

FELLOWSHIP REPORT

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(Now I understand Why Ibn Battuta was fascinated by India)

The majority of my Moroccan friends, relatives and colleagues associate India with its super-star actors like Amitabh Bachchan, and Shah Rukh Khan. Some of them connect it with the legendary Mahatma Gandhi and his non-violent teaching that inspired many social movements across the subjugated world. Many consider India to be the incredible civilization that accommodates multiple religions, languages and ethnic groups, whilst also admiring its diversified spices. The rest, however, associate India's hospitality with how the eminent Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta, who reached India in the 16th century and worked here as a judge, was welcomed in the great nation of India.

In my case, coming to India was a desire I had for long and wanted to realize, both for an academic as well as an exploratory purpose, and so achieving this goal would not have been possible for me as a researcher without the support of Ananta Aspen Centre. The Centre's principles are based on an insistence on intercultural diversity as an original aspect that encourages tolerance, multiculturalism and mutual development. I therefore believe that India is more than just being linked to one aspect of its enormously rich culture. I spent two months in Delhi researching and reading about India, living it via experiencing its food, sharing interesting talks and discussions with its people, visiting its many sights and viewing the world through its lenses by studying its foreign policy. Hence, I concluded that India is an overwhelming combination of many cultural aspects. You cannot gather a complete understanding by reading about it. The only way for a person to be able to actually comprehend India is by visiting and experiencing it. For me as a Moroccan, India exemplifies a mixture of history, a land where various subcultural identities are merged, and is a place that welcomed the eminent Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta in the 16th century. Therefore, India actually safeguards a pure image and position in the minds and hearts of most Moroccans. I am very happy to have visited New Delhi and to have had a glimpse of the Indian way of life and culture.

Working at The Ananta Centre for two months actually taught me a lot about India's geopolitical position globally, as an emerging power and most of all as a democratic nation. I recognized the ambitions of Indian policy makers

as well as its engaged population's aspirations for itself in the coming years. The activities taking place at The Ananta Centre imply the determined aspiration of leadership India is increasingly adopting with regards to global issues. Therefore, having the chance to join The Ananta Centre as an International Fellow allowed me significant opportunities that sharpened my knowledge on India. I got to learn about India's future challenges and prospects. This goal has been stimulated by being positioned among welcoming researchers and fellows at the Ananta Centre office located at Thapar House in the Avantha building. The collaborative environment in this office is reassuring to every motivated fellow. I found my refuge in the constant dynamism, which is spread among my Ananta Centre colleagues and their considerable regard and care.

I actually come from the field of communication and media studies which I studied at the University of Cadi Ayad in Marrakech. In fact, it is through the university that I was connected to Ananta Centre. Now, I am completing my PhD thesis at the University of Mohamed V in Rabat, working on the combination of social movement discourses online and the technological tools allowed via social media. Although, my research is related to the field of Communication and Media Studies, my interest in international relations is evident in the trainings I attended, the workshops as well as the conferences in which I participated.

My paper in itself challenged my knowledge about the diplomatic links India has with the Middle East. Working on India's foreign policy towards West Asia allowed me to grasp the consistent balance that India manages to secure within an ever-changing region of the world. The focus of my paper is analyzing the upgrades of India's policies towards and within the Middle East. The focus of my paper is about the dichotomy of the "Look Middle East" and the "Link West" Policies. Both policies aim at ensuring a more proactive role for India in the region. Strategic bilateral relations advance this Indian role with countries such as Iraq, Iran and Israel; whereas multilateral relations also stand for allocating India independent and undirected positions by the other powers.

