

- SHODHINI NEWSLETTER -

CORONA AND MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIVES OF YOUTH DURING CORONA
AND HOW DID IT AFFECT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

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EDITORIAL

During these Covid times two issues were greatly highlighted, one was food security which was a very serious problem and the other equally important issue was mental health. In many villages where Abhivyakti conducts projects this was a very worrisome problem. People were fearful, anxious and were feeling very insecure. For one thing there was insufficient information about Corona and secondly due to the lockdown, the people were scared and worried about their future. Even in normal times, we have too many worries. During Covid and after, this situation became all the more delicate and was on the verge of collapse. That was when everybody realized that mental health is so important. Even so there was no clarity about it. Health services were available but where physical health services were inadequate, mental health services were almost negligible.

What is mental health and not just in times of the Corona pandemic or lockdown and why is it important to pay attention to it? It has become absolutely necessary to understand this. Mental health is an essential component of our overall health. Health is a delicate balance between our thoughts, our emotions and our behavior. That is why health can be described in terms of excellent physical, mental and emotional condition. Health is just not an absence of disease but for good health an equilibrium of all these factors is absolutely necessary.

The essential condition for mental health is synchronization of thoughts, emotions and deeds. A conflict between these three can upset our mental balance. What happens when this balance is disturbed? It will affect our day-to-day life, our thoughts are confused, we tend to overthink, we are unable to act, unable to take decisions, it affects our behavior, stress increases, we become uneasy. Our emotional condition is also affected by this stress, we become anxious and this leads to a state of confusion. It also results in fear and depression affecting our behavior. Inertia sets in and there is no motivation or energy for doing anything.

Mental health is important because it has serious repercussions on our life. It causes us to become inefficient, weakens us in every way affecting our studies, work as well as our relationships. That is why it is important to have awareness and understanding of mental health. We must not ignore or hide mental problems. It is necessary to have information and be sensitive to mental health issues. Because the key to mental balance is in our hands, it is to our advantage to be aware of it. What is going on in our minds, what types of thoughts are we thinking. Are these thoughts negative, are they becoming defeatist, are they causing confusion, palpitations, perspiration and therefore affecting our body. If that is happening it is a cause for worry. At such times it is necessary to confide in our family, friends or relatives. If these symptoms are more serious it is essential to seek medical help. At times, just talking to somebody also helps. Just as we take care of our physical health, it is just as important to look after our mental health and wellness.

This lockdown has affected everybody's mental health. But specifically what were the agitations in the minds of youth? What churning was going on in their minds? We tried to understand this through the recent issue of Shodhini magazine. We talked to Dr. Rajendra Barve, Mumbai-based Psychiatrist and tried to analyze the situation through questions and answers. Please go through these topics and convey your reactions to us. You can also share your stories of mental agitations with us if you wish. Because sharing can reduce your stress.

- Nitin Paranjape

Executive Director,
Abhivyakti Media for Development, Nashik

MY MENTAL HEALTH DURING CORONA

- Pratiksha Kalparaj, Jalgaon/Nashik

It can be said that the lockdown that began in March 2020 gave an unexpected twist to all our lives. It caused a huge upheaval in our minds and of our emotions. I had just completed my education and taken up my first job. At that time, this serious life-threatening (or more mentally debilitating) virus entered practically every sphere of life raising a question mark on the very existence of mankind.

In the initial stage of lockdown, everyone was tired from working, welcomed the enforced holiday. It was like a much needed break. For a typical newly-turned wage earner like me and scores of others getting paid for no work was like a dream come true. It was a rare opportunity indeed. But gradually, the fun and thrill were replaced by a sense of guilt. We were safely cocooned at home, whereas outside the condition of laborers, homeless, old people and children as shown in the media or actually seen was distressing.

On the one hand juggling work-from-home and home work (domestic chores) was taking its toll on girls like me and other women. But on the other hand it brought a semblance of pseudo equality in my house. Life was in full vacation mode with work distribution, playful environment, lots of conversations and entertainment. "Home" a happy, safe and a rightful haven for people was gradually acquiring the feel of a prison. And where once near and dear ones strove to make each other feel loved and welcome, a journey towards intolerance started imperceptibly in many a homes. It was a strange and unstable time which made us wonder if the knot of relationships was becoming tighter or coming undone. While this Corona time proved false all the principles, equations and philosophy of living life it did give some important insights. There was no reconciliation between our natural, basic needs and the wants of modern lifestyle. Suddenly a negative news item would cause us to introspect, leading only to defiant thoughtlessness. The mere thought of being happy, of life being bearable led to a lot of discomfort. Two years back having studied in some class at TISS (or probably trying to find solutions through discussions) ideas like poverty, struggle, livelihood, the risks and uncertainties involved, I was now actually getting to see them or in some way experiencing them. Should I help those people in need or remain safe and secure in my own cocoon? Should I watch out for myself and my people? What do I choose between relationships, selfishness and humanity? It had become difficult to make a conscious choice between these. I made small donations to people or organizations which help the needy as a way to assuage my feelings of guilt or grief. Amidst all this there were times when I realized that the systems we have put in place for ourselves were all useless and inefficient and the Corona virus which did not discriminate between money, prestige, caste, religion, region, or class was therefore great indeed.

During this mental agitation, Buddha and his Vipashanna was of huge help because at every step I could feel and agree with the one thing that "Life is uncertain". Everything is temporary, nothing is permanent. Life is unstable and uncertain. You can at times impart an illusion of stability but in this world there is nothing that is definite and eternal. That is a fact of life which I learned during the pandemic. Change is the only constant and it is indeed indeed the ultimate Law of Nature. I could now actually experience these principle

Writing this article on behalf of Abhivyakti today, to be able to put forth my emotions freely has made me feel happy. I also feel that we have accepted Covid, probably even defeated it and moved on. We have reached an important milestone and will no doubt reach the next one. What seemed impossible a few months back has been possible today. I have decided to move ahead with this perseverance, resilience and hope. As collateral damage, I have lost my job which had offered me some financial stability. Though this was a huge setback I am now moving ahead towards a new life with all the changes small as well as big. After a job to establish myself in business. To live life with a new perspective because there is much more to be done. I will live to fight another day.

