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MASTERS' UNION × TIEEDI

Post-Read

PGP Bharat C2 Immersions | TIEEDI, Darjeeling

Why This Immersion Matters

Most of what we throw away disappears from view the moment it leaves our hands, which is exactly why the systems that deal with it are so easy to ignore. The TIEEDI immersion turned that blind spot into the subject of a full day: a walk through restored land, hands-on demonstrations in paper upcycling and waste segregation, a keynote on regenerative living, a natural building workshop, and a closing discussion on what it takes to turn all of this into a viable enterprise. Few immersions ask students to question not just how a business runs, but what a business should measure success against in the first place.

About TIEEDI

TIEEDI, short for “Take it easy, easy does it”, was founded in 2016 by Mr. Utsow Pradhan at 8 Mile, near Kurseong in the Darjeeling hills. Mr. Pradhan left a corporate career as a product head at an e-learning company, trained in permaculture design, and returned to the hills he grew up in to lead climate action through zero waste, responsible tourism, and experiential environmental education. TIEEDI is registered as a private company rather than an NGO, a deliberate choice aimed at long-term sustainability and local livelihoods. Today it runs waste management programmes with surrounding communities, eco-stays built from natural materials, and workshops in permaculture and natural building, all on land that was once used as a dumping ground.

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Restoring a Dumping Ground: The Forest Tour

The day began with a walk through the TIEEDI campus, where much of the existing landscape has been left undisturbed and the built spaces have been shaped around it rather than cleared for it. Learning that this land was once a waste dumping site changed how everything on the walk read: degraded land is usually written off as having little value, yet here it now supports a forest, a working enterprise, and a place of learning. The walk gave every later session a concrete reference point, a physical example of what restoration looks like when it is designed, built, and lived in rather than only discussed.

From Waste to Paper: The Upcycling Demonstration

The paper upcycling demonstration traced the full journey of discarded paper into a usable sheet: sorting, soaking, pulping, forming sheets, pressing out water, drying, and smoothing. Seeing the machines and the textures at each stage made a familiar material feel unfamiliar again, and showed how much water, labour, and time sit inside something as ordinary as a sheet of paper. Mohan daju's work in cutting, binding, and designing the finished products added a further layer: upcycling differs from simple recycling precisely because design and craft lift the output to equal or greater value than the original material, and that is where the commercial case is made.

Green Mile: Segregation and Community Composting

The Green Mile session showed what happens after waste leaves our hands. Separating waste into many categories made it clear why a single "dry waste" bin is only the starting point, since mixed waste becomes harder, costlier, and sometimes impossible to recover. The team works with households, schools, and villages to make segregation a habit, including recognising those who do it well, a reminder that incentives and recognition can shift behaviour as effectively as rules. The composting explanation connected food waste to a useful end product, and the team's candour

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about materials that still have no reliable recycling route made the discussion more credible, and pointed to where innovation is still needed.

Rethinking Growth: Mr. Utsow Pradhan on Permaculture and Regenerative Living

Mr. Utsow Pradhan's keynote challenged how students understand growth, wealth, and success, proposing that clean air, fresh water, rich soil, and biodiversity be counted alongside financial growth. The golden goose story made his concern about exhausting the resources we depend on easy to grasp: natural resources behave like capital, and drawing down the principal faster than it can regenerate shrinks every future return. The session left room for questions and disagreement on consumption, technology, and scale, and his tripod model, linking government policy, community action, and partnerships, gave a practical frame for turning a large vision into execution. Students did not need to agree with every argument to leave with sharper questions about the businesses they want to build.

Hands in the Mud: Soil Typing and Natural Building with Mr. Utsow Pradhan and Surendra ji

This was the most hands-on part of the day. Students examined a bamboo framework, applied the mud mixture themselves, and in the process challenged the common perception of a mud house as a weak kachcha ghar. Surendra ji explained the ingredients and how the mixture changes with the local soil, whose balance of clay, silt, and sand determines how it binds, shrinks, and holds up over time. The principle of giving a building "good boots and a good hat", a strong base that keeps moisture out and a roof that shields the walls from rain, made the design logic memorable, while questions on rain, maintenance, durability, and labour made clear that natural building depends on careful design and skilled execution, not on the material alone.

