

Indo-Canadians & The Pandemic-2020

Expressions from the Community



India
Association
of Manitoba



India Association of Manitoba

INDO-CANADIANS AND THE PANDEMIC-2020

Expressions from the Community



India Association of Manitoba

Founded in 1965, the India Association of Manitoba is the longest-serving organization within the Indo-Canadian community promoting an enhanced and mutually beneficial relationship between Canada and India, celebrating and promoting India, and showcasing the achievements of the Indo-Canadian community. In addition to preservation of identity, culture, and tradition, the Association now also emphasizes the promotion of all the best that members of the larger Indo-Canadian community have to offer and contribute. India Association of Manitoba is indeed a hub, connector and catalyst both within the community and to the broader Canadian society.

Governing our optimism for this Association's future role is our partnership with the University of Winnipeg, which has led us to jointly establish the India Centre for Academic, Business and Community Excellence. As the longest-serving organization within the Indo-Canadian community of Manitoba, the India Association remains always ready to serve both a leadership and facilitative role.

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Indo-Canadians and the 2020 Pandemic

Expressions from the Community

Indo-Canadians and the 2020 Pandemic: Expressions from the Community is part of a larger **COVID SEVA INITIATIVE** undertaken by the India Association of Manitoba through funding from the Government of Canada under the COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund for Community Organizations.

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that is pervasive in its reach and impacts everyone at all spheres of life, including the economic, social, and political. It has affected us in all spheres- economic and social (and by extension, political). In its aftermath, we see ways we might have addressed issues differently, both as they arose and going forward. As with revolutions and/or cataclysmic change, pandemics also transformative in that they leave behind far-reaching effects that change us all. In this respect, COVID-19 has been no different.

Our objective in undertaking this exercise is to compile a legacy narrative to show how the Indo-Canadian community and its members coped with issues arising from COVID-19. Taking a bottom-up or grassroots approach, we have asked contributors to record their observations and thoughts from a stakeholder perspective. Our contributors are from domains such as education, community, and government, business and service providers, as well as individuals with concerns for family and community. The document therefore captures a panoramic view of the community.

The articles are organized along the following themes: Project Overview and Drivers, Inspiration and Reflections, Education, Business/Service Providers, and Government. The guiding question was the same for all: did each contributor, from their vantage point, view and cope with the challenges presented by COVID-19. Some also offered a peek into the post-COVID context and a changed world. The overarching observation characterizing the contributions submitted is one of adaptability and resilience, an optimism towards overcoming challenges, and a hopeful view of the future. That is say, our contributors are not oblivious to the damage and hurt wreaked by the pandemic, but they are encouraged by their faith that "this too shall pass" – a brighter future with new ways of doing things will arise. Our experience with pandemics throughout history tells us as much.

As you peruse this report, the observations and thoughts encompassed by the preceding broad outlook should be evident. One contributor, a poet from India, describes what happened during the pandemic but is resolute that the human spirit remains indomitable -- that we must have faith in ourselves. Whether we are a cancer survivor, or a son taking care of their elderly mother, there is always cause

for optimism in the human spirit. Elsewhere in these pages, a student and a teacher share their boundless positivity that better learning processes, with time, will arise. Government and community have partnered to ensure the cohesion of the community and all its members. All things considered, our individual and collective responses to the pandemic are a fine example of overcoming challenges. It is about leaving no one behind.

It is often said that micro and macro perspectives are inseparable. Just as an ocean contains billions of droplets of water, each individual in our society contributes to and completes the overall good. This is especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which we bear witness to amazing stories and initiatives undertaken by individuals or groups. Our document is in line with these larger observations.

On a personal note, we as members of the committee that has been tasked with conceptualizing, planning, developing and delivering the document now in your hands, are honoured to have been asked to take the lead in this major undertaking that will resonate with us all for years to come.

Project Committee

Anupam Sharma (Chair)

Dr. Manish Pandey

Ramandeep Grewal, P.Eng., MBA

Dr. Pawan Singal

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PROJECT OVERVIEW AND DRIVERS

IAM COVID SEVA INITIATIVE



India Association of Manitoba proudly introduces
COVID Seva Initiative
in support of **senior citizens, newcomers, women and children**

The Initiative focuses on provision of
food related items and through programming in areas of:

**Ensuring Social Inclusion
Mental Health
Finance - Government programs during COVID**

For further information, please contact:

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ALL INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL

Please stay tuned for further details on our programs,
these will be posted on our Social Media handles

Facebook: @iaofmb | Twitter: @IndiaManitoba

We wish you all Prosperous, Safe & Happy Diwali

“ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਜਨਮ ਦਿਵਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਲੱਖ ਲੱਖ ਮੁਬਾਰਕਾਂ”



COVID Seva Initiative

*By Ramandeep Grewal, P.Eng., MBA
COVID Project Executive, President - IAM*

COVID-19 has pushed the world through a difficult time. Sudden changes in social interaction patterns, combined with economic and cultural interruptions, have created a set of problems that society was not prepared to absorb so quickly. Adults working from home while taking care of children, reduced incomes, dwindling businesses, and social isolation are just a few of the new issues we now face. A Quick and accommodative policy changes by government and dispersion of resources have helped minimize the impacts of this pandemic to an extent. However, there are still some areas where community organizations need to step up so that these policies and dispersions are effective in alleviating the stresses facing individuals, families and communities.

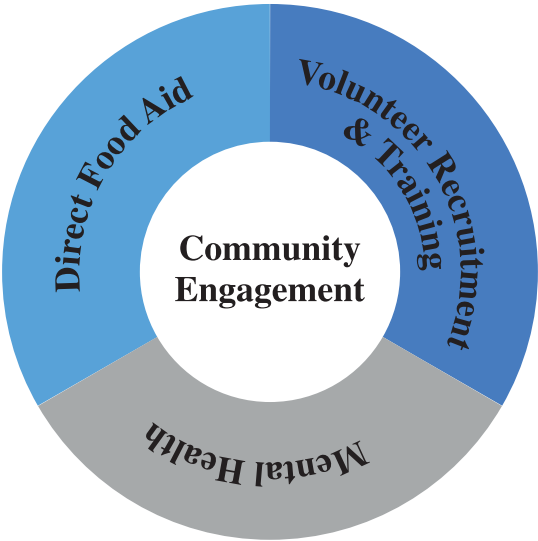
India Association of Manitoba (IAM), an organization established in 1965, has a mandate to provide support needed to cope with and overcome the adverse impacts arising from natural calamities. We have played an important role during many natural disasters, serving not only our own ethnic community, but anywhere our help was required. We take pride in stepping beyond our own community to offer help whenever and wherever our country needs it. Our track record and experience have given us confidence in IAM's ability to undertake initiatives that address the adverse effects of COVID-19.

Since the pandemic began to unfold in February 2020, our project team formulated and implemented a strategy to ensure that people were informed of and able to access resources and services provided through government programs. The IAM COVID-19 Seva Initiative's objective is to support our community's most vulnerable members, including senior citizens, women and international students, to ensure they have access to food aid, which we have supported by recruiting and training food delivery volunteers.

We also realized that, as increased numbers of people were now immobile due to lockdowns and other health-related sensitivities, many of us have become socially isolated. Accordingly, we have made mental health support as high a priority as other concerns. We have sought to address this issue by recruiting volunteers and instituting peer-to-peer support. In addition to this effort, we offered virtual workshops, led and facilitated by qualified mental health professionals with appropriate cultural and language expertise. As an established organisation with experience, we realize that community engagement is of utmost importance for

successfully executing any program. We are proud of and grateful for the active involvement of the various stakeholders throughout this project.

Our extensive community involvement was strategically positioned to produce a legacy document recording "expressions from the community". This legacy document is to be a forum for members of our community to share their thoughts, interact with others, and engage in dialogue. Taken together, this act of sharing lightens our collective burden of angst and stress, and opens our eyes to how our stakeholders dealt with this pandemic.



Community Engagement

The purpose of community engagement is to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that a citizen has a say in expressing their needs and expectations. Members of the community are not an "afterthought" but are engaged throughout the entire process. Their contributions are valued and reflected both in the delivery of our initiative and the outcomes they achieve. To this end, the Project Team floated a short survey to gather input on the needs and perspectives of various individuals. The responses we received were then aggregated to provide us with a snapshot of our community. The results have been encouraging in that they provide useful information and to large degree affirm the value of the project and its services. Additionally, this report ("Expressions from Community") is an important component of community engagement as it consists of contributions and perspectives from various stakeholders on a national level. From their respective positions or roles, each contributor provides their assessment of how they have addressed and adjusted to date to the ongoing pandemic. Each contributor provides us with lessons learned. The document therefore consists of diverse perspectives, providing us with an overview, guiding signals, and a documented record from our community for future consideration.

Direct Food Aid

Although there are many non-profit food organizations that share an identical objective and purpose - to support those in need of food - additional factors and nuances preclude many organizations from reaching out to all segments of society. In some communities, social and cultural factors can inhibit a person (or family) from reaching out for any assistance. Pride, shame, stigma and/or honour can be major inhibiting factors. All to say, unlike in mainstream society, such problems and issues can remain within the family, hidden from the outside world. Our challenge then is to take a subtle approach: one that "saves face" for the person (or family) requiring such assistance. Anonymity and assurance of privacy become a necessary condition. In other words - explicitly or implicitly - cultural and social factors play a major part in our ability to reach out and meet the needs of all members of society.

To date, with respect to distribution of food, this project has reached out to and assisted 2 women's shelters, 150 seniors, and 750 junior school students, and delivered hot meals to 500 people without housing, 25 international students, and 60 new immigrant families in need. Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is celebrated with pride every year. To ensure social inclusion in the festivities, we identified a group of senior citizens and sent everyone a package of mithai (ethnic sweets made with some combination of flour, sugar, nuts, legumes, and milk or khoya, a semi-solid dairy product made by slowly boiling milk until it thickens, and then often enhanced with cardamom, rose water, or saffron). We did this to remind one and all that they are not alone and that someone is thinking of them. We received numerous emotional calls from recipients who felt this was one of the best things happened in their lives since the beginning of COVID-19. These comments are encouraging.

We collaborated with Dr. Reg Urbanowski, Dean, of College of Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Manitoba, to deliver food aid to 25 families at one First Nation site in phase one of the program. We also delivered \$5,000 worth of food groceries to Bloodvein and Swan Lake Manitoba First Nations during phase two of the program.

We are also proud to deliver Halloween supplies to the Willow Place women's shelter, along with direct aid to women in the North End of Winnipeg. We also delivered food aid to Centre of Hope in Winnipeg.

IAM also partnered with Rising Runners of Winnipeg, to deliver 20 Christmas-related gift hampers to Winnipeg families. We provided the food items, and Rising Runners took care of packaging and delivery.

Training and Recruitment of Volunteers

IAM has a database of trusted individuals who have been our volunteers for decades. These folks have contributed time and energy to the success of our signature programs. These dedicated and passionate individuals not only help during these challenging times, but also committed to extend their support until the current situation returns to normal. We trained 70 of these volunteers in COVID-19 safety, material handling and mental health basics, as well as peer-to-peer support. These requirements are compliant of all municipal, provincial, and federal regulations.

SOCH Mental Health, a young Brampton-based mental health organization, helped us deliver training and raise awareness about the program.

As we focused on the volunteers on the distribution side, we became conscious of the need to prepare leaders and committed volunteers for the future. We are also addressing the need for ongoing volunteer orientation and training. Additionally, we have identified the need for training in governance with respect to roles and responsibilities of members belonging to boards of community organizations. We partnered with Volunteer Manitoba for training on a wide range of volunteer topics, including non-profit governance for effective execution of our current and future projects.

Mental Health

Isolation, social distancing, lockdowns, working from home and taking care of children have all become synonymous with COVID-19 containment. However, they have also been shown to lead to mental health-related issues. To address these issues, we combined programs into a bundle called 'Programming for Social Inclusion' to provide a place for dialogue. Our facilitators and experts made it a priority to find ways to minimize the negative impacts of social isolation.

We arranged online yoga asana classes for all age groups, and, in this effort, were very successful. We plan to deliver 6,000 hours of online classes by the end of June, 2021. Yoga is considered good for not only physical but mental well-being. This technique is and has been practiced in India for thousands of years, and in the past decades has gained momentum across the world.

We also invited community stakeholders and subject matter experts to speak on radio programmes to discuss their views on the identification, treatment, and prevention of issues under consideration. We partnered with Punjabi Community Health Services (PCHS) to deliver programs related to managing children and dealing with isolation, domestic violence and stress while working from home during COVID-19. As a result of this partnership, we also provided a letter of support to PCHS for their funding proposal for programs related to raising dementia awareness. A successful outcome of their proposal will put us in a position to have these programs delivered to Manitobans for free, and IAM will help market these programs to local markets by leveraging five decades of experience in community outreach. We were able to deliver 300 hours of sessions in eight sittings on topics including awareness, detection and accessing resources for COVID prevention and treatment measures. With the help of our local licensed subject matter specialist, we are in the process of delivering another five sessions, and will be able to deliver an additional 300 hours of sessions in areas such as anger management, mental health and happiness, and financial well-being during COVID-19, including information on how to access government programs.

SOCH Mental Health delivered a session in exploring mental in the COVID-19 environment. Licensed professionals from this group guided our audience in how to stay intact during stressful situations and help others in need. We delivered 40 hours for this program.

COVID-19 doesn't mean life had to come to a complete stand-still. Knowing how important it was to stay committed to our individual and community mental health, and keep up our hope and enthusiasm, we delivered innovative cultural programming such as the "Bollywood Gharana" Online concerts. These were well attended by approximately 300 Manitobans.

We marked New Year with a new Online cultural program delivered by Pandya Group, which ran for 3 hours, and was well attended by 200 people from across Manitoba. The event took place on January 17 and was named 'Apki Pasand – Your Choice'. We will be doing an Online musical event in April, to be delivered by a community artist from Toronto. We hope to attract a diverse audience to this event, as this festival is celebrated by farmers in various parts of India to mark the start of harvesting season.

To appeal to the artistic minds in our community, we successfully held a virtual poetry session, attended by 30 of our local poets. We plan to continue this event beyond 2020 by expanding it to include other ethnic languages as well.

Bhangra is a world-famous, high-energy folk dance. We realized that COVID-19 precautions placed bhangra programs beyond the reach of many families beginning in February 2020. We are proud to announce that we have launched a free program offering almost 1,000 session hours for children, plus an additional 800 hours for women, for up to 180 participants. Given its popularity, we have extended the program to December 2021.

IAM is also in the process of developing a virtual workspace on our website featuring an open, virtual forum for seniors. The forum will help seniors connect socially. Volunteer teams are adapting a virtual meeting platform to make it as easy as possible for seniors to use.

We would be remiss in failing to acknowledge the generous funding from the Government of Canada that made this project possible. India Association of Manitoba also sincerely thanks Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Red Cross Canada for their support in enabling these initiatives.

Finally, I would like to thank all our board members, volunteers and stakeholders for their countless hours of direct and indirect involvement during the whole project.



The Indo-Canadian Community and COVID-19

An Illustrative Snapshot

*By Anupam Sharma and
Ramandeep Grewal*



The survey below compiles, for illustrative purposes, a snapshot to how members of the Indo-Canadian community have coped with a pandemic that is still ongoing. This exercise does not meet the rigours and standards of an authoritative statistical survey used for prescribing recommendations with an assured degree of confidence. Our objective is mainly to provide an informal snapshot of how the Indo-Canadian community has and is addressing the ongoing COVID-19, which was declared as global pandemic in March 2020.

Organized into three main areas - Individual, Family and Community - the survey consists of 15 questions. The surveys was mainly conducted over the telephone by volunteers. Some respondents completed the survey on their own and forwarded it electronically. All respondents were presented with options to complete the survey in one of three languages - English, Hindi, or Punjabi.

The results are aggregated from a completed sample of 58 surveys. Please note, respondents may have chosen to select multiple responses or no responses. The survey questions and responses are presented in the accompanying appendix.

We would now like to present the needs and recommendations raised by our respondents in the survey, and some (perhaps tentative) observations and conclusions we can draw from them. The needs expressed by our survey respondents tend to coalesce around health, communication, and financial and economic concerns. On the whole, they lead us to conclude with a sense of relief that, by and large, the Indo-Canadian community and its members have pivoted admirably to cope with the challenges of COVID-19.

Needs/Recommendations

One question we asked our respondents was to tell us what needs would they would want addressed beyond those already provided by community organizations. Not surprisingly, their answers reflected the same needs we have observed across our broader society: resources to manage stress and isolation, deal with employment and economic uncertainty, and ensure the well-being of family and friends. When expressing these concerns, our respondents are, in effect, also suggesting how they can be addressed, so we can infer from them not only overall trends and observations, but also recommendations for the future.

The need for better public education and increased awareness made the top of the list for our respondents. They want information that addresses questions from both a personal/individual and a community perspective. Authorities also need to ensure that communications are culturally sensitive and appropriate. Within the Indo-Canadian community, for instance, concepts of family and relationship differ from those in the broader Canadian society. As well, special care must be taken to address the fact that in many homes, English is a second language, which increases the likelihood for misunderstanding and mis-communicating around issues related to the pandemic.

