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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Kuldeep Mathur Interview Narrative

4-15-2006 interview in Gurgaon, India

Please cite as: Kuldeep Mathur, interview by Dan Berman, April 15, 2006, interview narrative, East-West Center Oral History Project Collection, East-West Center, Honolulu Hawaii.

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

Co-coordinators: Terese Leber and Phyllis Tabusa

Narratives Editor: Susan Yim Griffin

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Kuldeep Mathur

4-15-2006 interview in Gurgaon, India

Personal Background

I was born in Jaipur and got my schooling also in Jaipur in a missionary school, known as St. Xavier High School. At that time, it was the only English medium boys school there. Jaipur was a princely state and the Maharaja (the ruler), invited the missionaries to establish a school. Then I went college in Jaipur, for my B.A. and to the university for my M.A. degree.

I come from a middle class background with my grandfather who was a popular doctor in Jaipur and my father was a government servant, who did not, in that way, match with the earnings of his own father. And so partly for economic reasons, I went through my entire education in Jaipur itself.

Jaipur was a small town at that time when I was growing up, it was not more than 150,000 people living there. By and large it continued to be a princely state in 1950s and 1960s. India had just got independent and we were still honoring our *Maharaja* and the *Maharani*. So it was very feudal from that point of view. But probably everybody knew everybody else; it was that kind of a town.

The school -- what I remember most about the school, is the exposure to U.S. as a country and American education style. The fathers [*priests*] were Americans by and large, very different from the kind that we have now where Indian fathers are running the missionary schools. It was run by a Jesuit missionary branch, missionaries from America. So we were introduced to a lot of cowboy movies, Western novels, American slang, chewing gum and World War II stories.

And even the songs that we learned were all the type of the World War II “coming in on a wing...and a prayer,” or “Red River Valley,” etc. I still remember reciting a poem “Casey at the Bat” when I was in class 3. We played baseball (softball) after classes were over and then came back to school after a break of around two hours to play soccer or hockey. On Saturdays and Sundays we played cricket. Every Saturday evening, too, we saw old war movies on whirring 35mm projector.

We were a small group and I still have friendships with old school friends, my class friends. We have continued to meet each other. Even now, we have our get-togethers until only recently.

We passed out from school in 1953 and only about four or five years back we had a big celebration of our 50 years of having left school. So that was school. Similarly, I took part in a lot of contests for public speaking and debates and discussions and left behind my sports activities and forays into singing American ballads.

So during college and the university, what I remember most is my participation in these public debates, etc. And of course, it was quite an interesting time and participating in public debates was always to meet other girls also. Otherwise all that we could do was to see girls giggling in English movie shows or at one restaurant that we congregated.

Jaipur was a small town and it was enough to have girls sit two tables away and call it a day of achievement.

So you became well-known in those days, like I said, well, a small place. There were only two English medium schools, one for girls and one was for boys. Thus there were limited English-speaking boys and girls. So it was fun (inaudible). It was a very good time.

We have an ancestral home in Jaipur and I have two sisters, one elder to me and one younger to me. I went on to teach in my old school as soon as I completed my M.A. but soon after left to join the university department, where I had studied, as a temporary lecturer.

It's about four or five years later that I saw an advertisement for a scholarship that was available at the East-West Center. That's where I applied. There were three levels of selection, from local, regional to national. It was kind of a year-long process and to which I had to go through interviews at Delhi. I still remember that on one of the interview dates, the Indian-Pakistan War of 1965 was on. I had to travel to Delhi by a train, which could not have lights because of the alert of aerial bombing. But in any case, I arrived safely and was able to appear for the final interview.

Life at EWC

Arrival in '60s

Flight to Honolulu was my first flight. I'd never been on any plane. It was a direct flight. In those days, PanAm had around the world flights, the ones that flew towards the east were PanAm I and the ones that flew towards the west were PanAm II. So I flew by PanAm I, and I really don't remember anything else except being so sick. I couldn't eat anything -- I had a sink.

Food, they were preparing -- they made omelets on the plane itself and that was through egg powder in those days. So I didn't eat anything and the flight would stop for an hour in Hong Kong and an hour in Tokyo. And after 18 hours, we landed in Honolulu. And there was a host family that met me. And there were also one or two Indian friends who

met me. And they evidently wanted to take me to Waikiki Beach and show me all of these bikini-clad girls swimming in the sea.

