

INDIA – “Satyameva Jayate“



As most people are today I'm tormented by an unwanted habit. A habit of jumping into conclusions, conclusions that especially give birth to unwanted and irrational prejudices about people, their different cultures and their way of living. These prejudices I believe are created in a state of fear, a fear mostly funded by ignorance.

When I first received news about being nominated for an internship at Manipal University in India my excitement slowly faded under a growing state of melancholy. In my application India was the last of many countries on my ranking list. I have never had any intentions of visiting India nor learning more about its history or people. Also, during the

preparations for my departure several birds twittered bad things about India and not just about the country, but of its people. Prejudices in their clearest manifestation was highly imminent.

Postponing my studies to go abroad and work for around 500 Swedish kronor per month suddenly became even more questionable. Still, I felt the need for new experiences, to meet new people, break routine and to relief my longing for adventures in all of its forms. There was no chance I would turn down the opportunity. So, my strive to experience something different from the comforts of Sweden took me across the globe, and eventually landed me on Mumbai's international airport.

The door to the airplane opened and a warm breeze spread across the interior of the airplane. I took a deep breath and I ventured out into the airplane passage leading to the airport. The warm humid air hit me like a wall. I was in India, and apart from my prejudices about the questionable hygiene I knew that this was the start of something new, something fresh.

On the later plane from Mumbai to Mangalore I met a peculiar Indian man. He was an electrical engineer working in London, but he had his family in Bangalore, India's third largest city. This was my first conversation with an native Indian and it stroke me how genuinely kind he was. After one hour of conversation he gave me his cellphone number and said to call me if I ever encountered any problems whatsoever. Just before the landing he was also kind enough to give me a detailed story of the 2010 flight accident on Mangalore airport which made the descend very interesting. However, not to surprisingly I survived to live another day. To not scare away any future trainees from landing on Mangalore's small and cozy airport, I am to notify that since the time of the accident the runway has been extended.

From Mangalore to Manipal it is a one and a half hour trip by car, and at this point of my journey I was feeling very tired and jet lagged. Slowly and part wise nodding I slid away into a empty void of sleep before abruptly being thrown back to reality every one minute to the sound of the taxi driver honking his horn. Never had I encountered a person who consciously misused the honking horn so much as this guy, unfortunately he was not the last. I believe and I still do, that here in India the only thing you need to know in order for you to get a driving license is how to honk the horn.

It felt like all new impressions both visual and emotional, the smells and the hearings activated senses that back in Sweden were hibernating due to the lack of outer stimulation. I felt more alive than before. I grinned, this was exactly the experience I was looking for.

I received a warm welcome from the IAESTE people in Manipal, I knew I was to like it.

During my time in India I was amazed by the overwhelming kindness from people, their eager to help and to assist you, and in general the outspread friendly attitude and acceptance from strangers I encountered. Qualities you really would want in the people around you, and especially in the people you work with. At my first day of work my supervisor Dr. Krishna Murthy showed up one and a

half hour to late. A timeless country I though, this will suit me just fine. The next day I stuated an example by purposely showing up two hours after appointed time. After that both me and Dr. Murthy realized that the Indian way of following the timetable was highly inconvenient. So during



the rest of the working period neither one of us showed up more than 10 minutes late.

To work when you have the imminent feeling of being far away from home is very stimulating. You exercise your ability to perform and to produce results in an environment that is different from what you are used to. Simultaneously you develop the ability to communicate your ideas effectively, and in a language different from your mother's tongue. My work involved making a simulation program of a Dual-Fuel Diesel Engine in Matlab. I worked completely one my own, which was very convenient as I could make my own schedule. I always tried to find places where I could escape the sometimes

overwhelming heat to be able to work more effectively. However, mostly I ended up programing in my apartment which I shared with a Nepalese, two Croatians, a lizard, some spiders and about a billion ants. It did not take long for the ants to build settlements in my computer. Probably they fed on lost crumbs of cookies that unintentionally slipped down between the keys. Apart from the ants we all lived in symbiosis, the lizards and spiders protected us from mosquitos in exchange for food. The fan inside our room was always running on full power contributing to the illusion of being inside a storm 24/7. Whenever the fan stopped working we all went overheated, unfortunately this was not a rare occurrence since the power broke down at least once every hour. It took some time to get used to not having the amenities of Swedish households like drinkable tap water, hot water, washing machine or the overall freshness and the lack of vermin. After some time however, one gets hardened and learn to appreciate the little things that we else take for granted.

