





CHANGE is no Accident , it takes HARD
WORK, DEDICATION, PRESERVANCE, LEARNING,
STUDYING and Most of all . A LOVE
FOR WHAT YOU DO



foreward

It gives me immense pleasure to introduce this edition of the Fellows Magazine, dedicated to the remarkable journey of the Gandhi Fellowship program in Jammu and Kashmir. The Piramal Foundation's Gandhi Fellowship program has been a beacon of hope and change, transforming the educational landscape in one of India's most picturesque yet challenging regions.

In this issue, we celebrate the relentless spirit of our fellows who have committed themselves to the cause of holistic education and community development. Their stories of perseverance, innovation, and impact serve as a testament to the transformative power of dedicated mentorship and grassroots leadership. As you delve into these narratives, you will witness the profound influence of the fellowship on both the personal and professional growth of our fellows and the communities they serve - especially in the domain of education.

Education is about promoting the holistic growth of students and capacitating them to navigate challenges with empathy, resilience, and moral integrity. Such an approach ensures that learners are not only knowledgeable but also compassionate and ethically grounded, prepared to lead and inspire in an ever-evolving global landscape. Often a pursuit to achieve academic excellence makes us overlook the significance of fostering human elements within our educational institutions.

Addressing these concerns, the Gandhi Fellowship program in Jammu and Kashmir is more than an educational initiative; it is a movement towards nurturing compassionate, resilient, and ethical leaders. These leaders are not only equipped with the knowledge to tackle complex problems but also embody the values of empathy and integrity. Through their efforts, we are witnessing the creation of a brighter, more inclusive future for education in the region.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, stakeholders, and inspiring fellows for their unwavering dedication and hard work. Together, we are making significant strides towards a more equitable and sustainable world.



Zeeshan Hassan
Senior Program Director
Piramal School of Leadership

Editor's Note

"Be the change you want to see in the world"- Mahatma Gandhi-

A little bit of 'sewa bhav', a pinch of 'Nirman', a little drop of 'Pragati' and finally with the essence of 'Leadership' creates the amalgam of 'Nation builders', where you can be the change you want to see in the world. so all these ingredients comes under the umbrella of Gandhi Fellowship, which paves the way for the growth of self & and the others.

Alim Chui Gaash- 'Education is Light' a famous proverb from kashmir which inculcate the essence of our work in J&K. To be the torch bearer of the change in Education to ensure a bright FUTURE.

so '*Alim Chui Gaash*' contains the wonderful khani of the dedicated team of Jammu & Kashmir. '*Alim Chui Gaash*' tells the experiences of our 'Community Immersion', 'Vipassana', and field visits. 'Our little journey'.

Team J & K



CONTENT

01 ARTICLES

Cultivating Hope and Creativity

02 CHANGE STORIES

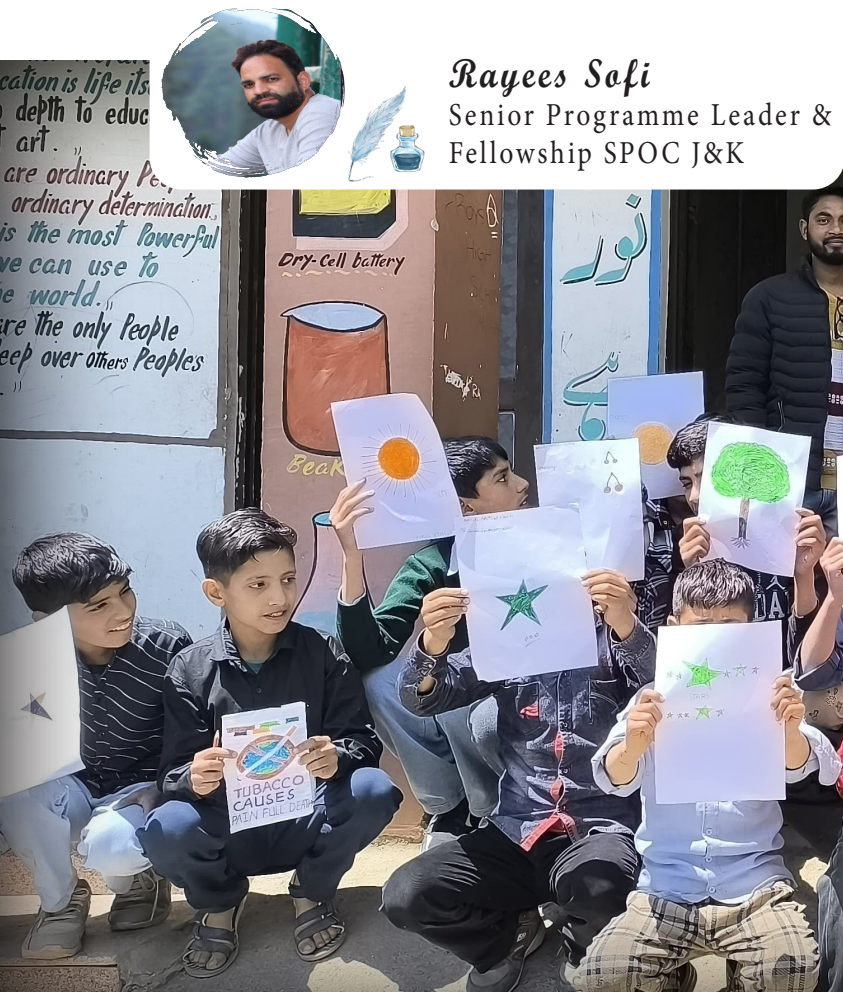
- From Village to Vision.
- Echoes of silence
- My community immersion journey
- From Resistance To Resonance
- The Silent Journey of discovering Myself
- Embracing Draklarn's Spirit
- My Journey Towards Self Change
- The Retreat....
- In The Shore of Dal Lake

03 POEMS

- Draklarn's Embrace
- थाम लिया है हाथ तो साथ
- “A tale of...?”
- Resilience in the valley....
- An ode to all

04 PICTURES

Our Journey



Rayees Sofi
Senior Programme Leader &
Fellowship SPOC J&K



In the picturesque valley of Kashmir, where natural beauty often starkly contrasts the region's complex realities, a transformative educational approach is taking root. Guided by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introducing aesthetic literacy in Kashmir's schools represents a crucial step towards holistic development and healing through art. Aesthetic literacy transcends traditional art education. It's about nurturing a profound sensitivity to the world, fostering emotional intelligence, and equipping children with diverse modes of expression. In a region like Kashmir, where young minds have often grappled with uncertainty, this approach offers a beacon of hope and a path to resilience. The NEP 2020 recognizes the transformative power of art-integrated learning, stating, "Art-integration is a cross-curricular pedagogical

“Cultivating Hope and Creativity: The Need for Aesthetic Literacy in Kashmir's Classrooms”

approach that utilizes various aspects and forms of art and culture as the basis for learning of concepts across subjects.” This philosophy is particularly relevant in Kashmir, where art can serve as a bridge between academic learning and the region’s rich cultural heritage. The need for aesthetic literacy in Kashmir is multifaceted. Firstly, it provides a crucial outlet for emotional expression and processing of experiences, which is vital in a region that has faced prolonged conflict. Secondly, it offers a means to preserve and celebrate Kashmir’s unique cultural identity through various art forms. Lastly, it aligns with the broader educational goal of nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped with 21st-century skills. The benefits of aesthetic literacy extend far beyond artistic skills. Research indicates that arts integration can improve academic achievement, increase test scores, and promote better attendance. More importantly, it nurtures crucial life skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and emotional resilience – all vital for the youth of Kashmir as they

navigate their unique challenges and opportunities.

