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Reflection 3: Phase 2 in Leh

Honors India Study Abroad

This phase has felt like a chance of reflection and application, compared to the rest of the trip. In Bangalore, we learned about many of the different, very established, foundations and organizations– as well as the scopes of the problems they hoped to address. But that portion also brought so many questions, which we either saw play out here, in Leh, or discussed how they might. For instance, the idea of choice and Akhtar's point about how has India *really* changed in the last 30 years? We mainly linked this to the GarvSe Center and Enable India, as the rural outreach was still just that– rural outreach: you can be a farmer, a fruit vendor, or a herdsman. Naropa was fascinating because what seemed like for the first time, we were discussing with fellows from vastly different socio, economic, and educational backgrounds. And not only were these leaders representing that idea of choice, but we watched them apply it as they discussed with farming communities where the extra money from communal subsistence farming (instead of individual) would go? What would education look like for that village in 15 years? What kind of economy are you setting up for the youth of Leh/ Do you have a right to diversify that economy and in what ways? These were the types of questions that forced us into an inquisitive mindset when we first spoke to the Naropa Fellows.

The most surprising part of my experience in this part of India might be the lasting connections I've made. You don't always expect a course to maintain its connection to you beyond the professors or the peers you share it with, and of course pieces of the topic that always seem to slip away the farther you get from having completed the class. But here, the class is very obviously much more alive than that. Even still, I wasn't expecting to make friends and collaborators to last a good portion of a lifetime. Maybe it's the culmination of the course, or the people I got to share it with, but there is something truly inspirational and driving in each of the moments we've shared. When I meet certain people in life, and find they become special to me, I like to adopt my favorite characteristics from them. Just a little something to remind me of their impact, and how they've helped– even if in only a miniscule way– change my life. Sometimes I will carry these traits with me for only a little while, or maybe a bit longer, but in specific cases I like to hold onto them for as long as I'm able. I wrote about this a little in my post card, but essentially, my peers, professors, fellows, and everyday changemakers have left an indelible mark on my soul, in what I can only describe as the most beautiful of ways.

In terms of differences and similarities between here and Bangalore, it is a completely different world.

The highs definitely come from shared moments with Padma and Rigzin and the mountain-scapes they shared with us, but also from the conversations Priya and I were able to delve into as a result of unanswered, or gapingly answered, questions we uncovered along our homestays. A low for me was frustration, or maybe better put as disappointment, at myself for feeling dispirited from someone else affecting the collective

experience; however, this was because I had not taken the time to understand that they get to shape the experience, too, and while some things may feel like they are taking away from moments, they might be adding to them in ways that I can't possibly foresee. The final high would have to be a shared moment between the views and the history offered here. The mountains, temples, monasteries, museums, and tales leave me breathless (and not just because of the altitude).

For coming home, I am excited to take the people, cultures, ideas, and lessons I've engaged with here with me. But with that comes the other edge of the sword. I am nervous to become complacent. I feel so intensely inspired and fortunate to have participated in such a scenario as this, that I do not want to waste this opportunity. I want to use each of the connections I've made here as a sort of positive peer-pressure to keep pushing, questioning, and creating.