

# Soulidarity



Issue 1: 2021

## Conundrum Hour

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## From the Team



Somdatta Chattopadhyay

Dear Readers,

**Soulidarity** welcomes you to its first issue of the newsletter from Mira Centre for Innovation.

The endeavour at Soulidarity is to create an inclusive platform for students, scholars, professionals and practitioners from the diverse yet deeply interwoven fields of Mental Health, Arts, and Education to voice their thoughts and works. Ours is a bilingual newsletter- curated in the hope of capturing the true spirit and essence of the various narratives in entirety. Through this eclectic amalgamation of perspectives, we look forward to cultivating and nurturing qualities of compassion, sensitivity and kindness in daily living. Our immediate past has witnessed the humongous challenges of the COVID situation, and in this issue, we focus on its threats and victories, both as a collective and on the individual level.

### *From our Beloved Kaveri-di...*

*It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the "Soulidarity" team on the publication of its inaugural issue. This bi-lingual edition that draws people from diverse fields, and age groups, has not come a moment too soon! I am sure that the narratives and self-expressions emanating from the present pandemic crisis, will not only have a cathartic effect on both the writer and the reader, but will also bind everyone together in a much-needed spirit of 'Soulidarity'!*

*Wishing you the very best in your endeavour,*

**Kaveri Dutt**  
**Director, Loreto Education Board**

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### Online Therapy: Is it a boon or bane for therapists

*Smita Gauthi*

*Smita Gauthi - PhD, training psychoanalyst, practicing since the last 22 years, based in Ahmedabad Gujarat, India*

Telephonic or online webcam-based therapy was always an option, but it was generally used by patients living far away from therapy centres without any access to transportation, terminally ill patients, pregnant women, or mothers of newborn children.

In the last 18 months, those who never had any mental health issues are now traumatized from having had COVID themselves or losing someone they loved to the virus. Mental health issues mushroomed in different directions and the collective psyche of humankind suffered immensely. Because of the pandemic, all healthcare institutions were forced to put physical distancing rules in place. Those who could visit therapy centres before the pandemic had to resort to online therapy. Even if face-to-face therapy was available, traveling to these centres and waiting in crowds were risky. This left online video calls as the only mode to access therapy. Moreover, because people were already not able to visit their loved ones, online therapy became a way to get emotional support as well as deal with loneliness.

#### **When teletherapy works well...**

When availing counselling services over the phone or video calls, the client can avoid traveling and the resulting disruption to their lives. They also save time and money as there is no commute required to access therapy benefits; video/phone calls happen from the comfort of the client's home. On the flip side, having a physical space dedicated to therapy may also help clients get in the mode of receiving therapy as it becomes a safe space for them to share and receive treatment. Clients have to take it upon themselves to arrange this space when they are at home.

Teletherapy isn't limited to phone or video calls. Asynchronous Messaging Therapy is also an option. It is just like chatting over the phone - a type of communication that many in the modern generation are so accustomed to. It introduces the concept of mental health care to so many new people.

A study by [Reynolds and collaborators in 2013](#)<sup>1</sup> compared online therapy with face-to-face therapy across several factors. The SEQ (Session Evaluation Questionnaire) scores from therapists and clients in a text therapy setting were better than corresponding SEQ scores for face-to-face therapy, except for Arousal scores. The ARM (Agnew Relationship Measure) scores were also comparable for both modes.

In another [study from 2013](#)<sup>2</sup> conducted at the University of Zurich, six therapists treated 62 patients with symptoms of moderate depression. They were randomly assigned any of the two therapy modes - face-to-face or online. One of the lead authors of the study, Professor Andreas Maercker, said "Our study is evidence that psychotherapeutic services on the internet are an effective supplement to therapeutic care"

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In a 2014 study by Jones and collaborators<sup>3</sup>, college students in 2 universities underwent a Healthy Body Image programme to screen them for eating disorders. Those who were found to need a higher level of care for their eating disorders were more likely to seek out deeper interventions after going through a text therapy program. Megan Jones, PsyD and Author of this study said, "It can be a nice first step in treatment for someone who needs more intensive therapy."

If clients of any age are hesitant in seeking therapy, they can start small by scheduling an online session with a therapist of their choice. It challenges the perception of therapy "being too hard" because the variable of spending time and money on the commute is eliminated. If things go well on the first few chat sessions, clients can graduate to more personal settings such as a video call or even a face-to-face session. Another advantage of teletherapy is access to remote therapy. If a therapist suits a client's needs but they are in different cities, they can continue consulting over video calls and continue reaping the benefits for as long as possible.

### **Why teletherapy might not be all rainbows and butterflies...**

Some therapists might not feel comfortable in online therapy settings and some patients might need more help than what online therapy can provide. On a therapy video call, therapists often cannot see the full body language of the patient. Their judgment of the patient's mental state is based squarely on their facial expressions and upper body in general. Often patients might not be comfortable turning on the camera. When in the text therapy session, none of this is possible and there is an additional risk of patients suspending the session midway without any clear intimation.

There needs to be a solid protocol covering nuances of various situations in which the patient is suicidal or wants to engage in self-harm. We know that many psychological conditions impair patients' self-awareness, making it hard for therapists to accurately gauge their patients' mental state. There could also be situations where therapists are exposed to potential violations of federal and state laws due to online therapy start-ups' risky engagement model and their unclear practices.

Online therapy suffices for individuals who mostly have "external" issues to resolve but when it comes to core personality issues, the client needs to "act out" their aggressive/hostile/faulty behaviour pattern in a therapeutic setting. The client needs to "experience" the therapist in a non-judgmental, uncontaminated response. This is called "experiential learning" which is essential to unlearn the faulty behaviour.

An emotional problem needs to be worked out emotionally, intellectualization is not the solution. Such deep work has limitations in online therapy settings.

### **Online therapy is a coin with two sides...**

Today, going to a therapist is normalized just the same as going to a doctor for the common cold. The stigma has reduced to such an extent that people of all professions and positions in society - whether actors, politicians, or other public personalities - are open to using therapy as an option to improve their mental health. Governments are supporting therapy in different ways as well.

COVID exacerbated mental health issues in our population and simultaneously forced us to use online therapy as it was the only option to not expose ourselves to the virus while seeking support from a therapist. On one hand, online therapy is a convenient way to access therapy. It has reminded a lot of people about the importance of mental health. Even those with minor anxiety issues due to social isolation (or any other issues) are now able to consider online psychological intervention as an option.

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## Love in the time of Corona

*Debasish Sen Sharma*

*Debasish Sen Sharma - filmmaker, theatre director and academician*

There was a sudden blink on my phone. I was not very alert and hence took some time to check it. The pdf I downloaded from my mail box was my RTPCR Test Report which confirmed that I was Covid Positive. Days which followed were indeed 'the best of our times, and the worst of our times', with no pun intended. I still remember the date: 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2021. Just a day before the Election Results of the Bengal Assembly were to be declared. Why do I mention this date? It is because this year's West Bengal State Assembly elections were a nerve cracking competition between two political powers, and both of them were smelling victory and tension together. It was, melodramatic, verbose and spectacular. Being born and raised in a politically vibrant atmosphere, the day of declaring the election results had always been an important day; it was almost like an unofficial 'bandh' with everything opened outside, friends gathering, debating about each other's political preferences, surfing television channels, calling people in thirst of some latest scoop, and the list goes on. It was a Sunday and I was waiting for this celebration to begin, this time with more interest than ever before. But then, I was locked down – in my room, cut off from everything, everyone.

