

Covid 19: A Defining Moment in our Story of Inclusion

"...the biggest enemy in this epidemic is not the virus, we can deal with the virus. The biggest enemy is the inner demons and our hatreds...they are all coming up..."

Yuval Noah Harari....

Corona Virus pandemic has brought the world on its knees. The rapid spread of the disease has put the whole of the humanity under a lockdown. Fear is reigning in every sphere of life. Social distancing being the only most effective way of curbing the spread of the virus, has left people isolated in their homes.

There is a deep impact on the mental health due to the loss of human connections, on people all across the globe.

The need to interact socially and to have diverse experiences is an undeniable factor to live an enriched life. However the lurking fear of the virus that kills ruthlessly, will perhaps see a world closing doors on its overseas guests, in times to come. In India, already the plight of the migrant workers and the communal discord has made the situation worse beyond comprehension. These stories of human trauma will come back to haunt us in the future.

This brings us to certain pertinent questions about how the world and India will define its story of Inclusion. This also makes us question the effect of accepting diversity wholeheartedly and building strong communities to see us through this unprecedented crises. It is time to cross the class, religious, caste, race, colour and all kinds of barriers to find ways to heal ourselves, our communities, our social fabric, our nation and our world.

It is a collective trauma and it is a collective responsibility to come together and redefine our ideas, beliefs and perceptions about each other, to find a way ahead. We have been presented with an opportunity to see through the dysfunctions that have kept us separate, for a long time. It is a perfect time to sieve what is important for us and what has kept our existence small, what are the issues which are more pressing and need our undivided attention; like human connections, climate change, healthcare, cooperation amongst people and nations, and building harmony.

Objectives:

1. Understanding the importance of human interactions/inclusion in the society.
2. Understanding psychological impact of isolation
3. Understanding the importance of community bonds and inclusion in moving ahead to combat Covid-19.
4. Understanding 'global cooperation', the way ahead to fight the pandemic.

Twelve students from Indraprastha Institute of Information and Technology Delhi, worked on this project as a part of their Summer Community Work.

It was their first experience of working on a qualitative research project of this kind.

The Reachout experience added value to their perspective regarding empathy and inclusion, the most needed human values during a pandemic that has every life battling against it, in some form or the other.

Reachout hopes to have deepened their engagement with life, for them to become compassionate and inclusive leaders, once they assume roles of responsibility in the society.

Nitin Gupta



“Isolation creates a completely different working environment for learning as well as for working. We need to be highly efficient. While learning online, procrastination becomes a serious problem. In the online learning process, the flow of ideas is heavily hindered as communication becomes difficult amongst peers. We know that not everyone in this country has access to high-speed internet, so online learning/working must be a problem for them. I also believe that learning needs a quiet and non-intrusive environment. So, households that don’t have a suitable environment with decent internet speed, for them learning in isolation will be quite hard.”

“Every single action of the government as well as individuals can have far reaching effects on the lives of many people.

Even a simple act of providing food to the needy and giving minimum wages to people working for us will surely have immediate effect in their lives.”

Case Study

The project helped me to interact with different people. The interview took place over a call. I believe this story is worth your time.

I interviewed Mrs. Priyanka Sharma who worked as a housemaid in 3 homes in my locality. She is 34 years old. She lives with her husband and her only boy. She originally belongs to Uttar Pradesh. She has been living in Delhi for the past 12 years. According to her, before the lockdown, she was able to meet her needs. She was satisfied with the earning and the living conditions. But due to the pandemic and the global call for self-isolation drastic changes occurred in her life.

Every household she used to work for asked her to stop working in their homes until the lockdown ended. Only 1 family out of the 3 was ready to pay her for the lockdown period. The other 2 households blatantly denied her the wages as she was not working. This unkind action had an adverse effect on her life. She was barely able to meet her basic needs.

By the end of the lockdown, even her family was planning to leave for UP as they didn't have enough resources left for proper living. Nearly 30 % of the people in her building have left for their hometowns due to the same issue. Almost all the people in her building left by train.

She has a 10 year old boy. The boy studies in a school where the school has not initiated the prospect of online classes because of the lack of internet facilities. This has disturbed his education.

She informed me that some NGOs used to visit her to supply free food and the NGO was able to maintain social distancing norms while distributing. This came as a relief for people, as there was not a single earning member in some of the families. This caused another hurdle to go back to their hometowns.

