



SPLIT IN TWO

By Lakshmi Anand

There is nothing I can say about the pandemic that has not already been said by countless others. Therefore, I am not going to proselytize. What I say is purely personal.

To take care of an elderly parent, our family has been split between the US and India for over a decade now. During the end of March-early June is when we typically spend some time all-together. As March came up, the pandemic was but in the distant shadows in India. My daughter was preparing for her final examinations. My husband was to visit us on the 16th and we were to return together on the 26th for our sojourn in the US. We had planned a get together for my daughter's entire class on the 18th and a field trip a couple of days later. By the 12th, though, there was some talk about examinations getting postponed and I wondered. We decided it would be best if my husband stayed put in the US. As things exacerbated very quickly, I switched my daughter's and my tickets to depart the morning right after her last examination. We took the only itinerary available that did not pass through badly affected Europe - a 40-hour journey but we got to the US safe and sound. The day after we arrived, India closed its airspace.

In India, I write periodically for leading newspapers, mainly on Indian Classical Music. After arriving in the US, I noticed musician after musician posting about concerts getting canceled. I wondered what they were going through and focused on doing a 32 episode podcast on my website (<https://LakshmiAnand.com>), on Indian Classical Musicians and their thoughts, at a very difficult time for artistes in general. I realized then that I had already had training on quarantine sans pandemic - growing up in rural Africa in the 1980s, sans television, internet or telephone. The best part? We were really happy and completely occupied. We studied at home, did gardening, read books, wrote hand-penned letters, listened to music. Those habits stayed. Now, with the Internet, cheap telephony, movies unlimited, Zoom, and a lot more, one actually has access to more. Yes, with India closed to us, we cannot visit our extended family members even if we wanted to, but that is by no means unique to us.

Social distancing is a misnomer. One is socially distanced only if one has chosen to be. What we are is, in fact, 'physically' distanced. In Africa, my family was physically distanced by sheer circumstances. We did not even think of how things could have

been different. The very rare telex, and snail-mail that took weeks to reach, was enough to make us not feel socially distanced. Similarly, now, we are enjoying the together time, the many things that we have, that we ARE able to do within the imposed limits and are staying in touch with others through technology - for that is what is within our control. I am in regular contact with family and friends, just like I was before – to come to think of it, my daily routine did not allow for as much physical meeting up as one would think. Our family will wait it out patiently. However long it takes which, realistically, is likely to be many months, rather than days. But, as with anything else, this too shall pass.

