

Ananta-Aspen Centre

International Fellowship Programme

16 October-14 December 2014

Having completed my master's in Disasters, Adaptation and Development at King's College London in the summer, I was looking forward to spending two months in India with the Ananta-Aspen Centre. My knowledge of India from the outside was limited to mostly what I had read, imagined and heard. Both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies have subjected India. Firstly, as a case study from the physical aspect, the topography, climate, and landscapes; then later for its emerging economy, social development, natural disasters and governance. So I had an idea. The fellowship added a new dimension to my knowledge and portrayed India to me in a new light. The realm of international relations, diplomacy and foreign policy, was a key addition to my understanding of the nation, all which I was unacquainted. I got a chance to observe the subcontinent and its transforming disposition from the inside.

The first event I attended was, '*Mexico's New Engagement with the World*' addressed by Dr. José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico. The discussion focused on the current and long-term intentions of Mexico's foreign policies and on refining social, cultural and economic ties with India. Dr. Meade stated that, the Indo-Mexican relations have evolved over the years; not only in the area of trade and economy but also in respect to cultural exchanges and tourism. However, academic interchange between the two countries still require more attention. In response to a question regarding Mexico's transition from subsidies to cash transfer, Dr. Meade highlighted that Mexico's recognition of poverty as a multifaceted and complex phenomena has modified the country's course of action. It has allowed them to take a more holistic approach to social protection and poverty alleviation. While conditional cash transfers have been a successful initiative some of the challenges included the exclusion of the poorest due to lack of access to infrastructure. As a result, Mexico has adjusted the program to focus on measures that lift people out of poverty without creating dependency on the program in the long term.

My first assignment entailed background research for the trilateral dialogue in food and water security between India, Israel and Australia. On the advice of Ms Harshit Sehgal, Foreign Policy Director at the Ananta-Aspen Centre, I familiarised myself with Professor Ashok Gulati's writings on developing the whole agricultural supply chain and explored the extent of India's relationship with the two countries.

The event titled, '*Creating a Second Green Revolution in India*' was specially addressed by the ex-president of Israel; Shimon Peres. He spoke at length about India's great potential and a need for a technological revolution within agriculture. Israel is widely renowned for making the 'desert bloom' through the adoption of modern and advanced agricultural technologies; therefore, would be a key partner for India's agricultural development. In addition, Mr Anthony Pratt stated that Australia's developed agro-business sector would serve as an ideal model to replicate. Hence, a trilateral dialogue

would be an opportunity to refine the action plan to enhance India's agricultural sector with the assistance from both Israel and Australia.

The next part of the conference was a panel discussion on India's food and water security. The panellists explored how shifting from traditional agrarian methods to a more inclusive and integrated approach involving the whole value-chain can offer thriving prospects for future development as well as food and water security. The dialogue spanned from, technological innovation, infrastructure development to nutrition and the changing dietary requirements of the population. The conversation was comprehensive and touched on all aspects of food security, access, availability, utilisation and stability, in compliance with the FAO/UN definition; which is not just limited to availability and access. My role hereafter was to focus on the issues raised in the conference for a more extensive and critical report. To complement and get more information on the water security aspect of the discussion I sought out a FAO/UN consultant, Dr Prem Sharma for an interview. Having a vast range of experience working in Latin America and South-East Asia, he gave me both, an international and national account on India's water resource management.

The next event I attended was the '*Track II Dialogue on Climate Change and Energy*' between the United States and India. The dialogue was a two-day event followed by a public session on the same topic. I assisted the team with logistics, registration desk and welcomed the participants, I later observed and documented the sessions. Climate change has been a pivotal topic in my studies, so I felt particularly privileged at this opportunity. I was essentially observing first hand, how decisions that influence policy was being constructed right in front of me. The topics covered were wide ranging, and the participants were from a diverse range of backgrounds.

My term at the Ananta centre coincided with two other fellows who had arrived before me, Farnush Ghadery from Germany and Matthews Mmopi from Botswana. We exchanged ideas and briefed each other about our respective research areas. While Farnush gave me insight into the European Union's relationship with India, Matthews informed me on agricultural input subsidies, both which have been enriching and supplemented my knowledge at large. They also proved to be wonderful company both at and outside of work.

My time divided between both helping in organising events, background research, documentation of sessions and the research report during the week. But at the weekends I had a chance to travel and immerse myself with the country's grand culture and history. I had the opportunity to visit Mumbai in the company of Farnush Ghadery. It was a defining experience to explore a new city in the country, I knew India was culturally diverse but to see it was a new dimension. I recalled what Rabindranath Tagore iterated on India's vast diversity, "India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle."

I was reminded I had arrived at the perfect time, mostly in relation to weather at more than one occasion. I had indeed arrived at the perfect time for multiple reasons. One was the weather. But the more significant other was that His Holiness Dalai Lama would be visiting for a conference on '*Cultivating Key Human Values*'. Listening to the Dalai Lama was incredibly exciting, as well as a spiritual feast. He stated that the "ultimate source of happiness was within us; we have to make an effort to cultivate that happiness within ourselves". He also mentioned that one way of nurturing key human values was through human affection. In addition, he emphasized "We need different religious traditions because among humanity we have people of different geopolitical, cultural, ethnic and historical backgrounds. Therefore, we need different ways of promoting the same human values. In the end, I also had the opportunity to meet him which will remain as one of my fondest memories.

I would like to end by expressing my utmost gratitude to all the individuals involved in shaping my fellowship experience. Ms Kiran Pasricha, thank you for providing me with this opportunity and for all the support and guidance throughout the duration of my time at the Ananta-Aspen Centre. You will remain as an infinite source of inspiration.

Vesile Tekin

Reference

Tagore, R. (1996). Nationalism in India. *The English writings of Rabindranath Tagore, 2* (1917).