Life is uncertainty. Whatever we can experience, do whatever good we can do, if possible search for the meaning of life is all that we can do. We don't know what the future holds, past is irrelevant, what we have is only the present moment. Let's live this moment, let's live in the present!!!

WORRIED ABOUT FUTURE ALL THROUGH LOCKDOWN

- Rohidas Charoskar, Village Sapte, Nashik

When everything was moving smoothly, the Corona virus spread everywhere and the fear of Corona -gripped the world. Along with other measures, lockdown was also imposed. Fifteen days' lockdown was extended to one month and now it is almost 7-8 months since the lockdown. Initially we were okay to sit at home but slowly we got tired. Before Corona we led a carefree life, we could roam about at will. We were free like a bird in the sky. Now it felt like a parrot locked up in a cage. Corona has snatched away the joy of living. The sound of my friends from college is no longer there. As if their mouths have been gagged and an invisible someone is shouting Corona, Corona and making life miserable. This has affected me mentally to a great extent. Normally, even though busy with college and studies I used to write poems and articles. But now even though there is nothing to do, I haven't been able to write a single poem.

I had big dreams for my future. I had carefully planned my studies. I was studying very hard. Just as I was planning to pass the NEET exam and to see my dream of becoming a professor come to fruition, during the last year of my college (M.A. Sociology) Corona pulled the brakes on my dreams. I felt ashamed to stay at home without doing anything. So, putting my dignity aside, in spite of being a post graduate student I accepted so-called menial jobs. From working in grape vineyards to making bricks. I could not concentrate on my studies. I was worried about my future and unfulfilled dreams. I was getting restless. I was going into depression in a big way. I had no work in hand. Government was promising jobs but the companies were not yet finalized. It had become difficult to get employment. Since I was without a job, I also thought of committing suicide. But I consoled myself that I was not the only one without a job. There are millions of highly educated unemployed youth like me. It is always better to fight than die.

I could not think of anything during lockdown. In this negative mental condition, I decided to get married. My parents were totally opposed to this decision. They thought since I was highly educated, I would get a government job somewhere. But under those circumstances government job was impossible. I thought I could get married with minimum expense. I reasoned that once the lockdown is lifted, I could get a job. But yet lockdown is not completely lifted. I still am without a job. I help my parents as much as possible in the fields. But at 26 years of age I am ashamed to be still dependent on my parents. I am still looking for a job. A happy and straightforward life has turned problematic. During this time life has changed a lot, no not changed, destroyed. But to get over this depression, I have to stand on my feet, lead a happy life, I have to fight for myself.

MENTAL HEALTH LOCKDOWN SOLUTION

- Shubham Dhande

I can't really say, life was smooth. Life has its ups and downs. Amidst these ups and downs, like an unexpected blow, Corona spread its tentacles of fear in such a way that shifting slightly in place could also be fatal. And then man stopped.....

Now that he had stopped, his body would get the rest which it needed so badly. But in the competitive world, he worked like clockwork so that he wouldn't lag behind. Sometimes to fulfill his dreams, sometimes just to survive. But during this lockdown, those in this running, those we were afraid to lose had also slowed down.

Thinking that if I also follow rules and stayed at home, this situation might resolve faster many now were busy trying to figure out what to do in this unexpected holidays. Those complaining you don't have time for us would also be with us, because now everyone had lots of time. Then someone took charge of the kitchen, someone organized games that all could play together, some did not leave their beds. Others spent their time with books, web series and movies.

But as time passed, the situation only got worse. With the hope of catching a bit of good news on TV, people switched on their TV sets only to be faced with disappointment, despair, worry and the fear of never escaping this virus. These questions were not faced by few people but everyone conveyed these questions to each other. Similar questions were being asked on the phone today by a friend. He was talking differently. "When lockdown was imposed, initially it was easy. It was good to spend time with the family, finishing pending tasks, doing time pass. But now as we watch and hear news about the lockdown being extended, there is restlessness and tension is increasing. This virus has arrived and clamped a lockdown on our life. It is waiting outside the door like a watchman. I had plans before this situation arose. But nothing materialized. Now that finally things were moving, Corona virus has stood like a barrier in our lives. When I sit quietly and hope that a way will open up, all the negative thoughts pop up in a queue in my mind. I don't know what to do. I called you because I thought you might tell me a story to stabilize my mind".

My friend was saying this on the phone, but the situation was the same everywhere. Just as it was important that our Corona report be negative, it was just as important that our thoughts stay positive during this period. Keeping this in mind, I told him, "Look here, my friend, whatever thoughts have given you tension today, might give me tension tomorrow and there are many more people who are in the grip of tension. Even though everything is at a standstill, the competition ground we were on, those ahead of us in the competition will remain ahead and those behind will start from that position. That is simple. But there may be some who are behind today, but will run twice as fast to cover the distance, but there may be some who are ahead today but may lag behind. All this depends on what we do during this Corona incarceration. Even if we cannot go out today we can still go inside and unlock our potential, skill for future glory.

LOCKDOWN IS TIME OF MENTAL AGITATIONS

- Shubhangi Bagul, Nashik

Suddenly an illness appears and a whole nation grinds to a halt. It was the first time we experienced it. We had heard a lot about epidemics until now but the Corona pandemic was the first one experienced by my generation and probably the last too.

