

NEWS FROM USEF NEPAL

VOLUME 25 NO. 1
March 2008

A Bulletin of activities and events from the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal

The Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal

Post: Box 380, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 444-4780, 444-4779, 441-4598(Advising)
Fax: 977-1-4410881
email: fulbcomm@fulbrightnepal.org.np
www.fulbrightnepal.org.np



FULBRIGHT



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR...

The past months in Nepal have had a mix of comings, goings, and opportunities for meeting other Fulbright scholars past and present. This was exemplified by the Fulbright South Asia Alumni Conference, “Public Service & Building Civil Society,” held at Gokarna, outside Kathmandu, from January 20-23, 2008.



Nepali Classical musicians help to open the South Asia Fulbright Alumni Conference.

For the first time in recent memory, the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal, led by Dr. Sangita Rayamajhi, held a conference specifically aimed at Fulbright alumni from neighboring South Asian countries; the intimate meeting was a great success. A few months later, Americans on Fulbright grants in Nepal had an opportunity to meet their counterparts from India and Sri Lanka in a conference—“Once a Fulbrighter, Always A Fulbrighter”—organized by USEF India, in Jaipur, Rajasthan from March 17-19. And in between these conferences were a number of events, held here at USEF Nepal in Gyaneshwar, that gave Nepali alumni and American current grantees a chance to meet each other (see “Talk Programs” inside).

On February 15, USEF opened its Fulbright and EWC scholarships competition for 2009-2010. Just over a month later, the competition closed with some 290+ applications; USEF staff members Monica Chhettri, Min Raj Gurung, Mily Pradhan, and Yamal Rajbhandary have begun the long process of checking each application thoroughly. Following their perusal for complete applications, and an objective assessment of whether all scholarship requirements have been met, USEF will hold its

usual English language aptitude test. Those applicants who pass this test, which is administered without charge, will remain “in the running” and we will read these applications with special close attention before creating a long “short list” to be sent to the USEF Commission Board Members for their scrutiny. Finally, around mid-May, we will prepare the final short list of candidates to be interviewed based on the rankings made by the Commission Board. In early June, the USEF Board will convene over two days for interviews of the top candidates, and soon after we will have our selections for Fulbright Master’s Degree scholarships, as well as our nominees for the annual East-West Center scholarship competition, and the Fulbright Science and Technology Ph.D competition. As always, the number of incredibly talented Nepali applicants is both inspiring and a bit daunting; USEF wishes it could fund more!

Ten days or so ago, the streets were dominated by flying water balloons and colored powders being primed for play on Holi. Now the public spaces of Kathmandu and many other towns are filled with election sloganeering, sometimes including a song or dance, and sometimes provoking tense stand-offs between rival groups. April 10 is meant to be “the” day: for the election to a Constituent Assembly for a new Nepal. Those elected to the assembly will be charged with writing the nation’s new constitution and paving the way for Nepal’s future.


Peter K. Moran

MEETING OF Fulbright Alumni from South Asia held in Nepal

“Public Service and Building Civil Society,” a conference of South Asian Fulbright Alumni was held in Kathmandu from January 20-23, and was opened by Deputy Chief of the United States Mission in Nepal, Randy W. Berry. The conference was organized by the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal, with assistance from the Fulbright Commission. Despite its relatively small size, it was truly international, and the small number of participants gave everyone an opportunity to actually meet and speak with every other person there. In the end, there were Fulbright alumni from Afghanistan (3), Bangladesh (4), Bhutan (4), India (6), Nepal (10-15, the fluctuation due to transportation strikes called on our second and third days), Pakistan (10) and Sri Lanka (1). Also in attendance were Peter Moran (Executive Director of USEF Nepal), Tissa Jayatilaka (ED of USEF Sri Lanka), Grace Clark (ED USEF Pakistan), Marilyn Berg Callendar (formerly President of the Fulbright Association Board in the US) and Constance Colding Jones (previously Public Affairs Officer in Kathmandu and now Cultural Affairs Officer in Islamabad). Also invited were two Nepali Ashoka fellows—Anil Chitrakar and Megh Ale—who spoke about on the ground “social entrepreneurship”



Cleaning up the Bagmati River.

that they have been involved with. Meghji led the group on a hike that culminated in a clean up campaign on the banks of Nepal’s holiest (and very filthy) Bagmati river (see photo).

