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## **Covid 19: The Educator: “Covid 19: Boon or Bane”**

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### **Abstract:**

The pandemic, Covid – 19 brought about a sea change in our lives – our behaviour, attitudes: physical, social and economical. The mad sick hurry of the human race came to a standstill. Forced to spend time at home, people became once again aware of the importance of family, morals and values. Physical distancing forced everyone to go online for meetings and conferences. Work and study from home, Webinars, Google Meet, Zoom became the new normal. The whole education system had to be revamped to meet the needs of the students during lockdowns. Teachers were faced with the daunting task of teaching online, preparing lessons and making online assessments. Our own educational and professional proficiency was challenged. Online teaching and learning modes had to be quickly taken up by the teachers who until now had been teaching in real classrooms and using real TLMs like blackboards, charts, books etc. to make their lessons interesting, exciting and comprehensible. Teaching, learning resources all became digital. The internet, whatsapp groups, became classes. Some of us triumphed while others did not fare well. We were made astoundingly aware of the truth in Carl Rogers words, “The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn ... and change.” Organizations and like – minded people all round the world joined hands to prevent the spread of the disease and help each other in whatever way they could.

This research paper will try to find out the reason behind the occurrence of pandemics. It will gauge the impact of Covid – 19 on our lives including the education system – the teachers and students and especially the teaching learning process. Furthermore, it will highlight the lessons we learnt which we must always remember and continue to practice in our lives.

**Keywords: Kali Yuga, pandemic, zoonotic diseases, reforestation, conservation farming, sustainable agriculture and farming systems, natural habitat, online teaching and learning, hybrid workplace, habits of the mind, National Education Policy 2020.**

Pandemics are not new to human history. The earliest recorded pandemic happened during the Peloponnesian War (430 B.C.); followed by Antonine Plague (165 A.D.); Cyprian Plague (250 A.D.); Justinian Plague (541 A.D.); Leprosy (11<sup>th</sup> Century); The Black Death (1350); The Columbian Exchange (1492), which included smallpox, measles, bubonic plague; The Great Plague of London (1665); First Cholera Pandemic (1817); The Third Plague Pandemic (1855); Fiji Measles Pandemic (1875); Russian Flu (1889); Spanish Flu (1918); Asian Flu (1957); HIV / AIDS (1981); SARS (2003); and the recent Covid –19 (2019) (*Pandemics That Changed History*). Different people hold different views as to why pandemics occur. The religious and spiritual feel that they are sent by God to wake up humanity, punish us and put us on the right path. Those with a scientific bent of mind further the view by stating that they are a result of man's own actions. If we see the inhuman way in which most of us behave and overexploit Nature and other humans, then yes, God needed to wake us up. But do humans really learn and keep what they have learnt or simply go back to do what they have been doing once the wakeup call has ended? Most of us have forgotten the good moral lessons that we had learnt from our parents or in school and college. We are living in the Kali Yuga, the age of strife, discord and contention. It is the age of decay in values when spirituality degenerates. God and virtue are forgotten and vice prevails. If we observe carefully and care to acknowledge, this is what is happening all around us today. People can be seen fighting with each other, the internet is full of spiteful messages. We are just running after high posts and good money. This is the case with most professions now, even those professions that are to be pursued keeping in mind the service motive. They have just become a type of work which requires special training, particular skill and high level of education. It is shocking to see the way in which some doctors, nurses and support staff treat patients in hospitals. They do not know how to take care of patients properly and show some love and care towards the unwell. This quality comes from loving your work and not doing it just in a mechanical way after getting a good degree and certificate. Most teachers have limited knowledge of the subjects they teach and do not know how to make learning effective and engaging. Students do not respect and obey their teachers. Farmers have forgotten to respect Nature. They usually opt for fertilizers and chemicals to increase their output

and earn more. They do not realize that it poisons the earth and harms the health of the people who consume them.

