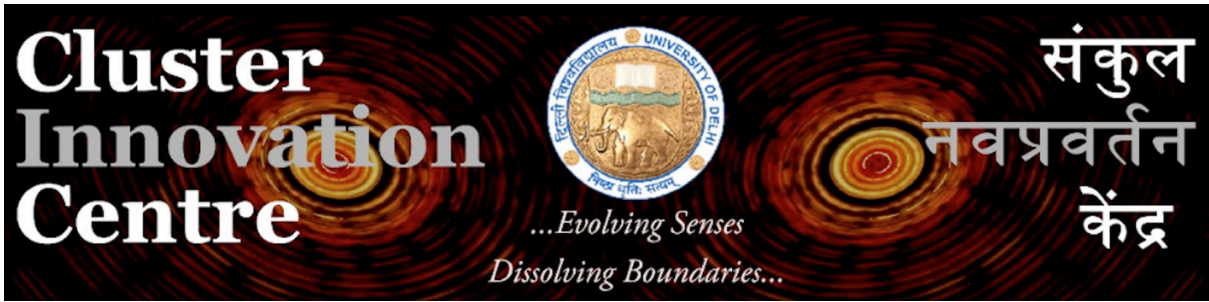




College on Wheels: Personal Report

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November 2023-December 2023

3am is not usually a time I would wake up at, especially not after having slept at 1am, but the excitement and anticipation of the next 2 weeks kept me up all night long; this trip was going to be an experience of a lifetime, something that almost no other college student, much less a fresher, would get to experience. College on Wheels, hosted by J&K govt. is a fully sponsored trip across several states of India, covering places like Jammu, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Goa, Bangalore and Wardha.



Day 1: Delhi - The Nation Capital



On our first day, we were given the wonderful opportunity of visiting both the old as well as the new Parliament, along with a visit to Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Official residence located in New Delhi. We were asked to leave all electronic items in the bus, so the only unfortunate part about our enriching visit to these places was the lack of pictures. The highlight of our visit to the Parliament was the brief interaction with Sh. Utpal Kumar Singh, Secretary General, Lok Sabha & Lok Sabha Secretariat at Parliament House. In our visit to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, we were briefly explained the significance of the various rooms and halls such as the Ashoka Hall, Darbar hall and ballroom. We also got to see the beautiful Mughal garden, and it being my first time, I was awestruck by the sheer beauty of it. Our visit to Delhi ended with our train being flagged off by Professor Dinesh Singh and Professor Umesh Rai, along with a cheerful Dhol baaje session where we got to dance and bond not just with our friends, but also our mentors and students from Jammu and Kashmir.