The implementation of aesthetic literacy aligns perfectly with the NEP 2020’s vision of holistic development. The policy advocates for “no hard separation among ‘curricular’, ‘extracurricular’, or ‘co-curricular’, among ‘arts’, ‘humanities’, and ‘sciences’.”

This integrated approach is precisely what Kashmir’s students need – an education that nourishes both mind and soul.

Looking to the future, the potential of aesthetic literacy in Kashmir is immense. It promises to equip students with the tools to express themselves, understand others, and contribute positively to their communities. Moreover, it opens doors to potential career paths in creative industries, aligning with the NEP’s emphasis on vocational skills and future readiness.

The vision for aesthetic literacy in Kashmir encompasses several key aspects:

1. Emotional healing and resilience: By providing creative outlets for expression, aesthetic literacy can help students process complex

emotions and experiences.

2. Cultural preservation and celebration: Integrating local art forms and cultural practices into the curriculum can strengthen students’ connection to their heritage.
3. Academic enhancement: Art-integrated learning can improve engagement and understanding across various subjects.
4. Skill development: Aesthetic literacy nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills essential for the 21st-century workforce.
5. Community building: Collaborative art projects

can foster a sense of unity and shared purpose among students.

The journey of implementing aesthetic literacy in Kashmir is just beginning. It requires sustained effort, resources, and commitment from educators, policymakers, and the community. But the potential rewards are invaluable – a generation of young Kashmiris who are not only academically proficient but also emotionally intelligent, culturally rooted, and creatively empowered.

As Kashmir charts its educational future, aesthetic literacy can be a powerful tool for transformation. It offers a way to honor the past,



Piramal foundation visit at Boys High School Manigah Hyhama, Kupwara

engage with the present, and build a more hopeful future. By embracing this approach, Kashmir's education system can nurture not just scholars, but artists, thinkers, and innovators who will shape the region's tomorrow.

In essence, aesthetic literacy is more than an educational initiative; it's an investment in the hearts and minds of Kashmir's youth. It's a commitment to nurturing a generation that can express, create, and innovate – skills that will be crucial as they work towards building a peaceful and prosperous Kashmir.

Piramal Foundation has been at the forefront of bringing aesthetic literacy to Kashmir's classrooms. Recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities in the region, PFEL has initiated a comprehensive three-year program aimed at integrating art and aesthetics into the educational fabric of Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2023, PF launched an ambitious project to develop 21st-century skills and art-based competencies through aesthetic literacy. The project began with a three-day workshop for 60

teachers, focusing on gender awareness and observation skills. This initiative is part of a broader vision to create a team of 112 master trainers who will, in turn, train 11,200 teachers over three years, ensuring a wide-reaching impact across the region.

The foundation's approach aligns perfectly with the NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic education. By establishing art cells, developing curriculum, and setting up art labs in schools, PF is creating an ecosystem where aesthetic literacy can thrive. Their work goes beyond just teaching art; it's about using art as a medium for emotional expression, cultural connection, and academic enhancement.

Consider the story of Amir, a 14-year-old student from Srinagar. Like many of his peers, Amir struggled to articulate his feelings about the uncertainties that sometimes cloud daily life in Kashmir. Through the aesthetic literacy program introduced in his school, Amir discovered a passion for poetry. "Writing helps me make sense of the world," he shares. "It's like I've found my voice."

Similarly, Nisa, a teacher,

experienced a transformation in her teaching approach after attending the Aesthetic Literacy workshop. "I used to think art was just for art class," she says. "Now, I use artistic methods to teach everything from science to social studies. The students are more engaged, and I see them expressing ideas they struggled with before."

These personal stories highlight the tangible impact of aesthetic literacy. They show how this approach is not just an educational initiative but a catalyst for personal growth and community healing.

Dr. Samina Hussain, an education expert based in Srinagar, emphasizes the importance of this approach. "In a region that has seen its share of difficulties, aesthetic literacy offers our children a way to process their experiences, dream big, and connect with their cultural roots. It's not just about creating art; it's about creating understanding."

The implementation of aesthetic literacy in Kashmir has been significantly bolstered by the involvement of Gandhi Fellows, young leaders who are part of a two-year social leadership



In essence, aesthetic literacy is more than an educational initiative; it's an investment in the hearts and minds of Kashmir's youth. It's a commitment to nurturing a generation that can express, create, and innovate – skills that will be crucial as they work towards building a peaceful and prosperous Kashmir.

program. These Fellows, driven by a passion for social change, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between policy and practice on the ground.

As part of their fellowship curriculum, which emphasizes experiential learning and community engagement, Gandhi Fellows are deeply involved in the aesthetic literacy initiative. They work alongside teachers and school administrators, helping to introduce and integrate art-based learning methods into daily



Piramal foundation visit at Boys Middle School Keller, Shopian

classroom activities.

The Fellows' work extends beyond the classroom. They engage with local communities, organizing art exhibitions and cultural events that showcase students' work and help build community support for the initiative. This aligns with the fellowship's emphasis on community leadership and stakeholder engagement.

The fellowship's focus on reflective practices has helped the fellows navigate the complexities of introducing new concepts in a sensitive environment. The involvement of Gandhi Fellows brings a fresh perspective and energy to the aesthetic literacy program. Their training in innovative problem-solving

and adaptive leadership, core components of the Gandhi Fellowship curriculum, enables them to address challenges creatively and effectively.

Moreover, the Fellows' journey mirrors the very principles of aesthetic literacy they are helping to implement. As they encourage students to express themselves through art, they too are learning new ways of self-expression and understanding. This parallel growth creates a unique dynamic where both the Fellows and the students they work with are embarking on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

The presence of Gandhi Fellows in this initiative also ensures a continuous influx of new

ideas and approaches. As each cohort of Fellows brings their unique perspectives and skills, the aesthetic literacy program remains dynamic and responsive to evolving needs.

This collaboration between the Piramal Foundation, local educators, and Gandhi Fellows exemplifies a holistic approach to educational reform. It not only brings aesthetic literacy to Kashmir's classrooms but also nurtures a new generation of educational leaders who will carry forward the vision of integrated, empathetic, and culturally rich learning environments.

The Piramal Foundation's work in Kashmir is a testament to the power of collaborative efforts between NGOs, government bodies, and local communities. By focusing on teacher development, curriculum enhancement, and infrastructure improvement, they are laying the groundwork for a sustainable transformation in Kashmir's education system.

As Kashmir embraces aesthetic literacy, it not only addresses local needs but also positions its youth to compete on the global stage. In an increasingly interconnected world, where creativity and

innovation are highly prized, the skills fostered by aesthetic literacy are invaluable. The ability to think critically, express ideas effectively, and approach problems with creative solutions are sought-after qualities in the global workforce. By nurturing these capabilities, Kashmir's education system is preparing its students to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their peers worldwide. Whether in technology, business, sciences, or the arts, the holistic development offered by aesthetic literacy equips Kashmiri youth with the adaptability and innovative thinking needed to excel in a rapidly changing global landscape. This approach not only honors Kashmir's rich cultural heritage but also empowers its next generation to be confident, capable global citizens, ready to make their mark on the world stage.

From Village to Vision.

MY TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY OF COMMUNITY IMMERSION.

I am absolutely thrilled to share the incredible journey of a life-changing process called Community Immersion. The purpose of this immersive experience was to decondition myself from the comforts of modern society and to actively contribute towards strengthening the education system in the village.

I completed my CI in Bathuni village of Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir. This was a dream come true for me, as it meant experiencing a new society, culture, and language. Excitement and nervousness filled my heart as I embarked on this incredible journey. I also remembered my parents who concerned about their son venturing into an unfamiliar place, far away from home. Their concerns were understandable, as the news often portrayed Jammu and Kashmir as a place filled with unrest. However, I reassured them and promised to keep in touch regularly.

