

A VOICE FROM AMERICA

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It is so natural for human beings to reflect back in time, and it becomes all the more a recurring feature for the thinking minds when one is away from one's sweet home and homeland. Feeling culturally alienated, growing nostalgic, looking for one's sense of belonging, remembering the always good old 'golden days' become a part of not only one's daily but moment to moment living. Such is the case here as well! The very word 'Ravi' with its deep-rooted linguistic, metaphorical, and cultural connotations, brings to my mind reverberations, ripples and ripples of unending thoughts and memories, memories that haunt as well as sweeten the world of dreams, yearnings that glorify the rich bygone days for a promising future. 'Ravi' as a name and a history written on the tides of time, is a solid image and a photogenic reality still preserved in the minds of 'Old Ravians'. It unfolds innumerable recollections through each page, each line, and each word; it is the ever-flowing river of knowledge. To be a 'Ravian' still knits together the threads of affiliations and acquaintances that we all long for as we flash back in seconds and minutes from our different spaces and distance in time. One cannot just stop wondering how powerfully:

*Music when soft voices die
Vibrates in the memory.*

(P.B. Shelley)

How can one forget the magnanimity of those great walls with each brick telling the stories of times gone by. How can one not love to feel pass through those huge columns and corridors of learning and enlightenment with rising arches of creativity and protection! How possibly can one not let the thoughts of booming prosperity elevate with up-going staircases to reach out for the skies of wisdom! How can one scratch away the picturesque images of those cherishable stretches and leisurely sittings on the lush green lawns that always spring forth fragrances of love, loyalty, and friendship! How can one not desire to get lost once again through those small yet dense luscious groves and gardens of secret sharing spots around! How can one erase powerful and assimilating yet softly modulating overlaps of faces and voices, of noisy traffic and singing birds! A strange sensory experience electrifies reminiscence when all of it comes together to remind what really 'The Ravi' may mean or what actually a 'Ravian' may believe in. How can one not welcome the echoing memories of those affectionate and caring dispositions, those devoted guides and teachers walking forever in one's mind to enhance learning and scholarship! Who would not love to embrace the faces of friends and fellows that treasure

nourishment for life just as their recollected presence is felt through dreams and daydreams! All this becomes so salubrious and a peacefully lasting experience!

It is with this spirit of remembrance and reverence that I have thought of addressing back posterity at my alma mater. I can see waves and waves of 'Ravians' floating through the oceanic depths of instruction that our grand institution has been offering to generations over time. I can see a multitude tied together into the bond of solidarity with an assigned identity that they carry as a passport wherever they go in the world. Let me make it clear at the very outset that for me to be an educated and civilized Pakistani and be groomed at the wonderful institutions of my homeland is a matter of great pride and honour. It is due to this academic source of knowledge that I could open the portals to global learning and, therefore, expand the horizons of my thinking. It is due to that native upbringing of mine in my country that I could make it possible to grow global in my ideas and practice, retaining my difference with honour, competing other nationalities with gusto and esteem. To be acknowledged with prestige and honour in a country that is far bigger than ours in size and resources brings me confidence that we all have talent for competition and competence. We, as individuals, as institutions, or as a nation, are no less than any other in the world. We need to build this confidence on such lines as to strengthen our faith that we have to share our part of learning with the world without losing the spirit of tolerance and hard work that is our legacy.

Getting global and competing with nations is the exigency of the present time because web-pages are knocking at our alcove doors and on our computer screens inside our houses. Hi-Tech once again has swamped human understanding to influence relationships beyond simple geographical boundaries. Cyber-parlance and digital-discourses have opened chapters for cross-cultural inter-connections, making log-ins and log-outs as travel agencies and electronic waves as sallies across borders: immediate and abrupt. E-mails and voice-mails come and go, squeezing distance into an almost tangible reality fed upon our thoughts for closer affinities. Cellular phones and video-mails have invaded the invisibility of our locations and made us conspicuous by our absence. Technology has enabled our expressions to float fast from one end to the other, lending our reflective ideas a cross-cultural code, making social messages out of our isolated ratiocination. On the blinking screens and through an atomic transference of invisible waves, facts and data hurl around, making choices difficult for us. Amid the anarchy of information surrounding us from earth to skies, from ocean to space, humanity stands stunned, though not completely fallen apart all the time. Well, this is the turn of the century, a universal metamorphosis anticipating the New Millennium.

