



যাদবপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

Fellows

JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY SYLFF ASSOCIATION

September 2005



Participatory
Forest Management:
The Dynamics
Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay

India and Japan:
Prospects for a
Strategic Convergence
Madhuchanda Ghosh

The Journey
of a Performer:
Tradition and
Modernity
Abhishek Basu

Jadavpur – Impressions
Fatimah Fanusie

From the desk of the
SYLFF Assistant:
Manikarnika Kanjilal

Editorial Note



SYLFF Vision:

"The world is one family and all mankind are brothers and sisters" (Ryoichi Sasakawa)
All have the right to fulfill their basic needs for food, health care and education.

SYLFF Mission:

To support the education of outstanding students pursuing graduate level study in the social sciences and humanities with high potential for leadership and commitment to exercising leadership in local, national, regional and international affairs, in public as well as in private endeavors. To nurture future leaders who will transcend geopolitical, religious, ethnic, cultural and other boundaries and will contribute to peace and well-being of humankind.

Mission Statement of the SYLFF Fellows Network:

The purpose of the SYLFF network is to promote and facilitate interaction of SYLFF fellows and programs, locally and internationally, consistent with the SYLFF vision and mission.

This year, as Jadavpur University celebrates the Golden Jubilee of its year of foundation, it is indeed my pleasure, as well as honour to recall the untiring and concerted efforts of the group of eminent Indians and the intelligentsia of the historical nationalist period (including Rabindranath Thakur, Aurobindo Ghosh, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Subodh Chandra Basu Mallik, Brojendra Kishore Roy Choudhury, Surya Kanto Acharya Choudhury, Rashbehari Ghosh and Satish Chandra Mukherjee) who were in fact the pioneers behind the foundation of the Jadavpur University. This eminent class of intellectuals laid the foundation of the parent body of Jadavpur University, the "National Council of Education," in 1906 with public money and bequests to fulfil the primary objective:

"To achieve self-reliance through empowerment of Youth by imparting Best of Global Knowledge, Technical Education, Awareness of social, cultural, political, economic realities of the State, Nation and the World."

Among the several efforts that the University is committed to make, I am again encouraged to see, yet another generation, under JU-SYLFF association's effort, is ready to take forward the tradition blended with contemporary needs.

Today, the University also focuses on promoting and pursuing higher education by linking up traditionally separated subjects in the light of the ever-changing local as well as global scenario and to set up a role model for academic leadership.

What identifies the SYLFF-JU programme is creativity, positive energy and free format. We are experimenting with the institutional process that can encourage independent, innovative ideas of the students who will shape the alternative development pathway in the near future. High-valued SYLFF fellowship enables us to reverse the brain-drain process and keep bright young minds to proliferate from home ground. Our experimentations over the past few years are making us repeatedly conscious of the fact that an issue or problem of the human society does not belong to any narrowly defined subject area. It reminds us of the story of the six blind men and the elephant. With our training in various subject areas we need to brainstorm, debate, discuss and have patience to listen to each other's views if we are committed to resolve the societal problems. What we can do with an open mind and a holistic approach is our research question. We start with the premise that solution cannot be a static concept, it is a pathway and every step unfolds new challenges demanding renewed thinking and dialogue.

Formation of the JU-SYLFF association is expected to raise the level of commitment of the future generation-an essential indicator of sustainability. Their desire to create the platform for global dialogue among the SYLFF fellows worldwide reminds me of the essence of the words from a poem of Rabindranath Thakur "you will give and you will take, you will allow them and yourselves to mingle".

I wish a meaningful journey to 'Fellows: Jadavpur University SYLFF Association'.

Asok Nath Basu,
Vice-Chancellor,
Jadavpur University
Chairman,
SYLFF- J.U. Programme

Joyashree Roy,
SYLFF-J.U. Project Director,
Professor of Economics,
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As a Master's level SYLFF fellow, in Department of History, I took up the job of understanding the dynamics of community participation in forest management and its 'gender' dimension in the province of West Bengal, India. I chose some of the forest villages of Bankura district for my field survey. In course of my research, I visited the villages like Niljhora, Jilakhana, Tribanka, Brindabanpur etc. for a number of times, and spent my days with the people who were engaged in nurturing and protecting the forest cover by negotiating with the state since 1988.

Being a student of social science, I tried to comprehend the impact of democratization on the livelihood of forest people who were earlier denied their customary rights over forest. How did the institutional arrangement, which claimed to be pro-people, come into being? How did the people react to it? Was the policy comprehensive enough to extend civil social institutions in the regions which remained in the margins of the civilized world? How far was the policy able to show 'gender' sensitivity in recognizing women's rights? How did they manipulate their 'agency' and get transformed? What could be the possible ways to ensure their voice, agency and choice in policy making? These were some of the questions, which stirred my mind when I interacted with the village people.

