

CONNECT, EXPLORE, SUSTAIN-

An Eco Adventure in Ladakh



ABOUT THE COMIC STRIP:

This comic strip follows Yamini, a conscious and curious traveller, as she visits Markha, an emerging eco-smart village in Ladakh. Through engaging dialogues and character interactions, it is hoped to raise awareness about responsible travel, ecotourism, waste management, and sustainable construction in the Indian Himalayan region.

MEET THE CHARACTERS:

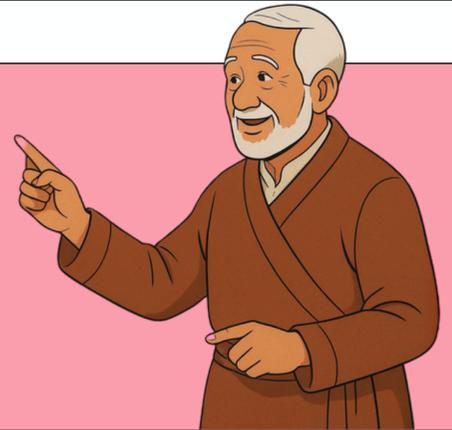


YAMINI:

Yamini, in her mid-20s, is a **cultural enthusiast** and **avid trekker** from Delhi who is exploring Ladakh. She is currently in Markha, eager to discover more about the village and its way of life.

DORJE NAMGYAL:

Dorje Namgyal, a **skilled mason** in his early 50s, has over 30 years of experience in traditional Ladakhi construction using mud bricks, stone, and wood. He is known for preserving age-old roofing and wall techniques suited to Ladakh's harsh climate; he also mentors younger masons in community projects.



TSERING LHAMO:

Tsering Lhamo, in her late 40s, is an **entrepreneurial homestay owner** who manages a four-room family stay offering organic, home-cooked meals. She enriches guest experiences through traditional cooking and knitting sessions.

STANZIN TUNDUP:

Stanzin Tundup, in his early 20s and son of Tsering Lhamo, is a **handicraft artisan** and **part-time homestay assistant**. He hand-carves wooden artifacts and paints traditional masks sold to local craft stores and tourists. During the tourism season, he helps his mother with guest check-ins and meal preparation. He aspires to launch an online store to promote Ladakhi crafts.



PEMA DORJAY:

Pema Dorjay, in her mid-20s and daughter of Tsering Lhamo, is a certified **eco-tourism guide** and **tour operator** based in Leh. Fluent in Hindi, English, and Ladakhi, she curates sustainable trekking and cultural tours across Ladakh, especially in Alchi and Markha, and often includes stays at her family's homestay to promote local engagement.

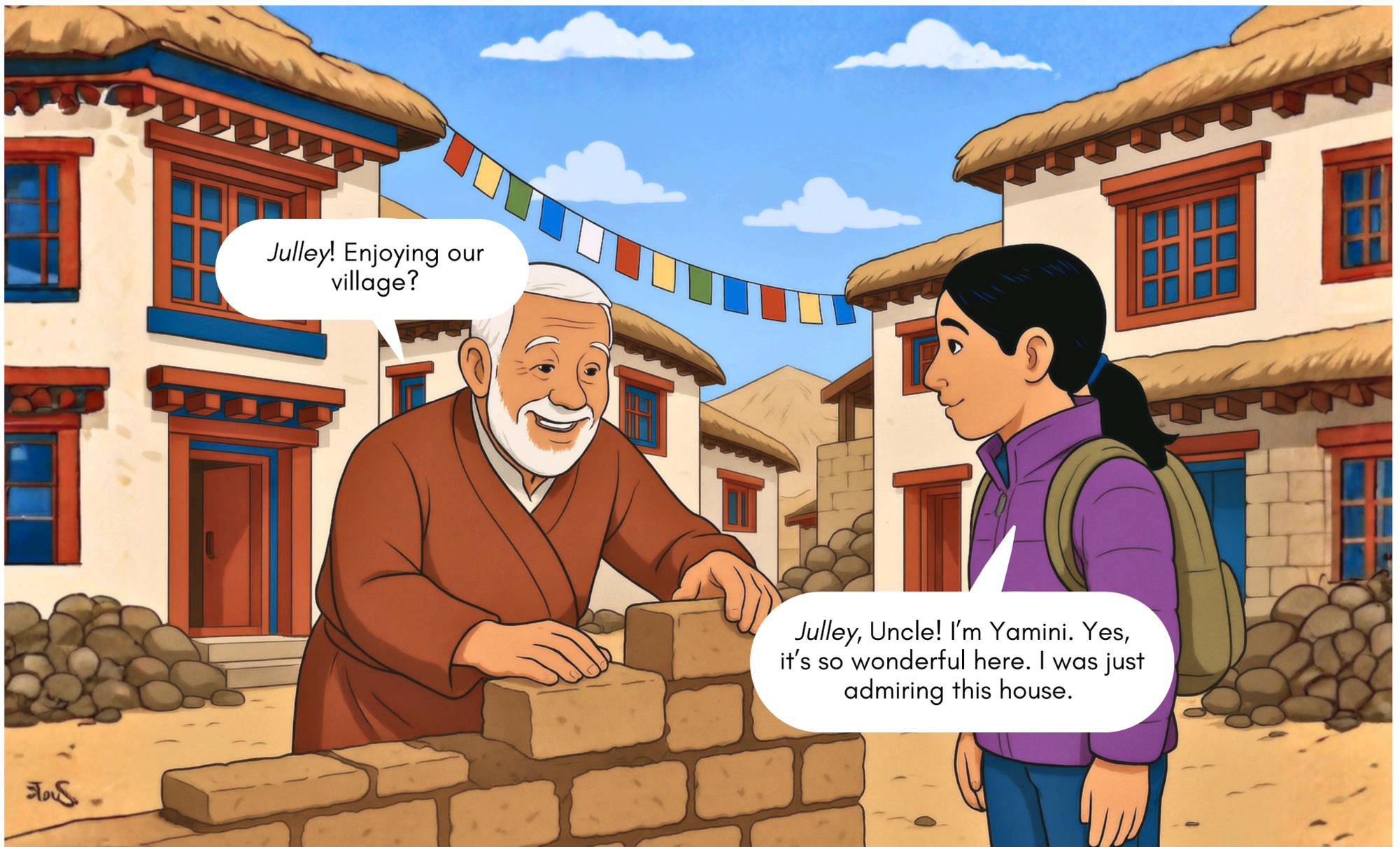
DISCLAIMER:

All the characters are AI generated and fictional. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents either are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.



