



ELIXIR

May 2020

FOREWORD

In a world where every street was bustling with people and car horns and flashing lights, it has all now silenced to an eerie whisper. We are on the verge of Lockdown 4.0 and the difficulties keep rising whether it is economic, social, psychological or the root of it all – Covid19.

Educational institutions locked down, everyday markets restrained, economic downfall, employees laid off – the world around us is in shambles. But it is true that every cloud has a silver lining.

The world is healing itself. Our wildlife grows in numbers while the atmosphere sews itself up. Humanity lives on in the form of medical personnel and police force who are outside making sure we are safe inside. WE STAND UNITED.

The past month has been a wary tale full of caution and worry. With the government formulating measures to ease us back into normality, those of us more fortunate to stay locked in at home have kept ourselves busy to keep ourselves sane during these pressing times.

This issue of Elixir: May 2020 brings you the creativity of our writers as they express their thoughts and views of quarantine life. Three students tell their tale in an exclusive interview on how they adapted to online education. When life gives you lemons, you make refreshing lemonade. This summer beat the quarantine heat with our incredible guest column: Dr Indrani Lahiri, Faculty at De Montfort University Leicester talks about how humanity stands resilient in the times of hardship.

We hope to alleviate your stresses this lockdown with this issue of Elixir.

Stay home, keep reading. Stay safe.

Express. Enrage. Emblaze.

Team Elixir

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INTERVIEW

Education: It's Digital Transformation

Teachers are working very hard to make things easier for students during the lockdown. The objective is to make sure that atleast those living in the comfort of air conditioned rooms equipped with computers do not lose precious time meant for learning new courses. While a majority of the population of students are being left out of this sytem due to lack of technological infrastructure, many who are trying to cope are facing issues; sometimes in terms of connectivity but also due to emotional and physical stress under the pressure of having to do household chores. Suryadeep Maity and Suheli Chakraborty, students of class 9 and 12 respectively share their experience in online learning at the school level. Ritam Chakraborty, an Under-graduate student of Philosophy tells us about the situation in Indian colleges.

Q. How are you keeping up altogether, during this lockdown period?

Suryadeep: Personally not much has changed in my lifestyle apart from the fact that now I'm able to spend most of the time with my family and I'm also able to gather around more time for my leisure activities.

Suheli: It was difficult to adjust at first; I have never been in my house with my family members together for such a long time. Because of the lockdown my sister also came back home, so we could spend some quality family time. I miss stepping out of my house, meeting my friends and attending school, yet I realise the necessity of social distancing for sound health.

Ritam: I am graduating this semester, so I am mostly occupied with assignments and paperwork. It is difficult to work from home without proper resources and there are a lot of distractions. Therefore, I need to put in extra effort to meet the deadlines. As for leisure, I mostly watch movies or read books.

Q: Many institutions have come up with the solution of online classes and classes through television, to prevent a total stoppage in the education system, or to get the students a bit prepared for their upcoming examinations, once the lockdown ends. What do you think of it as an alternative to normal classes? Have you been benefitted yourself from such classes yet?



Suryadeep: Online classes may be a decent alternative for classroom learning, but it essentially isn't the best alternative. There are several problems that we face during online classes, like lag in connectivity and other issues. Also, most of these classes are being conducted through the 'Zoom'

application which only allows a video conference for 40 minutes at a stretch. In this limited time span, the lesson plan gets restricted and the curriculum takes longer to wrap up. Moreover, there is a break in the flow. Though I feel benefitted for not having lost out on time, I would still prefer the offline classes.

Suheli: Yes, online classes are benefitting me. It was challenging for me initially, but I am gradually getting accustomed to it. As far as understanding is concerned, they are no different from the traditional classes in school. Shifting to online submission of assignments seemed a bit difficult at first, but now it feels like a walk in the park.

Ritam: Online learning experience definitely does not substitute in-person class learning. It is difficult to focus during the online classes and also to participate in the discussions. It is difficult to meet the professors frequently to discuss our work. So it has had a net negative impact on the learning process. But, I understand that it is the best solution that we now have during this unprecedented pandemic. I myself have benefited from online classes in the sense that it is better than nothing. Though online classes have made it harder to meet the course expectation, they have at least helped me to graduate without any delay.

Q: What is the mechanism by which your institution is conducting academic lessons at present?



Suryadeep: My own institution is conducting its round of classes using 'WhatsApp' platform. The study materials prepared by the teachers are circulated via the groups created for the purpose. The students can convey their doubts in the group itself, where they are instantly clarified.

Suheli: All the classes conducted via Zoom are being recorded and uploaded in the Google drive so that those who are facing difficulties in joining the online

classes due to network issues can view it from there. The assignments are sent to our school registered email IDs.

