

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Another interviewee who had to come to Surat during the time of plague revealed (Mr Satish Shah, scientist and teacher, 24 April 2020):

A date was fixed, a call was made. A call to a teacher of mine who guided and mentored me in the 12th class. He is one of those teachers who always have anecdotes and stories to share. He is a cheerful man with a gradual wise mustache and large spectacles, the kind of man you'd expect a teacher to be. He asked me to call him at around 5:45 pm on 22 April after finishing a round of teaching online classes due to the ongoing situation of the outbreak of COVID-19.

With the pandemic of COVID-19 going on, the situation was perfect and called for an anecdotal story from the '90s. Having heard about it so much in the social science textbooks it was time to hear some real experiences.

He narrated,

“I wasn't in Surat then”, he said. I was working in the Dhulia district of Maharashtra then. I was married to a Gujarati girl. She was 7-8 months into pregnancy with our son and was at her parents' home as they could take better care of her. Floods had recently swamped the entire city and with some preliminary news of a plague being detected she asked me to come there for our baby's birth in case the plague situation lasts long. In those times, trains used to run on coal and had steam engines and not electrical. I sat on a train without any ticket. Much to my surprise and luck, the train was empty. Not many people on the train. I covered my mouth with a napkin. In those days, there wasn't much awareness about science, and no one used to cover their mouths. I had a postgraduate degree in biology and knew what basic precautions one should take and I covered my mouth with a handkerchief. When I reached the Surat station, which is an underground station, strict measures were taken to not overcrowd it. Hence, it was seemingly empty. In those days, you didn't have Bus services or Cab services and I boarded one of the few available auto-rickshaws.

My desired destination was 6-7 km away from the railway station and much to my disappointment the autorickshaw driver said he wouldn't take me to Uma Bhawan road and would only go till Chowk Vistar due to the number of cases. I was exasperated as it would be a whole triangular route around. I decided to walk then. When I was somewhere near the house a police officer approached me and asked me where I was coming from in Gujarati. I was not very well versed in Gujarati then and also was pretty young and immature and so I told him I was coming from the railway station as I just

came from Maharashtra. The police officer started scolding me and asked me to do sit-ups. I asked him why it was necessary and tried explaining the situation to him that my wife was pregnant and I had to come. He made me sign my address on a slip of paper and finally, he asked me to leave for my home. The police officer showed up 2-3 hours later for a checking.

I admire Surat for its decision making. Especially after the plague, it became a lot better than what it was. During the plague, we were allowed to purchase groceries for a few hours in the morning and evening like the current situation. I used to go to the roof and see what was happening. Police officers made the people who broke the curfew perform sit-ups and various other kinds of exercises like reverse pull. Being a biology professor, I knew what was used by the government for sanitation purposes. They used a powdery bleaching product with a huge proportion of Chlorine. Chlorine kills away a lot of microorganisms and thus it was used. They maintained strict measures and conducted checking of people as well.

When we returned back to Maharashtra on the train, the situation was way worse. The trains were loaded with people. It was honestly, a nightmare.”

An eye-witness of the plague (Mr Narendra Talwani, businessman, 22 April 2020)

(Note: the interviewee is the father of the interviewer)

The account of the interviewee goes as follows:

During the 1994 plague, I was a college student and I was almost the age you are now, 18, he began. We, me, my elder brother, my younger sister, and my father used to live in Judges quarters in the Athwalines area of Surat. Our area wasn't affected by floods which came before the plague started. My father was a district judge and was in Bhavnagar when the news of plague first was known to us via Television and AFT or Attank Failavnar Tatvo (Rumour spreading elements). He used this word specifically for people who created panic and induced more chaos than needed. We called him up and asked if we should come to him as the other Judges and resident families were leaving. Judges are respected among people and hence, they could arrange for cars very easily. People started running out of the city. My father said, there's no need to fear, it's just a plague don't worry, I am coming back, you don't need to come here or out of the city. He later came to Surat on an almost empty bus. He said, restaurants, hotels, etc outside Surat became extra cautious and kicked out the population which fled the city and didn't want them entering

their premises anywhere. As we used to live in the Judge's quarter and belonged to a family of a judge, medicines reached us the foremost. An SMC official on duty to distribute medicines gave me a set of red and yellow pills. One of them was Tetracycline, the other I don't remember. The municipal corporation was agitated with action taking measures. The commissioner at that time was extremely powerful and accepted among people that even when he took draconian measures to deal with the situation no one questioned him. They spread this white powder and destroyed the illegal houses around the river Tapi. They demolished all the temporary stagnant filthy low-lying areas. After the plague, they also put up the wall we see today around the river to stop the flow to some extent. In terms of isolating ourselves, in the actual situation, only 3-4 families or 70% of families were present for those 15-20 days during the plague. We used to play cricket on the premises among the ones that were left and passed our time. Our house help lived in the quarters itself and we didn't have to face the situations that we are facing now.

