

Sign Of The Times

- Elvina Ann Charly

We turn to hope not in the face of triumph, but in those precarious moments when anxiety is commonplace. No matter how strongly we feel otherwise, bad times have to make way for the good someday. And hope makes for an uplifting companion in that journey. Sometimes, the best unifying force is a common enemy, be it covid-19, climate change or natural disasters.

The World Health Organization had warned the world that the pandemic would be a test of global fraternity. Many countries showcased these values by supplying neighbouring countries with vaccines, medicines, PPE and other medical equipment. World leaders have a huge role in keeping people's spirits high by highlighting positive stories of recovery and revival while addressing the nation; all the while reminding them to showcase covid-appropriate behaviours. Many countries paid tribute to healthcare workers by singing, banging on pots from their windows and dedicating murals and paintings to them.

The pandemic simultaneously united and divided us. United us with a shared experience of illness, but divided us physically and mentally. Reduced intergroup contact made it easier for prejudices against outgroups to fester. Only direct communication removes mistrust between groups and enables the discovery of positive qualities in another group. Forming and propagating stereotypes is easy behind closed doors, which the pandemic has enabled, albeit unintentionally. This has led to feelings of hostility towards Asian communities and escalating tensions between different cultural groups in many countries. These internal conflicts take the focus away from the fight against the virus; a fight for which unity and hope would be our greatest weapons. Therefore, understanding and respecting others' cultures should be as poignant a value as love or hope. Divide and perish, unite and triumph!

Young people have been at the forefront of information dissemination on vaccine centres, oxygen cylinder availability, helpline desks and medical facilities, via social media. Being a global citizen helps one to empathize with alarming issues in foreign countries and express solidarity. This is especially valuable when those affected do not have the freedom to speak out on the issue, as we saw with the plight of Uighur Muslims in China. Global outrage against climate change from a generation of concerned young people led to many world leaders proposing to cut down carbon emissions; a small but significant step forward.

The Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', means that 'the world is one family'. By looking beyond the categories that differentiate us, a sense of oneness can be achieved for a truly empathetic and multicultural way of being. Each culture has its own central values, which can be incorporated into our lives to obtain a nuanced set of values by which we operate in a globalized world.

The global goal now is to heal the world. Even as illness hits in waves and peaks, the curve of hope must never flatten. There's nothing to find but light at the end of the tunnel. We shall overcome. One day.