

I've been to the hospital here in India four times in the last week. Four times, just because of some rather nasty nosebleeds. Nothing too threatening or harmful, but concerning nonetheless. Three of these visits were to local clinics. Small, bug infested, and understaffed. One visit was to a private hospital, a place so clean and well equipped it matches any hospital I've seen in the United States. Devashish told me it is one of the best and most expensive hospitals in the nation. It's a place most Indian people could only dream of affording to go to. The cost of my walk in appointment with the ENT specialist? 600 Rupees. Less than \$10 USD. Pocket change, even for a college student.

The economic disparities that I see in India are not just in healthcare. To me as an American tourist, everything in this country is extremely cheap. A good, if not somewhat dirty, restaurant meal costs around 200 rupees, or about \$3. Souvenirs at tourist trap stands cost less than a couple of bucks each. I was at first amazed at how cheap everything was. It didn't seem possible.

As I've spent more time in India, I begin to realize why things are so cheap. There are so many people, the job market is extremely competitive. Those people who are fortunate enough to find a job are exploited for their work. In sites like Dharavi I could see the exploitation and poverty: the dirtiness, the hard working people, and the lack of material goods. I'm certain that none of the people there would choose to stay if they could afford to leave. Despite the fact that they were clearly working as hard as anyone could, Dharavi is still full of the working poor. From this, I can conclude that the wages and economic opportunities in this country are extremely low. That my "cheap prices" are actually fairly high prices. For example, many of us students have been craving American food. We go to places like McDonald's and Pizza Hut, which have the same prices as those in the United States. For us, it is no big deal. Yet inside, I can tell the clientele are different from your street food shoppers. These American chains are higher end restaurants in India which cater to foreigners and wealthier Indians. I have never seen a beggar or poor looking person in these chains in India, while I would see them all the time in the

United States. Yet I see these same poor people all over the streets, begging for some change. They are not even fortunate enough to work in a place like Dharavi.

Speaking with Nikin has given me some insight into the economic conditions of India's poor. He told me that people such as our hotel employees have good jobs. They need to know some English and have education to get what at home would be considered a menial, no skill job. They earn about 10,000 rupees/month, or \$160/month. Little more than 300 rupees/\$5 a day. These people are relatively well off in India and well above the poverty line of about \$1 or \$1.50/day. Yet even they wouldn't be able to dream of eating at restaurants every night like I am, of buying little things here and there, and walking into an expensive private healthcare institute. As I think about who can afford my kind of lifestyle, it really is only the upper class. Perhaps doctors, engineers, and businessmen can. But these types of people are few and far between. In India, I am essentially the 1%.

Throughout this dialogue, many of my friends and I have been making jokes and turning originally serious topics into jokes and catchphrases. "Check your privilege" is the one statement that sticks out to me the most right now. I had heard this statement before, but I had never really evaluated it in an Indian context. In the United States, I am fortunate to go to Northeastern University. However, I am of a minority group, and an "overrepresented" one at that, making it harder for me to get into colleges and access higher education. I'm from Quincy, MA, a town which is not exactly poor but not exactly rich. It is a town growing with immigrants and working people. Most of my friends are from working class to middle class backgrounds. None of us are rich or well off, and we frequently compare our high school quality to wealthy towns such as Newton or Wellesley and can see the disparity. Using schools as a metric, I can see how Quincy is one of the poorer towns in the Greater Boston/South Shore area. While I am definitely in a better position than inner city kids, I am not exactly too privileged at home. In the United States, I would say I have done well with my circumstances, making it into the Scholars Program at Northeastern while most of my peers in my city go to community or state colleges.

In the Indian context, my privilege is a completely different story. Earlier, I discussed how I feel the prices here are extremely cheap, yet due to low incomes in India, they are actually high for the majority of people. It's no wonder to me now why the USA is considered a land of opportunity. Despite my relatively lesser opportunity and income within the Greater Boston area, I am living like a rich person here in India. When compared to Indians, I have had a far higher standard of living and many, many more educational and economic opportunities. It is my first real encounter with worldwide wealth inequalities. While poor is relative, the standard here is so much lower that I can't call anybody I know at home truly poor.

This trip has definitely been an eye opening immersion into Indian culture and living. Beforehand, I never knew how bad the conditions in third world and developing nations are. It is one thing to hear stories and statistics, and another to actually go and see it for myself. It's something I have to keep in mind into the future: how much do I really need to have for myself, and how can I use my abilities to improve conditions at home and abroad? Seeing how little many Indians need to survive, the answer to the first question is "less than I think I need". The answer to the second is not so clear or easy to find, but I've also learned about social enterprises and other ways I can contribute back to others. As I develop my educational and career paths, I will keep in mind what I've learned here in India and be on the lookout for opportunities to change the way things are.