

**GYANODAYA IV: Travel is a learning experience.  
Chiragh Gambhir, Student on the train**

I, Chiragh Gambhir, the only Visually challenged student from Sri Venkateswara College on this trip would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dinesh Singh, Vice Chancellor of Delhi University who conceptualized the Gyanodaya, Lt. Parminder Sehgal, IRCTC staff and all other participants for making my recent encounter with India so fabulous. The only thing I can express in words is, "We must go beyond textbooks, go out into the byways and untrodden depths of the wilderness and travel and explore and tell the world the glories of our journey."

Gone are the days, when education used to be centered only on studies. An educational tour offers an opportunity for a rich immersion experience, and is a tremendously effective means to facilitate learning. In an educational tour, students have the chance to experience the culture of a place firsthand, by connecting with the people and location on a much deeper level than they ever could in the classroom.

Gyanodaya IV was an amazing experience. An engaging nine day trip organized by Delhi University, the educational expedition by train created for 52 college teams, included 60 NCC students (overall 940 students) covering the tour route of Delhi-Kanpur-Varanasi-Bhopal-Ahmadabad-Delhi. As the sun rose gloriously on the morning of 11th March, excitement and thrill filled my eyes in the face a mesmerizing journey for which I had waited for a long time.

On day 1, entering Safdurjung Railway station my heart was touched with the warm Indian welcome from Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary of MHRD, who offered a tilak and rudraksh mala to wish us well. And there it was, waiting for us, was our home 'Gyanodaya Express' (college on wheels), decked out with flowers and tinsel. A wondrous journey was about to begin.....The train took off at 10:30 am from Delhi to our first destination, Kanpur.

Day 2: Kanpur, situated on the banks of the River Ganges, also known as 'Manchester of the East', was a beautiful city. We reached our destination at 7 am. I now know why Kanpur is known as leather city. It contains some of the largest and finest tanneries in the country and earns a lot of foreign exchange. Later our visit to the renowned Kanpur IIT gave a wonderful exposure to research in technology development. The information gathered provided an all-round enriching educational experience.

Day 3: Hindu mythology is virtually unraveled in Varanasi (Kashi), among the oldest living cities in the world. To be in Varanasi is an experience in self-discovery, of an eternal oneness of the body and soul. It is also the seat of one of India's largest universities, the Banaras Hindu University, a pioneering institution which initiated teaching and research in Ancient Indian history and culture. The university carries out painstaking explorations, excavations and research in historical archaeology from which artifacts are restored for the museum which I got a chance not only to visit but to touch and feel objects as well. Next on our itinerary was a visit to Diesel Locomotive Works, one of the largest manufacturing and production units owned by the Indian Railways. After travelling continuously for 3 days, we stayed overnight at the Pratap Hotel in Varanasi.

Day 4: The next morning at 5am, it was a breathtaking view with the early morning sun rise shimmering across the Ganges, the high-banks, the temples and shrines along the banks bathed in a golden hue, soul stirring hymns and mantras along with the fragrance of incense filling the air. Soon after breakfast, we left for Sarnath, a small village in Uttar Pradesh, situated about 13 km north-east of holy city Varanasi. Formerly known as Isipatana, it is famous as the site where Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon and where the original Sangha was formed. Hence, it is one of the four main Buddhist pilgrimage destinations.

Departing from the station at 18:00 hrs to reach our next destination, Gyanodaya Express was delayed by 10 hrs and we ended up spending 24 hours in the train which turned out to be a big advantage for me as a chance to share conversation, exchange knowledge, play games, crack jokes etc.

Day 5: Here we reached another exciting place, Bhopal (Sanchi railway station) at 18:00 hrs. Rushing from the station, we got into our buses to head for the famous Stupa. The Stupa stands proud as an icon of Sanchi, a hemispherical brick structure, wheelchair accessible and with signage and information plaques in Braille, special tactile walkways, beepers and a Braille map that allows people with disabilities to experience the splendor of the monuments. My renewed interest in the site arose from it being recently made completely barrier-free and disabled-friendly, thanks to the efforts of a Bhopal-based voluntary organization. A visit to Bhopal is incomplete if you have not visited Bharat Bhavan and its museums. The museum is said to be dedicated towards the diverse Indian art forms in the region, divided into four different segments, each hall representin different forms of art. Sadly departing from the place, we headed to Abhinav Hotel in the evening by bus, located 50 kms away for an overnight stay and rest.

Day 6: Next morning at 10:00 am, we started on the expedition to Bhimbetka Caves, 46 km from Bhopal. The caves are among the most fascinating and popular tourist spots in India, and known for its treasure of prehistoric art. The drawings, executed mainly in red and white with the occasional use of green and yellow, have themes from the everyday events of eons ago, the scenes usually depict hunting, dancing, music, horse and elephant riders, animals fighting, honey collection, decoration of bodies, disguises, masking and household scenes. We further headed for Lower Lake which brought a little disappointment in the trip. The Lower Lake suffers from pollution due to drainage from sewage-filled nallahs, lack of fresh water source and commercial washing of clothes. The entire lake has atrophied, and its water is not suitable for drinking. After experiencing the sites of Bhopal, we left from Habibganj Railway station at 18:30 hrs to reach our final destination, Ahmadabad.

Day 7: The land of smart businessman and remarkably down to earth people, Ahmadabad charms its visitors with delicious food, amazing hospitality and colorful culture. On reaching there, we straightaway got into our buses to reach Lothal, a place for history and archeology, eager to visit the ancient site of the Indus Valley Civilization. The museum holds an artistic depiction as well as introductory write ups and maps, contains beads, terracotta ornaments, replicas of seal and sealing, shell and ivory objects, copper and bronze items, animal and human figurines, weights, and painted potteries, etc. After a quick tour, our buses took a speedy turn towards Sabarmati Ashram. Clean and serene, calm and inspirational, the Sabarmati Ashram

speaks its own language, reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi.

Exhilarated with memories of the journey, we checked into Hotel Inter Residency where another great surprise was waiting for us. DJ night and delicious dinner on the auspicious occasion of Holi. The hospitality of the organizers was magnificent.

Day 8: We were given a warm welcome by the DCP and the police force on arriving at Surat in the morning at 7am. After we had enjoyed a fantastic Gujarati breakfast, our bus arrived at diamond industry (Dharmanandan Diamonds) where we were given an inspirational presentation on the work and the success of this region which had rebuilt itself from near destruction. The last thing on our itinerary was to visit the Surat Municipal Corporation, Surat city and shopping.

Day 9: Our memorable trip came to a joyous end when we reached Delhi, the next day 19 March at 11:30 pm at the Safdurjung Railway station. I had made friends, learnt many things about India from the viewpoint of Urbanization, the theme of Gyanodaya IV, and I had more to look forward to in sharing my experiences.