Day 2&3: Gujarat - The city of Khakhra, Fafda and Dhokla

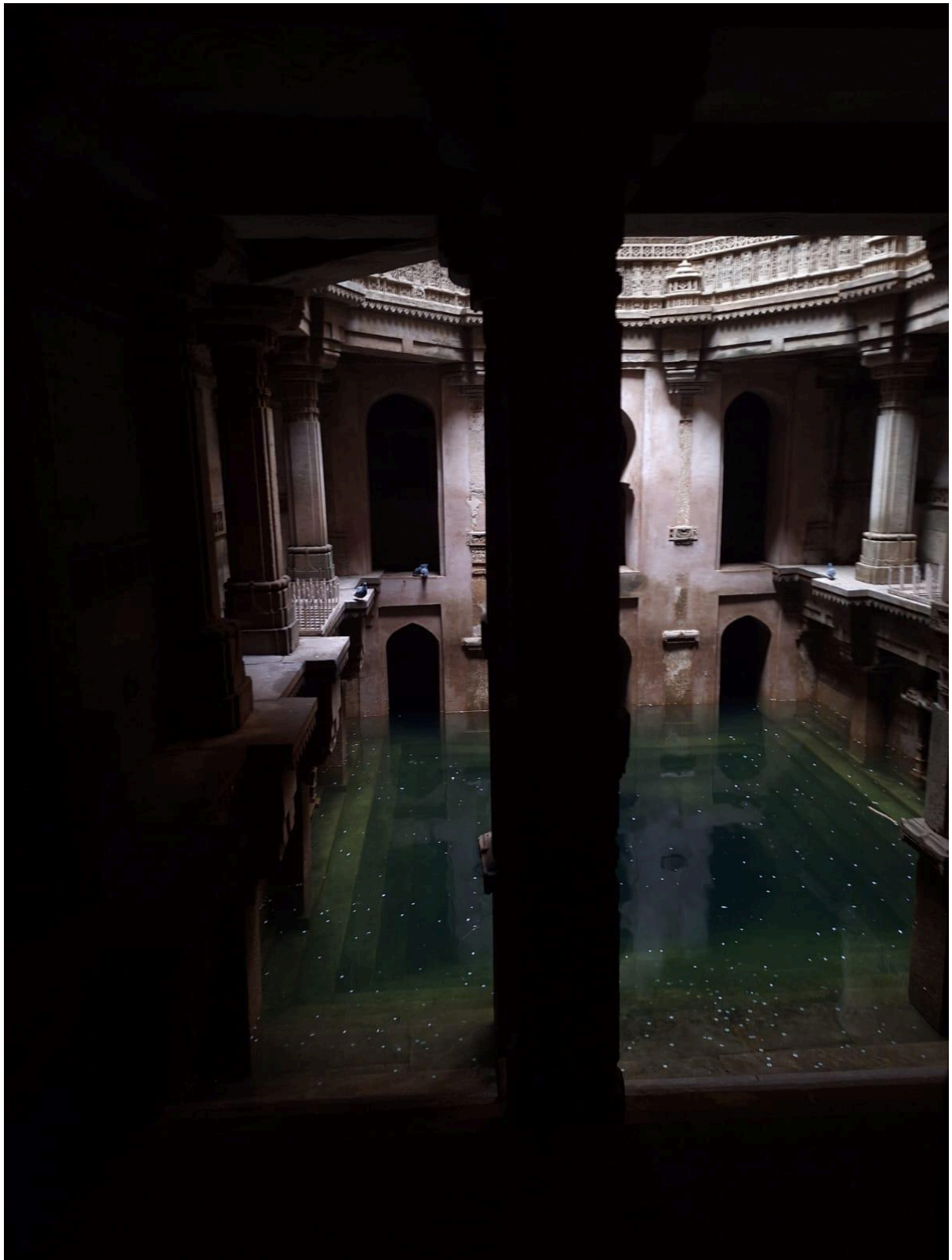


Our second day started off with a hearty breakfast and the fresh feeling that is usually accompanied after a good night's sleep. Since our train ran late by a couple of hours, our sightseeing and visit to the local market was cut short. Instead, after freshening up at the hotel in the evening, we were taken to Kankariya Lake, the second largest lake in Gujarat. The view at night was absolutely marvellous, what with the amusement park lighting up the lake in beautiful colours. We spent our evening at the fair going on various rides, all of us screaming at the top of our lungs; dancing to the beats like we were possessed, and most importantly, capturing these wonderful moments in the form of photographs to look back on. We sat by the lake and reveled in the tranquillity, all of us filled to the brim with joy and excitement. Amidst all this, we also had a group discussion regarding the proceedings of our project. Our night finally ended with a fulfilling dinner and a short trip back to the hotel, where the night's excitement finally caught up to us and we all crashed as soon as we hit the bed.



Sabarmati; a city I had only heard stories of, never having had the chance to visit it. I was grateful for the opportunity provided to us and hoped to put it to good use. We woke up early on the third day to get ready to go to Sabarmati Ashram. We ate breakfast and checked out at around 7:30 am and boarded our respective buses for a long drive to Sabarmati Ashram. At the Ashram, we were surrounded by years of Indian history, everything from Gandhi Ji's birth, up until his death, we were surrounded by enough information to last us a lifetime. We got to visit Gandhi Ji's humble abode and learn about the frugal way he lived his life. A lot of us also got to try our hand at the Charkha, a spinning wheel that Gandhi Ji used to make clothes out of Khadi.

After visiting Sabarmati Ashram, we were taken to Adalaj ni vav, also known as Rudabai stepwell. The stepwell was built by Mahmud Begada in 1411, to commemorate Queen Rudabai, wife of Veersinh, the Vaghela chieftain. It served both a utilitarian and spiritual purpose for the people around. A number of people from villages around once filled water from this stepwell. It was a *beautiful* structure and I felt lucky enough to get a chance to visit something as magical looking as what was supposed to be an ordinary stepwell. After clicking pictures with everyone, we were ushered back into our buses and taken to the station to board the train to our next destination: Mumbai.



