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The untold tale of globalization By Sweta Srivastava Vikram

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I was at a party the other night when a bunch of attention-seeking, pseudo-intellectuals got into a dispute over "globalization", the virtuous, clichéd, exploited, and under-explained buzzword. Simply talking about it seems to give people a license for precociousness. As with "Go green" which is another such expression, throw it in and you can convince the human race of your startling brilliance.

Back to the verbal brawl. One school of thought believed that globalization has dissipated geographic boundaries; led to mass exodus from third world countries to the western world; transformed China and India into upcoming, dynamic economies; and, created a world of equal opportunity. The other school of thought comprising of the guilt-ridden and chic elite believed that this buzzword has rightly attained an unfavorable reputation because of its contribution to "global warming".

The topic livened up the evening along with the free flowing champagne. I felt smothered by the incessant human cacophony and, at the same time, lonely in the crowd. I felt a tear at the corner of my eye, seeking permission to flow and share an untold tale of globalization.

I wonder why we humans talk only about the corporeal effects of globalization. Think about the emotional turmoil it causes. It is true that every generation aspires to do better than the one before and provide the next generation a chance at a better life. But, pursuing the dream in the current fashion requires exodus from the homeland. I cannot help thinking of the many losses incurred. Every soul is affected; just the degrees may vary.

As physical distances become indistinguishable, personal journeys become longer. Isolation creeps in and fills up the emptiness in people's lives. Relationships become a matter of convenience and timing. This is as true for those who move abroad as it is for the ones who stay behind. We learn to make do with what we have, but it hurts.

Many of my generation grew up in nuclear families, quite unlike earlier generations that existed in large tenuous tribes of extended and joint families. For us, parents and siblings were the primary focus of the family bond. Only occasionally were first cousins included in this circle. We learnt to shower all our love and affection on this small core group and they in turn defined our realm of existence. In the globalized world, when we move away, that core is absent, and the sense of self begins to shatter.

When I was a teenager, my mother would always say, "Beta, with age, the roots start calling out to you." She would share examples of family members who went from "me and my wife are my world" to doting on the entire extended family. Of course, with my adolescent bravado of the time, I treated her words of caution as a bunch of malarkey. Like most other teenagers, I lived in a bubble of ignorance and denial. I thought of myself as invincible. However, today I see her prophecy come true as I constantly ponder the perils of globalization.

The first time my brother's daughters addressed me as someone I am not - Ani bua instead of Sweta bua - I was distraught. I cried like a baby that night. The fact that they were both under five at the time provided little consolation.

It is now over four years later and I am still unable to accept the flawed form of address. It takes them a minute to correct themselves and call me "Sweta bua", but those sixty seconds are heart-wrenching in how they underscore our separation and my otherness. Of course, the kids are not to be blamed. After all, they see their family's friends more often than they see me. They live in Singapore, and I reside in New York.

The three of us adore each other. On one occasion I felt elated when Sana said, "bua, can you live with us forever?" Her naivety and simplicity touched me like no other. Despite this connection, our residences on separate continents ensure that I get only a glimpse of Diya and Sana's childhoods and not the entire view. Our attachment for one another has the cloud of long distance hovering over it.

A month ago, my husband's sister who also lives in Singapore, was blessed with a new baby girl. I can't help but fret about the nature of our new niece's attachment to us. Sure, my husband and I will always be the "legal" mami and mama (aunt and uncle), but will she call me "Sweta mami" or am I destined for inaccurate addressing? Her mother will, I am sure, introduce the notion of our existence to her angel. But, so what? My brother and sister-in-law always taught Diya and Sana about my husband and me, but they continue to get confused.

I am not content being a relative "on paper", but is it fair to expect a child to be emotionally attached to an aunt and uncle who exist in theory but whom they see only every year or other year? If bonds are formed in a child's formative years and with people who actually spend time with them, what are the long-term prospects of their relationship with me?

I don't want to be the aunt who showers her nieces with gifts if only to dispel the guilt of not watching them bloom. Over the years they will develop lives of their own and we won't be there to share most of the momentous occasions. Thinking about this makes me forlorn as I fear my existence will one day become nothing more than a myth.

I am speculating, but maybe globalization is easier on people who are hard-headed and less emotional. I don't mean they are apathetic; just not bound by the traditional shackles of familial bond. I say shackles because my bond for my family is beginning to hurt.

I believe my anguish represents an untold tale in the drama that is globalization, and is likely shared by many.

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Sweta Vikram was born in India and raised in India and abroad. She now lives in New York City with her husband. She has worked in the field of communications for over nine years and has a Masters degree in Strategic Communications from Columbia University in New York. Her newly published book of poems, *Pabulum*, is a journey through her emotions and reveals her opinions based on her experience. Vikram is also an avid blogger (<http://pandorastwocents.blogspot.com/>).

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