

TA: So, what was your experience like living through the pandemic?

TP: So basically we were stuck at home, obviously, for almost two years. And that was basically one and a half years of my two high school years, and that was the main difference I would say. We had online school, no sports events and all, and we couldn't go out at all. Obviously my parents had work like the other parents I would say, and then everything became online—shopping, school. And yeah, that's basically it. Life was very monotonous.

TA: Did you have any access to PPE and masks, and if so, where from?

TP: Yeah actually the government did a great job in giving out masks and all, but not PPE. Only the officials got them.

TA: And were you living at home the whole time?

TP: Yes, yes. So in Sri Lanka what they did was if you get infected most of us had to go to one of the centers and quarantine for like fourteen days. Other than that, everyone was at home.

TA: Did anyone close to you get COVID?

TP: Yeah actually, my cousins and their entire family got. Some of my friends got it as well. I would say most of the population did get it, yeah.

TA: Generally, as you were living through the pandemic, how did you feel?

TP: Uh, I felt, I would say, I really didn't like it—an entire two years of my life I was living at home, and it was my high school years, which are really precious I would say and you collect a lot of memories. But I obviously didn't have the chance to, you know, go out and experience them. But other than that, academic wise I would say it was actually better for me because I got to stay at home, study more, more free time on my hands. But for other kids it wasn't probably the same because in rural areas they don't have, you know, the devices that are necessary to do online education. And obviously the teachers don't have access to WiFi, smartphones, and whatever you need. But other than that, like I said—monotonous, bored, and maybe a bit scared also of the virus, yeah.

TA: And what were some things that you were hearing and noticing during this time?

TP: Um, well there was a lot of political instability in our country because the leaders couldn't make the right decisions because they had to close down the country, and that really has affected Sri Lanka's economy when it came to tourism and all. So, our source of foreign currency kind of fell and I noticed the economic downfall. Did you ask me what I heard?

TA: Yeah, just things that you were hearing, noticing, picking up on during this time.

TP: Yeah I would say the economic downfall would be something very significant. And other than that, you know obviously how many COVID patients they found every day, how many died—which was obviously very traumatic.

TA: And how do you think the COVID situation in the country has changed over time?

TP: I would say it's much better. We still wear our masks and all, but there's no restrictions, they don't cancel events like before, they have school for the children as usual. But, I mean, the economy is still suffering because of the fall in tourism and all that. So yeah I would say we're recovering, but when it comes to the economy I think it's really a slow recovery, and I don't know when we'll be able to see it being stable again.

TA: How do you think things now compare to how they were before, in the beginning?

TP: Again, in terms of health, I think it's almost there. It's almost fully recovered. But there's really a prominent change in the economy—the prices have risen, there's no foreign currency, and the tourism still hasn't risen yet. And now the unstable political environment is also kind of further not helping the economy to recover kind of. I think that's the main reason Sri Lanka's almost bankrupt, which is really bad, yeah.

TA: And were you able to access a vaccine?

TP: Yeah, yeah. They had a really good system when it came to the vaccine, and everyone was able to get it. The only thing is they got a bit late to vaccinate the kids under twelve, but other than that they did a really good job in vaccinating the citizens.

TA: When you got your vaccine, where did you get it and when?

TP: So I got it from the Army hospitals in Colombo, and I got my first dose in June last year. And yeah, that's when the people under twenty were given the vaccines.

TA: Do you remember which brand of vaccine it was?

TP: Yeah, I got Pfizer.

TA: Oh, so did I. What do you think the successes and failures of the country's response to COVID were?

TP: In terms of containing the virus, I think that was successful. But when it came to managing the economy along with the virus and somehow helping it survive, I think they failed. To be fair, I don't think there's much they could've done, because the country's export is tourism. So when you close down a country, the tourists can't come, so I don't think there's any other way to replace that. But I don't think they did a great job in terms of managing the economy, yeah.

TA: And how do you believe the pandemic impacted your education?

TP: Well, everything was done online. So when it came to maybe the practicals for science students, they probably couldn't do them. It wasn't as interactive as physical classes, but it wasn't too bad for me considering what everyone else in the country went through. I've heard so many stories about kids not having the devices, WiFi, or the money to afford whatever they need for online education. I've literally heard people saying that children used to, you know, go out and stay on some rock where there's connection and do their classes. So it wasn't really fair I would say when it came to the rural areas. And they really lost out on their education—maybe two years of their education.

TA: And do you feel that you learned something about the country and its healthcare system through COVID?

TP: Yes, so most of the controlling and the hospitals, most of it was done by the Army. So I was actually impressed about how quickly they could build new facilities and provide people with the basic needs. But at the same time, I never knew that Sri Lanka was about to face this kind of economic situation, and that was I think clearly brought up because of the pandemic. That's something I didn't see coming. But other than that, yeah, in terms of health and healthcare, Sri Lanka's in a really good state I would say in terms of controlling any health issues.

TA: And then, just to talk about yourself a little bit, so you're taking a gap year right now?

TP: Yeah.

TA: Why was it that you chose to take a gap year?

TP: One reason was that when I had to decide, COVID was at its highest and we just got to hear that so many people were dying and getting infected around the world. And since I'm planning on moving to the UK, my parents weren't really—they weren't sure of my safety. But other than that, I actually worked for a few months. I thought it would be great to get some work experience before going to college. Um yeah, that would be the main reason.

TA: Where were you working?

TP: Oh, at this company—this investment company called Acuity Partners. They help investors invest in bonds, the share market, and yeah, venture capital. It's a venture capital firm, yeah.

TA: Is economics something that you'd like to study?

TP: Yeah, yeah.

TA: And has the pandemic affected your future plans in any other way besides taking a gap year?

TP: Not really. The gap year is quite significant, I would say. I would probably be done with the first year of college by now. In terms of tuition fees, it has risen by almost one third because of the inflation and the depreciation of the currency and all that, which I think was related to the

pandemic because they had to close down the country and all. But other than that, not really I would say.

TA: Is there anything else you would like to add that hasn't been mentioned yet?

TP: So you wanted to talk about health disparities right? Caused by the pandemic? So I was actually thinking yesterday of what I should mention and I thought that how infrastructure, consumables, and manpower—most of those things which were already invested in healthcare was used to treat COVID-19 and how that affected, and the other diseases, and whatever health issues. So for example we had a shortage of ICU beds, that kind of stuff. Infrastructure. So they had to build semi-permanent COVID-19 centers and that kind of thing. So the limited number of resources really affected the situation, yeah.

TA: Those were all my questions, thank you so so much.

TP: I was glad to help you.