



STORIES

from City as Lab

Life in the Time of COVID-19

Part 1

2020-2021





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Preface

2020 came upon us in the most unexpected way. It brought sickness, death, grief and distance. It blatantly revealed, if not widened, existing inequities with respect to health care, nutrition, sanitation, employment and education.

2020 also forced us to re-consider our priorities. To examine who is truly “essential” for the smooth functioning of society. To acknowledge our own privileges. And to appreciate and value the work of scientists more than ever before.

Everyone has a story to tell about 2020 – the year of the pandemic. The year the world encountered COVID-19.

Everyone.

Students, teachers, doctors, patients, parents, delivery persons, sanitation workers, business owners, nurses, ward boys, auto-rickshaw drivers, police personnel, NGO founders, animal lovers, artists, daily-wage labourers, farmers, senior citizens... every one.

However, not all stories are told. Or heard.

Our story project for CaL this year asked students to tell the stories of ordinary people. The selected stories published in this two-part book give voice to those whose voices are typically left out of popular media. These stories capture glimpses of life in the time of COVID-19 – as told by 6th to 9th grade students from Mumbai and Pune.

Students interviewed the protagonists and wrote their stories in one of four formats – a first person narrative, a journalistic feature story, a picture book or a graphic novel. Over the course of five months, under the guidance of their teachers, students became authors, illustrators, journalists, researchers and editors.

The nine stories in these two books showcase empathy, courage, hard work, gratitude, loss and optimism. Not all of these stories have happy endings... but life goes on. And so above all, these stories showcase a relentless human spirit for survival.

We thank all the students and teachers who participated in the City as Lab story project this year and congratulate the teams whose stories are published here!



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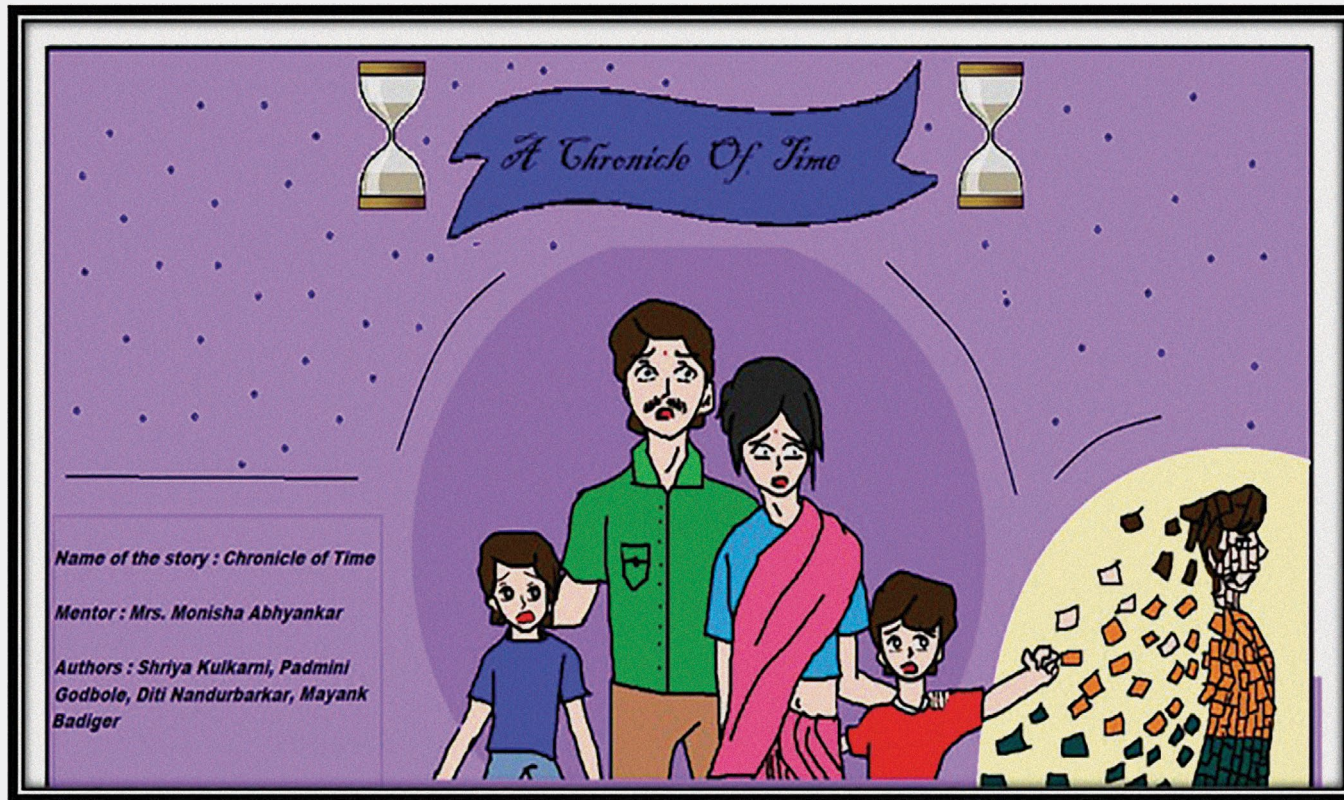
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A Chronicle Of Time - Graphic Novel