I am from a rural village. I work in Nashik and at present reside in Nashik. When the lockdown started everything was shut, so there was no point in staying on in Nashik. I decided my village was better. Like everyone else, I too went off to my village. Initially, we could roam about in the village, so I felt a little free. It felt and was much better than staying cooped up in a closed room in the city. I had left the village as a child for education and now after working for some time I was happy to be back with my family. But I had to work from home. Initially, everybody would be working in the fields, so I could work in peace. But after sometime the work in the fields was done and everybody would be at home. I live in a joint family so all the children as well as adults would be at home. The house was always crowded and work actually grinded to a halt. The environment was not very conducive to work. Also, there were network issues in the village so my work and meetings schedule was disrupted. My job involves working with girls from villages. Because of the lockdown we could not go for fieldwork. And so our work plan also changed. Changes in work pattern meant talking to the girls on one solitary phone. The girls faced the same network issues that I did. At that time, we had started a research project. It was possible to contact the girls with the lone phone, but again there were network issues.

It was easier to work in a closed room in the city. To decorate the room to create that work environment, to keep fresh by drinking tea or coffee! Therefore, many people liked to work from home because one could work when time and mood permitted. But this was not possible in the village. To work in between doing domestic chores and that too amid all the crowd and confusion around. This led to a great loss of enthusiasm and energy and caused irritation. Things used to quieten down at night and I could work well at night. But then I had to leave the house to find network and stand in a small street. If I did that my relatives would say, "If you stand in the street at night and talk on the phone what will people say?" I had experienced people's opinion in this regard. But considering my work more important, I tried to avoid these issues. But it was not always possible to do it, which led to more irritation and stress. This started affecting my mental health. Then for the next few days it became very difficult to stay calm or distract my mind.

To top it all my parents decided I was at the right age for marriage. Many girls of my age in my village are already married. At present I am 25 years old and this is considered "overage" in my village. During lockdown my marriage became a hot issue and my mother's only agenda during this time was to get me to agree for marriage. Since I was at home she seized the opportunity and kept bringing up the topic in all our conversations. As a result, slowly but surely I started wondering if marriage was the only option left for me. Had I really become responsible enough person to get married? I became totally confused. Because I spent so much time with the family, I realized our thoughts didn't always match. There were a lot of arguments. Because I worked in the world outside,

At the time of writing this, I am back in the city and have joined my office. Now when I think back I realize how many mental agitations I have gone through in that time of lockdown and the effects are still with me. At that time, it was difficult to feel happy or hopeful. But at least I had some tools of communication, I had close relatives around me, I had a job. I know many people who had none of these during lockdown. So, I tried all the time to celebrate and be happy with what I have. But doing that too was difficult in those difficult times.

EFFECT OF LOCKDOWN ON MENTAL HEALTH OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN VILLAGES

- **Manisha Gangode, Kochargoan Village , Dindori, Nashik**

School and college exams were fast approaching. Teachers were scrambling to complete the syllabus. Summer had arrived. Mangoes had just started coming in the markets. Summer season in our village is wedding season. So, the womenfolk were busy making 'kurdaya', 'papads' etc. But before all this started, the Corona pandemic which had caused havoc worldwide and the consequent lockdown put an end to all these summer activities. Schools and colleges were closed. Initially, weddings were also canceled. The number of Corona patients in the city were on the rise. People from villages who had gone to the city for livelihood had returned.

This situation had affected everyone but its effect was more prominently seen in girls and women in the villages. More importantly, the women were aware that Corona was a serious illness and its symptoms are cough and pain in the throat. But apart from this they could not get any more information. That is because apart from farm work, domestic chores and chatting with neighbors they did not know or do much else. They did not have mobile phones, so the information had no way of reaching them. There was a TV set at home but during those days they had just started showing Ramayan. Ramayan was a favorite serial among women. Which reminds me, when Ramayan was telecast women started keeping a fast for the Corona pandemic to go away. On Ram Navami, the entire village lit lamps at the entrance to their houses. When I told my mother and other women in the village that it was a superstition and won't drive away Corona, they all laughed at me. If that was so, would the government have aired only Ramayan on all the channels? I had no reply to that. They did not have the mental capacity to understand this situation. Not only that but all the rumors had taken such hold on them that they could not even think beyond all this. Somebody would show them a fake 'TikTok' video at home and they would believe it. There was no way of checking whether the video was genuine or fake. This caused more fear in their minds. This affected their mental health.

All the people who had gone to the city for employment had returned home. Schools were closed. The children were at home. So the whole day the women were busy cooking, washing clothes and utensils. Additionally, they had to work in the fields too. After working the whole day in the fields, they had to come home and cook and do other chores. Everyday was the same. They did not get time for themselves, so their irritation increased. But that could be seen on their faces or in their behavior only in a small way. Moreover, in some houses, the husbands used to come home drunk and then there would be fights about money and there being no food at home. They could not go to Nashik as laborers. There was no work at home so they spent their days gambling. Those girls and women who used to work as laborers were now at home. When they went out for work, they used to go in groups, so they could talk and meet each other. Now that there was no work, they were all at home. There was no money in the house, no food to eat. On top of that they could not meet their friends or share their problems with them. In fact, they could tell no one and this troubled them a lot.

Weddings were canceled initially but when it was announced that weddings could be conducted with a small number of people; the girls were married in such a way that even the neighbors were not aware of the ceremony having taken place in their neighborhood. Some girls were married against their will while others who were underage or minors were also married off. Because of this, not only the girls who were married suffered but those who were at home also suffered. I was afraid, I would be married off too. Every morning when I woke up, I would worry that someone would get a marriage proposal for me.

MY BANGLADESH LOCKDOWN

- Priyanka Akkar, Nashik

“Why Bangladesh?” “It is those people’s country. It is not safe for us”. When I accepted a job with an organization called VSO to work in Bangladesh, this was the reaction of most people. No one from my family had ever traveled abroad and definitely not for a whole year. From working in the social sector to going to Bangladesh nobody had done these things at the start of their career. My family is mostly in business and are shop owners. Now girls have started putting down the condition to be allowed to work after marriage, but they are few in number. Under these circumstances, everyone thought I was insane to have chosen such an uncertain field. I was looked at in this perspective.

