

**Life Under Lockdown: Lived Experiences and Lessons Learnt, Sanjai Bhatt, 2021, Papyrus Scrolls Publication, ISBN: 9788195385102, INR 999, Ebook: \$14.99**

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**Abstract**

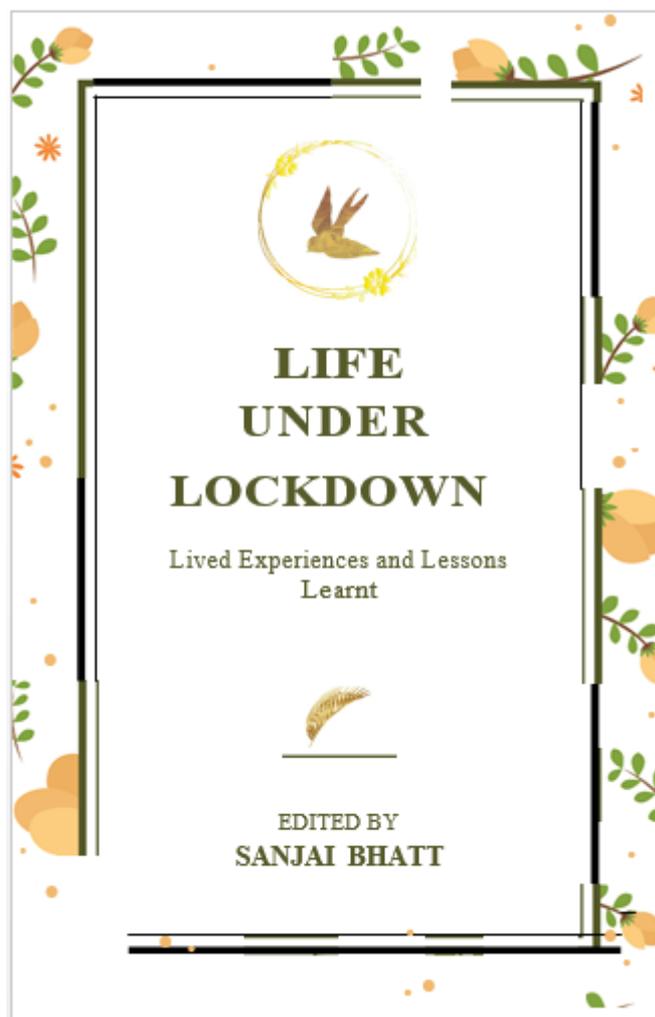
This article is dedicated to doing a detailed review of the aforementioned book entitled *Life Under Lockdown: Lived Experiences and Lessons Learnt* by Professor Sanjai Bhatt, Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, 3, University Road, Delhi 110007, India; Immediate Past President, National Association of Professional Social Workers in India; Immediate Past President (South Asia), International Council on Social Welfare, Alliance Ambassador, GSSWA

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## Introduction

Since March 2020, two industries have relentlessly dominated worldwide due to an invisible sneaky virus called COVID-19. These two industries are 'fear' and 'death'. An individual has been suffering from the fear of getting infected by the virus and its various mutant variants, fear of dying, fear of losing jobs, fear about ageing/terminally ill parents/relatives, fear of breaking down mentally and other invincible domains of everyday fear (Dodsworth, 2021). Similarly, the death industry has taken a 'new norm' globally, often causing unprecedented waves of premature deaths vis-à-vis, impeding the modes of remembrance and performance of death rituals through the deployment of public health measures. Meticulous observations of death

statistics retrieved from Covid-19 Dashboard (Coronavirus Research Centre, John Hopkins University) and Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)<sup>1</sup> during the ongoing pandemic demonstrate two important aspects—uneven spatial distribution of deaths (by countries, regions and (or) rural and urban) and deaths by unequal social dimensions such as race, gender, religion, age and ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2021; see also, Loubaba, & Jones, 2020; Maddrell, 2020; Ho & Maddrell, 2021).

