

“My Feet Remained Numb... My Mind was Quiet... But My Soul Danced”

When I was diagnosed with cancer, an emotional catharsis happened to me.

“Why me? Was the question...” The moment made me think and question my whole existence.

I don't know if this is the design of the Providence, but if it is, then there are always some signals indicating this. There were strange signals from my body which I felt were abnormal and these pushed me to undergo certain medical tests, ultimately leading to my cancer diagnosis. When there are signals of discomfort from the body, we should try to perceive them and respond accordingly. Many a times, reality can be masked in bizarre ways, just like a big tumor...!

When I think of it now, it unsettles me; how disconnected I was from my body. I think, it is the fear of cancer which is more dreadful than the cancer itself. We never imagine that “accidents,” “cancer,” and “death” can happen to us till they actually occur. When I learnt that I had cancer, I was devastated. There were mixed emotions of shock and confusion. A flurry of thoughts became the new normal for a few days.

I was not in any pain, it was the discomfort that forced me to go to doctor. The urgency of my visit to the doctor was only because I had a prescheduled performance, and I wanted to be 100% fit for that event. If I had no performance, maybe I would have overlooked all the symptoms and signals of discomfort from my body. Maybe I would have tried other home therapies and continued to ignore the physical discomfort. Should I question my destiny or be thankful that it was a timely visit to the doctor?

When the cancer was diagnosed, I decided that it is best to be detached and wade through the rough tides of life and live the moment of existence but the thought of baldness pervaded me throughout my chemotherapy sessions.

The whole agony of going through this pain, allowed me to explore the inner self deeply. I was trying to understand the mystery of life energy through my dance. I never shared my illness with anyone except my family. I kept performing after my surgery, in between my chemo cycles and radiation. I was experiencing the energy which worked like an elixir. The complete absorption in my art was leading me to a very tranquil path. When my feet remained numb my mind was quiet, my soul danced. With the enormous

positivity bestowed by my family, I was responding well to the treatment. I was touched by the sensitivity of my doctors, in fact it is their medicines, treatments, and care that cured me. My family, my art, and my own will and energy helped me respond positively to the treatment.

“You will have a low appetite, vomiting sensation, leg pain, but there are medicines for all these side effects. Take your medicines; eat well, drink lots of water...” The dietician used to guide me. I used to note these side effects explained to me very carefully and I tried to figure out my own way to deal with some side effects like nausea and vomiting.

I used to eat small meals more frequently, avoided greasy or spicy foods, and ate foods high in vitamins and soluble fiber. I also tried liquid recipes of my mother consisting of ginger, Tulsi (Holy basil), and other herbs, and had 8–10 glasses of clear fluids. I was all the time trying to understand my body to experience that flow of energy which would manifest in my performances.

Whenever I entered Tata Memorial Hospital I remembered my Grandfather Dr. V. R. Khanolkar, the pioneer of cancer research in India. My heart was full of gratitude toward him and all the scientists because of whom cancer patients can think about living. Without their contribution, there would still be dark clouds of cancer, spreading its shadows of death over all the patients.

I decided to be on the holistic path of cure of cancer patients after successfully completing my treatment by very efficient oncologists. I had seen lots of patients going through depression and fear of the recurrence. I do not have any medical background so I tried to work on myself with the help of personnel experiences in meditation, yoga, and dance. This whole exercise gave me confidence and courage to share my experience with my neighbor who was undergoing cancer treatment. After 3 months, she thanked me, saying “You changed my life. After talking to you, I started responding positively to my treatment.” This feedback changed my life and I was encouraged to share my experience with other cancer patients.

I also wrote a book on this painful journey and started philanthropic activities for cancer cause through my charitable foundation. The Films Division of India and PSBT produced a Documentary in 2018 on my Victory over cancer. This documentary titled “Peacock Plume” has

featured in many national and international documentary film festivals. Whenever I share my experience with any cancer patient and they respond positively, I feel my soul is purified.

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