Opportunities do come to many people but there are some opportunities that have a long-term impact, if not a life-long impact on individuals. For me, once such opportunity has been the IIRA fellowship award that enabled me to participate in the fabulous Congress. The reasons why I consider the opportunity to be a life-time are manifold. First, this has been my first opportunity to participate in a conference outside India. Secondly, for the first-time, I got a taste of a huge academic event that witnessed the congregation of academicians, HR professionals, researchers, policy-makers, trade union leaders and others, deliberating on diverse issues related to the interdisciplinary field of Industrial Relations (IR). Secondly, the congress enabled me to interact with a number of renowned HR/IR academics and professionals. It would not be out of place to mention that exposure to grand academic events like the IIRA World congress is definitely an enormous value addition for faculty members like me who are shaping their teaching career in the field of HRM.

Upon arrival at the congress venue i.e. Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre at the side of the beautiful Darling Harbour, gave an indication of the nature of event that would take place in the next few days. The organised office of the Congress secretariat managed by Mr. Ian Wainwright, Ms. Susan Fleming, Ms. Andrea Gall and others; with whom I had communication through e-mail to clarify different issues related to my participation at the congress, attracted the attention of the participants. The IIRA office at the congress venue was efficiently managed by Ms. Johanna de Vries who was cooperative as always, and extended her help and cooperation in all possible manners and provided information about IIRA and its activities.

The congress started with an excellent prelude in the form of a discussion on “Global Financial Crisis, Economic Sustainability and Employment Relations” wherein perspectives from the different parts of the globe were highlighted by eminent speakers. Selection of this topic signifies the importance attached to environmental issues vis-à-vis contemporary employee relations. In my opinion, another attraction of the first day of the Congress was the “Forum on Fair Works Australia Reforms”. The sessions comprised representatives across sectors and highlighted the significant changes in the legal framework in workplaces in Australia. These have been interpreted and analysed by the speakers in the most effective manner. The discussions on academic, legal, industry and trade union perspectives integrated the views in an effective manner. The session was nicely conducted by Prof. Suzzane Jamieson and it got more attractive when many participants got the opportunity to ask questions to the learned speakers. This also tempted me to ask a relevant question to Mr. Mark Lenon, Secretary of Unions-NSW, which was effectively addressed by him. The evening of August 24, 2009 became more vibrant and attractive with the Welcome Reception where I got the opportunity to meet many of the friends who participated at the IIRA Asian Regional Congress held at Delhi and also academicians from my country like Prof. C. S. Venkata Ratnam, Prof. C.P.
Thakur, Prof. Ratna Sen, Prof. K. M. Sahoo and others. It was heartening to meet many of the friends representing PSCBC South Africa and they were very much eager to know about the current trends in trade unionism and employee relations in our country. It was also inspiring to meet Prof. Russell Lansbury, Prof. Tayo Fashoyin, Mr. Jon C. Messenger, Senior Research Officer at ILO and others with whom we discussed diverse issues related to our field and some of the areas that may be explored in future.

Apart from the plenary sessions and workshops, the attraction of the second day was the Opening Ceremony and more specifically the speech of the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of Australia in which she highlighted the importance of having a right balance between fairness and flexibility at work and the salient aspects of the Australian work place. The plenary sessions of the congress were very much attractive in terms of the themes and width and depth of coverage related to the topics/themes. The presentations of eminent scholars in the plenary sessions made the sessions more attractive. In Track 1, Prof. Anil Verma’s presentation set the ball rolling with some subsequent presentations on interesting areas like hierarchical order in different organizational forms, multiplicity of commitment, high performance work system etc by the other speakers. The plenary session on Voice and Representation at Work (Track 2) highlighted some relevant issues like union membership vis-à-vis length of service, solidarity practices etc which generated a lot of interest. The plenary session on “Work, Family and Community” was quite interesting in the sense that it highlighted the need to go beyond the workplace and to include its impact on the non-working life of workers. The other two plenary sessions namely “Institutions, Processes and Outcomes” and “New Forms of Work” were equally interesting because they highlighted some contemporary issues related to the field of IR. Once the plenary sessions were over, one difficult decision that we had to make was to decide which of the parallel sessions to attend since many of the sessions were interesting and promised some thought provoking discourses. There were some sessions that need a special mention but due to space constraint it is difficult to identify these. The papers presented were of highest standards and gave an idea about the trends in current research in IR/HR and related fields. These have been immensely helpful for researchers like us in identifying the current research issues including the methodological issues and also the areas that may be explored in future. Another interesting observation has been the presence of academicians from the field of Sociology and other areas in the congress that highlights the interdisciplinary nature of IR. I had the opportunity to interact with a couple of professors of Sociology with whom I discussed the areas where Sociology and HRM intermingled and some emerging research areas as well. The communication (poster) sessions were equally attractive as the workshops. The sincerity with which the presenters discussed in the communication sessions and their eagerness in answering questions raised by fellow participants exemplified the academic seriousness of the congress in its totality. Excellent time management in all the sessions including the plenary sessions was another issue that attracted my attention. One additional gain for me, was the visit to the Trades Hall on the second day of the congress. Some excellent collections relating to trade union movement in Australia that are available in the building gave an indication of the history of Australian Trade Union movement.
The congress has been successful in highlighting “continuity and change” in the field of IR as referred to by Prof. Russell Lansbury, and it has truly been a grand event in every aspect. This being my first participation in the world congress has been a new experience for me in many ways and I have made a pledge on the last day of the congress that I shall take serious effort to participate in every world congress that would take place in future with the objective of getting acquainted with the “continuity and change” in the field. I would like to thank IIRA and ILO and to Prof. Russell Lansbury, Prof. Tayo Fashoyin, Ms. Johanna deVries and others for giving me an opportunity to participate in the world congress that has truly been a life-time experience for me.