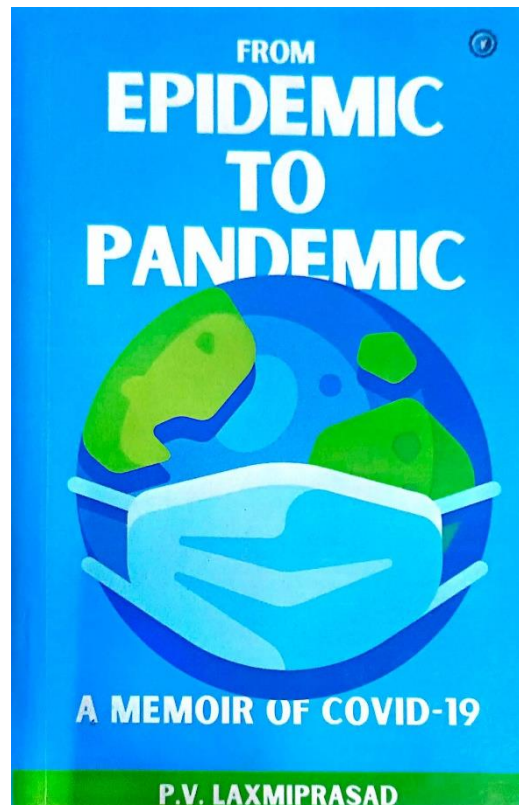


From Epidemic to Pandemic: A Memoir of Covid-19 published by The Impish Lass Publishing House, India, 2022. pp.120. Rs. 300.

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When I began to read Dr. P.V. Laxmiprasad's *From Epidemic to Pandemic: A Memoir of Covid-19*, I was instantly reminded of the poem "Death the Leveller" by James Shirley, considering the dismal march of the Covid virus that tramples down human pride and pomp. The poem presents a vividly personified picture of death as the ultimate conqueror in whose realm perfect equality prevails. The poet tells us how every man must bow before death, notwithstanding their position in life. To the author and me too, the Covid virus is certainly a loyal agent of Death as it represents the egalitarian nature of death and does not differentiate between the mortally mightiest or the weakest. All of a sudden, the inhabitants of this beautiful earth veered off their normal avocations at the beginning of the



year 2019 and their thoughts revolved around the ideas of the transience of worldly glory and the inevitability of death. Laxmiprasad is one of those who were actively engrossed in this kind of exercise. Day after day he jotted down his thoughts and experiences churned out of his personal life during the Corona phase, and also from his direct and indirect interactions with fellow beings in the immediate vicinity at first and by way of extension, with humanity as a whole.

The Memoir of Laxmiprasad is claimed to be a creative work and based on the author's own readings and observations. As he says while introducing the book, "Covid-19 ripped the world apart in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 in the most devastating catastrophe that human civilization has ever faced in its existence and survival. It threatened the very existence of mankind in terms of human loss, financial squeeze, and psychological grip of fear, anxiety and

frustration triggered by a series of lockdowns and emergence of vaccination drives across the globe.” In its aftermath, the world now remains alerted in the preparedness against any future crisis. He further observes, “Whether it is man-made or natural, Covid-19 kept almost every citizen in closed quarters and scheduled quarantines, rather a collective imprisonment of the entire human race.” He feels that the pandemic has left the world in a sort of constant uncertainty. He claims that he has experienced a lot first hand in the spheres of education, banking, science, medicine and politics, and this Memoir is a veritable record of those experiences. Laxmiprasad brilliantly recollects those memories of Covid-19 in a simple and elegant narration. The narration is punctuated throughout with personal anecdotes and autobiographical elements.

No doubt Covid-19 caused deep mental trauma, physical suffering and unexpected death toll sweeping the entire world. Initially, the catastrophic virus was conceived to be a new virus similar to one of flu when the first case was reported from China’s Wuhan province. Gradually the whole world woke up to the horrors engendered by the virus and found itself in the grip of fear of death. Thus, the virus started off its journey from the low-key epidemic threat to the colossal pandemic disaster. Man was at a crossroads indulging in introspections and their minds began to be occupied by an in-depth search for the meaning of the transient nature of our life. As a result, most people turned to spiritualism on the one hand, and some suddenly became skeptical about the very existence of any omnipresent and omnipotent force like God since Covid-19 to them appeared to be the real and tangible omnipresent and omnipotent one. It has left economy in the doldrums, and shaken inventions and discoveries that have benefitted mankind over the years began to baffle people all of a sudden as human beings, in the absence of any decisive and proven life-assuring protective mechanisms, were scurrying about helplessly to protect themselves from the onslaught of the merciless virus and its life-threatening and control-wielding nature.

