Museum of Artefacts

AIF BIF Cohort 2021-22
CONTENTS

- PREFACE ................................................................. 01
- FOREWORD .......................................................... 02
- AISHANI JAIWAL ....................................................... 03
- SIMARJEET NAGPAL .................................................. 06
- MANOJ DAS .............................................................. 09
- NAINA YADAV .......................................................... 11
- PRAKRITI CHAWLA .................................................. 13
- SAI SIREESHA .......................................................... 16
- ILIKA TRIVEDI .......................................................... 18
- AMANA PARVEEN ...................................................... 21
- PRAKRITI PANDIA ...................................................... 24
- VAISHALI JOSHI ........................................................ 27
The first leg of our fellowship journey began just as the aftershocks of the second wave had subsided. We were all very excited to join together as the first-ever AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship cohort. Once we finished the orientation conference, we all started getting inducted into our host organizations. This was a time of excitement as we were all set to move to our host communities and start working. That’s when the third wave hit our plans like a brick, almost everyone had to shift their work to a remote setup and the laptop became our best friend once again. As the situation eased up, some people moved to the host cities and some continued remotely. Each fellow has had a common and distinctive journey in the past 10 months and this publication brings those journeys to light with an interesting twist.

The concept of this publication was the product of a collaborative session of the fellows in the Midpoint conference where everyone had to map out their journeys to date using visuals, text, emojis, and any creative form they could think of. Since that exercise was so cathartic and fun, we thought of bringing it to a finish by creating our journey maps for the end-of-the-fellowship publications. During the brainstorming session between some of the fellows regarding how we would want to present the maps, the idea of ‘journaling’ appealed to us the most. Over the course of the next few weeks, everyone put their creative hats on and created journal entries for this publication showcasing their journeys in the most unique and visual ways.

In this publication, you will find the fellows’ most vulnerable, exciting, memorable, and comforting things that are the artefacts of each one of our journeys. Hence, we present to you a light and visually appealing publication, the ‘Museum of Artefacts, AIF BIF Cohort 2021-22’. Take a deep breath before you dive into the lives of each of the fellows in this cohort and submerge yourself in their roller coaster journeys.

Prakriti Chawla
Banyan Impact Fellow ’22

Aishani Jaiswal
Banyan Impact Fellow ’22

We are delighted to launch the Museum of Artefacts, AIF BIF Cohort 2021-22 which is a fun and celebrated publication of the AIF Fellowship program. This publication is light and visually appealing as it captures moments of joy, vulnerability, and memories from our fellows’ journey. This volume is inspired by the expansion of thought as a result of deliberate and thought-provoking consultations which led the cohort as a whole to present their journey through a range of images and snippets which are heartfelt and go beyond project implementation. This piece of creation encapsulates their unique experiences of working in a hybrid capacity in various thematic areas. The pictures clubbed with their stories are the core of this publication that aims to highlight the inspirational journeys our Fellows embarked on amidst the pandemic.

Despite being an all-India Fellowship cohort, this class also happens to be the first-ever cohort under the new avatar of the Banyan Impact Fellowship. Just like many of us, our Fellows also had to adapt themselves to the uncertainty caused by COVID-19. From operating in the hybrid model of fellowship to acclimatizing themselves to new cultures, language barriers, and communities they have empowered through it all. This publication captures the distinctive experiences of our Fellows who served amidst the pandemic, and how they navigated unprecedented challenges to continue to make an impact in their host communities. Irrespective of facing numerous situations, these Fellows have been able to develop a significant difference in the lives of multiple beneficiaries. Thanks to their passion, zeal, and growth mindset to contribute their best.

We are thankful to all our Fellows for their contribution in compiling unique moments during their service year, covering the broad theme of journaling. This volume opens up in a candid and vulnerable sense about fellows’ lived experiences that paint a real picture for our audiences on their holistic fellowship journey, especially in a hybrid setup underlined by the pandemic. It emphasizes the determination and brilliance of our Fellows and is intended to give readers an understanding of their fellowship tenure through their creative pieces. Their work speaks of the shared humanity and their contribution to enriching the lives of others. We hope that this volume will provide the readers with a sneak peek into their transformative journeys.

- Fellowship Team
Where are we now? Where do we wish we were? What is needed to close the gap?