Wow! This is even more beautiful than the pictures! It is so peaceful here.

Welcome to **Markha Village**, a hidden gem in Ladakh's cold desert, where ancient trails meet modern explorers! Known for its spectacular **trekking routes**, traditional Ladakhi **homestays**, and warm hospitality, Markha offers a glimpse into a way of life shaped by mountains, monasteries, and mindful living.

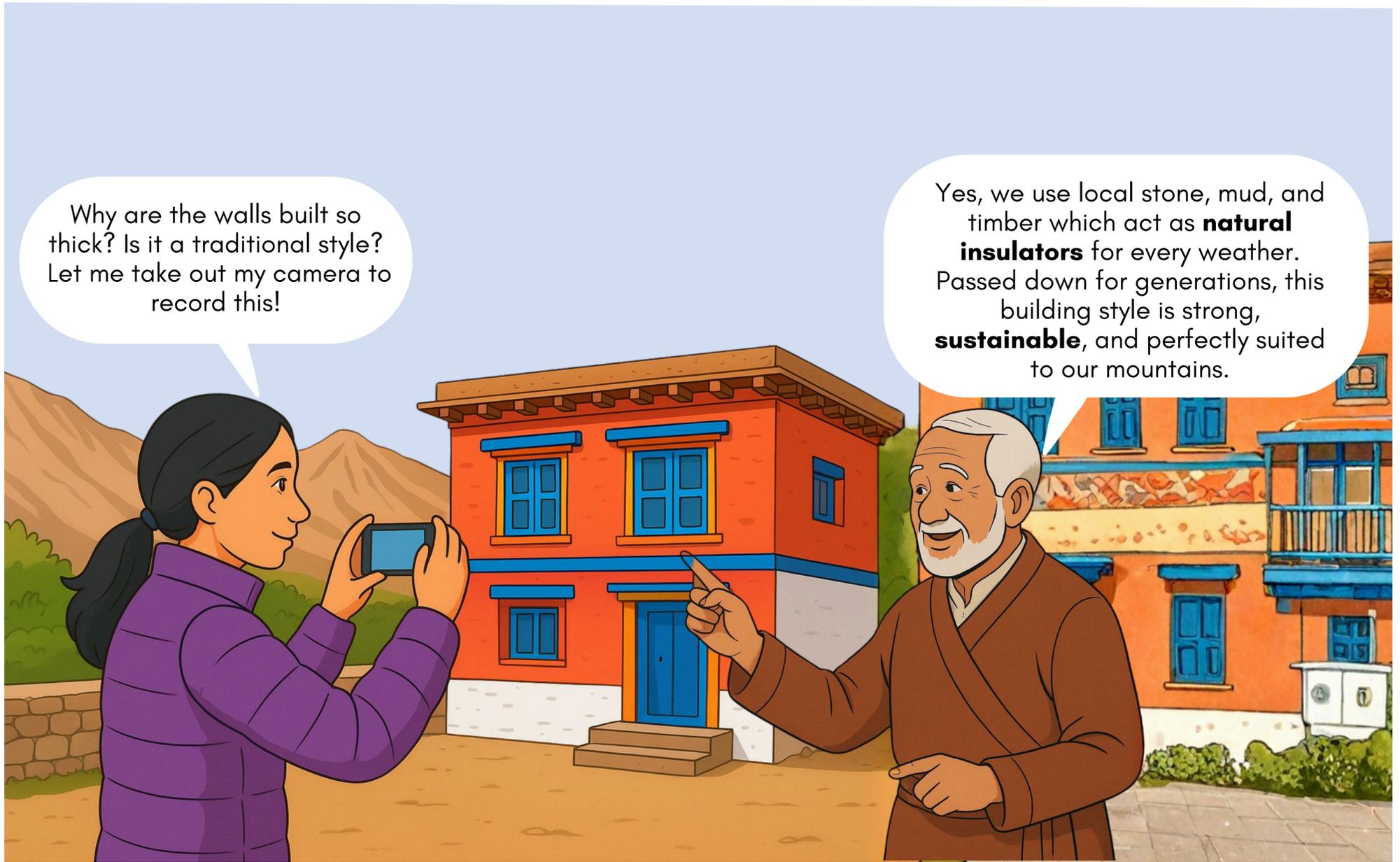


Julley! Enjoying our village?

Julley, Uncle! I'm Yamini. Yes, it's so wonderful here. I was just admiring this house.

Yamini has walked closer to the village. She is looking at a partially constructed house with a distinct architectural style. An elderly, wise-looking mason - Dorje Namgyal works steadily on constructing a wall, his movements practiced and calm. Yamini watches him for a moment, thinking about how these **traditional homes hold both history and skill**.

