

What the Pandemic Means to the World by Ishika Muchhal

When your computer gets a virus, you assess the situation, find a solution and reboot.

When the world gets a virus, we assess, resolve and reboot.

What if this virus isn't just a health issue? What if it was meant to tear us all apart? OR to bring us all together? What if it was meant for us to take a closer look at the **motherboard**, with care this time? We can say that we weren't ready for it or that we deserved it. One thing is for sure - this pandemic has brought a series of contradictions and revelations that has left humanity grappling for answers and action.

My name is Ishika Muchhal. I am a 20-year-old Indian American studying acting in college. My whole life revolves around people, collaborating, listening, observing and portraying. So, what do I do when the basis of my work and existence is stripped away and replaced by screens? I am part of the generation told to "get out of the digital world and get into the real world," But what happens when that digital world is the **only** platform through which we can safely connect?

To me, quarantine feels like a test.

- A test of self-restraint - will we follow social guidance or be swayed by the notion of free will?
- A test of selflessness - will we think more about ourselves or think about more than ourselves?
- A test of self-motivation - do we need to be stuck in someone else's machine or can we build our own productivity?
- A test of relationships - who actually matters to us and who do we actually matter to when connecting isn't convenient?
- And lastly, a test of personal and societal values - what is really important to us and will we recognize its value before it is gone?

Even before the pandemic, viruses of inequality, racism, sexism, corruption, poverty and environmental degradation have been throbbing through the veins of all our nations. Traces have been found in the blood test reports of countries but shrugged off like a common cold.

Well, here is what the Corona Virus is telling the world, "You can't keep ignoring them!!!"

The pandemic has given us time to reassess and reprioritize. Social issues have been put in the spotlight, the rallying cry for justice louder than ever. Taboo

subjects are finally being unlocked and unloaded by social media, news and conversation.

Because of the lockdowns, the environment has experienced drops in greenhouse gas emissions. I hear so many people exclaiming that “the sky looks so clear and beautiful!” which makes me wonder, if we are enjoying these improvements now, what was keeping us from cutting down emissions years ago?

Yet, on the flip side, the pandemic has also brought with it a wave of waste - increased use of water, disposable masks, gloves, toxic chemicals, plastic bags, Styrofoam containers and cardboard boxes from all the take-outs and deliveries. These things add up, contributing to the **looming** disaster of climate change.

But here is the catch. Many people refuse to believe in climate change and science in general. And at a time when science will get us through the pandemic, not trusting it is a risky choice.

Right now, science is facing either defiance, reliance or alliance.

On one hand, some communities and politicians are engaged in a battle to defy scientists and medical professionals. Essential medical workers lack the basic protection equipment, being pushed into an ever-changing battlefield with no armor. Governments are hiding data, skewing results and enacting contradictory regulations, allying with the enemy in this war against Covid-19.

On the other hand, a large portion of the population is relying on science, eagerly waiting for the results of ongoing vaccine and medicine trials.

The scientific community itself is allying towards a common goal. Even regulatory agencies have allowed adjustments, bringing the vaccine development cycle from years to months.

It all boils down to a concept that is a key part of my training as an actor - perspective.

We cannot judge the impact of this pandemic from a neutral lens because everything we see, hear, touch, taste, smell and feel carries our perspective. What is a period of opportunity and success for one could be a period of despair and stagnation for another, a roadblock to some and a stepping stone to others. So, the pandemic is a series of contradictions and revelations, and it demands that we live each day to the fullest with community, introspection, intention AND HOPE.