

Trip to Kumbhargarh: The Apprentice

Two days. Twenty Indians and twenty French students. Away from civilization. Having to work for their survival. No, this isn't the plot for a new reality show that is to be aired on television. But rather, this is the plot of the drama that ensued when twenty students of our school from Classes 9 and 11 met with their French counterparts from Ermitage International to work in the less developed village of Kumbhargarh.



Kumbhargarh village is located in the interiors of Maharashtra near a dam. The people living here are *adivasis* who have been ostracized from the main segment of the Kumbhargarh village resulting in their living in a small site situated 10 minutes away from the main village. Lack of money and skilled labor has arrested the village development, and it wallows in one of the worst conditions possible with almost non-existent infrastructure— no schools for education, no toilet facilities, few houses with interrupted power, and mostly straw huts. So, imagine our shock when we, who had no experience of work in the fields and were probably as adept at handling a spade as Cristiano Ronaldo trying to play cricket, were chosen to empower [superhero theme in the background], sorry, help these people! And so off we went on the 19th of March to Kumbhargarh to carry out the “legacy” of our “predecessors”.

We reached Kumbhargarh at 11.00 hours to take stock of our situation. The students, who had come earlier, had finished building the toilet block and laying the foundations of a house. And thus, after we exchanged goodbyes with these friends, we were split into two groups with each group given a task for the day.



At the pit section, our inexperience did show. We were unable to use the pickaxe or the spade properly, even after multiple demonstrations. It took some effort by the **Empowering Rural India** Project core team and funny quips by Mr. Ranjan to finally get us going. We started off with our steely minds set to reach the almost impossible (for us) target of 10 feet (fingers-crossed)!!!



Things weren't going too smooth with the house group too. Using a hammer and setting up boards for the walls proved to be too rough a task for one student's "soft palms" ("My nails have been recently manicured"), as she slunk away into the shade. But



nothing escapes the sharp eyes of the teachers, and she was sent to work again. And soon, the boards were put up, and the actual process of readying the mixture for the walls began. "Two parts red sand, one part grey sand and one part gravel with 3 liters of water" were the given instructions. And the mixture they did prepare. Amidst constant fallings, scraping of hands, dropping off bowls, the group finally got going and started to lay down the mixture into the floorboards. But then, fate had its way

and their rhythm was to be interrupted by the lunch break (much to relief of some!).

Work progressed smoothly post the lunch break, the groups finding their long lost rhythm, and the French and Indians working in tandem to complete their goals for the trip. The end product – a nearly complete pit for sewage, and a quarter section of the walls finished. Though we hadn't been able to complete the tasks set for us, we did do a good job, and returned home with our hearts full of pride that we had accomplished a task we never thought we would have been able to accomplish.

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