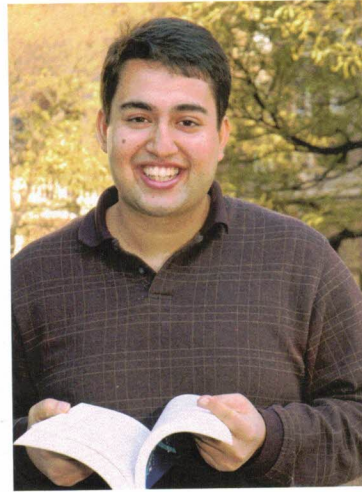


By MIRIAM FURMAN



Bibek Pandey

Columbia first-year law student Bibek Pandey, 26, chose Columbia Law School because of its world-renowned scholarship in international relations and human rights.

“The law professors in these disciplines are the finest in the world,” he says. “It also appealed to me to come to New York. With the U.N. right here, it is the center of international and human rights law.”

An only child of middle-class parents, Pandey spent his formative years at a Jesuit-run private school in Nepal’s capital city of Kathmandu. His early education, closely knit family and awareness of the poor socioeconomic conditions in Nepal — the small East Asian country that juxtaposes the grandeur of Mount Everest with a populace plagued by poverty and illiteracy — motivated him to seek a career in law and economics.

“My grandfather, one of the first medical doctors in Nepal, studied abroad in the 1950s and chose to return to his native country to provide free medical care to poor villagers,” he says. “He was my role model.”

Pandey’s close bond with his mother and young aunts — whom he regarded as siblings — spurred his interest in fighting gender inequality in Nepal and other countries where women are oppressed educationally and economically. Three-quarters of adult females in Nepal are illiterate, an example of gender inequality contributing to the poor economy in a developing nation. “Nepal is one of the only nations in the world in which men outlive women, and there are very few female professionals,” Pandey says.

After high school in Kathmandu, Pandey came to the United States for his undergraduate education at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn., where he received a double degree in political science and economics.

He was the only student in his graduating class to successfully defend

two honors theses: an economics paper that used econometric models to study the influence of economic growth on women’s health and education status in developing countries, and a political science thesis on the effect of the Maoist insurgency on Nepali women.

Pandey worked for two years after graduation as a research associate at the Spencer Foundation in Chicago, a private foundation that funds research to improve education in developing countries. He took a year off from work before entering law school to travel in Asia and volunteer in South Africa with a nongovernmental organization involved with children’s rights.

Pandey has a human rights fellowship at Columbia Law School and is also pursuing a master’s degree in economic policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He plans to earn both degrees in four years, which requires him to spend alternate years in Boston.

Although he may eventually work as an economist or academic, Pandey decided to get a law degree to open more options. “For me,” he says, “law is a means to achieving social justice.”

MIRIAM FURMAN is a contributing editor at Columbia Law School.