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IMPACT OF NOVEL CORONA PANDEMIC ON HUMAN LIFE AND SOCIETY: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A tiny RNA loaded, spiked, spherical microbe created history in infecting and causing death to human beings on the planet earth in such a large number that cannot be erased from the memory. The lethal virus called COVID-19 (Novel coronavirus "SARS-CoV-2) is a natural, accidental or engineered is the matter of investigation, but it has pushed the world into problems affecting almost everything in the society of all nations, be it a superpower or lesser power, developed or under-developed. Considering the tremendous global spread of the virus and virulence, the W.H.O. declared COVID-19 as Pandemic and issued guidelines to be followed by the government and people. WHO confirmed on 12th January 2020; that a novel coronavirus was the cause of a respiratory illness in a cluster of people in Wuhan City, Hubei, China, which was reported to the WHO on 31st December 2019. The first case of Corona in India was reported on 30th January 2020 from Kerala and the person had a travel history of Wuhan, China. The prevailing pandemic conditions were carefully observed, various reports appearing in research journals, newspapers, TV channels were studied and the effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on human society were analyzed with reference to Education, Environment, Dharma, Socio- Economic condition, Psychology, Behavioral changes, and Management.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, SARS, Coronavirus, Pandemic, Wuhan, WHO, Social Marketing, Good Social Practices, Gaia

The 'cognitive revolution' sparked the beginning of history and culture of civilization of man about seventy thousand years ago. Further development of human civilization was shaped by Agricultural and Scientific Revolutions about twelve thousand years and five hundred years respectively. Harari (2011) envisioned that these three revolutions may end the history and start something completely different. Our present, revealed humans moving beyond the boundaries of our home planet and also putting fingertips on digitally controlled tabs of nuclear warheads for mass destruction. This is so, because it is now the intelligent design rather than natural selection which is shaping the organisms (Harari; 2011). The prophetic plan of Dr. Kalam 'India 2020' was a vision of the country for the new millennium, which set the targets for India to become a developed country to meet the challenges of guns, germs and steel also created mental waves after observing the events of the fateful year 2020 till now (Kalam and Rajan; 1998). Novel Corona Virus Pandemic resulted in unexpected but almost complete overhaul of the world. The COVID-19 Pandemic played a big role in global power politics and diplomacy. The super powers polarized against China from where this monstrous microbe spread across the world. The present day prevailing conditions were

unthinkable prior to Corona pandemic. The changes were conspicuous throughout the world. The significant observations noticed during few months of Pandemic have been recorded and presented briefly in the paper.

METHODOLOGY AND OBSERVATIONS

The significant effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on human beings and our society, based on personal observations of authors as well as on research papers, reports published in news papers, TV channels etc. were studied, analyzed, compiled and described briefly below:

Covid-19 Nature's Homeostasis System

The living world experienced many positive changes during 'Covid-19 Pandemic' lockdown. The scientists have already warned earlier that if emission of 'Green House' gases is not reduced by 2020, the earth will be transformed into a difficult place to live. Surprisingly, the ozone hole over Arctic was filled up. The sky, air and water on the earth were found to be pollution free. As per one estimate, pollution level reduced by 40%. Global Carbon Project reported 5% less Carbon emission this year. Between March 2020 and April 2020 one has seen the environment and nature almost comparable to the level observed about 100 years

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ago. Globally, due to lockdown the flights were cut by 71%; traffic on the roads of Britain reduced to 37%. The World Health Organization estimated that about 70 lakh people die due to air pollution every year. According to International Climate Research, there was 30% cut in air pollution in February, 2020. Even at this level of pollution, 50,000 to 100,000 lives could be saved. After decades, India could observe a clear sky. Although, stress of Corona is widespread; but the earth is breathing fresh air.

The ecological theory given by James Lovelock (1972) commonly known as 'GAIA' theory proposes that living organisms interact their inorganic surroundings on earth to form a synergistic and self-regulating, complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the conditions for life on earth. It seems probable that COVID-19 Pandemic is 'GAIA' giving us warning to maintain equilibrium with nature and also proved the fragile nature of the human life.

Universalization of Online Neo-Education System

Education is a system of knowledge generation and application for the welfare of mankind in harmony with nature. Covid-19 pandemic has knocked down the education system across the world. Classes and instructions have switched over to online mode of teaching, of course with mixed enthusiasm, both in India as well as other countries. However, Indian education system showed heterogeneous response to the pandemic with regard to the variable quality of staff, diverse types of subjects and rural versus urban infrastructure. It is because of diversity in institutions of higher education – private and government colleges, research institutes, professional colleges, state and central universities. There are several issues for consideration before adopting any change in the education system, such as loss of session, pattern of examination, availability of pedagogic material, entrance procedure, fee structure, bank loan to students, infrastructure at institutional level as well as to individual student. How the academic research will resume is again very crucial issue?

