

Culture

This Dialogue of Civilizations was my first time travelling outside of the Americas, so, consequently, I knew I would be coming in to a culture that would be completely different from my own and was open to the new experiences that I would face. I knew that there would be large social inequalities, especially in Mumbai with slum-dwellers living next to 5 star hotels, like I had read in “Behind the Beautiful Forevers”. My experiences while in this country, though, have expanded my knowledge of the culture further than the small sliver of facts I had read about and studied in history classes.

Starting in Mumbai, I was pleasantly surprised at the friendliness of all the people we passed on the streets greeting us and waving to us when we were on the bus because most people have hostility towards tourists. I felt as though I would be intruding when we visited a Hare Krishna temple with a wedding ceremony, but the families welcomed us in and some even took the time to explain some of the rituals to us. The music encompassed the feeling in the room, with all the participants praying and spreading the love and joy of the newly married couple, it was definitely a moment that I won't forget.

Later that week, another student and I went to the Chabad House of Mumbai for Shabbat on Friday night, a place where Jewish people are welcomed for the weekly holy day and invited for dinner in places all around the world. These type of community or family dinners are like the ones I usually have back home so it was nice to be able to uphold the tradition in a country that's so different from what I'm used to. In 2008 in Mumbai there were terrorist attacks throughout the whole city and the place of worship was also attacked, so as the new Rabbi and his wife welcomed us into their temporary home I felt proud that they are still standing strong. After the last Rabbi was killed in the attack, the new couple said, it was hard to decide to take his place and they face many obstacles but I felt their open arms and optimistic attitudes did enough for the community to stand on its feet again. I think this experience

showed me a side of Mumbai that I could relate on a deeper level with, especially because the attack was publicized in the Jewish communities around the world.

The academic visits to IIT-Bombay, IIM-Bangalore and IIS-Bangalore all showcased the elite higher education side of India that isn't normally the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of this enormous country. Slums and holy cows are usually the immediate words that come to mind, so I was surprised that these institutions were funded by the government when I felt that there were other priorities that needed to get tackled before focusing on higher education. I soon came to realize, though, that these innovative students and faculty are what will drive the economy as well as advancements the country will need to be, and stay, competitive in the increasingly globalized world. In IIT we learned about various programs that focus on bridging the gap between the research at the universities and inefficiencies in various sectors, like C-TARA, which I thought was really interesting because they do not put patents on their designs so the farmers can make the products themselves with common household items.

Some of the PhD students we met at IIT mostly worked on different questions regarding the monsoons, which affects the otherwise water scarce India, and this research would be used to predict future onsets that could help the agriculture sector in the rural areas to better prepare for their irrigation. In IIM, we discussed micro financing and how it can be profitable to both farmers and the bank so the farmers can buy things they need to produce more crops which was a good financial perspective that we hadn't really heard before on the trip since we were focusing more on the engineering and policy of climate change in India. Our last academic visit was also very interesting with Professor Majumdar who focuses on hydrology, and since I was part of the water sector for the first war games I had read a paper by him regarding the scarcity of water and how rivers should be used to better serve Indian water needs, so hearing him and his students speak was fascinating.

My perception of India has completely flip flopped and now I feel like I have a better sense of what the country stands for and how the history contributes to development. With the recent change in the Prime Minister, India is sure to grow and develop more and it had all the tools it needs as well as the will

of the people to become an important world power leading the way for many other nations in Southeast Asia. India has the potential to grow in the next years and I'm glad that I got to be in the country for possibly one of the greatest changes to the government moving forward. I am extremely grateful that this opportunity allowed me to explore something that otherwise would be out of my comfort zone and I got to learn so much from the people while touring as well as the students and faculty we met on our various academic visits.