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Living in It: The Natural Homes Walkthrough

Visiting the finished spaces connected the workshop to what a natural home actually looks and feels like. The sculpted phoenix, earth colours, linseed oil finishes, and creative use of bamboo showed the range of what these materials can do, and the discussion of Tadelakt introduced how a traditional lime finish can handle spaces exposed to water. Students asked the everyday questions a real buyer would ask, about cooling, bathrooms, electricity, maintenance, and comfort, which is a useful reminder that unfamiliar products are adopted through lived experience rather than brochures. A conversation on digital detox and slowing down added a personal dimension to an otherwise practical visit.

From Idea to Enterprise: Scaling Natural Building

The closing discussion brought a business lens to everything the day had shown. Students explored who would choose natural buildings and why, how to address doubts, how to build skilled teams, and how to make the work financially sustainable, with workshops, volunteer programmes, stays, and construction projects discussed as distinct revenue streams. Mr. Pradhan was open about TIEEDI's current limits, its present focus on waste management, and its need for partnerships and organisational support. The takeaway was clear: in a craft-based enterprise the binding constraint is often skilled people rather than demand or capital, so scaling begins with understanding the customers who already value the offering and building the capacity to serve them well.

What Students Take Away

Across the forest walk and six sessions, a consistent thread ran through the day: restoration is not an abstract ideal but a set of practical choices about land, materials, habits, and business models. The paper workshop, the Green Mile, the mud walls, and the scaling discussion were not separate stories, they were the same story told from different vantage points, each showing that value depends on skill, that impact depends on behaviour change, and that credibility comes from being

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honest about limits. The day closed on the question every student will carry into their own ventures: what should success be measured against?

Questions Worth Sitting With

- Mr. Pradhan argued that clean air, water, soil, and biodiversity should sit alongside financial growth. If you applied that to a business you hope to build, what would you measure, and how would it change your decisions?
- Natural building depends heavily on skilled labour and local soil. What would it actually take to scale such an enterprise without losing the quality that makes it credible?
- TIEEDI was candid about materials it still cannot recycle and about its own organisational limits. When does acknowledging gaps strengthen a venture's credibility, and when might it weaken it?
- Which leg of the tripod model, policy, community action, or partnerships, would matter most for an idea you care about, and why?

Glossary

Permaculture	A design approach for land, food systems, and living spaces that imitates patterns found in natural ecosystems, aiming to be self-sustaining over the long term.
Regenerative living	A way of living and working that actively restores natural resources such as soil, water, and biodiversity, going beyond simply reducing harm.
Upcycling	Turning waste or discarded material into a new product of equal or higher value than the original, as distinct from recycling, which often produces lower-value output.

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Pulp	A soft, wet mixture of fibres created by soaking and breaking down paper, used to form new sheets.
Waste segregation	Separating waste at the source into categories such as wet, dry, recyclable, and hazardous, so each can be handled appropriately.
Composting	The natural breakdown of organic waste by microorganisms into nutrient-rich material that improves soil.
Natural capital	The stock of natural resources, such as air, water, soil, and forests, that provides value to people and the economy.
Tripod model	The framework shared by Mr. Utsav Pradhan linking government policy, community action, and partnerships as three supports needed for lasting change.
Natural building	Construction using locally available, minimally processed materials such as earth, bamboo, stone, and lime.
Soil typing	Assessing the composition of soil, its share of clay, silt, and sand, to judge how suitable it is for building.
Kachcha ghar	A Hindi term for a house made of mud or other natural materials, often wrongly perceived as weak or temporary.
“Good boots and a good hat”	A natural building principle: a raised, moisture-resistant foundation and a protective roof overhang keep earthen walls dry and durable.
Tadelakt	A traditional lime plaster, polished and sealed to make it water-resistant, used in bathrooms and other wet areas.
Embodied energy	The total energy used to extract, process, transport, and build with a material; natural materials usually carry low embodied energy.
Regenerative enterprise	A business whose operations restore social and environmental systems while remaining financially viable.