Dr Kalmadi Shamarao High School, Ganeshnagar, Pune



Authors: Shriya Kulkarni, Padmini Godbole,
Diti Nandurbarkar, Mayank Badiger

Mentor: Mrs. Monisha Abhyankar

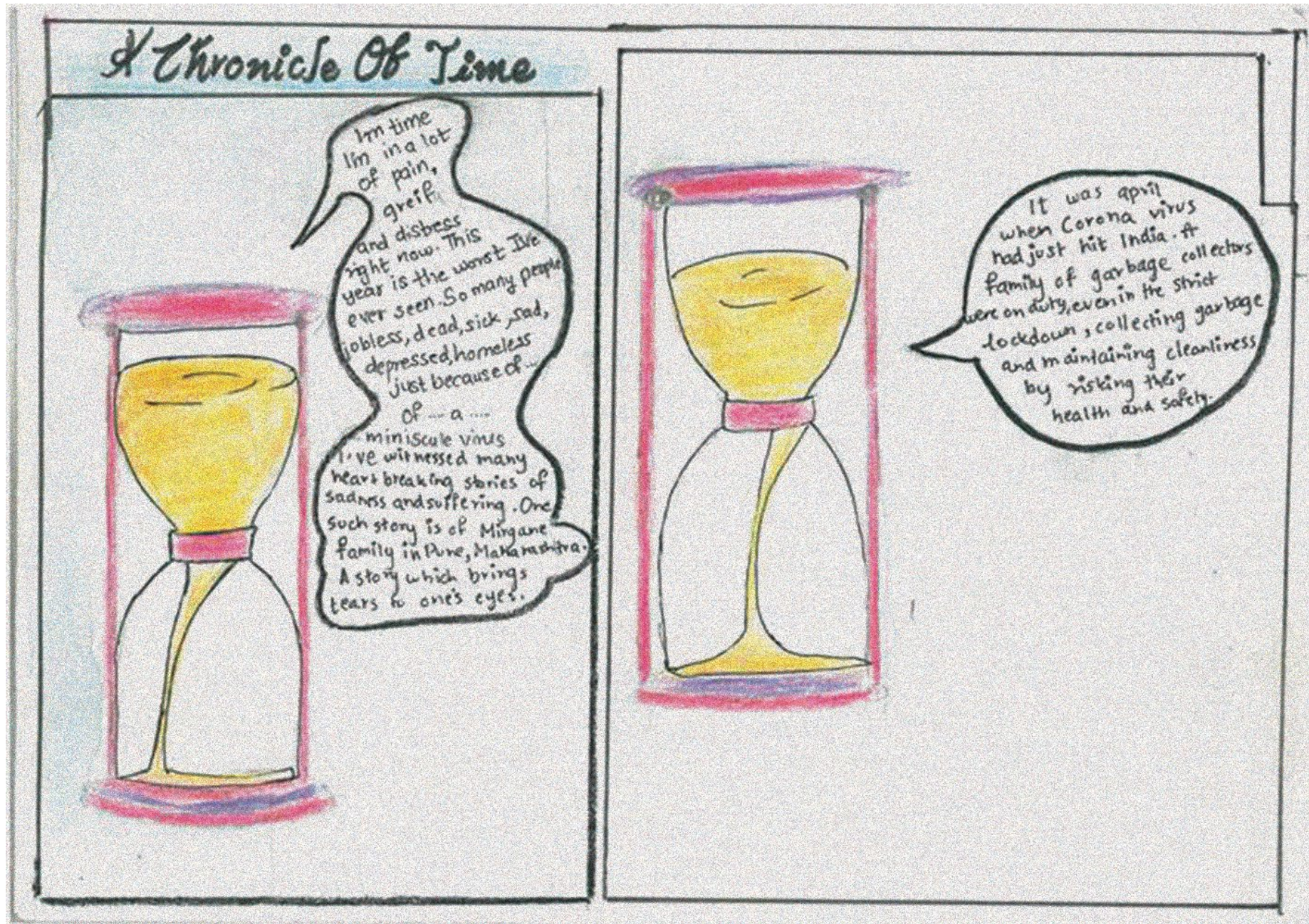
Rationale

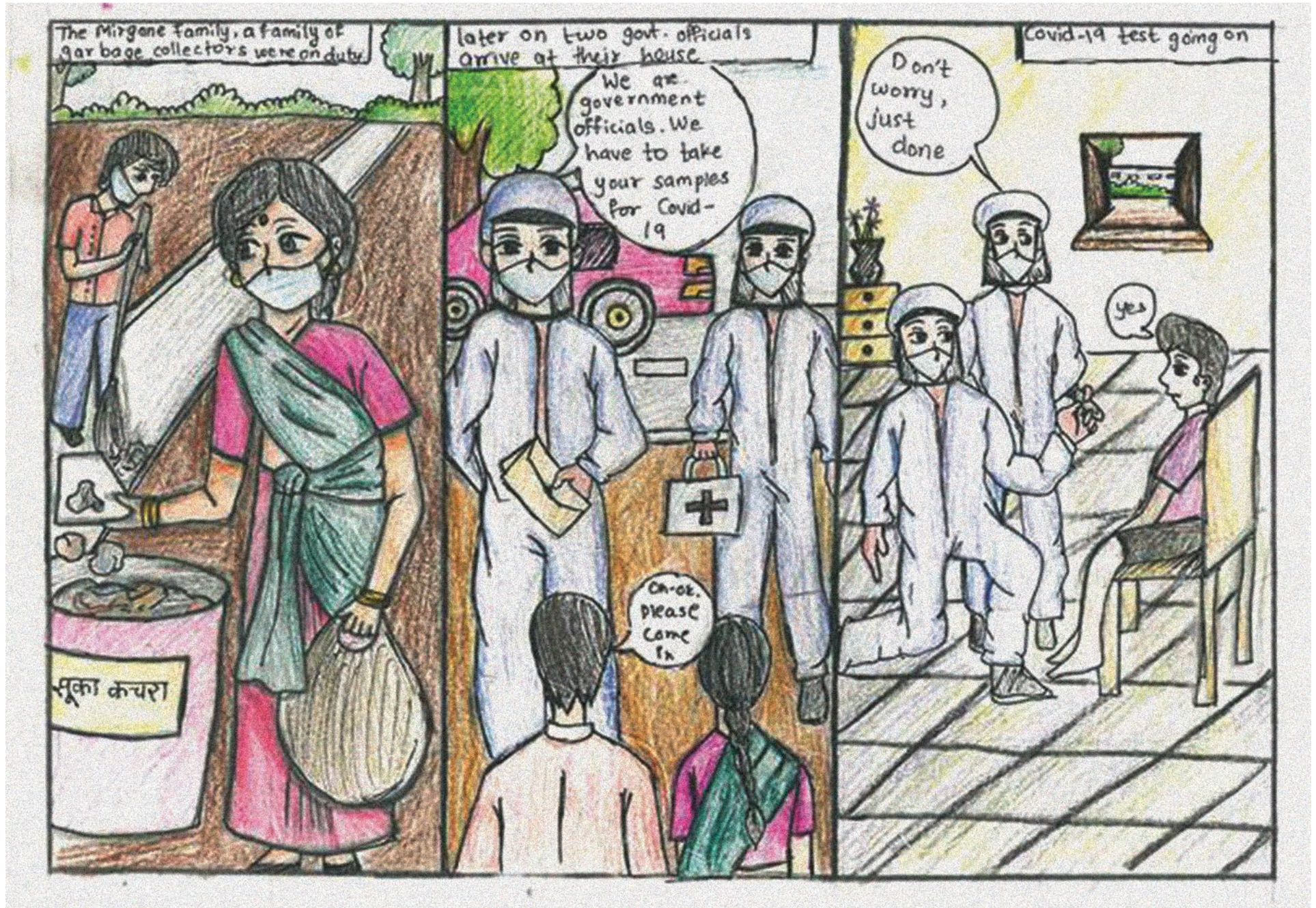
This is the story of a sanitation workers' family who are always exposed to the risk of skin infections, respiratory and eye ailments but their risk has gone up a hundredfold during the times of the Corona virus pandemic. The way this family had to battle with COVID in times of low funds, really touches our hearts and inspires us. We wanted to share this because we feel that when we understand the pain that others are facing, we learn to be empathetic and understand how truly privileged we are.

Can you imagine that there are many kids our age, who don't even get a chance to express their opinion like we do. We would like to use this chance, to show how our characters (A family of sanitation workers) who lead a life, where they are not recognised in the society due to their professions, are under rated and their work is not acknowledged, continue to fight against the society for their rights. In spite of the hardships they face, they step out of their houses every single day and work for the society selflessly.

We would like to thank them and let them know that their efforts are recognised and respected. They work for the society and its benefits. We would like to speak up for those who can't speak for themselves. Become their voice so that their stories are heard.

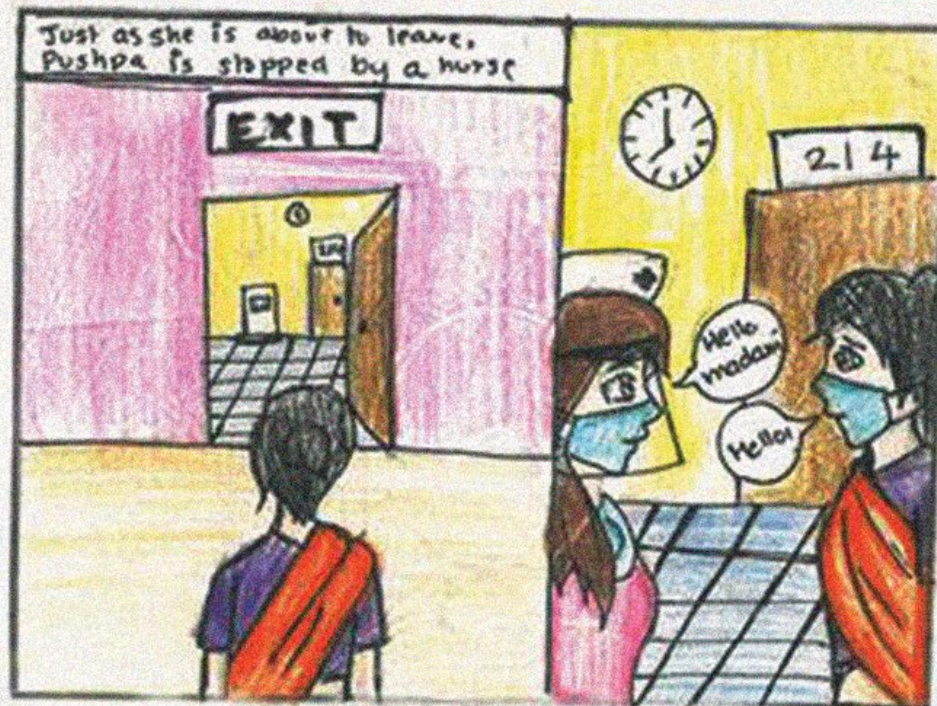
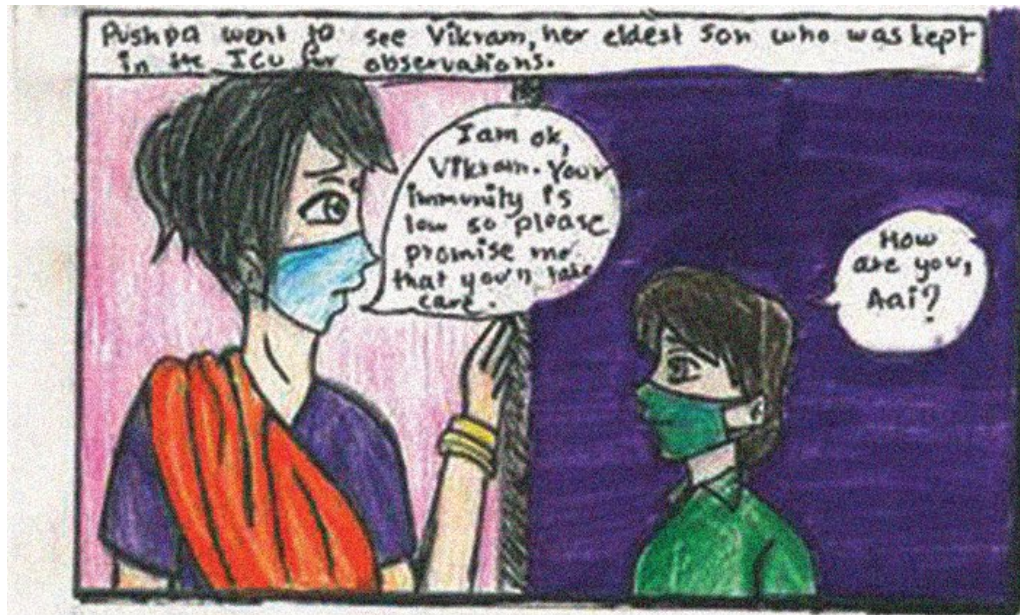
Our Story..... starts here