I must say that the Delhi metro has impressed me as it made my travel from my place of stay to the office practical. The connection from my accommodation in Kailash Colony area to Janpath using the Delhi metro was always safe and quick as the trains ran frequently. Upon riding the violet metro line I often wondered to myself what Delhi was like before the metro. The roads must've been overcrowded and I can imagine it would have been

very difficult to commute to work. It also had me wondering as to whether my country has ever thought of building a metro in one of its many crowded cities such as Casablanca, which would allow the opportunity to see the city from a better light. Travelling on the metro in Delhi allows you to really see an example of the execution of one of the many development projects India is involved in. The metro line is well equipped, with air conditioning facilities, useful signs, and clear speakers with station and passenger announcements in Hindi as well as English. All of this makes it able to compete globally with other similar services like the London Underground tube service.

With regards to the food in India, before arriving, I had had some reservation; however, on arrival I found I really had no problem with the food here. Sometimes it has been slightly chilly for me but overall it has been a pleasant experience. I find the food here in Delhi very delicious and attractive. I believe that the vast variety of food that Indian cuisine has to offer makes it the best and the richest. I really enjoyed the vegetarian cuisine as this was something which was relatively new to me; I enjoyed how healthy and creatively it is prepared.

The Sessions:

The Ananta Centre's activities are not limited to keeping indoors of the office; there are also high-level sessions on hot topics related to Indian foreign policy that take place beyond theoretical borders. In addition to having been privileged enough to come to India and work on a timely project connecting India with the Middle East in terms of security and intelligence aspects, I have also had the privilege to attend five interesting discussion sessions organized by The Ananta Center, some in collaboration with other institutions. These sessions were:

- India-Sweden: "Rethinking Urbanization for a Good Life"
- India- Myanmar: "Myanmar Elections: Why Do They Matter?"
- India-China: "China's Domestic Economic Policy – A Critical Understanding" With a focus on China's 'new normal' and 'the fourth generation reforms'
- India-Japan: "India and Japan: New Imperatives in the emerging Asian Geopolitics"
- India-Latin America and the Caribbean: "India's future with Latin America and the Caribbean."

All of these sessions highlighted the current strategic moves that India has made towards establishing itself as a reliable proactive contributor to global economy and regional political security. I have learnt a lot about countries that

previously had felt distant from my political interests. Being here in Delhi and attending all of these sessions offered clear illustration that a lot of academic research is being conducted for the betterment of Indian foreign policy. It is through the sessions that I had the impression of the practical usefulness of academic platforms for producing ideas and designing action plans for organizations, institutions and policy makers.

One area in which Indian foreign policy can really invest in is youth capabilities in India and abroad, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the youth population that the MENA itself has. Since India's image, in the minds of the majority of local MENA youth, is that of state that believes in non-intervention and encourages south-south cooperation, India can extend cultural, educational and development collaborations at the grassroots level, directly interacting with the youths. Indian youths could share their specialized skill-sets with MENA youths and vice versa, encouraging strong intercultural exchange. By doing this, India can have competent actors in their fields of expertise who acquired their knowledge specifically from India during an exchange scheme whilst also experiencing its diversity, cultural and linguistic tolerance, and most importantly democratic practices. I believe that once India succeeds in establishing these networks it can strengthen links with this region of major influence in terms of energy supplies, and positively encounter challenges related to political and economic stability.

I had conversations with many of my newly found Indian friends and students, some of whom I enjoyed playing football with. Furthermore, I delightfully came to learn that Ibn Battuta is held in high regard in India. India's outstanding hospitality is one of the many reasons the Moroccan traveler thought of India as a kind of second home, working here as a judge for many a decade during the 16th century. The modern India now continues to open wide its arms towards foreign seekers of knowledge and adventures. No wonder then that I truly felt home here in Delhi and that I felt that I experienced Indian life at its highest levels.

Thus, I would like to extend my thanks to each and everyone who supported me during this two-month experience and made it a very enjoyable one. A special thanks to Ananta Aspen Centre's director Ms. Kiran Pasricha who believed in my contribution to this centre and made sure that my stay, work environment and integration within the group went smoothly throughout my stay. Thanks to Mrs. Harshit Sehgal for welcoming me, for all the suggestions as well as the advice she shared with me for the best part of my stay in Delhi. It was also very informative discussing my research interests

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