Mental health is a clear concern to our respondents, who also expressed the need for a stronger focus on education and communication to better understand and cope with issues arising from the pandemic. They would like to see a more concerted and systematic effort from community-organizations in their outreach efforts, one that involves better coordination between organizations and individuals (for example, a buddy system). Religious and/or cultural organizations appear to be addressing the need for moral, social and communal support, and respondents appear to appreciate virtual offerings that facilitate contact and interaction as a means of addressing isolation.

Our survey responses also highlight the degree to which well-being at all levels – personal, family, community – is tied to economic and employment uncertainty. Not surprisingly, our respondents express a strong desire for active support and intervention from all levels of government to address the impacts of business disruption and job loss. Though we didn't see this reflected strongly in the results, we are certain that qualifying respondents continue to benefit from COVID-related government supports, including childcare support, increased child tax benefits, and more accessible employment insurance. Respondents representing the business sector have identified the need for rent subsidies, better training and support, medical health, and coverage.

Our seniors, meanwhile, need help with food delivery, medical prescriptions, and social inclusion. What they want is better communication and more effective outreach and engagement from community organizations.

In other words, they want community organization volunteers to reach out more proactively. They have also expressed a need for meeting places, complete with transportation. While mitigating social isolation continues to pose challenges, respondents do acknowledge appreciation for the temporary solutions devised to date.

Observations and Concluding Thoughts

Overall, the responses to our survey lead us to observe that, in spite of constraints arising from COVID-19, community organizations have done an admirable job reaching out to members of their communities. They, too, have pivoted and adapted to meet needs as they arise.

Having reviewed the aggregated survey and accompanying responses, we are able to suggest the following:

- Though unscientific, responses to the survey certainly indicate that the Indo-Canadian community is reflective of the broader Canadian society with respect to the main concerns and needs expressed by respondents. Our communities face the same issues as everyone else. Isolation and stress seem to be on the rise, but often, cultural dynamics may be an inhibiting force for a person to seek appropriate help.
- Respondents want better communications to keep them informed and updated on matters related to coping with COVID-19. There is great concern about the impact of the pandemic on economic prosperity and jobs.
- We need to be especially attentive to hidden concerns that may not be articulated due to cultural or familial factors such as social standing, family/personal honour, and shame. (In one of the virtual program offerings, the expert/facilitator expressed the need for culturally sensitive understanding and communication. Given that the definition of "family" and "household" may have a different meanings in different cultures, these need to be defined in clear terms to ensure a necessary common understanding.)
- Health, family/relatives/friends, and concerns about the economy and employment are top concerns for respondents.
- As with Canadians everywhere, members of our communities have pivoted and adapted to the use of technology and social media platforms to restore a semblance of normalcy to their day-to-day lives.

Appendix

The Survey: Aggregated Results

Individual

1. Are you a:
1). Male = 32 (55%) 2). Female= 23 (39%)
2. What age group do you fall under?
1). 18-28 = 9 (15.5%) 2). 29-38 =11 (18.9%) 3). 39-48 = 13 (22.4%)
4). 49-58 = 7 (12%) 3). 59-68 = 3 (5.1%) 4). 69-78 =12 (20.6%)
5). 79 and over=3 (5%)
3. You are currently a:
1). Student = 16 (27.5%) 2). Employed = 21 (36.2%)
3). Business Owner = 6 (10.3%) 4). Unemployed = 1 (1.7%)
5). Retired = 14 (24.1%)
4. Do currently reside at:
1). Home = 35 (60.4%) 2). Apartment = 12 (20.6%)
3). Shared Premises =11 (18.9%)
5. For transportation, you use:
1). Car = 52 (89.6%) 2). Public Transit = 8 (13.7%)
3). Shared Transport (Car) =1 (1.7%)

Family Supports

1. Do you live with family?
1). Yes = 42 (72.4%) 2). No = 6 (10.3%)
2. If "NO", how often do you visit each other
1). Every day 2). Twice a week 3). Bi-weekly = 3 (5.1%)
4). Monthly = 1 (1.7%) 5). N/A
3. Related to discussions within the family about the ongoing COVID-19, please rank in order of importance/priority (1 Priority to 5 Not Important):
1). Health = 18 (31%) 2). Family/Relatives/Friends = 35 (60.4%)
3). Education = 11 (19%) 4). Economic Prosperity/Jobs = 32 (55.1%)
(Additional responses were also indicated.)
4. Considering extended family (living elsewhere), are they from a health perspective adversely affected by COVID-19?
1). Yes= 36 (62 %) 2). No= 22 (37.9%)

5. If yes to # 4, how has the family been able to provide support?
- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1). Economic = 17 (29.3%) | 2). Moral = 24 9 (41.3%) |
| 3). Medical = No response | 4). N/A |

Community

1. **As an individual or family, has an organization within the community reached out to you?**

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1). Yes = 18 (31%) | 2). No = 40 (68%) |
|--------------------|-------------------|
2. **Please identify the community organization**

| | | |
|---|--|----------------|
| 1). Temple = 2 | 2). Gurudwara = 5 | 3). Church = 3 |
| 3). Individual Group = 2 | 4). Mainstream Organizations = No response | |
| 5). Community Cultural Organization = 4 | 6). NA = 1 | |
3. **What is the nature of support provided by the organization?**

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1). Food = 7 (12.8%) | |
| 2). Mental Health = 1 (1.7%) | 3). Transportation |
| 4). Medical Prescription Pick-up = 1 (1.7%) | |
| 5). Religious/Cultural = 8 (13.7%) | 6). Moral Support = 10 (17.2%) |
| 7). N/A | |
4. **How have others reached out to you:**

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1). In-person = 8 (13.7%) | 2). Telephone = 9 (15.5%) |
| 3). Social Media = 9 (15.5%) | 4). Zoom = 10 (17.2%) |
| 5). Friends/Relatives = 10 (17.2%) | 6). All the above = 1 (1.7%) |
| 7). N/A = 1 (1.7%) | 8). Other = 4 (Email) (6.8%) |

• If you have not been contacted, what would you need from them. Number of responses are cited in parentheses:

Needs Identified: An Overview

- Mental health (24 = 41.3%)
- Health education (20 = 34.4%)
- Religion for peace of mind (26 = 44.8%)
- Information on how to handle COVID-19 at the personal level (5 = 8.6%)
- Food support (17 = 29.3%)
- Child support (13 = 22.4%)
- Moral support (19 = 32.7%)
- Need Food, medical and economic support (21 = 36.2%)
- Health education (29 = 50%)
- Connecting with people to support them (3 = 5.1%)

Needs Listed

- Better communications and dissemination of information from organizations
- Volunteers should reach out to seniors
- Coordinate and arrange meeting places and transportation
- Business owners should be supported by rent subsidy, better training and support, medical health, and coverage
- Child Tax Benefit should be increased to support family
- Government agencies should communicate and disseminate information better, ie. it is difficult to reach people regarding Employment Insurance etc.
- Immigrants should be supported with getting jobs: 'Canadian reference' is a big issue
- Community (organizations) should improve communication to better connect new immigrants to the community
- Government/City should have no property tax for one year
- Government should divert monies from seniors (pensions) to supporting families
- In case of emergency, there should be provisions for free delivery of groceries
- Facilitate assistance for medical purposes
- Increase job opportunities
- Education system should be centralized in Canada and improved
- Rapid transit should be improved
- Free play activities and access to libraries for children
- Child benefit (for new immigrants) should begin with when work permit starts rather than after 18 months
- Better senior care in our community

We thank our volunteers, Ajay Kumar, Thomas Matthew, Manpreet Gill, Daljit Kainth and Gurjit Chhina, for assisting with the completion of the surveys



The COVID-19 Pandemic and Migrants to Canada from India

By Manish Pandey

There are three primary reasons for international migration of people: economic opportunity, family reunification, and displacement due to a crisis (refugees). While migrating for better economic opportunities or family reunification is a choice of the migrant, refugees do not get a choice: they are forced to leave their home country and move to another that will accept them. Along with an increase in both economic integration across countries as well as international crises, over the last two decades there has been a significant increase in international migration of people.

In recent years, more people from India have chosen Canada as their destination country for economic opportunity and family reunification, as well as higher education. According to data provided by Statistics Canada, in 2015 citizens of India made up about 14 percent of the total permanent residents to have migrated to Canada, and by 2019, this increased to 25 percent. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of permanent residents to Canada from India increased by about 46,000, approximately two thirds of the total increase in permanent residents to arrive in Canada over the five-year period.

The increase was even more dramatic for international students from India to Canada. In 2015, students from India were about 15 percent of the total number of international students to Canada. This number rose to 35 percent by 2019, marking an increase of more than a 100,000 students over the five-year period.

While there has been a significant increase in people from India who have migrated internationally, the increase in international migrants from India to Canada has occurred largely over the last five years. There are a number of reasons for this. The primary reason has been the rise in anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, the three other popular destination countries for international migrants from India. Given the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, the number of immigrants accepted by these countries has been reduced by their governments.

Canada, on the other hand, has not seen a backlash against immigrants. It has continued to emphasize and celebrate diversity. Consistent with its longstanding approach to immigration, over the last five years Canada has increased the number of immigrants it has accepted in all categories: economic, family and refugee. It has

continued with its policy of using international migration as a tool for attracting skilled workers, reducing the pressures created by an aging population, and stabilizing its population growth. The increase in immigrants accepted to Canada has made it easier for people from India to relocate and establish themselves here.

Another related reason has been the restrictions on immigration imposed over the last five years by the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In particular, these restrictions have made it more difficult for students in these countries to work after graduating and obtain permanent residency in the country.

In contrast, Canada has maintained its policy of allowing students to work for a period of time after graduating from a Canadian institution, and also has made it easier for students who obtain employment in their area of study to immigrate to Canada. This has benefitted Canada by helping it attract and retain high-skilled workers from all around the world, including students from India.

Because of the recent increase in Indian citizens moving to Canada, they now represent a larger proportion of recent immigrants to Canada. Studies examining the labour market performance of immigrants find that recent immigrants to Canada struggle to obtain employment that is consistent with their credentials in their first four to five years after migration. During this period, immigrants work on obtaining Canadian experience and on getting the credentials they acquired back home recognized in Canada. On average, the earnings of immigrants remain low in their first few years in Canada. During this early establishment period in Canada, it has also been documented that, to make ends meet, a number of immigrants accept temporary jobs in retail, hospitality, and transportation.

COVID-19 disruptions in Canada have been felt most in the sectors that employ recent immigrants. Closures of retail stores, hotels and restaurants and reduced usage of transportation would have a higher impact on the earnings of recent immigrants who are more likely to work in these sectors. Since people from India represent a large proportion of recent immigrants to Canada, the effects of the disruptions due to work stoppage as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic would be higher for them.

While there are no studies yet that examine the effect of COVID-19 on immigrants to Canada from India, there have been a few studies that have examined the relative impact of COVID-19 on minority communities. A recent Statistics Canada study finds that "the COVID-19 pandemic generally had a stronger impact on visible minority participants' ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs than for White participants, even after taking into account group differences in job loss, immigration status, pre-COVID employment status, education, and other demographic characteristics." (For details visit: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00042-eng.htm>.) Another study for the United Kingdom finds that "the UK's COVID-19 lockdown has had a disproportionate economic impact on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and migrant groups. BAME migrants are hit particularly hard." (For details visit: <https://theconversation.com/black-asian-and-other-minority-groups-are-more->

likely-to-have-lost-their-jobs-in-lockdown-new-research-142754.) These studies suggest that the effect of COVID-19 disruption is disproportionately higher for visible minority groups.

Overall, the facts and evidence would lead us to expect that the negative economic impact of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on recent immigrants from India to Canada would be high. In particular, the impact would make it more difficult for them to find work, gain experience and get their credentials recognized. In addition, students from India who are graduating this year would experience uncertain futures.

While the Government of Canada, in response to this pandemic, has announced programs to help a number of different groups, there are no programs specifically targeted to recent immigrants and international students. COVID-19 has created a need for additional supports from the community as well as the government for recent immigrants and international students. For immigrants, the government needs to invest more in supports for recent immigrants in finding employment and credential recognition. International students from India graduating during the pandemic will have difficulty in finding jobs, and would benefit from employment subsidy programs that emphasize hiring new graduates and international students. The community would need to do a better job identifying recent immigrants and students from India who are struggling to make ends meet as a result of the pandemic and provide them with assistance during this time of need.

The challenges posed by the pandemic to international students attending Canadian universities have received very little attention. As documented above, students from India represent a large proportion of international students in Canada. For most international students, attending in-person classes was the only way to interact with other students and make friends.

With universities transitioning to remote learning in March 2020, a number of international students reported feeling isolated and alone. The situation has been particularly challenging for international students who arrived in Canada in January and only had about two and a half months of interaction with their peers before the pandemic lockdown.

Universities have tried to address the isolation of international students by providing additional counselling, organizing online events, and other initiatives. While these initiatives have made a difference, the issue has not received much attention from the government or the community. More must be done to improve our understanding of the challenges faced by international students due to the pandemic, and to address them.

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Scenarios, Walking: A Poem

By Savita Singh

Translated from Hindi by Medha Singh

No one knew this:
really, no one knew this.
Not the cosmically favoured, no
they weren't privy to this either.

That one day, a microbe
like a nightmare
tiptoeing through their sleep,
might force an entry
into their lungs
suck the very breath
out of them, out of them
suck all life.

Nor did the labouring hominid
ever conceive the suddenness
with which he might have
to cross over life, as a bridge
that the soul must endure
such ignominy

Such ignominy, for which
the body may forever
be capable, yet the soul
never is

Neither did his woman
know she'd birth
the girl inside her
out on the street,
withstand it

And walk
miles sixteen more
to reach where she ought
with life pulsing through her

What did she know that a woman can
walk
even as she's unconscious?
She walks on, and walks far--

It's actually only now / that she's learnt
that all of life is a kind of voyage
a sort of unconsciousness

how else would
she have endured
the tortures thus far
how she'd have been filling
the stomachs of her children
with an empty stove
an extinguished fire

This must have been a half
consciousness / of its own kind
one in which a woman
has put her child to rest
as though lugging
in her suitcase, the weight
of the earth
the way she continues on
continues, homeward

It must have been the strangest
voyage and in it, how much of the
human remains
and what becomes of the microbe
is not known

It isn't such a mystery, though:
people usually are aware

of the casual cruelties
of rulers. their rulers

The ones witness to the scenario
the exodus
throwing foot, after foot
forward.

& it was ordinary
people who found out
for the first time

that even ordinary scenarios
sometimes, can walk with feet
These feet
can crush
yet / they're crushed

Cruor - This is blood



Artist: Divya Singh - Canvas in Oil from the year 2017-18



Zindagi Milti Hai Dobara (I got a second chance... at life!)

By Navneet Sharma

I am a survivor, a wife, and a doting mother of two kids. For me, naturally, they are the reason to aspire and live. My family is my bedrock of support and strength. They provide me with the willpower to overcome the challenges life has thrown at me. I may fade away, but not without putting up a fight. I may lose, but I will not be defeated.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2017, when I was 36 years old. That is a fairly young age for the onset of breast cancer. It all started with the day when I examined myself and felt a lump in my right breast. I had no other symptoms. It was later discovered to be a 9 cm tumor. Within a couple of days, my life had taken a turn, and everything seemed to have frozen. I was diagnosed with stage three invasive ductal carcinoma, triple negative receptors and BRCA-1 positive: in short, the worst kind of breast cancer and a carrier gene. This gene meant that I was at higher risk of getting more types of cancer in the future.

My near and dear ones were as much shocked as I was. I was the centre of my family, which was now shaking. But knowing the history of this disease in my maternal family and my experience seeing it up close in my childhood, I took the news with great strength. Life had blessed me in many ways before the cancer struck.

Being immigrants in this wonderful country, we were living for our dream. I was touching skies in my professional life; a financial advisor at my company, I was one of the top performers and had big goals for my future. I was passionate about my work and loved to start my day preparing for it. My diagnosis also impacted my personal and social life. My immediate reaction for some time was to shut myself from away others, for I did not want sympathy from people. It took me and my family a tremendous amount of effort to start discussing our situation with our friends and close relatives in a neutral way.

This news had initially shattered us, but we started to build our lives from the ashes. I went on disability. But as soon as I calmed my nerves, I was determined to go beyond my limitations. I had decided that with alongside my treatment, I would help other patients going through the same ordeal. **I strongly believe, the sun must rise after the long night of darkness!** On the day I left my job, and with the help of my husband Aseem Sharma, I founded **Cancer Warrior Canada Foundation** or **CWCF**. It is a humble attempt at giving back to the society that we are a part of.



I underwent a rigorous and sometimes painful treatment comprising chemotherapy and radiotherapy at the Juravinski Cancer Centre, which is affiliated with the Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation (HHSF). While I consider myself fortunate to have been able to fight this affliction, for me this journey was more about self-belief, patience, positivity, and self-discovery, amidst myriad emotions. I cannot even begin to quantify what it means to have received the strength

from my God and the support of my family and friends. It is funny how perspectives change: we can be reduced to choosing from the worst options, but I found my way forward through community service, by helping cancer patients facing the same conditions in my own life, and I have no regrets! On the contrary, I feel blessed that I have been led to a path of service and humility.