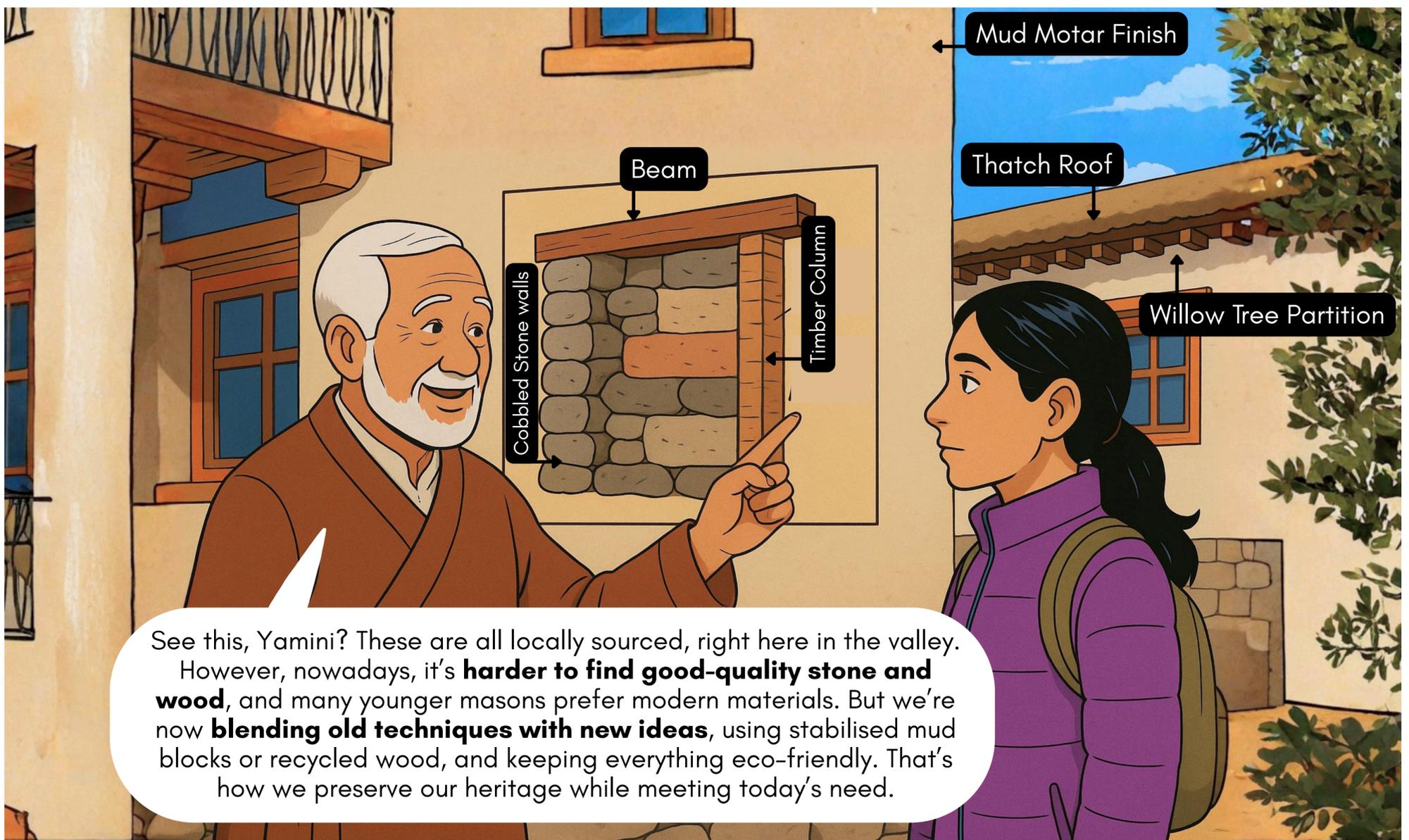




Why are the walls built so thick? Is it a traditional style? Let me take out my camera to record this!

Yes, we use local stone, mud, and timber which act as **natural insulators** for every weather. Passed down for generations, this building style is strong, **sustainable**, and perfectly suited to our mountains.

Behind Dorje, the thick earthen walls rise against the stark, barren hills. As Yamini looks at the structure, she can't help but think how **different these mountain homes** are from anything she's seen before.



See this, Yamini? These are all locally sourced, right here in the valley. However, nowadays, it's **harder to find good-quality stone and wood**, and many younger masons prefer modern materials. But we're now **blending old techniques with new ideas**, using stabilised mud blocks or recycled wood, and keeping everything eco-friendly. That's how we preserve our heritage while meeting today's need.

