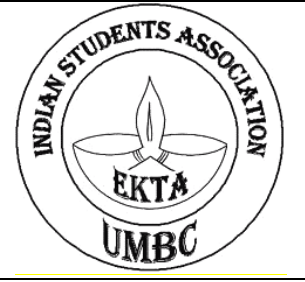




|| srishti ||

Newsletter of EKTA,
The Indian Students' Association at UMBC
Vol IV Issue No. I, March 2006



Editors: Deepak Bote, Balaji Viswanathan

From Bread uppumas to Bean Burritos - Karthik Gurumurthy

Clad in a business casual, with a *vibuthi* on my forehead, I stood in the arrival lounge of the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport waiting for my senior Manoj to pick me up. A few people who passed by stared. I wondered why.

I felt it was just yesterday that I came to know I had made it to a university abroad. I could almost see my proud father telling our friends and relatives that I would be off to America soon.

Well, here I was. In the land of opportunities. Finally!

I tried to settle down to my new surroundings. The first few days were terrible. I was nostalgic. I missed my mom's cooking. At home I used to grumble at the 'oily' bread uppumas she served me everyday. Now how I longed for it!

"You'll get used to all this," my senior Manoj told me as he ate a big bowl of raw vegetables (in the name of a salad!) with great gusto. I felt like being a cow after seeing so many leaves and raw vegetables in a plate.

"How could you pay for this thing?" I asked with repugnance.

"Try out the bean burrito," he replied. "It's delicious and that's the only vegetarian dish in the campus". "Also make sure that you ask for bean burrito and not beef burrito". I was hungry, so I asked for it. It came, I dug in -- and, well, all I will say is that it is nothing like *bread uppuma*. I was eating with my right hand as always and I was instructed that I need to use both the hands in finishing a burrito. That was a helpful hint which helped me out that day.

Despite such gastronomic setbacks, I had my share of fun too. Like on the day I first saw snow when I moved to Baltimore, MD during the Thanksgiving break.

Having lived in Madras, where the sun blazes all through the year, it was a totally new experience for me. I just couldn't contain my excitement when I looked out of my window. It was as though the earth was covered with a white quilt.

"Let's go out," my roommate shrieked.

We played around in the snow to our heart's content. We forgot all about our deadlines, our worries, and like children we chucked snow at each other. That was fun.

School was okay except for those difficult days when you had to stay up late to finish an assignment or a take-home exam. It was ironic to think how I was sitting up late, bleary-eyed, after eating leftovers and cold pizzas, when my relatives would be home in India, happily chatting to some neighbor about how lucky I was to be in the US.

But I was learning -- and not just academically. Looking back, I would say I have travelled quite some way. I still laugh when I think of an embarrassing incident that happened to me.

Professor A, this ever-so-busy man for whom I had just started work, asked me to check if he had any mails. I was puzzled. Why is he asking me to check his mails?

I was not used to American jargons then. The only mails I could think of were the ones that got delivered to your inbox. So I hustled off to his computer.

"Whoa! Whoa!" said he, "What are you doing?"

"Checking your mail," I answered.

"Karthik, I asked you to check for mails that are outside in my faculty folder," he burst out laughing. The students who were in the room joined him.

Today, after many months of 'settling down', here I am, working as a scientist, actually relishing salads, pizzas and bean burritos, gossiping with my American colleague -- now I enjoy everything America has to offer.

But I haven't forgotten how I felt when I landed here. And I know what to tell the fresh arrivals I meet on and off.

"Don't worry," I tell them, "You will settle down soon enough."

"Welcome to the land of opportunities."



Intolerance & Talibanization of the World

- Balaji Viswanathan

In many parts of India, colleges have started to introduce the *Talibanized* way in education: If something is found irritable, crush it with the fullest power. Cellphones are now banned and this is in a country, where any disaster can happen anytime, and communication is a very precious thing. Boy-Girl interaction (even a casual talk) is being frowned upon, Jeans and T-Shirts are cursed objects of clothing and there are insane souls in the college who would closely watch whether you sport a beard, shape up the moustache, wear formal shoes... Though such practices are not the rule, it is starting to get adopted by some government colleges and more private engineering colleges (many of which exist for the sole sake of making money from its students) and this is disturbing.