Ritam: My University is conducting classes online mostly using Google Meet or Zoom. And professors are also scheduling teaching hours using the same platform.

Q: How comfortable/difficult is it for you to attend these online classes, if they are being organized by your institution?

Suryadeep: It isn't a very good method for conducting online classes (for my institution), as the teachers only send the study materials (which itself is a huge help for people who don't have the current books or are lacking some of the books). Most teachers do this to help the students and ask them to visit 'YouTube' or other such platforms for explanations. Some teachers in our group also try to explain through audio files, but it is quite problematic for us as it is a bulk on the storage of the

device (because the teachers send 15 to 16 minutes long audio files) and by the time we are even able to listen to the audio completely, another class pops up. And I'm also facing problems attending these online classes as my mother still needs to work on some days (not all, but she is kind of at the front line) and I have to take up the responsibility of several household chores on those days.

Suheli: I am comfortable with this new mode of teaching. Sometimes due to network issues I face difficulty in learning but I refer to the class recordings to cover up for the portions I missed. Also, the teachers are available online most of the time to clear my doubts via our official class WhatsApp group and emails. But I am worried about not being able to do the science experiments in person which are very important for my class 12 board exam.

Ritam: As I mentioned earlier, I am more comfortable with in-person classes as I cannot continuously maintain my focus while attending online classes. Sudden calls, random inflow of notifications and constant activities of the family members are some of the unavoidable distractions that come in the way.

Q: In India, there are many regions where facilities like telecommunication, Internet, etc. are pretty scanty or even absent. But quite a few students reside in these areas, which means they would be deprived of any such added benefit during this lockdown period. What do you think about this unfair distribution of privilege?

Suryadeep: Well, there are certainly many places in our country (in fact, our country is still mostly rural and semi-urban, apart from the few metropolitan cities) where these facilities are lacking or even absent. As for the students there, it is quite obvious that they won't be able to attend any form of special classes during these times. But it is sad, that most of the people in these areas are actually ignoring the lockdown and going on with their normal life. As for the other deprived students who stay at home and follow the lockdown, we can actually do nothing for them.



It's too late to think about that issue. And matters like this shouldn't even bother the common Indians, as long as it doesn't affect them directly.

Suheli: I do feel privileged that I am getting these facilities from my school and have a good internet connection at home. But, I am aware that many news channels are also conducting the live classes, which perhaps is not as effective as online class but can be helpful for those who do not have any internet connection and they can learn from the experienced teachers in the field.

Ritam: The unequal access to resource is definitely a matter of concern. Institutions should make accommodations for students in need by allowing them to take a leave if necessary or by reducing the course load. Similarly, institutions can also provide financial aid to students to help them access

internet during this period. Some of these steps will address the inequality, at least partially and benefit the students.

Q: What according to you shall be the main challenges in the way of regaining normalcy in this year's academic session, once the lockdown gets over?

Suryadeep: I think the government should actually lift the lockdown for the schools and other such educational institutions before lockdown on other industries or institutions are lifted. And the government to some extent could actually help these educational institutions to return to normalcy (though this is near impossible). But I think that they wouldn't have much problem except the problems of resources (as getting resources like study material in vast quantities would be a problem). I personally don't know what problems they would face, to be honest. And I think that this "could" be one of their problems.

Suheli: The primary challenge would be adapting to the lifestyle changes and resuming the practical classes. I feel that I might be out of practice in conducting the experiments. Secondly, since we are getting used to this online mode of teaching and its timings, it would be difficult for a while to return to our regular class ways.

Ritam: The main challenge after the lockdown is over is to ensure that social distancing is maintained in academic institutions. Further, the classrooms would have to be sanitized regularly. But I am not sure if that is at all possible in India given the lack of infrastructure and the mode of operation of the daily processes.

Q: Almost all of us have a dream of getting a good job or other fruitful openings at the end of our academic career. But this year's pandemic situation would surely strike an inevitable blow in the job market worldwide. Competitions will surely increase in the upcoming few years. How confident are you about coping with these difficult situations?

Suryadeep: Surely the competition will skyrocket in the upcoming years. Every industry will be suffering losses beyond recovery when the lockdown is revoked and things may take even a decade to return to normalcy or at least to function like they did before. And to be very honest, I really don't know how to cope with these difficult situations. I think I'd have to work much harder now to even think of securing something in the future.

Suheli: I am trying my best so that I do not fall behind in the race for admission to good colleges and make the best use of time.

Ritam: I am not entering the job market immediately, so jobs are not my immediate concern. I am more worried about grad school prospects as universities are facing budget cuts and are reducing intakes. I myself have an MA offer from an institution abroad but I am not sure whether I'll be able to start this year or need to defer my offer. I might lose a year. So, I am definitely stressed and anxious about my future academic pursuits.