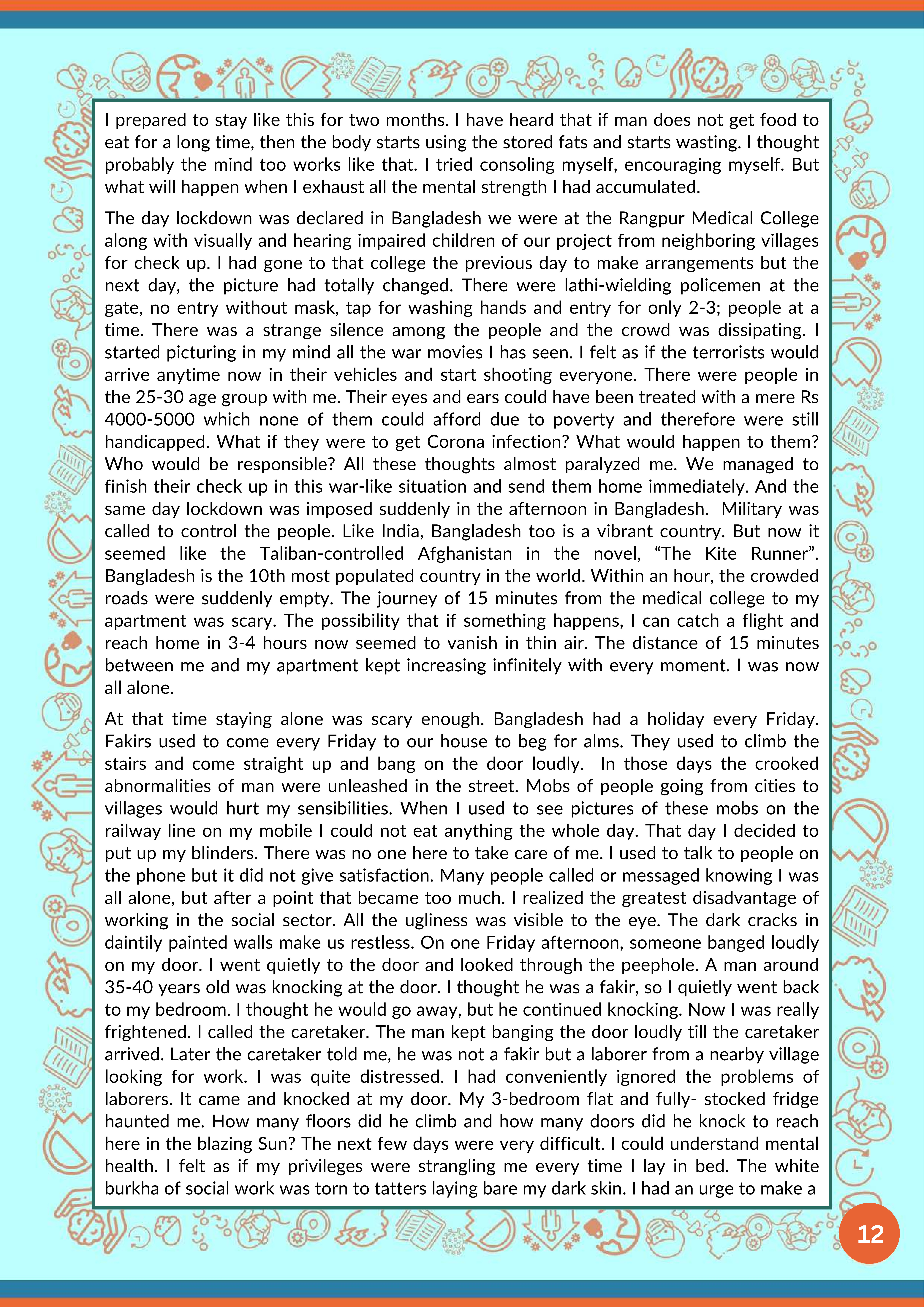
Normally, there is not much mentioned about Bangladesh in our news. But just before my departure that is in December-January the citizenship agitations started and there were discussions about Bangladeshi refugees everywhere. At such times going there was not immense bravery but extreme stupidity according to all people but my parents. I literally didn’t know anyone in Bangladesh. When my departure was finalized some friends gave me phone numbers of people they knew there. I was a little anxious that I didn’t know anyone there but consoled myself that if anything were to happen I could catch a flight from Dhaka and reach India in 3-4 hours. I was not too far from my people.

After I reached Bangladesh, it took a lot of time for my work to start. In the beginning, I spent my time reading, getting to know people and my surroundings. There were too many thoughts in my mind which had no outlet. This was all before lockdown. For me the uncertainty had started in February itself.

There was a girl called Federica from Italy staying with me. We were building bridges of friendship discussing our countries, our culture, our thoughts. At times somebody would talk about the havoc created by a virus called Corona in China. Usually I liked to be by myself, but I started enjoying Federica’s company and thus began my experience of living in a foreign country.

Corona having left the shores of China had started invading other countries. When it started spreading in Italy, Federica became very uneasy. Soon enough one country after another started falling prey to the Corona virus. When Italy warned of lockdown, Federica decided to go home and she left that evening! Just as I was settling down, Federica’s sudden departure caused me a lot of distress. The day she left we found the footprints of an unknown person in our house. We realized somebody had come to our house in our absence. We realized somebody other than us also has the keys to our house. And thus with these unknown footprints in the house began my journey of living alone. I had lived alone in Nashik though I had a family in Nashik itself. So I was not scared of living by myself till I found those unknown footprints in the house.

