



CORONA

THE CHALLENGE AND



Edited by DEEPA PADHI

CORONA PANDEMIC

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Corona Musings

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For the last six months the world has been held in ransom by a miniscule microbe, a 360-degree virus named novel Corona Virus or COVID-19 that has encircled the globe within its killing fields and shaken the very foundations of modern human existence. An invisible enemy whose origin is yet to receive final attribution, this virus has exhibited a horizontal trajectory, fanning without geographical discrimination through countries and cultures, as well as a vertical trajectory, cutting through layers of social class and rigid hierarchies. With 12,213,090 cases, 5,57,405 deaths across 196 countries around the world as on 10 July 2020, this virus has assumed pandemic proportions and exposed the fragility and vulnerability of the human race even as humans use the most modern technologies to explore habitable spots in faraway stars and planets.

As the world grappled with the initial shock of the pandemic, experts and leaders went into throwback mode to prehistoric times when our cavemen simply locked themselves inside their caves to tide over periods of natural disasters, health calamities and onslaughts by intruders. Pandemics in periods of recorded history like plagues, flus, cholera, measles and the more recent AIDS, Ebola, SARS etc, either always ended with the finding of an effective vaccine, or through measures like isolation, testing and treatment of the affected persons, or, through herd immunity. In case of the present COVID-19 pandemic, without a cure or preventive (vaccine) in sight, world leaders and global health organisations have fallen back on traditional epidemic control measures like isolation, sanitisation, social distancing,

lockdown, shutdown and use of face masks to mitigate the spread of infections.

With the virus creating mayhem in China, United States of America and Italy, the Government of India took swift and decisive action to bring the country under lockdown from the third week of March. This was indeed the game changer in keeping the numbers under control. The lockdown period was used to realign, reinforce and create medical logistics and facilities in order to competently manage the community transmission phase of the pandemic which was inevitable in the foreseeable future. This period was also used to educate and influence a stunned citizenry that was clueless about implications of the lockdown or about the real killer potential of the virus. Our homes became our caves that cocooned us from this seemingly indefatigable virus that was mercilessly searing through any lapse and gap that it found. Lockdown was the only solution.

In the first stillness of lockdown, denizens of the wilderness seemed to take over our urban habitats. Birdsong was louder and happier, deer and civets night-walked through our streets, rivers slowly began to shine like glass and Himalayan peaks glittered through hazeless blue skies. It was as if these innocent co-sharers of planet Earth were holding up a mirror to humankind, reflecting the serious transgressions of humanity over centuries, an affirmation that the human species had exceeded its brief in the scheme of interconnectedness of creation.

The lockdown, however, strangled people, societies and economies in ways never seen before in recent history. A pre-pandemic globalised world that was defined by ease and speed of communication and transport was suddenly rendered immobile, causing disruptions at multiple levels. Economies were brutalised, social connections severed instantaneously. Leaderships rose to the occasion but then some of the most powerful of them also floundered. While the palpable threat forced people to acquiesce to the "new-normal", there were aberrations that led to escalating numbers of positive cases. Businesses came to a standstill as a public health emergency held centre stage across all affected nations.

With infections multiplying all over the world, what has come to the spotlight is the inspiring spirit of service to humanity. Frontline

Corona warriors like doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, sanitisation workers, police personnel, administrators, government machinery, cemetery managers, pharmacies, basic service providers, shop owners, journalists and photographers, etc. have displayed exemplary grit and sacrifice as they risk their lives to treat and manage patients spilling out of hospitals, as well as, effect smooth implementation of lockdown regulations. Many frontline heroes have lost their lives as they fought to save the lives of patients. As infections and tragedies continue to be on the rise, efforts are being fast-tracked across research labs in several countries towards finding that elusive COVID-19 vaccine, even as frontline heroes are constantly and deservedly being honoured and feted by grateful world communities.

After the initial discomfiture owing to restrictive lifestyles, and the looming uncertainty over how long the situation would continue, people mostly realised that they had to move on as their very survival was threatened. “New-normal” became the global catchword as businesses rewired themselves and adapted to work-from-home strategies. Online meetings, online classes and webinars enabled requisite interfacing, and within the “new normal”, there was a sense of movement towards the normal once again. COVID-19 is here to stay, so say experts, and it’s not the only virus threatening humanity. There could be many more on the way. Therefore, the world has to learn to adapt to the new conditions and live with it, coping with the “new normal” as best as it can.

Wisdom lies in finding opportunities in adversities. The lockdown, while being restrictive, threw up the most premium commodity—time. Caught up in fast-paced lifestyles, people had almost forgotten what it was like to spend leisurely moments at home. Family bonds had eroded because of the constant rush to meet deadlines, pin-up boards and WhatsApp messages were the modes of communication between family members. Locked down together at home lead to the unlocking of locked chapters. It facilitated precious and much needed reconnection between parents and children, between spouses and siblings. Elderly parents and grandparents, most often left alone at home, now started receiving attention, which was so needed as they belong to the vulnerable age group. With no house help, family roles

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were redefined. Members took it upon themselves to share the burden of running the household. Houses came back into being homes. Many hibernating talents came to the fore with cooking emerging as the most favourite pastime. A deep mental connectedness strongly emerged out of social distancing and physical distancing, with people now finding time to remember and reach out to extended family and friends, celebrating birthdays and anniversaries over phone, chats and online meetings.

People also learnt that they could live with less. Ostentatiousness flew out of the window with the realisation that one could do without many things previously considered as necessities. In the initial days of lockdown when shops and markets closed down, people realised the value of simple living and the sensibility of coping with whatever was available. They realised that many such exigencies in future could paralyse the world for indefinite time and hence, it was prudent to save resources. Frugality therefore has become the watchword for now and also for the future. It has to be back to the basics and to learn to live and work with less.

