

Crossing Borders – How my international experience has affected my view of the world. *By Prasanth Ramu*

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference”*

A famous quote taken from the great American poet Robert Frost's immortal poem titled “Road Not Taken”. It is not only crossing the state border, but crossing of international border that has made all the difference. I come from a distant land called India known for its diversity in languages, religions, cultures and traditions, the hallmark of an ancient civilization. It was not an easy task to leave my home town and step out of the border as I had never been overseas. After finishing my undergraduate program, I was not sure as to where I should pursue my higher studies, although going to graduate school was a definite goal. I had admissions from schools in different states in India as well as in USA. Having heard of the invigorating and stimulating academic environment supported by state-of-art facilities and also motivated to fulfill the desires of my parents, I decided to pursue my higher education here in the USA, and at the end of the essay I will be able to convince that this route, the one less taken by many of my undergraduate class mates has made all the difference in my view about the world.

There were times when I was curious or even scared about the attitude of the people on these shores when I landed. At first, I was reluctant to even talk to my neighbors who were also students at UNCC. I used to see them around but just a simple 'hi' was what we had exchanged until one rainy day when my car broke down and one of my neighbors offered me a ride to school on that day. I got into his car hesitantly but the necessity to reach the class in time made me accept the offer. He offered to drop me at my destination though he was headed to a building on the other side of the campus and he even offered to pick me up that evening from school and slowly the reluctance of approaching a strange neighbor started disappearing. On my way back home from school, we realized that we shared a common interest in sports and I met his roommates and came to know

that he shared his apartment with two Pakistan nationals and one Sri Lankan. We decided to watch the cricket (an English game played in India with the same intense passion as baseball over here in the US) world cup at my apartment with my roommates.

As I kept thinking about my new friend and his roommates a few facts of relationship between India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka that I had acquired in the past came to my mind. The international community is aware of the fact that India and Pakistan are arch-rivals when it comes to the battle ground or in the south Asian SAARC summit or even in a cricket stadium. My fear and animosity towards people from my neighboring countries had grown as I watched movies and heard stories from my grandfather, an Indian Army retiree, about the Indo-Pak war. Jesus' answer to the question on the greatest commandment in law was to Love thy neighbor but how can one love his neighbor who exhibits animosity towards his neighbor? There were times when I was not able to answer it. But after crossing borders from my country, I realized that these lines drawn on map do not bridge the distances between us. Politics is the sole reason for the inhuman divide. Everybody is human and every one has a heart to love others, express their emotions and desires for the same. Those fears and animosities which grew at the back of my mind were proved wrong and I started seeing things in a different way!

India is a country divided precisely into 28 states and 7 union territories with English enjoying the status of associate national language for political, national and commercial communication and 14 other official languages. If I had decided to get into a school in my own country I would not have got youth from even four different states speaking four different languages as my room mates. More than that, crossing the border and coming to USA gave me an opportunity to meet and get acquainted with students from several countries, not to speak of students from at least 20 different states in India speaking a variety of languages, a bonus indeed. Ultimately, I have learnt to understand and appreciate new cultures, histories of other countries, to adapt myself to different environments, to observe the commonalities between all of us, the feeling of oneness and the list goes on and on, but I must admit that the experience of crossing borders is

definitely fascinating, something akin to crossing a cultural barrier or a threshold.

This international exposure opened my eyes to a lot of unseen facts. As I realized the importance of open mindedness, my hesitations to approach people started to fade. Right from room sharing to cooking food, or to go out and explore the places around, everything was an experience, a fascinating one. Each time, I explored something new in me and started to feel the birth of the best out of me. All experiences build on each other and shall I say, the sum is greater than the parts.

It is true that I missed my hometown, my mother's cooking but I feel missing these emotional quotients has adequately taught me something more worthy of life which you cannot find in text books. You must experience it to know who you are and where you belong to in this world, for this exposure makes you realize that entire world is your home. Quiet rightly this path taken has given me greater exposure and changed my view of the world and as eloquently written by Frost, *that has made all the difference.*