Missing School or Not

Having completed our exams in the first week of March, it was now the time to relax. Schools were already closing down in many cities since February, we hoped soon ours will do too. It was March 14th, 2020 when I got a call from my friend saying that our holidays were extended for a month. We were stoked. It was the feeling that every student experiences on the last day of summer vacations, that longing for a little more days of fun. On March 24, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a nationwide lockdown for 21 days. The entire family will be at home, together with all the time in hand, what else could we wish for? In that mere moment this pandemic felt like a blessing in disguise, but who knew what was left to unfold.

Our initial 3 weeks were like a dream, playing with siblings, having movie marathons, giving time to our hobbies. Mom made new dishes, every day was gourmet time, enjoyment and fun. But after that, the excitement wore out. The board games were more like 'bored' games, the phones on which we endlessly scrolled started giving us migraines, every fun thing we planned, ironically, gave us no fun. We were stumbling down the pit of procrastination and depression. Then finally we felt a wave of happy relief when we got the official notice that school will resume online. It was like a silver lining.

Months passed by and we've been studying hard and attending classes diligently, trying to get good grades. However, life seemed monotonous. Spending hours attending school classes, then extra classes, and then coaching classes, and trying to catch up with studies and assignments with the little time left. Waking up felt hard. It was as if we were trapped in limbo. Being stuck in the house and having to repeat the same thing over and over again made us irritable. We felt like caged birds.

With death counts increasing every day, our anxiety grew. We never felt more helpless. We heard the cries of neighbours as people, we once knew, died. With the feeling of death breathing down our necks, studying was the last thing on our minds. Home felt like a prison, school felt like a punishment, and our own thoughts felt like demons. The mouth-watering dishes tasted bland and were eventually replaced by the taste of kadha (an Ayurvedic immunity-boosting drink) on our tongue.

So did we miss school? The answer is yes and no. We still got that quality education at home, we were still studying and trying our best. We were not missing the studies, what we missed was the environment it gave us. We missed our friends, our classmates. We missed running

down the hallways, the chorus of the lunch bell, the chaotic bus time, the giggling in the library. We missed the whispers of the trees during windy days that kept us focused, the screech of the chalk against the chalkboard that used to catch our attention. We missed the labs and mundane yet mind-blowing experiments. Our teachers were trying their best to give us the same quality education but nothing could be the same as the classroom.

As a NEET aspirant, my 11th grade was spent mostly jumbling between school and the coaching institute, toiling hard to study for this test which would decide my future. I never felt grateful for those places at that time. Old me would have given you a weird, confused look if you asked her this. But looking back, I feel gloomy. If only we could turn back the time.