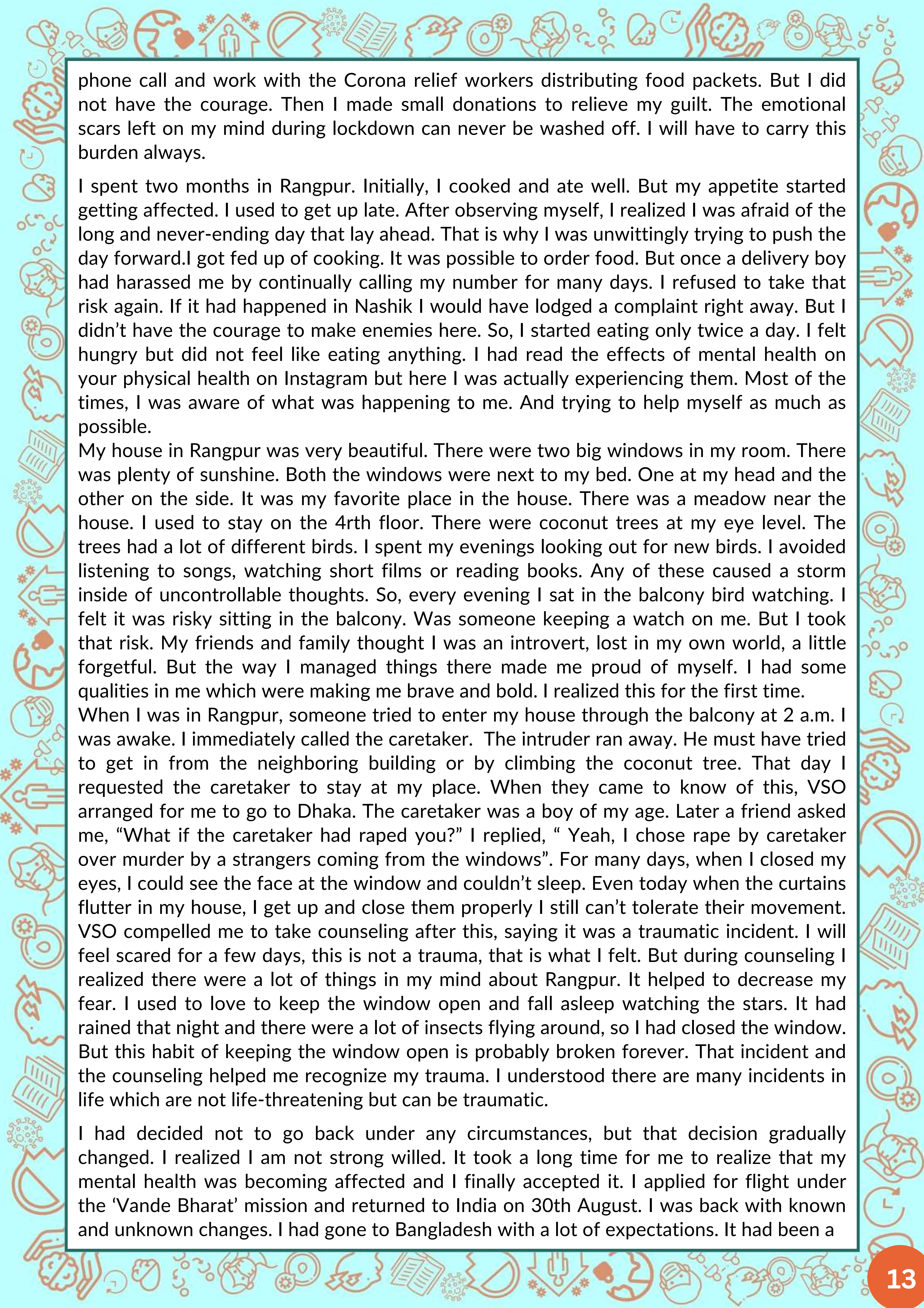
Slowly, Corona started spreading in India too and a lockdown was declared in India. I had the option of returning to India and my family virtually begged me to come back but I decided to stay on in Bangladesh. Though there was lockdown in India, there was no talk of one in Bangladesh. So there was some hope. But eventually, Bangladesh too declared a lockdown and my fieldwork which had just started went to work-from-home category.



I prepared to stay like this for two months. I have heard that if man does not get food to eat for a long time, then the body starts using the stored fats and starts wasting. I thought probably the mind too works like that. I tried consoling myself, encouraging myself. But what will happen when I exhaust all the mental strength I had accumulated.

The day lockdown was declared in Bangladesh we were at the Rangpur Medical College along with visually and hearing impaired children of our project from neighboring villages for check up. I had gone to that college the previous day to make arrangements but the next day, the picture had totally changed. There were lathi-wielding policemen at the gate, no entry without mask, tap for washing hands and entry for only 2-3; people at a time. There was a strange silence among the people and the crowd was dissipating. I started picturing in my mind all the war movies I has seen. I felt as if the terrorists would arrive anytime now in their vehicles and start shooting everyone. There were people in the 25-30 age group with me. Their eyes and ears could have been treated with a mere Rs 4000-5000 which none of them could afford due to poverty and therefore were still handicapped. What if they were to get Corona infection? What would happen to them? Who would be responsible? All these thoughts almost paralyzed me. We managed to finish their check up in this war-like situation and send them home immediately. And the same day lockdown was imposed suddenly in the afternoon in Bangladesh. Military was called to control the people. Like India, Bangladesh too is a vibrant country. But now it seemed like the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in the novel, "The Kite Runner". Bangladesh is the 10th most populated country in the world. Within an hour, the crowded roads were suddenly empty. The journey of 15 minutes from the medical college to my apartment was scary. The possibility that if something happens, I can catch a flight and reach home in 3-4 hours now seemed to vanish in thin air. The distance of 15 minutes between me and my apartment kept increasing infinitely with every moment. I was now all alone.