Like all the other walks of life, globalization of knowledge and information through cyber-pipeline has fast changed our perspectives about education, describing it more within the context of distance education. Classrooms have found more open contexts as the mentalities confined within four walls connect to the regions beyond our molecular human perception to grasp visions transmitted through online

resources. Being in one's homeland or being in a foreign land, physically or mentally, has become equally vital for the growth of learning through distant experience. And then, sharing of these experiences at a wider and more global level is becoming an indispensable and almost inevitable reality that may lead to a completely different sort of cultural integrity not only at national but also at international level. My academic experience in the US has opened avenues of research and innovation that have transformed technology into a requirement towards the future of our human education. I can remember my habitual reluctant desirability for the skillful adaptation of my imagination and dreams through digital resources. Though I have always been a humble learner in the field of language and literature, I have to accept technological challenges of the time at each and every step in order to modify my methods of learning and their transference. But let me also add that enjoyment through reading and analyzing literature has not let me lose grip on the spirit of my subject because human relationships and human beings still matter a lot to me being a student of English literature and world-literature in English.

I can see the human element still at the center of all learning about the contemporaneous environmental progress. Like William Wordsworth, I still keep my ears open and try to listen to the 'still sad music of humanity' under the pressures of success and progress, searching desperately for what John Keats juxtaposed in 'beauty' and 'truth'. I can still turn back to William Shakespeare's delineation of human tragedy, wondering how 'flies' and 'wanton boys' connect even today to proceed the killings committed by 'gods' of science and technology as a mere 'sporting' activity against artistic ventures. I can see how Christopher Marlowe's 'over-reacher (*Dr. Faustus*)' keeps reminding humanity of the consequences of excesses. I can assess how Mary Shelley's monster in 'Frankenstein', the product of gross callousness in society, may approach humanity for choking its ironic dreams, itching to lord it over while going wild itself. I can see how from metaphysical to mechanical chains of existence human beings may bear the 'Aristotelian' categorization of the magnanimous human fall, or how 'Brechtian' paradox of multiple mimetic splits may influence common human capacities to revolt for freedom. I can also measure the absurdity of our tragicomic survivals exaggerating themselves through Samuel Beckett's ordinary 'tramps' in 'Waiting for Godot' and perceive the complexity of human role-assignments and role-changes as they forecast surreal shadows of our breakdown in Pirandellian terms in his 'Six Characters'. I also graph how the drama of human struggle against oppression and violence is politicized for racial and gender-based discriminations, and how America and American-ness, like a mini-stage for the struggling diversity around the globe becomes a battle-ground for human survival. How multicultural and multi-ethnic groups slowly and gradually assimilate with their differences to form unity amid diversity, and yet the crisis of multiplicity may not let them escape altogether haphazard howls for locating their lost identities! How belonging and alienation counter-act to adumbrate the paradoxical human experiences around primeval forces of love and hate, power and resistance!

Human struggle to win love and fight against hatred and violence, existential to economic and linguistic to technological, unfolds infinite stories replete with inexplicable experiences. However, this does not change the fact that we, in our times, have to live amid a variegation of the evolutionary progress that we have inherited over centuries. Today, we live in the present moment of history that contains traumatic experiences of the past as well as dramatic dreams for the future. Destined victims of our time and age, we have to bear the burden of being born at a moment where our atomic existence and our cellular computation may blast our being into millions of split personalities or tie together the tapestries of our multi-colored livings into compact discs and microchips. We may be torn apart to live separately as islands of our solitary beings or we may be commuted together into a village of diversity with hands joined for future salvation and solidarity. The chemistry of our choices puts us in dilemmas ranging from national to international controversies.

Thinking back upon the issue of our growing educational and academic needs that surround us with a host of complexities and multiple layers of emerging problems, changes in the field of institutional learning are fast influenced by human experiences that result from technological and cyber-spatial inventions/interventions. Many realities shape our life-styles, as we grow more and more complex, demanding learning with focus. It is a gradual learning process that needs to be promoted and followed amid the chaotic rat-race of being always on the forefront. Our choices of career and profession based on our aptitudes for and attitude towards certain subjects certainly play a vital role, and then comes the use of resources that open themselves to us for furthering our cause.

