



A virus teaches to care for everyone

*Bholu and Sheenu learn about
stigma and discrimination
during the COVID-19 Pandemic*



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"A Virus Teaches to Care for Everyone" developed and designed by New Concept Centre for Development Communication in partnership with UNICEF.

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Bholu and Sheenu are two good friends, who live in Khushinagar. They go to the same school, share toys and books, and play together in a park near their home. All of this changed one day. Their family members spoke about a 'Corona virus' and the disease it caused. Everybody appeared anxious. Bholu and Sheenu were asked to stay indoors all day. They could not go to school or even go out to play.

One evening when Bholu got tired of being inside, he went to the terrace to watch the birds and squirrels hiding and playing on the branches of the trees. He saw the park, which was empty now, and seemed to miss the children too. How he wished, he could play with Sheenu again!



He glanced at her house in the distance, and there she was on the terrace of her house! He waved at her and Sheenu waved back.



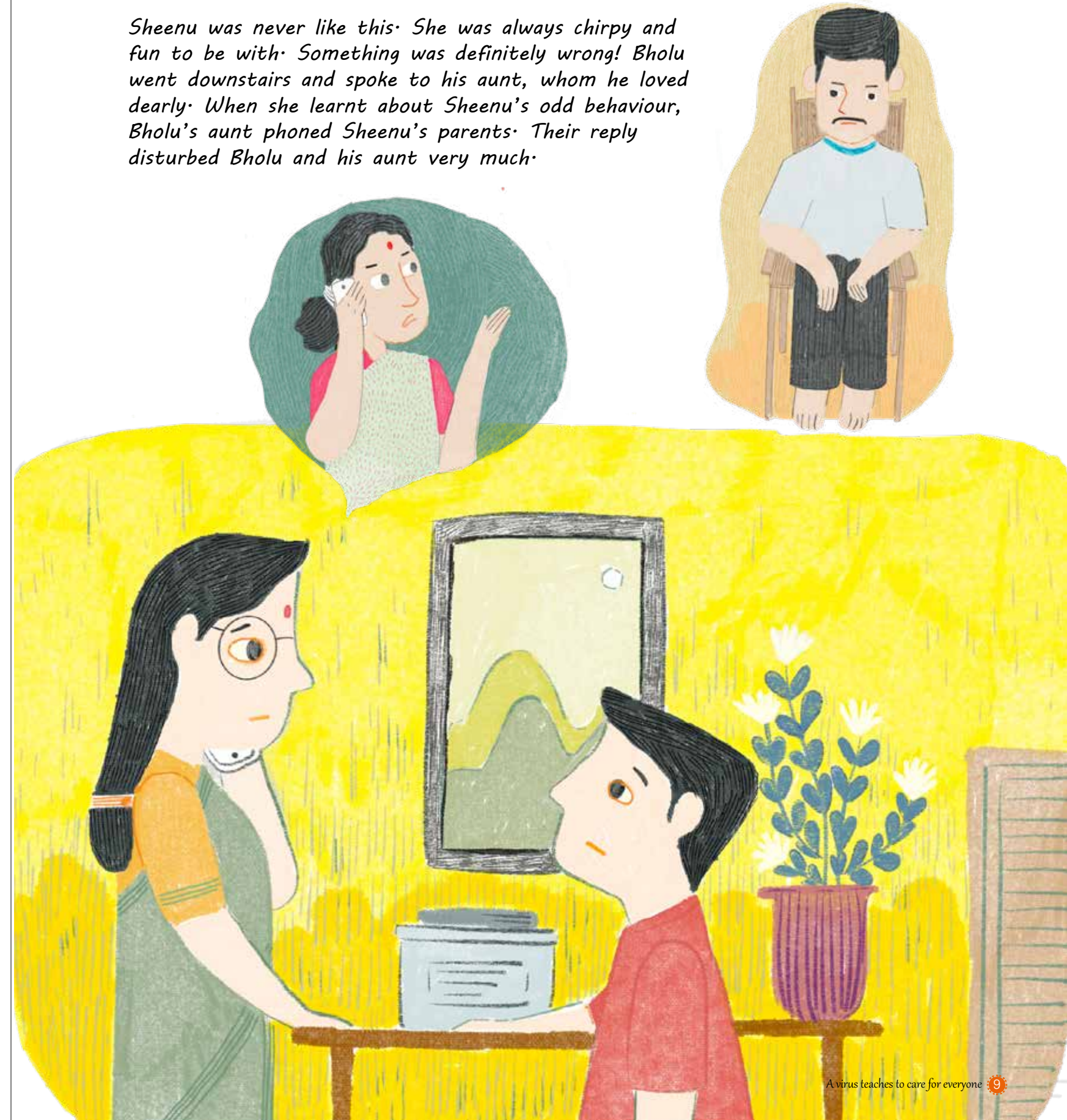
Though it was not the same as playing together, every evening Bholu and Sheenu went to the terrace. They would greet each other and later play with their toys by themselves. This went on for some days.