Day 4&5: Mumbai - The city of Dreams



Once again, we were woken up early in the morning to the sound of the train *bhaiyyas* serving us *chai* and biscuit and telling us to get ready before we reach Mumbai. We were a bit disappointed because we thought we would be taken to the hotel first to check in and freshen up, but we were told to get ready in the train itself, which felt a little dirty especially after

having travelled for hours upon hours. However, we didn't let this little detail get to us and we all got ready with immense gusto, waiting impatiently to reach Mumbai.



Our train was delayed by a couple hours, so we ended up reaching Mumbai later than planned. We boarded the bus and were taken to a naval dockyard, where we visited war ships and submarines. We got to explore the interior of the submarine Sinduratna and I was so

interested in getting to know the intricacies of the mechanism of the submarine that I didn't realise when my group mates had left, leaving me only with my mentors and the naval officers! I learned a *lot* about submarines and also observed that the uniform of the submarine officers had their blood groups patched to their shirt pocket for ease of identification in case of emergencies. We visited INS Chennai, INS Deepak and INS Visakhapatnam. We were then given time to admire the sun setting in front of the Gateway of India and the glorious Taj hotel. We were asked to board the bus where we were provided lunch at about 5pm. We didn't really complain much as we were famished after a whole day of activity and excitement.

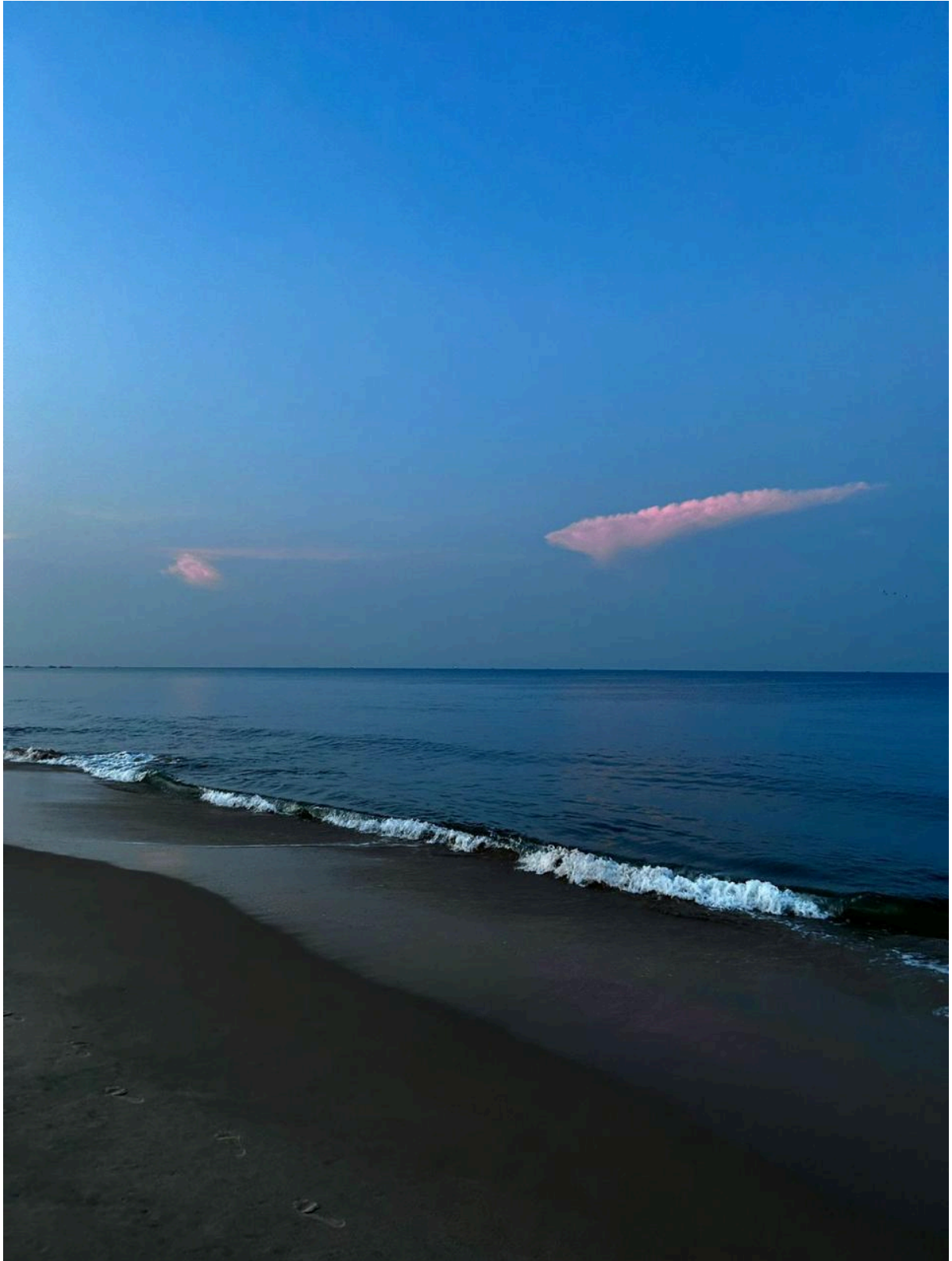
Then, we were taken to Colaba market, where we were given the freedom to roam around and do whatever we wanted to, provided we reboard the bus at the given time. My friends and I roamed the streets of Colaba market and drank overpriced cold coffee that was not worth the taste, but definitely worth the memories. We took many, many pictures to boast as well as to retain as memories of a fun filled evening. However, little did we know that our evening was going to end as one of the worst nights on the entire trip.

