

CULINARY LAB FELLOWSHIP

Supported by Zubaan
In collaboration with Royal Enfield

APPLICATION DEADLINE: July, 21, 2026

[Find a PDF version of this call here]

Background

For over a decade, Zubaan has worked with writers, artists, researchers, and community storytellers across Northeast India and the Himalayan region, creating spaces for stories that often remain outside dominant narratives. Through initiatives such as *Fragrance of Peace*, *Cultures of Peace*, research grants, and thematic labs, we have supported work rooted in communities, lived experience, and feminist ways of knowing. Across essays, films, podcasts, oral histories, photography, and community archives, these projects have documented lives shaped by migration, labour, conflict, ecology, identity, and belonging.

Over time, one thread continued to emerge across many of these conversations: food.

Not simply as cuisine or tradition, but as a way of understanding the world. A recipe could become an archive of migration. A family kitchen could reveal histories of care and invisible labour. A changing landscape could be traced through disappearing ingredients. A shared meal could hold stories of displacement, resilience, memory, and home. Again and again, food revealed itself as a language through which communities narrated their histories, negotiated change, and imagined their futures.

It was from these conversations that the Culinary Lab Fellowship emerged.

Launched by Zubaan in collaboration with Royal Enfield, the fellowship explores food through a feminist and community-centred lens. The first edition, centred in the Eastern Himalayas, brought together researchers, artists, photographers, filmmakers, and community practitioners working on themes as diverse as indigenous food knowledge, migration, labour, ecology, memory, and everyday food cultures. The work that emerged affirmed that food is never just about what we eat—it is about the landscapes we inhabit, the people we become, and the stories we carry with us.

Culinary Lab Fellowship 2026

Zubaan, in collaboration with Royal Enfield, is pleased to announce the second edition of the Culinary Lab Fellowship.

This year, the fellowship expands to include both the Eastern Himalayas (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Sikkim) and the Western Himalayas (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh). We invite applications from young researchers, artists, storytellers, culinary practitioners, community historians, photographers, filmmakers, and other cultural practitioners interested in exploring food through a gendered lens, examining how it shapes and is shaped by identity, memory, ecology, labour, migration, belonging, care, and broader processes of social change.

The Himalayas are home to diverse communities shaped by movement, trade, pastoralism, agriculture, political transformations, and ecological change. Across the region, food carries stories of adaptation, care, survival, and exchange. Recipes travel with people across borders and generations; ingredients reflect relationships with land and climate; kitchens become spaces where histories, memories, and identities are continually negotiated and reimaged.

At a time of accelerating climate change, rapid urbanisation, shifting livelihoods, and growing cultural homogenisation, documenting food cultures becomes a way of preserving knowledge while also asking critical questions about the future.

The fellowship will support five fellows from across the Eastern and Western Himalayas. Particular encouragement will be given to applicants from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities, including women, queer and trans persons, Indigenous communities, pastoral communities, migrant communities, linguistic minorities, and others whose food histories and cultural knowledge often remain undocumented.

Selected fellows will participate in a three-day residential Culinary Lab in Theog, Himachal Pradesh, where they will engage with resource persons, mentors, fellow participants, and local food practitioners. The Lab will serve as a space for learning, exchange, reflection, and the development of individual fellowship projects.

Through research, documentation, storytelling, and creative practice, fellows will contribute to a growing archive of Himalayan food cultures while foregrounding gender as a critical lens of inquiry. Projects are expected to examine how food intersects with questions of care, labour, memory, identity, ecology, community, belonging, and

power, and how these relationships shape everyday lives and social change across the Himalayas.

Theme

The Culinary Lab Fellowship approaches food as a way of understanding the relationships between people, place, memory, labour, ecology, and identity. Across the Himalayas, food carries histories of migration, trade, pastoralism, farming, and cultural exchange. It reflects how communities adapt to changing landscapes and climates, how knowledge is passed across generations, and how care, belonging, and survival are woven into everyday life.

We invite proposals that look beyond recipes to explore the wider worlds that food inhabits through a gendered and feminist lens. We encourage projects that examine how food intersects with labour, care, memory, identity, ecology, migration, power, and belonging, while paying particular attention to whose knowledge, histories, and experiences are made visible—or remain overlooked. Projects may engage with food memories and oral histories, Indigenous food systems, language, biodiversity, climate change, festivals and rituals, borderland food cultures, urban migration, community kitchens, local food economies, and intergenerational knowledge. These themes are only starting points, and applicants are encouraged to interpret them creatively, drawing on their own lived experiences, disciplinary approaches, and community knowledge.

Applicants are welcome to interpret the theme creatively and are encouraged to bring their own disciplinary approaches, lived experiences, and community knowledge into the project.

While the fellowship encourages experimentation across different media and forms of documentation, the primary outcome will be a collective book. Applicants are therefore encouraged to frame their proposals with this in mind. Alongside the written work, they are welcome to incorporate photography, illustration, film, audio, archival material, or other creative approaches that support and enrich their research. Any additional material produced during the fellowship may also become part of Zubaan's larger digital archive, helping preserve and share the diverse food cultures of the Himalayas.

Your research projects may take the shape of:

- An 8,000–10,000-word written submission

- A photo-essay
- An audio/visual archive
- Or a hybrid, mixed-media project and other creative forms of documentation that enrich and complement the written research

Timeline & Mentorship

This fellowship will run for eight months. After the three-day lab, fellows will have four months to work on their first draft. Fellows will be paired with mentors who will support their research, documentation, and the development of their final output. Proposals should therefore be realistic, clearly planned, and achievable within this timeline.

Final submissions must be in English, though applicants may work in other languages as long as English translations or subtitles are provided.

