

CHAPTER-I

LOCKDOWN PERIOD: A FEW THOUGHTS



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'Human is the virus & corona is the cure-nature is a great teacher, it takes the test first and the lessons later'. The outbreak of Covid-19 surprised the world and made powerful nations and communities pause and re-assess strategies which in the immediately preceding period were filled with eternal hope and optimism beyond a certain sense of reproach. The limits of luxury and comfort of human beings being undefined, there was nothing in the literal sense to 'check' the human aspirations and the human "paradise" so conceived seemed full of promises and painted a 'rosy' picture. The surreal held more hope and promise, losing touch of reality. Yet, the catastrophe of this magnitude was in wait and was bound to happen given the total disregard shown by humans in the past few years towards the flora & fauna around us, and towards maintaining the ecological balance in nature. The greed for power, the hunger to dominate the social order has since times immemorial made man a 'reckonable force' in the order of things as far as nature is concerned. This also implies that man has a pivotal role to play in maintaining the

order of things, to ensure balance and harmony in the eco-system. It has always been taught to us, through our religious texts, folklore and history, that when this fragile ecological balance is disturbed, catastrophe is inevitable. Therefore, the Covid-19 imposed scenario arrived at a time when man was chasing his ambitions at full speed. The lockdown imposed an initial sense of void, reducing our routine fast paced lives into a slow-paced narrative, exposing our vulnerabilities against the forces of nature, compelling us to make changes, and thereby initiating an inevitable process of change and adaptation towards a more responsible and responsive world.

‘Lockdown for me...’

Lockdown for me commenced with a sense of confusion and disbelief due to the sheer magnitude of the issues and the foresight/energy required to overcome the range of challenges posed. The basic and routine issues like functioning of offices, running the household, the ways we interacted, commuted, communicated and explored recreational activities,

everything necessitated a de-novo approach in the post Covid World. It was beyond the available means to mitigate or control the threat posed in terms of time and space even if resources were pooled. It was surprising how the manifestation of a small virus could hold the world of modern medicine in awe and confusion and cause consequent delay in the response mechanism. Yet amidst all this gloom and despair, human spirit rose to the occasion, as always, in accepting the inevitable and paving the way for further actions required concurrently and in near simultaneity at the individual level, in households, amongst communities and at the national level, in a synergised manner as best possible considering the spectrum of stakeholders and the initial challenges to bring all stake holders on a common wicket. Thus, began the starting phase of lockdown for me, awaking me, to take stock of things and contribute my share to mitigate the situation.

‘The Struggle for the Mundane and the Trivia’:

The things which were till then taken for granted started gaining manifold importance, to quote an example., living in cities amidst all comfort and facilities one seldom thought twice when requiring groceries and other utility items. One just had to take out a few ‘precious’ minutes from one’s busy routine to place an online order and the essentials would stand delivered. Similarly, was the case with many other such items perceived essential by us, as the degree of one’s comfort grew. Now, with the imposition of the lockdown, the term ‘essentials’ dictated a new meaning and owing to the short supply of items, even in metropolitan cities, the perceptions regarding what is essential and what could be done away with saw new realisation. Thus, simple mundane things when obtained with some amount of deliberation and effort led us to be grateful and thankful for having had the good fortune in obtaining it, in comparison with others who were not as fortunate. This insight amidst the daily struggle for the mundane and trivia to accomplish routine challenges led

to a deeper sense of wisdom and altruism towards 'humankind and its karma'. It brought about a greater sense of purpose in serving others/community unselfishly.

'A planned routine-Family time is Quality Time'.

A simple thing like having a meal together with family, enjoying a TV show or a game with family was becoming a rarity prior to the Covid 19 imposed lockdown. All of us seemed too busy in our lives to spare some relaxing moments with our family in doing these basic 'us-time' as opposed to 'me-time', 'my-time' and 'no-time' for such precious moments. During the lockdown, the time spent with family, the joyous moments and memories so created, compelled us to re-assess our priorities in life and our utilisation of time and resources. Consequently, came the realisation that activities with family indeed requires a higher prioritisation not only for mental well-being, happiness quotient, emotional stability, but also in nurturing these values in the short moments of time /short opportunities available, considering the unforeseen

destiny of human lives. A planned routine aimed to make the most of each single day with a mix of fun and frolic making the most of available means and addressing work related matters in a prioritised manner ensured judicious management of time and gave a great sense of bliss and contentment in daily routine.

