

A Consultative Workshop

Understanding Contemporary Social Issues in India: Through a Participatory and Holistic Approach

Opening remarks

November 24, 2006

Vice-Chancellor Shyamal Kanti Sanyal, Immediate Past Vice-Chancellor A.N. Basu, Dean Biswajit Chatterjee, Registrar Rajat Bandyopadhyay, Finance Officer G.K. Pattanayak, Deputy Registrar Sanjoy Gopal Sarkar, SYLFF Project Director Joyashree Roy, distinguished members of the Jadavpur University academic community, special partners, and SYLFF fellows,

It is a great honor for me to give the opening remarks on this very special occasion. Let me begin by congratulating the Jadavpur University SYLFF Association which has organized this consultative workshop.

Many in the audience today may not be familiar with the acronym “S-Y-L-F-F”. SYLFF is the Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund. In 2003, The Nippon Foundation, the largest private, grant-making foundation in Japan, presented Jadavpur University with an endowment—a permanent fund—of one million U.S. dollars. The Tokyo Foundation, an independent, operating foundation has responsibility for administering the SYLFF Program.

Based upon mutual agreement between the foundation and JU, the fund was invested and a portion of the earnings of this investment is used to provide fellowships; the remainder of the earnings is returned to the capital to ensure the sustainability of the fellowship program, in perpetuity. JU has been empowered to manage the fund and to administer the SYLFF fellowship program. Both The Nippon Foundation and The Tokyo Foundation are most grateful to the JU SYLFF Steering Committee for its prudent management of the fund, transparent administration of the fellowship program, strong support extended to SYLFF fellows and active participation in the SYLFF network of 69 endowed universities and consortia (a total of 88 institutions) in 45 countries.

Who are the recipients of SYLFF fellowships? Recipients of SYLFF fellowships—referred to as “SYLFF fellows”—are JU students enrolled in the Faculty of Arts pursuing the Master’s, M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees that relate to the theme, *Tradition, Social Change and Sustainable Development*, that is any issue or problem relevant to contemporary Indian society. SYLFF fellows undergo a rigorous selection process in line with the SYLFF mission which is:

“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.”

In other words, SYLFF fellows are not only the “best and brightest” graduate students, but individuals with leadership potential and strong commitment to making the world a better place for all throughout their lives.

What does it mean to be a SYLFF fellow? By definition, SYLFF fellows—and there are now more than 9,000 fellows world-wide—are recipients of financial support but unlike most fellowship programs, the SYLFF Program offers fellows opportunities for life-long networking and collaboration vis-à-vis research and social engagement, and exercising leadership.

The JU SYLFF Association has already demonstrated its leadership and commitment to serving others under the thoughtful guidance of SYLFF Project Director Professor Joyashree Roy and the egalitarian direction of principal organizer Duke Ghosh and co-organizers Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay and Abhishek Bose. Association members are “multi-taskers”—diligently pursuing their academic research, volunteering at the Leprosy Mission in Kolkata, and networking among themselves and with their counterparts throughout the world.

This consultative workshop, however, is very special, in fact, extraordinary, because it puts into practice what many scholars throughout the world talk and write about but too few implement. As noted in the name of this gathering—*Understanding Contemporary Issues in India: Through a Participatory and Holistic Approach*—this workshop,

- Focuses on the contemporary social context but underscores the importance of and integrates the historical perspective,
- Takes a trans-disciplinary approach in identifying and studying theoretical and “real” issues,
- Searches for sustainable solutions and outcomes, and
- Perhaps, most importantly actively involves all stakeholders, that is, as many of the individuals and organizations as possible that are at the center of SYLFF fellows’ research, and in an equitable and transparent manner.

To all of the stakeholders present today—the very special partners of SYLFF fellows’ research—thank you very much. Thank you for sharing your concerns, experience, ideas, time and much more with JU SYLFF fellows. Each and every one of you is an invaluable part of their learning and lives.

To all members of the JU academic community, I extend deep appreciation for your ongoing guidance and nurturance of this group of young leaders.

To all SYLFF fellows, I applaud you for practicing socially responsible scholarship—also referred to as public scholarship—and making the intellectual and personal journey as individuals and as a group to indeed fulfill the vision of the SYLFF Program:

“The world is one family and all humankind are brothers and sisters. All have the right to fulfill their basic needs for food, health care and education.” (the basic philosophy of the late Ryoichi Sasakawa, Japanese philanthropist, in whose honor the SYLFF Program was established in 1987 by his son, Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation).

This life-long journey may fundamentally be an individual endeavor, but I am certain that the journey will be enriched, better made and enjoyed with others. I deeply regret being unable to be with you today to participate in this workshop and to continue our numerous open-ended, wide-ranging and thought-provoking conversations.

Again, congratulations and all good wishes for a successful workshop.



Ellen Mashiko
Executive Director
Scholarship Division