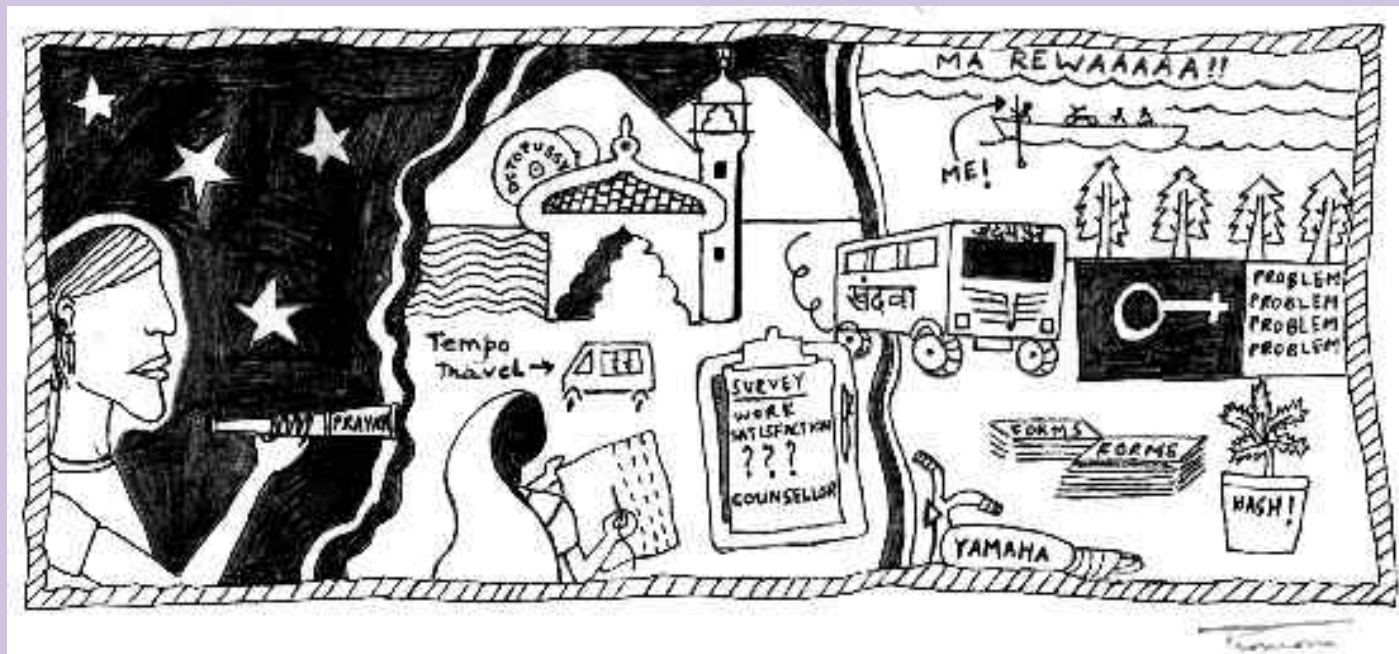


# YOUNGINFLUENCERS

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*The grass is greener on the other side... (above) is by Promona Sengupta of Lady Shri Ram College. Promona volunteered with Sadhna, Udaipur, Rajasthan and Narmada Bachao Andolan, Madhya Pradesh*

## I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER!

Most of us enjoyed with friends and family, went out on a vacation or just 'chilled' at home. Possibly even did an internship with a reputed publishing house. However, while we were at it, there was a group of highly enthusiastic (and slightly unsure) youngsters who were grappling with issues and situations way beyond their wildest imaginations in far-flung rural locales of India - learning puppetry in Rajasthan, teaching kids in Ladakh, holding a Bal-Panchayat in a village in Uttar Pradesh or working for the Narmada Bachao Andolan. They were participating in the month-long summer internships organised by the SMILE programme of Pravah. SMILE has definitely changed the lives of these youngsters forever. I know. I have interned too in the past!

