

HEARTbreak Over DOKLAM

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Vitasta

LET KNOWLEDGE SPREAD

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Singapore Management Academy

An Incubator for Millennials

‘My dear students,

‘Today, as you step out of the campus of Singapore Management Academy which is akin to an incubator of knowledge sharing, you join the illustrious group of our alumni all over the globe.

‘This farewell is an expression that we shall miss you. Your chirpings, blended with healthy mischief and banter, your energy resounding in the corridors of this institution, your laughter, your overnight stays while you performed plethora of business solutions... all will be missed. A fresh batch will fill your vacuum. The old order changeth, yielding place to new. The snowball of life will role on.

‘So, go forth into the dynamic, challenging, at times unforgiving, fascinating world of business management, of creativity and wealth creation. Go forth and make the world better, fairer, inclusive, more charitable and therefore kinder. The hard power of wealth creation must blend with the soft power of good human values. May the road rise up to meet you; your wisdom and value systems lead you. May the tail

winds of life take you forth.

‘As you enter the real world of competitive professional life, changes...big changes in life will be inevitable. Do not only manage the changes but adopt, adapt and accept them, with grace, confidence and equanimity. You will now enter the start point of a new learning curve.

‘This graduation batch has been groomed in this fine institution for the last two years—very carefully, imaginatively and skilfully. Thereafter, wherever you go, you shall be tackling projects after projects, presentations after presentations and their implementation. Never dither or fear. Remember how unsure you were when you walked into these premises. How many skills you have acquired, how hard you have all worked and how much exposure you all got here. You are all well trained, capable and empowered people now.

‘You all worked together as teams comprising of nationalities of Asian, European and other continents. You all are a globalised work force. You are also in the fascinating century of the rise of Asia, rise of the third world, blending with the skills, technologies, and work ethos of the developed world. It is a century in which human beings are trying to rise together, such as never happened earlier with such intensity.

‘The future dawn of human development will also now come from the eastern horizon, from where the sun shines first. You all are the millennials, the twenty-first century *youngistans*. Your horizons will be forever expanding.

‘Be a great team member as you develop your leadership skills for a higher calling. You cannot be one without the other. Be motivated and also motivating. You cannot be one without the other. Be capable professionals as well as great dads, moms, husbands and wives. No fun of being one without the other. Earn well, but be charitable and kinder to lesser mortals. No point of being the first without the second. Let the world be your oyster, yet make it fairer. Whenever you leave an organisation, leave it in a better state.

‘So far, for centuries, humanity has been suffering from

a disease known as *Earthritis*. The joints between civilisations and continents have been feeble and disjointed. The twenty-first century and globalisation processes are trying to cure this disease by seeking jointmanship. Singapore is in the joint for a future Asia. Your generation are the doctors who will cure the Asian *earthritis*.

‘We have endeavoured to put the seed of knowledge and skills in you. The seed will now develop, assimilate the air, earth, and water and convert itself into a plant. The practical world will now make the plant grow and blossom. There will be storms, floods, draught as well. Such is the law of nature. As you grow, plant, groom and nurture more seeds and be a good leader.

‘The environment today is packed with information, knowledge, data. You can Google and find out what Aristotle had for breakfast or how many children Alexander or Changez Khan sired (Laughter). That was on the lighter side. The line between knowledge and wisdom may look thin but is actually very significant. My entire faculty and I wish you great wisdom. Spread the light...light the lights around you as you move on in life.

‘Everyone aspires to reach the pinnacle of their profession. There is nothing wrong with that. But the vacancies up there will always be very few. Can one also aspire for a successful, meaningful life? The definition of success needs to be defined by each one of us, for our own selves. There maybe so many other aspects of life as critical as success and happiness in our multifaceted lives.

‘Think of the graduation just as a goal post which you are just crossing. It is the first phase of your moving into an environment where you have to live out the real life. For the first few years, try to learn more. To do so, you must listen more, reflect more and thus imbibe more. As you grow, succeed and prosper, make humility your centre of gravity. Never become proud, arrogant or unprincipled.

‘So run through your professional life with perseverance.

Run this marathon gracefully, sportingly. Be proud of having run it well. Some may run this marathon better, learn from them. Many would do less. Never whip yourself to comparison. It doesn't matter. While in this marathon, lead a value based, happy personal life. Life is essentially about giving back a bit more than you have received. God bless you all.'

Just as he concluded, the screen on the stage prominently showed a slide

*KNOWLEDGE IS PROUD THAT HE HAS LEARNED
SO MUCH,
WISDOM IS HUMBLE THAT HE KNOWS NO MORE.'*

—William Cowper

After the farewell address, Ayan, Arvind, Naveen, Sneha and Radhika met at the *Relax & Cool* bar of the Academy. The bar was crowded, cacophonous and full of scholar students. All were excited as well as nostalgic about the past two fruitful, sabbatical years at the Academy. They were all raring to go confidently into the profession of Business Management.

