

AN UNFINISHED (EFFIGY) STORY

By: Prof. Mirza Ather Baig

Translated by: Aqsa Ijaz

(I)

Sirajdin, the old gatekeeper of the party office, was assigned the task of preparing the effigy. The assignment had been so unexpected that, at first, he couldn't believe what the two senior party organizers were talking about.

Half the night had already gone by. Hashim Sahib and Rehman Sahib were through with preparations for tomorrow's procession, including speakers, demonstrators, megaphones, flower garlands, tires to be burnt in public, newspaper reporters and, the effigy.

The effigy! The moment the thought echoed in Hashim Sahib's mind there was the sound of thunder in the sky; heavy rains had already started in the city.

"And the effigy," Rehman Sahib said distractedly as he gazed at the rain.

"Yaar, this rain makes me feel nervous. What if it doesn't stop? Tomorrow's procession will be a waste, if the roads are still drowned."

"Well, for now, just think it's a blessing from God. Don't you know when it suits them people in authority consider the rain a sign of divine support?"

"But yaar think of the fire! I mean the effigy. Have you decided who's going to make it?"

"Yes," Hashim Sahib said thoughtfully, "it won't do without an effigy."

At this point Rehman Sahib felt a sudden itch in his left ear, and began twirling his finger into it, turning the interior upside down. When the itching subsided, he thought perhaps it was his old ear problem coming back. Here was an excuse for him to not give his speech tomorrow. But wouldn't a throat infection seem a more appropriate excuse on this occasion? Anyway, tomorrow, after the procession in the evening... or, if he got arrested, after the release, he'd head straight for an ENT specialist.

He said out loud, in a high pitch voice, "Yaar, do something! We have to make the effigy".

Since the beginning, everything had been done before Sirajdin, the gatekeeper. Indeed, for days, whenever it had come to him he'd embraced the leaders' orders whole-heartedly.

But presently, as he sat in a corner observing the two party leaders, he swung between his devotion to them and the pangs of hunger that he felt in his belly, urging him to go back to his quarters as soon as the work was over, and eat to his fill.

The other workers had all left one by one, after being assigned a duty for tomorrow. And now this effigy business had popped up from nowhere, and Hashim Sahib and Rehman Sahib had stayed on longer.

And now this rain had started...well, that was not really a problem they had car to leave on, but what of all this fuss about the effigy...?

"An effigy we must burn, Rehman Sahib we must burn it! And he, the **** he shall burn with it. So **** this **** is the matter of**** sentiments. A matter of public

sentiments..." Hashim Sahib would resort to a bad word every sentence, which was an effective way of speaking with him.

A lightning bolt lit up the room and as he sat down on the stool waiting for the sound of thunder, he looked at Sirajdin.

You will make the effigy, Sirajdin,' he said, and the thunder sounded.

Sirajdin heard it in the same moment as Hashim Sahib's voice. Numb for a while, he began with a stutter, "Ye-yeah... yes Sir Jee! Effigy..."

Rehman Sahib chortled.

Hashim Sahib frowned and said, "Effigy.... Sirajdin... his... his effigy... it will be burnt to ashes tomorrow... do you understand?"

"A puppet made of clay?" Sirajdin asked in a shaking voice.

Rehman Sahib chortled again. "A puppet made of clay will only burn in hell, Sirajdin."

Hashim Sahib said disapprovingly, "This isn't a time for bantering, Rehman Sahib. It's a difficult situation. Make this nincompoop understand that he will have to make the effigy. It's already one o'clock in the night while the city is drowned in the rain. All our workers are gone. We don't have anyone else. Make him understand. He will have to do it!"

Rehman Sahib stepped forward and spoke fondly, "Look, Sirajdin, as far as I can recall you and I joined the party together. We've invested our entire young life in its cause, and now here we are, in our old age."

"Sir jee! What are you saying?" Sirajdin felt he had ascended the heights halfway up the sky. "Tomorrow, Sir Jee, I... Your Highness I... I'm ready to give my life for the party!" "It's not your life we require at this moment, Sirajdin," Hashim Sahib said, and Rehman Sahib, with a smile, "Keep your life safe, Siraj. Just do as Hashim Sahib says."

"I'll do it most certainly, Sir Jee," Siraj said, putting his hand on his chest. "I'll make billions, and trillions of clay figures."

"What an idiot!" Hashim Sahib snapped. "Don't you understand? We don't need billions or millions! We just need one that will burn! Make one**** make one*** his**** his*****" His words were so gross that both Sirajdin and Rehman Sahib felt their hearts squirm.

"I'll do it, Sir Jee, I'll do it! Just tell me how to go begin, I mean, how do I ...?"

"Yes, that I shall tell you," Hashim Sahib took a deep breath and looked around the room. The rain had subsided, and the blue glow that came from the sky was soundless. He was disappointed with what he saw. "Just the party's records in this room." He turned to Sirajdin, whose eyes and mouth were wide open to swallow down his orders. "Do one thing. Look in your quarter, in all the rooms. What you need is this: four bamboo sticks, two for the legs, and two for the arms. Tie them tightly together. Then look for something for the head; some old pillows, old clothes... yes, a small pillow will do. Just cover it with a

cloth. Then you've got to make a shoe necklace. And on the head, remember! Use some black soot from a griddle to make eyes and nostrils. Got it?"

Sirajdin broke out laughing. He was enjoying looking forward to those moments of creativity. He spoke with more confidence. "I got it, Sir Jee... absolutely...But... Sir Jee... how would one tell that it is his. I mean that****'s effigy?" With some effort, he stopped himself from further abuse.

"Yes. yes. Here, perhaps. I can help you. Sirajdin." Rehman Sahib said. "While making this effigy, it is important to bring to your mind all those people you detest. detest so badly that had you gotten hold of them...had you gotten them in your hands. Siraj, you'd have torched them! You feel it? Those are the emotions you must keep burning inside you."

"Inshallah!" exclaimed Sirajdin, with frightening confidence.

"Bravo." said Hashim Sahib. "And listen, you'll be reimbursed for whatever you spend on the bamboo sticks, pillows and the cloth. Don't worry about that. And tomorrow before burning it, we'll announce that the party's old gatekeeper Sirajdin has made this effigy.

"The reputation of this office is in your hands now."

Sirajdin nodded. Hashim and Rehman Sahib patted him on the back and left.

Rain returned with thunder as they departed. Sirajdin, in a dreamy mood, closed the office door and came out to the verandah. Up in the sky the clouds blew in a breeze.

In the green light of the bulb hanging in the veranda he saw petals from the sunflowers scattered in the bed below. And despite having been promoted to the high station of the creator of the effigy he thought, like the caretaker that he was, to get the gardener to cut down the rest of the flowers tomorrow, for their season was past.

The stuff he needed to make the effigy was ready at hand. There was no lack of wasted cloth and spent pillows; there were the bamboo sticks he had once used for putting up the party banners. He picked the rags he needed from the old clothes, and a thick needle and a thread to sew them into a shape. From the round griddle on the stove he scraped out the soot for eyeholes and nostrils. He acted upon Hashim Sahib's directions to the letter.

Then, he got down putting those things together. He picked up a bamboo stick, which could have been a leg, the backbone, or a support for the head; or the two arms, if it were to go across, at the back. He couldn't decide, and so put it down.

A strange uneasiness crept into his heart.

With sweat on his forehead he realized that there was a forehead required for the effigy too. And, the two hands, and the neck, and...and...I won't be able to do it, he feared.

Then he remembered what Rehman Sahib had told him: Think of all those people you detest, so badly that you'd burn them down to ashes!

He smiled, as if a weight had been lifted from his chest. This is easy. All I have to do is think about people I really hate... who I'll burn to ashes if ever I'd ever get a chance. It's so simple. I should start from my childhood. Yes, right from the very start.

As he began to think, a diabolical thought crossed his mind. Should he also burn his father, along with the effigy? The idea shocked him to the extent that he touched his ears, and sought the forgiveness of his God: "tobah tobah!"

Then again, he started thinking of the most hated people, whom he'd rather toss into the flames to be devoured with the effigy, and he was amazed that though, they did appear, they did so as a hotchpotch of assorted organs. The ears of a donkey, he saw, the snout of a dog, and eyes and moustaches, my God! Eyes and moustaches...

He realized that conjuring the most detestable people in his imagination had left him half dead; and those organs of hatred he had awoken in mind's eye, bit by bit, had chipped away at his spirit, and this task had started to drain his force even before it had begun.

He recalled that he was hungry. For such a long time his stomach had been hollow and twisting. One should eat, even if it's for the task of setting people on fire. He got up and went into a corner, where he ate a couple of naans filled with minced meat that had been distributed among the party workers earlier that afternoon. Having polished off the naans and downed a couple of glasses of water he began putting the effigy together. He looked affectionately at him, who was taking shape on the floor...

He strained himself hard and at length. And with great resolve, he recalled that incident, when he worked at another place. His owners had accused him falsely of theft, and had him arrested. He had been taken to the police station and beaten all night long, and all the while he had pleaded his innocence. Those moustaches...those eyes... those feet.... those boots... and those kicks, he remembered it all.

And yet, nothing happened.

A fever of sorts would grow on him at the thought of an organ or another and disable him. Perhaps he had burnt himself out even before he had had the naans, when with an empty stomach he had summoned to his mind those grand and grotesque innards of the most detestable people...

But this is about the party's reputation, he said to himself, and got up in a panic and shook himself twice, thrice. Yet again, he tried to tie up the effigy where he wanted its back to be upright, but the rope slipped from his hands.

"It is a matter of the Party's honour," echoed in his mind.

They will be announcing it tomorrow: "This effigy here, that's being burnt, is made by our old gatekeeper, Sirajdin."

Sirajdin hurried towards the window and opened it because he wanted to see the rain outside. He was shocked to see that the clouds were no longer there, and neither was the rain or thunderstorm anywhere to be found. The moon was bright in the late night sky as if nothing had happened.

And then, Sirajdin...

(2)

Letter to the Great Writer

Aslaam-O-Alaikum:

By now you must have guessed who calls you by this name. How are you? It has been a while since we talked or met. I'm writing to you because... rather, also because there is an Unfinished writing... or an Unfinished story that I'm presenting to you ... Words slip out of my control as I sit down to write a letter, but anyway, to hell with it - to hell with it, to hell with it!

So my dear, the thing is that you are an established writer. You write with a plan.

You're published, and publicized. I, on the other hand, write out of literary dysentery that sometimes afflicts me. Then, at times, the same affliction comes back to stand in my way, and I retreat and I return to health as I do in the case of this story.

At this point I suggest that you read the story attached with this letter, and then resume.

So you've read it... whatever it is.

I'd named it as "The Story of an Effigy" but now, it is an Unfinished Effigy...or Story. Well now that too is an interesting and wonderful thing. Is it an Unfinished - effigy story... or an Unfinished effigy - story. These are two different things, I mean: story of an Unfinished effigy, and the Unfinished story of an effigy? See now, how we're miles apart, you and I?

So my Dear, I had thought that I would complete this story thus:

Sirajdin completes the effigy. Hashim Sahib and Rehman Sahib return the next day, and Hashim sahib asks Siraj, in his nasty, abusive language, about what he has made. "You mother f*****, it doesn't even look like a human being!" he yells.

Rehman Sahib chortles, and jokes that Picasso perhaps inspired Sirajdin. In the end, however, it is decided that the same thing will be burned after some polishing, since there is no time left. It will be set on fire when the time comes. But when the time comes, it rains, and the protest is disrupted. Sirajdin, however, is adamant that the burning must go on. He finds petrol from somewhere, and with the protestors all scattered under the tin shelters of the shops, sets it on fire.

The protestors and the leaders are astounded by what is witnessed.

The blazing effigy, in that pouring torrent from hell, cries out in a manner that clenches the heart. And then one wonders if it is a single effigy, or two, or...?

I think you know what I mean to say.

But then, my dear, I thought this ending would be too political. You know, how I hate political stories, and yet more and more stories that try to mirror the issues of today. In fact, I abhor the whole idea of mirroring. So what should I do?

As it is, I have a number of other endings in mind for this story - or whatever you might call it. But tell me, what do you suggest?

Everything else is fine here. I keep breathing in some damned void. Though, it is written: one should live in happiness, wherever he is.

Dearest, do skim through this piece. And, between us two, if you should like to tweak it a little and publish in your name, it's all alright. I won't object. In fact, I will be happy.

On a different note, my financial condition is rather bad. It was never good anyway. But now, your bhabi has to go through a gall bladder surgery. Friends are chipping in, you know, in the name of charity. I look forward...

Do tell me more. Your recent book is better than the previous one.

I shall take leave now.

Yours truly,

The Unfinished effigy

(3)

There happen to be various burnt and wasted notes found everywhere in the world. Who wrote them and when...Why were they written and why burnt? Nobody knows.

MY, ME, I; OURS, WE, US; THEIRS, THEY, THEM

By: Prof. Dr. Waqas Khwaja

It is a truth perhaps not unacknowledged that though we can, and may, leave home, we never return to it. Yes, yes, we come back sometimes, even often, in some cases. But where is that home? What has become of it? Why doesn't it feel the same anymore? Why don't we recognize it as we remember it? What happened to it? What happened to the dear ones we left behind? To our parents, our siblings, our relations, the inhabitants of our household, our pets? That room that was ours, though its furniture looks more or less the same, is not quite that intimate, private space it once was to us. The rooms and corridors, that clock above the mantelpiece, the shining dining table, the beds, the sofas and rugs, same, but not the same. The kitchen, the pots, and the crockery, somewhat faded and fatigued. The garden, still blooming with flowers as we left it, but why does it look a little stale, a little ordinary? The backyard and its fruit trees, still there, but helpless and bereft somehow.

And then it may hit us suddenly. It is we who have changed. Our orbit of experiences, our views, our perceptions. Where is that youth who skipped about without a care in the world, floated in and out of the house on whim, dashed through corridors and rooms, swerving past furniture and stands with dainty breakable displays, heady with laughter and delight? It is our childhood that is gone. And, with it, that childhood vision is no more. It is the innocence of youth too, that naïve, unsuspecting faith in the world, in the present as we had known it and the future that we imagined for ourselves with never a thought to the loved ones, as if they would never dwindle, never decline, that is lost. It is the young adult just coming into its own, seeing everything with that delicious wonder of a new and fabulous discovery, alight with expectation, who is gone. And everyone else has grown up or aged a bit, the time of separation opening a window to their physical attributes and personality traits that wasn't there before. In some strange way we have become strangers to those we left behind. In some equally strange way, those we left behind have become strangers to us.

But what do we do with memories? There everything is preserved just the same as it ever was. Now, perhaps, we realize, for the first time, that the world doesn't ever stand still. People grow up. People grow old. People are fragile. They pass. Place and location do not remain the same. Distance has made everything dearer to us, but when we come back it is no longer as we remember it. Indeed, it is not just our perception of it. The world too has changed. But who are these, calling for attention from the dark borders of our memory?

What is it we have forgotten? Are there people missing from this picture of our past? People who have dutifully fallen back from what memory has preserved. People who would like you to remember them, but don't expect it. People who would want you to notice them, but are hesitant to project themselves to your attention when you are so engaged and excited in meeting all those long lost relatives and friends? Look! They are still there. No, not poor relations. They too, perhaps, get delayed, and somewhat casual, attention. Oh, it is our cooks and housemaids, our dusting boys and gardeners, our drivers and chowkidars, our sweepers and sweepresses, diligent, silent until addressed directly, and often invisible. Now, perhaps, we see them called to present themselves and say their salaams before being

dismissed out of sight, except those that are expected to serve or provide food and other necessary services. Quite a cast of characters living in the shadows!

We notice, now, with some discomfort how brusquely, how imperiously, they are treated. If we were not already uneasy about this before we left home, this discernment too, probably, is the fruit of our "foreign" experience. They are expected to wait and languish silently in the background, alert, however, to any sign or word of need, while we enjoy your lavish repast, our deserts, our exotic refreshments, over an exchange of anecdotes and jokes, and the regulation after-dinner session of political wrangling. We are abashed to see how they are treated as if they did not exist, that is, not until they are needed, and how their slightest hesitation or confusion is an occasion for ridicule and sneers, if not downright abuse. But our courage fails when we wish to protest against this treatment of the domestics. We have just arrived. Everyone is so happy to see us. We don't want to spoil the atmosphere for everyone. And we remember, with a pang, an unpleasantness or two that might have occurred on such "fancy" issues of rights and respect a few years earlier, when we had not yet made our way out into the wide-open world across the oceans.

How shallow and artificial our world is, we think. How hypocritical! How safely cocooned in the security of family status, wealth, and entitlement! Even when we break away, we know we are still part of the system that favors those with family resources at the expense of millions who live but a life in name, ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-sheltered, debarred not only themselves from advancing their lot in life, but in imagining a life of dignity, of education, a respectable opportunity to earn a living, of adequate healthcare, comfort, even for their kids. They are all around us, but our kind, it strikes us, do not see them, do not notice them at all as we go about our daily indulgences and the routine of complaints about all that we desire but cannot have. How much do we know about them? How they live, or even where they live? What they eat when they are in their own small room or hovel with their families? How their time is spent when they are not working in our homes? Do they have a second source of income? Do they double as peddlers selling ice-cream from pushcarts, or balloons on a stick, or potato chips from a bag slung on a shoulder? Do they work as cobblers in the evening, or ply a rickshaw for someone, or hire themselves out for petty services? Isn't that woman roasting gram and corn on that small roadside oven of dried clay the Mehtrani who sweeps our floors in the mornings? We don't know. And we don't care. It is not for us to worry what these people do, or how they survive, or what their needs are? We know that our cook isn't one of them, for he, or she, is on duty with us twenty-four hours a day and gets to lodge in our servant quarters in recompense. We know that the housemaid is well provided for with a room of her own in the servant quarters, for she too is needed 24/7. But we are not responsible for the whole world.

Now if we emerge out of our bourgeois angst (or is it anomie?) for a few minutes, can we visualize how someone from the province of the people in the shadows feels about leaving home, and coming back to it? Do they have the same narcissistic thoughts and feelings that we have about loss of innocence and the loss of home, the passage of time and the ravages it leaves in its wake? They are the ones, for example, recall, whom we are so contemptuous of when we travel on that last stretch of our journey to Pakistan, passengers

the plane picks up from transit stations like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, and the like. They with those huge, out-of-date, portable three-in-one audio systems, rolled beddings corded with hemp twine or plain cotton rope, battered suitcases, and a miscellany of toys and knickknacks in hands or in plastic bags, teetering in the aisle as they go about trying to find a suitable storage bin for their assorted luggage. And we turn up our noses at the way they talk, the way they carry themselves, the outlandishly garish clothing they wear, at how those of them who have women in tow have them all covered up in burqas or chadors, but all extravagantly painted and made up underneath. They too have family and friends waiting for them at home. They have kids too, who are growing up in their absence, without the immediacy of their love and protection. And spouses left behind, expected just to take the jibes of in-laws, neighbors, friends and strangers alike as they patiently wait for their return. These hardy souls voyaging out to seek a living, to improve their economic condition, may come back to harrowing changes as well-the sickness or death of a child, parents in anguish over insufficient resources suffering extreme deterioration of health or mental breakdown, families turned out of a two-room flat simply because they could be thrown out, simply because they had no one to look out for them, a spouse gone astray, unable to cope, or lost to the unrelenting mists of black depression. Loaded with their cheap toys and battered suitcases stuffed with bargain clothing and other inexpensive gift items, how do they feel when they arrive home? Do they tell their family how they slaved 20 hours a day to bring this little bounty of cheap stuff for them? Or how they were despised and mistreated by the people they work for, by the people of the country they work in? Do they describe to them their shabby living quarters, where they share a 12x14 room with fifteen people, all sleeping on the floor, all using the only closet bathroom available to them? Will it help if they said how they had been abused and betrayed year after year, generation after generation, age after age, for as long as they or their ancestors can remember? Who is interested in their plight? Are we? It is as if there were two separate nations within a "nation", the haves and the have-nots, the prosperous and the destitute. Between them there is no understanding. Not just their vocabularies, their languages are different.

So no one writes the histories of the dispossessed and the marginalized. It is inscribed only on the skin of their bodies and in the invisible intricacies of their brain cells, and such inscriptions are easily obliterated. We may set people on fire and burn them to death. We may shoot them with a gun. Blow them up with a homemade bomb. We may chop off their head. Or we may shut them up in a prison cell and just forget about them. There are many ways of getting rid of people we may consider undesirable. And there are many pretexts to find people as offensive and expendable. An expression may be too bold. A gesture may upset us. Someone's religion may not be quite acceptable. Even the wrong denomination may ignite our ire. But poverty and helplessness, this is particularly odious, and it generates in us an incredible sense of empowerment, for in such a condition we can disfigure and destroy with impunity, without fear of consequences. Our spirit rages with some primordial urge to crush and pulverize the poor and the powerless. It is there blood, sweat, and tears that ensure our prosperity. This is the social value we have inherited from our ancestors. This is the economic system we swear by. This is our political philosophy irrespective of our form of government, civilian or military.

And we who have turned our face from this commonplace crowd of people find in

them the source of all evil. They are the unregenerate, the misguided, the most retrograde. It little bothers us that they comprise over 90% of the country's population, and if they could organize and plan an uprising, they could sweep our paltry sense of security away in an instant. We are fortunate, though, in that, this huge mass of people is divided naturally by language and cultural differentials. We have our controls firmly in place. Power resides, first and foremost, with the English-speaking elite class that believes it has inherited the mantle of the departing British colonial administration. The next level of defense is the imposition of Urdu as the national language of the country and all that this necessitates in terms of investment of resources in maintaining that status and promoting it as the medium of education for the populace generally. Only after space, resources, and precedence is ceded to these two privileged languages do the "provincial" or "regional" languages come into play. Although the perils of such an approach were clearly demonstrated in the breaking away of the country's eastern wing to form the independent State of Bangladesh, we have not learned much from it, for we continue to pursue it even as the hazards of this policy grow daily in depth, scope, and complexity.

We now discover that we are not just two nations but many within the country or State that we call one, that the lines of division are not just of class, the inequitable distribution of wealth, opportunities, and resources, but of linguistic and cultural differentiations as well. Thus, whereas, the rich do not speak or understand the language of the poor, provincial boundaries further multiply the demographic and linguistic diversity. This should have prompted a policy of flexibility and inclusiveness. However, the reverse has come to pass. Like the British in India, the center (the Federal government) has imposed its linguistic writ on the country as a whole. The provinces have thus been deprived of their linguistic recognition and identity. The poor, needless to say, have been totally ignored.

Would it really harm our commitment to a single State if all the country's spoken languages were officially given parity, an equal chance to develop and grow? Many studies have argued that it would advance the literacy rate and quality of life in all the provinces of the country. What is the harm, in recognizing all these languages, Sindhi, Pashto, Baluchi, Punjabi, Urdu, and English, as "national languages?" Isn't our multilingual, multicultural heritage something to be proud of, something to hold on to and embrace? It was the imperial British regime that silenced and disempowered the populations of the subcontinent by imposing on them the regime of a foreign tongue and rendering their languages peripheral and irrelevant. It was a deliberate attempt to kill the spirit and pride of the people by killing their language. That is how the development of several of these languages was arrested. Now that the British have left, should not such policies of theirs that were detrimental to local cultures and languages be also dismissed? Or was the so-called independence only gained to replace the authority of the gora sahib with the brown and continue the colonial practice of hegemonic exploitation unabated?

Our English-language writers, having in the past few years made a bit of a name for themselves in Europe and the United States, have come to believe, and of course their Western reviewers and scholars have encouraged this view, that they alone "represent" the country, that theirs is the "authentic" and "objective" rendering of the state of its society. Yet only two to three per cent of Pakistan's total population, perhaps, is able to read the books by these much-touted celebrities. Their actual readership is indeed a modicum of that

percentage. Isn't there something odd in that claim of representation then? For all the effort that some foreign publishers are putting into promoting/marketing the work of these writers in Pakistan through literary festivals, the fact remains that only a very small and select crowd, that belongs pretty much to a certain privileged elite, attends these events, and commends and compliments it in writing. The local languages, except to an extent Urdu, continue in the subsidiary position they were relegated to during the times of the British in India. Urdu, however, for whatever this information is worth, enjoyed a special status under the British colonial rule too, for the British made a special effort to popularize it as a link language for the commonality all across India.

And here is my cue to enter this piece of writing in person. I have nothing at all against any language. All languages, I feel, are effective, efficient, and beautiful for the people who speak them. I just don't think that any tongue in a richly multilingual country can lay claim to representing or speaking for all the linguistic groups in that country. Or, for the various groups and classes that exist within a society. And if it makes that claim, it is doing so by taking away the power from the people to speak for themselves in their own language or idiom, or a language of their choice, in their own way. This is such an obvious fact, that it does not need any iteration whatsoever. The question of who represents whom, and to what extent, if at all, is entirely related to the troublesome issue of identity, individual as much as collective identity (if there is, in a definitive sense, any such thing), and language, one's mother tongue, one's natural mode of communication, even the vernacular or patois, is intimately connected to what individuals and communities experience as their identity, a perpetually evolving and dynamic concept, by no means static and unchanging at all. But not until the sense of this spontaneously evolving identity is threatened or perplexed, does the need arise to recover and define it in some specific and conclusive way, which, ironically, is a self-defeating exercise, since it tries to give static shape and contours to something that is vital and dynamic. Yet, in marginalizing a language, or imposing one from the center, precisely that threat or befuddlement is created which provokes people to disaffection, protest, and calls for autonomy, with the insistent pressure and provocation to define their distinctiveness in some final or absolute way. Without the freedom to use one's own language as a matter of course, the right to education in it, and the opportunity to make a living based on that education there is no self-esteem, no pride of identity or ownership of place, no sense of home, for a person. If anything, this was the promise implicit in the struggle for independence from colonial rule. Each citizen of a free country should, in real terms, and as a matter of course, have the opportunity to experience the fulfillment of this promise, of self-fulfillment, if you will, on one's own terms, as long as it does not encroach upon or abbreviate similar rights of others irrespective of gender, class, race, religion, color, or creed. There can be no home or homeland where this promise is ignored or betrayed. Unfortunately, the culture of privileged communities, of language, class, gender, religion, ethnic origin, tribal or clan loyalty, elitist affiliation (military or civilian), and the like, does exactly this. It is a culture based on exclusion, exclusion, exclusion. A home is not a home unless it is inclusive, a source of strength, security, and reassurance for all who live under its roof.

ADDICTED TO THE SCREEN

By: Irfan Husain

Around thirty years ago, I sat down at a computer keyboard for the first time. The machine was an IBM PC-AT, the AT standing for Advanced Technology, and the processor worked at the blinding speed of 8 MHz. Today, of course, the simplest cell phone packs far more processing power than this.

But ever since, I have kept up with technology, and am writing this on a Mac Pro. Apart from the nature of my work, I am curious about the rapid developments taking place in computing. And whenever I lag behind, my son Shakir coaxes me to 'raise my game' and get the next new gizmo.

In fact, he's the one who made me get on to Twitter and Facebook, saying they would help promote my book, and that I could tweet my columns. While I don't know how useful these two social networking tools have been in pushing my writing, Twitter has certainly helped in bringing me a wide range of articles and views. But I only use Facebook to see photographs of my grandsons posted by Shakir.

One reason I try to limit my use of the social media is that I find it cuts down the amount of serious reading I can do. As it is, good fiction has almost been eliminated, and this is a huge loss as there are so many outstanding books out there.

But this problem of balancing social media with other activities is more real for young people. Tweeting and trolling now seem to be central to the lives of many tech-savvy kids today. Even people in their thirties prefer screen time to time spent with their spouses and children. And many young lives have been ruined by cyber bullying.

Then, of course, there is the world of online gaming. Millions of mostly young people are spending much of their waking lives plugged into games like the World of Warcraft, preferring these virtual worlds to the real one. And as virtual reality (VR) headsets are on the verge of creating a lifelike, 3-D simulation, more people will get hooked to this online, alternative existence.

The increasing use of cell phones, tablets and laptops is raising concern among behavioral scientists who worry that these rapid changes are distorting relationships, and making students unable to concentrate. In the UK, there is a debate going on over banning cell phones and tablets from schools. However, some teachers argue that these tools give students powerful means to research questions instantly.

Neurosurgeons have found that watching screens late at night disturb sleep patterns. Others have voiced concern about the possible damage cell phone signals do to the brain when used extensively.

In the UK, I see young people walking around with their phones attached to their ears via ear plugs, wearing goofy grins, or talking as though to themselves. On the Tube, fellow passengers are often passing the time playing with one screen or another.

When offered an iPod when these devices had just entered the market, I declined on the grounds that I would be unable to think with earphones stuck in my ears. The fact is that

we tend to forget that the brain needs quiet time to make connections and join the dots. Currently, we overload it with so much information that it is unable to analyse and reflect.

And this is my biggest fear for my young grandsons: at eight and five, they are both highly adept using their various electronic devices. Their father runs a successful tech company, and is not as concerned as I am about their intellectual development as he thinks all these machines are entirely benign.

And while I am happy to use them for my work, I do worry about their long-term consequences. For instance, while I am excited about the advance of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), I am concerned about their impact on the work force. Already, millions of jobs in the developed world have been lost to computers and robots, with many more at risk. Although new jobs have been created in tech industries, experts doubt this process will continue forever: the consensus is that over time, only the top managerial and creative jobs, as well as the menial, physical work will remain, with middle-level jobs lost to mechanization.

All these trends need to be carefully examined: we should not rush unthinkingly into a future in which millions are unemployed. And we need to reflect on how we, as individuals, use our time. Remember, time is our most precious resource.

PAKISTANIGOVERNANCE

By: Raza Rumi

Pakistan's governance remains an enigma for most observers. Beset by serious security challenges and demographic transformations, the unreformed state structure finds it difficult to manage and supply basic public services such as security, public safety, health and education. At the same time, Pakistan's progress on institution-building has been noteworthy especially in terms of deepening the ongoing democratic transition and strengthening of national civilian institutions. Pakistan's complex federal arrangements make the task of governing even more problematic as the central or federal government has limited influence on basic citizen services and entitlements according to the amended Constitution of 1973.

In 2010, Pakistan's Parliament enacted the 18th Amendment through which policy mandates on health education, women's development, environment etc. were devolved to the provincial governments. The federal authorities do have the responsibility of governing the troubled federally administered tribal areas (FATA), the Pakistan administered or Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and the disputed territories of Gilgit Baltistan (GB). Given the unresolved status of these areas, the scope of self-government is either limited in powers (e.g. GB) or virtually absent (e.g. FATA). The operations of law enforcement agencies and limited application of fundamental rights in such regions have virtually denied citizenship to the local population.

The World Bank's governance index places Pakistan at 23 while India is ranked at 47 and Bangladesh at 22. Pakistan is the lowest in terms of political stability and the impact of violence/terrorism. In terms of government effectiveness - key to providing services - Pakistan's ranking is quite low. Similarly, in maintaining rule of law and controlling corruption Pakistan's ranking is below par.

Nearly 25 million children are out of school and only 60% access public health systems and that too at a basic level. A majority of Pakistanis use costlier private health services, which deplete their incomes and often push a large segment of population into cyclical poverty. The key reason for Pakistan's service delivery gaps is weak or dysfunctional governance systems. The billions of dollars invested in social services (both locally raised and via international aid) have not produced the expected results. In recent years however, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have attempted to fill in the huge demand for basic services. For instance, in Pakistan's most populous province Punjab almost 50% of children attend better quality private schools given the premium placed on education by the families. Similarly, varying private healthcare services cater to the health needs across the country.

In addition to social services and ensuring food security, the issue of unemployment perhaps remains the most formidable challenge. It is estimated that in the coming years over 3 million jobs would be required to absorb Pakistan's young population. Demographic transformation in the last decade or so makes Pakistan a country of the youth where 69% of the population is below the age of 30. Skill enhancement and training of youthful work force is another service where the state facilities do not cater to even 4% of the population. Pakistan has the potential to be an exporter of skilled work force in countries with ageing populations, but this requires investment by the state, out-of-box thinking by the administration, public-private partnerships and better management and governance of

education and health sectors.

A population growing at a rate higher than 2 % per year also demands access to vast reservoirs of water while it puts pressures on the energy capacity and existing civil infrastructure of the state. Pakistan has had no civil service reform since 1974. Gen. Musharraf during his tenure (1999-2007) introduced key changes in the administrative services and also introduced a radical local government program, which was reversed by the elected political elites in 2008. The present structure of civil service has failed to deliver the basic entitlements due to the citizenry. The top-down process of recruitment, training, career advancement, monetary compensation, the structure of national, provincial and district governments and their operational processes all require emergency reform. There is much resistance to that by key power-wielders as the status quo suits the patronage based electoral system and retention of privileges for elite civil service cadres.

What are the obstacles to change?

Chronic political instability, relentless violence, growing radicalization has led to weak political institutions, skewed civil-military relations, fragile financial resources, a general state of insecurity, inefficient public sector organizations, and inefficient service delivery mechanisms in the last few decades. There are several critical obstacles in the way of any reform agenda for improving the governance structure and consequently, quality of service delivery in the country.

Since the constitutional changes in Pakistan, the major share of federal taxes is transferred to the provinces. Provinces still have underfunded mandates and their own tax collection is abysmal. In most cases, the share of provinces in their expenditures is minimal. At the central level, the national debt, defence spending and civil administration consume nearly 80% of budgetary allocations thereby leaving little resources for development expenditures. At the provincial level, oversized bureaucracy implies that most of the resources are diverted to paying salaries leaving extremely limited budgets for non-salary expenditures that can buy blackboards, medicines, and necessary equipment for the police. For instance, the police stations receive negligible budgets for essential provisions including the much needed costs for investigating cases.

Provinces are now in the driving seat of public policy. However, the capacity of provincial departments is weak at best and it would require a decade of concerted effort to build the required human resources for them to deliver on their mandates. This is compounded by the fact that since 2008 Pakistan has had no elected local governments. Unelected officials of the state manage services and remain unaccountable for their official conduct.

Corruption has also contributed to eroding the capacity and legitimacy of state. Corruption is prevalent at two levels i.e. systematic and individual. Systematically, there are rampant inefficiencies fueled by corrupt practices across the organization at all layers of the operations. There are discretionary funds and quotas at the disposal of governing authorities for providing access to infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities to the people. Those in the position of authority, thus, provide rents to select few at the expense of the

majority with terrible cost to the national exchequer. Individual decision-makers take advantage of their position and indulge in financial malpractices and nepotism for personal gains.

What are the drivers of change?

In the recent years, Pakistan has seen growing assertion of parliament in restructuring governance patterns. Learning from the earlier decades of political bickering bipartisan mechanisms were devised for deciding on major appointments such as the Election Commission and considerable powers and resources were shifted at the subnational levels. This process has slowed down in the past two years and would need a renewed momentum to achieve better governance outcomes at the local level.

The judiciary since 2007 has also emerged as an alternative power centre challenging the conventional dominance of the executive controlled by the civil-military bureaucrats. In the last few years, the judiciary has checked corruption, taken notice of human rights abuses and checked excesses by the executive. However, the record has been mixed and the district level judiciary has yet to discharge its functions in an efficient and effective manner. Over 1.2 million cases remain pending in the courts.

After years of censorship and state-sponsored controls, Pakistan's deregulated media especially electronic media, has emerged as both a means of public accountability and information. This has deeply altered the way power is exercised and negotiated in the country. In sync with a robust civil society and citizen voice through social media and community-based organizations, Pakistan's executive does not have the conventional dominance any more. These changes are new and it is early to assess their effectiveness but there is greater scope for accountability of power-wielders, service providers and policy makers.

Perhaps the greatest impetus of change is coming through the rapid rate of urbanization that increases the expectations of citizens from the state and generates newer dynamics for citizen-state relationship. More than half of Pakistan's population now lives in urban conditions and this has resulted in a greater demand for accountability and better governance. If one adds the youth bulge to this transformation then the pressure on the old, unreformed state is mounting and the elected representatives since 2008 have been attempting to respond to these newer realities of Pakistan's society.

The way forward

Democratic governance must be improved for greater citizen trust in the state. For this to happen, all the political parties would need to undertake internal reform and improve the electoral system. At the same time, the functioning of parliamentary oversight mechanisms such as standing committees and public hearings would need strengthening. This is only one segment of the much-needed democratic culture. The absence of local governments, now being addressed by provinces after much delay, has marred the way services are delivered.

Pakistan's federal structure is undergoing a major shift. Whilst the Parliament has given more powers to the provinces, there are demands for further autonomy. In

Balochistan, there are armed groups calling for independence and the issue of sharing natural resources with the centre are unresolved. Much of Pakistan's history has comprised negotiating the federal arrangements. In 1971, there was a breakdown of compact between Pakistani state and the Eastern Wing (now Bangladesh). In view of such a turbulent history, it is imperative to address the arrangements, which are commensurate with country's diversity and subnational aspirations.

Almost half of Pakistan's territory is 'ungoverned' in the formal sense. Regions such as FATA, GB etc would require 'mainstreaming' with adequate self-government arrangements that ensure improved service delivery and citizen voice. Even the Balochistan province dogged by an insurgency has police operations only in 5% of the territory. The rest of the province is governed by tribal administration arrangements, which are outdated and irrelevant given the needs of the population.

The menace of corruption requires effective accountability institutions. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has been functioning in an uncertain manner due to frequent changes in leadership. Similarly, the province level Anti Corruption Establishments (ACE), are ineffective in tackling issues of malfeasance and leakages. The offices of Ombudsmen at national and subnational levels require strengthening and increased powers to summon executive officials and hold them accountable for maladministration.

Other measures improve governance include ending discretionary laws, providing immunity to whistle-blowers, strengthening the Right to Information laws among others. Above all the long-delayed civil service reform and improvement in internal accountability procedures need to be established to improve the way state delivers basic entitlements to the citizens.

Pakistan's future path is contingent upon major reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the state in providing security and services and rebuild trust in the citizenry. That is the real challenge ahead.

FROM THE EYE OF AN EXPAT

By: Nauman Younis

The dawns I witnessed here while living on this piece of land are pellucidly different and distinct from those I have witnessed in the earlier years of my life. Every day's aurora cannot be unvaried only because it is the first light of just another day from the same star; it is destined to be unique. Watching the rays of the sun spreading in the skyline of Edmonton has always incessantly reminded me of the many sunrises I have observed in Lahore while lying on a charpoy on my house's rooftop. Those days were indeed lovely and worth living again; had I known this before I would not have been standing at the bank of a River Valley and watching yet another gloomy and sombre dayspring. Well, many readers would argue about the 'sombre' daybreak of Edmonton. My dear friends I am not wrong. No eye can catch sight and relish the blooming spring in the surroundings if the inside is so bleak and saturnian.

My life is full of treadmill-like activities. The only cheerful moments are those when I see my children happy and settled with their routine, and when I recall my childhood memories. Ah! Such wonderful days they were indeed. I have a wistful yearning for returning to my hometown and seeing all those alluring places and eating all sorts of mouth-watering dishes which made me nostalgic about my beautiful birthplace. Sitting in my air-conditioned room in a renowned multinational firm's office, I often try to relive my past - my years in Lahore.

My father was congratulated by an accoucheuse on the birth of his second child. My birth was celebrated in a double-storeyed house at Ravi Road, a residential area near Minar-e-Pakistan. So this was my start. Today, I live in a luxurious, fully furnished, five-bedroom house located in a swish area of Edmonton AB. Yet it is not the end. This phase of my life cannot make me contented; I am longing for something more satiating as this dream made me abandon my homeland. I had to leave my country, the land of pure. I had to go from beautiful Lahore, the city of gardens or universities or whatever one may like to say. Most hurtfully, I had to forsake my parents.

