The Adventures of Jugaadu Jaadu
The Adventures of Jugaadu Jaadu

Compiled and Edited by Amiya Chaudhuri and Trishla Bafna
Illustrations by Priya Charry
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Preface

Even at the beginning of our AIF fellowship, as we all sat nervously in front of our Zoom screens and greeted each other awkwardly, we knew we would be a unique cohort. While every cohort experiences some degree of trepidation and uncertainty at the beginning, the ongoing global pandemic ensured that we had absolutely no idea what to expect in the upcoming months. In some time, a few of us would be sent out to our host locations while others would be advised to work from home. As we adapted to a virtual setting or more hybrid models of work, we held the hope that one day, soon enough, we would be able to travel again, to meet our host communities and to meet each other as a cohort. However, when the devastating second wave of the pandemic hit India, we put aside these hopes and resigned ourselves to the inevitable feelings of envy towards earlier cohorts and their experiences of bonding over travel, food and shared company. And yet, slowly but surely, in the midst of this chaotic year, we became more than just figures on a screen to each other. As we began to check in on each other, to rant about a tough day at work, to seek advice or even to laugh about our misadventures, what struck us was that despite being an all-Indian cohort, each of us was adapting to and learning about cultures and communities very different from our own. It was here that the idea for a publication on the cultural immersions of an all-India cohort was born. From an Assamese Fellow placed in Bihar, to a Bengali one placed in Gujarat, all of us were learning new languages, eating new foods, learning about local traditions, histories and development challenges and even adapting to new work cultures. While the common perception about this Fellowship is that the bridge of cultural immersion would be between India and the U.S., we quickly discovered that we ourselves had a lot of learning to do about our own country, despite belonging here.

The most fun part of this publication is, of course, our wonderful protagonist ‘Jaadu’. The choice of a parrot seemed obvious. The bird is fairly ubiquitous in the country and its vibrant colours, innate curiosity, intelligence and ability to mimic human speech render it a personable and much-loved creature in Indian folklore and popular culture. Our Jaadu is all this and more. His sense of humour, friendliness and eagerness to explore new places and meet new people, represent our characteristics as a cohort. While he can be silly at times and gets caught in endless shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans, his heart is set on learning about the diverse lives and struggles of his fellow Indians. We would be remiss to not conclude by thanking Priya Charry (AIF Fellow 2017-18), our illustrator, for patiently bearing with our shenanigans.

Foreword

We are excited to present you with “The Adventures of Jugaadu Jaadu,” an exciting collection of magical short stories authored by AIF-Clinton Fellows from the class of 2020-21. Inspired by the works of R.K. Narayan and Antoine de Saint-Exupery, this volume chronicles the journey of Jugaadu Jaadu, using humour and wonderful storytelling to explore the myriad of cultures represented in India and how one has to navigate these cultural nuances, mirroring the journey the Fellows themselves took. It further explores the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they have affected the Fellows’ experience. Despite being the first all-India Fellowship cohort due to COVID-19, the Fellows had to adapt themselves to new cultures and navigate regional differences in food, language, work culture, community and lifestyles, doing so both in a virtual and in-person environment. This volume captures the experiences of our first all-India AIF Fellowship cohort that served during the pandemic, and how they navigated unprecedented challenges to continue to make an impact in their host communities. Moreover, it captures the joy of helping people, and how overcoming these challenges makes such moments all the more rewarding and enriching. This volume has been compiled by AIF Fellows—Trishla Bafna and Amiya Chaudhuri, with the stories focusing on the unique moments this cohort has been through during their service year, covering themes such as communication, translation, online culture and even short moments such as a lunch-time tiffin break. It highlights the perseverance, diversity, and brilliance of our Fellows and is aimed to give readers insight into their lives over these last nine months, illustrating how their work helps build communities and spread new ideas.

In a year where the development sector has suffered greatly, this volume aims to highlight the inspirational journeys our Fellows embarked on amidst the pandemic. Their work serves to highlight our shared humanity, and how we can all hope to enrich each others’ lives and make an impact for the better. We hope this volume provides some new perspective on this transformative year, and helps readers get a better understanding of the challenges we continue to face in the world, and how we can tackle them together. 