'Wasn't it an excellent address?' exclaimed Sneha. 'The Dean covered many aspects which he thought were relevant to us. Spoken like a true professor and a father figure. He tried to give us a panorama of the future environment in which we will be launching ourselves.'

Ayan reflected, 'Quite so. He blended the practical realities of the business world with the need to be good, creative human beings. He stressed on the need to contribute towards a better, more inclusive external world and be rooted to the realities all around us. He also subtly tried to caution us about the changes and challenges we shall have to tackle in the real world, which we shall soon be confronting.'

‘Yes Indeed,’ said Naveen, chipping in. ‘I liked the way he reiterated that we all will be active participants in the ongoing process of the rise of Asia which would be a fascinating journey, full of prospects as well as challenges. He linked it as an essential component of the globalisation process. He explained that it can be done with the help of the skills, technologies, work ethics and efficiency of the developed world. Many a times, people try to view the rise of Asia narrowly as East versus West, as a challenge to the hegemony of the developed Western world. In fact, rise of Asia means rise of the world. One cannot be without the other—as the professor usually tells us.’

‘All this is fine, goody, goody stuff,’ quipped Arvind, with a sarcastic smile. ‘The business world is a veritable jungle. It is not such a professorial world out there. In that jungle, it is survival of the fittest. To survive, as well as prosper, one has to be ruthlessly focused. Just reflect that the subject of Business Ethics was the easiest part of the syllabus, wasn’t it? We could score easy marks by glibly glossing over morality, compassion for all stakeholders, environmental concerns, inclusiveness and all such sermons.’

‘*Yaar*, the world of wealth creation is akin to a Roman stadium when gladiators fight each other to the end. The mass of the spectators who are also stakeholders, sit around cheering only the victors and jeering at the losers with scorn. It is a win or lose situation, an unforgiving environment, with a grounded, cruel realism which is as cold as the backside of a duck in a pond.’

‘Do not exaggerate so much Arvind!’ exclaimed Sneha. ‘You need to redefine and drastically modify your ideas of what a successful life implies. If the business management world is such a toxic jungle, then all the more we need to detoxify the profession as the professor suggested with such passion. Isn’t that how we should interpret the farewell address?’

‘No Sneha, I am not exaggerating *yaar*. This may be to an

extent, but not in essence. I am responding with a different perspective. Do not think of the global business environment as a distinct, productive, creative, stand alone endeavour. Come on, dwell deeper. When you see business in conjunction with political power play, as part of geo-economy, geo-strategy, you are dealing with an insidious, ruthless system. Add the ingredient of military industry, arms lobby amidst large parts of the chaotic world and you get a dangerous recipe. Finally, when environmental degradation comes in the way of seamless wealth creation, dangerous games are played. The destiny of future generations will get affected by present prosperity. Get real guys,' retorted an agitated Arvind.

'Come on Arvind,' pleaded Radhika. 'It is not such a bad world. It is neither an ideal world. It is a human, fault-lined world. Besides, the bulk of the creative, productive people are good human beings. They too give back quite a bit of what they earn. Isn't the world today better than what it was a century or more ago or than the medieval times?'

Before Arvind could prolong the discussion further, Ayan smiled and said, 'All of you missed having a look at Professor Miss Wang. She passed by twice, wearing such a smart skirt and a beautiful top. What a ravishing sight she was. And Arvind, for two years you have been subjecting us to your heavy stuff committing *bheja fry* on us. Relax *yaar*. Chill... We have completed the course. All of us have been placed in good jobs. Hey Radhika, Sneha, what would you like...coffee or green tea?'

'Oh Ayan, the ever chivalrous, cultured friend. Tea will be fine for both of us. It will be great if tea is accompanied by a few tuna sandwiches. And I am not paying,' said Radhika. Ayan come back with a tray of tea and sandwiches.

'Thanks Ayan,' said a beaming Sneha.

'So we guys will soon move out into the yonder world for our respective jobs,' said Naveen. 'However, both the ladies of

our group have different plans. I must say that the placement wing of our Academy is a competent lot. What a neat job they did. The best global companies came to interview us. There has been ninety percentage placements at the campus itself, in the first effort.'

Ayan looked at Sneha. 'You are going back home to Dehradun and have preferred to chill out for a while. If you wanted, you could have got a good offer in Singapore itself.'

'Yes indeed. I shall work at home reorganising my dad's work. He is setting up a modern polyclinic in the Doon valley. It will have a state of art heart centre.'

Arvind looked at Radhika. 'Radhika has all the luxury of taking her time to decide. I am sure her rich doting dad will encourage her to start some entrepreneuring venture here in Singapore. Uncle is a big shot here and Radhika his only child. Lucky lady.'

Radhika smiled indulgently.

Arvind looked at Ayan and Naveen. 'You both are from army families and your dads would be retiring soon. Both of you have starting pay offers larger than the pay they received after three decades of military service. Isn't that an achievement? They both must be proud of you.'

Amusement lined the boyish face of Ayan.