Having dedicated this Memoir to the millions of Corona victims throughout the world, the author divides the book into five chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. Corona Pandemic: Origins and Beyond the Borders, 3. Corona Pandemic: the USA and the Outbreak, 4. Corona Pandemic: Impact of Scare and Fear in India and 5. Conclusion, all put together in 113 pages between the covers beautifully designed with an eye-catching illustration on the front cover. Laxmiprasad in his Introduction recalls his Biology teacher, Venkat Reddy who impressed him “as a lifelong learner” (From Epidemic to Pandemic, page 1, hereafter abbreviated as EP, 1). He remembers

his teacher's words, "virus of any species is the most deadly micro-organism that would halt the life of all living species in the world at any juncture" (EP, 1). When he became almost a seasoned victim of flu and influenza in his childhood, he was asked to cover the face with a kerchief if anybody he came across was sneezing and coughing. The kerchief thus foreshadowed the mask worn in 2019. When he was forced to wear a mask during the Covid-19 outbreak, the author understood that what his teacher revealed to him in 1983 had become a reality in 2020: "Viruses are dangerous species living in different strains and undergoing mutation in different geographical conditions" (EP, 3). As a seeker of scientific knowledge, the subject of Corona pandemic has become the basis of an explorative study. This Memoir is the outcome of such an intellectual and philosophical exploration. True, the world has witnessed something deadlier than the Corona catastrophe like plague and much earlier the Black Death in 1348 in England. But the Corona death toll outran all the previous death tolls including that of the tsunami of the present millennium.

Laxmiprasad says he is reminded of a universal quote in the context of a global crisis arising out of Corona: "A hungry stomach, an empty pocket, and a broken heart can teach the best lessons of life" (EP, 19). He feels that Corona crisis has taught the world crucial and important lessons of life. Man has learnt the lessons of discipline, patience, self-restraint and staying at home during lockdowns. He could sense that the people's zeal for life is far greater the fear of death. Virus conspiracy theories have been in circulation ever since February 2019 that the virus escaped from a Chinese lab either by accident or by design. However, the author admits "the fact that there were turns and twists between what President Trump had alleged and what WHO Directed General commented" (EP, 23). He also learnt that those who had travel history had become carriers of the Corona virus from one region to another consequent on the growing incidence of the virus attack in Italy and Spain next to China because of the huge presence of Chinese workers in industries in Italy and Spain (EP, 24). By March 13, 2020, WHO declared Europe the epicenter of the pandemic and estimated that lockdowns had already affected more than 250 million people (EP, 44).

In continuation of this, Laxmiprasad chronologically traces the spread of the virus in America during the regime of President Donald John Trump who belonged to the Democratic Party, and also describes how "the demon of Corona danced the tandava nritya, that is, the dance of death and destruction" (EP, 47). Owing to the differences between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, there were allegations and counter-allegations between the President and the

Governors. As the outbreak was growing by leaps and bounds, new facilities and infrastructure were needed in addition to healthcare personnel on a war-footing. Later, the political heat in the US developed further when Trump took on his successor, Joe Biden for his poor handling of the corona crisis. The author rightly observes that the USA adopts and follows the policy for each of its friendly countries in a different way and “its relations with them differ according to the country” (EP, 55). He makes it a point to note India’s liberal help to neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh by way of free supply of vaccination worth millions of rupees.

Coming to discuss the steps taken by Mr. Modi to contain the pandemic in India, Laxmiprasad speaks about the phenomenal rise of Mr. Modi from being a tea vendor, then an RSS activist, then the Chief Minister of Gujarat, and eventually the PM of India. A few lockdowns became mandatory and interstate transportation was suspended. In his eyes, “What was normal life for people became all of a sudden troublesome and challenging. They were for the most part impatient of being at home. Further, they had felt they had become aliens in their homes. A few felt that they were treated as refugees” (EP, 60). Sometimes being infected by the Corona virus was regarded as a social stigma, and the author says that such elements of social stigma and syndrome are to be avoided. The pandemic situation forced academicians to go for online seminars (webinars) and workshops. “Academicians moved from lockdown phobia to webinar mania” (EP, 63). However, a webinar does not permit all fun and entertainment that go with a usual conference besides being a sort of get-together. In usual circumstances, seminarians enjoy the local tourist spots, luncheon and sightseeing.

Apps like Zoom, Google Meet, etc were used to link seminarians online. Online classes were introduced throughout the country. It is a new digital experience for teachers, students and parents. Online teaching exposed the teachers’ weaknesses. He cites an interesting anecdote: “Much to my curiosity, I find a few of them mispronouncing or misspelling certain words which finally put them in a troubled existence. The parents did not want such teachers to teach their children” (EP, 64). On the other hand, all the officials including the police, doctors, paramedical staff, army personnel and municipal workers were waging a war against the pandemic. As some citizens defied the restrictions and yearned for a carefree outing, the Govt. made stringent laws more stringent. The world looked at how India having the second largest population in the world would deal with the outbreak. The author takes a digression and meanders into a discussion about the multi-religious and multi-linguistic structure of India and

feels proud of our unity in diversity. He gives a state wise statistic in regard to the measures taken by each state and their varied geographical and cultural characteristics. He also wishes “to undertake a study of how Indians are really capable of withstanding the Corona outbreak in terms of immunity system” (EP, 96). Building immunity is just possible through a balanced and nutritious diet. He is of the opinion that native remedies like Ayurvedic medicines are efficacious in treating Corona and some chronic diseases. He winds up the fourth chapter with some autobiographical incidents. In conclusion, he appreciates the Govt. of India for achieving the feat that 130-crore people in India have been successfully vaccinated against the Corona virus. It is true, as he says, “Covid-19 has awakened the world for a thorough preparedness in the event of any such danger in future” (EP, 112). He ends the Memoir on an optimistic note that we can succeed in all our efforts if we all take a collective fight.