The success of the conference can partly be gauged by how much enthusiasm was generated among Bangladeshis, Bhutanis, and Afghanis to set up their own Fulbright Alumni Associations in their home countries. Another great success was the amount of good discussion we had on topics very pertinent to the whole region: water, democracy, and “civil” (and “uncivil”) society. On the final day there was a spontaneous discussion of strikes, fasting, shut-downs, marches and

other forms of public protest in South Asia. All participants had a great deal to say on how protests (peaceful and violent) worked in their respective societies. More importantly, people also discussed the nature of governance and the kinds of protests that their governments seemed to respond to. There were many instances where presentations provoked questions and sometimes fierce debate. For instance, hearing about water usage and water policy in Nepal raised the hackles of some Bangladeshis, who live in the lower riparian region heavily affected by flooding emanating from the Nepali catchment area. This exemplified Senator Fulbright’s message of people to people discussion and its benefits for further regional cooperation, especially with regards to information sharing among Nepali and Bangladeshi water NGOs. There was also discussion of projects like the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nepal’s “Democracy Fora” last year as well as issues as broad as children’s rights—and our individual roles in protecting them—to very specific recommendations on how to discourage plastic usage in our home countries in order to help reclaim heavily polluted environments.



Group Portrait from the Conference.

LINDEN TOUR COMES THROUGH NEPAL FOR THE FIRST TIME

Linden Educational Services (<http://www.lindentours.com>) is an American company that has organized “college tours” for American colleges and universities through many different countries since 1982. On February 9th, almost seven hundred students thronged into the Linden U.S. University Fair in Kathmandu, organized for the first time in Nepal with the help of USEF-Nepal’s Educational Advising Center (EAC). Directors of Admissions from six American colleges distributed information and answered questions about their colleges during the three-hour university fair held at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. The fair presented students the rare opportunity to access first-hand information directly from Directors of Admissions from US universities. Admission to the university fair was free and open to the public.

The participating institutions that took part in Linden’s first tour through Nepal were: Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (FL), Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ), Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IN), State University of New York at Buffalo (NY), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (NC), and

Wentworth Institute of Technology (MA). In addition to participating in the university fair, the group also visited various local schools on February 8th, conducting “mini-fairs” for students. They also visited USEF-Nepal, where they met USEF-Nepal’s Executive Director and where Educational Advisers briefed them on the EAC’s services for US institutions, the Nepali educational system, and current trends in Nepali student mobility to the United States.

USEF-Nepal’s EAC helped with logistics for Linden’s first tour through

Nepal, organizing school visits and overseeing the smooth operation of the university fair. The EAC enlisted the help of fifteen student volunteers (all frequent users of the EAC library and advising services), who registered fair participants, ensured circulation of participants, assisted with crowd control, and after the fair input registration data of all participants into a database.

After the success of Linden’s first tour through Nepal, USEF-Nepal’s EAC looks forward to future Linden tours through Nepal!



The Linden tour group with USEF EAC staff and student volunteers.



Participants registered their information before entering the fair.



USEF-Nepal’s table at the Linden U.S. University fair provided information about USEF’s EAC services to student visitors.

A Fulbright Pilgrimage....to Lumbini

Sam Mowe, a recent graduate of Occidental College in Los Angeles, began his research on the “Construction of a Buddhist Pilgrimage Site” in early October, 2007.

Lumbini is a powerful place, no question. Every year thousands of pilgrims and tourists from all over the world go out of their way, sometimes far out of their way, just to visit a small town in the south western plains of Nepal. UNESCO declared it a world heritage site in 1997, and the international community has donated millions of dollars towards the site’s development since the mid-sixties. The symbolic potential of Lumbini, as the Buddha’s birthplace, is obvious. The question is what to do with that potential—how to harness Lumbini’s power and utilize it.

