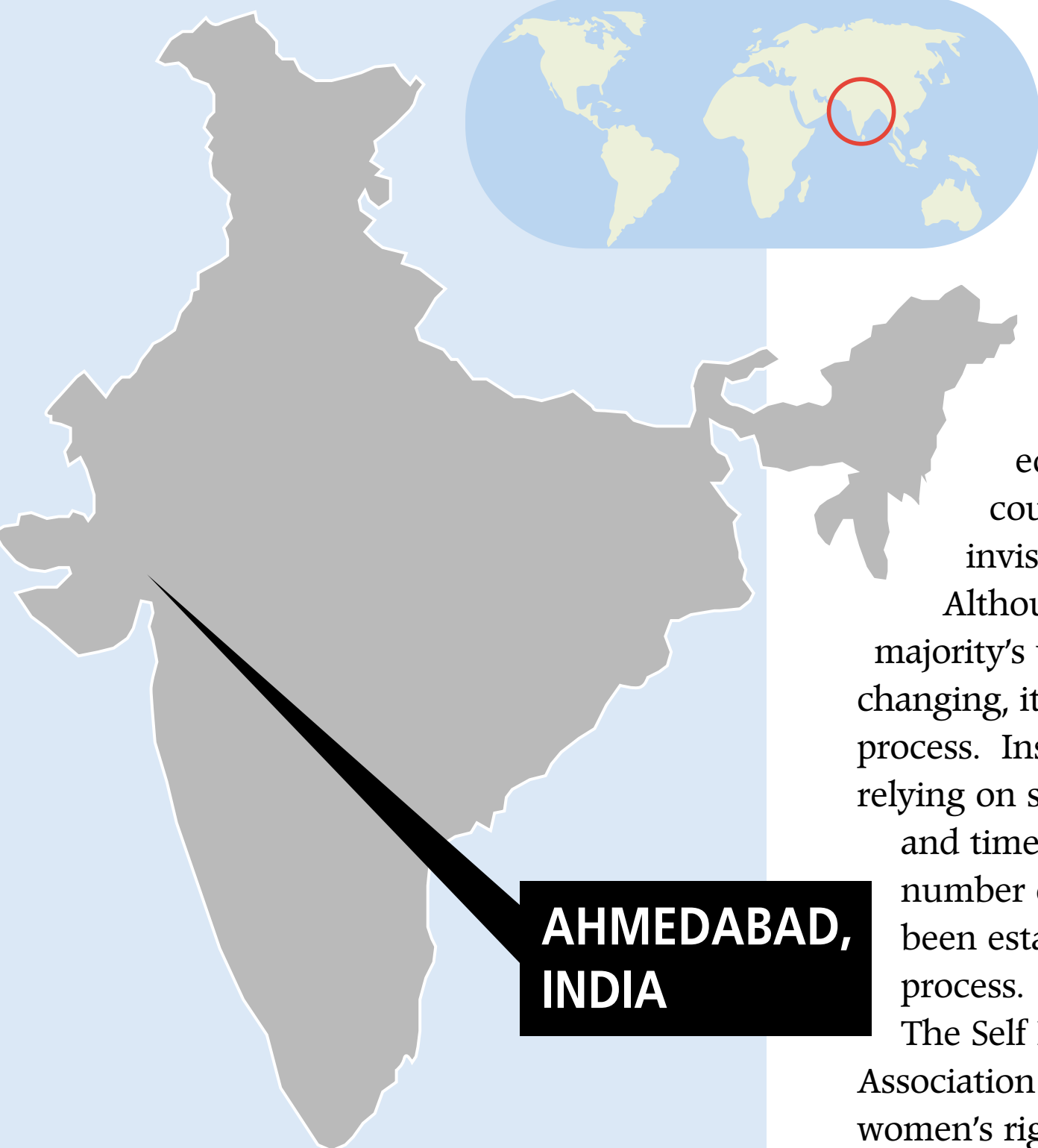


Burch Poster title
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Pooja Bavishi
Class
Hometown, State

I designed my Burch Fellowship experience to take place somewhere where I could not only make a difference in the lives of the people I worked with, but also gain new perspectives. With the help of the Burch Fellowship, I was able to combine my interest in human rights with my desire to work in my parents' country of origin and spent three months working with a women's rights organization in India.

Continued ▶



AHMEDABAD,
INDIA



Of the Indian women who are employed, 94% are part of the unorganized sector of the work force. However, the work these women do does not provide a regular salary, benefits, or securities. In addition, societal expectations place women at home to take care of their families. The result is that this part of the workforce, who works for 18 to 20 hours a day to receive a mere 14 rupees - roughly 25 cents a day, does not receive any credit for their labor. It is said that the women themselves remain, "uncounted, undercounted and invisible".

Although the majority's views are changing, it is a slow process. Instead of relying on society and time to take its course, a number of organizations have been established to aid this process.

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a labor and women's rights organization in Ahmedabad, India, which provides

support to women to raise their wages, increase their benefits, and communicate with their supervisors. The membership organization also offers women various types of securities including work security, income security, food security, and social securities such as child care, and shelter. The self-employed women perpetuate their own movement by working at SEWA. The goal of this organization is to not only allow the women to be recognized for their work, but also to help them achieve independence, economic



self-reliance as well as competencies to master in the everyday life. What first attracted me to SEWA was its international reputation as India's largest women's rights and economic development organization. My work within the research department of SEWA's Academy

Division focused mainly on representing a new project that the organization had taken on, incense stick rollers. My responsibilities included researching this industry through secondary research, focus groups, interviews and case studies with the goal of collecting and synthesizing the information to be presented to policy makers. However, this project turned out to be an enormous task and required me to overcome a number of obstacles.

Although I was relatively fluent in the language, it was initially difficult for me to understand the workers during the interviews, and for them to understand me. As a result, I spent the first two weeks in a language class to increase my ability to effectively communicate with my colleagues and research subjects. Yet another barrier I needed

to overcome was the lack of people's trust in my ability to help them. Having lived in poverty for the majority of their lives, it was difficult for some people to believe in the possibility of positive change. Another aspect that was somewhat overwhelming in the

beginning was the fact that I was not able to see the immediate results of my work. Having gained people's trust and respect and built new relationships, it was difficult to accept that the effects of my work would not be seen immediately and to some extent not at all during the three months I worked at SEWA. Despite many challenges and barriers that had to be overcome, I would not trade this experience for anything. It enabled me to gain a new perspective on the lives of people in India and made me appreciate the many things I take for granted in my own life. Reflecting on my experience in India, I understand the value of a Burch Fellowship. I left feeling prepared to work in a field that I have a passion for and am knowledgeable of. Nevertheless, these things turned out to be secondary. I learned to adapt and master new challenges, learn about different ways of life, and assess my own ability to help women in India and around the world in the future. I feel that I took a lot more away from my work at SEWA than I was able to contribute. It was an experience of a lifetime and I thank Mr. Burch for the opportunity.