Like double jeopardy, it seemed to be worsening the sense of isolation. When the Great Pandemic hit the world last year, we were all locked in our own homes. Now when this entire idea of 'home' got squeezed to a single room, it was really uncanny and weird. I want to compare these two 'forced lockdowns' in my own way, through my experience and try to share my personal strategies of dealing with them. Last year, with the announcement of the lockdown, we experienced different kinds of emotions. It came as a form of entertainment initially, gradually turning into a sense of claustrophobia, loneliness and helplessness, and we eventually adapted to the situation, while equipping ourselves with the use of technology, finding a way to connect to the world outside.

Why was it more difficult this time?

Yes, the physical health really mattered this time. The excruciating body ache along with high fever almost made me immobile. My entire family was Covid-struck, including my old parents and 9-year-old niece and each one of them were isolated in their respective rooms. For the first few days, I would feel really cut off from the outside world. I stopped taking calls and browsing through social media as they were flooded with news of rising Covid cases only. This was much more depressing than this isolation and Covid. The 'Covid news' overpowered the Covid symptoms. Then there was the intermittent wailing of passing ambulances! As I stay beside the Eastern Bypass connector, there was hardly any night when I did not suddenly wake up to these sounds. My fever and oxygen levels were moving in an inversely proportional rate. At this very juncture, I tried to find answers to a few important questions in life.

"Why am I feeling isolated? Am I really isolated? Am I lonely?"

This led me to address the basic difference between loneliness and isolation. I realized that loneliness is nuanced and is different for everyone. While isolation is more quantitative and objective loneliness is a feeling. and because it is a feeling, it varies widely. More than this real, physical isolation, the loneliness I felt was a result of the 'sense of isolation' which was building up in our heads, mostly self-constructed or manufactured. I paused for a moment and looked back to reflect on myself a couple of weeks back. With the covid cases rising during that period, it was an absolute mayhem

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everywhere and the medical system was almost on the verge of collapse. The civic society came forward voluntarily and took responsibilities to help people in crisis. I was playing a very small part in that network, where I could use my personal connections to build a support system for the distressed and in need. So, I was far from being socially isolated even a couple of days back. Then, how on the earth may have happened which made a sudden physical isolation became such a big issue in my life!

I got back to social media and started my work once again. And trust me, it worked like magic! There must be many scholarly articles on the influence of internet on our behavior, though researches show polarized results. On one hand people say that internet use can lead to social isolation and other forms of psychological disorders, like depression and loneliness, while on the other hand there are those who believe that the Internet is a new and better medium for enabling various forms of communication and social relations.

I took resort to the second one, and for the first time I realized the importance of the 'Smart Phone' as a gadget for helping with loneliness, depression and the 'sense of isolation'. The moment I use the term 'social media', I realize that its most important function is to help people socialize. It is very important to make optimum use of it. As a Covid warrior, that was my first step – to

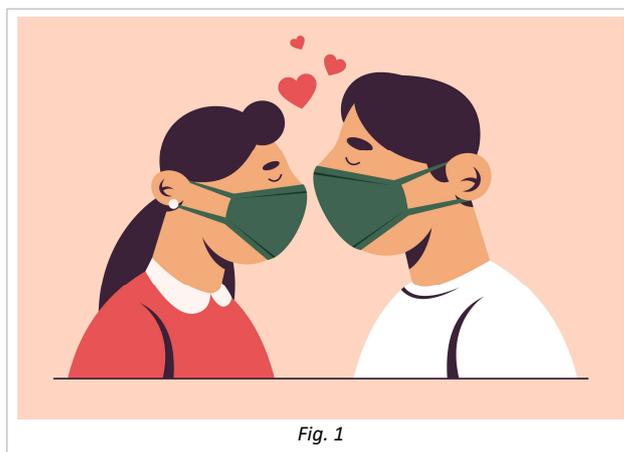


Fig. 1

be part of a collective, a virtual collective primarily and then focus on strength mapping and capacity building, so that when it comes to voluntary services you have a strong database of people to connect with for Oxygen cylinders, RTPCR tests or Ambulance services in the quickest time even at odd hours. This semi-utopian parallel social universe was made possible just due to the large number of honest, concerned and passionate people around us.

And there were friends – friends in need, indeed. Just a call from someone can act like magic, just a word of assurance from anyone can bring such healing! It is however, important to remember that it is not about mere assurance but physically taking up responsibilities, which makes this circle complete. It took a couple of hours for me to find a person to take my RTPCR test just after I posted about the requirement on my Facebook wall, half a day to reach the RED Volunteers who arranged an oxygen cylinder for me and delivered it to my doorstep at midnight. My food, both lunch and dinner, was home-delivered everyday by a group of my friends. My medicines and taste buds were taken care of by a 'didi' of mine who herself was not physically too well. In this process, the term 'social isolation' becomes a misnomer and you find that the journey which started with your virtual activity takes a U-turn and reaches you physically. You get so busy acknowledging people's help, that you lack time to be lonely.

When such things happen in your life, you feel a sense of belonging, you feel wanted, you feel connected – you start living in the moment, living for the moments!





## A Life Changing Journey

*Monami Nandy*

*Monami Nandy - Odissi dancer, movement therapy practitioner*

Being an artiste in a country like India is a daily life challenge. Within the limited resources we prepare our bodies, practice every day to get on the floor and drown in our own sweat. Armed with bare minimum weapons, with the burning desire to dance in our hearts, we step into the rehearsal hall, own the stage. We dedicate 7 to 8 hours almost every day to dance.

Before the pandemic hit us this was our regime. This was our life.

As a performing artiste, I have never experienced anything more challenging and shattering than the pandemic. I returned from Mumbai after delivering a power-packed performance at NCPA in March 2020, and then the pandemic took over. That was when I last danced on stage. That was the last time when blood rushed through my veins in full rigor. What exactly changed? Everything changed. The idea of dance, space, body, mind, the world in and around me -nothing remained the same. The pandemic destroyed a bit in each one of us.

The first lockdown was so sudden that we didn't know how to react. We were not prepared to live it, navigate through it. A virus just pushed the world into a box and we got entrapped in it. It was horrific and traumatic. Everything stopped around me, leaving no space to dance, no hope for me! Me, my guru, my colleagues, my other friends - all of us were detached physically from each other. The shared physical space, the shared bodily synchrony that bound us together was suddenly lost and we did not know how to rebuild our bonding without physicality.

