logistics, and a founder splitting time between Delhi and Bihar. But Sharad has proved that persistence and agility can be a powerful combination.

Over the year, he's added new products, optimized his packaging, and pushed INDIJAN into both online D2C channels and premium kirana stores around Begusarai. ***What I admire most is his discipline: even with cash in hand, he keeps his operations frugal.*** Supported by his family, and powered by sharp digital marketing instincts, he's slowly but surely carving a space in the FMCG ecosystem—one unit at a time.

Zia and Ranjan: Turning Waste into Wealth

Zia and Ranjan's enterprise in Kolkata stands as a bold testament to innovation in the circular economy. Their plant transforms low-grade plastic waste into value-added products like paver blocks, lumber, and even road-laying material. Their steady contracts with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and private firms ensure raw material supply, and their consistent wins in startup competitions provide a surprising, and reliable, source of additional income.

They run a tight ship—well-organized, innovative, and constantly evolving. With guidance from Ashok, Romesh, and me, they are now gearing up to scale production significantly, eyeing an ambitious turnover of ₹8 crores next year. ***What sets them apart is their clarity on both mission and margin—a rare and powerful mix.***

Deepak: Cultivating Hope in Dantan and Beyond

My visit to Dantan with Deepak remains etched in memory. ***His deep understanding of rural systems and the interlinked approach to increasing farm incomes was both refreshing and radical.*** From on-spot soil testing to providing growth enhancers, connecting farmers to markets, and enabling access to farm equipment—his model through Yogitha Biofarming was holistic and needed.

Sadly, despite the promise, Deepak faced unexpected losses and a working capital crunch that derailed operations. Yet, what remains undimmed is his spirit. He is now seeking to restart in Odisha's Jaleswar block, hopeful of new partnerships and government support. I believe that with the right ecosystem and financial cushion, Deepak's vision for rural prosperity can still take flight.

In Closing

This year has been a powerful reminder of how development entrepreneurship is as much about ideas as it is about endurance. Each fellow, in their unique way, has navigated uncertainty, built value, and carried forward the spirit of grassroots innovation.

As mentors, we do our best to guide and support, but it is the fellows who carry the burden and the beauty of this journey. I look forward to what this next year brings for each of them—with renewed hope, sharper strategies, and deeper solidarity from the Buddha Institute.



Sandip Bhatia giving a master class on Costing at BEC Mysore.



Sandip Bhatia with Buddha Fellow Manash being presented with one of the enterprise's signature stoles.

Profiles of Enterprises - Buddha Fellowship Cohort 2024-26



Adithi Millets Pvt. Ltd. **(Somasekhar Pogula, Andhra Pradesh)**

Adithi Millets promotes climate-resilient millet farming and provides direct market access, farmer training, and mental health support. It has uplifted small farmers in Kurnool by increasing incomes, promoting sustainable farming practices, and improving food security.



Jagdev Organics Pvt. Ltd. **(Vishal Pachar, Haryana)**

Jagdev Organics empowers beekeepers with scientific techniques and infrastructure for sustainable livelihoods. It has improved farm productivity, created jobs, and enhanced environmental awareness through beekeeping.



AgrowSure Products and Innovations Pvt. Ltd. **(Akshay Kawale, Maharashtra)**

AgrowSure designs affordable, gender-friendly farm machinery to support small farmers. Their tools have reached over 22,000 farmers, reducing drudgery and enhancing productivity on over 1.2 lakh acres of land.



Papla Manufacturing Unit **(Saranya Nampoothiri SV, Kerala)**

Papla creates biodegradable tableware from fallen areca leaves. This eco-friendly initiative has prevented millions of plastic products from entering the waste stream while providing sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.



Occipital Technologies Pvt. Ltd. **(Kshitij Thakur, Maharashtra)**

Agrograde by Occipital Technologies provides post-harvest tech solutions like AI-powered sorting machines. These innovations reduce food waste, ensure quality, and improve income for farmers through better value realization.



Feedko Agrokart Pvt. Ltd. **(Satish Kumar Mahto, Jharkhand)**

Feedko connects farmers to retailers and processors through a tech-enabled platform. It strengthens transparency, improves farmer incomes, and facilitates efficient movement of farm produce at scale.



Earthy Tales Organics Pvt. Ltd. **(Deepak Sabharwal, New Delhi)**

A D2C wellness food brand offering chemical-free products, Earthy Tales supports organic farmers and encourages healthy consumption. It has prevented the use of hundreds of tonnes of chemicals and nurtures a strong community of conscious consumers.



AniMeta AgriTech Pvt. Ltd. **(Vijayakumar Ramalingam, Tamil Nadu)**

AniMeta delivers affordable animal healthcare services and ethnoveterinary solutions to dairy farmers. It has improved animal health, reduced antibiotic usage, and enabled the supply of safer, antibiotic-free milk.



Almora Craft Design Studio **(Vasanthi Veluri, Uttarakhand)**

Almora Craft blends indigenous skills with sustainable design to create high-quality garments. It has provided steady income to over 100 artisan families and promoted eco-conscious fashion through natural dyes and fibers.



Symbiotic Foods Pvt. Ltd. **(Manoj Kumar Bosumatary, Assam)**

Symbiotic Foods operates a pig breeding and training enterprise. It has trained over 7,500 farmers in scientific piggery, increased farmer income, and strengthened Northeast India's livestock economy.