

Gandhi in India Winter Term Report

My Winter Term project took me thousands of miles away from home and immersed me into a completely different culture and mindset. I remember my first drive through the streets of Delhi. I felt completely overwhelmed by the horses, donkeys, cows, and elephants that weaved in and out of the lawless Indian drivers. I saw people crouched in the mud, laying bricks, the women's vibrant saris bringing a startling and regal beauty down in the mud with them. I think that I spent the majority of my trip trying to make some sense out of the apparent madness that is India and to internalize the mindset that incorporates such startling extremes into one functioning society. My study of Gandhi and the way his philosophy is implemented in India today proved to be a helpful window into India.

For the first part of my trip, I stayed in a retreat center outside of Delhi, meditating with a group that had traveled from L.A., including my parents, and acclimating myself to India. Trudy Goodman, a Buddhist teacher from the organization Insight L.A., led the retreat and this experience helped to center me using an ancient Indian tradition and mentally prepared me for the rest of my trip. After the retreat, my Dad and I visited the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri, the Mughal King Akbar's palace. We then, went up to Rishikesh in the Himalayas, a town nestled on either side of the Ganges River. Getting to experience the Ganges in its pure bright green-blue state away from the pollution and the mayhem of the cities is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

I then left my parents, and went on my own to the city of Ahmedabad in the province of Gujarat. I stayed with Yudeshduar and Sunanda Shastri, a professor couple who works at Gujarat University, and who I have known since I was a little girl. During this part of my trip, I truly lived the Indian life, integrating myself into this Indian family and rarely seeing other westerners.

I volunteered at Sivananda Ashram. An ashram is a religious community, and the ashram lifestyle is how Gandhi lived his life and was an important part of his philosophy. At the ashram, I served the community by working in the kitchen, cleaning rooms, and helping to tend the temples. I also read *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings* edited by Homer A. Jack and *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home* by Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. *The Gandhi Reader* was a collection of writings by Gandhi and his contemporaries that told the story of Gandhi's life and explained his philosophy through primary documents. *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* is a collection of essays by the top Gandhi scholars working today, giving a more modern interpretation of Gandhi's work.

It was sad for me to see that on the national scale and particularly in politics, Gandhi's ideals have been abandoned in India today. However, I did have the chance to visit his own ashram and the Gujarat Vidyapeeth the university that he founded, which still follows his lifestyle today. I also met a woman named Sonia Deotto who is working using Gandhi's philosophy and art to bring the conflicting religious communities of Ahmedabad together. I was inspired by her work, and we discussed a potential Winter Term project next year, involving a group of Oberlin students working with her in Ahmedabad.