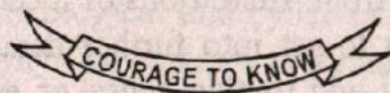
As a result of my experience in the United States at the turn of the century, I would like to emphasize the significance of perseverance and persistence through hard work as the key to any of our focused choices. Being a learner and a promoter of learning, I suggest a strong shake-hand with technological advancement for the future prosperity of our academic community. Like a quill or a pen, the digital drama of the cybernetic means of communication shape the power of the written word from new analytical angles. From the linear dynamics of earth to heaven we have entered into spaces in between to see our words floating in more multidimensional art forms with different sizes and directions. As we could assess the power of the pen only when the word got written so can we access the wider range of the semantics of our morphological existence only when we are read and interpreted at a larger scale through the computerized cosmos. Writing modes are changing fast throughout the world and so should our means to express. Exchanging views through digital assistance is a universally acknowledged fact and must be grasped as soon as possible to compete in the space age. I know that the truth about human dilemma of existence will remain grooved around personal gaps and spaces that humanity inherits at large, but sharing of these individual spaces through the space-technology itself has become the most powerful means to express our inborn loneliness. An awareness about spaces, within or without, itself becomes the proof of our physical as well as

metaphysical presence, enriching the debate about 'I think, therefore I am' against 'I am, therefore I think.'

Coming back to final thinking about struggles within our academic spaces, international entrance and qualification tests to different universities may pose a great technological threat to future competitors. Exams also are a skill to be mastered for growing global. Competing with this industry of examination requires educational as well as economic stability and risks of failure may block chances for acceptance and growth. Getting global by physically living abroad offers many more other challenges, which need more words and space to express the controversies built around them. Besides all the pressures of academic, cultural, and personal alienation I have mentioned before, day to day pressure in the United States is highly gripping, I would say killing at times. At many moments, sitting all by oneself on the study table, one grows too philosophical and questions the whole rationale behind waging this holy war of invading knowledge by being away from one's family, friends, and homeland. Living in complete isolation in a 'cut-off' region makes one feel like a Robinson Crusoe of our times who is hiking onto far-flung spatial islands! At such depressing and skeptical moments only the noble ideal of "sacrifice" and one's faith in God's sweet Will saves one from frustrations of a consistent and seemingly never-ending struggle. I do not want to get into further details about cultural shocks and crises of difference that might add to this sense of estrangement. There could be differences of opinion, petty politics of right and wrong, ideological confrontations, attitudes of non-acceptance and at times discriminatory tortures, unfavorable weathers, tight schedules and deadlines, institutional demands and requirements from teachers and peers, pressures of socializing within constraints and limitations, and so many more hurdles. Being away from home and homeland and being reminded of their comparatively controllable atmosphere offers a complete contrast to a hoard of uncontrollable noises that may be nerve-racking at times. But then, the positive point about all these seemingly negative and almost exilic elements is that by understanding these differences in time and distance one always gets stronger and becomes a better learner. Suffering does bring wisdom still!

There may be many more difficulties as well as promises to talk about but my space may not allow me to mention all of them in detail for fear of getting too extensive. Let me conclude that with all these distracting noises around and with a determination to keep alive the identity of one's own voice one learns to live amid diversity and difference with courage and forbearance. My objective in mentioning so many negative elements is not at all to discourage the future competitors from fighting out their positions, but to make them aware of these impediments about independent growth. I assure you that besides difficulties, there are so many encouraging incentives waiting for you to widen the horizon of your thinking. They say, 'take it easy', and that is the best solution to face challenges. Celebrate your crises, like everybody in that children's movie, 'Lion King' says: '*Akauna Matata!*' connoting that bad times come and go, so do not worry that much and be happy!

These arguments may be extended to any length, but amid so many significant voices that will get a printed space on this of 'The Ravi', my humble voice from America may mean some temporary group of 'Ravians'. I hope my voice, though physically far at the moment, is still audible, accessible, and understandable in the dynamics of digital-discourses that I am using right now to transfer my end of the earth to the other. Could this be a connection enough of the future to revive their 'Ravian-ness' through a cybernetic communication spread in time, space, and distance around the new millennium?



To stay cheerful when involved in a gloomy and onerous business is no inconsiderable art; yet what could be than cheerfulness? Nothing succeeds in which high spirits place of strength is the proof of strength.

(Twilight of the Idols, Friedrich Nietzsche)