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Nishant Pandey
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Country Director, New Delhi
A Kaleidoscope of Festivals

Story by Utsarga Mondal
A Kaleidoscope of Festivals

Christmas carols kept ringing in Jaadu’s head as he sat in his solitary cell looking out from the window at the colourful birds chirping by the pine tree. This was Jaadu’s first Christmas in quarantine, so he wasn’t sure how he should go about celebrating the festival of light all by himself. On other days, Jaadu kept himself busy with tasks assigned to him by his host organisation. However, this Christmas, despite waking up late in the cold winter morning, Jaadu was already tired of the humdrum.

It had just been a week since Jaadu had flown in from his hometown, but he was already sated with the Gujarati tiffin and longed for his mother’s homemade Bengali food. Jaadu relished non-veg delicacies, however, his short-term accommodation in a vegetarian flat at Kalpadroom did not allow him to order non-veg meals, and as his boredom got the better of him, he decided to experiment with some cooking. Previously, Jaadu had only taken culinary theory classes from his mother, but this time he was determined to finally test his knowledge by actually preparing some simple dishes.

By the sixth hour, Jaadu managed to prepare three varieties of dishes alongside rice in a single oven. The experience was no less than a roller coaster ride as Jaadu had to frequently call home, refer to YouTube channels as well as multitask between washing vegetables and pulses, to cutting, rinsing, boiling, frying and cooking them. He struggled to avoid burning his beak and chopping off his wingtips, he marvelled at the ease with which his mother was able to whip up these dishes at home. Even though Jaadu skipped his lunch, or rather his lunch comprised of tasting the dishes in the preparatory stages until he felt satisfied with the quantity of spices, by the end of Christmas eve, he was finally able to treat himself to a tasty home-cooked meal while enjoying a French film titled “Les Choristes”.

Since childhood, Jaadu had been intrigued by the cultural festivities of humans. Despite spending Christmas and New Year in solitary confinement, he could not have imagined he would get an opportunity to partake for the first time ever in the colourful festivals of Uttarayan with local children, as well as Holi with the Sindhi community at his host organisation.

Makar Sankranti is a festival dedicated to the Sun God, which is widely celebrated across India, marking the beginning of a new harvest season. It is celebrated in the month of Poush in the Hindu calendar, when the sun begins its journey towards the Northern Hemisphere gradually increasing the duration of daylight. In a diverse country like India, the festival of Makar Sankranti is celebrated by different names such as Lohri in Haryana and Punjab in which people gather around a bonfire to offer their oblations, Pongal in Tamil Nadu, a four-day long harvest festival, and Uttarayan in Gujarat, where the tradition of kite flying is celebrated with great pomp and ceremony.

This time due to the ongoing pandemic, the festival of Uttarayan was marred as people were prohibited from gathering in large numbers in public grounds and were instead advised to cautiously celebrate the festival from the rooftop of their homes. This news however did not disappoint Jaadu as much as it did the local residents, because he was convinced that he would at least get to catch a glimpse of the colourful festival.

After spending two weeks in isolation, what better way could Jaadu have imagined to build rapport with the local children than to learn how to fly kites from them. The children lived in some of the most marginalised communities in Bhavnagar, so on the auspicious occasion of Uttarayan, Jaadu’s
of India, the celebration of Lathmar Holi is interestingly not just played with colours, but with women playfully hurling aka lathis (sticks) on men.

A month before the festival of Holi, Jaadu moved out from his solitary accommodation at Kalpadroom to a homestay which was closer to his workplace. His new abode offered him access to a beautiful jhula (swings are common across Gujarati houses as it symbolises royalty) and a garden that was well-maintained by a staunch Hindu Brahmin. Generally, after a tiring day at work, Jaadu loved to relax on the swing or play a game of badminton with Sindhi children living in the neighbourhood (the children would giggle when he struggled to clench the racquet in his small claws). On numerous occasions, the children complained of how boring their online classes had become and how eagerly they were waiting for schools to reopen. Previously as Jaadu worked with children of primary grades, he kept an activity kit handy consisting of optical illusions, paper crafts, sudokus, matchstick problems and origami. The Sindhi families in the neighbourhood were happy that Jaadu was engaging their children in creative pursuits so on the colorful occasion of Holi, they gave him a warm welcome.