Would we survive? That was the primary question. Everyone was clueless! My Odishi repertory classes, dance classes, stage shows, workshops, meetings with friends and colleagues, dance tours across the country, and even my 'me time' – everything that I called mine - was snatched from me overnight. Life was completely shut down. My body felt shackled and my mind lost its freedom.

The biggest challenge that I faced was with my body. Slowness crept in, in forced confinement. My body was losing its power, vitality and strength. The fear of losing the capacity of my body, that I had built so painstakingly over the years, by pushing its limits unforgivingly was unbearable. I started slipping into depression thinking of it. What would happen to me if this body was gone! All the bodily skills and finesse of movement that I had acquired through rigorous practices over the years would be gone! I could not let it happen, but I was helpless. Days started to grow longer; feelings of desperation started to heighten. I wanted to go to the dance floor, enter the stage, the rhythm of mardala was ringing



Fig. 2

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inside my head. The body was desperate, but I couldn't. Many dancers started to post their dance-videos made in the interiors, on social media platforms. I asked myself, "Should I also try this?" But I was not convinced. "Did I have the resources?" Partly yes, but did I really want to dance like that in front of a bed, beside a closed window? I was not sure, and was sinking inside. It was a strange emotional journey for me, when I detested dance for not being able to perform

"Fight back! You have to fight back", I started hearing this somewhere inside my head, inside my heart. I started talking, sharing my anxieties with a few persons who could help me to come back. Sharmila di, my guru stood as a source of inspiration in this journey. I observed her and learnt from the way she was dealing with the situation. She started to compose new pieces with completely new dimensions in the confinement of home, which gave me motivation. I started to reach out. I started taking online classes for women, focusing on their mental and physical wellbeing without charging any fees. I considered that to be my contribution as an artiste in the time of long lockdowns- to help women come to terms with physical confinement and lack of mobility. Many joined in, some of them continued, while the rest left. It was like being able to breathe after ages. I finally discovered a way out to deal with isolation. And that was through dance.

Virtual performance already became popular and many dancers were taking part in online recitals, but my apprehension did not go away. The creative artistes in our country are not paid properly and online performances re-established the practice of free performances. We are taught not to discuss about payment for performance, as creative labor has always been considered a kind of duty, a labor of love, untouched by the corruption of money. But that's a real form of exploitation as I look at it. When we, the performers needed economic support most, when the auditoriums were shut



Fig. 3

down for an infinite period of time during the pandemic, we were being asked to dance online for free. My position was very clear. This is the time when we need monetary support most and no one can exploit my creative resources.

I feel that classical dance is an organic form of performance. The direct interaction and communication with the audience brings out the essence of the dance-form and the dancer. First, we lost performing with live music played by the musicians, and then we lost the live audience to the pandemic. We lost the live physical space.

In the meantime, dance as a physical performative form was changing its meaning and form by entering into the virtual mode. We started dancing for the camera lens, using technology to felicitate online classes. But I continued

to miss the stage, the adrenalin rush, the nervousness, and the final triumph at the time of reaching the climax of ecstasy.

But I strongly believe that performing art will survive, and so will the artists. In the last one and a half years, my routine has changed. I am now trying very hard to get back the elasticity of body, its power and my creative mind. I am trying to think through technology to ideate new work, create new expressions, and connect with new artists from different fields.

Nothing has remained normal anymore. What matters now is how we can adapt to new situations, new devices and new strategies. Things may not be the same as it were. But there should be healing. And I pray. I pray that we re-connect soon. We get back to life soon. I tried to read a lot, watched a lot – films, dance performances - in physical confinement. That should reflect in my idea of dance. A new form of dance should evolve from within me.





## Education during COVID times: *A conversation with Anindita Dasgupta*

*Anindita Dasgupta - retired teacher from Loreto Dharamtala, Kolkata*

### **How does it feel to be part of the teaching profession for over 40 years? What prompted you to become a teacher?**

The present concept of career counselling or career guidance was not heard of in the 1970s. Parents were mere caregivers. Everyone just fell into professions naturally, at least that is what had happened with my professional life. I always dreamt of becoming a doctor, while teaching the younger cousins in a huge joint family was a reality. Since then, teaching seemed to be in my blood. My grandfather, a landlord of Osmanpur, in present Bangladesh, had left his official work to 'Nayeb-dadu' and my very efficient grandmother to live in Nepal and teach the children of the king there. On the other hand, my mother was a teacher at Loreto Bowbazar, breaking the traditional protocol of the Indian joint family. (40 heads for each meal), where women were destined to be homemakers for life.

Just after completing Graduation with English Honours, when one of the nuns called me to join as a teacher in Loreto Dharamtala, I postponed going to college for completing my B.Ed and chose to start teaching instead. Since then (1977), there was no looking back. Teaching became my passion. My motto was to nurture my students with love, patience and care.

### **What kind of challenges did you face in the personal/ professional sphere in this long journey?**

My life was a challenge since day one. As soon as I got a job, my mother was forced to get me married as per orders from the head of the family, my grandmother. Then began the roller coaster ride. Both personal and professional lives progressed simultaneously. Academic qualifications had to be enhanced (B.Ed, MA in English, short training courses in Computers, and so on). I began excelling in my profession and received recognition as a dedicated and compassionate teacher. Parallel shifts were happening in my personal life too. My roles changed from being the quintessential daughter-in-law in a Bengali joint family to a mother. I feel surprised as to how I managed to hold up during that phase of my life, whenever I look back. It was my complete faith in my Maker and His love, that helped me to tackle the challenges so well. I got abundant love and respect from seniors, colleagues, students, guardians, friends and relatives while my motto was to serve with love.

### **What kind of rewards did you receive from the work which kept you going despite the challenges?**

It is said that receiving accolades and appreciation make work easier. Though I got plenty of tangible rewards and certificates, including Lifetime Achievement Award by Telegraph, Achievement Award as a Successful teacher from Anglo Indian Association, to name a few, the most precious reward was the love, respect and reverence showered on me by my seniors, colleagues, subordinates, students, guardians, friends and relatives. It was the depth and magnitude of their love that made me who I am.

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**How do you think the impact of COVID has been different across the wide cross-section of students you have worked with?**

Nobody had given the world an inkling of the devastation that the world was about to face, with the onset of terror called Covid 19. The pandemic has taken millions of lives, devastated families, and destroyed the livelihoods of a considerable part of the world's population.

The seniors, either lost their lives or are bound to their homes, under the threat of disease and death. The situation is no longer conducive for children to blossom naturally. The simple joys of childhood, and their education are at stake.

As a result of long-term Lockdown, the children and adults have been forced to be cooped up together. Socialising outside the family is thus greatly compromised.