In the rugged terrain of Jammu & Kashmir, I embarked on a journey of house hunt. I ventured deep into the heart of countryside, where air was crisp with scent of pine and melody of mountain streams echoed in distance. But my path was not without obstacles. The bone-chilling weather and language proved as barrier to navigate ahead. But perhaps my greatest challenge lay in the vast expanse of the area itself. The rugged terrain, marked by steep inclines and treacherous pathways, tested my endurance at every turn. Yet, with each step I took, I felt myself drawing closer to my goal, driven by a sense of purpose that transcended the physical limitations of my surroundings. After hustle, I got my space in the village. The house belongs to Mrs. Maya G. She was cook at Government middle School. Arriving in her house was very pleasant, greeted by warm smiles and open arms. The locals were curious about his background and eager to learn about my experiences in Bihar. They embraced me as part of their community, making me feel welcomed and accepted.

I immerse myself in the local culture and participated in festivals, tasted traditional delicacies, also learned about their customs and traditions. This experience broadened my horizons and enriched my understanding diversity. After some days, I got much connected with my host family and



observed a virtual point that change my vision. Aunty (Maya) used to serve me first and after my meal, the whole family ate. I got emotional and thought wheather I'm doing true to them even they don't have much resources still they were feeding me? The answer is not still clear to me but her answer was always like I am her Mahimana (guest). Back home, my parents were anxiously awaiting updates. To their relief and delight, I would often call them to share stories of his adventures and the kindness I encountered in the house. They gradually realized that their worries were unnecessary, as I had found a second home.

From the very moment I stepped in the village, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of excitement and anticipation. The warm welcome he received from the villagers instantly made him feel like a part of their close-knit community. As I settled into my humble abode, I would help them in fileds and enjoy beauty of rural life.

Over the course of my stay, I fully embraced the spirit of Community Immersion. I actively engaged with the local schools, teachers, and students, immersing myself in their daily routines and educational practices. I was amazed by the resilience and determination of both the teachers and students, who worked tirelessly to overcome various challenges that hindered their access to quality education.

During my time in the village, I organized interactive talks with parents and teachers, focusing on Conduction Parents And Teacher Meetings (PTMs) in schools regularly. I also conducted motivational sessions for the students, inspiring them to dream big and pursue their education with passion. Witnessing their eagerness to learn and grow filled his heart with immense joy and fulfillment.

As the days turned into weeks, I would feel a profound transformation taking place within myself. The simplicity and close connection to nature that I experienced in the village helped me break free from the distractions and materialistic pursuits of urban life. I gained a renewed appreciation for the importance of education as a catalyst for social change.

The successful completion of my Community Immersion journey left me with a deep sense of gratitude and purpose. I realized that by immersing myself in a community, I not only strengthened their education system but also learned invaluable lessons about empathy, resilience, and the power of collective effort. This transformative experience has inspired me to continue working towards bridging educational gaps in rural areas and empowering communities through education.

In the end, I returned to fellow house with a heart filled with gratitude and cherished memories. My parents' worries were replaced with pride as they saw how their son had grown and thrived in a new environment. My story is a testament to the power of embracing new experiences, overcoming challenges, and finding common ground in unfamiliar territory.



Shashank Raj
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16



In the land of Leh, Ladakh, where the mountains touch the sky and the air feels crisp and clean, my journey of self-discovery began. Hailing from Kashmir, a place fraught with turmoil and unrest, I had grown accustomed to a life filled with challenges. But deep inside, I yearned for something more—a sense of inner peace that had eluded me for so long. When I heard about the Vipassana Meditation Course, I knew it was my chance for a fresh start. After all, what better place to embark on this journey than the serene landscapes of Leh? With hope in my heart, I packed my bags and set off for this new adventure.

The first ten days of silence and introspection were particularly challenging. My mind, accustomed to constant chatter and distraction, rebelled against the stillness. But as the days passed, something remarkable happened. With each session of meditation, I delved deeper into the recesses of my consciousness, confronting emotions long buried beneath the surface.

Memories of my childhood in Kashmir flooded back, intertwined with the pain of loss and the longing for peace.

Vipassana became a journey not just of self-discovery, but of healing. The silent tears shed during meditation were cathartic, washing away years of pent-up anguish and resentment. The course was not what I expected. For ten days, I found myself in silence, surrounded by strangers, each on their own quest for inner peace. The rules were strict—no talking, no leaving the meditation area—but I embraced them, knowing that this was my opportunity for transformation.

In the beginning, I struggled. Memories of past hardships and worries filled my mind, and I found it hard to quiet the noise within. But as the days passed, I noticed a change. With each meditation session, I felt a sense of calm wash over me. The mountains that

surrounded us seemed to whisper words of encouragement, urging me to keep going.

On the ninth day, as I gazed up at the stars in the night sky, something shifted inside me. It was as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and I could finally breathe again. In that moment, I realized that I was stronger than I thought—that no matter what challenges lay ahead, I had the resilience to overcome them.

As I already mentioned, I was miserable every day. I was either bothered by the way the course was run, by myself for having such a painful body, or by someone else – either one of the students

who was moving or coughing a lot during the meditation or something the teacher or teacher's assistant said to me. The point is, I realized that the entire environment was made-up and very temporary. I'm usually very good at detaching myself from such situations. But this was different. There were no distractions to turn to – books, Netflix, music, even speaking to others about it. And this was super long-term

– 10 days! So, I couldn't detach myself until that moment.

This 10-day Vipassana Meditation course is a very brute-force approach to make you meditate. There is no mercy there that you would give yourself (that I gave myself) when you try to meditate on your own. The truth is meditation is HARD! And it doesn't get any easier. This meditation, the one passed down from Buddha, is extra hard and unpleasant. Here, there is nothing pleasant about it. It's about surviving it. You can't check-out during it – you must remain very aware and conscious – your brain is on the whole time!

As the course came to an end, I returned home with a newfound sense of purpose. Though the road ahead would not be easy, I

Echoes of Silence

A Journey of Healing from Dhamma Leh, Ladakh

knew that I had the tools to face whatever came my way. With inner peace, I face the future with courage and determination, each passing day, I felt more confident, more at peace with knowing that no matter what obstacles may arise, I am ready myself. And so, my journey continues. Armed with the gift of to meet them head-on.

“A glimpse into the serene dormitory at Dhamma Ladakh.”



Saima Wani
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-15



Hello, I am Santosh Kumar, batch 16 Gandhi Fellow and I share my community immersion story. The scope of CI ranges from exploring villages, places, challenges, emotions. When I was looking for a house for community immersion, an idea came to my mind that how will you let me stay in your house for 20 days and I will be free and I will get traffic from my place. Rajouri district was one of the most alert districts of Jammu and Kashmir but I motivated myself and told myself that whatever happens will be seen. Then I set out in search of CI village. While searching for CI village I found a village where there was an encounter between army and terrorist 2 days ago, then I started wondering where should I do community immersion and how should I do it?. Then we told our program leader about this incident and he told us that he had seen it earlier on TV and had heard that there was an encounter between the army and terrorists in Rajouri district. But now I was between them. Then our program leader told that this village suggested that there is a village named Muradpur, 7 km away from Rajouri, then I went to that village for home and there I met MD. Bashir ji. they were collecting paddy husks, after collecting the paddy husk, I told them about the community immersion and they immediately informed me as they needed my labour. He said that he would get free labor. Then on the same day, when I reached his house with my luggage, he collected paddy husk from me. Then after that she gave me rice ,beans and lentils along with ghee to eat. Then I completed this journey in 18 days from MD.

Santosh Kumar

Gandhi Fellow

Batch-16



Bashir's house.