On the eve of Holi, Jaadu witnessed the celebrations of Holika Dahan when families came in turn to offer their prayers and oblations, while also taking three rounds of the holy fire. Once the cow dung was consumed by the raging fire, prashad was distributed among everyone to commemorate the auspicious occasion.

The next day, Jaadu experienced his first ever Holi as he joined the children for the colourful festival. Traditionally people commemorate the festival by throwing gulal, but as Jaadu was playing Holi with children, water guns and balloons were more frequently used during the celebration. He flew over the laughing and screaming children, shaking his feathers to scatter water all over them, while attempting to dodge shots from their water guns. It was a wonderful experience which would remain etched in Jaadu’s mind whenever he fondly recollected his kaleidoscopic memories from the festive seasons.

While the festival of Uttarayan still remained vivid in Jaadu’s mind, his colleagues at work were already discussing the colorful festival of Holi which would be celebrated in less than three months’ time. Although, Jaadu had never played with colors before, he was aware that Holi is pompously celebrated in the month of Phalgun in the Hindu calendar marking the arrival of spring. The night before Holi, a pyre is lit to commemorate the burning of ‘Holika’ symbolising the victory of good over evil. On the following day, people throw gulal (coloured powder) and adorn their houses with rangolis while sharing home-made sweets with neighbours. Given the cultural diversity in India, Holi is widely celebrated by different names such as Dol Jatra in Bengal where the idols of Radha and Krishna are taken for procession on the streets, Shigmo in Goa in which farmers perform traditional folk dances, while in the Barsana region host organisation, Shaishav, had arranged a small get-together across several such communities for them to fly kites.

Jaadu had always loved watching humans fly kites. As they used complicated techniques to maneuver their kites in air, Jaadu knew that the elation they felt was akin to his own when he opened his wings and soared through the skies. Today, however, he wanted to learn how to fly ‘the human way’. He needed hand-holding at almost every stage from his little instructors, who taught him how to tie the manja (thread made from mixing cotton thread and powdered glass with rice glue) to the kite in the proper manner to keep it floating in the air as well as how to get the kite flying from the ground level. Once the manja was handed over to him, the kite chose to invariably plunge into a nearby dense growth of trees. “How can something as simple as flying be so complicated?” he muttered under his breath. After several failed attempts, Jaadu decided to take a break because his poor performance often cost the children their kites. Overwhelmed by the children’s kind act of spontaneous sharing, Jaadu recalled the Upanishadic saying, ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (the world is one family). Soon the break turned out to be a short interval as the children managed to convince Jaadu that he should keep trying hard at mastering this fine art and indeed, by the end of the day, he was finally able to keep the kite aloft high up in the blue sky.

Later in the afternoon, when Jaadu perched on a tree in the residential area of Bhavnagar to watch the colourful display of kites in the sky, he noticed some migrant children running after the drifting ones which fell onto the streets. These children wished to partake in the colourful festival, however, given the extreme poverty in the family, their parents could not afford to buy them kites. So, they decided to collect reusable kites from the roadside and distribute them among their counterparts who lived in the same jhoper pattis (urban slums).}

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Melodies from an Indian Prison

Story by Shivranjani Gandhi
Melodies from an Indian Prison

Jaadu had always been fascinated by the whimsical power of human emotions. Be it while flying and looking down at humans who resembled ants from above or when Jaadu was hopping on the ground surrounded by the now humongous looking humans, he always wondered about their extraordinary ability to feel. He made several attempts to work in different NGOs in Delhi to learn more about the foundational quality of humanity: empathy. These days Jaadu was working in a prison in Bhondsi district in Gurugram, Haryana. Jaadu was a daydreamer, imaginative, and was always brimming with new ideas. You know where we meet such people all the time? The Delhi Metro. The two-hour long ride to the prison meant time for Jaadu to do his favourite things in the world: think about the rest of the day, think about all the things he would get to eat, think about how he would talk to and interact with the inmates in the prison and then just look at other commuters doing the same.