She believes that this pandemic has created many problems but it has also brought people together as she has seen multiple incidents where people came forth to help others. She was touched by the help extended by the NGOs.

She finally decided to not go back to her hometown as all 3 houses that she used to work for called her back to work after the lockdown was lifted. They all made sure that she washes her hand as soon as she enters their household and always wears a mask while moving from one house to another.

Place: Delhi

Name: Nitin Gupta

Institute: IIITD Okhla phase 3

Yash Vats



“Getting the project approved from college was another challenge. This project deals with human behaviour and sensitive matters like social inclusion and discrimination. We as a society are quite ignorant concerning these things as they cannot be expressed in statistical reports. One cannot quantify human emotions, and that’s when it becomes our responsibility to increase awareness about human value, mental health and social involvement of every individual.

At some point in our lives, we all need to listen to those things which are wrong in us. We carry that darkness somewhere inside us, and extreme times like these makes us more vulnerable and exposed.”

Case Study

Kamla Aunty

For this project, I interviewed my press-vali aunty. Her name is Kamla Pal. She’s been in our locality for the last 4 years, and everybody knows her. I’m the one from my home who generally goes out to give clothes for ironing. So my interaction with her is the maximum. She always treats me like her own son. We mostly giggle on my lame jokes. I’ve kind of developed a rapport with her now.

I believe that she’s one of the happiest and most optimistic people. I went to her rented home, which is in our neighbouring locality(with all necessary precautions). Her home comprises only 1 room having a double bed, an old box TV, a little bit of furniture (4 plastic chairs and 1 wooden table, precisely), a wall attached showcase in which 8-9 photos of her family were put up and some more of usual things with an attached washroom and kitchen.

When I entered her home, she was working in the kitchen and her 17 years old son Kishan was watching the news on TV. Kishan saw me at the door, and he warmly welcomed me and asked me for water.

In no time, Kishan and I were talking on various topics. He was telling me about his school online lectures.

*Before I proceed, I want to tell you more about Kishan. Kishan is an exceptionally brilliant student. He scored a star 10 cgpa in his 10th boards which helped him in getting admission in one of the prestigious schools near his home. His fees are waived under gareeb kota (below poverty line). This year he passed his 11th std with 92% of marks and currently is in 12th std.

So I asked him, "How're your studies going?"

To which he replied that he had no books for the last 3 months as all the stationary shops were closed. So all he had was his outdated second-hand smartphone which apparently didn't support many useful apps.

He also shared his views about online lectures and a real classroom. About which he felt that in online classes he's losing his zest to study as it's painful for his eyes to look at the bright screen for 4-5 hours. He wasn't used to that. He also mentioned that on some days, even 1.5 GB of data which JIO provides isn't enough to attend all the classes. He runs out of data on most of the days, and he feels that WiFi has become a necessity now.

Learning online is taking a toll on his health and interest in studies. Also, he said he doesn't like to study alone and misses his school friends. This complete isolation thing is quite irritating for him. But he's adjusting with it now as he knows what the whole world is combating with.

We were just talking more about COVID 19 when suddenly Kamla aunty showed up.

My first question to her was - How are you doing nowadays in this lockdown?

To which she replied - kise fark padta hai hamare bare me, beta? (Who cares about us? Son.) The world only cares about blue bloods. I wanted to have my husband around me in this pandemic, but he couldn't get here as the government is not letting anyone cross borders.

I didn't know about Kamla Aunty's husband, so I asked her about his work and whereabouts. She told me that her husband is a daily wage firm worker in the outskirts of Rajasthan. He's been there for the last 7 months, and all their savings are on the margin now. Left exhausted in terms of options and resources, he also tried to head to his home on his own under the scorching Sun but police officials still didn't let him cross the border under safety measures of the pandemic. So, he's stuck there now.

Kamla Aunty also shared one of her husband's friends, Mr Pramod Kamat's story. Mr Kamat just lost his 30 years old brother due to hunger in Bihar, and he badly wanted to go for his last rituals. He begged and left no stone unturned to plead the government officials to let him go, but all his efforts were futile. Moreover, he got answers like - "ab kya karoge jaake, tumhare jaane se vo zinda to ho nahi jaenge." (What's the point of

going there now, the person won't come alive again). These kinds of answers broke his heart, and he felt that disharmony and nasty behaviour of people in such a situation.