I still remember my first encounter with the Indian administration applying for my visa. Believe me when I say, dealing with administration and logistics in India will test your patience for sure. For example, it took me two weeks to sign up for a gym card. Upon every arrival at the gym one needed to pass three security checks to get in. There were also some rules I had a hard time to respect. For example, seeing a family of six traveling on a motorbike without helmets with the mother siting back-to-front with a infant in her arms seemed to be alright and respected, but showing up in certain places with shorts when it was an outside temperature of 40 degrees celsius was not okay.

One week I got ill and had to visit the hospital. Reluctantly I made my way there with the fear of encounter a troublesome and time-consuming administrative process. However, to my surprise I returned home already a hour later to wait for the result of the blood test. In spite of having to run between a dozen different desks and filling in countless formulas the whole process had gone faster and more effectively than it would have done in a Swedish health center.

A lot of interns including me had a hard time handling the food during the first weeks. Apart from the imminent risk of food poisoning, the Indian food added a whole new dimension to the taste and spiciness. A lot is vegetarian which I like, but the variety from western dishes to traditional Indian foods like Tikka Masala Chicken, Paneer, Biryani and Bonda leaves nothing to the imagination. I will miss the variety, and a lot of the food will seem tasteless when I get back home.

As I got better I tried my best to speed up my progress to be able to travel and to see more of India. However, I had no problem getting of from work to do some travel, my supervisor was very understanding and welcoming to the idea of me doing some travel.

During my travels I have spent a little over 40 hours traveling on the Indian railways, from Kerala in the south to Goa north west of Karnataka. Going by train is a very fascinating experience apart from the lack of hygiene in some cabins. Still, it feels a lot safer than sitting in the back of a Rickshaw doing 80 km/h in high intensity traffic. A Rickshaw is the famous motor driven tricycle and probably the easiest and cheapest way to get around when traveling shorter distances. At the moment of writing I am on my way to Bangalore, which is a 14 hour train ride from Manipal.



I am stationed in the sleepers class which means I have an own mattress to sleep on. It is the most comfortable way to travel in my opinion. Close to my head I have a cockroach's nest, but luckily the bugs do not bother me to the extent they did at the beginning of my journey. Im bouncing back and forward to the puffing sound of the train movement. The wind coming in from the open window hits my face, so is the sun. The air is more fresh and clean here in the outback than in the cities, and the view is nicer. Though the environment in south of India is a bit monotonous which makes me miss the mountains I still cannot help feeling inspired.

If I am to sum up my first impressions of India in one word, that word would be “intense”. I think the word appeared in my mind during my first attempt to cross a street, which was also a near death experience I tell you. Everything here is so full of life, you never feel alone and it is almost never quiet. There are literally people and animals everywhere. Sounds of honking horns, barking dogs and people laughing and conversing will still echo in my head when I get back home. The Swedish streets feels almost deserted when compared to the streets of India.

My impression is that India is a country of great wonders and of great flaws. A country of huge contrasts, from the poorest to the richest, from inequality to equality, from religious fundamentalism to realism. India is on the rise, and it is becoming more and more integrated and influential and with it its people, its culture and its diversity.

For me, this trip has increased my knowledge and cured my ignorance on many levels. I have met a lot of new interesting people not just from India but from many different countries, and I want to thank IAESTE for this opportunity given to me. I have found friends for life and with that the ease of international companionship.

I believe that one way to kill prejudices is by knowledge. The knowledge and understanding one gain when coming closer to people from different cultures undermines the fear and thus also the prejudices about those people. Today, when hostile and negative attitudes towards other people with different customs, religions and cultures seem to spread like wildfire, an underlying understanding of one another, to respect and to cherish the diversity of one another is becoming of uttermost importance. To seek the truth of one another is a big step towards the right direction of a more humane and internationalized atmosphere. Therefore I want to finish this story by citing the Indian national motto “Satyameva Jayate” which is Sanskrit for “Truth Alone Triumphs”.

Thank you for reading,

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