

INTERVIEW

Entrepreneurs in the Himalayas

Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche of Ladakh talks about how the Naropa Fellowship aims to create agents of change for a robust socio-economic environment in the Himalayan region

■ BHAVYA VENKATESH

The 1,000-year-old Ladakh-based Drukpa Lineage is woven throughout the history of Buddhism in India, the Himalayas and Central Asia. The Naropa Fellowship is an initiative from this lineage, inspired by His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa, and co-founded by Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche (a Spiritual Regent to His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa) and Dr. Pramath Raj Sinha, the founding dean of the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad, and the co-founder of Ashoka University, Sonapat.

Excerpts from an interview with Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche:

The fellowship

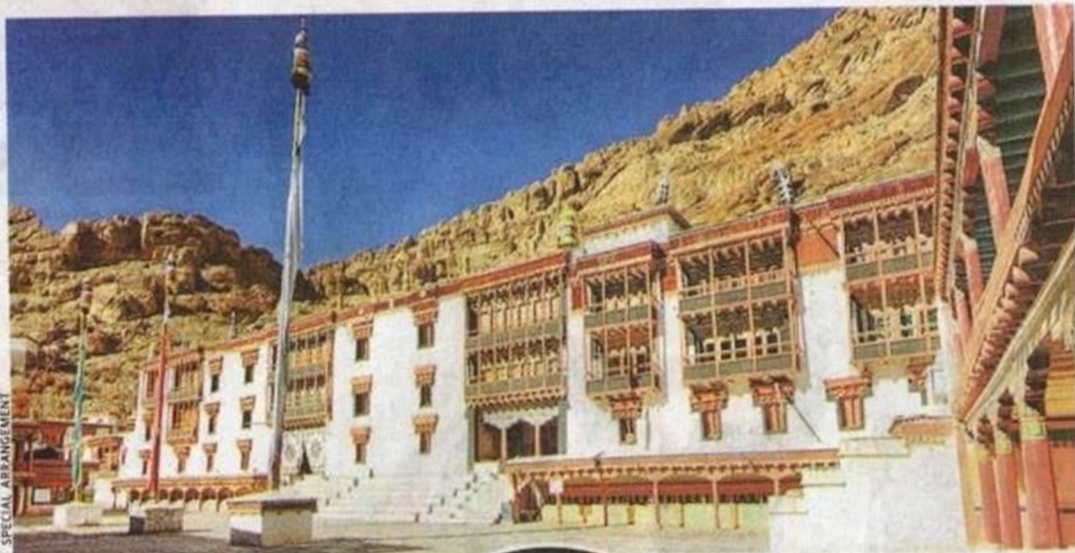
The Naropa Fellowship is a unique postgraduate programme designed to promote entrepreneurial leadership, so that students may actively participate in reviving the Himalayan economy, and be committed to keeping its heritage intact. The Fellowship seeks 50 bright individuals who will be groomed to transition from being job-seekers to job-creators. The programme will be based out of a state-of-the-art campus in Hemis, in the heart of Ladakh.

Vision

The idea came up as a response to our collective concerns over the direction in which several Himalayan societies are headed. Regional brain drain and cultural erosion is a reality we are dealing with. Regions like Ladakh tend to be ecologically sensitive and need development paradigms that are in-synch with its geographic realities. With the Naropa Fellowship, we are giving our youth an opportunity to get trained by some of the best minds in the world, so that they are equipped with the tools and sensibility to bring progress.

Curriculum

The Fellowship is an intensive 12-month academic experience, split into eight terms that last six weeks each. It binds together four curricular tracks: Entrepreneurship, Liberal Arts, Communication and Personal Growth. While the programme is



Himalayan heritage: Knowledge beckons.

geared to help our Fellows launch successful entrepreneurial careers, we also want them to have a well-rounded understanding of the socio-cultural and political landscapes in which they will have to operate, and be effective communicators. We are bringing in an inspiring line-up of visiting faculty from institutes across the world, including the University of Pennsylvania, the IE Business School in Madrid and the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad.

Hands-on project

This is the essence of the Naropa Fellowship experience. The cohort will be divided into small groups who will work on an entrepreneurial idea, steadily shaping it into a full-fledged organisation over the course of the programme. The idea is to take the projects through the entire graph of building a startup, from market research, prototyping, and brand building to, finally, seeking out potential investors.

Entrepreneurial core

The crux of the programme is entrepreneurial leadership. Our Fellows should be willing and equipped to boldly take on the many challenges plaguing the Himalayan region and



Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche

present innovative and thoughtful solutions. They will be trained in communication as well as hard skills such as financial management and advanced accounts, along with suitable technical know-how.

Career opportunities

The Fellowship is open to anybody who feels for the Himalayas, and we expect a sizeable chunk of our Fellows to come from places such as Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and the Spiti Valley. We hope that they return to their respective native places and create employment opportunities, using the skills and perspective they gain. However, if some of them don't feel pre-

pared to become entrepreneurs right after they graduate, we might help them with placements.

Eligibility

The minimum eligibility for the programme is an undergraduate degree. Anybody graduating before September 1 is welcome to apply. There is no upper age limit or a regional preference. Applicants can be from any academic background. The founding cohort can, therefore, expect to share space with engineers, lawyers, liberal arts graduates and media professionals – essentially, to anybody who wants to learn and make a difference.

Scholarships

The founding cohort of Naropa Fellows will receive a fully-funded educational experience. They will all receive a scholarship worth ₹10 lakh, which covers the full cost of the programme.

Relevance

The Fellowship is highly relevant to the current times. The best among the country's youth need to assume leadership of their collective future. We believe that efforts such as this Fellowship programme will add up to a sustainable future.