It has been a complex and slower-moving-than-expected process for those involved with development in Lumbini. For one thing, unlike pilgrimage sites such as Varanasi, Mecca, or Lourdes, Lumbini was only rediscovered a little more than 100 years ago. This being the case, those interested in raising Lumbini to the standards of these other sites have felt compelled to force its progress. Primarily this has involved carrying out the “Master Plan” made by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in 1972, who was assigned the incredible task of designing a place rich in meaning. His vision includes the central Sacred

Garden surrounded by canals and wildlife, and the Eastern and Western “Monastic Zones.” In these areas one can find separate Buddhist monasteries from all over the world, though some are still under construction, which provide windows into each country’s distinct Buddhist culture.

Despite all of these efforts, or perhaps in some cases due to these efforts, some visitors aren’t exactly sure how to experience Lumbini, a land brimming with contradictions. It’s a major Buddhist site in the middle of Hindu and Muslim populations. It’s presented as the “Fountain of World Peace” on the entrance archway, but it lies in what has recently been a hotbed of political unrest in Nepal. Is it a pilgrimage site, or a tourist destination? Can it be both?

Thus far, it is this last issue that has been driving my research in Lumbini. Can the current commercial and spiritual developments at the Buddha’s birthplace coexist without tensions? How can those responsible for the physical development of the place—making sure that there is water, electricity, and housing for visitors—keep the spiritual element of Lumbini in mind? The evaluation of a site in

spiritual terms is inherently difficult as many aspects of religiosity are subjective and defy quantifiable measurements. Yet it is this complex nature of the pilgrimage experience that drew me to Lumbini in the first place.

Pilgrimage is deeply moving—a dynamic process where the material and imagined commingle. On the one hand you have this very real physical journey taking place, and on the other you have what seems to me to be the most perfect metaphor for the spiritual quest. These two contrasting qualities combine to make the destination of such a journey at once an actual place that can be plotted on a map and also a symbol of the most transcendent human ambitions.

This mixture of material and metaphor that happens in Lumbini can also describe how I have felt about my Fulbright experience thus far. While I am aware that I am actually in this world renowned sacred site in Nepal conducting real research, it still feels like I’m doing something abstract—something that represents what I’ve always wanted to be doing. In this way my Fulbright experience has been a kind of personal pilgrimage. My own intellectual journey towards



Lumbini in progress.



The ritual creation of a Buddha image by Thai pilgrims visiting the site.



Sam Mowe standing in front of the Ashoka pillar at Lumbini.

understanding the relationship between the “Master Plan” and the pilgrim’s experience in Lumbini has been facilitated by the physical undertaking of living in a new place. Though I wasn’t raised in a Buddhist household, and I would hesitate to identify myself as a Buddhist, when I travel to the Buddha’s birthplace I go with more than simply academic ambitions—I set out with the intention of being personally affected somehow by Lumbini.

When I sit by the famous Ashoka pillar in the Sacred Garden area interviewing pilgrims from around the world it is clear that significant interactions between person and place do occur in Lumbini. Although interpreting these interactions precisely isn’t always an easy task, the profundity of them is plain. The feeling I get while conducting these interviews by the Mayadevi temple makes me wonder where the line is drawn between researcher and pilgrim. I recall a conversation with a pilgrim from Japan that I had shortly after arriving for my first trip to the powerful place.

“What were your reasons for coming to Lumbini?” I asked.

“The Buddha was born here,” he replied matter-of-factly, before flipping the script on me. “Why did you come to Lumbini?”

