To look back and summarize my experience in India is quite a feat. During my travels in Mumbai, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Delhi, Agra, and Amritsar, I met more people and experienced more things than my entire fall semester at Berkeley. When I stayed in Mumbai, I booked a full day taxi to show me the city and all its landmarks. The street food was particularly delicious, but was mostly composed of spiced fried potato dishes. From there, I took a sleeper train to Jodhpur, the famous Blue City. I arrived there at night, and although it was very intimidating at first, I got to my hotel and was dumbfounded by the sheer beauty of the city in the moonlight. When I awoke, I walked around the city and market, visited Mehrangarh Fort, and talked to fellow travelers at my hotel. The street food in Jodhpur was mainly curry dishes and was extremely tasty. From there I headed to Jaisalmer, the desert city where people occupy and are slowly destroying a historic sandstone fort. The street food was very similar to Jodhpur. After Jaisalmer, I headed to Delhi and Agra to see the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal. I found the most delicious and greatest diversity of street food in Delhi. There was a much greater focus on pastries and popsicles in this city.

Amritsar was my last location and I visited the Golden Temple, which is the largest and most illustrious Sikh temple. The temple gives out free food and board to all visitors that desire it. Although I visited more than six cities and even more landmarks and monuments, I believe that India was more about whom I met and the conversations I had to get a better understanding of the culture.

I think when most young people travel to India, they have a desire to find themselves, but I found that I discovered more about the world and human nature than about myself. Indians are some of the most friendly and accommodating people that I have met in my life. Conversely they are also manipulative and overcharge a lot of foreigners when it comes to taxi fares and souvenirs. Before I went to India, I had a concept of it being unhappy, poor, and dirty just because India is mostly portrayed like that in movies and media. But for the most part, only the dirty part is true. The streets of India are covered with excessive amounts human excrement, used water bottles, and rotting chicken carcasses.

Most Indians have very little money and live in rentless small slumhouses, but are able to maintain very hedonistic lifestyles. Unless you’ve been to India, it’s hard to explain the experience of traveling there. I thought of it as an oversaturation of human activity and a constant bombardment of car horns, people peeing in the streets, vile and delicious smells, and pressure to buy souvenirs or ride on taxis. There’s no way to conceive the Indian metropolitan lifestyle when you’ve been brought up in America. As far as architecture goes, there are very little modern “designed” buildings. The definition of opulence in modern Indian architecture completely strays away from aesthetic form and rather focuses on maximizing the quantity of tennis courts, swimming pools, and shopping malls in high-rise complexes. Most Indian architecture is vernacular in nature, and city residents construct their own houses using mostly plaster, bricks, and paint. Food carts are an interesting exception to this rule. A lot of the food carts are mobile, allowing the seller to move to different parts of the city. I discovered that these food carts were the backbone of the “architecture” in the market setting. Without these street food carts, local Indian people would not be able to eat quickly and cheaply. The wages of the average worker is around 150 rupees per day and street food is generally around 10 rupees per meal. Most restaurants cater only to the richer population, so it is not accessible to the blue-collar worker. The food carts determine the market circulation in the central area of the city. After the street food carts pack up and leave at 10pm, the market circulation completely stops.

The experience of going to India was extremely beneficial to my education and I would like to thank Ray Lifchez, Christina Huang, and the members of the jury who accepted my application. I would have never been able to go to India without this opportunity and am truly grateful for all the help I received.
On top of a sand dune near Jaisalmer

The Blue City of Jodhpur
Food Carts in Mumbai

Food Stand on train station platform
Sleeper Train from Mumbai to Jodhpur

Islamic Arches at the Red Fort in Delhi
Small Food Stand on the streets of Delhi