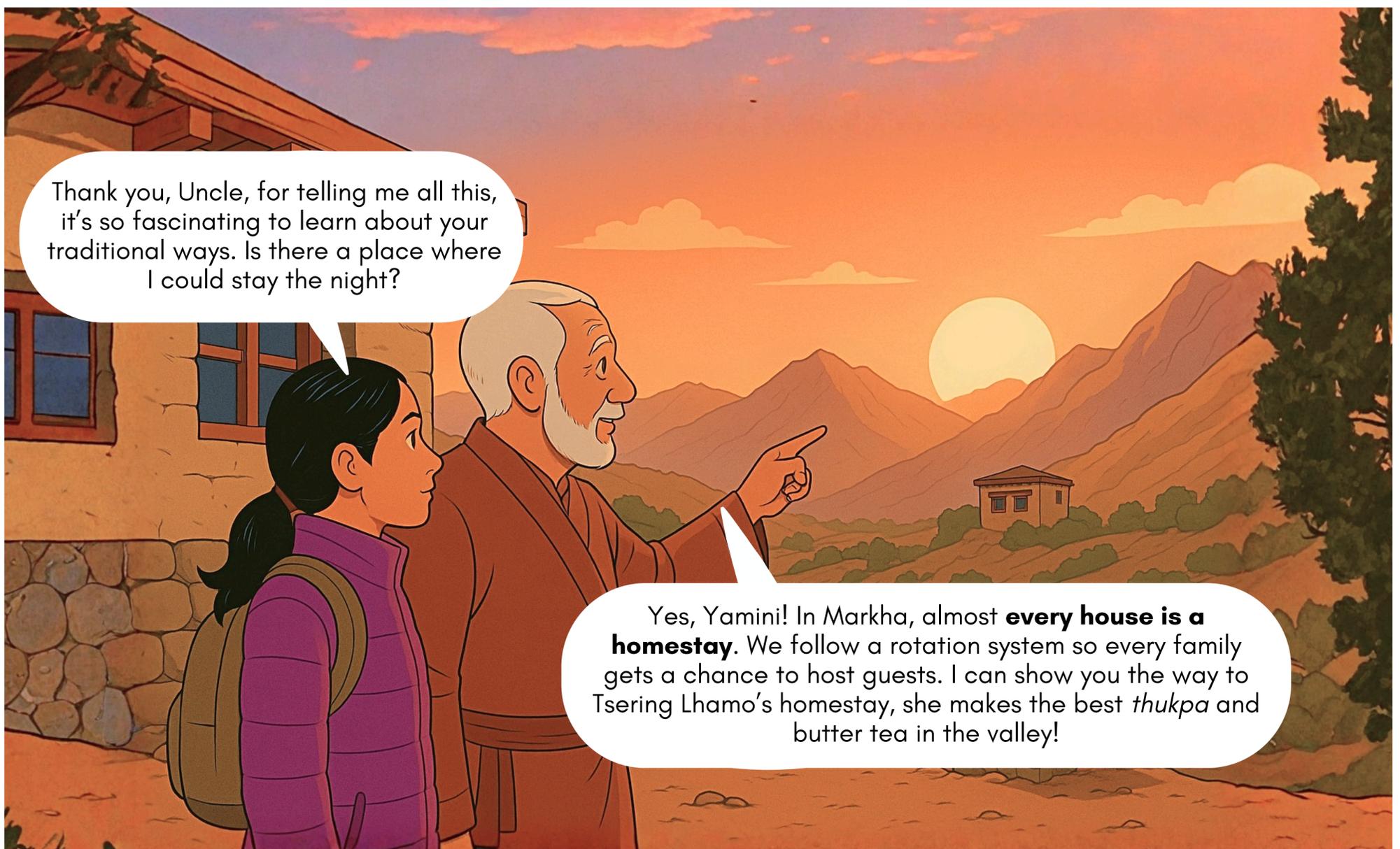
Dorje gestures toward a diagram beside him, which reveals the **inner structure of the wall**. As he explains, Yamini thinks about how local materials can create something so strong, warm, and perfectly suited to the mountains.





I'm using **natural colours made from mountain rocks** - red, yellow, white, and black. We grind the stones by hand and mix them with water or natural binders. This paint isn't just for beauty, it reflects sunlight, **protects the walls**, and keeps us connected to our land.

Dorje returns to his work on the house, **mixing toxin-free, traditional natural pigments** in small bowls beside him. Yamini listens intently, taking in the sustainable practices he explains. She appreciates how thoughtfully everything is done here. She wonders how she could bring some of these ideas into her own home, maybe by using natural colours, adopting local architectural practices, or choosing locally sourced materials whenever possible.