The next day when people nearby looked

at me to find out who I was, I introduced myself to them and told them about my CI and they asked me to move to my house I said thank you and told them no. For the first 5 days, we found out the location of Anganwadi, schools, health centers during which I found out that 2 out of 5 Anganwadis were not open, then we started studying and found out that the basic infrastructure of Anganwadis was not good. I talked to the village sarpanch about it and he assured that he will work to fix it. and also I helped in the old age pension survey with an Anganwadi workers.

And also I visited the primary school of the village where I talked to the head master and told him about myself, Piramal foundation and Community Immersion and then took his permission and built a healthy relationship with the children through the medium of drawing. I did the same work in all the primary schools of the village. While doing this work, I was feeling good and had developed a good bonding with the children.

After that I visited the high school where for the first time the principal told me that media is not allowed in the school then I solved his misunderstanding and then he asked me a permission letter to visit the

My Community Immersion Journey

school and came with my students. There was no need to talk about it. But again the next day I got to school this time they allow me and asked me can you Counseling what subject should 10th standard students take after 10th. After our counseling, you develop better understanding of subject selection after 10th.

After that I came to the health center and where I came to know that yoga was conducted once a week and villagers did not come for yoga, after that I went door to door and told about the benefits of yoga and did yoga with the help of yoga instructor. After this the villagers started coming every week to do yoga in health center.



Draklaran's Embrace

In Draklaran's embrace, I found my place,
Amidst mountains tall, and valleys of grace.
Nervous at first, unsure where to begin,
But kindness enveloped, like kin to kin.

Living among strangers, each day a test,
Yet within, resilience found its nest.
Tasks aplenty, challenges galore,
But perseverance led me to soar.

In a meeting convened, voices did rise,
To address why girls left education's ties.
Superstitions and fears, we sought to mend,
Creating a safe haven, where hearts could unbend.

Awareness awakened, through words and through touch,
Protecting the innocent, oh so much.
Good touch, bad touch, distinctions clear,
Empowering young souls, without fear.

Scarcity of power, and leopards near,
Yet strength within, banished every fear.
Adapting, enduring, transcending the fray,
In Draklaran's spirit, I found my way.

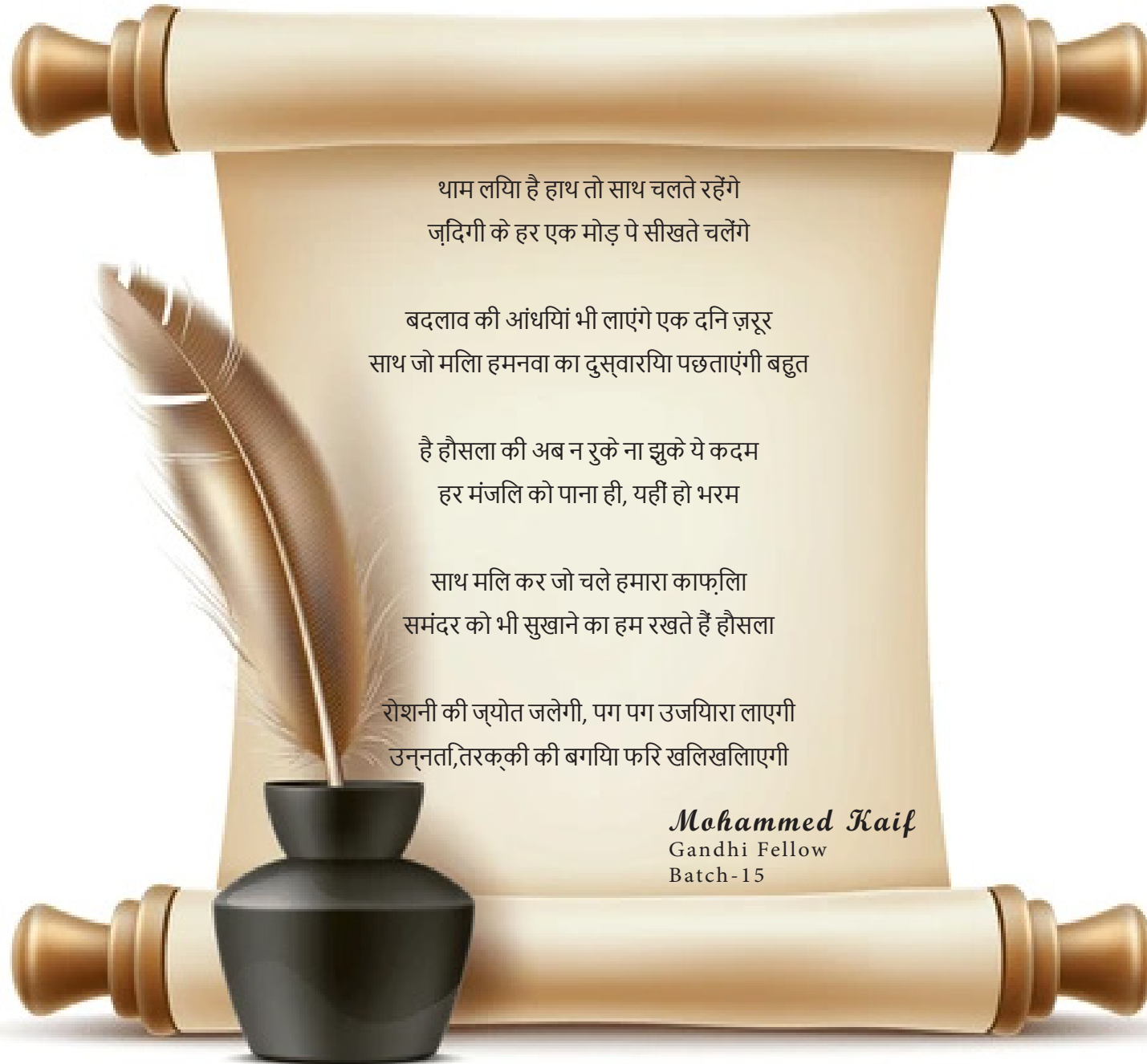
Leaving was hard, the bonds strong and true,
But memories linger, like morning dew.
For in Draklaran's embrace, I I learned anew,
The power of kindness, in all that we do.



Ishrat Mansoor

Gandhi Fellow

Batch-16



थाम लयिा है हाथ तो साथ चलते रहेंगे
जदिगी के हर एक मोड़ पे सीखते चलेंगे

बदलाव की आंधियां भी लाएंगे एक दनि ज़रूर
साथ जो मलिा हमनवा का दुस्वारयिा पछताएंगी बहुत

है हौसला की अब न रुके ना झुके ये कदम
हर मंजलि को पाना ही, यहीं हो भरम

साथ मलि कर जो चले हमारा काफ़लिा
समंदर को भी सुखाने का हम रखते हैं हौसला

रोशनी की ज्योत जलेगी, पग पग उजयिरा लाएगी
उन्नत,तिरक्की की बगयिा फरि खलिखलिाएगी

Mohammed Kaif
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-15

" A tale of ... "

For someone it's a beautiful creation
For someone it's colour collection

For some it's a reservoir of photochemicals,
For someone it may be perfect for modifications,

For someone the garden is just occupying space,
For someone the same is just a waste..

For someone it's just a weed growing anywhere,
For someone it's a seed to sprinkle smiles everywhere,

So the flower have different shades of prospective...
But does it depend upon flower whatever is the
prospective...

It depends only on the efforts desire and the
stimulus,
It just blossoms at perfect timing and impetus...

Procrastination may depend upon prospective
But, growth depends upon perseverance...



Shashank Raj
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16

I embarked on a journey to introduce Social Emotional Ethical Learning (SEEL) to the teachers and staff of Govt. Middle school Mongotrain. However, my initial attempts were met with resistance. The nominated teacher and the school's in-charge seemed hesitant, their enthusiasm muted by doubt. But I refused to be discouraged. I saw SEL Day on the horizon—a golden opportunity to kindle a spark of interest.

