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Internship Placement: Vanastree
Internship Location: Sirsi, India
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Question Set 1

1. What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

My initial impressions of the organization is that they have reached a great audience: they have many members, people who know about it, people who want to contribute; a vast array of support. However, in preparation for the Malnad Mela (where Vanastree members showcase and sell their handicrafts, seeds, or food products) I have noticed that this organization is primarily Sunita and that is a lot of work for one person to do! She mentioned to me that I am the 50th intern, and during our time in Mysore, she was interviewing another one! Seeing how her days go, the beginning part is orientating me to new things, checking on me, and giving me tasks. I think more could be done if she had a concrete staff and less short-term interns. I enjoy being her intern, however, and have picked up new skills as I am helping prepare things for the Mela. As for my expectations, I had thought I would be working with the women every day, but after talking to Sunita and Suma (a woman who is also living here), the women are too busy to meet every day, so it's more monthly. While this didn't meet my expectations, I am learning more about the living situations of the women because they don't meet every day. I am learning about what keeps them at home, what responsibilities they have, and hopefully when I meet them at the Mela, what motivates them to keep coming back to Vanastree.

2. What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

The thing that stood out the most to me was how *usual* India was. I was expecting a huge dynamite of culture shock, but nothing surprised me. Perhaps I looked up most things to expect, or read my guide book too in depth, but I fell right into motion with everything. I mean, even the driving seemed normal. Maybe not *normal*, but not something that set me back.

3. What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

My greatest anxiety prior to departing was wondering how I was going to make it through all of the emotional stages one goes through when being abroad (i.e. "the honeymoon phase," being homesick, settling in, ready to go home, missing your placement). The stage I get stuck on the longest is being homesick. When I was in Montreal I was able to talk myself out of it because it was only for a week, but this is long term. I am still worried about being able to be my full self because part of me is preoccupied with home, but I have peppered in a few activities throughout the day that help with me engage with home, get my fill, re-energize, and focus on my goal. When I am first getting ready in the morning, I will listen to ten minutes of my favorite podcast; if I am doing laundry that day, I will usually finish that

episode; and at the end of the day when I am taking a bath, I listen to a few songs. Knowing the length of each has also helped me keep track of how much time I am spending alone. These techniques have helped me manage my anxiety, I'm still in the phase, but having more control over how I react to inner emotions means I can healthily interact and experience others, my work, and possibly, the next phase.

Question Set #2

1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the remainder of your internship?

After the Malnad Mela, my workload has definitely slowed down. The days leading up to the Mela were chaotic and continued to be that way throughout the two-day affair. I have improved my graphic design skills, learned how to do wood working, and definitely built some muscle after lifting heavy bags from cars to stalls and back. Now that my internship duties have somewhat subsided, I find that I have more time for my anthropology research. Of all the ethnographic accounts that I have read in my college career, I have never heard of an anthropologist working as an intern; I think for good reason! Anthropology in itself requires one's full attention and complete immersion, while an internship requires timetables, deadlines, and tasks to complete. I thought I had struck a balance between the two until recently my homestay mother mentioned that I do a lot of computer work. Now my new task is to give priority to my observational research during the day and do my internship duties at night.

As for my professional goals, I am learning the difficulties of immersion especially in a household that has a full routine. I assume that balancing multiple types and loads of work will be a characteristic of my future professional life as I aim to gain more experience in the field. Therefore, my internship goals going forward would be to learn new skills apart from administrative work. I really want to see if I can offer more to Vanastree other than what I have already done or experienced.

2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

In terms of personal goals, I have learned more Kannada and have gotten over my fear of speaking it since I have to use it every day. Sometimes I get frustrated with being an outsider or feeling like I'm in the way, so I do have to work on coping with that. I don't have anything specific that I want to address before I leave, rather I want to continue learning more about Indian society and analyzing my own society.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

The experiences that have stood out to me so far are in relation to gender roles. Even today, I learned that the bus is usually segregated by sex. Navigating this has been difficult as I have had to learn what's appropriate, what's expected, basically the "rules of the game." It's come to a point where I don't even

acknowledge men outside of colleagues or my host's family because I am unsure of the proper etiquette. The one experience I want to have before I leave is to like the taste of curd.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life—what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

Every morning I wake up around 7, have breakfast around 7:30, and begin my workday around 8. Living at my internship site means that there is always work to be done whether as an intern or as a resident, therefore, my workday doesn't end until 7PM when I take my bath and we have dinner. However, sometimes after dinner the work will start again for about an hour or so as we wrap-up and review. Weekdays and weekends are inseparable; I do not have certain days off, but I am allowed to take things slower on Sundays. The work I do as a resident is watering the garden in the evening, taking the dogs for a walk if Sunita is busy, doing my laundry, and starting the fire to heat up the bath water. After our 1:30 lunch, time definitely speeds up, so by the time I reach my bed, I am exhausted from the day. The exploring that I have done outside of work is quite minimal. Most of my travel to town or to other cities has been work-related, but not all of the activities have been. For example: After the Malnad Mela, I stayed in Bengaluru for a few more days at a local artist residency. One of the neighbors took me to a school that she taught at, so I got a chance to see an alternative educational program in action. At my homestay here in Sirsi, I accompanied my host mother to a festival and other women's houses. While the balance between work and exploring is not as clear as it might have been if I were living offsite, I still do get the chance to see new places, meet new people, and try different things.

2. Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

There are three buildings here at Huthina Betta: the main house which hosts Sunita, the dogs, the kitchen, washing machine, and a guest room; Canopy cottage is where I live and has its own bathroom; and a third guest building that has a bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. The last building is further back into the forest, whereas the cottage is just a few feet away from the main house. The cottage is quite comfortable, though I spend most of my time at the main house doing my internship work. The windows are covered with mesh and the space between the roof and the room is also protected by mesh. However, some insects still find their way in between the gaps in the doors, so I sleep with a mosquito net.

I think that if a future intern wants more independence they should ask about alternative housing, but it will be hard to find it in a rural area like this. I'm not sure how long a host family would want to take on an intern; I lived with my host family for about two weeks and felt like I had overstayed by just a day. The family was very kind and we got along well, but in a rural area like this, the day is packed with seasonal tasks. My host mother would spend most of her day shelling Areca and my host father working on the Areca plantation. I assume that most interns would also say "yes" to the opportunity to help out and learn more, but at a certain point it becomes intrusive and the family may just want to be alone.

One tip I have is to bring your own neck pillow and comfy blanket. I initially thought I would use these only on the plane, but they have come in handy during long train rides or if whoever is hosting you has bedding that doesn't agree with your skin.

3. Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc? What would you do different knowing what you know now?

The hardest thing about finances is figuring out if the item is being sold at a good price! In the U.S. we use \$50 and up to denote something that is very valuable, so when people here say something costs Rs. 300 my mind immediately goes to "That's too expensive" when really it's \$4. It's the "hundred" that is really throwing me off. At the same time, I don't know if Rs. 300 is a good price for that item. At the Malnad Mela we were selling hand-painted fridge magnets for Rs. 150. I kept wondering if that was too steep; how do you gauge what's overpriced and what isn't if the vocabulary (hundreds and thousands) is rarely used in your own language? Does that make sense? Because of this, my finances have not been carefully monitored, but I do not go shopping every day, so spending Rs. 800 once in a while is fine.

For the next intern, ask Sunita if you should bring your internship payment in USD or if you can just pull money out in India in rupees. I had known that there was demonetization in India, but hadn't comprehended that I needed to bring cash with me. Luckily, the amount you can withdraw from the ATM has increased, so I only have to withdraw money a few more times before I settle the bill, but it is still a hassle.

4. Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage this? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

Now that I am back at Huthina Betta my main mode of transportation is my feet. It's beautiful to walk around and I particularly enjoy walking through the paddy fields during the foggy mornings and cool evenings.

At my homestay I learned how to take the bus, and I have also taken long distance buses between cities for work-related travel. I got a lot of stares on the bus the first few times because I am a foreigner, but I was also craning to see out the window. The conductor doesn't announce what stop you're at and there are no signs in English to tell you, so for the first few days I wrote out all the bus stops between my homestay and Huthina based on buildings. Many of the bus stops look very similar, so picking out unique, permanent details about each stop was an ordeal. If Sunita gives the next intern the same phone (it's basically the first model of Nokia), I suggest they check the "Reminders" tab as it houses all of these notes and try to beat my high score on the game "Bounce".

My next challenge is to take the bus from here (Karkolli) to the bazaar in Sirsi. To catch the bus back, I will have to go to the Old Bus Stand where it's about 40 buses all parked in one area going to 40 different places. On Feb. 18th, Sunita will be leaving for a three week trip. At that time, I will dedicate my time towards exploring the town more.

When we run errands into town or want more reliable transportation, we hire one of our private drivers. I have gotten to know our two main drivers, Munaf and Tilek, very well and trust them to take me on solo journeys. I did ride a motorcycle with two other people and that was quite the experience! Seeing families of five crammed onto one motorcycle is not unusual. I did find out, however, that if you are the last person on the motorcycle, the whole ride is a workout for your core as you try to sit straight up, not fall off, and balance your bags.