At that time staying alone was scary enough. Bangladesh had a holiday every Friday. Fakirs used to come every Friday to our house to beg for alms. They used to climb the stairs and come straight up and bang on the door loudly. In those days the crooked abnormalities of man were unleashed in the street. Mobs of people going from cities to villages would hurt my sensibilities. When I used to see pictures of these mobs on the railway line on my mobile I could not eat anything the whole day. That day I decided to put up my blinders. There was no one here to take care of me. I used to talk to people on the phone but it did not give satisfaction. Many people called or messaged knowing I was all alone, but after a point that became too much. I realized the greatest disadvantage of working in the social sector. All the ugliness was visible to the eye. The dark cracks in daintily painted walls make us restless. On one Friday afternoon, someone banged loudly on my door. I went quietly to the door and looked through the peephole. A man around 35-40 years old was knocking at the door. I thought he was a fakir, so I quietly went back to my bedroom. I thought he would go away, but he continued knocking. Now I was really frightened. I called the caretaker. The man kept banging the door loudly till the caretaker arrived. Later the caretaker told me, he was not a fakir but a laborer from a nearby village looking for work. I was quite distressed. I had conveniently ignored the problems of laborers. It came and knocked at my door. My 3-bedroom flat and fully- stocked fridge haunted me. How many floors did he climb and how many doors did he knock to reach here in the blazing Sun? The next few days were very difficult. I could understand mental health. I felt as if my privileges were strangling me every time I lay in bed. The white burkha of social work was torn to tatters laying bare my dark skin. I had an urge to make a



phone call and work with the Corona relief workers distributing food packets. But I did not have the courage. Then I made small donations to relieve my guilt. The emotional scars left on my mind during lockdown can never be washed off. I will have to carry this burden always.

I spent two months in Rangpur. Initially, I cooked and ate well. But my appetite started getting affected. I used to get up late. After observing myself, I realized I was afraid of the long and never-ending day that lay ahead. That is why I was unwittingly trying to push the day forward. I got fed up of cooking. It was possible to order food. But once a delivery boy had harassed me by continually calling my number for many days. I refused to take that risk again. If it had happened in Nashik I would have lodged a complaint right away. But I didn't have the courage to make enemies here. So, I started eating only twice a day. I felt hungry but did not feel like eating anything. I had read the effects of mental health on your physical health on Instagram but here I was actually experiencing them. Most of the times, I was aware of what was happening to me. And trying to help myself as much as possible.

My house in Rangpur was very beautiful. There were two big windows in my room. There was plenty of sunshine. Both the windows were next to my bed. One at my head and the other on the side. It was my favorite place in the house. There was a meadow near the house. I used to stay on the 4th floor. There were coconut trees at my eye level. The trees had a lot of different birds. I spent my evenings looking out for new birds. I avoided listening to songs, watching short films or reading books. Any of these caused a storm inside of uncontrollable thoughts. So, every evening I sat in the balcony bird watching. I felt it was risky sitting in the balcony. Was someone keeping a watch on me. But I took that risk. My friends and family thought I was an introvert, lost in my own world, a little forgetful. But the way I managed things there made me proud of myself. I had some qualities in me which were making me brave and bold. I realized this for the first time.

When I was in Rangpur, someone tried to enter my house through the balcony at 2 a.m. I was awake. I immediately called the caretaker. The intruder ran away. He must have tried to get in from the neighboring building or by climbing the coconut tree. That day I requested the caretaker to stay at my place. When they came to know of this, VSO arranged for me to go to Dhaka. The caretaker was a boy of my age. Later a friend asked me, "What if the caretaker had raped you?" I replied, "Yeah, I chose rape by caretaker over murder by a strangers coming from the windows". For many days, when I closed my eyes, I could see the face at the window and couldn't sleep. Even today when the curtains flutter in my house, I get up and close them properly I still can't tolerate their movement. VSO compelled me to take counseling after this, saying it was a traumatic incident. I will feel scared for a few days, this is not a trauma, that is what I felt. But during counseling I realized there were a lot of things in my mind about Rangpur. It helped to decrease my fear. I used to love to keep the window open and fall asleep watching the stars. It had rained that night and there were a lot of insects flying around, so I had closed the window. But this habit of keeping the window open is probably broken forever. That incident and the counseling helped me recognize my trauma. I understood there are many incidents in life which are not life-threatening but can be traumatic.

I had decided not to go back under any circumstances, but that decision gradually changed. I realized I am not strong willed. It took a long time for me to realize that my mental health was becoming affected and I finally accepted it. I applied for flight under the 'Vande Bharat' mission and returned to India on 30th August. I was back with known and unknown changes. I had gone to Bangladesh with a lot of expectations. It had been a

huge step for me. I had to make it a success any which way.

who has left their house must have experienced what I did in Bangladesh one way or another. I have described those incidents which had unexpected effects on my mental status. Apart from these there were happy incidents too. Needless to say there were happier incidents than bad ones.

The loss caused by lockdown can never be compensated, whether physical, financial or mental. But during my journey, the mental repercussions were a big lesson for me. When I was there, I thought I was handling things so well, Rangpur is beautiful, my house is beautiful, but now when I remember Rangpur, I feel dejected. Some unidentified thoughts of unknown shape and color cause a lot of distress. But they do come to mind along with memories of Rangpur.

But I went to Bangladesh, lived there under those circumstances, met people, savored the chicken, the biryani, the 'Ilish macher', the beef seekh kababs, the rivers, the Azaan, the language, Dhaka, Rangpur and the "I" that I met give me a lot of satisfaction. I do not regret going to Bangladesh for a moment, I am happy I went. If there was no lockdown, probably my experience would have been different. But none of these can ever make me talk bad about Bangladesh. I have made friends for life there.