With determination coursing through my veins, I concocted a plan to captivate hearts and minds. I proposed the creation of (Wall of Happiness) khushiyun ki Dewar, envisioning a space where emotions could bloom and understanding could flourish. The principal, though hesitant, ultimately agreed to the idea, and we set our plan in motion.

The following day, armed with paintbrushes and passion, we transformed a dull wall into a vibrant canvas of emotion. An Emotional Tree took root, its branches stretching towards the heavens, symbolizing the growth and interconnectedness of SEL.

To my surprise and delight, the teachers rallied behind the project, their skepticism melting away like morning mist. Together, we breathed life into the Wall, infusing it with the essence of empathy and compassion.

As the final brushstroke was painted, we turned our attention to the students. With eager hearts and open minds, they embraced the concept of SEEL, eager to learn and grow.

Gathered around the (Wall of Happiness), we shared our vision with the students, inviting them to participate in this journey of self-discovery and understanding. Teachers bravely shared their own emotions, setting an example for the students to follow.

From the class 4th student to the 8th-grade, each student added their own touch to the masterpiece of SEL. Laughter and tears mingled as we bared our souls.

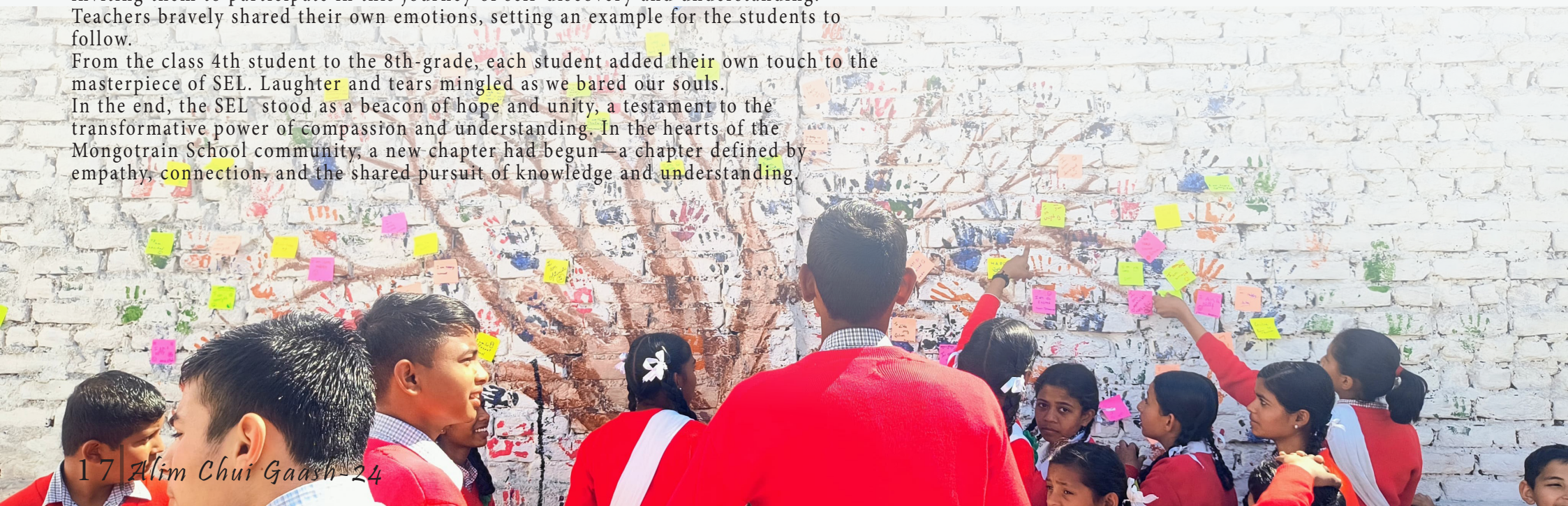
In the end, the SEL stood as a beacon of hope and unity, a testament to the transformative power of compassion and understanding. In the hearts of the Mongotrain School community, a new chapter had begun—a chapter defined by empathy, connection, and the shared pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

FROM RESISTANCE TO RESONANCE

The Triumph of SEEL at GMS Mongotrain



Shahid Gulzar
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16



“The Silent Journey of Discovering Myself Through Vipassana”

Amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life, I felt like a lost soul wandering through a maze of expectations and uncertainties. Seeking a way out of this labyrinth, I embarked on a journey that would change me in ways I never imagined—my adventure with Vipassana meditation.

Entering the serene retreat, I was greeted by an atmosphere of stillness and anticipation. The rules of noble silence and the rigorous meditation schedule seemed daunting at first, but deep down, I felt a glimmer of hope that this might be the answer I was seeking.

The initial days were a battle against my restless mind. Thoughts and distractions seemed to pull me in every direction, making it challenging to stay focused during meditation sessions. Yet, I persisted, determined to confront the chaos within.

As the days passed, something shifted within me. Walls of resistance began to crumble, revealing layers of emotions I had long buried. In the silence of meditation, I faced my fears, regrets, and pains, allowing them to surface and dissolve.

With acceptance came a newfound sense of peace. I learned to observe my sensations without judgment, embracing the concept of equanimity. Each moment became a lesson in acceptance and letting go, as I surrendered to the flow of life.

As the retreat drew to a close, I emerged from the silence feeling reborn. The world outside seemed brighter, more vibrant, as if I were seeing it with fresh eyes. Armed with the tools of mindfulness and self-awareness, I was ready to face whatever lay ahead.

Returning to the outside world, I carried with me the lessons I had learned during those ten days of silence. Vipassana had become more than just a meditation technique—it was a way of life, a guiding light in times of darkness. Through it, I discovered the power of self-change, the courage to confront my inner demons, and the beauty of embracing the present moment.

In the end, my journey with Vipassana was not just about finding peace within myself, but also about forging a deeper connection with the world around me. As I walked the path of life, I knew that I would always carry the lessons of silence and mindfulness in my heart.



Danish Raees
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-15

Reflecting on my time in the peaceful village of Draklaran, nestled among the beautiful landscapes of Jammu and Kashmir, I'm filled with a mix of emotions that are hard to put into words. What started as a step into the unknown turned into a wonderful experience of connecting with people and growing as a person.

When I first arrived, I felt a bit nervous about whether I'd fit in. Would I find a place where I belonged in the rhythm of life in Draklaran? Those thoughts crossed my mind as I walked through the village streets, unsure of what awaited me. But things turned out differently than I expected. I was warmly welcomed by a family who treated me like one of their own. Their kindness gave me comfort and made me feel like I belonged, even though we came from different backgrounds. Living among strangers was a challenge. Every day brought new tasks and difficulties, from getting used to different routines to dealing with the reality of life without constant electricity or good phone signal. From assisting with household chores to engaging in laborious tasks, every moment tested my patience and perseverance. Yet, amidst the toil and tribulations, I discovered reservoirs of resilience within

myself, empathy for labours and learning to navigate through adversities with grace and fortitude. Through it all, I discovered a strength within myself that helped me keep going. One important moment during my time in Draklaran was when I organized a meeting to talk about why so many girls were leaving school. We talked about the reasons behind it, like superstitions and fears, and tried to find ways to help. Through earnest dialogue and psycho-education, I endeavored to dispel misconceptions and foster a safe space for these young girls to voice their struggles. Hearing their stories and seeing their bravery inspired me deeply. Further, my observations unearthed the need for heightened awareness regarding non-verbal communication, particularly within the school environment. Taking initiative, I conducted sessions on distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact (Good Touch Bad Touch), with the aim of safeguarding students from potential forms of abuse. Witnessing the newfound vigilance and confidence among the students instilled a profound sense of fulfillment, knowing that I had played a role in nurturing their safety and well-being.