Amid the ongoing fear and death from the virus, the governments have deployed the 'notion of care' (Springer, 2020) via the imposition of various restrictions in public places such as mask-wearing, maintaining social distances and multiple forms of Lockdown— total Lockdown,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.icmr.gov.in/index.html>

partial Lockdown, curfew (or night curfew) aimed at safeguarding its citizens and containing the virus. Because of the Lockdown, there has been a massive transformation in everyday life of individuals— schools, college/university teachings have moved into an online mode; the culture of work from home has emerged— indeed, a new normal has arisen because of the Lockdown. In addition, many scholars and teachers have engaged in serious research and writings during the Lockdown. Captured in 32 chapters, this 360-page book with a Foreword by Dr Venkat Rao Pulla, who is a world-renowned social work academic. The book is an outcome of the first year of Lockdown contributed by 33 scholars—social work professionals, academicians, bureaucrats, researchers and students. The book brings to the fore the nuanced experiences, creepy feelings, sufferings, and socio-economic impacts from COVID 19.

### Review

In their first Chapter, *COVID-19 in India: Lockdown and Unlock Analysis*, Sanjai Bhatt and Ipshita Bhatt critically analyse the collateral socio-economic impact of the Lockdown. During the first few days of the Lockdown, India's migrant crisis took centre stage—the migrant labourers, who defied all odds to move back to their native homes on foot for thousands of miles, and in the process, many have lost their lives until the Government measures came forward to offer help (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Suresh et al., 2020). The authors have analysed the crisis of these migrants alongside the other impacts the Lockdown had on the economy, businesses, daily wage labourers, farmers and alike.

Stan Lobo, in Chapter 2, titled *Redefining the Meaning of Existence during Lockdown*, illustrates how identity crisis has been created by the pandemic while managing relationships have been a tangle of complexities. Though the pandemic has taught people to live and die in isolation, but humans being social animals, can only 'imagine' living in communities.

In Chapter 3, *Home Away from Home and Professional Responsibility*, Nagmani Rao

narrates the lived experiences of challenges and contestations of two generations living in the same household. As she argues (2021, p. 64):

With the younger generation facing uncertainties and pressures on the work front, they are far more stretched than the older generation. It is a struggle for them to balance their excessively demanding work routines with family responsibilities without external or family support systems. The older generation, on the other hand, goes through its own angst due to greater risks and restrictions on their free movement, a disturbance of their independent routine and also sometimes, differences of approaches in dealing with work and family stress. When multiple generations live continually under the same roof, these create undercurrents of tensions that are just waiting to erupt.

Seemingly, Neera Agnimitra, in Chapter 4, *Life in Confounded Times: Experiences of Struggles and Resolve*, discusses the lived experiences of everyday life by comparing life during pre-COVID and at the time of the pandemic where during the pandemic, family bereavement is one of the most common phenomena. Nonetheless, the pandemic has taught people to be resilient, updating abilities for problem-solving, decision making, innovating, and adapting.

Deploying the notions of reflections and positionality (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018), Seema Sharma in Chapter 5, *Passing through Prism*, narrates how the lived experiences of any individual unlatches the windows to 'innumerable nostalgic moments' (87), leading the individual to reflect one's responses, better understand the situation and react not only with maturity but also negotiate to the 'situations encountered' (87). In this chapter, she recommends that all schools of social work, taking their students as its stakeholders, establish a structure with due processes, responsibilities, and accountability to be functioned appropriately during an emergency or any other disaster or hazards.

*Locating Meaning of Life and Death during COVID-19* is Chapter 6 by Archana Kaushik, who

applied several indicators— fear of corona; extending help to the poor: beggars, destitute, homeless, rickshaw pullers; growing concern about ageing parents, meditations, enrichment through knowledge and skill enhancement, personal health and well-being, work from home— narrates her own lived experiences, challenges and mechanisms of coping during the lockdown period, who herself underwent a knee replacement surgery in December 2019. While discussing the various aspects of death, the author urged the importance of bereavement counselling as a formal area of study and practice.