My eyes were closing, I couldn't enjoy or see anything. I kept on pleading, "Take me back to the dorm." So finally I got to the dorm and it was a double room. My roommate was Bob Eddinger. And I just slept. I probably must have slept, through, for 24 hours or 36 hours because my roommate got really worried and anxious about what was happening.

I missed out on the introductory morning and all of the briefing. It was not possible for me to even stand. That's what I remember of my arrival in Honolulu. It took me about three, four days even to be able to see the surroundings or the beauty of Manoa Valley and the beautiful campus that we had.

And there was a Saga cafeteria; it was in the basement of Jefferson Hall. I would go down and by the time I would be climbing down the staircase, the smell of raw meat being cooked on fire would be so strong that my appetite would disappear.

Breakfast time was OK. So that took me another four or five days when I survived on chile con carne and Tabasco and tomato ketchup for awhile. But then after I think about 10 to 15 days, I became very adapted, eating all kinds of foods. By the time that we went on our inter-island tour, I was ready to eat -- what was it called? The pig. A luau and the other things that they make.

Academic Memories

I went in for a Ph.D. program in Political Science. And my specialization was in public administration. Academically I was attracted by the fact that Fred Riggs was on the faculty. We had known of him from student days. He was a well-known academic as far

as developing countries and development administration is concerned. There were two or three other faculty members who I was attracted to.

But my first academic experience was that we would be connected to these people only after we had really taken the basic courses. And in those days the basic courses consisted of hard-core mathematics courses and our department was very strong on this dimension. You don't need a foreign language but you need algebra, metrics, and all of those kinds of things.

So, in the beginning it was challenging. But I did pretty all right. It was hard work but I did get full support from teachers of quantitative techniques -- mathematics was never a very strong point with me.

I had chosen to do a Ph.D. in Political Science and I was really given a fellowship for that. As far as political science was concerned, we as students here were acquainted with some of the writings with the faculty members in the Department of Political Science, particularly Fred Riggs, who was very well-known in development administration. That was the area that I was trying to specialize in.

But then what I found was that before you started writing what you wanted to do or think like that, we had to take some basic courses. As I mentioned earlier, these basic courses were in mathematics. One could probably flunk in other courses, but mathematics was extremely important. Even though people in the development administration were not concerned about this, but that was a requirement for the doctoral program at the department. So the initial semester or two were very difficult.

It was difficult in terms of trying to understand not only the theoretical base of behavioral science but also to then work on the skills of quantitative behavioral science. To combine these two, which we were not acquainted with in India at all.

We were acquainted with other kinds of political theories. These two we were not acquainted with. So that was one major challenge that I took. But both the East-West Center advisor and the faculty adviser were really helpful and supporting. It was possible to talk to them -- the initial person, the first one at East-West Center, (Meyers, I think) was really a very good man -- it was possible to talk to him, explain to him and he was kind of a source of encouragement. That, "No, this happens" and get on and work and things like that.

And the department people and faculty as well as other American students were also very supportive. So it was a very supportive environment, with the faculty, the teacher himself, everyone was very supportive of the way to push you up. Even though, very well, it was a challenge, but it went off extremely well.

Cross-Cultural Exchange

While this was going on, the more attractive part of the East-West Center was to be able to arrange social evenings in which people from various countries, students participated. We were not able to see the places of other countries, but we were able to taste the foods of other countries and then meet with people from other countries. I think those kinds of social evenings that East-West Center arranged lead to many friendships, which otherwise would not have taken place because we would have been isolated in our own studies.

And most of these social evenings, I think, we all came in our national dresses. It was one of the more memorable parts of the contributions of East-West Center in my life, of creating empathy for other cultures, to be able to talk to people of other cultures and things like that.

What I found then, as a contribution of the East-West Center was that East-West Center acted as a facilitator, as a great source of encouragement. The East-West Center advisor, one could talk to for both academic as well as non-academic matters. And secondly, this whole idea of building fraternity was another great contribution. And third, which is, I think, very important, has been the inter-island tour.

