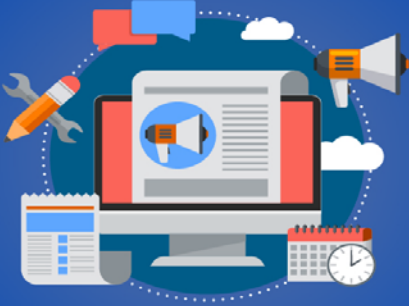


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Covid-19: A Study through a Green Lens

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Abstract:

Today the world is suffering amid the unprecedented pandemic COVID-19. The pandemic has entirely dented the capacity of the whole human race by confining them indoors. On the other hand, the non-human world seems to be quite free amidst the prevailing chaos. It has been observed that during the national lockdown, nature is healing itself while the COVID-19 is hitting the globe. It indicates that man has pressurized the mother earth for the past centuries. Like HIV, Nipah, SARS COV, and Ebola virus, COVID-19 is also believed to be originated from animals like bats and pangolins. Many pieces of research have confirmed that the novel coronavirus is a zoonotic virus and has not evolved directly in the human species. So, it would not be a superfluous statement that man's anthropocentric outlook is responsible for inviting this most immediate crisis into human life. It is evident that the present pandemic is the bi-product of man's ego-consciousness which has resulted in an imbalance in our ecosystem. The present paper attempts to explore the corona outbreak as an aftermath of unrestrained capitalism and man's apocalyptic attitude towards the natural environment. It also focuses on the need of eco-consciousness among men as the only weapon to prevent such further outbreaks.

Keywords: Unprecedented, Pandemic, Zoonotic, Anthropocentric, Ego-consciousness.

Introduction

Since life began on this earth, man has been sharing a relationship with the external world (Environment). This interrelationship between both worlds is inseparable and is governed by the principles of a branch of science called ecology. A perfect ecology is one in which humans and the non-human species live in such a harmonious way that none exploits the other. Formerly, considering himself as a part of nature, man worshipped nature as a

living being. He shared an emotional relationship with the integrated ecosystem. Many rituals helped to balance the complex cycle of the ecosystem. Hakkow ceremony, for instance, was one that involved dancing, chanting, drumming, and journeying through the mountains during which the participants had to greet the natural inanimate objects like rivers, trees, and mountains, coming in their way. But during the last few decades, the ecosystem has been disrupted and damaged by the unrestrained speed of modern society. Man has become the exploiter of nature. He considers nature as a separate entity and has caused irreparable damages to the non-human realm. Edward.O.Wilson, Harvard entomologist, in his monumental work “ The Diversity of Life,” estimates that we are losing around 27,000 varieties of living organisms every year and predicts that about 20 percent of existing species are sure to get extinct in the next 30 years. As a result, we are facing the risk of different types of viruses from the non-human world, which may transform into fatal pandemics. To cite a few examples: HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) which attacks man’s immune system causing AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) and making him more vulnerable to other infections and diseases, was identified in the 1980s. It was proved to be originated from chimps and monkeys and could be transmuted to humans by the consumption of the meat of these animals. In 1976, the Ebola virus (EBOV) causing Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever characterized by coagulation, bleeding, an exaggerated inflammatory response, abnormalities and often death, was discovered. The virus belongs to the filoviridae family having its six various species. Among these six species, Zaire ebolavirus (EBOV) was the species, responsible for the 2014-2016 ebola outbreak in west Africa. WHO declared that the largest outbreak of Ebola in west Africa, was mainly transmitted from wild animals and spread in humans through human-to-human transmission? Animals like fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelopes, and porcupines are determined to be the natural reservoir host of ebola virus by many scientists. Similarly, the Nipah virus (Nipah Henipavirus) in 1999 in Malaysia, originated from a village, Sungai Nipah in Malaysia among pig farmers and the people with close contact with these pigs in Malaysia and Singapore. The Nipah outbreak was initially a mild disease in pigs, thereby millions of pigs were euthanized in order to control the outbreak. In 2003 SARS-COV (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) with the symptoms like fever, headache, cough (initially dry), shivering, shortness of breath and diarrhea was identified in China and MERS-COV (Middle East Respiratory syndrome), a viral respiratory disease was identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012. These two were also declared to be animal viruses that caused severe

diseases and death among the people. Thus, we see that the interconnection of the animals, humans, and epidemic is not new.

