Understanding Bengaluru: A Guidebook to the City and the Self

by
Melinda Lewis

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Spring 2017

Understanding Bengaluru: A Guidebook to the City and the Self

by
Melinda Lewis

APPROVED:

____
Dr. Laura White
Department of English

____
Dr. Maria Bachman
Department of English, Chair

____
Dr. Kathleen Therrien
Department of English

____
Dr. Philip E. Phillips
Associate Dean
University Honors College

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, to the people of Bengaluru, thank you for sharing your home. I value the experiences I had in your city more than I can express, and the way in which I was welcomed and embraced warms me to this day. Though this work might not accurately demonstrate the admiration I feel for the many who made my experience so memorable, I am indisputably appreciative and truly touched by the way this cross-cultural experience changed my life, even if it was just for a season.

To Dr. Laura White: Thank you for your tireless guidance and valued insight. This project could have never existed without you. The efforts you put forth both in and out of the classroom are truly admirable, and I will carry the knowledge and understanding you helped me gain for the rest of my life.

To Dr. Kathleen Therrien: From my first day of Customs, you have been an integral part of my MTSU experience. Thank you for taking the time to help me develop from start to finish, and for always being a resource, a teacher, and a friend.

To the Office of Education Abroad: The opportunities you provide students are countless, from going abroad to contributing to an international environment here in Middle Tennessee. Your support has been so beneficial to my personal and professional development, and I cannot thank you enough for the hard work that you put into your students.

To my family: Thank you for always being long-term dog sitters while I'm away, and for always cheerfully providing rides to the airport, late-night phone calls, and a strong sense of home even when I'm far away.

Abstract

This creative thesis is written from firsthand experience of the author's time in Bengaluru, India. Written as a travel narrative, this work gives information concerning various matters in the city such as social issues, population and poverty, environment and pollution, and transportation. Through the exploration of these topics, this project also addresses the impact of travel on personal development and growth.

Table of Contents

Page

Introduction 1

What's in a Name? 6

A Brief Introduction to Social Relations and Issues 10

Population and Poverty 18

Environment and Pollution 25

Transportation 35

Conclusion 43

Works Cited 46

Introduction

For the first semester of my final year in college, I studied in Bangalore, India. I went with the dual purpose of cultural exposure and gaining knowledge for this thesis, which was meant to be a cultural guidebook for foreigners in Bangalore. Through initial studies of the history of travel writing, I became aware of the genre's past limitations when writers wrote their observations and understandings of cultures as unparalleled truths. Post-colonialist scholar Edward Said wrote about the history of biased writing when studying other cultures in his book *Orientalism*, which I read to better understand how to approach this topic. According to Said, "any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer [and are] interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation" (Said 272). With this perspective in mind, I decided to leave much of the focus of this project open ended, since I didn't want to give myself tunnel vision when exploring the city. I came with a flexible focus on the city's culture, but in retrospect, this was still too large for me to see clearly. Bangalore is home to a mixture of many distinct cultures and peoples, so the way the city manifests itself is different for everyone who lives there. There is no single, unified culture, but rather a culture best understood as diverse, complex, and multilayered. Rather than experiencing tunnel vision, I felt I was standing in front of a massive and abstract painting. Jackson Pollock comes to mind because it was chaotic, but with intention and beauty. I discovered there was no way I could make sense of it all in the time I had allotted myself.

I attempted to combat the limitations of my representation by interviewing locals and including their words to offset my perspective throughout this work. Unfortunately, though I conducted interviews, they were lost due to technological failure. Though I no longer have the exact words to quote from these interviews with students and a professor from the school I attended, I do retain the effects of such dialogues as they affected my understanding of the city and its culture. This kind of informal procurement of knowledge demonstrates much of how I began to understand the city, through conversations with friends, other students, professors, shop owners, street vendors, and rickshaw or Uber drivers. I tried to talk to people when the language allowed, and often they seemed to be just as interested in my culture as I was in theirs. I read the local paper on an almost daily basis, tried not to repeat restaurants when eating out, and saw comedy shows in my neighborhood. To relieve tension from studying, some friends and I would go to a nearby bar and play foosball with the waiters when there wasn't much business. I gained knowledge through formal education as well, taking classes at Christ University with other international students in subjects which pertained to the sociology and culture of India such as Caste, Class, and Gender; Population and Poverty; Indian Culture and Traditions; and Gandhi and Nonviolent Protest.

I learned—from all these sources—that it's somewhat rare to meet someone born and raised in the city, since its booming economic growth and career opportunities provide a strong pull factor for those all over the world. Bangalore is in the state of Karnataka, but most of those I knew were from Kerala, a neighboring state to the south. Though everyone is Indian, people often clump together by region, with those from

Kerala—called Malayali—often cohabitating, speaking Malayalam, and sharing in culture. India is unique from much of the world due to the way regional differences can often lead to language barriers between those from the same country; however, most who live in Bangalore know multiple languages and can usually get by with knowing English, Hindi, or Kannada. Because so many people who live in Bangalore are, themselves, immigrants of sorts, each group faces unique challenges and personal culture shocks. There are regional prejudices and stereotypes as well as social movements to limit the cultural influence of those from outside Karnataka. But Bangalore is a cosmopolitan city, and all those who live in it affect its identity. The mixture of foods, dances, arts and crafts, languages, education systems, religions and more creates such a massive and frequently-changing culture that, from such a limited outsider's perspective, I began to realize it would be a gross oversimplification to continue this project as a cultural guidebook.

So what is this, then, if not a guidebook to understanding the city's culture? In my initial studies of the genre of travel writing, I was introduced to Bill Bryson. I appreciated his style of addressing stereotypes surrounding specific areas through humor and information to work through those issues, rather than ignoring them or feeding them. I hoped I could utilize this style myself in tackling some of the pervading stereotypes and prejudices surrounding India. This wasn't my first experience studying abroad, so I considered myself prepared for the task and hoped my work would encourage others to travel and push their boundaries. Instead, I found my own limits and experienced culture shock harder than I had ever expected. To be honest, I actually experienced prejudicial

thinking during times of difficulty. When I felt objectified or like I had been treated unfairly due to my gender or ethnicity, I often fell into a negative mindset that I had to work myself out of, which was harder than I'd like to admit. I learned that prejudice comes out of low moments and a baser need to blame and simplify to make sense of a reality that might seem incomprehensible in the moment. I'm not proud of this, and coming to terms with the knowledge that my own thoughts can be at odds with my core beliefs was something with which I grappled both during my time in India and after I returned home. I thought greater exposure would solidify my preliminary belief that more information about a culture and a place leaves little room for stereotypes and simplification, but it seemed to do the opposite at times. All this left me with the question: how can an experience which brings an awareness of my own unexpected prejudice be a positive cross-cultural experience?

After a great deal of reflection, I think the idea of greater cultural exposure as a combatant to prejudice is still effective. It just means first facing the oversimplifications of culture which occur when there has been little or no exposure beforehand, as I had to. From my safety bubble, I could comfortably look out into the world and hold the belief that everyone is equal and that every culture is uniquely purposed, none better than another. But when I was actually living in a culture which was so different from my own, I experienced the mindset of Orientalist scholars and understood things from my own emotional reactions rather than from the intellectual framework I had tried to build before going. I'm sure some very lucky people will be able to travel the world and never experience any sort of horrible tensions between their own culture and the culture of

others, but for me and many others, there is a process of navigating through a sort of personal muck of stereotypical thought and discomfort to get to the other side. And from this other side, we are better equipped to address and challenge stereotypes and prejudices. In the words of Mark Twain in *The Innocents Abroad*, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime" (Twain 380). So, to address what this thesis has become, I would still answer that it is a guidebook, written from personal reflection on my time abroad and the tensions that I felt with certain aspects of life in the city. But instead of working as a guidebook to the culture of the city, it is a guidebook for the traveler who wants to work through potential discomfort in order to have a stronger sense of the many ways in which people live in the world. It's a study of both the city and myself, as being abroad brought forth certain understandings about the ways in which travel can affect personal development. It's for the daring and the nervous, for the curious and the cautious. It's for people in the same position I was in a year ago, designed to serve as a roadmap to what might be happening internally when so much is different externally.

