

Chronicle of my Curious Corona Case / Susmita Mukherjee



Susmita Mukherjee in her Farm in Orchha

It all started with what in Mumbai's parlance is known as '**Pateli**'. Let me elaborate, **Pateli**' and it's stronger aspect, also known as '**Vatt Pateli**', loosely translates itself as arrogance or false bravado. You see I have been living in my idyllic farmhouse in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh, with my family since March 2020 lockdown, along with our cows, dogs, cat and even peacocks so how did I get the dreaded Covid? I did **Pateli**. To be honest I have tried to be disciplined most of my adult life (ever since I gave up being a 4 packs of cigarettes a day smoker back then in 1989) and had turned into a unrecognisable creature who gave up smoking, meditated, did yoga, pranayam, ate clean food and basked in the adoration of friends and family who made me feel pretty invincible. In fact I hadn't taken a single pill for the last 3 decades, and combated the rare fever with coconut water and fruits.



So I swung around with full **pateli**, with the belief that Corona or whatever the world was talking about with such fear, could never reach me. It helped that we don't have a TV as ours is a microclimatic zone, and so I kept myself occupied with reading novels, and occasionally watching "goody goody" stuff on my cellphone. Then I made 2 fatal errors. On the 10th of April, I sauntered with my friend, (a woman who was contesting as an Independent candidate for the Zila Panchayat election from a backward seat,) as we wove in and out of Bundeli villages, drinking water from the homes we visited, not realising that some water came from wells, others from bawois and some from God knows where. So we had "ghat ghat ka paani", because in these parts refusing water is equivalent to hurting the host.

Error No. 2. On the 12th, I accompanied my husband and our manager who got their vaccines but I bluntly refused. Vaccine? Oh no , not for me. **Vatt Pateli**. That very evening I was invited as chief guest for a function in Jhansi, where my friend, Dr Neeti Shastri was celebrating National Street

Theatre Day and as I had been part of the street theatre movement in Delhi, back in the early days, I was happy to attend. The only problem, (which of-course I realised in hindsight,) was that the anchor, a veteran journalist, who stood and sat next to me had a very bad cold and sneezed a lot which reminded me to keep my mask on firmly but when the photographers wanted to see my face, vanity kicked in (I'm an actress) and I let my mask down in more ways than one, with chilling consequences., (*Error No. 3*).

13th, 14th and 15th of April were busy days as I prepared to welcome Mother Durga who it was said was coming this year on horseback and did not portend well for mankind. And I , in my fervour, was determined to fast and pray and so I ignored the horrid body pain I felt for 3 days not for a moment imagining it could be the dreaded Corona. Then on the 4th day the pain vanished mysteriously and I had no memory of it as I gaily completed the Naudurga, fasting on fruits, coconut water and one small meal of permissible items. I was continuing with my yoga, meditation, walks. No cough, no fever, no body pain. Suddenly it got curious.

Error No. 4. On 23rd April, I committed another **Pateli**. I walked out in the noon heat for a small pooja we were performing at the farm for the creative Academy my husband is building and returned dizzy from the heat. ' *Vinaash kaale vipreet buddhi*' 2 hours later I was on my way to Jhansi, 15 kilometres away, helping my team source iron and cement blocks for the construction..After that every thing got black. I declared to all that I would self quarantine. I may have had a slight fever but since in the past I had never paid attention to it, coupled with the fact that we did not own a thermometer and did not see the reason to have one (**Pateli**), I dropped into a pitch black hole of sleep, utter fatigue and an unquenchable thirst. A small cough started. Not dry or racking but just an irritating moist cough with phlegm. I did not listen to my husband who sent me a strip of paracetamol but

cunningly tore one pill away and hid it under my pillow, in case he inspected the strip (**Pateli**) From 23rd to 30th, I kept myself strictly self quarantined. Food was sent to me outside my door but I was not particularly hungry. But thirsty, yes, and fatigued, by my standards. My yoga, walks, meditation continued but with difficulty.

So for 21 days after possible infection I was sustaining without any medicine, only on fruits and coconut water. Suddenly on 30th morning, I woke up with a panic attack and called my doctor in Mumbai who immediately prescribed some pills and asked me to take the RTPCR test. Now this test had been the bone of contention for a while. My younger son who is studying to be a scientist in New Zealand, along with his school classmate, My doctor,, who is in the frontline of Covid treatment in India, had been pleading with me to get a test done. I had dismissed it as medical haranguing. I had first heard the term from my very concerned older sister, and ofcourse I was determined not to go to any hospitals for testing (**Pateli**) But my Mumbai doctor was not going to listen to this insane patient in Orchha. A conversation happened between him and my husband and I was bundled off to to our small but clean hospital in the village where they stuffed some cotton up my nostrils and the dreaded RTPCR test seemed like child's play.

I was seeing the outside world after 3 weeks, the weather was nice and I felt really well. My husband's younger brother and his wife were visiting and knowing my propensity to cure myself with fruits and water were not unduly alarmed as I now started to hang out with them, albeit always at a safe distance. Then on 2nd late evening, the verdict came. Covid positive. We had been sitting out in the cabana, chatting, having tea, and suddenly within minutes my family disappeared like in stop block and reappeared covered from head to toe in whatever plastic they could lay their hands on. It was such a comical sight in an absurd situation where within minutes the

whole scenario changed. Of-course in hindsight it was not so funny! Next day, 3rd of May came the epiphany, the real reason to write this personal chronicle. My husband, Raja Bundela, is well known in these parts as an activist leader, and without my knowledge an ambulance, an oxygen cylinder and a hospital bed in the most premiere hospital had been lined up. Lucky me!