Illustrations: Google Images



বাংলা

আমি তার লাগি পথ চেয়ে আছি | ঐশীপ্রমা ভৌমিক

প্রিয় শ্বেতদ্রোণ,

তোমার একটা চিঠি এইমাত্র পেয়েছি। খুশির বাঁধ ভেঙেছে। চিঠি খোলার আগেই মনে হচ্ছিল একবার প্রাণ খুলে আকাশের দিকে তাকিয়ে গাই, "আমারে যে জাগতে হবে কী জানি সে আসবে কবে", অসম্ভব বেসুরো গাইবো আর তুমি তাকিয়ে মিথ্যে হেসে বলবে "পাখি! গানটা শিখতে পারতিস তো..."। গান নাচ কিছু কেন শিখলাম না বলোতো? রাগ হয়ে যায়। এই যে একটা চিঠি লিখছি সেটাও দেখ কত অগোছালো। তুমি কত গুছিয়ে যত্ন করে আগের চিঠিটা লিখেছিলে। লজ্জা লাগে আমার রীতিমত। আচ্ছা শোনোএটা কোন গাছের বীজ পাঠিয়েছিলে খামের ভিতর? এই বিষয়ে কিছুই বলোনি চিঠিতে। শুধু লিখেছ যে "এই লকডাউনে গাছটাকে বড় করিস"। আচ্ছা আমায় একটা কথা বলো তোমার তো সব কথা সবসময় ঠিক হয় তাহলে কবে এসব মিটবে সেটাও জানাও আমায়। তুমি তো দেখেছ এই মহামারীতেও কত মানুষ না খেতে পেয়ে মরছে। কত পরিষায়ী শ্রমিক মাইলের পর মাইল হাঁটছে বাঁচবে বলে...তাও কি বাঁচতে পারছে? এত যন্ত্রণা কেন চারিদিকে? গাছগুলোকে জল দিতে দিতে ভাবি এই রাত হয়তো আবার কেটে যাবে। আমাদের তো তাও মাথার উপর ছাদ আছে, যাদের নেই তাদের কি হবে? সত্যিই কি তবে ঈশ্বর বৃদ্ধ হয়ে গেলেন? আমি কিছুতেই শান্ত হতে পারছি না। কাগজ পড়া প্রায় ছেড়ে দিয়েছি। মা রোজ যেটুকু ভালো খবর সেটুকু কাগজে আমার জন্য বেছে রাখে। তবু খারাপগুলোই চোখে পড়ে। আসলে চোখ বন্ধ করে কি থাকা যায়? আমি যদি এই মুহূর্তে তোমার কাছে যেতে পারতাম সবচাইতে বেশি শান্তি হত। মনে হত আমার সব দুশ্চিন্তা জুড়িয়ে আসছে। আর তখন মাঝরাতে ঘুম ভেঙে এমন ভয়ও করত না। তোমায় কতবার বলেছি পিজিতে থাকলে সারাটা রাত আমার দুচোখের পাতা এক হত না অথচ সকাল চলে আসত। মাঝরাতে জানলা দিয়ে তাকালেও দেখতাম তখনও যেন ব্যস্ত কলকাতায় কারা হেঁটে যাচ্ছে রাস্তায়, একটা দুটো রিক্সাও যাচ্ছে, গাড়িও আছে। আজ হয়তো সেই রাস্তায় কেউ নেই দিনেও নিস্তব্ধ। আচ্ছা এখন যদি আমি ওখানে থাকতাম আমার কি ঘুম আসত? আসতো না বোধহয়। আসলে আমি বুঝতেই পারিনি যে শুধু প্রকৃতি নয় আমি তার পাশাপাশি মানুষকেও ভালোবেসেছি। তাই আজ এত কষ্ট।



Illustration: Oishiproma Bhowmick

যাক গে, এসব দুঃখের কথা শেষ হবার নয়। তোমার চিঠিটা আজই হাতে পেয়েছি আজ আমি আর মন খারাপ করে থাকব না। তোমার চিঠিটাই বারবার পড়ব যতক্ষণ না প্রত্যেকটা বাক্য আমার মুখস্ত না হয়ে যায়! এখন রাখি। ভালো থেকে।

ইতি
তোমার পাখি

গোঁফ-ছেঁড়া | সম্বিত বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়

ঘিরে ফেলেছে অগোছালো জীবন
আমার চিন্তার ধারাকে।
এই খাতাটার একটা কোণে ঠেসে,
টানছে আমায় অপচয়ে।

চোখকে সন্তুষ্ট করতে পারি না,
শব্দকে জেরা করতে পারি না।
খিদে মেটাতে পারি ইচ্ছে হলেই,
পকেটে যদি টাকা থাকে।

আবার বন্যা আসবে একদিন।
সেই জলে নিজেদের ওজন
হারিয়ে গোঁফ ছিঁড়বে পুলিশেরা।
বাপ্প ডোবে না, সাঁতরেও পার পায় না।



Illustration: Sombit Bandopadhyay

তাড়াতাড়ি লিখতে গেলে ভাবতে পারি না,
আর ভাবতে গেলে লিখতে পারি না কেন?