She remembers, she had a helper named Anwar at her press work who used to collect charcoal for her press. Later on, he left and set up a fruit and vegetable store. His store was working well. But after this lockdown and Tablighi Jamaat incident, people have started boycotting him, humiliating him. Nobody is buying from his store now. He's totally devastated and broke. A few days back, he visited Kamla Aunty and cried about his condition and how unfair it is to connect him with Tablighi Jamaat . Kamla Aunty helped him. She herself doesn't have so much to give, but that doesn't stop her from helping one of her needy friends. She said that if you help someone by the skin of your teeth, it'll definitely come back to you as well because that's how karma works.

She's not being selfish and unkind to anyone because she knows that if the people didn't get help at the very moment, then it would be too late. This is completely "A day late and a dollar short" condition.

I was overwhelmed after talking to her for so long.

At last, she said that she's way too happy that someone came to her home, talked about her life and interviewed her, she felt like a celebrity!

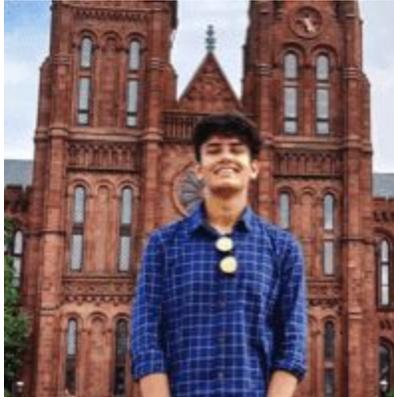
At that moment I realised that even our small contribution could bring immense happiness in someone else's life. The least a person must do is to support other people, talk about their problems and feelings. That will bring a huge change in the entire society.

Place: Delhi

Name: Yash Vats

Institute: IIIT Delhi, Okhla Phase 3

Ansh Kumar Sharma



“Learning in isolation has been a boon for some and a curse for others. Those who are privileged enough to be with their family and have adequate resources to work/learn from home are doing well in this lockdown. However, those who don’t have enough resources like laptops or those who are stuck in some remote places with poor internet connection are facing extreme difficulties in work. Some people are living in complete isolation and so have to do daily chores like buying groceries, cleaning, cooking along with work which results in a very hectic routine and may affect their mental health. Also, many people like labourers have lost their jobs due to this lockdown.”

Case Study

One of the people I talked to during this study was Mr Dharmendra Lodhi. He is a 28-year-old man who lives and works in Old Delhi. His hometown is a small village near Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh where his parents, wife and kids live.

When Dharmendra first came to Delhi, he used to work in my house as domestic help. After some time, we helped him get a job at a clothing shop, and he left working for us. However, he kept in touch with my family and came to visit us frequently about twice a month.

Just before the lockdown, he was doing three jobs a day. In the morning he worked with a vegetable vendor. In the day he worked at the clothing shop and moved handcarts at night.

However, after the lockdown was announced, he didn’t have any work. The vegetable vendor left for his village, the clothing shop closed down and there were no handcart jobs to do. He used to live in a place inside the clothing shop, and he continued to live there but had no source of income. We, being familiar to him, helped him through this by giving him food, money for milk and other essentials. On some days he even used to go to places where they offered free food like Gurudwaras.

When a massive crowd emerged at Anand Vihar Bus Terminal, we advised him not to go

there as there were high chances of catching Coronavirus. People were facing a lot of difficulties. He didn't go there, listening to our advice.

When governments started to arrange for the movement of migrant workers, he decided to leave for his village. He tried to get a train reservation, but to no avail. So he decided to go by himself. He got in touch with a tempo driver and managed to go to Ghaziabad Bus Station for Rs 2100. On reaching Ghaziabad, he left for Garhmukteshwar in UP. He travelled to Garhmukteshwar by different means and also walked for 8-10 km. According to him the authorities in Uttar Pradesh had excellent facilities. His temperature was measured, he was given fresh water bottles and food in the day. At 8 in the night, he was sent towards his village in a private bus arranged by the authorities. The authorities also told people that they will ensure the passengers reach their homes safely. The bus stopped at a place, midway where people had to buy food on their own if they wanted to. Before leaving that place the bus conductor started asking Rs 500 from the passengers to go further, but people rebelled. A police van stopped by, and the policeman scolded the conductor. People agreed on giving Rs 50 to the conductor. From there, it was a smooth journey to his village. On reaching his village, his temperature was checked once more before allowing him entrance.