Inter-Island Tour

In doing all this, the inter-island tour played a significant role. We were a group that was diverse; there were Indians and there were Americans and many other nationalities. We went to two or three islands. It was a great experience by itself of being together and I still feel those are the kinds of memories and kinds of imprints that East-West Center has left behind. I think no other fellowship granting agency makes such kinds of efforts.

That was the greatest strength, and the meaning of East-West Center lay in this kind of idea. EWC was not merely an academic experience. So many other agencies are providing financial support for higher studies.

But it was this kind of an idea [*of*] fraternity and inter-cultural understanding that I really cherish very much as far as the memories of the East-West Center go. I have been fortunate to continue friendships from those years and you Dan are a friend from those days. [*Dan Berman was the interviewer here.*]

In the Kitchen

Yes, I learned how to cook with – it was a means of creating friendship. But it was a lot of -- again, I would mention that was the East-West Center environment, where the people did get interested in other kinds of food. If I was cooking Indian food, there would be a Japanese friend who would be cooking Japanese food, there would be an American friend who would be cooking American food.

It was not only that people were attracted towards Indian food. We had friends where we'd go for Thanksgiving and we had turkey. We had Japanese who would cook us Japanese food. So it was really in that way, our cooking Indian food was a kind of a motivator, to say that if other person cooked his own food, why can't I?

So I still remember writing home to find out recipes, then starting cooking here with whatever spices available. That was it. But see again, this was the rule of the East-West Center. Initiating you, introducing you to multiple cuisines and then allowing you to create opportunities for friendships and cultivate them through cooking sessions during weekends.

One memory that I'll always have -- is after study very hard after midnight going to a bar with Dan Berman and some others, and Aditi [*Aditi Apa Pant?*] and then pontificating about India and the world for the next two or three hours.

This was both a relief from the serious work we were doing but also an occasion when we were bouncing back different kinds of ideas and half-baked ideas. That was a kind of a very interesting academic group. Somebody else wanted to join, we, of course, would encourage that person to come and join.

Willy [*Chan?*] and Bill [*Feltz*] and others were also coming in but rather infrequently.

Waikiki in the '60s

[I remember] Queen's Surf, Don Ho and the International Market. Those were the days when, Waikiki was a very pleasant place. You could go and eat at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

I still remember buying a steak for a \$1.99. And cook your own steak and have a swim and walk around in the International Market. And also, those were the days when my wife and I were living in Ohana Nui, meant for married grantees. She used to work at the International Market and return home at 1:00 in the morning. This was after I had completed my field work. We really enjoyed ourselves.

I got married after two years in the EWC when I had a fellowship to do my field study in India from the East-West Center. It was known at that time as the International Development Fellowship. So I came back to spend a year in India, do my field work and gathering data for my Ph.D., and also getting married.

Married Grantees

And she came back with me after a year. That was a different experience in the sense that meant that we were meeting with married grantees. And you are meeting with people with homes, and in an entirely different area, which was, consisted of people living as couples -- and some had children also. And that was a very different experience.

And because of the East-West experience, we interacted with each other. My neighbor was from Cook Islands; several times in the month we used to eat together. And so, we got to know each other. So that was really a family experience, which was different from, when we were single.

EWC's Impact

On Career

I returned to India in 1970. And the value of research, and the kind of work and Ph.D. that I had done was still, in terms of the developmental experience, was very relevant. So I did get a lot of advantage out of my degree in Hawaii, and work with Fred Riggs, and other faculty people. It has been helpful, all in all.

But I think it was not only work in India that was very helpful, but I think it led me to work in countries abroad, outside India.

I returned to Jaipur in 1970; worked there initially for two years. And then I came to Delhi. And, had a long stint with the Indian Institute of Public Administration [*IIPA*] from 1973 to 1985, which was a training institution. Plus research institution. And, so that is where my training in development administration and, understanding of other cultures, for purposes of looking at Indian administrative system was very helpful. And, I think the research methodology training, I might be still a little wary of the mathematics training that I got, but it really stood me in good stead, because that mathematics training and the research methodology training that University of Hawai'i provided was a very strong point in my academic work.

