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## THE SILVER LINING: THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF THE PANDEMIC

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### ABSTRACT

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A year ago, when everything was so settled and regular and man's crummiest nightmares could not exceed the world collapsing in flames and high tides, little did we know that humankind would be defeated by such tiny adversaries? While nations were arming themselves with the deadliest nuclear weapons against any enemy visible on sight, the world was brought on knees by enemies invisible to the naked eye. This was the advent of the Corona virus disease or popularly known as the Covid-19 virus. Covid-19 is an infectious disease transmitted when an infected person coughs, exhales or sneezes and the water droplets generated from the cough or sneeze fall on a tangible surface, later touched by a healthy person. It is mainly transmitted by touching an infected surface or a person. A petty disease turning into a pandemic brought about changes beyond imagination. Due to the pandemic, almost every country, city, were locked down. It seems like the entire world is shut for the period. Although, due to this sudden stoppage of business, jobs, administration, schooling, etc. brought about vital changes in lifestyle and other irretrievable loss, yet behind the entire misery there existed a silver lining. Covid-19 undeniably a bane to mankind, acted as a boon to wildlife, biodiversity, and the environment. Various instances that never occurred in the ordinary course of Earth's routine was witnessed in these desperate times which included- drop in air pollution worldwide reducing the risks of climate change and instigating Covid-19 virus; recovery of aquatic life where the sea turtles were spotted laying eggs and dolphins returning to Italy's coast; fall in carbon emission level than usual; clear water flow in rivers due to sediment settlement since there is no boat or cruise traffic for the reason of tourism and recreation; decreased deforestation i.e. purified air; reduction in noise pollution; other innovative advancements and more.

**KEYWORDS:** - *Pandemic, Transmission, Irretrievable Loss, Infiltration, Improvement*

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## INTRODUCTION

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The above quote was quoted by Mahatma Gandhi, long back but is relevant even in the current epoch. Till today, man did develop- in technology, education, styles, and more but in matters of environment and biodiversity, the most human could do was create plans but the execution was at a rate of 20 out of 100%. After years of planning and failing to execute even half of what planned, the environment, the resources, the diversity, almost the entire planet was on the verge of losing all of its environmental dignity when the Corona virus pandemic happened.

Corona virus pandemic or Covid-19 is an infectious disease transmitted when an infected person coughs, exhales or sneezes and the water droplets generated from the cough or sneeze fall on a tangible surface, later touched by a healthy person. It is caused by acute respiratory syndrome, transmitted by touching an infected surface or a person. It was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Later due to unawareness about the disease, the petty disease of cough and cold became a worldwide pandemic.

It was something that touched every aspect of human life irrespective of race, caste, sex, region, beliefs, etc. The outbreak of the pandemic has unimaginable consequences- masses of people dying, loss of economy, changing trade policies, unemployment, and more. On the whole, the entire world shut down but amid all human grief, the pandemic and the consequent lockdown turned out to be a sacred chalice for the environment, biodiversity, and habitat.

The pandemic dug for victory what years of human efforts and trials couldn't achieve. Few of such wins, the pandemic, and the lockdown bagged are- earlier there was no control in traffic, exceeding tourism, out burned fossil fuels and, other natural resources but post lockdown, there was lowered traffic resulting in lower air pollution, control over tourism leading to cleaner land and waters, fossil fuels liberation and more.

Earth found peace in the pandemic heartache proving that nature has its own ways to cleanse mankind. However, mankind just like all times is striving forward to live with the pandemic scenes. It brought numerous changes in human life, business, and ventures as well.

### PRE-PANDEMIC SCENARIO

Cough, sneeze, and fever were considered very minute ailments until mid-January 2020 when the unforeseen outbreak of Covid-19 or corona virus disease victimized the entire world. A year ago, everything was normal and with normal what was meant was high levels of air

pollution, global warming at a rise, glaciers melting into oceans, various flora and fauna at a stage of extinction, man’s unhealthy and unhygienic habits, 24\*7 vehicles honking crossing safe hearing decibels and various more. But this was all considered to be “normal” with slight humour hidden in it. People were very adapted to living in such inadequate circumstances but paid negligible heed until lockdown. Various eye-opening instances that people around the globe thought of as quotidian routine were-

- i. <sup>2</sup>In the year 2016, India has bagged almost all top ten positions with the highest air pollution rates with 173 PM2.5 and 172PM2.5 in Kanpur and Faridabad respectively. The same had been noticed in the later years as well, with another site reporting “*21 of world’s 30 cities with the worst air pollution are in India*”.
- ii. The major reason for the sky-reaching levels of air pollution being uncontrolled traffic. Harmful gases like Carbon Monoxide released from motor vehicles with an inadequate traffic system acted as a cherry on the cake. Methods like carpooling too were not taken benefits of.
- iii. <sup>3</sup>Climate change accelerated between the years 2015-2019 with a continued increase in carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere of about 20% greater than the previous five years.
- iv. <sup>4</sup>Rise in sea level amounting to 5mm per year since 2014-2019, says the 5-year statistics. Melting glaciers also have an indisputable contribution towards such an increase in the sea-level budget. The loss of marine life was also marked.
- v. <sup>5</sup>As talked about above, the hype in glaciers melting is off the charts as compared to the previous millennium as measured by the World Glacier Monitoring Services (WGMS) for years 2014-2019. The Greenland ice sheet is a major victim of such melting into oceans.
- vi. Wildfires, another extreme event of nature caused due to phenomenal imbalance. This too directly or indirectly is instigated by human activities. A recent wildfire witnessed in the year 2020 beginning was the Australian wildfires.