FONT SIZE OF MENTAL PROBLEMS HAS INCREASED

- Dr. Rajendra Barve, Mumbai

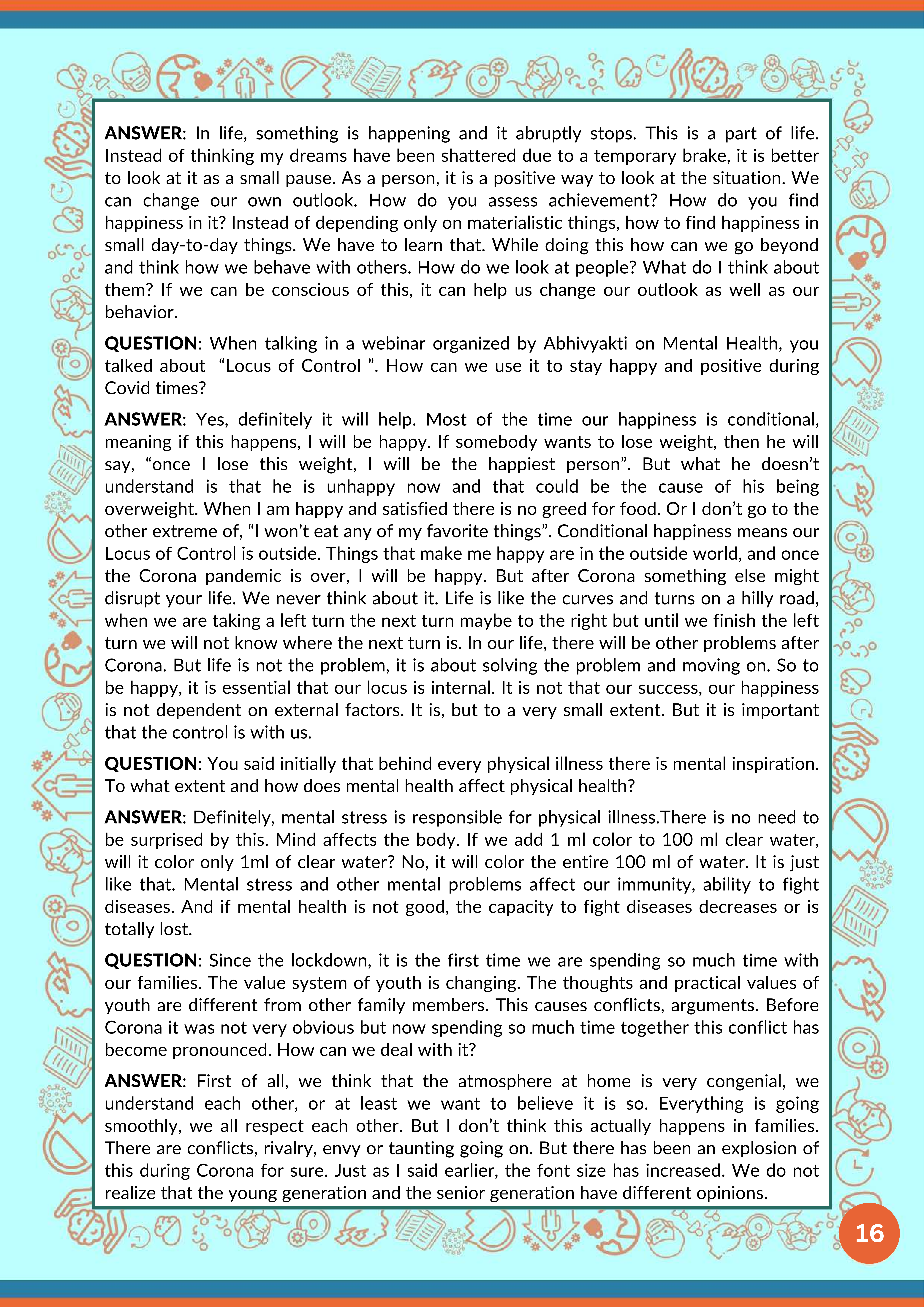
After listening to mental health stories of youth during and after lockdown, we talked to Dr. Rajendra Barve, consulting Psychiatrist and Abhivyakti's trustee. Dr. Barve has been active in mental health sector, talking to people, increasing awareness about mental health and working with people for many years. He explains how to deal with these problems.

QUESTION: What can you tell us about the disrupted mental balance of youth during lockdown? What are your observations?

ANSWER: It is a fact that Corona has changed the mindset or increased mental stress. But before Corona our mental health was excellent and now it suddenly deteriorated is also not true. Jokingly, I like to say that the font size of mental health before Corona was 10, 12, 13 and now it is 48, 50, 60. Not only that but it now comes in Bold and Italics. But one good thing that has been highlighted is that people have become aware that whether it is Covid or any other disease, every physical illness has a mental inspiration or mental illness or mental worry.

At present, schools and colleges are shut. Consequently, classes are held online. Work from home has started. This was seen only in the IT sector. Most people say the workload has increased. Before this in IT industry 80% of the work was done from home. Today 100% is done from home. These days, the young generation is venturing into new fields such as hospitality, hotel management and event management. It has and still is affecting their business as well as their education. Online education has increased. How do you study online? How to teach online? There are so many questions before us. Also, it's taking a lot more time for young people to settle down. That is causing a different type of stress. When youth go to college, they are learning a lot through chatting with friends or having fun with their friends. They learn to handle themselves, handle their friends. They also learn many things from peer groups. If they don't understand what the teacher teaches, a friend says, "do it like this, not like that" and things become easier. This peer-learning process has now come to a stop. This has created difficulties in education. Because of work from home, our life has become unilateral. Fun times at work, conversations while having tea, people talking while working, listening to opinions, dialogues all this is over. So getting along with people, learning something from them, and enjoying the interactions is a very important part of our lives. We were not aware of this before Covid. We call this social learning. But these changing circumstances is not only affecting the youth but also people above 70 years. They can't leave the house. There is nothing to entertain them all day. Same programs on television. All this leads to loneliness and affects mental well being.