The country is only able to identify 79% of the estimated people living with HIV and initiate treatment for 83% of those who need the treatment in the country.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) launched the 95-95-95 targets. The aim is to diagnose 95% of all HIV-positive individuals, provide antiretroviral therapy (ART) for 95% of those diagnosed and achieve viral suppression for 95% of those treated by 2030.

Proper health care service delivery systems
Development of infrastructural capacities
Stigma prevention campaigns
Reduction in HIV/AIDS infections all over India
Reach 95-95-95

AISHANI JAISWAL

I have learned about the complex public health system through the lens of HIV+ persons and built upon their lived experiences to build an empathetic, gender-sensitive training curriculum for medical service providers.

I began my fellowship journey in December 2021 after a brief stint at a media house. It was on the first day of the Orientation itself, I learned that this experience is going to be different. I was introduced to the cohort, who were just as nervous and excited as I was. I found myself in the middle of a thriving network of individuals with similar stories to mine, with a common goal of development in their minds.

Soon after the orientation, I made my way to my host organization, SAATHII’s Delhi office, where I was greeted with the utmost warmth by my colleagues. I had always wanted to work in Public Health and SAATHII’s extensive work in HIV/AIDS across India proved to be a more difficult yet unique task than what I had previously assumed. But with the support of my supervisor and colleagues, I was able to perform a gap analysis of my fellowship project after reading about a hundred journal articles on the matter.

Things were pretty smooth until India was hit with yet another wave of COVID-19 and I found my mother and grandmother at the center of it. Coming from a single-parent household that only consists of these two caregivers and me, it was inevitable that when either of them got sick, I would become their primary caretaker. I took a long break from work to take care of them. I had never been tested this way earlier in my life but thankfully both of them made slow recoveries. I began to doodle and draw whenever I found myself getting anxious to find some semblance of calm. I am lucky enough to have a support system that exists not only from my family, my partner, and my friends but also from three dogs (Milo, Chloe, and Eva) that have been by my side through thick and thin.

Doodles I made during lockdown:
Immersively engaged with six different rural communities across Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh allowing me to gain a more nuanced perspective on India as a whole.

I was in my fourth standard when I heard about climate change. The narrative was so moving that I just had to do something about it. I asked a few of my friends to help me plant trees in an empty neighborhood. That group grew slowly and carried out an anti-plastic project. We formalized our social activities into an NGO in 2012 and started computer education classes in my garage for the children of a nearby slum. I was able to guide over fifty children until I left for college. Ever since then the guiding star to making decisions has been to find ways to make a much more significant impact on a sustainable and equitable society.

During my fellowship, the project at Alaap luckily had a strong alignment with my trajectory. The project took me to two villages near Jaipur, six villages across Bundelkhand Region in Madhya Pradesh, and Tarari in Uttarakhand. The experiences allowed me to give input for the betterment of these communities and understand the diverse living and working standards which exist in our country. I have gained close memories through this fellowship above and beyond the strong connections I found.

Upon my return to work, I began to immerse myself through actively participating in their National workshops, field visits, and deliberations with the National AIDS Control Organisation. Meeting the leaders from the key populations such as sex workers and members of the Transgender Community opened my eyes to the passion and zeal the community has for programs that benefit them. At the start of this fellowship, I had asked myself to answer who am I after this experience? I am glad to say that by being associated with the Banyan Impact Fellowship, I have gained immeasurable experience in Public Health and policy implementation. Through this experience, I aim to imbibe a bottom approach to policy making and extend the warmth and empathy to every program I work for in the future.
The initial months went into learning about forests and what makes a thriving forest. The most important step in raising a forest, you guessed it, is prepping for a plantation which meant getting the soil ready and raising the saplings. Saplings end up becoming an important metric in identifying the scale of forest and the success rate of plantations.

At Tarari, work on an organic plantation in the region was also ongoing. This has helped to identify newer crops to grow with changing climate of the region. It has been supporting the community upskilling and aiding newer economic revenues.

For the time I was at Tarari, the place I was staying had a beautiful common room facing at the valley, where in monsoons, the water flows through. For a few hours a day when we were not on the field, I got to sit and work in this magnificent space.

