

The United States has a very exaggerated, fuzzy view of the Indian culture and society. Before coming on this adventure, the only cultural insights I had to India were the book Behind the Beautiful Forever's, the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* (both about the slums of big cities), and the small insights I received from other people who had visited. None of these, however, could have prepared me for how *not* different so many things are. There are still many, many differences obviously but in the U.S. we only really see and read about the livelihoods of those in extreme poverty (of which there are very many). I really did not have any view of those who do not live in shanty towns outside of the airport. I knew of Bollywood and that there are many wealthy businessmen but did not have a strong perception of the middle class in any sorts. The night before leaving, I went to a close friend's to hang out and say goodbye. Her mom made a special point to give me a Klondike Bar and champagne because "I won't get anything like that in India." I posted a generic "Off to India" Facebook status. A lot of people comment, however, one comment that stuck with me was one that said "Say Hi to Dave from AT&T for me." A lot of people had "liked" the comment and when I told others about it their immediate reaction was to laugh. Until I explained that I didn't want that be the first thing people thought about when they saw I was going to India, no one really understood why I had the urge to delete it. I chose not to delete because I didn't to seem dramatic but I thought it was a very good example of the narrow view that the U.S. has of India.

When first arriving in Mumbai, the airport was nicer than JFK in New York and Logan in Boston, where we had just left from. On the drive to the first hotel, I saw three Baskin & Robins and laughed to myself, thinking about the Klondike Bar. This is not an argument to say that the

culture is not different from the U.S. but it is very different from the U.S. perception thinks it is. For example, many people were worried about what clothes I would be able to wear and being conservative in my outfits. I am currently sitting by the pool, wearing a normal American outfit of shorts and a tank top, feeling no sense of uncomfortableness. This is in Southern India which is much more accepting than the North; we are going to Delhi in a few days and just had a meeting to talk about how it will be very different there and we need to stay in groups and have our guard up. From a national India perspective, I do feel that in a sense that much of India is more accepting than many parts of the U.S. Much of the Indian culture revolves around Hinduism; this is the religion of about 80% of the country (which I did not know before this trip). Hinduism believes that God can take any form He desires; therefore, when other religions have different Gods, they just see that as a different form of the same God who they worship and do not have any motives to procure more worshipers to their religion. This is the extreme opposite of the Christian dominated U.S. religious followers, where if you do not believe in their same God than you are in the wrong. I think the Hindu perception, leads to a much more accepting and, in general, a less judgmental atmosphere. However, this could also be part of the reason that the country is so accepting of the extreme poverty that is so prevalent.

Having a chance to visit the Universities here also gave a good perspective of Indian culture that is not well exemplified in the U.S. Besides the exception of Sahana, I did not have much social interaction with the University students but rather got to interact through their studies and see the similarities to our own University. This is not an aspect of Indian culture that I had felt exposed to before and is definitely not something the Facebook commenter had been thinking about. The Professors had the same demeanor as our own; the students interacted the same way I would expect American PhD students to interact when being asked to give a

presentation to foreigners. They were grateful that we were interested in their research and bashful but welcoming in their interactions of with us. Whenever we asked questions, they were shy but excited to explain things to us.

Getting to stay on the House Boat with Sahana and three other students really gave us the best opportunity to get to know the Indian culture of our generation. Before dinner everyone came over to our boat for Latoro's Birthday to have some cake and hang out. We were all together hanging out the second floor of the boat, relaxing and enjoying the sunset and beautiful palm trees all around. Professor Ganguly called over to me and told us that Sahana had told him how she did not understand how such a large group of Undergraduates were together and not making a big ruckus. We laughed and told her, "Once it gets dark out and the Professors are gone!" We ended up having a great time and teaching her a bunch of silly games like Ninja and Spoons. We got to ask her a lot of questions about growing up in India, what her and her friends do (like lots of karaoke), and her very close relationship with her family. She said when she is at school for her PhD in Mumbai, she Skypes with her parents every day! I know people who had done that their first year of University but not afterwards. It was really cool to learn about her values and points of view. Even just little things, like how houses are not known by their postal number but by the name that is chosen by the elders of the family. They are houses that look as though they could look be any house southern, warm half of the U.S., in fact, a house that would look very familiar to that of the Facebook Commenter.