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## **Innovations in Public Diplomacy** <sup>[1]</sup>

Embassies generally busy themselves promoting their own culture and values, spending a large sum of their financial resources inviting cultural troupes from the countries they represent. What if, in addition to promoting their own culture, they could promote the culture and talent of their host countries without committing major financial resources? Wouldn't it be a masterstroke in the practice of public diplomacy and economy of resources?

B.P. Koirala Nepal-India Foundation in association with the Embassy of India, Kathmandu has been experimenting with four such innovative initiatives at the Nepal-Bharat Library in Kathmandu, Nepal to expand the horizons of public diplomacy since January 2013. These four programs are aimed at promoting Nepalese art, literature, music, and film; they also encourage and engage the younger generation of Nepalese to share their ideas, experiences, and stories.

The *Conversations* series began in January 2013 and its 11th edition is scheduled for this month. The idea behind *Conversations* is to get two writers to discuss their work and ideas with each other to get to the very core of their writing and dig out their deepest thoughts, philosophies and messages. These conversations between writers are followed by a Q&A session in which the audience members get a chance to ask questions. This monthly program provides a literary platform for Nepalese writers and readers to learn from each other.

The *Conversations* series has hosted eminent Nepali authors such as Krishna Dharawasi and Amar Neupane, both recipients of Nepal's highest literary award. Other *Conversations*

included prominent artists such as Prakash Sayami and Sanat Kumar Wasti, comedians Haribansh Acharya and Mandan Krishna Shrestha, and best-selling authors and literary figures such as Buddhisagar, Nayanraj Pandey, and Abhi Subedi. *Conversations* has received wide media coverage in the mainstream media and has become one of the most popular literary events on Kathmandu's calendar attended by the 'who's who' of the Nepalese literary world.

*Poemandu*, a monthly poetry recitation program was launched in March 2013 on the occasion of the World Poetry Day to provide a platform to the Nepalese poets to recite their verses. It was inaugurated by the National Poet of Nepal, Madhav Prasad Ghimire and Chancellor of Nepal Academy, Bairangi Kainla. Over thirty Nepalese poets participated in the inaugural edition of *Poemandu*, reciting their poems in Nepali to Hindi, Newari, Maithili, English, Awadhi, Urdu, and Bhojpuri languages. There have been six subsequent *Poemandu* with equally prominent poets reciting their works and creating a culture-based dialogue between Nepalese and Indian poets.

*Cinemandu*, the third innovation stemming from the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu is a celebration of the fine Nepalese films. A new generation of Nepalese filmmakers, directors, actors, and actresses are working innovatively to give Nepalese film industry a niche of its own. At *Cinemandu*, notable Nepalese films are screened, in presence of the cast and crew of the film who interact with the audience after the screening of the film. *Cinemandu* has screened some of the best Nepalese films such as *Loot*, *Highway*, *Sanghuro*, *Shayad*, *Sunghava*, and *Kagbeni*. *Sunghava* is Nepal's entry for the Academy Awards in U.S. this year.

*Voices* is the final program in this genre in which one or two Nepalese thinkers, scholars, journalists, and more, give a talk on their areas of expertise. It was inaugurated with two journalists of Nepal, Kunda Dixit and Narayan Wagle followed by Raghu Rai celebrated photographer, Sudheer Sharma, Editor of Kantipur *Nepali Daily* and Akhilesh Upadhyay Editor of the *Kathmandu Post*, Prateek Pradhan, Editor of *Nagrik* with Gunraj Luitel, editor of *Annapurna Post*.

Each of these four programs are open to the public and have been very well attended. They take place at the Nepal-Bharat Library where only one hundred members of the public can be accommodated. As a token of appreciation, the Embassy gives relevant books to the speakers at the end of each program and the audience enjoys refreshments such as samosa, coffee, and tea.

These programs have now become brands in themselves and are likely to be initiated in the five most populous cities of Nepal such as Pokhara, Nepalgunj, Birgunj, Biratnagar, and Janakpur. A large number of young people turn up for these events to learn from their elders as well as to share their ideas, opinions, and feelings with them and each other.

Public diplomacy in this context could be redefined as putting the other country, its people, and culture first.

*Views expressed are personal.*

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