Today was one of those days Jaadu was particularly nervous. He was going to give a workshop on power, privilege and intersectionality in the prison. You know all the dark and sparkly things we all talk about these days? Yup. All those things. Now that his manager had fallen sick with COVID-19, he was all alone to conduct the workshop. He thought about all the things he is going to speak about and visualised how he will coordinate the privilege walk. He looked forward to meeting the prison inmates. They always greeted him together and were a little clique in such an overwhelming environment. I guess you always make family in any environment. Bonding is the core of humanity. Excitement and nervousness were palpable in him and that is how it always was. Most days he could not tell which was which.

He reached the prison in two hours that day. That was fast from Noida to Gurgaon, he thought. A feat in itself. While approaching the prison, he saw the security guards scrutinizing him. Top to bottom, then bottom to top their eyes went. They asked him what he was there for and in between the sentence, the prison coordinator hopped into the conversation and smiled at Jaadu. “He is here for a workshop”, he said to the guards. Together they went into the prison and walked through the gardens and the barracks. They finally reached the community centre of the prison. That was his favourite place in the prison. It gave him a safe haven and was equipped with the best things in life: art, music and computers. He saw the familiar paintings and artwork by inmates when he reached the community centre and smiled to himself.

Upon reaching the auditorium and getting seated, he was slowly greeted by the peer fellows who sat with him in a circle. The peer fellows were inmates with previous skills and competence in teaching that were recruited from the prison during orientation programs. The discussion began. They spoke about the differences between them and their life experiences. How their privileges as men have helped them navigate certain aspects of their lives. Then the differences of opinion followed. Conflict is always hard to navigate. This time it was about whether women should report sexual assault. One inmate stated that women should think of her family’s honour and should not do it. Jaadu took a deep breath. Anger and sadness threatened to overwhelm him but then he did what he always did in these situations. He remained calm. “Ok, I’ve got this”, he thought. Then he asked the peer fellows. “How is a family’s honour affected by reporting?” The peer fellow was baffled by the question. Then the discussion took a different turn and Jaadu spoke about how the survivor feels after an assault and why reporting is important. Two peer fellows nodded in agreement but the others seemed unconvinced. Jaadu remained calm and non-defensive. “This will take a long time”, he thought. “All we can do is start a conversation for now, which is the most important step.” The session ended with a privilege walk activity. As he flew over the peer fellows, he realised this was the last day he would probably see everyone. He was filled with nostalgia and a feeling of warmth enveloped him.

“Let us play for you today since it is your last day”, one peer said. Jaadu followed them to the music room. It was decorated with all kinds of graffiti and had different kinds of instruments. They started singing and playing the guitar. The aura of the prison changed. Suddenly, the whole room was reverberating with the vibe of instruments and he could feel the happiness of the singer. One of the peer fellows glanced at him and they smiled together at each other. And when the moment was over, Jaadu knew he would carry the energy of this special day with him forever.
Natkhat Nayak
Jaadu
Story by Amiya Chaudhuri
It was a sunny and beautiful day outside but Jaadu sat quietly inside his house, picking nervously at his breakfast of green chillies and mango. It was his first day at work and a few hours ago, he had received the link for the Zoom meeting, titled “Playback Theatre Practice”. ‘They know I don’t do theatre’, he thought to himself, ‘It must be a mistake, it has to be’. But it wasn’t. These things rarely ever are. As soon as he logged into the session and the preliminary introductions were over, he realised that he too was expected to perform. His heart started beating faster, his stomach sank and his wings got sweaty. He had read in the paper a few days ago that a bird’s heart rate going up could end fatally and sitting perched over his laptop was not how he wanted to go. As his fight or flight response kicked in, he realised that being a bird, he was more prone to the latter. He switched off his camera citing ‘technical difficulties’ and sat down to watch the others. The wave of loud shouts, sounds and sudden movements overwhelmed him and he ended the day feeling quite low.

