Scholarships

RAJIV GANDHI TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAMME

Every year the Foundation awards upto 20 scholarships to students from Cambridge and four other British Universities (Edinburgh, London School of Economics, Oxford and Hull) to travel within India either to conduct research or to get to know the country The Foundation collaborates with the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust and the Rajiv Gandhi (UK) Foundation who partially fund the travel cost from Britain to India while RGF supports travel and stay within India. At the end of their visits, the scholars submit a report of the experiences. Since the commencement of this programme in 1996, a total of 201 scholars have been sponsored.

Programme Vision

International student exchange builds bridges and promotes understanding. The Foundation gives:

- *Travelling scholarships to British university students to come to India*
- *Scholarships/Bursaries to Indian students to study at Cambridge*
- *Science Talent Research Fellowships to encourage careers in science*

Ms. Catalina Robledo Botero in Tamil Nadu

This year 16 students visited India – 6 from Cambridge, 4 from the London School of Economics and 3 each from Edinburgh and Oxford. Their study areas were diverse ranging from medicine and archaeological studies to astrophysics and social anthropology.

Without exception all felt deeply enriched by their first hand encounter with India.

Mr. Anish Shonpal, reading for a BA Law degree at Cambridge, says Mumbai with all its contrasts was a real eye-opener. In Delhi he spent some time with a High Court judge and gained some insight into the internal operations of the Indian legal system. "I had seen how an English High Court worked" he writes

"I was amazed at the number of cases the judge dealt with and at how quickly he would deal with them. In one day a judge would deal with anything between 100 and 200 cases."

"but to see the Indian High Court working was something else. It appeared to be a conveyor belt with a buzzer (complete with red light) to indicate when the next case could be brought before the judge. I was amazed at the number of cases the judge dealt with and at how quickly he would deal with them. In one day a judge would deal with anything between 100 and 200 cases. This appeared entirely to be due to the overworked legal system. I left Delhi shocked at the vast difference between the Indian and British system." He also spent time with the Additional Advocate-General of Haryana and Chandigarh High Court. After completing his placement he stayed in a monastery in Ujjain. He spent his time performing voluntary service for the temple – cleaning, cooking and distributing free food to the homeless. He says "it was a remarkable experience".

Ms. Catalina Robledo Botero, a Colombian national doing an MSc in Development Management at LSE, came to India with some trepidation to do a two-month internship with the Centre for Microfinance Research, Chennai. "Women in microcredit groups became the centre of my new life in India", she writes "I visited clients of microfinance institutions about three times a week in places as diverse as slums in Bangalore, Chennai and Hyerabad and in rural areas in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and spent the rest of my time talking to staff members and other people at the research institute. What was I trying to find out? Basically, how microfinance products can solve demand-side constraints on education financing."

She came out with ideas of different products that microfinance institutions can provide at a flat rate of 10 per cent to fulfill the financial needs of parents wishing to send their children to schools, ranging from a loan of Rs 3,000 for primary and secondary school to Rs 15,000 to Rs 30,000 per year for tertiary education to be paid back only after graduation. As a result of her study, she says that "the Centre for Microfinance Research will engage in a long-term research project in partnership with a microfinance institution willing to set up a new educational product, pilot it for a certain period of time, adjust whatever didn't work during the pilot

Demand-side financing of education: What role for microfinance?

Cataline Robledo Botero

For the past two decades, the number of microfinance institutions (MFIs) offering microcredit has grown markedly, and at the same time NGOs and governments have augmented efforts to increase literacy rates and to reduce drop out rates in schools. However, traditionally, microcredit and education programmes have not worked with each other – government programmes relating to education have focused on increasing the number of schools and teachers, while microfinance programs have focused on providing credit for the acquisition of working capital in micro-enterprises. Microfinance and education can and should integrate. There is a very strong potential for microfinance to play an active role in helping developing countries increase their level of educational attainment.

It is not out of chance that the provision of microcredit has focused on loans to acquire physical working capital and not to accumulate human capital. It is inherently harder to provide credit to build human capital. However, there are also strong reasons to think that developing credit markets for education, thus removing important demand-side constraints on its acquisition, is very important to help families get out of the vicious circle of poverty. Low and variable incomes lead to deficient levels of educational attainment, thus leading to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

There are also institutional reasons why most MFI programs have developed a single-product credit delivery mechanism: standardization of products together with economies of scale helps to reduce transaction costs. However, such programs can hardly reduce poverty on a large scale and on a long-term basis. Poverty is caused by many factors, including lack of skills, entrepreneurship and human capital. If microcredit is used for investing in education, it can have a deeper and longer impact through the creation of virtuous cycles out of poverty by making the younger generation in a family have more skills than their parents did, and so greater opportunities in terms of access to more and better jobs in the future. The challenge in this respect, however, lies in finding out how to design microfinance products that are effective in removing the financial constraints that poor families face in sending their children to school, but at the same time making sure that the outcome is not just greater indebtedness.

phase and re-launch it again to all microfinance clients. I am very happy that my study has been the first spark in this long-term ambitious project. I am confident that in the years to come microfinance institutions in India will start to supply educational loan products on a large scale."

On a lighter note, Ms. Botero says that buffalos and elephants have become her favourite animals after her India sojourn.

Ms. Bethan Lloyd, a BA Theology & Religious Studies student, at Cambridge, visited Delhi, Amritsar, Manali en route to Ladakh, MacLeod Ganj, Rishikesh, Gangotri and then to the source of the Ganges at Gaumukh in whose waters she bathed "to purify her karma". She writes that "coming from the meticulously punctuated west to a country where things happen when they happen, could push the unprepared visitor towards madness, violence and nervous breakdown. But for those who can break free from the grip of our conditioning, it is a truly divine opportunity to experience newfound freedom".....She observed worshippers at the Golden Temple, in the monasteries of Ladakh and the shrines at Rishikesh and Gangotri. She felt deeply privileged to meet the Dalai Lama and attend his teachings, followed by a 6-day meditation retreat which she says re-energized her and gave her a new understanding of herself, others, religion and the world around her. "The colour and variety of religious experiences on offer in India is an Aladdin's cave for any theologian.....not only did India exceed my expectations, it transformed my perspective of life and the world around me." As a result of her trip, she has picked "The Liberating Dream: Jungian and Tibetan Buddhist Perceptions" as the topic for her dissertation.

All photographs by Ms. Catalina Robledo Botero

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARSHIPS AND BURSARIES

With the help and support of the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust, UK, the Foundation continues to award scholarships/bursaries to meritorious Indian students wishing to pursue a second degree affiliated course at any of the colleges of Cambridge University, U.K. This year bursaries for BA Economics were awarded to Miss Kriti Mittal and Mr. Siddharth Kothari (both St. Edmund's College) Mr. Ritam Chaurey (Hughes Hall College), and for BA English to Miss Debashree Roy (Wolfson College).

RAJIV GANDHI SCIENCE TALENT RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

The Fellowships programme commenced in 1993 and is implemented through the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bangalore. These are given every year to bright undergraduates and MSc students who apply from all over India. The fellowships are renewable on a selective basis for a consecutive second year. The selected students spend two months during summer under the guidance of distinguished scientists/researchers at the Indian Institute of Science, or at other such renowned research institutes in the country. The programme tries to assist the students to understand what scientific research really is and how it is conducted and encourages them to opt for scientific research as a career.

This year 16 students were selected who will be researching in the fields of Life Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Chemical Sciences and Physical Sciences.