আমি শুধু হেঁটে যেতে দেখি
নিজেকে অন্যের চোখ দিয়ে।
আজ কুকুরটিকে আদর করছিল
ওরা, তাও এক দর্শককে চিনল সে।

বাইরে কাল রান্না হয় যদি
নতুন কোনো পদ, তাহলে
আমি ঘামের বদলে এই
সন্ধ্যার নিশ্বাসের গন্ধ দেব।

গরম ভাতের জলীয় বাষ্পে
না-দেখা ছবি ফের গিলব।

অর্বাচীন পৃথিবীর বুকে
পুরুষ সৃষ্টির নামে -
তপ্ত রক্তবীজে শবের শরীর গড়ে ;
উদ্ধত সে সব শরীর ,
মস্তিষ্ক বিকারগ্রস্থ ,
অকালে আগুনের তৃষ্ণায় তারা ছোটে...

স্বপ্নগুলো চুরি হওয়ার পরে,
মায়া যে রাপে বিরূপতা ধরে !

শান্ত দুপুরের নোনা জলের লবণতায়
সভ্যতার তিক্ত অশ্রুবিन्दু
বিষের মত ছড়ায়।

জল-সমাধির আধমরা কষ্টগুলোর
শিরা-উপশিরাকে সরণি করে।

নির্বিকার নিস্তব্ধতার মাঝে,
নিগমের রক্ষ অস্বস্তিরা ভাসে ;
জীবনুচক্রের মলিন দুর্ভিক্ষের রোষে
সেটুকুও আত্মস্থ হয়ে শেষে ,

শুষ্ক হৃদাসনে মেশে!

হ্যামেলিন, পৃথিবী ও বাঁশিওয়ালা | দীপজ্যোতি চৌধুরী



Illustration: Sourish Dey

গোটা পৃথিবীটা, যদি একটি শহর হয়,
হ্যামেলিন, যদি নাম দেওয়া হয় তার,
রূপকথাটিও দেখাই যাক না চেখে
ছোটবেলাটা হাতড়ে আরেকবার।

সেই শহরের মানুষের কী নেই !
কষ্ট ছাড়াও কষ্ট অনেকে পায় ।
পেটজোড়া খিদে পেটেই বাড়তে থাকে,
চাইলেই সব সত্যিই পাওয়া যায় ?

বুদ্ধি খাটিয়ে ঢেকেঢুকে আর চেপে
ঠিকঠাক করে রাখা হয়েছিল সব,
শহরের হাওয়া মন্ত্র ছড়িয়েছিল----
আরো চাই, আরো চাই আমাদের সব।

কিন্তু,

ঠিকঠাক সব রাখা গেলো কই আর?
শহরের বুকে হঠাৎ বিপর্যয়
শমনের দূত ভাইরাস ঘোরে ফেরে,
শহরটা জুড়ে ভীষণ মৃত্যুভয় ।

ঠিক যেমনটা হুঁদুরের জ্বালাতনে
হ্যামেলিন জুড়ে থেমে গিয়েছিলো কাজ ।
লকডাউনের অমোঘ মন্ত্রবলে
পৃথিবীর নাম হ্যামেলিন তাই আজ ।

নেই প্রতিকার শহরবাসীর হাতে,
পরোয়া না ক'রে মৃত্যুকে ডেকে আনো !
বাঁশির সুরেই বিপদ কাটিয়ে দেবে,
বাঁশিওয়ালার ঠিকানাটা কেউ জানো?