The children belonging to affluent or middle-class families are now totally dependent on mobiles and laptops as these devices are now essential in order to keep up with academics. In the past two years, they have become quite addicted to these devices. Conversely, the current situation has left a large number of children belonging to the lower socio-economic strata of society unable to access quality education, as their parents cannot afford smart phones. Many children have been compelled to start working as the family's financial situation has worsened during COVID times

**Tell us a little about the nature of your work as a home coordinator at one of the Red-light areas in the city?**

After retirement in 2015, as I still felt active and energetic, I wanted to lend my services to that marginalized section of society which is always neglected and hushed up. I joined as a Resource Teacher, with a team of 5 teachers and 1 special educator and started working at the Red-Light areas in Kalighat, Chetla and Kidderpore, in collaboration with Sarva-Siksha Mission. The objective was to improve the children's health and education, to identify children with special needs or children who were abused in their homes. Appropriate interventions included encouraging them to attend school, helping them with books and stationery, arranging food and medicines with support from an NGO and so on.



Fig.4

On 3rd January 2017 a shelter home was started in Behala with 18 girls from various red-light areas and I was appointed as the superintendent. My job responsibilities included documentation as well as over-all training of the children, equipping them with appropriate academic and social skills, in a manner that would them to adapt to life as a part of mainstream society.

The guardians, who were engaged in sex-work, were also given regular training to help them choose an alternative occupation for themselves. By January 2020, 12 out of 18 guardians had relocated to other occupations like, domestic help, tailor's assistant and helpers at parlours.

Children had changed completely, with the help of regular meditation, yoga, pranayama and prayers. They received opportunities to explore their talents and in-built potential. They were learning to behave in a socially-appropriate manner and were also doing well academically. They could dance, sing, draw, colour, and be their spontaneous, innocent

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selves. Most importantly, they had learned to live together in a cooperative manner without fighting or abusing each other.

**What inspired you to defy the conventional notions about life post-retirement and continue working under such challenging circumstances? What new challenges did the COVID situation bring about in your work?**

As if changing the life pattern of these children was not enough of a challenge, life threw open, yet another challenge in the form of the Covid 19 Pandemic.

My age and the lockdown situation did not permit me to leave Home for days and months. Regular counselling by the counsellor was not possible. Though the children managed to hold on to their inherent goodness for a while, but gradually began to revert to the unhealthy patterns of behaviour. Life for them had become very difficult in the absence of good role-models and mentors. The COVID situation compelled me to take a step back, and hand over the charges to a younger person for the good of the children

**What long term consequences do you think the crisis would have with respect to the holistic development of the child's psyche, and what kind of interventions should we be looking at, to help them cope?**

The only way to protect our children during these dark times is parent and teacher intervention. Parents need to spend quality time with their children. They need to take the initiative to help develop soft skills among their children. Many of the students are slipping into depression in the face of an uncertain future.

In this situation, the government authorities and key stakeholders also have to come forward with helping hands. The present situation is taking a toll on these innocent minds. The dire need of the hour is to allow the children to go to back school, have plenty of opportunities to engage in outdoor activities. They also need rigorous counselling by professional therapists in order to realize their true potential and continue to grow. We, as educators have to take responsibility and find constructive solutions to help our children.





## একদিনের গরম ভাত

শ্রাবস্তী ঘোষ

*Srabasti Ghosh – a performance activist and Independent researcher*

"কেউ যদি বেশি খায়, খাওয়ার হিসেব নাও, কেননা অনেক লোক ভাল করে খায় না"

গানের কথা হলেও আমাদের রোজকার চারপাশের ছবি বলে দেয় এর প্রাসঙ্গিকতা কতটা। প্যান্ডেমিক- লকডাউন যে এই ছবিটাকে আরও প্রকট করেছে, তা বলাই বাহুল্য। গতবছরের পরিযায়ী শ্রমিকদের দীর্ঘপথ হাঁটার প্রতিটা পদক্ষেপে আরও দৃপ্ত হয়েছে এই ভেদাভেদের কথা। করোনায় যেমন অনেকের কাজ চলে গেছে, তেমনই, যাঁদের রোজগার প্রতিদিনের হিসেব মেনে হয়, তাঁদের ক্ষেত্রে উপার্জনের পথ দুর্লভ। সেই তাগিদেই কলকাতার বা পশ্চিমবঙ্গের অনেক জায়গায় শুরু হয়েছে শ্রমজীবী ক্যান্টিন। স্বল্প মূল্যে খাবার পৌঁছে যাচ্ছে মানুষের জন্য এই সকল যৌথ হেঁশেল থেকে।

এরকম খবর বা ছবিগুলো গত বছর থেকেই আমার আটপৌরে জীবনে বেশ ছাপ ফেলেছিল। তবে বেশিরভাগ ক্ষেত্রেই, সাধারণ মধ্যবিত্তের হাতে পেন্সিলের মতন করে ধরা থাকে দুঃখ ও শঙ্কা, দুইই। কোভিডের এই দ্বিতীয় ঢেউ যখন সবে আছড়ে পড়ছে, ভোটের রেজাল্ট ইত্যাদির অপেক্ষায় লকডাউন স্থগিত, অন্যান্য কাজ সমান তালে চললেও, আসন্ন বিপর্যয় নিয়ে সকলে ত্রস্ত। সেটা এপ্রিল মাস। বাঙালি দোল, নতুন বছর, দীর্ঘ ইনিংসের ভোট ইত্যাদি নিয়ে জর্জরিত ও মুখরিত। সেই সময় আমার শরীর থেকে সদ্য কোভিড বিদায় নিয়েছে, অসীম দুর্বলতা, তবে বাড়ি আবার স্বাভাবিক ছন্দে ফিরছে, অফিস যাচ্ছে। আর, এসবের মাঝেই সোশ্যাল মিডিয়া ভরে উঠছে হসপিটালের বেড আর অক্সিজেনের হাহাকারে। মাত্র কদিনের মধ্যে ছবিটা যেন রাতারাতি বদলে গেছিল। সারা দেশ জুড়ে একের পর এক ভয়ানক ছবি, নানান প্রান্তে 'লিড' পৌঁছে



Fig. 5

দেওয়ার উন্মাদনা আর এইসবের সঙ্গে আমাদের শেষ দু'দফার ভোট-পর্ব- সে এক অস্থির উন্মাদনা।

এইরকমই, ২৭-এ এপ্রিল, মা অফিসে, আমার ওয়ার্ক ফ্রম হোমের (ডিকশনারিতে সবচেয়ে ট্রেন্ড এই শব্দের) মধ্যে মুহূর্মুহু মেসেজ আসছে কখনও দিল্লি থেকে, কখনও কলকাতা থেকে, অন্ধের মতন যা যা অক্সিজেনের সন্ধান আছে, ফরওয়ার্ড করে যাচ্ছি। ঘুমোতে যাওয়া থেকে ঘুম ভাঙা- এই একই কাজ চলেছে ক্রমাগত। বেশ অনেকে মিলে জোট বেঁধে কাজে নামছে বেড আর সিলিন্ডার জোগাড়ে। এসবের মধ্যেই মা' কে মেসেজ করে বসলাম পনেরো জনের দুবেলা খাবার রান্না করতে পারবেন কি না জানতে চেয়ে। মা স্বভাবতই হতবাক, বলেন, বাড়ি এসে কথা বলবেন। কেন জানি না, মনে হচ্ছিল বারবার,