What's in a Name?

I'm not going to lie. I didn't have the expectation of fully gaining an understanding of Bangalore, India in the four months I chose to study there, but I did expect to have a better understanding than I do now. For starters, I'm still not sure what to call the city. In 2014, the city decided to change its name from the name given to it by the British (Bangalore) back to a previous name it had given itself (Bengaluru). One of its previous permutations was "Benda-kaal-uru," which means city of boiled beans in Kannada—the regional language. Apparently this title for the city also changed somewhere in the city's history, as it's now known as the City of Gardens.

Regardless, I was unaware of the name change of the city when I decided to go, as my education abroad program still calls it Bangalore. When I found out about the change, I quickly decided to remedy my faux pas since I would always prefer to call a place what the people there would like it to be called rather than abiding by antiquated colonial titles; however, it became confusing when many people I talked to preferred Bangalore to Bengaluru. A main factor contributing to this preference was just the matter of changing the name at all. I'm pretty positive that no one who was alive for the initial name change done by the British is still alive today. That means that everyone currently living in the city has only ever known the name Bangalore as the official title, which would make the name change a pretty difficult shift to make mentally, even if everyone supported it. And changing a name kind of changes the identity of a place as well. Bangalore gives reference to the city's history with the British and its ties to the western world. Bengaluru is purely South Indian. It's said to come from King Ballala of the Hoysala dynasty, who

got lost while hunting in the forest and came across an old woman who gave him some boiled beans to remedy his hunger. He was so grateful that he named the forest "Benda-kaal-uru" (later simplified to Bengaluru) in reference to the old woman's generosity. Historians are split on the validity of this story, but many of the young people I met while studying in the city felt the name was too historical. They would prefer a name which reflects the nature of the rapidly growing city and its global ties. The city itself also seems to reflect this ambivalence, with strong roots in the past which offset its contemporary global integration. One of the primary concerns about greater globalization is the potential homogenization of places in the world. Rather than each place being a unique embodiment of local creativity and enterprise, the world at large might become a sea of Starbucks and McDonalds, choking out all the things which made a place distinctive. Those concerns are present in Bangalore, but forces are at work to ensure it remains Indian above all else. Restoring the name of the city to its historical title demonstrates to me that global forces will come second to Indian identity. It also actively opposes any continued colonialism by rejecting an identity given by outside forces and in this way, reclaims the ability to negotiate which global forces are able to influence the culture of the city.

Ultimately, for the purposes of continuity and clarity, I've elected to refer to it as Bengaluru in the remainder of this work, since that is the current official title of the city; however, the city is constantly changing as a result from rapid growth. What used to be the City of Gardens is now severely lacking in green space for its well over nine million inhabitants ("Bangalore District: Census 2011 data"). Efforts to provide housing to

accommodate those residing in Bengaluru have created issues with the ecological balance of what was once a lush and green city. Part of the city's appeal is its global position as India's Silicon Valley, but the technological nature of the work done there has begun to permeate the lifestyles of those who live there. Bengaluru is the very definition of a cosmopolitan city, with a unique mixture of religions, languages, nationalities, ethnicities, and lifestyles all contributing to its identity. Like most of India, it has strong roots in traditional ways and the rich history of the country, but it also has become a hotspot for foreign investment and urban development. It's a city in the midst of transition, yet in many ways it retains its core identity.

I use this example of ambiguity in naming to demonstrate how difficult it is, from an outsider's perspective, to pinpoint a culture. Even something as simple as a name can be steeped in a rich history that leaves outsiders unsure of how to begin to understand. It's like a kaleidoscope, where the picture changes while you're still trying to understand what you're seeing. My desire to understand things in order to share that understanding with others made this rapid change even more disconcerting, and though I fought it, I quickly learned that the task I aimed to complete was out of the question.

Essentially, there is no possible way that I can give a conclusive and comprehensive guide to Bengaluru, having only lived there for four months, but I can tell you what I do know, which is a lot more than what I came into this knowing. I can tell you about the Bengaluru that I—as a European-American female student—experienced and understood, and I can tell you about how it shaped and changed my perspectives

through specific areas in which I felt the most culture shock. So here’s some of the Bengaluru I know…

A Brief Introduction to Social Relations and Issues

I arrived in Bengaluru at night. My travel companion—a man my age with whom I had studied in Thailand two years prior—and I took a cab from the airport to our hotel, but the driver didn't take us all the way there. In my experience, drivers in Bengaluru don't like using GPSes for a multitude of reasons, which I'll address later. Instead, he took us to the bus station down the street from the hotel, so we were left to walk with our semester's worth of luggage down a ragged street at midnight. Auto-rickshaw drivers were yelling prices at us, hoping we would be oblivious enough to agree to whatever price they offered us first. We *were* oblivious, but since our hotel was just down the road, we didn't accept their offers.

Any city at midnight might feel uncomfortable to newcomers, but I felt especially out of place. It stood out to me almost instantly that I was the only woman outside, which felt like a bad situation in which to be. Our hotel was in a part of the city called Majestic, which I learned later is one of the seedier parts of the city, and the hotel was absolutely horrible. There was an overwhelming odor of mothballs in the rooms, and the room itself looked like it had never actually been cleaned, just tidied. Worst of all, there were bedbugs, a horror I had never before experienced that made even restorative sleep impossible. Huddled with our luggage by the door, carefully watching the bedbugs as they began to crawl toward us on the walls and ceilings, we decided to leave at around 3:00 a.m. and attempt to check into our student housing early. It was a very bad introduction to my home for the next four months, but luckily the time I spent in the rest of the city gave me a better perspective on Bengaluru's diverse identity.

I use this experience to highlight one of the most prevalent features of the social interactions I observed in the city, which permeates nearly every other topic addressed in this thesis. There is a palpable delineation of the appropriate behaviors for men and women within the public and private spheres. It's not that women aren't allowed the same opportunities as men. Women are encouraged to be high achievers, and at my college there were actually more female than male students enrolled. It's more a matter of how each gender is expected to behave. Men own the night, and women are expected to understand that. With this division comes an understanding of gendered behavior, but also how gender itself is perceived. If women don't go out at night—and I can attest that many of them actually do—then those who choose to engage in nightlife unfortunately lose their classification as women. They fall into some kind of ambiguous space where any issues that may arise become their fault because they chose to behave outside the mandates of womanhood. For example, shortly after I left India, there were some unfortunate reports of mass molestations in Bengaluru during New Year's festivities, which G Parmeshwara, the home minister of the state of Karnataka (the state Bengaluru is in), brushed off with an unsatisfactory, "These kind of things do happen," and blamed the women for gathering outside and dressing like westerners (Safi 2017).

This example is yet another instance of negotiating the Indian identity with global influence. These women, predominantly Indian women, were perceived to be at fault for emulating western women, who generally do not forfeit the night to their male cohorts. And despite Bengaluru's having a healthy nightlife scene with specific ladies' nights to entice women to socialize, the dominant understanding of Indian female identity is still

limited to customs which are becoming more and more out of date. This instance still shocks me because even though I was aware of the unspoken rules regarding conduct for men and women, I never found the city to be so unsafe and unforgiving.

Though my experience was, admittedly, greatly influenced by my position as a person outside of Indian society and of European descent, I felt there was a strong counter-movement for the empowerment of women. The men who became my friends were embarrassed by the way other men behaved toward women and actively tried to create opportunities for women to feel comfortable during activities after dark. They would host parties, invite us over for dinner, and make us more aware of the events going on in the city. One of the greatest contributions of my male friends was their desire to confirm that the women they invited out felt comfortable at social gatherings, making sure any men who didn't respect our boundaries were escorted out, and always ensuring we made it home safely after every outing. But these were educated men, usually from at least a middle-class background and almost always from a high caste. They had the means to show me and others who were new to the city places which many who lived there couldn't afford, and these places had little stake in maintaining any sort of social order which kept half of their target demographic away. They had the luxury of being able to denounce the caste system because they were never limited by its influence on their lives. They exemplified the demographic to which I had most access in Bengaluru, though I deeply wanted to make female Indian friends. But my access to certain groups of people is very telling about Bengaluru society. Women weren't unkind to me, but they were distant. There's a stereotype about white women—specifically American women—

being openly promiscuous that I think contributed to this distance. Many of the students who chose to live on campus cultivated friendships with the women with whom they cohabitated, but since I lived off-campus I missed that opportunity. I had several substantial conversations with women, but never the kind of lasting friendship I maintained with my male friends.