This was also a time to recalibrate our value systems, to ignite the collective consciousness towards empathy. There were many homeless who had no roof and walls to lock themselves in, which made them most vulnerable to the virus. There were many who could not store food and water to tide over the long lockdown. Six and a half crores migrant labour all over the country were the hardest hit, some of whom walked through three or four states to escape the harrowing shock of sudden loss of work and homelessness. As heartbreaking stories of the hapless were aired on television, empathetic individuals and social organisations came together to provide them with food, water, medication and transport. Governments ensured that these people were tested, isolated and treated, and the large percentage of ongoing patient recoveries is an indicator of the efficiency of systems and processes that had been put in place to tackle community transmission.

We are now in the critical opening-up phase. Experts say that while so far younger people have been testing positive and also recovering, now is the stage when more at-risk populations will begin to get

affected. As more and more youngsters return to the work space, many of them will become asymptomatic carriers of the virus and load it on to elderly and people suffering from illnesses. WHO and scientist communities warn that COVID-19 is here to stay, while the vaccine which is in early stages of human trials in multiple labs around the world, is not expected before at least a year. The latest update that the contagion is also airborne is making it deadlier.

The “new-normal” therefore must be the way of life, going forward. There cannot be any lapses in defined protocols even as we move towards reclaiming our world that had been temporarily denied to us. End-to-end sanitisation lies at the core of this discipline. Even the seemingly innocent act of ordering food online could have serious ramifications. Let homes be our safe havens unless it’s absolutely necessary to go out. Mental connections, online interfacing and work-from-home have to be the armoury until the arrival of the weapon of the vaccine. While leading our lives thus, let us constantly endeavour to open up our hearts and our resources to the less privileged as well as do our best to respect and **serve those who dare to serve us** in so many ways, ensuring our safety and comfort in these turbulent times. Let us be grateful for everything we have rather than focus on what we don’t. **Let’s look beyond our own difficulties and pains** and lend a helping hand to everyone who needs it, friend or foe. For those falling prey to despair, this is the time to convert pain into creativity, for in creativity lies hope. It is the obligation of those around clinically depressed persons to gently address their fears and lead them towards medical interventions if need be. Since the luxury of time is with us now, let us be with time, let us utilise this time to do all that we wanted to do for ourselves and for others, but could never do.

This is the time when leaders of the world must unite in their efforts to tackle this global pandemic, whether it is in the search for a vaccine or in the attempts to enforce behavioural changes in their people towards abiding by the codified existence in the “new normal”. Collective must rise over the individual in order to arrive at redeeming goalposts. Leaders will be assessed on how they handled this crisis: therefore, they must keep aside their parochial tendencies and join

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hands to wage this collective war against such biological threats, not only today but also in future. Organisations like WHO need to take a relook at their present systems and strategies, uphold the vision behind their establishment, and be more accountable for their actions.

There is no doubt that the Corona outbreak like previous virus outbreaks is an outcome of human interference in natural ecosystems. Zoonotic diseases emerge when pathogens cross over from animals to humans. By mindlessly invading wild landscapes to meet our ever-increasing greed projected as needs, we compel animals to move out of their habitats and shake viruses out of them which then find convenient new hosts in humans. These zoonotic diseases are a hidden cost of economic development, hitherto, ignored by policy makers and governments. The only way out is to adopt a socio-ecological approach to policy-making and ensure that this percolates down to all levels in order to create an **ecological consciousness**. Unless this paradigm shift prevails, the human race would be constantly fighting wars with viruses that could devastate the very foundations of our existence. Let us draw inspiration from our ancient seers who espoused harmonious coexistence with all forms of life on earth. Let us also adopt natural immunity-boosting methods like Yoga and Ayurveda which have been prescribed and practised by our wise ancients.

Whenever faced with fear, anxiety and uncertainties, people turn to God. All religions and most human beings accept the sovereign control of God, The Almighty, over the affairs of the world including those of the human race. Ever since Coronavirus started afflicting the human race globally, most of the human beings, individually or in groups, have been beseeching God emotionally and mournfully for deliverance from this life-threatening disease. Such emotional beseech, made in whichever language, is known as prayer. All of us possess this power of prayer gifted to us by God. Prayer is the easiest and the most potent path shown by God to connect with him in our times of happiness and sorrows. Therefore, let us pray to God when locked in our homes not only for ourselves and family but also for the Corona sufferers and those who are not in a position to pray due to physical and mental inabilities. Let us pray for those who are busy taking care of us at high

risk to their lives and have no time to pray. Since we cannot meet in temples or in gatherings for mass prayer, it is worth considering the observance of World Prayer Day online on one particular time and day in a year. However, countries can choose to observe more Prayer Days. Prayer builds inner strength in us and gives us a positive outlook to fight any vicissitude of life including the threat Corona—with heart within and God above,

Tamaso Maa Jyotirgamaya
Lead me from darkness to Light.

Dr. C. B. Satpathy is a saint poet, mystic, author, noted scholar and spiritual thinker. He is the pioneer of Shirdi Sai Movement in India and abroad. An officer of the Indian Police Service (IPS), he served the Government of India and his allotted cadre (UP) from where he superannuated in the rank of DG Police. He is the pioneer of the Shirdi Sai movement in India and abroad.



Dr. Satpathy was invited by the US House of Representatives, through the House of Chaplain, to open the US House of Representative session on 24th June 2015 as the Guest Chaplain, with a prayer.