যে, সময় বড্ড কম। বললাম, একটু ভেবে এক্ষুনি জানাও, নাহলে দেরি হয়ে যাবে। তবে, মন বলেছিল বা অনুমান করেছিলাম, মার সম্মতি আছে। তাই পরবর্তী এক ঘণ্টার মধ্যে একটা পোস্টার বানিয়ে সোশ্যাল মিডিয়াতে দিয়ে দেওয়া হল। ইংরেজিতে লেখা ছিল, উত্তর কলকাতায়

কোভিড আক্রান্ত ও হোম আইসোলনে থাকা মানুষজন খাবারের জন্য যোগাযোগ করতে পারেন। দিনে পনেরো-জনের খাবার পৌঁছে দেওয়া হবে বিনামূল্যে, সঙ্গে ফোন নম্বর। নিমেষের মধ্যে অসংখ্য মানুষের মধ্যে ফোন আসতে থাকে। সংখ্যা বাড়তে বাড়তে পঞ্চাশ জনের দুবেলা, মানে প্রায় ১০০ জনের খাবার রান্না হতে থাকে বাড়িতে। ২৮শে এপ্রিল থেকে পরবর্তী একমাস দিনে বাড়ির চেহারাটাই যেন বদলে যায়।

সেদিন বিকেল থেকে বাড়িতে এক অঘোষিত উৎসবের ছবি, উৎসাহ আর উদ্দীপনা জার একমাত্র রসদ। আমি-মা-বাবা- আমাদের তিনজনের এই টিমের তখন বাজার করা থেকে বাজেট বানানো আরও কত কাজ। আমাদের ছোট্ট বাড়িতে তখন কম করে পাঁচবার ভাতের হাঁড়ি বসছে, নানা জায়গা থেকে জোগাড় হয়েছে বিরাট কড়াই, গামলা, হাতা। রাখার জায়গা, অতিরিক্ত কেউ বাড়ি এলে বসার জায়গা- কোন কিছুই কুলিয়ে উঠছে না যেন, কিন্তু সেই অপ্রতুলতার মধ্যেই এক অদ্ভুত তৃপ্তির স্বাদ ছিল মানুষজনের সুস্থ হয়ে ওঠার ফোন কলে। আমার মা খাওয়াতে, রান্না করতে বরাবর পছন্দ করেন, সেখানে এতজন অচেনা মানুষকে এমন অসময়ে খাবার দিতে পারার পরে মায়ের মুখে এক অদ্ভুত প্রশান্তি দেখেছি। সেখানে প্রতিদিনের এই একশো জনের রান্নার ক্লান্তি আছে, তাকে ছাপিয়ে গেছে পরিতৃপ্তি। তার মধ্যে পরিবর্তে কোন কিছু পাওয়ার আকাঙ্ক্ষা নেই, শুধু আছেন কিছু অচেনা মানুষ, যাঁদের সঙ্গে কখনও কোথাও দেখা হয়নি, হয়ত হবেও না। সেখানে সাহায্যের গরিমা বা দাস্তিকতা নেই, গরম ভাতের গন্ধ ভাগ করে নেওয়া আছে। আছে, আন্তরিকভাবে সুস্থতা কামনা, আর অপরিপক্কের শুভেচ্ছা আর আপীর্বাদ।



করোনা আমাদের অনেক কিছু কেড়ে নিলো যেন, শেখালও কম কিছু না। অপরিচিতের জন্য হাত বাড়ানোর যে শিক্ষা স্কুলের নীতিশিক্ষা ক্লাসে বা বাড়িতে মূল্যবোধ তৈরির পাঠ ছিল, তা হাতেকলমে করে দেখানোর সুযোগ করে দিল এই সময়টা, এও একধরনের অভ্যাস। এই দুঃসময় কেটে যাবেই, শুধু অভিজ্ঞতার বুলি ভরে থেকে যাবে একমাস দিন, মায়ের শ্রম, আমাদের যৌথ হেঁশেল।





## মিনু: ছোটবেলার দোসর

ছন্দা গুহ

*Chhanda Guha - a passionate practitioner of mental health*

শুরুর থেকেই শুরু করা ভালো। সে এক বিস্মৃত যুগের কাহিনী। আমার জন্ম আসামের ডিগবয় শহরে। অয়েল টাউন, আপার আসামের ছোট্ট অখচ ছবির মতো সুন্দর একটি পাহাড়ী জনপদ। আসাম তখন সাত ভাগে বিভাজিত হয়নি। তখন আসামের রাজধানী ছিল শিলং। ভারতের উত্তর পূর্ব দিকে অবস্থিত আসামের ডিগবয় শহরের কিন্তু তখন বেশ গুরুত্ব ছিল। কারণ, আমার যতদূর মনে আছে ঊনবিংশ শতাব্দীর শেষের দিকে আবিষ্কৃত হয় ক্রড অয়েল। ক্রমে তৈল কূপ খননের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে রিফাইনারিও তৈরি হয় এবং সমগ্র এশীয় দেশগুলির মধ্যে একমাত্র ডিগবয় ছিল পেট্রোল সরবরাহের মূল কেন্দ্র। একটা ছোট্ট শহরের মানুষেরা যেমন হয়, আমরাও প্রত্যেকেই প্রত্যেককে তখন চিনি। সকলের সঙ্গেই ছিল সহজ সরল সম্পর্ক। ছোট্ট জায়গা তো, তাই এক নিবিড় আত্মীয়তা। তখন পাবলিক যানবাহনও ছিল না। বাড়ির গাড়িতে কিংবা সাইকেলেই যাতায়াত করতেন সকলে। স্কুলে, কলেজেও সেই ভাবেই যেতে হতো আমাদের, কিন্তু আমরা মোটেও সেইভাবে যেতাম না। পায়ে হেঁটে যেতেই আমরা পছন্দ করতাম। সে ভারী মজা হতো! রাস্তার একপাশ দিয়ে, বেণী দুলিয়ে, কাঁধে ব্যাগ ঝুলিয়ে গল্প করতে করতে যেতাম স্কুলে। একই স্কুলে পড়তাম সকলে। আসাম অয়েল কোম্পানি গার্লস স্কুল। ছেলেদের জন্য ছিল পৃথক স্কুল। অনেক বন্ধুর মধ্যে মিনুও ছিল একজন। ভালো নাম মিনতি দাস। সাত ভাইয়ের এক বোন চম্পা যেন। কেজি থেকেই ওর সঙ্গে আমার বন্ধুত্ব। একই সঙ্গে স্কুলে যাবার সঙ্গী, পড়াশোনাও একইসঙ্গে। একটু বড় হতেই বুঝতে পারলাম, মিনু আমার খুবই প্রিয় বন্ধু হয়ে উঠেছে। তার কারণও আছে। ও ওর দাদাদের সঙ্গে অনেক হিন্দি, বাংলা সিনেমা দেখার সুবিধা পেতো। যেটা আমরা পাইনি, কারণ আমাদের হিন্দি বা বাংলা সবরকম ছবি দেখাই নিষিদ্ধ ছিল। স্কুলে যাতায়াতের পথে ওকে চেপে ধরতাম গল্প বলার জন্য, এবং গল্প শোনার আকর্ষণে পথ যেত অচিরেই শেষ হয়ে।