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<sup>2</sup>List of most-polluted cities by particulate matter concentration[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-polluted\\_cities\\_by\\_particulate\\_matter\\_concentration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-polluted_cities_by_particulate_matter_concentration)

<sup>3</sup> Global Climate in 2015-2019: climate changes accelerates, World Meteorological Organization <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/global-climate-2015-2019-climate-change-accelerates#:~:text=The%20WMO%20report%20on%20The,C%20compared%20to%202011%2D2015.>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* At 2

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* At 2

- vii. <sup>6</sup>According to the World Resource Institute, the world lost about 30 million acres of forests in the year 2018, which is on a rough note the size of the state of New York. The loss of tropical primary rainforest and the fact that lesser than 13% of wetlands only remain are devastating.
- viii. <sup>7</sup>Around 30,000 species at the verge of extinction every year. The current count of tigers is 3890 with about 38 million animals driven away by illegal means per year in Brazil says statistics. Poaching of rhinos at the rate of 2% per week in the year 2018.
- ix. <sup>8</sup>2015 report from the Times of India writes that approx. 80% of India’s surface water is unfit for drinking and majorly polluted.
- x. As scientifically stated “Noise exposure above 60dB is injurious to hearing and can lead to Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL)” was excellently violated by nation’s fellow countrymen as seen in the world reports where India once again aced top positions.
- xi. Health loss due to an unhealthy atmosphere to breathe, hearing, and cardiac issues due to noise pollution.

The above-stated points are just a glimpse of what was previously called “*Normal*”. Humour has it how sick could have human lifestyle been in the past years yet masked with the falsehood of development and sustainability.

### POST-PANDEMIC SCENARIO

With the life-threatening Corona virus consequence, the world was locked down one by one with India shutting down on 24<sup>th</sup> March per Prime Minister's orders for 21 days restricting the movement of millions of people nationwide. The lockdown has continued in different phases ever since. Never in the wildest dream might have a person dreamt about the entire world shutting down in one go.

<sup>6</sup> Glenn Hurowitz, *Here’s what deforestation looks like in 2019- and what we can do about it*, Mighty Earth, <http://www.mightyearth.org/heres-what-deforestation-looks-like-in-2019-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/#:~:text=Careers-Here's%20what%20deforestation%20looks%20like%20in%202019%20%E2%80%93%20and,we%20can%20do%20about%20it&text=In%202018%2C%20the%20world%20lost,data%20from%20World%20Resources%20Institute.>

<sup>7</sup> Nemanja Petkovic, *51 eye-opening poaching statistics you must know in 2020*, PetPedia (Feb. 13, 2020) <https://petpedia.co/poaching-statistics/>

<sup>8</sup> Sushmi Dey, *80% of India’s surface water may be polluted*, The Times of India, (Jun 28, 2015, 04:42 IST) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/pollution/80-of-Indias-surface-water-may-be-polluted-report-by-international-body-says/articleshow/47848532.cms>

Where the nations were preparing themselves for the biggest of fights, endeavouring to become international superpowers and nuclear power heads, nations were defeated by petty viruses that are not even visible to the naked eyes. Nature once again is proved the most powerful of all.

Lockdown did create havoc in spheres like the economy, business, diplomacy, etc. with various factories shutting down, people turning jobless, etc. nonetheless it turned out to be a holy grail for nature, biodiversity, wildlife, and habitat.

The government or the environmentalists or the common people with environmental interest always created plans and initiated movements for the betterment of the biodiversity, but hardly had anyone guessed that the entire world shutting down will fly high with environmental development and sustainability and triumph over all problems coming their way. Some major impacts the Covid-19 lockdown had over biodiversity, wildlife and habitat are discussed below-

- i. <sup>9</sup>According to the recent survey, there is about a 60% drop in air pollution as well as Nitrogen Dioxide decline in Indian cities. Such drop air pollution has been seen throughout the world, making the skies clearer than ever before. The drop in NO<sub>2</sub> level was first marked in China, but later on, with lockdown extending, and restricting billions of people to stay back home, various other regions could also ace chances to see clearer skies and breathe fresher air.

<sup>10</sup>Reports say 55% reduction of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in Delhi, 42% reduction of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in Mumbai, 51% reduction of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in Los Angeles, etc. compared with the prior 4-year average. The lockdown binds to stay people in their houses, and continue their jobs with work from home. This resultantly reduced the number of vehicles on the road thereby lowering down the emission of harmful gases like Carbon Monoxide. Also, the roads are cleaner for habitats.