Though this overview just scratches the surface of the gender dynamic in Bengaluru, I felt I should provide some preliminary information about it since much of my experience was influenced by it. It's an important piece in understanding the way people coexist in Bengaluru, although the population is incredibly diverse. Inhabitants of the city perceive it as moderately peaceful and safe in comparison to other cities of its size. One of my professors expressed her satisfaction in Bengaluru's safety, telling me that her favorite part of living there was how she was able to walk around and feel safe, which was not as true in other Indian cities. This degree of security is especially impressive in regard to the diversity of religion that exists there ("Crime in Bangalore"). One of the first things I learned about the city was from my program director, who told us all, "Everyone talks about politics here, and no one talks about religion. That's how we stay peaceful." This is not entirely true, especially when religious practices and government policies clash, but religion is not as publicized as it is in the United States, despite having equal or greater influence on the daily lives of those who observe it.

Obviously, the most prominent religion is Hinduism, followed by Islam, Christianity, and Jainism, in addition to other religions with populations too small to mention. Hinduism remains the most popular by far, outnumbering the next three most

popular religions even when their followers are combined ("Bangalore District: Census 2011 data"). I attended Christ University, which is a university founded on Christian principles, but practicing Christianity is not required to attend or to teach at the school. The school included Hindu, Christian, and Muslim religious holidays in its calendar and made efforts to emphasize the "unity in diversity" of the population. For the most part, there is great effort in the community to be inclusive and accommodating to the many ways of life people live, but sometimes there is tension. For example, air pollution is already an issue that affects everyone who lives in Bengaluru, but it became noticeably worse after the Hindu celebration of Diwali, or the festival of lights. In South India, this holiday celebrates the defeat of the demon Narakasura by the god Krishna, or the power of light to overcome darkness ("Diwali in South India"). The festivities include feasts, giving gifts, and lighting candles and fireworks. Unfortunately, when a population as large as the one in Bengaluru celebrates with fireworks, the air quality gets significantly worse overnight. Throughout the country, non-Hindu groups criticized the continued use of fireworks for celebrations when air quality is already something which cannot be taken for granted. Censures like this on a large scale are rare when it comes to religion and really only seem to happen when there is an issue with religious practice's interfering with the lives of those outside the religion as well.

Another way in which religion affects society on a large scale is through the institution of caste. Caste is a form of social stratification in Hinduism through which people are categorized by their closeness to purity. The idea behind it is that if one performs their dharma—or cosmic duty—then they will be rewarded with good karma

and will move into a higher caste upon reincarnation. On the opposite side, if one fails to follow their duty, they will be reincarnated into a lower caste. Caste is highly regionalized and localized, but in a broad sense, the highest caste is Brahmin, and the lowest is Shudra. Brahmins have traditionally been priests and scholars while Shudras were servants to the higher castes. Lower than Shudras are the untouchables, or Dalits, which form a level actually below the caste system. This is a historically marginalized group, as they are viewed to be impure and unclean from the traditional Hindu perspective. Hinduism is heavily dependent on spiritual purity, so exposure to things viewed as impure is meant to be avoided as much as possible. Impure things would be garbage, anything that has died, or things concerning the body. Traditionally, jobs that demanded exposure to this kind of impurity on a daily basis were delegated to Dalits, which contributed to their perceived impurity.

Caste is a highly complex issue that I can't claim to understand fully myself, but it is still a system which influences daily life throughout India. After Indian independence in 1947, there was a movement to even out some of the effects of caste by providing caste reservations in schools, through which a certain number of places in a school would be reserved for those of a lower caste and the minimum qualifying score would be lowered for those spots. This system was supposed to last for ten years after independence, but it is still functioning today and is a hotly contested practice. Additionally, the practice of untouchability was made illegal after independence. Untouchability is the way in which other castes marginalize Dalits by refusing to eat or drink anything prepared by them, let them touch water sources, or even stand on their shadows. It can manifest itself in many

ways, but essentially it's a reification of the way in which Dalits are perceived as pollutants, and their rights are affected because of that. If Dalits do not abide by this system, violent acts are often used to maintain the social hierarchy. Unfortunately, though untouchability has been made illegal, it still happens in many parts of India today, although Bengaluru is not one of those places. If it is practiced in places in the city, it is a deviation from the norm. Caste is still a factor in the city, but it is not so rigid. Most young people have a progressive view of the stratification, having friends from all areas of the caste spectrum. One area where it retains its significance is in marriage. In this case, the idea I heard cited most frequently was that marrying in one's caste is practical, since it provides a basis of understanding and shared background with one's spouse.

With the patriarchal structure of society and the caste system imbedded in the way people interact, boys' needs are often given priority over girls' in situations in which resources are limited. This is especially true regarding education because families view sons as better financial investments than daughters, since their daughters will likely marry someday and leave the home. It is perpetuated by the traditional joint-family system, a system through which families lived and worked together to amass greater wealth and to encourage family values. This is a patrilocal system, so when daughters marry, they move in with the family of their new husband. This system is losing its prominence in Indian cities like Bengaluru since the cost of living is higher than in rural areas where this practice originated; however, the mindset of daughter's being less valued than sons still holds true in many circumstances. This generally only manifests itself in areas with less economic opportunity, such as slums, where parents must make difficult

decisions because of their lack of funds. It's also a bit of a self-fulfilling cycle since a lack of education perpetuates a skewed view on the value of women.

These social relations proved to be some of the most difficult for me to understand. They are all highly complex and based on centuries of history, and despite taking classes on two of these three areas (caste and gender), I still felt that the nuanced nature of these issues was beyond my perception. I was frustrated by these limitations since I wanted to gain a proper understanding beyond the simplified versions of I had been exposed to prior to coming to India. Once again, I had to accept that the time-frame which I had allotted myself wasn't nearly long enough to get the kind of perspective I craved in all these areas.

Population and Poverty

According to the 2011 census—the most recent census taken—the population of Bengaluru is nearly eight and a half million (“Bangalore District: Census 2011 data”). To put this huge number into perspective, the population is greater than that of New York City (“QuickFacts: New York City, New York”), and of the entire state of Tennessee (by a long shot) (“QuickFacts: Tennessee”), and it is roughly seventy-two times the size of my hometown of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. (“Murfreesboro, Tennessee Population”). Some sources estimate the population is over ten million as of 2017 (“Bangalore Population 2017”). I had never lived in a city this large before, and to be honest, I still cannot fathom its size. It’s truly a massive amount of people in one area, and with that comes a multitude of issues on how to provide for those who inhabit the city and how to accommodate for their capacity of population growth. From my perspective, things run relatively smoothly on a day-to-day basis, but when there is a bump in the road the whole system gets derailed, as exemplified by an event I’m calling “Modi and the Rupee Fiasco.”

It was early November of 2016 when Prime Minister Narenda Modi announced, due to an excess of counterfeit money, that ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 banknotes would no longer be recognized as legal tender after midnight. These bills total around $7.50 and $15.00 respectively. The announcement was made around 10:00 p.m. Almost immediately, hordes of people formed queues at ATMs to exchange their bills or to withdraw money that could be legally used in the morning. From that point forward, there was always a line at an ATM for the duration of my time in India. Similarly, banks had lines out the

door of those trying to exchange their old bills before the deadline of December 30. There was an exchange and withdrawal limit of ₹ 2,000 per day, which further contributed to the density of the lines. Even if someone were to take the time to make it to the front of the line—which often involved taking time off work—the maximum they could get was around $30. Additionally, due to over eighty-five percent of bills in circulation being ₹ 500 or ₹ 1,000 banknotes, ATMs and banks quickly ran out of currency (Damodaran 2016).

