

CHAPTER-8

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: BOTH A BLESSING AND CURSE



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The novel Corona virus outbreak broke at Wuhan city in China, as we know, in late December 2019. Since then, it has been spreading its egregious wings all over the world. As the following response, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020. It later characterized it as a 'pandemic' on 11th March 2020. Ever since the outbreak of Corona virus, also called as COVID-19, there is a growing panic all across the globe. In order to contain the spread of the virus, many nations have adopted the social-distancing strategy. Consequently, most public airlines remain closed, shops and businesses shut down, borders sealed, etc.

In India, the first COVID-19 patient tested positive in Kerala, during the first week of February. The patient was a medical student who happened to return from Wuhan, China. Later, as the Corona Virus spread, reported cases and casualties became more severe across the world. Our Honorable PM, Narendra Modi, called for 'Janata Curfew' on 22nd

March and a following national lockdown for 21 days from 25th March-14th April 2020, which extended up to 31st May.

Covid-19 pandemic has been both a blessing and a curse for me as a daughter, teacher and Ph.D. scholar. As a daughter and a teacher, it is a gift because it was the first time in the last eight years; I have been home spending time with my family members for such a prolonged duration. The busyness of life drifted me away from home for such a long time, but the lockdown compelled me to remain home. I miss my father's presence badly, who died in 2015 due to throat cancer. Life at home was not the same as in my childhood. My mother has a high expectation from me now as I am no longer a child now. She expects me to get up early and do a few household chores. Yet, her love is still the same, and I love the thrilled and joy to see my mother's unchanging love for such a long period. I realized it more when I stayed with her during the lockdown. Living together is crucial to have

that humane connection. We tend to forget its importance due to the hustle-bustle life.

As a teacher, I learned many online tools to be used in the teaching-learning process. Online education has made it possible to access the best course from refuting institutions worldwide. However, as a Ph. D scholar, it has been a curse for me. It affected my Ph. D. research progress due to the educational institution's sudden closure. Therefore, this pandemic has affected every one of us in different ways. In general, it has also given me time to ponder upon a few lessons that we can learn from this new reality.

Freedom

The first and immediate lesson is to understand that we humans are innately relational. The novel corona virus is contagious and spreads through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The rate of the volatility of the virus is high if the people do not maintain physical distance. All of us have to take precautionary

measures, irrespective of religion, caste, race and creed.

In short, we can exercise freedom, but only within boundaries – which shows that freedom is also relational. We exercise freedom in relation to others. To put it simply, an individual is free only when they have a healthy relationship with others. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, late German Theologian and an anti-Nazi dissident, said:

“Freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other’, because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.”

Health is not private

The second lesson that comes to us loudly is that good healthcare must be accessible to all, and it isn't a private entity. India spends only a small 1.28% of its GDP (2017-18) for public healthcare, but our per capita expenditure has only seen a rising curve. Therefore, it is imperative to proactively work towards a well planned, robust healthcare

infrastructure, build human resources and affordable public health care facilities for all the citizens. It's high time the government realized the tremendous importance of public healthcare.

Meaning of life

Third, we need to think where our ultimate hopes lie. Both as a nation and as communities and individuals. What do we pin our hopes on – success? Wealth? Power?

You might have read that the princess of Spain died while battling the virus and Germany's finance minister committed suicide while helping people cope with the economic stress the virus has caused. Similarly, people have started taking refuge in all sorts of traditional and religious rituals to contain the spread of the pandemic. Can such steps protect us from the threat of the virus? Why are nations, which have the best of religious traditions, weapons, wealth, technology and information, still lost as much as, if not more, than others?

Isn't this the time to question our existential purpose? Where do we find the ultimate meaning of life?

Earth needs to rest

The fourth lesson that I could derive is that even our planet needs to rest. Our greed, desires, and wants continuously motivated by the competitive and capitalistic world have exploited our earth to an alarming extent. Maybe it's time for nature to clean herself. What stares at us are those fundamental questions: how human beings are supposed to conduct lives according to nature and how care is to be shown to the environment. How much is too much to consume?

Time is Precious

We live our lives as if we are going to live forever. Many of us have the habit of procrastinating our work. This pandemic reminded us that time is precious and vital—a job to be done in its given time. I started taking the importance of time more seriously when I read about the fatality rates worldwide. Covid-19 has taught us that all humans are equal, and a deadly

virus like this sees no boundaries nationally and socially. All of us are given the same 24hour time to make the best use of it, not to waste it.

Power of citizens

The fifth and final lesson that I could draw is the tremendous power of citizens. A society cannot be changed by the government's efforts alone, nor without our unity and cooperation. We see it right before our eyes. Shall we let this pandemic make us realize the real power of thoughtful and responsible citizens of a society and what we can accomplish?

I hope we all may have learnt our own lessons too. It taught us to care for those faces we had ignored for so long and keep physical distancing. A chance to share our love and wealth, feed the fellow humans who are dying out of hunger, and give shelter to the homeless. It is a time to show that we care for the less privileged by paying our maids and labors, waiving the rental fee of those who cannot afford to pay due to the lockdown. It is also a time to speak up for those

neglected. Unfortunately, social-distancing could be a privilege of only a few in our nation.

Nevertheless, it taught us that we may be separated by distance, but can we get connected by our hearts and spirit? Can we forget to hate and remember to love? We might be going, “I wish it never happened in our lives, not in our generation.” I wish so too, but the bigger question is 'what to do with the time given to us now?'.

(This reflection is an edited version of an opinion piece published at <https://livewire.thewire.in/health/coronavirus-pandemic-key-lessons-to-be-learned/>).