Undoubtedly, my immersion journey was not without its share of challenges – from enduring the scarcity of electricity and limited network coverage to the monotony of repetitive meals and the looming presence of leopards. Yet, amidst the adversities, discovered an innate ability to adapt and persevere, transcending the constraints of financial resources and physical comforts.

Leaving Draklaran was hard. I'll always cherish the memories and connections I made there. This experience taught me a lot about myself and showed me the power of being kind and understanding. It reminded me that no matter where we come from, we can make a difference by caring for others.

Embracing Draklaran's Spirit

A Journey of Connection and Change



Ishrat Mansoor
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16

My Journey towards Self Change

I am Gul Afsana Parween, born and raised in the vibrant state of Bihar, India. From a young age, I harbored a deep-seated passion for serving communities and making a positive impact in people's lives. This passion led me to pursue opportunities that aligned with my values and aspirations.

Upon completing my education, I was fortunate to work as a Gandhi fellow in an esteemed organization, Piramal Foundation. Initially stationed in state of Rajasthan, I embarked on my fellowship journey with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose. However, fate had other plans, as the organization later decided to relocate me to the picturesque landscapes of Jammu and Kashmir.

The transition to my new location was not without its challenges. I encountered scepticism and resistance from some members of the communities I was tasked to work with. Undeterred, I embraced the opportunity to learn and grow, recognizing that true change often arises from overcoming obstacles and adversity.

With unwavering determination and the guidance of supportive mentors, I embarked on a journey of self-discovery and community engagement. I immersed myself in the daily lives of the villagers, actively listening to their stories, participating in their rituals, and gaining a profound appreciation for their culture and traditions.

Collaborating closely with local leaders and stakeholders, I endeavoured to identify key issues and co-create solutions

that addressed the pressing needs of the community.

My time in Jammu and Kashmir is transformative, both personally and professionally. I learned invaluable lessons in resilience, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. In my fellowship, I emerged as a compassionate and empathetic leader, equipped with the skills and mindset to continue making a positive difference in the world.

As I reflect on my journey, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunities I have been afforded and the individuals who have supported me along the way. Moving forward, I remain committed to serving communities with humility, integrity, and a steadfast belief in the power of collective action to drive positive change.



Gul Afsana
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16

"Resilience in the Valley" A Gandhi Fellow's Tale

In Srinagar's valleys, where mountains reach high,
A girl from Bihar walks, aiming for the sky.
Among struggles and strife, she finds her way,
Facing each challenge, making Srinagar her stay.

Through thick fog and haze, she marches on,
With courage and heart, never withdrawn.
Understanding cultures, fitting right in,
Helping others start, with a hopeful grin.

Though resources are few, her spirit is strong,
Working with others, she sings her song.
Guided by kindness, she lights the way,
Bringing hope to Srinagar, night and day.

Bridging divides, with love inside,
She stitches unity, far and wide.
In Srinagar's story, she plays her part,
A hero of change, with love in her heart.

Oh, brave girl from Bihar, in Srinagar's land,
With each challenge you face, you take a stand.
Bringing hope and peace, you stand tall,
Spreading love and joy, inspiring all.



Gul Afsana
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16



I'd capture the wind
And bring you its song,
But the breeze slips through my fingers,
It's where it belongs.
I'd paint the sky
With shades of your smile,
But the colors would fade
After a while.
I'd weave a tale Of dreams and delight,
But stories are whispers
Lost in the night.
So I give you my soul,
In whispers, in deeds,
In the quiet moments
Where love truly leads.
For the heart knows no bounds,
No lock, no key, It's yours, ever after,
For all eternity.

A n o d e t o a l l



Rinshad K N
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16



What is Vipassana?

Vipassana, meaning “to see things as they really are,” is one of India’s oldest meditation techniques. Rediscovered by Gotama the Buddha over 2500 years ago, it is a method of self-transformation through self-observation. The Vipassana courses are secular in nature. This meditation practice aims to eradicate mental impurities, leading to the ultimate happiness of full liberation.

Why I Chose Vipassana?

Since Vipassana being part of our fellowship process, we were asked to participate. Honestly, I didn’t want to go, but couldn’t deny the team, so I decided to give it a try. I also thought it might be good to disconnect from the world and embrace a period of noble silence.

On the day of arrival, participants were to check in between 2 pm and 5 pm. However, I reached the centre at 1 pm. After completing some required paperwork, I was allotted room M-21. We were asked to deposit our phones, reading and writing materials, and other gadgets by 4 pm. I called all my important contacts before handing over my phone.

At 4 pm, a fellow meditator from the room next to mine knocked on my door. We decided to submit our phones and belongings together. As we explored the Vipassana centre, we discussed our reasons for attending the retreat. Outside the meditation hall, I noticed the daily schedule for the next 10 days on the wall, and it became clear to me how challenging the days ahead would be.

The Retreat: Exploring Vipassana Meditation



Jafar Hussain
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16

Each day included ten and a half hours of meditation and a one and a half hour discourse, with the day starting at 4:00 am. At 5 pm, we were given tea with some snacks, which was the last meal for the day. At 6 pm, all students assembled in the office for orientation, where they explained what Vipassana is and its rules.

The Precepts and Rules of Vipassana Participants in a Vipassana course commit to five precepts for the duration of the course:

1. To abstain from killing any being.
2. To abstain from stealing.
3. To abstain from all sexual activity.
4. To abstain from telling lies.
5. To abstain from all intoxicants.

Additionally, attendees must follow several rules:

- Noble Silence: No communication with fellow meditators, including gestures and eye contact, until the final day.
- No Rites or Rituals: All other forms of worship or religious ceremonies are suspended.
- No Mixing of Techniques: No other meditation or spiritual practices are allowed.
- Separation of Genders: Complete segregation of men and women.
- No Physical Contact: No physical interaction, regardless of gender.
- No Physical Exercise: Except for

designated walking areas, other forms of exercise are prohibited.

- No Intoxicants: This includes drugs, alcohol, and certain medications unless necessary and notified to the course manager.
- Modest Clothing: Simple and modest clothing is required.
- No Outside Contacts: Phones and other electronic devices are surrendered, and no communication with the outside world is allowed.
- Stay on the Compound: Participants must remain within the course boundaries.
- No Music, Reading, or Writing: These activities are prohibited as they can be distractions.
- No Filming or Photography: Permission is required for any recording or photography.

The evening began at 7 pm. We were assigned our meditation spots in the Dhamma hall (meditation hall) and received our first instructions from our teacher, S N Goenka, through an audiotope. The instructions were about 30 to 40 minutes long, covering the basics of the technique, its history, and some initial meditation guidelines. I quickly realized how challenging this experience would be. After just 10-15 minutes, I felt considerable pain and discomfort, a

precursor to the days ahead.

On the first day, a bell started ringing outside my door at 4 am. I woke up and saw the sevak (the server) ringing the bell at the window. As soon as he realized I was awake, he left. I got ready for the 4:30 am session. I made my way to the meditation hall, trying to find a comfortable position on my cushion. The focus of this meditation session was on awareness of breathing. During the first meditation session, I struggled to stay focused as my mind wandered and my body experienced discomfort and pain. Throughout the day, this pattern continued. Each meditation session tested my ability to sit still and focus. My mind wandered here and there continuously, and I changed postures every few minutes to ease the discomfort.

In the next days, I noticed gradual improvement in my practice. Despite ongoing challenges, I started encountering periods of seamless focus and heightened concentration. Our meditation sessions persisted with Aana Pana, emphasizing breath awareness, gradually strengthening our mindfulness and calmness.

