



This Entrepreneurial Couple Moved Back to India to Turn Himachal's Fruits Into Jams & Chutneys

Kartik and Anuradha arrived in Thanedar, Himachal Pradesh, in 2005 as tourists and fell in love. In 2012, they moved there permanently with new life goals.

by **Sohini Dey**
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The state of Himachal Pradesh is known for its fruits as much as its beautiful locales. Himachali apples have a legendary following, and its apricots and kiwis can transform even the most reluctant fruit eaters into taking a bite (or two).



After staying in Singapore for over a decade, when Kartik Budhraj and Anuradha Kanwar Budhraj moved to Himachal Pradesh to start their own enterprise in 2012, they decided to tap into the state's luscious local produce.

Kartik and Anuradha are the founders of Fruit Bageecha, an enterprise selling packaged products made from locally-sourced fruits by the region's talented self-help groups.



The couple's entrepreneurial journey began in 2012, when they began to plan their return to India. A marketing and branding professional, Kartik was then leading the creative team at the television channel AXN while Anuradha was a financial television news correspondent, working with Reuters News.

"We didn't want to be corporate slaves," says Kartik, adding that their templatised way of living coupled with their need to take care of their ageing parents in India led them to consider new opportunities in the country. A food business was a natural choice, particularly for Kartik who had grown up savouring his mother's homemade treats (particularly her fresh fruit jams) and briefly even considered pursuing it as a career.





“We’d first come to Thanedar in 2005,” he says. “We visited as tourists and fell in love. We began our work with some business analysis, visiting both Uttarakhand and Himachal, to get a sense of the local communities, supply of fruits and vegetables, and crafts. We had friends in Thanedar who offered to help, and the availability of supplies and connectivity led us to set up here.”

It was Anuradha who first quit her job and moved to Thanedar in 2012, taking the responsibility of the initial setup. Kartik followed a few months later, in 2013.

With an abundance of fruits in the area, Kartik and Anuradha launched their enterprise to translate the delectable flavours into jams and preserves.





The duo started their work with a pilot project in the village, involving the local self-help groups. Kartik says, “The local specialty was apple chutney, and we helped them standardise the recipes. We used traditional methods of boiling and preparation, and bottled them to launch the first set of products.”

In the meantime, they also considered the possibility of receiving government subsidies but navigating what Kartik calls the Kafkaesque bureaucracy turned out to be a long-drawn affair and the couple decided to invest their own funds into the enterprise. They made a batch of over 40 different recipes, including ingredients like cherry, chocolate, vanilla etc in the mix, for tasting and feedback.

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The testing stage helped them narrow down to the most popular flavours. Today, Fruit Bageecha's repertoire consists of six varieties of preserves and chutneys, in flavours like green apple with ginger, chunky kiwi with star anise and wild apricot.

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“We found that while people liked sweet, they liked *chatpata* flavours even more,” Kartik says. “We are now working to develop new flavours that are more savoury, including ketchup with a Himachali twist. The fruits are grown here, and we try to source locally as many ingredients as possible.”

In their effort, Kartik and Anuradha continue to be aided by 12 women from self-help groups, who make the delicious flavours. A food scientist and packaging personnel are also part of the team. The team work out of their farm in the village, which was started by Kartik and Anuradha in March 2016.

In a market filled with packaged jams, the Fruit Bageecha team considers pricing and outreach to be among their major challenges.





Citing examples of a few mass-produced brands, Kartik says, “Jams are required to have 40% fruit pulp content and four-fruit combinations makes for the popular mixed fruit jam.” Brands often add the pulp of fruits like papaya and banana in large quantities, which compromises the taste of the product, but also brings down prices. To convince customers of the value of natural ingredients, and their cost, emerges as a major challenge.

Additionally, reaching the customers can also be a test for small, independent brands. The Fruit Bageecha team sells its products through outlets and kiosks in and around Himachal Pradesh and are also making use of e-commerce sites. “We are expanding in the southern part of the country, like Bengaluru and Chennai,” Kartik adds.

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Even as they work to stabilise their brands and expand its reach, Kartik and Anuradha are unwinding and enjoying their time in their new home. “It’s absolutely relaxed here,” he says. “It may sounds strange to entrepreneurs in cities like Delhi, but we work according to the needs of the local communities. Sometimes, the women have a festival or attend or their children’s exams. We have changed our pace according to the place.”

And the couple have welcomed the slow life with open arms. Their mornings begin with tending to their garden, attending to cats and soaking in the beauty of their surroundings. During the interview, Kartik mentions, “We have asparagus growing in our garden, and our breakfast today is asparagus over fried eggs and some homemade bread.” He sounds blissful, and his tales of slow life in this Himachali hamlet is enough to make any harried city dweller consider a permanent change of pace.

For more information on [Fruit Bageecha](#), contact Kartik [here](#).

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