Ah! But this all is some serious stuff which seldom haunts me, especially on some of my bad days. Of times I only get beguiled and enchanted by the beauty, picturesqueness and uniqueness of Lahore and its culture. I am madly in love with Lahore not only because it was the city where I was born; in fact there are uncountable reasons. Although I am no more a part of the social stratification or culture of Lahore and also I do not practise any of the customs and traditions, nonetheless I am still encouraged by them.

As I have mentioned earlier in this account, we used to sleep on the rooftops on our houses. Well, we never actually slept until the sun had spread its light on the sky above us. Mostly, I located the North Star and counted the total number of twinkling pearls in the sky along with my siblings. My sister was fond of domestic fowls. Therefore, as you may expect, our eyelids parted only when my mother released the roosters from their coops and they traversed the whole area while crowing 'cock-a-doodle-doo'. The chanting of Azan

from nearby mosques always made me realise while waking up that I had slept till the midday. Here in Edmonton, we can never imagine sleeping in open, thanks to the freezing temperature that prevails, reaching as low as -46 °Celsius, and our somatesthesia which stops us from making such foolish decisions. The musical sounds of alarms wake us up in the morning. The timepiece says "It is seven o' clock" and the dark grey, mackerel sky reassures by saying "Yes dear! The sky is dark but it is 7 a.m." No chanting of calls for the prayers can be heard and no flying roosters can be seen.

We had only one lavatory at one corner of the house where all toothbrushes along with toothpaste were kept in a glass tumbler; we took turns in answering the call of nature. By the time I reached the lounge, my mother had made lassi, a drink made with yoghurt or buttermilk diluted with water and flavoured with salt or sugar, and paratha, a bread with a texture more or less resembling puff pastry. As of I migrated to Canada, I have lived in several cities, including Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton, and all the houses I moved in had four to five bedrooms and at least three water closets. Lassi and parathas are now considered special meals only to be made on particular occasions.

Playing cricket at a famous cricket club of Alberta would not have been possible had I not played it with my buddies in streets of Lahore. Breaking glass windows and lampposts was a routine and running away from the crime scene was even more usual. Ah! I gravely miss the food. What in food? Well, Lahore is a big-name when it comes to feasting and launching new bistros. Lahories can never become jaded of food. All sorts of cuisines are warmly welcomed with cuffs rolled up the sleeves and can be found almost everywhere in the city without any struggle, let it be nihari from Karachi, Baghdadi haleem, Balochi sajji, or Kasurifalooda. One can find several fast food restaurants (McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Johnny Rockets, Hardee's), steakhouses (Arizona Grill, California Grill), coffeehouses and cafés (Arcadian Café, Butlers Chocolate Café, Gloria Jean's), and frozen yoghurt parlours (TuttiFrutti, YogenFrüz, Yogerberry) in my gifted city Lahore.

I have thrice visited Pakistan since my immigration to Canada and every time my departure from Lahore becomes increasingly painful. Indeed home is where family is but my case is a little different. My body lives in Edmonton with my family but my heart and soul still breathe in the polluted yet long-familiar atmosphere of Lahore; and I simply love cherishing every memory I can retain.

DO YOU WANT TO LEARN CHINESE?

By: Danyal Gilani

There is a lot of truth in the saying "*Learning Chinese is the work of men with bodies of brass, lungs of steel, heads of oak, hands of spring steel, hearts of apostles, memories of angels and lives of Methusaleh.*" Chinese is a difficult language, arguably the most difficult language for a foreigner to learn.

For a foreigner intending to learn Chinese as a second language the challenges are numerous. It is a daunting task. Learning Chinese is challenging for a non-native speaker. It is definitely not a language to be learnt at home on your own no matter how many audio visual aids are available.

The path to learning Chinese is strewn with myriad difficulties beginning with mainly (though not only) the script. To aggravate matters further the language is devoid of any alphabet. Instead there are many thousands of characters primarily in shape of pictographs and pictophones based on pictures and images of things which are required to be painstakingly remembered one by one.

Even the natives spend years learning to read and write their mother tongue. Due to this unique nature of the language, hardly anyone can make a claim of being able to fully read and write it, especially the traditional characters. It is believed that there are over 80,000 Chinese characters in traditional Chinese having evolved over last few millennia. Each Chinese character signifies one syllable and combinations of two or more characters form words.

Chinese is a very old script, starting from earliest systemic form of Chinese characters inscribed on oracle bones since about 3300 years ago. However, in 1950s, as part of their reform process and to increase literacy, the new leadership of the People's Republic of China undertook the cumbersome process of systemization, simplification and standardization of Chinese characters, after which several thousand of the most complex characters were abandoned while few thousand others were simplified.

In 1988 a list of "*Generally Used Chinese Characters in Modern Chinese*" was officially released by the Chinese government which contained 7,000 characters. Out of these 3,500 are the most frequently used ones. Consequently the new revised Mandarin script used in mainland China and Singapore today is called Simplified Script, whereas in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan the old Traditional Characters (prejudicially called 'proper' Chinese script by Taiwanese) are still used. Some argue that simplification has actually made learning of Chinese more difficult, because simplified Chinese characters have done away with many rules and the traditional essence of the script has been compromised. They argue that the traditional Chinese script was more logical for people to follow. In fact many professionals teaching Chinese as a foreign language teach their students the traditional script before simplified characters to show how Chinese characters were formed and evolved.

For a foreigner venturing into unfamiliar Chinese waters, it is rather intimidating

that even these simplified characters are so complex. Keeping this difficulty in view a parallel Roman alphabet phonetic script called *Pinyin* was invented in the beginning of the 20th century. This by no means is a replacement of the Chinese writing system, but merely a learning aid. Later in the 1950s the current Chinese government introduced simplified *Pinyin*, which is now used in Mainland China and Singapore. This is a universal system and every character is written in a standardized way. The Pinyin used in Hong Kong and Taiwan is different and is believed by some scholars to be a more accurate depiction of sounds and tones of various dialects of Chinese language.

The second difficulty in learning the Chinese is that everything foreign has to be Sinosized, so to speak. There is hardly a word of any foreign language which is used in Chinese as it is. Even proper nouns like names of countries, places and people have to be converted to Chinese. The reason for this is again the script. It is difficult to find exact replicas of sounds and meanings of foreign words in Chinese characters. Therefore, there are two approaches to translate foreign words into Chinese. One is the phonic way, like Pakistan is called Ba Ji Si Tan. The other is through the meaning, for example United States of America is called Mei Guo, beautiful country. Even China is not China in Chinese. It is Zhong Guo, the Middle Country.

Writing Chinese is a bigger challenge than reading. Even with characters which one can recognize or comprehend, it is quite a task to write them. This needs extensive practice. These characters are written in the size of equal invisible squares. The complex ones have several strokes squeezed into that invisible square, while simple ones are written bigger so that they remain equal to the others.

Each of the thousands of Chinese language characters has its own specific, well defined stroke order. Without following this stroke order it is not possible to write them with fluency. If a character is written by hand without following proper stroke order, there is a chance that native Chinese may fail to comprehend it or even take it as an altogether different character. Some of the basic rules are to write from left to right, from up to down and first inside then outside.

It is however interesting that though the Chinese script, unlike the alphabetical languages, gives little idea to a reader about the way it is spoken, it may give some idea about its meaning. For example all Chinese characters related to water have a water radical in them which is written as three water drops on the left side. Similarly two drops on the left refer to frozen water, and four drops at the bottom of a character show that it has some link with hot water.

Speaking and listening comprehension of Chinese is also a challenge because Chinese is a tonal language. There are four tones. The wrong tonal effect can change the meaning to the extent that sometimes it may even become exactly the opposite of what it stands for. For example Shu signifies a book, but it can also mean comfortable and vegetable. Given a different tone, the sound also means to relate, the Aurora, to be accustomed, or rodent mouse. It also expresses the loss of a wager. In such cases meaning is understood through the context in which the word has been used. Due to this a new speaker

has to be very cautious to avoid the pitfalls of saying or understanding things wrongly.

All languages have homophones but in Chinese they are in abundance. The Cihai dictionary lists 149 characters representing the syllable "Yi." Many Chinese take great delight in using large amount of homophones to form puns which have become an important component of the Chinese culture. For example 'star' and 'gorilla' are called Xing Xing having same sound and tone. Similarly two entirely different words pronounced as Beiju mean 'tragedy' as well as 'cups.' The list goes on.

A combination of these challenges gives rise to another unique challenge for a new learner of the language, especially those who go to China. One has to start building vocabulary literally from scratch. There may be a handful of words which could be comprehended at the outset but the rest have to be learned. In comparison, for example, if an English-knowing foreigner comes to Pakistan, he would have an initial vocabulary of at least a thousand words. These are the English words we commonly use in our everyday life.

Going through the initial stages of Chinese learning one expects things to become easier for a learner but in fact for quite some time, at least throughout the intermediate level one needs to actually increase the amount of input towards learning Chinese in order to push through the advanced level.

But this is just one side of the story. This does not mean that Chinese is impossible to learn. One just needs to get formal education in its learning. Chinese grammar is quite easy and with a bit of tutoring, and by relying on Pinyin, foreigners can learn to speak good Chinese.

Some argue that Chinese is actually objectively easier and more logical than many languages. Their contention is that rather than having completely different words for related concepts, one character in Chinese represents a concept that is used in a huge number of multi-syllable words. Similarly there are no conjugations, no tenses, no cases, no plurals, no genders and no long words in Chinese. And if you want to impress native Chinese with your command over their language, you need not speak any complex words. Just speak words with proper tones and they would hold you in high esteem even if you do not have an extensive vocabulary. Many educated Chinese people envy that that foreigners spend few years learning the Chinese language and can speak just like Chinese, whereas most Chinese cannot speak as good English, despite putting in years of hard work.

So if you want to learn Chinese by all means go ahead. There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says "Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." It is the language of more than a billion people. In addition there are Chinese people living in every major country of the world and knowledge of Chinese is quite useful in making new friends.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ISHTIAQ AHMAD

By: Editorial Board

Professor Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad is a Swedish political scientist and author of Pakistani descent. He is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Stockholm University. He is also an honorary senior fellow of the institute of South Asian studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore. He was a visiting professor at the Lahore University of Management Sciences during 2013 to 2015. Apart from these engagements Dr. Ishtiaq is an internationally acclaimed writer and his recent book "Pakistan: The Garrison State" has been published in 2013 by the Oxford University Press. His other book "The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed" is also one of the monumental works on the history of Punjab. He is currently a Visiting Professor at Govt. College University Lahore.

Q: You have received your education from the most prestigious institutions of Lahore. First it was St. Anthony's, then FC College, later Punjab University and finally Stockholm University. Talking about Pakistani institutions, particularly your alma maters, how would you rate the level of excellence in these institutions? Is it the same as it was at your time or has it dropped over time? If it has dropped, what are the reasons for it?

A: Actually, it would be very presumptuous of me to give a definitive or categorical answer to this because since I left, I have no experience of what has happened, so what I know is what I have heard from people. All I know is that FC College went in to a decline after it was nationalized and it remained in a bad shape for a while. But after it was returned to the missionaries, it has recovered. Now it is a Chartered University and apparently doing quite well. On the other hand, Punjab University I've heard, is in a bad shape, the department of political science in particular. I am perhaps being very unfair in saying this for I have no way of knowing it for certain. I'm in no position to give you a responsible answer and this is all based on hearsay.

Q: You have also taught at LUMS. How do you compare the student of LUMS to that of GCU? Have you felt any difference between them?

A: First of all, I'm teaching a higher level at GCU and I find that the students here are very well informed which is not to say that the students at LUMS are not well informed. The only thing would be that they all come from very comfortable, elite backgrounds so I don't know how much they read. But I know that people at GCU read a lot because when they come to class and we have discussions, I have to be alert in order to give reasonable, plausible answers. So I think the standard may even be superior but then they are people at fourth level honors, more advanced students, so then again the comparison is not a fair one. LUMS is good. The students there were good, well groomed, polite and decent people. But I would say that GCU as a whole attracts the brainiest students in Pakistan. And I didn't say this because I am teaching here now, but because this is natural due to the fact that if the top people come here at the basis of merit, it is really understandable that it would

be true of the classes.

Q: What were the intellectual influences on your early career? The era you lived in is considered to be a golden era in student politics and you have also been associated with the socialist circle. So what were the intellectual influences on your work?

A: I think I grew up as a very curious child, maybe precocious even because I used to go with my father and sit with his friends. It is unusual for a little boy to do that but I wanted to learn. So there are many ordinary people whom I consider wise. I learned a lot of wisdom from good yet ordinary people that I associated with. But then at one stage I met a gentleman Mr. Ibrahim Ali Chishti. He was a Sufi and a very learned man and he initiated me into gaining interest in Islam. That was a phase, in which for a while, I was interested in Sufism. But then he died in 1967. This Saturday, I went for a walk up to Anarkali to Paisa Akhbar where he used to live; went in and checked this place and recalled him. He was someone I looked up to because of his learning. Let me also say that I learned a lot from my father who was active in Majlis-e-Ehrar and in the Khaksar movement which were both very militant Islamic movements. But at the same time, he had gone to FC college and he was an enlightened man so we had a liberal sort of home in which nobody imposed his/her views on anyone else. So I would give my father credit in regard to being open to my questions. I was always a rebel. It gets you in to trouble wherever you are.

Then when I went to FC College, where there was a Christian teacher to whom I owe a debt. His name was William Fazal Massih. I had some problems with my father. He had remained kind and considerate man but he was fond of marrying so I had a problem with my step mother due to which I was thrown out of my home. So William Fazal Sahib came and talked to my father. He said, "Your child is a very bright one. Why do you mistreat him?" So then I was taken back home. My mother was living in Karachi and I used to go and meet her there. So here is a man who helped me at a part of my life when I was abandoned. Had I gone to Karachi and lived with my mother, it would have been very difficult for my mother to raise me, especially in a society like ours in which a male figure has to be there to take care of you. William Sahab was a very kind man who went out of his way to help me and talked to my father.

Then in 1968, I came to Punjab University. The student movements started breaking out again in Ayub Khan's time. We had teachers like Professor Khalid Mehmood who was a Marxist. I was under his spell. He was learned. In the Islamic dogma, Sufism is a way which makes it easier but even then I thought that was a bit out dated so I came under the spell of Marxism. I became a Communist and all my life I have had a Leftist commitment. Although now having lived 42 years in Sweden, my rough edges have been very much tempered by the social democratic model. I consider myself a left, social, democratic humanist now. Sufism, Bullay Shah and all the positive things about our culture fall under this domain. Plus the fact that

ultimately it is the reason and evidence that matters. The rest is all emotion. Evidence, reason and compassion, when combined, is what takes you forward in life. So that's how I came to the Left. If you are sorrowful and in a bad emotional state and some tells you that this pain and suffering is not given by The Divine or a product of fate but a product of people and society itself, then Marxism fits in very well. So it was very liberating for me.

Q: Were you officially a member of the Communist Party of Pakistan?

A: No. CPP was banned in 1954. There used to be underground CPPs of front parties so I joined the "Mazdoor Kisaan Party" of Major Ishaq. It was a Marxist party and I was its member until I left Pakistan. So formally you can say that these people influenced and impressed me in life.

At one point in life, I used to think very highly of M.A Jinnah but I think in the end he went in to a direction which defeated his own way of thinking. And you may publish these views of mine because I am well known for my radical views and different takes on subjects. I believe one must not lie. When you go in depth, you realize the positive and negative aspects. You learn through experience and one must have this capacity of saying what is right. Our people are cultural fascists, advocating that you can't say anything against the Khalifa. Whoever is coming is basically claiming the platform of the Khalifa - total obedience - which is wrong.

Q: You belong to the golden age of student politics. How would you comment on the need for students politics in today's era? The contradictions are piling up, students are being attacked and the state has been helpless in protecting them. So after a ban on these organizations, how would you comment on the need for social student organizations?

A: That's a very good question. I have been thinking about it too. In Pakistan, the problem is that the institutions have not prospered. They have been interfered with so often that none of them is what an institution ideally should be or should represent. Under these circumstances student organizations and student awareness are extremely important. But I'd say something conservative here. I think if you look at Pakistan, the way student politics has impinged on the universities, it has been destructive. Jamiat started when we were there. At that time, the left and right were equal and both sides stood against each other with sticks and stones in their hands. I actually escaped being knifed, and my sitting here alive was just a chance. This was 1969. Skirmishes between Left and Right student movements sprouted so I'd rather not have student activism come into the campus because when it comes to the campus it becomes a power game. On campus there should be open debates and discussions but protests and agitation should be out of the campus. You should have the capacity to bring your students out of campus. I would say yes to student activism but not on campus. I may be considered a utilitarian and it may be considered a tactic but I think even as a principle we have not learned the art of democracy, accommodation, tolerance and listening. The sanctity of the campus

should not be violated.

Q: A question about your recent antics, sir. As you said that you are a rebel, keeping that fact in mind and the fact that you had differences with LUMS, what is your take on that?

Ans: There is this proverb in urdu, "Bakray ki maa kab tak khair manaye gi?" so if you keep your opinions and comments to yourself and make sure that what you are saying is suitable to the external environment, you can survive anywhere. But I am not this sort of person. I can't help it. I was just a child when I protested against the mistreatment of my mother and maybe I am doing the same to date. It has become a habit of mine now. I am not a religious person though I respect all religions. I am recalling a hadith of the Prophet (S.A.W) which has had an influence on me that, "if you see a misdeed or a crime being committed, do your best to stop it with your hand, if you can't do it, raise your voice against it." Now the latter suits me more where I raise my voice against all injustice and cruelty. My weekly columns are mostly centered on the injustices that prevail in the society, be it against minorities or women or anything which I feel is against humanity at large, I protest against it with my pen. Nowadays we have started a film series. I'm writing about "Punjab's Contribution to Cinema" in Friday Times. There also, I am taking the same stance - how culture unites people across political and religious divides. We are writing from a point of view that liberates people. So every where I write and try to express my opinion, I try to take up causes which I think are morally demanding support. The rebel in me is always there but simultaneously, you have to be realistic and at my age you realize that the world is not resting on my shoulders and even if I move, its goings-on will remain uninterrupted, and that is very liberating. Even if in your own limited space and time, you can help someone, I think one must not shy away from it. That's a good way of feeling that you have acquitted yourself well on Earth.

Q: An off-shoot of your previous answer. You said that you are a rebel and you do what you can in your space, to liberate people. In this position, it is very much probable that people will hold opinions about you and comment positively or negatively about you. So how do you react or handle the negative criticism that is directed towards you?

A: What can be done about this? You see, when you take part in a public debate, people are bound to be irritated. They will despise you, hate you and you will get hurt. But over time, getting hurt becomes a habit and then no one cares. I think that what I talk about is adequate, correct and morally justified but if people don't share the same point of view they curse me as well even to the extent of calling me an Indian or a RAW Agent, but what can you possibly do? If I say that it is in Pakistan's interest to have peace with India (I stand by it) and I think it would have been better had the partition with India not happened; history can't be undone. You move on as two nations, trade with them, because culturally as well, people from these two regions are very similar. People who question the official narrative are

condemned in Pakistan and in India as well as in the case of Arundhati Roy and others like her. In Pakistan it happens to a pathological level.

In LUMS as well, the maximum capacity in my classes was 50 but students used to keep coming to join my courses. I don't know if my courses were popular because of the student's interest in partition or the fact that I used to take them to India. I wouldn't know. Maybe this was one of the reasons for the conspiracy against me.

Now I have been called to GCU, I'm working here. I have won all the laurels in my life. Now it's just a way of returning. Anyone invites me and takes care of me, I am willing to come.

Q: If we talk about the Pakistani society, we see that there is a patronage given to patriarchy. Female representation is not very widespread; even where there is representation, it receives resistance. What, in your point of view, are the factors behind these patriarchal thought patterns in our society?

A: Well I think they are quite well known because this is an ideological state. It is not neutral on the question of citizenship. Be it Shia or Sunni versions, dogmatic Islam is the same. I have Imaam Khumeini's writings which state that you can marry a girl who is still sucking milk from her mother's breast but consummation of marriage will only be at the age of nine. Now what logic is this? But the fine point he makes is that if your own present wife feeds her on her own breast then that girl becomes haraam because now she has become your daughter. This is the level of reasoning of these scholars. Our own Mullahs issued a "fatwah" against the bill against child marriage, considering it blasphemous. These biases have been instilled in to our state and its lobby has grown stronger now overtime because of the patronage in Zia Ul Haq's time.

Land owners in our society consider a woman their private property. Tribal people treat women in an even worse manner. So biases have become a part of the social fabric; patriarchy is built in into the cultural Islamist structure. Social, ideological and theological biases will always be a part of it.

68 years of nation and state building have to be reconsidered and we need to see what went wrong. India is also a somewhat similar society and they are changing their laws. At state level, changes are coming about but in society it is a problem because the society is still based on the 300 hundred year old traditions and orthodox. In Hinduism women were even weaker. Islam allows women to remarry but a Hindu woman is treated in an extremely inhumane oppressive manner. They are making changes in India according to the ideology of a secular state. Pakistan is an ideological state but it needs to come out of its ideological, social and theological biases, questioning things that are morally out dated.

Q: People from other provinces blame Punjabis for using all the resources of the country. Some even say that if Pakistan had to come in to being it should have been without Punjab in it or Punjab being the only state. Does the partition of India and Pakistan have a role to play in this hegemony that Punjab has over the rest of the

provinces in our country?

A: These two can be empirically linked. The reason for saying this is that when Pakistan came into being, the peaceful institutions in this state were the army and the civil bureaucracy and Punjabis dominated both these institutions. So the Pakistani state, from day one, has had a Punjabi stamp on it, right or wrong. The reason is that all the power is organized at the center. Initially the capitalist class was Punjabis, Ismailis and Memons as well but Punjabis have increased over time. Naturally the dominant group has access to more advantages and is more privileged. Punjabis are settled in Sindh as well. They have their lands there. This gives rise to arrogance in them as well. So in a way, if you are from a non Punjabi background, you might feel that Punjab has taken advantage of the creation of Pakistan, and I think the accusation is justified.

On the other hand, Punjabis are one of the strangest people on earth I'll say, who have no pride in their past. I recited a few verses of Bulleh Shah's poetry in LUMS one day, and my students were giggling in a state of nervousness they didn't know how to take it. About 70% of these students were Punjabis; for them it was something exotic. This is Lahore, and if people here don't understand Punjabi, then this is a loss. This lack, this sheer lack of intelligibility, shows it is a generation without roots. If you have no pride in your past, you stand nowhere.

There's another reason for this which I think I should point out: you see when the British came to Punjab, there was a discussion in the East India Company as to what language they should use in Northern India, where Urdu was already being used in the British army. The discussion in this board of Punjab Directors was regarding selecting Urdu or Punjabi. The view prevailed that Urdu and Punjabi are kin languages, so why not opt for Urdu here? All the literacy is in Urdu and Punjabis have benefited most from this project of Pakistan by virtue of using Urdu in the name of Pakistaniyat. This suited the Punjabi elite very much. Why should they promote Punjabi which they think will limit their claims to the state? There is an elite preference for Urdu, although the elite mostly speak English. Urdu only serves as an ideological argument for them; otherwise, everything is carried out in English.

Q: One version of Islam is what we see and experience in Pakistan and another one is in Turkey. In Pakistan, mullahs play a vital role in building up the state narrative, whereas in Turkey mullahs even read out the 'khutba' given by the state, which is about civil and social issues. Both are Islamic countries, then why is there such a difference in the narratives?

A: There's an answer behind this. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, there was a Treaty of Sevres in 1919. In this treaty, the Sultan signed away all Turkish territories. Only Istanbul, Konya, Anatolia, and a few other states were left with Turkey. Turkey became a third-rate power. Mustafa Kamal and the Nationalists fought and rejected the Treaty of Sevres. In 1923, they signed

another treaty which confirmed the territories Turkey has today. Therefore, Attaturk went on to have a secular state. In 1923, it was declared that Islam would not be the state religion of Turkey. Attaturk formed the Ministry of Religious Affairs which brought religion under the jurisdiction of the state and propagated that Hanafi rituals will be used, not in legal ways but only in spiritual matters. Mosques and burial rituals are done according to Hanafi school. The fatwas that Mullahs get from the state depict a positive interpretation of Islam, and are centered only on social issues. I think it is inherent among the Muslims that they resist the progress which has taken place in the modern era. Professor Tedd's theory very aptly describes the situation of the Muslims. It puts forward the concept that if your self-esteem decrees that you are the best, but your achievement is non-existent, the gap between your self-esteem and achievement causes frustration, and then you rebel. Muslims tend to think of themselves as the best community on earth, but unfortunately that is not the case in reality. Some are of the view that the world can only be set right if Islam prevails, and this gives rise to Groups like IS Al-Qaeda etc. The long-term effect can't be achieved but you can become a nuisance. That is what is currently happening.

Q: All your work is non-fiction. Do you plan on writing fiction any time soon?

A: When I became a Leftist, I read Chrishan Chander, Saadat Hassan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Sahir Ludhyanwi. Sahir especially centered to a vast range of topics and emotions and all these had a very profound influence on me. They had a main role in my affiliation with Humanism. Coming to your question, I have never written fiction but I really wish to write it. I want to make a novel out of this book of mine about the partition of Punjab. I will have to adopt the style of a fiction writer in order to write fiction, but I strongly want to write a novel on the partition on Punjab because there are so many stories in it which are stranger than fiction. They are ahead of reality. I have included these stories in my book about partition already, which are about the reunion of the families that had lost their loved ones during the catastrophic events of the partition.

Q: Your message for the students of GCU?

A: My message is the same as the Vice Chancellor's. Avoid extremism, devote yourselves to your studies, and think and act responsibly.

"Do unto others what you want others to do unto you." It should be done as a conviction, and not merely as a tactic. Treat others with respect; I try to follow it as much as I can in my life as well.

It was a pleasure talking to you - Thank you for giving me this honor.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALI TAHIR

By: Muhammad Ali

"I learned the presentation of character, the intonations of voice and other basic techniques of acting during my play at Bokhari Auditorium."

"Whenever someone enquires about my education, I say it with a degree of pride that I have been a student of GCU."

"Creativity is a Godly attribute and must be fully utilized, but we should set our priorities."

"Complex mathematical problems might not come in handy throughout one's life, but the effort one puts in to solve them can make him or her a hardworking person for his entire life.....," says Ali Tahir.

Q: In which year did you enter GCU and as a student of which subject?

A: I remained in GCU from 1989 to 1993. From the years 1989 till 1991, I did my intermediate in Pre Engineering with chemistry, physics and mathematics as my subjects. After that, I did BSc in double mathematics and statistics in 1993

Q: Who was the principal at that time and what sort of an institution was GCU under him?

A: When we entered GCU, the principal was Abdul Majeed Awan who was later on succeeded by Khalid Aftab. Both of them had very different approaches. I personally prefer the tenure of Mr. Khalid Aftab, for he was a very educated, humble and a liberal person who removed many weapons from the hostel and abolished all acts of bullying that had gained momentum during the tenure of Abdul Majeed Awan. For instance, once while we were performing in Bokhari Auditorium, a bully by the name of Abid Boxer protested against my being the leading actor and forced the dramatic team to cast him in the leading role. He was called for the audition by my father but trembled so badly during the audition owing to lack of confidence while performing on stage that he could not be selected and apologized for his attitude later on. The incident apart, but such bullies were thrown out of GCU by Khalid Aftab.

Q: Was it your father who advised you to study at GCU?

A: Government College has always been among the top universities of Pakistan. My grandfather and father both had been Ravians and I too, had a desire to study over there. Therefore, I applied for GCU and luckily got admission in it.

Q: When you entered GCU, was your motive to pursue your subject or to enter media finally?

A: My career has always been uneven. I started with engineering as my motive but did not obtain very good marks in intermediate. My score was 701 which was not enough for UET whose merit was in the 800s at that time. Then I decided to change

my approach and started to apply in foreign engineering universities but did not really want to go abroad. Then I decided to go for MBA, for MBA at that time was a new field and everyone was running after it. Many universities were emerging offering MBA degree. I tried for LUMS but in vain. Then I got admission in one of the universities of Karachi, but owing to poor security measures, I did not prefer going to Karachi. I stayed in Lahore and did MBA from Imperial College and again changed my decision later on.

Q: What was your parents' attitude while you were a student? Did they want you to be good at your subject or did they want you to enter the media along with them?

A: My parents never forced me but did incline me towards acting. My father made me act in a long play of PTV which was directed by Muhammad Nisaar Hussain. It was my first character. He made me do that for he thought that in order to realize the importance of small and side characters, one needs to take a start from them. Whereas education is concerned, my parents never pressurized me to get excellent marks and be among the toppers of university. They were very liberal and trusting, for they knew that their son was studying in a good institution and would prove himself a good student. Besides that, whenever I needed help regarding my studies, they were always there to help me. They were very proud of me because I was performing very well at dramatics and my name was even mentioned in newspapers published after the performance of my play, praising me as a brilliant performer. They never pushed me either for excellence in studies or in dramatics, but allowed me to make my own choice.

Q: People having artistic temperaments mostly find subjects such as chemistry, physics, mathematics etc. tough. They usually go for humanities or social sciences. What was that inclined you towards mathematics?

A: I am extremely passionate about maths. I was good at numbers from my childhood. After acting and cricket, my third passion is mathematics and I still wish to teach it in some school or college. But during 6th to 8th grade, the teachers I encountered were not really good and I did not understand their strategies. Besides, there was a constant shift between English and Urdu medium at that time. Algebra in Urdu seemed more like a slang language to me. However, when I entered 9th, I encountered a very good teacher who rebuilt my confidence in mathematics and I started to find it simple. Things fell into place. Maths is all about understanding the concept and not being afraid of it. Most people are afraid of maths. Once you become good at maths, you learn it for your life. For maths, the most important thing is a good teacher otherwise one starts to fear it for one's entire life. Mathematics is a subject which comes in handy all your life.

Q: Which was your first play in Bokhari Auditorium?

A: My first play at Bokhari was "Mujrim Kaun?" which was performed at the 125th anniversary of GCU. Besides that, I did an English play by the name of "An Inspector Calls" which was adapted by Izhaar Kazmi, who was an important

personality from the radio. It had been performed several times before and had become a classic theatre work. This specific version was directed by my own father, Naeem Tahir.

Q: Name your contemporaries of GCDC at that time.

A: The head of the dramatics club from the students' side was Asif Nazeer. I do not remember anyone else.

Q: At GCU, were you known for being a good student or for being a good actor?

A: During my initial academic years at GCU, I had no specific motivation for acting, although I did like to act. As a student, I was an ordinary one, but still never attended extra hours at university cracking jokes and wasting time in cafeteria with friends. As soon as the classes would end, I would head for home. I had a very few friends. I did not spend extra time in dramatics, but during the play that I did, I put extra efforts in it for it was being directed by my father and he was a very strict advisor.

Q: Did your teachers know that you were the son of such important personalities of radio and television? What used to be their response?

A: Yes they did know about my parents but their attitude was administrative and they did not really bother about my being the son of celebrities. But my father being an important personality of media as well as a director of the dramatics club was often met by them with flattery. I was never favoured.

Q: Can you name any people who were your fellows at your time in GCU and are now known as important people in some field?

A: None of them entered the media. They chose other fields.

Q: During your acting career, you have also worked with people of NCA. Do people from GC's dramatics club and people from NCA's dramatic club get along well?

A: The people who were working with me were always very humble and nice and paid respect to me. My experience with them has always been very good. I even did a production which had its entire cast from NCA.

Q: Is there anything that GCU provided you with which you feel would have been missing had you not been a Ravian?

A: Acquiring education from a good institution is a source of pride for everyone. That pride was there at that time and still persists, for such great personalities have been the students of GCU. It was a very good feeling that still remains with me. Whenever someone inquires about my education, I say it with a degree of pride that I have been a student of GCU. As far as acting is concerned, it is due to the play which I performed in Bokhari Auditorium under the direction of my father which has made me a good actor. I learned the maintenance of character, the intonations of voice and other basic techniques of acting during my play at Bokhari Auditorium. In this respect, GCU has contributed a lot in making me what I am today.

Q: Here's a short list of your drama serials. You have to choose your personal favourite. Ghar, Pankh, Teen Bata Teen, Gharoor, Taar -e-Ankaboot, Mohabbat Subha Ka

Sitara Hai, Samjhota Express, Rang.

A: My own choice is Rang. I loved it in terms of my own acting. Another one was a serial "Ajnabi Raaste" in which I played a blind character. Besides that, I played a character of a drunken writer in "NayiKameez", an episode from a series of GEO TV based on Krishan Chandar's stories. Along with these, Gharoor and Teen Bata Teen are my personal favourites. In terms of direction, Samjhota Express was a big challenge.

Q: Most of the drama serials nowadays discuss feministic issues. Amidst those topics, your "Samjhota Express" was an offbeat project. What kind of response did it procure?

A: It's true that our media is more feminist-driven than necessary and it has confined our audience to females only. Our kids, males and other youngsters are being ignored as an audience and they find solace in western shows. If our males are not interested in Pakistani Dramas, the reason is that media has stopped accepting issues other than womanish. Samjhota express was a historical play and besides being aired on PTV only, gained a lot of popularity. I had bought an extra sim through which I used to spread anonymous questions regarding the play and in return, obtained thousands and thousands of answers which showed that people were taking an interest in it.

Q: Who has portrayed feministic issues in a better manner? Haseena Moin or Noor ul Huda Shah?

A: Haseena moin has been promoting liberal attitudes whereas Noor-ul-Huda Shah has been discussing women's rights in a conservative manner. Both have contributed well to the discussion of female rights.

Q: Writers nowadays are given specific topics to write on, in lieu of which they are paid. Do you think that a writer can come up with a good piece of work if he or she is forced to write on a certain topic?

A: In professional writing, it becomes necessary sometimes to prescribe a topic to the writer. It depends upon the person who provides the topic to conceive such a story which can excite the writer to such an extent that he or she can put natural feelings in it. The idea must be provided but along with that, freedom must also be given to the writer to shape the topic the way the writer wants. Forced writing can turn out to be bad if we constantly interfere in the writer's work, but after having given him or her the topic and then allowing him or her the freedom to write can result in a good, genuine and a natural piece of literature. For instance, "Samjhota Express" was prescribed to my father. The topic was historical and interesting which inclined my father to do research on it and then dramatize it. So it mainly depends upon the kind of topic.

Q: A book or a TV show is meant to provide leisure. In order to escape from the worldly grievances, one picks up a book or switches on the television. If in books or in TV shows, the very topics are discussed which the reader or viewer is trying to

avoid, then do you think that literature and art here serve their true purpose of providing peace to minds?

A: Media emerged with posters. Posters used to be distributed among people in political or religious gatherings. Since then, the role of media has been to convey a message. That message can be of happiness, of sorrow or any other thing. When you watch television, you do not get relaxed only by laughing at things, but at times, the understanding of certain topics relaxes you as well. According to me, the purpose of media is to provide long term happiness to people and our media is lacking at that. Ninety nine percent news are sorrowful which is very unfortunate. In our drama as well, eighty percent topics are about screwed up relationships, people fighting over property or sisters or brothers fighting with each other. You won't ever find serial propagating ideas to resolve relationships. Our media, therefore, is not playing its true role of providing leisure to people.

Q: Art, be it painting, acting, singing or writing, demands a lot of time. What is your advice to the students who wish to continue their professional studies and want to bring their artistic capabilities in front as well? How can they manage time between their studies and their passions?

A: Creativity is a Godly attribute and must be fully utilized, but we should set our priorities. The students who are currently in dramatics should give their time to it, but their first priority should be their studies unless they are doing a major in dramatics. My priority was always my education. We always do get time for our extracurricular activities. Education is something that proves to be fruitful in every field of life be it engineering, acting or painting, for it teaches you discipline and basic teachings of life, which we find tiring or useless at that time but always turn out to be useful for the rest of our life. Complex mathematical problems might not come in handy throughout one's life, but the effort one puts in to solve them can make him or her a hardworking person for the entire life. Whatever the side interests of students are, their top most priority should be their studies. But along with that, they must take part in such activities, managing their time appropriately.

Q: What is the future of arts and literature in Pakistan?

A: I see a bright future ahead. We have a lot of scope for new people who will come and improve the current conditions. In most of the cases, we have a very stagnant approach and have confined literature as well as arts to certain topics. The youngsters to come have to fight these attitudes and come out of conservative thoughts. They will show something else on media besides grief and negative news. Our teenagers, males, kids and elders are being ignored. If these people are given attention, then our market will expand beyond our own country as well. Most negative news are spread by anti Pakistani agencies who wish to inculcate hatred among the people of Pakistan against their own country. But the youngsters to come will hopefully create a beautiful image of Pakistan in their works.

ABSOLUTION

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

A single lonely light wavered in the sweltering night, the aureole of brightness flickering as moths bombarded it, each of them like Icarus: careless and ambitious. The streetlight stood like a silent sentinel, looking through the window. The moon was hidden behind a battalion of wispy black clouds and the air was crackling with the trepidation of an approaching storm. Around the streetlight, a few people were basking in its light with smoke spiraling from their fingers and mouths as they poisoned their blood to battle the poisons already raging in their minds.

An old woman lay in her bed, straining her failing eyes to look outside. Her breath was labored. The small flickering light was a small boat, fighting against the tumultuous sea of darkness that threatened to overcome it. She saw her son, dozing by the window. She was tired too, as God was her witness. She wanted to doze off too but the sterile stench of the hospital made her want to retch. She gazed around the linoleum walls and the buzzing fluorescent bulb in the centre of the ceiling which threw the room into a sickeningly colorless vista. The walls were adorned with various shelves, each stacked with medical supplies. The displays mounted on the wall threw the room into various shades of green.

Her eyes travelled and settled on a distant display at the end of the room. She suddenly felt like someone was watching her and she turned towards the door of the room to see a man silhouetted against the doorframe. She felt him smile as soon as her eyes stopped on him. He stepped into the light. The first thing she noticed was the gray eyes drawing the light into them. She had seen him gliding around the hospital during this stay that seemed like an eternity crammed into a few weeks. He walked up to the bed and flipped through the pages on the clipboard.

An inexplicable calm rushed through her as the man looked into her eyes.

"How are you?" His voice was sure and firm.

She coughed loudly and sharp pains jabbed at her. She smiled at her own answer.

She expected him to scribble something and leave but he sat down on a chair next to the bed. He said nothing. Although his face remained expressionless, she knew he was smiling. She wanted to sleep but she couldn't while he was there.

"I'll not be here long," he spoke, as if hearing her thought. She drew back into the pillow and nodded.

"Doctor," she whispered. Her voice was raspy and strained. "How long do I have?" Her voice wavered at the end, shattering the veneer of bravado.

He didn't speak for a moment and the silence felt tangible. When he did, his voice was like velvet.

"Are you afraid?"

She thought for a moment, her ancient face wrinkling up.

"Yes," she whispered, "But I am ready." She paused for a moment to lick her dry lips.

She stared into the distance, holding the pain at bay.

"Doctor?" she whispered. It was a plea that escaped her.

"I'm not a nice person."

She did not wait for him to respond.

"I have done bad things..." She broke off, trying to gather her frayed mind,

"I was born in 1928," she wheezed. "My father was a farmer and I had three sisters and four brothers. I was the youngest. My mother died giving birth to me. Those were different times, son. My siblings didn't really grow old, all dying due to disease or famine or some other thing. By 1940, I was the only one who had survived. Our farm had more graves than fields by then."

Her eyes had gone misty, as if seeing through the decades back to her childhood.

A young girl skipped through the tresses of wheat to a deep ditch where a small stone marked the grave of her brother. Humming, she put a small wooden toy on the grave. It was in case he got lonely at night. The doll's eyes glinted in the sun.