বাঁশিও'লা আজ আবার এসেছে ফিরে,
স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী, পুলিশ.... এমন
আরো অনেকের ভিড়ে ।
বাঁশিতে বাজায় যুদ্ধের এক সুর,
ময়দান ছেড়ে যাবে না'তো তারা ফিরে ।

শুধু মনে রেখো যুদ্ধ জিতলে পরে,
কিছু চেয়েছিল নির্ভীক বাঁশিও'লা ।
ঠকিয়ে দিও না এইবার যেন তাকে ।
বাকিটুকু থাক স্মৃতির পাতায় তোলা।

বেড়া | অয়তীক রায় সায়ন

তালশাঁস আর কাঁঠালের দিন এখনো আসেনি, যায়নি আমার দিন। এমতাবস্থায় বনে বনে ঘুরে বেড়ানো বারণ হল। তালদীঘিতে গরম ছায়া পড়ে বিকেল অবধি। জলার ধার দিয়ে বেড়া তুলছে আগাছায়। মশা কামড়ায় জংলার গায়ে গেলে।

দেশে রোগব্যাদি এসছে। খাতিরদারি করছে ডাক্তার, মানুষে। মড়ক আসেনাই আজ দীর্ঘদিন। লক্ষ্মীর মায়ের হাতে লাঠি ওঠে, সন্ধ্যা স্পন্দিত হয়। কুপি জ্বলে বিকেল হলেই। দৃষ্টি কমতে কমতে ঘরে চলে যায় পরিয়ানী পাখির দল।

লক্ষ্মীর মা'র কাছে এইসব আলাদা নয়। সারাজীবন ধানিজমির হাওয়ায় হাওয়ায় কেটে গেল। স্টেশনের দিকে একটা শহর আছে, সেখানে থেকে অন্য শহরে যাওয়ার রেল আছে। লক্ষ্মীর কাজ বন্ধ। পয়সা বন্ধ। রেশন নেবার আগেই বেহাত হয়েগেছে বস্তা। জটলা ছেড়েগেছে পাড়ায় পাড়ায়। হিঁদু মোছলমানে লাগছে এর মাঝেও। অউফ! ভাল্লাগেনা আর! লক্ষ্মীর মায়ের পাঁচালি বিমিয়ে আসে।



বড়পাড়ার ওপারে কোরোনা হয়েছে। পুলিশ ধরে নিয়ে গেছে কারে যেন। থমথমে চারদিক। বাজারে শাকের আঁটি শুকিয়ে আসছে। শুকিয়ে আসছে হাত, পা। বাকি কটা দিন কী হবে! শহর থেকে বারণ না আসে লক্ষ্মীর...

কাজ বন্ধ লক্ষ্মীর। ভান্ডারে ধুলা পড়ে আসে। বিকেল পড়ে আসে মায়ের থানে। বুড়িরা কেউ আসেনা এর বাড়ি ওর বাড়ি। এর মাঝে আবার দেখা যায়, বেড়াগুলো বেড়ে বেড়ে উঠেছে এঘর ওঘরে। কুমড়ার চাল থেকে ফুল আর ডগা খুঁচিয়ে নিয়ে আসে লক্ষ্মীর মা। পিড়িতে বসে জ্বাল দ্যায় লক্ষ্মী। আগুন জ্বলে, আঁচ বাড়ে।

রৌদ্র বেড়ে বেড়ে মাথার ডগায় উঠেছে। বিকেল হলেই ঝড় ঝড় হয়। একদিন একদিন করে ট্রেনের আওয়াজ আসে শহরথেকে। তালশাঁস, কাঁঠালের দিন চলে যাবে। ধানের আর অভাবের দিন কাছে এলে বেড়াগুলো ভেঙে দিল লক্ষ্মীর মা।

Illustration: Sayan Roy



ENGLISH

Quarantine Life | Siladitya Sarkar

It's not as simple as $7*7=49$
A life in quarantine.
Where we fight against
Solitude, loneliness,
Unknown diseases.
Where we strive, if we may,
To live another day.
Where this journey leads to
Skies filled with laughter, happiness.
Some day or the other
We have a glimpse of another.
Shout out at life.
Where at the end,
The real connection thrives
Among all of us.
Where the death is no more ominous.
It's the quarantine life, my friends,
Just hope that someday it ends.



Illustration: Ankita Datta

Care – A Venom | Srijoni Mitra

I wonder, if I could describe care
Through withering tears and warm touches
Like a venom that slowly mixes with the blood,
Dissolving every barrier or sheath growing within,
Hands tied, body turned stringent
Kept on counting the vicissitudes of fate
Waited for the puzzles to be undone,
But I couldn't find an escape,
Never learnt fighting the denials before.

We are born infants,
Cushioned with care
Shielded against every little peril,
Learning to walk,
Willing to fall back on our loved ones.
And as we grow restlessly,
With goals and unending dreams
Exposed to the atrocities of time and tide,
Eyes flickering with speaking sorrows
Breathing in the filthy air,
We are only left with a precarious living.
Eulogizing the graveyard-bound emotion of adulthood,
As the sheath didn't grow strong enough
It got dissolved in the venom called "care".

