

## **Gyanodaya Diary, 11-19 March 2014**

**Dr. Amrit Kaur Basra, Faculty on 'Gyanodaya'**

### **11 MARCH. DEPARTURE FROM NEW DELHI**

#### **Gyanodaya Express flagged off by Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary, MHRD**

Gyanodaya Express, Delhi University's fourth train in the series of "College on Wheels" chugged out of Safdarjung Railway Station at 10.30 pm on 11 March with 900 students and 100 teachers and support staff on board. Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development graciously flagged off the train amidst a rousing applause. In his message to the students Shri Thakur upheld the benefits of experiential, hands-on learning through travel saying "You will know much more on this journey than inside a classroom." He specially appreciated that students would write projects on facets of the cities they are visiting. Vice Chancellor Professor Dinesh Singh called upon students to make the best use of this learning opportunity. He thanked the Chief Guest and IRCTC, partners to Gyanodaya. Despite the late hour, there was a large turnout of teachers, administrators and well-wishers. This remarkable train, Gyanodaya, has already become a symbol of innovative and successful higher education pioneered by the vision of the Vice Chancellor.

### **12 MARCH. KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH**

We had a good night's sleep on the train, tucked into our berths. The excitement among the students is lovely to watch .

Its 6.45 am and we are ready to leave this train, our home and college for some days. Now at Kanpur, we will head to the fertilizer and leather industry sites. For the teaches and mentors it's wonderful to be with young, energetic students with projects in hand. The local administration and the police are taking care while our contingent of 1000 from Delhi U explores the city.

Projects have made some progress through interviews. The day was fruitful as students gained an opportunity to collect data at Sarsaiya Ghat, Tanneries, Fertilizer industry and IIT, Kanpur. Mentors and students have strict timelines on their projects and most of them are alert on that front.

The bright red Gyanodaya train at the platform raises curiosity among onlookers and they enquire about it. Many were awestruck to know that an entire train is booked for students and is an institution for their research. Teachers and students are happy to be part of Gyanodaya-4 and are getting information on DU's virtual learning portal ([vle.du.ac.in](http://vle.du.ac.in)). Many students are using their laptops and dongles issued to the train and are finding the e-content helpful.

Its been a rare opportunity for the group to visit a tannery, learn about IIT Kanpur and also see the ghats. These impressions will stay for life.

### **13 MARCH BANARAS, UTTAR PRADESH**

The second day was hectic but fulfilling. The visit to Benares Hindu University, especially their Museum was rewarding. One admires the legacy of this famous institution and its strong intellectual output from the time of its establishment in 1916 by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. We are reminded of the national legacy of great leaders. The visit to the Museum showed the historical development of the city and the steps that have been taken for its preservation. Effort is being made to disseminate the knowledge.

Later, one group interacted with the famous silk weavers of Banaras and came to learn about traditional processes of weaving, as also their current hardships and problems. It was told that globalisation has brought cheaper yarn from China and imitation silk makes it to the market, often displacing the authentic, local handloom workers. The life experiences of weavers touched our young researchers.

One segment of the Gyanodaya students went to the Diesel Locomotive Works (DLW) of the railways to understand coach design. Another group went to visit the museum at Sarnath maintained by ASI. For those of us who stood in front of the Asokan pillar, it was a moment of pride. The benign expression on the face of the sculptures of Lord Buddha brought lessons in the practice of peace. The local security was attentive to all the groups and the travelers on Gyanodaya returned to their home on the train very happy with the day's discoveries and research work.

### **14 MARCH. BANARES & SARNATH, UTTAR PRADESH**

We went to Bheinsa Sur Ghat. For all of us, it was enchanting to see the ancient rituals performed at the ghat. The importance of the river Ganga as a lifeline in religious and material lives of the people in Banaras came directly to the forefront of this experience. For our researchers, information was plentiful as they could meet socially differentiated people.

Thereafter, we went to Sarnath. The very sight of the Stupa where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon to five disciples was a moving experience. The entire space of the excavations at Sarnath with the ruins of a temple where Lord Buddha used to pray, other sites and current digging pits are well maintained by ASI. The temple of Lord Buddha attracts hundreds of visitors.

Our students got valuable data throughout the days in Banaras. The first report on work in progress was submitted by everyone online.

### **15 MARCH, SANCHI, MADHYA PRADESH**

On 15 March, we were to reach Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, by 7 a.m but the train was late by 11 hours. The ASI officials were in touch and made special arrangements to ensure that we could still visit and see Sanchi. We learnt that "the 'Great Stupa' at Sanchi is the oldest stone structure in India and was originally commissioned by the emperor Ashok the Great in the 3rd century BC." We were there for an hour. To see our national emblem of Ashoka chakra and the valuable archeological finds was highly satisfying. The entire place offers information in the domain of religion, historical tourism, urbanization and the role of conservation agencies such as the ASI.

