

**Why Not Me** by Sudha Bhuchar, written for the *Covid and Me – Vaccine Monologues* – Bangla version (Theatre of Debate/NIHR/Leeds University).

## **Nilfur (Varsha)**

Nilfur (mid-fifties, working class Bangla. Nilfur and her husband are both recovering from Covid. Their son Rohan is in his early twenties)

Amar bandhobi Beryl fereshtar moto manush. O shurute NHS-er kormider jonno khabar bili korto. (Amar daal raana oder jaa pochhondo chhilo!) Ekhn O mohilader jogar korchhe Mask shelaai korte jaate NHS-er charity-r jonno bikri korte paare. Soheli-ke bollam, 'Amar purana Singer machine-ta loft theke niye asho. Tomar Baba aar amake aei NHS-i bachiyechhe. Ekhn amar shahajjo korar pala.'

Baajar theke manush tukra kapor daan korchhe (taar maskguli dekhaai) - aei ujjol chhapata ami nijer jonno rekhechi — eta amake na, desher rikshaay aaka nanan ronger nokshar kotha mone koriye dey. Aar aei projapoti mask-ta amar khub priyo. Ami amar bor-ke bollam, 'Bairey eshe **'Painted Ladies'** daykho, phule phule kemon neche berachhe. Onek durer migrant, thik amader moto. Koto lomba poth pari diye ekhaney eshechhe.'

Projapoti dikey unar kono agroho naai. Unar chokh 'breaking news'-e aatkey achhe. Ekhn Corona-r second wave niye besh chintito — desh-takey ekdom chheye phelchhe. Ami bollam, 'Allah'r kachhe hajar shokor je amra first wave theke bechey phirchi. Beril bole, 'ekhn amra ektuk chhar dite paari'. **'We need to live a little now'**.

Taate unar jobaab, 'Beryl jodi tomakey pahar theke laaph dite bole, tumi ki diba?'

Beryl-er chhele Uni-te shobey dhukechhe 'fresher' aar prothom shoptaho-ta shey shompurno lockdown-e chhilo. Taar abashoner beshir bhaag hall-e test kore positive dhora porechhe. Beryl bollo, **'Youth is on their side and they will be fine'**

Beryl aar taar bor ekhn-o 'date night' kore. Bor lamb kuskus radhey aar ora ekshathey boshe sky-er box set daykhe! London thekey ek paa na beriye-o ora 'wild swimming'-e jaay aar Great Wall of China-r prachirey ek songe ghoraghuri kore. Beryl amake or Fitbit thekey dekhlo. Soheli to bole, Engrej-der monobhaab ekdom think achhe. Aar-o jemon-ta bole — **'the Asian 'fear of living thing'** sherokom na.

Ami baachte bhoy paai na, kintu amar **'life partner'** mortey bhoy paan. Uni ekhn sofa-i quilt-er niche boshey achhe. Sharata-kkhon bechara klanto thake aar shiri diye upore uthey bathroom-e jete jete-i kaheel. Amader GP hocchhe Uganada-r Gujrati, tini bolchhilen, eta **'Long Covid'** hote paarey, taar upor unar nanan shmoshya to achhei - diabetes, heart, BP aishob.

Ek-i shomoye amader dui-joner-i virus-e dhorechhilo, kintu Soheli bollo — amar bhagyo bhalo je ami **'Principal Trail'**-e chhilam. Amar uposhorgo chhilo halka flu-r moto (ami baba shob-shomoy flu jab nei) aar echhara ora amake onyano oshudh-o diyechhilo. Tin shoptahe moddhei ami motamoti bhalo hoye gechhilam.

Ami bhablam aei doure bujhi amra jitey jacchhi kintu sheta to chhilo matro first round.

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Basha thekey kaaj korte korte aar upor-tolay thakte thakte Sohel hoyraan hoye gechhe. O bollo, Or phone-e O Duolingo-i French shikhchhe — karon Theresa-ke naki Diamond league-e ‘Smash’ korte chaai. Ami kintu kono ping shuntey pacchhi na, taai ami jaani O asholey flat dekhchhe. Ami jokhon Zoom-e yoga korchhila tokhon shunlam O state agent-er shathey phishphish kore kotha bolchhe.

Raat tinta porjonto ami mask shelaai korlam tarpore eka eka Sohel-er iPad-e amar ‘box set’ dekhlam. ‘Aeishob Din Ratri’-r purana episode-guli dekhchhila. — Ekhon amar chheler din-ratri thik korte hobe... Natoker bou-ta ki mishti chhilo dekhte!