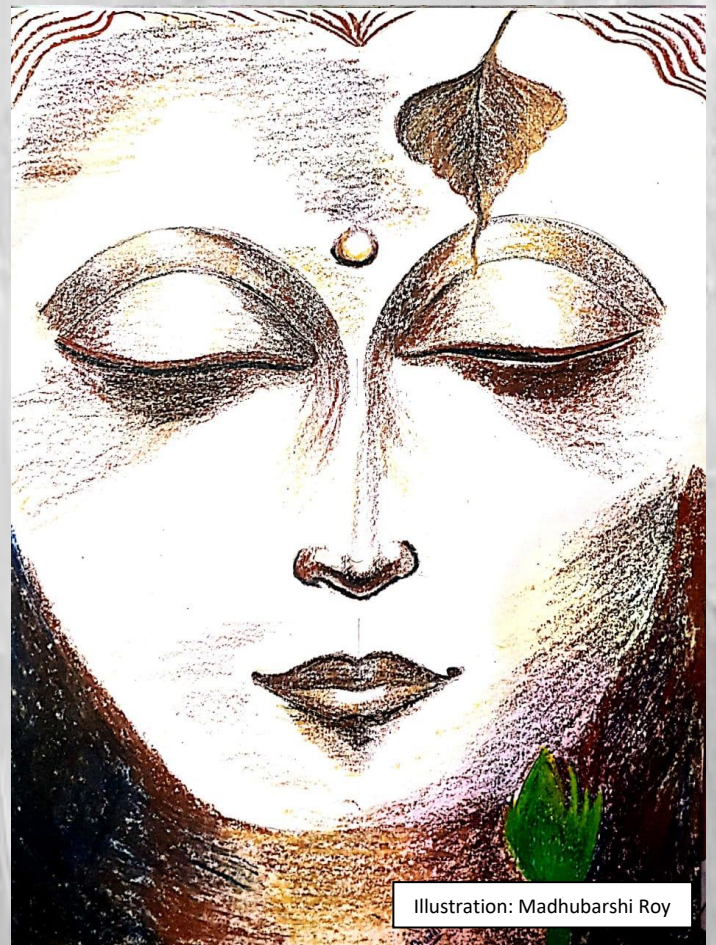


Illustration: Madhubarshi Roy

Soon enough, the care disappears
The barrier completely dissolves
We are left with burns on the soft skin
Embracing the kisses of vigor
Desolated in a corner
Like shallow wine bottles,
Speaking about the bygone era of childhood
Of desiring care, desiring the venom
Unknown to us are its insidious effects
Thus, we fail to shred the dread
And learn to smile at the denials.

Quests in Quarantine | Spandan Rana

What is a quest? It is a search for the unknown. When the word “unknown” enters our ears, we think of the enigmatic side of our planet. Never did we think about looking a little closer to home. While others embarked on banal quests within the confinements of their households, I decided to tap into a



Illustration: Sumartya
Mullick

world with no limits. I know that video games are engraved into your brains as a possible answer but what if I told you there is a world beyond the malarkey that comes with video games.

During the free time that I was given by this unfortunate event, I decided to embark on a spiritual journey to the depths of my soul. I believe that somewhere in the haphazard lifestyle of the modern world, we lost ourselves.

Somewhere sitting in the classroom, bored out of your mind as the teacher blabbers about Organic Chemistry, you must have remembered the promise that you made to yourself; to enjoy life and experience the beauty of it all.

This world, this lifestyle has coaxed it down our throats but that does not define who we are.

I delved deep into my conscience and found a scared little boy, kicked out of the control room. I connected with that embezzled kid again and he taught me how to live again, showing gratitude for

not forgetting him. I started to make time for myself. I turned on a new leaf. I finished that “boss battle” which made me cry as a child.

I allowed myself to be in the comforting embrace of nostalgia again and I became friends with the monsters living under my bed! Sometimes, it becomes difficult to express feelings in mere words so I want you to imagine something. A beach dazzling in the humongous limelight that we call the ‘Sun’. The sea water wraps itself around your feet as your soul flies high up in the sky, being carried away by the cool and soothing winds. That newfound freedom and the feeling of belonging to a greater world is the best way I can describe reconnecting with myself.

Let us stray away a bit and talk about another mystical and magnificent element. As a kid, I was always fond of the beauty of the world around me. I propose a simple challenge to the people of my generation. Drop what you’re doing for a couple of minutes (only after you’re done reading this, comrade) and walk into the balcony or peek through the window. You feel different, don’t you? The ‘Sun’ feels warmer, the trees look greener and the smell of a new world pulls you out of your pensive mood. Allow the calmness of the outside world to lend some of it to you and you’ll feel the anxiety ooze out of your veins as you become a new person.