No more Pateli for me

Clearly my family was in panic. I was pretty well and when I reached the hospital in Jhansi, a doctor rushed to me and slipped something plastic in my index finger, where I met an oxymeter for the first time. Puzzled, he did his check again and murmured..." 98"Then he asked me" Can you walk or do you need a wheelchair"? I was astounded even a bit enraged (me, the compulsive walker!!!) Much too sweetly I replied," No, I can walk. Thank you so very much'. To make my point, I walked faster than usual as he led me inside a door which read ICCU. It closed behind us. The room was abuzz with doctors, nurses and wardboys. Next they moved me to a sheetless bed and said that it had been sanitized for me. To my left I had a glimpse of a brown wrinkled arm and several people were thumping him up and down. (He died minutes later) The air was rent with what seemed to me like demonic sounds of people moaning and groaning, all out of synch, ; the AC was not functioning at its best and it smelt of anasthesia . I was asked to lay down on "my " bed as the doctor hurried out.

I had 2 options, I could look around or I could shut my eyes. I suddenly remembered a line I had read somewhere, that during World war 2, the only Jews who had escaped the concentration camps were people who kept their inner bodies clean. And then all of a sudden, the developmental biologist, Dr Bruce Lipton and his seminary work, ' Biology of Belief' popped up in my mind. He claimed that our cells prosper in the Petri dish of our bodies only if they feel safe inside. So despite the shock of being unloaded in the ICCU without warning, I closed my eyes and within minutes, I was roaming inside my body which till date I can remember clearly. I was surrounded by million, trillion tiny sparkling lights, much tinier than the string of fairy lights we put out in Diwali and Christmas but they were golden yellow and each point was disappearing into another point which went deeper into another point in an amazing non stop dance. It felt as if I was roaming inside a large warm golden honeycomb. I thought I lay there endlessly as the

sounds around me dimmed. I am told that about 15 minutes later, I was aroused by the doctor who arrived with a flurry of nurses. He handed me a sheaf of papers to sign mandatory before being admitted to the ICCU. Shocked, I almost charged out of the unit, desperately looking out for my family. Some more conversations happened. I convinced them that I was well enough not to utilise the ICU and to give it to someone who was really critical. So I was sent to the room where my CBC and urine were taken. The sight of the stoic south Indian nurses, in their pink frocks, made me weepy with gratitude. A chest x ray was taken and I was allowed to go home.

Next day I was asked to return to the hospital in Jhansi where they took a CT scan. Latest medical knowledge says it has the power of 300 chest x rays but this one was from the University of Whatsapp so it is yet to be authenticated. By evening the report came. All was well. But with Covid there is always a risk of pneumonia and I had a slight chest infection. And with that the allopathic medicines were started on me. Technically then, I got my first shot of medicines after 21 days of infection. This was the worst cycle. My body completely unused to medicine lay drugged and fatigued. I used to get panic attacks at meal times because the very thought of food was nauseous. I was dizzy. I fell down twice and was in a very bad place. But I ploughed through because of the immense loving care from my extended family. For 10 whole days my insides were bombed with antibiotics to deal with the dreaded Covid. My body shocked and confused, just collapsed into a heap .

During meditation, the part who I think is " me" I would often pity that dead weight . That was the time I thought of writing my will when I realised the full idiocy of chasing career, fame, money when my body was deciding whether it wanted to be "killed", by chemicals in order to "survive" the virus. The existential question came up: Can matter destroy matter? After my ICCU experience, I can say with utter serenity, that in my

case, energy was the most potent tool to kill matter. This is not to say that one should not take medicine if attacked by the virus, or not take the vaccine, because physicians and doctors too have a life purpose, which is to help cure us. But the best cure is not to identify with matter. In other words don't get hooked into the disease, don't give it the attention it is craving. In short, do what the doctor tells you to do, but at the psychical level, give Covid the BIG IGNORE!

*Instead, while distancing yourself from your body, treat it like a " treacherous friend" who when the time comes, will walk off the earth in death, whether one is ready for it or not. So while still on earth, keep giving it the antibodies it needs in the form of laughter, sunshine, positivity or whatever it is that makes you happy. Joy is energy. This will create the best immunity to recover. This has been my first hand experience. In conclusion then, I had spent the first 3 weeks without any medicine and then 2 weeks with lots of them. A huge thank you to everyone who helped me crawl out of the black hole, back to sunlight, yoga meditation, barefoot walks in my beloved farm, albeit with much more gratitude and. **.ZERO PATELI!***

From a spiritual perspective, there may be good news. It appears that disease, is like the cream that collects, when milk is boiled. The more it is boiled, the more cream comes to the surface. This may be equated to our ' Prarabdh karma', or allotted karma, which has to be worked out this lifetime. So the onset of a disease (likened to the surfacing of cream), forces us to work out our karma when we are still conscious and able bodied. By this token, who knows, the Carona may have reduced our karmic load, both individually, as well as from the perspective of collective humanity.



Epilogue

Susmita Mukherjee finally got her first Job yesterday the 7th August 2021. Cheers to that.