"My father never loved me. He thought I had cursed the family by existing." She chuckled bleakly. "All my early years I spent thinking I had killed my mother. The guilt made me claw my skin open and then I cried more for having tarnished the body I had been gifted with. I thought life would never get better."

Her thin lips crinkled into a pursed smile.

"But it did."

The man in the chair leaned forward slightly.

"I found my prince one day. It was love at first sight. We used to meet secretly by the barn. One day, he proposed to me and I said yes knowing full well my father would never say yes."

Ma cherie, he had said in a horrible faux accent. Marry me. I can't, she had replied blushing. But you must, he retorted. You are sad here. I can make you happy. I'll build you a home. I can give you a family, a life. She looked into his eyes and saw them drenched in love and sincerity and she nodded once and then flew into his embrace as swans sang their mournful songs in the nearby lake.

"My father," she said with unmitigated disdain seething from her raspy tone, "needed me to work around the farm: we couldn't afford help anymore. We had just fired the ploughman and my father needed someone to yell at. He was a very bitter man."

A slight frown creased the brow that must have been beautiful once but was now marred with liver spots.

What are you doing? She had said. Her father had not answered and flung a shoe at her. Go away from here, he yelled. You don't deserve to live. She ran away to her room and

echoes of mother-killer and satan-spawn broke in upon her hysterical sobs.

"I had buried seven siblings. I knew how fickle life was. I didn't want to spend the rest of my years dodging bottles my father heaved at me in his drunken stupors. So we ran away, on a night when a full moon hung in the sky. The dirt road winding from our farm to the town was the aisle and the moon walked me down it."

The man looked outside to see. The moon was full on this night too. Poetic, he mused.

"We had nothing to our name. He bartended at the local pub and I used to sell baked bread. Soon I was with child. We had a son. Then another. And then a daughter. Life was going perfectly. Sure, my husband would get drunk some nights and we had a few spats. God knows I nursed some bruises, even a broken hand. But who hasn't? I was happy."

She winced as a wave of pain wracked through her dilapidated vessel and her gaze instinctively flew to the morphine dripping down drop by derisory drop.

"Then one day my husband went to work and never came back. There was a bar fight and he got slashed. He bled out alone on the dingy wooden floor."

It was cold that night and the candle wax pooled like a smear on the table. It was late. Too late for comfort. There was a rapping on the door and she flew up and pulled it open, an expression of relief and annoyance that morphed into one of revelation and anguish as the policeman bowed his head slightly and gripped his hat so hard his knuckles were white. The policeman looked up at her with his gray eyes brimming with tears.

A single tear made its way down her face too. The ghostlike figure of Memory began to materialize, dancing her grotesque dance in ephemeral pirouettes that were beautiful and sad.

"I didn't know what to do. I contemplated suicide. But I couldn't leave my children behind alone. So I worked. I did some things that I'm not proud of when the going got tough. But I had to. I had no choice. I couldn't let my children starve. I hope God will forgive me."

A dark alley, a light mist hanging in the air. A raspy voice whispering vile words and leathery hands and pain and the feeling of wadded up currency in her pocket and the mist vanishing and wishing she could be so ethereal.

The man spoke for the first time since the story started: "Are you a religious woman?"

The woman choked with indignation. "I am! I am proud of it. Do you think I, a single woman in the 1950's, could have raised my family on my own without divine

intervention?"

She didn't wait for him to answer, and continued with her story with increased fervour, as if trying to tell as much of it as possible. Maybe she couldn't hold back the torrent of reminiscences anymore.

"I sent my sons to school. I couldn't send my daughter. How I wish I had. But I couldn't." She seemed to be talking to herself at this point.

"My eldest son got a government job and turned our lives around. The younger one got a desk job at a bank. My daughter and I had a bakery at this point. Things were good again. She got married to a merchant, and they gave me many beautiful grandchildren. My younger son got married next, to some exotic beauty. I never approved. She left him a few years later and he found refuge in drugs and women. He passed away in 1980, alone and with enough tranquilizers in his bloodstream to debilitate a horse."

She watched as her son was lowered in the grave and it began to rain. It was slow at first but then it began to pour down heavy as if it were desperate to wash away the shame he was tarnished with before he met his Maker.

She sniffed, either with sadness or contempt.

"My elder son never married." She turned her head towards the window where a man was bunched up on the couch.

"I have lived a full life. I have despaired and wept at the graves of my siblings and my husband and my son. I have held my daughter in my hands just after she came into the world, and felt her grasp my finger. I have seen my grandchildren run around me. I have done bad things, and good things."

She scrunched up her eyes as a wave of pain made her wince inwardly.

"I am ready to go."

The man looked at her with his gray eyes, and she suddenly realized she had seen them before. They were the eyes of the doll she had left on her brother's grave; they were the gray of the moon on the night she had run away; they were the eyes of the policeman who had told her that she was now a widow. She saw the cosmos reflected in them. Constellations etched in the irises, the pupils like black holes sucking all the light in. She saw her whole life flashing in front of her in them. She felt overwhelmed by an inexplicable euphoria.

The man spoke and his voice felt like a thousand voices speaking at the same time: whispers and screams, old and young, male and female, human and something else.

"COME WITH ME."

He extended his hand and his skin was glowing with the light of a thousand nebulae. His figure seemed so large she thought the roof would burst. Then he spread his

wings, stretching infinitely. Each feather glowed brighter than the sun. She thought everyone must have noticed this but no one came. No alarms blared. Her son remained sleeping. She slid her hand into his and he pulled her up. She got up from the bed, light as a wisp of smoke and the pain was gone. A sharp beep emanated from the machine she was connected to. She looked at the bed and saw herself lying there, old and frail. She saw her with eyes closed and an expression of contentment etched on her face. She looked down to her hand and saw her skin was young again. No wrinkles or bluing veins protruding.

A nurse and a doctor rushed into the room, running through her. Her son's eyes flew open and he rushed to the bed. She tried to call out but her voice sounded distant. She tried to reach out but the man beside her put out an arm to stop her. She nodded grimly and they walked out of the hospital, past the single streetlamp. The moon followed them, looking over her for one last time. Then the man spread his blinding wings wide and folded them around her. She saw an untainted and absolute white. And she felt herself soaring.

Painless.

Insubstantial.

Infinite.

Ethereal.

Absolute.

Complete.

Content.

THE END..?

SMOKE

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

Smoke. I remember smoke.

I remember the shattered glass bursting forth from the window, each shard burning in a red hue, like a galaxy of a million suns suspended in the air, and a loud thud as the stone lands on the bedroom floor. I remember my violent coughs reverberating in the blazing air. Most of all, I remember my daughter screaming.

I remember my husband's hand pulling me up, his other hand scooping our daughter up and then running. We run into the open air, through the burning house, and I sense my body is singed and riddled with shrapnel as the roof cracks and caves behind us.

"There they are," a callous voice yells. There is a series of angry chants and then the sound of running men grows louder.

"Run!" my husband yells as he pushes me away and I grab my daughter and run. I remember not knowing this is the last time I would ever touch him.

I run for a minute or so and then hide behind some trees where no one can see me in the moonless night. I turn around to see the mob converge around my husband. His brown eyes search for us in the dark. He smiles when he doesn't see us. Then a single scream tears through the sky: "Infidel!"

The word resonates in the silent night. Then an almighty roar rises from the crowd and they lunge at my husband. I remember holding my scream in and hugging my daughter, holding her to my bosom and sitting there till morning.

I remember my body stiff and aching from sitting so still through the night; a smoking pile of rubble; and a faint bloodstain on the pavement where my husband had been.

My daughter, two years old, cries in my arms. I have no idea what to do next. Grief is registered as a dull pain in my chest, as the primal urge to protect my daughter overpowers all reason. I cradle her in my arms and walk down the street as I look up to see the crimson morning sky.

My subconscious survival instinct is racking my brain for contingency plans. There is only one place where I can seek refuge right now. I remember walking through the street, face bowed.

It had been a few weeks ago when my husband had come home and slammed the door behind him, fear emanating from him. 'They have reached a verdict. I am guilty.' I gasped as I understand what he was implying. 'The people here already didn't like us,' he said. 'They were looking for an excuse to kill us. And now they have one' I soothed his hair. 'The Lord will help us,' I whispered.

I remember trying to inch my way to the church without anyone recognizing me. The pastor would get me justice, he would save my daughter. We would be protected.

In the middle of the market, a few things happen at once. A child runs and collides into me and an involuntary "Oh Jesus" escapes me. A man turns to look at me and I recognize his eyes from the mob. He lets forth a lingering scream of indignation and lunges at me. I duck and dodge his hand which barely misses my cheek. Other people in the market are now looking at me, there are alarmed eyes staring at me through veils and men staring with gross interest. Some men step forth, with realization dawning in their eyes. In the middle of the market, I cower with my body arched around my daughter. There is adrenaline coursing through my veins and my brain is working in overdrive trying to come up with a

plan but all I can feel is intense fear and anger, the cold and the fire dancing with each other in a dizzying pirouette.

A hand flies out of the crowd and I barely move away as the fingers entwine in my scarf and it tears off, burning my neck with the friction. Another hand shoves me and a low squeal escapes me as the hand digs into my back with brutal force and a sharp jab of pain flies across my body. My daughter is crying, her wailing resounding in my ears. A large man steps forward, his face contorted into a smirk.

"Let all here witness," he booms. "That we do not tolerate infidels. This country is the land of the pure. We have no place for filth like this."

To my horror, a cheer rises through the crowd. I feel the people converging on me and I remember realizing that my fate had already been sealed.

'I worked for that Nawab all summer,' my husband claimed indignantly. 'I worked in the fields and did more work than anyone else. But now that man is refusing to pay me.' I was appalled at this and told him to go to the authorities, at which he laughed. It wasn't a happy sound; rather it chilled me to the core with the echo of resignation and despair that rattled within it. 'He owns everyone in the village, because he is rich. What can I do against a man like him?' He sighed and took out a cigarette. He lit a match and the flash of phosphorus threw his dark face into relief, highlighting the lines and the wrinkles on his dark face. The acrid smoke filled the room as he puffed and we sat there, letting the smoke envelope us.

'We are Christian,' he sighed. 'There is no justice for us in a place like this. But I will go to the Nawab and appeal to his humanity.' A pause. 'If he doesn't pay me, we will starve.'

He went the next day, and when he came back there were bruises on his body and fear in his eyes. 'He said that he will not give an animal like me a single rupee. And that he will fabricate some story and report me to the police or to the people.' I whimpered as I realized what he meant. But still, in a frail voice, I asked him. I asked him to maybe hear reassurance that this wasn't what I thought it would be. 'They will try me for blasphemy,' he said and he began to cry.

The man in the market grabs me by my arm and flings me to the ground. My hand hits the pavement hard and I feel a sharp pain fly through my arms. The men advance and I see a woman clad in a burqa scoop my daughter up and hold her against her chest, soothing her. I feel a twinge of reassurance before the voice booms again- speaking of how I would be an example for those who wanted to commit any sacrilege in the future. I remember trying to reassure the man that I had never committed the crime for which I am being punished and am silenced with a kick. As I curl up in pain, I remember screaming for help but no one comes. No one steps forward. I remember their merciless eyes as these men of faith converge around a broken woman to exact divine justice.

I remember the pain as my body is attacked, as the kicks and punches follow hard upon each other.

I don't remember when I lost consciousness. Some men and women in the crowd were weeping as the life left my body; others averted their gazes and some chanted songs of victory.

And as my broken, tattered body lies in the street, my blood congealing around me. I remember my last conscious thought being about my daughter.

After that I remember no more.

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

It was an oppressively humid night, with the heat hanging in a thick blanket over the city. The darkness was streaked with moonlight, the beams cleaving through the atramentous night sky. The clouds kept eclipsing the light of the moon as they rolled by, throwing the deserted village streets underneath into a macabre web of shadows. Ensnared in the shadowy web on one such street, sat a boy of no more than seven or eight years of age.

He had scraggly brown hair and brilliantly large eyes adorning his high cheekbones. He might have grown up to become an attractive man; but with his sunken cheeks and his jutting bones, he looked skeletal in the pale moonlight. In the darkness of the night, one might have overlooked him for he sat with such unmitigated stillness. A fine sheen of sweat covered his young face and his skin was stretched taut with hunger. He longed for a slice of bread, or a warm meal. He had gone to the local shrine earlier in the evening, where people often distributed food to the destitute but had only met with other sunken eyes seeking the solace of a full stomach. He had scrounged for leftover food near the restaurants but the Fates were not on his side tonight. They hadn't been since the famine hit the village.

He felt the fatigue overpowering him, the life draining out of his body. He wanted to lie down and fall asleep but he knew that he must resist. He hadn't eaten in two days: if he were to lie down, he might never wake up. He felt his eyes growing heavy. His limbs felt like someone had filled them with stones and a light haze started to obscure his vision. As he felt himself sinking, he saw the moon above him. It was full, cratered with grey on its white surface. He saw the stars, and they converged to form his parents' faces. They were smiling from the heavens. Then the silent stillness of the night was shattered as the resounding symphony of the aza'an rang out from a nearby mosque. There was one last burst of energy, as his body desperately fought to keep him alive and the boy shakily got to his feet.

There was this village elder, a respectable man who owned most of the land nearby. He was simply called Sahab, or Sir. He was a man of religion, and he helped many a poor soul in their time of need. The boy stumbled to his villa and knocked on the door, the echo sounding through the house. The house was massive, with a whitewashed façade and mahogany windows with colored glass. There were lush gardens surrounding the house, which were silent and empty. There was no reply from the house. He knocked again. The boy was sinking to his feet as he heard footsteps echoing through the house. The massive door opened and Sahab stood there. There was water in his beard and his hands were dripping with the water of ablution.

"Yes, my son?" Sahab's voice asked. "What brings you to my door at this hour?"

The boy speaks shakily, his voice failing him. "Please sir, I am so hungry. I haven't had even a morsel in days."

"There is the famine nowadays," the Sahab says pensively. "But do not worry I might be able to help you. Come inside."

A silent prayer escapes his heart as he walks into the house, with arching pillars of white marble entwined with intricate gilding. A large chandelier hangs from the ceiling and satiny cushions are set up in a precise fashion on an ornately embroidered rug.

Sahab leaves him there and goes to another room, from where he appears with a plate full of dates and a glass filled to the brim with milk.

"These are the best dates in the world. And this is camel milk. The Arabs used to believe these things were the best food. They were right."

The boy feels his stomach grumbling and his mouth waters. The Sahab places the plate on a table and stands in front of it.

Gratitude wells up in the boy, pure unadulterated appreciation for the goodness in this world. As he moves towards the table, Sahab doesn't move out of the way.

"The question is," Sahab says as a smile appears on his kind face, "how will you repay me?"

The boy is taken aback.

"I have nothing," says the boy.

The Sahab looks at him, his gracious eyes running over his body, "I wouldn't say that."

The boy feels confused. The Sahab moves forward and grabs the boy's arm. The next few minutes, he doesn't remember. All he remembered was pain: intense pain as he screamed for clemency. He screamed for Sahab to stop but the pain only mounted until it was over. The Sahab threw the boy to the floor as pain wracked his body. He felt frayed. There was a pain in his soul more potent than his body could ever hope to feel. The Sahab placed the plate and the glass next to him as silent tears glistened in his kind eyes.

"Have some food, son." He panted. "Lock the door when you leave."

The Sahab walked away, leaving the boy lying on marble as cold as his body was aflame. The footsteps faded away and the boy closed his eyes and wept.

LEAVING LAHORE

By: Muhammad Ali

When the incident occurred, I was not in a state to think sensibly, but during the several years that have elapsed since then, I have often contemplated the whole scenario objectively, as a result of which I have come to the conclusion that a bomb blast does much besides killing its victims. It also kills, not physically, but mentally, the acquaintances of the deceased left behind. It devastates the beauty of the place at which it occurs. It extracts from inside you, your spirit of patriotism. Yes. You start hating your country. You start hating the people of your country, especially those ... those who are alive!

My seven-year-old son, Hadi, had been a motherless child since the age of three. Not that his mother had died, but she had abandoned her husband and son for another man. Besides, she was one of those women, who, after giving birth to a child, lament at having a proof of their being old enough to become mothers, and as a result, abandon their own blood. My wife did the same, leaving me to stand all alone on a crossroads, with one way leading towards fatherhood and the other one leading towards motherhood. I would have to tread both now...

During the early years of our separation, when Hadi had just started attending school, things had grown quite difficult for me, for I did not find it easy to wake up early, take a bath, order my son to do the same, prepare breakfast for both of us, press his clothes as well as mine, and send him to school. But gradually, life became tranquil, for I learnt to cope. Hadi's anger at being late for school owing to me started to abate because as he grew up, he started to realize the hardships his father had to go through while playing the role of a father as well as that of a mother.

The hugs we exchanged, I used to think, were no substitute for the warmth of a mother's embrace, but in this case too, things grew normal as I convinced myself that my son had not grown old enough at the time of his mother's abandonment to know what a mother's hug felt like, so he must have learnt to find solace in a father's hug.

As there dwelt only two of us in the house, our relationship was a little beyond a filial relationship. We had become intimate friends, who would talk, hang out, share secrets and figure out things for each other. We would buy his favorite books and I would read them to him before sending him to sleep with his little, soft arms tied around my waist.

Being citizens of Lahore, we had been to every corner of the city. I had shown Hadi the historical monuments of Lahore, in the walls of which were latent a thousand tales: of glory, of bloodshed, of the luxurious lives of monarchs. We had been to every cheap food stall of Anarkali, and to every posh restaurant of Gulberg. I had made him visit all the gardens, after which the city was named.

Along with this, I had often discussed with him, the facts of life such as friendships,

betrayals, death and numerous other things. Though both of us were aware of the mortality of human beings, neither of us was prepared to live without the other.

The day we parted, till the moment of our separation, was a beautiful day, for God had bestowed His blessings upon the city in the form of rain, causing the streets, whether of slum areas or of posh areas, to glisten. The vegetation of the city too, had acquired a glittering semblance, owing to the drops of rainwater still lingering on the tips of leaves. River Ravi, dry for decades, had started to form ripples on its surface. It was made all the more splendid, as it happened to be Hadi's birthday, who in his youthful impatience, had himself demanded his gift. Not that I had disliked the gesture, but I had to let go of something big which I had planned for him, for I could not refuse my son. Once while passing by a shop, his eyes had caught the sight of a watch inside the shop window, and with his little, plump forefinger, he had pointed towards it, showing that he needed it at any cost. Then he had made me promise that I would give it to him as a birthday gift.

That day, before picking him up from school, I visited the very shop and bought that watch for him. Then I headed for school, all the while thinking how it would look on his soft, fair wrist.

Hadi got in the car with a scintillating smile and a thousand questions. Before he could put forward any of them, I took out the watch and tied it around his wrist. A hug is something which comes in handy all the time, be it a moment of happiness or a moment of sadness, for it does the work when words fall short, either for expressing glee or for expressing sorrow. At that moment, a hug says it all. Hadi did the same, his hug evincing his happiness as well as his love.

After school, I took him to a park, for after rain, a park becomes the best place to visit, though some people might find it muddy and prefer to avoid it. But unlucky are they, for they have not been bestowed with the sense of relishing the fragrance which rises when soil mixes with water, thus creating an atmosphere rather pleasant. The moments spent with such a fragrance spread around are often the best ones.

In the park, we once again shared our best moments. I made Hadi sit on my shoulders with his legs hanging on either side and ran around and around on the fresh, green grass. Then I bought him a ball and we played catch with it, and often when the ball would drop out of our hands, we would run after it together, often falling and tumbling over each other. Not a single moment passed without my son's giggles echoing in my ears.

After playing catch, we walked towards the play area, where swings were placed for the children who had come along with their parents. For a moment or two, I was afraid: what if Hadi noticed that there were present, along with the fathers, mothers as well, equally playing a part in entertaining their children, and that here was I, playing the role of a father as well as of a mother all alone. But thanks to Providence, Hadi did not pay any heed.

After having taken two to three rides, he started craving chips (special chips which were not available at every other shop) and a bottle of juice. I asked him to stay there, enjoy the ride while I went to the canteen and got food for him. As anticipated, the chips could not be found easily and I had to move from one tuck shop to another, eventually moving quite a long way away from the play area. Finally, when one of the canteens provided the chips my son liked, I grabbed the pack with alacrity, paid the shopkeeper and turned around when a

thunderous noise boomed.

I could not perceive where it had come from. For a moment or two, silence prevailed as if giving me time to compose myself and bring my wandering thoughts back into place. But I failed to do so. The bag of chips and the bottle had fallen from my hands. I failed to conjure a single sensible thought. When I tried to run to see if what I had conjectured was true or not, I failed to do that as well. My legs would not allow it. Trembling and stumbling, I made my way with great difficulty to the play area, and there, I fell on my knees, not even caring that I had fallen into a puddle of blood.

I wanted to shriek.

I wanted to cry.

But it seemed as if someone had grabbed my throat. I could neither let out my emotions, nor could I swallow them. Before my first tears fell from either of my eyes, pools of water had formed in them.

Like an infant who has not yet learnt to walk, I picked myself up with the help of my palms and started to move about the place, which seemed to me a scenario from a horror film, with different body parts scattered all over the place with stains of blood on them and pools of the same red liquid at every step. Seeing all that made me feel like throwing up. But such chaos erupted inside me that even that did not happen, but kept burning me up inside. My surroundings gradually started to blur in front of my eyes. I was about to faint when I stepped on something. With a weak mind and a weak body, I looked down to see what I had stepped on.

It was a watch.

A watch tied around a wrist.

There was nothing else over there.

Except Hadi's wrist.

My son was my world, and although I had been rendered destitute of my world, I shuddered at the thought that even if life gave me another chance to be happy, this country, where every second hour a blast occurs, would snatch that away from me again. Therefore, I left Pakistan.

I left my city Lahore, which was not an easy task to perform, for so many good memories were associated with the city, of my son and myself; sometimes walking along the canal made colorful with flowers of spring, sometimes strolling on a misty track of Lawrence Garden during winter, sometimes dancing in the monsoon rains, and sometimes walking hand in hand on dry, autumn leaves, our steps giving rise to crunching sounds beneath our feet. It was not easy to leave the city, of which we had visited every restaurant, every bookstore, every play area. It was not easy to leave behind the bedroom where I had read stories to my son, and where I had sent him to sleep. And it was equally difficult to leave behind the roads where we had taken long drives.

But I had to do so. As I said, a bomb blast extracts from inside you, your spirit of patriotism.

HASTY PASSIONS

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

7:00 AM. The alarm clock buzzed. He woke up in what seemed like a fraction of a second. He stopped the alarm clock's buzzing and started preparing for his day at college. By 7:30 he was ready and just then, in a beautifully synchronized second, the college transport bus honked at his doorstep.

He quickly wolfed down the last piece of bread and washed his throat down with a gulp of milk, straightened his neck-tie, and rushed towards the door.

The journey to his college was always beautiful. It was December. The mist had started to flood every household; it made invisible almost everything that it came in contact with. He passed the journey trying to decipher what was behind the vague fog. What secrets do the mists of fog hold?

He reached the college and hurried towards the classroom. He never missed a class. He never could. He was a boy of about seventeen, with firmly formed stereotypes ingrained within. He never digressed. He was a product of the system; manufactured out of the cold-blooded virtues of conformists.

The academic day came to an end. The bell of the last class rang and he started walking briskly towards the bus stand. As he was walking, he heard someone call out his name, "Salman". He looked back, and saw his teacher in the crowd. He walked towards him and inquired about the matter due to which his teacher had called him. His teacher assigned him a task that he very reluctantly undertook. He was to represent his college at the annual student board meeting. He was never the extrovert type. He took the job, hesitantly, and started walking back towards the bus-stand.

After an hour's travelling in the peak rush hour, he reached his home, freshened up, had his lunch with the family and went in his room for his regular afternoon siesta. He woke up after an hour or so and went out to offer the Asar prayers. After offering his prayers, he stood up and carefully put the prayer cap back in the basket. He then started searching for his shoes in the heap of shoes, piled one upon the other. After this exercise of persistent irritation, he found his shoes. He carefully put them on and started treading his way back home. Just as he had started his journey back, he heard some footsteps, the footsteps seemed like they were inflicting pain on the moist earth under the orange December sun. They were not of one man; that was sure.

He looked back to carefully examine the faces of these people with such forceful steps. They were three people. Their attire almost made them look like triplets. They had beards which ran down to their bellies and crawled up to their eyelashes, turbans that were as dark as their intentions. They were dressed in their traditional attires, shalwars- above the ankles and below the knees. They were approaching him. "assalam o alaikum", they greeted in a stolen Arabic accent. Salman's face always made him look gullible; indeed, he was harmless as a lamb. He returned the greeting, confused, and then it started.

The three mullahs first started off with honey-dipped verbosity. They gave

arguments and used language that seemed almost irrefutable and alien. Then they told him of the unevenness of world and how borrowed morals have ruined them for eternity and how the constant intervention of superpowers was nothing but a hindrance in their prosperity and a stain on their sovereignty. And then, finally, they came down to the point.

Jihad, struggle in the name of God. These words echoed throughout their sermon. Salman was gullible. He was indeed gullible. He found no excuse, no lie, and no harm in what they were saying, and then they told him that to fight against evil was not a necessity but a condition of survival; all in the name of the poor God.

It was then that it struck him for the first time, fighting for survival might not be unreasonable at all. He had to do it. He searched for days and days for different ways to refute what they were saying but at a certain level he wanted them to be right. At some stage of his subconscious he desired all their sermons to be true. He wanted to be on their side. And after diligent efforts to disprove their analogies, he fell prey to them and decided that something had to be done.

A week had gone by; he was more emotionally charged than he ever had been. He had had seven more meetings with the mullahs, once every day after the Asar prayers. Since then he had stopped shaving his beard; some transcendent force had gotten hold of him. It felt as he was knocked down to the ground and then resurrected, all new and washed off of all the cognitive faculties that once made him undisputed in the realm of his studies. He was losing interest in college and he had ended his commitment with his professor to represent his college at the student board meeting. These things, he thought, were unnecessary auxiliaries that needed to be cut off. These things were fat and sinew and had to be trimmed down- the excess had to be trimmed down, all that was required was flesh and ironed bones. Brutal coercive measures were the only possibility to rectify the world that was falling down bit by bit. He knew that another meeting with the mullah convincers would ignite the volcano inside him and a huge explosion would follow- within and without. His reality would shatter, never to be changed again; he would fade away into the mists of roaring emotions. His previous existence would become a lie. He would evaporate here and then condense elsewhere, somewhere in an unknown tribal war-zone, waiting for a bullet to pass through his head and serve as means for a meeting with the Creator.

And so it happened, he had another session with the three bearded psychoanalysts. He was filled to the brim with countless thoughts and an inexplicable desire to perform. "An intellectual tilt towards a certain group did not matter; a performance of physical acts was what counted." These words were constantly ringing through his mind and overwhelmed by the sheer desire to discover these unknown realities, he signed up as member of the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan.

He wrote a confessional letter to his parents and left it by their bedside table. He stuffed his necessary belongings in a bag-pack and started off for the rendezvous. One of the mullahs had decided to accompany him to the war-lands. He waited for his accomplice behind the mosque. He arrived shortly and started off with him towards the boundary of the yardstick of civilization.

After a day's journey, they reached the fertile mountain ranges of the tribal regions. Here, a new Salman began to be forged. Every pore of his body was injected with motivation that would eventually result in an endless spasm that would give birth to new techniques and methods to achieve the ultimate goal.

A year had already passed had he was now a fully trained master in the art of guerrilla warfare tactics. The work of putting these skills to practice was now in progress. He had built a reputation for himself as being reckless, relentless and brutal with any weapon put in his hands. His previous personality had been overcome without the slightest of efforts by his trainers. He had forgotten what his face looked like without a turban and a beard. He had forgotten his old self. He was trying to reach towards a higher goal, beyond the barriers of his bodily existence; something that could be achieved only through a higher order morality. He had become a revered entity amongst his peers and a virtuoso in the battlefield. The desire to be at the top, to be remembered in the pages of history and in the art of war was what ran through his blood, amongst other things.

His family had almost forgotten him as he had forgotten them. A year had passed and the thought of going back home to see his mother's face had never entered his mind. The smell of home-cooked food and carefree sound sleep had never been his since he came knocking at the doorstep of his own new being. He had grown indifferent.

Once in the middle of an incoming assault, he saw a woman shielding her child helplessly, as though her embrace would stop the bullets from entering their flesh, the scene of his own mother giving him a kiss on his forehead flashed before his eyes. And a sudden overwhelming desire to see his home for one last night started haunting him. He pondered on the possible repercussions of going back to his hometown for a short while; the cons outweighed the pros every time he did so. But even so, regardless of what could happen, he asked for formal permission to visit his home from his superiors and started travelling.

He smuggled himself into the masses when he reached the urban outskirts of his own city, Lahore. He tried to camouflage himself as thoroughly as he could and merged into the sea of faces. A number of questions were inundating his mind. Would his family recognize him? Would he be able to keep himself composed? Would he succumb to the comforts of modern life? Would he be able to go back?

He spotted his house from the end of the street and started walking towards it. Each step was slower than the last. Time was dilating. He was raining sweat. He could hear the thump of his heart. He reached the gate of his house. He pushed the bell button very gently; a thousand thoughts crossed his minds as he did so. Little did he know what was about to happen.

He heard footsteps growing louder as they approached the door. Who would open the door? He thought. The door opened with a creaking sound almost as if an archaic door to a century old palace had been opened after a long time. He rolled his eyes upwards and then focused right at his own height's parallel. It was a moment of breathless mystery for him. It was his mother.

His mother broke down, burst into tears. She had to. These were tears of love,

anger, hatred, but most importantly, of a fear that something undesirable was about to take place that would shatter these moments of delight into splinters.

He entered the house with an unwelcoming air. His mother embraced him and took him inside the house. He went to see his old room and sat there. His mother sat alongside him. He asked about his father. His mother again burst into tears. After regaining her composure, she told him that his father had been taken away by the law-enforcement agencies. Apparently the news of his turning violent had spread through the area like alcohol catching fire. And in the aftermath his father was abducted by the agencies for interrogation and since then his whereabouts were not known.

He tried to grasp this torrent of disturbing information that had entered his mind. He got up and started regretting all that he had done in that emotional chaos. He fretted about it for hours and hours and then suddenly, as though through a cosmic force, his mother and he spoke of the same danger: he himself might not be safe in the city since the agencies might have had their house under constant surveillance.

Anyhow, he took his chances and stayed the night. He fought with his sleep as if he were fighting with a grand cosmic scheme. Even the chilled breeze seemed like a conspiracy, an act that would initiate a series of events. He was fighting with his own consciousness. He woke up again in the middle of his cracked sleep. The head-lights of a car passing by pierced its rays through his window and illuminated a vase on his table. It seemed like a flickering police light bursting havoc upon Salman's soul. He was trying to rationalize his deeds and it occurred to him that what he had done might be wrong. Who judges good or evil, God? Even his symbolic presence seemed dubious as the anxiety started creeping up his veins. He got up and emptied a bottle of water into his stomach. He was feeling thirsty in spite of the coldness of weather.

The sun had started to show up now and he got up again to offer Fajr prayers. He offered his prayers with a big question mark waving in front of him. However, he composed himself and tried to pick out and crush every unnecessary detail out of his mind that he thought might try to fiddle with his beliefs. He was trying to systematically sort out and arrange his thoughts and beliefs that were in the form of a colossal delusional structure.

He was trying to sort himself out when the door was knocked upon rather aesthetically, like a carillon in a far off land. His heart-beat almost synchronized itself with the tune of knock, or maybe missed a note or two. He got up and started forcing himself towards the door. He opened the door slightly just to get a glimpse of the passer-by. He looked out of the corner of his eye and almost ogled through the small space of vision that he had procured for himself.

His heart-rate was true to him. It was the police. They pushed themselves in and got hold of him. He did not retaliate but glanced at them with a distasteful horror and anger. He was hand-cuffed and was being carried to the car that would take him into an undisclosed location of which only God and the state knew.

As he walked down to the car, he was filled not with remorse but with a subtle feeling of accomplishment that at least he was true to his belief and did not digress. He showed his steadfastness with a feeble smile. He saw his shadow as clear as his soul, and grinned even more feebly. It was not the hand-cuffs that were restricting him, but fate.

A BLISSFULLY IGNORANT LIFE

By: Haniya Humayun

After the spell of rain, the ground that seemed to radiate heat, cooled down. The dry, cracked surface was fertile once again and the petrichor could not have been more exotic. The fields looked lush and the vegetation was vibrant once more. The one hundred and fifty years old tree, older than the oldest inhabitants of the village itself, stood all-alone in the center of the village. It still looked stronger than it had ever looked before. Its long branches formed a well-knit net, providing shade to a wide area. Underneath that shade, something happened after the recent rain.

It was a something that had never happened before. A young sapling sprouted from the ground. It was the first of its kind that had ever emerged in the surroundings of the giant old tree. It looked with amazement at its surroundings; the distant fields, the houses of the villagers, the hens, ducks, and buffaloes. It saw the cats and dogs pecking and littering the land. It heard the birds chirping and the crows croaking. It also observed the patches of serene blue sky that seemed to be filtering through the branches of the tree. Suddenly, its attention was diverted as it heard a voice.

"Hey there little fellow," the giant tree said to the sapling.

The sapling looked up in awe, smiling brightly.

"You are so tall and strong! Will I ever be as big as you?" It asked eagerly.

The giant tree laughed.

"When you are a century and a half old then yes you will," it replied wisely.

The sapling was full of questions.

"What is that big black mark on your trunk?" it asked.

The giant tree bent its branches low and replied sadly "This is where the fire burnt me. It was a horrible, horrible night. But don't ask any more questions about it, you are much too young to be feeling the grief of a massacre that occurred years and years ago."

The sapling was curious, but decided not to upset the giant tree over it. Instead, it looked around and said joyously, "Everything is so beautiful!"

The giant tree sighed and thought to itself. "Yes. I was once young, too. Everything is beautiful at the beginning of life. It is untarnished by reality, which opens up its ugly folds at later stages. Experience and exposure bring wisdom, but it comes at the cost of innocence. You are blissfully pure and ignorant, young sapling. I want you to enjoy this brief period of your life before harsh reality strikes in."

All day long, the young sapling observed with fascination as the villagers carried out their daily routine. It saw as women walked long distances, balancing pitchers of water on their heads and questioned itself about the perfect technique that enabled them to do this. It looked at the children, who came to the giant tree to play and was mesmerized by the beautifully colored marbles that they were playing with. It watched as some boys climbed up the tree and asked the tree if it hurt him. It watched men passing by on donkeys and wondered how the donkey could bear such a heavy load. It laughed happily as little girls came to the tree and swung high on its branches. The giant tree smiled at the little sapling and tried to answer its numerous questions one at a time.

As the evening progressed, the sun reduced its glare and the shadows began to fade. A large number of people were starting to come towards the giant tree. Stools and chairs were placed under it and a colorful charpoy was also set on the ground.

"What is happening over here?" the young sapling asked the giant tree.

The giant tree knew only too well what was about to happen. He had seen this ritual being carried out for as long as it could remember. At the young sapling's question, it looked sadly towards it and reflected that the time of its innocence and bliss was almost up. It would now witness the reality that was going to shatter its childlike perspective of the world.

"These people are here to make an important decision," it replied briefly.

"What decision?" the sapling inquired.

"You will see for yourself," the giant tree said gravely.

Soon all the people had gathered under the giant tree. A bulky man with a thick mustache and a turban came walking pompously and sat down on the charpoy. All the other people bowed down to him. A man sat down and began to knead his legs. Another came and set the hookah near him. The man with turban ran his eyes over the crowd and then spoke in a harsh voice.

"What has brought you all here today?"

A tall, thin man with cunning eyes spoke.

"Chaudhary sahib, it is about Manzoor. He found a firangi trying to cross over to our village. Instead of informing anyone about it, Manzoor kept him hidden in his house. He claims that this foreigner is only here to find out more about his great grandfather who was General in the British army in British India. However, today he was seen at the well where he was misbehaving with Naeem's daughter Sidra."

The Chaudhary listened to this and wrinkles etched themselves on his forehead. His eyes began to reflect a burning anger and his hands were clenched into tight fists.

"WHAT?" he roared.

"What am I hearing? There has been a firangi in our village without me knowing about it? Where is Manzoor? Come forward this instant!"

A slim man came forward, trembling from head to foot. He held both his hands together in front of the Chaudhary and said "Please Chaudhary sahib, he is innocent. He has not harmed anyone. He was just visiting our village. I dare not hide anything from you. I intended to tell you about him, but I found him last night and thought that you would be asleep by then. I was going to bring him to you today."

"I will deal with you later. Where is Sidra?" the Chaudhary demanded.

The young sapling watched as a young girl whose face was covered by a veil walked forward. It wondered what made the girl not want to show her face.

"What did he do Sidra?" Chaudhary asked her.

The girl replied, "I was at the well filling my pitcher when he came towards me. He waved at me and said something I could not understand. He kept talking and then suddenly grabbed my hand. I panicked and dropped the pitcher. He then collected the broken pieces and followed me as I ran, but I was too quick for him and went and hid at Chacha Nazir's house."

The Chaudhary listened to her and then ordered the foreigner to be brought. Two men brought him forward. He was looking with interest at this gathering oblivious to the fact that all the people present there had not gathered in his best interests.

The Chaudhary observed him pitilessly and said then said, "We have no room for firangis like him in our village. They can never be trusted. And he has violated the prestige

of this village by misbehaving with Sidra. He shall be beaten up in front of the whole village and then kicked out."

A young man spoke, "Chaudhary sahib I think we ought to listen to this foreigner too. I understand a little English, may I talk to him?"

The Chaudhary's expression revealed that he did not like the idea, however an old man with a kind face and long white beard said, "I agree with Mushtaq, we ought to listen to this chap as well."

So the Chaudhary reluctantly agreed. Mushtaq conversed with the foreigner and then addressed the villagers. "This man says that he went to the well to drink water and saw a girl filling water there. The pitcher seemed quite heavy for her so he asked if he could help her. The girl did not respond and kept standing silently so he repeated his offer again and again, but when she did not say anything he took the pitcher from her hands to fill it himself but the girl dropped it and began to run. He collected the pieces and ran after her to apologize for breaking the pitcher, but she had disappeared."

The old man spoke again. "I am sure he is telling the truth. It will be unjust to punish him. Just because his ancestors were cruel to our ancestors does not mean that we should not trust him and hold him accountable unjustly."

The little sapling that had been listening intently, cheered up after hearing this. "Everything will be fine now, the right decision will satisfy everyone," it said brightly.

Before the giant tree could say anything, however, a heavy man shifted a little and stamped his foot on the little sapling, crushing it completely.

The giant tree was startled, but at that very moment the Chaudhary stood up and announced his verdict. "Whatever you may say Baba Rehmat, the village respects you for your old age, but we are not fools to let a firangi get away with it after he has misbehaved with one of our daughters. This race can never be trusted. Have you forgotten how that firangi general came to this village years ago and when our Muslim ancestors protested peacefully against the British rule and Congress, he ordered the leaders of the protest to be tied to this very tree and then burned them alive. We have not forgotten the bloodshed his ancestors caused and he is not different from them. He entered this village to create unrest once again. He shall be punished. Nomi, Sallu seize him!"

Two strong, burly men came forward and seized the foreigner. He was speechless at this attack and reflexively took out his gun, which he kept for protection. The whole village gasped at seeing the gun. Their worst fears seemed to have been confirmed after seeing it and they instantly panicked.

The Chaudhary shouted, "See! I told you! He is here to harm us. All you people, why are you standing like this, grab him and tie him to the tree right now!" The villagers obeyed and with some effort succeeded in trying to tie him to the tree.