Ami Sohel-ke bollam,  
‘Khub chomotkaar ekta Bangali meye-r shathey tomake porichoy koraay dibo, tarpore Zoom-e tomra alaap shalaap korte parba.

‘I don’t want to date on zoom mum, but to meet people in the flesh. And she might not be Bengali’

Uttore bollam,  
‘Ete amra mind kori na. Kintu vaccine na ber howa porjonto opekkha koro, tarpore tumi nijer khushi moto thaktey parba, eksom shadhin-bhabe.  
Ami jaani ami norom-shorom type shashuri hobo.

Sohel bollo,  
**‘The goal post keeps changing mum. Even with the breakthrough they still need to test other vaccines.  
I’ll never be 23 again and I’ll have wasted my youth in your attic!’**

‘Arey... emon to na je amra tomake bondi kore rekhechi’

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Sohel-ke Gabriel Bournemouth-e jete dawat korechhe, aei kichhu bondhu bhandhober shathey Air B&B-te thakar jonno. Gabriel khub prokriti shocheton chhele - jaake bole **‘Eco-warrior’** aar shey shomudro shoikot thekey aborjona uthay.

Ami bollam,  
‘Tumi jacchho na keno? Jau... koyekta din moja kore asho.

Sohel bollo,  
**‘Mum, they don’t think Covid is serious. They think it’s the Govt trying to stop the young from being free. Or big pharma companies wanting to make more money. They think if they all get infected, it will help herd immunity.’**

‘Tomar Baba-ke video kore tomar instagram-e post koro. Aeita koto-ta marattok oder-ke dekhau.’

Koto manush je ventilator-e chhilo, news-e dekha oi dingulir kotha Ora bhuley gechhe! Koto mrittu, koto jiboner opochoy... ish. Amader community thekey to onek.

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Sohel aar jaay naai. Amar chhele-ta khub bhalo. Kemon amader aagley rakhchhe, O bole jodi-o ekhon amader antibody achhe, kintu Or Baba-r eto shob oshusthota niye amra je abar shongkramito hobo na aei beparey to amra nishchito kore kichhu bolte paari na.

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Ajkey Sohel bollo O vaccine Register-e jog diyechhe. Asian-ra naaki shecchha-shebok hocchhe na aar tader shei data dorkaar. Aei obostha thekey ber howar ekta matro upaay hochhe emon ekta vaccine ber kora jeta shobar jonno kaaj korbe.

Ami bollam, 'jader bhaai-bon achhe tader korte dau. Tumi keno? Amar ekta matro baccha.'

**'Why not me? You went on a trial'**

Hai, kintu ami to tokhon oshustho-i chhilam, — Tumi bolla na amar jog deyata **'no brainer'** chhilo.

**'Mum we're over-represented in illness and under-represented in research. They want people of all ages. Even with pre-conditions'**

Soheler raashi Taurus. Rashi-phol onujayi ekguye aar ekta **'Dark Horse'** — jekono shomoy darun kichhu kore dekhate pare. Dhir goti kintu uposthit buddhi-te paaka.

Hm... taai to, **'Why Not Him?'**

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Khub shighree Sohel Or prothom doze paabe. Tokhon Or phone-e Oke App-ta download korte hobe. Tarpur kichhu din por-por data dhukatey hobe. 24-ghontar help-line achhe, aar tara ek bochor dhore Sohel-ke monitor korbe. O bollo jekono shomoy mot bodlabar onumoti Or achhe.

Ami jiggesh korlam,

'Aei Asian-ra jara Engreji-te kotha bole na tara aei shomosto kothin niyom-kanun meney sign-up korbe aeita kortri-pokkho asha kore ki bhabe?'

**'Exactly mum. Research needs to shake it up and include them'**

'Aei jemon amader aam-wala WhatsApp-e post korlo je prottek-ke naki jor kore vaccine injection diye deya hobe aar shekhan thekey tader Corona hoye jabe.'

**'Tell him it's not a 'live' vaccine mum, and won't be mandated'**

Aei shob boro boro shobdo shey shob jaaney. Amra torke paari na.

**'And don't let dad eat too many mangos when I'm gone!'**

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O khub sunder ekta flat peyechhe. Shoja nodir dikey mukh kora. Sohel bolchhilo je O kichhu korar aagey **'risk/benefit'** tulona kore tobe kaaje naambe.

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Koyek-ta tupperware-e ami Or jonno daal freeze kore rekhechhi, noiley shudhu shei daami daami  
pasta ranna korbe - Ottolenghi.

Amader-ke 'Fitbits' kiney diye bolechhe steps guney rakhte hobe.

Amar jokhon boyosh kom chhilo khub Kilimanjaro phare uth-te chaaitam.