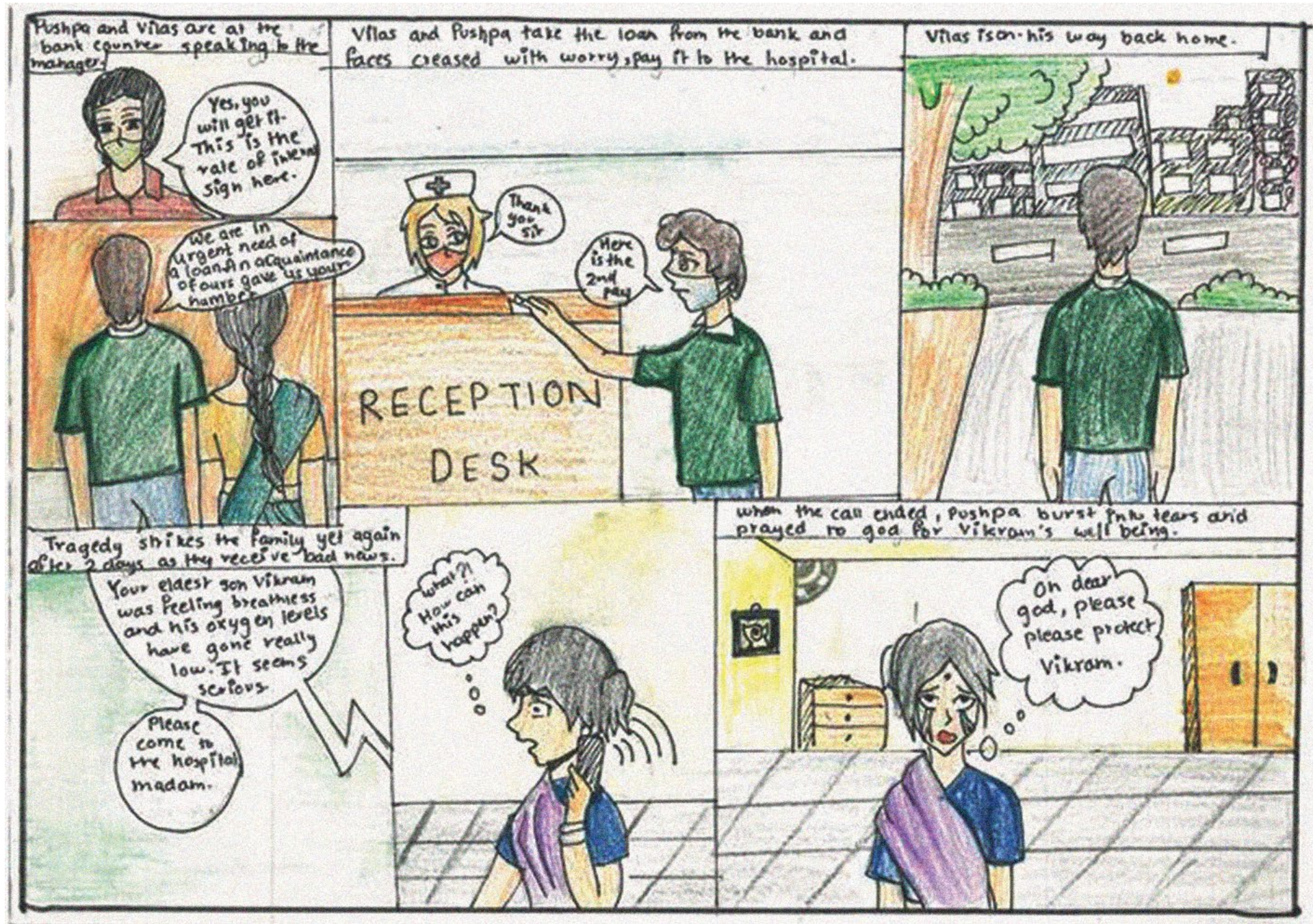


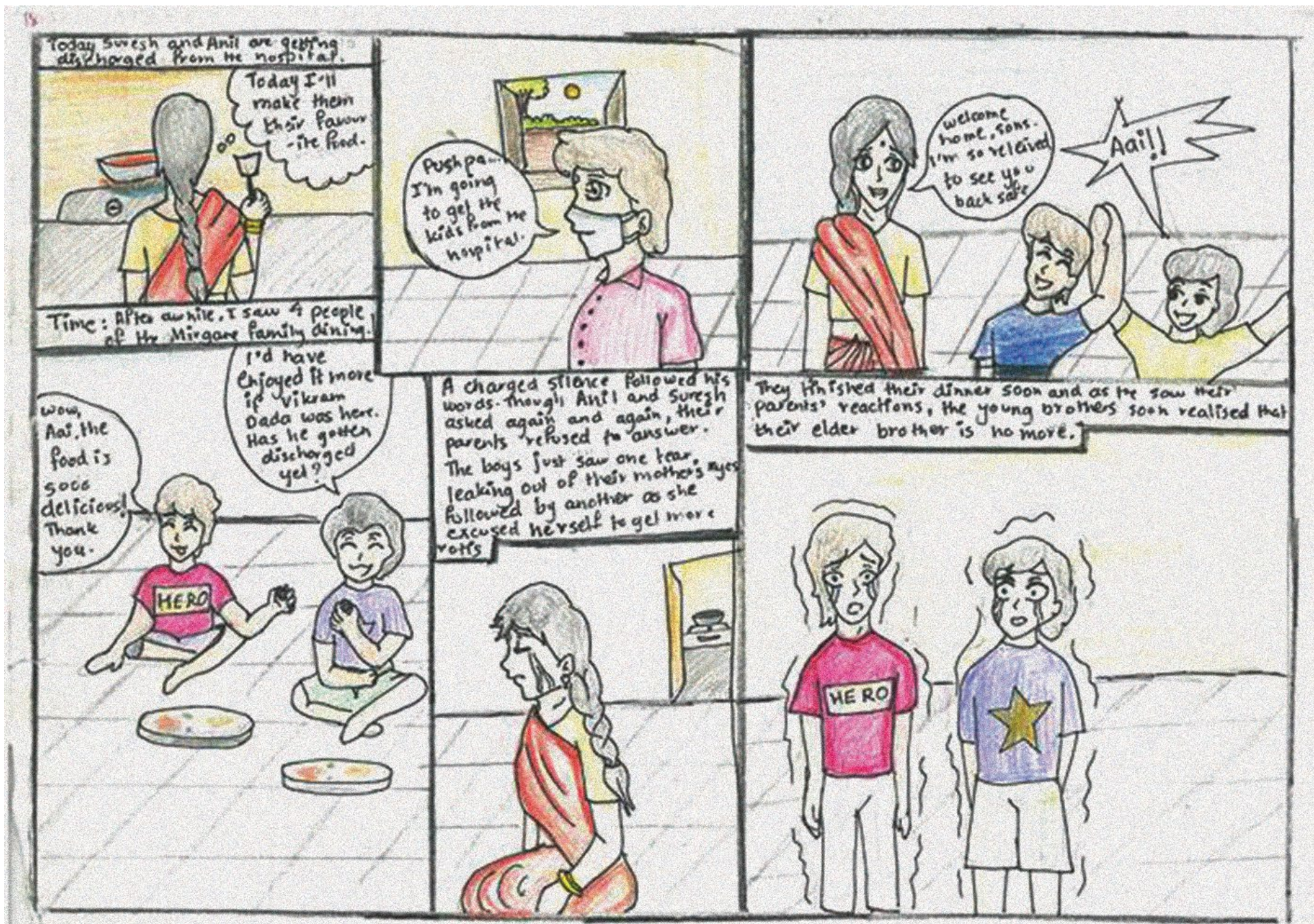


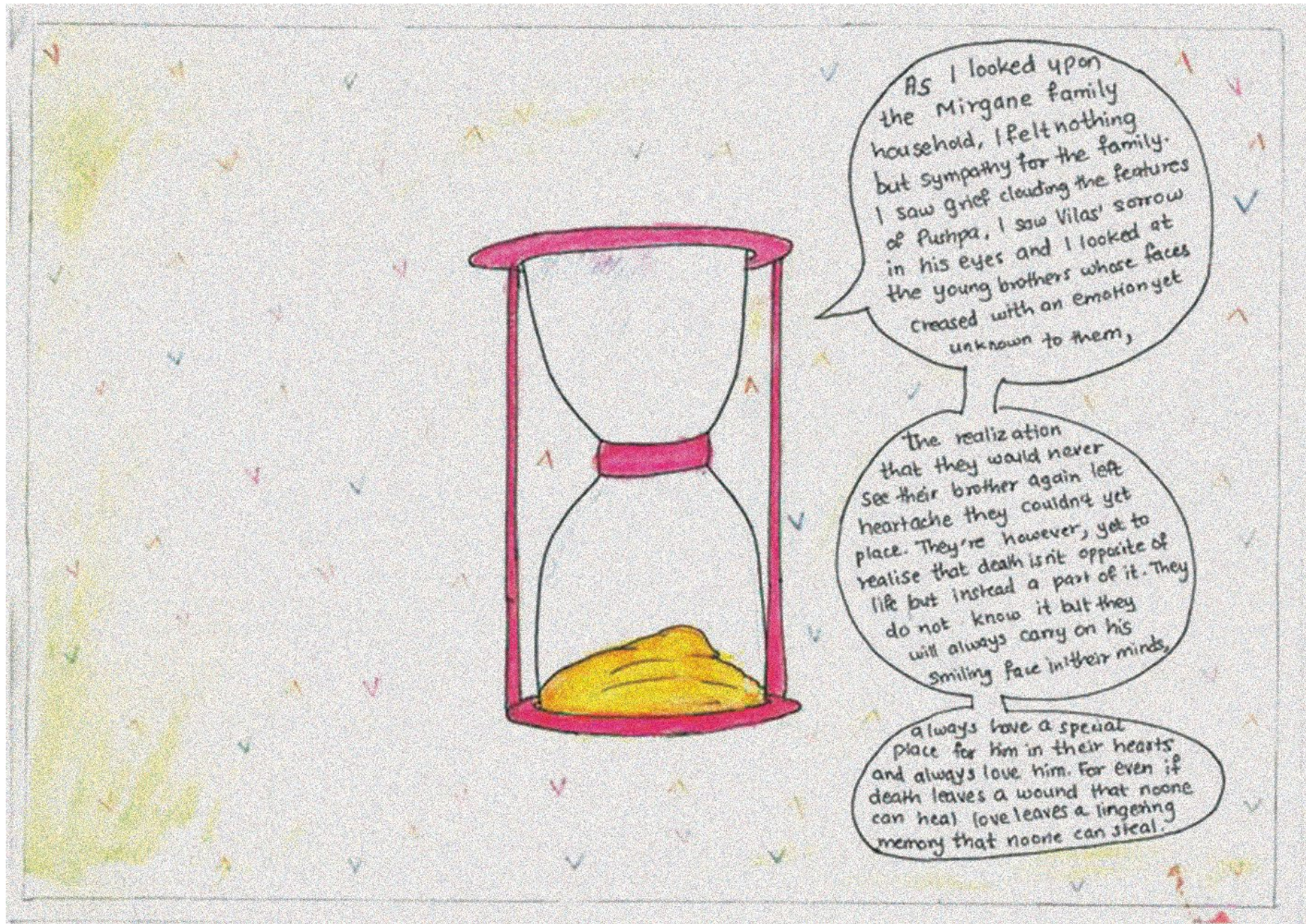












Reflections

"I enjoyed the most while we were writing dialogues for our graphic novel. In a graphic novel, along with the graphics the dialogues are equally important. They have to be really quirky and should reveal the individual character. There were so many changes which were needed after we wrote our dialogues. I enjoyed writing them and then improvising on them the most. As we are doing the graphic novel, it takes time to draw every page properly, add the dialogues and then colour the page. I feel that I struggled with time. We needed a lot more time to finish each and every touch-up for our story. Basically, I improved my language skills a lot. Interviewing the person, writing down all the details properly, writing the context, rationale, audience and format. By doing all this your language skills develop. I can feel that they really have!"

"I personally enjoyed having zoom meetings with my teammates for discussion of our project and also explaining our ideas to our teachers. For me, creating unique features for every character and maintaining the same throughout the comic was a challenge. I developed comprehensive skills, my co-operation with others developed, my writing and drawing skills developed. My speech and speaking skills of how to elaborate and explain things to others improved. I learnt new things and concepts, learnt new words and my spoken English improved. I learnt how to respect everyone's opinion and then add my suggestions too. I learnt time management and my creativity improved as well."

“The most enjoyable thing for me during the CAL project was getting to write the dialogue and narration for the graphic novel. I had never previously worked on a graphic novel, so as a writing enthusiast that was an intriguing and interesting concept to work with. I also really enjoyed getting to tell a story that was not my own but that of someone else’s experience. It is something that touches the heart and I personally enjoyed writing it. One thing that I struggled with during the CAL project was working in such a diverse group. Most of the creative work that I’ve done before was on my own so I had an idea of what I was doing but working in a group of people whose creative thought process was unfamiliar to me was a little difficult at first. One of the most important skills that I’ve learnt from the CAL project is that of finer communication in the digital age. For example, while in the early stages of our project our ideas were not being

