

Nicholas Salazar  
CIVE 4777 & 4778  
Professor Auroop Ganguly  
23 June 2015

Income Inequality: A Comparative Look at Economic Mobility in the United States  
and India

Having been raised by a single mother, one who worked three jobs during my early childhood, the plight of the economically disadvantaged has always been close to my heart. The reality of the poverty I faced was the source of great heartache, embarrassment, and stress for my family. Although I was too young to fully appreciate the gravity of the situation, I remember the feeling of economic suffocation. In those first few years of my life it seemed impossible to fathom another standard of living. However, through her pursuance of a master's degree and her dedication to her occupation, my mother was able to elevate our family to a position where we were no longer struggling. I remember the feeling of liberation and pride that my newly attained brand name clothing brought me as I began my journey into adolescence. An increase in standard of living was beneficial both in academics, as I could afford whatever was necessary for classes, and in athletic competition, as I could afford proper equipment, entrance fees, and professional training. These two facets of my upbringing, school and sports, provided a basis for a happy, healthy upbringing. Children who cannot afford to be prepared for school and cannot afford to pursue positive extracurricular activities not only suffer in childhood, they often suffer developmental setbacks that alter the course of their lives. As a young adult, I have worked both with underprivileged youth and adults, but I realize that systematic changes must be made to provide underprivileged citizens with the resources to grow and succeed. Although economic mobility was possible for my family, it is often impossible for the other poor families of the United States. Any small crack in the road could have been devastating enough to prevent my family from escaping the clutches of poverty. I am actively seeking to better understand the hardships and causes of poverty, so that as an adult with more resources available than simply my time, I will know where to focus my efforts. My

travels throughout India, and the contrasts I have observed between India and the United States, have provided me with an entirely new perspective on the challenges that poverty presents.

Before my departure to India, my only references for what it means to be poor in a developing country came from documentaries and articles. I had not experienced the ravages firsthand. That is no longer the case. The poverty I have experienced in India is nigh inescapable. The ability to pursue education and the ability to work your way up the corporate ladder are what make the American dream possible. If they are unlikely in today's American society, they are fairy tails to an enormous percentage of the Indian population. The sense of responsibility I have always felt for the well being of the economically disadvantaged has often ended at either the borders of my motherland or the edges of North America. The reasoning for this was never the dehumanization of the developing world. Rather, the cause was that I always considered the scope of eradicating global poverty to be so broad that it must be compartmentalized to either each nation or small groups of nations. However, if in the United States we struggle to provide the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of to our citizens, then in India there is a struggle to provide only the first right, the right to life, to their citizens. Infant mortality and child malnutrition are no longer statistics to me; they are the stories told by the children begging for money and food on the streets of nearly every Indian city I visited. It is not a fanciful, utopian idea that the citizens and governments of developed countries should help the rest of humanity rise above the woes of abject poverty. Yet, the developed world falls woefully short of making a concerted effort to do so.

The challenges faced by the Indian people are often a result of poor national infrastructure. Simply put, there is nowhere for one to begin to climb the economic ladder, for the ladder is non-existent. From an overly stressed public healthcare system to a university system with too few seats for the quantity of deserving Indian high school graduates, it is all too obvious to an outside observer that many Indians are lost in the cracks and failures of a developing government trying to meet the needs of one billion people. Without access to education, healthcare, and other essential services, it is impossible for each Indian citizen to maximize their potential

in the workforce and in life. This ultimately damages India, as the country fails to reap the rewards of a fulfilled citizenry. For those seeking employment, jobs offering decent wages are far and few between, leading to poverty even for those who work long hours of full-time work. In the United States, even minimum wage is often livable, especially when the employee is receiving government benefits such as food stamps. For those who find themselves in a state of poverty in India, be they workers or unable to enter the workforce, there are no safety nets. The poorest receive no aid. Starvation does not fall under the purview of the government. This reality is unbearable. So long as we have the agricultural capacity to feed every human, and we currently do, starvation and malnutrition are an unthinkable.

To bring about long-term change, India's economy must continue to improve. In classes and theoretical work, we are often taught to think of foreign employment as competition in the global marketplace. Understanding that every job created in the Indian economy offers the opportunity for the uplifting of families and communities puts the concept in perspective. Investment in India's growth and development is an investment in humanity. To have the world's richest nations ignore the needs of developing countries at a point in history at which the developed nations have the capacity to research and help solve the systematic inadequacies of developing nations would be a disgusting stain on humanity's history. Before India's people may begin to pull themselves up the economic mountain, the developed nations of the world must establish and check the security ropes to which the people will be attached. Nations like India must be thought of in terms other than economic partner or adversary, they must be thought of as the homelands of our sisters and brothers. The success of India must become intimately linked to our success, and this success is heavily tied to the infrastructural security and the economic opportunities of the Indian people.

Reconciling the realities of India with my studies as an international business student has only just begun. I believe strongly that I have a role to play in providing opportunities to the world's poorest. My journey throughout India been enlightening, and I now possess greater understanding of the forces which are already at work trying to solve the issue of global poverty, be they governmental,

educational, corporate, or non governmental organizations. Whether I will join an existing organization, begin my own, or help provide innovative solutions in another capacity is yet to be seen. What is definite, however, is that the goal of providing economic stability and opportunities to all will be a long, difficult process. Be that as it may, I look forward to being a part of the solution.