My personal experience at the hospital during my treatment led me to recognize a huge gap of understanding between medical service providers and patients from South Asian communities. For many members of our community, English is a second language. In a tricky situation like mine, where we are traumatized and have a language barrier, it becomes very frustrating for patients and their families trying to understand and process the huge amount of information thrown at them. At CWCF, our main aim was to bridge this gap and support families and women unable to understand the medical advice being given to them. We wanted to reach out to families in need and serve as a channel between them and the Canadian medical services.

Eventually, raising funds for cancer research became another of our main aims. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, one in every eight women will be afflicted with breast cancer in her lifetime. Our foundation supports research to not only save future generations but also to support currently impacted families. All the money raised by various events organized by CWCF goes to the Juravinski Cancer Centre for the purpose of research and development in the field of oncology. Since 2017, thanks to the support of our community, we have raised approximately \$100,000 for research and about \$50,000 for young kids and their families affected by cancer.

We also sensitize people about cancer and promote early detection, educate patients and their families, and offer emotional support to them. We try to fill the communication gap between medical services and patient families caused by the language barrier. We have realized that sometimes even an honest heart-to-heart makes patients and their families feel relieved and motivated. That is what we try to do: provide them with an ear to pour their hearts into. We listen.

Currently, we have been helping around 15 families with facing a new diagnosis or ongoing treatment on a daily basis.

Apart from personal conversations, we use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to reach out and create dialogue around this dreaded disease. We are working to eradicate the stigma around cancer and start a conversation around this subject. We want to spread the message that "Cancer is not a life sentence!" We have been helping people understand that if detected in early stages cancer can be curable.

We are a tribe of cancer survivors (we call them Champions!), care providers, and professionals from many fields such as medicine and technology, who have seen and felt the impact of this disease very closely. Our diverse team of 25 people brings perspective from all walks of life. We empathize with patients and their families and give them the best of advice we can. We strongly feel that a positive mindset and a will to defeat cancer pushes the patients to recovery. Our motto is "Do not despair, for there is help".

While we were making great strides through CWCF, we still had a lot to accomplish. But then came the pandemic! None of us were prepared for it. In 2020, we came across hundreds of families in Canada who were starving. They were mostly students or professionals who had lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and did not qualify for CERB. Most of these families contacted us on social media platforms seeking help in these tough times. This inspired us to start our food project. Our aim was to deliver groceries and ready-to-eat meals to the families in need. With our chain of volunteers, we raised funds, gathered food, and got it delivered to the doorsteps of those in need.

We took utmost care in training our volunteers, especially those delivering the food, to ensure health and safety protocols were being followed. We took online sessions explaining how to wear masks, sanitize hands, and drop off food without any personal interaction between volunteers and the families they delivered to. It is indeed a strange time, but we have to adapt to it and take the best measures we can.

We have helped thousands of people to eat healthy food in this crucial time. During this journey we have also realized that apart from food, there are many other basic needs such as sanitary pads, diapers, and soaps etc. that must be provided for people in need. We are building on our past effort to ensure women get these. We are also trying to help senior citizens by educating them on how to remain safe from COVID-19. Owing to their vulnerability to this virus, we are holding virtual sessions on Zoom and Facebook.

At CWCF, we continually aim to unite those who need help and those who can be of help. Our journey so far has made us realize that life is indeed a wonderful force, and diseases such as cancer and COVID should be fought with all our might. We pledge to support patients, caregivers, survivors, and everyone who needs us in any way possible!



Taking Care of Our Elderly Mother: A Priority for the Family

By Sam Koshy

It was on February 25, 2020 I left Kochi airport in Kerala and got back to Canada after making my annual visit to my 97-year-old mother. A handful of students coming back from medical college in Wuhan, China already had brought COVID-19 to Kerala a week before. At 73 years of age, with my various health and medical challenges, it would have been a real problem if I could not get back for many more months.

I use this as an opportunity to reflect on what it now means to take care of one another. Facing and coping with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a moment for pause, to take note and determine all that is most important to us. What do we do when the one we care for lives halfway around the world, in India? This is when we realize and appreciate the true importance of family.

It is said that sharing and giving results in the lightening of burdens and the expansion of joy and happiness. As I further reflect and assess, caring for our mother has been, and will continue to be, a family endeavor, one that is driven by love and duty.

I am fortunate to be the oldest of five siblings who share responsibility for our mother. While I live in Canada, the others reside across the United States.

First order of business

Though my mother has in the past years frequently visited her children, she made a conscious choice to live in India. She had lived in the US a long ago when my father was studying there. We had sponsored both parents as immigrants to Canada about 25 years ago; they only lasted three months and went back to their preferred village life. After our father's death, for many years she came and visited all of us in our various homes and locations for six months of the year. We took turns visiting regularly and in recent years at least one of us would be there every couple of months.

Nursing homes exist in our area (in India) and some are of higher quality and luxury than those available here. The option to choose a safe and secure nursing home for our mother was available and affordability was not an issue. However, the "easy option" was not one for us!



Our mother was not going to a nursing home. For myself and my siblings, taking care of our mother was our duty and responsibility. The Indian culture places emphasis on taking care of each other, especially in old age. We are supposed to be looking after our elderly if possible, living with a family member even in their last years.

Our mother, although physically very weak and needing caregivers, is mentally as lucid as ever and with a memory the likes of which I was never blessed with.

Given the distances involved between India and North America, we were concerned about her possible feelings of abandonment, especially since, from our state there are hundreds of thousands who have jobs in

the Gulf countries and come home to look after their parents. For her part, she was always concerned that the community should not think ill of her children for "abandoning" our old parent even if her necessities were well looked after by helpers. "What would people say" is still the question asked about things big and small, perhaps not just in India but other long-settled rural neighbourhoods where everyone has known everyone else over many generations, almost for centuries it seems.

As many of us Indians know, "there is a feeling that if your children go to North America, they are basically lost to you; might as well write them off forever except for visits occasionally! Bless them, let them go and make a future for themselves as I did in 1965 at 18 years of age."

The challenge our family faced across such vast physical and cultural expanse is, how do we take care of our mother and fulfill the responsibilities, that we willingly undertake? Working together, we managed with considerable effort to find and entrust her personal care at home to three helpers working shifts. More than that, now that no one can visit their family or parents from overseas, she does not have to worry about our reputation being tarnished as irresponsible children! So far, she is fine. Airlines are starting to fly, and we are planning to resume our scheduled visits to see her.

Our own challenges

Concurrently, we have challenges that are immediate to us. Both my wife and I, in our seventies, have self-quarantined and are scrupulously cautious in looking after our health. For us both, this assumes further consideration, as our daughter has her own family. Our two grandchildren, eight and twelve years old, are used to treating our home as their own and come and stay, arguing about who got to stay the most days with Oma (Grandmother) and Appachen (Grandfather).



Eventually, we had to get used to masking with them, visiting outside on the deck and no longer having them stay overnight. During the summer, we were able to have family over to help us regularly with our fairly large gardens. Tending our flower and vegetable gardens became a source of healthy activity and family togetherness.

Our daily lives

Gardening has provided not only exercise, but something much more that encounters with nature seem always to trigger: the special awe and wonder experienced with grandchildren. For me personally, having forgotten much of my early life, spending time with my grandchildren has triggered memories I did not have before. As many grandparents will attest, starting as early as two or three years of age, the usual question grandchildren ask as grandparents read stories to them at night is, "Tell us about when you were a boy or girl."

I must mention the daily entertainment provided by Donald Trump and the whole political process in the US. It has not only kept me occupied, but provided context for a lot of conversations, discussions, and arguments through the WhatsApp group I finally joined with my 42 cousins around the planet on all continents except Antarctica. This "conversation" has helped me stay alive and connected to what is going on in the world outside my basement office.

The pandemic: a reset, and pondering the Big Questions

In my case, as I mentioned, I was not a good candidate, at least as I understood in the early days and months of the pandemic, to survive a COVID infection.

The imminence of death has a way of concentrating the mind, as Samuel Johnson has pointed out. I called a friend retired from the palliative ward and now writing a book on the subject. We had a long talk about options, and how to communicate my choices to doctors if I caught COVID but was not able to give those instructions. Given my pre-existing conditions, in case of infection I realized my preference would be to view my situation as palliative. She agreed to be an advocate and adviser if needed, for me or my family. However, she suggested I keep my mind open; people change their mind sometimes with good palliative care.

While it may not be my preference to move on from this life, having lived an interesting and eventful life and having advocated for “death with dignity” for decades, I realized I was not brave enough or interested in prolonging my suffering with a ventilator and a prognosis of possible disabilities later, while also taking up scarce resources from someone else who has a better chance to survive and thrive.

Forced Sanyasa with books

Having been interested in spiritual matters from various faiths and points of view throughout my life, I found myself at my Sanyasa stage with plenty of time. Indians are familiar with the observation that human beings generally, intentionally or as prescribed by faith and practice go through four stages of life. For those interested, the stages are:

1. Brahmacharya, or student life, until about 25 years.
2. Grihastha, in which one must pay attention to social and family life, beginning at around 25 years.
3. Vanaprastha, or partial renunciation, beginning at around 50 years.
4. Sanyasa, the last stage, in which one snaps off worldly ties, beginning around around age 74.

My wife and I have what is for us an amazing library: a collection of hundreds of books on diverse topics from science to metaphysics, and even three biographies on Gandhi! Our son-in-law has further added to the range and comprehensiveness of our collection with books he received when his father died.

There are many books, some from our university days, that we have not read or want to review. I have also ordered quite a few more from Amazon. For several months, although I spend some time helping students and professionals in India as I do here with career and life decisions through email and WhatsApp, and now Zoom, I have been “like a mouse in a sack of flour,” as they say, reading books and making notes on several them with the goal of capturing my reflections and critiques.

Suffice it to say, my readings allow me to assess my life and come to some personal conclusions that allow me to exit this life feeling rather peaceful and sanguine for now.



Spiritual Practices During COVID-19

By Darius Maharaj Hunter

Indian culture places a great emphasis on spirituality, regardless of your respective religion. The sacred is seen in every aspect of life: the good, the bad, the successes, and the failures. In cities across India, from Kashi to Amritsar and everywhere in-between, you can find a multitude of religions and spiritual practices that permeate daily actions. While in the West these actions may be religious, in India they are just part of life, and reflect the innate spirituality that is supremely unique to the culture of India. These principles, while often subtle, tend to be found when we are not looking for them, especially when they are so intertwined in our daily lives. However, in this unique moment of time, there is even more reason to embrace this concept of spiritual living.

We are in 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic. How can we find aspects of spirituality that help us cope with and come to terms with this event? We must not look at the pandemic as a spiritual event; rather, we must look at what we can do to further our spiritual practices during the pandemic. While suggesting that we can take something spiritual away from what we are dealing with may sound far fetched, the reality is that there is much we can learn about ourselves and our spiritual practices during these times of social distancing, lockdown, and general difficulty we find ourselves in.

The harshest reality of this lockdown is the necessity for us to remain socially distant, in addition to the temporary lockdowns that have occurred. How does one see a blessing in this? How can we justify why this is happening or why this is necessary? It is these aspects I wish to consider in this article.

Spirituality teaches us that in some instances, things truly are beyond our control. Our society places value on staying in control and creating a life that is always organized, structured, and planned. During a global pandemic this creates uncertainty because we can no longer maintain control of all the various aspects of our life that we once did.

What remains in our control is the ability to thwart the virus by reducing our contacts. As such, one could argue this is a karmic responsibility. We are responsible for the outcome of our actions and, more precisely, for the intention of our actions within the context of an individual soul's relationship with universe. We must avoid harming the most vulnerable in our society. We can do this by reducing the spread



of the virus. Simply put, our karmic responsibility in this instance of time is to follow the recommended health orders to protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Spirituality teaches us that each of us is not an isolated individual; rather, each of us is part of a larger collective of souls that are, in turn, part of one, divine, united being. As my guru, Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, says when we see others suffering as our own, that is when we reach true spirituality. In that same vein, helping others heal and maintain health should be as important a priority as maintaining our own health. Again, we must follow the recommended protocols to prevent the spread of a virus that can harm people.

One of the underlying issues with this pandemic, specifically arising from having to socially distance from one another in order to prevent the spread of this virus, is loneliness. However, being alone is not always a negative thing; in fact, social conditioning tells us that being busy and sociable are indications of a healthy life.

Now is the time to read, learn, and meditate. During this period that has forced so many of us to work from home, manage our schedules differently, and not allow others into our home, this may be one of the greatest opportunities to embrace and focus our attention inward, as the forced nature of self-isolation will likely not come again.

As a consequence, the outside world will attract less of our attention as social distancing makes the inner world of the self more and more accessible.

Looking inward and meditating is not for everyone, but everyone can become a student. What do I mean by this? Read, watch, and listen. We can learn spiritual practices and concepts from a variety of sources. The internet gives us the ability

to watch videos of great spiritual figures and leaders from across the spectrum of religions. We can also use it to purchase books about great thinkers such as Tagore, Kabir, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda, allowing us to learn timeless concepts that our schedules or focus would otherwise not allow. We can also return to the ancient texts of our own respective religion. The wisdom we can find in these writings are always available to us, but during times in which our ability to do more or be busy has been diminished, we can really harness the potential of these texts and learn how to cope with the current predicament our world is facing.

Kabir says, "Love does not grow on trees, nor can it be bought in the market, but if one wants to be loved, one must first know how to give unconditional love."

Above all, spiritual principles remind us at their core to practice love. Love is an encompassing word, and its meaning is completely subjective to the individual who is interpreting it. However, the beautiful thing about love is that everyone envisions it as something positive. For some, expressing love may take the form of selfless service.

There are many opportunities to do this, despite COVID-19 restrictions. Delivering groceries to the elderly or the vulnerable, donating to homeless shelters, or ensuring that your neighbours and friends are coping with social isolation are just some of the ways that people are selflessly serving humanity during this time. Some people show love to themselves by exercising at home, staying active, and going for a walk with those from within their household. Some people show love by honouring their mind and spirit by meditating and following their spiritual practices. Find this love within you and express it however you can. When you express love and you recognize it, that love returns to you. In times of anxiety and stress, where we guard our health and worry about our collective state, we should always strive to be a force of light for others.

In the spiritual or religious context that we are discussing here, love is not simply about affection; love is referring to bhakti love in a devotional sense, Seva love in the form of selfless service, and atma-prema, which is unconditional love for all souls. The atma-prema form of love is often reached through a combination of both bhakti and seva. As Ramakrishna Paramahansa says, "Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace, one realizes Him in the course of time. God can be seen, one can talk to Him, as I am talking to you."

Everyone is facing challenges right now: some are financial, some are physical, some are mental and emotional. Regardless of the issue, it is fair to say everyone is experiencing difficulty in one form or another. Many of us are feeling lonely or trapped, or that we've lost control of our lives due to this virus, and that we are living in a place of darkness.

Always remember that in a world of darkness, we can be the light. Science tells us that we come from the stars, that we are a part of an interconnected ecosystem of planets, elements, and environments, but at our core, we came from the stars. This idea comes to use through the theory of the Big Bang. By this logic, then, our bodies and minds are made from the same matter that makes up the entire universe, through the concept of evolution. We should always remember this principle and attempt to be that shining light for others. No matter how dark this pandemic may make the world look, our souls and our nature are, at their core, truly as bright as a shining star.

It seems almost a cliché to talk about how we can be positive during such a uniquely difficult time. Many people have lost loved ones, are in the hospital, or are in various negative states. We cannot deny this. We cannot ignore the truth of the world around us. What we can do is increase our spiritual and holistic health, thus increasing our wellbeing and our capacity to handle these challenging times. We can help those who are facing negative situations due to the pandemic. We can take the darkness away from this situation by remaining that light for others, and we do this through our respective spiritual practices, by our meditation, prayers, our learning of spiritual concepts through various mediums. We can help others through our selfless service, and arguably one of the most important ways we can help is through our karmic responsibility to keep the vulnerable safe and healthy by following the rules and recommendations of medical professionals and authorities.

These principles and concepts are not only applicable now during the pandemic, but will continue to resonate with us after we heal from the damage this virus has caused. There is never a bad time to be loving, kind, helpful, and a light for others. If we embrace spirituality in a dark time, it will only bolster the of immense joy waiting for us in times of light and happiness.



The Pandemic 2020: The journey so far, and what I have learned

By Anupam Sharma

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared that a novel coronavirus had assumed the status of a pandemic and named it COVID-19. The Oxford Dictionary defines a pandemic as "a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world". A closer consideration tells us that its impacts are pervasive, far-reaching, and greatly consequential in all aspects of life, work, and society. As with revolutions or major inventions that serve to transform an individual, family, and community, one must therefore expect no less from a pandemic.

