

# ESSAY

## *The World Stopped but Not the War*

*by Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'*



It was the fifth of February, winter morning when I received the call from India that my younger brother had passed away.

He was in the ICU for a few weeks, then both his lungs and heart became very weak. His oxygen level became critical despite the breathing devices he was on. Ultimately and

sadly, he was gone. I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to him. It is that strange disease. It was Covid-19. It was my first encounter with the pandemic hitting so close to home. I had lost my younger brother.

For more than the last 2 years, I haven't traveled anywhere. This time both my family and my brother's family passionately pleaded with me not to go to India as they didn't want to lose the last surviving member of my generation.

This pandemic has made millions of us feel stuck in our boundaries, suffocating, and alone. Nobody can make a move. Practically every country has been shutting its doors, discouraging visitors from other states. Some airlines closed their shutters; others reduced flights or imposed harsh restrictions. If you wriggle through and arrive in another country, you run a gauntlet of tests and end up quarantined for weeks. Others I know have been in the same position as me, restrained to their homes.

I am shocked that in our preoccupation with personal concerns and private fears, we overlook the most stunning aspect of the present pandemic. This pandemic is an international blight, striking every country including the most isolated island and archipelago, and yet the response is pathetically limited and insular. At the level of doctors and nurses, there was some minimal sharing of information, but there was virtually none of the swift and full sharing of experiences that could have saved many more lives.

There were at least thirty separate initiatives for developing a vaccine in as

many countries, involving talented groups of researchers, but scant cooperation could have eliminated false leads quickened promising approaches, and saved precious time. Companies in different lands competed fiercely to develop a marketable product fast, for a sizable profit bonanza but never considered joining hands to help dying men and women.

When I hear of the individual frustrations, I begin to realize, despite the vast opportunities today for international communication and awareness, how utterly provincial we have remained, how little we can transcend our pettiest concerns, and how scantily we have learned to get together as a race to wage a clearly-needed international crusade.

Ironically, the pandemic stopped the world but not its wars. Countries like the USA, Russia, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria continue fighting directly or indirectly with each other instead of saving each other from COVID. Hobbes rightly said, "The condition of man... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone."