

CHAPTER-2

QUARANTINE DAYS OF A COLLEGE STUDENT



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“From comprehending a new way of living to gaining a new perspective on life”

Twelfth of March, I was writing my internals. It was microbial biotechnology, I remember. The paper was really easy and I was acing it. I was almost finishing up my paper when the strangest thing happened. One of our professors walked into the class and told us that the State Government had ordered college authorities to dismiss students from college campuses immediately. Yes, I’m talking about the same twelfth of March when the country recorded its first COVID related death and this unfortunately happened in my very own state, Karnataka. I just came home confused. Since, all our tests that were scheduled for the next few days got cancelled, I thought I’ll head to the gym for a good workout. Before I could leave home, I got a text from the gym informing us members to stay home, since the State Government had ordered closing of gymnasiums, malls and restaurants. I spent

the next few days trying to figure out what was going on. I was reading about the pandemic online, watching the news and trying to understand where we were and what the future holds for all of us.

Twenty-Fourth of March, it was dinner time and we were watching the usual 8-o'clock news when Modiji declared a 21-day nationwide lockdown to mitigate the spread of the disease. This brought all offices, businesses and various other services to a halt. That day, we went to a store to buy some essentials to last us for the next 3 weeks and I was shocked to see people hoarding obscene amounts of groceries and other essentials. Most of the racks in the supermarkets were nearly empty. Gluttony is a disturbing facet of a human being. This affected many innocent lives. Poor, unemployed and daily wage workers who didn't have the luxury to stock up on weeks worth of groceries to feed their families, the elderly and disabled who couldn't rush to the markets and depended on others for their supplies were left apprehensive about their lives during this lockdown.

The next 21 days were rather unusual. Nobody had anywhere to go. Shops, banks and schools were shut, roads that once buzzed with traffic were completely deserted. With transportation being cut off, a lot of my friends living as paying guests and in hostels were in a fix, they could neither stay where they were nor could they travel back home. But, these 21 days also meant for us students a break. A respite from the dreaded 7AM classes, assignments, projects and exams. 500 hours of doing whatever we wanted! Netflix and Prime became our best friends. Binge-culture was never as popular as it was during quarantine. People for once turned away from their monotonous nine to fives and picked up hobbies and tried slowing down a bit from their stressful routines. I tried everything millennials popularised during quarantine. Watching Tik-Tok videos, baking, spending hours reading and being hooked to social media, enjoying hilarious memes that were channeling our anxieties over COVID-19 into classic internet humour. This went on for a bit after which unproductivity didn't

feel as enjoyable as it was anymore. It was around this time when schools and colleges took classes online.

‘An Online Class’ was a new concept for all of us. It was surely amazing that I could at least meet my friends and professors in a virtual class-like atmosphere. The fact that we could just roll out of bed and start attending our classes in sweats and didn’t really have to factor in extra time to get ready and physically travel to college was exciting. But, online classes came with its own setbacks; network glitches being the most significant of it all. Poor audio quality, videos appearing blurry and pixelated did affect the learning process. Online classes didn’t match up to a real-classroom scenario, no matter how hard we all tried. Student feedback was difficult. Interacting with friends and helping each other understand was impossible. I also missed talking with my friends between classes, our usual samosa-chai breakfast at 10:30 and treating ourselves to milkshakes in the college canteen after tests. Quarantine robbed us of all the college memories we would otherwise cherish for

a lifetime. And, although our teachers tried really hard every single day to help us learn our concepts, they constantly expressed their disappointment teaching to an empty room with a camera and how they missed seeing all of us. But I'm still really grateful that we all had some means to continue learning. Zoom, Skype and Google Meet were undeniably of great help to all of us during these uncertain times.

Apart from attending college classes online, digital certification courses became extremely popular. Thanks to multiple online learning platforms, learning anything from coding to gardening was available at our fingertips. Educators from world-class universities started putting out lectures and various other learning materials online. It was beautiful how internet seamlessly became my companion for productivity, entertainment and social interaction.

But, it was definitely not all sunshine and rainbows. News updates about the wild spread of the pandemic, terrifying death tolls, unemployment and poverty, crashing of the economy. It was almost like

the world we built for ourselves over all these years was crumbling right in front of us. Coming from a doctor's family, I was proud and worried for all my loved ones putting their lives at risk, sacrificing their comfort and working long hours in PPEs to serve the society. All I could do was pray for their safety.

Now, it has almost been seven months in quarantine. Withdrawal from the society, self isolation, fears, frustration, financial precarity and the sheer uncertainty of the future has had serious effects on mental health of people. Self regulation and mindfulness is the need of the hour, for our own sanity. Giving my days a structure, doing something that will get me closer to my goals every single day but also prioritising exercise, meditation, good nutrition and adequate amounts of rest has truly made a difference in the way I see my days now. I'm someone who strongly believes that someone else's pain and struggle doesn't negate our own experiences. All of our struggles and experiences are equally valid. But, at the same time, its equally important to practice

gratitude, and I think 2020 has taught us to be grateful for every little thing in our lives - good health, food and shelter, family, clean air, warmth of a fellow human being and the gift of life.

Finally, I would like to confess that I'm a diehard optimist, I couldn't be more hopeful about the future. I know that our courage, strength and our undying human spirit will help pull through these harrowing times and rebuild everything right from the scratch. We will cruise through all of this and emerge braver and stronger than ever, and build a better world for ourselves and our children.

CHAPTER-3

LOCK DOWN: LIFE WITHIN FOUR WALLS



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