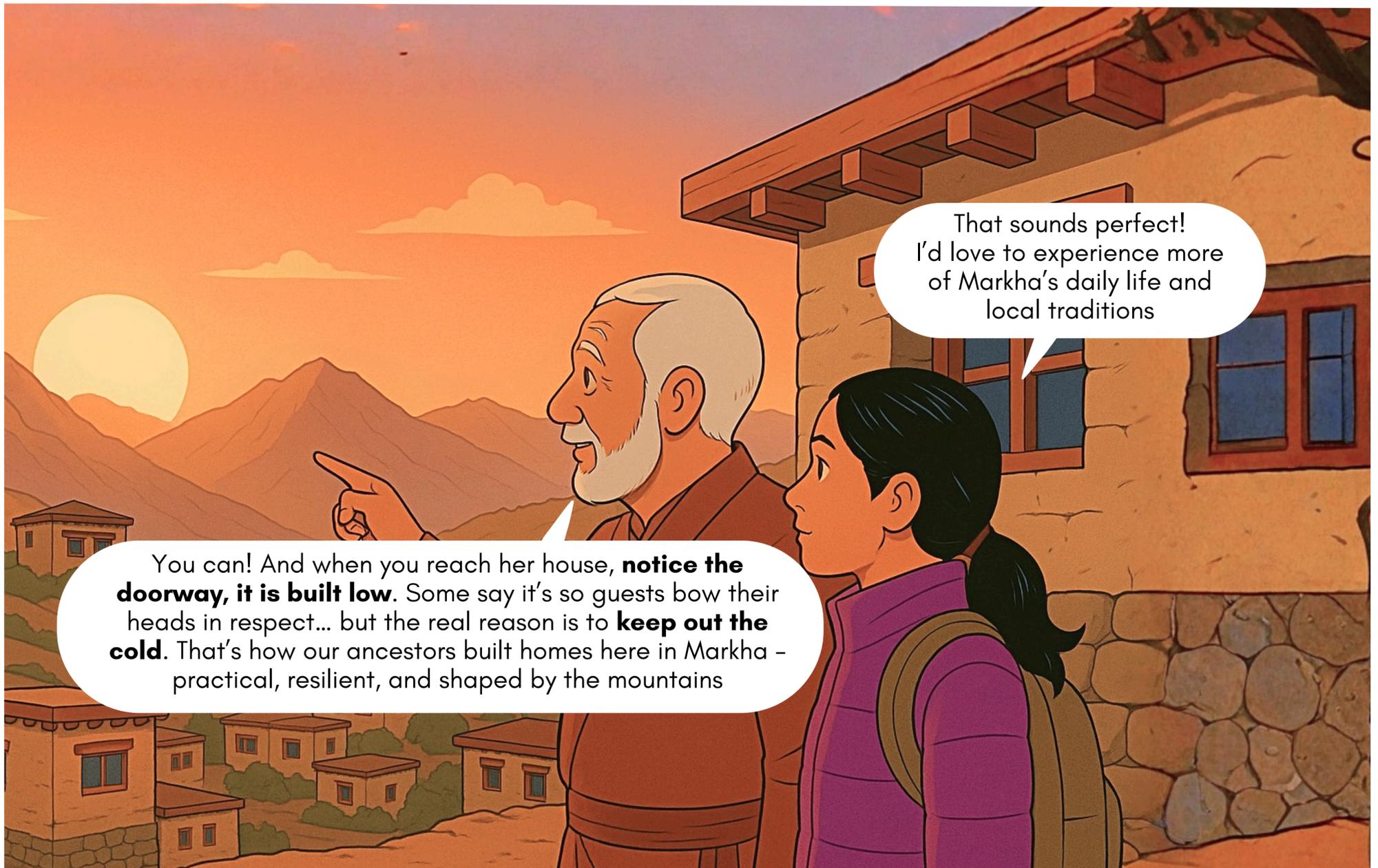


Thank you, Uncle, for telling me all this, it's so fascinating to learn about your traditional ways. Is there a place where I could stay the night?

Yes, Yamini! In Markha, almost **every house is a homestay**. We follow a rotation system so every family gets a chance to host guests. I can show you the way to Tsering Lhamo's homestay, she makes the best *thukpa* and butter tea in the valley!

After a long day of walking and learning, Yamini feels the tiredness settling in and wonders if she can find a warm, cozy **place to rest** and maybe enjoy some **traditional Ladakhi food** to end the day!





That sounds perfect!
I'd love to experience more
of Markha's daily life and
local traditions

You can! And when you reach her house, **notice the doorway, it is built low**. Some say it's so guests bow their heads in respect... but the real reason is to **keep out the cold**. That's how our ancestors built homes here in Markha - practical, resilient, and shaped by the mountains

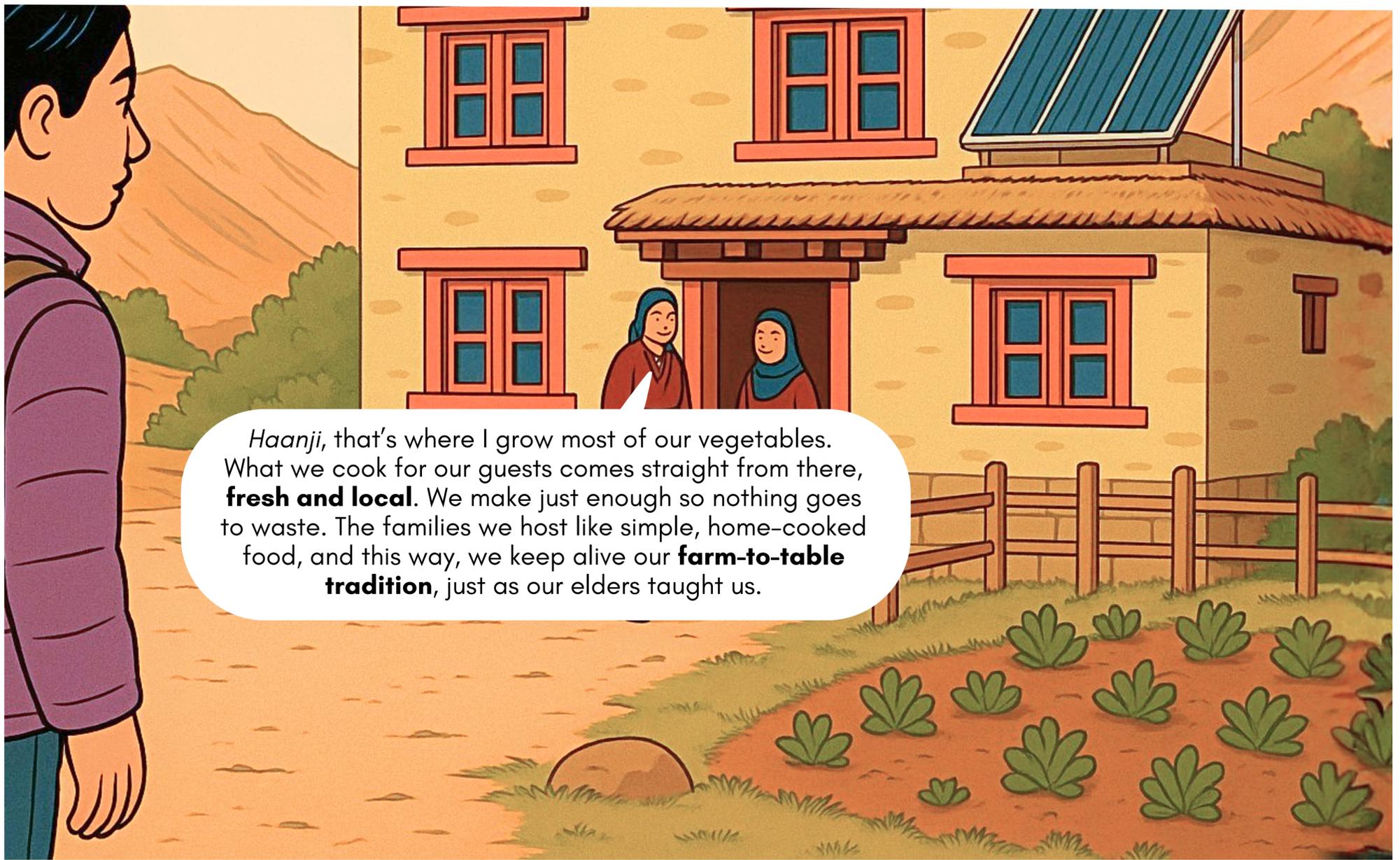
As they walk, Yamini notices how the **homes in Markha are built a little farther apart**, spaced to protect fields, manage water flow, and give each family room to farm and to sun-dry their produce.