Throughout my fellowship period of one year I sought to find answer to some of them. During my field surveys, I could manage to have access over some of the unconventional primary source materials such as unpublished reports of field officers containing their own world views regarding JFM, the register books written and preserved by those who were involved in forest protection, evidences of individual/community bank accounts, attendance sheets of different meetings etc. With the help of these, I crosschecked evidences gathered from other conventional sources such as interviews, governmental records etc., which surprisingly differed in many respects. As a curious observer of social processes, I sought to investigate how the interpretation of a same incidence varied, by situating my sources in their proper historical perspective.

In my paper, I have tried to show how the essentialized notion of sexual division of labor worked in the minds of the policy makers which hindered women's mainstreaming. I also argued that a mere increase in the number of women in public bodies was not enough to ensure their voices. Both men and women should be given 'gender sensitive' education in their curriculum. I substantiated my views by maintaining difference with two other available universalist conceptual frameworks namely Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD). I demonstrated how these frameworks failed to provide any useful analytical tool to understand multilayered 'gender relations', emanating out of everyday lived experiences of man and woman and also the dynamics involved in the relations within the same sex, constantly mediated by class, caste, religion and generations. My jungle days were full of new experiences, which made me much more equipped as a researcher and also gave me enough scope to develop a researcher's ethics. I would like to end my account by saying that SYLFF fellows should not only work hard to maintain interaction among themselves, they should also act as a hinge group to initiate dialogue among their subject groups who still remain in obscurity. This is also the guiding principle of our association.



Women members of Brindabanpur FPC



The pond owned by Tribanka FPC and the surrounding Sal forestry



Women members of Brindabanpur FPC

As a researcher in the SYLFF programme I am trying to understand the dynamics of the social processes in the contemporary Indian milieu with regard to the bilateral relationship of India and Japan.

A careful study of the India-Japan relationship reveals that the low-intensity bilateral relationship has undergone a remarkable turnaround in the new millennium. The change in Japan's perspective vis-à-vis India was markedly evident in the former Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Yoshiro Mori's declaration. In 2001, in a joint declaration he stated that "Japan and India are global partners". The term "Global Partnership" has rarely been used in the Japanese diplomatic lexicon except in case of its relationship with the United States. To realize the full potential of the global partnership, the two premiers Mr. Junichiro Koizumi and Dr. Manmohan Singh signed an eight-fold plan during Mr. Koizumi's visit to India in April 2005. These developments bear testimony to the growing importance of India and Japan in each other's foreign policy calculus.

The burgeoning proximity between the two states in the new millennium was something unthinkable in the Cold War period. Why the change in the foreign policy perspectives of the two states? As a researcher in Indo-Japanese relations, I have examined the trajectories of the foreign policy of the

Participatory Forest Management: The Dynamics

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India and Japan: Prospects for a Strategic Convergence

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two states in the Cold War and post Cold War periods for a better understanding of the dynamics propelling this process of change. The conclusion derived from my examination is that divergences in the foreign policy objectives coupled with differences in the domestic policies held the two states apart throughout the Cold War years. Japan's alliance with the United States and India's support to the Soviet bloc casted the two states into opposition by proxy. Thus India and Japan loomed very little in each other's foreign policy framework.

The end of the Cold War prompted a paradigm shift in India's foreign policy objectives. With the collapse of the Soviet Union India lost an easy access to the vast Soviet market. The Indian policy makers sought to explore the thriving market in the Asia Pacific under India's newly articulated "Look East" policy in which Japan figured prominently. The economic liberalization programme, the steady growth rate in Indian economy and the potential of its vast market underpinned India's outreach to Japan. Thus by the year 2000 the emerging consensus in the corridors of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo was to reassess the marginalized status of India in its foreign policy framework.

It will, however, be wrong to assume that divergences in the bilateral relationship have become altogether non-existent. Differences still persist on the nuclear issue as reflected in Japan's criticism of the Indian nuclear tests and its imposition of economic sanctions on India in May 1998. Such differences need to be sorted out in a mutually agreeable manner. The two states need to play a more proactive role in enhancing cooperation in the areas of common interests which far outweigh the areas of divergences. In the new millennium developments in the political, economic and security relations have created a conducive environment in which the two states can lift their relationship to a strategic level. However it is too early to predict whether this would lead to a comprehensive strategic engagement in the form of a strategic alliance between the two states.

As a researcher in the SYLFF programme I feel that the novelty of the SYLFF research programme lies in its multi-disciplinary approach to research works which has given me the opportunity to study the various dimensions of the Indo-Japanese strategic relationship, namely the political, economic and diplomatic dimensions which could together provide a conducive platform for the development of a wholesome and sustainable strategic engagement between the two states. I have completed one year of my doctoral study. I will come back to you in our next newsletter with some more research findings.



Sahana Begum, singing in a train compartment



I am working on the performers who earn their livelihood singing in the train compartments. During one of my field tours I met Sahana Begum, in Sealdah South Section on a short-distance local train. Sahana sings *fakiri* songs, the *fakirs* are close to the Islamic Sufi tradition.