The World Health Organization declared Covid – 19 a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The pandemic brought about a sea change in the lives of many including teachers, students, sportspersons, migrant workers, forest – fringe communities, indigenous people, farmers and fisherman who faced immense difficulties. Hospitality and tourism industry suffered. The Coronavirus has been classified as a zoonotic disease as it originated from an animal – a horseshoe bat and spilled over into the human population. According to the WWF new zoonotic diseases are emerging at an alarming rate because of humanities broken relationship with nature. “According to WWF’s report, “COVID – 19: Urgent Call to Protect People and Nature,” over the last 30 years, approximately 60 – 70 % of the new diseases that emerged in humans had a zoonotic origin” (WWF– India “Spotlight: Urgent Need to take transformative actions to prevent risks of future pandemics”). Excessive encroachment by humans upon the natural world, land – use change, illegal and unregulated wildlife trade and intensified agriculture and livestock production have resulted in the increase of contact between humans, livestock and wildlife, thus leading to an increase in zoonotic diseases and deadly pandemics like HIV/AIDS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Covid – 19. WWF calls for governments, businesses and financial institutions to reverse the loss of nature and put nature on the path of recovery. There is an urgent need to take transformative actions to prevent the risks of future pandemics.

According to a report titled, “Indian wildlife amidst the Covid – 19 crisis: An analysis of poaching and illegal wildlife trade trends,” by TRAFFIC India, a wildlife trade monitoring network, there was an increase in the wildlife poaching cases during the lockdown. Before the lockdown 22% of ungulates – sambar, chital, wild boar and barking deer were poached and during the lockdown the percentage increased to 44%. Similarly, before the lockdown 17% of small mammals like hares, porcupines, pangolins, civets, monkeys etc were poached and during the lockdown the percentage increased to 25%. Thus, further increasing the risk of human and wildlife conflicts.

According to “Save our future: Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World’s Children,” a campaign supported by hundreds of organizations worldwide:

Even before the pandemic, 258 million children were out of school (UIS, 2019) and an additional 175 million pre-primary children were not enrolled in education (UNICEF, 2019a). Globally, 1 in 2 pre-primary school age children, 1 in 12 primary school age children, 1 in 6 secondary school age children, and 1 in 3 upper-secondary school age youth were out of school (UNESCO, 2020f; UNICEF, 2019a). But even more children are attending school but not even learning the basics. The I-CAN assessment of foundational numeracy found worryingly low levels of numeracy amongst primary school children across 13 sample sites located in low- and middle-income countries (PAL Network, 2020). The World Bank estimates that over half of 10-year-old children (at the end of primary school) in low- and middle-income countries are in learning poverty, unable to read or understand a basic story (World Bank, 2019a). In many cases, this lack of foundational learning is never recovered. The Education Commission estimated that over 70 percent of all school age children (ages 4 to 17) in low- and middle-income countries will reach adulthood without gaining basic secondary level skills (Education Commission, 2016). (*Save Our Future* 11–12)

The pandemic has been believed to have further deepened this crisis or “learning poverty” by forcing closure of schools worldwide – depriving millions of children of education, daily meals, and making them increasingly vulnerable to early marriage, child labor, and violence.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted education systems across the world, forcing school closures that have affected 90 percent of the world’s students. These closures have had devastating impacts on children and their ability to exercise their human right to education. Education systems were already in crisis even before the pandemic and are now facing the likelihood of drastic budget cuts. If governments and development partners do not act immediately, this crisis could turn into a catastrophe from which millions of children may never recover. The vital news is—there are solutions and a way forward that turns this crisis into an opportunity, but only if we act together with urgency now. (*Save Our Future* 5)

The white paper issued as part of the Save Our Future campaign in response to the current global education crisis, throws light on the three overlapping challenges facing the education sector: the pre-existing learning crisis; the direct impacts of the health crisis due to

school closures, and the effects of the financial crisis on education in the short and medium term. It proposes a seven-point action plan to tide over the difficulties. Online teaching made the teachers and students rely excessively on technology. In order to attend classes, children had to possess a mobile phone or laptop, download various apps, and learn how to use them. Most poor families could not afford mobile phones. Assessment tests, exams had to be taken online.