Now Jaadu was no Sharmilee Sharmila (his classmate in school who was now ironically a famous Bollywood actress). He never thought twice before jumping into heated debates, he loved meeting new people and he shined in the spotlight. Theatre, however, was just not his cup of tea. It wasn’t that he hadn’t tried. As overbearing Indian mothers do, his mother had forced him to try his hand at acting as a child. His stellar debut role was a ten-second appearance in a play as “Parrot Perched on Tree” but in the 5th second he tripped over his own claws and crashed loudly on top of the lead actor just as he was dramatically professing his love to the actress. Needless to say, Jaadu’s acting career was abruptly cut short, much to the disappointment of his mother. In college, he would be frightened by the crows in the nukkad natak (street theatre) club, they would jump out when you least expected it and begin screaming, cawing loudly and writhing all over. It was not until the performance was long over that the audience would realise that it was meant to be an abstract commentary on the poor working conditions of Woodpeckers in South America or on the ill-informed stereotypes about Magpies in London.

And yet, all these years later, Jaadu found himself again on a theatre stage (albeit a virtual one). Some days he was so self-conscious he wanted to open his wings and fly straight out of his window, but some days he would join in the performances, either egged on by his friendly team or because the story would move him so much that he volunteered an impromptu performance. One day, he was told that they would be practicing with a theatre troupe of Hornbills from Singapore. Excited to meet birds from a different country, Jaadu was looking forward to a practice session for the first time! The Hornbills were friendly and funny and rather than a practice session, it felt more like a chance to express his goofiest and weirdest self. Two months ago, Jaadu’s mind would have boggled at being asked to enact his favourite food but today, he stuck out his neck and curved his long tail with élan, to resemble a green chilli.

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low-caste status. Jaadu puffed up his green chest in pride as he thought of how his theatre group was de-stigmatising the instrument and reclaiming it as one of artistic and national significance.

While studying Indian history in college, Jaadu remembered reading about the origins of theatre in India. He knew that folk theatre in the country had a long and rich cultural lineage, and that it was originally used to carry messages of socio-political importance to remote villages all over India. Folk theatre forms such as jatra and bhavai were a reflection of local cultures and values and also provided entertainment for the masses. Now, Jaadu would normally shudder at the prospect of not being able to watch Netflix but, the thought of gathering around with his friends every week and munching on hot pakodas under a starry night sky while watching a live theatre performance, seemed very inviting.

One day Jaadu joined a theatre session with the little children of an orphanage. On being asked to act like their favourite animals, the shy and reserved children transformed into goofy balls of laughter as they jumped over each other to roar like lions or squirm around like snakes. Jaadu saw himself in these children, not just literally, because one naughty boy was squawking like a parrot, but also figuratively, because theatre had helped Jaadu return to the innocence of childhood. In the daily rigmarole of adult life, he was always worried about what others would think of him, always trying to be the smartest parrot in the room and always preening his feathers to impress the cute dove who lived next door. Theatre had shown him a glimpse of the childlike magic that existed beyond the foggy clouds of self-consciousness and now Jaadu was certain that the next time he fell off a tree in the middle of a climactic scene, he would brush himself off and fly right back up again!
Zooming towards “Zoom Culture”

Story by Aman Walia
Jaadu woke up to another foggy morning as winter was getting more intense in most parts of Northern India. As he started to prepare for the day, there was hardly anything visible from the windowpane which was obscured by a million dew drops. Jaadu had a busy day ahead with lots of meetings, catch-up calls and training. Suddenly, he saw a news notification pop up with an alert saying that daily commuters might have a tough time reaching their offices as visibility was close to zero due to dense fog, and commuters might have to Zoom in to see the road ahead. Jaadu hated flying to work in foggy weather; his feathers would get wet and in the low visibility, he often crashed into poles, trees and sometimes even unsuspecting pedestrians. Today, however, Jaadu was unfazed by this. After all he had lived in the unique online space of "Zoom Culture" for the past four months of his Fellowship program. This gave him the superpower to be present anywhere and everywhere at a moment’s notice.