With a final contemptuous glance at him, the Chaudhary said, "Now we shall do what his ancestor did to ours. Throw oil on him and then light a matchstick. And remember, nobody will repeat anything about this to a soul outside this village. If anyone comes searching for him, tell them you never saw him."

As the orders were followed and the man was burnt alive, the giant tree looked at the flames and smiled sadly. "I am glad the young sapling did not see this. It died in bliss. It only had the happy, peaceful outlook on life and brutal reality had not yet managed to harm it in its short life. Its life was beautiful."

AND THE ONES WHO STUDY SCIENCE...

By: Zuriat Jabbar

"So what are you studying?"

"Microbiology"

"Oh! I see... Weren't you trying to take the admission in a 'medical college'?"

"Ah, yes. But luck was not on my side, I suppose."

"Oh, so what exactly do you 'study'?"

"We study about the microorganisms that are--" (interrupted)

"Sorry what?"

"I mean bacteria and viruses, that can't be--" (interrupted again)

"Sorry, I don't understand?"

"Okay! You must have seen the commercials of soaps that kill germs? Actually it is related to--" (interrupted)

"So you mean it is related to soaps?"

"Ah no no! Actually it is related to the germs which-are-also-known-as-BACTERIA... We study about them how they are harmful or even useful."

"Oh. That sounds pretty interesting! So what is the 'scope' of this?" (Trying to show 'concern')

(While explaining the scope) 'Oh God! What have I done?'

"Is that related to 'medical'?" (still a jolly annoying expression)

(Frustrated but helpless) "Yeah, you can say that."

"Alright! Good!" (Seems to be finally satisfied!)

But this is just not it. Every time you will meet your relatives or the nosy aunties and uncles in your neighborhood, the above story will be repeated. They will always ask you about your studies, especially about the subject you are studying, if you were about to take admission in a medical or an engineering college but somehow, unfortunately and reluctantly, opted for any other science subject for BSc. They will keep on reminding you of your 'failure'. The interrogation may be a very serious one (the above is only an example) with the sudden bombardment of a million questions and you will feel like a wretched wreck that has nothing left to do but to try and satisfy its master, as if you were being questioned for a serious crime. They will also keep on 'advising' you and telling you the tales of their 'efficient' and 'successful' nephews and nieces who are doing medical or engineering (just adding to your misery). And if you are trying to explain something to them in the light of 'science' that might concern them, then... think again! Because you are (obviously) the one at fault. They will make you question your own existence. Just as in my case (for I am a student of microbiology myself) when I try to tell something about, for example, germs, the reply I get is "Keep your 'microbiology' to yourself" or "Come on! I think you are getting superstitious. It is not good for your mental health." and at that moment, you are like "What on earth am I doing?" So sarcastic isn't it? Poor science students.

Well, taking all that stuff rather seriously, it seems that most of the people in our

country do not seem to like the idea of doing simple honors in any of the science subjects. They think that the only 'science' which is to be studied is the one that is studied in the medical or engineering colleges. Their only question is what is the 'scope' of that particular subject? (Because that is the only thing that actually matters to them) The conservative thinking of the majority of people in Pakistan is actually divided into two parts. One is that their children should be going for a medical or an engineering profession. The second part, that starts when their children 'fail' to fulfil this wish and opt a science subject, is related to the scope. The parents, very much concerned about their children's future, seem to have that thought in the light of the current situation of our country. They are very much concerned about the insecurities regarding their children's future. But sometimes, it is those people who actually work on the principle of 'live but don't let others live peacefully' that keep on brainwashing them.

Many students are not satisfied with the subject they study. When they fail to get admission in medical or engineering, most of them just switch to other subjects like accounting and business studies. While those who reluctantly choose a science subject are usually the ones with a 'broken heart'. The thought of being a 'failure' always remains there, partly because they too had studied hard but did not get the desired results and partly because most of the time they are not much appreciated and also some people do not let it go so easily. As mentioned earlier, whenever they will meet you, they will 'interrogate' you.

As this is about those who study science so it would be unfair to ignore their 'way of life'. Let's see the some of their perspectives as well. The sciences students study very hard, but can you really guess what they mean by 'studying hard'? It would be better to ask this question from our 'education system'. But can't we just thank it for giving us an overall false notion of 'studying hard'? And look, it has given us a plenty of 'cramming machines' too. The merit is increasing rapidly and in order to meet it, students study very hard. To achieve a high score for getting admission in a medical or engineering colleges, a majority of them have made the best use of their 'retention power'. They seem to quickly 'drink' the books without being able to sense the real taste of them! More precisely, it can be said that they can remember everything but only a few of them really grasp the concept either in matric or in the F.Sc. They are only concerned with the book and even remember the page numbers! So once you ask a question from their textbook, they can tell you "yes I know the answer. It is on in the second line of the first paragraph on the fourth page of the third chapter on the page number 32..." and so on but when they are asked a question (that, according to them, is 'out of the book or syllabus') but which is based on one of the principles described in the book, they really go blank, having not even a vague notion of what it really is about. Because they are 'programmed to cram' and seldom grasp the concept. It is not the student's fault itself. It is a flaw in our education system. (Cramming is not just confined to the science students, other students do that too)

One more term that is usually used to define the science students is "uncreative". Well, the majority of them are. They do lack creativity and confidence; once again, thanks to our education system. In order to meet the ever increasing merit, the students spend all of

their time in studying (cramming actually) ignoring all other creative activities. In most private and government schools, they are not really motivated to participate in other activities. The tuitions and academies further help the students to 'study' only to prepare for the 'hideous' board examination and hence all the other activities are ignored. The students are only concerned with their books and that's it. They are perceived as tough and boring (not every student is the same, though). The 'dry air' of science blocks is mostly filled with tensions and fears and the echoes of cramming students. And when you try to persuade them to participate in a particular activity, 'wasting' much of your time in trying to convince them, the only answer you get after all that labor is "sorry, we are not interested, maybe some other time" Frustrating but funny indeed.

Science is very vast. It is amazing and interesting. It is not only confined to the fields of medicine and engineering, as perceived by a majority of people. Rather it incorporates so many interesting things and phenomena that are present in this vast universe. Who could have thought that there are so many invisible beings that can be of great benefit to the mankind? Who could ever have imagined that there are stars so big, so much bigger than man ever thought? How about the idea of modifying a person's cell to treat an illness that has prevailed in his family for generations? We can see so many benefits ahead that can be reaped by sowing the seeds of scientific research. Man has gone so far in his pursuit of knowledge. But here, we are still cramming the works of those who have passed away centuries ago. We are still in deadlocked into a choice between the fields of medicine and engineering. We live in a country where pharmacies are being run by the illiterates while the pharmacists are out of a job. And then starts the series of never ending taunts: "Who told you to study pharmacy?" "See, I told you that this is not a subject worth studying. No jobs." and the most annoying one "What is pharmacy all about anyway?" etc. etc. Moreover, our education system needs an urgent change. We do not need cramming. We need our students to grasp the concepts, because that is all what matters. We do not need 'machines'. We need humans who can fully understand scientific concept, for this is what is essential to join the race of ever increasing knowledge. There are so many problems that are being faced by those who study science. No wonder we lag far behind the scientific world. People do not seem to understand the need of the hour. Well, they need to understand it for it is important to move forward.

BEING IN A BE-HIVE

By: *Lyca Ahmad*

Part 1

When we met the last time, you were sitting in your room and had gotten hold of this paper-the medium for us to communicate in this modern world. You had gotten it from a girl, struggling to compose a short story. It wasn't as petty as you expected it to be. In it, I had written about our last rendezvous when you were in the abyss of unconsciousness. I revealed some realities unto you which had seemed to be forgotten by that day and thus, I was there again, speaking to you about those things that you were unable to understand in the beginning but you did. You were probably wondering how I knew you and how you knew me because you had never seen me before but you did have me with you, every other day-right behind your consciousness, somewhere hiding in the crowds. I certainly didn't hold any kind of evidentiary support to prove that you had known me from many, many, many experiences of your life. All I had to offer you was a feeling that I left you with in our first meeting, and was trying to do the same once again. How I knew you, wasn't the question but how YOU knew me, was.

I told you about the time the time when you were wrapped up in thin, fine strips of linen-silk, way before this day, and how I silently stood there waiting for you to recover consciousness. Then I told you about your struggle to come out of that silk-covering. You kept striving, kept making noises to get rescued from that captivity; all that time I stood there, still and silent, thinking that it wasn't the right time to converse until you had gotten really tired of struggling against the hope. In my story, I told you about your fading strength in that disturbing situation and the time when you went dead silent, trying to observe your surroundings because that constant fluttering sound of movements had convinced you to believe that you weren't alone and, rightly, you weren't-there was I, along with the hundreds of Egyptian slaves working in that pyramid where your body was taken to be embalmed as a mummy.

"You are not alone here," I had finally broken the ice. "I can see you, clearly, from where I stand."

"Who are you?" You questioned abruptly.

"I'm a human. And, for multiple reasons, your mind doesn't recall who I am, but you will, sooner or later. You're surrounded by Egyptian slaves experimenting on you. And that's one reason why I cannot get you out of this situation lest I shall be killed by the masters." I replied.

Then we exchanged a few strange thoughts, discussing how you came to be there, what the people around looked like. You were silent and innocent, like a child. I told you you had two eyes, and because they were closed, you couldn't see anything around you; then I assured you of my help in understanding anything that you sought to learn. I explained to you about your senses-the ears that helped you hear the people running and walking across you, the nose that let you smell the burning sand under the sweltering sun that had so bright

a light that it burned every inch of your delicate skin-the skin around which the silk-linen strips were tightly wrapped. You started making sense of everything the moment I had begun explaining the universe and how it functioned. You had started to remember but it was just that you weren't certain - certain of how you had gotten there.

"How long have I been here? Why don't I know what you know?" You asked me.

"As far as the first question is concerned, you've been here for days I cannot count; and as for the second question, you still wouldn't know what I know even if I unveil everything that I know. You just recovered from unconsciousness."

"So, can I say that I've been dead?" you asked, "and that's probably the reason why I've been embalmed, right?!"

"Could be," I replied after thinking for a while. "Now you're starting to figure out things on your own."

"But now that they know I'm alive, why won't they let go of me?"

"Because you haven't tried yet," I replied.

You hurriedly rubbed your head across the finely woven cloth covering your face, striving to see the light that your eyes had now begun absorbing through the blindfolding sheet. You still couldn't move your limbs. The fury in the air had gotten all the more infuriated by the loudening buzz in the atmosphere. "It could be one of the three curses of Moses," you thought, "or it could be the end," you feared. I had assured you that it wasn't, but you kept insisting that it was.

You moved your limbs about, which one of the working slaves noticed. He called his companions hastily and within a few moments, many slaves had been summoned and gathered around you. The wind had gone still, making you aware of your silenced self in a bustling crowd. You could feel them advancing towards you, whispering and wondering what should be done to you. The more you heard their whisper-negotiations, the harder you struggled and forced your limbs to break through that silk-cyst. So intensely had you pushed the cyst that it bulged upward every tacky surface left undone by an overworked hand. The slaves kept rushing forward. The fire, the heat-you knew you were about to get yourself cooked, and the un-emitted smoke suffocating the scream deep inside, further worsened the situation. You had felt such extreme energy run through your chest that finally the cyst crisply cracked, letting a ray of light seep in with its maximum brilliance. With a great force, you pushed your limbs backwards and took a gigantic leap from that cocoon dropped in a beehive hung on a tree. You opened your eyes and let your wings float through the waves, leaving the quivering leaves behind. This was when you had, finally, realized that you weren't a man stranded in Egypt and that you falsely identified yourself as a human.

It sounded insane to you, when you read this part of the story. "What? Are you saying that I was caught up in a beehive all that long? How can I be a butterfly then and a man now?" You thought with a strange certainty in your confusion that I hadn't seen coming.

Part: 2

"There is no 'then' or 'now'. You are what you are," I replied in the second part of the story. "You're living through everything, everywhere, every moment. It's just that you don't know."

"You're saying that a man who just died in another part of the world was me? And the Egyptians, the bees, the butterfly-everything was, in fact, me?"

"Now you're starting to learn everything once again," I calmly replied. "There is no such thing as time. You've created it in this world and you've started believing and living in it. You're everything around you."

"So, it's just you and me in this universe?"

"You are, indeed, a part of me."

"Eh?" You made a cynical gesture, "Let's consider for a moment that I am a part of you then to know about myself I must know who you are."

"Sure!" I fondly replied. "I'm a figment of your imagination! Whose voice is this that you've imagined to read these words in? Have you seen me or heard me somewhere else before? Why have you given this character the voice of a man or a woman? Who, in your mind, is reading my words?" I asked with great conviction.

"I guess, this is how my mind works," your eyebrow twitched, dropping paleness in your eyes. "Who created me then and everything around me? I'm standing here and holding this paper, how can this be my imagination?" Your face turned blank with an unrecognizable fear.

"You just have this paper in your hand and you're reading it with brilliant sense of imagination. This, whatever you are now, is your imagination in some other world's time and space. Every time you imagine, you make a world somewhere out there. Déjà vu, coincidence, accidents, your 6th sense, it's all right there, inside the cranium, supported on the medulla, behind your eye socket. Everything surrounding you could be an imagination of your own imagination." I smiled after a pause. "You've yet to recognize yourself not from the outer world but through your inside which is pure and sublime. Somewhere under all these strata of imaginations, you'll find your true self-the Self that is nothing but 'I' who is the Creator, the Initiator, and the Activator of all these imaginations."

I took advantage of your silence and declared my upcoming words to be the last. "You're reading the words that are about to come. You're racing your eyes over these words, which means that you have your eyes opened, unlike the first time we met each other in the beehive; 'that' was different and 'this' is here, and what is here, shall not last. You will be dead and then reincarnated once again." I dramatically sighed in between the monologue. "I'm about to explain another reality of your life with respect to the eyes that now you have but then you hadn't. The fact is, they had neither been of any help to you back then, nor are

they now. How could they be, when the two of you look at a flower and call it pink without letting any doubt intrude your stable world? Are you, by that, suggesting that you see exactly what the other sees? What if I tell you that the color black in your imagined world is yellow in his? And every time you see black, he sees yellow and you both, delusionally, call it pink because that's what you are told; but what actually - in the ideal world - what -it is, is blue. Considering there is an original form of everything, underneath these layers of imaginations, the pink is your yellow and his black but the pink itself is blue. And as a matter of fact, all the dumb, deaf and blind men unable to use these senses eventually got saved from being the extension of reality that you are. What if they are closest to what you originally are? It seems that you're sensually challenged, and fail to save yourself from any doubt that could lead you closer to the core, to the bottom of the spiral. We've met each other for millions of times before and we shall keep meeting like this every moment you overlook things that you can see but aren't."

After that, I disappeared, just the way I'm going to, right now.

COTTON CANDY

By: Amna Niaz

Cotton Candies were my favorite. Their softness, vague connectivity and then their dissolution in mouth was the most enjoyable magic that I used to do in my childhood. I remember all of us friends enjoying the chuckle sound after the suspension of the candy that came out by blocking air between tongue and palate and then loosing the tongue from roof of palate. I also remember dropping ink at centre of the candy and watching it spread towards the periphery, spoiling its beauty and purity.

One foggy winter morning I went to buy cotton candies for Rs. 5. I use to get 10 for Rs. 5 but that day I got 5 for 5. The reason that the shopkeeper put forward was inflation. I now wonder if that really was the reason, or if it was just my bad fortune. As I stepped out, I felt a hard hand pulling my cheeks. It was a new experience, many people do pull my cheeks, but softly. However, the offer put forward by him was so fascinating that I forgot the salty pain of my cheeks.

"You want more candies?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Oh! Darling, come with me, I will let you buy more."

I just opened my hand and put it in the hand of that uncle who I was sure belonged to my village because I had seen him off and on near that candy shop in my village. He took me to the back of a Government school wall saying that a new shop for kids had opened there. On the way was a water null confined in four walls. He asked me to come in and move the null for he wanted to drink water. I started doing it, amused, but suddenly he caught my hands. I thought he was going to tell me how to move the null but I got surprised and frightened when he seized my body with his cruel hands. I wondered and forgot how to react. He did something very cruel to me that I did not know how to describe at that time but I was sure it was something shameful. I shouted and yelled but no one heard me, no one came to save me. The cruelty went to its apex and my voice was curbed by his hand blocking my mouth. I scratched his hands, I rubbed my hands and legs on the ground, I tried to fight but all was in vain.

My weakness was his strength, and finally those barbaric eyes began to fall down with an entire satisfaction. Warning me not to open my mouth, he freed me. I ran away from there at a speed that could have won me medals. Looking back again and again with a tightly closed fist so not to feel any other such hand encroaching, I collided with a woman. She was someone who used to come to our home. She asked asked me what had happened.

I said weeping, "That man...behind the school...aaa...nothing...he...he...my clothes...my mama will scold me."

I just ran and came back home.

After that, I was highlighted: I often found men and women pointing me out, saying, "That is the girl, that one was abused..." and this title has been engraved within me. Most of my childhood memories are vague, but some are not. I wish that they were too, or

they could be removed from my mind as a cotton candy vanishes after some time, as if it were never there. My personality has been modeled and defined by society and they have defined me as an 'abused' girl for whom respect is something impossible.

I was a cute, simple and beautiful girl but I lost all that to an uncle, he snatched it away from me, and the rest has been taken away by society.

Now what am I? I am an undefined, vague entity whose stained self is disappearing.

I feel I am a cotton candy. ?

GOOD NEWS MAKES ME SAD

By: Aiza Tariq

Good news makes me sad. I'm afraid that the reader will, at this point, have discarded me off as a masochist. No, I do not purposely inflict pessimism over my faculties and neither do I take pleasure in doing so. In fact, I am as likely as the next person to want to remain happy. Why then does something that is supposed to bring joy, and is to be an agreeable change of situation, bring sadness to me? The reason underlying this is not at all complex. It is simple, and can be considered childish, if you will.

I've grown up watching chocolate and sweetmeat advertisements on TV. And the companies seem to have picked upon good news as a marketing strategy, as if every cause for celebration demands sweetmeat to be spread amongst loved ones. As if inflicting diabetes is elementary in order to share one's happiness with others. But perhaps this impulse is buried deep in our culture, our collective unconscious. I still remember the piles of sweet boxes that my parents distributed in the family when my brother was born. At the age of 7, I was too swept away by the ongoing buzz to question the proceedings much. My grandmother, even when she was suffering with heart valve disease, never forgot to wake up early every Eid morning, and cook a pot of vermicelli swimming in milk, in her lizard-infested kitchen. And since she is not here anymore, the tradition has been passed down to other women of the family and the next generations of lizards, if lizards ever do die.

My roots have propagated in me the idea that your happiness must be shared with those around you. Christopher McCandless was not fooling around when close to his death; he reached the conclusion that happiness is only real when shared. And this sharing is our impulsive reaction whenever we are happy. We share our joys with our loved ones, watch them express their joy, and bask in the spotlight.

Here, what if you don't know who to share the 'good news' with? Not that you don't have people around, you do, a lot of people. Still, your long list of prized friends and contacts, the ones you have claimed to love, and who have claimed to love you, fails you at such a crucial moment, and not because they are uncaring selfish individuals who have no interest in your wellbeing. Yet the fact remains that this particular headline, is not 'their' own happiness and is somebody else's, even if that somebody else is their sibling or best friend. What if good news is just an invitation to loneliness, when you realize that the only person truly happy over this information is you? That can be a sad moment.

This is where my sadness draws from, and where good news can act contrary to its nature. What I've learnt to do then is to cover my sadness up when I'm in public, wallow in it when I have the comfort of my private quarters, and to forget about it in a few days. That is, until it happens again.

JOURNEY TO GCU

By: Gullalai Khan Shairani

I remember choosing GCU over an Engineering degree at UET. I remember the gaze of my father filled with surprise for I had just rebelled against my family's 'all-choosing-science-and-business' majority. The idea was simple, I found a pen and a paper more alluring than questions like 'why gravity pulls?'. No, it doesn't mean that I don't like these questions at all, quite the contrary, I did. It was like asking a child whether he liked an ice cream or a chocolate better. I always despised such questions as a child. Such questions tend to leave you with only one option. I always refused to answer such questions, and so I did as a grown up as well. (The reason why I'm comparing Literature with Physics when my field was supposed to be engineering is entirely different. I actually wanted to apply in GCU for Physics, and I just randomly filled the form for Literature while submitting it on 20th September, 2014. (Yes, I remember the dates) I was selected in both, but I preferred one dream over the other.

'Good parents are no lesser than finding an umbrella on a rainy day, surprisingly in your bag.' There's a thing about my parents; they're not clichéd, conventional Pakhtoon parents. They're rather more liberal than my liberal friend's parents. The idea is simple. You've to give your parents reasons to believe in you. So I did, and now they're aware that whatever decision I will take will be rational enough.

This decision of mine was wholeheartedly accepted by my family. The society, however, is a crazy breed. They tend to oppress one's creativity to a point where one gives up on every single hope, every single strand of uniqueness. Hence, a lot of criticism came my way as a child scoring A+ is usually forced to opt for Engineering or Medical subjects.

'The problem with our society is that we are never contented. We never really set our next generation free. We tend to tie them with our chains of expectations. If they come up to those expectations, our level of expectation goes higher rather than setting them free. If they fail to meet our standards, they're pushed to try again and again until we realize they've wasted precious years of their lives.'

Enduring it, I finally entered my university life. The first few days were exhausting and for the first time, I was out of my 'we all love you to the point of bringing cold water and umbrella for you' environment. I remember crying alone while sitting in The Oval, under the scorching blanket of heat.

Quoting it again:

'We come to accept the things we cannot change.'

The very first day, I had five friends already. "You tend to make friends as quickly as you flick your hair", my teacher complimented me. "No", I felt like telling her. There's a difference in making people comfortable with you and being actual friends.

'The heart is like an ocean, its waves always eager to touch the glitter that's present on the other side of the boundaries set for it. And later, returning as they touch, for appearances are often deceptive.'

I wish I could speak of the struggles I had in those days.

'A part of you whispers to be indifferent; a part of you scolds you to care. Which part you listen to, defines your experiences.'

So I accepted the point that I wasn't going to get a group, somehow similar to my own self. And hence I planned to spend my days sitting in Shahab Garden or the library of course.

'The goals we set for ourselves are often taken away by what He plans for us.'

LOST INNOCENCE!

By: Maryam Suleman

"300 dead, 132 injured, we found the attacker's head ...

Long beard, dark features, whereabouts unknown age 18

a-

"bachao"(help)

"My son was supposed to be here!

Shrieks, moans, sobs...

And the scene dissolved to be replaced by a baby lying in a cloth knotted to the ends of a small cot, eyes wide opened and face towards the sky, a pacifier in his mouth. Lost in his little thoughts and dilemmas, the baby didn't seem to care what was going around him, not even his mother, having usual arguments, with his father.

"The baby isn't my responsibility" said the father and before the mother could retort, he was gone, gone for good.

The baby's eyes could now see tears falling down his mother's eyes. She came down to pick him up and the moment her lips made contact with his forehead, he gave a blissful smile and yawned.

"it's time for you to sleep beta (kid)", she murmured and as she said this, a stream of tears ran down her eyes.

Sleep will come...

It was 6 in the morning when Manan was woken up in Edhicenter, an orphanage and was asked to get ready.

The voices could be heard outside the sitting area; apparently someone had come to adopt him which he found exciting.

"His mother left him here ".

"How old is he?"

"He was a year old when he was brought here. He's probably 4 now."

"I shall take him."

Abdul Manan, a child abandoned by his parents because he was the outcome of an illegitimate relationship, was brought in an orphanage. His life was nothing but guilt. A criminal he was, whose crime was to be a son to such parents. Manan was a quiet and vulnerable child, a child who was found in the left over garbage container when he was a year old, alone and abandoned.

Deprived of love, Manan found the orphanage infuriating as he was recognized there as an illegitimate child. To add fuel to the fire, his illegitimacy was publicized and ridiculed in TV shows. Since then, he had been a subject of mockery .Growing up in an orphanage; he had to go through a great deal of hardships and isolation. His life was nothing but guilt and shame until he was adopted by a group of sacred Islamic scholars (as he was told). Manan was happy and desperate to get out of the orphanage but little did he know what else he was about to face.

Life is cruel. This was demonstrated to Manan soon as he left the orphanage. Living there with a group of bullies was more unbearable than the orphanage that bullying was nothing compared to the horrific realities unearthed later as he reached the age of 10.

It was the night he was gang raped. The vicious monsters quenching their thirst on Manan. He wanted to run, to shout, call his parents for help and he did, aware of the fact that no one would come to his aid. Despair latched itself onto him. He kept shouting but the screams drowned and so did another precious thing.... Innocence!

It can be said that man is cruel by nature. Manan's life had been a fair depiction of cruelty in this regard so far. From an innocent child to a vicious monster...the journey had been devastating and revenge was what he wanted. Being sexually molested and being accused of being an illegitimate child left him no choice but to avenge his destructive life. These were the reasons which turned him into what he was not: a ferocious extremist.

It was he who brought about countless deaths in the society he was spiritually killed in. Nothing made him more content than to extinguishing the fire of revenge burning inside him. But one thing he never realized was that by doing what had been done to him he was creating a more vicious society. His innocence turned into violence.

And now he could see it clearly, his eyes wide open, head towards the sky just like it had been years ago when he was abandoned and spiritually killed by his mother. The difference was he wasn't in his cot and there was no pacifier, no one to pacify either...

LOVE AND FLOWERS

By: Amna Niaz

Nature is the manifestation of the Great God. From the grain of sand to the epic of the mountain, all has been created by the Great Artist. From the beginning, humans have been appreciating nature in different ways, through art, literature and music. Each and every aspect of nature has been variously explained, like the rise of the sun: an emblem of hope for one, a sign of victory and a symbol of progress for another.

This flexibility of nature in representing different aspects of human life makes it very inclusive. This is the reason that humans have long been associating their complex and inexplicable feelings with nature or its different aspects. There is a plethora of feelings that otherwise are difficult to explain because of our inability to speak of them with ease, which when related with nature are conveyed effectively like feeling in the seventh heaven is enough and even more than enough to explain the extent of one's happiness. Rage is compared with thunder, fits with a cyclone, hatred with thorns and love with flowers.

Flowers are the fullest form of life and inevitably bring smiles to the cheeks that see them. Their rhythmic movements with the blowing of the winds invoke the writers, singers and dancers to manifest their art and bring forth the feelings inside. Their spectacular beauty, kitschy colors, aesthetic harmony and the utter humility that makes them bow in spite of being the comeliest entity of nature and the delight that these flowers shower upon their environment by their fragrance make them undoubtedly loveable. But how are love and flowers associated?

As said before, the feelings that are hard to explain, vague or inconspicuous, are related with nature. Love is a mighty and deep feeling and explained in different ways as one feels it but it is always comparable with the flower. Like a flower, it brings life to the dull soul, it makes those affected feel like the most beautiful creature on earth, it is shy and humble toward its beloved, it polishes the conscience and the soul, it lets one say the unsaid words, gives lyrics to the melodies, and teaches lessons never learnt before. Along with these, both love and flowers grow with appreciation and die of selfish possession. As a flower is being plucked, it ceases to have all the characteristics that made it loveable. In the same way, love becomes a dull and boring responsibility when instead of a being worthy appreciation, it becomes a possession.

TRAIN

By: Sidra Amin

I feel dust in my mouth and some ash. It tastes something like a bonfire from one of the nights that I spent with my old lover who ditched me by the river side on our "romantic date" for no reason. I can't tell what it is, or maybe, my mind is too occupied to tell because I am scribbling on the diary that my grandfather had left in the drawer of his side table, right next to his bed, under the piles of prescriptions and some poetry notes from his favorite poetess whom he used to admire when he was 48 and tired of the worldly affairs that included the daily drama of his wife complaining about the kids not studying and neighbours being rude.

I paint the picture of earth and horizon with alphabets in the diary. I write about the birds chirping on the trees. I write about the very trees that seem naked without the greenery. I write about the world's unfair judgment and broken hearts and chocolate wrappers hidden under the pillow cover. But somewhere in these stories, I disguise my misery with fancy words and glittering lies. This is what all writers that I have known, do. This is what I have been doing for last 638 days, 126 hours, 170 minutes and 394 seconds.

While I continue to write, there's a constant sound in the background, a cacophony, very sharp but comforting for me, and a horn after every interval. Yes, this is my first train ride; to a destination I don't care about, with people I don't know anything about. The dust from the nearby village, the ash from the coals burning in the engine is no different from the smoldering desire in my heart to explore this world. "Finally!" I write, "My thirst of travelling by train is quenched, my dream has come true."

I hear songs from the forest, of birds and animals and maybe some humans, who have no idea about my existence in this vast, unfathomable universe. As I write, I sip the tea which has a somewhat sombre color and smells like the breeze on a winter morning. I look around from the door of the train which could be decades old and try to find something (or someone?) in the emptiness of the colossal forest which is not familiar to me. I question everything around me, trying to untangle riddles in my mind. Slowly and leisurely, I find the answers to this world and its belongings, to humans and their obsessions, to animals and their fears, to trees and their unvoiced tales- from an unknown voice which is audible only to me while everything else feels invisible. But all of a sudden, this "oh-so-perfect" and impeccable world becomes devastatingly woeful for me. It sings my heart, sears my soul, and burns every part of my body.

"So this wasn't a flawless universe?" I wonder. "The nebulae weren't just colorful clouds? And the stars, the stars weren't explosions of matter? The rivers? They weren't just beds for waters to flow in?" I comprehend that this world is everything but what I had thought.

I'm lost, doing some calculations in my mind, trying to mute an old song at the back of my mind that I had heard on radio when I was travelling to a hill station by highway, and being awestruck by the secrets revealed to me at the same instant. In between all of these

silent trains of thought, I hear a BANG. I try to decipher what has happened but I cannot. Everything blurs. I cannot conclude what has happened until I hear a voice that says "the train has crashed". All of this happens so fast that it is hard for me to believe that the train I was travelling on has turned into debris which is ravaging me. I discern the entire world moving towards me, singing its fibs and deceits and it stings me. A stream of crimson (I thought I had iron deficiency??) flows down my heart, down to my wrists and trips off my fingers, turning my ugly nails into perfectly manicured red nails. I chant some religious verses I was taught in childhood but they don't cure the fire that has been lit in my heart. I whisper my first love's name who used to sit next to me in drawing class in 1st grade, but it doesn't help either. I see a vision of something leaving me. It's dark like a nightmare, corroded, akin to a heart that has never loved anyone, desolate like a little child whose father leaves her before she even learns to spell his name. It is my soul. It is me, leaving myself behind for I am not permitted to know the secrets of the universe.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: A DREAM IN PAKISTAN

By: Hazrat Shah Kakar

"Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development, it is vital to our existence."

Great controversy exists whenever we analyse pluralism, secularism, and the state of Pakistan. Almost every state has people adhering to various religions, sects, cultures etc. Countries that have been passing through stages involving deliberations over secularism, pluralism and the states' response towards these have almost succeeded and have achieved their desired goals. During the last century, the west has moved further towards these concepts than the rest of the world. Living in a religious state, it becomes necessary to create and promote pluralistically religious sentiments in our people. Inter-religious harmony was much stronger in pre-partition times where people lived peacefully for centuries, in the present. They were more culturally and religiously pluralistic than we actually are. But everything has changed.

Since partition Pakistanis have been bearing the brunt of religious intolerance. Sadly, we have declared the Ahmedis as non-Muslims constitutionally. Since then survival of the Ahmedis in the 'land of pure' has become impure. Not only Ahmedis, but also Shias, the largest religious minority, Christians and Hindus are discriminated against. Hindus have to see their relatives facing forced migrations and marriages. Their houses, shops, places of worship etc. are being ransacked; some are even burnt alive. The religious extremist thugs are enforcing their agenda not only on their fellow Muslims but on every human being. Our schools, mosques, temples, and churches are not safe; People belonging to any sect or religion are afraid of performing any religious ritual of their religious sites. Though admirers of Medina, the largely pluralistic Muslim society, we Muslims now have now forgotten the ideal standards concerning pluralism set by prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Is the state responsible for all this mess? Or have some regional developments during the last century and the last decade pushed us to this extreme?

Firstly, let's have a look at the related developments of the last century. After the decline of Ottoman Empire, many Islamic movements reared their heads in Middle East and the south Asia. Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and Jammat-e-Islami in British India were the most prominent. They launched their movements to revive lost Islamic glory and work for bringing about Islamic revolution in the world. They believed in the political struggle to achieve their objectives. They are known as the political Islamists. But some significant events like Islamic revolution in Iran, the siege of Makkah, and the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the year 1979 took place that shaped and steered some movements in quite different way. The stated three events, especially the afghan jihad saga, gave impetus to Al-Qaida to struggle for pan-Islamism militantly rather than politically. One can say that the cold war period contributed much in transforming Political Islam into militant one. Al-Qaida, Taliban, and the recent rise of ISIS have strong implications and have damaged our societal fabric. These have left no stone unturned in crushing religious pluralism and

promoting religious hatred in the Muslim world, including Pakistan.

Secondly, like the religious extremist forces, the state has also played its role by fomenting religious violence. State patronage of some groups (the Sunni faction) has made them so stronger that the rest of the factions seem men of a lesser god. Ironically, the clerics who voted against the making of Pakistan were given more space after partition, thereby manipulating everything for their own individual gains. During the 1980s, in order to counter the Iranian revolution, the state helped Saudi Arabia disseminate Wahabism in the region. Consequently, we have the scourge of sectarianism that has grown in its size. By stressing Islamic identity too much, the state is deciding the fate of Hindus, Christians and other non-Muslims in mosques. Unexpectedly, the socialist leader, Bhutto, intervened too by deciding who is Muslim and who is not. Worse still, some central political parties love to patronise and aid some groups which pursue their own agenda while suppressing others. Everywhere states interpret religions, but whenever religion is misinterpreted by states there is anarchy. Amidst that anarchy, the throat of pluralism being slit becomes inevitable.

I have some recommendations for how can we achieve religious pluralism. One, the parliament should de-radicalise some parts of the working constitution. Also, the state must stop patronising some of the groups at the expense of the minority religious groups. Two, the curriculum till school and college level must be reframed; new progressive curricula should be formed aimed at promoting religious harmony, tolerance and respect for each other. Three, we have to learn to control and tame our anger. For that we can find supreme examples in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). We should educate our people, especially the younger generation, about anger management and non-violence. Four, there should be ban on public loud-speakers, a technology used sometimes to provoke violence. Five, we should revisit our relations with Saudi Arabia because they have invested much in form of madrassas in the country. These madrassas have produced more Jihadis than scholars; madrassa system should be state controlled. Six, since each citizen has an equal right to be protected, it is mandatory for the government to ensure the security of the minorities. Another, the civil society should also come forward and arrange seminars on the topics of inter-religious harmony and pluralism. Finally, our relations with our neighbours should be improved as these relations have implications for domestic issues; the policy makers should adopt a non-hostile attitude.

PAKISTAN: A NATION EARNED BY SACRIFICE AND STILL SACRIFICING

By: Aminah Suhail Qureshi

Sakina screamed and yelled for help. It was dark down there. The only hope for her rescue depended on her squall reaching someone's ear, but her raucous cry faded away while covering the long distance to the ground. It was getting even more tenebrific with every passing second and all she could see was her life in the form of flashbacks in reverse chronological sequence. Her very own mother had just thrown her into this darkness about the depth of which realised only when it took her a long time to hit a surface. She had held her mother hard, clenched her shirt tightly in her fist, and tried every tactic in a futile attempt to change her mother's decision.

May be her mother wanted to get rid of this fifteen kilograms of weight she was continuously carrying, as they had been running for quite a few hours. Had those men stopped chasing them, Sakina thought while staring at the sky, her mother would have never separated her daughter from herself. Sakina was now losing consciousness but she wrestled with her memories to form a link between their escape from their own house and her sister's squeal coming from the veranda a few moments after three men had torn off her clothes. Had those men not killed her father, she thought, he would have castigated and berated her mother for throwing her into this well. In the midst of this labyrinth, Sakina took her last breath and uttered a whisper, "Mama..."

Zain was crying out loud in response to the pain a bearded man was giving him by pulling his hair. The language in which they were conversing was not known to him but he knew that these men would soon slaughter him. He knew that no one would come to his rescue as the brutes had already burnt the school's Principal in front of his eyes. Zain had already witnessed his brave teachers and fearless fellows being turned into corpses. He wished to live no more, but he did not want to die at the hands of those bloodthirsty maurauders.

A bewhiskered terrorist bent Zain down to his knees and pushed his head down towards the earth. He dared to move his eyeballs and looked at his surroundings. Just then he caught a glimpse of a boy he recognised as his senior. The trepidation and fear in Fawad's bloodshot eyes were not alien to Zain. He saw Fawad shutting his eyes tightly behind his eyelids. The tightness heightened with the rate at which the gunman pressed his finger against the trigger. This one moment seemed a whole lifetime to Zain. He was demanding an omelette for breakfast just a couple of hours ago; he had kissed his mother's cheeks before boarding the bus and had promised her that he would come back in the afternoon and would not keep her waiting too late. It took the gunman only a moment to fire a bullet but the bullet took several fractions of that single moment to pierce the skull and damage the brain, bang against the walls of the cranium and settle. By the time he caught attention of the bearded killer, Zain had realised that it was not going to be an easy death. It took them less than a minute to turn him into a cadaver, but Zain's blood took multitudinous fractions of

that minute to stop circulating in Zain's blood vessels and leave him cold as a stone.

Pakistan's foundations were laid on immolation and sacrifice; its emergence on the world map cost several innocent lives and their honour. The year 1707 marked the beginning of the continual forfeiture and excruciation of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. The situation leading to cannibalism among the public during the construction of the white marble mausoleum, the Taj Mahal, in the 1600s did not spare the Muslims of India. The afflictions faced by them were doubtless not less than the agony of those belonging to other faiths. Then why were they blamed for something which they had also suffered? Why was the entire blame of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 put on the Muslims despite knowing the active contribution and participation of the majority and not just the followers of one religion?

In spite of the presence of the Indian National Congress in the Legislative Assembly, there was no say of the Muslims in law-making until the founding of the All-India Muslim League in 1906. Prior to the establishment of this forum for the Indian Muslims, they were dependent on the Congress to convey their problems and proposals to the rulers. As they were never given proper representation, the Muslims principally did not have any identity and did not seem to exist at all. After decades of being fooled by the chameleons in the Congress, the Muslims finally decided to show their strength, and it was this very movement that led to the creation of Pakistan. However, this was not an easy task.

None of us is incognizant of the initial disinclination shown by the Muslim population towards adopting and learning English culture and language. Nonetheless, this hesitation was inimically used against the later generations and Muslims were deprived of their fundamental rights, such as to voice their opinions and get formal education. Despite all these efforts to retain Muslims at the lowest level of stature, eminent figures like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar emerged and contributed to winning Muslims their true identity.

It was in 1940 that the Muslims of India demonstrated their conviction and determination to get a separate country where they could live freely, practice their religion without having to face persecutions and run the state according to the decalogue given by their credo and faith. They had realised the paramount importance of an Islamic Republic where the believers of other religions would not play their religious chantings outside the mosques and would not throw the remnants of slaughtered pigs inside the mosques. Also, they dreamt of giving their daughters a home where they would not be harassed or sexually abused. For this purpose, Muslims from the other side crossed the border after being plundered. Old women and young girls were molested alike, their houses burnt, and their fathers, husbands and sons brutally killed in this carnage. It was not an easy task for them to leave their lands and properties, if they had any, and travel for miles on foot. The darkest chapter of the story is the assassination of young girls by their own parents and guardians in order to save their honour from the plunderers who had already stolen away their belongings and had burnt down their houses. Sakina was one of them.