One of the major issues faced by the Tarari community was the lack of infrastructure to catch and store water. We tried to design a system for the same, some spaces which naturally collected water were being looked at to create water tanks and use them as a network of storage spaces across the hill.

Along with water, there existed many aspects of ecosystem regeneration, involving people, plants, and the planet. This was an impromptu session that broke out while evening chit-chat and it felt like a jazz session.

I stayed in a community member’s new room which he had built. It was built meticulously and with creativity at its disposal. As I told him I was an Architect, he took me around the place and asked for my input. I could only praise the work that had been done.

“Beyond this only a tractor can go. Have you ever sat on a tractor?” asked the community member. Another member said, “come, sir, today take a ride on a tractor as well.” I was given a carpet to sit on so that I don’t have to sit on the metal mudguard. What a unique experience I explored through this fellowship!
I have immersed myself in the community and have become one of them. Staying with the tribal people and adopting their minimalistic lifestyle has made my life simple and has made me empathetic to their problems.

It was in the month of February when I got an opportunity to move to my host organization, Seba Jagat in Kalahandi. Undoubtedly, I was a little apprehensive about moving to this place and setting out on this adventurous journey but my apprehensions turned into excitement after meeting with my colleagues, staff, and mentors. It started as a self-exploration journey. Each day brought with it an opportunity to learn something new about my work.

Since my host organization’s work focused on the key areas of rural development, I got an opportunity to be a jack of all trades. However, my special focus was on creating sustainable employment opportunities for the tribals of Kalahandi. I worked on my project by converging government schemes, conducting workshops to promote ecological farming and forest-linked livelihoods, and helping the local government in implementing government programs like the millet mission and the forest rights act.

My host community was always filled with warmth and kindness. I never felt like an outsider. I was always given a chance to immerse myself in the community. Staying with the tribal people has made me empathetic and adopting their grounded lifestyle has made my life unadorned.

During this time, I have immensely grown both personally and professionally. This fellowship has supported me to become compassionate, self-aware, and accommodating.
This experience taught me the ropes of not just effectively managing various data systems but also enabled me to analyze the impact, monitor past learnings, and come up with better data-oriented solutions and systems.

Serving as an AIF fellow was my true calling as the next step in my professional career. The exposure and wealth of experiences this fellowship has offered have been a valuable opportunity for me. I strongly feel the fellowship is a great way to learn firsthand from organizations that are doing inspiring work in the social development sector. Moreover, the chance to interact and learn from co-fellows with diverse yet unique lived experiences is a rare growth opportunity to find somewhere else.

I was beyond thrilled to be accepted as a Fellow and be matched with Milaan Foundation. The project that I was engaging in was The Girl Icon program. This program desired to support adolescent girls with the necessary tools to follow their aspirations and provided a safe space for them to practice their newfound skills. I remember my first day in the new work environment initially felt edgy and discomfiting. However, all thanks to the amicable colleagues who made me feel comfortable and at ease.

I feel glad that in this journey I have shared a kind relationship with my supervisor and colleagues who have well aligned with my work. The office felt homely with a number of small yet memorable events. From having lunch together, making coffee, celebrating birthdays, and working on ambitious projects with a group of brilliant people to reviewing massive data spreadsheets daily made my journey of exploration easier. What a curve of learning and growth it has been!

I feel elated that my host organization trusted me and allowed me to lead the impact assessment for the Girl Icon program. Until now, most of my professional responsibilities have been very structured. I always knew what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. However, it was only while working with Milaan that I realized the need to express my opinions. I am grateful to my team who gave me the opportunity to share my views on data collection and its accuracy. Leading this gave me the confidence to share my ideas and thoughts and the chance to understand the process of designing surveys, analyzing data, and authoring the captured findings in the reports. There were times when I felt overwhelmed but my passion and zeal to stabilize the challenges helped me to serve during the fellowship period.

I feel glad that in this journey I have shared a kind relationship with my supervisor and colleagues who have well aligned with my work. The office felt homely with a number of small yet memorable events. From having lunch together, making coffee, celebrating birthdays, and working on ambitious projects with a group of brilliant people to reviewing massive data spreadsheets daily made my journey of exploration easier. What a curve of learning and growth it has been!
My host organization, Frontier Markets, is a social tech startup that focuses on building a strong women workforce on the ground, known as Saral Jeevan Sahelis. When I had just joined, I learned about how their work evolved, and it truly inspired me. Their quick adaptability during the pandemic boosted their success. It increased its foothold in rural India.