Jaadu had to be on time for a survey enumerators training which was about to start in a while. So, he quickly finished his breakfast and was rushing to get to work, looking for his laptop all around the house until he found it on the computer table itself. Jaadu had never taken part in such a training before and was extremely excited to get started. Around ten people were supposed to join in from different parts of India. Jaadu was ahead of schedule and joined five minutes early, but found no one else had joined yet. Just as he was starting to get nervous (in Zoom work culture it was so easy to be in the wrong meeting room) everyone else joined too and unmuted themselves to say hello, hi and good morning. Jaadu also did the same and most importantly, he did it correctly! In the initial days, Jaadu would often talk at length in meetings only to realise with dismay that he had not unmuted himself and his words had fallen on deaf ears.

Even though it was afternoon, the fog outside did not seem to disappear. Jaadu had an hour-long lunch break and was rushing to get to work, looking for his laptop all around the house until he found it on the computer table itself. Jaadu had never taken part in such a training before and was extremely excited to get started. Around ten people were supposed to join in from different parts of India. Jaadu was ahead of schedule and joined five minutes early, but found no one else had joined yet. Just as he was starting to get nervous (in Zoom work culture it was so easy to be in the wrong meeting room) everyone else joined too and unmuted themselves to say hello, hi and good morning. Jaadu also did the same and most importantly, he did it correctly! In the initial days, Jaadu would often talk at length in meetings only to realise with dismay that he had not unmuted himself and his words had fallen on deaf ears.

Even though it was afternoon, the fog outside did not seem to disappear. Jaadu had an hour-long lunch break and he finished his lunch alongside his computer table itself. Four months into the Fellowship, Jaadu had an elaborate setup with his computer, cubicle and canteen all squeezed into his 10 by 10 home-office space. In the days of online work, his premium ‘office real estate’ came with a customised Zoom background and a front facing balcony. Long-distance flights would always leave him with sore and tired wings so he was delighted that from this office space, at the click of a button, Jaadu could travel to all his pilot project sites, located in eight districts of four states, and receive progress updates about work from partner organizations. Jaadu had made his presence felt at so many places and had met so many people because of his Zoom workspace, which could have never been possible in person.

However, that is not to say that Jaadu was not spotted saying “I cannot hear you” or “You are not audible” quite often in Zoom Meetings. He knew that despite his struggles in virtual meetings, his experience with "Zoom Culture" was a lesson of a lifetime and had taught him to believe that anything and everything is possible. Zoom Culture had allowed him to think out of the box and come up with innovative ways of doing things online. Jaadu had even discovered unique dimensions of himself through "Zoom Culture" and had got new perspectives of the world around him. He was proud to belong to the clan of Zoom Experts from the 21st century.
Tiffin Time

Story by Trishla Bafna
Tiffin Time

Jaadu used to always wait eagerly for the tiffin bell to ring at school. Not only was that a signal to eat the yummy food he and his friends had got but, also a fun time with lots of play, laughter and teasing involved. Eventually, the final bell rang and he graduated from school, never expecting to have these glorious moments again as he made the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Fast forward a few years and Jaadu found himself ensconced amongst the breathtaking hills of Dharamshala working with the Central Tibetan Administration. Although extremely happy and grateful to have landed not just the Fellowship but also this unique organization at this beautiful place, Jaadu never expected to be taken back to his childhood tiffin time during the lunch breaks at the office!

On the first day, Jaadu got his lunch, which is cooked for the entire department collectively, with his colleagues and was pleasantly surprised to see a mixture of Tibetan and Indian cuisine. While ‘dal chawal’ was a familiar sight, the red hot chilli and ‘tingmo’ (Tibetan equivalent of roti) being served were not. Now, Jaadu cannot imagine eating his ‘dal chawal’ without the spicy addition of chilli. In addition to these, there were vegetable dishes which reminded him of home, for instance the ‘aloo ki sabji’, and, sometimes took him on a tour of Himachal’s exotic and local produce like the unheard of but very tasty and nutritious ‘lungdu’, a type of wild fern.

