

The "Ishan Kon" balcony

It was the fateful month of December 2019 when news of an unknown virus ravaging the entire human race came to the knowledge of everyone everywhere. The origin of the virus was traced to the Wuhan city of China. It was named Covid19 or the Corona virus. The dangerous virus brought with it a fearful pandemic and an unprecedented loss of human lives. The spread has been so rapid that we have been unable to get a grip of things. It's no longer just China, but each and every country of the world has been facing the onslaught of the virus. The uncertainty of even the near future could not be more pronounced than what the virus has brought in its wake to mankind. In our country, Kerala was the first state to get affected. Its spread in other states and cities has been happening so rapidly that we fear what's in store for us. Having assumed the characteristics of a global pandemic, every nation has been trying its best to deal with the onslaught of the virus. The tentacles of the virus are spreading fast, swallowing in its form, many human lives. The numbers of the loss of lives is increasing every day and its growing in leaps and bounds. Despite efforts of the medical community, no vaccine has yet been discovered. Hence, the appeal to all is to maintain social or I would say, physical distance as much as possible. With this now we have the necessary additions for safety and security to our daily lives – the constant use of sanitizers, masks and handwash. Scientists have started exploring the virus and its ramifications and governments have been holding meetings to find a way to deal with the spread of the virus. In India too, the Prime Minister has meetings with the State Governments in an attempt to stall the vast exposure of human kind to the virus and save as many lives as possible. Declaration of "lockdown" as the only plausible solution has brought about a complete overhaul of life. We are trying to stop community transmission, but are unsure of what the future holds for us. Banning travel between cities and even countries is the new normal. Suddenly everything has come to a stop. People have become jobless and the economy has got a fatal blow. Migrant labourers stuck in different cities are far from their homes. The call to shut down schools, offices, colleges, shops, markets and courts has brought the country to a standstill. The only thing allowed has been the procurement of essential commodities. The police are always on guard, putting defaulters in place. Such being the condition, everybody is compelled to stay indoors and do their tasks online. This lockdown has ruffled up the lives of the young and the old alike.

Standing alone at the "IshanKon" balcony is the first hero of my story, eleven year old AngshumanChaudhury, who resides in Kasba. By the way, before I go on, I want to state the significance of "IshanKon" meaning the north-east direction. IshanKon has a lot of significance because it is believed that this is the direction receiving Sun's rays which help purify the environment and bring in positivity. Angshuman lives with his mother, while his father is now in Mumbai, caught up there because of the lockdown. Angshuman believes that once the lockdown is lifted he will have his father home again. He is sad as he misses his father a lot because he has never had to stay like this, without his father around. Circumstances teach us a lot! Just when Angshuman was feeling lonely and wondering what to do, he sees a boy from his balcony, who looks about the same age as he is. He waves out to the boy and calls him to come and be friends with him. The boy, who is the second hero of this story, says, "My name is Raju. I live in the white coloured house right in front of yours." He also says that his father is no more and his mother is a vegetable seller. He has a sister called Rupa. Raju and Rupa used to go to school when their father was alive, but now no more! He loves Maths. But now, he has to help his mother a lot at home. Angshuman listens to him and offers him to come and play with him. Raju tells him that since he is poor, Angshuman's mother

won't allow him to be friends with him. Angshuman promises Raju that he will manage to get his mother to support him and be ok with this friendship.

Angshuman confides in his mother about Raju and tells her that he wants to be friends with him. But his mother disagrees at the prospect of this friendship. Angshuman feels sadder now and goes and stands at the IshanKon of his balcony again. He calls out to Raju again. This time he runs inside to get his toys, storybooks and other playthings to show and share with Raju. Raju feels elated and also runs to his house to get his wooden car which he had made. Angshuman feels very excited. Raju is an intelligent boy and can remember and recall whatever he sees or learns once. He is kind and always stands by people in distress. Angshuman gradually gets attracted by these sterling qualities of Raju and plans to go over to his house without telling his mother.

So, one day he quietly sets forth to go to Raju's house. But the security guard catches him unawares and takes him to his mother. Angshuman's mother scolds him, but he keeps trying to convince her of Raju's goodness and that he will benefit from Raju's friendship. Mother enquires about Raju's whereabouts. Angshuman tells her in detail that Raju lives with his mother and sister in the house opposite to theirs. Raju's father had passed away due to an unknown bout of fever. He also said that his new friend is always there at everyone's beck and call. But Angshuman's mother doesn't agree to this friendship and puts her foot down. She refuses to have her son mingle with a poor boy.

Angshuman goes to his favourite balcony spot and calls out to Raju. This time, Raju makes an attempt to come inside Angshuman's house, but is stopped by the security guard at the entrance. Raju feels hurt and tells his friend to come over. Angshuman manages to reach Raju's house and both of them play with their toys in the garden in front of the house. Mother sees this and gets livid. She scolds Angshuman very badly. Angshuman, failing to convince his mother each and every time, goes to his balcony and calls up his father and narrates the entire story. His father succeeds in persuading his mother. Finally Raju comes home and Angshuman's mother treats him well. She watches them play and chat and feels happy for her son.

One day, Angshuman's mother falls ill. Raju rushes to call the doctor and also brings the medicines prescribed for her. Mother realises the truism about Raju's helpfulness. Mother, on recovering, realises her mistake and pulls Raju close to her and hugs him with tears in her eyes. She admits Raju and Rupa into her son's school and promises to take care of them. Raju's mother and Angshuman's too, agree that the lockdown has not only brought sadness into their lives, but also this surge of happiness too.

Despite the morose environment that the lockdown has perpetrated into our lives, here's a story of true friendship blossoming from a balcony's "IshanKon". I hope that in this new normal life, we will not forget to use mask, sanitizer and maintain social distance and keep friendships alive.

Name – Subhangi Mtra

Age – 17

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