It is very clear that technology will play a bigger role in education from now onwards. The online higher education using MOOCs (Massive Open Online Classrooms), NPTEL (National Programme on Technology), SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), SWYAMPURABHA, GYANVANI, DOORDARSHAN, National Depository E-VIDYA, E-ACHARYA,

SAKSHHAT, E-VIDWAN, etc. have been encouraged. However, the quality and quantity of online courses need to be improved. It is proper time to re-imagine higher education in India. Blended modes of education will be unavoidable; online instructions where possible and limited contact for laboratory instructions and individual mentoring. The Covid-19 Pandemic has the potential to change the perception of education because it has so far been directed more towards acquiring degrees and less about learning.

The government is trying its best to safeguard the career prospects of student, dispel parent's worries about their ward's future etc. In order to meet the social and psychological issues of students, a web portal 'MANODARPAN' has been launched by the government. The Centre is preparing guidelines on digital education, including cyber-security.

Health Care and Medical Facilities

The current health pandemic has exposed India's inadequate health facilities and governmental responsibilities; of course such crisis was unexpected. The sum total of health care expenditure of States and Centre is 1.5% of GDP which is far less than that of America.

The general non-COVID patients found it difficult to find a suitable doctor for timely treatment. It was embarrassing and painful situation which must be addressed with sincerity.

Downtrends in Economy

A nation is considered developed on the basis of at least three parameters (i) the wealth of the nation (ii) the prosperity of its people and (iii) its standing in international forum. Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Foreign Exchange Reserves, Per Capita Income etc. The extreme national lockdown has badly affected India's economy, though it has influenced almost all countries of the world. Due to diversion of funds towards treatment of COVID-19 patients and slowdown of economy, resulted in many side effects during Pandemic such as loss of jobs, no fresh jobs, low GDP etc. India is facing total financial burden, because of closure of industries, offices, schools, colleges, institutions (recently unlocking steps are being taken by the government cautiously), to meet economic challenges under current Pandemic conditions.

The Covid-19 Pandemic presented policy makers with unenviable task of sustaining employment

amidst lockdown and the model policy may be workable to meet any such disaster in future too.

Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector in India suffered the most, because the harvest season met the lockdown. The agricultural products could not be harvested, stored properly and transported to the market. Since, there was no circulation of money laborers were unpaid and started migrating to their home towns or villages carrying germs from affected areas, thus, led to spreading the disease elsewhere.

Sports

The pandemic led to postponement of several national, international events, for example, Tokyo Olympic Games have been postponed. Some games are being played without any spectator in stadium.

Loss to Airways, Railways, Road Transport, Tourism and Hospitality Sector

Very limited Airlines were operational causing huge loss to them as well as inconvenience to the people in future. Railways and Road transportation were not allowed during COVID-19 Pandemic. In case of any urgency people were allowed to move with government permission. The tourism, catering, hotels and hospitality business have almost come to standstill.

Corona Funds

People donated generously to the government. Many National and International companies have diverted their CSR (corporate social responsibility) fund of 2% of their profit to Corona fund nationwide. This will result in suspension of other social activities aimed at socio-economic uplifting of the needy people of society in the country.

Fear Psychosis

The COVID-19 Viral disease has created a fear psychosis throughout the world especially in children and aged people and is suffering from various psychological stresses due to Pandemic. The slogan 'Stay Home Stay Safe' is good but occasionally creating depression among general public as they cannot go out and move freely.

Necessity of Lockdown

Lockdown is a measure for buying time for the preparation to fight with COVID 19 by breaking the chain of infection cycle. Because, it was feared that once unlocking is announced, people may not take things

seriously and which may lead to spread of infection. This we are witnessing now, compelling governments to go for localized lockdowns in most of the areas of India.