This mixture is actually a very true representation of the assimilation that the Tibetan community has undergone in India, from adopting the Indian cuisine (‘aloopuri’ is a staple part of their diet) to Bollywood movies and songs (Jaadu has spent many hours humming Hindi songs in the office with his Tibetan friends) to cheering for the Indian cricket team with all their heart. Dharamshala is the centre for the Tibetan government in exile and therefore, has people coming in from Tibetan settlements all over the country. Jaadu has met Tibetans speaking fluent Tamil, Kannada and Marathi along with Hindi and English while he struggled to put together basic sentences in Tibetan. However, with language classes and some help from his colleagues, he managed to learn a bit more than just the formal greeting in Tibetan: “Tashi Delek”

Lunch time with all the enticing food was also when Jaadu got to know a wealth of information about the Tibetan community. Lunch break or as Jaadu thought of it ‘Tiffin Time’ went on from becoming a fun play zone to more meaningful conversations about culture, economy, family, movies, books and a million other things new friends chat about. Jaadu realised that the ties to and the love and immense pride for the Tibetan culture remains strong among the community as evidenced by the Tibetan flags found everywhere in Dhasa (Dharamshala in Tibetan).

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Every day became a new adventure for Jaadu as he learnt new games, interacted with new people and not just his immediate colleagues and in general became as carefree as a child laughing and falling during tiffin time. Starting with virtually no skill and experience in the game, Jaadu kept failing at the game but, bonding with his new friends till eventually he actually beat one of them. That moment was a crowning glory and the true spirit of healthy competition cemented the connections that Jaadu had been forming.

Lunch break or as Jaadu thought of it ‘Tiffin Time’ went on from becoming a fun play zone to more meaningful conversations about culture, economy, family, movies, books and a million other things new friends chat about. Jaadu realised that the ties to and the love and immense pride for the Tibetan culture remains strong among the community as evidenced by the Tibetan flags found everywhere in Dhasa (Dharamshala in Tibetan). The city looks colourful and emanates peace with the blue, green, white,
red and yellow flags (representing elements of nature) fluttering in the wind, an act which is believed to spread positivity and goodwill. The Norbulingka Institute is the centre for preservation of Tibetan art, culture, music and cuisine. It also serves the most divine lemon tarts that Jaadu had ever tasted, having had those when he visited to soak in the rich heritage and culture of his host community. ‘Butter tea’ and ‘bhaley’ (Tibetan bread) are also staples that can be found in almost every food establishment in Dhasa. These lunch time interactions sometimes continued or spilled over during tea breaks as well. Before Jaadu knew it, he was not just learning new things about the Tibetan community and CTA but was also warmly welcomed and considered a part of the community.

Another very endearing part of Jaadu’s experience in Dhasa that has taken him back to childlike delight has been his epic love story with the hills. Equipped with all the recommendations from his local friends about the offbeat places that are rarely known to tourists, he forayed into the hills daily. What started as a lockdown challenge turned into a magical experience of discovery and peace. Some days, Jaadu found mountain tops kissing clouds while some days sunshine created a halo on its crown. Jaadu discovered a cave, got his claw stuck in a rabbit hole, got chased by a variety of animals and also floated through the clouds when they descended on the hills.

These discoveries and (mis)adventures would never have been possible without the Tiffin Time conversations that were sometimes personal and sometimes political. Jaadu has discerned that it is not just the hills which have made a place in his heart but also his new friends. Who would have thought that something as small as a chungi would lead to all the frolicking fun and faithful friendships reminiscent of Jaadu’s childhood!

Shivranjani Gandhi
Shivranjani is sensitive, empathetic, curious, and anticipating yet, trying to live in the moment. Being a social and cultural psychologist by training, she has developed a deep inclination towards several social and contemporary issues that can be researched and solved at an interdisciplinary level. She is passionate about causes from life situations that have impacted her personally, while she is holding space for others and learning how to best support them in their life journeys.

With the help of regular playback theatre sessions, Amiya built on her creativity and confidence. She learnt that with the right amount of research, support and preparedness, no task is too difficult to complete. Through the fellowship she realised that social progress begins with barely perceptible changes in the mindset of people, which manifest later at larger scales.

Aman Walia
Aman is very curious and always seeks new ways of doing things. This curiosity infuses him with a great sense of dynamism to travel into unexplored paths in and beyond professional life and this serves as an all-time inspiration for him to keep moving.

Trishka Bafna
Trishka is a curious, quirky feminist who loves to read, write and dance. The Fellowship has made her delve even deeper into the complexities and intersectionality of gender and societal norms affecting communities. Patience and courage to keep asking difficult questions has been a part of her professional and personal growth during the course of this journey.