(all photos courtesy of S. Mowe)

Talk Programs

This year USEF Nepal instituted the first “Fulbright Scholars’ Work in Progress” Series, so that our American student researchers might have a chance to discuss their projects half-way through their ten month grants and receive valuable feedback from the local community. Student researchers who want to take advantage of this opportunity to receive guidance and possibly further their research connections speak for a mere ten minutes on their topic, with more time devoted to questions and discussion. Our current format has been to group scholars loosely according to their interests, so that two or three student researchers discuss their work per session. Thus far we’ve had the following presentations at the conference room at USEF in Gyaneshwar:

On Feb. 15, Mr. Ajay Pillarisetti discussed “A Cross Sectional Analysis of the Impact of Improved Cook Stoves on Indoor Air Quality”, and Mr. Tyler McMahon presented his findings thus far on “Rainwater Harvesting in Kathmandu - An Economic Perspective to Becoming Self-Reliant in a Situation of Water Scarcity.”

On Feb. 29, the talk program included Mr. Justin Eure on “Communing with Gods: Hindu and Buddhist Religious Dance,” Ms. Charis Boke on “Meaning and Relating: Aniconic Worship Practices in the Kathmandu Valley,” and Alexander Yiannopoulos discussed Buddhist philosophy, translation and physics in his “An Inertial Theory of Action.”

On March 3, the “Work in Progress” program presented Mr. Michael Piech discussing “The Role of Nepali Film in Kathmandu,” Mr. Sam Mowe gave his “Slave to the Lumbini Masterplan—An Assessment of the Development Situation in the Buddha’s Birthplace” discussion, and Mr. Scott Sorrell spoke on “Defining ‘Community’ and its Role in Child Protection and the Reintegration of Children Affiliated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups.”

Dr. Mark Liechty, a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar from the University of Illinois at Chicago, gave his presentation “Far Out: The Early Days of Tourism in Kathmandu,” in a well attended event on February 19.

Alumni News

Dr. Paul Lachapelle (Nepal Fulbright Scholar 2001), completed his Ph.D. in 2006 at the University of Montana and recently joined the faculty of the Department of Political Science at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. With a split appointment in the State Extension Service, his responsibilities are to design and implement educational programs on the topic of governance and community development throughout the state. He is currently coordinating efforts in small rural communities on poverty, tourism, and conflict resolution and working on a statewide effort addressing Tribal health and coordinating a men’s health initiative on the Crow Indian Reservation.

Mountain Biking in Kathmandu

The Best Way to Start a Day

Fulbright scholar Tyler McMabon, a recent graduate of Colorado College, takes time from his research on rainwater harvesting in Nepal to engage in another kind of cultural exchange activity: biking with some of the best young athletes in the Nepali sport today.

Surrounded by mountains, valleys, and villages, two foreigners pedal their bikes up a beaten dirt road. Suddenly speeding toward them with a big grin, another rider passes by on his way down the hill. “*Ma talim gardaichhu*” he says in Nepali (literally ‘I am training’). His name is Padam Limbu and he has taken the two foreigners on this ride to show them mountain biking in Nepal; they both will be in Nepal for the next several months. Without breaking a sweat, Padam continues down the hill only to return minutes later on his way back up—for the second time. This happens frequently over the course of the 70 kilometer ride, and at the end Padam runs off to work at one of the local bike shops, continuing as if nothing had happened, specifically a 70 km ride up, down and around the Nepali countryside. The foreigners—being fairly decent riders themselves—recognize that they are seeing something special and begin to wonder what really is out there with respect to Nepali riders.

Two weeks later, to follow through on this curiosity, I participated in the 2nd annual Nepal Mountain Bike race, a race which Padam won, but it was a close race—his competitor, Surendra Rai, mere seconds behind. Surendra is a proven rider in Nepal and last year’s national champion. (In the weeks to follow he beat Padam and retained his

national title at the 2007 8th National Mountain Biking Championships).

To say Nepal operates on a different schedule than the U.S. would be an understatement. On the one hand, nearly everybody in Kathmandu is up, awake, and making noise by 5:30 in the morning. Despite this however, most NGO’s, government offices, and other businesses (besides small shops) do not open until 10:00 a.m. This schedule leaves a nice window of time for a cyclist like me, without sacrificing my research, to explore the countryside with Nepali friends each morning. This is something that I did not do while I studied abroad here in Spring 2006, and this has opened a new world to me.