I wish to reflect and offer my observations to date arising from this journey, a journey we have all had to embark on through no choice of our own. All journeys, this one is no different, provide us with ups and downs. However, this journey differs from others in that it places us at crossroads and compels us all to reflect and reassess. It is indeed a major and perhaps a great transformative moment for us to assess all aspects of our lives.

A transformative moment is when something or things change dramatically - it is a tectonic shift - such that things will never be same. Or stated otherwise, the rebuilding takes place and things seem the same, but the resulting construction - even if the building looks the same as before - incorporates new knowledge to produce a more effective, efficient and/or durable structure, approach, or outlook. Pandemics are transformative in this way, also.

My assessments arise from both experience and observation. The former has arisen from my interactions with people at the individual, family, and community levels. The latter has arisen from reading and speculating, as well as conversing with those who share my sense of curiosity. I am interested in the "sociology of the pandemic" - how we are interacting at the individual, family, and community levels.

Though my unbridled faith in goodness and reason has been somewhat dampened during this time, I remain an optimist driven by the fact that the darkest night is always followed by the sunrise. It doesn't matter how long the darkness lasts, or whether it lasts beyond our liking to cause anguish and consternation.

Pandemics have taken place throughout history, from the typhoid fever that struck during the Peloponnesian War (430 BC) to the present COVID-19 pandemic that struck in 2020. Though each pandemic has been devastating and exacted a high

cost, the opposite has also been true. Akin to the rising of the phoenix, societies have arisen from the ashes of pandemics in better and more durable forms, and brought about changes such as the end of feudalism, the rise of sanitation and healthcare, and advances in virology and epidemiology that help us better understand these diseases, and (though this is still in progress) possibly reorganize our future work and social spaces.

COVID-19: The social context

At the outset, to allow for the smooth passage and flushing-out of the coronavirus through the system, public health directives emphasized physical distancing and minimization of personal contact with others. This could only be carried out regulating access to or completely closing large swaths of the economy and society. It is obvious that this has taken a huge toll on our economy and raised a host of related issues.

According to Paul Ward in "A sociology of the COVID-19 pandemic: A commentary and research and agenda for sociologists" (2020), the pandemic has, not surprisingly, given rise to issues of risk, fear, panic and trust. This erodes a society's social capital/trust, the invisible glue that holds us all together, and the basis for interaction and relationships. Once tampered with, this invisible glue quickly loses its potency and strength; if neglected, it takes a much longer time to reconstitute. It is through this sociological lens that I now assess my journey and learnings to date. I will organize my assessment along three lines: individual, family and community.

The individual and the personal

My first response, was an acute realization that the cost exacted by the pandemic may vary, but no one would be left unaffected. Whether economic, physical or mental, it was about the state of health. I work for a charitable organization and as revenues declined, I found myself not immune to having, for a time, to go on to reduced hours. However, I took solace in knowing that economic decline was a problem that could be addressed, while physical health is a necessary condition for life. It was about coping and building resilience to see it through. For this, it was imperative that I view myself from a holistic perspective: body, mind, and soul.

As it related to the soul, I am reminded of the great Viktor Frankl and his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. This is an account of his time in the concentration camps, especially Auschwitz. He asked himself how some survived the ordeal while many others simply perished. He says it is about living versus existing. It is about drawing meaning from "love", "purposeful work" and "courage in face of difficulty". This provides the food and fuel for undertaking this uphill task. One more observation from him: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way".

Recently, the Maryland Centre of Counselling published a diagram entitled, "What do I want to be during the COVID-19 Pandemic?". It begins with acknowledging the "state of fear" followed by "stage of learning" and culminating in "stage of growth".

Family and friends

Humans are social beings: they do not and cannot live in isolation. In our day-to-day lives, caught up in the hustle and bustle, we may not have the time or inclination to pay closer attention to the challenges at hand. It is especially during grave situations that we realize both the relevance and value of this "social glue" or social capital. The current pandemic is perhaps one such time in which a reset seems to be taking place. The effects of this reset may remain for at least some time.

We notice that family and friends are reaching out to each other and making conscious efforts to overcome physical distancing through social inclusion. Here, technology and social media platforms have served as very powerful enablers. Over the past seven months, it seems as though the use of Zoom and other platforms has



become almost ubiquitous in our daily lives. If we scan the advice from counselling services, we see that during these times it's more important than ever to reach out to relatives, friends, and colleagues, especially those you have not connected with in a while. It's even more important to connect with those who are older and vulnerable. Often, just a few words are enough. When someone takes the first step, a change for the better is almost certain to follow. As I grow older, family, health and friends become a higher priority. I am sure it is the same for all. Keep the following in mind:

- You are doing it for yourself.
- In one form or another, we are ALL are facing these challenges.
- Make a concerted effort to reach out 4-5 close friends and family. Talk about a dedicated subject. The task is to minimize COVID-19 and its effects on us and the space it occupies.
- Be encouraged by the fact that we (in Canada and North America) are still much better off than 95% of the world and its people. We should approach this fact with a sense of gratitude while keeping others in mind.

Our community and the world

My good friend Andria Spindel, in a recent exchange, reminded me that “we are living in an uncommon time, but generations before us felt the same way, whether because of war, famine, pestilence, or natural disaster, yet they survived. We are proof of it. Remarkably, each disaster led to improvements in the world, whether in medicine, agriculture, finance, communications, transportation, or, as now, in technology. Hopefully, we also improve in compassion.”

Taking a view of my own neighborhood and community, I have noticed that the street is teeming. Neighbours are reaching out to one another, checking on their wellbeing, and offering to help where needed. In addition to serving as exercise, the daily walk has also acquired a social dimension, one in which greetings are not as formal, and the chit-chat is about concern and interest in each other's welfare.

At a broader level, we're reaching out as individuals and communities to those in need. This reaching-out encompasses both material and mental needs. For the vulnerable and elderly, food and medical needs are needed most. The economically disadvantaged and the unemployed or underemployed may need food – and these needs may be hidden from the general gaze because of cultural values. This document highlights the many ways in which the India Association of Manitoba and the Indo-Canadian community have reached out – both within and beyond our own community – to address those needs.

Communities and countries do not have a homogenous personalities. Driven by differing outlooks and perspectives, we can expect a countervailing current to that of globalization and collaboration. Countries such as the United States have expressed and undertaken a contrary approach by focusing on nationalist sentiment and interest. Their efforts to confront and address the havoc wrecked by the pandemic have been diluted and exacted a greater cost at all fronts.

However, it is encouraging that counter to these nationalist and narrowly defined interests, collaborative efforts from the scientific community continue to produce effective COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. To quote Major General William T. Sherman, “It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell.” The scientific community and the health sector – both closer to the action – are clearly on the front lines of this battle, and our medical and scientific communities certainly have a clearer assessment of the gravity of the pandemic. Their clearer view of the realities of the pandemic are also due to institutional memory: they've also served on the front lines of other pandemics, including the one that struck in 1918-19.

Concluding thoughts

This is a personal account drawn from observations diarized intermittently over the past seven months. I have undertaken to follow the advice offered by the wise ones. To every extent possible, each day, I try my best to undertake one activity in each of the three previously referenced areas. As an individual, I have come to place greater emphasis on relationships and mutual understanding, and have

sought to strengthen these progressively through family, friends, close relatives, and acquaintances. Here, I am guided by a quote attributed to Dr. Seuss, "...Those who mind don't matter and those who matter do not mind." As we take charge, so does our sphere of control which, over time, progressively expands.

Though there are discordant voices and outlooks on issues such as masks and closures, we can reconcile these by noting that what we are facing a global challenge one that is confronting us all simultaneously. No one is spared! Coping then becomes a matter of perspective: the best we can do is take responsibility for the areas of our lives we can actually control. The best information we have to date tells us that, as we wait for the vaccine, physical distancing, washing hands and wearing a mask will still go a long way to slow the spread of the virus.

A pandemic may be a crisis, but it also offers opportunity for rebuilding and rejuvenation. Just as in previous pandemics, we must look to the silver linings. The COVID-19 has forced many organizations to both review and reorganize the workplace. Business and communication platforms such as Zoom have made it possible for employees to work from home. For those living in larger metropolitan cities, moving to a smaller local community can serve to reduce stress from commute times and housing costs.

At a moral level, the pandemic has in no uncertain terms brought to the forefront the needs of our most vulnerable people. We will need to revisit the conditions and supports available to the elderly, especially those living in long-term care facilities. Is institutional warehousing of the elderly, the way to go? Another weak link is the inadequate pay of our health-care workers. How are we to expect excellent care and service when those working on the front lines must work more than one job just to meet the basic needs of their own families?

Both here in Winnipeg and across Canada, the Red Cross and other community organizations and foundations such as the Winnipeg Foundation and the United Way of Winnipeg have stepped forward to provide leadership and anchor the community through this challenging times.

However, let us not wait for others. Let us take steps on our own. Even small contributions such as lighting candles to show support make a real difference. These need to be celebrated as well. Just as our society is made up of billions of individuals, the ocean of goodness is filled with billions of droplets. The droplet and the ocean each reflect one another in completeness, connecting the micro and the macro perspective.

A great example of a "droplet" making a difference is the recent donation of \$2,500 from Mr. George Daniels and Dr. Valsa Daniels to support the food needs of the community of Lake Manitoba First Nation. Let us celebrate contributions of all kinds, shapes and sizes. To an eternal optimist like me, when these challenging times finally end, the world will be a much better place because of them.

EDUCATION AND FUTURE CITIZENS

MULVEY SCHOOL

750 Wolsley Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1G6
Phone 204-786-3469 Fax 204-774-2894

Peter Correia, Principal
Meghan Clements, Vice Principal



October 28, 2020

Hasmita Trivedi
Past President, India Association of Manitoba
P.O. Box 1974, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3R1

Dear Ms Trivedi,

Mulvey School would like to thank you for your most generous donation to our school. The abundance of bananas and Rice Krispy Squares will be used to promote our Active Healthy Living Initiative. It is with significant donations, such as the one made by the India Association of Manitoba, which assists the initiative to continue to be a very strong and vibrant programme at the school. Your funding of the nutritious snacks is extremely valued and will make a significant difference to our students.

These nutritious snacks are excellent resources that will definitely provide extra energy for the busy students at Mulvey School. The mention of the donation at both the Staff Meeting and then the Parent Council Meeting was most appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact your school association to be congratulated and encouraged for your leadership in securing the funds and directing them toward providing a healthy nutritious snack for our students – a big bravo of gratitude. I also want to congratulate and extend my warmest regards to the India Association of Manitoba for their leadership in promoting and celebrating diversity in our city and for your extremely successful active role in further enriching Folklorama, the largest and longest-running multicultural Festival of its kind in the world.

Please be assured that your donation and support of our school are greatly appreciated. At Mulvey School, we continue to seek opportunities to provide positive connections among the school, home and community. Once again, thank you very much for your donation, thank you for making a difference in our community!

Mulvey School would like to extend our gratitude for the generous donation of fruit for our students to enjoy. We appreciate your willingness to share and contribute to our school and students. They are always very thankful for such practical donations that they get to consume and enjoy. Please share with all your members of the India Association of Manitoba our appreciation and pleasure in this very meaningful donation.

Thank you on behalf of the entire Mulvey School Community.

Sincerely,

Mr-P Correia

Principal

Ms. M. Clements

Vice Principal



FRONTENAC SCHOOL
866 Autumnwood Drive
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2J 1C1
T: 204-257-0609
F: 204-257-7390
www.fsd.net/schools/frontenac

Frontenac School is committed to developing a community of interdependent lifelong learners in a safe environment.

Dear President of the India Association of Manitoba,

We would like to thank you for choosing Frontenac School for the grant to help with food related items. The support has been deeply appreciated and will have a positive impact on both the students and community. Frontenac School would appreciate being considered in future opportunities for partnership and support.



Sincerely,
Justin Bell
Principal
Frontenac School



Schools During Pandemic: A Teacher's Perspective.

By Timmy Sharma

March is usually a joyous time in the life of a school. The days are becoming longer and warmer and Spring Break is just around the corner. However, March 2020 was unlike any other. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic and, since then, this novel coronavirus has stirred everything in its path. It has touched our schools as well, and it will have a permanent impact on us all at the individual, family, community, and global levels.

The pandemic has been pervasive, affecting how we interact and carry out our roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities in turn ensure the smooth functioning of our society and our world. The entire education sector, including schools, are a major economic driver of our society, tasked with nurturing informed citizens and leaders able to contribute to a sustainable and vibrant future.

The pandemic has not spared the school community – students and teachers, bricks and mortar, even pens and paper – from its tentacles. From the very outset the pandemic was a crisis and cause for intense concern and stress. In my experience, we had never been confronted with such a situation before, one which called for an audit of how we interact at a grassroots level. More specific to school and education, some basic questions arose: How does learning take place if schools are closed? In the absence of in-person interactions and relationships, how does an exchange and sharing of ideas take place? In this new unfolding context, what are the emergent roles and expectations from and of students and teachers? How do things we had taken for granted, such as field trips, graduation ceremonies, and laboratory work, happen? Has the new order changed the purpose of education and learning?

The pandemic is clearly a transformative moment and a pause for reset. Clearly, there are going to be new stresses that will also affect mental health. However, having taken a momentary pause for reflection, I believe there may be cause for optimism. Danger can bring opportunity (though I will not go as far as using the Chinese word *weiji*, as JFK did. Incorrectly, I may add).

Since March 2020, we teachers have opted to pivot towards “opportunity”. We, as a society, have pivoted to viewing and pursuing the opportunities presented for the future. As a teacher, I share my observations and thoughts with the goal of starting a conversation about schools during the current and post-pandemic phase.

The pandemic and its aftermath

Prior to the declaration of the pandemic, schools were operating as they had done for some time. Routines and operating procedures usually served to ensure smooth class operations. Roles and responsibilities were established and understood. The teacher enabled and facilitated specific learning goals for the student. The student responded with an opportunity to seek further clarifications or information. This model and its operation relied on a physical setting and context. Predominantly, it assumed in-person interactions.

And then COVID-19 struck. Teachers and students were asked to not interact in person. Learning now had to be imparted through the medium of technology only. A transition to virtual learning that may have begun in “fits and stops” now plunged us into wholly uncharted waters, and we all realized this change and its impacts would be permanent and transformative. Technology (and creativity) was set to play a major role in all aspects of education, and, in the process, change our educational setting.

That first week in March was almost surreal. Even under the extreme weather conditions that Manitoba lays claim to, school has never shut down (except for one day during the blizzard of 1997). Teachers have always been asked to report to class. This was the first time that teachers were being asked not to come in. So how does teaching continue to happen? How does a teacher keep in contact with his/her students and guide them through say, Assignment 5 – Question 3a?

Overnight, educators went from teaching in person to teaching online. Eight months have since gone by. We, as educators, are still grappling with ever-changing procedures, protocol, and platforms, all while trying to salvage as normal a school year as possible. Amid all this change and flux, new learning for students and teachers has continued – not in the same manner as during pre-pandemic times, but in ways that are more digital, more modular, less personal, and much less socially interactive.

Suddenly, lesson plans, tests, and field trips became things of the past. Now the challenge was to keep students engaged, keep them asking for help, keep them in contact, while still making progress with the curriculum. Educators have had to re-embrace online teaching, which before now had been on the outskirts of traditional teaching, but has now become its focal point.

Technology can certainly bridge the gap of space and distance created by the virus, and even add layers that were not always accessible in a regular classroom.

The shift to technology as an enabler had already begun during pre-COVID times, but suddenly the pandemic forced teachers to leapfrog their way instantaneously into classrooms built by their determination and scaffolded by Google. The Google Classroom platform has been available to educators for some time (in our division), but we had only dabbled with using it up to now. When COVID arrived at our doorsteps, it became my platform of choice, along with my cellphone. I had always kept my cellphone private, but as the pandemic hit, it became the device of choice with some of my students. They found it easier to send pictures of their work and discuss questions over the phone. It was strange at first, but as the virus continued, it became the vehicle for daily check-ins with some.

Schools are not just hubs for academic learning. They play an important caretaking role by safeguarding the wellbeing of students from a social, cultural, and emotional perspective. Now that families have begun working with their children at home amid so much new uncertainty and stress, the role that teachers and schools plays in their lives has received much greater recognition and appreciation. School closures have highlighted the issues faced by many students: motivation, food insecurity, childcare challenges, counseling, housing and, of course, access to technology. I have personally delivered food hampers to some of my students during these trying times. Our school division is loaning technology devices to students who do not have access to them. We continue to provide food and protective gear as we hope this staggered and physically distanced approach keeps us all safe.

My hope, of course, is that we all survive this behemoth of an ordeal. My other hope is that this is a moment in history in which the crucial role played by public schools in the social, economic, and, of course, academic prosperity of our community is acknowledged. For some children, these times may be used to gain empowerment over their own learning by judging their own motivations, and by collaborating with one another rather than learning only from their teachers. But what about those who need the intimacy and the synchronicity of face-to-face learning? What will happen when the pandemic ends?

