

Marianela Cardelle

Equality Reflection

It is 7 AM on a crowded train platform and it feels like every eye in the area is on our group. I'll admit our group of 28 students lugging around bright red bags, talking loudly to one another and searching for the nearest bag of Lays chips does stand out in Delhi. The line of Indians that have gathered to observe us gets a little longer every minute that passes by. One man in the back pulls out his phone and quickly snaps a picture of us. This is a normal thing for us now and no one in our group makes a comment because we're each more focused on staying awake. It crosses my mind; does this happen to other people? Do Americans ever take pictures of visitors? What makes some cultures so fascinated by foreigners and other cultures so annoyed by "outsiders"?

Overall I would describe Americans' views of tourists as unfavorable. We look at them as a nuisance before seeing them as a window to a world most of us dream of exploring. I've heard people describe Times Square as a hassle because of the bus loads of Asian tourists but then most of the people doing the complaining are not residences of New York City let alone Times Square. Why is there a change in respect for a tourist who lives a 2 hour drive away versus a 12 hour plane ride? Is there a territory around each American tourist destination that you must live within to get this respect? Or must you look and dress a certain way to get it? Then when we travel through India we get questions about where we are from, what we are studying, how do we like India, how close are we to Chicago where someone's brother's wife's family lives. Not once in my life have I seen or been an American who asks these types of questions to a tourist. Why do Americans build this wall between ourselves and visitors while Indians crave interaction with us? Every time I travel I try to change something about how I view the world

and lead my life. I want to learn from India that reaching out to others is not something to be embarrassed by. It is a gift.

Walking out of the Delhi train station to our bus I immediately regretted putting on running shorts for comfort. The people around me did not make me feel uncomfortable but it was more of a personal discomfort. As if I was disrespecting a home and a culture that was thousands of years older than me. I tainted the conservativeness around me. Looking at it from the other side of the world; how do Americans see Indian dress? I think Americans see saris, hijabs and burkas in many different lights. All are seen as foreign and new but saris painted in a beautiful light while hijabs and burkas bring suspicion and discomfort. I believe this is where the United States and India are most similar when it comes to tourists. When visiting the other country, there is discomfort dressing how we normally do. For Americans looking at Indian dress, the discomfort comes from stereotypes about Muslims and Hindus. While as an American visiting India, I feel disrespectful wearing my clothing.

If American is supposed to be the melting pot of the world why do I feel like I am greeted with open arms and genuine curiosity when I am traveling here while Americans roll their eyes at visitors getting in their way? Maybe it is because of this. Perhaps Americans do not have a pure fascination with other cultures because we are exposed to them on a daily basis. I believe it is because of our individualism. Americans are used to independence and shutting out others especially if they are different. We have lost or maybe never had a desire to reach out and hear another's story.