We left Colaba market at about 9pm, and travelled for hours from one end of the city to another, just for dinner. The hotel where our dinner had been arranged was in the middle of some rocky jungle, and reaching the location took us hours until we finally reached at 11:30pm. Upon reaching there we discovered that there was some issue with the food arrangement, so most of us sat back in our buses and were driven to our respective hotels. We reached our hotel at 2am and since my friends and I were absolutely starving, after much difficulty we ordered food for ourselves and had dinner at 3:30am. We obviously couldn't go to sleep but had to force ourselves to, after we received a message from our mentors instructing us to get ready by 8am to go to IIT Bombay.

However, in the morning we were informed that our visit to IIT Bombay had been cancelled as many students and mentors were still fatigued and tired from the mishaps of the previous day and could not get ready on time. We were all bummed out, and to try and make up for it, one of our mentors, Professor Shobha Baghai, suggested we go shopping and then to Powli Lake to distract ourselves. As it was Shobha ma'am's last day with us on the trip, she wanted to spend some time bonding with all of us, and what better way to do it than with a walk around a beautiful lake! After spending some quality time drinking *jaljeera* and spending time with each other, we were taken to the railway station to cover an overnight journey we had in front of us, to our next and most awaited destination: Goa.



Day 6&7: Goa - City of the Seas



Our most awaited destination was Goa (although for me it was a close second to Bangalore), which was understandable as almost all of us were excited for one thing and one thing only, the beach! We followed the same routine of getting dressed in the train before boarding the bus. This time instead of travelling within the city, we were taken to Karwar naval shipyard

which is in Karnataka, so we had to travel across the western Ghats for about 4 hours before we reached there. We visited INS Makkar and INS Suvarna this time, two other warships. After that, we were given the privilege of having our lunch at the private navy beach. We were almost disappointed for a moment when we thought we wouldn't be allowed to enter the water, however we were later told that we could play around in the water for a couple of hours and our happiness knew no bounds. We played in the water like little kids, took what seemed like a hundred pictures and basically had the best time of our lives. Sooner than our liking, we were told to board the buses to be taken to our resort, and though our afternoon at the beach was cut short, we knew that this day would be engraved in our hearts like no other.

We were so exhausted that night that as soon as our heads hit the pillow, we were out like a light. My friend later told me that she had entered our room early the next morning to shake us awake to visit the beach in the morning but we were in such a deep slumber that we barely even stirred! Oh how disappointed I was when I heard that piece of news! I so desperately wanted to visit the beach early in the morning but my travel fatigued brain refused to wake up. However I was at least happy that I finally made up for lost sleep and didn't have to roam around looking like a sleep deprived zombie. We were once again allowed time to roam around, but not for long, as the journey from the resort to the train station was a long one, and we had to reach our next and *my* most awaited destination: Bangalore.