portrayed the way we wanted them to be and they weren’t coming out exactly as we thought they would. The reason for this being that most of our communication happened over text and emails with periodic zooms meetings so the lack of physical communication was clearly evident in our work results. But as we went forward and learnt to communicate with each other better, laying out our ideas clearly, specifying certain aspects of narratives, giving better insights, our work soon improved. While I gained more perspective on having ideas being scrapped, my team working skills really improved and I developed as a writer.”

Deva Tujhe Aabhar - A Picture book

Lodha World School, Palava

Story by: Srimathi Srinivasan, Rijul Rakheja,
Illustrations: Sidhanth Gaddam, Venkatesh Bindu
Mentor: Ms. Smitha Nair

Preface

This story is based on a 25 year old man who works as a delivery boy in Palava, Dombivli.

Reasons for selecting this group and its importance:

In times of a pandemic hit world, these are the front liners who leave their homes to help in maintaining a semblance of normality for others. Working under dangerous and at times, exhausting conditions, leaves essential workers and their families more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.

Recognition and appreciation for the heroic work being done by workers at the essential services has been immense. However, those same workers are often left unprotected by governments and systems that have failed to supply them with enough

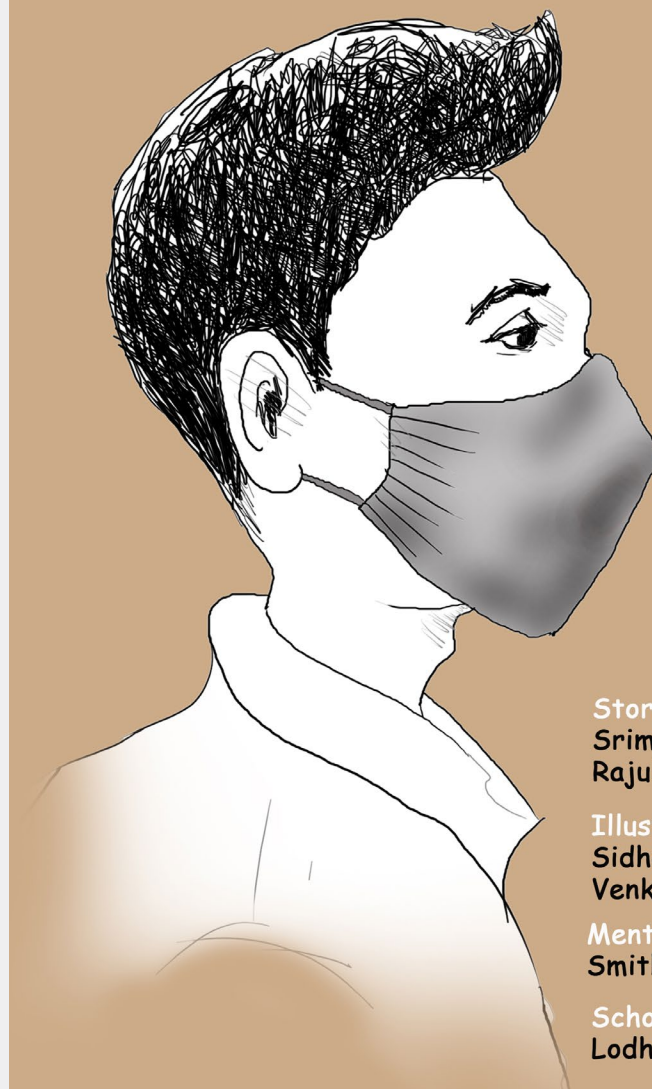
personal protective equipment (PPE), supplies, and resources to do their jobs.

How does this relate to the aforementioned essential working services in our city?

As per reports, the twin cities Kalyan - Dombivli is the second worst hit city in the MMR region after Mumbai in numbers of COVID - 19. Even as the economic activities and citizen mobility in Dombivli remain jeopardised, essential services have been unabated in catering to the demands of its citizens. Be it delivering provisions to households or redressing the ever-increasing data service glitches, the essential workers in Dombivli have worked undeterred in the most stringent of locked down days.

Deva Tujhe Aabhar

(Thank you God)