On August 14, 1947, the Radcliffe Line appeared as the actual demarcation defining

the boundaries of a stretch of land named as Pakistan. Since the displacement of billions was unaffordable, Pakistan emerged to be an Islamic state with several minorities. It pledged to give equal rights to all the denizens of this land as reflected by this statement of Quaid-e-Azam, the first Governor General of Pakistan: "Minorities, to whichever community they may belong, will be safeguarded. They will have their rights and privileges and no doubt, along with it goes the obligation of citizenship. Therefore, the minorities have their responsibilities also and they will play their part in the affairs of the state." In actuality, not only have the minorities suffered, but the Muslims have also been equally targeted in these years. The tale of this hecatomb did not end after the advent of Pakistan; the story had just begun.

Besides all the wars we have fought against our unruly neighbour India, Pakistan has gone through numerous crises since its creation. The nation which stood together like a barricade during the wars of 1948 and 1965 was incited to shed blood within the country. This political tinderbox was inevitable owing to the geographical existence of the enemy between the two sequestered units of the country. The Western Unit's army killed many of those living on the eastern side, or it can be said that Punjabis, Pashtuns, Balochis and Sindhis rather showed unity in slaughtering the Bengalis, but as a matter of fact Pakistanis liquidated other Pakistanis. The upshot of this war-turned-revolt was an independent People's Republic of Bangladesh. This was yet another partition the consequences of which still persist. People were bankrupted, their families divided and their businesses smashed. The country's economy continued to encounter and confront financial tremors for many years that followed. But above all, it is the result of the unjustified battle and gore that this part of the earth had developed acquaintanceship with bloodshed and murder. Unfortunately, this instance was only the first in the list that was yet to be written.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's reign is considered to be an epoch in the history of Pakistan. Historians have penned down mixed reviews about these years. Some regard his rule as the golden era in which true socio-economic construction was carried out by introducing communism in the country. However, the other pan of the balance considers this juxtaposition of socialism with Islamic ideology, and the resulting amalgam in the system, as a blunder and absolute failure. To illustrate, historiographers criticise Bhutto for developing Pakistan's atomic programme without eradicating hunger, and providing the population with fundamental rights and basic necessities. They compare this with embellishing the wall which is used to hide the loathsomeness of a society. These highlighted weak points were ill-used by his successor; General Zia had a secret weapon which he knew when to use most befittingly. He knew that the whole nation could be brought together, and thus its sentiments and passion be exploited, by playing only one trump card with the word 'religion' inscribed on it. It was from this point onwards that the word 'Republic' began to seem irrelevant in Pakistan's official name. In literal sense, a republic is defined as a political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them. It is in this very chapter of our history that Pakistan was attributed as a dependent *res publica*. It can be aptly said that the Indian subcontinent was initially a British colony a part of which, now Pakistan, is a good ally of the US.

The development, funding and ingraining of Mujahideen in Afghanistan and the

north-western strip of Pakistan were carried out during this decade. The already porous border between these two countries was made even more unrecognised and unproclaimed due to the involvement of Pakistan Army in Soviet War in Afghanistan. This resulted in an immediate burden of a million refugees on our economy's meek shoulders. The collapse of the structure of state and economy was thus inevitable, hence the present-day energy and food crises. Also, it was during Zia's term of office that the population of this country was divided on the basis of culture and linguistics. Along with scheduled loadshedding and dramatic step-ups in the prices of petroleum fuels, many other dockets were permanently made a part of the *modus operandi* the consequences of which still subsist today in the form of non-functional industries and, therefore, collapsed economy.

The sun sank below the horizon during the dusk of September 11, 2001 and took along with itself the remaining glory and esteem of Pakistan. The collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York became the reason for the tumbled honour of this country. It was during these years that we accustomed ourselves to estimating the impact of a bomb explosion by simply counting the dead bodies and blindly relying on the news channel which informs about the highest number of fatalities and injured. It is debatable whether or not a dictator was able to deal with the backwash of this calamity, but no sane and noetic person can deny the fact that it gave Pakistan and its indwellers many new challenges to be confronted in forthcoming years. It was during the tenure of the Chief Martial Law Administrator General Pervez Musharraf that suicide bomb attacks became quite prevalent; the Mujahideen from General Zia's reign turned into the Taliban in General Musharraf's rule. Convalescence can only wished for if there are no more afflictions, but these detriments are to date revenant.

The sale of the citizens of Pakistan at a price of five thousand rupees per head to agencies for human experimentation, the abduction of Aafia Siddiqui after being accused of opening fire on NATO soldiers, provision of Pakistan's air bases to American fighter planes, the bombardment of the northern tribal areas of Pakistan by drone planes, the establishment of over a hundred ammunition manufactories, the instigation of street crime in major cities of Pakistan, the routine target killings of religious scholars, professors, doctors, engineers, students and common people, and frequent suicide and implanted bomb blasts are just a few exempla of instances which directly targeted and impaired Pakistan's sovereignty and integrity. Apart from the scathe caused by external sources, the administration of that time filled the room left for further impairment. None of us can forget the blitzkrieg on the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Without arguing about who should be held responsible for the crisis, the use of phosphorus bombs to obliterate the orphans admitted to the madrassa affiliated with the mosque is absolutely unjustifiable and condemnable. Humans at least deserve a proper burial instead of being exploded or combusted.

A recent addition to these frequently contemplated crimes is target killing. Pickpockets, burglars, murderers and many other anti-social elements have been a part of every society since ever, but this recent phenomenon of training, hiring and paying professional killers to murder the targeted people is a new and bizarre concept. People are

robbed of their possessions openly and, surprisingly, bandits no longer cover their faces with the aid of masks as if there were no need for them to hide their identities. This clearly reflects the efficiency and intention of our police officers who were appointed as our saviours but are now themselves involved in almost all categories of criminal activities. People of Pakistan are victimised not only by the robbers but also by robber barons. Such wealthy plunderers include businessmen, industrialists, feudals and politicians. Instead of working for public welfare, planning to eradicate energy crisis by the construction of dams and barrages and utilising other alternatives, and focusing on fundamental rights of the public, these people have always been busy in making money and depositing it in foreign accounts. Besides looting the general public's wealth, these influentials also pillage the common man's share in the state treasury by becoming free riders. Statistics prove that only two percent of Pakistan's population submits income tax. Dumbfoundingly, despite all the aforementioned efforts to make Pakistan bereft, this land is still a golden sparrow for the future opportunists.

The dwellers of this land of the pure who fought to win a separate country where Islamic ideology could be followed, the ideology which gives every living being protection and is synonymous to peace and humanity, have failed to follow the regulations set by themselves. They wanted to give their women shelter so that they could be considered as humans and not as sex toys, but even today a one year old baby girl may be raped and slain in this 'Islamic' Republic of Pakistan, and it is always the girl who is blamed by the society. She is blamed for she is among those who are considered a commodity and who are still bought and sold. She is the one who is blamed for the society thinks that her virtue is right there in the organ which gets brutally wounded as a result of the incident of rape. Was an Islamic society not supposed to be above all this? Why do these followers of Islam not realise and accept that rape wounds a woman's body and not her virtue? In this Islamic state, several women are molested daily; a Sakina dies every single day here in this country for which Sakina sacrificed her life.

The terrorist attack on Army Public School, Peshawar will always haunt our minds. The killing of 146 innocent children is not easily digestible. The survivors have been pushed into life-long trauma by their sight of their friends' dead bodies and their teachers' burnt corpses. We have unfortunately been unable to make our country independent. The words 'Islamic,' 'Republic' and 'Pak' (meaning pure) in the official name of this country have become quite reprehensible. Quaid's dream was to create a homeland for the pure, for those who respect others' opinions and views, and have trothed to live peacefully and harmoniously. He wanted a separate country for the Muslims who were being cruelly crushed and were not allowed to practice their religion with complete freedom.

Islam is the ideology of Pakistan; this is what we find written in the syllabi of Pakistan Studies for all classes. It is indeed difficult to negate the idea that there is a huge difference between theories and ground realities because, in the case of Pakistan, one gets to see an unmistakable contrast in the apparent and real purposes behind its birth. The scenario prevailing since 1947, with a little or no variation, suggests that Pakistan was created to provide opportunities to those plunderers who would not have been able to garner so much loot had partition not taken place. The common man sacrificed to get this country for those who could later ask for more sacrifices from him; thence, Sakina and Zain are yet to be accompanied by many.

REMEMBERING THE EMINENT MAJID NIZAMI

By: Aminah Suhail Qureshi

Ahmad Sirhindi is most popularly known as 'Mujaddid Alf Thani', the title which credits him with being the 'reviver of the second millennium' as he rejuvenated Islam and showed his opposition to the heresies introduced by Jalal-ud-din Akbar. Indeed, Majid Nizami can aptly be remembered as 'Journalism's Mujaddid Alf Thani' as he contributed more than his share in evolving and shaping news media in its true meanings. His unforgettable contributions in the Pakistan Movement together with his pioneering work in the fields of journalism and international affairs make him an ideal role model for the generations to come.

On his birth on April 3, 1928, his parents, living in a small house in Sangla Hill, Punjab (British India), must have been enthralled to see the future breadwinner of their household. Little did his parents know about the unique contributions he would make to the Pakistan Movement and print media along with his elder brother, Hameed Nizami. Due to the financial constraints of the family, he attended Government High School, Sangla Hill for elementary education. His childhood and educational life is not to be erroneously compared or equated with that of a normal child. He had inherent leadership qualities, which he occasionally evinced during his formative years.

He moved to Lahore just before the creation of Pakistan, passed his matriculation examination, and finally gained an intermediate certificate from the Faculty of Arts from Islamia College, Railway Road. During these years, he joined Muslim Students' Federation and actively participated in the Pakistan Movement. These contributions were recognized later when the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan honoured him by awarding the title of 'Mujahid-e-Tehrik-e-Pakistan' along with an emblematic sword. Majid graduated from Government College Lahore in 1952, then completed the M.A. degree in Political Science from the University of the Punjab in 1954.

By that time, Hameed Nizami had established the Nawa-i-Waqt and raised its status from being a monthly to a daily newspaper. Majid wanted to assist his brother in every aspect of running the business, so he wrote the celebrated editorial column 'SareRahe' for two years. He left for England to become a student of International Affairs at the University of London and also attended Grey's Inn for presentation to the Bar. While in London, he consistently wrote for the Nawa-i-Waqt and also worked as a political reporter during the course of which he got to meet many eminent world leaders including several heads of states.

Nawa-i-Waqt was in point of fact considered to be the only unfeigned voice against martial law, first imposed by President Iskander Mirza. In many of his articles, Hameed Nizami referred to martial law as "the dark night". But the coercion on him during the reign of Ayub Khan increased to such an extent that it gave him a heart ailment, resulting in his sudden doleful demise. Though Majid had launched his own newspaper by the name of Nida-e-Millat, he returned to Pakistan at once and devoted himself to serving the cause of his late brother.

Nawa-i-Waqt, under the stewardship of Majid Nizami, came forth to represent the fundamental ideology of Pakistan. The credit doubtless goes to Majid and his team who brooked a lot of unprofessional pressures, coercions, threats, remarks and mulcts during

both monocratic and democratic rules. He took over the administration of this newspaper when Ayub Khan was contesting the presidential elections against Fatima Jinnah. Majid valiantly backed the Madr-e-Millat despite flagrant opposition. He strived hard to resist these hardships solely on the basis of his fundamental belief based on the saying of Prophet pbuh according to which the best form of Jihad is to voice the unflinching truth against the corrupt ruler. It may justly be said that Majid Nizami practiced these words his entire life.

Nawa-i-Waqt earned its prestige and repute through the process of controlled evolution - by retaining the values of our society along with the adjustments called for in order to move forward. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's recouping of newsprint allotment was no different from the sanctions imposed during General Zia-ul-Haq's rule. Without any interruption, Majid voiced his opinions and stance in his editorials and in person on different fora, which led him to chair Nazaria-e-Pakistan Trust.

Majid Nizami staunchly supported the idea given by Quaid in his saying: "Kashmir is indeed the jugular vein of Pakistan." He travelled around the globe but always refused to tour India despite receiving several invitations from the visiting delegations. He incessantly opposed the idea of good terms between the two countries till the resolution of Kashmir's issue. He also bluntly declared Bangladesh the creation of India and an attempt to undo Pakistan. Likewise, Majid has unblinkingly promoted Sino-Pak friendship by himself visiting the People's Republic of China on several occasions and meeting Mao-Tse Tung, the founder of the country, along with other notable panjandrums.

Nizami's commendable contributions have been recognized on various platforms. He was honoured with the Human Rights Award. In recognition of his services in Kashmir and his endeavor to look for a democratic solution to Kashmir's issue, he is frequently remembered as 'Mujahid-e-Kashmir'. He also served as the president of All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS) and All Pakistan Newspapers' Editors (APNE) several times. Furthermore, he was awarded with Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Sitara-i-Pakistan and Nishan-i-Imtiaz. Nizami courteously declined Zia, Junejo and Nawaz Sharif's proffers of making him a nominee to the Majlis-e-Shura (the Parliament), the Governor of the Punjab and the President of Pakistan, respectively, by announcing his relief at being the editor of the Nawa-i-Waqt as it gave him a better opportunity for serving Pakistan.

Nawa-i-Waqt reached the zenith of success and fame primarily owing to the vision, determination, commitment and diligence of Majid Nizami. The Nawa-i-Waqt Group began to publish the English daily 'The Nation', the weekly magazines 'Nida-e-Millat' and 'Family' and a mag for children by the name of 'Phool'. Along with these, this print media house launched a successful television news channel 'Waqt News'. His literary contributions include his books, namely 'Raudad-e-Junoon', 'Majid Nizami Eitraf-i-Khidmat' and 'Jab Tak Main Zinda Hoon'.

Nizami continued to work tirelessly to awaken and bring political awareness to the people of his country. His ceaseless work gave him a cardiac ailment for which he was treated at a private hospital in Lahore for three weeks. Alas, after living piously for more than eight decades he passed away in the early hours of July 26, 2014. Many illustrious politicians attended his funeral prayers, which were held at Dar-ul-Islam mosque, Bagh-i-Jinnah. He now rests at the Miani Sahib graveyard. Those who had the honour of his acquaintance are well aware of his cerebrations and views about establishing Pakistan as a symbol of preeminence and supremacy. Nothing better could be done than to follow his footsteps and build the nation he had always dreamt of building.

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

By: Aminah Suhail Qureshi

"Pakistan not only means freedom and independence but the Muslim Ideology which has to be preserved, which has come to us as a precious gift and treasure and which, we hope, others will share with us."

This was the message of Quaid-e-Azam to the Frontier Muslim Students Federation on June 18, 1945. Freedom of speech and worship, independence, brotherhood, love, care, unity and discipline were the notions put forth by the Father of the Nation. Although we are declare ourselves an independent nation, in truth, we have never been independent.

I am well aware of the fact that most of you would surely be disagreeing with my statement above. "You must be joking. We celebrate Independence Day every year!" "You might be one of the disloyal Pakistanis who are always planning to serve another country by cleaning their toilets," and "How many marks did you get in History last year? For your information Pakistan came into existence on 14th August, 1947," might be few of the opinionated affirmations made by some people if the above-mentioned statement was uttered in front of them. My opinion is not without justification.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah addressed Civil, Naval, Military and Air Force Officers of Pakistan Government in Karachi on October 11, 1947. He said, "We should have a State in which we could live and breathe as free men and which we can develop according to our own religion and culture and where principles of Islamic Social justice can have free play."

The Quaid's dream was to create a homeland for the pure, for those who respect others' opinions and views and agree to live peacefully and harmoniously. He wanted a separate country for Muslims who were being cruelly crushed and were not allowed to practice their religion with freely. Islam is the ideology of Pakistan; this is what I have always been taught in all Pakistan Studies classes. It is not difficult to see that there is a huge difference between theories and ground realities because in the case of Pakistan, one gets to see a big contrast in what we are taught about the purpose behind Pakistan's origin and what it actually was.

Pakistan may justly be described as a nation. The Oxford Dictionary defines nation as a large group sharing the same culture, language, or history, and inhabiting a particular state or area. 'Sharing is caring' is a renowned English proverb. This was one of the ideas promoted by our Quaid. Today, neither of these features appears to prevail in our society. Rimsha is not concerned with what is happening to Aminah, and Javed avoids carpooling with Ali, for instance. In short, one has no concern with the other's issues, reservations, problems and objectives. One is completely ignorant whether the next-door neighbours have eaten dinner, and is not in the least concerned with household, local and national issues.

"The area where bombers attacked today in the morning was at a distance from our residence." This is the response of almost every person, except for the victims, when asked about the bomb blasts in his city. It is as if our concern for our brothers died long ago. We do

not feel like helping others in times of need and hopelessness. We have now accustomed ourselves to counting the corpses and blindly relying on the news channels which are giving the highest number of dead and injured.

Next, a nation has culture, language, history and land in common. Unfortunately, Pakistanis have only history in common which we are taught even during our professional studies. The reason why Pakistan Studies is included in our syllabi is to remember our past and its lessons so that the mistakes and errors are not repeated. As far as culture, language and land are concerned, these are closely linked. Not only are the historians and their accounts evidence of the disputes that arose in this country in the past on the basis of the three above-mentioned characteristics defining a nation, but also the population of this country is the witness of the phases of turmoil.

One of the demands posed by Bengalis from East Pakistan was to make Bengali the national language of Pakistan as the population of East Pakistan was greater than that of West Pakistan. As Urdu had been suggested as the national language long before the advent of the country, it was chosen to serve for the purpose of communication between the distributed populations. Provinces were formed according to the language spoken in this area. Changing the name of NWFP to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ignited disputes like the formation of provinces like Siraiki and Hazara. Apparently, these issues are of minute importance and are used as political weapons to either unite or divide the local population, but are of paramount significance in proving the mentality of the majority.

'Pakistani' culture is often represented at many forums around the globe. My question is that is it really 'Pakistani' culture? In my opinion, the culture staged is either Punjabi, or Balochi, or Sindhi or Pashto. Punjabi culture is identified by dhotis, dastars, parandas, colourful glass bangles and earthenware pots (or matkas), whereas interior Sindh's culture is keyed out by white arm bangles and ghagras (long skirts) worn by women. Balochi culture is depicted as a crude and rowdy one whereas Pakhtun culture is normally portrayed simply by speaking in a Pashto accent and women wearing burqas (veils). Regrettably, Pakistani culture is still to be formulated and defined; representation is a later stage.

The next parameter of paramount importance is the significance of the word 'Islamic' in complete official name of Pakistan. As mentioned before, Pakistan was made for the prosperity and widespread of Islamic belief. The foundations of the thought were laid when the Two-Nation theory was put forth. The basic idea was that the Hindus, in majority, and the Muslims, as the biggest minority in the subcontinent, are two separate nations. Muslims were not allowed to practice their religion and follow customs and rituals. Remains of pigs were thrown into the mosques and loudspeakers were used to disturb the pious Muslims gathered in mosques for congregational prayers.

My question to all those pious Muslims is that what has happened now? Why are mosques never full and why do we feel ashamed when it comes to offering prayers? Probably we fear that our friends might taunt us as old-fashioned, conservative and fundamentalists. Why do we as Muslims not care about brotherhood, rights of the

minorities, the rule of law and many teachings of Islam and the Prophet pbuh? Why is it so that the term 'modernisation' is being used to promote vulgarity and put forth social and ethical challenges?

Today's youth is simply crazy about mobile phones. Night packages, friends and family number, text message packages and mobile cards seem to be the only major issues in our life. As Pakistan has a Muslim-majority therefore it would not be wrong to say that the largest users of mobile phones in this country are Muslims (with respect to the population). If we call ourselves Muslims then why is our society facing ethical crises today? Why is this facility of text messaging and calling being misused? Why are young boys and girls taking advantage of the commodity to indulge in unethical and immoral acts? Or in other words, why do we still have 'Islamic' in the official name of Pakistan?

Mass media simply refers to the sources of information and news that reach and influence large numbers of people. The most common examples of today's mass media are newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Electronic media has overshadowed all other forms, the major reason being the illiteracy of the population and secondly because people think of it as a much easier, comfortable and accessible way through which they can receive the latest news immediately. Therefore, television is the most common means of communication.

When specifically talking about our youth, they are greatly influenced by what they see on television and in films. They have immature minds and, therefore, need a direction or pathway to follow. If they are guided rightly, they will turn out to be peaceful humans in future, but if shown the wrong path, they can become antisocial elements in our society.

Nowadays, all what we get to see on television is violence. The protagonist of a movie is either a criminal or an ex-criminal. To become such 'heroes', the youth tends to behave in the same way as in the films, and end up committing social crimes. From the models on the ramp to the anchorperson hosting a political talk-show, the media personnel is contributing to the moral and ethical challenges being faced by the society as a whole.

The last point of debate is related to the word 'Republic' in Pakistan's official name. A republic is defined as a political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them. If this country was a republic with the rule of majority, then why is this republic under the influence of other superpowers? It is an established fact that we depend on other countries like United States. It can be aptly said that the Indian subcontinent was initially a British colony, a part of which, now Pakistan, is a good US ally. IMF grants us with aids in return of which we have to fulfil the 'Do More' desire of USA. Our parliament continues to pass bills of condemning the drone attacks, but in vain.

By bombardments and drone attacks, the next country which one is reminded of is Afghanistan. We share no officially recognised border with our war-torn neighbour because of which we have to support a million refugees along with our population of 170 million. The collapse of the structure of state and economy is thus inevitable and therefore we have to suffer from energy and food crises.

Another neighbour of ours is India, with which we share the longest border. While discussing India as one of the influential countries, it must not be forgotten that Indian subcontinent was partitioned to make Pakistan (formerly East and West) and India. The Hindu majority wanted independence but was not in the favour of partition. This idea was reflected several years after the independence by the ex-Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, at a press conference where she said, "We will capture Pakistan through our media." The mania of Indian media in Pakistan has reached a level where people are more curious to know about the Shoaib-Sania marriage's news updates than to listen to Dr. Israr Ahmad's lectures especially telecasted after his death in the same week.

We celebrate the Independence Day (Independence from both the British rule and the monopoly of Hindus) like hooligans and at the very next moment we negate our stance by saying that partition was a mistake, and art (music, films, etc.) has no borders. My question is that were we desperate at the time of independence or are we now being heroic? The answer is that we are a dogmatic nation with no specific stance. We have forgotten the meaning of the sayings of Quaid, "Unity, faith and discipline," and "Work, work and work," and have allocated some places in the universities where these quotations are to be written in bold. Why did our ancestors struggle so hard for something which was later to be known as a mistake?

We, as a nation, need to redefine our values. We must reach a consensus over our decisions and should not project our weaknesses in front of the world. All countries pass through the phases of turmoil but such times are the indication of an evolution which can only be triggered by the work of teachers, writers, scholars, scientists and intelligentsia. Thus there is a need to focus on our educational policies so that people could become literate and mature enough to put aside the cultural and lingual differences refresh the religious spirit and choose representatives who could efficiently serve the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

MY FASCINATING SOCIAL LIFE

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

I consider myself a popular person, as do the eyes that regard me with envy as they jealously assess my throes of friends with wistfulness. I have an extremely satisfying and fulfilling social life...until the Internet is switched off. Then I am thrown in the horrifying realm of real world interactions which I dread more than any spider, ghoul or animated cadaver. Things that terrify me include hugging sweaty people with oppressive body odor, shaking clammy hands, smiling awkwardly and not quite knowing what to do with your hands. What exactly is the conversational etiquette regarding hands? Stuffing them in pockets is regarded as rudeness; wild gesticulation can appear to be some primal romantic advance or some invitation to fight. Crossing hands is too assertive; keeping them idly hanging looks disinterested. In the end, it is a sinful mixture of all the aforementioned social faux pas resulting in the fact that all physical conversations exude a sense of extreme cultural ignorance. However, we soar through virtual conversations with grace and unmitigated poise and stumble over basic words due to the absence of a keyboard and a 'backspace' key to correct our mistakes.

I recently went to lunch with a friend, which turned out to be a lovely experience where we exchanged no more than ten superficial sentences before taking our smartphones out and asking the waiter for the Wi-Fi password. Then we spent the rest of our meeting scrolling through various blogs and occasionally showing each other pictures of random silly cats we saw online. Food arrived and my friend dug into his steak and I stared at him in indignant horror. He paused as he realized his folly and looked ashamed as I raised my phone to photograph my food and consequently upload it on my social accounts. After all, recent scientific research has conclusively proven that taking a photo of your food before eating it boosts the self-esteem of your food and contributes to a richer flavor as well as alerting everyone you know as to what you are eating, quenching their curiosity for questions they never asked for. Then I started my own meal, as the upload bar reached completion. Before parting ways, my friend and I took a 'selfie' and the caption paid an ode to the wonderful time we had (followed by a copious amount of exclamation marks.)

Some people remark how exceptionally redundant my life is. Then I remind them that all my photos get 'likes' in the hundreds and I got a staggering four hundred and seven birthday wishes on my special day. That is irrelevant though that almost four hundred and six of those people wished me only because there was a notification telling them it's my birthday. The four hundred and seventh wish was my mother, who doesn't have an account on that social website so I safely assume she has my birthday memorized. I have her birthday saved in my phone calendar and it alerts me one day before her birthday. I think it lies in early February or early September: one of the two.

I want to be a lawmaker in the near future so I can pass a law banning all corporeal social interactions. Why must we dress up for and drive to weddings when we can just have them in a group chat from the comfort of our own homes and nightshirts. I might pitch this

idea to some friend with entrepreneurial tendencies. I still haven't perfected my proposal for online funerals due to complications arising from not being able to type through the tears and there are no online cemeteries to bury the deceased in so we just have to settle for real cemeteries. Plants don't move and they are happy and well. We should really take tips from nature and its wisdom.

Personally, I feel like my views are not supported by the masses who pity this generation for never having played in the streets. In fact, it is they who are to be pitied due to increased risk of infection and skin problems (as well as excessive tanning.) I have never been concerned about kidnappers who lurk outside of parks or of strangers who may approach you and offer you candy. The only threats I have are the spam e-mails guaranteeing boosts to my male ego concealing viruses of various malicious kinds.

Romance has also become significantly less arduous. Gone are the days of penning amorous letters, posting them secretly and waiting for the postman a week later. Now, contacting to your significant other takes no more than the time taken to select the template and hit the 'send' button. Meeting in parks and frolicking in markets just to see your paramour's face is an effort in futility, for now you can just video-call. The romantic spark, however, is now dead; but that is an adequate price to pay for the convenience and the savings from being able to send virtual gifts instead of tangible tokens of love. Expanding your social circle has also become just a matter of striking up a conversation in the correct online chat-room. It should be noted that the amount of middle-aged men pretending to be beautiful girls is at an all time high so most online romances lead to severe disappointment. You do have a very interesting story to tell your friends later though when they come online.

So what if my social life is only based on zeroes and ones flying through the air and I have no real experience or interaction in my life? What if I'm so busy in my phone to look up and see that one day the people I love won't be here anymore?

I still get more likes on my selfies than you.

OTHER HALF

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

When I was young, I used to watch fantastical cartoons featuring superheroes. People like Bruce Wayne and Clark Kent who went throughout the day living normal lives and fought crime at night. As I grew up, I inadvertently started to lead such a life...almost.

During the day I am a regular student, trudging through my academic life and occasionally indulging in some extracurricular activity. But as soon as I get home and turn on my computer, I transform into internet royalty. Quite literally, as my online alias is Innocent Prince. I am not related to any monarch in reality and innocent is a very liberal term to describe me. My alter-ego is a tortured, lovesick teenager who is currently 'in a complicated relationship', which loosely translates to 'I am buckling under peer pressure and am fabricating tales to impress my friends.' He often shares photos featuring some sentimental poetry in blatantly block yellow text edited onto a photo of a girl smoking/crying (or both) in front of a sunset.

Other hobbies of my alter-ego include posting wrongly attributed quotations featuring the likes of Bill Gates, Albert Einstein and Adolf Hitler saying tacky lines usually found in Dr. Seuss books. Like Superman's super-strength and flight, my alter-ego has a few abilities too. One of these is an uncanny ability to write and comprehend some presumably long-dead language consisting of alternating lowercase and uppercase letters harmonized with copious amounts of digits and accents substituting actual letters. It is indecipherable for the masses and anyone unaccustomed to this advanced form of communication attempting to read it can suffer from mild hemorrhaging in the cerebral area due to the sheer assault on the brain. Unhindered by the confines of mortal language and grammar, my alter-ego runs rampant over the cyber world.

His other abilities include shape shifting. His online avatar often alternates between photos of various actors and celebrities, dotted here and there with photos of cars leading people to believe that he can morph into various vehicles as well.

Although I am currently employed in no capacity other than consuming oxygen and increasing the burden on this planet, my alter-ego is apparently a multimillionaire oil magnate. His location shows that he lives in England, even though the farthest I have ever been from home is to the Wagha border. I am bounded by the laws of reality but he is not.

As Batman had Robin and Iron Man had Jarvis, my sidekick is codenamed Sweet Angel. Although she claims to be a teenage girl, she is actually a man in her late thirties. Her abilities include coercing gullible men into sending her gifts and gaining envying amounts of attention from hordes of people on every post she makes. She is from Pakistan but she looks an awful lot like the stock images of Thai models on Google. Her hobbies include posting photos of babies and of cats; sometimes babies with cats, cat babies and just generally anything infantile or feline. She also likes posting photos of chocolates and other desserts, maybe trying to live up to her name.

Her photos are usually captioned with enlightening messages such as advice not to

cry because it is over but rather to smile because it happened. Sometimes, they provide insight into her psyche such as stating that she likes to walk in the rain so that no one can see her tears. All of these photos are lettered with solacing comments, feeding her appetite for attention effectively.

You might wonder what our origin stories were. We weren't from Krypton neither were we recruited by Professor X. We were people tired of the boringness and repetitiveness of life. We were tired of never being the best; of never getting attention that we so desperately craved. So we had to reinvent ourselves. We had to embrace the medium where we could be whatever our heart desired. All our fantasies were merely a click away. Hence, Innocent Prince and Sweet Angel were born.

We used our newfound powers of imagination to build majestic personas to fight the evils of tediousness and the parched feeling of desperation. There are others like us, everywhere: people who use their other halves to fight such demons. At the end of the day, we all want to be something we are not.

But after every such adventure, I have to now return to the real world. I transform back into myself, returning to life once again.

Innocent Prince signing out.

THE AVERAGE PAKISTANI

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

I am a Pakistani: born out of struggle, raised out of a land of slavery and liberated into an independent state to safeguard my fundamental human rights. I am a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, for which my forefathers gave uncountable sacrifices to ensure my protection of life, property and dignity. I am not you, or the people you know, or me. I am all of us.

I live in a beautiful country, guaranteeing a free and secure life, where I will shout at a person for wearing jeans to the mosque but will walk by idly as someone's daughter is being harassed in the street. I will treat everyone with equality (except for everyone having a different race, color, sect, language, caste, area of origin, accent, education or hairstyle.) I will not judge anyone and focus on living my own life (except for on trivial things such as casually decreeing who goes to heaven and hell.)

I am proud of my country, which is why I would jump at any opportunity to go abroad to live my life. I am incorruptible; however due to my intense devotion to the man that built this country I might make an exception to my moral code if enough of blue and teal Quaid's can persuade me. I am strong and fearless, the true man that Iqbal dreamt of, protector of my family; which is why domestic violence rates are estimated to be at a mere 90%.

I am tolerant towards other religions. I don't think of other religions as inferior, which is why I refuse to share my food with them and consider it an offense to my person if they sit next to me. I am a staunch opponent to the notion of provincialism: except for the fact that everyone in the other provinces is backward and anomalous and I am better than everyone else. We are all united under the flag of Islam, the heartbeat of this Islamic Republic: which is why everyone belonging to the other sects is an infidel and must be slaughtered.

I believe that all men are created equal and no man is superior over his fellow man. The only exception to this principle being in faith, and more importantly: the number of zeroes appearing in your account balance. I proudly declare that my national language is Urdu but I refuse to take someone seriously until they can raise their point in English. Everyone enrolling their children in educational institutes with foreign examination systems is an enemy of the state and is taking their child away from religious education; yes I tried to get my own child into that institution too but that is beside the point.

I live in a land of unfathomable convenience, where nothing is unobtainable and things like justice, jobs and degrees are just a payment away. I value the honor of labor but refuse to engage in any trivial job that might damage my social reputation. I curse the people overtaking me on the road but will ignore the red light whenever I don't see a traffic warden nearby.

I am a peaceful person harboring naught but goodwill but no one is safe from my blade in their back. I tell my daughters to cover themselves up from head to toe instead of

telling my sons to look at a woman with respect. I will be ready to spill blood if anyone were to look at my sister or mother or daughter or wife but I will admire the beauty of nature by ogling every passing woman in the street. I will pray five times a day, pray for a prosperous life, and push aside the hungry children begging for food on the way out of the mosque. I will cast suspicious glares at the man sporting a full beard, and question the belief of everyone with a shaven face.

I will revel in other people's miseries and question as to why no one will leave me alone in mine. I sport an amazing anatomy with my vertebral column bifurcating at my neck to give me two fully functional faces. I will sit and watch movies all day long and listen to music but will not stand for anyone in my family to go near those professions. When some harm befalls others, I will ask them to question themselves as to what sin this is punishment for. When some harm befalls me, I will state that God only tests his favorite people.

I lie.

I cheat.

I break my promises.

I teach my children about the hypocrites and how the lowest levels of hell are reserved for them. It's a good thing I am accustomed to the Pakistani summers.

I am the average Pakistani hypocrite. Are you?

THE NEW MEDIUM

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

The universe was created billions of years ago and slowly billions of galaxies came into existence. These galaxies were made up of billions of stars. These stars had collectively billions of planets orbiting them. On one such planet orbiting one such star in one such galaxy, life was formed eons ago and evolved over the course of billions of years to give an accumulated pinnacle of evolution: Homo sapiens. Culture evolved; society was formed and people started to nurture their aesthetic as well; giving rise to the arts. The entirety of the world regards the performing arts and fine arts to be respectable professions with institutions to scout for and hone talent to advance the culture of humanity as a whole. It just so happens that our society is going through what is the equivalent of a rebellious phase every teenager is familiar with. Hence, we regard these pursuits as a waste of a good doctor/engineer and such frivolous courses are wildly discouraged. Resultantly, the few unlucky souls cursed with such a talent are crushed into submission by social and familial influence. Those children who actually do manage to brave this assault are left to their own devices to fend for themselves. These aspiring authors and painters and caricaturists and singers were used to boiling in a cesspool of talent and despair but they realized that they had no way to broadcast their talent. As tempting as it sounds, you can't practically go out to the streets and wave your paintings at random people or stuff CD's into their pockets.

So there was a conundrum: you couldn't get an exhibition or recording deal or a writing job until you were established. And you couldn't be established until you had had an exhibition, recording deal or writing job. This meant that new talent couldn't rise until the old talent, well, retired. As dramatic and apocalyptic as it sounds, it was the truth. As many analysts feared a spike in assassinations, there was a savior on the scene and it appeared as though there might not be need for The Artistic Hunger Games. This savior was the internet.

Now suddenly artists, writers and musicians could relay their work to millions of other writers not only much more effectively, but with a much larger audience. If a gallery can hold a thousand guests, a blog can hold millions of views. People began rising to internet fame, with websites such as Wordpress, Tumblr, Wattpad, Devian Art and Instagram as the new messiahs for the talented.

Not only did these just give a platform to put talent out into the world, they also gave a wider spectrum of talent to see and observe from. One scroll down a blogging site and you run across graffiti artists in America, truck art in Pakistan and airy watercolors of some Swiss meadow. You can read Sufi poetry, articles about the crumbling economy and a story about a wizard on the same website. Music has more genres springing up faster than you can keep count, the latest being EDM or Electronic Dance Music and consequent sub-genres. In such ways, the diversity in talent also increased. This gives artists the ability to not only hone but to expand their talent.

In a culture that shuns every endeavor that doesn't end up on a fixed income salary, these platforms also help to give artists the appreciation they crave and require. One like or a

positive review can give an artist the boost of confidence needed to continue with their art.

Not only have the artists discovered the beauty of social media as a podium, but so have the scouts. Now, on a daily basis, thousands of artists are brought out of obscurity just because a producer or a designer stumbled across their talent or because they went viral.

These methods are also a method to gain some sought-for revenue, with numerous options such as being paid for advertisements or blog hits, or merely for content. This, coupled with the possibility of rocketing to internet fame or being scouted by an establishment, makes social media a veritable asset in for all aspiring artists.

This new medium has given these artists one thing they never had before: a chance.

UNTITLED

By: Daniyaal Ahmed

Most people fail to grasp the simple concept that being a parent transcends the physical act of causing another human to burden our planet. In fact, to parent is to nurture and care and protect and support and guide another unfortunate being through the labyrinth we affectionately refer to as Life. The tragedy is most inflated in the rural areas of Pakistan, where most people are farmers and are heartily invested in forming small armies of their own. This is due to the lack of education, caused by not being able to afford the expenses involved in educating a horde of children and we find ourselves trapped in a vicious cycle.

However, many intelligent people in the lower echelons of society have realized the amount of potential their children have as an exploitable work force. Education is after all transient, as is this world. So why invest so much time and energy for a futile endeavor? Instead, over 4 million children avoid these vain ventures and slave away in the sweltering heat, doing menial and harrowing work, for petty change lying grossly below the minimum wage.

Rising up in the economic classes, we reach the average people. In this class, the parents play a major role in the child's life: primarily as rigid chaperones and secondarily as education counselors. According to a study published in 1993 by Middleton and Loughead, parents can be divided into three wide categories based on their involvement in their child's education: 1) the positively involved parents who support the child in every decision, allowing them to make their own mistakes and consequently learn from these mistakes to become a functional member of society 2) the non-supportive parents who just don't care what their child is doing and are content in their own lives or lack thereof and 3) the negatively involved parents. These are the parents that pressure their child to lead his/her life the way they, i.e. the parents, deem fit. Often, they believe they are doing this for the betterment of a naïve child that has no clue as to how the world operates. Most Pakistani children have had the 'future talk' with their parents, in which the child is presented with the graciously open choice: doctor or engineer? If a child fails to accomplish either one of these, they will doubtlessly lead an impoverished and shameful life before dying; single, in their early thirties. However, in recent years, there has been an increasing tolerance towards financial jobs (such as banking and accounting) bringing the options of parent-endorsed careers up to a staggering four careers. Law and Civil Service are still frowned upon by most holier-than-thou families and any form of artistic pursuit is regarded as a hobby instead of as a career. The children thinking of pursuing language, fine arts, music or philosophy are met with contemptuous looks at their sinful gullibility.

Psychological studies suggest that parents, due to their emotional attachment to their child, are the worst judges of the child's ability and will often misinterpret the lack of aptitude as a lack of effort. Thus, they will push the child harder to achieve their idea for what the child needs. This results in a child with crippled self-esteem and parents who think their child is talentless/unserious/indolent. You try too hard to fit into the glass slipper and

you get a broken shoe, an injured foot and an unhappy prince. What comes next? The child realizes that the parents are just trying to think for his/her betterment and trying to help him/her secure a lucrative career. Or the child starts to rebel, leading to further discord and the pursuit of solace in narcotics and illicit courtships. It's not a very taxing excursion to judge which of the two is prevalent. Some parents threaten to disown the child, or withdraw emotional and financial support, if the child tries to pursue his/her dreams. Doesn't that sound happy?

But why is this even a debatable issue? Most parents see their children as reflections of themselves. So they utilize their children as a proxy source to fulfill their own failed dreams and aspirations. For example, a man who wanted to be an engineer but failed to do so would want his son to achieve his dream for him. This can be a conscious effort to try to give the child the life that the parent dreamed of; or it can be a subconscious urge to finally achieve (in a way) what had eluded them before. Parents sometimes forget that their children are unique individuals with their own skills and abilities and not mere extensions of their own being.