Though a matter of inconvenience, this situation was manageable for those of us who were able to use credit and debit cards to make up for the lack of cash. It meant going to a supermarket rather than a produce stand on the road. It meant taking an Uber instead of an auto-rickshaw. In fact, after waiting in several lines to exchange the ₹ 10,000 I had withdrawn the day before demonetization to serve as my monthly allowance and explaining multiple times that though I didn't have an Indian bank account, I had legally withdrawn the money from the ATM, I decided to just get a tattoo with the remaining rupees at a place I knew would take my old bills, as some businesses continued to do secretly. But those whose livelihood depended on the cash economy, such as the roadside produce vendor and the auto-rickshaw driver, were seriously negatively impacted by this policy. During this time, I saw a dialogue on Twitter that still stands out to me as a good example of how this situation was simply unacceptable for those who had no guarantee they would survive this bump in the road. *The Times of India* reporter Bharti Jain tweeted, "My cook accepted my regrets when I told her I had no cash to pay her salary. Said this was a temporary phase ahead of a larger national

good" (Bharti 2016). This tweet elicited the reply, "And her cook went & told her children they had to starve temporarily for a larger national good. The children clapped & sang national anthem" (Dudguru 2016). It's reported that around 105 people died as a result of demonetization; however, these numbers come from deaths that occurred from the strain of standing in bank lines or being denied treatment at hospitals due to possession of old banknotes (Bremmer 2016). I suspect the number would be significantly higher if factors such as hunger stemming from declines in business were taken into account; however, such a figure would be nearly impossible to calculate.

Eventually, new ₹ 2,000 bills were introduced, but since the availability smaller change was now so limited, very few places could break them and they did little to alleviate the cash problem. The whole thing felt half-baked and rushed because although stealth was necessary to catch those breaking the law off guard, the banknotes left in circulation were not enough to support the cash economy. During this time, journalist Prasanto K. Roy eloquently tweeted, "To hunt crocodiles, the pond was dried. No crocodiles were found, for they can live on land too. But the small fish died. #DeMonetisation." This summed up much of what I felt during the process since those most affected were those unable to sustain themselves without a healthy cash economy. When I left India in mid-December, there was still a long road ahead in addressing the issues which arose during demonetization (Roy 2016). Fifty days after demonetization was announced, *Forbes* evaluated the effectiveness of the initiative on fighting counterfeit money and the shadow economy. In the article "After Day 50: The Results from India's Demonetization Are In," author Wade Shepard writes, "Even with the strict

regulations put in place to audit large deposits and limit the amount of banknotes that could be exchanged at one time, India's shadow economy was able to unload their black money, often laundering it sparkling white in the process" (Shepard 2017). Though there is still ambiguity regarding how this was accomplished, what is clear is that the crocodiles went relatively unscathed, and the small fish had to struggle to survive.

Roughly ten percent of the population in Bengaluru lives in slums ("Total Population, Slum Population and Their Percentage in Municipal Corporations with Populations above One Million-2001"), and some studies estimate that around twenty percent of the population lives below the poverty line (Sudhira, Subrahmanya & Bala 2007). While studying in Bengaluru, I took a class in Population and Poverty and became aware of a tactic of the Indian government in combatting the percentage of those living in poverty, which was simply to lower the poverty line. Though this sounds like a shocking conspiracy, it's a fairly well-known fact in India that the government's estimation of how much money is required for one person to live per day is a gross underestimate. To demonstrate this, two upper-class men from America decided to live on ₹ 100 a day each, the daily expenditure of the average Indian, for a month while working in Bengaluru in 2011. The men experienced substantial weight loss, had to completely give up protein of any kind, and realized they couldn't travel more than five kilometers and keep to their budget (Rai 2011). And though their experience is significant, even they lived above the poverty line as estimated by the Indian government. According to government estimates, it only takes ₹ 32 ($0.48) per day to live in rural areas and ₹ 47 ($0.71) per day in urban areas (Singh 2014). This estimate is unreasonably low and demonstrates that there may

be a significantly higher percentage of the population living in relative poverty in India than what is reported.

As previously mentioned, resource management for a population the size of Bengaluru's is difficult, and often those at the bottom of the economic scale are less able to navigate issues that inevitably arise. From shortages of natural resources to loss of business when a cash-based economy becomes all but impossible, the poor living in Bengaluru face hardships which keep them down. Despite certain reservations for lower caste and class citizens in academic programs, many in relative poverty have no means to better their situation. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, there are more people living in poverty in eight of the states in India than in the twenty-six combined poorest countries in Africa ("'More poor' in India than Africa" 2010). Poverty is inescapable in India, and even small gestures of short-term alleviation come with strings attached. Busy streets frequently feature children or mothers with sleeping babies strapped to their bodies selling pens for ₹ 10. While these sales seem harmless enough at first, I was later told that these vendors were pawns of a mafia of sorts, which takes all the proceeds at the end of the day and pays the workers only enough to survive. I was also told that they give the babies morphine, which seemed outlandish, but after that I became aware that I never saw a single vendor-baby awake. There were times I could communicate well enough through gesture to offer to buy the child vendors food, but they frequently refused. On one occasion, I was approached by a child while on a street full of vendors, and I let her choose what she wanted to order. She quickly finished the dish and asked for another, and since it was street food, and thus cheap, I was willing to

comply. She took her food somewhere else this time, and then came back with a small boy. He also wanted food. I gave him something too, but at this point I needed all my remaining cash to get home. I waved goodbye to them, and instead of waving back they pointed at their bare feet. Any potentially nice feelings I had about buying food for these children immediately disappeared as I stood there soaked in my own privilege. I wish I could say I knew what to do in that instance and that I was able to solve a problem greater than hunger for that night, but I didn't. I didn't know where to buy shoes for them, or if that was even appropriate. If I did, would there be two more kids asking me for shoes directly after? Would it shame their parents or would they be happy? Did they even have parents to look after them? I was so torn and flustered that I left without a word and tormented myself with all of the potential scenarios on the way home.

I don't claim to know how to solve the issues of poverty facing so many in Bengaluru, but through my experience I learned how to handle some of the guilt that might come to those who feel helpless in observation of their suffering. As an outsider, it's not necessarily my role to impose any sort of solutions, since real and lasting change should come from within the community, but I wanted to do something with the privilege into which I had been born. The most important thing which helped me feel like I was contributing was volunteering with the non-profit ANULife, which works with women in a slum in Bengaluru. Although I wasn't especially helpful in their day-to-day functioning, I worked on the marketing of the organization and helped in sales, which contributed to the continued success of the organization. I tried to buy from street vendors when possible, and I tried to buy food for those who were asking for money. This isn't a perfect

system, and I still struggle a lot with the knowledge that, at times, I would ignore the poverty in front of me because I had the luxury of being exhausted by it. None of this is meant to be interpreted as reasons to avoid Bengaluru, but poverty is part of the city. This is the reality that many people in Bengaluru experience every day, and engaging in this reality is vital to gaining a broader understanding of the city, though it might come at the price of personal discomfort.

Environment and Pollution

The Cauvery River is a body of water that flows through four states in South India before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. Though the most famous river in India is indisputably the Ganges, the Cauvery River is essential to life in Southern India, specifically in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. There has been an ongoing dispute about the allocation of water for these two states since 1892, with tensions coming to a head every few years (Lahkshmana 2016). Fall of 2016 just happened to be one of those years.