While the efforts made by people to put a stop to malpractices and reverse them always have limitations, perhaps Nature decided to step in and heal itself on its own by sending in the pandemic and locking up humans in their homes. Most human activities came to a standstill, the mad sick hurry of humans stopped. During that time Nature relaxed and healed its wounds. Pollution – air, water, land, sound decreased. Plants and animals remained untouched by humans and began to rejuvenate. Globally soil or land degradation which has constantly been on the rise was put to a standstill during the lockdown. Land degradation occurs due to pollution, industrial agriculture, industrial monocropping, mining, clearing of large forest areas for agriculture or urbanization and sealing up the soil with concrete while urbanizing or building roads. All these activities prevent the soil from breathing properly and rejuvenating itself. Repeated use of land which does not allow it to regenerate by allowing nutrients to return to the soil disturbs the soil structure and profile, thus degrading it and disturbing the natural balances which have preserved the Earth's ecosystems. The pandemic put a halt to most of these destructive activities giving the land some time to heal itself and the humans to introspect. During the pandemic, construction work ceased. Reforestation, conservation farming, sustainable agriculture and farming systems that existed in India over thousands of years are calling us back. Maintaining the natural habitat around us is essential as these habitats enable essential ecosystems.

Online teaching became the new normal and there was a pressing need to assess the current situation, adapt and utilize it to the best. Teachers needed to ensure that they expanded their horizons and gave their best to the students. Teachers had to use their previous knowledge and skills and apply them in the present context. The pandemic actually made education more accessible to children of remote areas and expert teachers available to students everywhere. Good teachers were able to make their lessons more exciting, interesting and comprehensible. Whatsapp, Google Meet and Zoom became classrooms. Online teaching removed geographical

barriers, saved time, effort and made the learning process more engaging. Most N.G.O.'s stepped in providing food rations and mobile phones to poor families.

Microsoft Office 365 provided a wide range of facilities like teams, word, powerpoint, excel, announcements, flipgrid, video editor, one note, online courses and certified badges on the successful completion of the course. Microsoft Whiteboard, Google Meet, Google Classrooms, Google Drive, Google Forms, Jamboard, You tube and Zoom became more popular in education as online classes increased during the pandemic. Webinars were conducted to help teachers to quickly adapt to the digital mode of education. FICCI Arise came up with its webinar series on schools post lockdown in which they discussed classrooms post lockdown, lesson plans for remote learning and the use of various apps in order to make learning more interesting and effective. The virtual conference, "Future of Work: Shaping the Organisations of the Future" conducted by Ashoka University in association with Harvard Business School India Research Center, Harvard Business Publishing, FICCI, NHRD, Your Story Tie Delhi, CII and NASSCOM, discussed issues like the challenges faced by organizations; reimagining the work place – new digital workplace, hybrid work place; decentralization of work; change in the role played by the management; challenges for the leaders; reskill and upskill of existing work force; employees working from home etc. Shikshangan Education Initiatives Private Ltd. in its webinar, "Habits of the Mind for Character Development," talked about the National Education Policy, the Habits of the Mind and character development through content, pedagogy and assessment.

Above all, the pandemic forced us to become humane, arousing our innate goodness. The YouTube was flooded with videos about good morals and values. People realized the importance of spending time with their family and friends as if they had discovered something new that their ancestors did not know. Some started to utilize their time in feeding and taking care of stray animals, some made masks and distributed them free of cost to the poor while others distributed food to the poor and needy. Furthermore, they realized the importance of leading a balanced life – devoting some part of their time to prayer, meditation, work, exercise, play, leisure.

Perhaps Nature tried to renew the balance by sending the pandemic and slowing us down. It is for us to realize and act, walk on the path to recovery before it is too late. Will humans retain the lessons learnt or go back to how they were, only time will tell.

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