This issue should not be discarded as the immature ravings of audacious teenagers but should be regarded as a major contributing factor to many problems plaguing our nation today. These issues include a very concentrated work force in some professions and a dearth of jobs resulting from the influx of professionals; the lack of other fields expanding due to lack of interest and incompetent or nonchalant professionals. Careers are seen as merely ways to get money and maximize assets before you leave this world. This purposeless existence leads to domestic conflicts and general discontentment in life, as well as a deep pang of regret when you are breathing your last and you realize that in the flurry of trying to achieve what was expected of you, you forgot to fulfill your own dreams. The harrowing epiphany that you didn't live; you merely existed.

As this issue is raised in front of the parents of the future, they must realize that a child needs guidance rather than dictation. As parents, you have to wait till the child has sprouted their wings. You have to teach them to fly. But after that, you must let them soar.

THE NAKED TRUTH

By: Hafsa Idrees

Man has always exploited nature in the name of progress and prosperity. In the haste for gaining his own interests he has usurped the rights, not only of the other people but of the wild life and the environment as well. Allowing the economy to take precedence over ecology has disastrous consequences whose shadows are lengthening over the entire globe. The menace is alarming as all the living creatures are being deprived of healthy air to breathe. The smell of diesel, petrol, fumes, the thick fumes puffed by the brick kilns and chemical factories are making life unbearable both for the creatures of earth and the sky.

Our tiny earth was like a paradise before the industrial revolution and nuclear capability. There were such good old values as concern for the collective good, contentment, respect and consideration for others and altruism. Our ancestors could hear the lonely cry of whirlpool or soft sound of the wind darting over a stretch of water. They had the opportunity to smell the earth, cleansed by the midday rain or the breeze scented with pin on pine. All this is getting lost to us after this ever-increasing pollution. The dragon of the pollution is going to swallow all of us, irrespective of caste and creed. Nature abhors segregation. Robert Frost in his poem "Mending Wall" tells how nature dislikes walls and barriers:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it
down"

We are all in the same cradle of nature. We will all prosper or perish together, depending upon whether the atmosphere is pure or polluted. Our fate is common!

The root cause of this catastrophe is the lack of planning and inordinate greed. The population explosion is adding fire to it. Urbanization, expansion of cities and installation of industries in thickly populated areas without any proper planning has accelerated pollution. Nature does not allow anyone of us to violate its laws but we humans have been continuously doing that for our own interests. Trees are cut down mercilessly about which it has been said:

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only god can make a tree (Joyce Kilmer)

Deforestation is in fact the deformity of order but, unfortunately, we try to command nature rather than obey. The purpose behind such an approach is quite selfish i.e. "commercialization".

Nature has been punishing us continually. Energy crises, global warming, greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, melting of glaciers causing huge floods, scanty rainfalls, acid rains, and what not -- wherever the natural cycles have been disturbed, such serious hazards are ultimately faced. The initiatives must come from the general public. Every single person who lives on this planet must realize and play his part before it is too late. It is the manpower that contributes greatly to the construction or destruction of Mother Nature.

Air is precious to all, for all things share the same breath; the beast, the trees, the man. It shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. Therefore, it must be free from all the dangerous chemicals and pollutants.

The neutron bomb discovered by Cohen leaves non-living material intact and kills everyliving creature. The experiments are also affecting the balance in atmosphere. Environmental pollution is the worst of all the pollutions. It is not difficult to recall how Bhopal's atmosphere was contaminated. We don't know how many more 'China Syndrome' and "Bubbles" are going to cause mass-deaths.

The pollution of the land is the cause, and water pollution is the after effect of atmospheric pollution. It can be controlled if we curb the population explosion, adopt planned urbanization and industrialization. We have to teach our young generation that we are not here to exist but to live. We must tell them that the richest are those whose pleasures are the cheapest. If we speak to the earth, it shall teach us wisdom. The use of energy in different forms is the need of the hour but energy remains conserved so we have to keep a balance, otherwise this beautiful globe called earth will perish especially when water, land and, above all, atmosphere is being defiled ruthlessly.

Nature has its own cycle and it doesn't allow anyone to violate its laws. Francis Bacon has said: "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed"

DECADENCE OF PAKISTANI DRAMA

By: Muhammad Ali

The Novel, in my opinion, is not only meant to provide aesthetic pleasure, but being a source of entertainment, is also meant to artistically put into words keen observations which cannot be enacted due to their boldness thoughts which cannot be exposed by reasoning to the perversity of human mind. Contrary to the novel, the drama is meant to put the written word into action, but both stage and television being a source of collective entertainment, which can be relished with one's family in one's free time, are not meant to present decadent acts, which create an awkwardness between parents and children.

Moreover, the essence of writing is destroyed when a writer, who is a symbol of freedom and leisure, is given a specific topic to write, provided a limited time, and in lieu is paid quite a large amount for writing on the desired topics. How can one expect a piece of literature which is written under such constraints to be worthy of relishing? The deplorable fact is that this practice is common nowadays.

Drama writers are not allowed to put their own creations before the production houses. Even if they receive consent to write offbeat, they are not paid as much as those who write according to the producers' will. Unfortunately, in their lust for wealth, writers put into words, things inappropriate for a family to collectively watch. Dialogue with sexual connotations and references to the fair sex is used to spread vulgarity, either with the aid of indecent clothes or through seductive scenes.

There were times when writers like Haseena Moin, setting beside the greed for money, wrote for the sake of literature and family entertainment, and conscientiously kept in view the important aspects to be displayed on media, for a show of a country which is watched across the world is meant to portray the culture, religion and language of that country.

Proper and sophisticated Urdu, decent story lines, strong and respectable characters and good humor instead of bedroom jokes were to be found in their plays. Moving towards her contemporaries, Noor-UI-Huda Shah and Asghar Nadeem Syed were also known for classic Urdu dramas, using the female gender as a respectable sex rather than portraying obscenity, and decent dresses depicting Pakistani culture were shown. Bano Qudsia, an important personality in the world of Urdu literature, is observed to be quite audacious while writing novels, but all the same, is found to be morally restrained while writing for television.

Today's drama, deprived of culture, religion and morality has failed to match the works of Haseena Moin, Anwar Maqsood, Amjad Islam Amjad, Asghar Nadeem Syed, Noor-UI-Huda Shah and other writers of the same time, which were seen and reputed across the border as well. Their services to Pakistani drama are no doubt, commendable. On the other hand, modern Pakistani Drama, owing to its indecency and audacity in the name of liberalism and awareness, has failed to stay in ethical limits and has even failed to depict the true Pakistani culture, except for a few writers, who for bucking the trend, are unfortunately not well paid.

THE SUFFERER STANDS ALONE

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

Many moments create ripples across the consciousness of the observer. The sheer tangibility of these otherwise imperceptible moments leaves behind a disagreeable aftertaste. And the observer, the sufferer stands alone at the brink of a precipice deeper and darker than history.

Individuals don't choose the life they are living; they don't choose the effects of the moments passing them by. At times the bloodiest of massacres fails to tickle the compassionate tendencies of man, and at times, in the least expected moment, a plethora of emotions charges away maiming everything that falls in its way. This arbitrariness of experience can be disturbing. But there are not many who suffer and drench themselves in this randomness of life.

While most stay indifferent to life, the gifted, the endangered, feel something that otherwise goes unnoticed and untouched.

But what is it that haunts the best of men? Consider a room with multiple doors, deep down into the earth's crust. A man, alone, sits in the room. Absolute darkness prevails, absolute silence, a silence where the sound of his breath becomes heavier and heavier, and his own voice feels as if it's the strangest of all the sounds he'd ever heard, a novelty; the newness of it catches him by surprise. The only thing he remains conscious of is his non-negotiable state of being. The awareness of his self remains the only thing of vitality. And then, just when he is struggling to comprehend the gravity the situation, the presence of loneliness strikes him like an iron fist. He tries to escape the situation. He approaches the door, he finds it locked. He approaches the next door; he finds it locked as well. He then pursues other doors but finds them all locked. And in that moment of absolute self-awareness, the horrifying union of darkness and silence, the earth starts trembling. The force of the tremors takes him by surprise but he is trapped. He feels himself in the shackles of an inescapable truth.....life.

This is the state of a man who has transcended the pertinent regression of the contemporary society. This is his state, perhaps the only thing left in his personal domain. This is the state of a man who is guilty of individuality. He has bitten off more than he can chew, and slowly, very slowly, he is choking on it. This is the state of an artist. While his fellows may find his incongruity with the external world misleading and useless, essentially it is his biggest asset. This is not the state of the everyday man, the calculable man, the man who recreates and reproduces; this is the state of someone who produces and creates; the man whom I shall here call the Artist.

But where exactly is the division between the Artist and the man? Meanings and identities are most easily cultivated by contrasts and binaries; the realm of the Artist and that of the man run parallelly, both simultaneously defining each other. The Artist in conventional terms is marked by a desire for rebellious passions and iconoclastic expressions whereas the ordinary man apart from strengthening the prevalent structures of the society provides the grounds for rebellion on which the Artist flourishes. And hence the

contemporary Artist finds himself at a disadvantageous place, experiencing deteriorating strengths and incessant collisions with the calculable man. And so the Artist- feeble and exhausted, witnesses the slow pulverization of all that he cherishes under the heavy paw of the blind social structures. And so, the Artist, the sufferer stands alone.

With such social repression of the Artist's spirit, an interesting psychological phenomenon takes place. Psychological and sociological changes are interdependent. Through sociological disturbances, psychological alterations take place. And so it is in the Artist's case.

Of all the primordial instincts present in human beings, the instinct to survive is the strongest. And it manifests itself most aptly in the form of mediocrity. The instinct to survive is probably what turns the majority into "masses". It keeps the ability in humans to adapt and merge intact. Those who fall on either side of the mediocre bracket find it difficult to survive and flourish. The survival instinct, using the channel of mediocrity, attempts to erase the difference of "one" and the "other" by compelling the individual to become a part of a greater collective identity, i.e. the masses. The masses although present the visage of an ever-changing, dynamic whole, but what lies underneath the apparent dynamism are the deeply established roots in the social structures which provide them with an unshakeable hold on its own preservation and hence, survival.

The modern Artist with individualistic tendencies tries hard to move harmoniously with the slow, mammoth movements of the masses. But he fails miserably and becomes an anachronism, an error in time and space, a rupture, and his agony transforms into an arrogant, ruthless desire for passion and intensity. He establishes a disregard for mediocrity and stands firm facing the existential threat that is now upon him, alone.

With the psycho-social status of the artist as it is, the art that is born out of him seems strangely pleasing and disturbing at the same time. It is considered both Abstract and meaningless. Abstract, because it seems like a detached part of a whole and meaningless because it is considered incomprehensible on its own.

But art is a reflection of life, a shadow. The art seems meaningless because what it is portraying is meaningless and chaotic; an unspeakable feeling that can only be conveyed through a gesture; a gesture that the artist tries to capture in his product. Hence the Artist tries to comprehensively put forth the totality of a disjoint, alienated human experience. The art, apparently, seems out-of-place but it nevertheless reflects the intangible tremors of experience in terms of sounds, brush-strokes and lyrics. It is the only possible way of communicating such abstract sentiments. Language seems like an inadequate bystander at this point, attempting to comprehend the monstrous commotion of life.

And thus, the Artist breaths and eventually he triumphs in his own way, but it's the masses who flourish -always the masses.

THE REALM OF DREAMS

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

I ascended the highway to glory for the first time in my life on 8th October 2012. With mild confidence, a furiously throbbing heart and a few dreams, I entered the university and within a few seconds, before realizing what was going on, I fell prey to the majesty this place is imbued with. It was as if the surroundings had owned me within the matter of a few elevated footsteps.

I left for Lahore with fluctuating emotions. The comfort of being at home had blurred my judgement. But the cry for glory, the honour of walking on the pavements where Rashed, Abdus Salam and Faiz once walked had overpowered my desire for staying in my comfort zone. Hence, I packed my bags and left for Lahore, with the courage to know.

Surprisingly enough, I wasn't filled with the fear of new and unknown when I entered the university; I was rather filled with a weird nostalgia. I felt like I had been here before, as if every dream I ever saw was structured around this gothic building, as if I was privy to everything that was once here and everything that was to come.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that this place is a melting pot of different cultures, civilizations and traditions. Since my arrival I have had the privilege to meet a number of people, each distinct. I met people who were multiplicities and pluralities stuffed into a singularity, so many things stuffed into a single being.

But the company is only an iota of what this place has in it. Eventually what remains with the distinct gothic building is the spirit which this whole setting holds, the peculiar spirit which lurks around in the corridors of its majesty, the spirit which can only be felt and seen by a person who gives himself to this place, just like finding God. It is as if every brick, every leaf, every wooden door, every archaic window, every shattered and rebuilt dream this place is made up of is made up of that spirit. The spirit which can only be felt when every chirp of the pigeon becomes a song, when every sound rings like another philosophy, when you can almost see the sun peeping in through the window a classroom. When the Cassia tree in the Scholar's Garden seems to be the centre around which the world revolves. I sometimes feel that the walls of this building come to life at night. They come to life and discuss literature, love, philosophy, and politics and challenge everything that can be challenged.

Being a part of such a majestic a legacy has often left me with a socially unacceptable feeling of an immature bias. Quoting every word from a Ravian's book, citing every theory this place and its people ever created. But that bias is always coupled with a romantic feeling of pride at being a part of the Ravian fraternity. It might seem irrational to people who haven't been here and to those who have been here but were too pre-occupied with the mundane construction of their dreams.

So three years have passed and I am still in the awe of what is in front of me; three years greater than a thousand lives. Each day in GC is another story that unfolds with every passing second. Each day new, novel and hidden with a thousand dreams, some rational,

some irrational. Some structured on reality, some on myth, each day giving birth to a wealth of romances, some real and some imaginary.

A lot of time has passed and I am left with only one more spring in GC. I shiver at the thought of having to leave soon for the sake of my future prospects. May the future hold something better- but that seems like a blurred vision of reality. Whose reality? God knows. But I will not forget, no matter where I go, the gothic building, the cultures, variations, the company and the lady in black lost in oblivion.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

A DROP OF RAIN

By: Hassan Qadeer Butt

Free as a drop of rain

Rain. It flows like a continuum of suppressed rage when there is no fear to scare it off. That rage is fearless and thus honest and resounding. And with all that is blunt and honest and resounding, there lies a subtle beauty in rain.

That beauty is freedom.

A freedom that is revealed and embraced by every drop of rain.

A freedom to give up the ultimate heights at the message of a cold wind and dive fearlessly to unknown depths.

A freedom to transcend down with humility in a world that is not free, that has limitations both in essence and existence.

A freedom to make music when striking cords with anything on its way.

A freedom to venture for an unknown, dark destination and still be enthusiastic about it.

A freedom to bid farewell to its home, the clouds, where it got borne and was cherished and found peace.

A freedom to bid farewell to other drops of rain whom it saw being formed, who embraced that drop like a part of themselves and the drop knew it was a drop when he watched those other drop.

And most importantly the freedom to bid farewell to its own self, for the journey between the cloud and earth will be the last time it will know itself before driven in to oblivion and a wait to see the sunshine again.

That single drop of rain is free and willing to do all of these things, the moment a cool wind touches it.

Are we as free as a drop of rain?

STOP! PROVE YOUR IDENTITY

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

Saadat Hassan Manto is getting chaotic in his grave, swirling round and round in his own grave. His tombstone is trembling. His shrine is dazzling. He cannot find a way to escape and see the chaos outside. He is getting anxious. He is getting mad. He is crying. Sad and gloomy, his cries are waving out of his epitaph. Abruptly, he tries to get out of his grave. His grave can no longer hold him. There is too much that still needs to be said. His inkpots have tried up. His pen is lost. His papers are wrinkled. His glasses are broken. His stories are being dragged through mud. He is the cause of nature's obscenity. He tries to get up but he cannot. There is too much earth upon him, too many of God's questions to be answered, still, too much alcohol burning his liver. But he gets up, trying to see the city that never sleeps.

Yes, Manto, the mad lover of this city has awoken. But what does he see? He sees bloodshed, sects of religion and more bloodshed within those sects. Only a scattered crowd with no direction, intricate people moving haphazardly. Blood stained daggers in everyone's hand, police lights flickering through the moist wind, the echoes of security sirens bouncing off the vast silences, dug up graves of humanity, scattered bits and pieces of flesh like a cannibal festival, security reflectors shining everywhere, queues of people trying to prove their identities, everywhere. Metal detectors, loudspeakers, and attention calls are its musical instruments.

He wakes up to see his city burning; Lahore, the Paris of subcontinent, the lover's mecca. His city is struck by restlessness. The city that never slept has dozed off to a deep slumber. Its people are dancing to the hymns of madness. Its streets are filled with religious fanaticism. Its book-fairs have been replaced by hate speech. The spirit of Lahore is lost, in the deep alley of religiosity. The anklets' tune is lost in the sound of gunshots. Its morning raga has faded in the police sires. Saleem's Anarkali is ashamed of market named after her. Their love story is crushed under the leather boot. The smell of its food has drowned in the frothy sea of gunpowder. Its liberty has died.

Now, not a single Cuckoo sings to a lover's playing. Now, there aren't any anklets. The feet which wear the anklets are cut off. Nobody wears a necklace, those necks start to bleed. Nobody sings now, for it is a sin. Nobody dares to question. Nobody dares to cry. Manto's city, my city and the city of my beloved has bled to death. I am the one who made it bleed. I was ignorant. I did not care.

Heaps of cement, tons of concrete, dust struck clouds, chimneys making smoke rings, a visitor confused between Islampura and Krishananagar, an ashamed sun that is confused whether it should shine on Joseph Colony or not? A restless moon that refuses its silver rays to the dark alleys of Heera Mandi. It is all that is left. The city of the beloved has died. And its blood is on our daggers. We are its convicted murderers. No politician did it, no religion did it. These are my extensions, our extensions, just our projections hovering through the filthy sky, the sky which no longer holds any rainbow or muddy crimson.

Seeing this, Saadat Hassan returns to his grave and shouts for the undertaker. He cannot hold it, this destruction. He reverts to his coffin and shapes himself up, like a hot iron piece dipped into ice. But the undertaker is busy in selling dead bodies. He won't listen. Saadat Hassan covers himself in the rocky earth, heaps and heaps of rocky earth. He goes back. Never to be seen again, never to be mentioned.

A SEARCH FOR THE WORD PAKISTAN

By: Zahid Ali

Although the traditional school of thought in Pakistan history links the emergence of the idea of Pakistan with the famous Allahabad address of Iqbal, the creation of Pakistan became the only goal of Muslim league no sooner than 1945.

The creation of Pakistan is a unique event in world history. Before it, all the countries which rebelled against their oppressors had planned for years to achieve independence. But in case of Pakistan, the idea of a completely independent state had not occurred to its creator Jinnah before 1945-46, two years prior to the independence.

Jinnah had always talked about Hindu-Muslim unity. On a number of occasions, he expressed this idea and considered India as a beautiful damsel with Hindus and Muslims as its two beautiful eyes. But later events were too shocking for Jinnah to uphold the idea of United India anymore. So, the original plan which Iqbal had conceived for the dominion status of India with maximum provincial autonomy was now to be done away with. Partly due to the selfish and deceitful policies of INC and, to a certain extent, due to the Indian Muslims' desire to have a separate homeland, the scheme for a United India was discarded in favour of an independent Muslim state, Pakistan.

In her book, Ayesha Jalal deciphers the historical ambiguity of Pakistan Movement and the circumstances under which Jinnah and his league had to take certain steps. She is of the opinion that Muslims did not want any separate state but urged for the preservation of their integrity and self-respect. This self-recognition of Muslims, though good, accelerated the ethnic approach of the Indian nation and proved to be a catalyst for extremism. She also mentions in her book that till 1945-1946, negotiations had been continued for a confederated state.

Khalid bin Sayeed is of the opinion that when we come to the last four or five convulsive years before the great partition, we are not in full possession of all historical sources that may one day be available to us. Of exceptional interest, I found the writer's account of what Jinnah thought about the Cabinet Mission's proposals in 1946. It was briefly this, 'if Pakistan was not conceded, Jinnah would not be able to avers to the idea of a super centre entrusted by both sides to look after certain common subjects'. There is also an illuminating comment of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, 'if the congress had shown sufficient patience and far-sightedness and followed Lord Wavell's advice on the matter, Pakistan would not have been inevitable'. This kind of speculation is no doubt academic. In 1947 Pakistan became, and is today, a reality of which there can be no question. But the historical problem is still one of intense interest; at what point did Jinnah discard this idea and make up his mind that complete severance was the only solution?

Jaswant Singh believes that it was impatience on part of the Muslim League and Congress leaders that forced Jinnah to incline towards the idea of a separate state. Hindus couldn't digest any concession or privilege given to the Muslims by British government. And Muslims, considering Hindus their arch enemy, were too rigid to come on terms with

them. Hindus from being slaves for thousands of years had more than their share in government. It was mistrust on each other which complicated matters between the two communities to an extent which was irrevocable and impossible to untangle.

It is an old saying that true history is never written. History is presented in its most perverted and manipulated form to the readers and turning back its pages, many misconceptions reveal themselves. And the minds of young Pakistanis are fed with many distorted ideas.

The idea that Muslims of British India wanted an independent state from the very beginning of their struggle for freedom is refuted by historical facts. It was only after the elections of 1945-46 that Muslim League put forth the demand for Pakistan. Muslim League leaders were swept off by their unexpected and astounding success in elections. The fact, often overlooked, is that all Muslim league leaders were either Nawabs or feudal lords. It wouldn't be at all false to say that they had their own interests to pursue which could come in clash with the interests of Muslim community of British India- and that is what actually happened.

Jinnah had been not prudent enough to scrutinize the Muslim League leaders and identify their true motives. With the passage of time, Jinnah had become too weak to take any step in the interests of Indian Muslims, in front of Muslim League leaders who, to face the bitter truth, had started to use their position and support for the protection of their own objectives.

Jinnah-Gandhi talks which are rarely mentioned in any book took place at Jinnah's house after the elections. In these meetings Gandhi and Jinnah looked forward to a peaceful co-existence of Hindu and Muslim communities and a solution to the bilateral issues in United India. But these talks were a futile effort on the part of both the leaders. Jinnah, now, couldn't take any decision without the approval of Muslim League leaders. And Muslim league leaders were not going to settle down on anything less than partition, as it would eliminate any chance of disintegrating their jageers.

So it becomes evident that Jinnah, the greatest well-wisher of Indian Muslims did think that their rights could be protected in United India. Many notable Muslim leaders, including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, held the same opinion. These leaders preferred to be represented by Congress and other political platforms rather to join hands with Muslim League. Freedom from the British didn't present itself in the form of an independent state before Jinnah in the first place. The most desirable option was to attain maximum provincial autonomy, if possible, and most drastic of all measures was to demand for a confederation.

These facts are never brought up in any textbook. The students are never told about the conflict their founders had in making the state they live in. They are never told that this state wasn't totally made in the name of Islam, neither was it made in the name of democracy. There were some personal motives that went so far as to carve a new state on the map of the world. The only plausible explanation for keeping our young generation ignorant can be the authoritative approach of the still governing feudal lords and Nawabs. They don't want a layman to know that Jinnah could've agreed to United India or a confederation within

India.

For an ordinary Pakistani, the situation is still the same. He is still a slave, only his rulers have changed their faces from being foreign to indigenous. The exclusion of these facts from all textbooks is questionable. It makes the whole idea of the creation of Pakistan suspicious. Hiding these facts means that even our founders had doubts about creating a new state; a state that wasn't created for the reasons we are told.

It is for fear of being questioned by the young generation that our elders never dared to acknowledge the presence of selfishness in the cause of making this state. The ideology, once found to be flawed, would open a gate to anarchy and chaos. There wouldn't be any room left for our rulers to provoke and exploit Pakistanis in the name of religion or nationalism.

The cause of unity, if flawed, is bound to fall apart. Nations cannot thrive on the basis of false and misinterpreted ideologies. This might be the reason that day by day, our nation is falling prey to sectarianism, provincialism and prejudice. Had students been told the error, they might have done something to rectify it and improve the degrading situation of Pakistan.

There is no greater unifying power than the truth upon which the basis of a nation can be laid. If not now, then soon the nation will stand up and claim facts from its leaders. Nationalism has to resurrect itself for every coming generation. It is impossible for the coming generation to relate to the case of its ancestors if it weren't true. It's about time that we throw away the house of cards on which we stand and seek the true cause of our national existence. Then and only then, the youngsters would be able to pull the nation out of this pit of darkness and lead it to a glorious future.

THE MIND: AN IMPREGNABLE FOE

By: Javed Iqbal

Since the advent of human being on the Earth the Mind; an unseen, weightless, immaterial, intangible, and non-physical entity having exclusive power over all our materialistic body, has been a hot and controversial topic of debate. It has sprung a very effective heap of literature about this ghost which every one calls mind. Philosophers and Psychologists have been keenly interested in the subject matter of mind. But this has been just an intellectual fantasy for them because none of them has empirically proved the mind. It may be said that these all are assumptions and ideas.

Today's rationality and logic oriented generation is still unable to define the mind. Is it man's enemy or a friend? Our mind can be both, a buddy or a ruthless opponent who is always ready to kick our back. It creates and sometimes manipulates the information we receive from our world. As John Milton says in his miraculous creation *Paradise Lost* "The mind is its own place. And in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." The mind is a property of brain which functions to generate specific waves, if these waves match the frequency of the other person than he or she becomes our friend otherwise the same person is our enemy. Our mind needs to be trained to produce signals of friendliness and love rather than hatred, bias and prejudice. Our mind is like a coin having two sides. If we learn to keep it on our side then it is a victory if other side appears than it can be disastrous for us. The interesting thing about this dilemma is that it is in Us but out of our control. As it is said that a free mind is the devil's play ground so don't let it be free instead keep it full of beautiful thoughts, feelings, emotions, music, photography, good literature and poetry. "What we think, we become" says Buddha.

Our mind is an effective tool whether it is used in a positive or negative way. The negative use of the mind may lead to appalling incidents. Our mind is a valuable treasure for us if we learn how to use it in a beneficial manner. All our experiences are dependent on our mind but we don't have its reins in our hands. The mind travels at galloping pace and never stops proceeding from one event to another. Someone may think that I am pessimistic, trying to make a fuss about nothing real. They may consider it just an unrealistic picture of our valuable friend named the 'mind'. Here I make it clear that if materialistic luxuries can keep us happy and our mind just looks at brighter aspects than why do people commit suicide? Who tells them the way to cross the finish line of their life? If the mind is just our friend than why does not it bring us to life? Suicide has become the leading cause of death in the United States. According to a survey conducted in 2009 suicide is one of the three major reasons of death among 15-24 years olds.

Our mind is a problem seeker it focuses more on our faults than our virtues and strengths. It is the mind that gives rise to illusionary perceptions, delusions and hallucinations therefore it is not a reliable and trustworthy friend. It deceives us through negative self talk like a student who is supposed to present a topic before his or her class starts, who starts thinking "I am not a good speaker. I can't face the audience. People will

laugh at me. All this stuff generated by the mind may result in defeat before beginning of the battle. We have to remember that our beliefs, actions and consequences are correlated. About 47% of the time our mind remains in orchards of thoughts says a Havard study. In a book titled Positive intelligence Shirzad Chamine identified ten mind saboteurs e.g controller, restless, pleaser, judge, victim, hyper-achiever, hyper-rational stickler, avoider and hyper-vigilant. Each of us has saboteurs in our minds as our hidden foes. Walt kelly's cartoon character shows truly that "we have met the enemy and he is us".

We have to take care of our mental health as we take care of our physical health. The Mind can only be our friend if we take care of its thoughts as we take care of our friends by paying attention to them. If our best friend is ignored he or she can turn into our worst enemy undoubtedly. By focusing on our virtues and strengths, avoiding negative thoughts and promoting cognitive control and emotional regulation we can make our mind play the role of our friend rather than that of our enemy.

MEDIA GROWTH OBSERVED: WHAT DO THE STATISTICS SAY?

By: Saria Ahmed

Our world, today, is getting more digitalized in almost all aspects of life. People use advanced equipment instead of the previous technologies. Globalization is turning our world into a digital one. Mobile phones are getting smarter with time; now, they are more than just a phone, through these phones networking is just a click away. Resultantly tabs, laptops, various electronic devices have become a growing need of the people. While social media is another way of connecting people from far off places, people of modern era have created their own social world where they can get updates of their friends and families. For which Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Instagram are the most widely used sites.

Social networking is increasing day by day and people get more information from these social networks than other ways. According to the most recent statistics by PEW Research Centre of USA, in 2014, Facebook was the most popular site and a Facebook user used to spend approximately 6.35 hours on Facebook per month. However, its overall growth has slowed and other sites like Twitter and Pinterest have increased in volume. Every other social media platform saw a significant growth between 2013 and 2014. Instagram increased its overall users by nine percent. A study showed that approximately 58% American adults use Facebook while only 19% and 21% adults use Twitter and Instagram respectively. With the accessibility of smartphones, the users are more likely to go online on a daily basis. The recent overview of teenagers using social networking sites done by PEW Research Centre of USA concluded that 92% teenagers go online regularly and 24% remain online almost constantly. More than half (56%) of teenagers (defined in this report as 13 to 17 years old) go online several times a day, and 12% report once-a-day usage. Just 6% of teenagers report going online weekly, and 2% go online less often. Whereas nearly three-quarters of the youth have access to smartphones and 30% have basic cellphones. These phones and other mobile devices have become the primary driver of teenage internet use as 91% of teens go online from mobile devices at least occasionally. Among these "mobile teens", 94% go online daily or more often. By comparison, teens that don't access the internet via mobile devices tend to go online less frequently. Around 68% teenagers go online at least daily.

The trend of social networking has created a great impact on peoples' life, especially on teenagers. The youngsters usually put all their activities on these networks and share their emotions with their friends. A recent report issued on 16, July 2015 explores how parents are turning to these networks for information related to parenting and social support. Approximately 66% mothers and 44% fathers are using the social network content for guidance in parenting. This has become a vital source of information for the Americans. Not only this but many of the users get updated on politics and other current affairs through these sites.

Along with that, companies get a quicker feedback from their consumers through

social networks. A study conducted in 2013 has shown that almost 25% of consumers who complain about their products on Facebook or Twitter expect a response within 1 hour. Dealers are appreciating and embracing the inherent value of social media for building relationships and are working to create products that deliver great experiences while giving them more loyal consumers and increasing their demand through publicity on social media.

Social Media leaves a great impact on families, children and adolescents. People show great interest in social media. These are among the most common activities of today's children and adolescents. Besides all its advantages one of the most necessary things is that it is important that parents become aware of the nature of social media sites, given that not all of these provide a healthy environment for children and adolescents. Pediatricians are in a unique position to help families understand the impact of these sites and to encourage healthy use and urge parents to look out for potential problems regarding cyberbullying, "Facebook Depression," exchange of explicit messages, and exposure to inappropriate content.

The ongoing harassment and bullying along with the blackmailing culture have all given rise to cyber-crimes. If we do not look after our kids and keep a check on them, they might end up in a lock up or facing a criminal trial. The young offenders will increase in number, the crime culture will be nurtured in the society, the rape-rate will go up, the drug addicts and law breakers will transform our children's mentality completely. We do not want all this to happen right? Nobody wants his/her child to become a criminal in the eyes of the law. Therefore, parents need to act responsible and protect their children from being morally and socially corrupt. Children have the most gullible minds of all, while using internet or watching television they might not be necessarily searching for Einstein's or Newton's theories, or watching something decent; perhaps contrarily, they might be searching for some of the worst things to watch on earth.

Therefore, a medium which is unrestricted should be monitored by the state in order to prevent spoiling our younger generation. As the statistics show, the excessive and increasing Facebook and Twitter usage can damage the mindset of our children. Their minds are captivated badly by these social networking sites. Their thinking and imagine faculties have been hindered; they spend entire days scrolling up and down their profiles resulting in time-wastage. It gives them nothing but a temporary pleasure. They should instead spend this time on reading something worthy which gathers their interest along with improving their vocabulary and correcting their grammar. They should also devote some time towards sports and exercise. This would provide them with recreation and sound health. And therefore, the statistics should be taken seriously and acted upon, as they are leading us towards betterment by warning us against the bad.

MCLUHAN'S MEDIA: POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

By: Harris Bin Munawar

"The parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from the paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute them to a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality" Plato (Phaedrus)

I was at New York University when I first heard of the famous singer and songwriter who calls herself Lady Gaga. At the age of 17, she began going to Tisch School of the Arts, where I was taking a course called New York as Laboratory of Modern Life. She wrote papers on art, religion and politics, and I was told to pay special attention to her lyrics. But when I heard her hit single Bad Romance expecting outstanding poetry, I was taken aback for a moment. This is a transcript of the first few lines:

"Rah-rah ah-ah-ah!

Roma rommamaa!

Gaga ooh-la-la!

Want your bad romance"

Soon, I discovered a hilarious 'dramatic reading' of her single Poker Face by Christopher Walken in BBC's Friday Night with Jonathan Ross in November 2009. Not long after that, I had become a big fan of Lady Gaga. I had realized soon that the phrase "P-p-p-p-poker-face" just cannot make sense in writing. Such utterances concern themselves entirely with the experience of popular music. They are meant to be spoken and heard, not read and written. This split between the spoken and the written word has had a very profound effect on human cultures.

The first Greek philosopher to have spoken of a split between the heart and the mind was Socrates. Ancient Greece was on the verge of becoming a literate society. Plato, who wrote down the teachings of Socrates, referred to a split between thought and action. Speaking of this split in The History of Western Philosophy, Bertrand Russel spoke of two tendencies in Greece - "one passionate, religious, mystical, other-worldly, the other cheerful,

empirical, rationalistic, and interested in acquiring knowledge of a diversity of facts." It is the split at the heart of most political polarization in our recent history.

The day I first listened to Lady Gaga was also when I first read Marshall McLuhan. I had to go through his Playboy interview for a class. A literate society, according to McLuhan, shares a linear, sequential worldview that makes logic possible. A non-literate society plays it by the ear, as the saying goes. Writing allows the externalization of thought, and that is what makes it possible to see how thought and action are different.

This difference between thought and action made less sense in Russia than it did in the US. The Americans valued freedom of expression, and they were shocked at the "purge trials" in the 1930s in which people were tried for their thoughts as much as they were tried for their actions, especially the fact that many pleaded guilty of thought crime.

"The American is usually talking about the freedom of expression, the right to say or not to say certain things, a right which he claims exists in the United States and not in the Soviet Union," says Alexander Inkeles (Public Opinion in Russia). "The soviet representative is usually talking about the access to the means of expression, not to the right to say things at all, and this access he says is denied to most in the United States and exists for most in the Soviet Union."

In non-literate societies, "A man comes to regard himself as a rather insignificant part of a much larger organism - the family and the clan - and not as an independent self-reliant unit: personal initiative and ambition are permitted little outlet; and a meaningful integration of a man's experience on individual, personal lines is not achieved," JC Carothers explains in *Culture, Psychiatry and the Written Word*.

When Pakistani liberals speak of peace and harmony achieved through rationality and logical debate, I always remind them logic itself is the outcome of a worldview that many of their political detractors do not share with them. "The literate man or society develops the tremendous power of acting in any manner with considerable detachment from the feelings or emotional involvement that a non literate man or society would experience," Marshall McLuhan says in *Understanding Media*.

"Whereas a western child is early introduced to building blocks, keys in locks, water taps, and a multiplicity of items and events which constrain him to think in terms of spatio-temporal relations and mechanical causation," says Carothers, "the African child instead receives an education which depends much more exclusively on the spoken word and which is relatively highly charged with drama and emotion."

The non literate human receives and decodes sound patterns, like a radio, says McLuhan, and not words as concepts that are dealt with in terms of logic. A community with its own language learns to live in a world that is different and sometimes irreconcilable with

other worldviews. A non-literate community is a tribal society, where an individual's opinions and actions are determined by their identification with a community. That is the definition of political polarization.

Prof John Wilson of the African Institute of London University, who tried to use film in teaching natives how to read, "found that if you were telling a story about two men to an African audience and one had finished his business and he went off the edge of the screen, the audience wanted to know what had happened to him," he wrote in a 1961 paper. "They didn't accept that this was just the end of him and that he was of no more interest in the story. They wanted to know what happened to this fellow, and we had to write stories that way... We had to follow him along the street until he took a natural turn." In panning shots, "they thought the items and details inside the picture were literally moving."

His conclusion: "We found that is, as produced in the West, a very highly conventionalized piece of symbolism although it looks very real."

In 1963, the British comedy film *Sparrows Can't Sing* was released in the US with subtitles so that the audience could understand the dialects. "One of the most extraordinary developments since TV in England has been the upsurge of regional dialects," McLuhan writes in *Understanding Media*. "Dialectical speech since TV has been found to provide a social bond in depth, not possible with the artificial 'standard English' that began only a century ago."

Unlike text that is entirely visual, TV is a medium that allows "Synesthesia, or unified sense and imaginative life" that Western poets always aspired to. In Europe, he says, Radio "resuscitated the tribal and kinship webs". He wasn't sure if TV would have the same effect on England and America, where he says "literacy and its industrial extensions" had gone too far.

Pakistani TV, since the explosion of the industry a decade ago, does not focus on visualizing, especially in its popular news programs. Instead, the most popular news programs are talk shows, where people from various political and ideological associations participate in wars of words, and the audience roots for the participants who they associate with. What party you associate with does not matter. In fact, the most popular talk show participants frequently change associations. What matters is that we clearly know whose side they are on. The other popular shows - soap operas - are also morally unambiguous. There is a clear division between the good and the bad. The intervening ads too appeal to public stereotypes.

"The tribal community (and later the 'city') is the place of security for the member of the tribe," says Karl Popper (*The Open Society and its Enemies*). "Surrounded by enemies and by dangerous or even hostile magical forces, he experiences the tribal community as a child experiences his family and his home, in which he plays his definite part; a part he knows well, and plays well."

"The TV image," according to McLuhan, "is an extension of the sense of touch". He was perhaps unaware of the touchscreen of the computer and the mobile phone. Although it

is a textual medium, the internet is fundamentally different from books in that it is immersive - it forms a world that you become a part of, and interactive - it allows the reader to participate in the process of content production.

The immersive environments that we participate in, such as Google or Facebook, use algorithms that show us content that they believe we will like, based on the patterns they recognize in our past behavior. And because we choose our content by touching the screen, we tend to interact with those who belong to our own social groups, and go to sources of information that conform to our own political beliefs.

"In the spring of 2010, while the remains of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig were spewing crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, I asked two friends to search for the term 'BP'," Eli Pariser says in *The Filter Bubble*. "They're pretty similar - educated white left-leaning women who live in the Northeast. But the results they saw were quite different. One of my friends saw investment information about BP. The other saw news. For one, the first page of results contained links about the oil spill; for the other, there was nothing about it except for a promotional ad from BP."

If the results are so personalized, "the query 'stem cells' might produce diametrically opposed results for scientists who support stem cell research and activists who oppose it. 'Proof of climate change' might turn up different results for an environmental activist and an oil company executive. In polls, a huge majority of us assume search engines are unbiased. But that may be just because they're increasingly biased to share our own views."

Cass Sunstein uses the term "echo chambers" for these bubbles that we live in. He speaks of "the risk of fragmentation, as the increased power of individual choice allows people to sort themselves into innumerable homogeneous groups, which often results in amplifying their preexisting views. Although millions of people are using the Internet to expand their horizons, many people are doing the opposite, creating a Daily Me that is specifically tailored to their own interests and prejudices."