Question Set #4

1. How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

All of the practical coursework has come in handy! Knowing ahead of time what to expect about the day to day activities (like using a squat toilet) has helped me feel like I am not completely foreign because I have some know-how. Although, I still struggle with hand-washing my clothes—some of my clothes are stiff because I use too much soap and can't rinse it all out. I am glad that I did not read too much about India because books offer only one perspective either from another traveler's experience or a scholar's if in a textbook. For instance, in my Culture and Personality class we read about the third gender in India and how they are revered as mystical peoples. Instead, I saw an alternative reality in Bangalore where a group of them were begging and walking between cars during stoplights. The person I was traveling with had said that they were perfectly capable of getting a job (she noted how they must be eating well since they're "fat") and kept taking the money of the poor auto-rickshaw drivers who had no windows to roll up. Other classmates had told me about their experiences, and those either have yet to come to fruition or I experienced the exact opposite. Therefore, I would suggest to other interns to follow a similar path: learn the basics of what to expect, then get ready for your own, unique adventure. Knowing the basics will help you desensitize yourself to what may be the most shocking, but leaving yourself with questions will help you remain curious.

2. Have you learned about any new possibilities for a career path? Have you done any informational interviews to learn about the field?

I have learned more about my current career path as an anthropologist and have connected with a social anthropologist here who has helped me develop my research question further. In addition to that, Vanastree is currently working with the Women's Earth Alliance, an organization in Oakland. Part of me is hoping that if I collect enough data and show my skills through my Vanastree work, I can find an internship with them once I return.

3. Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

In early February, Sunita and I took a field visit to a city on the coast. She had been corresponding with an NGO that wanted to align with Vanastree. The major part of our field visit was meeting one of the women sponsored by the NGO. We had interviewed her and talked with the case manager for some hours before heading back to the van. On the sides of the small street were vendors selling vegetables, dyes, toiletries, saris, etc; and in the middle of the street was a large wooden carriage ornately decorated. Walking amongst this buzzing crowd, I could smell the flowers coming from a stall nearby. I was looking at the beautiful arrangements when Sunita pointed out a palm flower or a coconut flower—

I do not recall. Whatever it was, I was intrigued to see what it smelled like. In the U.S. I have the habit of literally stopping to smell the roses, so without a second thought, I leaned over to smell the flower. As I straightened up, I saw the shocked face of a man next to me and Sunita waved me over. She informed me that you're not supposed to directly smell flowers because they could be offerings for gods and if you smell it, then you are tainting it. Ashamed that I ruined/tainted the flower I turned to buy it, but Sunita said it was okay, and we rushed away. The hardest part about learning from this is that these small habits, especially when appreciating nature, never seem to be offensive, yet they are. Of course, if given a second chance, I would not sniff the flower. However, this was not an apparent cultural difference like knowing what clothes are appropriate clothes or food to consume, so I may run into problems like this in the future because they are "hidden" conflicts.

4. What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

The most frustrating aspects of my host culture are the ones concerning the dynamics between sexes and the freedoms awarded to males. In the U.S., society is still highly patriarchal, but not to the level that I have experienced here. It is frustrating to see all of the work women do inside and outside the home and to see their husbands not lend a helping hand. It is also frustrating because back home I have always enjoyed going out by myself or with friends, but each time that I head out here, it is with the accompaniment of a man, or I risk getting stares when I travel alone. However, it would be an oversight and culturally inappropriate for me to say that every woman is oppressed by this because I have seen the tremendous strength and spirit women have. They handle and juggle so much at once without getting flustered. It has also been rewarding to see relationships between men and women that break the mold. A couple of the Vanastree women I interviewed had husbands that fully supported their membership, taught them about organics, and pushed them to pursue their own dreams. So while I get frustrated with the treatment of women and expectations of them, I have also found it rewarding to see this society through multiple perspectives and experiences.

5. What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

I can adapt quickly. I have moved around from house to house, field visit to field visit, each with their own set of challenges. Somehow, I am able to spring between each with a sense of curiosity and excitement. This is good news for me as I hope to continue this lifestyle of movement. I have also learned to watch my diet more when abroad. Once Sunita found out I like Indian sweets and white bread, she has been stocking the pantry with all kinds of biscuits and bread items from a local bakery. As I prepare to transition back to the U.S., I am trying to switch my carb consumption for fruits, so that the habit doesn't follow me. Although, I will bring back a loaf and some milk sweets to share with friends and to remind me of my time abroad.

Question Set #5

1. Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you have been gaining for your next endeavors (job search, graduate school applications, etc). Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below.

The professional success I achieved during this internship was learning how to communicate what I need in order to be an effective intern. When working for someone else, I tend to teeter more towards being complacent and doing whatever is assigned, but I found that it is necessary for me to also advocate for my needs. For example: I asked Sunita if she could change up my tasks from being just Vanastree work to splitting it with garden or land labor. Having something to do aside from looking at a computer meant I would be engaging with the environment in a similar way that the members would.