PRAKRITI CHAWLA

I am a Social and UX Designer who is passionate about equity and inclusion, focusing on people with developmental disabilities. I came to the AIF Banyan Impact Fellowship to become a better development professional and leader and to gain on-ground experience in social causes. I am also a budding clay artist and hope to integrate it into my work.

When I joined the fellowship, I had expected it to be a chaotic but meaningful process of finding who I was in the development sector. As expected, I got to know my skills and weaknesses better, but the best part was discovering new things that I was good at and getting the support from the AIF and host organization to thrive.

During the eight months of the AIF Fellowship, I worked on multiple projects simultaneously. My work involved developing and upgrading the digital platforms that Frontier Markets uses in its day-to-day operations. In-app Onboarding/Assistant Bot - One of the first projects I worked on was to design the content and flow for the in-app onboarding/assistant bot in the Meri Saheli app. It makes life easier for those who want to learn how to do different things on the app. This bot also helps Sahelis who are not familiar with technology in operating it and navigating through the various functions.

Meri Saheli App & Web CRM - I was directly involved with the internal and external tech partners to redesign and design new modules for the Meri Saheli app and the web-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. I worked on essential modules like registration/sign-up, survey creation, and product categories.

Atlas Corps - AIF & Atlas Corps formed a strategic partnership in 2021, and my cohort was a part of the Virtual Leadership Institute. Through this rigorous 5-month leadership development program, I developed a leadership project.

Along with all this, I started taking courses by Google on UX Design and got certified. At the same time, I was building my facilitation and leadership skills by taking sessions with my co-fellows and outside organizations on different topics. The fellowship gave me a lot of opportunities to explore various social issues and my potential.
It was in December 2021 when my life transformed in its unique manner. From learning about the fellowship to building connections with like-minded people, things changed for good. Through AIF’s prestigious fellowship, I was lucky to work on an educational project that aligned with my experience and skillsets. While working on designing the curriculum for the students of the Merasi community which is known for its history and musical legacy, I got an opportunity to exchange my ideas regarding the education policies and schemes in India and the USA.

Throughout my fellowship, comfort objects and people have kept me motivated and grounded. From my grandparents’ daily 6 pm video calls to eating my favorite food with my best friends, I am fortunate enough to call this my small community. Through this fellowship, I have also gained some mentors and friends whom I can count on to give me the best feedback. In this journey, there have been several memorable moments that I will forever be grateful for.

The experience of working with a great musician and genealogist, Dr. Sarwar Khan Ji was unique. He is not only a great musician but also a historian who continues to preserve the culture and heritage of the Merasi culture.

Working with people has always motivated me to believe in my limitless capabilities. As a change warrior, I believe that education is one of the powerful means to strengthen people’s lives. Its emphasis on equality, inclusivity, and diversity is essential for building a powerful and capable society. This thought motivated me to maximize my potential for this project.

This journey of learning and unlearning from people and instances around has been transformative. Self-reflection is one of the fundamental practices that I as a development professional have learned. I believe self-reflection exercises should be followed often as it helps us to contemplate and structure our actions, emotions, and thoughts.
In this innovative journey, I was fascinated to learn about the cultural heritage that the Merasi community harbors. Not only this but it is also known as one of the oldest living communities in Rajasthan with a long history marked with continuous discrimination and prejudice. Surprisingly, the Merasi School is the only hope for the people of the Merasi community. Here the children of the Merasi families are welcomed without bias. Thanks to Dr. Sarwar Khan who started the school to provide quality education for the Merasi students.

I was fortunate enough to collaboratively work with my supervisors, Karen Lukas and Lisa Darling who have always assisted me with compassion. They both have played an essential role in shaping the project and supporting me in overcoming the challenges I have faced while working virtually. I am lucky to have known them!

This journey has been a roller coaster ride yet a rewarding one. It made me realize that while working in the development sector it is necessary to empathize with beneficiaries who have dealt with varied experiences and mindsets. The process of transforming people’s lives is not easy but with patience and kindness, a huge difference can be made. Thanks to this fellowship that pushed me to work beyond my project. I can proudly say that I have learned to be benevolent to people and have developed a non-judgmental approach. On a professional note, this journey has enabled me to collaborate with people from various backgrounds and understand the importance of teamwork and collaboration.