Thank you so much. This
place feels so peaceful.
Is this your **kitchen
garden outside?**

Julley! You must be Yamini!
Dorje told me you were
coming. *Achi-achi*, it's cold
out there!

As Yamini approaches Tsering Lhamo's homestay, she recalls Dorje's words about Markha's houses, thick earthen walls, timber beams, and natural materials to cope with the mountain cold. She also thinks about how **women help shape homes** - mixing mud, plastering walls, and preparing materials alongside the men.



Haanji, that's where I grow most of our vegetables. What we cook for our guests comes straight from there, **fresh and local**. We make just enough so nothing goes to waste. The families we host like simple, home-cooked food, and this way, we keep alive our **farm-to-table tradition**, just as our elders taught us.

Noticing the solar panel, Yamini makes a mental note to learn how people in Ladakh use the strong mountain sunlight. Even a small rooftop panel shows how they adapt with simple, smart solutions.



Here, have some **gur-gur cha**, our butter tea. It will warm you right up! We make it with tea leaves, yak butter, and salt, strong enough to **keep you warm** through these cold mountain evenings.

Thank you so much. This experience makes me realise how **self-sufficient homes in Ladakh** are, and how peaceful life feels when everything comes from the land around you.

Feeling warm after the tea, Yamini reflects on how food is such a big part of a place's culture. She realizes that in Ladakh, every meal indicates how **closely people live with their land** and how deeply **traditions shape daily life**.





This is such a lovely way to host - simple, warm, and homely. Did you set all this up yourself?

I'm so glad you liked the room, Yamini! Yes, we set it up with help from the **Ladakh Homestay Policy 2023***, which provided essentials like bedding, carpets, and cutlery. Most tourists find us through trekking signboards or by asking locals. We keep things simple and that's eco-tourism for us! Hosting without harming the land, using what we grow, wasting little, and keeping our traditions alive. You must be feeling hungry, let me get you some food!

As Yamini looks around, she becomes curious to **learn more about the homestay policy**, how it supports families, strengthens village tourism, and whether similar models or policies are prevalent in other mountain regions too.

**To know more about the Ladakh Homestay Policy 2023 click [here](#).*



Julley! You must be our guest, I'm Pema, Lhamo's daughter. I just got back from a trek. I work as a tour operator in Leh, certified in eco-tourism. I lead **trekking and cultural tours across Ladakh**, especially here in Markha, and I always include our homestay so guests can experience actual local life.

Julley, Pema! That's wonderful, it must be so rewarding to show people your homeland. What kind of treks do visitors usually do in Markha?

Seeing Pema's gear and confident stride, Yamini imagines what it's like to guide trekkers through these mountains, and feels **inspired by how Ladakhi women are confidently leading tourism**, sharing their knowledge, and shaping a stronger, more empowered community.





The Markha Valley trek typically takes 6 to 8 days, crossing high passes like *Ganda La* and *Kongmaru La* and offering sweeping views of Kang Yatse. All my **tours are eco-friendly**, encouraging behaviours of zero waste, consuming local food, and staying in family-run homestays like ours. It supports livelihoods and keeps our traditions alive.

That sounds amazing, Pema! I'd love to join you for a short trek and experience this beautiful valley the way you do.

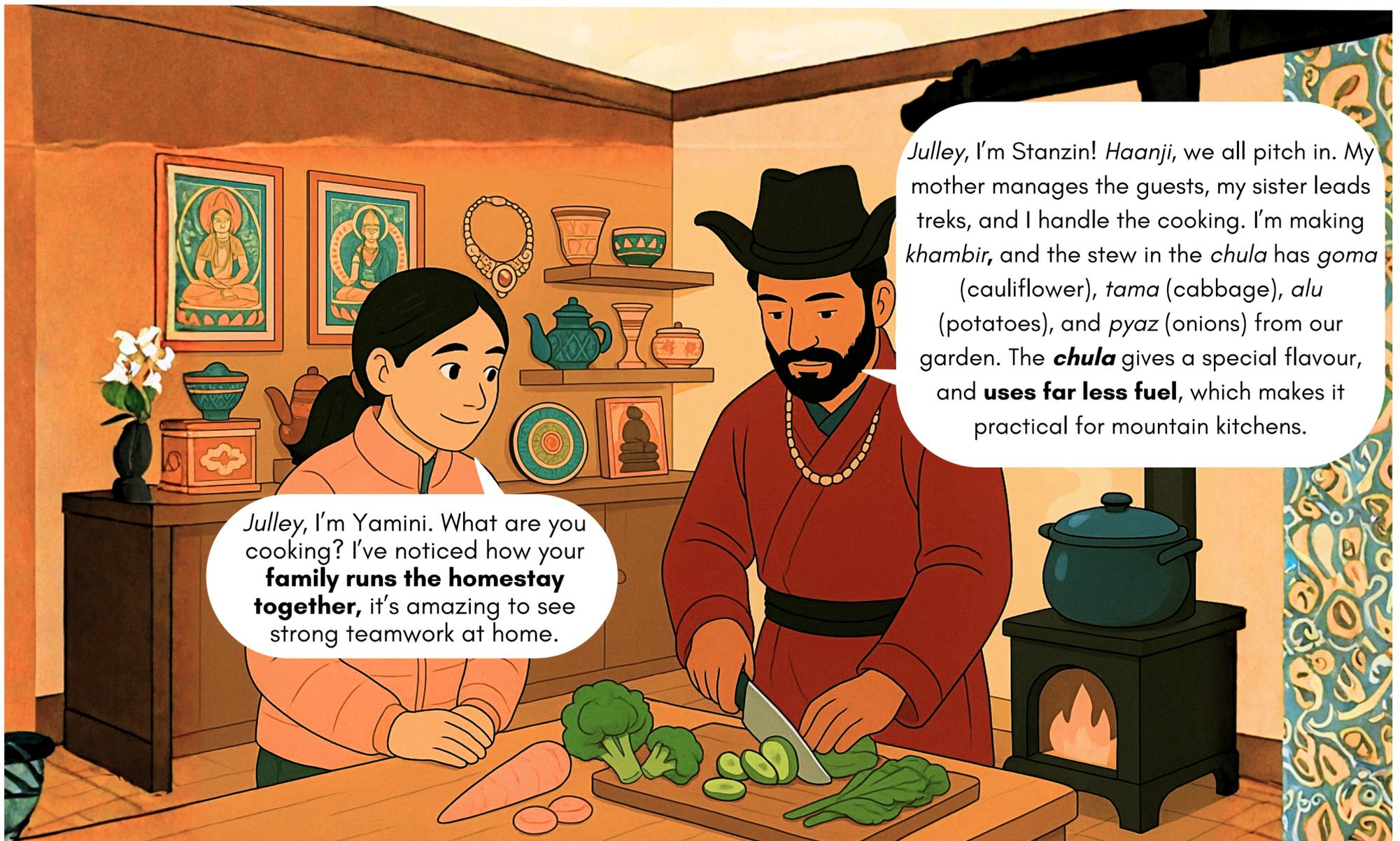
Night settles over Markha, and Yamini reflects on her day - learning about traditional homes with Dorje, tasting Ladakhi food with Lhamo, and hearing about trekking routes through Pema's stories. She plans when she might join Pema and the other trekkers for a journey into the mountains.



