

The best and worst of times

IT was the best of times, it was the worst of times. The year 2020 was greeted with high expectations. Yet, by the end of its first quarter, the world has been left bewildered, struggling to get to grips with the enormity of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As countries implement the necessary strategies to contain the pandemic, 2020 has become known as the year of the Great Lockdown, and will certainly go down as one of the most challenging times in human history.

Ultimately, humanity has been forced to seriously consider the essentials and non-essentials of life.

What is certainly essential is food, which many turn to for comfort. To endure the monotony of the lockdown, people have taken to cooking and baking. On social media, the hashtags #stressbaking and #quarantinetimebaking have garnered thousands of posts as baking became a survival tool and

an anxiety outlet for the restless in the confines of their homes.

“It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...”

If literature is a mirror to life, then we can expect this year’s narratives to be coloured by the experiences of going through a pandemic the scale of which we’ve never encountered before. We are seeing heroes and villains being created; such are the stuff of great literature.

To my mind, the crisis highlights the degradation of humanity and vulnerability of human life that’s often captured in literature. The pandemic has taught us that all humans are equal where disease is concerned. It knows no boundaries; it cuts across geographical borders and nationalities, age, gender, race, social class and economic status. Every human being is as vulnerable as the other.

Indeed, with most human activi-

ties being halted, nature has been allowed to reclaim its space. The world has become less polluted, less crowded.

“It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity.”

How should we deal with this crisis? An English idiom keeps coming to mind, perhaps after being inundated with baking activities on social media: “To eat humble pie”.

Interestingly, I recently learnt that the word “humble” was originally “umble”, meaning deer offal, which was fed to servants of lower rank in England in the Middle Ages. It was deemed to be lowly or demeaning to eat “umble pie”. As usage of the word “umble” died out, it was replaced by the similar sounding “humble” while still keeping the original meaning.

So why should we eat humble pie in the face of this pandemic? When you eat humble pie, you are

acknowledging the mistakes you made and promising to do better. This pandemic has been, and still is, a humbling experience for humanity, however technologically advanced we think we are.

It is time for us to reset, rethink and reflect on how we have used and abused nature, on how dependent we are on others, on how lowly we are compared to those frontliners who work tirelessly for others, on how arrogantly we have lived thinking that we own the world, and on how there is a greater power that we need to turn to again and again.

Let us remember this as not only the worst of times but more importantly, the best of times.

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