

*"The oak fought the wind and was broken  
The willow bent when it must and survived"*

- Robert Jordan

COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown has brought about the entire humanity to its knees. It was not long before we heard stifled news about a new virus let in the loose in a plum blossom laden Chinese province of Hubei, WUHAN. A place that hasn't spared t any part of the world unheard. Breaking news quickly started creeping through every means of media rattling the world into distress. Like the waves of the sea that reach the shore eventually despite all the barriers on its way, there comes the first confirmed case in India on January 30th in the State of Kerala reporting thousand suspected cases simultaneously. Administrations and governing bodies thought the sail was smooth but alas it wasn't a calm sea anymore, eventually hastening to brace the unseen calamity. When people started falling ill the society started to collapse like a stack of cards blown by the wind. Turning back, half the world was under its clutches already facing devastating health and economic nightmares. According to the International Monetary Fund the global economy is set to contract by 2.7 % for the financial year 2020-21. Domestic rating agency ICRA has forecasted a contraction in India's GDP in the current fiscal to 9.5%. This will change the world as we have known for most of our lives as this is not the end but a misty road in the woods. Weeks before its outbreak in China the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation along with John Hopkins centre for health security and the World Economic Forum conducted a high-level simulation exercise for pandemic preparedness "Event 201" on 18th October 2019. They found that governments business and public health leaders were all woefully unprepared. In India, this pandemic unmasked the ugly face of the healthcare system, where inappropriate screening led to intolerable mishandling of patients.

Nurses, Doctors and Social workers the so-called frontline fighters are battling a daily life and death situation with the highest risk of exposure despite the heart wreathing incidents. Denying the burial of a world-renowned pioneer in neurosurgery Dr Simon Hercules, chasing away field workers, verbal abuse in residential complexes are just the tip of the iceberg. When the whole world was applauding the service of the medical fraternity, we in India did not recognise what these selfless services meant. That indeed was a bitter lesson learnt due to poor awakening of the commons. As always said being a doctor is a way of living, thousands of healthcare workers have forfeited their lives to give others a chance to survive. Inadequate personal protective equipment forced doctors to wear garbage covers, substandard hand sanitizers and indefinite reuse of N95 masks haunts in the minds of budding healthcare workers. In the post COVID world, countries need to formulate healthcare systems that protect and insulate workers in fool proof ways. Telemedicine which is just hatching in our part of the world along with virtual consultations has be largely limited to the western world. There is urgency to globalise these facilities in the benefit of underprivileged countries. By enhancing Primary Health Care centres boosting their reach to millions providing services like screening, consultation and basic treatment on a virtual platform eventually drastically improving the health status as well as minimizing travel, and that would be the new normal. Among many astounding observations about the pandemic, the worlds response has been consistent among different communities and populations. Social factors like discrimination, lack of access to health care and economic inequality increases load in turn providing a convincing argument for a biological contribution to increase susceptibility to infection and worse outcomes among the under resourced population. Precisely spotted by the WHO, Dharavi set an example under the Marathi government

# 18

acquiring ground breaking efforts to contain the spread exposing the seriousness to remodel the healthcare setting among the vulnerable population.

In the globalised world where political boundaries between countries are disappearing and greater collaboration of cognitive generosity among peers across borders leading to a transparent flow of ideas will be the new normal. Medical experts, engineers and scientist like never before are contributing towards innovative ideas that can tide over these rough times. Astonishing inventions like the AEROSOL BOX by Dr Lai Hsein-Yung (Taiwan), Aerosol ICU beds, Isolation structures, 3D Printed face masks, Antiviral incorporated Personal Protective Equipment, dozens of Applications tracking diseased and at-risk population. To probe into the extents of technology, introduction of Artificial Intelligence in the field of medicine from nursing care to cardiopulmonary resuscitations making life easier and stress free. That doesn't stop there UK pioneered in waste water epidemiology which has become a popular method of studying the pandemic. Indian virologist Minal Dakhve Bhosal and her team had submitted low cost COVID- 19 diagnostic test for validations to Indian National Institute of Virology. Despite mammoth contributions by science, vaccines just peeping around the corner. The everchanging media content has instilled a constant threat and distress to mankind.