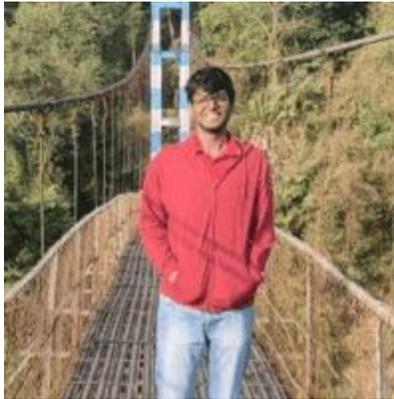
He is currently working as a farm labourer in some field in his village. He is struggling economically but is still in a better state than living unemployed in Delhi. However, he plans to return to Delhi soon and continue with his jobs.

Place: Delhi

Name: Ansh Kumar Sharma

Institute: IIIT Delhi, Okhla Phase III

Anunay Yadav



“Online platforms have bridged the gap well and even in isolation I am connected more with people than before. Learning has improved, but cannot say the same for people without the internet because I think the internet has played a major role in connecting everyone.

Learned a lot of new things. This period has overall increased my work limit per day, sitting on a screen and working on a problem for 1-2 days with nothing else to focus on is just great.”

Case Study

I interviewed more than 8 people and from one such interview, I interacted with Tushar who was a student at IIITD CSD branch. Interview took place on cellphone and he was very much angry as well as depressed because of the huge number of online classes and assignments taken by professors, internet problems and frequent light outs. At the time of interview he stated that 1-2 coronavirus cases were found in his society because of which the whole neighbourhood was quarantined. Assignments given by professors were graded thus contributing to CGPA which is of great importance for students in college and because of which he had no choice but to complete those assignments. Because of lockdown he was not able to get internet providers to fix his internet. Also he had to manage everything with frequent light outs in the society since his quizzes, assignments, deadlines, interviews, everything needed constant supply of electricity.

His family had plans of going to Uttarakhand (his hometown) because of the coronavirus spike in Delhi but they were not able to because of lack of supplies needed to travel by road as traveling by train and plane was not possible because of the high possibility of coronavirus spread. He informed me that people from his society came to help him in any need possible helping him with groceries etc.

He believes that this pandemic is the cause of many problems but it has also brought communities together to help each other. He said that he did not expect how considering and helpful his society is. There are positive as well as negative aspects of lockdown. Even till the end of lockdown he was facing the same problems.

Naman Tyagi



In this project, I interviewed many people and some of them shared their problems and stories and how this crisis has affected them. While analysing the responses, I came to know that according to most people, this isolation is the best time to work upon themselves. They strongly feel that it is the best time for an individual to work on his/her personality.

Case Study

I spoke to a student Amit from Delhi University. According to him, this lockdown is not helping anyone and it has made him exhausted and depressed. Hence the impact on his learning was also negative because it had drained him mentally and had hampered his ability to think. He said, this crisis has impacted the confidence of people and generated a fear amongst them. He also said that this has affected the economy of our country and people are losing their jobs. He thinks that communities are unable to follow lockdown properly and this is leading to increased coronavirus cases. Also, nations have not shown empathy towards each other as people are not sensitive enough, and they are not acting responsibly.

After analysing these responses, I contacted him and asked further questions in order to find the root cause for these negative answers. During the discussion, I came to know that he had been placed in a company but due to the lockdown, he lost his job and is unable to find another one. This loss has affected him mentally and psychologically. His situation made me realise that this is one case which I interviewed and came to know. But there could be thousands of such people in our country. This has in turn affected them psychologically, giving rise to negative thought patterns in their minds.

Arka Sarkar



I understand that many people are facing problems during this pandemic, they are not able to concentrate on the task at hand. However my experience is different. I find that this lockdown has given me a lot of time to learn new things, since we are not going to the gym or to play, we have a lot of time at hand which enables me to concentrate on my studies and my career. I thought that most students might also feel the same but apparently it's not.

The government hasn't taken much initiative for the underprivileged, I think we as a community should take a stance and do something about it. I have read about various NGOs and business organizations who have started distributing food and clothes to the needy. If our student community could also take such steps then it would certainly be great. This is the time for the youth of our country to channelise ourselves towards Nation building.