The Cauvery originates in Karnataka—where Bengaluru is the capital—and the state maintains a dam to retain the amount of water they deem necessary for drinking purposes, crop cultivation, and other various needs. In August, neighboring state of Tamil Nadu appealed to the Supreme Court of India for Karnataka to release some of the reserved water; however, Karnataka claimed to be suffering from a shortage of water. After assessing the situation, the Supreme Court ruled that Karnataka release a modified amount to Tamil Nadu, resulting in outrage and protest. Throughout Karnataka, a bandh—or strike—was observed to demonstrate unity in dissatisfaction regarding this mandate. In some parts of the state there were riots and violence, and two people were killed. Bengaluru imposed a curfew, and shops, schools, and restaurants closed. Usually, places would only remain closed for the weekend, but for many weekends in succession Bengaluru observed a bandh.

This crisis began during my first week in Bengaluru, and I watched as the city transformed from a bustling metropolis to a ghost town. Though not everyone agreed

with Karnataka's stance regarding the water issue, and very few actually condoned the violence that occurred, a strong sense of state pride kept people indoors. Karnataka is unique in being one of the only states with a state flag, and it could be seen flying from auto-rickshaws, hanging from shopping centers, and printed on signs pasted on the doors of shops closed during the bandhs.

Though the water issue went on for months, the bandhs were usually announced by pro-Kannada groups on Thursday evenings and took effect on Fridays, often continuing through the weekend. After the announcement, people would rush to grocery stores to stock up for the weekend. Chaos ensued, with people crowding the aisles and security guards positioned at every exit, ready to shut down the store at a moment's notice. Though I never witnessed any violence, I could feel the tension in the air as the energy of the population shifted from relaxed to nervous. During one of the early bandhs, one of my roommates was suffering from dengue fever. Because we didn't have much food at home, I ventured outside to find something that he could eat. The streets were deserted and most establishments were closed, but I fortunately found an open café which served western food and quickly put in an order to go. The staff at the café seemed reluctant to let me leave on my own due to concerns for my safety, but because I lived nearby they were eventually reassured. They sent me on my way with admonitions to be very aware on my way home, which, despite the short distance, made the walk seem to take twice as long due to my anxiety. Though people from Tamil Nadu had to be especially cautious since those from that state were the targets of violence, I felt it was unlikely that I would be targeted since most considered me an outsider to these domestic

issues. However, the concern of the staff—those who had lived in Bengaluru longer than I had—demonstrates the uncertainty that most in the city experienced during the bandhs. The Bengaluru that existed during such times was unpredictable and potentially unsafe. It was a perpetual wildcard that convoluted my early attempts to understand and explore the city.

I never experienced any effects of the water scarcity personally; it was those who were already resource-insecure who felt the brunt of the shortage. Through talking to friends from school, I gathered there was the perception that those who were perpetrating the violence were those less educated and more reactionary than much of the population, but it should also be noted that those who attended my school were also usually from more affluent backgrounds, so any shortage of water would have little effect on their daily lives. Those who led the efforts of the bandh were farmer's unions and pro-Kannada protesters. Pro-Kannada movements are considered somewhat radical, as they favor local Karnataka culture and oppose widespread influence of outside cultures in the state. This preference for the people of Karnataka became more evident as pro-Kannada groups began burning vehicles with license plates from Tamil Nadu and contributing to the tension between the two states (Bisht 2016). The role of the farmers in these bandhs stemmed more from a need-based perspective rather than state pride since without sufficient water their crops, and in turn their incomes, would suffer, leaving effects that would last longer than the water shortage.

The truly tragic aspect to all of this is that Bengaluru was planned so the city would never have a shortage of water due to the many man-made lakes created in the 16th

century (Fernando 2008). Unfortunately, through the rapid development of the city as well as the struggles to create housing for the growing population, these lakes have been filled in or polluted—one to the point of spontaneous combustion multiple times (Singh 2017). All aspects of pollution in the city are invariably linked, from poor waste management harming the quality of water to toxic fumes contributing to air pollution when the water quality is so poor that it catches fire. I found the pollution to be incredibly overwhelming at times, but I had the benefit of being able to retreat to my apartment when the city became too much for me. Walking to and from school was sometimes especially challenging. It was around a forty-minute walk to campus from my apartment, and I liked the idea of getting some light exercise before classes. Unfortunately, I usually went to school during peak morning traffic, and the time I had hoped would be a mild introduction to my day was in reality a stressful and overwhelming combination of honking, construction, and air pollution. I noticed early on that my nasal mucus was black from the air pollution, and I was sick unusually often during my time in Bengaluru. I gave up on walking fairly quickly and elected to take an auto-rickshaw so my commute from the haven of my apartment to the haven of campus would be quicker. I actually dealt with depression for the first time in my life while in Bengaluru, which might have been due in part to the outside environment, but was most certainly influenced by my personal disappointment in my inability to adapt to this environment. I was judging myself for struggling with sensory overload, but in retrospect I can see this did nothing to help me address my discomfort.

I was fortunate enough to have the luxury of some choice when it came to my exposure to the outside world. Unlike a great many in the city, my livelihood didn't depend on transporting people through crowded streets or selling produce on the street. People living in these situations are already lacking the choice to ignore or hide from the issues of pollution and scarcity since these issues directly affect their daily needs. So while the violence which resulted from the water crisis was regrettable, unfortunate, and truly abominable, it becomes more understandable from the perspective of those in desperate need of resources which were scarce for them even before the Supreme Court ruling.

According to the Numbeo database, Bengaluru ranks high in all indicators of pollution, including pollution in air, water, noise and light, and in dissatisfaction with disposal of garbage ("Pollution in Bangalore, India"). Similarly, data from the World Health Organization indicate Bengaluru has very high air pollution, among the worst in the world (*Ambient air pollution* 2016). As in any population, those with greater exposure to the elements and less economic affluence face a disproportionate burden from these pollutants, since they frequently don't have the means to ensure they are living healthy lifestyles. I would often hear advertisements for air purifiers for cars, but those who drove scooters or auto-rickshaws were at the mercy of the air quality on the street. A similar argument could be made about the water issue since water purifiers and bottled water are staples in many households in the city; however, those living in slums with limited infrastructure and access to basic needs did not share the same easy access to potable water.

The government of India is well aware of the pollution problem that much of the country is facing, and there are initiatives to limit the issue. Plastic bags have been banned from Bengaluru since March of 2016, but the effects of this ban seem to be limited to supermarkets and shopping malls. Small vendors are notorious for continuing to provide plastic bags to their patrons, for both convenience's sake and to maintain competitive prices (Sripad 2016). Additionally, there are laws which require rainwater harvesting in buildings of certain dimensions, but this initiative is also frequently met with a lack of compliance from the greater public. According to the newspaper *The Hindu*, fewer than half of the buildings to which the rainwater harvesting initiative applied actually implemented procedures for water conservation (Bharadwai 2015). Though the government initiatives could be better enforced and the incentives could be stronger, the greatest issue seems to be a degree of apathy or even opposition from the public. It's very common to see people dispose of garbage in the street despite laws in place to prevent such littering from occurring. The concept of purity becomes highly pertinent when looking at waste disposal since garbage is viewed as impure and should be handled sparingly from the perspective of those who observe the rules of the caste system. Those who are caste-conscious will often put their desire for purity above government mandates about waste management, so, for example, if their garbage is not picked up because they refuse to separate it and further handle it, it will simply end up on the street.

Private groups have taken on some of the responsibility of keeping Bengaluru sustainable through various projects. Christ University, the school which I attended, has a

paper recycling plant on the premises where paper products such as stationery and picture frames are made from the paper waste from the school. The school puts heavy emphasis on waste segregation, and through this meticulous separation, the school is actually able to recycle all the waste it produces (Bheema 2015). The difference in air quality and cleanliness on the campus from the outside world is astonishing, but since it is a private school, generous funding creates the opportunity to make sustainability an area of focus. This seemed to be a trend in my observations of environmental issues in Bengaluru; greater affluence led to a greater ability to avoid suffering from environmental issues and, in the case of my university, the ability to actually create a significantly better environment on a small scale. Those who struggle to have their basic needs met have less control over their own exposure to pollution and, in many cases, have little to no control when it comes to working to better the environment.