R P Dwivedi, the 62-year-old Professor of Social Work, Varanasi, in Chapter 7 titled *Lockdown and Retirement- Double Loss*, narrates his personal experiences of retiring as a social worker during the Lockdown. In doing so, applying Gandhian philosophy, he explained how his retirement accompanied by Lockdown came to him as a form of 'double-edged sword' triggering sadness and depression, although he was gifted with a grandson to enjoy and cherish.

In Chapter 8, *Observing the Philosophy of Rasa and Aswāda during the Lockdown*, Gautam Kalotra applied the philosophies of nine emotions (*Navarasa*) and tastelessness to narrate his experiences during the Lockdown. In so doing, he suggested that there needs to be a balance between *Rasa* and *Aswāda* because to manage one's sufferings and pleasure, it remains paramount to maintain peace and harmony. This chapter also delves into the question of understanding oneself, which in turn can help in understanding the holistic nature of the universe.

Because of the engagement of the everyday mundane aspects of life, people seldom get quality time to spend with their respective families. However, one of the silver linings of Lockdown is that it helped people to spend quality time with their family, friends and neighbours. The next three chapters are devoted to family experiences.

Shivani Chauhan Baruah, in Chapter 9, *Even Lockdown Could not Change My Routine* reflects about her life during Lockdown in the city of Guwahati. However, it remains unclear as to

how Lockdown could not change her routine. Similarly, in Chapter 10, titled *Learning Skills in Emotional Intelligence during Lockdown*, Nitesh Dhawan discusses how he and his family spent time and coped during the Lockdown. Indeed, he and his family adopted four critical skills — yoga, spirituality, sharing, and creativity to tackle the state of crisis during phase 1 of Lockdown. In the next chapter, Chapter 11, *Family Life during Lockdown and Learning Lessons*, Sony Kunjapan has narrated similar family experiences and coping mechanisms during the first phase of the pandemic. PK Bajpai, in Chapter 12, *Family Where Life Begins but Never Ends*, is another similar description of the lockdown experience.

In Chapter 13, *Ponderings in the Period of Pandemic*, Nirupam Hajra, while highlighting the use of new words and vocabulary— hydroxyl, chloroquine, quarantine, social-distancing, pandemic, Lockdown and containment-zone, Hazra also made the meaningful observation with the notion 'work from home' where he argues that because of the pandemic, the idea of work has incorporated the notion of leisure, signalling that 'work 'look' leisurely'. In contrast, 'leisure [is] adulterated with works' (164).

*Unlocking Life During the Lockdown* is Chapter 14, written by Neena Pandey, where the author unlocks her lived experiences of social responsibility for her family and urges for preparedness during times of crisis. India is a massive country with more than 1.3 billion people, with many myriad issues in different geographical spaces, so a single central policy does not work appropriately. While praising the Kerala model of tackling COVID-19, she called for the decentralisation of healthcare policies across the nation. The author, however, fails to mention the Assam model of tackling COVID 19, which also proved to be one of the good models so far the issue of tackling COVID 19 is concerned.

In Chapter 15, Bhavna Mehta, in her study entitled *Family: Where Life Begins and Love Never Ends* discusses how the family and her neighbours provided a sense of security, love, and a feeling of care for each other. The author goes on to describe that based on her online

study, she launched a training programme aimed at understanding the psychosocial impact of the Lockdown. The findings of her study unfolded the common people's panic and anxiety regarding them and the future of their families in terms of education, income, job, business, economic stability, etc. triggering a massive agony and impacting lives emotionally, socially, and economically, in both positive and negative ways.

Although the author acclimatised herself to the 'new normal' and has restarted working full time like before the start of the Lockdown, she witnessed transformation linked to online teaching-learning and distance communication, which she appreciates; herself becoming a learner about social media and technology.

Comparing Lockdown to the curfews of Kashmir, as the curfews in Kashmir is a normative mode of everyday life, Aadil Bashir, in Chapter 16, *Lockdown: Another Form of Curfew*, argues that Lockdown and curfews bear similar appearances. However, the impact of Lockdown is far more intense as it affects the psychosocial and mental health of the individuals. The author also argues that COVID 19 has shown the importance of recognising the real purpose of all the social and economic institutions— family, education, businesses, economies, political parties and governments, local civic associations, international organisations, including conventions and ideologies, and other institutions serving and working for humanity.

