

# The Sum Of Our Grievs

**A nightmare without end, the pandemic is emotionally scarring us in ways yet to be fully grasped**

[AVIJIT.GHOSH@TIMESGROUP.COM](mailto:AVIJIT.GHOSH@TIMESGROUP.COM)

Facebook is like a bulletin board of loss these days. Words have become wreaths that people are pouring out for those who left them. Sharing is also a way of mourning. Many replies are filled with disbelief.

Relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours: Nobody has been spared from the random charge of the virus. Many families have endured a double blow: Husband and wife, sister and mother, father and son, gone within days of each other. Top writers, academics, actors, composers and many others who enriched our lives for decades have passed, some without acknowledgement. The overall loss of intellectual and cultural capital is incalculable. And it continues. Day after day. There's no sense of an ending.

It is the frequency and the unexpectedness of these departures that has made coping harder and more unbearable. Can you recall how many times recently you have typed 'sorry for your loss' or 'heartfelt condolences' on your phone? It has happened so many times that it's almost like a reflex action sometimes devoid of real feeling now. We even log in to social media with a sense of dread. Fear and anxiety play on a loop in our heads. Covid-19 is a sadist and it has colonised our heads.

For many, the management of grief and anxiety is overwhelming. How do you efface the image of a man you saw gasping for air at a hospital? How do you get over the lingering regret of not having been able to give a proper cremation to a dearly loved which is all that she ever wanted in life? How do you console a friend who's lost his father and grandfather within hours of each other?

Grief, said writer Jamie Anderson, is just love with no place to go to. But sometimes, grief is also a gaping void in your heart that nothing seems to fill. A friend asked, “Isn’t it strange that in normal times we would be worried if someone was in the ICU; now we are relieved if someone has found a bed in the ICU?” The pandemic is scarring us emotionally in ways that are yet to be fully grasped because we are still in the middle of it. We would need many more mental health professionals than we have.

The staggering number of deaths is reflected in the expanding size of the obituary section of newspapers. Notice how they have grown in recent weeks. Back in 1918, deaths caused by the Spanish Flu had overwhelmed cremation grounds and graveyards. Ahmed Ali’s novel, *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), detailed how the national capital became “a city for the dead”. He wrote, thieves pulled out winding sheets (kafan) from the grave and sold them. Gravediggers multiplied their fees. Cloth merchants hiked the prices of winding sheets and blamed the jump on the ongoing World War I.

Ironic ditties of the outbreak were sold as leaflets for one-pice each. “How deadly this fever is, / Everyone is dying of it. / Men become lame with it / And go out in dolis. /The hospitals are gay and bright, / But sorry is men’s plight.” History doesn’t always repeat itself; sometimes it just gets worse.

From all accounts, the process of cremation nowadays is a soul-crushing experience. From oxygen cylinders to ambulances, from medicines to cremation charges, unashamed profiteering has been rampant amidst the worst health emergency faced by the world in over 100 years. Have we evolved or devolved as humans?

Covid has brought out the worst in some, many also gave their best: Those who opened free oxygen langars, who offered to deliver food to afflicted families, who sent cheques to the needy, who stood in hospital queues for people they hardly knew, who dialed a hundred calls or more to find medicine for a colleague, who volunteered to donate plasma,

thoughtful celebs and conscious citizens who harnessed the social media for the greater good.

Then, there were the much-maligned cops who often rose beyond the call of duty to do things that no one else offered to, and of course, the health professionals and frontline workers, who for all the pressure never gave up. Sadly some major film stars and top cricketers with millions of followers have remained silent on social networks. Staying in a bio-bubble is mandatory when playing sport these days but living in a self-satisfied cocoon in such distressing times is not.

We know about the inevitability of death. We know that Covid-19 also kills. But there is a difference between the deaths caused by the unpredictable devilishness of the virus and those happening because the afflicted couldn't get access to an oxygen cylinder or a hospital bed in time.

It's undeniable that many have died in the last few weeks due to the monumental ill-preparedness of governments. That sad truth of this pandemic will endure long after the virus has been conquered. Managing perception won't be easy when the lived-in experience of the public runs contrary to the spin of cynical politics.





**It is the frequency and the unexpectedness of these departures that has made coping harder and more unbearable. A friend asked, “Isn’t it strange that in normal times we would be worried if someone was in the ICU; now we are relieved if someone has found a bed in the ICU?”**