

Looking Back: Life trapped in a Pandemic

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Masks, respiratory ailments, deaths. People going stir-crazy in isolated rooms. It is like all your nightmares have been bundled in an episode of ten months long T.V. series where everything is in a halt.

When I was in third standard, I would come to the dining room and tell my mother or grandmother “I don’t want to go to school today”. My grandmother always told me “be careful what you wish for, God works in mysterious ways and the universe is listening to everything we are saying now”. I always laughed it off, I know it was true, but I knew I could handle whatever God, or the universe threw at me that would make me not able to attend class. Or I thought I did anyway.

22nd March, 2020. The last day of our University, the last day of our gatherings in the Indian Coffee House, the last day of getting disgusted about one another’s stupid jokes, the last day of our friendly cricket matches, the last day for the world to get into a busy, clumsy day as well, before the lockdown due to the COVID-19. I remember that night before the dawn of our ‘new-normal’ morning. It was as if, the world had plunged into an eerie silence, as if time had stopped, as if we all were holding our breath. We knew something bad is going to happen but nobody presumed that the pandemic would get this worse.

I had seen my fan turn and turn hundred times a day. I have stared at the same blank, grey wall for time immemorial. I woke up in the same tender bed that I have had since four years. And I had seen the same people, my family, for days on end. This cannot be real. It was everything but real. It was like; life has been paused and put into a never-ending continuum of time. University was not a place we could go; class is just an awkward video chat over our tablet. We had to be careful about what we eat and drink and use - but was not it always like that? Did we ever see our friends in real life? Did we ever touch a pen or pencil? Did we ever go to the University? The remnants of another universe were around me, but that world felt so different. It was nice in some ways, but terrifying in others. Maybe my now is the future for others. Am I

even making sense anymore? Maybe the leftovers of that ‘new world’ have changed me. Or maybe this is the time to utter the immortal lines of Act V, v of *Macbeth*:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!¹ (V, v)

27th January, 2021. I am writing this and when I look back it feels like I was living through something big, so big that it fills up the outside air like thick syrup. Every once and awhile, a little seeps in and you get the vision of that bygone time just like Harry Potter got the vision of Lord Voldemort. I could die out there, my loved ones could die. It is hard to forget what came before.

After all these things we cannot afford to lose hope. After witnessing people dying all over the world, the time can only get better. Perhaps aptly expressed by Roy when she states,

What is this thing that has happened to us? It’s a virus, yes. In and of itself it holds no moral brief. But it is definitely more than a virus. Some believe It is God’s way of bringing us to our senses, others that It is a Chinese conspiracy to take over the world. Whatever it is, Corona virus has made the mighty Neel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth longing for a return to normality, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists and in the midst of this terrible despair it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew, this one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can chose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our databanks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth*, (India: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly with little luggage, ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.²

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² Arundhati Roy, *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction* (India: Penguin, 2020) 214.