Analysis:

Presently, the world is facing a new strain of the virus- novel coronavirus- which has emerged in the wet market of Wuhan in China in December 2019. It is subsequently named SARS COV-2 by the Chinese centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) because of its 79.5% similarity with SARS-COV that had caused several deaths in 2002 in China. It has also the bats as its reservoir hosts and 96.2% similarity with bat coronavirus RaTG13. On 12th January 2020, WHO named it a 2019 novel coronavirus (Covid-19 because of having some unknown elements with crown-like spikes on its surface) and it has been declared a public health emergency. Due to its similarity with SARS COV and MERS, many scientific pieces of research confirm that the virus is a zoonotic virus that is spread from animals like pangolins and bats. Like the previous viruses, coronavirus has also not evolved directly in the human species. A report, received by WHO from national authorities on 23 April 2020 proclaims that the novel coronavirus “has an ecological origin in bat populations. All available pieces of evidence to date suggest that the virus has a natural animal origin and is not manipulated or constructed a virus. If it were a constructed virus, its genomic sequence would have shown a mix of known elements”. Apart from this, some other theories are being widely aired about the causes of coronavirus. Social media is abuzz with the claim that the novel coronavirus is not naturally originated but China has deliberately constructed the virus as a biological weapon to paralyze the economy of other nations and to establish itself as a superpower in the whole world. Former American president Donald Trump and his ministry supported this conspiracy theory by calling it ‘Chinese virus’. An American singer, Keri Hilson argues that the pandemic has a link with China’s new technology of the 5G network of telecommunication. But a research paper entitled ‘The proximal origin of SARS COV-2’ published in the journal *Nature Medicine* confutes the conspiracy theory stating that “ the high-affinity binding of the SARS-COV-2 spike protein to human ACE2 is most likely the result of natural selection on a human or human like ACE2 that permits another optimal binding solution to arise. This is strong evidence that SARS-COV-2 is not the product of purposeful manipulation”. Thus, it is clear that the conspiracy theory has no scientific shreds of evidence. The first revealed cases of the corona, in the wet market of Wuhan that trades live animals like bats, give us strong reason to call it an animal virus.

However, the causes of COVID-19 are still being investigated but it can't be denied that man's urge for progress, power, and eventually his disconnection from nature has pushed the whole world under the curse of COVID-19. Our interruption into the wilderness; the uncontaminated area which is untouched by modern civilization and the excessive consumption of natural resources have left us on the brink of life. All the shreds of evidence claim that it was initially an epidemic that was limited to the area of Wuhan and could have been controlled but man's ego-consciousness, anthropocentric attitude, and lack of awareness transformed it into a pandemic. As a result, in the month of March 2020, most of the nations have become the victim of this deadly virus. Though the mortality rate of this newly emerged virus is less than 3%, we are still struggling for its vaccine as it has posed a great threat to human society. The virus has a great transmission rate of 3 to 4 people from a newly infected person, therefore people are getting infected at an alarming rate. It has caused great mass destruction that has raised widespread concern, fears, and anxiety among humans. The unprecedented lockdown, which was the only weapon to control the chaos, has shown us a series of events that have really put the screws on us. The whole lifestyle has subverted dramatically. There is a halt in the economy and the nation has been pushed deeper into the ditch. An immense exodus has been documented and the livelihoods of thousands of poor city migrants have collapsed due to the ongoing pandemic. According to NDTV news, "Around 90,000 people of Punjab who were living abroad, have come home as coronavirus spread across the world". Thus, the multifaceted calamity (physical, psychological, social, and economic) is threatening humankind horrendously.

