

Hey Kavita or whoever else,

I was checking for jobs at MIT Media Lab, particularly the Center for Civic Media, because their directions overlap with my ideals. A little disappointed in how distant the jobs are from reality, especially after years of living in various areas of Asia, I was delighted to encounter the Poverty Lab in the job listings, for my keyword search “media lab”.

There are many particulars about this gig that work for me: 1. It is near my parent’s hometown, Baroda. (I have relatives in Ahmedabad). 2. It is short term, allowing me to experience without long-term commitment. 3. It places me exactly where I want to be: in the slums (“field research”). 4. It contains the programs of the Poverty Lab that most interests me: Targeting theHardcore Poor, and to a lesser extent, Teaching at the Right Level.

On another level, I’ve traveled quite a bit, wandered through a few NGOs (a clinic for Burmese refugees on the border of Thailand, civil engineer student association in Nepal, and a few in Taiwan dealing with education and civil engineering), but as a person without a background in any of these, only being able to do the grunt work and throw in software where needed, my mind has been directed toward higher level things: philosophy (theory) and civic technology.

What’s most interesting is that MIT approaches the poor (and everything) with science, quantitatively, as opposed to my cultural critical philosophy, which emphasizes change in culture (and education). So to simply see this at work, determine the usefulness, and see the results in reality, could make me less skeptical, and believe that this is a direction one can go for these kinds of problems. Of course I believe in medicine and education, but where money is thrown elsewhere, I don’t. And in the case of India’s complex cultures and urban planning, I am very skeptical.

I am currently in Taiwan and may do a master’s (mainly as a way to stay in Taiwan) during the fall in a smaller city, hoping to pursue many of these interests mentioned, independently, with a community-hall like organization for small-scale experimentation of urban and social interventions. Taiwan is surely not as poor as India, but many of the problems exist. So, I was also glad to see the natural process of experiment and scaling programs, because that’s exactly how it should work, and hope that the organization I create will work.

Anyway now the bad news: 1. Language: I grew up in America with Gujarati speaking parents, yet my Gujarati is terrible – only listening is good. And I don’t understand Hindi at all, because I never enjoyed Hindi films. Perhaps learning Chinese made it worse. 2. Place and Money: I am currently in Taiwan. I am a bit afraid that if the work is only for 8 weeks it may not be enough to even pay for a round trip. I’m sure I can get free lodging and food at a relatives house though, so I’m not so worried about that part. 3: I lost my passport and OCI card many months ago, and need to re-obtain my OCI card. I have no idea if I can get this in Taiwan, or India, or if I must be back in the US. Ah so many problems.

Anyway, glad to just write this out. Keep up the fight for human well being. :)