Nepal as a country offers some of the best training grounds for mountain biking; within 25 kilometers of the capital, Kathmandu, one can gain over 2000 feet in elevation. Unbeknownst to me before arriving is that Nepal is full of a growing group of cyclists with incredible personalities. It is these personalities with whom I spend my mornings exploring Nepal and training. Never before have I met such an amazing and innovative group of cyclists, and in the U.S. I spent a lot of time with various mountain bikers. These guys are the best at transitioning from an intense training session to a relaxing cup of tea filled with conversations about various goings on in life. Typically a ride in Nepal with the best starts with a cup of tea at 6:00 a.m., continues for 2-3 hours at a very fast pace, up and down hills around the valley, another cup of tea, and then a 1-2 hour return; usually finishing by 10:00 a.m. Saturdays are the exception, starting at 6:00 a.m. and going all day

long with *daalbbat* along the way, and finishing around 3 or 4 in the afternoon.

Fun is the perfect word to describe my friends’ attitudes toward their riding. While Nepal offers the perfect training ground in terms of altitude and hills, it isn’t exactly full of maintained mountain biking trails that foreign cyclists are used to. Most of the ‘singletrack’ is composed of walking paths which many times result in carrying bikes, or some of these bikers cheering each other on as they attempt to ride—without a second thought—what many (especially myself) would deem not ride-able. Every ride shows the riders’ commitment to getting better, as they encourage each other to ride faster, try new technical paths, and to have more fun. I know that I have become a better rider, at least physically, while riding here. An example that illustrates the best of these riders’ commitment to the sport, is Padam Limbu’s custom-made bicycle ‘trainer’, which is a welded metal contraption designed to resemble the expensive magnetic resistance trainers many cyclists own in the U.S. for indoor training. He uses this after work many days a week to add an extra hour or two to his daily riding total. Not only have I been impressed with their ability to ride well, train hard, and have fun; I’ve been really impressed with their innovation and creativity when it comes to getting the most out of their cycling on a small budget.

Riding and getting to know these riders has been one of the biggest highlights of my stay in Nepal. It has helped my Nepali, my mountain biking, and my mental state as I require a lot of physical activity to keep myself



Padam Limbu and Tyler McMabon.

happily functioning doing other work. No matter how the previous day went, whether research was stalled, traffic was bad, meetings were cancelled, anything, I know that I can wake up at 6:00 a.m. and ride around the Kathmandu Valley with (albeit a little behind some of

them) my good friends, Padam, Mangal, Rajiv, Surendra, Ajay, and Nirjala, who have a passion for mountain biking which is unmatched by anybody I have ever met. Personally, I could not think of a better way to start the day, can you?

Note: Padam and Mangal just participated in an international mountain bike race—the 1st Annual Kachenjunga Mountain Bike race—and won both the team category and the top two individual places. Congratulations to both of them; they have made my mornings here thoroughly enjoyable and are great friends and riders.

Encountering Change: Reflections of a Humphrey Fellow

Mr. Deependra Nath Sharma is a Humphrey Fellow (2007-08) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA.

Before landing at Boston Logan Airport as a Humphrey Fellow I had not realized what an interesting journey of about a year I was going to have—a year which would bring a sea change in my worldview by providing an opportunity to explore the new millennium's 'global village' through an entirely new and holistic lens of academia and professional networking. Studying at MIT, attending seminars and workshops at different institutions, travelling in the US and interacting with professionals from several countries has given me new insights about how to approach problems such as poverty, inequality, exclusion, and corruption that underlie the conflict in my own country.

Though I presently feel that my journey here was an adventurous venture it had its own steep ascents and descents. By far the greatest challenge that I faced was adapting to an entirely different culture that carried symbols with meanings that were so alien to me. Staying away from the home and returning to the life of a student with long assignments and lots of reading were not necessarily fun—especially after working as an executive in civil service for years. The pace here was so fast that I had to run to catch up to natives who seemed to be merely walking. I had a hard time expressing myself in a language in which words did not come easily. Despite all the sweat and tears, I managed the transitional shocks

successfully. And in the process, many shifts have taken place in my life, including my attitudes towards phenomena as broad as development and as personal as my relationship with my wife.