Though I was pretty harsh in the previous paragraph, I feel it is going with the greater scheme of things around the world. Muslim protestors going on riots for some prank cartoons, Europeans getting agitated over a steel company takeover and going over huge extent to stop Turkey's bid, Western people's over-reaction against out-sourcing and liberal visa policies, Chinese filtering of words like democracy and human rights from Google searches and protests in India against Valentine's day celebrations. In many cases, intolerance can mean bloodshed as done by the Taliban, brutality against democratic protesters by dictatorships and religious riots in ethnically diverse regions.

Why is the world becoming so ugly? The increase in information flow and increased ease of travel should have integrated the cultures. But, paradoxically we are living a world with splinter groups with divisionist agendas. Racial groups have started to sprout in countries like even Britain (Germans, French and rest of continental Europe are even worse) and many Presidents directly address to their niche population - the ultra conservative constituencies. In India, groups like Shiv Sena opposes people movement within the same country. Many Muslim groups are getting worse and value of life doesn't mean to them anymore - throats are getting slashed, terrorists in TV are threatening countries and humans become just bomb carriers.

It is too scary to live in such a world. If the suave Scandinavian countries can have racial hatred, then the world is surely becoming deadlier. Unless we

pay more attention to the hatred mongering groups around us, we are going to be trapped by their vicious agenda.



Movies on Mafioso - Kausam Kumar

Well, Mangal Pandey was the disappointment of the year. Took 4 years to make such a bad movie. But it's a waste of time to talk about such movies.

What I wanted to talk was about the theme of a different genre of movies. Movies that involved the Mafia. Well, I was watching Godfather the other day at a friend's house and then watched Sarkar. Also, reminisced the first gangster movie - Satya and the followup of Company.

What struck me was the gradual delineation of boundary between bad and good.

If you observe Godfather - in all the 3 parts it firmly believed that what the Don did was bad and Michael and the Don himself were always trying to become 'legitimate'. Even when they mentioned about the days in Italy where they had to fight the government, it was a robinhood kind of thing to do but ultimately it was bad. Although, it was all about business and the family, however the family grudgingly accepted the business. Michael did not want to be part of it and Kay left Michael for what he became.

Satya - Here the family had very little say even though Bhiku Mahtre the protagonist loved his wife. Here, Satya joins initially to take revenge but the ultimately, he is in for the money.

Company is where the shades start becoming gray. Chandu's wife and mother have no qualms about him earning money by killing guys. And the movie does not show a robinhood kind of saga but its money and greed for which Chandu does not follow the path of good. A far cry from 'Mother India' where the mother does not tolerate such behavior.

However, Sarkar is where the protagonist is now good instead of being bad and he punishes the people since the justice system could not do its work. I do wonder how did the justice system degrade if not for such warlords if I may say. So if not a single innocent man is harmed by Sarkar who runs a parallel government than it means the laws are ineffective or the laws are not taken in the spirit in which they are to be enforced.

Now, why does the bad really become good. Is it the law as Ayn Rand mentions in Atlas Shrugged - Making a law which people are forced to break will involve more power to the government. But I do wonder, if the entire constitution is bad ...

This does not look to be the case then, the people involved do discharge their duties properly. Which of the above actually is what has happened ? Which means the sense of fairness and morality of people have nosedived in the society ..

Basically, the movies represent the genre of our own society or is it all fiction ...Is RobinHood really a good person or are Robinhoods created as the societies righteousness dives down ..

Any thoughts !!!



7 Tips for facing job interviews

- Ramakrishna Shenai & Deepak Bote

We have tried to put together a list of some helpful tips that have helped us during our own interviews. These tips are not in any way comprehensive, but these are just some of the things that we have found useful in preparing for interviews:

1. When to say "I don't know":

There are two types of questions: The "facts" question and the "thinking" question. For e.g., if someone asks you, what is the capital of Peru, you either know it or you don't. These are the type of questions where you should state right away that you do not know the answer.

On the other hand, for questions like logic puzzles, or anything else where the answer is not based on just facts, you should never give up trying to answer the question. The interviewer expects you to think, and even if you do not get the answer, your thought process as you try to solve it will definitely earn you some brownie points.

2. Resisting the temptation to answer quickly:

I have realized through personal experiences that when an interviewer asks me a question, there is a pressure somewhere inside me to answer as quickly as possible. Learning to resist this pressure can really worked wonders with the quality of answers that you finally give in an interview.