The pandemic has not only manifested "Happy Hypoxia" but a happy flip too. It has turned the world's attention towards the Indian pharmaceutical empire. A sudden boom in essential needs and lifesaving drugs to an extent that would not only suffice national requirement but could quench the global demand. Actively taking part in the race towards formulating a vaccine against corona virus India has come up with COVAXIN that has successfully started human trail all over the country. Countries along with the WHO are counting on India as one of the largest vaccine producer and supplier once a vaccine is rolled out of the laboratories. But India cannot rest on its laurels, it depends on china for 85% of the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) eventually disrupting the global chain at present. Reduced dependency on china and increased domestic production makes me see India as "The pharmacy of the world".

The end of a pandemic will eventually lead to beginning of an epidemic of mental illness. Doctors particularly the psychiatrist in the NHS are overburdened due to the steep rise in anxiety, depression, distress and mental fatigue due to isolation, quarantine, fear of death, unemployment and disease progression. Fear of socialization, buying from vendors, allowing children to play has turned threatening. Post lockdown India's mental health infrastructure must be revamped. With a miniscule number of 9000 mental health specialists serving a staggering 1.3 billion people. Setting up effective peer counsellors working under a local administration and trained on established models such as Dr Vikram Patels Sangath might be the way forward. This requires strong civil, social and administrative involvement. Unless the community is empowered to take care of itself the numbers will keep soaring.

To keep up the momentum physical training for wellbeing, mass gatherings and panel discussions has become virtualized. Recently, virtual summits like the one between India and Australia on June 4th was conducted online. The Tamilnadu government has signed an agreement with television channels so that students without access to internet could receive quality education. Such enigmatic leaps in medicine during a crisis could elevate training to global standards.

Human beings have long forgotten being humane, harming mother nature in whose very arms we lay. In India, there is disproportionate increase in the most vulnerable poor population staring at poverty, hunger, locust attacks, cyclones, flash floods lashing out the daily living. This pandemic

# 18

leading to several lockdowns has suppressed human arrogance towards nature and healed the environment briefly. In early April, with shutdowns widespread, daily global carbon emissions dipped by 17 percent compared to last year. But as of June 11, data show that they are only about 5 percent lower than at the same point in 2019, even though normal activity has not yet fully restarted. Governments around the world should formulate strategies to limit exploitation of limited resources and avoid pollutions in any form. Even though the medical fraternity has been fighting a battle against the spread of the pandemic. It is our responsibility as healthcare workers to limit the biomedical waste that we generate by dumping infinite tons of gloves, masks and other biological wastes into the environment.

With the exponential rise in criticality, there was a sudden surge in requirement of Anaesthesiologists and intensivists expertise. Throbbing headaches, fogging glasses and drenched aprons and the scare of their families getting infected following prolonged COVID duties, what if this is the new normal? A difficult intubation through an aerosol box can leave you sleepless for days. The anaesthesia fraternity considers these troughs as an opportunity, formulating essential SOP and guidelines to protect patients as well as the healthcare workers. The ISA has taken active role in conducting webinar and updating the latest information at crucial situations. This pandemic has taught the essential lessons of unity, companionship and humanitarian behaviour like never before. Oh yes, the way I see it: "Regional blocks over General anaesthesia" whenever feasible.

They say never waste a crisis. Seriously, we wouldn't have wasted this opportunity if we invested in building attitude within planetary boundaries in right earnest, both in our personal lives and public spaces. Personally, maintain hygiene, instil self-worth and remain compassionate. Educate the masses, offer services, feed the poor, donate willingly. This opens opportunities for governments to improve through telecommunication and intensifying supply chain resilience and by removing social ills one at a time.

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others"*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*