There has been one drastic change in our lives during this lockdown, that is the lack of domestic helpers. I am now realising how crucial they are to our everyday lives. For the past few months my mother has had to do a lot of the household work apart from her work. I and my dad also helped out several times in the household chores. In India we take the household chores for granted as right from our childhood we have domestic helpers for the job and we never really get to do it ourselves like in foreign countries. I think this is the time to become empowered to take on bigger roles in life as professionals, inclusive and compassionate team leaders. Connecting emotionally with the society at large in order to be of help.

Several communities have come together to fight against covid-19. We as humans have certainly shown empathy towards one another by helping anyone we can, the doctors, police, people in the public health sector have all worked day in day out for these past couple of months. But I feel the government failed to show any kind of empathy towards the poorer people, like the migrant workers, they are starving and dying without any jobs to support their families, despite the news and social media screaming to help these people the government simply ignored their pleas. There are many articles on social media with the title "If Corona doesn't kill me, hunger will", it's really heartbreaking to see the level of ignorance displayed by our government.

Anuneet Anand



“The pandemic has strained the social fabric of our nation. It has exposed various vulnerabilities and incapacities of our social system. There has been a continuous upsurge in the number of COVID-19 cases even after imposing lockdown. Many people have lost their jobs and there has been an economic downfall. The poor section of the society and daily wage workers are in a miserable condition. There is widespread resentment and fear among the people.”

The anxious young adults...

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a profound effect on our lives in the past few months. In the course of this project, I interviewed many people from different backgrounds and got to know about their experiences and struggles during the lockdown. In one such interview, I interacted with Rhythm Patel, an undergraduate student pursuing a degree in Computer Science.

Rhythm is a very humble and friendly person who likes keeping himself busy with various exciting activities. Unfortunately, the past few months have been quite challenging for him. He is a DASA student and his family is settled in Doha, Qatar. In the earlier half of March, the number of cases in our nation was relatively low and most of the students were able to return to their homes safely. However, Qatar had denied immigration in the country as a safety measure. This brought in fear and anxiety for Rhythm but he tried to keep calm and act wisely. He considered that it was best for him to go to his grandparents' house in Anand, Gujarat. The journey was quite a tussle and he had to keep himself safe from getting infected in the crowded places. He managed to reach Anand just before the nationwide lockdown was announced but was anxious about the upcoming challenges.

As the lockdown continued, the college decided to conduct online classes and assignments. Rhythm is a person who likes socializing and is motivated by people around him; thus, he found it difficult to continue with the studies in isolation. He missed the enriching class discussions and debates over various topics. Another

problem was poor internet connectivity and frequent power cuts in his area. A reliable and fast internet connection has become an absolute necessity during this crisis. He attended most of the online lectures on his phone and even had to miss a few. He tried his best to stay motivated and cope with these obstacles.

Prior to this pandemic, Rhythm had got an internship at the reputed Qatar Computing Research Institute. He faced a lot of difficulties in working remotely for the same and felt distressed. According to Rhythm, a diverse group of colleagues and fellow learners, play an essential role in our growth and regular discussions bring in some wonderful ideas.

Rhythm missed his parents a lot and felt miserable at times. But his grandparents were supportive and caring and helped him cope with sadness and loneliness.

When the lockdown relaxed, Rhythm made friends with some of his neighbours. One of his neighbours even offered to share Wi-Fi so that he can continue attending important meetings. A group of young adults in his area helped to bring supplies for the older people and he too volunteered for the same. He understood the value of community bonding and as the days passed, he made efforts to make more contributions to his society.

According to Rhythm, this pandemic created a turmoil on his mental health but constant support from his grandparents and his new neighbours helped him a lot. Looking at the news, he felt quite sorry about the plight of migrant workers and wished for their well-being. He insisted that we all should try to be more empathetic and help people around us in this crisis. We should be more inclusive and should not let this crisis drift us apart.

Place: Delhi

Name: Anuneet Anand

Institute: IIIT-D, Okhla Phase 3

Divyam Gupta



“Social constructs like racism can be broken down instantly if one understands the history of the community being discriminated against and letting go of long-standing biases against them.

A careful observation of the Indian society reveals that we tend to be more servile as compared to Westerners. We can trace this phenomenon to the classroom setting, where the teacher-student relationship is essentially that of a master-pupil with the pupil being subjected to the orders of the master. Flow of ideas, critical and creative thinking are not encouraged. Thus, as adults in a workplace, we seldom put forward new ideas and serve as the working class as compared to being innovators and leaders.”

