

The past three decades witnessed new global alliances in geopolitics. The formation of ASEM - Asia-Europe Meeting, an informal geopolitical bloc, provides a complementary axis to the APEC - Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. Unlike the American-centred alliance with a focus on economics and the nexus with East Asian Ascendancy, ASEM brings together countries of Europe and Asia into a new relationship in the post-cold war years. It remains a means for dialogue and cooperation.

Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) under ASEM with contributions from member countries has been a success story of collaboration and cooperation based on mutual respect and equal partnership. The focus is around political, economic and most importantly for me cultural issues. It is the cultural engagement that promotes cross cultural understanding and innovative networking. One of the key areas of activity is the next generation through ASEF's Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS).

The 1st ASEFYLS in 2015 focused on 'Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment' in Luxembourg. It was organized together with the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting and the 5th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference. The 2nd ASEFYLS centred on 'Access to Youth Employment' in 2017 in Korea. It contributed to the 7th ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting.

The 3rd ASEFYLS took place in conjunction with the 12th ASEM Summit from October 15-19, 2018 in Brussels. It focussed on Ethical Leadership. The dramatic escalation of changes in the digitally immersed world and rapid transformations of economies means that ethics need to inform human-centred and responsible leadership. The questions are what Ethics; what Leadership; and where are the Youth Voices. Ethics, Leadership and Youth Voices were rethought and interrogated within the frames of self-leadership, team leadership and societal leadership.

ASEFYLS promotes ethically literate leaders. It provides a platform for reflection, dialogue and practice. The values and challenges of ethical leadership are addressed in ten spheres: Culture, Economy and Finance, Education, Environment, Family, Media, Politics, Religion and Spirituality, Science and Technology and Sports. There is a concerted call to Action and Commitments on Ethical Leadership at the ASEM. ASEFYLS is focussed on youth and draws on intergenerational transmission of knowledge and ethical engagement in all spheres of life. These are woven across a complex web of relationships across the ASEM countries and their rich tapestry of diversity.

What I observed in the Summits is emergent and inspirational youth leadership that resonates across the groups. The facilitation of the Summits enables a seamless crossing of cultural borders. What is most important is that the youth groups do not meet in isolation but in conjunction with decision makers in all domains of engagement in ASEM. The fact that the ministers listen and engage in dialogue with the youth is significant. ASEFYLS takes place alongside the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summits, where Heads of States from the 51 ASEM partner countries, the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat meet to discuss the status and future of Asia Europe relations.

The ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS) is the go-to place for young people willing to learn new concepts, strategies and actions on how to create enduring impacts in society. It is an experiential platform for Asian and European students and young professionals. They adapt to a

360° approach on leadership development. ASEFYLS recognises that leadership takes place across all spectrum in society. Leadership is for those who are determined to take a leap by asking questions, thinking critically, action-planning and collaborating.

In most national and international meetings, the majority of presenters bemoan that the young people are not interested in culture and heritage and that so much is being lost with the passing on of elders. While this may be true to a certain extent, it is based on some presuppositions that need to be questioned. There is an undertow of thinking that culture is static, and that heritage is frozen in time, even when everyone goes to great lengths to emphasise the dynamic nature of culture and that intangible heritage is living. Moreover, it is the young people who are portrayed as not being interested. But with the disjunctions created by modernist thinking and rapid changes that it is the older generation that has fallen behind and has lost the appropriate capacity and skills of transmitting arts, culture and heritage values to the next generation. So, we should look at as to why we are failing to pass on our heritage values to the next generation and endangering our culture and heritage.

In India as in many countries, majority of the museums and heritage sites fail to attract young people. What is presented is de-contextualised heritage without relevance or meaning to the young people. The trend is to copy user and visitor studies from elsewhere in the Anglo-American museology and heritage studies. But the fundamental failure is to re-contextualise the heritage resources using creativity and intangible heritage of the contextual communities as a means to safeguard heritage resources. An understanding of demographics and psychographics of youth is important. But most importantly the leadership of young people themselves is needed in any transformative process. Hence, the importance of vehicles ASEFYLS.

ASEFYLS is based on 5 pillars: 1. Knowledge Stretching: Development of rewarding insights to equip young leaders with a tool-kit for action. 2. Action-Oriented: Commitments and co-creation of spin-off activities linked to leadership and sustainable development.

3. Network-Based: Space for networking among youth, business leaders, academics and policy makers 4. Leadership Exchange: Participation of ASEFYLS participants in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit. 5. Reciprocity-Focused: Learning and sharing of time, talent and resources beyond the ASEFYLS framework for greater impact.

In India and Andhra Pradesh in particular, the major focus is on high tech and professional education. Irrespective of the quality of education, it does not prepare young people as active citizens in society. A fundamental flaw in the educational system is that they are not informed in the basics of history and culture. The educational system or societal growth does not place the human face in its learning hubs. In many ways the educational system is enslaved to the globalising forces. All middle class aspirations seem to be for success monitored in earning capacity. The notion of ethics is rarely considered or discussed. The transmission of values from generation to generation through families and community groups is abrogated to a culturally bankrupt educational system. Hopefully multiplier effects from activities such as ASEFYLS will inform youth leadership and the ethics of engagement in rapidly transforming societies. It is good news that the next Summit of ASEFYLS will be in South Asia in 2020. Perhaps Ethics and Entrepreneurial Leadership on the Edge could be a theme to address.



PROF. DR. AMARESWAR GALLA

a.galla@yahoo.com.au

(Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an Indo Australian, has been involved with ASEM since its foundation as a motivational speaker during various summits)



ETHICS ON THE EDGE Asia Europe - Youth Leadership



NEXT
WEEK

Heritage Matters will bring you from Paris the efforts of UNESCO to minimise illicit import and export of cultural property