Sahana has a very strong personality, she sustains her four children all by herself. Her husband Akbar Ali is originally from Bangladesh. Sahana hails from Mallikpur in the district of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. They got married in a chance occurrence and Akbar migrated to India. Coming from a *fakiri* tradition, for livelihood, he began using his musical skills. Sahana started accompanying Akbar in his train performances. But when I met her, she told me that due to a mental disorder her husband was in Bangladesh. However, another singer on this route informed me that Akbar had left Sahana and fled (paliye gecche) to his country.

So, now Sahana is earning by singing alone. Though uninitiated in the *fakiri* cult, she sings the songs with considerable mastery. In these routes, there are various other sorts of singers who perform different kinds of music. For example, the group led by Asim Chakrabarty is equipped with a synthesizer and an amplifier box. They sing Hindi and Bengali film and *adhunik* (literally, contemporary or modern) songs. With these devices they are able to reach a greater audience and ensure better earnings. Sahana, trying to compete with them, is using a *box* for the past few years. The traditional folk songs are now amplified. And also modified. She has to hold the microphone with one hand, so she cannot afford to play the traditional instrument *ektara* which requires the use of both hands.

Therefore, in modernity, the traditions cannot remain the same. However, it's not a one-way process of influence. The modern train space gets transformed through the performance. In the early hours of the day, Sahana, with her eldest son boards the train without a valid ticket. Moreover, with her pleas to the *dada-didis* (customary term of address) stating her plight, she turns the space of modern transportation into a commercial space. But her commerce is not translatable in capitalist economic terms. The performance is always in a state of flux, mediated by the electronic device, by the audience character, by the pattern of gift/ exchange, by the railway journey itself.

Pic: Subhabrata Das

The Journey of a Performer: Tradition and Modernity

Abhishek Basu
Master's Level SYLFF Fellow
2004-05
Jadavpur University

Arriving for the first time in Kolkata (and India) on 6th August, 2005, with a 3 year old son in tow – as you can imagine, was no easy feat. But I can honestly (and happily) say that my first welcome into Kolkata was what every traveler to a foreign land seeks: the comfort of a friendly face and the mature expertise of the knowledgeable citizen. This I found in the SYLFF fellow who greeted me upon my arrival.

And to be truthful, that has been the pattern of all my interactions with JU-SYLFF fellows. They have been attentive and friendly, courteous, warm and welcoming in every way. It has been a pleasure to talk to everyone and my own impressions of Jadavpur are quite favourable. I have written home to loved ones that the erudite climate of JU campus and students leaves much to be desired back home, when compared with the atmosphere of intellectual mediocrity at many of our US institutions of higher learning. As a student of US History in a department that has no course of study for Indian, Islamic or Middle Eastern history, it has been absolutely wonderful to converse with students who have a clear and firm grasp of my own topic (at least the Indian aspect of it).

The JU-SYLFF Project Director, Dr. Joyashree Roy, is in a category of her own – shared only with our own Dr. Anita Nahal of Howard University, for together the two of them have worked to make the program, that brought me here, possible. I hope that the HU-India Research Program will eventually bring Jadavpur students to Howard, as the process of leaving one's home to conduct research in a foreign environment is always beneficial in and beyond academic realms. In addition, I look forward to hosting the students of JU at Washington DC. My research at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the National Library of Kolkata, the History Department Library and the Central Library of Jadavpur has been going remarkably well. I wish everybody at Jadavpur all the best in continued research and imminent careers.

As I start writing for the first-ever issue of the JU-SYLFF Newsletter, I recollect the journey of the SYLFF-JU programme over the past couple of years. The programme itself is unique, it provides the students with research opportunities while giving them space to expand beyond the boundaries of their own discipline. The most interesting and attractive part of the job of an SA is that one gets to work and brainstorm with so many vibrant researchers who are full of new ideas and potential. Working with visitors from other SYLFF Institutions is another rewarding experience since it provides the true flavour of the global atmosphere. As the JU-SYLFF association is ready to take itself forward to the global SYLFF community, the SA will have to take a proactive role, to explore new avenues and suggest new plans of action. This, I am sure, will be a rewarding experience for me.

After JU got the SYLFF endowment, we were among the first three SYLFF fellows. We bagged the SNP Award for forming our own Local Association: *Fellows* in that very year. Documentation of different social processes is a major goal of our SNP proposal and this first issue of the newsletter is a small step towards that.

Two of us had the opportunity to be a part of the SYLFF Asia Pacific Regional Forum, 2005 held in the University of Indonesia. That was a wonderful platform to get to know each other in the global SYLFF network.

This newsletter is our attempt to continue the dialogue with the SYLFF fellows worldwide.

We have begun the process by sharing our own research experience. Fortunately, we got a visitor from an overseas SYLFF institution in our campus this year itself. We are happy to include her contribution in the newsletter.

The next issue, we hope, will include the voices of the new SYLFF fellows and contributions from the other SYLFF institutions. Any research briefing and suggestions and/or comments to make the newsletter more effective would be most welcome.

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Jadavpur - Impressions

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Editorial Note

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