My personal success surrounded my ability to stick myself out there and try new things. Being in a new country, I had a lot of anxieties like getting lost, being unable to talk to anyone, etc. However, wherever I went there was someone there to help. I learned how to trust my instincts and the general compassion of others more.

My cross-cultural success I think was not talking about America! It turns out that a lot of foreigners go on and on about America and how things are different there. Sunita expressed her fondness for me just talking and asking about India. To me, it makes sense to focus on the cultural context that you are in and do comparisons later. When someone is always doing comparisons, it tends to make hosts feel as if their culture or country is not adequate.

2. After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:

- Outline the context of the situation

- Describe any challenges you faced

- Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges

For my professional success it concerned the type of work I was doing. I had felt that aside from field visits and homestays, my internship was just like any other: I was writing reports, creating visual aids, and preparing Vanastree products. I began to reflect on why I chose India as opposed to an internship in the U.S. and what I really wanted to get out of it. I was not comfortable asking my host/boss for something else because I did not want to seem ungrateful, but I found my joy of being in India slipping away. It was also frustrating because I would be in the same spot everyday while life was buzzing around me. Eventually, we sat down to discuss upcoming tasks and I felt it was appropriate to ask her for change in work; half computer, half land. She was very open to it and enjoyed seeing me happy to do land work.

The cross-cultural accomplishment is harder to explain. Of course any visitor wants to know more about the country they are in. Over dinner they would tell me folk tales, religious traditions, and how relationships with the environment had changed over time. Occasionally, I would connect both America and India, but my primary focus was to see where India was at, then later assess how it compares and what I can apply to my own life. It was not until we housed other guests did I realize how different this approach was. Towards the end of my stay, the homestay was majority Kannada speakers, with three being bilingual. However, the other American would talk about American things, refer to American pop culture, and would speak primarily in English. Before then, Sunita and Suma had made sure to limit how many conversations they had in Kannada, so that I did not feel left out. I had felt embarrassed for engaging in these conversations that were only relevant to us Americans because I was leaving them out. Each time I would try to relate it back to India and then try to talk to the other guests

in Kannada. Although this continued to happen, I am proud that I have this sense of awareness; to know when the topic of discussion is exclusive and perhaps irrelevant for the moment.

3. Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

The culture of the workplace had to be adaptive to a lifestyle that was the opposite of itself. For us, we could work all day on Vanastree items. Our food would be prepared, the land taken care of, and the house cleaned while we busied ourselves with Vanastree. However, for the other employees/trustees of Vanastree who lived and worked in another village, Vanastree had to come second or third to everything else. After doing a few homestays, I began to see how demanding one's life is outside of the comfort of the home base. Creating a lens that sees past your everyday life and instead peers into the life of others will help ease frustration and generate patience because now you have a reference point or an understanding as to why this is late or why they need an extension.

4. What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

Don't "investigate" too much into India! No one ever describes it in its true way. Even if you have been to India before, it is the kind of place that keeps surprising you. Expect nothing and you will receive more than you can imagine!

Question Set #6

1. Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

Now when I think of India, I don't see the stereotypical images found in textbooks or films. I have a more personal connection. I imagine the women I have met, the children I played with, all of the sweets I ate, and the hot chai that burned my throat. My impressions were limited to what people told me or what I saw, but no one ever mentioned how sweet it is to be a part of a community that is both curious about you and also loving. I did not think I would feel freer in India, but I did! I can feel it in myself now. I remember swimming in the river and my host mom telling me that it was okay to swim in my undergarments because no one was around. I had so much hesitation and fear. As I hastily dove into the water, I felt those emotions shed off of me. Those emotions were more than me being unsure if it would be appropriate to swim in my undergarments, they were me being unsure of myself in India, in America, in any context. Unsure of what is right or wrong. Always asking should I or shouldn't I. Never being. My host mom told me to be. No one is around to judge; just be. Even after surfacing, I left those emotions in the water.

2. What were your greatest challenges and rewards on this internship in each of your three development areas?

- Personal & Professional: I combined these two because the biggest challenge was having time and space for both. Towards the end, I focused on my personal well-being to make sure that I savored India

enough. Professional skills can be cultivated in nearly any environment, but it's the personal challenges and rewards that are unique to the context. At a "normal" site you have home and work separate, so the mind never has to say "Okay, now to focus on my personal development." At Vanastree, my challenge was learning how to train my brain to do that.

- Cross-Cultural: Learning Kannada! I feel like I did not try hard enough and should have spent more time trying to learn from people than my guide book! However, as I departed India, I realized this was the last time I would use Kannada until I returned, so before my flight took off I spoke to the airport staff very enthusiastically. It's rewarding to know it, but I still have regrets for not learning more.