



Ms. Manju Mukhi

The Virus

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In conversation with a friend:

"The dreams are back. I thought I had outgrown them but it seems that the Pandemic has stirred something within me that I thought I had dealt with a long time ago.....the dreams were dormant not gone for ever".

In the 1st half of the 20th Century the world was assaulted by another virus, Poliomyelitis, similar to what we are experiencing today.

" As a child I contracted the Polio Virus during the epidemic. This left me with a disability. Disabled...Today the Corona Virus has attacked the world and now the world is disabled".

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The Polio virus was invisible, it struck with no warning but with deathly consequences. It was highly contagious causing numerous deaths and leaving even more afflicted by it. It was hard to escape, as it attacked adults and children. Parents were scared to let children out in the Polio season. In its wake, it left paralysis of the limbs in some, difficulty in breathing in others. People with breathing difficulties were put into a large respirator called the Iron Lung that would enable them to breathe..... The Iron Lung encapsulated them completely so that only their heads were visible.



Dr Jonas Salk and his team worked on the Polio vaccine for many years. They faced many disappointments before the vaccine could be developed and lives could be saved. The difference between then and today is that today we have the knowledge and the capacity to work out the genome of the virus. Today we can build on the work that was done by Dr Jonas Salk and others who came after him

Today we have been affected by something similar. Just as the children were kept indoors during the Polio epidemic, we too have been in quarantine for 6 weeks and counting. Schools, Colleges and work places have been closed down. Financial systems are collapsing and millions of people are hungry and homeless. Life as we knew it has been changed by the Virus.

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What will be the impact of the lockdown on the psyche of people and of Nations? This is not something we had prepared for. I read somewhere that in Wuhan people are refusing to step out and have developed Agoraphobia. But there is hope that we will come out of this.



" When I was little I had to fight for my life but for me there will be no complete recovery from the Polio Virus. I am locked into this body, physically disabled but I strive to be free of my fears and limitations. I learnt to walk, I learnt to drive a car and I learnt to be Independent. I learnt to live and to live well".

Today we are more aware of the impact that the pandemic will

*"In my dreams something monstrous and dangerous to me is reaching through the louvered windows.....hands that had the power to catch hold of me....to kill me".
Today again I am afraid to step out. I am vulnerable. I am afraid for my life".*



People wonder if life will ever be the same? People say I want my old life back. I want the freedom to move out and to do what I want to do.

"Maybe now you can understand a little bit of how I felt. I felt like my ability to move was restricted by a wheelchair at first and then by the crutches and then the callipers that are my companions everyday. But little by little struggling with grit and determination I started the rehabilitative process. I learnt to walk, but with a limp. The limp is the after effect of the polio virus in my system."

"After this lockdown is lifted and a vaccine is found the world will also have to go through a rehabilitative process and slowly limp back to a 'new normal' just as the life I lead due to my disability is the new normal for me now".

"Again I feel the fear build up. It wants to explode out of me. I feel I have to put this in perspective so I call the no of a Counsellor to talk to her. That helps...I feel calmer. Talking helps me to understand what I am going through. The thoughts and feelings want to be heard. I want to be healed".

Today we are more aware of the impact that the pandemic will have on people. We will need to understand what they are feeling. We will need to go through a collective healing, emotionally and psychologically. This will need to be the way forward, to help people to deal with the emotional scars that this virus has wrought on us.