The pandemic has opened many parents' eyes to the role that teachers and schools play in the basic fabric of society and as a one-stop solution for nurturing a number of needs: the provision of school-based supports such as meals (breakfast, emergency meals), health clinics (even mobile eye clinics), counseling, and even housing. Beyond that, schools provide a reliable custodial service for their children. Irrespective of whether their child is floundering or flourishing, schools provide parents a place to drop off their children in the morning, knowing that at the end of the day, they will pick them back up safe and sound. Maybe academic learning can happen elsewhere, but what about socialization – learning to get along with people who are not your family, building the lifelong friendships that many children form, and sharing the stories of their adventures (and misadventures)? How does one learn and live those experiences without the in-person environment that schools provide?

I do think blended education (a mixture of online and traditional education) is here to stay. Schools have realised the potential of online education not just as a substitute to traditional teaching but as an important complement to it. Besides the manner in which it is being used at present, I think blended learning is a valuable tool that can be used to help students who need to be absent for various reasons to keep up with classroom assignments and projects. Students do not have to fall behind. Also, classroom time will become more precious, and will be used more for discussions, field trips, group and laboratory work, and so on. Distance or e-learning will no longer have a stigma attached to it. Blended learning will become a part of the strategic planning of all school divisions. Every child has his/her own rhythm for learning. The use of online tools has the advantage of personalizing education so that all students can work at their own pace.

Of course, teacher education will change, too. Their technological skills will need to be extensive. Many teachers will always lag behind students (ha ha), but they will

have to familiarize themselves with the myriad of digital platforms available and guide their students through them. New ways of teaching and communicating are taking shape, and teachers must pay attention to them. Curricula may be re-written to align with this brave new world. Teachers will become models of lifelong learning, and of stepping outside one's comfort zone.

When this is all over and children return to school full time, everyone will be at different points in their academic journey. Needs and preferences will therefore vary. Some students or parents may object to being taught the same thing that they were to have learned during the pandemic. Students will have learned different things and to varying degrees. Maybe this is the time, then, to personalize curricula for each child. Schools have always been mass education institutions that have operated the same way for centuries now. This is the time, then, to change the "one size fits all" approach.

Technology presents us with a way to personalize education. There may be a child in my class who might learn physics better by listening to Neil deGrasse Tyson than to me; another might prefer to listen to Margaret Atwood reading her own novel than to his/her teacher. I think that these opportunities were already becoming a reality for many of us, but because of COVID-19, their adoption has accelerated. Brick and mortar schools are not going away; they are still much needed to provide a place where children learn from their peers and teachers, share experiences, and forge relationships. The use of pens and pencils will also continue as children continue to learn not only through audio and visual tools, but through physical and tactile activities that are so critical to their holistic growth.

In conclusion

My sense is that the teacher-student relationship will in any future context revolve around each inspiring, engaging, empowering and sustaining one another.

Another way of looking at this revolves around the Circle of Courage teachings inspired by First Nations peoples. According to Martin Brokenleg, the universal growth needs of all children can be modelled under the four tenets of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. These are the foundations of positive growth and resiliency based on First Nations teachings and modern youth development research.

At this moment, notwithstanding our current fears and challenges, I believe we stand on the brink of new evolutions in education: blended and recovery learning, increased societal responsibilities for schools, and changes in teacher training. These changes were originally set in motion when societies became increasingly knowledge-based, globalized, and technology driven. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for some these changes, and accelerated the adoption of others. Hopefully, by working together and taking a holistic approach to teaching and learning that places the student at the centre, we can use this pandemic as a catalyst for building a robust education community.



Life During the Pandemic: A Student's Perspective

By Armaan Kaur Dhillon

My name is Armaan Dhillon and I am a Grade 10 student and athlete at St. John's-Ravenscourt School. Currently, the world is at battle with COVID-19; this battle has affected me to a degree in which my life has been immensely altered to fit the conditions of the virus. In my article, I am going to highlight the main factors in my everyday life that have been affected by the pandemic. These include my education, sports, and social life.

First, my education. The education system has changed considerably over the course of this year and has made it very difficult to interact with teachers and my peers. In my school, I can fortunately still come to school (in-person) and learn in class with my peers; however, our desks are separated, we have to wear masks, we can't write tests on paper, and overall, doing work is much more complicated than it used to be. Even if we wanted to write a test, we would have to wait two weeks for the papers to quarantine; at the end of the day, it is not practical and is greatly time-consuming. We also have the choice to stay at home and do virtual learning, which is equivalent to face-time.

Although it may seem less stressful, this year has been a challenge and one of the most frustrating years at school, in part because there are so many negative effects that online schooling has on students. Examples include technical problems, lack of involvement with classmates, level of engagement and motivation and plenty of other issues that are going to negatively affect students in the future. However, the concept of online learning is not all negative. As I mentioned, it does come with many challenges, but looking on the positive side, it teaches students that we can adapt to new situations, be flexible, and do the best we possibly can during the pandemic by overcoming obstacles one day at a time!

In my experience, the teachers at my school have always been very helpful and always make the effort to help when we need it. Even before the pandemic, we could email our teachers and ask questions and interact online. I think the student/teacher relationship has changed a little because of the pandemic. Students that choose to stay home and study online do not get the personal interaction they would if they attended class in person.

Student and family relationships have changed in some families, and changes in roles have also taken place. Parents are having to spend more time teaching their children. This may be a great thing for some families but could be stressful for others.

Moving forward, one of the changes I see students needing to make is that we need to stay focused and practice good time management skills. It can be challenging at times to stay motivated and not be distracted when you are sitting in front of a computer and no one watching to make sure you are doing your work. This is where us students need to prioritize our studies but still make time for extracurricular activities to keep our minds and bodies active!

Secondly, the pandemic has affected my sports. I am a multi-sport athlete: I'm an avid golf, hockey, soccer and basketball player. All these sports have been cancelled due to the pandemic. This affects me tremendously because these sports are how I stay active and get exercise. These sports are also a way for me to relieve stress and take a break from school. During the Orange (Restricted) period of the province's pandemic response, I had the opportunity to keep playing these sports and go to the gym while being very careful about social distancing and following the rules; now that we are at a Red (Critical) level, everything is closed for now. I have found other ways to remain active. I spend time at home doing workouts and practicing my putting for golf.

We must never stop doing the things that keep us going! The pandemic has taken multiple opportunities away from me in specific regards to golf. In June, I was invited to take part in the High School Golf National Invitational in North Carolina. I worked exceedingly hard to be invited to this prestigious tournament, which would have given me the opportunity to be recognized by respected authorities in the golf community, and would have expanded my options for university. I know that I will still have more opportunities in the future, though, and that the decision to stay safe was a higher priority.

Lastly, the pandemic has affected my social life. Not being able to visit my grandparents in the the beginning of the pandemic was very hard. But we wanted to make sure they stayed healthy and well. It was a very happy moment when I was finally able to go over to their homes and visit them.

I also have a strong devotion to helping others, whether through volunteering, debate tournaments, or taking part in community events. The pandemic affected all aspects to a great extent. For volunteering, my classmates and would sometimes go on class trips to personal care homes to play bingo and keep the seniors happy and joy-filled; due to the pandemic and the number of breakouts in care homes, these visits were unquestionably no longer a good idea. I have traveled all over the world to take part in debate tournaments, including places such as Bermuda, Vancouver, and Montreal. This year, I was supposed to travel to Germany. The debating trips I take are undeniably the activities I look most forward to each year; I am so fortunate that I was able to go on these trips before the onslaught of the pandemic.

For work, I work at the front desk at my dad's chiropractic office on the weekends, mostly during the summer months. I would normally connect with people and have conversations with them, but due to the pandemic, we try to minimize the interactions.

I am also a junior golf assistant/coach for the Special Olympics, one of the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities. Special Olympics provides year-round training and activities to five million participants and Unified Sports partners in 172 countries. Coaching at the Special Olympics is one of the liveliest activities I do each year. It enables me to connect with new people who love the same sport as me. I learn so much from the people around me at this event, and I am so grateful for all of the opportunities it presents.

The pandemic has had multiple negative effects on me, but at the end of the day, what positive knowledge have I gained from this experience? The pandemic has taught me that we need to support the people around us and be appreciative of what we have; I have learnt to not take anything for granted; and I have learnt that in hard times, we as a society should never give up on each other and, instead, work together.

We have the choice to make the best of our days by staying positive, keeping faith, and being thankful every day for what we have.



Seven Oaks School Division: Navigating COVID-19

By Derek (Deva) Dabee

On November 14, 2020 I began writing this article. On the same day, it was announced that Manitoba had sustained the full force of a second wave of COVID-19. The province registered a record-breaking, one day infections tally: - 411 cases and 15 deaths. This was a more than 800% increase over the daily average reported during the first wave. These cases were mostly in Winnipeg and 11 of the 15 casualties were residents from the Maples Long Term Care Home.

The Maples Long Term Care Home is a care facility located at the centre of the Seven Oaks School Division, in the heart of the area where its students reside. It became a district flagged as a "hot spot" on the Manitoba COVID-19 infections scale. This has had a direct impact on our students and their families. There were 625 students who were affected by students who tested positive for COVID-19, and all of these required two weeks of isolation at home. None of these students were said to have contracted COVID while attending school.

With COVID-19 still in its full fury, I relate my observations of the governance and administration of a mid-size Manitoba operation/business, the Seven Oaks School Division, and how it took on the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These observations encompass areas that required immediate and critical attention to mitigate infections in schools, including additional budgeting, staffing, supplies, schools rooms/gymnasiums, and transportation.

COVID-19

Canada's first wave of COVID-19 began in February 2020. At that time, Manitoba came out mostly unscathed. As of September 6, the provincial tally was 400 cases and 14 deaths and, until this point, no student cases in Manitoba schools had been reported. However, on November 14, Manitoba recorded a total of 5,271 cases, including 625 students in Seven Oaks schools.

The first wave subsided in late summer. The swift onslaught of the first wave triggered a six-week lockdown of our schools. School trustees worked with the Manitoba Chief Medical Officer to launch a series of COVID-19 protocols and remote teaching practices. After observing a reduction in infection rates on a sustained basis, we reopened schools in May and then closed them for summer holidays in June. Remote teaching was only a pale substitute for the brick-and-mortar classroom, as learning ideally takes place through an experiential exchange of ideas and interactions.

Seven Oaks School Division

Seven Oaks School Division is a public school district with over 11,800 students from kindergarten to Grade 12, with more than 1,560 staff members and an annual budget of over 160 million dollars. The division administrates 25 schools and serves a catchment area of over 18,000 households.

The governing structure and functionality at the Seven Oaks School Division are like that of Winnipeg's City Council. It is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees. Trustees are elected by the district residents every four years, at the same time as city councillors.

Addressing COVID-19



With rigid COVID-19 distancing protocols in place, there were no high school graduation ceremonies for the 1,240 students at the end of the school year. Mindful of forecasts of a dire second wave in the fall, trustees and senior staff members, in association with provincial government health officials, began a series of planning meetings in the first week of August to plan and implement safety, health and

preventive measures for the 25 schools in the divisional district and, the 73 school buses that transport our students. An additional 7 million dollars was budgeted to hire 50 additional teachers and dozens more non-teaching staff members. Schools supplies and school rooms were requisitioned and community centre gymnasiums were rented to ensure physical distancing. Furthermore, sanitation supplies, teaching supplies and iPads were also acquired.

Schools Open

September 8, 2020 was the first day of in the new school year. A strict list of COVID-19 protocols and safety measures were rolled out by the Seven Oaks Division, including:

- School buses set at 40% seating capacity in compliance with COVID-19 distancing guidelines
- Bus riders must enter the bus in single file
- Students were required to remain seated in assigned seating
- No eating nor drinking in buses
- Bus riders must exit seat by seat, by alternating sides

Thanks to the continued valuable advice from Manitoba public health officials, all our schools, including grade, middle and high schools, were "custom outfitted" to best accommodate their students while limiting their risks to COVID exposure. Here, measures included:

- Screening at the school entrances to prevent symptomatic individuals from entering the school
- Hand hygiene and washing

- Physical distancing in classes, gyms, moving phys-ed classes and other activities outdoors
- More frequent custodial cleaning
- Improved ventilation
- Mitigation of risk for students who are vulnerable to severe diseases
- Mandatory mask wearing by everyone
- Mental health awareness and support
- Safety measures in place for quick response to positive cases in schools

We have observed a steady but slow decline in student attendance, from a high of 91% in September to a low of 80% in mid-November. Some parents understandably decided that keeping their children at home was the best prevention. "There were 625 active cases, we have no evidence of spread through our schools. The resulting spread was likely arising from the high number of families working in front-line occupations. To date we only had to isolate a small number of individual students and a dozen classes," said Brian O'Leary, Seven Oaks School Division Superintendent. This situation contrasted to the first wave during the spring of 2020, where there were no COVID-19 cases in all of Winnipeg schools!

Lessons learned

National and provincial systems must now plan and prepare to manage and cushion the shock effects of future emergencies. Global closures of schools in the spring of 2020 remains a wake-up call for all. COVID-19 has been an important learning experience for the education system that has challenged us to adapt to rapidly changing information and circumstances, while working to ensure the health and safety of everyone we serve. Education systems will find that "returning to normal" is no longer an option. Here are some of the lessons we have learned:

- Technology: As the pandemic spread around the world and schools closed their doors due to the need for COVID-19 distancing, educators tried remote teaching. At the top of the list of lessons learned is the invaluable role of education technology versus distribution of printed materials.
- Equity: Again, COVID-19 reminded policy-makers of the need for equity in education resources and opportunities. Poverty and lack of disposable income mean that not every student can afford the required learning tools.
- Information sharing: Education systems must mobilize education networks so that together, they can more effectively disseminate potentially life-saving public health messages.
- Teaching scenarios: Planning for sustained teaching and continuity of education is one of the best things we can do to support the resilience and well-being of our children and reduce anxiety during a crisis or emergency.
- Build new schools better: A central principle in post-crisis recovery is to take advantage of the opportunity to "build back better". For example, during the recovery period after the deadly 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, schools were rebuilt and retrofitted with improved designs, mitigating against potential similar disasters.

At the Seven Oaks School Division, contingency plans are being made for a possible government-directed extension of Christmas break to four weeks, with virtual teaching to take place during the first two weeks of school in January. Our division will continue to employ creative ways to meet the learning needs of all our students and staff members.

COMMUNITY AND SERVICES

The India Association of Manitoba PRESENTS

Online Session on

Domestic Violence and Abuse

delivered by
Ms. Seema Vankayal, PCHS
(in English)

On

November 26, 2020
6:00pm-7:00pm (Winnipeg)
7:00pm-8:00pm (Toronto, Montreal)

To Register, go to the following link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3JIR6UeZoNQo>
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3JIR6UeZoNQo>



The India Association of Manitoba PRESENTS

Online Session on

Stress Management

delivered by
Ms. Akanksha & Ms. Anmol, PCHS
(in English)

On

December 3, 2020
6:00pm-7:00pm (Winnipeg)
7:00pm-8:00pm (Toronto, Montreal)

To Register, go to the following link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7ZlucOysqTkJH90k4cY324TgYewmqvZ2ZU5D>





COVID-19: How the Indo-Canadian Community Is Identifying It and Coping with It: A Psychotherapist's Perspective

By Kamal Bedi

Few circumstances in life carry within them the power to uproot us from our foundations and call into question what it is that we really value. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is one such circumstance. And while the world at large has been impacted by a tremendous death toll, economic havoc, and soaring mental health issues, many cultures and communities are doing their best to cope with and address the competing challenges of this time.

As a psychotherapist and member of the Indo-Canadian community, I have seen a large increase in the number of Indo-Canadian people wanting to access therapy for reasons related to COVID-19. This is interesting from a cultural perspective as well, given the stigma connected to seeking help for psychological problems prevalent within Indian culture. Perhaps the need for human interaction, to be understood and seen, is making people more comfortable with seeking help they would have turned away from before this crisis.

My Indo-Canadian clients often affirm to me, through stories of their upbringing, that psychological health is not a subject that was openly discussed or given importance to in their homes. Many children of immigrant parents, and even first-generation Indo-Canadians, have shared with me stories of how hard their parents worked to provide a financially stable environment for them. This was the goal for many parents, and achieving it meant to them being a successful parent. Consequently, however, many of us grew up in homes where we were expected to be thick-skinned and not take anything too personally, and if we did, our homes were not usually encouraging environments in which to process our feelings. High-intensity conflicts of any kind were to be resolved within the immediate family, or within the extended family at most. Seeking help from an outside source was considered shameful, as it could make the family vulnerable to mockery and criticism, and threaten how the family was perceived by society, which, for many families, is of large significance.

Many Indo-Canadian clients share stories that overlap and mirror one another: stories of how COVID has compelled them to live lives that are much more isolated and confined than many of them are used to, stories of feeling disconnected from loved ones, and stories of increased stress and anxiety as we learn to live on the brink of a future enveloped in uncertainty. To help deal with the increased stress and anxiety levels of Canadians in general, many provincial governments have begun

offering more mental health resources at this time. These services, however, have mainly been accessible in English, and many of my clients, who range in age from 18 to the mid-80s, have shared that it was important for them to seek counselling services with someone who was well-acquainted with their ethnic background and language, regardless of how fluent they were in English.