Our students were attentive to the literature available and tried to understand the basics of Buddhism.

Later we went to stay at different hotels. The experience of living together on the train has been unique as such a large study group has never been organized in this manner anywhere in the world! Using communication networks and ICT, experiencing the variety of station platforms when Gyanodaya berthed, changing into buses for long rides, caring for each other in times of need, were all important aspects of our learning. As we travelled in the train and interacted with our companions, we learned about our own selves too.

**16 MARCH, BHOPAL AND BHIMBETKA** The day was spent in visiting several places of historical importance. The journey to Bhimbetka and the visit to the ancient caves made us realize the importance of space influencing the lives of people at a given time in history. This site, said to be inhabited by human beings almost 300,000 years ago is astounding for its artistic paintings. The sedimentary rocks and shelters with a variety of drawings presented the signs of a forgotten era. The mystery of flora and fauna, community lives, rituals and cultural practices came vividly through the pictures. Once again, the conservation and presentation of space by ASI was impressive.

Thereafter we checked into a local hotel with our minds contrasting the ancient and the modern habitats. However, it was time to relax, review the projects done so far and plan the remaining field work. The walk through Bharat Bhavan with its array of paintings and artifacts by tribal artistes appealed to everyone. It showed how aesthetics bring onlookers and creators together. A meaningful insight into the world of tribal communities was provided by the guides. Later, the visit to Lower Lake showcased the beautification of a modern city by a water body which is valued for recreation by both the local community as well as the tourists. The layers of history in and around Bhopal make it a fascinating place to study.

### **17 MARCH, AHMEDABAD, GUJARAT.**

On 17<sup>th</sup> March before entering Ahmadabad, we went to visit Lothal, one of the most important Harappan cities. The excavated site having remains of dockyard, town, bead factory and cemetery introduced students to some essential features of civilization. Its museum contained valuable articles such as hand tools, jewelry and two skeletons in one burial pit. At the archeological sites, ASI had provided guides but queries by students and teachers queries were also answered by me as this area is part of my deeper history studies.

Thereafter, we went to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi by visiting Sabarmati Ashram. The aura of the Mahatma and his philosophy come close through his photographs and the atmosphere of his simple home, Hriday Kunj. The importance of Kasturba Bai, his wife is also felt there. The Ashram, in the neighbourhood of the Sabarmati river made us realize the value of frugality, discipline, and truthful living. Many of us were inspired and drew a resolve to work for the benefit of our fellow human beings.

### **18 MARCH, SURAT, GUJARAT**

The visit to Surat was another great learning experience. The arrangements made by local administration were overwhelming in its efficiency and meticulous planning. We went to the police head quarters where we saw the latest in weapons for security. The Command and Control unit was also shown. Next, there was a power point presentation at the Diamond Industry Centre followed by a question and answer session. The visit to a Diamond crafting workshop showed the process of cutting and polishing of these precious gems. This was followed by a visit to the Surat Municipal Corporation. Mapping the activities of SMC, Shri Devang Patel demonstrated the use of ICT in tax collection and in difficult field work such as solid waste disposal. At SMC, Shri M.M. Anarwala, DCP also addressed the students and warmly praised the Vice Chancellor's visionary concept of Gyanodaya.

Being in Gujarat and during Holi, we all wanted to put in some gift shopping and managed about one hour. The escorts remained with us. With our bags full, our memories fresh and our projects written up in draft form, we have started our journey back to Delhi.

### **19 MARCH. RETURN TO NEW DELHI**

The return journey strengthened the bond among all the travelers. Many remained busy with finishing their projects. Those leaders and administrators who had made the journey safe, secure and enjoyable were thanked warmly by the students. A three member team from Ramjas College ensured that spaces which were visited by us were cleared of litter. They urged everyone to keep the environs clean. We returned to Safdarung Railway station close to midnight to meet a crowd of family members, friends, and curious bystanders. The windows on the red carriages of the train looked as though they were bidding us a farewell.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

The Gyanodaya journey has shown how urban spaces have complex correlations and no one lives in isolation. The importance of civic agencies, law-enforcement institutions, educational centres, livelihood and cultural spaces must be recognized. The methodology of field work and modalities of conducting interviews was a great learning experience. The journey also demonstrated that a group of fifteen undergraduate students with a mentor is capable of conducting useful research. The four year undergraduate programme has introduced components of hands- on research which are extremely important for academic and experiential growth. Throughout the journey we were joyful about comprehending the unity of India at first hand even when we came from different backgrounds. We felt welcome everywhere. Having the opportunity to be a part of the College on Wheels, it is our responsibility to strengthen learning processes and become useful to society. In the realm of higher education, Delhi University's Gyanodaya programme has once again shown that theoretical information about India can be found through numerous sources, but long standing knowledge is generated only in contact with real life experiences. "Gyanodaya" means the "awakening of knowledge", and this journey surely brought us a new awareness.