And I worked there and then I began my first consultancy work from IIPA in a UN agency in Kuala Lumpur, where I did comparative work on Asian administration. And then around '77, '78, I went to Nigeria, as a UN consultant to help establish a management institute. I worked there for about more than a year then I came back, because I did want to return to academic work, rather than to stay on this kind of job.

And then I did short periods of work in Tokyo, at the Institute of Developing Economies. And then, also, at the University of Indiana, in Bloomington. And there were shorter stints at several other places.

But I think that strong academic base was, to really great extent, supplemented by intercultural understanding. And I still feel that that was a very great contribution in my academic area, because it's not pure academics, but also understanding -- and I feel very fortunate that I'm able to have friendships from those days still. And primarily because that is how the East-West Center and the Hawai'i experience provided.

Life After EWC

Jawaharlal Nehru University

After having worked in IIPA until 1985, I wanted to go back to teaching. And that's the time that I went to JNU [*Jawaharlal Nehru University*] as a professor. In the political studies department. And worked there, and then, the vice chancellor, Prof. Agwani, picked me up to head the JNU's -- what they call Academic Staff College, which I headed for a couple of years.

And then I became the rector of the university. That was in '93, '94. And after that, I was picked up to head an institute, known as the National Institute of Education, Planning and Administration. I worked there for a term of three years and that was a very good experience. And, the reason why I say that it was a good experience is because at least the faculty still remembers me. (laughter) And, they really do.

It was also gratifying to work as policy level with Government of India. It's not that one is boasting of oneself, but it must have been good work - if you are valued by colleagues and peers like that. So, that's what I did then. Then, during the last couple of years of

affiliation with JNU, my main interest revolved round contributing to establish another center in JNU. And that was the Center for Study of Law and Governance. After considerable painstaking work and help from colleagues it is finally established.

We were able to manage funds from the Ford Foundation, from TATA Trust -- and it is now flourishing. It is now more than four years, since it was established.

I had a joint appointment at the time when I was serving the university -- but after that, I was retired. I did spend a lot of time at the Center. And for whatever worth it is, I'm still a source of some advice to them. (laughter) And in contributing to its future policies and programs.

On Career/India

One cannot really separate one's first individual accomplishments with what happens within the country. My orientation about research, and contribution to the developments in the area of my work -- which is public administration -- has brought about some change. I think I have made contribution in the development of the study of public administration in India.

And [*I received*] two awards, one from the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the other from University Grants Commission, in recognition of steering a different kind of perspective on the study of public administration. So I feel that, yes, I have made some contribution to the study of public administration in India.

Ties That Last

South Asia Regional Alumni Conference, New Delhi, 2005

I was head of the chapter some years ago -- quite some years ago. And at that time, if I contrast it with what is happening today -- there was a tremendous support and linkage

with the East-West Center. There was somebody in the United States Education Foundation of India (USEFI) who was responsible for East-West Center activities. And on him also fell the responsibility of looking after the work of the alumni. So the result was that we had a good linkage, we alumni did meet more often, and on social occasions. And got to know more about what was happening at the East-West Center. People did visit Delhi from the East-West Center, and meetings were held. Now, I feel that, with the number of scholarships going down, nobody is usually taking any responsibility for the East-West Center alumni. We really do not get the kind of support or information that I think we should get. If East-West Center wants to continue to reiterate the philosophy that it had when we had joined the East-West Center, then I think it has to provide this continuity. But if the East-West Center is purely a grant-giving agency, then it is competing with any other private foundation which is giving a scholarship and grants.

My only concern is that the East-West Center was different, and was different primarily because it catered to a larger vision of humanity, of peace, of interchange, of understanding. Which was not limited to pure academic work. And sometimes I do get the feeling that that kind of vision is suffering. But that's my feeling.

But for this conference [*EWC South Asia Regional Conference in New Delhi in 2005*] and but for the fact that Dan Berman is here from the East-West Center, which demonstrates that there is a great interest from the East-West Center of getting people together. I think I have really lost touch with the East-West Center alumni. Because there doesn't appear to be any other occasion.

But, this particular conference did provide -- and as I said, the mere fact that the East-West Center could locate Dan to be here for these months, demonstrated that there was strong interest in trying to build up that kind of vision -- how long it lasts, and how it works, is a very different matter.

All that I can say is that if I had not gone to the East-West Center, I would have missed something.