মিনু বেশ লম্বা ছিল। মাথায় ছিল এক ঢাল কালো মেঘের মতো চুল। দারুণ গান গাইত মিনু। খুব সুন্দর গানের গলা ছিল। সরস্বতী পুজোর সময় ওর লম্বা চুলের প্রেমে পড়তো অনেকেই। ওই চুল সকলেরই দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করতো। আমাদের ছোট্ট শহরে জীবনের রঙিন আনন্দগুলো নিয়ে আমরা বড় হচ্ছিলাম। এভাবেই স্কুল ফাইনাল পাশ করে আমরা কলকাতায় পড়তে এলাম। একই কলেজ, একই হোস্টেল, কিন্তু বিষয় ভিন্ন। রুমও গেলো আলাদা হয়ে। দেখা হত ডাইনিং হলে, স্টাডি রুমে অথবা কলেজের করিডোরে। গ্র্যাজুয়েশনের পর আমরা সবাই আলাদা হয়ে গেলাম। মিনুর বিয়ে হয়ে গেল বর্ধমানের এক বিশাল পরিবারের জ্যেষ্ঠ পুত্রের সঙ্গে। বিয়ের পরই ওর ঘাড়ে এক বিশাল পরিবারের দায়িত্ব এসে পোড়লো। তার মধ্যে দিয়ে মিনু ক্রমে পাকা গিনি হয়ে উঠলো। ওদের বাড়িতে নিয়ম করে কালী পূজা হতো। সেই বাড়ির বড় বৌমা হয়ে মিনু ক্রমে সাংসারিক আবর্তে হারিয়ে যেতে লাগলো। যোগাযোগ ক্ষীণ হতে হতে একেবারে ছিন্ন হয়ে গেল একসময়। আমিও পোস্ট-গ্র্যাজুয়েশন করে নিজের আবর্তে ঢুকে গেছি ততদিনে।

তারপর প্রায় ত্রিশ বছর পর আবার যোগাযোগ। আবার জন্মে উঠলো ফোনালাপ। স্বামীসহ বর্ধমান থেকে একদিন আমার বাড়িতে দেখা করতেও এলো। সে কি আনন্দ! কি গল্প! সেই ছেলেবেলার কথা কি এত সহজে শেষ হয়! সেই আনন্দের দিনটা আজও আমাকে করে তোলে স্মৃতি

মেদুর।এরমধ্যে একদিন উদ্ভিন্ন গলায় মিনুর ফোন এলো। জানলাম, বোম্বের টাটা ইন্সটিটিউটে ওকে চলে যেতে হচ্ছে চিকিৎসার জন্য। চললো কেমো, চিকিৎসা। কথা হতো নিয়মিত। বেশ ভালোই চলছিল চিকিৎসা। বুঝতে পারছিলাম,ওর গলার স্বর বেশ উৎফুল্ল।

এরই মাঝে শুরু হল লকডাউন। মিনুর কেমো বন্ধ হল।ডাক্তার ওকে বর্ধমানে নিজের বাড়িতে ফিরে যেতে বললেন। বর্ধমানে ফিরে ওর চিকিৎসা কিন্তু বেশ ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হলো। কেমো বন্ধ হতে,বেশ কয়েক মাস কেবল ওষুধের উপরে রইলো। মেইল বা ফোনেও বোম্বের ডাক্তারের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে পারেনি ওরা। বেশ কয়েক মাস পরে, কষ্ট করে গাড়ি ভাড়া করে বর্ধমান শহরে এসে ডাক্তার দেখিয়ে ,মোটামুটি একটা কেমো নেওয়ার রুটিন তৈরি হল।

এমতাবস্থায়,আমিও ওর মানসিক জোর ফিরিয়ে আনতে প্রায়ই কথা বলতাম ফোনে। ছোটবেলার সুখ-স্মৃতি ওর মনের মেঘ কাটিয়ে দিচ্ছিল। ও খুশি হতো,আনন্দ পেতো। আমরা

দুই সখী এই দুরারোগ্য ব্যাধিকে ছোটবেলার গল্পে ভুলিয়ে রাখতাম। ওর একটাই প্রশ্ন ছিল আমার কাছে,"হ্যাঁরে ছন্দু! আমি ভালো হয়ে যাবো তো?" আমি মনে প্রাণে বিশ্বাস করতাম যে ও ভালো হয়ে যাবে। তাই এটা কোনও মিথ্যা আশ্বাস ছিল না আমার।

একদিন সকালে ওর ফোন। বললো,"জানিস তো, ডাক্তার বলেছেন,আমাকে আর কেমো নিতে হবে না। আমি বোধহয় ভালো হয়ে যাচ্ছি", বেশ খুশিয়াল গলার স্বরে বললো মিনু। কিন্তু কোভিদের গল্পটা ছিল অন্য।ওর বাড়িতে ফোন করে জানলাম,ডাক্তারবাবু ওর স্বামীকে আলাদা ডেকে ওকে কেমো দিতে আনতে বারণ করেছেন ,কারণ আর কেমো দেওয়া সম্ভব নয়।বুঝতে পারলাম সবই। আমি বুঝতে পারছিলাম,মিনুর চলে যাবার সময় এগিয়ে আসছে। আমি ফোনে গল্প করতাম, ওর গলার স্বর কেমন বিমিয়ে যাচ্ছিলো। ধীরে ধীরে ওর কথা বলাই গেলো বন্ধ হয়ে। এবং একদিন সমস্ত বন্ধন ছিন্ন হয়ে গেলো। কোভিড জেন এক মুহূর্তে, এক কথায়,এক ঝাপটায় আমার ছোটবেলাটাই দিয়ে গেলো মুছে।



Fig. 7



## Faculty Development Programme

The workshop titled “Faculty Development Programme- Module 1” was a full day training programme. It was held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021, at Palm Avenue, Kolkata. The module was designed for the faculty members of Oxford Public School in Sono, Bihar. The project was lead by Sayan Sarkhel and the moderators were Sayan Sarkhel, Somdatta Chattopadhyay and Dr. Jhuma Basak. The workshop began with a formal introduction of Mira Centre for Innovation (MCI) and its areas of work by the Founder-Director Dr. Jhuma Basak, followed by the participants introducing themselves.

The module was primarily divided into 8 sections. While the section on “Classroom Management” touched upon the use of effective rapport building strategies in the classroom, “Know your student better” aimed to acquaint the participants with the different learning styles used by students.



Fig. 8

Strategies for effective teaching included the use of Audio-Visual aids, Story-telling, Debating, Games and Roleplays, all of which are known to contribute significantly in cultivating intellectual and oratory application skills in students. The highlight of this session was a riveting recitation by Arun Shekhar, elucidating the exemplary courage of Rani Lakshmbai in battle, which the participants seemed to enjoy thoroughly.