I am Divyam Gupta, a 20 year old student at IIIT Delhi, pursuing Bachelors in Computer Science and Engineering. Though I was born and raised in Delhi, I've lived in various parts of the country owing to my father's transferable job. I am a kind, compassionate person who takes interest in a diverse range of subjects, from technology to the social sciences. As an introvert, I find socialising to be a daunting task. Yet, I've been lucky enough to be blessed with a fantastic set of friends who've not only guided me through academic hurdles but also supported me during vulnerable times. I hope to meet similar people in the future, who'll ensure an upward trajectory of my professional and emotional development.

Case Study

On a warm May afternoon, I interviewed Ms. Indu Gupta, a 52-year old principal of a government school in East Delhi. The previous day had recorded over 5,000 new COVID-19 cases in the country, at a time when lockdown restrictions were relaxed by a bit. As a student, I couldn't help but wonder how the backbone of the education system, i.e., our teachers, were being treated in these trying times.

Dismally, she recounted the evening of 24th March 2020. She had just sat down to have a hearty dinner with her family after a strenuous day at school, not anticipating the

shock she was about to receive. In a matter of a few minutes, she witnessed the imposition of the nationwide lockdown, which would later be touted as the longest one in Indian history. As a diabetic patient, she was slightly relieved, as she feared to contract the virus while in school. Her relief subsided when she realized how the dynamics of her household would be disrupted. She had to appease the domestic help employed at her house by paying advance wages while managing the tasks they were assigned. As a joint family member, she had to take care of her parents-in-law, who were mentally impacted due to isolation. One of her children, Ritika, a 12th grader, was supposed to appear for the JEE (Mains), 2020. With no revised date in sight, Ritika wailed at the uncertainty of her future. The world seemed to be crashing upon Indu, as multiple aspects of normal life were shaken due to the lockdown.

To compound her troubles, she was assigned to a ration distribution center in North Delhi. She pleaded with the district administration to relieve her of these duties owing to her co-morbidity only to realize her pleas were falling on deaf ears. Moreover, she was forced to be on-duty lest she wanted to be removed from her current post. She couldn't afford the latter as she supplemented her husband's income to ensure a modest lifestyle for her family.

Reluctantly, she would head over to the center in Rohini daily, only to find an old and poorly maintained building. She had to wear protective gear in a room with minimal ventilation, unbearable heat, and tiny windows that were used as booths for the ration collectors. She lamented the apathy shown by the Delhi Government towards the teachers. A limited supply of ration meant that she would have to ask people to go home empty-handed, after having maintained social distancing protocols for several hours. She would feel helpless in these moments and wished she could've personally helped those people.

As her shift ended, she would hastily remove the protective gear that had been suffocating her. On her way back home, she'd witness various langars and NGO workers distributing food to the needy, educating them about the virus's effects, and providing them essential items for short-term survival. It is in these moments that she felt that a ray of hope existed at the end of this dark period. Another bout of relief would come when she would reach home and find her children engaged in activities that reduced the household's burden on her. She'd take a bath to cleanse herself and maintain a strict distance from everyone until she bathed. Her colleagues would narrate a similar story when she'd get a chance to talk to them.

Even after three months of following this draconian routine, and adhering to hygienic practices, she still fears that she'd contract the virus and infect her whole family. Yet, she bravely allays those fears, by contributing to a noble cause at the center, with immense support from her family.

Place: New Delhi

Name: Divyam Gupta

Institute: IIITD okhla phase 3

Anshul Raj



“No matter how diverse/open we think we are , there are always things we don’t know about others, things which might be troubling them, things which they are afraid of talking about.”

Looming economic crisis

One of the people whom I interviewed was a friend of my uncle named Abhishek who works in the accounts department in a company in Delhi. He is a married man 40 years old and has children both of them relatively younger (3-4th grade). He has recently shifted to Delhi from Ranchi and currently lives in a rented home. He is the only earner in the family and has to take care of all the expenses in the family.

I interviewed him on a video call, he seemed to be a very polite, humble person. I asked him about how he feels about working in isolation, to which he replied that it was all well and good till the company decided to fire him at very short notice. He explained that as he is the only earner in the family, they have no source of income and have to pay the rent monthly from their savings which are running short.