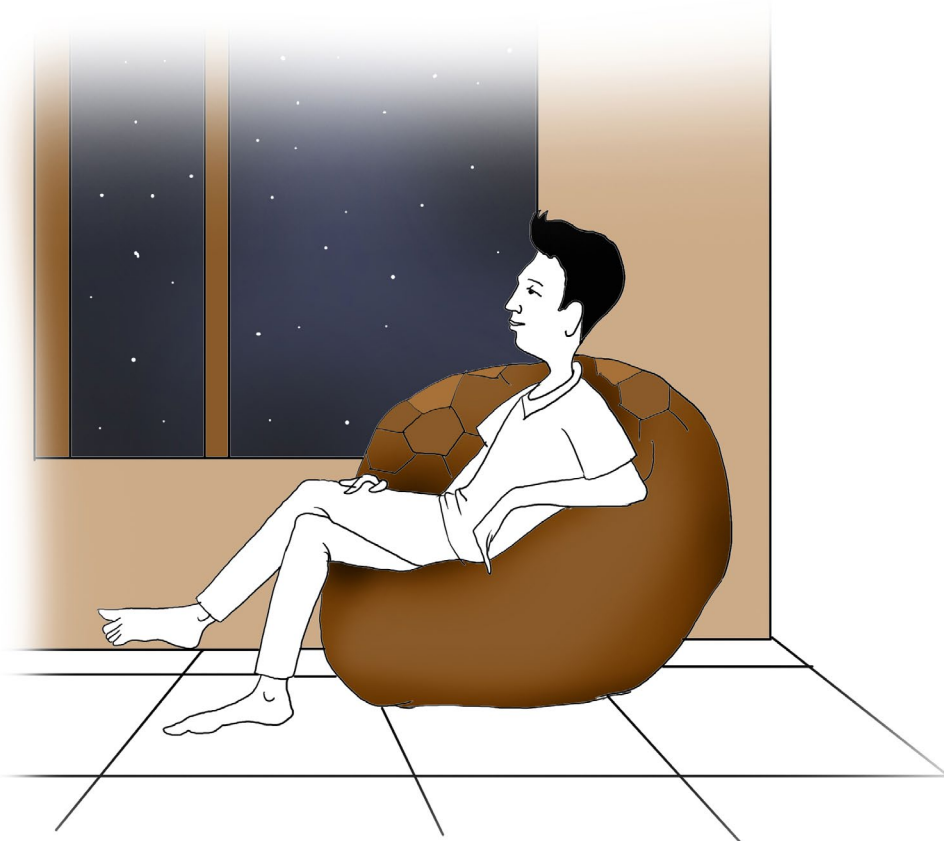


Story by
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Rajul Rakheja

Illustrations
Sidhanth Gaddam
Venkatesh Bindu

Mentor
Smitha Nair

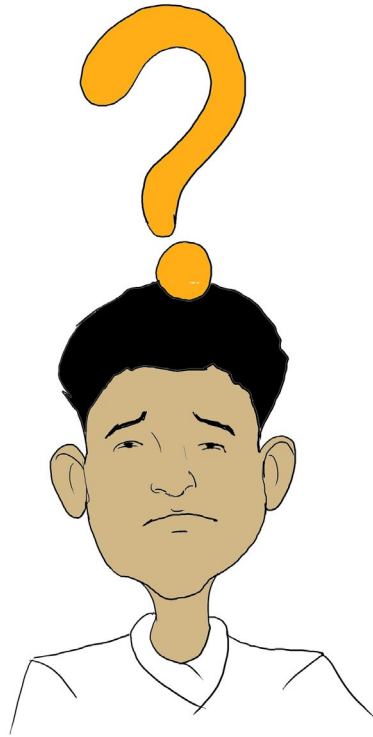
School Name
Lodha World School, Palava



It was a humid night of the tropical March. But Arun felt magically pleasant and at peace. He tucked himself comfortably into his new possession of pride - a bean bag resembling an oversized football. It was placed unperturbed in the groove by the window of his humble 500 sq feet home on the quiet streets of Vaibhav Nagari. The night was a silent celebration for Arun; celebrating the realization of his marvellous evolution. He looked up at the stars which seemed to shine only for him and smiled.



How different were things on a similar humid night of March a year ago. As he sat with a distant look, his thoughts wandered to those fateful hours of darkness when he was trying to catch a peaceful sleep. There were mammoth orders for the following day. He worked at Providence Supermarket as a delivery boy.



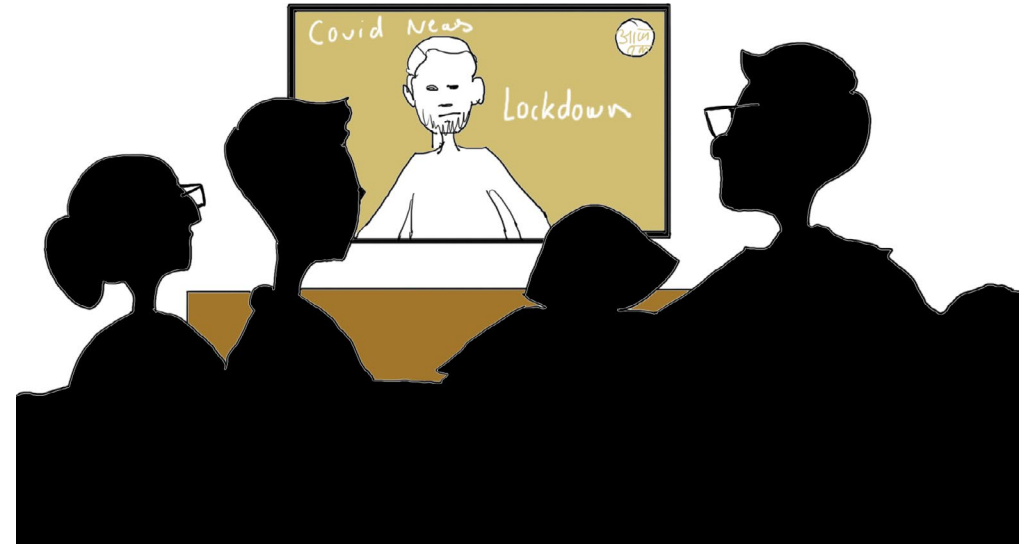
He, like any other 24 year old, had dreams. In the next ten years, he wished to buy a house for his parents in the Pushpita - the township where he delivered goods, and wanted to give the best education to Meera. But he was yet to learn that along with sweating it out for dreams to come true, one also needs to be strategic with finances; and like some 24 year olds, he was extravagant. That was the chief reason for him and Baba to be at loggerheads.



In his defence, studies had never been his forte and he had bid adieu to academics after high school. Football was his passion and Ronaldo, his icon. However he did not intend to be a rival to Ronaldo and thus settled with playing football at the local level. After years of building castles in the air, reality dawned and he landed at Providence.



For a fortnight, the amount of orders they had was tenfold. People were in a rush to stock essentials for the fear of a certain lockdown looming in the air. His colleague Neerja had remarked "No one knows what it is going to be like."



His body ached after a hard day's toil. Aai rubbed her fingers through his hair as he laid on the floor with his head in her lap. Aai- was the source of inexhaustible support for Arun. A soft spoken but strong woman with a serene face. Her eyes were glued to the TV. It was a ritual for Arun, Meera, Baba and Aai to assemble for the 10 o'clock news on Zee Marathi. Irrespective of whether they watched the news or not, Arun and Meera would religiously be present in front of the TV.



'PM announces a 21 day nationwide lockdown' was the breaking news. The next half an hour went in astonishment and speculation for them. Of all the sundry things they heard, what they understood was, Arun would be one of those who would continue to be at his workplace irrespective of the locked in status of the rest of the country.



The week went by with heavier work for Arun as several of his co-workers hadn't reported. He was also getting accustomed to working with stringent rules imposed overnight and of course with the indispensable masks and gloves.



The silver- like streets of Pushpita had never been this deserted. While riding, to the interiors of the township, there were the sights that had so much become a part of his routine - the children and the seniors at the dense green park on the sides of the road, the bouncers at the porch of every apartment, the young men visiting Cafe Coffee Day whom Arun thought were 'intellectuals' because they always were seen with laptops, the breed of people chiseling their physique at Hardcore gym, the boys at the football turf - he missed seeing all. Only the occasional cry of a bird cut through the silence.



A month and a half passed in anxiety. It only worsened in the coming days. The nation was anxious as the lockdown extended. Meera was anxious about her school. Aai was anxious about Arun. *"Deva, kalji ghe. Shakti de," She would pray. Baba would be more anxious thinking if they would be able to make ends meet for Arun lived beyond his means. Arun, too, was profoundly anxious. He was facing a drastic pay cut.

* God, take care. Give us strength



Arun exclaimed, "In his days of service, Baba has toiled hard to provide us a decent living. We never had to borrow money. And me! I don't know how will we buy provisions for the next month and Aai's medicines. She is not very well these days. *Khokla aahe tila."

Neerja replied, **"Kahi tari marg shodhuya. Why don't you ask the Manager for an advance?"

Arun implored, "Amidst pay cut?"

Neerja assured, "So what?"

* She coughs

** will find a way out



Arun did get help from the kind old Manager. But, the relief was short lived.

Neerja was tested COVID positive. All the delivery staff were to be tested and Meera, Aai and Baba also had to be tested.

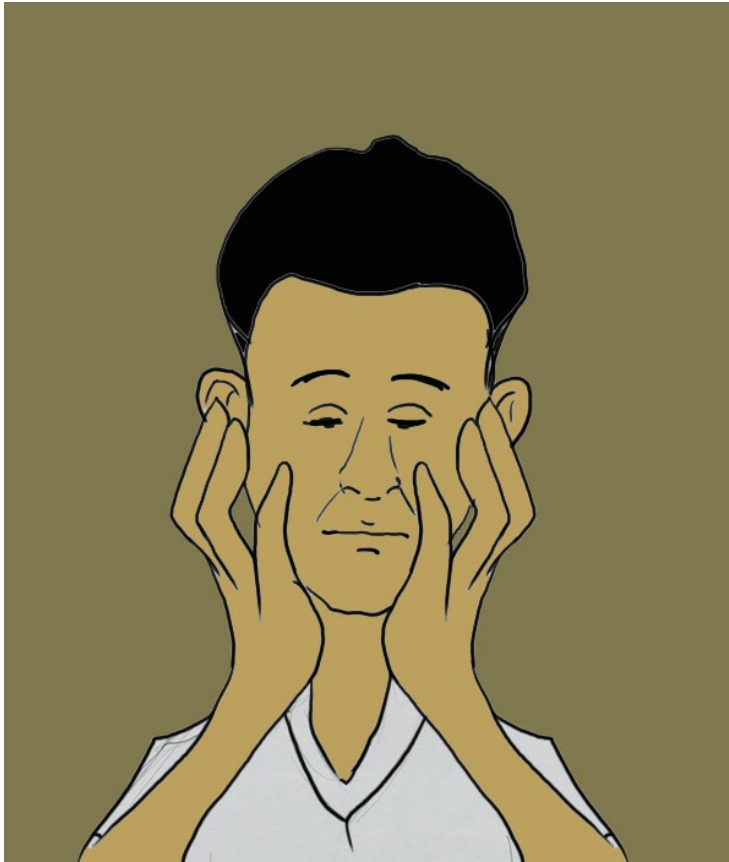


Now, tragedy struck. Not that any of them were infected but with all the medical test, they drained out all the existing finances.

He had a health policy in case of exigencies. But the challenge was to dispense money for present expenses. He was not left with money enough for milk and vegetables for the next day.