While the section on Nurturing Creative Pursuits and Athletic Abilities elaborated on how introducing sports and cultural events into the school curriculum can contribute to a holistic development of the child’s psyche, the section on Time Management in the Classroom included discussions on the use of weekly lesson plans, dividing the topic into workable units, and prioritizing as per significance.

The Technical Skill Development session, demonstrated the use of MS Word, PowerPoint and MS Excel using a collaborative ‘hands-on’ approach with the participants. Likewise, the section on “Being a Mentor” was a discussion

on who a mentor is and the role that he/she plays in handling emotional conflicts and career related concerns among students. The importance of using Reward Systems with students was also explained to the participants. The workshop drew to a close with an Open House discussion, followed by handing out small tokens of appreciation to the participants.



Fig. 9

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It was an extremely enriching experience for us at Mira Centre for Innovation, though some of the content had to be modified/omitted keeping in mind the receptive capacity of the participants, and more time had to be allotted towards rapport building activities.



*Fig. 10*



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## MIRA PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY GROUP

### In Baby Steps...

The inaugural meeting of the Mira Psychoanalytic Study Group was held on 11th December 2020. It was initiated to encourage critical thinking in the areas of Psychoanalysis, Mental Health and the allied fields of Social Sciences, Culture, Gender, Performance and Literature, and to test its applicative potential beyond mainstream academia and clinical parameters.

Ever since its inception, the group meets once a month and a lecture/discussion is held on a pre-decided topic, where both the online and offline modes of presence are open for the participants. Relevant reading material is also shared with the participants over electronic media.

The activities of the Mira Psychoanalytic Study Group have been summarized below:

**Date:** 11-Dec-20

**Topic:**

Relocating the Couch During COVID Times

**Speaker:** Dr. Jhuma Basak

While acknowledging the importance of the virtual medium in initiating therapy, the possibility of a breach of exclusivity in the dyadic exchange could not be negated. It was concluded that the therapist and patient must collaborate and revisit existing ethical norms to suit the needs of present times.

**Date:** 29-Jan-21

**Topic:** Navigating through the Quandaries of Virtual Analysis - A Beginning

**Speakers:** Dr. Debatree Mukherjee

Dr. Jhuma Basak in Conversation with Ms. Somdatta Chattopadhyay

This lecture focussed on the changing nature of transference in the online setting, and ways to negotiate with the difficulties, keeping in mind the best interests of the care-seeker. Despite efforts to establish virtual therapy as an aspect of co-presence, the aspect of corporeal bonding between analyst and patient within the analytic frame was emphasized

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**Date: 13-Mar-21**

**Topic: I am Heathcliff- The darker undertones of a relationship from the eyes of Catherine's point of view: Exploring the fantasy of "The Heathcliff" in all of us.**

**Guest speaker: Prof Kaveri Dutt**

This lecture highlighted the themes of violence, oppression and savagery in the novel Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte. Questions were raised as to whether education has truly been able to contain the savage in us, and whether the polarity of genteel civility and barbaric brutality coexist in all of us- Hence the pressing question, "Are we all Heathcliff?"

**Date: 15-May-21**

**Topic:**

**Stories of Containment at a time of loss**

**Speaker: Dr. Jhuma Basak**

This virtual session was conceived to be a mutually containing exchange at a time struck by grief and despair. It was discussed that, the anguish, unless transformed into a process of transgenerational sharing, causes us to linger in a vicious cycle of pain and dejection. Hence, an attempt was made to create a safe, holding space for one another.

**Date: 17-Jul-21**

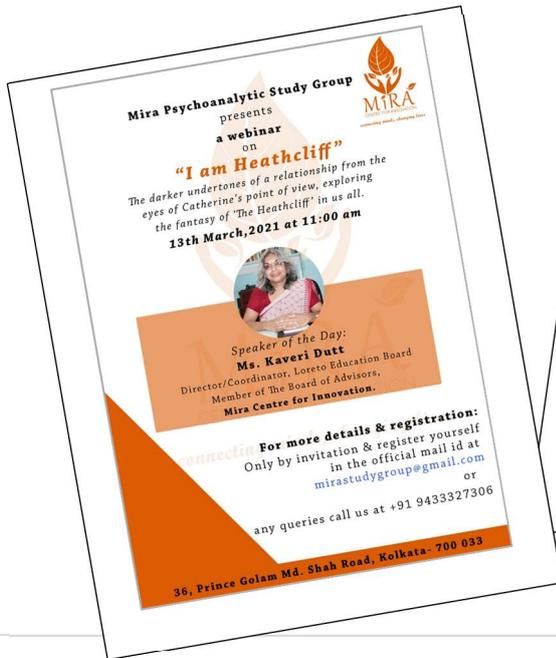
**Topic: A Performer's Mind**

**Guest speaker: Debasish Sen Sharma**

The primary focus here was to decode the performer's quest for truth in the apparently illusory, make-belief world of performance. The performer's challenge therefore lies in his ability to create believability in the moment.

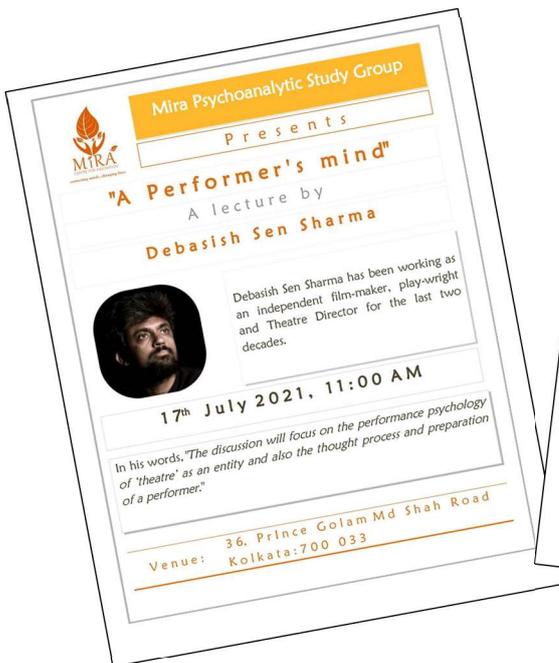
## “I am Heathcliff”