After three days of focusing on breathing, we were introduced

to Vipassana. We learned about equanimity (Samta)—the practice of staying calm and non-reactive in discomfort. We were instructed to observe sensations from the top of our heads to the tips of our toes, scanning each part of the body in sequence. This meditation continued daily. Initially, I found it comfortable to observe sensations, but as days passed, concentration became challenging. I often found myself bored and unable to focus, sometimes even nodding off during sessions, though I participated diligently. On day 8th during a break, a fellow meditator, whom I had met on the first day, began hinting that he wanted to talk. Despite my desire to chat, I resisted, testing my resolve. However, during another break, I saw him conversing with someone else, and I felt a mix of curiosity and longing to join in. After the last session of the day, as I headed back to my room, he was walking ahead of me. Suddenly, he looked back, and we made eye contact, smiled at each other. He asked, “How is Vipassana going?” I replied, “puch mat” breaking my noble silence. We briefly shared our experiences, mindful not to disturb others, before returning to our rooms. From then on, we secretly conversed until the noble silence officially ended.

From Noble Silence to Noble Chattering

The final day of my retreat was a standout moment. After the morning meditation and Mangal Maitri (Metta meditation), where we wished goodwill and compassion to all beings, the noble silence was officially lifted at 10:00 Am. We were finally able to speak to each other and share our experiences, which made for fascinating conversations. Everyone was in high spirits, feeling positive and uplifted. We first talked about our individual experiences and challenges before diving into discussions on real-life topics like entrepreneurship, politics, cricket, spirituality etc. Shortly after the noble silence ended, we were allowed to retrieve our phones from the locker in the office. I hurriedly went to the office and collected my phone. Calling my parents was a sigh of relief. I was flooded with messages; apart from my family, I hadn't told anyone about Vipassana, yet friends had been concerned and even contacted my family. It was touching to realize how much my presence meant to them. The entire day was filled with fascinating conversations, only briefly interrupted by the last two meditation sessions. Instead of the usual ten

hours of meditation, day 10 was cut down to around five hours, including the two morning sessions and the three group sittings.

Back to the Real World

We woke up at 4 am for the last time. Instead of our usual two-hour meditation, we gathered to listen to a final talk and chanting by S.N. Goenka. Afterwards, we had breakfast, and many of us cleaned our rooms before returning back to the world.

After leaving the Vipassana centre, I started thinking on why these Vipassana courses are held in such high regard. My own experience, while positive, wasn't so amazing, transformative or life changing. I felt a sense of accomplishment for completing the ten days, recognizing my discipline, strength, and resilience. I also felt relieved that it was over and eager to get back to my usual routine. The emotions I experienced were normal but positive, like pride, relief, and anticipation for what's next.

My differences with S.N Goenka's Lectures

While I appreciate the teachings of Vipassana and the benefits it offers, I have a few differences with some of

the beliefs presented by S.N. Goenka.

1. Killing and Purity of the Mind: I do not believe that killing inherently generates impurity of the mind. My faith, Islam, allows us to consume animals as food, and I believe that humans can live harmoniously with nature, including being stewards of animals while harvesting them responsibly.
2. Reincarnation: Vipassana upholds the belief in reincarnation, which is not part of my belief system.
3. Prayer and Belief in God: Vipassana courses do not allow for prayer, and I believe they promote the idea that there is no God. This conflicts with my spiritual belief in a higher power. I respect their perspective but hold onto my faith in God.

For those interested in Vipassana, I suggest approaching it openly. It's okay not to agree with everything, and it's important to focus on the practice as a tool for mental purification and improvement of life, rather than complete enlightenment. Each person can set their own objective and decide what to take from the teachings.

Lessons I learned from the Vipassana course

- Both craving and aversion are forms of attachment, which is the source of all miseries
- Stay committed to reaching your goal by following the established discipline and rules.
- You have much more discipline than you may think.

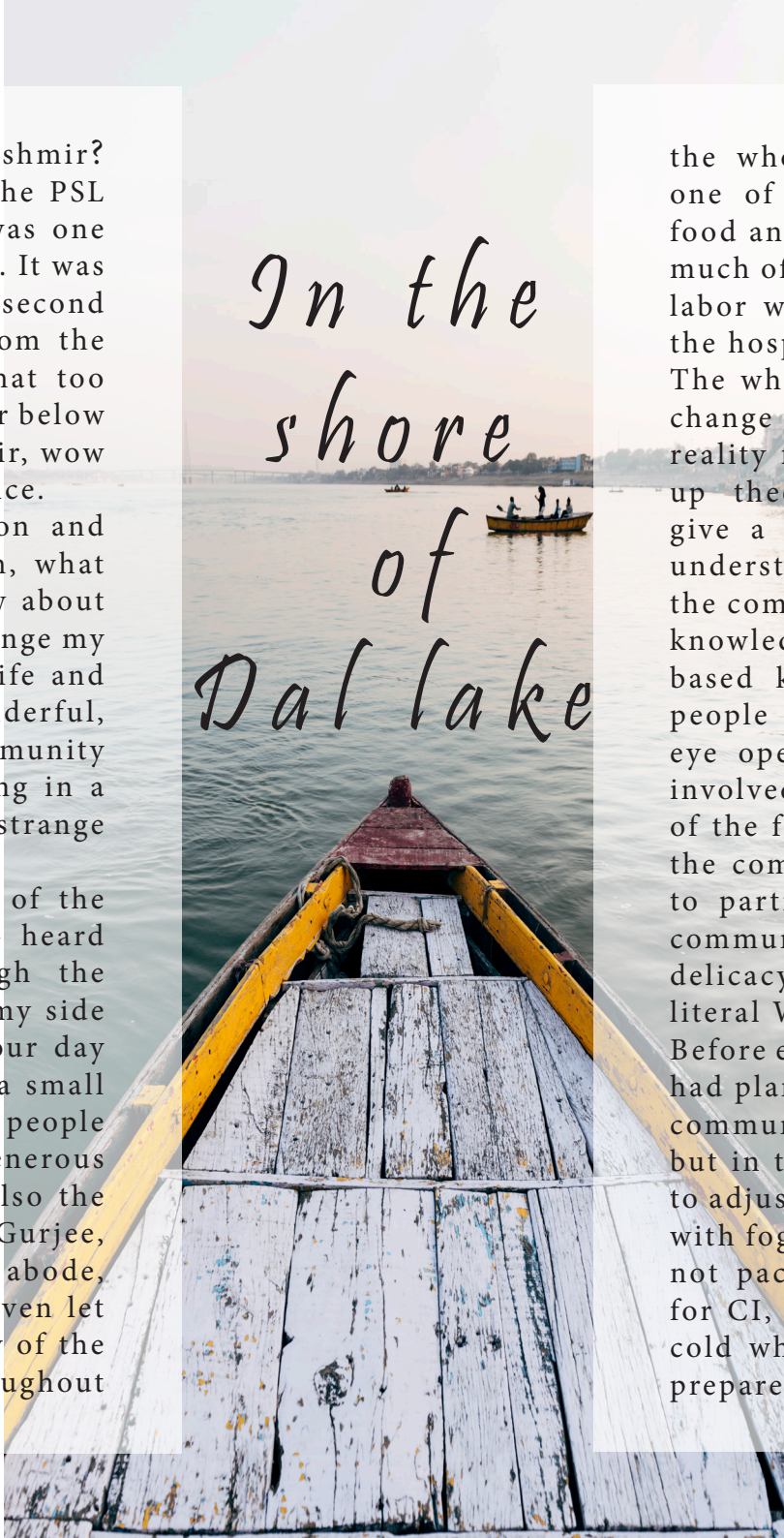
Good luck.



Do you want to come to Kashmir? Hearing that question at the PSL on the day of induction was one of the happiest moments in my life. It was an easy 'yes' for me with a millisecond of time to make the decision. From the minimum of 25° c (in Kerala) that too rarely, to the cold minus 4 to - 10 or below according to the climate in Kashmir, wow what an amazing thing to experience. Working in the field of education and that too in the paradise on Earth, what else can one ask. But little I knew about the thing I am to experience to change my perspective on the hardships of life and that too mostly because of the wonderful, life changing process called community immersion. A total stranger living in a total strangers house in a totally strange area - a small definition of CI.