It all began with the wonderfully insightful and exciting orientation camps - the first stage to the SMILE rural internship process - one in Laporiya, Rajasthan and the other in Kalika, Ranikhet. This is a 3-4 day camp, usually organised in a space outside Delhi and is designed to help the SMILers get an idea about how to prepare themselves for the internship. After the orientation camp, the SMILers chose a grassroots level organisation somewhere in India and spent a month there.

Post the internship, the SMILers come together in a feedback camp organised by SMILE to emphasise on sharing of individual experiences and learning from each other. This camp is usually 2-3 day long, and helps the returned-interns analyse their key learnings and then formulate action projects. This year we decided to form a short play on active citizenship for performing in different campus spaces and mobilising more people to undergo this journey as an action project. We also decided to take out this newsletter to share some of our experiences.

## A SUMMER IN THE HILLS...



As I look back at the past summer, a smile unknowingly appears on my face. It all started with a first ever train journey alone. With fear and a whole lot of determination I descended

the 135 steps of the Grassroots' office. The most amazing people I've ever met, welcomed me with open arms into their small and cozy blue tiled office. My internship was defined by the very delicious jams, the late night conversations, interacting with the villagers, the most beautiful landscapes, the Himalayas (which I saw just twice), fox spotting, the shrieks when monkeys took away our *rotis*, making Maggi and *halwa* for the staff, learning a little bit of Kumaoni and a lot more. These little things contributed in making me a better person and also to the most memorable moments of my life.

*Prachi Kathuria of Miranda House volunteered with Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation, Uttarakhand*

## OF DREAMS, FRIENDSHIPS AND CONTRADICTIONS



A vast expanse of green fields, ladies in their colourful saris singing while sowing paddy, little kids stealing mangoes from trees, young boys having a swim in the muddy pond... no, it is not a scene from a movie or a page out of a book. I'm describing what is life for some and a dream come true for me. My dream has a rather beautiful name... Paigamberpur. It is the village I had gone to for my internship. It is a small village where friendships are formed by just nodding at each other and relationships for life are formed in just one meeting. This is a place where you get so many *chachas* and *chachis* and *dada* and *dadis*. Days turn into weeks and time flies without the aid of clocks and calendars. Life moves at its own leisurely pace and yet it never stops. It is a place of contradictions and my being there is itself a contradiction to what I am. It is an experience that will always remain with me. It is an experience that changed the course of my life, and it is an experience that was facilitated by Pravah. Thank you Pravah for this...

*Madhulika Khanna of Sri Ram College of Commerce volunteered with Vistaar Mother's Own, Paigamberpur, Uttar Pradesh*

## MA GYAALA DUK! (LADAKHI FOR 'VERY GOOD')

The solar-powered campus of SECMOL (Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) rises from an abrupt pool of green in the middle of nowhere, with an aquamarine Indus gushing close by and the nearest STD booth 18 kms away! Here I spent 5 amazing weeks of my internship doing everything - from milking cows (and getting kicked in the process!) to doing dishes (for forty people!) to teaching the residential Ladakhi students. These were punctuated by lovely picnics (food, dance, apricot juice... upset tummy!), attempts to learn Ladakhi film songs, endless gossip over cups of butter tea or simply taking a walk along the grey-blue-purple mountains. The 'shit-in-a-pit', a rare mango for dinner, the grazing yaks, bathing in an ice cold stream, and the warm and friendly people - they have all given me a wealth of valuable learning and beautiful memories to treasure all my life.



*Sohini Lahiri of Lady Shri Ram College volunteered with SECMOL, Ladakh*

## A REALITY CHECK

It's been almost a month since I've been back and the sights, sounds, the essence, the emotions have not left me yet. Paigamberpur was an experience I'll never forget for it gave me a lot. Sitting in class has taught me a lot, but the experiences I gained during my internship were priceless! I witnessed all those issues which I just spoke of earlier, which were topics of fierce debates among friends in between classes or while sitting in the cafe. But today they are not just issues but a reality to me, a reality which took time to settle in. Women's issues, girl child education, child development, urban - rural divide... you name it and we saw it. But this time I was expected not to only talk about them but work with and tackle them. After that month-long sojourn, I've grown up as an individual not only in terms of living an alternative life for a month but actually in terms of being a more flexible, accommodating and probably receptive person. My internship opened a door for me, showed me the road less travelled. I know it will make all the difference.



