

Ministry of Arts & Cultural Heritage:  
Short Story on Covid-19 Experience

## Arvind and his Grandmother's Lockdown Selfies



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Word count excluding cover page  
& title: 1494

## **Arvind and His Grandmother's Lockdown Selfies**

Arvind was sitting at his office desk, concentrating on his laptop on that particular morning when Irfaan, one of his colleagues, broke the news to him. It was around 10 o'clock in the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 when rumours about active coronavirus cases in Mauritius were making rounds in the local media. "There's currently panic buying across the island and the Prime Minister will address the population this evening..." said Irfaan in a serious tone. Arvind paused his work and seemed lost for a few seconds. Various questions raced through his mind as he thought about his 77-year-old grandmother who lived alone. The 25-year old grandson wanted to visit his grandmother, Mrs. Vimla, right after work. He rushed to the closest medical store to buy a few essential medicines and safety masks. After that, he bought food products such as biscuits, canned items, rice and cereals in a supermarket, where he was amazed by the huge crowds. It was already dark by the time Arvind reached his grandmother's place and he was completely exhausted on this unusual hectic day.

Sitting all by herself on her old swing chair, Mrs. Vimla was surprised to see her grandson at her doorstep on that Wednesday evening. "What brings you here my son? Is everything alright at home? Margaret just finished preparing dinner and left some time ago..." said Mrs. Vimla smilingly.



Margaret had been working as the old woman’s daytime caregiver after the latter became a widow and started living alone. “Do you remember I was telling you about the ongoing deadly disease killing thousands of people around the world, grandma...?” murmured Arvind confusingly, while looking for the television remote control. He turned on the old and blurry television and within a few minutes, the whole nation learnt that Mauritius had three active coronavirus cases.

Arvind explained in details about the pandemic and its consequences on vulnerable people to his grandmother, who was visibly shaken up by all of this. He stressed on the situation’s gravity by elaborating on the basic precautionary measures such as mask-wearing or washing one’s hands more often. Later, both the grandmother and her grandson had dinner in silence and went to bed early. The following morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Arvind waited for Margaret’s arrival before getting ready for office. Luckily, he always had one clean office shirt in his laptop bag. With Margaret’s help, he made a list of all essential items that his grandmother might need for the upcoming weeks.

Upon leaving, Arvind promised to visit his grandmother again in the afternoon, which made her emotional. Mrs. Vimla was Arvind’s maternal grandmother. Ever since her husband passed away almost two decades ago, Arvind’s parents proposed to her to stay with them, but Mrs. Vimla found

it hard to leave her late husband's ancestral house to which she had grown much attached. The elderly woman knew that her only grandson was most of the time busy, given his daily packed schedule at work, but she felt loved and pampered by his generosity in this difficult time.

Following a long day at the office and after having spent hours buying extra basic food necessities like many other tense consumers, Arvind finally reached his grandmother's place late in the evening only to find out that a two-week sanitary lockdown had just been announced on the national television. He felt even more anxious when he realized that Margaret would not be able to come to take care of his grandmother as from the next day. He knew that his efforts would go in vain if he tried to convince his grandma to come to stay at his, together with his parents for a few days. Arvind felt puzzled by this unpredictable situation but he had to make up his mind quickly. After pondering for a few minutes, he decided to stay back and support his grandmother for the coming two weeks.

Mrs. Vimla felt relieved on hearing this and went straight to bed while whispering merrily to herself. As for the young adult, he was jumbled up by many thoughts as he walked through the narrow corridor. With no extra clothes other than what he was wearing, no Wi-Fi and not even a good quality television screen, how would he possibly make it through those two weeks? While he felt reassured by the idea of using mobile data as an alternative to Wi-Fi, Arvind felt a bigger challenge coming his way. He realized that he had to put himself into the shoes of Margaret by constantly assisting his grandmother, who was now no longer capable of fully taking care of herself. After calling his parents to seek guidance, he felt determined to make them proud by taking the new responsibilities courageously. That night, Arvind lay curled up in the small bed next to that of his grandmother, thinking about his decision for a long time until he slept.



As much as the two weeks' responsibilities at first seemed difficult to Arvind, not only did he succeed in being a dutiful grandson, but he also got the opportunity to discover his hidden talents as well as revive some old memories. During the first day of the lockdown, his grandmother lent him a few of her late husband's old clothes that she had kept safely in an old cupboard which was unlocked only a few times since his death. Mrs. Vimla would go down memory lane, remembering moments spent with her husband years ago, when she would see Arvind wearing those clothes daily during lockdown. Even if Arvind was just six years old when his grandfather had passed away, he could still vividly recall memories of him while viewing some old photographs in albums that he had accidentally found inside the same cupboard.



Every night, Mrs. Vimla narrated a new story to Arvind about her simple everyday life as a young bride and she would repeatedly emphasize on how people back then lived in austerity but happily. These conversations made him reflect on his humdrum daily work-routine and the young man realized that he needed a break. He contemplated on taking a holiday in the forthcoming months to revitalize himself. As the days passed, Arvind improved his cooking skills thanks to the many recipes that were being posted on social media and those taught by his grandma. He would go to bed worn out and earlier than usual, considering that he spent his days cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of his grandmother's needs. Even if he missed playing football with his friends in the afternoon, he chose not to whine about being bored, to his close ones. In fact, he would smile in appreciation each time someone messaged or called him to express their contentment regarding the support that he was offering as a grandchild to his grandmother.

As the weeks went by and news about the lockdown being extended locally, Mrs. Vimla religiously put on her radio every evening to listen to the updates about the rising number of active coronavirus. She seemed scared when Mauritius recorded a few deaths linked to the disease. Arvind would then try to distract her mind by showing her funny videos on his phone or on video

calling a few relatives who would talk to her. Given that Arvind did not have to resume work until the end of the lockdown, he further took the initiative to keep his grandmother's garden healthy. Arvind was by no means willing to let his grandmother, being a vulnerable person move out of her house during the coronavirus crisis. His love for his grandmother was beyond words and he even made it a personal choice to avoid going out unnecessarily, not even to the nearby grocery store unless it was very important for him. As such, he decided to grow his own vegetables although he was not very fond of gardening. Mrs. Vimla used to work in agriculture and her advice helped her grandson largely during his gardening time. Arvind even posted pictures of his grandmother and himself reaping the harvest of a few vegetables on his personal social media handles which garnered much admiration.



With every passing week, the bond shared by the grandmother and her grandchild grew stronger. Arvind learnt being satisfied with small achievements such as successfully trying a new recipe or seeing the growth of his vegetables. Mrs. Vimla on her part grew slightly familiar to social media

and she seemed very fond of watching videos and taking instant selfies, something which her grandson loved doing.

It was finally time for Arvind and everyone to get back to normality after almost three months since Mauritius' battle against coronavirus had started. With a heavy heart, the young adult thought of his lockdown days spent with his adorable grandmother as an unexpected yet beautiful experience. Before waving each other goodbye, Mrs. Vimla and Arvind clicked one last selfie in the blooming garden, signifying their strengthened bond.