QUESTION: For young people who are going through a transitory phase like from education to employment or marriage etc. the lockdown has created a huge block. There is only uncertainty ahead. Under these circumstances how does one stay positive? What are your suggestions?



ANSWER: In life, something is happening and it abruptly stops. This is a part of life. Instead of thinking my dreams have been shattered due to a temporary brake, it is better to look at it as a small pause. As a person, it is a positive way to look at the situation. We can change our own outlook. How do you assess achievement? How do you find happiness in it? Instead of depending only on materialistic things, how to find happiness in small day-to-day things. We have to learn that. While doing this how can we go beyond and think how we behave with others. How do we look at people? What do I think about them? If we can be conscious of this, it can help us change our outlook as well as our behavior.

QUESTION: When talking in a webinar organized by Abhivyakti on Mental Health, you talked about “Locus of Control”. How can we use it to stay happy and positive during Covid times?

ANSWER: Yes, definitely it will help. Most of the time our happiness is conditional, meaning if this happens, I will be happy. If somebody wants to lose weight, then he will say, “once I lose this weight, I will be the happiest person”. But what he doesn’t understand is that he is unhappy now and that could be the cause of his being overweight. When I am happy and satisfied there is no greed for food. Or I don’t go to the other extreme of, “I won’t eat any of my favorite things”. Conditional happiness means our Locus of Control is outside. Things that make me happy are in the outside world, and once the Corona pandemic is over, I will be happy. But after Corona something else might disrupt your life. We never think about it. Life is like the curves and turns on a hilly road, when we are taking a left turn the next turn maybe to the right but until we finish the left turn we will not know where the next turn is. In our life, there will be other problems after Corona. But life is not the problem, it is about solving the problem and moving on. So to be happy, it is essential that our locus is internal. It is not that our success, our happiness is not dependent on external factors. It is, but to a very small extent. But it is important that the control is with us.

QUESTION: You said initially that behind every physical illness there is mental inspiration. To what extent and how does mental health affect physical health?

ANSWER: Definitely, mental stress is responsible for physical illness. There is no need to be surprised by this. Mind affects the body. If we add 1 ml color to 100 ml clear water, will it color only 1ml of clear water? No, it will color the entire 100 ml of water. It is just like that. Mental stress and other mental problems affect our immunity, ability to fight diseases. And if mental health is not good, the capacity to fight diseases decreases or is totally lost.

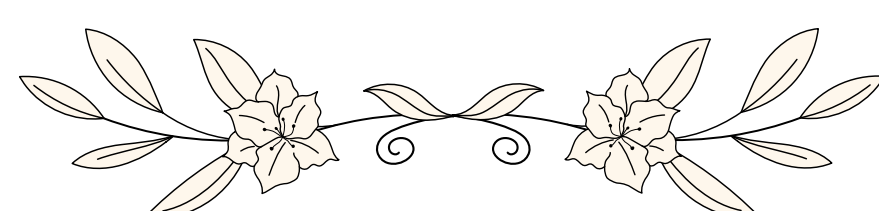
QUESTION: Since the lockdown, it is the first time we are spending so much time with our families. The value system of youth is changing. The thoughts and practical values of youth are different from other family members. This causes conflicts, arguments. Before Corona it was not very obvious but now spending so much time together this conflict has become pronounced. How can we deal with it?

ANSWER: First of all, we think that the atmosphere at home is very congenial, we understand each other, or at least we want to believe it is so. Everything is going smoothly, we all respect each other. But I don’t think this actually happens in families. There are conflicts, rivalry, envy or taunting going on. But there has been an explosion of this during Corona for sure. Just as I said earlier, the font size has increased. We do not realize that the young generation and the senior generation have different opinions.

We confuse between difference and right/wrong. If we start applying parameters to decide if something is right or wrong, then we end up judging every little thing. We become judgmental. Family issues are not sorted by passing judgment on who is right and who is wrong. They may be sorted in court, but in courts we get judgment not justice. Because court is different, family is different. So, we need to find where each of our happiness lies. If my saying something can hurt another person, how should I talk? That is also important. It does not mean one should behave very diplomatically. We can say whatever we need to say either softly or angrily. It is very simple. I can speak in different ways, but what matters is my tone, the attitude with which I speak. We call it non-violent communication, where the aim of the conversation is to understand each other. My thoughts, my emotions should reach the other person, that is the goal.

QUESTION: In the initial stages of lockdown, suddenly there was no contact with people. A life lived amidst crowds and surrounded by people was limited to a house. Under these circumstances almost all young people felt lonely. We are not in the habit of conversing with ourselves. How can we increase this dialogue with self? How can we learn to love ourselves? Can loving self be a way of getting rid of our loneliness?

ANSWER: We are surrounded by people; we talk to people but most of the time our talking is useless. Nothing comes from it. We keep repeating the same thing over and over again. I feel there is no harm in talking to oneself. We have to maintain a dialogue. Dialogue with self is indeed a dialogue with others. What we talk to ourselves is reflected in the other person talking. We all have a feature of talking to ourselves, of understanding self, of knowing oneself. Once during a conversation at home, I said at age 68 I am getting to know myself anew. How can I remain self-dependent? If not self reliant at least understanding myself, or getting to know myself to remove any doubts or misunderstandings. I realized I have the capacity to do this. If I can do it at this age, young people should definitely do it. Today, young people really need it. We normally indulge in so much loose talk. Always teasing or making fun of each other, talking about irrelevant stuff, these things have no value. If this is conversation, it is better to keep quiet. I firmly believe that each of your dialogue must be meaningful.



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