That night he cried like a baby in Aai's lap. Aai, serene as ever, consolingly patted his back. Baba's words came like a deluge to his mind and piercingly echoed his ears. "Is such an expensive watch required?", "Wastefulness is dangerous". He was engulfed with guilt and shame when he recounted his father's words.



They had to dig into the hard earned savings of Baba to run the house for the next month. This shattered him. He realised his follies. Extravagance had been his nemesis. It also made him kind and shed his reckless finance habits which youthful exuberance had rendered him.

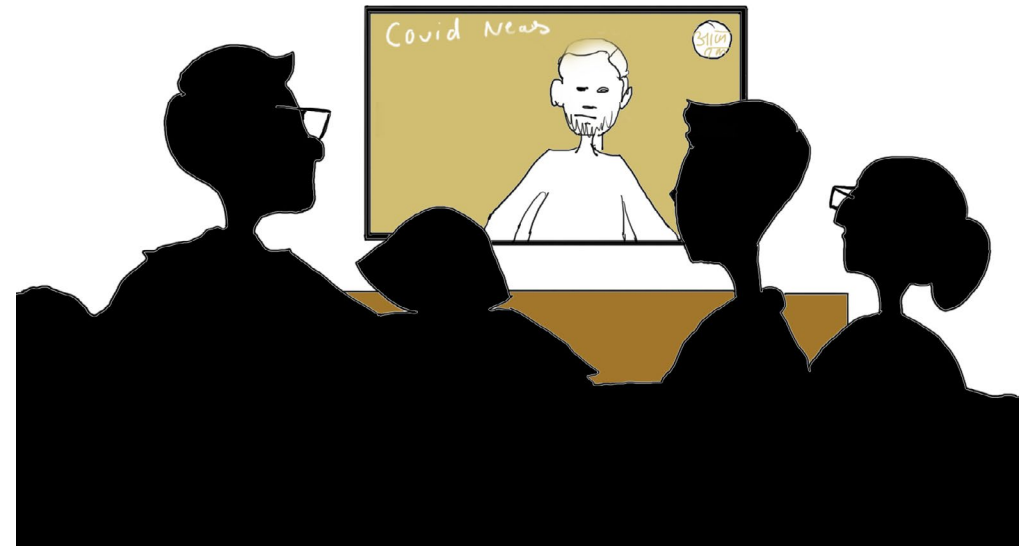


He worked for Neerja's shift for the next month so as to help Neerja. It was tough. Excruciating! But he found fulfillment in that.



November came with good tidings. The employees at Providence Supermarket were to get their arrears and that was indeed an answer from Providence Divine. Arun closed his eyes and mumbled, * "Deva Tujhe aabhar".

* Thank you, God

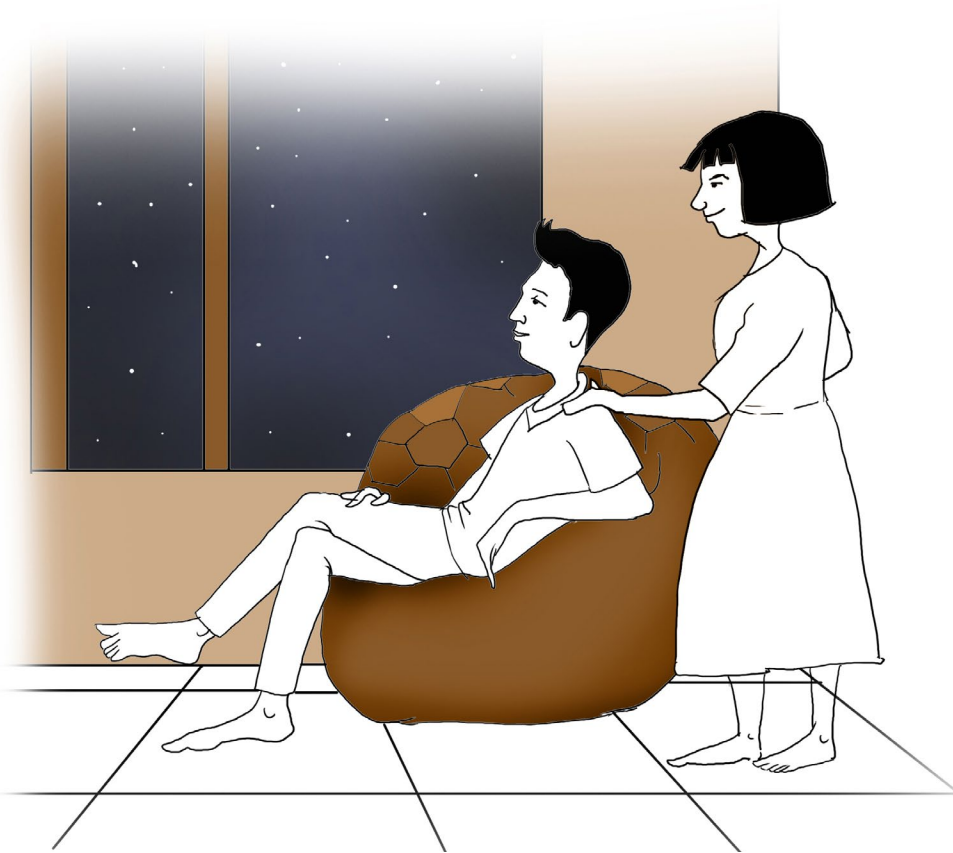


Things were falling in place for the nation and even for Arun.

Baba had seen the change in Arun and he was happy.

Aai was proud. Meera was enjoying virtual classes.

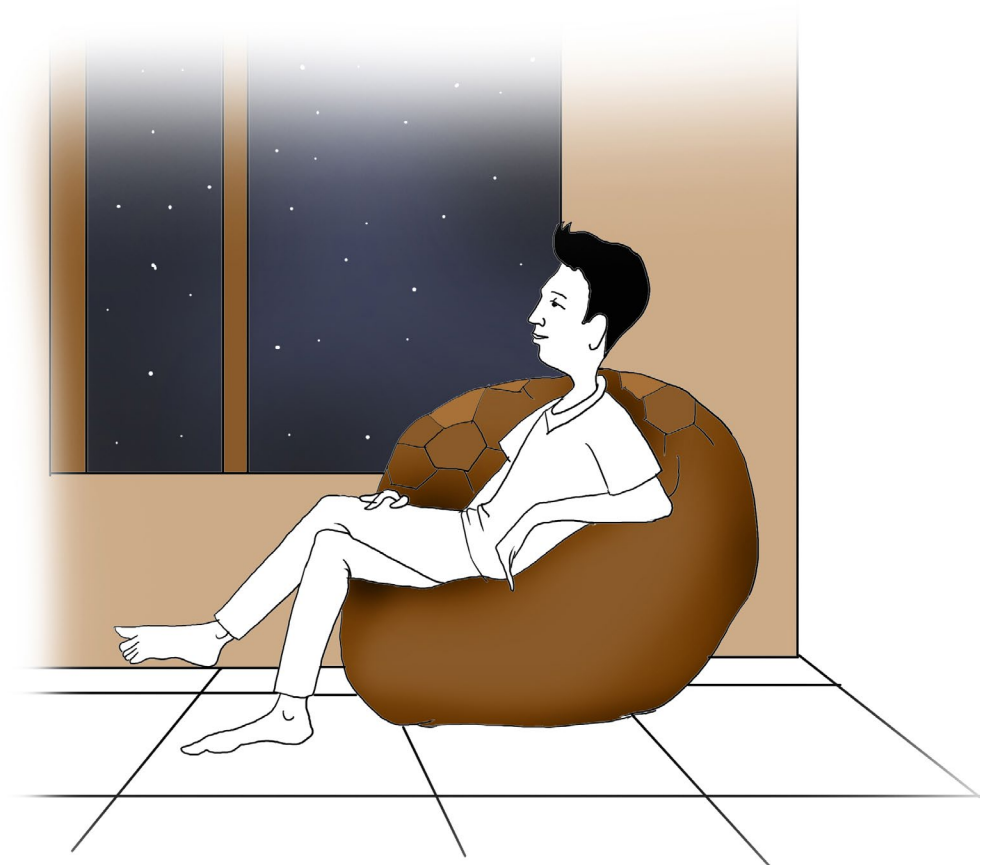
As for Arun, he was happy. So happy that the tough times made a somewhat better human of him.



He came out of his reverie at Meera's voice. **"Dada, ja zhop. Ithe ka buslas?"*

He nodded and gave a smile that reached his eyes.

**Brother, why are you still here? Go to sleep*



The bean bag was a gift to Arun from Providence Supermarkets for being the 'Excellent worker of the COVID year'.



The End

Reflections

I consider myself to be more of a learner than a teacher because every classroom experience of mine ever since the fourteen years of my teaching experience has offered me much to learn. Currently, I teach English Language and English Literature to high school students of Lodha World School, Palava.

Being with my students for the City as Lab - Picture Book Story Project has been a one-of-its-kind experience for me. First and foremost, it provided me a platform to orient my students to conduct research. As the story was based on real experiences, the project helped me to guide my students in conversing with people associated with the essential services and in making them aware of some of problems faced by the essential workers of their town during the peak of the pandemic. The project also helped me in guiding my students to explore

their creativity as they turned storytellers.

The students learned some very important 21st century skills while doing the project.