*Vasudha Zutshi of Lady Shri Ram College volunteered with Vistaar Mother's Own, Paigamberpur, Uttar Pradesh*

## EKLAVYing...AN AMAZING ENCOUNTER!



Though I had gone with an aim of internship, 'internship' is just not how I would address this month... it was so much more than that. "*Ekalavying*", if I can call it that (my organisation's name being Ekalavya) was full of enjoying, learning, struggling, loving, working, exploring and growing. The exposure was almost contrary to my expectations but encountering something new is a lot more fun and educating than merely experiencing the expected. One month couldn't have been more productive than this. The enchanting beauty of the place was like a refreshing pill, the organisation, the perfect facilitator, the villagers, a shower of love and the children, the kick of life! No experience could have been as personally satisfying, professionally enriching and socially productive as this!

The SMILE journey is like an open space wherein you first understand yourself (at the orientation camp), then experiment and develop yourself (the exposure) and finally use yourself and your explored potentials to become change agents working for a better world (post-exposure action). It is an unforgettable journey.

*Shraddha Rawat of Delhi School of Social Work volunteered with Ekalavya, Madhya Pradesh*

## WHEN I SMILE...

I have always been a smiling person  
But this time when I SMILEed  
I was not the only one  
For there were many more who SMILEed.

SMILE has been a guiding light  
It's given me a purpose, a way of life  
This experience has made my life enriched  
It sure has had me bewitched.

I embarked on this journey  
With fears in my mind,  
The quest to learn and achieve  
Did not permit me to rescind.

I interned with Eklavya in MP  
Which works in the field of education.  
Runs *Shiksha Protsahan Kendras* where  
Teaching techniques are based on innovation.

As I continue my journey in SMILE  
These moments fill me with pleasure  
This new place and its people,  
They give me memories to treasure.

Whenever I think about this journey  
I have a twinkle in my eye  
A song on my lips  
And on my face - a smile.



My 4-week internship had it all - kiddo games, grown-up talks, adventure, teaching and learning through out-of-the box techniques, folk-songs, theatre, craft, travel, thrill, late-night walks, dancing sprees, etc. I find myself richer by the stories of hardships, struggle and hope of the villagers and the people working at Eklavya. Although I am back, in my heart dwells the village Ganera with all its people and Eklavya - a home away from home.

*Tanvi Shah of Shri Ram College of Commerce volunteered with Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh*

## A SENSE-SATIONAL EXPERIENCE



When you are walking alone in the Shivalik ranges near Dehradun, all your senses are fully awake and your adrenaline level is high. So were mine as I walked up to Nahi Kalan, not just due to the reason stated above but also it was Nature's beauty and the warmth and love of the people there that overwhelmed my senses. So let me put down my rural internship experience in terms of how exactly they affected my senses.

Starting from the eyes, I clicked about 1200 photos in my 24 days stay and I still wanted more. It's a spectacle to watch the sunset, the mountains, all the houses on these mountains, watching the people work in the fields, the flowers and forest, cattle grazing, children playing and laughing and seeing myself in the middle of this nature's cradle is surely like living out a fantasy.

Coming to the yummy yummy sense of taste, it was really surprising to know about the wide variety of food they have and that too, all directly procured from Nature. I still long for those juicy and mouthwatering wild berries and fruits like Hinsar, Kaphal, Kingoor, Timla, the spicy and delicious vegetables and the wide variety of *dals*. I think one can have 365 different kinds of food in all 365 days of a year!

Moving to the sense of smell, the very thought of the smell of the fallen Oak leaves in the forests, the smell of burning wood in the 'earthen *chulhas*' every evening, the smell of the cattle dung, still manages to makes me nostalgic.

Nahi Kalan has a musical band, which comprises of wild animals, birds, leaves of trees and the wind. Listening to local songs to the accompaniment of Nature's harmony is sheer ecstasy!