Although the corona outbreak is a dark period in the general episode of human life, it is a period of rejuvenation for the natural world. The chaos has forced the whole human race to live in isolation and it has triggered depression among human beings. Unlike humans, nature is quite unshackled on this issue. Amid the acute moment of devastation, we have experienced, "the sea is calm, the tide is full, the moon lies fair" and the flowers are fluttering and dancing in the fresh wind. In normal circumstances, if in the month of May we want to inhale the fresh air, we get only a gust of warm poisonous air. Even the water quality of the river Ganga along with the other rivers has improved considerably during the nationwide lockdown, it is what massive schemes of government couldn't do over the decades. Similarly, rapid decline in pollution, a disordered cycle of climate, scintillating sight of Dhauladhar range from Jalandhar, and wild life's entry into the cities, etc. are some pieces of evidence, proclaiming that the natural world is breathing a sigh of relief since human beings have

confined themselves indoors. The mother earth is relishing and is healing itself in this great havoc. Amid the lockdown period “The largest hole in the ozone layer spreading over 1 million square kilometers above the Arctic has closed due to unusual atmospheric conditions”. By controlling man’s unrestrained steps, coronavirus has given us a strict warning that we are just caretakers of this globe and not the owners. The corona outbreak is actually nature’s retort against man’s apocalyptic attitude that has pressurized the mother earth over the past centuries. It will not be a hyperbolic statement that man’s past activities like deforestation, animal smuggling and slaughtering, emission of greenhouse gases, battles over public land use, toxic waste contamination and illegal dumping, etc. are the root causes of all the environmental crisis like a flood, hurricane, a growing hole in the ozone layer, global warming, soil erosion, destruction of the tropical rain forest, extinction of species and now more responsible for hailing the animal viruses like Covid-19 into human life. Man forgets that nature is more responsive in its own ways as “nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama”. It functions like computer science, following the principle of garbage in, garbage out (GIGO). It simply means that the quality of the output received from the natural world depends on the quality of man's action within the natural environment. So, the crisis like Tsunami, a volcanic eruption underwater in 2004 that caused destruction in 14 separate countries, fire in the Amazon rainforest in 2019 that brought a massive loss of those rainforest trees which play a vital role in balancing the earth’s climate and water cycle by absorbing the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, the 2013 disaster in Kedarnath valley in Uttarakhand that caused wide mass destruction and currently this newly emerged deadly virus are the garbage that man has been giving to the non-human world over the decades. Humans, therefore, need to preserve and conserve the environment for their own survival and for the well-being of the planet. They need to live sustainably, without harming or damaging natural resources.

Conclusion:

Nature, humans and their culture are interconnected. Man must realize that his overenthusiastic use of modern technologies has profoundly disturbed some ecologies. For instance, coral mining, pollution through industrial waste water, overfishing, blast fishing, digging of canals etc. are serious threats to the aquatic ecosystem. As a retaliating action, a war has been broken out from the non-human world. The corona outbreak is a wake-up call, shattering all the previous misconceptions about nature like nature is a mute object and man

has the controlling power over it. Man exploits and pollutes water, air, soil, and other natural resources because he considers them to be their own property. Worldwide overpopulation and the avarice of modern man are the chief factors for the loss of rural landscapes. In the modern paradigm, the link of man's emotional relationship with nature has fractured due to the degradation of human understanding. The lack of eco-consciousness among human beings has given birth to all environmental problems. Modern inventions and technologies are not enough to change the level of human understanding regarding the preservation and conservation of the natural environment and it is difficult to understand and protect the environment unless humans recognize their interdependent relationship with the natural world. So, there is a sore need for an esoteric study like ecocriticism, elucidating the nexus among humans, culture, and the physical environment which can bring about ecological literacy all across the world. In this context, Ecocriticism is an emerging discipline in the field of literary criticism, analyzing the connection between human and the non-human world in literary texts. It is essentially an interdisciplinary approach that integrates philosophy, History, Psychology, life sciences, and ethics. Humans need to encourage the study of ecocriticism and environmental ethics to raise eco-consciousness among Humans. Ecological enlightenment would mean relearning a language that redefines man's place in the cosmos and discarding all the ways that ignore nature. It would enable man to realize that the planet is not merely debris of sand and stone but a platform that exchanges energy among its diverse objects. It would bridge the gap between the human and the non-human realm that can surely prevent further outbreaks like covid-19.

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