I have been exposed to academic literature and research papers that challenge the conventional wisdom and provided new insights on development issues like role of the state, priority sector, governance, environment and natural resources management.

It was interesting to learn about the 'pendulum swing' taking place in the academia of 'development'. Contrary to the neoliberal idea that favors weakening of states, this literature—taking the cases of success stories of East Asian giants—strongly advocated effective states that are so important for formulating and enforcing policies and regulations aimed at making gains in globalized economy.

I was impressed by the articles that had the central idea that the primary sources of development are learning and knowledge accumulation, and that no quick and easy fixes to development problems are available. I learned how some countries benefitted while many others failed applying same development modalities. I always believed in development as a 'learning process approach' rather than a 'blue-print approach' and such readings reinforced my belief by providing

empirical evidence to support the strong logic that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to problems that underlie the complex process of development.

In terms of sectoral emphasis on development, I was struck by another 'pendulum swing' in favor of agricultural development in developing countries. This reinforces my own feeling that undesirable policy biases have increased the share of donor aid to social services thereby reducing the share of productive services that are so critical to the farmers. My studies have further convinced me that agricultural growth is an important determinant of overall development of country like mine.

One of the major drivers of change in my worldview was my interaction with a diverse group of people representing various parts of the US and several other developed and developing countries. Through these interactions I learnt how important it is to understand cultural variations for fostering good communication across different cultures. Furthermore, I also realized that cultural changes are inevitable in today's context of globalization and that such changes should not be viewed as contamination.

Exposure to the American culture played an important role in bringing changes in some of my behaviors and

Backpage

Part of the Jaipur conference, “Once a Fulbrighter, Always a Fulbrighter,” was a visit to local NGOs to learn more about the work they do and the challenges they face. One NGO is the Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (Cecodecon), with American Fulbrighters and local participants pictured below (photos courtesy of Dr. Alenka Hlousek-Radojic).



Raj Shrestha discussing microcredit with participants in Bhairawa.



Charis Boke and family, Devlang, Dolakha.



Dr. Fred Connell and colleagues, near Dharan.



Dr. Sandra Connell and friend Dhankuta district.

continued from page 7

attitudes that I believe would help me become more efficient as a professional and more humble as a human being. I now value time more than before. Making appointments, planning ahead and meeting on time have become important to me. I have been trying to be as direct in communication as average Americans. I am very much impressed by the rule of law that governs this country. I have seen many ‘stars’ being imprisoned for crimes—no matter how popular or rich they are, and would like to see the same happening back home. Like Americans I have started giving high value to my personal success and achievement. I highly value networking and make efforts to reach out to others.

Till date, I have visited more than half of the states in the US and have met many Nepali living here. I found that they value Nepali culture and try to transfer this culture to the younger

generations. As a result of this meeting, I am optimistic that Nepali living in America can be an asset for the development of Nepal in the future. What they need is a favorable environment back home in which to contribute intellectually and financially.

Being away from home was a big challenge for me, given the fact that I had never been away from my joint family for more than two weeks in last twelve years. As a result of my time away from my family, I realized how dependent I had become on most of my household activities. It was hard, but I had to learn how to cook and how to live on my own. By the time my wife Namita joined me three months later, I was already a different person who could take care of himself. Back home we were so busy in our jobs that we seldom had any chance to talk with each other at length. Here we had the opportunity to learn more about

each other. As a result we have been able to create a friendship that extends beyond a traditional Nepali husband-wife relationship.

Though this transition has not been easy, I have gained more than what I have missed. Yes, I have missed the company of my kids, parents and friends back home. But I have acquired skills and knowledge that have made me more confident to serve my family and country when I return to Nepal. The experience of change that I encountered here as a Humphrey fellow has taught me a great lesson about why change is so difficult to let happen. I now understand that ownership, determination, resilience, and learning are the key to successful transitions whether at the individual, societal or national levels. I hope this inner understanding of change will help me become a better ‘change agent’ in Nepal.