

The Greatest Lockdown

I am a woman with cerebral palsy. I cannot do anything physically. However, because of God's blessings, my brain is normal. I work my life around with the help of my left index finger. With that one finger, I have become a writer. Since I was young, I had dreamt of releasing my own book: a compilation of all my poems, essays, and short stories. By the beginning of 2020, everything seemed to be perfectly falling into place when the news of a roaring pandemic started making the talk of the town. I had never thought that a virus that is otherwise invisible to the naked eye could wreak havoc in the entire world at once.

The Covid-19 viral infection originated in the Hubei province of China. This virus spreads from one human being to another through touch and aerosol. All the scientists and governments have failed to find effective and realistic ways of controlling the spread of the virus. The most cost-effective way is to force the citizens into a lockdown, where no physical movement of people is allowed. You cannot go out or party or hang out with friends. The only realistic option one is left with is to wash utensils, clean the house and do everything else that a wife asks.

The national lockdown has most severely impacted the migrant workers in India. As businesses have shut down, all the labourers have been laid off. Many people travel across the country to work in factories and construction sites and without the daily wage, it is impossible for them to survive away from home. Since all the transportation was also stopped during the lockdown, the migrant workers had to walk down for thousands of kilometres to reunite with their families. Many also lost their lives in the process as they had to spend days without food.

The pandemic also brought the children's lives to a standstill. With schools and colleges closed for up to seven months, now they have little to do at home to satiate their curious minds. Technology has really helped in solving the issues. All the classes have been shifted online and teachers are now teaching from the comfort of their homes. However, without the personal touch, the pandemic is taking a mental toll on everyone.

Even the domestic helpers are locked at home. And for a person like me who requires a constant special aid, it becomes really difficult without one. However, I am lucky that I have the support of my father, my brother, my niece and nephews. All my family members carry out their individual responsibilities to help me live a complete life.

Countless people throughout the world have died because of the Covid-19 pandemic. It originated sometime around November 2019 and even nine months since its origination, we still don't have an answer on how to treat the disease. Even in the hospitals, the most effective treatment is considered to be Vitamin shots, drinking warm water and steam inhalation. I wonder when we will be able to come out of this crisis.

By God's grace, I have got a companion by my side at all times. Do you know who?

It is my left index finger. My index finger has seen a lot of ups and downs but with tough practice, it has always turned victorious. Initially people used to think that it is not going to work. However, at heart, I knew I could do it. In the initial days, my finger used to shake a lot when using computer keyboard. My teacher thought better for me and gave me an alternative solution of using switchers, an easier way to use the computer. This again was uncomfortable to use so I was determined that I will use the keyboard only. I was then given

the aid of a keyboard guard. It helped me in taming my index finger. Slowly I started to use the finger without guards and eventually I got fully rid of them. It was 10 years of tough practice and now I rate myself as a first-class typist. But I did not want to stop the good run. I wanted to hone up my skills now. I wanted to work on my speed of writing. I started copy writing, it was tough I must agree, it pained definitely but I never gave up, not after coming so far.

When I proposed to sit for my 10th board exams, my teachers refused saying that I point at my alphabets very slowly and that I will never be able to complete the paper. My mother and I took this as a challenge. We practiced for hours along with a writer. Finally, they allowed me to take the exam. I got a 75%. I felt really proud of myself. The marks were not any achievement as compared to the fact that I could successfully complete all the papers on time. I have never looked back since then. I can now communicate what I am thinking, through poems and stories. I keep honing my skills further.

I look at my index finger as my closest companion. After all, it sticks with me through thick and thin. Sometimes when I am all alone, my index finger talks to me to keep company.

Index Finger: "Look Shradha, God always means well to people."

Me: "How is that?"

Index Finger: "Because of this lockdown, your father is at home and you can spend much more time with him. Your beloved brother also finds more time to sit and discuss things with you. Even your niece and nephews sit with you much more often to pass your time."

Me: "I love your positivity. You are absolutely right. However, I still feel depressed at times. Can you tell me a solution to this?"

My Index Finger always has the best solution to light up my mood. Like a magic wand, it moves in circles and then points at something, giving it life. It will point at the fan and the fan will start making comical noises. It always cracks me up.

The index finger started moving in circles and started pointing at my mother's picture. Suddenly I could hear my mother's voice telling me, "Shradha, I am there beside you at all times. It is only my body that has been returned to the soil, my soul is still alive." I started feeling better instantly.