Chapter 17, *COVID and Lockdown: Law of Nature v/s Human Beings*, has been contributed by Ngaopunii Trichao Thomas investigating the pandemic lockdown by connecting it to the law of nature versus human beings. He argues that despite the incredible advancements in science and technology, human beings remain vulnerable in the face of nature. He also contends that the pandemic has driven people close to the notion of 'fear' and psychological and emotional stress leading humans to question the 'divine power'. As he argue:

All these experiences have raised serious questions about divine power as it offers

an inexhaustible source of interpretations when nothing seems to explain the onset of a questionable pandemic. In turn, it forced human beings to reflect on how divine power works at a time of vulnerability. It has become passable and able to bring comfort and speak to us in our every situation. We tend to look at God on the basis of faith instead of looking at what makes us fearful. For many people, they desire to take professional help, for some, prayer has become the first resort and not last. To balance life and avoid reductionist approaches, many undertake diverse coping strategies such as exercise, cooking, gardening, etc. On the flip side, public awareness about COVID-19 has benefited all of us in terms of convincing the general public to check regularly for fever and report symptoms promptly. By means of all this, there is familiarisation, streamlining, envisaging our circumstances and progressively helping one adjust to a new life (202)

*Welcoming Lockdown Baby: Lived Experience of a Couple in Bihar* is Chapter 18, written by Rajiv Kumar, narrates his personal experience of living in a nuclear family with his working pregnant wife, who safely delivered a baby during the Lockdown. While conveying the lives of two working professionals of a nuclear household, the author beautifully captures the fear they encountered—the fear of the invisible virus knocking at their door, the increasing ritual of handwashing leading to the heights of pathological obsession.

In Chapter 19, *College Youth and Their Response During COVID-19*, Keshav Walke narrates his experience working with the college youth as a National Service Scheme (NSS) Programme Coordinator engaging in online and offline activities at tackling COVID 19. Besides, voluntary his services in helping people during the pandemic also spanned across five levels— Urban Communities, Rural Communities, Tribal / Indigenous Communities, Communities Affected with Wildlife Projects and Migrant Workers.

In Chapter 20, Wakar Amin, *My Profession-A Blessing During Lockdown*, greatly acknowledged his social work profession while analysing his personal and family life during the Lockdown. In Chapter 21, *My Hundred Days of Lockdown*, Ambadas Y Mohite, the progressive writer of his region—the founder President of Maharashtra Association of Social Work Educators (MASWE) and Senior Academic Consultant and Regional Director Yashwantrao Chavan Open University (YCMOU), Amravati Region narrates how his 100 days of Lockdown became productive for him and his family—his wife and two grown-up sons spent quality time together almost after 11 years, not only playing carrom board but also learning new technologies and reconnecting to friends and families via phones.

Shalini Pandey, in her Chapter 22, *Lockdown Blues: Lived Experiences of COVID-19* describes the lived experiences and the anxieties during COVID -19. This chapter explains how her life was balanced before Lockdown, engaging in writing her PhD thesis. She used the term—adrenalin rushes to describe the fear of the virus plus the safe return of her husband and son who had gone to Varanasi to meet her in-laws, the pain of losing her 93-year-old uncle in Bengaluru.

Chapter 23, *Lead by Actions and Not Just by Words* by Nimisha Gupta, explains the challenges and coping mechanisms during the lockdown period—as a Professor and homemaker, how she balanced her life during the first wave of the pandemic.

Chapter 24, *Achieving Lifelong Dream during COVID-19*, contributed by Manju Panwar, is a narrative of how she was suspected of carrying the COVID-19 virus and pressurised to inform at the nearby medical centre and take a test and subsequent hospitalisation as a returnee after attending the International Conference on ‘Sustainable Goals: Higher Education and Science Take Action’, which was organised by the Global University Network for Innovation(GUNI) held at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain from 5 to 6 March 2020. This chapter also narrates the challenges of her days at the hospital when her parents looked after her

children and the ways of coping during the pandemic.