In conclusion, then, "it is important to realize that a well-functioning democracy-a republic-depends not just on freedom from censorship, but also on a set of common experiences and on unsought, unanticipated, and even unwanted exposures to diverse topics, people, and ideas."

GILGIT BALTISTAN: DEATH AT INTERVALS

By: Raza Gillani

*Sons are we of the mountains
Of snowy entrancing landscape
Dwellers are we of the roof of the world
Neighbors of the moon and the stars
This land of beauty we eternally own
We boast of the paradise that is Deosai
Of K2 and Rakaposhi are we
Of Shandoor and Nanga Parbat are we
Proud are we, of our exalted status
Of Gilgit Baltistan are we*

Towards the end of the summer, I happened to visit a province whose ownership of our nationhood doesn't seem to be reciprocated by the State of Pakistan. At the fringes of the junction that unites the three major mountain ranges lies Gilgit-Baltistan, a deserted yet majestic piece of land. Comprising of places far away from the stretches of hardcore urbanization, Gilgit Baltistan is a province whose beauty is rather inexplicable. More astonishing than the exquisiteness of the land is the beauty of the people that reside within. The kind of love, care and hospitality that the populace offers only adds splendour to the travels down the northern side. It is, at the same time, heartbreaking to realize that even after 68 years of our national independence, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are still waiting to be merged constitutionally with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. More shocking is the fact that most of the population of Pakistan bears a collective indifference towards them, unaware of the constitutional and political status of this province.

It was in 2009 that Gilgit-Baltistan was given a de-facto local assembly, which lacks power to take tangible decisions. Other than that, the story of Gilgit-Baltistan is a tale overshadowed by the state's nationalistic struggles for Kashmir. It is the tale of a place which has historically remained in a position of constitutional quadriplegia, a place that has repeatedly been referred to as a land 'almost' Pakistan, not quite a part of it. Most importantly, it is the tale of a community which despite all our apathy, chose to linger on.

Prior to my travels, I had seen videos on the internet and had witnessed how buses were hijacked and people were killed as soon as they were identified as a part of the Shiite community, the sect I belong to. The fear of falling prey to sectarianism that lurked inside me vanished as soon as I reached there as the place showed a completely different picture.

On my arrival, it was surprising for me to witness that behind all the political struggle, the social organization was filled with love, care and generosity. It was after I had spent a day or two that I asked myself why I still saw a mutually shared happiness behind the horror of being abandoned historically. Why haven't we seen a single wave of separatist tendencies from this area even after being treated as an unwanted child by the ruling elite?

The answer to these questions lies in the everlasting belonging that the masses feel towards their land. Upon further observation, I came to conclude that it is actually the nature of their social order that breeds their union and the consequent sense of belonging and fulfilment.

Perhaps it is this desertion that Gilgit-Baltistan is yet to undergo hard-core industrialization and urbanization. This has arguably come as a blessing in disguise for them. The reason why the communal bond shared by these people is stronger than most of the other parts of the country, say Punjab, is the fact that their relationship are not yet influenced much by uncompromising business models and the consequent commodity fetishism; the common pre-requisites of successful industrialization. We have seen several instances of such developments where capital and commodities become an integral part of the lives of the people that reside in advanced urban lands. They begin to value things on the basis of their substance, not the form. That is to say that the monetary value of something becomes more important than any other aspect. It is due to these practices that people start to construct relationships with each other not on the basis of who they are, rather on the basis of what they do in order to earn their living. The DHAs and the Bahrias are perfect examples of how commodities and brands are the latest entities that people relate to in order to identify themselves and to make themselves distinct from others.

Gilgit-Baltistan, in that sense, is fortunate to not have housing schemes like DHA to live in and multinational food chains to eat from. What they possess seems beyond the idea of monetary values. Their houses by the river side might not seem valuable in terms of urban development, but for me the late night strolls in the empty streets and the cool wind descending through the clouds suggested otherwise. The whole place and the generosity of its people, in its fullest sense, is an exhibition of its inclusivity towards the guests long gone and the people yet to come. Their hospitality and generosity breeds in intrinsic human values, not in the financial scheme of things.

These inherent and fundamental native values are probably the main reason behind the uncompromising cultural association and belonging. I also happened to visit some events where the verses 'Sub phool hain, ik guldaan kay hain; Hum Gilgit Baltistan kay hain' continued to resonate through the speakers. The reason why they feel so proud of their culture is the fact that for years they have owned their culture, rather than barely selling it. The commoditization of culture is also something that comes with the urbanization. We have the example of Punjab, the province that has for years dominated the power politics and comprised the ruling elite of our country. After the rapid and extreme industrialization and urbanization in cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, etc. we have witnessed how the cultural values have faded away or are now dominated by the neo-western and pseudo-civilized values, especially in the mainstream. Only by means of listening and dancing to the classical Punjabi adaptations by mainstream multinational musical monsters like Coke Studio or Nescafe Basement does most of the majority that lives in the urban areas relate to their cultural norms. People here don't tend to identify themselves with their culture by living it; rather they do it by wearing their artificially commodified forms. Such negligence then becomes evident when speaking Punjabi or wearing a Dhoti becomes a taboo within Punjab and people who still do it in the mainstream are stigmatized

horrendously.

When it becomes difficult for an individual to speak a language in the land from where it has originated, it acts as the primary step of one's alienation from one's roots. This lack of alienation and the pure cultural integration in the province of Gilgit-Baltistan is also a prerequisite to their tendency to be inclusive about the other ethnicities in Pakistan, even if they have marginalized them. It is due to this very inclusivity that, even after years of systematic desolation, we see the people of Gilgit-Baltistan still adhering to the collective national identity. It is an astounding realization that during the four wars that the state of Pakistan has fought, some of the best soldiers belonged to Gilgit-Baltistan. Lalak Jan Shaheed, the recipient of the Nishaan-e-Haider, was a Havaldar in Gilgit-Baltistan's Northern Light Infantry (NLI) which acted as a major force in Pakistan's Kargil War campaign. Furthermore, in opposition to the possibility of major anti-state or separatist sentiments, Gilgit-Baltistan has always held on to its loyalty towards the nation. 'Defenders of the North - GB Scouts' is much more than a mountainside political slogan, if ever the ruling elite realizes it.

They say that in the modern democratic nation-states, rights are granted to those who fulfil the consequent responsibilities. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan have always been keen in fulfilling these responsibilities, but only in return for rights promised, not granted. Having said that, the love and hospitality that Gilgit-Baltistan still offers, should perhaps be a symbol of worry and desperation for the State of Pakistan rather than being an emblem of hope.

As I pondered upon my travel experiences, I realized that I had witnessed, perhaps for the first time in my life, a community that had always waited with their ears against the wall for us to call out. It is true that we had historically led their way, but we have only taken them further away from home. With every passing day, they so cheerfully and unknowingly get one step closer to death while we live our lives enveloped by a constant feeling of indifference. Behind the joyful smiles of these people, I had observed the unseen tears of a child deserted by its parents and had experienced the constant tragic sense of abandonment at the back of all the serenity and the beauty this province had to offer. It had dawned upon me on my way back that in a world which boasts of celebrating plurality, I had lived 7 of the best days of my life in the land of a diversity that is not meant to be celebrated.

And of course, how I wished you were there...

ECHOES OF MB 4: MY TIME IN THE GCU-DS

By: Saad Ul Hassan

My journey from being an ordinary member of the Debating Society to the post of president was completed in a long series of steps that led me higher and higher on the ladder of success. I got admission in GC University Lahore on the basis of debates in August 2007. I cannot say it was like a dream coming true because I had never dreamt of being admitted to this esteemed institute. There was something very peculiar in this college that gave me the strength and power to dream of anything. I am still unable to define what that power was but whatever one may call it, to me, it remains a mystery.

It was soon after my admission that I started dreaming of achieving something big in my life. This desire did not arise in me at once. I am immensely blessed because I became a part of the debating society at the time when legends used to walk through its doors. The session 2007-2009 was a glorious one. It was the time when GCU Debaters used to outshine some of the finest orators from all over the country in almost every debating competition in Pakistan. It was the time, as put by Sir Siddique Awan, "Jub jeet ki khabrain aam thien". The time when I read a press release declaring GCU Debating Society setting a record by winning 148 national awards in a year, and the authorities were giving credit to the then president of the DS, Mr. Hamza Ijaz, who was an indefatigable speaker in the parliamentary style of debates. The time when a team comprising Ummar Bhai (Ummar Ziauddin) and Umer Bhai (Umer Khan) used to be the Society's safest bet in any significant debating competition of Pakistan. I saw Adeel Shehryar, the overall best English Parliamentary Speaker becoming a member of GCU's Parliamentary Team and winning every tournament in Pakistan. In short that was the time when Debating Societies of all other institutions used to fear GCU Lahore's excellent Debating Society.

I was a struggling speaker in Urdu declamation at that time and, of course, I could not be counted anywhere among those titans of debates. At that time I aspired to becoming like my seniors. I aimed to get praised by Sir Haroon Qadir and Sir Siddique Awan for my debating skills. I did not know then whether I would be able to fulfil my dreams or not but I always used to hear that if you are able to dream it, you are definitely able to achieve it.

If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough and surely, my dream of taking the Debating Society to its peak of achievements was scary, but it all came true. This alone strengthened my faith in the fulfilment of my dreams. I refined my style of Urdu Declamation under Imran Bhai's (Imran Feroz's) guidance. He used to write speeches for me till the time when I learnt the art of writing speeches. My dream of becoming an established speaker of the Urdu Serious category came true when I closed the house of 30th Allama Iqbal Bilingual Declamation Competition 2010 after which Sir Siddique Awan, Sir Haroon Qadir and Rana Abdul Aziz selected me to represent GCU Lahore at All Pakistan Bilingual Declamation Competition organized by PAF Academy Risalpur. Speaking at PAF Academy Risalpur is every speaker's aim and while sitting in the inter café Sir Siddique Awan told Adeel Anjum Bhai that the team of Saad Ul Hassan and Ali Zafar is our best bet at PAF

Risalpur. I felt a great sense of pride welling up inside me like it had never before. At that time, I was the General Secretary of the Debating Society and after winning this tournament, another part of my dream took the form of an amazing reality.

Higher Education Commission Islamabad organizes Annual Debate Competition for the Award of Allama Iqbal Shield and in 2010-11, I participated in the 14th edition of this competition. After successfully winning the provincial level, including Best Speaker award and Team Trophy, Adnan Farooq (my team member) and I qualified for the final round which was to be held in Islamabad. While departing for Islamabad, I came to Sir Siddique Awan and asked him to pray for us. I can never forget his words when he told me whether you win or lose, you are our best speaker. I was declared the Best Urdu Speaker of Pakistan, and GCU Debating Society was declared Pakistan's Best Debating Team. With that, yet another part of the dream got fulfilled.

The story does not end here. I became the president of this renowned, most vibrant Debating Society for the session 2012-2013. The period of my presidency was one filled with the most memorable times of my life. My ultimate goal of taking the Debating Society to its peak was always in front of my eyes but I faced the most challenging time. My seniors had graduated and were in search of employment. There was no parliamentary team in English or in Urdu since the senior speakers who used to speak in team A had graduated at that time. I was quite alone in the task of making teams for both English and Urdu Parliamentary Style of Debates as well as for declamation. Sir Awan was often quite busy in different affairs of the university due to which he was unable to give his time to hold camps for the newcomers. He had trust in me and I was trying my best to live up to his hopes and expectations. My father had once told me that if you work wholeheartedly to fulfil your dreams, God makes the way easy for you. And indeed, by following his advice I was able to perform to the very best of my abilities. I am extremely thankful to my seniors Zulqarnain Bhai (Zulqarnain Cheena) and Zinnia Mansoor who shared my burden and took the responsibility of training the students for Urdu and English Parliamentary Debates.

It was in August 2012 when the training camps for newcomers started in the Debating Society for parliamentary as well as conventional style of debates and in a span of ten months, these newly trained students brought a bag full of prizes for their Alma Mater. It was with an overwhelming sense of happiness and pride that I read a press release declaring that GCU Lahore's Debating Society set a new record of winning 175 national awards in a year. All these brilliant accolades were possible due to the brilliant debating skills and untiring hard work of our members, namely Almas Sabeeh, Harris Saleem, Rehan Mir, Ali Moeen, Zahid Ali, Misbah Mukhtar, Raza Gillani, Ahmad Chaudhary, Hassan Haider, AbdulahSherdil, Awais Ahmad, Khawaja Yasin, AmnaKalim, Khaqan Arshad, Quratul Ain, Adnan Farooq, and Nawazish Malik along with numerous other speakers who played their role in setting this record.

The last two tournaments of my debating career are the most unforgettable moments of my life. I wished to end my career as a parliamentary speaker on a winning note. Services Institute of Medical College Lahore (SIMS) hosted All Pakistan Parliamentary Style

Debating Championship and All Pakistan Bilingual Declamation. I participated in Urdu Parliamentary Debates along with Zinnia Mansoor and Misbah Mukhtar as my team members. We won the Team Trophy and I was declared the Best Speaker of the tournament. However, the moment of pride came when at the prize distribution ceremony, it was announced that GCU Debating Society clean swept the tournament by winning team trophies in all the three categories i.e. English and Urdu Parliamentary Debates and Bilingual Declamation Competition along with two Best Speaker awards.

Khawaja Yasin had established himself as the finest English humorous speaker by that time and I spoke with him at the All Pakistan Bilingual Declamation Contest organized by Allama Iqbal Medical College Lahore. I was declared the Best Speaker along with bagging the Team Trophy. With this victory, my debating career came to an end. The words of Sir Haroon Qadir, "I can never forget working with three office bearers; Rana Abdul Aziz, Hamza Ijaz and Saadul Hassan" will always echo in my ears and will continue strengthening my faith in the realization of my dreams.

The GCU Debating Society taught me how to set goals and how to work hard to achieve my goals. During the 6 years of my being in the debating society from its common member to its president, I learnt and achieved a lot. All this could not have been possible without the continuous guidance of Sir Awan and the never-ending support of Zulqarnain Bhai.

As I see the Debating Society now from a newer perspective, I am quite satisfied that the ones following me are able enough to take GCU Debating Society to more heights of glory and will continue setting new records for their juniors. I hope and pray that the Debating Society of GCU Lahore continues to prosper and its members keep achieving successes by leaps and bounds. Ameen.

CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM

By: Fizzah Rai

Electronic Media is one of the most important mediums of communication in the 21st century. Media, nowadays, has gained so much power and influence that it is considered to be the fourth pillar of state. As technology has advanced through the ages, so has the electronic media. Electronic media is not only replacing print media, but has also given birth to social media.

Electronic media has not only changed our lives for good, but has made communication, education, information, broadcast and advertisement etc. very easy. The world has now become a global village and it requires fast and speedy modes of communication, which are being provided by the electronic and social media. We can be aware of the news around the globe within a few seconds; this was not possible a few years back when one had to wait many days for the news. Whatever is happening in the world is reported within seconds in the form of videos and pictures while the print media requires time for the completion of work as well as for the circulation of news and in the meanwhile the news becomes history.

Electronic media has also blessed people with the facility of online jobs which has become a very convenient way of earning money. This has further led to the concept of online trading which helps the managers and owners of various companies to deal across the globe very easily. Thus we can say that electronic media has helped us enter a new age of fast and convenient working.

While on one hand electronic media has made our lives easy, on the other hand it has created some problems. It has affected us socially and psychologically. It has helped in decreasing global distances, but at the same time it has greatly increased distances among family members, creating a widening gap between relations. Through electronic media, people are much aware of the whole world, but they are oblivious of their own families, neighbours and their surroundings, creating a sense of estrangement between themselves and the ones around them.

There was a time when people used to sit together, share their problems, and discuss family matters. Grandparents used to tell traditional folk stories to their grandchildren. They used to transfer impart cultural values to their children in an entertaining way. But parents, now, prefer to leave their children in front of T.V and internet without knowing what is being served to their youngsters. They think that they have fulfilled their duty by providing them with good means of entertainment, but they are unaware that this "entertainment" is spoiling the minds of their kids. According to different researches the growing violence among children and teenagers is because of the violent TV programs and games.

In addition to that, the high rates of depression and anxiety are the result of the indifference in our behavior. The children now hesitate to share their feelings and emotions with their parents. They seek refuge in internet and social networking, as the colourful world of electronic media makes everything very attractive for children. But without proper guidance these can harm them.

On a social level, electronic media has a strong role in deciding new trends in

fashion and clothes. Whatever media promotes becomes fashionable in the blink of an eye. Our social and cultural values are changing rapidly. We can easily realize this difference by comparing the era before the involvement of electronic media and the era that followed.

Electronic media has changed the face of social media which includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc. Basically social media is defined as media for social interaction by online communities to share personal messages, information and networking and micro blogging through web-based or mobile technology. Social media has made it really easy for us to share our messages, videos and pictures with anyone at any time. It has provided a platform to the people for sharing their intellectual views with others. They can now write freely and can easily share their views with the world through a mobile or a web-based technology and get acknowledged while sitting at home. Prior to that, when a person needed to write something, he would seek the help of publishers and without them, his writings would stay unpublished and unexposed to the public. Media has provided freedom of speech to everyone, now everyone can express his/her feelings through social media (within a certain cultural barrier).

Where social media has provided a platform for free-speech, it has also caused many scandals. People spread information, without any verification, on social media and it circulates in minutes throughout the world, devastating someone's reputation. People have started using it as a stage for creating false propagandas against their adversaries. The problem is that when people start writing and sharing information without knowing the ethics of free-speech, chaos follows. Everyone is not capable of expressing his or her feelings in an apt way and sometimes they express their emotions in the forms of hate-speech and abusive words in order to intensify the weak logic in their arguments. They abuse the freedom of speech and nobody can stop them.

Social media has made us quite web oriented, people now feel proud in recording and capturing their moments in order to share it with their friends on social media, but they have forgotten that the more one tries to capture the moments in images, the more detached one gets from the real pleasure and thrill of these personal moments. They share their life on social media but fail to share it with the people around them.

Electronic and social media has brought a great change in our lives; this technology has absorbed our minds and souls fully and consumed all our time that we previously used to spend with friends and family, reading various novels and newspapers and helping each other in household chores. It is therefore our duty now to change the ill of media for good. To retrieve all those lost moments of life which we have devoted to this media and to relish and live our life in a better and more peaceful way. Media should take the responsibility of using its power in a constructive manner, to bring happiness and prosperity in others' lives.

PAKISTANI LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

By: Hafsa Sohail Rathore

"Words - So innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of the one who knows how to combine them."

'Words' were what were 'combined' by the leaders and thinkers of the time who wove them in such a manner as to serve as an impetus and solid grounds for the creation of a separate motherland. Given birth to in 1947, the year is also marked to be the root year for Pakistan's literary history. The genesis of a national identity in this new-born Pakistan took some years to develop, so the reflection of this identity in the country's literature came over time. Initially, English was in no way the language of choice for a country built on all things patriotic, but the British Raj left its language as its legacy, which is now considered the lingua franca of the world. The English language's influence on Pakistani literature thus cannot be ignored.

Pakistani literature in English started coming to the surface as early as a decade after the birth of the country, and then began the onslaught of the production of literature which continues. Sadly enough, there was more negative criticism about Pakistani literature in English, than praise and constructive commentary. Pakistani literature in English begs the question of whether writing of any sort must have an agenda. Should it be a response to the global commentary addressed to Pakistan or should it be a defense of a culture and context widely misunderstood? The truth is, Pakistani English literature needs appreciation and applause more than the stones and sarcasm being thrown in its way.

Writers of English in Pakistan are viewed with a general bias by the masses, are believed to be in a bubble and having pro-English inclinations. The very fact that they write in English is the reason for contemptuous looks being cast upon them, and they are accused of being caught up in a colonial hangover. Our people have a love-hate relationship with English language and have not matured enough yet to look at it beyond the limitations of being a colonial leftover and merely a notion of the 'Other.' We don't wholeheartedly own it but also take pride in it in a twisted manner. Thus, in the Pakistani public sphere, Pakistani English literature bears the burdens of inauthenticity and foreign-ness.

Moreover, Pakistani writers are faced with the challenge of a miniscule local reading public. Where writers from all over the world receive tonnes of appreciation and warm hugs from the audience, the best Pakistani writers receive is a limp handshake. Accusations such as "Pakistani English writers are elitist in their work and cater to the interests of only a certain class"; "they are more English than the English themselves and do not reflect Pakistani-ness in their work"; "they present a shattered image of the society; they use local allusions, elaborate vocabulary, local lexis and culture as decorative elements to sell their works abroad and attract wider readership"; "expatriates do not know anything of the Pakistani culture and write in a detached manner": are leveled against them. The

Pakistani literary pond is a small one and those who must swim in it can't help but fall prey to the predators.

Hypothetically speaking, let's suppose that these claims are correct to some extent. According to a rough estimate, only 2 percent of the Pakistani population reads, writes and thinks in English, and only a countable few who read Pakistani English authors. The market and readership for our writers locally is very low when compared to the one globally. So if they write for an international audience, what is wrong with that? Yes, there is the issue of the language barrier among the local masses, but someone has to do something. The language they choose depends on their ability to handle a subject in the language they are more at home with. Just because they are not writing in Urdu is not a justifiable reason to strangle our writers with criticism of all sorts.

Besides this, there is the fact that there is a lack of research and criticism on Pakistani literature. The only criticism available is that by the readers which is rarely productive. Writers need funding, readership and research done in this sphere, not biased claims and negative commentary. Our writers are being evaluated using borrowed ideals from the West, and because we use such borrowed notions as the yardstick our writers are often misjudged; we forget that Pakistan is altogether a different nation with different traditions and ideals. Furthermore, no Pakistani university offers a separate course in Pakistani literature in English, which is further reflective of the fact that it is yet to be recognized as a separate entity and not just a sub-domain of English literature.

Going on to defend the charges against Pakistani writers, it can be seen that there has been a lot of pressure on them after 9/11. The global reader's mind has imbibed certain stereotypical notions about Pakistan; he tends to think he will get nothing out of our literature but stories on terror, extremism, Taliban threats, corrupt dictators and the decadent state of affairs in the country at large. On the other hand, local readers want the writer to sell the image of Pakistan as they dream of it. Our writer's dilemma is that he is torn between these two extremes. In spite of this, it is evident that Pakistani writers are trying to find a middle way through this puzzle, in trying to promote a positive image of Pakistan globally and also addressing local issues which need to be brought to light.

Mohsin Hamid, for example, in his novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, questions the grand narrative and the notions associated with fundamentalism through his protagonist, Changez. A rational, intellectual and nationalistic kind of fundamentalism has been shown by Hamid which is very different from the commonly perceived idea of fundamentalism. He reflects upon the necessity for connecting with the roots of our country and fighting for its cause in a manner that works to its advantage and harms none. Bapsi Sidhwa, in her novel *Ice Candy Man*, brings forward the feelings of people and the monstrosities that were committed at the time of partition besides just the facts and figures. Tariq Rehman says: "Without a word of protest or preaching and without histrionics, Sidhwa has written one of the most powerful indictments of the riots which occurred during partition." She has avoided propaganda by having a child narrator so present the situation from a bias-free detached point of view. Furthermore, the Army has never been challenged, criticized and ridiculed as

an institution as Mohammad Hanif did in his *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel *How It Happened* addresses a Shia-Sunni marriage conflict. Such novels and others like *Moth Smoke*, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, *Maps for Lost Lovers*, *A God in Every Stone* and many others raise issues that need attention and are a depiction of society. Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's world famous Academy and Emmy award-winning documentary film 'Saving Face' (which addresses the issue of acid attacks on females in Pakistan) is yet another example on the part of Pakistani literati to bring the country's issues to light, condemn the wrong and promote the right.

Pakistan is not a homogeneously definable entity and this answers the question of why there are so many voices against almost everything that is written. Culture has deep connections with language and language is the heart of literature, so what is approved by one may not be appreciated by the other because Pakistan is a blend of different subcultures. Although Pakistan is an umbrella for all the cultures it is home to, this diversity cannot be catered to on all levels. H.M. Naqvi in a response to a question said that perhaps the problem lies not in the Pakistani author writing in English but rather the Pakistani reader. A lot of truth lies in those words, and it goes beyond the literal. It may well be that Pakistani readers find Pakistani authors inadequate or unaccomplished in reflecting the reality they want. In doing so, however, readers may be representing just as well their own confusions, the unfulfilled distance between what Pakistan is and what they wish it to be. Here, Mohsin Hamid is again worth referring to when he says in his essay, *Room for Optimism*, that he is not pessimistic about our country's future because it is a very diverse nation and there is a huge untapped sea of potential available. Pakistani writers in English provide us with counter-narratives and these are very much the need of the hour too, since they are also playing a part in developing tolerance in a society which doesn't hesitate to pull out a gun just because things are not going their way. Writers should continue to write since Pakistani literature in English is playing a crucial part in improving our image abroad, reforming our society by trying to address its weaknesses in whatever way possible and setting it on the track towards a more tolerant co-existence. ?

THE POLITICS OF ECONOMIC JARGON

By: Ali Zafar

Economics, without any doubt, plays a vital role in the decision making and prosperity of any cluster of human beings; be it a household or a country, economics is the vantage point from where deals are envisaged. The importance of economics in running a country is paramount. So, if the discipline plays such a crucial role in preserving the present and carving the future of a country one would assume that the people who run it are well versed in it, and if they are not masters of the subject, then would definitely have a basic idea about the subject. Unfortunately, the month of August made me realize, that for Pakistan, this does not hold true.

The whole Azadi March fiasco started from 14th of August 2014, and after only a week when the sit-ins and marches weren't able to achieve the motives which the leadership wanted i.e. the resignation of a democratically elected Prime Minister, the Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf announced a nationwide civil disobedience. Now, he knew that the so called "educated" participants of the sit-ins would not be able to comprehend the meaning of civil obedience hence he took it upon his educated shoulders to explain the terminology (after all he is an Oxford graduate). While explaining the terminology he said "we will not pay General Sales Tax"; being a student of economics (yes, I won't call myself an economist) it broke my heart, because what this sweeping statement of Imran Khan implied was that he, his party members and all his supporters will stop buying anything and everything that has a GST levied on it. Ironically, while he was announcing this, his party members and supporters were dancing on the mesmerizing music played by Decent J. Butt and Khan Shb's forehead glistened with the floodlights, both powered by generators which run on petrol or diesel: both commodities on which GST is levied. And many other items that the Junoonis used while observing the civil disobedience including the cellular network, the coke and pizza that he loves to devour.

I made a joke or two about this statement of Khan Shb and what Asad Umer would be thinking at that time (assuming that he understood the sort of rabbit Khan Shb pulled out of his hat) and then I left for Germany where I was to represent Pakistan at the 5th Lindau Nobel Laureates Meeting on Economic Sciences. The event was officially kicked off by an address from Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany and a PhD in Physics. I was reasonably impressed by the dexterity of her arguments about trade with US and her commendable knowledge on economics. But at the same time it made me sad as we. Comparing her to our leaders literally made me feel like I am ruled by clowns and the worst part was that the alternatives are useless as well.

Be it Shahbaz Sharif's claim to eradicate electricity crisis (load shedding) in three months; which is economically impossible, or Tahir Ul Qadri's assertion that prices of all the necessary goods in Pakistan will be reduced by 50% once the godforsaken 'Inqalab' is successful, or Imran Khan's claim that if he were the Prime Minister of Pakistan he would stop taking loans from IMF and World Bank, rather Pakistan would be able to give the

loans: this is the sort of economic jargons which make our citizens unlearn the somewhat vague economics that they have learnt from their schools.

On my return from Germany, I was surfing through the TV channels and suddenly I stopped and started watching an interview of our former President General Pervaiz Musharraf (with Mubashar Lucman) and while arguing the importance of democracy in Pakistan (which is pretty ironic) Musharraf gave an analogy which was like "Agar oopersey leadership strong hogi tou neechay sey uska Trickle Down Effect aye ga" (if the leadership in the highest echelons is strong only then we will get a Trickle Down Effect from the lower strata). Now, first of all it is a very common jargon of economics (which was wrongly used here), secondly the jargon is self-explanatory; if only he understood basic English language he wouldn't have misinterpreted trickledown effect.

We as humans, tend to follow our leaders, their charisma makes us follow them. And in a democracy these claims that our leaders make are in actuality the promises that they assert to fulfil in return for our unconditional loyalty. But if they will goof around by saying "it's not an investment, it's a loan" not realizing that a loan is always an investment in case of a country, then the few sane people who actually know economics will stop following them.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTATORS

By: Ali Zafar

In the last decade, social media's impact on lives of humans has grown substantially. Where the complex intertwined network of social media has achieved the goal of globalization and provided voices to those who didn't have a platform to share their views, it has also unfortunately provided a forum to those voices that, for the collective betterment of human race, should be subdued. For instance, one cannot ignore the misogynistic pearls of wisdom that our very own pop-star-turned-religious-scholar-turned-tailor-turned-bigot spreads on various social media forums. But this is nothing new; religion and misogyny have been like inseparable best friends for centuries now. The bigger problem is that now these pseudo intellectuals have started giving their "expert" opinions on issues ranging from military warfare to economy. I have no interest in combat strategy and I don't care, but it breaks my heart to see absurdity being confused with analysis of economy.

The greatest tragedy of our time is that apparently everyone believes himself to be an expert on the economy. The moment government fails to achieve a certain goal or launches an ill fated economic plan these glorious commentators on the subject roll their sleeves, log into their accounts and start typing long, really long, critical analyses which could be used as an example to define banality in dictionary. These banal commentaries are usually adaptations of the loose analysis that their star TV show host has done a night ago in a primetime current affairs show. These self proclaimed critics of the subject usually give two arguments (rather incessant rants, but for the sake of keeping this serious let's call them, out of mere politeness, arguments) in favour of their absurdity. I will try to break these "arguments" down through this treatise; I have intentionally used the word try here because in my own "expert" opinion it is really hard to [1] understand stupidity and [2] to provide a decent rebuttal to stupidity. But now that I have a forum to write and you have taken it upon your shoulders to read it, so let me hop onto the bandwagon. Anyway, if you had anything meaningful to do in your life you wouldn't be reading this so I guess I should exploit this little power that The Ravi has provided me and enlighten you with my wisdom.

Argument No. 1: The people who have been given the job of designing and implementing economic policies didn't deserve the job and have no right to impose their flawed opinions on the masses because they are not qualified to do their job. Hence it is our responsibility as citizens to spread awareness.

Now, this argument is based on a few assumptions. The first assumption here is that only because the social media commentators believe that the policymakers didn't deserve the job hence its true. The second assumption is that only because the policies aren't working or showing desirable results so they are flawed (the social media experts here forget the exogenous factors that might affect an economy on more regular basis than they themselves upload a status on Facebook). And third assumption here is that these policymakers are not qualified for the job, and who are we to decide? This question never popped up in the minds of these glorious commentators. The beauty of this argument is that the social media

commentators are so certain about the lack of qualifications of these policymakers who have been at least doing their job for a while they forget about their own qualifications for making a critical analysis on the matter, which by the way is just having a working computer and an account on one of the social media sites.

The next step to these analyses is starting a campaign against the government. Yes, that too on social media through memes and pictures, and the only test that they apply while turning these patriotic rants of criticism into a campaign is the number of likes and shares they get on social media. One of the most famous campaigns is the one against Metro Bus Project. The criticism is the same old: Pakistan is a developing country; this money could have been used to improve education and health sector, or provide social protection etc. The problem here is that these experts on economy forget about the short term and long term goals of the economy. And especially for a developing country which has been long aloof from foreign direct investment, improvement in infrastructure to attract this missing foreign direct investment is more important than focusing on long term goals of education and health sector. Because if the economy is not stabilized through inflation rates and interest rates in short run by attracting investment then there will be no long run. This is called public spending for short term, which is done under the umbrella of Fiscal Policy. I am sure you would have all seen them on your timelines on various social media forums. This particular strategy was recommended by Robert Solow (Nobel Laureate in Economics) as a consequence of economic recession of 2008, he agreed that there will be a debt issue but it is inevitable for short run. He writes in the book entitled *In The Wake of The Crisis*, "In economies and labour forces that are more and more service-oriented, public spending aimed at job creation should look more at the efficient production of needed services... countercyclical fiscal policy can leave long-term hangovers of debt that need credible planning immediately and actual fixing in due course." I am sure these Social Media commentators are bigger visionaries than a Nobel Laureate but they should at least give the old man and his recommendation on the subject a little attention. Or they can simply, in one of their really long criticisms, question the qualifications of Solow and declare him an agent of Jews who specifically gave his policy recommendation so that Pakistani policy makers will follow it and ruin the country. Wait for it.

Argument No. 2: Economics is not a rocket science. Even a street vendor is an economist. So, one doesn't need expertise in the area to make an analysis, its common sense and it's just a matter of one's opinion.

Again, this argument has a few problems. Firstly, if a street vendor was an economist then he/she would definitely know how to efficiently utilize his/her limited resources and make the best use of them and in process he/she would graduate his/her modest business to a bigger profitable one. Secondly, if economics were just about one's opinion and a matter of common sense then there would be no success stories either on firm level or on national level as a consensus would be hard to achieve because everyone's opinion varies from others. So, there exists some academic and pragmatic set of rules, only through which an economy could be run. Lastly, if economics were that simple and not a

rocket science then every country would be rich today, there would be no poverty and definitely there wouldn't be any economic recessions. The basic facts that every economic crisis is different, and that there has been no one measure to predict or tackle it makes it a very complex subject, which can only be handled by people with some expertise.

The inherent ability of humans to misunderstand the context of an inspirational quote is the basis of this issue at hand. Yes, the greatest service that a citizen can do towards his/her country is to criticize the government, but there should be some basic understanding of the issues and subject before the step of criticism is taken. So, please keep on uploading your selfies with uncountable filters in futile attempt of looking whiter than you are but leave analysis on issues of economics for those who have at least some basic understanding of the subject. Keep on wishing your friends birthdays with your revolting pictures accompanied by a long note describing how much that person means to you in incorrect language but leave the cost benefit analysis of a regional policy for the experts.

INCIVILITY AND UNSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By: Farida Tareen

The advent of social media has revolutionized the modern-day means of communication. Facebook, Twitter along with numerous blogging sites have provided us with new avenues to communicate and disseminate our views and thoughts to a larger audience that was once a prerogative of politicians and journalists only. When these blogs and forums, commonly referred to as "Social Media", hit the internet world; they became the voice of the public within no time. The primary reason behind the immense popularity and surge of the social media was that both electronic and print media - newspapers, radio and TV channels - failed to give due space to voices who dissented with the authorities or governments. It befuddled many governments and societies through its community-building capacity.

However, as is true of other scientific inventions, the poor and irresponsible use of social media in our society has turned it into a bane rather than a boon for our social values. Civility is being chipped away as the 'unsocial attitudes' of the so-called warriors on social media are infecting our moral values. Social Media abounds with fake profiles which are involved in spreading misinformation and levelling false and often unfounded accusations against popular leaders, journalists, public figures and even civil servants. This dilemma reveals that the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is incapable of checking this misuse of technology. Do we need to learn to live with this idiocy and senselessness? This remains a burning question for all concerned and responsible citizens, social scientists and thinkers. As far as our government is concerned, the main concern for it is to decide whether it should also follow the lead of Gulf governments by penalizing the people behind these fake IDs for these clear acts of slander and defamation or not?

Before this social media crept into our lives, people used various means of communication but all of those were different in their nature and in their respective impacts on society. Means of communication used prior to the advent of social media were direct in nature as the parties involved in communication knew each other and there was no scope for anonymity anywhere. Because the identities were known to everyone, it was important for everyone to remain within the limits of civility. In case of political debates, our leaders, writers, columnists and political analysts used to express their opinion and dissent through newspapers and readers could comment on those views through letters to the editor. The newspapers kept a check on the views expressed by general masses through their editorial policy. Social media removed these barriers and gave people direct access to such forums where there were no explicit checks. By making wrong use of the right to free speech, they started enjoying unbridled power and passing comments and expressing opinions about their leaders, public figures and celebrities. The very nature of social media is such that imposing checks and applying filters in order to assess the veracity of opinions is almost impossible.

This new and greater access, no doubt, led to empowerment of people where everyone had equal access to show his/her sentiments and opinions. The main intent behind the development of social media was to provide people with such forums where they could express their ideas and opinions with relative ease and freedom. It also meant that the ones who used to sway the public opinion could no longer assert their views with impunity without being challenged by their audience. It made all public statements issued by political leaders, observations and rulings of the courts, columns as well as comments from journalists and news-anchors subject to instant criticism by an active audience at social media.

This vibrant new society surprised everyone with the power of community-building by organizing people of different races and communities under one common cause. Its greatest manifestation was the Arab Spring where dissenting youth used Twitter and Facebook to unite like-minded people and to quickly disseminate information in order to plan and organize massive countrywide protests. Even autocratic governments in Gulf had to give in to the pressure of protestors demanding change.

Social media also filled in the vacuum of electronic media where, for vested interests or want of commercial value, the latter ignored just voices of the aggrieved and dejected people. This aspect became evident in the Shahzeb murder case in Karachi where electronic media didn't highlight this issue until a massive movement started on social media. It built so much pressure that the apex court had to intervene and suspects were brought to the book.

Where this emergence of powerful social media proved a panacea for many ills, it has created bigger problems than those it solved. Without going into the details of how social media has affected our relationships and how wasting billions of hours purposelessly on social media has made us actually antisocial, let's examine its impacts on our socio-political lives.

The biggest problem with social media is that anyone can say anything to any audience without respecting the basic norms which ought to be followed while speaking or commenting in public. Ours is a society where dissent is not encouraged in any institution and where argument is limited to debate competitions on annual functions. The majority of the population gets no training as to what should be one's conduct during a public debate. In such a scenario, getting unbridled power to indulge in debate and express one's opinions is playing havoc with the moral and social ethos of our society.

Couple this fact with the kind of argumentation we witness every evening on mushrooming commercial current affairs programs on news channels. Our leaders, unfortunately, are made to demonize each other in these programs like an act. Ironically, at the end of program, they greet each other and move to another channel for a similar act. All this nonsense has crept into minds of our untrained youth equipped with keyboards and modems. With such intellectual pollution constantly fed to them, all they learn is inept

arguing and incivility which they reflect while interacting on social media.

The most dangerous aspect of this issue is the ability to hide one's identity and pretend to pose as one likes. It doesn't require any identity except an email which may well be a fake one. Thus, you can be anyone from Roger Federer to Imran Khan, and from Nawaz Sharif to the Chief Secretary of a province. From these foundations, emerges the anonymity and mob-mentality where one gets into a position to bash anyone as one likes without a slightest fear of one's real identity being disclosed.

Because there is no effective control mechanism devised by regulatory bodies, what we find on social media is an educated but abusively aggressive youth. They vehemently tongue-lash anyone they dislike ignoring all civilized limits. Many politicians, sportsmen and journalists face the wrath of these Keyboard Jihadists who believe they are the beacons of moral values, and rationalize coming down hard on any famous person.

Unfortunately, most of the political parties have hired these Tech-warriors in order to wage a 'war' against their opponents. The weapon of this war is propaganda by disseminating misinformation and levelling false accusations against opponents. These social media warriors or e-brigades have become a nuisance for the society as many politicians and journalists find themselves in an embarrassing situation due to "unsocial campaigns" and they have no option but to issue clarifications and tender apologies for no fault of theirs.

The height of this nonsense was observed during the General Elections 2013. Some techno-jingoists used every unfair means to propagate for their parties. The majority of such campaigns were based on falsehood, fabricated videos, half-truths and fake accounts. From these fake profiles of renowned scholars and leaders, they issued statements in favor of their parties. Ironically, their slogan was 'free and fair' elections. Election results came as a surprise for many; more so for these e-superheroes. Driven by rigging complaints in a few constituencies, these warriors created a chaotic atmosphere trying to sabotage the whole process.