The truth is that Mother Nature heals itself from time to time to keep up with its arrogant and hot-headed children. She heals herself from time to time from all the long-lasting effects that human cruelty afflicted upon her. A mother always shows her best side to her kids and hides the darkness away. She cries now to smile again. In conclusion, our quests in quarantine should not be confined within a virtual and imaginary world, it must expand far beyond those boundaries.

It must be about finding ourselves. Finding that person who keeps drowning as we keep staring at its dying body. It should be about exploring the depths of our soul which were buried before they could see the light of day. It should be about spreading the light of hope to the darkest corners of our heart. Most importantly, it should be about searching for ways to keep Mother Nature from shedding a tear again. I have one simple request for all of you, find yourself and save yourself. They don’t scream from inside of that nauseating screen which rules your life. It lives closest to you, so tell me why it feels more helpless than a dying deer who can hear the footsteps of its executioner. Be charitable, towards others and towards the very world that gave you life.

We are criminals standing in front of our own time bomb. Ignorance always spells out doom. It has been evident that we must take action for a long time now. What we require is the willpower to make a difference and it starts with two small steps. Two small seedlings, one planted in your soul and another planted in the ground that gave it life.

Gazing as they Go | Nirajana Chakraborty

Who hangs from the bough,
against the ripe-sun canvas,
storm-washed, sharp blades
of evening grass, my Jasmine
lovers and me?

And they who Fall upon
their fragrant-deathbeds, strewn over
and over

this crude, unforgiving dirt,
wet with damp dust?

Who sees the other,
last, one eyeful to keep?



Illustration: Ankita Datta

Lost Love | Biswadeep Sen

Days trudge by, not as fast as they used to be,
The faint trace of your presence, is still felt by the Heart within me.
The very thought of which, riddles the mind, rebels the heart;
Which makes me ask, how necessary was it for you, that we part?

I remember sunny mornings, chilly evenings,
A simple smile of yours, would prevent my heart from freezing;
I can't help but ask you, was it really true, or was I dreaming,
For you had shown me Paradise, even though I was Living!

A world away from chaos, a world built by us,
A world resting on tolerance, a world depending on trust.
Little did I know, our days were numbered,
For my mind was good at Maths, but your love made it slumber.

So, when the Lightning struck, it showed me the face of the Game,
For it woke up the mind but the Heart couldn't bear the same.
And so it sank to the bottom, a place where it can reminisce,
Little did I know, it would take more than just my efforts, to lift it from the abyss.

And so, here I wait, with a battered mind and a bruised heart,
Waiting for the dawn, to bring upon a fresh start.
Start of a journey, with someone who'll be my equal,
Someone who would love me, more than the prequel.





हिंदी

कर्तव्य | ऋषव दिवेदी

ना कुछ सोचे, ना कुछ समझे,
छोड़के अपना परिवार वे
अपनी जान की बाज़ी खेल,
हमारी जान बचाते वे।


जब सोते हम , तब जागते वे
जब खेलते हम , तब लड़ते वे
जब खुशियों के सागर में डूबते हम,
तब शहादत की चादर ओढ़ते वे।

ना डरते हैं , ना मुँकरते हैं,
वतन को अपना धर्म बनाकर,
हमारी सेवा करते हैं,
तो फिर क्यों उनकी बलिदान को हम क्षण में भूल जाते हैं।

इतना उनके लिए हम करें,
हर पल उनको हम याद करें,
जब शहीद हो वे सरहद पर,
अफसोस ना कर उन पर गर्व करें।



Illustration: Google images



**GUEST
COLUMN**

Community resilience in times of the pandemic: reflective commentary | Dr Indrani Lahiri



The air has less pollutants. Colourful butterflies are back in the garden. Amidst all the adversities, the world is singing together to express gratitude. The terms like compassion, empathy, surfacing more on the public domain. Life has certainly become purposeful and meaningful, with unprecedented human costs. Whether we are civilised enough to hold on to those precious human values or revert back to the chase, is a question to be answered in the future.



Illustration: Soma Mitra

We are adapting to a new situation. There is a huge potential to learn life lessons, if we can cultivate the practice of critical reflection (social, emotional, mental, physical, spiritual). Being critically reflective is an attitude that can be developed through continuous practice. In a time of global instability and uncertainty, 'disorientations and reorientations' are the new normal that affects the way we think. Thoughts do have an impact on our actions and behaviours. Without a concrete direction and clarity, we are exposed to the uncertain thoughts that can be emotionally uncomfortable and blurs our vision of the future. Being critically reflective enhances the chance of recovery, by connecting us to our fundamental values, and teaching us to manage internal and external conflicts,

even if we cannot resolve them. Critical reflection is an important component that has the power to affect our mental wellbeing. In difficult times, keeping a record, either in digital journals or a diary, depending on individual preferences, can influence our individual strategies for survival and empower individuals with ways to remain resilient during change.