He said that if the lockdown continued and if he couldn’t find a job soon then he could run out of savings which would be disastrous. He also added that this is the story of many of his colleagues who were also fired with him.

Then I asked about what he thinks about the social fabric of India and how it has been affected, to which he said that as all the people are facing problems and trying to solve them. There are very few people who are worried about others, “ Every man for themselves ”. He also added that nowadays when he goes out to buy groceries, he

notices that people are very irritated. Probably because there haven't been many things recently to keep people in high spirits, it is just one bad news after another.

When asked about empathy, he had a very strong opinion "NO, If the people would have been empathetic then I wouldn't have got fired." He also added that his boss never asked about his mental health or the problems he was facing in his work.

I asked him, "Do you think this crisis has divided us further or brought us together as a Nation?" he had a mixed response. He said that even though there are not many people around to talk to in this chaos, we have grown closer to the people who are physically near. He added that he has recently been spending more time talking to his neighbours, to whom he only met during the society meetings before.

He finally added that despite all this chaos in his life, he is trying to be optimistic and trying to find a job online, and hoping that this will all come to an end shortly and we will return to normal lives.

Name: Anshul Raj
Institute: IIT Delhi

Kinshuk Chopra



We love to take life for granted and this pandemic made us realise that life is the most unpredictable thing there is. We should start cherishing moments even more and understand the importance of every person in our life from daily workers to friends to families.

I would want our college to be a bit more empathetic towards the students and try to understand that it's a completely new experience for us. A few of the professors were very empathetic towards us but the general attitude was more about continuing college the way it would if there wouldn't, have been any pandemic.

I interviewed people from different communities, and reading their responses made me happy that I took up this project.

One of the responses that I received was of Mr. Sushil Gupta who owns a stationary shop in the market nearby my house. I read his response and felt like he might be a person who wanted to share his story so that he could feel mentally relaxed. I contacted him.

He has had a shop since 2010. He had been personally going to his shop since 2014. I have been a regular customer. The best thing about his personality is that he always tries to share small jokes with his customers to make them feel happier.

Since the lockdown was imposed his shop was shut. Stationary shops were not considered as essential commodities by the government. That was the only way of earning his livelihood.

He told me that like him almost every shop owner in that market was in the same situation, that is no earnings and only had expenses to account for. He is the only earner in his family of 4 people. The lockdown forced him to deplete almost all of his savings.

I was a bit surprised when he told me that money wasn't the major issue, the major issue was staying at home. Mentally it had started taking a toll on him. His shop used to

be open 7 days a week and only closed on holidays .He was a person who loved to be in his workplace.

But as lockdown kept getting extended his family which belonged to the lower middle class started moving towards a financial crisis especially with all the rent dues and EMI's he had to pay.

Then, as a ray of light, he got an opportunity to sell the majority of the stuff that he had in his shop as bulk order to a few companies which needed supplies. He also mentioned that his shop was recommended to those companies by people who were once his customers.

It's been twice that I have met him since lockdown got over and still, he's that same old person who always cracks small jokes. At times it hits me that had people not helped him during this pandemic a good person like him would have lost all his savings and would have been in a much worse situation.

Place: Delhi

Name: Kinshuk Chopra

Institute: IIITD okhla phase 3

Himanshu Raj



The social gap increased because of this pandemic. The upper-class people are able to afford everything they need. While the lower-class people are opting to move to their hometown due to no support from the government and officials in this testing time. Many of them lost their lives walking tirelessly for thousands of kilometres on highways.

Though many communities helped a lot in this pandemic, the social/political/religious differences can be seen in a lot of cases. This is the time when we should be standing united facing this pandemic.

The educational institutions should have considered everyone before making everything online. Not everyone is able to get the internet due to financial crises or demographics. Also, the trauma that a family goes through when someone gets infected is unimaginable and this is never considered. This is the reason why many foreign universities put an end to the ongoing semester.

We Indians lack the understanding of mental health and this is not only the problem with the general public but with everyone including the top decision-makers and officials. The above stated three observations clearly show this.

This is a story of March 2020 and about me, a second-year undergraduate at IIIT-D who is working hard and doing all the deadlines. One day I got to know about the unfortunate demise of one of my close family members. I went back to my hometown to attend the funeral and at the same time the COVID-19 cases started rising in India. When I and my family were about to come back to Delhi, the sudden lockdown got imposed and we got stuck in the hometown but far away from our home.

