

My Reflections during Covid-19

“There has been a virus outbreak and everyone is advised to stay indoors and avoid social gathering”, this is something we all have heard at least once in our lives in movies or books until this year’s pandemic. It has changed everyone’s lives in different ways. For me, as a college freshman, I had just completed my first semester. With all the freshman year experiences and mistakes I made, I had set many goals to achieve during the next semester, but I soon began to notice that a seemingly normal infection would lead to some unexpected changes in my life. Starting from its inception until now, I have experienced what it is like to actually live alone, in someone else’s country during such hard times, all by yourself. And, how it can change people like me emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

To begin with, as I now look back from here and start to connect all the dots, it all started the day since I got my first semester results. I was in college and everyone was expecting their results from the university. Like every other student, when the results came, everyone was checking everyone else’s marks except their own. So, one of my friends told me that I scored a B+ and upon hearing that I was depressed and frustrated. I don’t even know how I spent the rest of the classes. I felt my heart sinking into an infinite space. The entire class seemed gloomy to me that day. Then I went back to my dorm and cried, which relieved me to some extent. After having dinner, I received a message from my family. It was some horrible videos from China where people were vomiting blood and falling on the streets, as if they were paid actors, and for me, Oscar worthy. I thought maybe it was just some new propaganda, and so I ignored it. From then on, I started to realize day by day that something was seriously wrong in China and that they were hiding it from us. After weeks, things really took some bad turns and its consequences were inevitable.

I used to live in a dorm with my Indian friends, the great Indian festival was coming soon-Holi. All of them were planning to go to their homes, but since I don’t celebrate Holi, I made up my mind to stay back and do an internship near my college. But right after Holi, the country declared a nation-wide lockdown for a few weeks. It shook me; as I was neither prepared nor anticipated it. It felt like a prophecy come true, as one of the famous writers, Dean Koontz, wrote in his book back in 1981. He wrote about how a Chinese scientist was able to defeat the entire United States with his biological weapon called Wuhan-400 which only afflicted human beings (The Eyes of Darkness, chapter 39). It happened so unexpectedly that I wasn’t even ready to digest it. It wouldn’t be wrong here to say that I felt somewhat similar to what soldiers must have, in the past, felt when they were ambushed. It taught me that anything can happen in life no matter how impossible it seems. Even the unexpected can be expected.

Then after the first lockdown, came the second and so forth, but this time I wasn’t lucky, as my college told me to leave my dorm and go home. I requested multiple

times to be allowed to stay, but nothing good happened except receiving a few commiserations. Then I had to look for a new place to stay during lockdown and it wasn't an easy job. To me, honestly it felt as if I was betrayed. I had given my full year's installment and still I wasn't taken care of. I could do nothing but search for a new place in the following days. I learned that no matter how respectable or reputed someone is, during hardships, they will always prioritize themselves and won't care much about others. It hit me even harder later on as I was finding it hard to find a new place to stay. I was losing hope.

Every day I would try to visit as many new potential places to stay as I could. Some days would go to waste, as no one was willing to take in a new resident during such times, and other days they asked for a very exorbitant amount. Returning the night after finding no place to stay made me feel anxious, and I found it hard to sleep at night. I would wake up several times, sweating as I was unsure of what tomorrow might bring. This feeling is no less similar to those poor people who have to search for food everyday. I admit that at some point during those days I was able to feel, not just say, "God, please let me find a new place to stay". Even when I had lost hope in myself, I trusted God and moved on. It made me appreciate how well-off I was before that, but still I used to complain about small things all the time. And now, I know that we must be happy with what we have and never take anything for granted. We often get confused between what we need and what we want.

With time I had almost lost all hope and was heading to one of the last places where I could possibly stay. It was a long gali(eng. alley) with dull buildings and a few locals watching me from balconies with big eyes as if I was responsible for their buildings being dull. There I asked for rooms with utmost decency hoping I would be allowed, but all I got was rejections. Before I headed to the very last building, I closed my eyes and prayed to God. I took heavy steps, slowly and placed myself near the building entrance. The door was ajar, as if it was waiting for someone, I knocked, and to my surprise the uncle said, "Are you here for rooms, beta?" And I said, "Yes," and I was very happy to have finally found a place to stay. Later that day I realized that there were many other students like me. Finally, I felt that I was going to be ok. This moment was almost like finding a way out of a dark cave. The terror, losing hope, and each step taking its toll on oneself is something no one would want to experience. Like a ray of light to a man stuck in a cave for days, the uncle was the ray of hope to me at that time. This taught me that to be successful we have to work hard and consistently for it. In the future, I hope to achieve greater goals by following this. Then things began to fall into place, I started to gather myself, doing the usual routine and trying to stay happy.

All in all, after all the hardships, I am now in a position to calmly sit down on my chair with my laptop, sipping hot chai (eng. tea), bright rays of sunlight falling inside my room, making it bright, warm and cozy, all at the same time. This short period was not less than a nightmare to me. It still sends chills down my spine when I talk

about it. But for some people this isn't just a nightmare but a day to day scene. The two most important things I learned-from my experience is that first, as said by HH the 14th Dalai lama, "We are social animals who need friends. We need a community to survive". (Facebook Dalai Lama, 25th March, 2015). Being alone can have disruptive mental and emotional effects which I personally experienced. It is always better to communicate with others about how you are feeling and ask for help if you need any. Communication is always the key to answers. Secondly, we all should learn to remain calm in every situation of our lives. If I hadn't been calm during my own hard times, I might have ended up worse than I am right now. Always stay calm in every situation and try to find what's the best for you. I personally feel that nature has taught every one of us a very important lesson that we must realize.