

## Book Review

# 'Till We Win' Is a Health Systems Book for Every Serious Public Health Specialist and Epidemiologist

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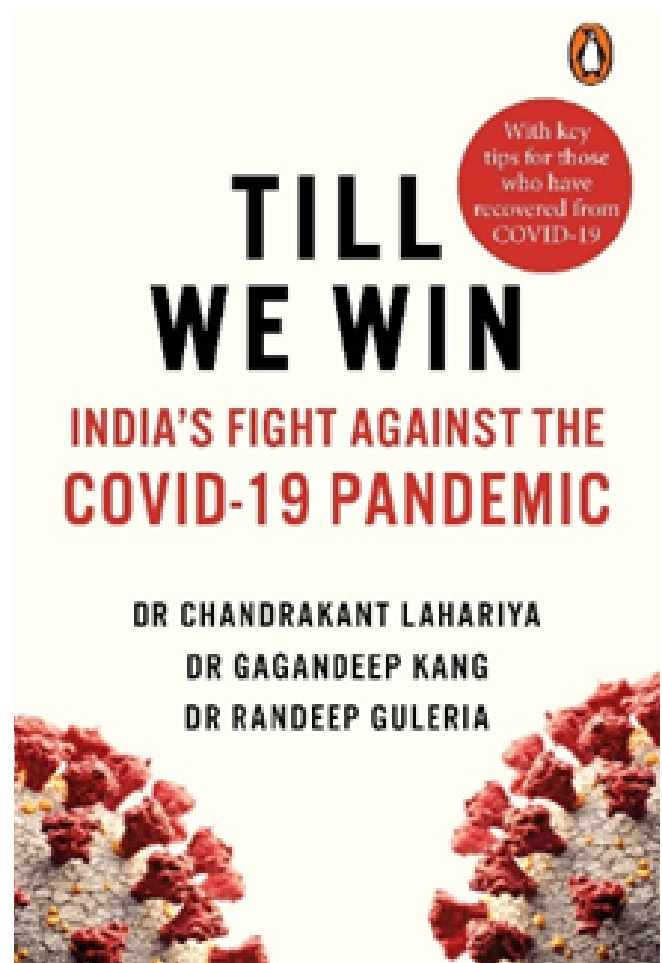
The unexpected onslaught of COVID-19 has blurred our vision and lives. It has given us a devastating yet focused perspective - one that is centered on 'survival'. The viral contagion is ravaging economies, people, and most importantly livelihoods. At this point in time, it appears that no one can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

In the present crisis of COVID-19, there is an abundance of information on pandemics, epidemiology, vaccines, ventilators, antibodies, Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR), antivirals, and health systems - most of which is not well reported or understood. In such a time of incomplete information, misinformation, disinformation, and selective information, *Till We Win* provides accurate information and a detailed scientific analysis on India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The authors are experts who have worked at the heart of the country's COVID-19 response. They have a thorough understanding of how health systems and policies work, especially during pandemics and epidemics, in India. The beauty of this book lies in its simplicity in spite of very thorough analyses. It can be easily understood even by a common man without any background in medicine or health sciences.

In this book, the authors talk about the fulcrums of epidemic and pandemic responses, arguing that both understanding and evidence based approaches are equally important. This rightly emphasizes the importance of 'descriptive epidemiology', 'analytical epidemiology', and 'preventive and social medicine'. The authors argue that, in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the excessive attention on hospital beds and ventilators clearly indicates that it is often clinical medicine that is equated with healthcare.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in my opinion (the author of this book review), the policymakers and government agencies did not choose their teams carefully. The country's response team had experts, dominated from the disciplines such as cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, gastroenterology,



### About Book

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orthopaedics, neonatology, and not from the disciplines of public health, epidemiology, or behavioral sciences. These are specialized areas. Asking cardiologists to help with policies on public health is like asking fish to win a race on the ground. Don't get me wrong! Fish are excellent swimmers. But in running a race on the ground, you don't choose a fish. You choose a rabbit! In reality, public health, preventive medicine, and social medicine are equally useful, if not more, in pandemic responses and more importantly in daily health services.

The book also talks about "The Triangle That Moves the Mountain", which is a popular phrase in health policy circles in Thailand. This model has been time and again used in many public health success stories of the world, as in the case of Smallpox – one of the world's deadliest diseases, and in the case of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) - which according to the World Health Organization (WHO) is the single most important cause of totally preventable mental retardation. The mountain here refers to any big or difficult problem - be it Smallpox, Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD), or the current COVID-19 pandemic. The vertices of the triangle refer to the 'Three S'. Scientists (health experts representing disciplines of public health, epidemiology, behavioral sciences, and management experts), Society (and their elected representatives), and Statesmanship (political leaders who think of the next generation, rather than next election or next bi-elections!!!).

Till We Win explains the intricacies of how each of the vertices contributed in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors very rightly praised the health experts and frontline workers as 'Heroes Without Capes', the policy makers and governments for their evolving 'understanding and evidence' based actions, and most importantly the general public for their efforts towards reducing community spread. With examples and success stories, the authors show that by working together, the triangle has the power to move even the unsurmountable mountain of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To top it all, the inclusion of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in the book is a stroke of absolute genius. In a disease caused by a virus that is still not very well understood, the readers are bound to have many questions as they understand the pandemic better. Inclusion of FAQs after the most important sections on Drugs, Therapies, Vaccines, and The Way Forward is, in my honest opinion, an amazing idea! What an idea Sirjee!!

The key takeaway is that we need to constantly keep learning and improving to get through the COVID-19 pandemic, and any such emergencies in the future. The book states "For India to be truly Antmanirbhar (self-reliant), there has to be investment in research and frugal innovation." The fact that we, as a country, need to be united, ever-evolving,

and "Antmanirbhar" to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and be better prepared for future such health emergencies cannot be more rightly and strongly put than as done by the authors.