'Dharma' Reinvented

Most interestingly due to Pandemic, Gods and Goddesses have been relegated to the background, religious places of worships are virtually closed, online worship and prayers have begun. Worship from home is the trend of the day. The COVID-19 Pandemic has modified or changed the concept of Dharma and presented the real meaning which probably people would not like to accept or even listen in pre-pandemic time. 'DHARMA' the prime mover of life cannot be ceased, because it is universal and continuous process. Time has come to understand the essence of 'DHARMA'; and follow its applied or functional values. The present prophet Sri Sri Thakur defines 'DHARMA' and 'RELIGION' as "To uphold one's own life and growth with that of others is 'DHARMA' and to bind oneself with Love-Lord through sacred devoutness and follow 'Him' accordingly is religion" (The Message; Volume IX).

Social Marketing

The Pandemic period witnessed some social marketing phenomena in India and abroad. A well planned social marketing campaign can effectively help contain COVID-19 Pandemic and also prepares societies to face the present day crisis and also future disease outbreaks. Besides good policy decisions and medical assistance and advice, it also needs continued compliance with the prescribed behavioural changes or good social practices even if it goes against social and cultural conventions. This, in fact, helps both the target audience as well as society. The 'Good Social Practices' may be beneficial in the areas of public health, safety and environmental concerns. One recent example was the appeal of Prime Minister to applaud 'Corona Warriors' on 'Janta Curfew Day'. The concept behind this act was to create awareness about the disease and also pay respect and gratitude to those who are serving people during Pandemic. However, doing it once will not make people sensible, so the urge to execute this 'good social practice' should be periodically rekindled. In this way people in general are sensitized towards the real problem and become prepared to face the challenge.

Similarly, if people of India in general are made to believe since childhood that they are born to work for the welfare of the country and its people, then surely,

people will work hard to make our country strong and developed (Kalam and Rajan;1998). Thus the science of social marketing based on established marketing principles and behaviour change theory may be used to influence people's behaviour for the benefit of both the people themselves and society as well.

Other Effects

Some other noticeable effects were also observed:-

- i. New emergent economic policies were declared and adopted by the government to face the COVID-19 Pandemic, migrant labour, food security etc.
- ii. Saving foreign exchange reserve due to less import of oils (petrol, diesel, crude oil).
- iii. Decrease in the rate of accidents on roads due to lesser movement of motor vehicles.
- iv. Reduction in number of general crimes due to deployment of forces in society.
- v. The Pandemic has changed the lives of people. The fabrics of social relationship which were revered in pre-Corona period are now falling apart. Even at the death of (normal or COVID infected) kith and kin, people are trying to avoid and not coming forward to receive the dead body or attending rituals.
- vi. The people have valuable family time by remaining at home.
- vii. Mask, Swachhta (Cleanliness) and Sanitizer culture boomed.
- viii. The knowledge seekers of any age group, whether children, young or aged, started online courses of their interest, which they were not able to do due to paucity of time during pre-COVID-19 Pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The world has witnessed many fatal epidemics in the past out of which a few were declared by WHO as pandemics. COVID-19 has hit economies, stranded people, destabilized education, work and travel and even cut short people's life. Now, the people have learnt from COVID-19 Pandemic is that people, places and non-human component are connected. This fact was ignored in the past in most spheres, including economic landscapes, food systems and pedagogies. The government must avoid the policies based on the concept of "growth at any cost" since such policies will ultimately

fail because all goods used in any economy arise from natural world.

The destruction of habitats, forests, diversified food system for urbanization, mining and industry means pathogens which were confined to animals and plants in the wild have found an easy access to infect human beings and spark epidemic or pandemic. Now, mankind should be ever ready to check the occurrence of such lethal events.

Lockdown is a preventive measure for any society; it is not the curative measure. Still we don't know much about this deadly virus and every day the global scientific community are trying to unravel the exact origin, mechanism of transmission, action and symptoms of this COVID-19 virus in humans for better prognosis, prophylaxis, diagnosis and treatment. Until recently, the transmission of COVID-19 virus was through contact with respiratory droplets (aerosol generated while coughing, sneezing, saliva and surface) having the viral load but now it is being conjectured that it may be air-borne and can be transmitted through air (WHO Report; 9th July 2020); and if it is true, it will be a challenge to contain the spread of COVID-19; till we find a cure. Medical awareness and facilities should be improved at all levels with full dedication and more budgetary allocation.

People should work together following 'good social practices' to save lives and to put local and global economies back on track. The long term well planned economic policies are needed to protect people, environment, society, health, education, industry, economy, transport, defense to meet the challenges of pandemic in future. Let us beware of overexploitation of Nature. Is COVID-19 Pandemic poses before us as a 'GAIA'?

At present, India is passing through a hazardous and extremely challenging moment in its history. It is how India emerges from the current critical phase will shape not only India's destiny but also of the world.

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