The Next DAY

Morning light filters through the small window as Yamini steps out of her room. The air is crisp and quiet, filled with the aroma of butter tea and the warm, earthy smell of dough. She walks down the narrow corridor toward the kitchen, where the sound of gentle chatter and clinking utensils drifts out.





Julley, I'm Yamini. What are you cooking? I've noticed how your **family runs the homestay together**, it's amazing to see strong teamwork at home.

Julley, I'm Stanzin! *Haanji*, we all pitch in. My mother manages the guests, my sister leads treks, and I handle the cooking. I'm making *khambir*, and the stew in the *chula* has *goma* (cauliflower), *tama* (cabbage), *alu* (potatoes), and *pyaz* (onions) from our garden. The **chula** gives a special flavour, and **uses far less fuel**, which makes it practical for mountain kitchens.

Yamini notices how warm the kitchen feels, not just from the stove, but from the way the space is designed. There is no wall separating the kitchen and dining area, and the **open layout lets heat spread through the home**, making it feel cozy and welcoming in the cold mountain air.

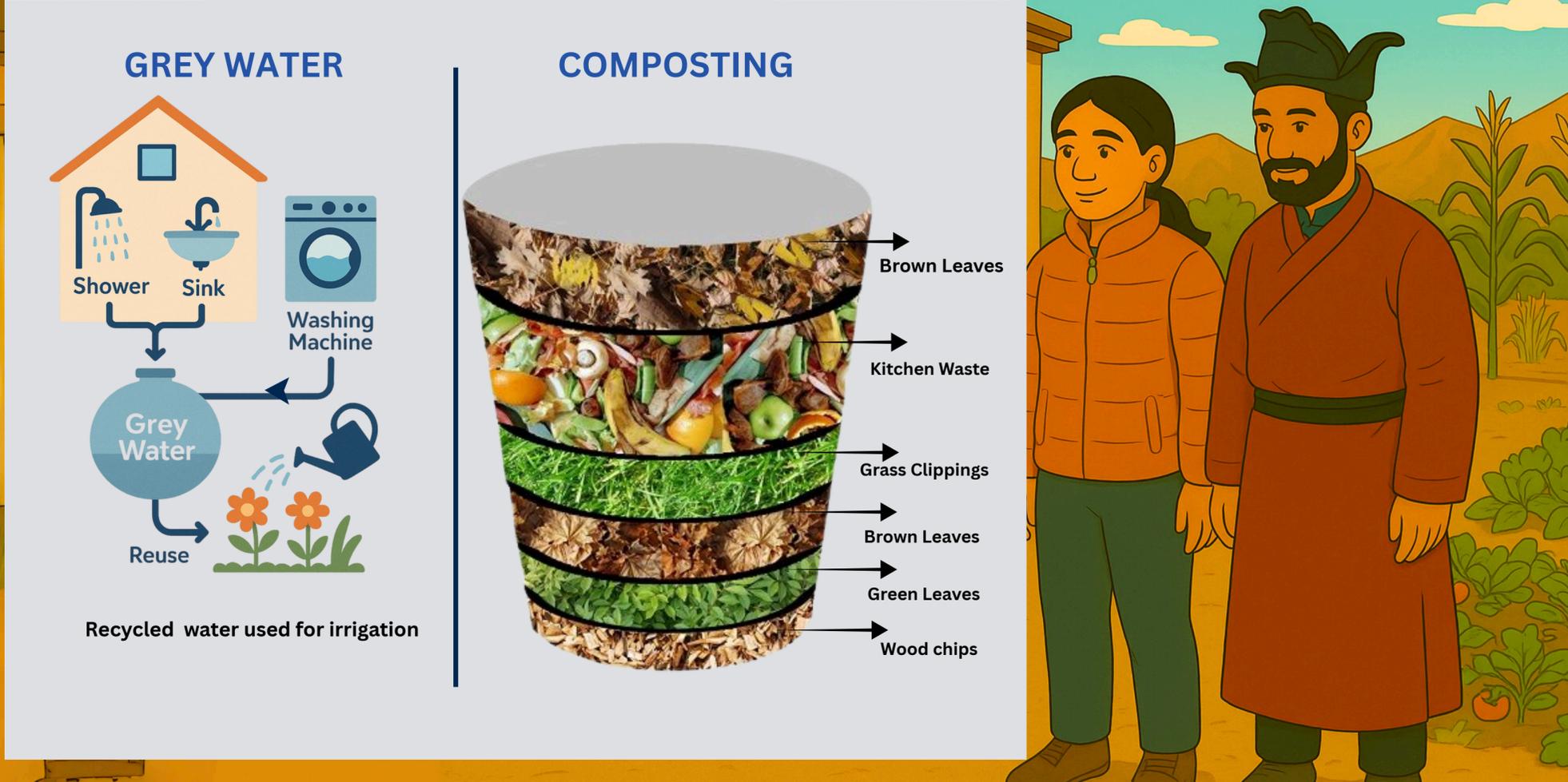


These are beautiful! Did you make them?

That's amazing, Stanzin! I would love to join the training tomorrow and I definitely want to buy one of these bracelets you made.

Achi, I work with wool, wood, and natural dyes, everything we **source locally**. I make bracelets, belts, carved wooden pieces, and sometimes even handwoven bags. In winter, when there aren't many tourists, I get more time to focus on my craft, which gives me an **alternative income**. I learned these skills from our elders, and now I also **offer basic training** to anyone interested, especially the village youth and curious travellers

Curious to know more, Yamini feels inspired to **read about the world beyond fast fashion**. She begins to appreciate the time, skill, and tradition behind handmade crafts, not just as products but as stories woven by local hands.



At the back of the homestay, Yamini notices that the **kitchen's greywater** is channelled into a narrow trench that irrigates the vegetable garden. Stanzin explains how this **soap-free water helps keep the plants healthy**, especially during dry months. Nearby, a small **compost pit** sits beside the garden, where all their kitchen scraps and peels break down into rich, fertile soil. Yamini thinks about how simple and effective these practices are, **water and waste turning back into nourishment** and how such systems help families rely less on outside resources. To her, it feels like a perfect example of how mountain households live in harmony with the land.



The village's Material Recovery Point (MRP) under Project Tsangda, is part of a **decentralised Solid Waste Management (SWM) system** supported by local governments, communities, and NGOs. The MRP **helps villages segregate dry waste and reduce what is sent to landfills**. In the distance, a truck carrying similar sacks makes its way up the mountain road, reflecting the collective effort to keep Ladakh clean.





Waste management starts at home, everyone tried to segregates their waste. Wet waste goes into the green bins and is composted locally, while dry waste into the blue bin is separated and sent to MRPs like the one Stanzin showed you. We've even banned single-use plastic! It's simple steps like these that keep Markha clean and sustainable.

I've seen these bins all over the village. It's great how everyone's involved! Now that I know about Project Tsangda, I'm curious, how does it all connect?

Segregate at Source, Sustain the Soil,