'Many times Arvind, I have noticed that you tend to grasp the arse both ways. I hope by virtue of the august company of the four of us, you change your attitude now. If you don't do so, soon you will develop the habit of walking backwards,' joked Ayan.

Everyone laughed loudly with Arvind too joining in. The comradeship and frank bonhomie in this group of five was very intense and healthy, despite many differences of views. Two years of association had grown into a strong friendship. They could speak their minds to each other, without fear or hesitation, with honesty and transparency.

‘Come on Ayan, we all are issued with an arse, so where is the difference?’ retorted Arvind.

Ayan said laughingly, ‘We all have one but you are one. But I must clarify this Arvind,’ he continued, ‘The honour, elan, dignity of life lived by our dads, and I speak for Naveen also, was unique. The element of leadership required while leading subordinates on missions involving sacrifice of lives and limbs for the nation, the spirit of adventure, daring, risk management, getting the best out of the human resources, continuous training, motivation and organisational commitment are unmatched. Their pay was less but they lived honourably and brought up their children very well.

‘In fact,’ Ayan pressed on, ‘the world of business management needs to learn so much from military management apart from concepts of democratic, secular nations. Everything from mission statement, environmental analysis, tactical and strategic studies, detailed plans, contingency plans, small team operations, resource management, human resource optimisation, logistics, IT, to morale, *esprit-de-corps*, leadership, communication skills, leading by personal example—what is not there to learn from them? Finally, they have patriotic commitment which enables them to give so much for so little in return. No profession can match the military.’

Sneha gently put her hand on Ayan’s shoulders. It was a reassuring touch of a friend who understood.

‘I agree my friend,’ acknowledged Arvind. ‘Well said indeed.’ This time he appeared genuine.

Naveen showed a thumbs up sign towards Ayan. Radhika too was listening very intently. She lavished a beautiful, soothing smile on Ayan.

Having lived in Singapore for the last ten years with her parents, Radhika was a regular source of home food, at least once a month for her group. Radhika’s mom was a great, fun

filled lady with extraordinary cooking abilities. Often she cooked homemade snacks, neatly packed, enough for five hungry people. Her father was rich, with a big heart. He doted on his daughter and always ensured that there was enough money in her account. Radhika, always aware that her friends had comparatively limited resources, would take a larger share of the eating out expenses. Arvind too, being from a prosperous business family in Noida chipped in accordingly many times.

‘So what is your future plan Radhika? You did not participate in the placement interviews,’ asked Arvind.

‘*Yaar*, I do not want to plan my future. Let it all happen. I will take a year’s break and travel.’

‘Okay, you have the luxury, so indulge. But you must have a vision of what you want to do with life.’ Arvind pressed on.

‘Actually, I am confused. Perhaps the most indecisive people are those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Maybe I am a start-up person who does not know from where to start at the moment. Soon I may find out. I may also go in for a doctorate in management.’

‘Which aspect of management would you like to research in,’ asked Ayan with interest.

‘Aah, maybe something to do with organisational behaviour and ethics in business management, so as to further refine the art and craft of Business Management in the twenty-first century.’

‘Wow! great subject to work on,’ acknowledged Ayan admiringly.

‘It is too serious a subject. Life is waiting to offer you too many possibilities to be ignored, dear Radhika,’ said Arvind.

‘No one climbs Mount Everest for money, Arvind. Radhika wants to do something entirely unconventional but noble and challenging. Go ahead Radhika. Climb every hill, climb every mountain, till you find your dream,’ encouraged Naveen.

‘Thanks Naveen,’ acknowledged Radhika with a sweet smile.

‘Well Arvind, you maybe right or you may not be. Who can understand the mysteries of *zindagi ka safar*. Therefore, just travel and marvel at life, savouring it as well as suffering it. My *Ganesha* will see me through. Meanwhile Arvind, I prescribe *Hanuman Chalisa* for a typical Delhite like you,’ quipped Radhika.

Ayan looked at Sneha. ‘So you too want to get into research. Good for you. You love to study and get into the depths of the matter. You are too sincere and scholarly type to be seeking a job yet.’

‘Yes *yaar*. The MBA course has made me realise that there is so much more to learn yet. I feel that the subject of skill development and employment generation of people in rural and semi urban India needs a lot more study and research. My desire is to take on this subject to research on. My dream is to do that in a good university in UK,’ replied Sneha.

Ayan nodded smiling. ‘In fact, my sister Dia did her doctorate from University of Cambridge on Astrophysics.’

‘Wow! That is perhaps the toughest subject anyone can dare to take. She must be brilliant. I must contact her for inspiration and guidance,’ replied Sneha with enthusiasm.

‘Yes, I shall organise that. You will get along very well with her. She too is crazy about research,’ said Ayan encouragingly.

‘What will you do after that? Surely you would need to take up a good job,’ queried Arvind.

‘Well, I would love to teach after that in any institute of excellence,’ replied Sneha with confidence and clarity of purpose.

‘Great *yaar*,’ encouraged Naveen. Ayan nodded with approval.