

Reflective Paper for Dimensions Scholarship

I have spent more time in India this year than America. This fact is rather startling to me, especially because I went to India for the first time in my life this past fall. While I knew that I would someday return to India, I was rather surprised that my return came only five months after my arrival in the US. Something about India had me hooked. It's nothing I can name outright, nothing I can put my finger on; nonetheless, it's something that pulls me with an astounding strength.

This summer I followed that pull back to India and back to Jaipur, Rajasthan, the city I lived in while studying abroad in the fall. While I was in the same city, it was a completely different trip. This time I was alone. I arrived in New Delhi, amazed that I had somehow coordinated my own trip to India, found an internship, and actually arrived halfway around the world. I traveled from Delhi to Jaipur on a six hour, non-air-conditioned bus, arriving dusty and exhausted. I managed to fit all of my luggage into a *rickshaw* and direct the *rickshaw-wallah* to the house I would be staying in for the next three months.

The house turned out to be an impressive distance from the institute I would be working at. I took a *rickshaw* on my first day, grudgingly paying an exorbitant amount of *rupees* to my grinning *rickshaw-wallah*. I would definitely have to work something out for transportation. The answer to my mobility problem came on my first day, in the form of Mr. L. P. Sharma. Mr. Sharma, one of the secretaries at the institute, approached me in the library and said he had been informed that I was in need of a ride to work. He was one of the few employees that lived as far away from the institute as I did. Incidentally, Mr. Sharma had two wandering eyes and drove a motorcycle. And so it was that I rode to work every day for three months in extremely disorganized, congested Indian traffic, on

the back of a motorcycle driven by a cross-eyed secretary. Luckily, I arrived every day unharmed and became good friends with L. P. Sharma, eating dinner at his home with his family before my departure. His willingness to help an unknown foreigner made my internship possible.

The Indian Institute for Health Management Research (IIHMR) is where I spent the majority of my three months. According to their mission statement, “IIHMR is an institution dedicated to the improvement in standards of health through better management of health care and related programmes. It seeks to accomplish this through management research, training, consultation and institutional networking in a national and global perspective.” They offer a two-year post-graduate degree in Health Care Management, provide various types of training for professionals and NGO workers, and conduct field research for organizations such as UNICEF.

One of the reasons I decided to complete an internship in India, rather than in the US, was to see what it was like to actually work in India. I have an interest in pursuing a PhD and will very likely conduct my research in India. Though I am currently not one hundred percent certain what field I will enter for my doctorate, it will most likely be in the field of Women’s Studies. My summer internship was something of a test for me to see what it was like to work and study in India; it was like a nine to five job, only in the middle of an Indian desert with peacocks and cows outside my office. I had already been to India as a student on a study abroad trip. Now I wanted to come to India as more of a researcher, though still at an introductory, undergraduate level. This allowed me to gauge my ability to work independently in India while researching within a structured framework.

My advisor at IIHMR was Dr. Nutan P. Jain, head of the Gender Health Research Center at IIHMR. She informed me on my first day that I would be working on the issue of adverse sex ratio with a focus on female feticide and female infanticide. My relationship with Dr. Jain was a somewhat strained one, as I had difficulty understanding what she wanted from me. There were cultural as well as personal differences in research style, but we worked through it. Dr. Jain is no doubt a lovely and intelligent individual. Working with her was, at times, very challenging, but I feel enriched by the experience. The report I produced supplied history and background on the issues surrounding adverse sex ratio, female infanticide and female feticide. I addressed the legal aspects as well, supplying and analyzing the existing laws against female feticide. While the laws exist, they are very poorly enforced. Poor enforcement and lack of education regarding these issues have led to the continuance of female feticide, infanticide, and the upholding of son preference within the culture, that all lead to an increasing adverse sex ratio. There are definite trends in the sex ratio: the North of India is, in general, worse than the South; the urban areas are worse than the rural; the more affluent states are worse than the less affluent; the higher classes are worse than the lower. The reasons for these trends in sex ratio are many; the complexity of the interrelations between all of the factors influencing adverse sex ratio makes any linear analysis of the issue impossible. In the end, my paper suggested that better enforcement of the laws was needed, along with better education about the issues, especially among the NGO workers that are out in the fields, and an overall shift in cultural mentality about girls and women. I questioned whether this shift would be possible before the negative effects of adverse sex ratio became extreme or if the negative effects themselves would be the necessary force needed to create such a shift.

More than all the literature I reviewed, the field studies I conducted, and the 90-page report I produced, I feel that the most important aspect of my internship was learning to work in India. This meant dealing with obstacles I would never have to face in America. I feel that my experience in India has prepared me to handle almost anything that comes my way, both in life and in academia. I not only acquired new skills, but I also learned a great deal about a subject I have become very passionate about: adverse sex ratios in India (with a focus on female infanticide and female feticide). I will not expound upon all I learned here, as I could go on for many pages. I now feel confident that if I do choose to pursue PhD research in India, I will be as prepared as someone going to India can be. I know that I will return again to India, and knowing that I have laid the groundwork to more academic research in such an amazing country is very rewarding.