Finally, it was the warmth and love of the people there, which made me feel like one of them and not like a mere visitor. It was my interaction and connection with the people that made me understand them, their lifestyle, their problems and issues in a far better way. I would like to thank the people of Nahi kalan and Pravah for giving me this opportunity of a lifetime.

*Mirza Fahad Beg of Deshbandhu College volunteered with Vividhara, Uttarakhand*

## WINDS OF CHANGE

"Digantar", as the name suggests, means a change in direction. This organisation, situated in the outskirts of Jaipur, truly lives up to its name. Working towards rural education, Digantar seeks a path which is parallel to the conventional, mainstream mode of education. It virtually turns educational institutions into a playschool for rural children. I volunteered at Digantar and came to know that it has been doing exemplary work in the field of rural education for over forty years, under the able guidance of Mr. Rohit Dhankar and Mrs. Reena Das. A short visit to Tiloniya, during my stay at Digantar, proved to be my true rural exposure, and I also managed to learn some puppetry. I now feel that I am more able to adapt myself to conditions which lie beyond my comfort zone. The internship shaped me up into what I am today.



*Aritra Hore of Kirorimal College volunteered with Digantar, Tiloniya, Rajasthan*

## OF MANY COLOURS AND MANY MOUNTAINS...



*Puneet Paliwal from Delhi University went to SECMOL, Ladakh for his internship where he worked with the children from the local areas in a summer camp. These photographs speak about his experiences.*

## AND QUIETLY FLOWS THE NARMADA

"The Road Less Travelled" made all the difference, I knew,  
And hence, one and a half moments of wisdom  
And perhaps a few ounces of Imagination took me  
To the 'less travelled' and perhaps lesser known,  
Where stars canopied the night,  
The horizon was the fence to the never-ending sky.  
The Narmada beckoning. A movement calling,  
1 a.m., 13<sup>th</sup> July on that railway station,  
I knew it was a moment of reckoning!

It was overwhelming to be  
Among the most inspiring people,  
To be a part of India's biggest movement since 1947,  
It hits you then, life is not an apple tart!  
Ten People who were living,  
Living to make ten million lives worth living

Ok now...  
Let me tell you a story repeated endlessly from silent mouths,  
A story of a river, the way it had been,  
The birth of its valleys it had seen,  
Life blooming from its very womb.

A rabbit out of the magician's hat! POP!  
Is all it took. Is it that simple?  
When human malice, decided to impregnate  
The sanctity of its virgin aqua chalice!  
And miles of concrete monsters!  
Stamped their feet on the waters,  
Life hiccupped, and choked!  
As if Satan had written the suffering, himself  
Before he would decide to poke.

Lives were being taken in the choicest way,  
Suck the soul out,  
Lleave the lifeless lump called body  
So that thou know not may...  
Take from the farmers... his land  
The workers... his work  
The woman... her flesh.

And let them be, what difference it makes  
After all, the soul has been traded,  
Weighed on the scale of fairness against  
Green currency, all RBI graded!  
Where the power of the gun had been used!  
To usurp a town, pull out the very roots,  
Curse be on you, Man!  
Your name will be part of History's Hall of Infamy,  
In crass, black and sticky soot!

Alas! The evil rarely knows,  
That He is the one who always bows,  
Because a spark was all it took, to spread the wildfire  
To every corner and every nook.  
The power of knowledge showed its might,  
People now knew the difference,  
The wrong from the right,  
A chord had been touched, five fingers had closed  
To make a million fists, all ready to fight!

The Light of Justice has finally risen,  
The sun of hope the valley has finally seen,  
A common song can be heard in the hills,  
Let's give Narmada back, all and more of her lost sheen.

The bugle had sounded 21 years ago, small wars continue.  
There is no end; a beginning is what every day ensures  
The mountains stay, so does the green,  
The farmers stay, so does the mother,  
They all live, today, to see the light of tomorrow  
To commit suicide and again survive!

And quietly flows the Narmada,  
Silently, among her own.  
Waging her war, flowing ahead  
Ever strong!

**Mridul Kumar Dhaniwala of Ramjas  
College volunteered with Narmada  
Bachao Andolan, Madhya Pradesh**



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