Mohd Salman, a Delhi based research scholar hailing from Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, describes in Chapter 25, *A Research Scholar's Life during Lockdown in a Village of Uttar Pradesh*, the ways COVID- 19 lockdown coerced him to flee home where his research took a ‘standstill mode’ because of the lack of access to both online and offline resources. While explaining his experiences during the Lockdown, he highlights the punitive actions of the government and the police force as a way of containing the virus. He goes on to highlight the coerced school holidays enjoyed by his nieces and nephews and that online education was merely a symbolic ritual rather than actuality.

Sukriti Chowdhary, another Delhi-based researcher, pursuing research in Missing Children, describes in Chapter 26, *The COVID-19 Pandemic Changed My Family*, how her father's sudden illness and hospitalisation and herself falling sick affected their family and her research life, which compelled her to stop the final stage of her data collection.

Jaimon Varghese, in Chapter 27, *Meaning of Life Redefined*, sees the glass as ‘half-filled’ rather than ‘half-empty’. He narrates how his routine changed entirely during the Lockdown and had to adapt to the new model of ‘work from home’, but the changed model turned out to be positive for him where he set sails a new journey of explorations and creativity, and of course, appeasement from social media.

As a gynaecologist by profession and a family counsellor by interest, Dr Rita Goel, in Chapter 28, *It is Family that Knocked Out Covid*, has made robust claims by connecting her knowledge of medicine and behavioural science to argue that it is the family that kicked out COVID. This chapter unravelled her yearning to construct a trauma-informed society that thrives and proliferate in kindness, compassion, and empathy. She argues that during COVID, loss of jobs and the new work model from home, increased domestic violence (Singh and Bhattacharyya, 2020), divorce rates, suicides

have further added to the gravity of the problem.

Jaya Kamble Kalotra has taken a somewhat philosophical route to explain her experience during the Lockdown in Chapter 29, entitled *The Fluidity of Life during Lockdown*. She argues that life is uncertain, and survival is a part of everyday life—one cannot predict life; therefore, life remains fluid even during the Lockdown.

R. Nalini, in Chapter 30, *A New Daily Routine Evolved During Pandemic*, narrates how her everyday routine changed drastically during the Lockdown. She reflects that “[l]ife thus was moving at a steady pace and we were leading a contented and happy life – not that I had nothing to complain, especially at the work front” (335). As a teacher, she describes how she coped with her responsibilities by taking a new mode of teaching and fieldwork.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter 31, *Work from Home: Actions and Innovations* by Atul Pratap Singh, reflects the positive experiences of working from home during the Lockdown. Unlike his offline commitment at work, which followed a fixed routine bearing fixed time, his online work with the adoption and use of ICT, his work hours became unlimited and flexible. He reckons that the adoption and application of ICT made a staggeringly positive impact on teaching-learning and research.

Finally, in Chapter 32, entitled *Adolescence Lockdown, Bloom Again*, the 18-year-old Anoushka Sharan, the youngest contributor, was a student of class XII during the Lockdown; and is currently a volunteer at Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation. In the chapter, she captures her experience of being an adolescent during the Lockdown.

In sum, the narratives of the chapters more or less bear resonance to the observations made by the scholars of the West (Dodsworth, 2021; Loubaba & Jones, 2020; Maddrell, 2020; Ho & Maddrell, 2021; Springer, 2020).

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the contributors of this book add to the burgeoning scholarship of the impact of

COVID-19 and Lockdown. However, one of the significant weaknesses of this book is that it is solely contributed by scholars belonging to the social work fraternity. Nevertheless, the narratives of this moderately priced book would be useful for scholars—human geographers, sociologists, anthropologists and of course, other social workers to pursue their own research/social work.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

I bear no conflict of interest in reviewing this book commentary

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