I facilitated sessions in maximum security conditions at Tihar Jail No. 5, Asia’s largest prison complex, where I interacted extensively with prisoners and was able to see the world beyond the high prison walls.

I approached Dr. Kiran Bedi for an interview and had an insightful conversation with my childhood role model about prison reforms.

My selection for the Banyan Impact Fellowship turned my desire to work in the field of human rights into a reality. Even though this was a fantastic opportunity, I kept my expectations low and moved through the new experiences. But something happened along the way; I evolved with the daily frustrations and responsibilities. I met some people who challenged my beliefs and got to know me better.
I learned about AIF and my co-fellows during the virtual orientation and some amazing sessions. The first half of my journey was spent designing and planning my project at my host organization, TYCIA Foundation. I had multiple responsibilities and tasks, most of which I handled for the first time. Managing social media was a particular learning curve. Working in a team was a challenge since I had only worked as an individual before. I created an introductory brief on the organization’s Prison Reform Program and made my project Proposal while getting my wisdom tooth extracted after two painful dental surgeries! The additional component of Atlas Corps Virtual Leadership Institute also brought on its share of responsibilities and knowledge.

As I settled into the fellowship, I found my ground and started to see the results of my actions. It was for the first time, I worked from a home-turned-office, which I now know is the norm for the social sector. Eleena, Gauri, and I worked together during this time, endlessly brainstorming and planning the future execution of our project. I met Momo, the Foster cat in our office who made the winter months much more entertaining and meow-worthy.

During this time, the tools of the trade were Microsoft Excel which has all my planners; Microsoft To-Do something I like to call my lifeline, Canva, which helped me design content, Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides, which allowed me to collaborate with my team, and G-Meet which helped me work from home during the Omicron scare.

The second half of my fellowship journey started with the launch of my project - the Unlearn Fellowship. The month-long training of the fellows helped us in learning facilitation skills with engaging activities and modules created by me, especially on topics related to gender based violence and crime. I visited some places which gave me a whole new perspective - a juvenile deaddiction center, Tihar Jail, Bhondsi Prison in Gurugram and the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

I met some new people who enriched my experience. I interviewed Dr Kiran Bedi, who is a stalwart in the field of prison reform, I met former inmates who are peer fellows in my HO and current inmates during the sessions I facilitated at Jail No. 5, Tihar. I learned about their good and bad experiences, witnessed their efforts for change and felt their fears. I now believe that people are good and want to be good. I have more faith in humanity than I used to have in the past, and I am more positive and hopeful about society as a whole.

For the most part, I was commuting almost 4 hours every day. My main supporters along the way - podcasts, Twitter, blogs, books, Wordle and Spotify. I also took some short breaks in between to keep my spirits up - visiting my father at Baramulla and Gulmarg with my sister, a road trip with friends to Jim Corbett and Naukuchiatal, and a train journey to attend a friend’s wedding in Dehradun and Mussoorie. And through it all, my mom - my biggest support and my all-time companion!
I entered the fellowship knowing only the fundamentals of the Indian Handicrafts Sector and the Fair Trade Movement; now, I am completing my fellowship as an ardent advocate of the Fair Trade Movement and by constantly using advocacy to narrow the policy gap in the Indian Handicrafts Sector.

It was around the end of November, and Kolkata was catching up with the rest of India for winter. I was getting homesick and missing Kochi's backwaters while waiting to hear back from AIF. I came home tired after a long day at work and saw an email from AIF saying I’d been selected. The only instance I remember next is me jumping out of joy – I danced around my room that night!

Applying to AIF or to be a fellow was to create impact. To be around communities and hear their stories. While selecting my project, the only aim I had was to be a part of a project which focuses on the holistic development of a community. I was thrilled to be matched with a project that exactly does what I was looking for (I still can’t wrap my head around it - I think one can always stay thrilled, right?)

