

My Reflections during Covid-19

- Tenzing Dhamdul

The constant shrill of ambulance being the dominant voice, the empty and abandoned roadways, people wearing masks much like an essential (similar to undergarments) are the images that cross my mind immediately when I think of this pandemic at first glance because this was the new normal set into the minds and images of us all. However much like the undertone of a music that is subdued in nature but is vital for making it more vibrant there were many positive tales and images coming out during the pandemic. The most prominent of all being that of humanity coming together, being united and trying to tackling this problem together, this strengthens the humanness that was ever present and the act of Italians singing and paying respect to all, especially the victims, their families and the frontline workers (Doctors, Nurses) will forever be etched in the history of humanity. On a more personal level to all, during this pandemic families were connected, people interacted with each other and though nostalgia was on the rise, the presence of the pandemic made it possible.

I got news of Covid-19 when it started to spread in China initially around the end to the year 2019, but with my own ignorance I never really thought much of it as I being a student in Delhi, JNU was travelling to Dharamshala and enjoying my winter vacation with my kin and friends at that time. The initial months of 2020 seemed to pass by quickly and I was even fortunate enough to do a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya during which I noticed that there seemed to be a growing concern of the Covid-19 as many pilgrims were also coming from China and its neighbouring countries, this could be seen from people talking and also of them wearing and providing masks to all. Yet when I returned to Delhi there was no real hassle or noise raised about Covid-19 as no one was really wearing a mask and I personally was dumbfounded at first but the reality started to seep in eventually. Then in March the news of Covid-19 gained traction worldwide with large number of cases being found in Italy, the government there took the decision to implement a nation-wide lockdown and this set a precedent to others when it came to handling Covid-19. Videos and instructions were given as to how one must deal with this disease whereby the wearing of mask, sanitizing and washing your hands became popular. I remember how during this time various organizations came to the fore in providing guidelines in handling and being safe from this disease. When finally, the WHO concluded that this is a pandemic, there were movements everywhere and people outside of China finally started to take notice of it.

Residing in JNU, notices came out as to how lectures would be cancelled, initially by professors in light of the situation and eventually a directive came from the university as to how lectures would be on hold till further notice. All this happened after 10th March, a significant day for us Tibetans as we commemorate our uprising against the communist China on this very day each year. I still personally thought nothing much of this pandemic that has its origin from Wuhan, China and thought that normalcy would resume but then our university started circulating directives that requested students to vacate out of hostel and return back home if possible. Many students including me thought this was a joke but gradually students started to vacate and then, we had the Janata curfew on 22nd March. I was a bit stifled as we were not allowed to venture outside our hostel during that particular day but believing it would only be for a day, I thought nothing big of it. However, taking this as an example India under the leadership of PM Modi

announced nationwide lockdown from 24th March onwards initially for a week but which further got extended for months.

The lockdown which was a direct result of the drastic spread of Covid-19 was a measure taken to combat it, yet the sudden implementation of it took everyone by surprise. The lockdown in India was very different to those imposed in other states as one was strictly not allowed to venture outside public spaces during this period. This impacted the livelihoods of many especially the daily wage earners and those businesses being dependent on tourism, with me being associated with the latter. With the gradual phasing of lockdown, I came across many auto-drivers while traversing through Delhi and all of them had sad tales to share regarding Covid-19 and how it has impacted their livelihoods.

I regretted not returning home prior to the lockdown and to make matters even worse my smartphone hung up and got internally damaged at the end of March. This situation of residing in your room during lockdown without a smartphone to contact and connect to WhatsApp was a real issue at first, personally as online classes were occurring and important messages were also being shared through it. Fortunately, I had my PC and it enabled me in carrying a bulk of my task relating to lectures and my academia. And in many ways, it also became a blessing in disguise because I firmly believe, I got more connected with people around me and saw life in an unbridled way away from the social world.

One experience that I really want to highlight here was the concern and humanness exemplified by Tibetans seniors in JNU. When the lockdown began, we made a WhatsApp group out of the 7 Tibetan students remaining in campus and would share things there. With my phone giving up I was no longer connected to the group and personally was feeling a bit on the downside at that time. All of a sudden, a hostel mate of mine knocked my door one day and told me some people wanted to meet me. I was astounded and thought who of all people would be wanting to meet me at this time of the pandemic whereby entering other hostel was restricted in campus. Like many others, I contact people via phone and then meet, so this was an unexpected situation to me. When I went down and saw my Tibetan seniors and colleagues awaiting my arrival at our hostel gate, my hands were on my mouth and I greeted them and talked as usual. We talked and they explained how they were worried about me since I was not active and unseen our WhatsApp group. I was taking a heavy spin here as I never expected and thought people would be concerned about my well-being like this. I felt really emotional during that meeting and tried my utmost in conveying thanks and gratitude towards them for looking after me. Their help did not stop there as a particular individual even lent me her keypad phone that proved to be so useful in such times but more significant than this was the small gatherings, that we had in campus that provided a short escape from the reality of the pandemic that has and is still impacting everyone. This act of unhindered kindness and compassion made me realise and understand how beautiful the world truly is and if possible, I would also like to try and do the same to others by extending a lending help.

Being a political and international relations student what I have felt and seen during these times of Covid-19 is how vital and pivotal the role of a community and society at large plays. The functional role they play may or may not break an individual, it forms a pillar that support many individuals, their say impacts individuals from the poorest of the poor to the richest of the rich. Hence, without them the life of an individual seems empty, the lockdown experience that everyone felt, some more drastic than others back up these assumptions. On top of this

being a Tibetan we have seen how important a role was played by the CTA especially the Health department on this matter in tackling the fight against Covid-19. The weekly press conferences regarding the Covid-19 cases in our community made all of us aware of the situation within our own community and furthermore the propagation of our very own Ayurvedic medicine from Men-Tsee-Khang has been very helpful to not only us but to the general public at large from this pandemic.

All in all, my experience and reflection of Covid-19 has been very meaningful and through it I see myself growing and learning a lot from it. I am one among many fortunate ones who has not been infected with this deadly disease as of now and also have not been at the front lines combatting it. So, with folded hands, I whole heartedly want to thank them all for their tireless efforts against this pandemic that has truly rattled the global world unlike anything before. With the recent news of a Covid-19 vaccine on the way I hope it comes more soon than ever so that it would be able to save countless lives and also let the economy and world function properly.