

# Redefining the retreat

Excerpts from the report by Gargi Sen, of the Magic Lantern Foundation, India, on her experiences as a TAP scholar.

I received a TAP scholarship for the year 200-2001 to pursue a Masters degree at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester. The Scholarship came at an opportune moment, both for my organisation Magic Lantern Foundation (MLF) and for me personally.

The MA course at the University of Leicester was perfect and appeared tailor made for us. First of all it is of one-year duration only (as compared to MA degree in India which is 2 years. But in India, because all of us lack the bachelors degree, we would have to study first for a bachelors and then a masters ? a marathon five years that none of us had the patience for.) Secondly, the course is dedicated to media theory and research. We were not interested to study media as a culture. That, we felt would defeat the purpose, as our intention is to understand specifically the sociological and political aspects and theory of media. We were also not interested to study media as practitioners. We train people, both nationally and internationally, in media practice and didn't want to pursue that.

And when Leicester University accepted me in the post-graduate course, it was naturally a cause for celebration. Receiving the TAP scholarship made the whole plan possible and feasible.

The TAP grant would cover the entire tuition and living costs for 9 months.

For me the course helped in many ways. I was not even familiar with approaches like political economy and cultural studies. The familiarity with theory helped us to articulate our position with precision.

At a personal level, I have learnt a lot from my one year at Leicester. Initially, it was not easy to live so far from the chaotic familiarity of home. The organized life of Britain is culture shock and I felt like a fish out of water. (Arundhati Roy sums this up better. She said she could not live in the West because ?good manners and hygiene? would kill her)

However, the ?hygiene and good manners? eventually turned out to be an advantage. Because of my complete alienation from the society around me, and also because of the difference in age and experience with my fellow class and housemates, I felt like I lived in a forest; a fact that considerably helped the academic pursuit. In fact in India, apparently in ancient times, Hindu sages would withdraw into the forests or climb isolated mountains, to reflect and ponder over issues of concern. I understand that Christianity has provisions for the notion of a retreat, a space for withdrawal from regular life to reflect and ponder. For me the year of study was also a time for reflection?it helped me to reflect on my life, my work with MLF and our common future?I do feel that my time with MLF is going to be very, very exciting in the future.