Luckily, there are organizations which address this environmental disconnect in less-affluent communities. Another organization in Bengaluru which makes recycling and sustainability a priority is ANULife, which is a non-profit organization that produces handbags and other products from recycled tetra paks and cement bags. I spent roughly five hours a week volunteering with this organization while in Bengaluru, and my time there quickly became a bright spot in my week. I learned that their mission is two-fold: not only do they work to reduce some of the environmental burden from the usage of tetra paks—which never biodegrade—but they also provide jobs to women in the slums of Janakiram Layout. These women gain valuable skills through working for ANULife, including sewing and English. Through investing in a slum area, ANULife also

encourages positive change in areas most affected by pollution, as these women become leaders in their own community for environmental sustainability. There is also an education fund for the children of the women employed at the organization, through which several families have been able to send their children to private schools. Though these bags are not very popular in India due to their relative expense and their perceived impurity (because they are made from recycled garbage), the organization is maintained through sales to expats or international orders. I felt this organization did a wonderful job in working to tackle both the issues of both female economic development and environmental sustainability, and though I was of little help in the assembly of the products, I enjoyed being able to communicate with the women employed at ANULife. They seemed to find the work to be meaningful and gratifying and had a sense of power and influence in effecting change in their community.

I predominantly worked away from the organization's headquarters, creating a theme for the design of their website and selling their products at craft fairs and to other foreigners I met during my time in Bengaluru, but I spent a fair amount of time at ANULife as well, observing and finding other ways to be of use. Previously, some foreigners had volunteered to teach the employees English, so many of them were fairly fluent, in addition to being fluent in several Indian languages, which they more frequently spoke. It was a strong community of women who had worked together for years, and, as I later learned from the director of the organization, the women regularly discussed their trials and triumphs during their work and formed a sort of support group. During moments when their conversation would come to a lull, I would cautiously interject to

ask a question about their work or their children, and they would answer me kindly before resuming their earlier conversation. I got the impression that I was just another in a long line of volunteers, and while they didn't want to discourage or exclude me, they were tired of answering the same questions each time a new batch of foreigners came to Bengaluru.

I had become resigned to being a mainly silent worker when I met one woman in particular who seemed just as interested in talking to me as I was to her. She was a few years older than me and had three daughters. Before she married, she had lived as a housekeeper for a family in Spain, and she was excited to talk about the world with me. I told her about my home in the United States and she told me about her life in Bengaluru and her daughters, and the opportunities they had gained access to through her work at ANULife. Her two older daughters were away at boarding school and had been living there since they were each five, only returning for holidays. She said she missed them terribly at first, but she was proud of them and excited for their futures. She had the dream that her eldest daughter would be a teacher, her middle daughter would be a doctor, and her youngest would be a flight attendant. Though she was living in a slum and was still cleaning houses in addition to working for ANULife, she could see that her children wouldn't be facing the same hardships that she experienced. Although the organization is by no means perfect since it is unable to provide enough hours to serve as full-time employment, I believe it works as an effective way to fight the apathy surrounding environmental issues that plagues so much of Bengaluru's population by

investing in a population which is rarely given the power to see the way they can change the world.

From the very beginning of my time in Bengaluru, the effects of pollution and environmental scarcity took center stage, but it felt like there was an unwillingness from the greater population to admit the critical nature of these issues. Although the water crisis regarding the Cauvery River led to immediate shortages, I felt there was little push to create long-term solutions in comparison to the outraged reaction to the Supreme Court mandate. Though many citizens and local groups make efforts to keep the environment a priority in Bengaluru, it seems that the amount of energy necessary to be conducive to changing conditions is only put forth when things have already become unacceptable, rather than before, when these issues might be prevented. The way Bengaluru addresses the issues of pollution and sustainability within the next ten years will dictate the city's ability to continue on as the City of Gardens.

Transportation

Getting around Bengaluru is a task, to say the least. The city has grown exponentially within the last decade, increasing in population by over three million people. This may be attributed in part to the growth of the information technology (IT) sector, which remains Bengaluru's most attractive drawing power on a global scale. However, growth at such a rapid rate can lead to issues with a city's ability to accommodate its inhabitants, which is one of the major issues with travelling in Bengaluru. The infrastructure is not rudimentary, simply lacking in ability to effectively hold the over six million vehicles on the roads daily (Deepika 2016). The roads range from sophisticated highways, equipped with overpasses and footbridges, to congested dirt roads where scooters weave through pedestrians and stray cows.

Though there are lanes and official traffic rules, it seems the unofficial rules of the road are the ones most observed. The general mindset is that the best way to be a defensive driver is to be an offensive driver, staking a claim on a space in the road and honking to let others know of one's presence. My first experience with this kind of driving came during my first day in the city, when a friend and I hailed an auto-rickshaw to go to a mall in search of internet access. The auto-rickshaw, about half the size of a sedan, shot off into traffic so confidently that I could hardly be afraid. It wasn't until the driver decided to squeeze between two public buses in a space so narrow I could touch a bus on either side that I began to have my doubts about the safety of this type of driving. I spent my time as a pedestrian or a passenger, never brave enough to test my own abilities on the road, but even these roles posed challenges.

Being a passenger was a new concept for me, since my home is in a place where most families or individuals have their own vehicles. Though I've lived in other places where public transport is the most effective option, Bengaluru has a unique variety of ways to get around, each with their own positives and negatives. The first and most obvious option is auto-rickshaws, which are nearly impossible to miss due to their bright yellow and green paint and their frequently hunting drivers. These are, debatably, the fastest way to get around as a passenger, but they have their downfalls. The first issue is that of cost. While all auto-rickshaws are equipped with a meter to ensure a fair rate for both driver and passenger, most of the time the driver will want to agree on a price before the trip. If a price cannot be agreed upon, the driver will usually give up and drive off, and another will be along shortly. Often the price negotiation is not a bad option, especially when in a rush; however, it can be especially difficult for foreigners, who are easy targets for comparatively high prices. When converting money back to US dollars, it's difficult to argue about price since the difference is usually less than a dollar. It can feel kind of scummy at times to haggle for a price when the original price offered was affordable; however, that kind of behavior is expected and it would be stranger if it wasn't done. For example, three friends and I decided to get a ride from a grocery store to a nearby shopping center, going a distance just slightly over a mile. Since there were four of us, we expected an auto-rickshaw driver to ask for a higher price, as is the custom for any amount of passengers over three. We should have easily been able to take the trip for around 50 or 60 rupees, which is just under a dollar. Instead, the driver was asking for 120 rupees, which was a markup that any Indian would be offended by. But we were

tired and ready to finish our errands, and since the difference in price was still an exceptionally cheap trip by American terms, we agreed to the ride. Just as we were getting into the vehicle, a young Indian woman around our age came up and intervened. She let us know that we were being charged a ridiculous price and tried to get the price down to a reasonable rate. When the driver didn't agree, she asked us to get out of the rickshaw and helped us find a driver who would take us at an appropriate rate. She asked us how long we had been in the city, and none of us had the heart to tell her we had been living there for several months already. It would have been a concession of laziness in observing Indian customs.

None of this is to say that the relationship between auto-rickshaw drivers and passengers is contentious; rather, it is a social formality that price be discussed before the ride begins, otherwise both parties run the risk of contention after the ride is over if each had different expectations of the price. Another downfall with auto-rickshaw transport is that unless the destination is a well-known location, the driver might not know where to go. It's best to choose a landmark near to the desired destination and then direct the driver or walk the rest of the way. Finally, auto-rickshaws are open-air vehicles, and this puts the passenger at the mercy of the surrounding air quality. Though this is often no worse than what a pedestrian might be exposed to, there were many times that I found myself stuck in traffic behind a bus, painfully aware that I was breathing in carbon monoxide and other pollutants. Such experiences were less than pleasant, but usually were quickly remedied once traffic started moving again.