One day, Bholu noted that Sheenu did not come to the terrace. She stopped coming for a few days. Bholu wondered why. Then one evening, Bholu saw her again on her terrace. He waved at his friend and called her, but Sheenu did not even look up. She was sitting quietly, thinking about something, and later went down to her room.

Sheenu was never like this. She was always chirpy and fun to be with. Something was definitely wrong! Bholu went downstairs and spoke to his aunt, whom he loved dearly. When she learnt about Sheenu's odd behaviour, Bholu's aunt phoned Sheenu's parents. Their reply disturbed Bholu and his aunt very much.



Sheenu's parents told her the situation in a locality close by, where Sheenu's uncle lived, had upset them all. Sheenu's uncle had contracted COVID-19 caused by the Corona virus. He wasn't aware initially. He had possibly touched some contaminated surface and the virus entered his body by inhalation of contaminated droplets, through nose or mouth, or by touching his face with his hands.



As in other cases, Sheenu's uncle did not show any symptoms in the beginning. The virus silently grows in numbers and then the symptoms become visible - the person starts coughing, becomes feverish and in extreme cases even breathing becomes difficult.



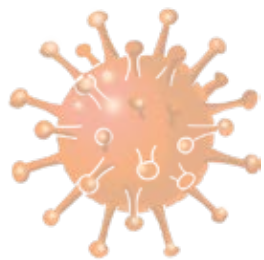
Sheenu's uncle too started feeling feverish and started coughing, and he immediately isolated himself in a room in his own house. This meant his own family members could not meet him and he had his meals separately in his room, and washed his own plates and clothes.



It was only when he started finding it difficult to breathe that his family took him to a local hospital where they tested him.



The report showed that he had the Corona virus and they started his treatment immediately. Sheenu's uncle's family and their contacts were also asked to immediately quarantine themselves for a certain period. This meant they could not move out for anything. They had to stay in their homes, not meet anyone and not allow anyone inside their home during this period. They were tested for the virus in the beginning and also after their isolation period was over. Thankfully, no one in Sheenu's uncle's family or their contacts had got the virus.



Sheenu's uncle too recovered after his treatment and he came back home from the hospital. However, their happiness was short-lived. People started distancing themselves from the family. Their neighbours shut their doors if they saw them. They learnt that people gossiped about them and blamed them for bringing the virus into the neighbourhood. One day Sheenu's uncle went out to buy some items from a shop near their home. To his surprise the shopkeeper that he had known for many years, refused to serve him and told him not to come to his shop again.





This incident greatly disturbed Sheenu's uncle and his family. When Sheenu learnt about it, she was very upset. The Corona virus had already caused trouble for everyone and, as if that wasn't bad enough, the way in which people turned against the family, hurt them a lot.

Bholu was very sad after he learnt this and angry with the people living in Sheenu's uncle's neighbourhood. Bholu's aunt calmed him down and explained that the people of the neighbourhood were unaware and fearful about the Corona virus. Therefore, they were reacting the way they did. Bholu calmed down a little, but he told her he was still worried about his friend and her family members. His aunt smiled and told him that he need not worry and she will set things right. This made Bholu happy, since he knew his aunt could do that. She was the principal of a local school and was known in the town due to her good work. Bholu was proud that the local community respected her and knew her.





Early next morning, Bholu's aunt set off for Sheenu's uncle's neighbourhood wearing her face mask. The local people knew her well and maintaining a distance, because of the Corona virus rules, followed her to Sheenu's uncle's house, where she started talking with the neighbours.

As the conversation went on, Bholu's aunt told the neighbours, "You must first understand that no one really wants to be infected, or for a disease to affect them. In addition, we should realise the Corona virus can infect anyone."



She further pointed out,

The virus can be passed on to others unknowingly, from a person who has the Corona virus. When this person sneezes or touches any surface, very small droplets carrying the virus move and fall on surfaces nearby. When others touch that surface later and touch their face, nose or eyes, the virus enters their body, infecting them.