For e.g., suppose the interviewer asks me a difficult question. The pressure to answer quickly often results in saying something which is not the best answer. It's important to realize that this is something that the interviewer is also observing. That is, given a difficult problem, how do you react? Do you have the patience to sit back and think about it for the best possible solution, or do you, in your need to please, just go ahead with the first marginally reasonable solution you think of? It's often best to say, "Let me think about this for a couple of minutes" and then reason out the solution aloud.

On the other hand, suppose the interviewer asks you a simple question, it's still a good idea to say "Let me think about this for a minute". By doing this, you are still giving a good impression, as one who doesn't rush into answers. You will also be able to phrase your response in a better manner than you would have done a minute earlier. More importantly, it will give you time to think about the question carefully: What is so special about this question, why did he/she choose this simple question to ask me? Very often, you can avoid a trap if there is one. If on the other hand, it was indeed a straightforward question, you have done nothing wrong by answering it a minute later.

3. Reading before the interview:

When you are preparing for the interview, it is good to plan it in such a way that you have nothing to do on the last day. In particular, do not read anything new and difficult on the last day. I keep a few pages of really simple concepts with me which I already know very well. Yet, I read these on the last day, simply because they put me at ease and lessen the apprehension of the interview. Going into the interview having just solved a problem, or having just read and understood the basic concepts, can really boost your confidence. Of course, in the earlier period of preparation, you should have covered the more difficult concepts.

4. Use simple language:

Always use simple language to explain anything. Avoid using technical jargon. Do not assume that your interviewer knows everything. Suppose you are explaining your project. Ensure that the person you are explaining it to knows some background. Explain clearly the why, how etc. of the project. Indicate upfront how much time you may take to explain your project. E.g.: Hey can I take 5 minutes to explain this?

5. Show interest:

Show clearly to the interviewer that you are passionate about what you do, and that you are really interested in the job. A lack of passion is a sure no.

6. Ask questions:

Understanding the question thoroughly is important. Ask as many questions to get a good understanding. Make sure that your questions are directed towards getting somewhere. E.g.: Hey I am trying to understand how deletion takes place. So what happens when this memory is released?

7. Think aloud:

If you are working on some question, let your interviewer know that you are thinking (by thinking aloud). He/She may help you direct your thoughts. If you are stuck, thinking silently will only send a signal to your interviewer that you are stumped by the question.

Good luck with your interviews!!



Message from the Ekta President

When I was asked to write an article for Srishti in the capacity of the President of the organization, I had various topics in mind to write about. Finally I decided to write about one that is befitting to the purpose behind the existence of this organization. The objective behind forming this organization was to create oneness amongst the Indian Community in UMBC. Our predecessors felt the need for a forum where all Indian Students can exchange ideas and help foster a feeling of “home away from home”. Under Babu Raman’s (now Dr. Babu Raman working in Oakridge National Laboratory) able leadership was born “EKTA: The Indian Students Association in UMBC”.

With the above said mission in mind, this organization has been trying its best in getting people together and promoting positive cultural exchanges amongst Indians and Americans in UMBC. The strong Indian community makes its presence felt by organizing events like Diwali and having stalls in UMBC events like Involvement Fest and Quadmania.

When we set out to collect articles for this issue of Srishti we were very thrilled to find out a lot of Alumni willing to contribute. This sends one strong message across the board when I look at it. EKTA not only gets current students together, it also brings together students who graduated long ago and are located in all corners of the globe. Everyone feels

connected to the Indian community here and feel that they want to contribute towards its growth in all possible means.

Fun and frolic filled get-togethers organized in regular intervals throughout the semester acts as a mental and physical refresher to the students here and one is always in the look out for the next event that is around the corner. The recently organized “Tax help Session” helped a lot of graduate students to develop a better understanding of the tax laws that govern their income in the USA. In the near future EKTA intends to organize a picnic to Washington DC for witnessing the annual Cherry Blossom festival.

Having said so much, it will be gross injustice if I do not acknowledge every one of you who is making an earnest effort in shaping EKTA into what it is today – a forum where all of us unite as one community and share our rich and varied cultural heritage.

Balaji Sadasivam,
President, EKTA UMBC

Wishes And Roses



She gave me no roses
I asked for none
But in secret refuges
I hoped for one...

She gave me good wishes
I kept them away
But their goodwill refreshes
Me to this day...

For roses are lovely
But not forever
Roses lose their fragrance
Wishes...never!

Deep Bote