With isolation comes feelings of disconnection and loneliness, mainly stemming from unmet needs for social interaction. Perhaps this has led many of us to reflect on the role of socializing and social functions in our lives. For many of us, family reunions, weddings, travel, birthday celebrations and other occasions were cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic. Our ethnic closets containing beautifully embellished clothing in rich colors remain unworn, and we resign ourselves to more subdued and mundane choices of attire: choices that are practical, yet somehow make us feel less spirited and alive. We confront disappointment in being unable to attend events we were looking forward to, and feel critical of those who go ahead with those activities anyway, despite government restrictions on group sizes and quarantine measures. Many of us have found ourselves in homes, families, or circles of friends in which there exists a divide in perspective between members who are gravely concerned about the impacts of COVID and feel a strict need to adhere to government legislations, and others who feel it is all being blown out of proportion, and are therefore less inclined to follow the regulations. There has been no shortage of media inaccurately dramatizing the way COVID-19 is impacting the world, and not everyone is able to identify credible sources of information. This has led to a lot of confusion about how to interpret our present circumstances.

Many of us at this time feel our lives are somehow confined, that our choices are limited, and that so much is out of our control. These sentiments give birth to anxiety, depression and increased relational conflict. Families with multiple adults working from home are feeling a strain on their relationships due to being around their family members more than they are accustomed to. The Indian culture is a collective one, which has since time immemorial deemed virtue to be in accordance with placing others' needs above one's own, and acting in accordance with what pleases the family as opposed to the self. For some, this makes it very challenging to be assertive about one's needs. The result in many Indo-Canadian homes has been that people start feeling saturated with each other's presence and need more time alone or away from family members. This has led to people seeking connection and intimacy outside their homes and even their marriages. Some of us have fostered hobbies to keep ourselves preoccupied, and live in relationships that have open communication. But for the vast majority of us, this is not the case, and we are not able to be as authentic with our loved ones as we would like.

If we are willing to look deeper, we may realize that these struggles are simply mirrors of patterns of behaviour we have become quite comfortable with over time. Relationship conflict is both uncomfortable and inevitable, so it follows that the natural impulse in dealing with it is to avoid it and blame others. However, this approach often creates a bigger mess because it creates fertile ground for wounds to fester, thus leaving core issues largely unresolved. Reflecting on our patterns of behaviour, exploring why we respond to people and circumstances in the ways

we do, and looking closely at our style of engaging in conflict can provide clues to where we need to work on ourselves. This is a prerequisite for finding more joy in our relationships, appreciating them more so that we do not take them for granted, and, ultimately, for increasing our self-awareness and understanding.

For many of us, the emotion of grief is very real and easy to identify with currently. Some of us are grieving the loss of human touch, while others are grieving the loss of community as we know it, the loss of our livelihoods, the loss of spending time with children and grandchildren, the loss of safety, or the loss of friends and family who have died from the virus, especially those who have died alone. While some relationships are indeed ending due to death or clashing perspectives, others are embracing this is a time for self-reflection, spiritual growth, and finding creative ways to instill life with meaning and purpose. Some are relying on their local Gurdwara or temple to give them an excuse to leave their home, see familiar faces, and receive spiritual guidance; others are finding ways to celebrate occasions such as Navratri and Diwali virtually with family and friends. COVID-19 may serve to some as an invitation to pay more attention to their own self-care, how they spend their time, the quality of their relationships, and their roles and responsibilities in the larger communities in which they live. For all of us, it is an invitation to wear masks, to social distance, and to quarantine when required so that when we do gather again, no one is missing.

Many of us are eager for a return to "normal", and this can be a significant time to question whether our pre-COVID-19 ways of being ought to be retained, and what we want to change about ourselves and our lives? Sometimes we feel we can implement the changes we wish to manifest on our own, and other times we may feel stuck on where to begin or how to implement those changes. Being willing to learn what we can do to help our families, community, and society at large while interacting with it in unfamiliar ways means embracing uncertainty, expressing curiosity, and seeking authentic and honest communication.

This willingness may equip us with the tools and resources we require to navigate our internal and external worlds, which always are, and will be, in flux. Seeking help is courageous and a testimony to our self-worth. Initiatives that encourage more conversations in our homes and communities about mental health will help the Indo-Canadian community break down barriers to accessing available resources. These are trying times, but it is beneficial to remember that we are all in this together, and that there can be growth in discomfort.

For feedback and queries, please contact kamal.d.bedi@gmail.com



East India Company: Operating a Business during the 2020 Pandemic

By Sachit Mehra

The 2019/2020 pandemic has proven to be a challenge for society at every level and across the globe. No family has gone untouched, and many have faced dire consequences. Economically, the fallout is yet to be fully realized and remains an ongoing process as markets and habits shift from old norms to new realities requiring new norms. Moreover, as jurisdictions continue to evaluate the fallout, it is becoming increasingly clear that, across the business spectrum, there are business models that have thrived, including online businesses, local real estate, renovation and grocery stores, while others have completely crumbled, such as restaurants, event spaces, travel, and tourism.

Furthermore, it is now also coming into focus that specific areas of cities have also been impacted in different ways. The downtown or central business districts of many cities, once thriving areas of commerce, residence, employment, business, and pleasure tourism, have withered away under stay-at-home restrictions and the evaporation of tourism.

As a restaurant family with business in our central business district, we have seen first-hand, across provinces, the impact of the COVID crisis on the local and on-the-ground economy. So where, in this changing landscape, does a local small business stand among the new norms? Is pivoting from a traditional model possible? What about jurisdictional programs and their effects? What does the future hold for the restaurant business?

The new norm

What is the new norm? For restaurant business, it means closed dining rooms, limited hours, raised operating costs and reliance on low margin revenue streams. Our first closure came on March 16, 2020 when we closed all our restaurants, ahead of any government obligation or order, because protecting the health and safety of our business, our guests and our staff was of paramount importance to us. We maintained the closure through the eventual Manitoba announcement late March/April.

The early restrictions brought on by public health orders limited operating hours, then imposed space and capacity restrictions. Most businesses were happy to adopt all these measures if it still meant being able to operate. However, despite

all the levels of compliance, full shutdowns were implemented and the only revenue stream left for restaurants was, and remains, the delivery business.

Pandemic business realities

Delivery has become a big business boosted by current pandemic restrictions. Because having staff dedicated solely to delivery is beyond the reach of many restaurants, using a delivery service company is the only solution. For many restaurants, delivery is their only source of income, apart from pickup. Indeed, volumes for delivery through many small, local restaurants are staggering.

Why, then, are we still hearing an outcry from restaurants? Why are so many establishments, especially small and local ones, closing across Canadian cities? The reason is simple: delivery companies charge punishing margins, upwards of 20 to 30 percent of the total food delivery, and this is before additional incentives such as driver-pay subsidies, additional marketing, website integration, etc. Moreover, any issues that may arise, including ANY problem with the order, driver delay, even the speed at which a restaurant clicks the accept button on the tablet, is subject to a cost or score. Customer or curbside pick-up has become a key revenue point because it leaves the operating margin in the pockets of the business, and for those restaurants with enough cash flow to operate during the pandemic, that has been a welcome reprieve.



Business is less about what you are selling or providing and more about being consistent in all that you do, including food quality, service, and guest satisfaction. It is not about how good your offering is, but how consistently you offer it. It is not about how good your service is, but how consistently you deliver the same.

Our model is buffet service, but that changed overnight to takeout and pickup, which meant our kitchens had to change to accommodate a new style of business. To illustrate, think of a sprinter and a marathon runner. Both are runners, but each has completely different goals and styles. Customers have come to expect

a consistently good product and we needed to be able to offer the same level of satisfaction and experience in a takeout scenario.

Our kitchens needed to be modified to handle volume, speed, efficiency, and, above all, the quality that people expect from the East India Company. This meant a changeover of stoves, shelving, and overall setup of our kitchen. This presented a double whammy of a large cash outlay during a time where cash flow had come close to nil and where the future was uncertain. It also meant a double-down commitment to all our permanent staff. To date, we have not had a single layoff.

There have been many announcements by various levels of government about assistance to small business. For the restaurant industry specifically, the numerous federal programs have had the most impact. They were implemented early, have been consistently applied, and, with input from the business community, were changed when they were not working.

Certainly, other jurisdictions may not have the capacity of the federal government, but they can consult, advocate, plan, and program for the future. Failure to apply these steps by governments will mean a continuing decline of small and large local business. Manitobans are already aware of a number of high-profile retail establishments shuttering in downtown Winnipeg, but what you have not heard about is the countless small businesses that have suffered and closed, and that is only three fiscal quarters in. The popular consensus is that we won't return to 2019 levels until 2023, in another eight fiscal quarters.

A comprehensive plan, through meaningful consultation, for a strategic return to work and a return to business and pleasure tourism should be at least on decision-makers' minds, if not in progress. Moreover, incentives such as corporate deductions on dining out should make a return as an incentive for customers to return to frequenting establishments. Inaction will only make worse what is surely to be a dismal first fiscal year post-2020 for many provincial and municipal budgets. This will, in turn, further impact crown budgets, staffing, spending, and ultimately further damage an economy that is completely reliant on local business.

Of course, all the aid in the world will not matter if you are managing your business debt or some other leverage. The most successful organizations have had to rely on internal resources to carry them through; while various programs continue to roll out at different levels, they remain a band-aid solution, and frankly, no entrepreneur is in business to rely on a compensation package.

Post-pandemic projections

Let me be clear: the restaurant business is not going anywhere. People will always want to celebrate the joy of sharing a birthday celebration, special occasion or promotion, and for many people and organizations, events like these simply cannot take place in solitude or at home. And, of course, people want to congregate in groups, but do not necessarily want the responsibility of clean-up, safety or decor. This is where different types of restaurants that offer experiences as well as good food will excel.

While restaurants will remain resilient, they will change. Expect more big boxes that rely on commissary kitchens to reduce on-site cooking costs. Expect simpler menus as supply chains groan under the strain of various establishments reopening: for a while, many menu ingredients will simply be too expensive to work with. Expect smaller, limited-space dining as pandemic restrictions and anxieties will remain on the minds of many diners for years to come, and restaurants will have to balance this mindset with the reality of expensive leased real estate. Furthermore, many establishments that geared their operations to a take-out/pickup model will be slow to revert to dine-in service. Expect higher prices as supply chains and competition from other markets compete heavily for raw product. Moreover, expect less variety of the type of establishments that are available to dine at; public confidence may take years to return to 2019 levels, and this combined with a high resource cost and financial risks will lead to fewer entrepreneurs opening new spaces.

In the end, restaurant and small business owners will have faced many lessons through this pandemic. Reliance on operating within a cash flow has proved be disastrous for many. So has over-reliance on any one segment of the population, whether it be a late-nigh crowd, the tourism crowd, or any other niche. The location of one's business in any specific part of the city can make or break you: those restaurants in the suburbs have generally faired better than those in the core. We have also learned the absolute necessity of advocating for ourselves: no one in leadership positions knows your business or your industry better than you. Continuous updates about the industry, either through associations or directly to leaders, is a necessity. Finally, and now more than ever before, lean, focused menus and business models will win the day.

While the landscape continues to change and evolve, the reality that local business depends on local dollars does not. Where safe and reasonable, please continue to frequent the establishments that you love, and occasionally try a new potential favourite. You may discover a nice surprise.



Punjabi Community Health Services: The Community During the Pandemic

By Puneet Dhillon

Punjabi Community Health Services is a not-for profit, charitable organization that aims to improve quality of life by providing culturally appropriate services to diverse communities. Our services include, but are not limited to, mental health and addictions, geriatric support, settlement, and social awareness. Started in 1990, PCHS is accredited among the top three percent of organizations by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), which surveys 7034 organizations in 20 countries around the world.

To provide health, settlement, and social services that improve the quality of life of individuals, families and diverse communities is the mandate of the organisation. The following are the key services we provide:

Health

- Mental Health & Addictions
- Services for Seniors

Settlement

- Services to Newcomers
- Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC)
- Volunteer Support
- Support Services
 - Crisis Support
 - Child Minding

Social

- Marriage Counseling
- Better Families
- Family Enhancement
- Anger Management
- Parenting



The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been a very challenging time for all communities and service providers. PCHS has been working hard to keep up the work and continue to support our communities. As soon as the pandemic was declared by the Canadian government, PCHS immediately switched to working from home to ensure the safety of staff and clients. This was a challenging transition for management, as they had to procure funding to provide infrastructure to staff, including laptops, and the training they needed to use hands-on technology. Another major hurdle for staff to overcome was stress and anxiety caused by these difficult circumstances and the social isolation brought on by lockdowns.

A major challenge encountered by our South Asian clients was adapting to new technology. Clients have had a hard time in switching to an online service mode as many of them, especially seniors, were not used to using technology in this way. Our domestic violence clients struggled with sharing their stories when the abusers were present under the same roof. PCHS immediately took the initiative by listing signs and resources on our website and online media to help victims communicate safely with service providers.

We saw an increase in domestic violence calls from both male and female victims. There could be many reasons for this, including an increase in alcohol use. Clients also connected to PCHS for help dealing with challenges related to working from home, managing children, and living as an extended family under one roof during lockdown.

- In 2019, a significant number of domestic violence homicide victims in Ontario were South Asian women.
- Other stressors from COVID-19, such as unemployment and food insecurity, make many South Asians in Canada vulnerable to increased family violence

Studies are now showing how the South Asian population has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This includes higher infection rates and economic impacts. Among South Asian families, it is common for one family member to provide income through work; quarantines have therefore placed an enormous strain and economic hardship on families where work is disrupted.

By virtue of being immigrants, South Asian communities experience higher rates of poverty, and these rates will continue to grow in light of the systemic racism and stigma revealed by the pandemic.

Religion and cultural rituals are deeply important and meaningful to the South Asian community. Not being able to attend religious practices due to public health restrictions has created a spiritual vacuum for many community members who rely on prayer and connection with the divine.

Thousands of international students from South Asian countries cannot access the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) even though they pay astronomically higher tuition than domestic students. In light of the above circumstances, we hold academic institutions responsible for taking care of these students and demand more accountability and equity. The major issue for these students is housing: many are living in precarious conditions and are exploited by their landlords. The situation is even worse for female students, many of whom have been sexually abused. We highly recommend these academic institutions provide housing for these students. Broader discussions are also required to explore ways to help international students become permanent residents.

- Thousands of South Asian workers with precarious immigration status cannot access the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)
- South Asians with precarious immigration status (such as visitors and undocumented workers) cannot access any provincial income support -

leaving them without any source of income and with few to no options for returning home safely.

- Many South Asian seniors in Canada are not eligible for Old Age Security and live in poverty and food insecurity as a result.
- Many South Asian parents in Canada are not eligible for the Canada Child Benefit.

PCHS continues to have a seat at the Colour of Poverty and Colour of Change table and lobbies the government for change. We are also actively exploring developing employment programs for our community. PCHS as a social work organization is also looking to highlight the lateral exploitation of South Asian workers by South Asian employers.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, organizations like Punjabi Community Health Services and various other agencies serving in the Greater Toronto Area are facing the problem of underfunding to the social and health sector. High diabetes and COVID-19 infection rates in our community is a non-factor when it comes to seeking funding in these areas. Ontario has also reported higher rates of heart diseases among South Asian members of the community. There is a huge demand for services supporting mental health, seniors, newcomers, and victims of domestic violence.

PCHS as a service provider advocates for the removal of all gaps to income support benefits for the South Asian community. PCHS also recommends by-laws and support for South Asian workers to ensure they experience better and more fair labour market outcomes. This includes creating better basic employment standards, safer workplaces, employment equity to tackle discrimination in the workplace, and programs targeted to improve economic prosperity for South Asian workers.

PCHS: Post-COVID

One of the major challenges we will face is that it is becoming harder to deliver services virtually in a way that serves both our organization and our clients. Not all settlement services can be delivered virtually. Even our mental health services have suffered a setback as clients inform us that they are unable to "open up" in front of their loved ones. Our addictions services have also struggled to assist clients who need withdrawal management services (also known as detox services) when in-person services are suspended. The question becomes: How do we support those clients who require in-house services?

The second challenge we will face is helping women who are experiencing Intimate Partner Violence. These women are unable to access services because the abusive partner may also be at home while they try to reach out to these services.

Next, the South Asian community will experience higher levels of poverty brought about by the pandemic. PCHS will lobby the government to pay special attention to this issue.

Last but not least, PCHS is concerned about the gut-wrenching conditions faced by international students. Academic institutions are not owning up to the problem. We view this as borderline “modern day slavery” in which a segment of the population pays exorbitant prices for education, and yet academic institutions do not recognize the challenges faced by the vulnerable students they continue to profit from.

