



GHAR PAR: DHARAMSHALA



## Ghar Par: Dharamshala

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In development and humanitarian work, a lot of ideas, programs, and projects tend to have a single-story perspective and they are often created and disseminated by people who are not living in the shoes of their subjects. There is a bias and a privilege in being able to go there and show views of the world which is not necessarily what the subject's perspective is.

As I approached my summer of work in Dharamshala, India with EduCARE, this was something I was aware of. Not just as a development practitioner, but as a photographer. I realized that while my heritage and roots are Indian, I would quickly stand out as an outsider because of the way I dress, my inability to converse easily in Hindi, and my mannerisms. And this proved to be true as, upon arrival, I experienced how hard it was to get candid shots of people. When walking around on my first day in India, I noticed how quickly people noticed my camera, and how keen they were for me to take photos of them, even providing me with a posed smile. That was not my intention, and I found it hard to blend in and capture "raw" moments without being quick and subtle.

To tackle this differently, taking myself out of the picture, I brought with me to India, 10 disposable film cameras. The idea was to empower people to tell their own stories and capture what they saw unfiltered and unadulterated without my "outsider" presence. After I mentioned my intentions to do such a photography project to my mentor, Harjeet Bhullar, we spoke about how we could align the project with EduCARE programs as an applied learning tool that would help the organization's stakeholders advocate for themselves and their community. We discussed how giving people a way to express themselves and a voice in the work that EduCARE is involved in would help create a sense of belonging with the work itself. This would enable EduCARE projects to be more co-created with the communities and people we hoped to work with and for.



Photo by Harjeet Bhullar; Pictured: Rahul Kathayat (Left) and Kiran Topiwala (Right)

With EduCARE's support, the project was completed in about 5 weeks, and the photos were developed upon my return to the US. Soon after receiving the scans, I marveled at the art that was created by the participants. I reached out to each participant, shared the photos they took, and asked if they could provide a few words or a brief caption for some of the images. Then, together with Harjeet, I reflected on the experience and the project's relevance. While the art speaks for itself, what was demonstrated in the project further emphasized how important it was to give participants a voice and allow them to be heard.

This emphasis on belonging, and how I had demonstrably used art to help create it, led me to connect it with what I believe to be the missing piece in regenerative sustainable development: closing the gap between the development practitioner and participant community. While intentions may be well-founded, there still seems to be a massive disconnect between what participant communities want and what we as innovators think they want. Closing this gap and creating a sense of belonging with all aspects of the environment (everyone and everything), is an overlooked step in sustainable development initiatives. At Kula, we have set out to change that, by iterating the photography project and giving participant communities a voice to advocate for themselves, while emphasizing the notion of belonging and principles of deep ecology.

For more on EduCARE's projects, please visit [educare.in](http://educare.in)





If you're interested in contributing to the evolving model and bringing some of these ideas to your community, we provide consulting services to organizations to bring their regenerative vision of a community to life.

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