‘Online Education and Children’

Online classes for children sounded preposterous initially and most parents treaded with caution and trepidation. Gradually this apprehension waned as children adapted to the scene well and some children even found ingenious ways to showcase innate talent online during the period. The online platforms are here to stay and for long are very much apparent. The online platforms now are offering numerous possibilities in real time sharing of educational content and have increased the opportunities exponentially. But what appalls me is that we are again falling into or rather making our children fall into a trap of aiming for academic pursuits on online platform/s as compared to very less or limited outdoor and adventurous pursuits,

remember “all work and no play makes jack a dull boy”. Also, the imperatives of balanced growth of children and overall development by both indoor and outdoor pursuits needs no further emphasis and this aspect remains a challenge given the current scenario of education vis a vis Covid-19 imposed restrictions.

‘Of Hospitals and Health Care’

During the lockdown phase, I often wondered and pondered several times regarding our response system given the inadequacy of resources and the vulnerability of our frontline Corona Warriors. As a civilisation, world over, we were being taught the basics of how best to wash hands, how to cover when we sneeze and cough and various other basic preventive measures, often leading to hilarious predicaments while travelling, or at public places. Donning the mask which commenced as a preventive measure has evolved to a style statement with variety of designs to choose from and the Mask making industry has flourished. The hospitals and the medical insurance domains also adapted to the need, but does it meet all the concerns

of the common man, the answer is probably 'no' and there is a need to go a long way in this field, commencing from a much awaited vaccine to the post Covid procedures including the recuperative period needs attention of the professionals and the community. When I visited the hospitals during this phase, I often felt that the possibility of falling sick and getting infected were more in a hospital than anywhere else given the dynamics of various testing & control measures established by the various governments in various states. The mechanism and preventive testing procedures envisaged were more cumbersome in practice than addressing the concerns of the common man. Initially it seemed like a collective stigma for a person/institution to be detected or associated with an infected case, which after too many cases improved, albeit to a prevailing non-chalant situation. I can only join others in prayers for a more comforting solution in the times to come.

‘News and News Channels’

There was a time when we as students would watch news on TV to keep ourselves abreast on current affairs and be ready for that odd general knowledge question in school. Those days, whatever was conveyed by the fourth pillar of our sovereign democratic republic was taken as the ‘gospel’ truth and faithfully reproduced during various competitive exams without any bias. During the lockdown, TV news was a major source of keeping the family well informed. But as the days passed, the futility of watching “paid” news became more apparent after sifting through various channels and finally reached a level of saturation beyond a limit. It became an exercise to avoid certain anchors and personalities on prime channels to maintain one’s ideas, clarity and convictions on various issues. I am a firm believer in the dictum that one’s true character emerges when under stress and trying conditions. So therefore, there were very few instances of display of character of that nature in the News and channels stuck to their “paid” monologues rather than playing a distinct and impartial

role as expected from the fourth pillar of democracy, with truthful reporting, which was the need of the hour.

‘The New Normal’

A few weeks back amidst the various lockdown-unlock-phases, I was duty bound to travel and therefore undertook the most cumbersome travel in my career spanning over 2 decades, donning the PPE suit, occupying the middle seat in economy class and looking like an astronaut, eating cold food and purging oneself constantly with sanitisers available in various forms, another flourishing industry I suppose. Whereas, the scope exists to better apply the new norms with a little bit of common sense, ingenuity and practical application/interpretation of rules in vogue, by responsible people on ground/in contact with public. It then made me realise that in the absence of any clear-cut directions, standing operating procedures and other rules are as good as the weakest link in the chain and with slack in monitoring mechanism, the envisaged new norms will be yet another facade.

‘Ending on a Positive Note’

Like all major catastrophes the world has witnessed periodically, one thing has emerged very clearly and boldly and that is the ‘indomitable human spirit’ and its capacity to surpass hurdles, thrive and sustain life. I have always believed and will continue to believe in the quote “this shall also pass”.