I started working on my project in December initially, I spent a reasonable amount of time understanding what impact looks like for my project and my Host Organization. Slowly, I fine-tuned my project proposal and prepared my deliverables, then went onto the more incredible world of the Indian Handicrafts Sector - to learn, belong, impart, smile, train, and leave a mark.

This journey wasn’t that easy. I had to face challenges including communication gaps, and personal setbacks - my paternal grandmother who is very dear to me, got bedridden after suffering a stroke. Leaving her back home and moving to Delhi was the hardest thing I’ve ever done (probably ever will). Language and cultural barriers were shocking too but I feel glad to say I tackled it pretty well.

On the contrary, I can proudly talk about my achievements. I worked on the creation of a policy gap analysis report on the Indian Handicrafts Sector after multiple qualitative and quantitative research surveys. Designed community-centric advocacy models of training and provided the same to 65 women artisans. Impacted the importance of empathy and most outstanding professional achievement has been spreading the word about Fair Trade and its principles outside my larger host community.

This journey helped me to meet some fantastic people. Waving them goodbye and moving on to the next chapter of my life seems tough, but I believe I’ve equipped them well to take this impact road forward.

Even though various challenges and setbacks made me question many things, I am sure that while graduating, I will be able to hold onto the promise I made to myself by creating an enormous impact and touching people’s lives.
Assimilating myself and creating impact in two projects with rural and tribal communities of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in a short period is my biggest achievement. My newfound passion for Monitoring and Evaluation and Policies has provided me space to holistically utilize and explore my expertise.

PRAKRITI PANDIA

My journey was not of cherry and blossoms but laughter, tears, learning, and courage. My journey has now become a story of success only because of the immense support and strength I was able to get unconditionally from my support systems. My story of this journey is incomplete without them. Here I am showering love on my support systems!

This is one quote that kept me going and resonates with my journey

“A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking because its trust is not in the branch, but in its wings.” - Charlie Wardle.

(An end to the journey which taught me the importance of self-reliance.)

She came in, with her eyes shining for impact, striving to balance passion and life, imagined a road that was blooming to take her in, the reality had a different story to tell, endless sleepless nights, bridging the communication gaps, deadlines fast approaching, succumbing to every tool that made her believe will create an impact, disappointments and questioning, lessons learned, she left with a lot more stories to tell, not just hers but of everyone, and the experience which changed her for good.

The experience which made her see the world, through the eyes of not just hers, but of just and unjustness.

The experience imparted her vision to many, The experience made her stand up for herself and believe in herself with kindness.

Reinventing myself: Familiarisation with Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh: Staples

In the chilling Delhi winters in December 2021, my metamorphosing journey of becoming a butterfly began. After AIF Orientation, I was excited to meet my supervisor and the project team and start the work in the Learning and Migration Program at AIF. I immersed myself in reading project proposals and reports and conducting online team training. Soon after, on 20th December, I started writing project proposals, and it hit me that I should be in Jharkhand to do quality work. I packed my bags and arrived at Ranchi Airport on 18th January 2022, filled with happiness and jitters.

Here I started familiarising myself with the culture, community, and team. I set up my room with lights and dreamcatchers to keep me company as I missed my family and city; this was my first experience living outside. But soon enough, I made friends and spent the time watching movies and sharing stories with them.

I shared many beautiful times with team members in the office. We cooked, worked, conducted trainings and learned together.
But I found myself extensively challenged when working with women. I had never worked with women in a tribal and rural area, and I wasn’t sure what to expect and how to go about the session, so I tried to shake off my nervousness and enter my confident state. To my surprise, I introduced physical, musical, and participation-based activities, which were a hit. I learned, ‘Take risks; you will learn either way.

When I conclude my journey, in retrospect, I can say the journey might have ended. Still, the gifts wrapped with the nostalgia of experiences, learnings, and bonds will linger on for years, primarily because of the documentation of this beautiful journey of a lifetime.

Later in May, I left for Chhattisgarh to start the second leg of my journey, which was full of surprises and giggles. Here I met Yash Paul and Gauri Rathi. We three worked in the office like a small family. I am fortunate to have found these gems!

To name a few important people. My co-fellow, Vaishali Joshi, was my roommate in Jharkhand, and we shared varied adventures, from 4 am late-night talks to fighting insects to her wedding shopping. Another co-fellow, Amana Praveen, grew close as we shared our disappointments and painful issues while finding strength in each other’s stories. It is astonishing to see how you find friends in unexpected situations; glad to have found many soulful people (Avijit, Ankita, and Sashita). I shared an enduring and sweet relationship with Amanpreet Kaur, my lovely mentor.

