

VIKRAM PATEL

Dear Dalit Solidarity,

My name is Vikram Patel and I am the older brother of Jon, the coordinator of the Baylor Team. Jon started the idea of doing this trip and working with a nonprofit in the beginning of 2019. As he continued to coordinate and develop the trip into its fruition, I decided to tag along and assist him in any way I could. I thought I was just going to be an older brother with a helping hand, but this experience was so much more for me than that.

When we arrived to India, we had already gone through a variety of problems and issues with our luggage, our needs for essentials, and constant flight delays. We were exhausted and grumpy to say the least. Our moods completely changed, however, when we arrived at St. Mary's.

We were in complete awe when we got off the bus and were welcomed with such love and appreciation from the whole community. Sun necklaces wrapped around us, smiling faces leading us to a row of chairs to sit in, and a beautiful welcoming dance choreographed by the students there all captured our attention. This began what I believe to be a recurring theme of experiences for me in my personal reflection of the people of south India: the idea to spread unconditional love and joy to those around one another.

All of the experiences during this trip were unique and memorable in their own ways. Going to Kanyakumari and watching the sunset with the boys gave me a feeling of bliss. Sitting down in various temples and churches from cities like Pondicherry and Ramashuram opened my heart to new areas of inner peace and appreciation for God. Eating local foods during our travels from one city to another opened my palette to new spices and tasteful experiences.

I would say the areas where I felt most humbled were the experiences at the medical camps and schools. Having a business major and my own marketing company, I had no idea what I was going to see at the medical camps. Seeing patients with a variety of diseases and malnutrition re-opened my understanding of how privileged I am to be in the position I am today, and how I have to work extremely hard to help others succeed and have long healthy lives. Finding my own way of impact in the health sector is a newfound goal I have for the future.

Now to talk about the schools and the children. This was truly the #1 most rewarding experience that I had here, if I had to rank (although again, every experience provided their own learning lessons). One of the days we were at the

clinics, I asked Leenus where I could be of value. Given that I was not a premed student like my brother and his friends, I felt slightly out of place. Leenus directed me to an area where I was able to greet and direct patients to get their medications. She gave me a couple of words, and those few words led to so many personal interactions. I connected with the locals and was able to form conversations with the children. They asked for my name and some questions about the states. I even showed them a picture of my girlfriend back home as they wanted to connect as much as possible with me. The concept of undivided attention to connect on its own is something extraordinary.

Arriving at St. Patrick's Academy was truly magical for me. When we arrived and were welcomed in, I was so happy to see the kids in green uniforms with their smiling faces. They were beating the drums in sync and marching, sharing their flags to us, and spreading more love with dances and joyous calling. As I turned around when walking in the courtyard, I was in complete disbelief and the number of children awaiting us. Lines of them not only on the ground floor, but also on the second floor looking down at us, waiting to meet us and connect with us. One of my favorite music videos is God's Plan by Drake, and the experiences I had here felt so similar to the ones I saw in that video. Having started the trip feeling a little out of place, this moment made me realize it was truly God's Plan for me to be here and experience this love.

I want to thank my brother Jon, his team, Leenus, and everyone who was a part of making this trip happen. It was in no ways easy, and I apologize if we made coordination more difficult. I want to thank you, Dalit Solidarity, for providing me this opportunity and learning experience, as I will take it with me for as long as I live. This will not be the last time for me to visit this wonderful side of the world, and I am excited to work hard when I get back to help out as best as I can. My heart has so much love for all of you and if there is anything you ever need, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. It's my mission to spread the unconditional love and joy that you have shown me on this trip to everyone I am surrounded by. Thank you for everything.

Sincerely,
Vikram
CEO of WorkingOverNight, LLC.
817-271-1452
vikram@workingovernight.com

Dalit
Solidarity