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Cultural Comparison on Women Inequality between India and the U.S.

Sensation and perception are the basis for human understanding and thought. Sensations are indisputable as they are simply the stimuli provided by outside sources that an individual receives. Perception is the trickier part. Our bodies may receive the stimulus but how we interpret the data is a whole other matter. The relationship between sensation and perception is a complex one that some psychologists devote their whole lives to understanding. The implications are pertinent as how we perceive stimuli can have major ramifications for how we grow and develop as individuals and as a society. Everything that we know or believe to be true comes from what we are taught and from what we observe from our surroundings. Growing up in the United States and traveling to India has made me compare the two stimuli and perceive differences between the two environments. It's remarkable to witness how places on opposite sides of the globe can be so starkly different and yet so strikingly similar at the same time. One particular subject that has intrigued me is women studies. From how women dress to their distribution amongst jobs in the workplace, India has imposed foreign concepts on me and yet at the same time has resonated familiar truths. This whole experience has also made me challenge the truths I have either been exposed to or sheltered from.

My first impression of the treatment of women in India compared to the United States was oppressive. Women were forced to wear pants in the pre-monsoon heat. Ladies had their own special line at airports for security check which was extremely inefficient. Girls on the

dialogue also witnessed firsthand extreme disregard when they would get skipped in line or served last at businesses. Some of us women on the trip were frankly overwhelmed and had lost our patience with the men in India. Within the first two weeks, I felt as if I was in a purely male-dominated nation and I was eager to leave.

Then I met various female professors on this trip who challenged my way of thinking. Graduate students at IIT Bombay inspired me with their research on monsoons and promoting social change within the waste disposal culture of Mumbai. It was encouraging to see women in STEM who were conducting compelling research. I was struck by the film writer who came to speak to us and walked our class through the roles women played throughout film history. She spoke of how women went from playing the innocent love interest that needed to be saved to the bad girl adulteress to slowly having a more dynamic role in films. As she discussed this, I could not help but think about how the same progression is true within U.S. films as women have grown more powerful and independent from their love-interest-role beginnings. I was also greatly challenged by the professor in women's studies who discussed with us how water inequality has the greatest impact on women. Within the United States, I have witnessed firsthand how the lower the income bracket, the lower the treatment of women. Having volunteered for a girls' self-defense program, I saw how in inner city schools girls tended not to speak out in class and usually would only laugh at the rude jokes boys made, no matter how personally cutting the remarks may be. All three of these examples had their U.S. counterparts. As much as I revere the United States for its forward thinking and strong initiatives to give women equality and empowerment, it is still a nation with flaws that need to be fixed. There are still major gaps in the salary between men and women. Women face a much greater threat of being sexually harassed or assaulted. It is especially an atrocity to think about that occurring in

the work place or within walking distance of these women's homes. Advocacy for women is still necessary and a battle that must continue, both for the United States and for India.

I recognize that all of the things I have mentioned are perceptions of the things I have observed. They are open for debate and could be proven invalid. But there is a greater issue present here. There is no doubt that the sensations I have encountered both here and the United States are real but the question is, are they enough? Does traveling around India for five weeks make me an expert on women's studies? Does growing up in upper-middle class suburbia of Indiana give me a good grasp on the status for women's rights in the United States? Clearly the answer is no. While I find my opinions to be valid now, I realize that they will grow and change as I age. I may never know the full truth of the state of women's rights within our country or our world. That statement can also be true for other issues our world faces. But what I can control is my impact on the world around me. Whether it is for women's rights or for environmental sustainability, I hope to be an advocate for change. As I witness injustice around me, I desire to be a voice for the voiceless and give hope to those who have lost it. I may not be able to be a catalyst for change throughout the whole world in my lifetime, but I can at least be involved in my community. Though I may not live see it, my small actions may cause ripples that make an impact for generations to come.