When a person gets treated at a hospital, he or she is tested properly for the Corona virus at the end of their treatment. They are only allowed to go home if the virus is no longer present in their body. At this point there's no difference between them and any other person who does not have the disease. Hence, we shouldn't be afraid of them or about meeting them after their treatment is complete.

Bholu's aunt then said, "When we treat such people, who have recovered, badly and discriminate against them, we create a difficult situation for them and everyone else. Do you know what will happen then?"

The neighbours did not say anything, so Bholu's aunt continued. She said,



If people find their neighbours treating such people badly, anyone with the symptoms of the same disease will try to hide this from others and refuse to get tested and treated. If everybody does this, we will never know who has the disease. This will spread the virus quickly in the neighbourhood.

The neighbours nodded their head in agreement, as they listened to her. Bholu's aunt then continued,

Our fight is against the Corona virus. On one side is the virus, and on the other, is all humanity. When I say all humanity, I really mean everyone – people from different countries, races and religions. Everyone faces a danger from this virus and that's why all nations have come together to find a way to get rid of it and to find a cure.

The people of the locality quickly understood what Bholu's aunt was trying to tell them. They felt what they had done was not right. Sheenu's uncle's neighbour started crying. He exclaimed, "We have made a big mistake! Uncle and his family have always helped us, whenever we were in trouble. Now, when they needed our support the most, we treated them so badly. He turned towards uncle's family and requested, "Please forgive us!"

The other neighbours too joined him and asked the family to forgive them. They all thanked Bholu's aunt for making them aware.





Bholu learnt from his aunt about it, after she came home. Sheenu too heard about it from her parents and later when she spoke to Bholu over the phone, she sounded very excited. Sheenu told Bholu,



Your aunt is really wonderful! She is a superstar!

Bholu's aunt smiled when Bholu informed her later.



A few days later, after their dinner, everyone was chatting at Bholu's home, when the doorbell rang. They wondered who it might be at this hour. When they opened the door, they found a lady wearing a mask standing outside. When the lady pulled her mask down they were surprised that it was Simran aunty!



Simran aunty was Bholu's aunt's good friend. She was from a town close-by and worked as a nurse at a hospital in Khushinagar. Simran aunty had taken a room on rent in Khushinagar. They asked her why she was out so late. Simran aunty replied sadly,

I came back from duty, as usual, this night. However, the house-owner stopped me from going to my room. Another person warned me and asked me to go away. I pleaded with them and asked them where I could go so late at night. However, they did not listen to me, so I came to your house

Bholu's family members told her not to worry. Bholu's aunt said she will talk to the house-owner the next day. Simran aunty stayed with them for the night.



Simran aunty was a very kind lady. Bholu liked her and she was fond of Bholu too. Whenever she came to their house, she would bring lots of sweets for Bholu and played chess with him. That's how Bholu had learnt to play chess. During Bholu's last birthday, she came with lots of sweets and sang a special song for him. Bholu was very angry to see her so disturbed.

He had seen on TV that many doctors, nurses, sanitation workers, police and other 'Heros' helping society from the Corona virus, were being treated badly. He knew that such people could be punished under the law. Bholu wanted his family to call the police and complain against Simran aunty's house-owner. Bholu's aunt calmed him down and told him that he shouldn't worry and everything would be fine.



Next day, Bholu's aunt, Simran aunty and a few others wore their masks and went to meet Simran aunty's house-owner, keeping a distance between them. At first, Bholu's aunt scolded the house-owner for his behaviour and then calmly explained why he was wrong. Bholu's aunt explained,

People like Simran are helping society by treating patients who have the Corona virus. Doctors, nurses, sweepers, the police and so many others are doing their duty, even when they could catch the virus. No wonder they are all called 'Corona Heros'. People are praising them and showing their respect by lighting lamps, and beating drums and thalis. You should be proud that you are hosting one such warrior. Instead you troubled her so much. Is that right?



She continued,

Are you aware that one can be punished by the law for troubling these Corona Heros and for stopping them from doing their duty? Simran aunty could have simply called the police last night and they would have come here to question you. It's because of her kind nature she did no such thing and simply walked away at that late hour.

The house-owner realised his mistake and asked Bholu's aunt to forgive him. Bholu's aunt told him he should seek forgiveness from Simran aunty instead. To this, Simran aunty told the house-owner,