While the primary focus of this fellowship is the creation of a book that brings together the fellows' recipes, stories, and creative work, any additional materials that emerge from the research — such as video interviews, audio recordings, photographs, transcripts, or other mixed-media elements — may also be included in Zubaan's larger digital archive, enriching the documentation of food cultures from the region.

[Note: Projects that are part of ongoing or recently completed PhD theses are not eligible.]

Use of AI: Fellowship proposals should represent the applicant's own thinking and writing. Applicants must disclose any use of assistive AI tools. Proposals that are substantially generated using generative AI will not be eligible for consideration.]

Duration

The first draft of the selected papers is expected in four months after the culinary lab. Depending on the review and feedback meetings, papers may need to be revised after the first draft. After the feedback meetings, three more months will be provided for the final draft. The total duration of the grant is eight months.

Grant

The grant carries an amount of Rs 100,000, less applicable taxes.

Payments will be made in three instalments: 25 per cent upon signing the fellowship contract, 25 per cent upon submission of the second draft and participation in the review meeting; and the final instalment upon successful completion of the fellowship and submission of the final work.

Deadline for submission: 11:59pm, July 21, 2026.

Who Should Apply?

1. Eastern Himalayas (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Sikkim) and the Western Himalayas (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh) and between the age of 20-35 years, you are eligible to apply.

[Note: Preference will be given to candidates based locally and working actively within the community.]

2. Demonstrated experience or strong interest in issues related to gender, food, culture, and sustainable development.
3. Commitment to research and produce a substantial work equivalent to at least 8,000 words, which can take various forms such as:
 - A long-form essay (minimum 8,000 words)
 - A complete graphic story with at least 20 page spreads
 - A culinary project combining recipes with stories

The fellowship encourages creative outputs beyond traditional essays, including graphic narratives, extended interviews, audiovisual pieces, and more, all within an agreed timeline.

4. Availability to participate in a 3-day residential workshop in Theog, Shimla, scheduled for early to mid October, 2026.

How to apply

Please complete this Google Form ([link here](#)) and upload all required documents as specified.

List of documents required for upload:

- 1) An updated CV and any other relevant information about yourself that you think is necessary, including proof of age.
- 2) Send in a grant proposal (maximum two pages) which clearly describes what you wish to do, what sources you will tap (primary and secondary), the subject of your research and a timeline.
- 3) Two names of referees, ideally people you have worked with.
- 4) Please mention any special accommodations that you will require (example, disability accommodation, etc)

Note: The last date for submission of the application is 11:59 pm, Thursday, 21st July, 2026

Selected candidates will be informed via email by 13th Aug, 2026.

Shortlisting and selection process

A selection committee will screen all applications. The committee will prepare a shortlist based on relevance to the Culinary Lab fellowship's priorities as described in this document and may wish to interview some candidates. Interviews can take place via Zoom or phone, or in person. The committee will then decide, and the candidate will be informed. The committee's decision will be final.

Duration : 3 days of workshop, excluding travel days between early-mid October (this will be confirmed soon)

Payments : Accommodation and food will be provided during the workshop. Travel expenses will be borne by Zubaan.

Registered in 2003, [Zubaan](https://zubaanprojects.org) is a charitable trust based in Delhi. It follows in the footsteps of its parent NGO, Kali for Women, and has been an active participant, chronicler and publisher of the women's movement since 1984. It works to increase the body of knowledge on women with a special focus on South Asia and India. For more information, log onto <https://zubaanprojects.org>.

Royal Enfield, whose spiritual home lies in the Himalayas, has long been inspired by the region's landscapes, cultures, and communities. Through the Eicher Group Foundation, it supports Himalayan communities and ecosystems, working towards protection, regeneration, and resilience in a rapidly changing world.

FAQs:

- What is the fellowship about?

The fellowship will explore the histories and cultures of food in the eastern and western Himalayan region, looking at how culinary practices shape identity, memory, and community. Through a feminist lens, the program will document and engage with the ways food traditions evolve — especially in the context of migration, displacement, and cultural preservation.

- Who can apply?

We invite young researchers, artists, storytellers, culinary enthusiasts, and community organisers working on food and culture in the Himalayas to apply. We particularly encourage applications from young women, queer, trans, and non-binary people. Priority will be given to candidates rooted in the region and already working closely with local communities. This call is open only to Indian nationals.

- Can I apply if I live outside of India?

This is a physical, in-person workshop. You cannot apply if you are not a resident of India

- Is there an age limit to apply?

Yes, you must be between the age of 20-35 years to apply.

- What language should my submission be in?

All submissions should be in English.

- What kind of content can proposals be submitted for?

The proposal may aim for a collective book as the primary output, and can focus on a research paper (8,000–10,000 words), a photo-essay, food-related stories, interviews, or other mixed-media formats.

- What should I not submit?

Masters or PhD thesis (whether completed or ongoing), proposals for fiction, poetry, etc., are not eligible as submissions.

- Does my submission need to be final, or can it be a draft?

You should submit a proposal which clearly describes what you wish to do during the grant duration.

- How do we submit multimedia proposals?

You can submit your multimedia proposals in the same format, with a link to a google drive housing the content.

- What will mentorship look like?

Mentors will be individually assigned to you during the grant period. You will be in touch with your mentors over email.

- Who will own the copyright to the work I submit?

All materials created with the support of the fellowship will remain the intellectual property and copyright of the fellow. Zubaan will retain the exclusive first right of publication for the fellowship work, and copyright in the published anthology as a collective volume. Following its first publication by Zubaan, fellows will be free to publish, adapt, or otherwise use their individual work for other purposes, with appropriate acknowledgement of the fellowship and its first publication by Zubaan.

- Will my previously published/ screened work be eligible as a submission?

No