Another transport option I used as frequently as auto-rickshaws is Uber, the app which allows people in the city with cars to receive payment for driving other people around. Though this is a US company, I had never used Uber before living in Bengaluru. The ride options were UberPOOL, which offered a discounted price due to carpooling with someone else going to the same area, UberGO, UberX, and UberXL. UberGO is the most basic private car option, while UberX and XL are slightly more expensive based on how many passengers they can accommodate. My experience was that while UberPOOL was the cheapest, UberGO was usually the best option if I was in a hurry, and it was often cheaper, but slower, than taking an auto-rickshaw. This can be attributed to a car's limited ability to weave through traffic because of its size, while the smaller auto-rickshaw can often get around traffic congestion. Uber was a nice option because the driver would come to my home and take me to the destination I had specified on the app. Another benefit was avoiding price haggling, which makes the app an especially attractive option to those unfamiliar with the area.

But this option also has its shortcomings. Uber relies on the driver's using GPS to pick up passengers and take them to their desired destination. And although Bengaluru is the Silicon Valley of India, unfortunately satellite maps are often faulty or outdated. Drivers in Bengaluru have learned to trust their instincts more than these maps, but to a foreigner it might just look like their driver is deliberately taking them the wrong way when the GPS says one thing and the driver does another. Sometimes these instincts prove fruitful, while other times they actually make the trip longer and more expensive.

It's really just one of the aspects of travel in Bengaluru that people must come to terms with.

I, however, had a lot of trouble accepting that this was the way things were done. I'm used to living in a place where the GPS is usually right, and deviation from its direction is undeniably foolish in most situations. Thinking of it now, I'm reminded of a scene in the American version of *The Office*, where the ridiculous protagonist, Michael, drives into a pond while following GPS instructions despite seeing the pond and being warned about it by his sidekick, Dwight. Western dependencies on GPS navigation might look as silly as this to those who live in Bengaluru and are aware of all the symbolic ponds around the city in which they can be stuck, but to the foreigner who is unaware of the reasoning behind deviation from the navigation, this can all seem just plain wrong.

There are other forms of public transport; however, I never utilized them. I heard mixed messages about the buses, ranging from praises about their efficiency to warnings about riding them as an unchaperoned female. They are a much cheaper option than any of the aforementioned forms of transport; however, they also involved knowledge of routes and the layout of the city, which is a skill I lack even in my own hometown. Another budding form of transport was the metro, which seems to be a wonderful solution to many of Bengaluru's traffic problems. I, unfortunately, never tried this either, since it predominantly services areas of the city which were out of my way. I got the impression that although it is acknowledged as a good form of transport, few people actually find it useful in their daily commutes. Most people drive motor bikes or

scooters—called scootys—and pile whole families onto one bike. Drivers must be skilled in balancing and weaving through traffic in addition to being prepared to stop at a moment's notice in case a bold pedestrian or cow steps into their path. All forms of transport involve a spectacular amount of honking, which is usually not aggressive, but simply a way of demarcating the space which a vehicle is either taking up or planning to move into. So in addition to the air pollution from the sheer number of vehicles on the roads, there is also a spectacular amount of noise pollution from the honking. Eventually it fades away, and I would imagine those who have spent their lives in the city don't even notice.

I spent much of my time as a pedestrian, but I actually liked this form of mobility the least, despite usually enjoying walking when in other parts of the world. To begin, the observed rule is that pedestrians do not have the right of way. This holds true in just about any situation where there isn't a foot bridge, including situations with a crosswalk. My program director made us practice crossing streets in groups since that proved to be the most effective way to stop the flow of traffic. When alone, the best strategy is to wait for a break in the cars and cross as much as possible. It's extremely nerve-wracking from a western perspective. Essentially, the whole system is the opposite of how driving is taught in the United States, and it was very hard for me to let go of the "shoulds" that came into my mind when on the road. I also had trouble ignoring the honking while outside, and walking places meant more time exposed to the cacophony of horns in addition to the exhaust and fumes. At times, I actually dreaded leaving the house, but I

think I was one of the more sensitive ones in my program to the sensory overload from all the stimuli occurring outside.

But the issues stemming from traffic aren't purely ones of discomfort. They actually significantly affect the lives of those in Bengaluru, not only by exposing them to noise and air pollution which can be detrimental to their health, but also by directly contributing to Indian fatalities, with traffic accidents causing one death every 3.7 minutes (*Road Accidents in India*). According to a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), road accidents were the ninth most frequent cause of death in the world as of 2004 and are projected to be the fifth most frequent cause of death by 2030. India accounts for almost ten percent of the total traffic deaths in the world, and of those deaths, around seventy percent come from pedestrians and bicyclists (Pruthi). Additionally, Bengaluru was found to be the least pedestrian-friendly in a survey conducted by Walkability Asia, which examined seven Indian cities (Asif 2017). Sidewalks are frequently so poorly maintained that those on foot are forced to navigate around various barriers like fallen cables or debris from the road. Furthermore, it's not infrequent for scooty drivers to drive on the sidewalk to bypass traffic congestion, which also inhibits the city's practicality for pedestrians. Though there are laws in place to prevent such things from happening, the lack of enforcement of such laws perpetuates this practice.

I had moments of culture shock when I felt such a way of managing traffic was ridiculous and counterintuitive. I felt like the whole process could be streamlined if people drove like westerners and obeyed the rules of the road, but it's doubtful that such

a system could be implemented without a huge overhaul of the entire transit system, which—if even possible—would take decades. To preserve my ability to leave the house, I knew I had to come up with a short-term solution to mentally shift my perspective on the traffic issue. What really helped me was when I saw a screenshot from a short documentary made by Brazilian DJ Alok about the Yawanawá tribe in the Amazon Rainforest, which said, "There is not a more or less developed culture. There are different values and purposes." With that in mind, I tried to understand how driving in such a way could simply be a display of a focus on other values. I came to the personal understanding that Indians don't put as much value on meticulously managed lanes and barriers, but instead value their freedom to engage the journey in the way that works best for them. It's very similar to the mindset regarding GPS navigation, where the intuition takes priority over instructions. Driving allows a more individualistic aspect of Indian society to be understood, which is especially interesting since the society as a whole is understood to be group-oriented. And although I still have the personal belief that aspects of traffic management in Bengaluru could be improved, with this understanding I was able to accept the city's traffic conditions and transport...most of the time.

Conclusion

I chose to write about these particular areas of focus because they were some of the most prevalent sources of discomfort during my time in Bengaluru. Though I had travelled before, the culture shock I felt in this particular city was intense. There were many occasions when I actually felt I had to escape from the discomfort, which caused me to question the understanding and beliefs I have about my own adaptability during my attempts to understand the city.

If I had had to come to conclusions about my time in Bengaluru directly at the end of my time there, I am certain they would have been pessimistic and highly self-critical. Luckily, I've had the luxury of time, and with that, hindsight and greater understanding of the ways in which I learned and grew during my time abroad. For me, this brings an even greater purpose to the genre of travel writing than my initial understanding of the genre. The purpose of travel is to branch out and see new things, but such changes will invariably cause a change in the self. Writing about travel can provide the space necessary to dissect these changes and understand how a place can change those who travel. It can provide a way to look at an experience with a fresh perspective and use that to come to conclusions which might have been unattainable during the time of travel.

Ultimately, I know now that I can't explain the reality of Bengaluru, as it changes from person to person, but I can write about how different aspects of being there brought out different parts of me. I can, without a doubt, say that my time in Bengaluru challenged me to redefine my ideas about hardship and about my position in the world. I became significantly more aware of the impact of the choices I make and how they affect

my ability to create a change in the world, even on a small scale. I could hide in my room or I could interact with and understand the discomfort to learn to use it. This was not always an easy decision, but I think most days I made the right choice. I wish I could say that I changed things in Bengaluru for the better in some way, but I suppose I'll have to appreciatively settle with the knowledge that it changed me.

