



“Confidence”

I'm in Noida which is close to Delhi. I'm trained in Hindustani classical vocal music and I'm a self-taught instrumentalist. I was a participant in 2018 - my colleagues were a part of Ethno India here and I went to see that concert and I really liked the vibe of it - lots of positivity - and I made up my mind that I want to go for an Ethno too. Ethno England because I'm part-British and part-Indian. The last time I was in England was when I was 6, so I wanted to go back.

I was very shy, and not very comfortable reaching out to people but right from the beginning, everyone I met from participants to the organisers was very warm and welcoming. I remember I was at the station, waiting for someone to pick me up and then there was another participant who was sitting there and I was hesitant, but this was like 'hey, are you here for Ethno?' and then he started talking. It's very rare to be in spaces where people who don't know you or whom you don't know are very open right from the beginning, but it was just a completely different vibe. I had never experienced that kind of a camp - sleeping in sleeping

bags, being in tents, no proper washrooms. It was completely out of my comfort zone! It really challenged me and I realised the importance of every little thing that was there around me. I had to push my boundaries. The whole experience helped me a lot in getting to know myself better. I had to be on my own for the entire trip, so I got to know a lot of things about myself. I didn't know that I could be confident. Being self aware is not something that we're taught.

I think when you're actually sitting with people for hours and practising music there are so many other things that are happening at the same time. It helps in bonding a lot when you're playing together. One thing about the whole Ethno that's really nice is that we're all learning all the tunes together, nothing's happening individually. In the end also we're playing together as a group, they're not solo performances. The people who were singing with me were not judging me at all, - that was a very important

aspect as well. Nobody ever pinpointed it or said, 'hey you know what you're doing this wrong'. The way of communication at Ethno created a safe space for everyone.

In India the concept of busking is not very popular. I had never seen anyone busking, so to be out there in front of people - my god! - out there on the streets, and performing, I had never been that happy after performing. I've been doing music a lot but I get very nervous on stage, when I'm singing alone especially. As soon as I get on stage my heartbeat starts going fast and I just feel like a completely different person, and I'm lost. Earlier I used to feel like 'maybe performance is not my thing'. It took me some time to accept that, but I made peace with that fact - you know 'it's okay, I'll teach'. But when I performed there, busking, being so carefree in a different land, I was like 'Hey I CAN perform!'





I come from a classical background and things are very strict you know, but here it was more free, everyone had smiles, they were going with the groove - it was a very different energy on stage. The audience definitely resonates with it, and if they can feel how happy we are performing and then they are happy listening to us, I think energy definitely gets transferred from people to people. Sometimes you have these stereotypes in your mind, subconsciously, about certain countries or cultures. You know, you have these thoughts because you've heard it in the media - people might look down upon people of different cultures, and when I went there it wasn't like that. Everyone's the same! We face the same emotions, we face the same things. The only thing that's different is geographical location, or how we look on the outside. And I know this idea is very easy to say but only when we're experiencing it do we actually know what it means. Having an open mind and just more awareness about what's happening around the world, literally physically - reading about it and stuff is different - but when you're out there meeting those people from those countries it's completely different. It's made me a lot more aware and confident.

One thing I really liked about Ethno England was the whole sustainability aspect of it, because I knew about these terms - we know about them - but we don't actually practise them. It was mentioned in the bathroom that we saved this much water by not flushing, and that made me think, 'oh my god why don't we think about these things when we're actually using them ourselves?' You would realise the importance of 'use as much as you need', 'you should not waste', sustaining these natural resources, doing our bit. We read about these things in our

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lessons, or we may see this kind of posters and stuff around, but actually being there and experiencing all of this made me more aware, and when I came back, I'm like 'oh, this is plastic, maybe I can replace this with something else, and maybe not use the plastic.'

I took world music in my classroom for kids that come from an underprivileged background. They have absolutely no idea about the world and those kind of things. It's definitely helped me having conversations with those kids. I did this really interesting activity where I asked them: So what do you think they like to eat? What do you think they like to wear? What language do you think they speak? Showing them culture pictures or maybe videos. And the children have

completely wild guesses, but then you shatter the glass and you're like 'no that's not true', 'they speak this language in this country', 'this thing is grown over there more so they eat that.' So then influencing those kids and their mindsets as well.

Last year I had to move to a completely new place. It was my choice and I wanted to do that. Ethno is one of the major places from where I got the courage. If I could be in a different country where I don't know anyone for 23 days on my own, then I can have this whole amount of confidence in me. I had the belief in myself that I can do this.

As told to: Maya