Imagine a situation where a person gets stuck in a place with no proper electricity (an average of 8-10 hours of electricity cut) and a hot place like Bihar. I being an engineering student of an Indian institute was forced to continue my studies online in this traumatic situation. The assessments and classes were going on like normal in this global pandemic, where you have no idea who is suffering how much either due to COVID-19 infection or with this sudden lockdown.

I was also worried about the fact that almost no one was aware about the COVID-19 there. Life was going on as usual in my village.

However, we came back to Delhi using E-Pass in the middle of May. My life didn't go back to normal but it was better than before. I can very easily term these 2 months as the most challenging period of my life till now, the basic routine of a human life like sleeping was also very hard during that time. (sleeping in 45 degrees with no fan and stretch this situation for 2 months)

After reaching Delhi, I could perceive the change in my life. I could attend classes, exams, etc. normally like any other student. I also took up some new skills and courses to learn and work on. I learnt how much life changes from village to city. At the same time I do realise the situation of students who are stuck somewhere, not having proper resources for attending online classes. This saddens me deeply and I totally empathize with them.

My experience taught me how the life of a college student changes when his college management makes a bizarre decision of continuing with online assessment at the time of global pandemic. It made me realise how much mental health education and the idea of inclusion, that we lack, needs to be incorporated.

A supreme decision maker imposed a big decision like sudden lockdown without any planning and it resulted in numerous migrant workers dying on the roads. If they had considered the case of poor people and made better arrangements, then this chaos wouldn't have happened. It exposed the lack of thought and empathy that goes into making such arbitrary decisions.

I hope these lessons will stay with me and help me act wisely in the future.

Vishwesh Kumar



Working on this project has helped me expand my viewpoint regarding multiculturalism in India. A new side of things has been opened for me . I have become more perceptive of the daily challenges faced by people ,and hope to induce the same into others around me .

Simple actions that matter.

I have gone on a journey of coming across many perspectives , viewing this pandemic through different lenses.

On a day to day basis , the lockdown has made me highly self dependent . Majority of my day is spent cooking small meals , making shakes etc (small things , which I am capable of doing right now) , for the family, which I am sure will help me in the future.

A major effect of this pandemic has been on my education , and learning virtually was quite a slippery slope. I was able to score a decent grade point , but what I actually learnt was quite a different story. With deadlines still intact thanks to the college not being ready to back down on that front , a majority part of my mental strength was sapped by my college and an internship I was applying for .There were many days when I had to deliberately pull myself away from the screen , as that was slowly becoming the only way to progress.A decent method I apply to separate my work and fun is to make different workspaces/devices for both of them. This is a great psychological booster , and something I'd recommend others to do too.

My physical strength has gone down , despite the bi-weekly jogs and regular skipping I do. Possibly a cause of that is that earlier on , I had become accustomed to having a social motivation (badminton team practices in college) behind every workout session . However , the current motivation is to keep my immune system intact. With a corona

case occurring in my neighborhood, I have come to the understanding that at the end , one's immunity is the last resort that one can rely on, despite all the social distancing one does.

I felt that Online communication has pushed me to interact with people outside my group again. These apply to both new and old acquaintances. This really has helped me get back in touch with my soft skills. This project has also helped in that.

A major part of the project I undertook dealt with community strength ,bonds , and social fabric of India. The responses helped me model what the current outlook of individuals has been towards society. The most important front I came across was that of unity , and the communities that have been on the forefront of this pandemic.. Every person fend for themselves now , and with social distancing in place , a lot of the physical exchanges in life have now been reduced to null. For quite a lot of people , these were what kept the relations intact (seeing each other on the walk , talking to ones neighbour while taking out the garbage). I feel the pandemic has brought us apart at a community level, due to lack of social interactions . However, we have had better time to bond with family.

A shopkeeper near my house is on the verge of shutting down, due to the fact that his main source of sales were luxury items . Unable to procure those goods anymore , he has tried to expand his business to selling grocery items. I learnt that helping others may not only be in the form of monetary help , but also simple acts like buying from struggling shops .My father and I consistently tried to buy things from his shop, and encouraged our neighbours to do the same. With some encouragement , soon the sales picked up , and the money flow to the shop increased gradually. I am happy to say that the community was able to come together to help each other out.