We are anxious, tensed, stressed, but we are capturing the beauty of the nature to share with our friends and family. Confinement has taught us the value of hugs, human touch. The chairs and tables are empty in the cafeteria, although we have embraced gladly the virtual transitions with homemade fair-trade coffees and teas. Zooming to stay connected is not new, however zooming to build community resilience is a novel approach. Digitally connected individuals, and communities, are using the digital space to co-exist globally. As part of our digital ethnography study, findings suggest symbolic convergence perspective is one of the potential contributing factors to strengthen emotional resilience. The shared principles, narratives, ideas, agreements, disagreements, acceptances, rejections, all of these have cultural influences on how we perceive it and they impact our emotions. Those emotions then get shared within the 'common belief islands' that are formed and preserved by telling the stories. The common belief islands are pockets that are nurtured based on shared beliefs but can have complex cultural catalysts or sanctioning agents to pursue or impose it on a broader societal level. The pandemic situation is training us every day to cross those virtual barriers and deconstruct the complex cultural narratives to co-create and co-produce intercultural spaces. The language matters least when the existence of human beings is threatened, in a way reminding us of the core principles of life. Hence, naturally we have embedded certain practices like meditation, reflection, appreciation etc. in our daily lives. We are tuned to feel secure and stay in our comfort zones. The insecurities spiralled out of the pandemic showered some blessings, amidst the crisis, reminding us of the rhetorical vision that is powerful in creating emotional and community resilience.

For many of us, who continue to work, we have our own office space reserved on the floor with cushions, or on a fancy desk. We continue to prove our capabilities and competencies by thriving in lockdown conditions. Each day we come out strong by flexibly adapting to novel challenges. The real struggle is to stay grounded in a confined life. The important point to remember here, we are not stranded alone but the world is stranded together, and we owe to the Zooming culture that has helped us to stay connected. Although, this brings to the surface another two important issues around digital haves and have-nots, and digital literacy. Staying digitally connected does not always bring happiness, rather sometimes compounds tensions. There are many research findings that suggest, social, economic and cultural capital can 'affect mental wellbeing' at individual levels. The stigma around mental health in societies (degrees can vary depending on the place) are historically rooted in cultural generalisations affected by external contingencies. There are certain stereotypical visual and narrative patterns that have been used in various forms of media, to reinforce the stigma within societies. The exigencies of the current social situation demand some unlearning exercise to produce the counter narrative. In a world engulfed by insecurities, and so less under our control, we need to focus more on positives and develop some community models globally on cost-effective, digitally mediated survival techniques. Based on story fidelity, it is possible to decipher the positive 'hang-out' narratives from the negatives and identify the strengths to construct the powerful tools for mental wellbeing and mental wellness. For example, over the last few locked down months, the musical and visual art aesthetics contributed immensely to shape beliefs, thoughts and behaviours. We need empirical evidence to confirm any claims, but as a visual ethnographer, observations suggest, the conversations around mental wellbeing on the digital public sphere has been reassuring.

We need very less to live and remain physically and mentally wealthy. Cultivating the art of living in a personalised way, gives us the power to appreciate others and focus on our core desires. On the contrary, fear obstructs our vision for change and limits our ability to create the pathways to success in terms of physical and mental wellbeing. Happiness, also known as subjective wellbeing, can be long and short term. Our positive and negative emotions triggered by thoughts, fluctuates daily. We still have access to the basic human needs and not in a Castaway situation. Lockdown experience has reframed happiness at social and individual levels. Lockdown has helped us reflect and understand how we perceive our emotions. The situation demands us to reflect back on our contextual factors, like social, family, professional relationships, deeds etc. and to harness the positives and unhitch the negatives. Practicing minimalism and appreciating our daily lives, can sound spiritual, but has a deeper connection with mental wellbeing. For reflection, think about the time when you brought a houseplant or a garden plant that has now grown or blooming. How do you feel? Connecting back to the air pollutants, at the beginning, think how positive you feel to breathe the fresh air? Now think of a situation where you are commuting amidst smoke and noise. Traditional and contemporary media, politicians, policy makers, to some extent, have normalised 'million deaths', the question to reflect is how that affects you? Now as a last exercise, think about how you have consciously or subconsciously engaged with your passions during lockdown and did you feel connected? Capture the answers in some tangible forms as we will need those to find answers in the future. The above contemplations should help individuals to craft strategies to stay resilient in lockdown times.

“(If) you have an eye, look with your own eye: do not look through the eye of an ignorant fool. (If) you have an ear, hearken with your own ear: why be dependent on the ears of blockheads? Make a practice of seeing (for yourself) without blindly following any authority: think in accordance with the view of your own reason.” - Rumi

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