Day 8&9: Bangalore - the Silicon Valley



Bangalore. My home city. The one place I love more than any other in the world. My connection with Bangalore ran deeper than someone who simply lived here for a couple of years. Bangalore is my birth city, the one true place I call home, and getting to visit it after six months away felt like a blessing more than anything else. All my friends were aware of how

excited I was to visit Bangalore, and they were all so happy for me. We reached the station in the morning and I was woken up to the wonderful sound of the railway peddlers selling *idli vada* and I knew that I was home. Just the *smell* of the air felt familiar to me and I knew that the day was going to be a good day. Our first stop was the prestigious Indian Institution of Science, where we had the privilege of attending a chemistry lecture by one of the many wonderful faculty members of this institution. Though I was from a Humanities background, I couldn't deny the beauty of science when we were shown various experiments, some involving luminescence, although I can say with much shame that the lab visits were not entirely fruitful for some of us. After that, we were taken to our hotel, where we celebrated Saleem Sir, our mentor's birthday. Since we had no other place scheduled to go at night, I called my friend to come visit me since he lived pretty close by where our hotel was located. Meeting my friend after nearly half a year made me so happy and I was once again thankful for the opportunity that I was given. After saying my goodbye, I went back to the hotel and saw that my friends had made plans to visit the popular church street and were waiting for me to come back. Twelve of us piled into 2 autos and started our breakneck journey through Bangalore's infamous horrible roads and traffic to church street. There, we roamed around and hopped from cafe to cafe and had the best bonding time with people I never knew I could get so close to. I knew that not a day would go by where I wouldn't think of the time I got to spend with my girls and everything that I learned in the 14 days that I was gone from home.



Day 9&10: In the train

We were all half dreading the 9th day because who wants to spend a whole day on the train! However, we were also super excited to spend a whole day on the train with our friends where we'd have to work on our project reports and presentations and also spend quality bonding time with each other. We gathered in our coaches with our respective groups and began working on our project and analysing the accumulated data that we collected through the surveys. While one half of the team spent time analysing the survey data, the other half went around different coaches to interview girls from Jammu and Kashmir to get their valuable insight. I interviewed about 8 people, 4 from Jammu and 4 for Kashmir and I have to say, whatever I knew about Jammu and Kashmir from movies and TV shows, they were all simply a part of a huge aspect of what makes up their culture. My topic was cultural exchange via multi-destination travelling, so learning about cultures was an important part of my project. This was the first time out for many of the girls and so it was interesting to get perspectives of people who had never been out of Kashmir and understand how much they learned over the course of 9 days and how it differed from their own cultures. Overall I think this trip also helped broaden my understanding about so many aspects in the Islamic religion, something that never would've happened had it not been for the trip. Towards dinnertime, we wrapped up our projects to freshen up and have fun with our friends, making videos and playing *antakshari* with our professor. We had a late dinner and went to sleep, eagerly awaiting our next stop, Wardha.



Day 10: Wardha - The Last City



We were woken up at 4am when we reached Nagpur, which at the time we found so annoying because we all wanted to sleep after the previous night's tiring activities. However, we had no choice, and were piled into the bus and taken to our respective hotels where we were asked to get ready by 7am. My friends and I crammed in the same bed and went to sleep till 7, and then woke up to get ready and eat breakfast. After that we were again told to sit in the bus and were driven for 3-4 hours before we reached our last stop, Sevagram Ashram at Wardha. In the Ashram we got to learn about the Salt march, and we also visited the khadi shop in the

ashram. The ashram, to our surprise, was a place where people resided, where disciples came to study and their children studied in a montessori school in the ashram itself. We stayed there till lunch, and though we were provided lunch as usual, we opted out of it and chose to have lunch at a nearby *dhaba* which I think was the best decision my friend and I made the entire trip. We got to try unknown traditional dishes like *Jhunka*, which is a traditional Marathi dish made of gram flour. We had that with *kadhi* and *bajre ki roti* served with a side of *khatti meethi* chutney. and though I don't usually eat *bajre ki roti*, I wolfed it all down in one go. We also had *chaas*, Marathi special *bhel puri* and *Utthapam* and I think so far in terms of food, this was the best I had. We stuffed our stomachs until we couldn't have anything else, but we somehow still found the space to have a kulfi! All in all I think our Sevagram Ashram visit was also a hit!





Day 11&12: Last days on the train

And with this, our trip came to an end. I was very saddened and I could already feel the nostalgia seep in as we sat in the train completing our projects and presentations. For the most part I was busy making the ppt and our speech, but my heart was barely in it; I could already feel myself reminiscing about these memories for as long as I could. The bond I created with these girls, the new friends I made from Jammu and Kashmir; I was so happy to be a part of such an educational yet fun trip. Our train soon reached Delhi, and we exchanged tearful farewells with our friends from Jammu and Kashmir and promised to stay in touch with them and meet if we were ever in each other's cities. Thank you to everyone involved in making this trip possible, the sponsors, my mentors and my friends who I made unbreakable bonds with in these 12 days. I will hold these memories close to my heart for years to come.