For my work, I lived in remote villages of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. I often found myself sleeping with a book in my hand; reading and creativity became my friends. I learned monitoring and evaluation through reading and attending a rigorous online course. I found solace and calm in writing the project proposals, reports, and concept notes. I was beyond this world when conducting training on gender, health, and life skills with the team.

But I found myself extensively challenged when working with women. I had never worked with women in a tribal and rural area, and I wasn’t sure what to expect and how to go about the session, so I tried to shake off my nervousness and enter my confident state. To my surprise, I introduced physical, musical, and participation-based activities, which were a hit. I learned, ‘Take risks; you will learn either way’. When I conclude my journey, in retrospect, I can say the journey might have ended. Still, the gifts wrapped with the nostalgia of experiences, learnings, and bonds will linger on for years, primarily because of the documentation of this beautiful journey of a lifetime.

I felt one with myself and others in communities surrounded by children, adolescent girls, and women. These visits shook my ground, made me question my beliefs, and propelled me to think creatively. I was on my toes in the field as conducting workshops on gender, health, and sexuality with children and adolescents was natural as I have four years of experience as a child and adolescent psychologist. However, the issues and methodology I used in workshops with them were also innovative and new to me.

I started with hope in my heart, Ending with an enduring note in my head, A journey to cherish, And a lesson to carry. -Prakriti
My host organization was Yuwa India Trust, based in Ranchi, Jharkhand. Founded in 2009, Yuwa is an internationally acclaimed community-based non-profit organization empowering girls in rural Jharkhand through sports and education. Yuwa uses three participatory and interconnected programs - sports for development, education, and life-skills workshops - as a strategy to give girls the confidence, leadership skills, education, network, and tools they need to break out of poverty permanently.

I could not relocate to Ranchi until after the third wave of covid subsided in January 2022. So, I began observing Yuwa's school activities online (on google meet and WhatsApp) and witnessed social innovation emerging in the field of virtual education in rural India. I moved to Ranchi in February and moved in with a co-fellow, Prakriti Pandia. It was during the in-person engagement that I bonded with the girls. I began observing daily football practices and weekly life-skills workshops for about 610 adolescent girls.

My fellowship journey began in December 2021 with a virtual Orientation designed to prepare the fellows for a smooth transition into our host organization’s culture and project. Even though it could not replace the in-person experience, a plethora of social-emotional learning exercises helped me connect with the people from my cohort who were as passionate and enthusiastic as me.

Getting comfortable with 14 year olds rejecting my ideas and taking action on what works for them.

My fellowship project aimed to assess and improve Yuwa’s current monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems across three different programs and to share externally the newly collected stories of impact. Besides observation, I used various methods such as case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions in March and April. This resulted in a revised MEL framework with nine new data collection instruments, including feedback surveys, training evaluations, and a revised review system.

Getting to know Yuwa

I have also been actively involved in career development activities for girls because I wanted to empower them. Some of the ways I have been able to build their capacities included conducting summer classes on online tools and resources. I am indebted to the people in my network whom I was able to leverage to give career talks that supported the girls and build collaborations with Tech Mahindra Foundation’s SMART Academy and Wedu Changemakers. This journey would have been incomplete without their assistance.
Halfway through the fellowship, I realized that my responsibilities had increased with the advent of new opportunities and life-changing experiences. I became an Atlas Corps Scholar as part of a 5-month program by Virtual Leadership Institute which required my extensive engagement to develop myself. During the same time, I also got selected for an MBA program at Vanderbilt University’s Owen Graduate School of Management. In addition, one of my personal accomplishments also included my marriage in April. The range of events also stressed me out so I vehemently started using time-management tools and resources to keep myself afloat.

**LIFE AND TIME MANAGEMENT**

This fellowship allowed me to build a community of friends, colleagues, and networks that will last beyond the fellowship duration. I am privileged to have been supported by family, friends and colleagues who have been through thick and thin. Plus, the motivation that I gained from the girls was powerful and something I’ll always cherish.