Changes to our service delivery model:



Changes will take place in two areas:

- o Service delivery to clients, and
- o Staff wellbeing and their ability to work remotely

This will require the following pre-requisites:

- o Educating our clients about how they can become tech-savvy
- o Providing tech resources to clients who do not have the resources to purchase computers
- o Training staff to take care of themselves
- o Teaching supervisors how to supervise remotely
- o Developing video resources that clients can view while at home and in “privacy” (however that is defined by the client)
- o Strengthening PCHS’s ability to educate the community through PCHS TV

We anticipate that some of the bigger changes we’ve seen may remain post-COVID, including more individuals working from home. This may lead to forced communication between family members. We also foresee school boards and parents adapting to new ways of working and educating children, including home schooling. The majority of Ontario government, health and banking services may permanently shift online rather than in person. The biggest change we anticipate is in fundraising. Organizations will need to quickly develop new and innovative ways to raise funds; those that do not, may be forced to close.

Among all these challenges, PCHS will focus most on addressing poverty in our community. We would also like to expand our offices and our capacity to serve Ontario’s South Asian community. We are strengthening PCHS TV to reach wider and educate our community more deeply. Each day, we are preparing and training ourselves to serve our clients and our community in the best way possible.

India Association's Covid Seva Initiative Helps Vulnerable Community Members

by STAFF WRITER

In response to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, India Association of Manitoba launched a Covid Seva Initiative to ensure that senior citizens and other vulnerable community members, including women, children and international students, have access to food aid, as well as other resources and services.

Through food distributions, the project has assisted about 150 seniors, 750 junior school students, 25 international students and 60 new immigrant families, according to a project report from Ramandeep Grewal, India Association vice president and Covid project executive.

"This project would not have been possible without the generous funding from the Government of Canada," Grewal said in the report. "India Association of Manitoba sincerely thanks Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Red Cross Canada for their support in enabling us to take these initiatives."

A significant component of the project was community engagement, partly through a short survey that allowed community members to express their needs and expectations.

India Association trained about 70 volunteers to deliver the food, ensuring that they'd be able to follow health and safety requirements to protect themselves as well as the recipients. The volunteers were also trained to provide mental health support, particularly to those feeling socially isolated during the pandemic.

During Diwali, the project identified a group of senior citizens and sent each of them a package of Indian sweets to "remind one and all that they are not alone and that someone is thinking of them," Grewal said.

India Association collaborated with Dr. Reg Urbanowski, Dean of the College of Rehabilitation Sciences at U of M, to deliver boxes of food to families at a First Nations site in round one of the program. "We are committed to reach out to a few more with the second phase of funding,"

Grewal said.

India Association delivered Halloween supplies to Willow Place, a women and children's emergency shelter; direct aid to women in the North End; and food aid to Centre of Hope in Winnipeg.

India Association partnered with Rising Runners to deliver 20 Christmas hampers to needy families, providing the food while the running group took care of the packaging and delivery.

A significant component of India Association's Covid Seva Initiative was arranging "Programming for Social Inclusion" to alleviate mental health-related issues



Jayshven Nair of Rising Runners delivers food hampers to Winnipeg Harvest, part of a 20-hamper donation that India Association sponsored (see article on Page 7).

that social isolation might generate. India Association arranged online yoga asana classes for all age groups, and plans to deliver 3,000 hours' worth of online classes by the end of December 2020.

Through India Association's initiative, mental health experts have shared advice on radio programs to help community members.

India Association partnered with Punjabi Community Health Services (PCHS) to deliver programs related to managing children during the pandemic while working from home, as well as dealing with addiction and domestic violence. Soch Mental Health also delivered a session on handling stress during the

pandemic.

As part of the "social inclusion efforts," India Association also provided community members with a free online concert from Bollywood Gharana, virtual poetry sessions, and bhanga lessons.

India Association is developing a forum on its website where seniors can meet through a virtual platform. Volunteers are trying to ensure that the platform is easy to use, so seniors feel comfortable meeting virtually and reducing any social

isolation they may feel.

"I would like to thank all our board members, volunteers and stakeholders, for their countless hours of direct and indirect involvement during the whole project," Grewal said.

GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY



SOCH MENTAL HEALTH
IN COLLABORATION WITH
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WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH & WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

An introductory conversation about
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The India Association of Manitoba PRESENTS

Online Session on

Stress Management

delivered by
Ms. Akanksha & Ms. Anmol, PCHS
(in English)

On

December 3, 2020

6:00pm - 7:00pm (Winnipeg)

7:00pm - 8:00pm (Toronto, Montreal)

To Register, go to the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/zoom/register/tZlucQysqTkjH90k4cY324TgYewmqZ2ZU5D>





Courage, Caring and Community Spirit: Our Response to COVID-19

By Devi Sharma

As I began to write these reflections, an already extremely tough year for Winnipeggers had just gotten tougher. On October 30, 2020, the Province of Manitoba announced new COVID-19 Public Health Orders, elevating our city to Critical (Red) in its Pandemic Response System. Once again, residents prepared to comply with increased restrictions to halt the growing community transmission of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great hardship for our community, and its effects will be with us for many years to come. My heart goes out to those who lost loved ones, who suffered illness personally, who have been separated from beloved family members, and who faced the loss of jobs, income, and business in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

This has been a painful time in our history, and yet, there is hope. I am glad to be part of a team within Council and the City Administration that has been helping residents weather this unprecedented storm. We continue striving to be adaptable and responsive to Winnipeggers at every stage of the pandemic and our recovery. Coordinated by our Emergency Operations Centre, we have responded swiftly to all Public Health Orders. Throughout the crisis, we have maintained the crucial services residents rely on, while keeping the public updated in real time via the City of Winnipeg website. A new section of the website (www.winnipeg.ca/COVID-19) is specifically dedicated to COVID-19 information, including details about visiting reopened City facilities, precautionary measures, online City services, affected City programs, and more.

The City acted quickly to help residents cope with the unprecedented economic hardship wrought by this pandemic. In April 2020, Council approved a plan to ease the financial burden of COVID-19 on Winnipeg homeowners and businesses, waiving penalties on unpaid property and business taxes for several months.

As Speaker of Council, I was particularly concerned to ensure that our civic democratic processes continued operating effectively, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with Council and the City Clerk's Office, we implemented electronic Council and Committee meetings, broadcast electronic meetings on YouTube, and enabled citizens to appear remotely as delegations.

One thing is certain: as a Council, our efforts throughout this period have been inspired and energized by the response of Winnipeggers themselves. Indo-Canadian Winnipeggers have been at the forefront of fighting the pandemic, both as individuals and in the work of our many community organizations. Your courage, care, and community spirit have set an example for the city and the province as a whole – and fill me with hope for the future.

I have seen this spirit everywhere, throughout this stressful time. I think it is important to acknowledge, first of all, the many, many Indo-Canadian Winnipeggers who have been serving on the frontlines of the pandemic. In research, in the medical professions, in small businesses, in service industries, in transportation, and in many other fields, Indo-Canadians have been providing critical services to keep our city going. Thank you!



Over the past several months, our community organizations really kicked into high gear, to provide encouragement and support to those most affected by this pandemic – both at home, and overseas. Khalsa Aid volunteers delivered food to seniors, international students, and others adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Khalsa Aid also held free grocery pick-ups at the Punjab Cultural Centre, and donated food items to the staff of St. Boniface Hospital.

The Hindu Society of Manitoba established a fund for coronavirus relief in India and Winnipeg, with proceeds to be shared between PM CARES, international students from India here in Winnipeg, Siloam Mission, and Winnipeg Harvest.

Punjabi Food Relief-Winnipeg mobilized to distribute non-perishable grocery kits to people in need and delivered free pizza to staff of the Health Sciences Centre to show their appreciation. And three Indo-Canadian-owned Winnipeg businesses – Hollywood Limousine, Creekside Transport, and BVD Petroleum – got together to

make a \$10,000 donation to Winnipeg Harvest.

The India Association of Manitoba has had a presence in our community since 1965. As with others, my family and I have interacted with it for many years. It has a national perspective and has served well in its increasing role as a hub and connector as our community grows stronger and, within it, other community-based organizations arise to take on the mantle of promoting and preserving culture and language. Now, there is a need to also reach out to our larger society and ensure we contribute to our broader community: Winnipeg, Manitoba and Canada. I want to offer my thanks to the India Association for undertaking this role.

The India Association of Manitoba collected donations for India's PM CARES fund, to provide relief to people affected by the pandemic. This was followed by initiatives at the local level in Winnipeg, with organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest and a women's shelter being supported. The Association has expanded efforts to address social inclusion and food security, while also developing legacy pieces, such as this one, to document this historic time. These are just a few of the stories of the incredible caring and community spirit Indo-Canadian Winnipeggers have shown over the course of the pandemic. These stories continue, all over the city. The COVID SEVA Initiative is an important stepping-stone in support of seniors, newcomers, women, and children. I know that initiatives like these, and the truly amazing people who support them, will be crucial to Winnipeg's recovery in the months and years to come.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to say "thank you" to all the individuals and organizations who have reached out to help those affected by the pandemic. Thanks to you, Winnipeg's Indo-Canadian community has offered our whole city a shining example of compassion, unity, and hope. Just like the Diyas we light at Diwali, your courage and caring remind me: though this is a dark time, we can see light shining in the darkness. You are that light.

Thank you again for all you are doing. Stay safe, stay well, and let the light prevail.



The Pandemic and the Community: An Update

By Terry Duguid

The circumstances we find ourselves in have been challenging for a whole host of reasons, but they are even more challenging because we are unable to get together for celebrations and special occasions. Having to isolate, stay home and limit social events has been difficult for everyone. I personally miss being together with our community and seeing all of you at various events.

One of the best parts of being a Member of Parliament is getting out to meet with constituents from our many cultural communities. I know we all miss getting together for special cultural celebrations such as Diwali, Navratri, and Vaisakhi. How incredible it was to see nearly 10,000 Winnipeggers at the Winnipeg Convention Centre to celebrate Diwali last year.

In the last several months, we have been able to adapt to our new circumstances and have done our best to keep in touch by phone, email or Zoom. Over the summer, I was able to connect with the Hindu Society executive over Zoom, where I was thrilled to introduce them to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Honourable Anita Anand. Currently, Minister Anand is responsible for Canada's procurement of personal protective equipment and other materials needed in our fight against COVID-19. Along with Minister Anand, the Indo-Canadian community is well-represented in our caucus by 18 members of Indo-Canadian heritage.

Since the outset of the pandemic, my office has been working hard to support those in our community. When travel restrictions were first issued during the early days of the pandemic, we worked tirelessly to get community members home from India, as Canada and the rest of the world grappled with our new circumstances. We are proud of our efforts to get many Canadians home from India and across the world. This was truly a Team Canada effort to reunite families during a very challenging time.

Over the last several months, we have done everything we can to support our community as we deal with the widespread impact of COVID-19. Members of the Indo-Canadian community in our riding have been incredibly patient as we work through the immigration backlog brought on because of the pandemic. Our office has continued to work hard to aid people with permanent residency applications, temporary resident visas and citizenship applications. We continue to help our community in any way possible to speed up these applications.

Community organizations have been at the forefront of our government's response to the pandemic. Many non-profit organizations have truly stepped up and

supported the most vulnerable in our community. Our government has worked hard to identify how we can support these organizations, as they have been important and critical partners in the fight against COVID-19. We have established the Emergency Community Support Fund, which invests \$350 million towards supporting community organizations across Canada that provide essential services. This, along with other measures such as the wage subsidy, have been critical in ensuring that Canada can continue to benefit from the important work that our community organizations do every day. We continue to listen and learn about how we can better support the non-profit sector in Winnipeg.

Our government vowed early on that we would do whatever it takes to help Canadians get to the other side of this pandemic. When we entered the first wave of the pandemic in early April, we knew that immediate financial help was needed. Many Canadians had been laid off from their jobs and had bills, rent and mortgages to pay. We quickly created the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program, which provided direct relief to workers, parents, and families in desperate need of support. Today, employment numbers in Manitoba and across the country are improving, as we all find ways to adapt to this new normal.



Many of you who are business owners will know that small businesses have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic. For the past eight months, businesses have struggled to keep their employees on payroll, pay their bills, and provide for their families. Local entrepreneurs have worked hard to build their businesses and it has been very tough for them as revenues decline. Our government is doing everything it can to make sure that businesses

are supported during this time with temporary, generous measures that will help bridge them to the other side of this pandemic. The road to a complete economic recovery in Canada will be long. That is why we've provided numerous programs that will help keep the lights on, ensure employees get paid, and make sure that small business owners survive to see better days.

The last eight months have shown the important role that determined and stable governments play in ensuring that we can get through this public health crisis. Right now, we are focused on the immediate challenges ahead and supporting Canadians through this difficult time. In the future, we will make investments in programs and initiatives that will help create a better, more resilient Canada. We are fighting for a Canada that will boost economic growth through increased immigration and family reunification. We are focused on building a country that creates good, well-paying jobs, has a plan for tackling climate change, and ensures everyone has access to the medications they need through a National Pharmacare Program.

No matter what our backgrounds and stations in life, now is a time for Canadians pull together. If governments, businesses, and communities all work together, Canada will emerge from this health and economic crisis stronger than ever.



A Time for Manitobans to Give of Themselves

By Andrew Smith

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all facing some of the steepest challenges in generations. Everybody is affected in some way. The very core of how we conduct ourselves has changed; public health restrictions against gathering at public event or as large crowds have had an impact on how we connect and relate to each other. On Wednesday, March 11th, we started to see our first cases of the virus here in Manitoba, and since that time, we have had limited social interaction.

Although this has been a difficult time for everyone, there are those in the community that rose to the challenge and gave of themselves to help others. The Ramgarhia Association of Manitoba was one of those groups assisting those in need. They remembered our frontline workers, who are tirelessly putting their own lives on the line for our safety, and as citizens of this province, did their part and stepped up for all Manitobans. I participated as a member of the team of volunteers who, with the cooperation of the Dashmesh Darbar executive committee, prepared and delivered meals in person to frontline workers at both Victoria and Concordia Hospitals in Winnipeg during the late spring of 2020.

We made two separate deliveries to workers at Victoria General Hospital, as well as additional meal deliveries to Concordia Hospital. We subsequently delivered meals to St. Boniface General Hospital, CancerCare Manitoba, and the KeKiNan Centre for First Nations seniors throughout the summer. As an elected representative, I was very moved by the volunteer spirit of this group for their charity and generosity. Such faith-based groups who step up for others in times of need are to be commended. It was an honour to be with them to serve frontline workers, and other vulnerable individuals. Similarly, there were other local members of different communities who partnered with international relief organizations by donating and delivering food to frontline workers, the homeless, and women's shelters.

Another way I engaged myself was by actively supporting D'Arcy's ARC animal rescue centre. Not only did I urge others, by means of social media to donate items to their local thrift store, but I also made sure to donate as many viable items as I could myself. On a positive note, there are currently fewer homeless animals than at any other time in recent history, since staying at home has afforded people more time to adopt and care for pets.

As I am writing this, we are in the midst of virtually celebrating Diwali, on the heels of Remembrance Day. Both could not be symbolically more timely as we face these challenging times, for in the end, there was a victory of light over darkness, good over evil. We must give of ourselves, and work together to combat this virus. Manitobans have overcome overwhelming adversity in the past, and prevailed. I look forward to the future, when we have done so once again.

I have always believed in maintaining a strong social media presence, as I connect with and inform most of my community online. In these times, virtual is the new reality. I continue to connect with my constituents through a combination of emails and personal phone calls. In the meantime, I urge all who want to contact me to do so, as their concerns are important to me.



India Covid Relief Fund

by Priyanka Singh

Concerned with the situation in India due to COVID 19, Winnipegger Anil Sedha decided to start a gofundme campaign to send oxygen concentrators to India on April 25, 2021.

The India Association of Manitoba decided to support Anil's campaign and immediately donated \$5,000. Through direct contact, media interviews and social platforms we rallied the Indo-Canadian and the larger communities. The initial goal was to raise \$19,000. However, witnessing the immense outpouring of support from all segments of the community, we exceeded this target and have eventually raised over \$50,000.

A lack of Oxygen supply was (and remains) one of the largest issues which contributed to the high rates of deaths among the people. Though India does have adequate supply of Oxygen, the distribution system and logistical distribution systems skewed more towards the metropolitan areas. The sheer scale of the Pandemic, the rising infections and number of deaths has overwhelmed India's healthcare infrastructure.



Anil Sedha

In Canada, one cannot purchase Oxygen concentrators without a medical device establishment license. Anil leveraged his contacts in the US and found a distributor who could supply the concentrators to India. The concentrators have been sent to the Indian Red Cross Society and other Hospitals in India. The cost of a concentrator is approximately \$1500.00

Additionally, 50 units for each of Digital Blood Pressure Machines, Pulse Oximeter, and Infrared Thermometers have also been purchased and sent. These will be forwarded directly to Holy Spirit Hospital, Cardinal Gracias Hospital and, 3 units of each will be sent to Shri Sai Clinic, in Nagpur, Maharashtra. A few units will be sent to smaller hospitals and clinics that perform manual checks.

This initiative exemplifies taking charge to "light a candle in a corner of darkness". It is both aspirational and inspirational. A thought from an individual resonated and had a positive ripple-effect with a great number of people. To illustrate, as

this campaign winds-up, there have been a total of 365 donors- with 31% of the contributions arising from members of the Indo-Canadian community, 38% from the larger community and 31% who have so done anonymously.

