

VACATION

Monalisa Paul



AI generated image from Freepress

PRABHAKAR and Diwakar were at their home. It was vacation time for all the school children in this metropolitan city. There was a sudden announcement about the vacation by the government but unlikely there was any joy associated with it. While Diwakar was busy solving his class eleventh calculus problems, Prabhakar was getting restless. For him, this vacation had nothing much to offer. He could neither go nor meet his friends nor could he invite them to his place. Usually, kids of his age are busy watching reels on their mobile phones, playing video games or killing time through any screen time activity, but it's hard to believe that Prabhakar does not like any of them. In fact, he dislikes screen time so much that he is against online tuition. To make his misery appalling, schools have started online classes for children to cover the broad syllabus as the schools are closed due to untimely vacations.

Prabhakar is the kind of boy who wants to enjoy the nature around him. He wants to breathe fresh air, go for nature trails, dance in the rain, observe the life cycle of butterflies over their native host plants, watch the sunrise, witness sunsets, gaze at the night sky and figure out constellations, fly kites in the parks and most importantly go to school physically. All these simple activities have now become a luxury. This metropolitan city no longer caters for these services to its residents. Everything was gloomy. Inside as well as outside. It is post-Diwali time. For the last few years, city councillors have been making this impulsive decision to close the schools due to poor air quality in the town.

When Prabhakar could not find anything to do, he would simply poke his elder brother. "Dada, this is the worst. Worse than COVID-19 captivity. Please play with me". Prabhakar's impatient, shrilling voice could break anything in the room but not the attention of Diwakar.

Diwakar nodded but did not look at him as he was completely engrossed in his mathematics textbook. He waved his hands to Prabhakar and called him.

"Look Prabhakar, we cannot go against the protocol of the government. We have to abide by the rules. After all, it is a matter of our health. Can you see the haze outside? It is due to air pollution in Delhi. The Air Quality Index (AQI) has gone over 400 units. It is very dangerous to go outside and play or to travel. I am concerned about Dadu. Since morning, he has been coughing vehemently. Maa and Baba nebulized him several times. He is 89 and a patient of bronchitis. Though our lungs are fresh and young, I warned our neighbor, who is just 21 years old, for doing outdoor exercise. If we Delhiites do not mend our ways, such vacations will become casual events after every Diwali. Unlike summer, winter and autumn vacations, this is not a fun vacation but a situation which has come up due to anthropological mismanagement of the air", explained Diwakar with great patience and pause.

"Dada, just now the Diwali break has ended. It was so much fun around, but now everything is gloomy", said Prabhakar.

Diwakar smiled critically and said, "We are paying the price for fun now". His grin revealed everything. He kept on with his monologue, "Diwali is a festival of lights, but people have made it as a festival of sound and smoke by burning crackers. This festival coincides with the post-harvest season