Though I've outlined a plethora of issues that affect the lives of those in the city, I still believe it's a wonderful place to live for many. As I said at the beginning of this work, there are many different ways of life which exists in Bengaluru, and mine was just one of over eight million. Although it might not be perceptible on a small scale, ultimately it is the people who shape a city, and Bengaluru is changing every day through the efforts of its inhabitants to create good work, to provide better education, to make delicious food, and in doing so, to carve out a section of the world which reflects their values and their priorities. This is a living city, growing and adapting through trial and error as organic things tend to do. Had I spent an additional four months there, I still think it would have been impossible for me to understand the full picture, but maybe getting a comprehensive picture isn't really the most necessary part of understanding a place. Maybe, instead, it's realizing which elements stand out most to form their own picture and recognizing that it's a highly subjective understanding rather than living with any sort of illusions of objectivity. This method of understanding isn't perfect, but it's authentic, and sometimes that's the most truth that can be agreed upon. It can provide both insight into a particular place and insight into the self, which can be uncomfortable and painful, but ultimately provides knowledge essential to being able to navigate in the

world. And with that in mind, I encourage anyone who reads this to travel to their own Bengaluru—or Kolkata, or Delhi, or Bangkok, or Madrid, or really just about anywhere that isn't somewhere you call home—and to see what that place brings out internally and figure out what the truth of that city is, even if it's just from your perspective.

Works Cited

Ambient air pollution. N.p.: World Health Organization, 2016. World Health Organization, 2016, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/250141/1/9789241511353-eng.pdf. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Asif, Nadia. "Let's change namma Bengaluru for better walkability." *Citizen Matters, Bangalore.* N.p., 25 Jan. 2017, http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/articles/bangalore-pedestrian-safety-problems-on-roads. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

“Bangalore (Bengaluru) District: Census 2011 data.” *Census 2011*. N.p., n.d, http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/448-bangalore.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"Bangalore Population 2017." *World Population Review*. N.p., n.d., http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/bangalore-population/. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Bharadwaj, K.V. Aditya. "Harvest rain water or pay penalty." *The Hindu*. N.p., 09 Oct. 2015, http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/harvest-rain-water-or-pay-penalty/article7743860.ece. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Bheema, Shravani. "Sustainable Campuses: 5 ways Christ University makes sure all its waste is recycled - The Alternative - Sustainability as a way of life." *The Alternative*. The Alternative, 26 Aug. 2015,

http://www.thealternative.in/lifestyle/sustainable-campuses-5-ways-christ-university-makes-sure-waste-recycled/. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Bisht, Renuka. "There was nothing pro-Kannada about the bandh." *Times of India*. N.p., 10 Sept. 2016, http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/twinkle-twinkle/there-was-nothing-pro-kannada-about-the-bandh/. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Bremmer, Ian. "Around 105 died, but 'Twitter king' Modi didn't mention it: Lalu on demonetisation." *Hindustan Times*. N.p., 22 Dec. 2016, http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/around-105-died-but-twitter-king-modi-didn-t-mention-it-lalu-on-demonetisation/story-XGSe6LlYLiKdTBoBBL4zJL.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Bryson, Bill. *In a Sunburned Country.* Broadway Books, 2001.

"Crime in Bangalore." *Numbeo*. N.p., n.d., https://www.numbeo.com/crime/in/Bangalore. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Damodaran, Harish. "Are banks equipped to replace 2,300 crore pieces of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes?" *The Indian Express*. The Express Group, 09 Nov. 2016, http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/web-edits/rs-500-rs-1000-notes-are-banks-equipped-to-replace-1874-crore-pieces-of-notes-4364746/. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Deepika, K.C. "Over 60 lakh vehicles on Bengaluru roads, and counting ..." *The Hindu*. N.p., 09 May 2016, http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/over-60-lakh-vehicles-on-bengaluru-roads-and-counting/article8573251.ece. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"Diwali in South India." *Diwali Festival*. Society for the Confluence of Festival of India, n.d., http://www.diwalifestival.org/diwali-in-south-india.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Dudguru (@inquestioner). "And her cook went & told her children they had to starve temporarily for a larger national good. The children clapped & sang national anthem." 13 November 2016. 5:05 AM. Tweet.

Fernando, Valérie. "Disappearance and privatisation of lakes in Bangalore." *Dialogues, Proposals, and Stories for Global Citizenship*. N.p., Nov. 2008, http://base.d-p-h.info/en/fiches/dph/fiche-dph-7689.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Jain, Bharti (@bhartijainTOI). "My cook accepted my regrets when I told her I had no cash to pay her salary. Said this was a temporary phase ahead of a larger national good." 13 November 2016. 2:16 AM. Tweet.

Lahkshmana, KV. "Cauvery water row explained: Why Tamil Nadu, Karnataka fight over river usage?" *Hindustan Times*. N.p., 06 Sept. 2016, http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cauvery-water-row-explained-why-tamil-nadu-karnataka-fight-over-river-usage/story-9pbepHlNQCeAXBsl25KtXL.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"'More poor' in India than Africa." *BBC News*. BBC, 13 July 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10609407. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"Murfreesboro, Tennessee Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts." *Census Viewer*. Moonshadow Mobile, n.d., http://censusviewer.com/city/TN/Murfreesboro. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"Pollution in Bangalore, India." *Numbeo*. N.p., n.d., https://www.numbeo.com/pollution/in/Bangalore. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Pruthi, N, et al. “Magnitude of Pedestrian Head Injuries & Fatalities in Bangalore, South India: A Retrospective Study from an Apex Neurotrama Center.” *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, vol. 136, n.d., pp. 1036-1043. EBSCO*host*. http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/Legacy/Views/static/html/Error.htm?aspxerrorpath=/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer.

Pulsipher, Lydia M., Ales A. Pulsipher, and Conrad M. Goodwin. “Chapter 8: South Asia.” *World Regional Geography: Global Patterns, Local Lives.* Sixth ed. W.H. Freeman, 2014. 414-71.

"QuickFacts: New York city, New York." *Census.gov*. United States Census Bureau, n.d., https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/SEX205210/3651000. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

"QuickFacts: Tennessee." *Census.gov*. United States Census Bureau, n.d., https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/47. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Rai, Saritha. "Living Like the Other Half." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 20 Oct. 2011. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.

Road Accidents in India. N.p.: Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, n.d., http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2.12.India_.pdf. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Roy, Prasanto K (@prasanto). “To hunt crocodiles, the pond was dried. No crocodiles were found, for they can live on land too. But the small fish died. #DeMonetisation.” 15 November 2016. 8:26 PM. Tweet.

Safi, Michael. "'Mass molestation' in Bangalore blamed on Indians 'copying' west." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 02 Jan. 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/02/mass-molestation-bangalore-blamed-on-indians-copying-west. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* Vintage, 1979.

Shepard, Wade. "After Day 50: The Results from India's Demonetization Campaign Are In." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 04 Jan. 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/02/mass-molestation-bangalore-blamed-on-indians-copying-west. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Singh, Mahendra Kumar. "New poverty line: Rs 32 in villages, Rs 47 in cities - Times of India." *The Times of India*. The Times of India, 07 July 2014. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.

Singh, Manish. "Lake catches fire in India's Silicon Valley yet again." *Mashable*. Mashable, 17 Feb. 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/New-poverty-line-Rs-32-in-villages-Rs-47-in-cities/articleshow/37920441.cms. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravotry. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea.* Ed. Rosalind C. Morris. Columbia UP, 2010. 21-78.

Sripad, Ashwini M. "Plastic bags are back in Bengaluru." *The New Indian Express*. N.p., 20 Dec. 2016, http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2016/dec/20/plastic-bags-are-back-in-bengaluru-1551083.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Sudhira, H.S. Ramachandra, T.V. Subrahmanya, M.H. Bala. 2007. "City Profile: Bangalore." Cites: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning September: 379–390.

Tomlinson, John. "Globalization and Cultural Identity." *The Global Transformations Reader.* Ed. David Held and Anthony McGrew. 2nd ed. Blackwell, 2003. 269-77.

"Total Population, Slum Population and Their Percentage in Municipal Corporations with Population above One Million-2001." *Web Archive*. N.p., 6 Aug. 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20070806121833/http:/www.censusindia.net/results/slum/slum2.html. Accessed 17 Mar. 2017.

Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad*. American Publishing Company, 1869.