A School teacher revealing the condition of the schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic 2020 (Mr. Hitesh, teacher, April 15 2020)

I managed to get an interview from one of the supervising teachers from a private school in Surat located in a mass-quarantined area of Rander. The school has students of all ages from 5 years to 18 years; pre-primary to higher secondary.

The first notification from the government came around 16 March for closing down schools. Some board exams of CBSE class 10th and 12th were left and some internal school exams of the secondary schools were left as well. The school officials along with some other accompanying school went to the education department of the Surat City to consult what to do with the pending exams and they were given an allowance of a week to conduct exams and board exams were going on but on 18 March notification was issued that board exams were canceled throughout the country and hence, exams were left pending. The students were given promotional grades as such for now except the students of the higher secondary. There's no measure for the students of 9th and 11th because it is going to impact their next academic years if given promotional grades. If they should be passed, it will lead to an easy escape for students and they will face difficulties during their board years.

As of now, the school is using the App Zoom and meanwhile developing its own portal MCB to tackle privacy issues. Classes have switched to the online mode for all the classes including pre-primary. There was a meeting with parents to guide the kids to learn online. The classes for higher secondary started as 2 sessions per day leading to 5

sessions of 5 hours. It's a new adaptation both for teachers and students he mentioned. Teachers have had to learn technology and adapt to the situation.

I needed a stylus to teach so I covered the aluminum foil over the pencil.

Students want to study but there are a few network issues. We record calls for them so that gets sorted and we are going along the syllabus and it's going on efficiently along with all the assignments and everything.

Exams will be taken if the quarantine doesn't end online in different ways such as MCQ's.

CBSE is supporting the government and passing on all the government notifications such as stay at home and Aarogyam Setu. The school is ready to offer grounds for isolation if needed as well.

An International migrant (Mr. Pavan Patel, Chemical Scientist from Al Jubail, April 29 2020)

Covering the accounts of all the migrants is necessary and thus, I took an interview of an Indian person who wanted to return back to Surat, Gujarat in India finally after spending years working in Saudi Arabia but pandemic had other plans for him.


The interview was taken on a whatsapp call on April 29 2020. He was scheduled to come back to India on 29 March but was not able to due to the travel restrictions imposed by the Government of India in the light of the ongoing pandemic. He quit his well- paying job at a chemical company and sold much of his valuables. He said there are many Indians stuck due to cancelled flights, some who permanently want to return while some just want to come for a summer break.

“Saudi Arabian government is doing their best to send the migrants to their homelands. I am in touch with the Indian embassy constantly but there is not much that can be done. I call the Indian embassy at least once a week to stay informative. The Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has launched a portal to prepare a list of migrants, prioritising women and children and people who do not want to return back to the country again. On a list of all the people who want to return to their homelands my number is around 64000. So far, the response of the government has been

positive and they are answering all our queries but it is still undecided when I am going to return.

Even after returning, I will have to stay in a quarantine for a minimum of 14 days and travelling in a plane is extremely risky. Thus, I am waiting for the right time to return and of course a chance to return. My wife is unwell and is in Surat and I want to help her as soon as I can with the household work in absence of a maid during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, luckily my company gave me a temporary job for the time being and I go to work 2 days a week and work from home on other days. Staying hopeful is the best that can be done right now. I expect to return by the end of May or the early June but nothing can be said with assurance right now.”




**Facilitating a Safe Return
of Expats to their Homelands**

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) will facilitate the return of expatriates working in the Kingdom to their homelands, despite the travel ban ensuing from the precautionary measures to control the spread of the current pandemic. To take advantage of this exceptional opportunity, employers of expatriates interested in this service are advised to officially apply online.

Terms and Conditions

- The service is accessible to the entity's authorized representative.
- The service is accessible to operating entities only.
- The eligibility is limited to the expats who are currently employed.
- Applicants are permitted to submit one application every 14 days, so the details of all expats interested in the service should be included in one application.
- The names of the employees should be entered in English, as written in their passports.
- Follow the steps below before submitting the online application:
 - o Issue the final exit permit from MOI for all employees
 - o Finalize the end of service process for the employees.
 - o Complete the medical examination for the employees as per MOH requirements.
 - o Cooperate with MOH regarding the cases that require medical attention and traveling is not possible.
 - o Purchase the airline tickets and abide by the air carrier's stated timings.
 - o Transport the employees to the travel terminal, and ensure completion of all travel procedures.
 - o The entity and its representatives shall bear all legal consequences, if the information provided is not in accordance with the above.

Submit Application <https://mlsd.gov.sa/ar/node/482550>



MLSD.gov.sa 19911 MHRSD_SA MLSD_SA