Speaker: Prof Kaveri Dutt

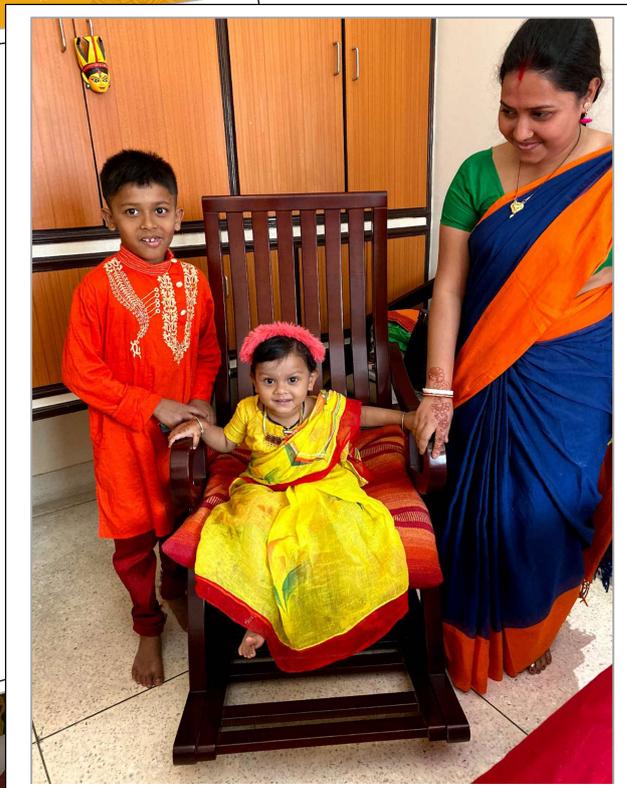
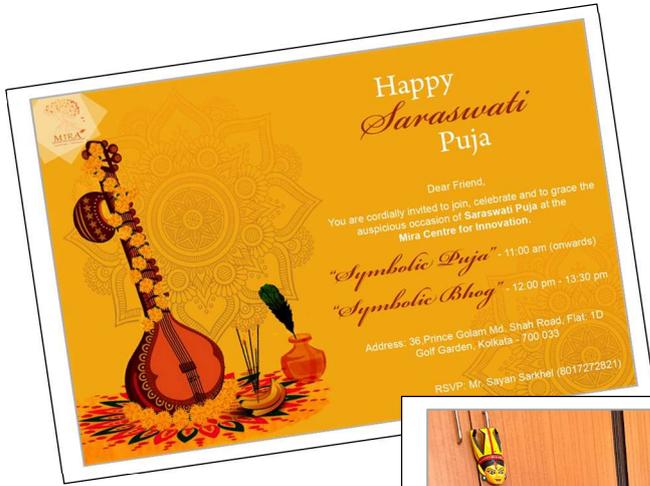


## A Performer’s Mind

Speaker: Debasish Sen Sharma

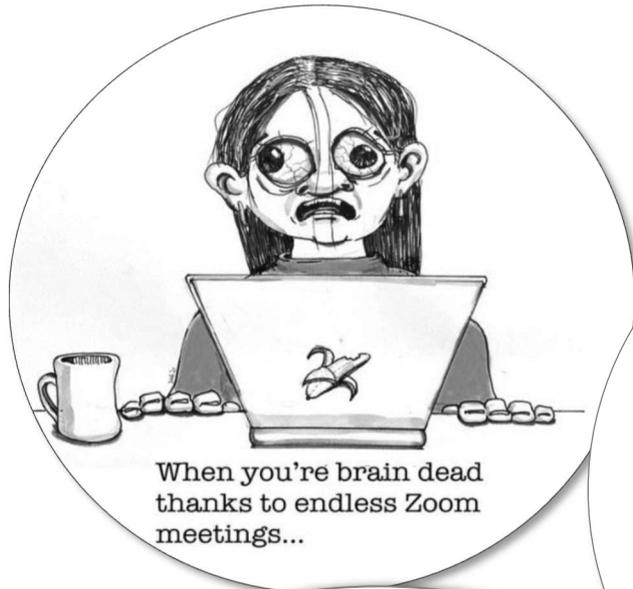


# Celebrating Saraswati 2021





*did you know?*



*zoom fatigue Syndrome* is characterised by tiredness, worry, or burnout associated with the overuse of virtual platforms of communication.

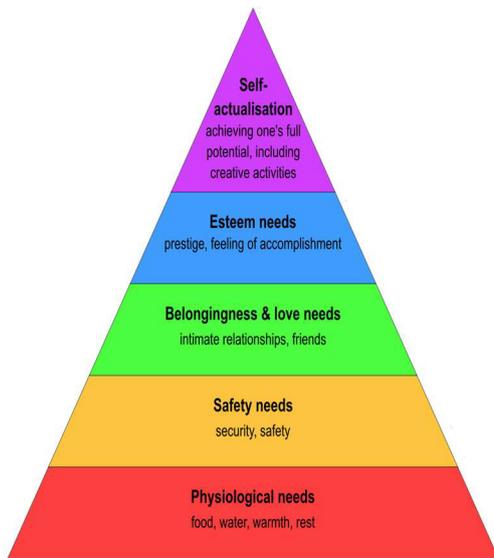
*fun fact*

There are 1,200 new words that have been added to the German lexicon in the last year, according to the Leibniz Institute for German Language - the majority of which bear some relation to the coronavirus pandemic. **Coronafußgruß** is a pandemic-inspired greeting where two socially distanced people tap their feet together.

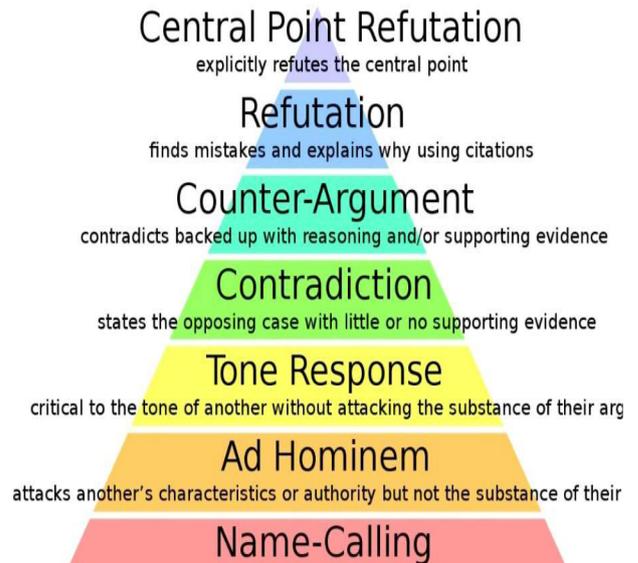


## hierarchy of disagreements?!

*A comparison: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Vs Paul Graham's Pyramid of disagreements!!*



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Graham's hierarchy of disagreement

*What say we up our game a bit in settling differences?*

## test your bewilderment

- The process involved in producing an idea that is novel, original and useful is called...**
  - Innovation
  - Creativity
  - Intelligence
- Which of the following is NOT a book by Rabindranath Tagore?**
  - Gitanjali
  - Kabuliwala
  - Rajkahini

3. **What according to you does true education stand for?**

- A. Education as perfection
- B. Education as adjustment
- C. Education as an unending process of development

4. **The full form of the RTE Act is...**

- A. Right to Free Education Act
- B. Right to Compulsory Education Act
- C. Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act



5. **Which of the following is known popularly as the love hormone?**

- A. Dopamine
- B. Serotonin
- C. Oxytocin

**Answers:**

1. B. Creativity  
2. C. Rajkahlani  
3. C. Education as an unending process of development  
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