This has truly been a grass-roots campaign with a heart that is marked by commitment, dedication, and passion. In turn, we are highly pleased that the India Association, for its part, in undertaking the required support work of raising funds it served as an effective bridge to the larger community in Manitoba and across Canada.

We are very grateful to all who have donated and/or supported efforts to coming together and making this campaign a huge success.

ENTERTAINMENT



The India Association of Manitoba

(founded 1965)
P.O. Box 1794, Winnipeg, MB R3C 3R1

Aapki Pasand

(Sa-Ro Music by Pandya Family)



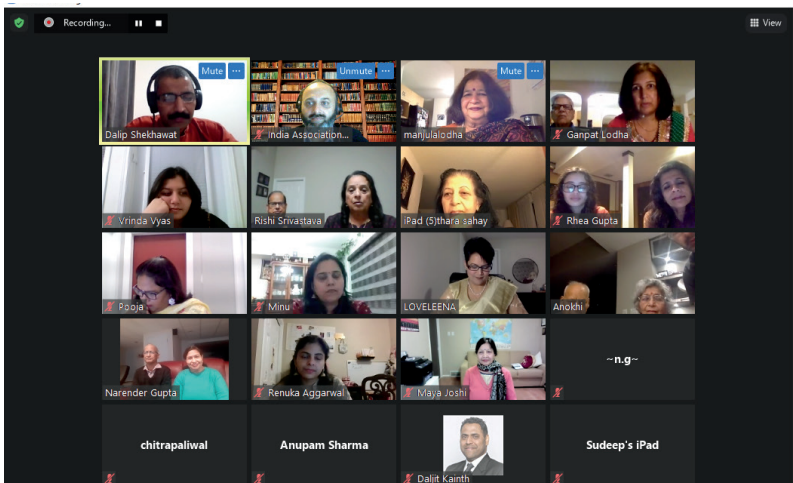
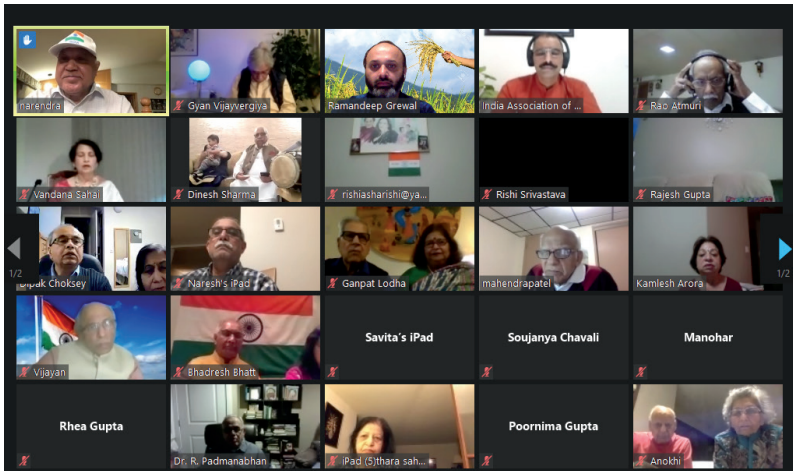



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Virtual Panel on

MAHATMA GANDHI AND ETHICS HUMAN RIGHTS AND CORPORATE DIMENSIONS



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2020

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

(Winnipeg Time, CDT)

PANELISTS

21ST CENTURY ETHICAL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

PROFESSOR JAYDEEP BALKRISHNAN

Associate Dean for Faculty Support and Professor/Marketing and
Supply Chain Management Department, California State University, Sacramento

GANDHI AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE MODERN CONTEXT

DAVID MATAS

Immigration Refugee and International Human Rights Lawyer (Order of Canada, 2007)
Winnipeg Manitoba



This event will be held virtually via Zoom.

RSVP to indiacentre@uwinnipeg.ca
by Thursday, October 1 to receive the link to participate.



Epilogue

by Anupam Sharma & Pawan Singal



At the outset of this project, we asked our contributors to join in the voyage of observing and recording their different experiences arising from the pandemic at about the eight-month marker. We are now approaching almost a year and the pandemic is still ongoing. One thing about this pandemic is certain: the changes it has brought about will correct, re-organize or transform our lives, for better or worse, across all dimensions: the individual, family, and community.

We are not out of the woods yet. The woods are dark, and may get darker still. It has often been said that a recession is when your neighbour loses their job, but a depression is when you lose your job. It is truly a calamity when that loss is compounded by other losses in health and life. The pandemic has been pervasive, impacting large swathes of humanity across the world. It has not discriminated between rich and poor countries. Those who have been adversely affected face a long, bleak uphill struggle. Directly or indirectly, the pandemic has impacted us all. No one has been left unaffected.

None of this has been lost on any of our contributors. In effect, it is precisely their observance or experience of adversity that has served to drive each to serve in important roles as chroniclers, or as “candles in the dark” illuminating their corner of life and serving an aspirational and/or inspirational role for one and all.

At the outset, each of our contributors, in his or her own way, is a testimonial to the assertion that the Indo-Canadian community has undertaken and played a valuable role in alleviating the pain and angst accentuated by the on-going pandemic. As with their counterparts from other segments of society, they are a cause for optimism and renewed faith in the overall goodness embodied by humanity.

Project Drivers and Overview: The articles in this subset establish both the context and the need for the initiatives undertaken. The illustrative survey provides a snapshot of needs expressed directly by members of the Indo-Canadian community. Of the major needs expressed, the India Association of Manitoba was able to focus on mental health and mental health education, communication and dissemination of information, food security and distribution, and systems navigation. For those based in the larger society, food-security initiatives were undertaken to support various organizations and Indigenous communities. Where necessary, these services were outsourced to other organizations with the requisite expertise.

A lesson learned and appreciated was the experiencing the benefits of leveraging existing strengths and capabilities to ensure the most effective and efficient deployment of scarce resources.

Inspirations and Reflections: "Walking" is a poignant portrait of all that a vulnerable person endures when faced with a calamity. Amidst the harshness of nature, one realizes one's intrinsic strength and resilience. The author affirms a time-tested belief in the resilience of the person: he or she may be beaten but not defeated unless defeat is accepted. Navneet Sharma affirms this outlook, despite her own health challenge, henceforth paying it forward and opting to serve others. After all, for her, it is *Zindagi mili hai dobara* (a second chance at life). Our bundle of inspirations and reflections is augmented further with the inclusion of a commitment and undertaking of selfless obligation to one's own. Sam Koshy expresses this as his family is engaged in "Taking Care of Our Elderly Mother". **A lesson learned is that human beings are bundles of fragility and determination, but together, they can achieve much more. One is not defeated until defeat has been accepted as reality.**

Education and Future Citizens- Though occupying different roles as teacher and trustee respectively, both Timmy Sharma and Derek Dabee start from a common appreciation- the school is a fundamental and important foundational pillar of the community. It nurtures and sustains future citizens and leaders. They also state that schools have pivoted and adapted to change and transformations; otherwise, they would lose relevance. Armaan Dhillon - the student and customer- informs proper education is the key to a successful future and, that attention to mental health is also critical. They note that for any future education-design, technology will play a greater role in enabling and empowering all involved- student, family, and teacher. Lesson learned is that education plays a critical role in the formation of human capital and that there will probably be an increase in the use of technology in the post-pandemic future to improve access to education.

Community and Services: In the article, "COVID-19: How the Indo-Canadian Community is Identifying It and Coping With It, the author provides us with a psychotherapist's perspective. Kamal Bedi's observations identify an increasingly changing Canadian society. Given the demographic changes taking place today, it is important when trying to understand and address individual needs to note the cultural and social context. We cannot assume that the western-based methodologies will address the issues. This is further affirmed and amplified as community-based organizations undertake to offer programs and services for those based in a specific cultural context. Language and nuances are important. **Lesson learned: any outreach programs and services must consider cultural, familial, and linguistic contexts. Otherwise, we may be dealing with symptoms rather than addressing root causes.**

Government and Society: Representatives from all three levels of government outline their outlook and highlight the initiatives they have delivered in response to the pandemic. These in turn are derivative of the roles and responsibilities arising from their respective mandates (city, provincial, and federal). The overarching observation is that from their respective positions, they have undertaken a broad

range of programs, and these have been characterized by relative generosity. They demonstrate empathy and understanding for our citizens and what we are having to endure. **Lesson learned, from a delivery perspective, for the future, a better coordination of efforts must result in a more effective and efficient distribution of resources.**

"Expressions from the Community" lead us to list some arising considerations and observations:

- The Indo-Canadian community is a giving community. Individual members and various cultural organizations have coordinated a myriad of initiatives during the current pandemic. Within the larger community, the Sikh community is certainly at the forefront and a worthy example to emulate.
- Because a larger component of the community is comprised of either frontline or essential workers, we sense that the probability is very high that COVID-19 will be transmitted to larger numbers of peoples in the community.
- Based on media reports, discrimination is on the rise towards those who drive trucks and deliver products. They are denied use of washrooms and other facilities.
- Cultural and family contexts are likely to contribute to underlying issues that can result in domestic violence and may limit extent to which the affected person may seek redress.
- Effective communication is important in languages other than English. This must be addressed at a level of language that is understood with most easily by the greatest number of people, ie. daily use and vernacular language.
- It is important to recognize that ethnic communities differ from those in the larger mainstream. The notion of family is broader than the "nuclear family" and this appreciation allows one to ensure appropriate communication and interactive strategies with respect to dissemination and communication of information, and the adoption of relevant approaches to diagnosis and prescription.

Our Contributors

Kamal Bedi earned her MMFT (Masters of Marriage and Family Therapy) in 2018 from the University of Winnipeg. Born and raised in Winnipeg, she studied philosophy in her undergraduate studies and lived in India for four years to learn more about her passion for Indian classical music, dance, and poetry. Kamal has always been fascinated by human interaction and the mind-body-soul connection, and loves to ponder bigger questions about intangible aspects of human experience.

Derek "Deva" Dabee was elected as a school trustee to the Seven Oaks School Division in 2010. Prior to this, he was a civil servant for 27 years with the Government of Manitoba. Active in the Indo-Canadian Community, he is the recipient of the 2015 Mahatma Gandhi Volunteer Award. He has been involved in the sports (cricket, tennis) community, as well as cultural and political organizations. He is originally from Guyana.

Armaan K. Dhillon is a Grade 10 honour student at St. John's-Ravenscourt School. She is an avid golfer and was most recently recognized as the 2019-2020 Manitoba High School female golfer of the year, and as Golf Manitoba's 15/16-year-old Provincial Champion. Armaan enjoys volunteering in her community, playing sports, and spending time with family and friends. She has volunteered at the India Pavilion during Folklorama.

Dr. Puneet Dhillon has a PhD in journalism and mass communications. Her work has focused on men's perceptions of women's roles and the ways that influences how they treat women. She is currently employed as communications and research analyst with the Punjabi Community Health Services, Brampton, Ontario.

Terry Duguid is Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South, elected in 2015. He is also Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Western Economic Diversification Canada) and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Canada Water Agency). With a diverse background in civic government, business, and environmental leadership, he has shown a strong commitment to public service throughout his career.

Ramandeep Grewal is President of the India Association of Manitoba. As executive lead for the IAM COVID Seva Initiative, he has ensured a very successful delivery of this project. He is also a member of the committee responsible for developing the legacy document, Indo-Canadians and the 2020 Pandemic: Expressions from the Community. He is an engineer by profession and holds MBA from University of Manitoba. He is currently working with Shared Health Manitoba as senior business consultant.

Darius Maharaj Hunter is a third-year law student at Robson Hall - University of Manitoba, and a vocational student of Hindu thought and philosophy under Swami Bhajananda Saraswati of the Ramakrishna Seminary in California. He has frequently contributed articles for the India Magazine, an annual publication from the India Association of Manitoba.

Sam Koshy is Principal Consultant at Compass Career Life Solutions. He is passionate about helping people achieve a renewed sense of hope and purpose by assisting them in making the best possible decisions. His books and ebooks are available on his website or through Amazon.

Sachit Mehra is a local entrepreneur, speaker, and community advocate. His website is www.sachitmehra.ca. He is also a member of the board of directors for the India Centre for Academic, Business and Community Excellence. He has frequently contributed articles for the India Magazine, an annual publication of the India Association of Manitoba.

Dr. Manish Pandey is Professor and Chair, Department of Economics, University of Winnipeg. He also serves as member of the board of directors of the India Centre for Academic, Business and Community Excellence. At the community level he has been engaged in various capacities with the India Association of Manitoba.

Anupam Sharma is currently Vice-Chair of the India Centre for Academic, Business & Community Excellence. He also serves as a member of the board of directors of the India Association of Manitoba and is employed as Manager/Community Liaison, Indigenous Peoples with March of Dimes Canada. Over the years he has provided commentary on various subjects through electronic and print media.

Devi Sharma has served as City Councillor at the City of Winnipeg since 2010. Since 2013, she has served as Speaker at the City Council. In addition to her various roles within municipal government, she has served in a voluntary capacity at the community level as board member of Seven Oaks General Hospital and as Vice President of the Maples Community Centre. In 2001, she received the Woman of Distinction Award from YMCA-YWCA.

Navneet Sharma is a cancer survivor and founder of the Cancer Warrior Canada Foundation (CWCF). She has worked tirelessly in supporting other survivors, and during the 2020 COVID pandemic, worked with others to ensure food security for members of the community. Her mission is to give back to society with gratitude. She believes in "Zindagi Milti Hai Dobara"- a second chance to life.

Timmy Sharma is a teacher with the Winnipeg School Division, based at Gordon Bell High School. At a national ceremony at the Rideau Hall in Ottawa, she received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal from the Governor General. She was cited for her educational work with teenage parents primarily from Indigenous communities.

Dr. Pawan Singal is Professor of Physiology and past Director of the Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at the University of Manitoba. He is a well-known and recognized member and respected leader of the Indo-Canadian community. In addition to his professional affiliations, Dr. Singal is a member of the board of directors of the Centre for Academic, Business and Community Excellence, where he also serves as chair of the India Centre Annual Gala Dinner.

Savita Singh is Professor, Indira Gandhi Open University, Delhi, India, where she teaches and conducts research at the School of Gender and Development. She made her mark with the publication of her first Hindi collection "Apne Jaisa Jeevan" (A Life Like Its Own) in 2001, to the acclaim of literary critics. The collection received Delhi's Hindi Academy Award in 2002.

Andrew Smith has since 2016 been elected as Member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, representing the constituency of Lagimodiere. Since 2017, he is the Legislative Assistant to the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage. He always looks forward to putting the skills he has acquired in business and public service to work for his constituents.

Priyanka Singh is Secretary with Board of Director of India Association of Manitoba. Priyanka is a professional fundraiser and has a Masters degree in Sociology. She has worked for various charitable organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross and the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Priyanka currently works for the Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba.

MEDIA



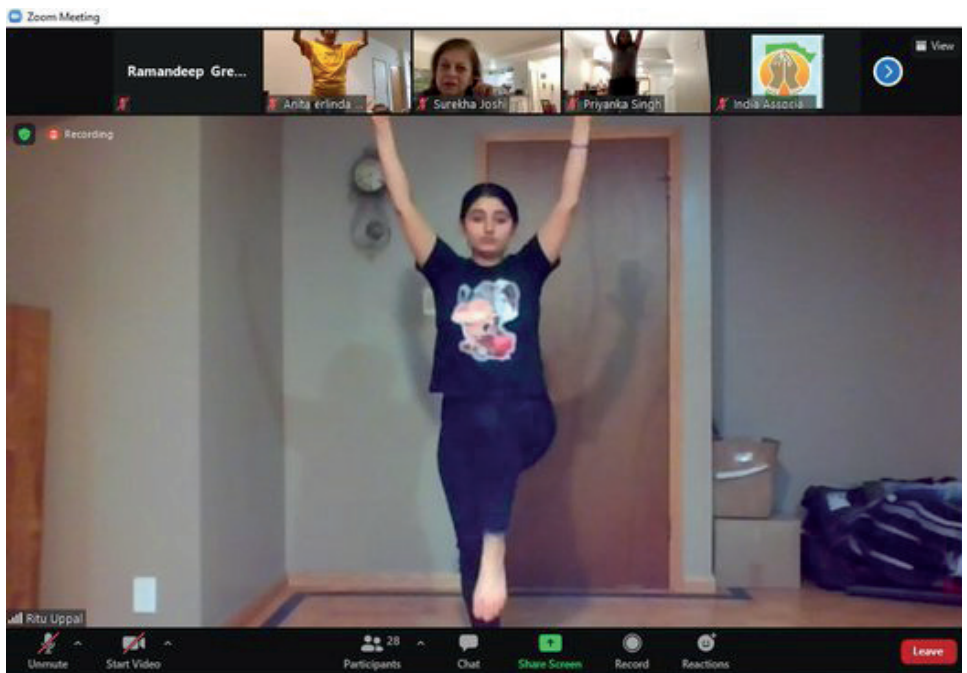
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