- 1. Critical and Analytical thinking:** They brainstormed and came up with the idea of a commoner from our society, whose life had been impacted directly because of the lockdown.
- 2. Problem Solving:** Then planned and sorted out the obstacles they might face while working and tried to keep a substitute ready. They also remained calm and searched for a solution while facing an unprecedented problem, instead of being panicky.
- 3. Design Thinking:** As, in our school, Lodha World School, Palava, we practise Design

Thinking method to approach certain interdisciplinary project work, my students were able to plan the work seamlessly, in spite of the limited resources and the new found shackles of isolation.

- 4. Communication:** Being locked up at our respective homes and native places, the students were challenged with the key ingredient of any successful group project which is communication. Nonetheless, being energetic and enthusiastic enough they soon overcame that barrier.
- 5. Collaboration:** Doing these kinds of practical projects, where they had to deal with real life situations, sometimes even outside their comfort zones, they brushed up another essential skill - collaboration with the team members.

6. Time Management: Time played a very tricky role throughout the process. Preparing the questionnaire for the interviews, searching for suitable and available people for the interviews to be done, making the story and finally creating the picture book, lots of instances where we felt we have almost reached a dead- end. At those times the perseverance, wisdom of experience and encouraging guidance of our Principal, Ms. Aditi Banerji, helped us a lot. My students would unanimously agree with me that this was their hard earned skill.

My learning as a teacher has been enriching. The skill that I honed during this project is research work. This is something which I want to inculcate in my classroom teaching as well, taking the teaching-learning process beyond

the textbooks and outside the boundaries of a physical classroom. Thus, the experience with City as Lab has been gratifying, as the basic foundation of it is learning through research work beyond the classroom.

City as Lab projects provide numerous possibilities of broadening the horizon of a student as well a teacher. It makes you challenge yourself and think beyond boundaries.

Despite the fact that the pandemic had confined us inside our four walls, the City as Lab project had brought the much needed oxygen in our mundane lives. I, as a guide and facilitator of English Literature, always try to encourage my students to compose something on their own, taking inspiration from the various live examples of life. The City as Lab

project helped me to rejuvenate and indulge in such a challenging activity of creating a picture book story based on a real life experience. I am immensely grateful for that.

- Ms. Smitha Nair
(Teacher mentor)

Mumbai Police Force - Journalistic Feature Story

Green Acres Academy

By: Anikait Nair, Raj Gandhi, Shaurya Shrivastava, Yohan Jolly

Mentor: Shrabona Nandi, Savita Mali

Rationale

Our group chose this story because we wanted to tell people how the policemen risk their lives and even leave their families and home to protect us. We felt it worth to choose this story because we read about a particular police officer named Devendar Arya (having his wife and two children), guarding a Covid-19 contaminated zone along with a few other policemen. While on duty, he did not go to his home as he was worried that his family could get infected since he himself was getting exposed to more than 150 unknown people each day. It was only through a few minutes of video calls that he kept in touch with his family. As Devendar feared, 4 months after guarding a contaminated zone, he was tested positive for covid-19. His family was worried but Devendar was mentally prepared and so stayed calm. He was admitted to a nearby hospital and once he got better he self quarantined himself in a room which was in his home's backyard. More than 90,000 policemen like Devendar Arya are fighting a very tough battle for us. We want people to understand and know that.

At least 3,820 policemen in Mumbai have been infected by the novel coronavirus since the pandemic began, and the numbers are still rising. Police have been deployed in contact tracing, monitoring of home or institutional quarantine, lockdown implementation, and closure of

containment zones and district boundaries. All police units have been given the added responsibility of facilitating the homeward journey of stranded people. (Kulkarni, 2020, p. 1)

Naval Bajaj, Mumbai's Joint Commissioner of Police (Administration) said that on an average 40 policemen test positive for Covid-19 in Mumbai every day. Last month, when the pandemic in Mumbai was more severe, the force was dealing with as many as 70 new cases of infection every day. At least 56 policemen in Mumbai have succumbed to their illness, five times more than the number of doctors who have died of Covid-19 thus far. This comparison is not to diminish the heroism of frontline health workers, but to draw attention to the plight of the police force. (Shelar, 2020) The "Corona Warriors", i.e. The Mumbai Police, with a force strength of just 40,000, has never let this numerical disadvantage come in the way of their duty of keeping an eye over 1.3 crore people of Mumbai in a geographical expanse of 602sq. Km during the corona pandemic.

In order to honour the 56 brave police personnels who have laid down their lives (till August 9th) for the safety of Mumbai, Mumbai Mirror has paid a touching tribute to them. (Baghel, 2020) We felt that our fellow Mumbaiites will understand better the plight of our city police when they read our story and salute them for their tremendous contribution by being the invisible bridge over troubled waters.

MUMBAI POLICE

THE FRONTMEN OF THE FRONTLINE WORKERS

When the government implemented the lockdown, the police forces were out of their houses to ensure that we were safely indoors. They had this huge challenge of enforcing the lockdown^[1] on quite a number of unwilling people and managing migrant workers in multitudes (who were eager to go home with very few buses available then.) The task of overseeing and managing the COVID-tests of these migrants, was extremely difficult and dangerous. In fact, a significant number of police personnels gave away their lives in this bargain of managing the crowd and thus being exposed to the infection devoid of basic PPE kits and face shields. Till May 19, 618 police personnel out of approximately 40 thousand had tested positive. Eleven of them have died and only 219 could recover. Rest of the personnels were in high risk areas.^[2]

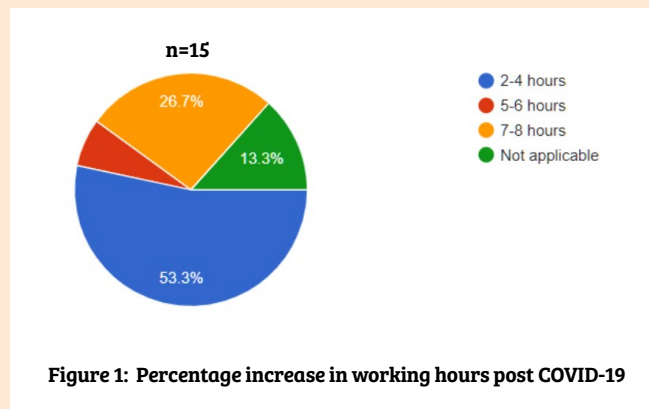
Each one of the police personnels that we interviewed had touching stories to convey. A common story among them was that the life of a policeman goes much beyond that of only maintaining law and order, as the common belief may be. One of our interviewees, Mr. Dinesh got very emotional while relating how he had personally gone to a lone 80 year-old woman, in order to help her with medicines during the lockdown. Her son, who is in the Navy, had rung him up for help from Cochin and had requested him to do the task.

These lines of a song constantly ring in our ears when we think about the contributions of the Mumbai police in the midst of the pandemic period

**“Did you ever know that you’re my hero
And everything I would like to be?
I can fly higher than an eagle
For you are the wind beneath my wings”**

He also told us: “It was an emotional moment for me when I had to witness a five year old boy being taken away from his parents to a quarantine center since he had tested positive for the coronavirus.” Ms. Archana, another interviewee, was very hopeful that since their department was risking their own lives as well as their families, the outcome would definitely be good. “For two months, I had to quarantine myself daily in a bedroom, so that my eighteen month old daughter would not come in close proximity to me, for 12 hours after returning home from work. It was only the next morning after taking a bath that I would allow my child to come near me. It was quite difficult because she is so small.” That was the experience shared by Ms. Archana.

Mr. Yadav, another police personnel, had stayed away from his family for around seven months. He told us in a very matter-of-fact manner that 50% of the society always perceived policemen negatively. He justified his opinion stating that the police always need to pick the right side when resolving a conflict. By consequence, it makes misbelievers all the way.

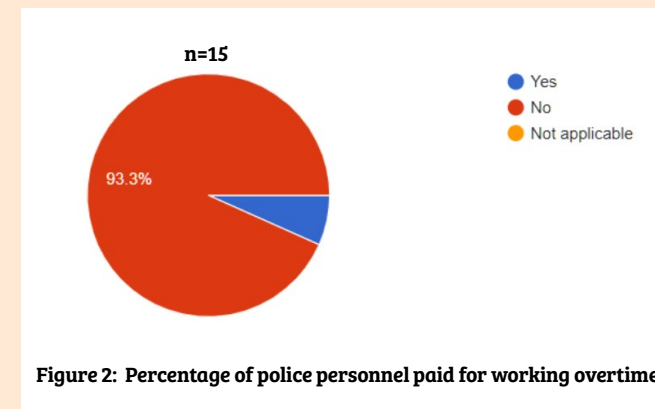


The Mumbai Police, with a force strength of just 40,000, has never let this numerical disadvantage come in the way of their duty of keeping a hawk-eye on over 1.3 crore Mumbaikars during the COVID pandemic.^[3]

We had surveyed 30 police personnels out of which 15 had responded which included a wide spectrum of police personnels like PSI, ASI, constables and naik In order to make our data more authentic, we interviewed four police personnels out of which two were lady constables. So there was a 50% gender split. Amongst the rest two male interviewees, one was a PRO and another was a PSI.

As per our internal survey, these men have often worked long duty hours extending from 2-8 hours as overtime, with no extra pay (See Figure 1 & 2 above). Sometimes they even had no weekly off in order to compensate for their paucity in numbers.

