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Global Awareness Study Abroad Grant

Critical Reflective Assignment

Throughout my study abroad experience in India, I learned so much about my privileges and how they are relevant to a country other than the United States. I am not going to lie, it was incredibly difficult the first few days in India. For the first three days in India, I was in culture shock. I wasn't used to being anywhere other than America. As I worked through my culture shock I became disappointed with myself. I always preach that I am a culturally open minded individual, but that was only according to the books. I was only open to other cultures without having to face the realities of that culture. Therefore, after the third day I began the journey of taking apart my privileges.

After my culture shock, I began to realize that India was a country with a vast amount of depth to it. Meaning, India was not a homogenous population, each state had its official language, mosques and temples were barely three blocks away from each other, and food was vastly different across different parts of India. Growing up, I learned that India was a homogenous population, but while I was in India I received a reality check. I was invited into a culture that praised collectivism and practiced tradition. India put me into an uncomfortable reality that allowed me to engage in things I wouldn't do in America. I entered my first mosque, saw my first camel, and opened my eyes to a world other than the Eurocentric America.

While I was in India, I realized that Americans are anti anything but Christian. In India, we walked into a Sikh Temple and then into a church right after. Yes, there is religious tension in India, but the idea of religion is completely different in India. Individuals are respectful to their peers and the religions they practice. The students from the Shri Ram College of Commerce practiced Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. Besides the fact that they practiced different religions, I never once heard of an incident on their campus of religious hatred. From

the museums, I learned that Hindus and Muslims lived as neighbors peacefully. That happened for thousands of years before the British colonized India and turned the Hindus and Muslims against each other. That is one of the main reasons as to why there is a religious tension between individuals who practice the Hindu religion and those who practice Islam. Experiencing that in India, has allowed me to see more of the religious hatred in the United States. I've reflected on the ideologies of religion and how it affects every country differently.

Throughout my stay in India, the Indian students taught me something so beautiful about their culture, and that is the idea of collectivism. I come from the Hmong culture, which is also a culture of collectivism but I have assimilated so much into the dominant American culture that I have lost some of that along the way. Therefore, in India, I was able to regain that collective identity. Whenever we would eat together, the Indian students would set their entrees into the middle of the table. Food would almost always be shared as well as snacks. People always walked in groups and refrained from walking individually because the company of another person was well respected. Many Indian students planned to move back into their family homes after graduating from college. The whole dynamic of collectivism changes the family structure so much. One is not so much viewed as an individual in a family but a person who can support the family. That is something I revered and valued so much while in India. Because in America, Americans value individualism so much. People achieve for their own desires whereas in India there is this dynamic that people achieve for their family and the community around them. That has allowed me to reflect on my own Hmong American community. How assimilation has affected the Hmong individuals in America as well as the Hmong culture. How collectivism has almost disappeared in the modern Hmong American Culture.

Growing up in the dominant American culture, it has been a battle for me to be a Hmong individual in an American culture that doesn't highlight the Hmong community. Through much research about European countries and America, I identify America as a Eurocentric country. Meaning, the origination of America has stemmed from the origins of European expansion. The ideologies in America align much with the ideologies in Europe. So, when I visited India, one thing I noticed was the impacts of colonialism. I've noticed how the University I was hosted at spoke only English even though the national language is Hindi. The younger generations envied American pop culture and fashion as well. Hindi was a language that was beginning to be written less, while English was growing. India is classified as a developing country and has only been independent for seventy years. Therefore, the impacts of British colonialism and the stripping of resources from India has had a devastating effect on India. Therefore, the decision of colonizing India has had effects that India is still trying to dig itself out of.

Another example I noticed of a decision made by my home country, is the decision to take from the Indian culture without understanding the importance of certain things. Such as, the henna. The henna is historically relevant to India and is ingrained in the practices of marriage of India. There is so much history in the henna that people don't know about, but many Americans take it as jewelry. I find that extremely problematic because it is taking the henna out of its cultural context. No, the henna is not just jewelry it has thousands of years of history. With a decision made by Americans, the henna has lost many of its history in America. That is something I noticed, and it is called culturally appropriating. It becomes problematic because it makes India envious of the way America portrays Indian culture, without regarding the fact that many Americans are ripping out the cultural context of that aspect of the Indian culture.

Throughout my trip in India, I realized that I was so privileged to simply be an American. In the beginning I found myself complaining about the materialistic things like hot water, when I was ignoring the beauty of India outside. I complained about things like not having wifi when I should have been focused on building relationships with my fellow Indian peers. I went with a group of American students, and I found that many of the individuals were doing the same things as I was. A few days into the trip I realized that Americans are extremely materialistic and judgmental of cultures other than European countries. I was guilty of that as well, so I decided to fix myself. I decided to stop complaining, but many of the travelers in the group did not. Therefore, I realized that Americans try so hard to fix countries and forget to learn from that country. I realized that through the actions of many American students. Therefore, I began to take into account my own privileges and I stopped complaining. I didn't need hot water and wifi, I needed to understand the complexities of India. That's when I began to realize that as Americans, we should take the initiative to stop trying to fix countries and start trying to learn from them. My actions as an American can effect so many people.

I've learned that I was culturally open minded book wise, meaning when I was thrown into the reality of another culture I had to take a part my own biases. Therefore, as an individual I am to not only learn about countries through books but travel to understand the world. Because as shocked as I was about India, I have come to the conclusion that a third of the worlds 'population lives in India, so that is the reality of so many people's lives. Not many people lived in developed countries and not many people in the world have access to hot water and wifi all the time. Those aren't necessities in life, and I need to connect myself with the real world. Because America is not the reality of the world, it is the reality of the materialistic world. Therefore, I want to learn more and travel more to better understand the dynamic of this world. . To better

understand the systematic disadvantages that other people in the world have to face compared to the systematic oppressions in the United States such as race, gender, and class. It is a reality that I need to come to terms with.

India basically changed the way I think about life systematically and socially. Meaning, I come from a background that acknowledges race a social construct and I work hard to understand systematic oppressions but I have never done so on a global scale. When I traveled to India, my life changed. The way I thought about myself and my actions as well as my worldview changed. I realized how uneducated I was about the realities of a different country. That has stimulated me to travel to more countries that may not fit the ideal vacation, but that is how most of the world lives. Therefore, it has allowed me to open my eyes to things that I have ignored my whole life because of my privilege of simply being an American. India's complex culturally really captivated my emotions and mind, now I am individual who will be forever intrigued with India.

Photo Portion:



This photo is important to me because this is a market in India that is the reality of India. The Bollywood movies, although they are beautiful, don't reflect the true realities of India. Delhi, India is a bustling city that is extremely fast paced and always moving. All Indians don't live elaborately, people work and bargain. Therefore, I enjoyed the markets because they showed the everyday experience of a person living in India.



Now, this photo is important to me because it showcases the bonds I made with the Indian peers. India is a very complex and beautiful country, but it is the people who make it memorable. The individuals at Shri Ram College of Commerce were nothing but open and giving to the American students. Their actions were generous and true and I felt that in the connection I made. So as much as I miss the busy markets and rickshaws, I miss the people the most. I learned so much about a country, its' people, and myself.

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