I had the opportunity to do an assignment with the Sehgal Foundation and visit some villages in Mewat (Nuh) district along with Crystal Harris, from the World Food Prize in Iowa in the United States.

Our first day at Sehgal Foundation, March 8, 2017, was celebrated as International Women’s Day. The women on staff got together to celebrate womanhood. The theme of the event was Nazariya—to change the mindset of everyone toward women. The topics discussed were mostly related with women’s empowerment. Many panchayat (village council) members and field workers presented their views on women’s issues and shared various success stories. Village women and girls were really enthusiastic in sharing their experiences. It was enriching to listen to the experiences of grassroots workers.
EXPERIENCE AT COMMUNITY RADIO CENTER (ALFAZ-E-MEWAT)

We visited the community radio at Ghaghas village. Community radio is a unique initiative by the foundation in collaboration with the Government of India that has given voice to the people of the region and furthered a community-led development process. After an amazing experience talking with the people who coordinate activities at the center, we had a sense of how community radio has created a platform for villagers to discuss their problems and their views about social issues, including issues generally considered as taboo in our society. Community radio has also helped villagers during the demonetization period, giving them timely information. Children participated as well in various activities that day.

I had the opportunity to record a program on the radio regarding exam fever. This was my first time on radio. I shared my own experience as a child during exams and suggested the importance of proper diet, sleep, and of course preparation for exams.
TEACHING A DIGITAL LITERACY CLASS

Our next stop was to witness a digital literacy class in progress in Nangal village. We shared some of our own knowledge about digital devices to adolescent girls. We talked about Internet banking and various apps, such as BHIM, USSD, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. It was a great experience talking to those girls. We asked them about their dreams and aspirations. Some wanted to study more, some want to become teachers, and most want to pursue a career in the medical field. They complained about financial hardships as well as the lack of available facilities. Everyone eagerly came forward to discuss about their own strengths and weaknesses. For example, all of them wanted to learn the English language.

Visit to a life skills center, a primary school, and the site of a check dam

On our last day, we visited with women at a life skills center who were learning stitching. They were so much excited to show what they have made and discuss their learning experiences.

We then visited a primary school. The renovation and wall paintings on the building were done by Sehgal Foundation in collaboration with Mosaic Fertilizer. The school looked bright, and it was amazing to see all the images on the wall of the school.
The most interesting thing to learn about was the see-saw machine that served a dual purpose. Children can play on the see-saw and their playing activity pumps water to the storage tank. This innovative initiative by the foundation needs to be adopted in more schools.

We visited a check dam in Firozpur-Zirka block of Mewat district built by Mewat Development Authority in collaboration with Coca-Cola India and Sehgal Foundation in 2012. This check dam turned out to be a boon for
villagers in this area. Before this check dam, they were facing severe water scarcity and a drinking water problem. The groundwater level in this area has increased by about 100 meters and provides irrigation for agricultural purposes.

These ten days were really amazing for me. I had a great learning experience of the foundation’s work going on in the villages that need to be replicated in other areas also. I enjoyed a great engagement with Crystal Harris. She is a great human being who was very much inclined to do whatever can be done for those girls in the villages. It is really good to meet with people who have concerns for others. I hope that this kind of good work will continue with great vigor for the welfare of people in rural India.

(This is the edited version of the blog by, Ritambhara Singh, who volunteered with Sehgal Foundation during March 2017)