In this pandemic, they have been present everywhere trying to distribute food and essentials, accompanying health workers to various slums, standing guard in containment zones. Thus



overworked to the point of exhaustion, getting very little time to spend with their family members and facing the most serious threat of infection (even greater than the medical professionals)---- these unsung heroes deserve respect and consideration since they are critical in keeping the system moving.

Despite the odds, the police force has gone beyond the call of duty and law and order operations. They have extended a helping hand to the city dwellers in order to ensure the common man’s life goes on smoothly even in pandemic. It is time for all of us to empathise with their situation and collectively salute them for their commendable and relentless efforts in ensuring the safety of their fellow humans.

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Reflections

“I enjoyed doing my secondary research online and not to forget the meetings that were held where discussions were taking place, tasks were being allotted with a given deadline. I realised so many things can happen online, on a virtual platform. One thing that I struggled with was when a teammate was not being able to keep up with the deadlines, which definitely affected all of us. This project has given me insight as to how research work is carried out and also helped me to empathise with the difficulties that the police personnel have been facing during the pandemic in order to keep us safe.”

“I enjoyed working as a team and that too on a virtual platform. One thing that I struggled with while working on this project was dealing with the different opinions of my teammates and coming to a consensus. This project has helped me develop my capacity to handle information and process it in a meaningful way. I could collate a great amount of secondary data and then summarize about the lives of policemen in our city during the pandemic.”

“We worked as a team; it was quite fun getting links related to our topic and getting information from different websites... During the course of my project I got to know about the skill of journalistic or investigative format of story writing. In the journalistic format, the article is written in short sentences and paragraphs and quickly gets to the audience. The big, bold headline, helps to grab readers’ attention, while the first sentence or paragraph lays out the story so the reader knows what to expect. Apart from concise sentences, another important element of this format is the inverted pyramid. The inverted pyramid places the more newsworthy information — the information people really

need to know — at the very beginning of the article. The middle of the pyramid, and the middle of the article, is filled with other important information necessary for telling the story. The very bottom of the pyramid is the least important information of the story.”

Humane Warriors to Animal Rescue - Journalistic Feature Story

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High School, Ganesh Nagar, Pune

Authors: Harsh Kolhe, Ishwari Zope, Jui Mulay, Pradyumna Bhate

Mentor: Mrs. Monisha Abhyankar

Rationale

1. Animals are an indispensable part of our society as they are a part of our culture, they maintain the ecosystem and give us company.
2. The corona virus may not kill the animals, but the apathy of the people will. It is extremely important to dispel the myths about the animals getting affected by the coronavirus so that unnecessary killing of these animals is stopped.
3. It is our duty to look after them as they are speechless and helpless.
4. The Indian Constitution (in Article 51A G) states that, it is our duty to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures. It is illegal to abandon pets under Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
5. The efforts taken by the animal feeders and animal NGOs are creditable as these people are working hard for those who cannot communicate their problems to us.
6. People generally don't pay attention to this topic. Such a topic does not become front page in newspapers, is not debated upon and is not mentioned about on most of the social media sites.
7. Animals too feel pain, pleasure, fear, loneliness, love and deserve to live their lives free from suffering and exploitation.
8. Animals do need equal consideration as humans.

HUMANE WARRIORS TO ANIMAL RESCUE

Just as Sachin, a dog feeder in the Kothrud area was about to call it a day, he got a distress call from his colleague about an injured dog in the area. In spite of the lockdown, Sachin could not stop himself from going to the site. When he reached the scene, he saw Tia the white stray wimping in agony with blood stained paws and a piece of glass jutting out precariously from her leg. Tia had been injured by some boys the second time, just to have fun! The same boys had earlier stuck her head in a bottle and left her to die. Sachin was shocked by the inhuman behavior towards these helpless creatures.

Earlier in June, he and his teammates had constructed a few temporary shelters for the stray dogs near the hill area. The residents in the area were not happy with the strays living near them. Harboring the misconception that dogs spread the virus, they demolished the newly made enclosures and made the dogs shelter less.

Several stories of atrocities towards the strays have been coming in during the pandemic. Thousands of these hapless animals have suffered due to our apathy or by the lack of food. Eight dogs in Akurdi and four puppies abandoned in a Katraj construction site died due to starvation (Pathare, 2020). These homeless animals would depend on food and waste from markets, restaurants and grocery shops. However, with coronavirus sending people into isolation and public establishments shutting down, they had a hard time finding food and would wander all day on the footpath.

Taking advantage of the deserted roads, some people drove their vehicles at a great speed, causing injuries to many stray animals. Mr. Samir, a dog feeder in Viman Nagar area remembers an incident when a dog named Muddy was badly injured during a hit-and-run. She had broken a leg and was totally disoriented when Samir found her. Samir nursed her to health and the adoration in her big brown eyes was the most precious gift for him. Mr. Samir himself handled two more hit and run cases whereas his teammates dealt with more than ten such cases.

Volunteers have been facing issues, including opposition, aggression and threats



Mr. Samir sharing a wonderful moment with Muddy after her recovery.

from their neighbors. A woman in Vishrantwadi, Pune was abused and harassed by the people of a housing society for helping the homeless animals.

According to Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960, abandoning pet dogs is illegal. (The Central Government Act, unknown). But pet dogs were also found abandoned in a lot of areas. The helpless animals were left by the owners on the highways to die of starvation as they could not afford to feed them. Have we humans forgotten how to care for the animals and spread love?

Due to lack of feeders, Mrs. Saroj Soparkar, a volunteer for the animal feeder group, Wadgaon Sheri Animal Saviors (WAS), took up feeding the hungry and homeless animals. “There was no funding for their food anymore” she says. The roadside vendors and shopkeepers were no longer putting out food for them nor were they present there to pet and pamper them. “We had to feed the hungry dogs after midnight because of the police intervention in lockdown. Most of the police were considerate and kind and helped us a lot although a few of them argued with us for no reason. They had to fulfill their responsibility, but we had to fulfill ours”. Some of the animals used to be on the verge of fainting when the volunteers would go to feed them. “The competition for food had also built up because of the rising number of strays in my area.” said Mrs. Soparkar. She covered an area of 5 km every day. She got a lot of help from NGOs like Resq Charitable Trust, VOSD Bangalore, Karma Foundation and YODA Mumbai who donated food for dogs and cats and also helped the volunteers of many areas with rice and money.



The WAS volunteers treating a stray on the spot.

“We need more compassionate people to make this planet a better place to live. We appeal to people to come and join us in this cause.” she says.

As Anthony Williams, a consultant, researcher and the vice president of ‘New Paradigm’ has said, “When humans act with cruelty, we characterize them as ‘animals’, yet the only animal that displays cruelty is humanity”.

“Animals are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.”
Don’t you all agree?

If you see any stray animal in distress then contact the following numbers:

Mrs. Saroj Soparkar (Wadgaon Sheri)- +91 98909 01665

Mr. Nikhil (Kothrud)- +91 99707 09900

Mr. Samir Maniar (Viman Nagar)- +91 98200 36107

RESQ Charitable Trust- +91 098909 99111

****Note: Mr. Sachin’s name has been changed to protect his identity.***

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Pathare, V. (2020, July 15). Starvation kills eight street dogs in Akurdi. Retrieved from [PuneMirror](https://pune-mirror.com)

The Central Government Act. Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960. Retrieved from indiankanoon.org

Reflections

“The most interesting part in the CAL project was interviewing the resource persons. I had never experienced interviewing someone and forming a questionnaire on my own. Me and my teammates had to compose a suitable question form for the interviews. It challenged us to think and form questions which are clear and would give us the information we are seeking.” Following up with the team and the resource persons was the toughest job in the project. Our resource persons were animal feeders and were busy throughout the day. Therefore, they used to take some time to answer our queries and provide us with the needed information which often led to lack of progress in our article. This project helped me to improve my writing and leadership skills. I had never written a feature article and did not know its characteristics, features or the basics to write one. I had to do research on “How to write a feature article” too! I also developed skills for interviewing people and collecting the required data from them.”

“I loved to participate and take interviews. When I was taking an interview, I felt that I am a little journalist. As my team’s topic wasn’t introduced to the general audience, nor was it discussed much by them, the most challenging part was to write the article in such a way that people would also give importance and start discussing this topic. And we would also be grateful if it makes its way to the front page of newspapers. Overall, it was a great experience and I would love to do many more such team projects. I learnt many things while doing the CaL project like persuading people to accept my point and taking interviews. I also got to know how to write a feature article.”

"I teach English and science in the school and I mentored the group that wrote the story on animal feeders. The group of energetic students selected for this project wanted to bring out the often ignored atrocities committed on stray animals in the country and the pain they underwent during the pandemic. They felt it was their duty to make people realize that these speechless animals deserve as much consideration as humans. I realized after listening to them that this was a group of students who showed deep emotions, empathy and love for animals.

Having decided on the topic, the main challenges were finding resource people during lockdown, contacting them and conducting interviews on telephone. Many NGOs were contacted, some helped us, some did not, but the students showed resilience and got the information needed to develop a beautiful feature story.

This project has taught the students how to conduct interviews by asking relevant questions. It also taught them team work, time management and self-expression. We all enjoyed the online meetings, discussions, deliberations and ultimately came out with a beautiful true story which highlights the problems faced by stray animals and which urges us to be more humane towards them. Throughout the project, our Principal Mrs Pallavi Naik motivated the students and gave them valuable advice. This was a really fruitful experience for all of us and we would like to thank the CaL team for giving us this opportunity. We would be most willing to engage in such projects again in the future."

- Monisha Abhyankar
(CaL Mentor)

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