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### Socio-economic Inequality Reflection

Stepping off of the plane, I was astounded by how alike the Mumbai airport looked as compared to American airports. It seemed elaborate with historical statues decorating the walls and beautiful tiles lining the floor. As we were leaving, I was excited to see how the actual city of Mumbai would compare to cities back home. Driving away from the airport, I was flabbergasted by the differences. Everything was different. The streets were covered with people and dirt and trash were very prominent. Not only were the streets covered with garbage, some of the people looked like they were barely scrapping by. Although I knew that India was a developing nation, I had never quite realized the gap of wealth that was present.

The day I truly realized the socioeconomic gap was the day we took a trip to Dharavi. Driving to the slum, I saw tall skyscraper buildings all around. When we passed by a twenty-six floor apartment, the guide discussed how the house was uninhabited due to the fact that it had bad feng shui. Although this did not surprise me that much, as we arrived in Dharavi, I became disgusted by the blatant lack of wealth. That twenty six floor apartment was left empty while thousands of people were living in a slum that looked like it was falling apart. These people seemed to be barely surviving on their living. On the other hand, the rich seemed to literally tower over the poor although they lived within a mile of each other. Walking through Dharavi, I saw people all around me who were doing hard labor in order to earn minimum wages for their families. This slum, I learned, was one of the largest in the world. Knowing that the slums are a

huge part of the informal sector that makes up a big part of the Indian GDP, I imagined how many more slums of this condition must be in India.

Throughout the whole visit to India, we seemed to pass by slums every few blocks. Seeing this huge gap, I was surprised to hear that the United States had a larger income gap than India. In the United States, poverty is not as apparent as it is in India. Downtown Kansas City, where I live, has people who are poor and cannot afford basic shelter and food, but it does not seem as obvious. The people in Dharavi hit a new level of poverty I had never seen. Many appeared to be struggling to survive. The three of the biggest differences I noticed were sanitation, healthy food and drinking water, and homelessness.

The first difference, sanitation, seemed nonexistent. Sewage was all over the streets. While both littering and urinating on the side of the roads is not acceptable in the United States, this is a common sighting driving through India. It is apparent that different cultural norms exist between the two countries. More prevalent in the less affluent areas of Kansas City, littering is seen rarely although more often than in wealthy areas. In more affluent areas of both India and the US, it is shown that the higher the socioeconomic level of the citizen, the better sanitation the area has. Sanitation is an important factor in safety. Without it, the spread of disease can be easily spread.

The second problem is safe drinking water and nutritious food. While in the United States, where water is readily available, in India it seems like clean drinking water is a luxury. India is known for water that is full of bacteria and hard metals. Due to the low sanitation, chemical waste has ways of getting into the tap water. This causes many problems down the road. The lower down the ladder a group of people are, the less educated they are about the danger of drinking water directly from the tap. The water issue is not so much of a problem for

the impoverished in the United States. Strict federal regulations have made tap water more monitored than many bottled water companies. On the other hand, nutritious food is a problem in the United States. The cheapest food is usually unhealthy food. Because of this, many of the poor in the US can only afford to eat innutritious food that causes obesity and many health risks. In India, fruit and vegetables were seen to be the cheapest foods to buy which creates a healthier society. In fact, McDonalds, a common American chain, was considered for the upper class in India. On a McDonald's door in Kolkata, it stated that they had the right to deny people, while in the US, it was known as a place where the poorest could go and find a cheap meal.

Finally, one of the most prominent issues for the impoverished is homelessness. In India, it was hard to be oblivious to this problem. On sidewalks, in the middle of roads, and even on benches, there were whole families sleeping. Babies of less than two years of age were lying next to their mothers on the sidewalk as cars horns blared throughout the night. In the United States, it is not socially acceptable for people to sleep on streets or on the sidewalks. Instead, people sleep on playgrounds, in their cars, or find other locations to serve as a shelter. Although this makes it less prominent, homelessness is a huge problem within the United States also.

Socioeconomic inequality surrounds us. Although they claim that the caste system no longer exists in India, it seems like it still plays a relevant part in many Indian's lives. This system determines the socioeconomic classes of the people. The poor have many problems to combat while the rich tower over them. In the United States, there is also a large gap in socioeconomic equality, although it is not as obvious. What the United States considers poor is actually the middle class in India. I realize now what the difference is between surviving, living and thriving. Coming to India, I have comprehended how privileged I am. Using this knowledge, I hope to be able to combat the problems of the impoverished by using the power of education.