Utsarga Mondal
Utsarga is passionate about reforming the education space in the country through systemic intervention. The grassroots experience during the fellowship helped him develop resilience, poise and determination to stand up to challenges and learn from opportunities. He aspires to contribute to the public policy space to create large-scale social change.

Amiya Chaudhuri
With the help of regular playback theatre sessions, Amiya built on her creativity and confidence. She learnt that with the right amount of research, support and preparedness, no task is too difficult to complete. Through the fellowship she realised that social progress begins with barely perceptible changes in the mindset of people, which manifest later at larger scales.
Get to Know Jaadu Better

Across
3. What does Jaadu experience during his fellowship in spite of being in the same country? (8,9)
8. What makes this batch of AIF fellows, represented by Jaadu, the most unique one? (3,5,6)
9. Which culture did Jaadu get to experience sitting right at home? (4)

Down
1. Which new game does Jaadu learn during lunch? (6)
2. What activity does Jaadu learn during the festival of Makar Sankranti? (6,5)
4. Who does Jaadu represent in the stories? (7)
5. Who does Jaadu get to conduct a workshop for? (9)
6. Which musical instrument is Jaadu fascinated by during theatre practice? (5)
7. What bird is Jaadu? (6)
10. What is ‘Serve, Learn, Lead’ to Jaadu? (5)

ANSWERS:
Across:
3. Cultural immersion, 8. All India cohort, 9. Zoom

Down:

Our Supporters

Rural India Supporting Trust
The Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) was established in 2007 as a family-based grant making organization. RIST’s goal is to assist in alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life for communities in India. RIST partners with value aligned, publicly supported organizations to achieve its goal. Since 2017, RIST and the AIF Clinton Fellowship program have partnered to enhance capacity and the impact of India’s social sector through the placement of knowledgeable Fellows who can impart specialized skills, expertise, and best practices to Indian social service sector organizations. From 2017 - 2019 the RIST supported AIF Clinton Fellowship has dispatched ten Fellows to Uttarakhand and other under-served regions of India on an annual basis. Due to the U.S.-India cross-cultural nature of this project, RIST and AIF are assisting in creating a cohesive ecosystem of understanding between these two countries. The Fellows who participate are on their way to becoming the global leaders of tomorrow. In order to create a higher level of program impact, an “eleventh month of service” was added to the existing 10-month program model. This is an opportunity for recently returned Fellows to use this extended program time to strengthen the Alumni network, enhance the impact of the Fellowship program, create innovative program practices, help train the incoming cohort, and engage the broader public. In the second phase of the RIST-AIF Fellowship partnership, RIST committed to support eight Fellows each year from 2019 - 2022. During the pandemic, RIST generously agreed to support an all-Indian cohort of Fellows during the 2020-21 program year and assisted the AIF Clinton Fellowship in establishing critical infrastructure needed to run a successful hybrid program. RIST’s contributions have enabled the AIF Fellowship in increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all program practices.

Lata Krishnan and Ajay Shah
We are grateful to Lata Krishnan and Ajay Shah for providing long-term support of the AIF Fellowship program. On March 14th, 2021, they announced the largest gift to AIF, a $5 million gift to the Fellowship program. Building on the legacy created over 20 years, the gift carries a bold vision for the future. Lata Krishnan’s and Ajay Shah’s historic gift ushers the Fellowship program into a decade of action, focusing on accelerating impact and supercharging ideas to solutions. Under the avatar of the AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship, the next phase of the program will invest in a cross-generational force of change makers building an equitable and sustainable world. The new name embodies this promise: the Banyan tree is a symbol of strength, resilience, and interconnectedness. It’s a powerful metaphor for mobilizing a collective force towards sustainable impact. Lata Krishnan is the Co-Founder and former President of AIF, and serves as Co-Chair of the AIF Fellowship program. Both are award-winning technology entrepreneurs, start-up investors, and engaged philanthropists, passionate about AIF’s mission. We are extremely grateful to Lata Krishnan, Ajay Shah, and the Krishnan Shah Family Foundation, for their leadership and vision.