Keep Leh Clean for the Peaks to Smile!

कचरा अलग करें, ज़मीन को बचाएं, लेह को स्वच्छ रखें
ताकि पर्वत मुस्कुराएं।

Zong tsap-nas thap, sa zhim thap, Leh zang-
po yong—ri-gyal tshik-tshik zhim-zhem yong!

Yamini thinks about how organized and community-driven the system is, realizing that **simple daily actions can make a big difference**. She feels inspired by how Markha's residents combine tradition, practical approach, and environmental care to keep their village clean and sustainable.



I understand it now, Stanzin. Sustainable practices aren't just about protecting nature, they strengthen the entire community. From composting and solar energy to homestays and Project Tsangda, everything here works together. It's inspiring to see how small, **thoughtful choices can help a village thrive**. As a traveller, I want to do my part: **reduce waste, respect traditions, and support eco-smart ways of living wherever I go**.

Exactly, Yamini. When **awareness meets local action**, that's when real change begins, one mindful traveller and one resilient village at a time!

Prayer flags flutter gently in the breeze as distant bells echo through the valley. Yamini sits beside Stanzin, gazing at the mountains and the village. She thinks about how every small practice she's seen comes together to create a **resilient, self-sufficient community**, and wonders how such approaches could **inspire other mountain villages!**





A panoramic view of Markha village basks in the morning sun. Traditional Ladakhi houses gleam with solar panels on their rooftops, and color-coded waste segregation bins line the paths. A wooden signboard at the entrance reads: **“Welcome to Our Eco-Smart Village.”** Yamini realises that Markha is shaping into an eco-smart village, where community-led, environmentally conscious practices—such as **green construction, eco-tourism, and waste management**, preserve the land, support local livelihoods, and maintain cultural traditions, showing how small, consistent actions can create a significant impact.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The **Eco-Smart Village Initiative** is part of a broader effort to build climate-resilient communities in the fragile ecosystems of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR). Supported by the National Mission for Himalayan Studies (NMHS) under the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (GBPNIHE), and implemented by Development Alternatives (DA) in collaboration with Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG), the project is developing 2 model eco-smart villages in Alchi and Markha in Leh district, Ladakh. Through eco-tourism, decentralized waste management, and green construction practices, the initiative empowers local communities to conserve resources, enhance resilience, and strengthen livelihoods. These models aim to inspire replication across the IHR, showcasing how small Himalayan villages can lead the way in sustainable mountain development.

CREDITS:

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PLEASE NOTE:

We acknowledge that English is not the primary language spoken by communities in Ladakh. This comic strip has been developed in English to ensure wider accessibility and understanding among a diverse audience. For the purpose of storytelling and illustration, the comic strip assumes Markha as an eco-smart village which integrates ecotourism, waste management, and green construction practices. Many of these practices already exist in the village, however, they are presented here collectively under the framework of an ‘eco-smart village’ to showcase an integrated and aspirational model for sustainable development.