Index Finger: "You can do something in this lockdown."

Me (Excited): "What is that?"

Index Finger (Smiling): "Shradha, try to improve your voice. You should try singing. It will really help to clear your voice."

It felt like a good idea. I navigated to YouTube in my phone and searched for my favourite numbers. After listen to them a few times, I slowly started singing along with the songs. Everyone agreed that my voice needed improvement. But they did not ask me to stop. In a few days I could feel the improvement in me, and I could communicate more properly with my family members. I was really happy.

The happiness was however short-lived. They say that too much of anything is not good and this pandemic made me realised that too much of staying indoors can also make people weary.

Randomly stressed about the ongoing crisis I was sitting by the window and looking outside blankly. Suddenly I started wondering about how we could eradicate this virus. Suddenly my index finger said, "I will eradicate the virus."

Me (trying to act supportive): "How will you do that?"

Index Finger: "I will help in creating the vaccine. However, you will have to help me with something my dear friend."

Me: "How can I possibly help you?"

Index Finger (smiling): "You just have to separate me from you."

Me (Startled): "What are you saying? I can't separate YOU from my body!"

Index Finger (Unmoved): "You have to do it for the nation otherwise this virus will kill everyone."

Me (Fighting a losing battle): "I can do anything for my nation. But this will be very painful."

Index Finger (Emotionless): "So who will do it for you?"

Me (Still bewildered): "My niece will do it for me."

It was late evening and the last of the day's light was visible through the clouds. My niece walked into my room (startling me, as usual) and said, "Hi Bua, what are you doing?"

Me (Sighing): "I want to tell you something, please listen to me quietly."

Neice (Slightly impatient): "What's that?"

Me (Slowly): "Can you do me a favour?"

Neice (Visibly impatient): "Please tell me fast Bua, I have office work."

Me (Trying to pickup pace): "Please separate my index finger from my body."

For a moment she was stunned and struggled to respond. After a while she said, "What are you saying Bua? You are not allowed to watch horror movies anymore."

Me (jumping in the wheelchair): "If you cannot do it, I will do it." Before I could complete, she stormed out of the room.

As the echo of the night rang in my years, I could not help but turn back my thoughts to the index finger. I slowly gathered the courage to talk to it again, "Nobody wants to separate you from me."

Index Finger (Unmoved): "Every problem has a solution, do not worry my friend."

Me (Rejuvenated): "So you are telling me that you have a solution?"

Index Finger: "Yes, do as I say, okay? Just close your eyes and concentrate all your energy into me. Do not think of anything but me and then slowly imagine that I am automatically

getting separated from you. Without any pain, without any blood. And once I am done with my work, I will also reattach automatically”

Without allowing my mind to weigh the rationality of its words, I did as asked. I closed my eyes and started concentrating on my left index finger. Ten minutes into it, I slowly started imagining that it is lifting on its own. To my utter surprise, I could actually feel a tingling feeling on my finger. However, I did not open my eyes to see and continued to gather my energy.

In the moonlit night, an index finger could be seen flying outside my window. Without any sign of blood. In the coming days, my finger travelled around the world and found out that there are close to hundred vaccines under development. It finally came back to India to help the Serum Institute in developing a vaccine. After working day and night, it finally got approval for human trials by ICMR. The first stage of trials is on small group of people and is done to find out whether the vaccine has any side effects on humans. Once the first stage was complete, they quickly moved on to the second stage where the vaccine is tried on a larger group of people to find out whether they are developing any immunity. After 2 months of trials, they found out that the vaccine was indeed successful in protecting the person from Covid-19 infection.

The final stage of the trial was carried out using thirty thousand people from different walks of life. After three months of trials, the nation’s first vaccine against Covid-19 was launched and my index finger was at the forefront of it. I was in tears. Finally, I could go out again.

My niece called out for me, almost shouting. However, I was eagerly waiting for the return of my finger, so I did not respond. She called out again, this time louder. Suddenly my body started moving on its own. “Bua, Bua, Bua...” I opened my eyes with a start and found my niece leaning towards me and staring blankly into my face. I could feel my index finger slowly making its way through the blanket and rubbing my eyes. It acted as if it had never gone. My niece said, “wake up fast Bua, it is time to give you a bath.”

-Shradha Khator

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