

Fellowship Report  
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I would like to start off this recap of my experiences at Ananta Aspen Centre by saying how grateful I am for having been chosen as one of the Centre's international fellows as part of the Avantha International Fellowship and for having been given this academically stimulating and culturally enhancing opportunity to work with such an internationally renowned organisation.

I have always had a strong interest in visiting India and experiencing the culture of those people who have been able to hold on to their traditions so firmly despite various hits in their past. As I have always tried to take every opportunity to work and study in different countries, I applied to the Avantha International Fellowship as soon I was made aware of it by my university. However, as a recent Law graduate from the University of Birmingham, my background was not per se linked to Indian political affairs. Despite the fact that my in-depth knowledge regarding Indian politics was initially limited to India's foreign relations with international organisations, such as the UN and the EU, the Centre gave me the chance to widen my horizon and acquire a better understanding of Indian domestic and foreign policy by awarding me this fellowship.

I particularly appreciated their decision to allow me to be part of their fellowship as I believe it to be important to include persons with different backgrounds in such programmes, which is exactly what the Centre did, as opposed to limiting the selection to the classical international relations background as often done by other international policy organisations. By widening our horizons we experience personal growth; and I can most definitely say that working with the Ananta Aspen Centre helped me grow on a personal as well as professional level and I hope that with my different background I was able to contribute to the Centre's growth, too.

Although academic research was indeed at the heart of the fellowship, I very much appreciated that the Ananta Aspen Team also enabled us, fellows, to participate in the preparation and organisation of the foreign policy events. In that way, I learned a lot about India's politics and their cooperation with other countries and organisation, which I would not have if I had been solely limited to doing academic research.

As the Ananta Aspen Centre offers a platform for the exchange of foreign policy and international relations, my responsibilities during the fellowship included the preparation and organisation of different foreign policy events. Varying from public sessions such as with the Foreign Ministers of Guatemala and Mexico or even the session on food security with the former President of Israel, Shimon Peres, to Track II Strategic Dialogues between India and China as well as India and the US; these events and their preparation were not only incredible opportunities to become more involved in international affairs but also allowed me to acquire a much deeper understanding of issues I had not been working on beforehand.

The highlight of my work as a fellow at the Ananta Aspen Centre was most certainly the visit by His Holiness the Dalai Lama very at the end of my fellowship. The Centre had organised a session on 'Cultivating Key Human Values' with His Holiness and I was incredibly lucky to be involved in the preparation of the content of the discussions with His Holiness. Hearing His Holiness the Dalai Lama speak on how we, as human beings, can make the world a more harmonious place by going back to our key human values and particularly by being compassionate beings was incredibly inspiring. The Ananta Aspen Team was even given the opportunity to have a short encounter with His Holiness in which he shook each one of our hands which was a truly unique experience and one that I will never forget.

My main responsibility during the fellowship was the production of an academic paper. As a result of my prior knowledge in European Union law and affairs, I asked the Centre's CEO Ms Kiran Pasricha whether it would be possible for me to write a critical analysis of the India-EU strategic partnership. Indeed, this process of choosing a topic for the academic paper was another very positive surprise for me. Instead of allocating a research topic to me that was only beneficial to the Centre's activities itself, Ms Pasricha took into consideration my different suggestions and together we chose the one that would be of benefit to the Centre as well as to me. I very much appreciated the taking into consideration of my interests on Ms Pasricha's behalf and was very thankful for the respect she showed for me.

In general I would like to take the opportunity to emphasise what an incredible role model Ms Kiran Pasricha represents in my eyes. In a male-dominated society like the Indian, where women are unfortunately only rarely seen in leadership positions (particularly in the international relations scene as I noticed during these two months), for me, as a young woman with a very strong belief in gender equality, it was extremely encouraging to witness such a competent female CEO being so successful despite the constraints of patriarchy. With a large part of my family still living in Iran, experiencing such a strong female role model in India has given me hope for not only women in India but for women in all developing societies.

Of course, my gratitude also extends to the rest of the team at the Ananta Aspen Centre who all were remarkably helpful during my time with them. There was always someone to talk to in case of a problem (or for a nice chat inbetween!) and no one hesitated to offer support and advice when it came to the best sights in Delhi, our travels in India, etc. as well as regarding professional questions that arose during my research and the writing of my paper.

In addition to these professional activities, I was able to explore India and be enriched by the Indian culture as part of the Avantha Fellowship. New Delhi is a city like no other I had seen so far and although at times an overwhelming experience, living in such a vibrant city that depicts a picture of tradition and modernity at the same time was a unique adventure. As a matter of fact my entire Indian experience was a great adventure, since with the help and support of the Centre, the other fellows and I were able to travel India besides working as part of the fellowship.

During my two months in India, I travelled to the beautiful and picturesque Udaipur, which is known as the 'Venice of the East' because of its multiple bodies of water, to Agra to experience the breath-taking beauty of the Taj Mahal as well as other famous

landmarks, such as the Agra Fort, and ultimately was also able to make a trip to Mumbai, the vibrant (and extremely hot!) business capital of India.

I can only reiterate how grateful I am of the Ananta Aspen Centre for being so accommodating and demonstrating such considerable amount of understanding for their fellows' desire to explore and travel the country whilst working at the same time. It is this combination of personal pleasure and professional development that makes this fellowship with the Ananta Aspen Centre such a unique and precious experience.

As with regards to my own career, I believe that this fellowship will be a great milestone for my professional development. With me aspiring to work in the area of international law and relations, an understanding and knowledge of a country like India is essential. It is not only one of the fastest growing economies but also the largest democracy in the world, and with its rapidly growing population, its status in global politics will only increase. Therefore, I am convinced that by participating in the Avantha International Fellowship at the Ananta Aspen Centre and thereby enhancing my knowledge of India's domestic and foreign policy, I have also enhanced my chances of being able to pursue a career in international law and international relations.