Getting the host family was one of the biggest ordeal in the CI process- heard from others who have gone through the process. But I think luck was on my side because on the first day of the four day house hunt I got my host family, a small house with three generations of people living under one roof. Due to the generous mind of the family head who is also the sarpanch of the village called Faqir Gurjee, welcomed me into his humble abode, even though it was congested to even let another person in. The hospitality of the people was awestruck for me throughout

In the shore of Dal lake



the whole CI process, considering me as one of their family even with providing food and shelter even though I was not that much of help for them, obviously I did some labor work but even that won't suffice for the hospitality the family showed to me.

The whole 20 days full of experiences that change the perspective of the ground level reality for me. Learning about the bottom-up theories in social work classes did give a vague idea about the necessity to understand the root level but being part of the community immersion made theoretical knowledge into a more clear experience based knowledge. being in the shoes of the people you want to bring change is a big eye opener. Interacting with them, being involved in the work they do, being part of the festivals and functions happening in the community, which I was lucky enough to participate in a wedding held in the community and to enjoy the famous food delicacy of Kashmir called 'Wazwan', a literal Wow moment.

Before embarking into this 20 days journey I had planned to bring so many change in the community -obviously the rookie mistake- but in turn I myself changed in lots of way to adjust with the cold environment that too with fog and rain and also foolish enough to not pack necessary dress before leaving for CI, to cope with the environment / the cold which taught me a lesson to be more prepared.

Going to the field interacting with the people, knowing about their problems and coming up with solutions, truly a life changing experience. one of the biggest problem the community was facing is the high dropout rate in schools after 8th class because of people's notion that there is no job opportunity after education because people from our community who completed graduation and post graduation are doing labor jobs same as those who quit after 8th class, so what difference does education make? The concern was genuine, but education is not more than getting a job, it was a difficult notion for the people to understand which I try to convince them through meeting them daily in the village main gathering areas, such as junction, taxi stand and below the chinar trees. I was partially successful in convincing them of the importance of education to the level that they thought about joining for classes in their free time which for me was a great achievement in short a time.

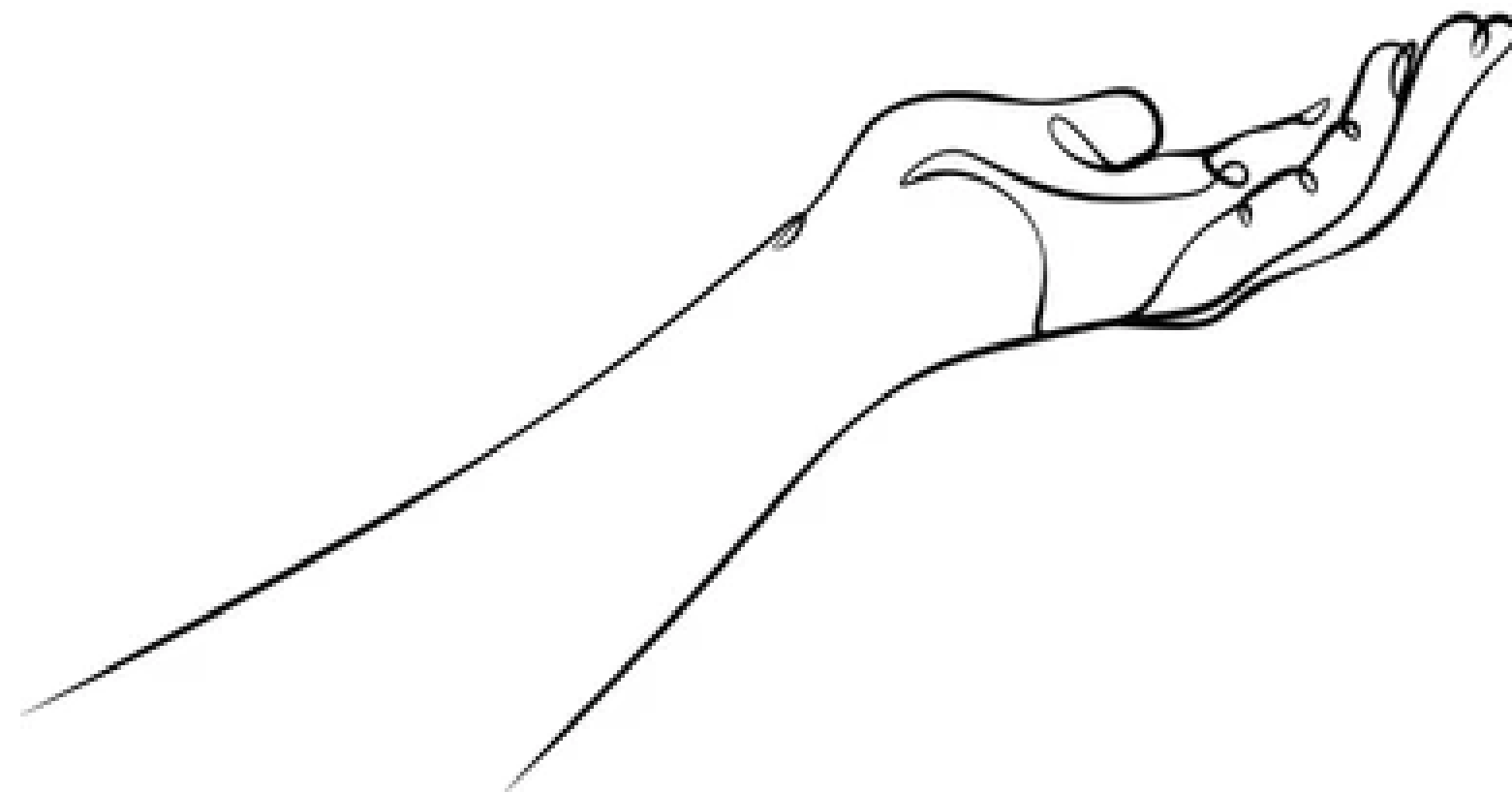
My next focus in the community was on visiting schools and understanding the problem there. In the community there was only one primary and a middle school which lacked proper infrastructure as well as a high number of absentees in the class. I wasn't able to tackle the former problem but I was able to put effort in the later one, that the high number of absentees in the school. I visited the houses of the children and talked about the importance of education to their families. Maybe because of a total stranger with no material benefits for himself trying to convince them for importance of education and that to a guy from the tail end of India working in the top end of India made some sort of impact in them which saw in the coming days as in form of their children attending the school, another Wow moment.

Even though there were so many hardships like lack of proper facilities in the host house and the cold weather which I was new to experience in my life, I was able to understand what the people are going through and to be a part of the community and to understand their problem and somehow able to come up with solutions which brings a level of satisfaction in ourselves. The biggest achievement is to understand our own limitations and strength through the deconditioning of self. The biggest *Wow moment*.



Rinshad K N
Gandhi Fellow
Batch-16

NATION BUILDERS





Team J & K





*our
journey.....*



Little info about the cover

The cover page embodies the soul of Jammu & Kashmir, the three different shades of color maroon, red, and orange is the shades of Chinar leaf depicting the flow of time. Inside the map of J&K is the traditional craft of Kashmir's papier-mache art which connects the people with their land. The name '*Alim Chui Gaash*' is a famous kashmiri proverb meaning education is light, as we are in journey of transforming ourselves into the nation builders, as well as making the impact to the education system to build a bright future. The magazine contains the hardwork and efforts of the Gandhi Fellows of Jammu & Kashmir.

THANK YOU.....

Editor, Design, Cover : Rinshad K N, Magazine Name: Shahid Gulzar, Calligraphy: Liyakath Ali