

Pegasus Scholarship Trust – India Placement 2019

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Picture the scene: it is circa 35 degrees and the court's resident peacocks are noisily seducing each other on the roof outside; two witnesses in two different cases are being cross-examined simultaneously on either side of the courtroom as the over-burdened judge translates their Hindi answers into English for the stenographers to take down as evidence, while hearing a bail application at the same time. I'm mid-way through my first week in India and feeling a long way from home. What an introduction to the Indian legal system!

In the autumn of 2019, I spent two months in India as a Pegasus Scholar. I was based in Delhi where I divided my time roughly equally between placements at the Delhi Commission for Women (the municipal body which works to improve the lot of Delhi's women), the High Court and the Supreme Court of India.

The work was extremely varied, everything from compiling statistics on the woeful lack of prosecution in domestic violence cases to observing a five-day insolvency trial (I have to confess that the latter, as a family law specialist, I found quite the voyage of discovery). Whilst some elements of the Indian legal sphere were remarkably similar to life at the English bar (I now understand that a dark sense of humour and a propensity to gossip about judges are universal characteristics of advocates the world over), at times the culture shock was profound: I won't forget helping out at an advocacy training day for university students where I raised an audible laugh when I explained that I had never worried that the independence of an English judge had been compromised nor the discussion that followed about the acceptable level of official to bribe.

It was a particularly interesting time to be in India, just as the radically right-wing Indian government appears to be finding new momentum. Many unprecedented things happened during my time in Delhi. This included three lawyers being shot by the police whilst at court, the arrest of prominent human rights lawyers, the alleged hacking of many journalists' mobile phones and the shutting down of whole sections of Delhi in an apparent attempt by the government to curb protests. On more than one occasion I wondered what the future held for the country and worried for my left-leaning Indian friends. The political intrigue reached its zenith for me in my final week in Delhi, as the lawyers I was working with geared up to start

the litigation which has resulted from recent events in Kashmir. I wish I'd been able to stay longer to see the full hearing.

Political worries aside, I enjoyed my time in India from start to finish: the people were incredibly welcoming and the work very interesting. It has been odd returning to London in grey January, although it is true to say that no longer being woken up at night by monkeys fighting stray dogs outside my window is something of a relief.

I am incredibly grateful for the wonderful opportunity afforded to me by the Pegasus Trust and the Hingorani Foundation. It was an unforgettable experience, which has allowed me to learn so much more than I am able to express in this short article. I would recommend a Pegasus scholarship to any young barrister.

(And no, I still don't understand how it is possible to hear three different cases at the same time).

