

CHAPTER-4

THE TUG-OF-WAR THAT IS SELF-RELIANCE EARLY MARCH 2020



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I was in Kerala and Tamil Nadu for business meetings when the spread of the virus became a cause of country-wide concern. Thankfully, due to some quick thinking on the part of my colleague, I got to the safety of my home in Bangalore. While I was recovering from the duress I endured from all the travelling, 'staying put at home' had become a national sport! The one-day lockdown turned into an unending moving target with different connotations which are still hazy at the time of punching this article in. I really did not let it bother me for the first several weeks because somewhere it felt like this was the downtime I needed! While my clients got their acts together changing and adapting to the 'new normal', I found solace in exploring things I never made time for earlier. Along the way, have had multiple realizations and there is no better way to describe them than to call them Contradictions!

Self-sufficiency is underrated

I was stuck in a house in prime Bangalore with no one but a puppy (who is pretty much a the rap up. But then again, is there a pet parent who does not find

their pet therapeutic?). There was a strange sense of liberation in knowing that I was accountable to no human being and did not need to comply in any way because I kept hearing horror stories of how the lockdown had impacted seemingly solid relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children who had lost the art of connecting in the most basic way possible - face-to-face! Some of them went from seeing each other 2-4 hours a week to 24 hours a day. Pretty insane considering there was no gradual transitioning period. This can have lasting impressions on modern relationships which tend to be hopelessly fragile. In a way, I was extricated from having to save and nurture relationships when taking care of one's own self should have been a priority. I managed the occasional phone calls and video chats with family and friends but did not let Cognitive Dissonance that technology brings with it, shake me up. I applied myself to learning a new language, reading some of the ignored books on my bookshelf, honing my voice and vocal tropes (I did some fun voice-overs during the lockdown!), and picking up ways to

skillfully manage the kitchen and make myself a happy-tummy meal (side note — there's great power in being able to cook a good meal if you love food!). Not someone with a green thumb, halfway through, I even figured why my plants seemed dull and sad! Arbitrary information — I also brought in my 32nd in lockdown. Super eventful and memorable! In the middle of the general chaos, as was expected and is understandable, several clients were confused about whether they even wanted to set aside marketing dollars at all. Some of them pulled out almost immediately, and others sent contract termination notices only to come back in a week's time to 'test waters when everyone else was at the shore'. As a Marketer, when prospective clients asked what I could promise them in a month's time, I could not bring myself to answer with any level of surety. The only thing we could do is embrace the uncertainty and roll with the times. But this is where I realized that having one's self-worth come from only one source is disastrous! In my case, for the longest time, it was my work that occupied the whole pie. Over

the last year or so, through therapy, I have learned how to aim for realistic standards of perfection and not beat myself up for something that is not under my control but could still be a cause for guilt. There was a lot of inner engineering that had been done much before the lockdown and as a result, I noticed that my spirit was substantially unwavering in dealing with everything it brought with it. As an empath, I did go through the guilt of “Why am I thriving in this situation? People seem to be struggling. Am I being a moron for NOT feeling miserable like them?” But that’s when the voice of reason of a good therapist hits you — learn to focus on what you can control while being mindful of what you need to keep your head above the water! This balancing act is definitely not easy. But I can tell you it is important. When the metrics of success tend to be how many zeroes your salary has, it’s natural that, as a society, we give very little importance to the journey inwards. But in strange ways, the pandemic brought us all to our knees and showed what was important all along. The biggest lesson learned was the one that is

most basic - self-sufficiency is more than just being able to keep yourself alive physically. The mind needs to be alive too!

Self-sufficiency is overrated

Almost as a contradiction, self-sufficiency seems to be a little overrated also, you know? Life prepared me for this lockdown about 18 months before the pandemic, when an ACL surgery rendered me stationary and in a constant state of pain for two months. The road to recovery is something I am still limp-walk-running on. Anyone who has ever been bed-ridden and dependent on others for the most rudimentary things will tell you that it is quite a luxury to be home and have all your appendages and most importantly, your brain functioning at almost optimum levels. But at the same time, you are being kept alive by the people around you. I got to experience something similar this time too. Although I am from the Digital Age and my profession, which I love deeply, prevents me from actively internalizing the 'Social Dilemma', I am almost always quick to feel the pinch when someone complains of the perils of the

internet. But if there is something that has come out strongly in all this, it is that strangers on the internet keep your hope alive, keep you alive! Artists, musicians, comics, poets came out of the woodwork in hordes and enthralled a virtual audience. They quickly adapted their forms and formats to what was feasible for an audience viewing them on a 4.5-inch screen. I remember just waiting evening after evening, during the early days of lockdown, just to see who would go live on Instagram or Facebook with what new form of art. They impressed and inspired millions of people they could only virtually reach out to. There were cliché responses to the one question every child between ages 5 and 10 was thrown - 'What do you want to become when you grow up'. Invariably most of these responses needed you to be good at some form of science or analytical thinking. But the moment of reckoning for all those brave souls who decided to pay no heed to societal expectations and chose arts over science has come in the form of this pandemic. While the scientists and doctors tirelessly work on finding practical solutions to cope, our

erstwhile humanities students have shown what life beyond molecules and atoms is actually like, and dare I say, it is every inch beautiful! Another set of human beings whose significance we understood and appreciated more than ever before were the house helps, the cooks, the gardeners, the dog groomers, the plumbers, and the electricians. True acknowledgment of what they do to make our lives less laborious is in respecting their time and effort and this cannot be a pandemic thing. It needs to be an everyday life thing! While we still learn all about self-sufficiency and in what measure it needs to be exercised, this pandemic has uncovered some of the simple values I wish were taught to us sooner. Without sounding incredibly optimistic, I do believe there are things to feel grateful for and wish that this has a lasting impact on us all.