This growing peril demands swift action from those at the helm of affairs as well as from civil society. Surely, a crackdown against social media, as in the case of YouTube, would not be a wise option. Unlike Gulf States, where courts have sentenced people for dissent on social media, we need a crackdown against these fake profiles. Facebook and Twitter may be asked to link user accounts on these sites to mobile numbers used in Pakistan by these users. It would remove the anonymity and facelessness from these warriors and at least they would realize that their real identities are known to everyone and they will have to face the music for their 'shares'.

All the political parties and their leadership should tighten their filter against fake profiles and abusive posts. Political parties especially need to denounce and condemn in clear words any such e-Brigades that are tarnishing their names as well. It is their responsibility to cultivate in their workers a sense to abide by the moral and ethical values

and societal norms while professing their political agendas. Moreover, as a society we need to teach our youth that argument doesn't imply fighting; rather, it is a constructive debate based on empirical evidence, objective analysis and logical reasoning. We also need to realize the implications of 'sharing' a post without checking its authenticity. Social media and internet are meant to be a boon. Let us not make it a bane for our society.

The impact of social networking on human relationships in the present-day modern life invites mixed responses from various sections of society. Some deem it a healthy and positive factor which has improved human relationships; while there are others who think that social networking has made human relations devoid of truth and sincerity. There is no denying the fact that social networking has done great work in improving the social consciousness and awareness. It has also brought people together by giving them a chance to find and interact with others having same interests, attitudes and goals through various web-based communities. But as far as intimate human relations are concerned, social networking has created isolation and alienation.

In the present-day globalized world, where socialization through social networking has acquired the status of a necessity, the basis of relationships is more on appearances than truth and sincerity. The core values driving an intimate relationship, like trust, fidelity and sincerity, have been put to the test because of the over-mechanization of human life. Relationships which develop in the due course of time often culminate in mature and trusted companionships. This was possible in an age where the relationships were more intimate and depended on direct interaction. But nowadays, the social networking has made communication possible without having a face-to-face interaction. Thanks to social networking, now there are three parties in a relationship; social networking sites/mobile being the third party. This intrusion of technology has greatly affected human relationships. Where it has introduced ease and accessibility in relationships, it has also created a room for deceit and dishonesty. The seemingly greater access to personal information is in fact a controlled reach to filtered information only. It has made it difficult to understand a person in his or her entirety. What people say and how they appear means more than what people are and how they behave in person. Social networking has penetrated to such a level that it has started hurting the health of human relationships.

The advent of social media has transformed the way we communicate. From business and organizational communication to interpersonal communication, and from socio-political interactions to leisure activities, communication in every walk of life has been drastically redefined by this new form of communication. Text messages, emails, tweets, direct voice calls, and personal messages on social forums, to mention a few, have become new the drivers of communication, having an enormous effect on our interpersonal relationships. Social media has gained this power for its ability to fulfil the basic need of people: the need to be heard, engaged, and involved in processes they had always wanted to participate in. Now communication is often multidimensional and that has impacted

interpersonal relationships the most. It has created new communities and relationships based on mutuality of interests, attitudes and goals. Being nearby is no longer required to be near to someone. This erosion of the need of being together in person in order to be close to someone has affected our relationships. The truth and sincerity of relationships can no more be ascertained through these virtual communication tools.

The social networking has affected the development of a true and sincere relationship. The first and foremost thing necessary for a true and loyal relationship is the presence of mutual trust. With the advent of social networking sites and mobile phones, mutual trust and harmony has decreased. When both the partners in a relationship interact on any social networking sites, their mutual relationship is susceptible to mistrust and suspicion. Most of the issues creep up between the partners/lovers due to the inherent nature of social networking sites. The most common instances of such issues are befriending such persons which the other partner does not like, reluctance to share passwords and sharing information with others.

The relationship which has its birth owing to the social networking has a hint of immaturity and is mostly because of infatuation. Most of such relationships are formed during teenage when the thinking patterns of the youth are derived more from passion and less from reason. Such relations are made more fickle by the social networking where updates are provided for every minute detail. Updating statuses, uploading pictures and the comments by friends creates confusions and jealousy.

One of the biggest issues with modern-day relationships is that they are far too dependent on impersonal forms of communications like social networking sites and mobile phones. It is impossible to build a stable and healthy relationship online or on a mobile phone. Face-to-face interaction is very necessary for the development and growth of a sound relationship. But the modern-day relationships based on social networking are dependent on impersonal forms of communication lacking face-to-face interaction.

Moreover, relationships based on social networking are devoid of truth and depth of understanding which is essential for a sincere relationship. People get to know a lot about each other but that depends on what information is being shared. Mostly, those traits and aspects of one's life are shared that are more likely to appeal or excite interest of the other party. Chatting is mostly centered on areas of common interest and not meant to gauge the personality of the person. That is the reason why there is little of scope for testing the veracity of shared information and statements.

Moral decay is also among the issues surrounding modern-day relationships. Values like dedication, fidelity, sincerity and truthfulness find no place in the technology based relationships. Appearances, sensuality and verbosity seem to play a greater role in making new relationships. The unchecked access to information available on web disinhibits immoral behaviors and puts to test our real relationships. Increasingly we find posts, comments or even pictures that are inappropriate to be shared in public. Many of these posts

relate to our relationships thus making a private matter public. Matters pertaining to the emotional life have become the subject of gossip at social networking sites. Traditionally, such issues as those of relationships on verge of breakups were resolved by elders within confined sacred boundaries of home. Now there is nothing confined; hardly any concept of sacred; and virtually no boundaries. Personal differences are shared and discussed publicly. Ironically, we get 'likes' and 'comments' from those hardly concerned.

Interacting on Facebook or twitter has another problem. It brings one closer to so many possible 'matches' that your partner becomes naturally suspicious. Given the still-existing social dynamics and values of our society, such interactions always lead to disagreements. The thin line between complimenting and flirting has been worn away by too many interactions. Many a time these suspicions are not unfounded. Thus, a spontaneous and casual attitude in social networking creates scope for suspicion and infidelity.

Many relationships are now disturbed by a compulsion to share too many things with one's fellows that one otherwise would have kept to oneself. One has to disclose one's leisure activities and hangouts against one's wishes. It becomes an obligation to sign-in and inform whenever one is around thus eliminating one's personal space. It leads to frustration and disappointment which often proves fatal for relations.

Anonymity or little access to true information makes social media unpredictable. Because people control what they share, social media gets dicier. Anyone who is moderately technologically literate can project whatever image of him he/she wants. One can hide behind the texts, emails, tweets, comments or status-updates. No one has access to the 'real one'. Thus there is little scope for sincere relationships.

One of the hallmarks of social media is sharing of minute details and pictures with virtually everyone around. Over a million pictures are uploaded on Facebook every day. People use this medium to broadcast their social lives projecting their awesome lives and company. These false perceptions often become basis of new relationships premised on expectations that are never fulfilled. Thus breakups are even more common than the forming of new relationships.

Most of our time previously spent on socialization is now consumed by social networking where we meet our virtual friends and fellows. Apart from seeing anonymous people and indulging in fake relationships, it markedly reduces the time we spend with our near and dear ones waiting for our attention. We communicate more with our web-friends thousands of miles apart and ignore those sitting next door. Even siblings who are considered to be closest to each other are now being considered infringing on personal space. Thus, rather than improving our connections, social media has snatched our dear relations from us.

Social media has also widened the generation gap as technologically illiterate older generations find it difficult to reconcile with social media dynamics. The so-called Generation Y, that grew up with fast computers, instant internet, mobile phones and digital

media is more comfortable with tools of social media and interacting with their communities of friends and peers. They have become more and more distant and isolated from other segments of society. Thus, our relations with our affectionate and loving elders have been affected by this social media.

Given the drastic consequences of social media for human relations, we need to realise and fix this problem. We need to learn to live with this new phenomenon and adapt to its requirements. There is a need to check what and with whom we are sharing and its possible implications on our relations. Also, the significance of face-to-face communication cannot be underestimated. We should resort to direct communication whenever electronic communication fails or puts us in a fix. Moreover, communication must be a two-way process. Simply texting someone should not mean that our message has been conveyed. We need to get to recipient's feedback to ensure that they understood our message. Furthermore, rosy pictures and eloquent speeches are often made on social media without realizing that we have to live up to the expectations arising from those statements. Social media thus requires extra care in communication so that it doesn't disturb our relationships.

TOLERANCE

By: Zain ul Abedine

The Oxford concise English dictionary defines the term "tolerance" as "The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with." Considering this definition, one can clearly see that our society desperately needs to develop such a respect for diversity of opinion. Since tolerance is the only key to a peaceful co-existence, no one can ignore its importance.

In earlier days differences in religion led to prosecution; differences in politics created bad blood, and differences in opinions ended in fatal blows. This is intolerance: the refusal to be just and fair-minded led to these tragic ends. Now, we have progressed to become a globalized society where we face various critical situations. In such perilous situations tolerance is the only weapon to offset the chances of a conflict. In cases where communities have been deeply entrenched in violent conflicts, tolerance helps the affected groups to endure the pain of the past and resolve their differences. We cannot impose our own will all the time. We must listen to others' opinions at the same time. For a calm and peaceful society cannot exist without tolerance.

But tolerance is not meant to encourage a weak-kneed approach to life. It has a limit, and once that limit is crossed, it may lead to social misconduct; as there can be no tolerance where we come up against fundamental principles. If we tolerate evil, our best self goes down and under. Tolerance is an asset only in the little things of life.

If we look at the possible cures to intolerance, we come across three different solutions: education, introspection in individuals themselves, and the media. In an academic environment, educators are instrumental in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence. For instance, colleges and universities that create a tolerant environment help young people respect and understand different cultures. In our country's present intolerant environment, such a development in education will provide the most suitable change at grass-root level.

Individuals should frequently focus on being tolerant of others in their daily routines. This includes deliberately challenging the stereotypes and norms that they typically encounter in making decisions about others. Because often, in the absence of personal experiences, individuals base their opinions of others on assumptions which are influenced by the notions set forth by those who are closest in their lives, like parents, colleagues, educators, etc. Such notions enforce conflicts due to the dearth of actual interactions with others. And at a collective level the media should use positive images to promote coherence and cultural sensitivity. The more the groups and individuals are exposed to positive media messages about other cultures, the less likely they are to find problems in one another.

In conclusion, we can say that tolerance is not only an abstract virtue; but an element of considerable influence in the everyday affairs of life. Man is a social being and must live with a spirit of harmony and co-operation with others. In this process some amount of give-and-take, a capacity for compromise, is necessary.

Anomalies

By: Hassan Qadeer Butt

Human Beings search for continuities throughout their lives. It's an inherent desire to expect that things should happen as they have happened before. However, in a bid to find a continuity or to ignore it, a lot of stuff is over looked. To be sure, things repeat themselves. Many say that the reason is that there are certain lessons that we have not learned yet and the circumstances are repeated unless one learns them. That being said, a lot of life's circumstances are much different than anything that we have ever faced before. They are different than our childhood and the way life transpired after that. They are different than the manifestations that did or did not show up earlier or later in our lives.

Let me give you an example. I have always been fond of the skyline that very long trees form. I have loved watching it since I started my degree at Government College. I went to a park today and luckily, there were a lot of tall trees there. I became immersed in how the distant leaves formed the edge of the highest contact that the tree had with the air and sunlight. Out of unconscious intention or design, I didn't want to see the rest of the trees that were not so high, and didn't have the same sort of design that made trees reach out to the sky. Yet there they were, and they were hidden from me due to my inability to fathom a life that was not always high.

I only saw them when I became familiar with the old notion of happiness associated with watching air, sunlight and leaves play in the backdrop of the blue grey sky. And they were not the continuity I was looking for, nor were they supposed to be part of a moment that I wanted to remember on a random Wednesday afternoon in December. Yet independent of my bias, they were nurtured by multiple hands, which saw to it that they too were around, just in case. Just in case someone was more interested in down-to-Earth than to-the-sky.

My meaning-making stopped when I looked at them and tried to decipher them. Of course, intellect wants to fit everything in a predefined picture, not knowing that it's another way of strengthening a self-created and self-sustaining incarceration cell. Freedom to think and live again, it turns out, is nourished in the same way as imprisonment of the earliest impressions. To be sure, these impressions are flexible to the extent that they can incorporate within them an anomaly. Like a prisoner is granted several privileges to place him above the other prisoners, the end being keeping the structure of the prison in contact. It is said of the Nazi concentration camps that an inmate performed various administrative duties in the camp, who was known as a Capo. He was often times incharge of the other inmates and reported to the authorities. Such are the concentration camps of memory. A memory different from the rest is given charge of the rest and that's how it blends in to form a coherent picture of a relatively incoherent life.

Time now is an extension of the Time past (If we think of time as perceived in a subjective human consciousness. (An extension by default, builds on the previous experience. Yet, because it is an extension, it is also by default, different than the source. I would like to think that awareness of either similarity or difference might influence how we come to perceive the way time tramples over our memory. But there is an inherent bias in

perceiving what-had-been-before in what-is-here-now. Perception of similarity directs our thought processes to a relatively tangible reservoir of past memories. The present moment then becomes familiar and certain. You can just feel the old neurological pathways lighting up, disguised in a sense of certainty. However, to perceive an anomaly or discontinuity is to come out of a well-established structure of mental representations. The structure feels threatened by this alien happening that has, all of sudden, raised doubts on its validity.

In this situation, whatever you have thought up till that moment becomes less valid. It's as if, you were connected with reality with a bridge and suddenly, the side towards reality moved a few steps back due to land sliding. In this situation, your bridge and the rubble falls on the same place, so you may very well believe that the old days are still intact, even though there will be many reality checks. But still, such is the miserable sustainability of the old structure that you can live in the rubble for years and still survive. As Eliot says,

'Years of living among the breakage
Of what was believed in as the most reliable-
And therefore the fittest for renunciation',

It's important to listen to the hint of anomalies that happen every day. It's important to resist the urge of contextualizing present in the past circumstances. But how should one find or better still, build a better context to explain an anomaly? How should one hold on to an uncertain hint of transformation and follow through, rather than resorting towards old, dysfunctional ways of existence? Eliot explains it this way:

'These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of evidence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled,
Where action were otherwise movement
Of that which is only moved
And has in it no source of movement
Driven by daemonic, chthonic
Powers. And right action is freedom
From past and future also.
For most of us, this is the aim
Never here to be realised
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying
We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil'.

SPECIAL DAYS

By: Sarmad Sehba

Then there are days
not reported by newspapers,
they do not spit out rumors
and their faces are not pock marked
by whispers and intrigue
childlike days.
Then the loudspeakers migrate from cities,
shops disappear
and newscasters go dumb on air.
Then no cold wind blows
Through the windows
no heat wave descends on terraces,
the climate is of their own
with tattooed arms they sing and dance.
Native days,
days that awaken
the hissing memory
and shake the trees to steal
fresh apples for us.

TERRORISM

By: Hassam Khan Alizai

Cracked lips, wailing land,
dusty promises of help - too far
Terrified children, falling bombs
their dreams broke, like shattered shards
Rusty clouds of smoke and dust
won't bring much relief
Sleepless nights, days of fear
no hope of seeing Palestine in peace
Amidst debris I see helpless children
calling for their moms and dads
I wonder what will happen to them
in this world so shrewd and sad
Their tiny, shimmering eyes
dream of going to school
But what they see are bombs and fires,
unstitched open wounds
Instead of holding pens and books,

their fingers reach their faces
To shield their eyes from horrid sights,
their ears from deafening bombs
Whose war are they fighting,
will there be any end?
When, towards tranquillity
will faith's fingers bend?
This war, so black and red and dull and dark,
leaves behind a painful mark
In their innocent hearts and minds,
it leaves them completely blind
Their minds are baffled, clothes have
reddened,
bodies shackled and dreams shattered
Tearful eyes blur their vision
Their hearts and souls clash and clatter
Saddened by their pitiful fate
are the Sun and the Moon
These delicate buds shrivel
even before they bloom
They pray for another Saladin
or a Yousef like Berber
sadly, these are just secret wishes
that they nurture
Why are we putting an early end
to their delicate lives?
Why are we turning a deaf ear
to their echoing cries?
Guns and bombs, tears and mud,
fancy limos race through paths of blood
But bound by debt to hopelessness,
can we ever clean this mess?
Join your hands O weary Muslims
this Massacre has to stop
Speed your arms around these buds
before another tear drops
As bright as the starry sky,
these pearls have to shine
Veterans of pain and suffering
the Children of Palestine

UNTITLED

By: M. Zulqarnain Chheena

The insomniac God must have looked at
them

And felt a connection

Seeing them awake

But how can us, the miserable

Sufferers of early temptations

Of earthly love,

(Who never get to talk about their dreams

Afraid that they might come alive

If we let even a blink

Get mistaken with sleep)

Know of things

That make us Gods

In our own little ways ...

UNTITLED

By: M. Zulqarnain Chheena

Chasing your sun

I run

As if the night

Would beThe end of me...

But the end never comes

And you keep on rising

And setting

Leaving me and my chasing

All alone...

READABLE ABSURDITIES

By: M. Zulqarnain Chheena

He says he had written verses

But it doesn't look that way,

For he still skips a blink

When a certain name is taken.

And smiles before he lets

Out a cold sigh

A poet would have known better,

Where to sell his disguise

When to blink

And how to hide his story

In vague little poems

So that they become

Readable absurdities...

THE WORLD OF MY THOUGHTS

By: Hafsa Idrees

Let's talk in words, coated in cocoa;

Let's write haiku, wrapped with melody,

In thoughts that maybe,

Just maybe, we might meet.

Under a street light,

Post-midnight.

Love fight,

December night.

Me and you,

The lovely us,

Dancing, pulchritudinous.

With hands cupped on each other

We felt love

ECHOES OF LIFE

By: Hafsa Idrees

I begged you to be mine

But you took me for granted

I forgot I had choices

But the fears always haunted

You held me down but I realized

I can't force you to love

It comes naturally if it has to

So, I moved on like a wounded dove

I couldn't save the pieces of our love

For, it existed only in my head

There wasn't anything like it

Just lies and pretense

You lived in an illusion

And a false mirage of hue

But what you see in others

Existed actually in you

SPEECHLESS SILENCE

By: Hafsa Idrees

I am straying in the garden of my past

To reciprocate what life has given me

Tears, grief, regrets, grudges and nothing

I jeered at my fate
 Why didn't I find my jubilation?
 Why is my life not kaleidoscopic?
 Couldn't I be a happy lass?
 Why is there a labyrinth?
 And death; the last maze
 I have got nothing for you,
 Except these questions
 Will I ever find my share of happiness?
 I can't hear anything
 Nothingness surrounds me
 I have an opaque lens
 For, all I get is
 Speechless silence

A BITTERSWEET CONFESSION

By: Hafsa Idrees

Her eyes brandy
 Her lips cocaine
 We twirled on classy songs
 Down the silent lane
 Shimmery red velvet
 Covering her soul
 Dancing as one
 We are a whole
 Smell of gunpowder
 In the foggy air
 Reminds me of my stolen heart
 In the grave, here
 A tear escaped my eyes
 Flowed down my cheek
 Told her that
 Her lover is weak
 With the same passion
 He still loves her
 The difference is only
 Slighter
 He saved her memories
 Though he couldn't save her
 And preserved them carefully

As a loyal lover
 They do make love
 Ignoring the hurled
 In his sub conscious
 Away from the world

TIME FLIES LIKE PAPER PLANES

By: Hafsa Idrees

I sat on the dry leaves lying on the ground
 The tree stands still in the eternal bounds
 Brown, grey, beige and yellow around
 That is all I could ever found
 Feels like it was just yesterday
 That we celebrated our birthday
 And today I stand here
 Bawling like a baby i whimper
 My tears crawl down my cheeks
 Absorb in the mud of your grave
 I placed roses that you always adored
 And some tears that I had saved
 I know you are gone now
 And I can't reach you anymore
 Death is inevitable
 And so are the memories
 They are a bit sourer

NAKED TRUTH

By: Hafsa Idrees

I tear my soul,
 And use the ink to write
 Don't just ask me
 Why my words are
 Painfully sad
 And a fright.

BLACK ROSES

By: Hibah Shabkhez

I flee the jaws of Time's story
 As they snip me apart twig by twig
 Black Roses nesting
 In the flesh that was broken

Sand seeps in, questing
Eternity's whittling me down to a sprig
An Enting lost in a paper factory

HEAL ME SLOWLY

By: Hibah Shabkhez

Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Leave me the day's dying light
Come for me gently in the night
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Leave me a little while my pain
Let me watch a sun set again
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
The scent of new-born summer lingers
Mingles with winter's cold fish fingers
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Let me taste one more mango
Leave me to dance another tango
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly
Come for me gently in the night
Leave me the day's dying light
Heal me slowly, O death, heal me slowly

LOVERS OF THE LOST

By: Ibreez Shabkhez

Three wanderers went where wanderers go;
I found not where to look.
O'er mountains high or depths of the sea',
Even leaves of their wonderous book.
Torn I came, and tattered, and tired;
Back where I had begun. I heard one snore,
another yawn.
The third slept quietly on.
Good old Ibbi, my wandering's done;
Their's I know of no longer...
For bright as the moon, I see the sun;
And the journey's made us stronger!

THE WILLOWY GREEN STEM

By: Muhammad Ali

The willowy green stem
Lived through all seasons

Through gales of autumn,
through frosts of winter
Through colors of spring,
through scorches of summer
The pains it endured
Were no less than a mother
Who gives birth to a child
And brings it up
The willowy green stem
Also gave a birth
Which when infant, was a cute little bud
The cute little bud, when opened its eyes
When moved its legs, when gained skin color
Was a flower very pretty, a flower very soft
The willowy green stem
Witnessed its growth
Became its brace, gave it support
Who was it?
The cruel, the heartless
Insensitive and ruthless
Who broke the flower
And took the life
Out of the stem
As is a mother
Without a child

BE MY TRUNK

By: Muhammad Ali

Be my trunk
The keys of which I'll hold to my chest
Be my trunk
And keep my secrets
Concealed from the world
Be my trunk
Which none can open
But me whenever I want
All the impositions
Are not for you
I'll take care too
I'll keep you upholstered
With a magnificent tapestry
I'll keep you safe

In a corner of my room
 And sit by you
 In moments of isolation
 Be my trunk
 For if you'll be
 You'll be all mine
 And you'll always be mine
 Be my trunk

SPRING MIGHT ARRIVE

By: Muhammad Ali

In gloom are spent my days and nights
 Once in a blue moon, happiness arrives
 Seasons of spring have gone for long
 God! Till when will the autumn prolong?
 The chirping sparrows have left the trees
 A strange melancholia is in the breeze
 Around me, a crowd remains
 But in the heart, sadness prevails
 Which road to travel?
 Which river to cross?
 Engulfed by the mist are all the roads
 Wrecked and wretched are all the boats
 But still with a courage and a mighty heart
 I have given my life, a brand new start
 I'm sitting by the window with the curtains
 aside
 With a ray of hope that spring might arrive

A STAINED PAST

By: Muhammad Ali

It follows me like a thief
 As if laden with gold am I
 But laden I am with sins
 How unfortunate am I
 Life would have been better
 Had my sins been few
 Or if not the case
 Then an ability to change my hue
 Like a chameleon does
 So disguised I would be
 And safe I could be

From the world's eyes
 And stop them from saying "Guys!
 Isn't he the one?
 Piety who chose to shun?"
 How to look at the future
 When in every step falls a tincture
 From my stained past
 Which might forever last

THE COMIC TRAGEDY

By: Mohiba Ahmed

From behind the curtain, I heard a faint
 laugh;
 Curiosity struck me
 What could be remotely amusing about this
 tragedy?
 What indeed?
 I followed the voice behind the curtain,
 I followed the voice behind the curtain,
 The world shifted.
 Then,
 I was there on stage, but here- behind the
 curtain
 too,
 performing that very act again.
 And the perspective shifted too,
 the sight of the tragedy i beheld- beguiling
 and
 vulgar,
 brought out but tears of mirth;
 I started to laugh then;
 A faint laugh, oh! It had been me all along
 Me,
 mocking myself.

SWEET NOTHING

By: Mohiba Ahmed

Peace enveloped me into its soft embrace.
 I could feel the aura of serenity surrounding
 me,
 and all i felt was happiness.
 It was a feeling lost to me.

There had to be something wrong.
 How could a person be this happy...absolute,
 without a constant reminder of how it was all
 temporary - just an illusion,
 and then there it was again.
 I felt it before i saw it-darkness.
 It started to lift like fog around me, feeding
 on the light,
 which had now begun to fade.
 This was my 'familiar', and yet it frightened
 me
 beyond words.
 In a matter of mere seconds the darkness had
 consumed
 every single ray of light.
 Familiar- yet frightening.
 Soon, it started to choke me,
 that too familiar yet utterly terrifying.
 I could not breath.
 And that was when i felt myself
 disappearing,
 disappearing into nothingness.
 With no one to hold onto
 gave myself in.
 Afraid. Alone. Now, lost forever.

IRONY

By: Mohiba Ahmed

With every breath i prayed for death.
 A release from this pain, however, was a
 winged
 dream
 that had flown far out of reach.
 'Misery, pain, misery, pain' the anthem was
 yet
 another step away from salvation.
 'There are people far worse' the conscience
 consoled;
 a consolation, though, that had never helped.
 How do you heal wounds that mark the
 inside?

To cope with something so painful
 but to have no proof of its existence,
 how is that you make them believe?
 I died a little everyday
 but the world was fooled by the smile my
 flesh wore.
 Who would've thought a mere smile
 could be such great a disguise.
 God only knows what I would present
 ifi ever were to wear my skin inside out.
 Surely, as if i'd walked straight out of hell ...
 the irony.

BLISS

By: Mohiba Ahmed

To be numb is to be free,
 Of all the thoughts that imprison the soul
 Of all the ache that dwells within
 Of all that was, that is and could be
 Of all the mush, the haunting sounds
 And then never to come around
 To be numb is to be free,
 Oh! What a bliss that might be.

A SHADOW UNDER THE HILLS

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

The shadow of a deserted dream stood by the
 corner,
 Where the hay joins hands with the hill.
 The shadow had your shape,
 your contempt.
 Slowly, the shadow took hold
 of the snow of time
 Moulded it into nostalgia
 Into the bitterness of the past,
 of paths never taken.
 I scathe the sky
 persuading the rain
 with a wish
 to see the droplets

chasing the evading sunlight.
That'd melt the snow of time,
While the sunset burns
me under the blanket of a cloud.
A sunset freezing the molten hell,
And rekindling a fire
Worthy of my heavens.

CHOICES

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

You are time,
And I am the boundary,
That dissolves,
When a second merges into the soul of next.
I wish I could usurp,
The kingdom of the night,
And throw it at
the face of the sun.
There you walk, dressed like a poem,
And verses dripping,
From your contours.
And I stand here,
Knitting those verses,
Into a cloak,
That keeps me warm,
When I touch the cool in your breeze.
There stands truth,
At the top of the stairway,
Where each step is a lie
I stumble and slip
like a vapor
resisting the ardent sun.
We are nothing but shadows,
Of someone we've never known,
We are choices,
No one ever made.

COFFIN OF THE NIGHT

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

The mournful moon has remorse on its face
alone; it sits in the woods of the sky.
the stars; its leaflets,

crumble down in a silver dust,
decaying, bit by bit,
swaying into the nothingness,
of anticipation.
The silence of the night,
has merged into the moonlight.
I sit under the naked sky,
bathed in moonlight,
and with it,
its woven silence,
crawls down beneath
my skin.
Helplessly,
it claws at the roots,
of my marrow,
to flow within me,
like darkened blood,
smelling of eternity.
Not long now,
I'll breath my last,
on a puff of air that has your smell.
and collapse into,
the coffin of the night.
This is my night.
My being and becoming,
Through the windows of the stagnant clouds,
my past peeps,
down at the corridor of my existence,
somewhere in whose corner,
my battered soul resides.
Through the bosom of the earth,
my future ogles,
deep into the abyss of my pupils.
Beyond the barricade,
is a cloud of smoke,
dancing in the moonlight,
to hymns of madness,
and songs of despair.
These are my dreams,
that burnt to ashes.

ashes to ashes,
dust to dust.
This is my night.
It holds my sun imprisoned,
in the chains of its own light.
This is my night.
These are my phantoms,
feeding themselves

on the memories of my past,
of a dark eyed damsel.
who froze my moments,
and took away,
my glaring sun.
and ascended on,
to the slow climb of oblivion.
And I lay here,
in the coffin of my night,
with a shroud of darkness.
waiting for dawn.

CROSSROADS

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

And now,
Here, at the crossroads,
I stand, alone,
Like a sad tree
Stripped of its leaves,
And branches spread out
As if begging the orange sun
For mercy.
Standing here,
stuck to the ground.
With the burden of its shapeless roots.
Here I stand
At the crossroads.
The threatening sky gazing at me
The clouds mocking my soul
For I am emptier than these.
For I am emptier than life itself.
I stand here

Where madness and sanity collide
And fail to merge
And nurture an event like me.
I stand here
Facing the gallows
Where the rope of life
Asphyxiates to death
Where nothing but barrenness resides.
I stand here
Trying to filter
Her dulcet voice
From the babel
That surrounds me.
I stand here
Perhaps not as a traveler
Perhaps this isn't the boulevard of my life
Perhaps I'm a destination
To where these roads lead
Perhaps I am an ancient ruin
where darkness flutters
And within these ruins
This pulp of lies
Truth may emerge
Bearing the emptiness of a shadow.

LIMBLESS-NESS

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

If only I could,
pierce my dagger,
through the heart of the sun,
If only I could,
split the moon,
into two bleeding halves,
If only I could,
be the lightning,
and kiss in between,
the cheeks of the night,
If only the blow,
of my sword,
could rupture the womb,
of the calculated earth.

To attain from the mists of vagueness,
 all that I could wish for,
 to reason with God,
 and collide head-on,
 with his intentions.
 To break the chain that is,
 clung to my feet.
 Beginnings, happenings, endings.
 I wish I could alter,
 the fabric of which,
 I am composed.
 I wish I could break,
 the thread of the force,
 that holds me down,
 and my potential.
 If only I could
 Fight my fate,
 and live a day more.
 What is ambition? But verve,
 rising through the friction-burns,
 between the reality and dreams.
 What is man? But a bridge,
 between the ape and the superman,
 a bridge suspended,
 by desire and ambition.
 To have the courage that compels,
 to embrace the grandiose angel of death,
 that'll come down one day,
 with a pinching news,
 that holds my fate,
 the news that, "I am no more".
 To end my life,
 like a song well sung,
 a poem well written,
 a play well-played,
 To die while facing the unkind sun,
 not a minute too early,
 nor too late,
 to do what can be done,
 and succumb to my fate.

SECOND REVELATION

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

Our puppeteers look down,
 With envy running in their scarlet glances,
 A silver river broke down.
 When their glances,
 Cracked the roof,
 Of the sky.
 They see us drowning,
 In the depths of our loneliness,
 Gasping for,
 The musky scent,
 Of the dry pond,
 Where the rosebuds of time
 Lay oblivious.
 My reality darkens,
 The glow of my dreams,
 The dreams that flow,
 In the fountain of love,
 The water of which,
 Is darker,
 Than a blind man's sight.
 I poke the flimsy skin,
 Of my substance,
 And walk through these walls.
 Peeling the layers of my intentions,
 Searching for the day
 When the molten sun,
 Plasters your forehead,
 And drops of sunlight,
 Roll down your cheeks,
 I'll lie there,
 In the cave of,
 Your dimples.
 Waiting still,
 For a revelation.

THE SEARCH

By: Saad Kalim Zafar

I search for a poem,
 in the hopeless trees,

that clap their leaves,
 when the wind descends,
 that smells of our ancestors.
 I search for a poem,
 in the lips of the flower,
 that speak in colours,
 in the voice of their scent
 I search for a poem,
 in the fog,
 that swims slowly,
 on the meadows of my heart.
 I saw a verse,
 floating in the moist air,
 I tried to reach it,
 but it sank,
 in the shores of your memories.
 I search for a poem,
 in the strange shadows,
 of your belongings.
 Perhaps a verse,
 will fall on my cheek,
 while I rest,
 on the pillow of my longings.
 Perhaps a verse,
 will crawl up to me,
 when the moon dissolves ,
 in the moist puddle of the sky,
 like a snow flake,
 on a warm pavement.
 Perhaps a verse,
 will caress my skin,
 while you pierce my soul,
 with the dagger,
 of your heart.
 and while the night,
 robs us,
 of our colours.

UNTITLED

By: Ushna Butt

A single tune pierced the air
 and shattered the silence;

into chords three
 and a million more.
 Each note painting itself
 upon her colourless skin,
 dyeing her with shades
 that penetrated within.
 Arousing the words
 yet obscure to ink,
 resurrecting a turmoil
 that began a beginning.
 And one by one
 the solitary words,
 un-stitched themselves
 from the finest soul;
 as her fingertips trembled
 in an exotic glow
 of colours, words and music
 embraced in a flow.
 Entwined with rhythm,
 they burst in fusion;
 to a strange orchestra
 still and silent...

THE AUTUMN OF YOUR EYES

By: Ushna Butt

The sky itself, gasped!
 And the cold earth
 stripped off its gravity!
 As all the gold
 of the saddest autumn
 dried over years;
 burst into flames.
 Scorched alight
 by a single spark,
 that flamed
 in your barren eyes,
 when I opened mine
 to finally whisper,
 'I wish it had never
 stopped raining...!'

UNTITLED

By: Misbah Mukhtar

It can be only love
To fill in the holes
Deep down in our souls
From uplifting spirits
To mitigating woes
It can be only love
To pinch, pierce and prevail
In the fibre of our beings
Through our very bones
Running as blood
In our every vein
To help appreciate
The setting suns
And rising dawns
From rivers that flow
To the falling snow
It can be only love
That makes it cherish-able
To have a long walk
Through the forlorn roads
In gloomy winter nights
In bright moonlight
From July till December
From green till amber
From the twilights of eve
Till the brilliant new leaps
It can be only love-
Treading through the aisle
Of the thick dark forest
With a graceful pride
With the beauty of hope
That longs for togetherness
Togetherness- that shall never come
And Ah.....
Such beauty.....
Such grace, in vain!
And that's what makes us wonder;
Would that have even mattered

For the Master of creation
To let love exist
Without the idea of separation?

UNTITLED

By: Misbah Mukhtar

I don't see why
things can't have
a shared meaning.
So that we may not have to see
the same horizon
with different angles.
And may not have to sleep
with different dreams
in our similar eyes.

I AM

By: Maria Imran

You will see me everywhere,
floating gracefully on the clouds
swimming fearlessly in the seas
I need no pillars to cling on to,
no rooflops, no floors to set my feet on.
I am a mermaid!
A ghost, an angel
a shooting star I am
the wish you count on it,
the desire you keep unheard-
I am the golden sand in time's hand
the purple glow in a river's flow
the secret in a book divine
the prisoner in a castle fine
I am everything-
I am everywhere
I am now, I am never
I am infinite forever.
You think you can get hold?
Like the sailors before you planned
they all died in my seas
swallowed by the deep.
Thirsty in my deserts
injured by my cacti
illusioned by my oases

begging for my mercies.
 I am the shapeless cloud,
 free to make my move
 Noah's faithful ark
 a light in the dark
 Musashi's sword
 a legend adored
 I am the minaret, the temple bell
 the prayer bead, salvational deed
 I am your past-unreachable
 your destiny-unattainable
 I am anything but your present.

MYSTICAL EMBRACE

By: Maria Imran

With aching hands and tired feet
 this traveler shuts her eyes to sleep
 her thoughts she packs in mind's backyard
 but yours it seems she can't conceal.
 All night through she thinks of you
 as the sky dresses in cobalt blue
 and silver moonlight washes earth,
 to another dream her heart gives birth!
 Your name she whispers a hundred times:
 flutters, her soul in those heavenly chimes
 smiling she submits herself in space
 as sleep takes her in its mystical embrace.

ONCE THERE WERE FIVE

By: Aiza Tariq

I started out with five
 One dropped his hat
 And when he bent
 Got left behind.
 I sailed with four
 One found interesting
 The image of a sea snail
 Never to be found again.
 Three went to pray
 One no longer believed
 God didn't see him leave
 Neither did we.

Two stumbled up an intersection
 They still don't know
 Who left first?
 But there was none.

MIRRORS

By: Sidra Amin

I hesitate looking into mirrors,
 and can't peek into my eyes.
 for when I do, an appalling terror I face,
 that prevails and engulfs,
 my shattered heart and soul.
 and knits a picture
 of a defeated mortal.

Exhausted, weary and crippled.
 Eyes dark purple and black,
 from sleepless days
 and that xeric, wrinkled skin.
 staying up for long does it limn.
 The image in the mirror
 wants to stumble and slump.
 the insides have already collapsed,
 the outsides want to plunge
 Into an ocean of tears.
 The mirror forecasts realities,
 unmask the shrouds,
 and depicts a portrayal of me.
 which is hard to endure.

I am not a star,
 But I want a shooting star.
 I'm not a hawk.
 But I yearn to be one.
 I am not a castle,
 But a speck of dust.
 I'm not a beautiful rose,
 But an ugly dandelion.
 That dances around to spread smiles.
 I am like a shrivelled tree,
 but I wait, . . .
 For the burgeoning oasis inside
 The person in the mirror is me,

With all the facades off.
With no glitters and cloaks.

STAYAWAYMYLOVE

By: Haris Ali Virk

I know that you exist
somewhere, somewhere.
Beautiful yet pure,
wise yet innocent.
I know you exist
somewhere, somewhere.
But I doubt my own existence,
I doubt my own beauty,
I doubt my own purity,
I doubt my own wisdom,
And I doubt my own innocence.
I doubt myself, my love.
For what I am, after all
a burdened soul,
a callous being,

an enigmatic creature,
a hollow man,
and a life long failure.
I want to hold you in my arms,
I want to embrace your soul.
This, we must forestall.
For I'm not worthy of you,
it may prove a mayhem,
and rip your tender soul.
My soul is already burnt,
time will blow away the ashes.
Stay away my love,
for I am scourged,
the cursed one.

VISTA OF MOONLIT NIGHT

By: Muhammad Hamza Waseem

After every interval of a fortnight,
The queen of night comes to address,
To preach love and cascade light.
The mysterious charisma: the white dress!
As the moonlight embraces everything,
The stars blush and put on veils.
Silently, the lake keeps on smiling,
With breeze, the perfume of night sails.
The nightingale, in praise of moon,
Begins chanting a soothing song,
The charming vista is a boon,
Surely, to nirvana, it belongs.
As the bright moonlit night leaves, the
craving
hearts say,
'Forever-long, wish the aura would stay this
way.'

THEY NEVER WILL KNOW

By: Ibreez Shabkhez

"Just keep going, and you will be
acknowledged someday for who you are."

"No. I won't. They'll all just clap because of
what I'll be able to do then; they'll never
know who I am, was, or ever will be."

"And just why not?"

"Because I will have neither the courage nor
the stupidity left to tell them."

LIBERATION

By: Gullalai Khan Shairani

In her eyes, lies the secret of death
In his heart, the torment of ages

They live miles apart and away
And yet cling to the hope of souls meeting
Worldly pleasures and temporary sufferings

Never were the issues to make a new start

For life had never been like in their mother's
womb

And they survived for a better tomorrow's
grant

Survived to solve a riddle- not so familiar
A rhyming of hearts is what they attained
The string of rotten pieces

Pressed tight against their existence

And abyss in all its glory waits.

For their liberation is still out of question,
sweetheart

They've yet to part the oceans, kill the waves

The only choice given is to survive,

And from the seeds of sadness, let mirth
arrive