Industries shutting down, thus no disposition of industrial waste in water bodies apparently improved water quality of rivers like Ganga or Yamuna, which were previously the dump yard for untreated sewage and industrial wastes. Although since 1985, various and plans and schemes like ‘Namami Gange’ (2015, with a budget of Rs. 20,000) were created for cleaning Ganga but none of them could actually execute

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<sup>9</sup> James Poetzsch, *The effect of Covid-19 on India's air quality*, The Hindu Business Line, (May 19, 2020) <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/the-effect-of-covid-19-on-indias-air-quality/article31564038.ece>

<sup>10</sup> Isabelle Gerretsen, *How air pollution exacerbates Covid-19*, BBC, (Apr. 28, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200427-how-air-pollution-exacerbates-covid-19>

to a total 100%. But the lockdown effect is very evident to all eyes. <sup>11</sup>Extraordinary improvement with 6.8 milligram/litre of dissolved oxygen value was seen in Varanasi’s Nagwa Nala. Such clearing of water surfaces has been seen in Malaysia, Italy, Singapore China, etc.

- ii. Aquatic life was redeemed due to now cleaner habits. Various sea creatures recovered- sea turtles in the beaches, horseshoe crab spotted in the Delaware Bay, dolphins returning to Italy’s coast, Hat Chao Mai National Park caught sight of a herd of dugong commonly known as sea cows.
- iii. <sup>12</sup>Fall in carbon emission level up to 17% as reported and measured in early April by the survey which technically is the biggest drop since World War II. This too was mainly triggered by transportation and uncontrolled traffic system. Clearer skies brought along an opportunity for the people of Jalandhar, Punjab to see the mountain ranges of Himachal Pradesh with bare from the town itself says the news.
- iv. Since billions of people are restricted to their homes and thence negligible transportation, a considerable amount of fossil fuel is conserved which can be found helpful in rainy days in the long run. This may assist in accelerating clean energy transition by the government authorities.
- v. Decrease in deforestation. About 13 million hectares of land is deforested every year throughout the world. The global pause saved several trees from getting chopped off.
- vi. Remarkable decrease in noise pollution. Taking note of the survey reports from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the noise pollution rate has decreased from <sup>13</sup>the range of 55-45dB to the range of 30-40dB. Similar reports touch media from West Bengal, Maharashtra, etc.
- vii. Better vegetation due to cleaner water supplies.

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<sup>11</sup> Sumita Singhal, Mahreen Matto, *CovId-19 lockdown: a ventilator for rivers*, Down to Earth, (Apr. 29, 2020) <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/covId-19-lockdown-a-ventilator-for-rivers-70771>

<sup>12</sup> PTI, *17% decline in global carbon emissions due to COVID-19 lockdown: Study*, The Economic Times, (May 20, 2020, 10.52 AM IST) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/17-decline-in-global-carbon-emissions-due-to-covId-19-lockdown-study/articleshow/75840410.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>13</sup> Jasjeev Gandhiok & Mohammad Ibrar, *CovId-19: Noise pollution falls as lockdown rings in sound of silence*, The Times of India, ( Apr. 23, 2020, 13:14 PM) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/covId-19-noise-pollution-falls-as-lockdown-rings-in-sound-of-silence/articleshow/75309318.cms>

- viii. Amongst other aquatic lives, various other organisms were also spotted<sup>14</sup> returning to their land- wild boar in a town named Hafia in Israel; flamingos arriving in Albino to mate; several cougars found wandering in the streets of Santiago, Chile; wild deer and peacocks spotted in the streets of Mumbai, India and various more. These are some uncommon events mankind is getting to see in the lockdown period. This is uncommon for an added reasoning that all these years man was in a habit to see these animals caged in the zoo and it happened for the first time, the animals are free and mankind is caged. This is nature sarcasm as well as a lesson for being more human than being a human being.
- ix. Awareness towards environment and biodiversity protection increased.

The above-mentioned points were few major impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on biodiversity, wildlife, and habitat. The lockdown is a godsend blessing for the environment. However, the greatest challenge that lies here is how to maintain and continue the current scenario of wellness for another century.

This is because staying locked up, business shut down for lengths isn't a solution to keep up the current scenario of nature. We must learn to live with such care and maintenance for the environment and diversity. A stoppage is never a solution rather modern problems require modern solutions.

#### *KEEPING CONSTANT THE CURRENT SCENARIO*

It is delightful to see how nature and the environment healed itself of all blemishes of the past years, but the greatest challenge that lies behind on part of humans is maintaining and continuing this balance and well being of the environment. After ages, our biodiversity has come to a state of stability; it must be our responsibility to keep it up without fail. Few measures that can be taken to keep up the prosperity of nature can be as follows:

- i. Laws regarding the protection of wildlife and the environment- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the Biodiversity Act 2002; does exist, yet there are cases of animal hunting, poaching, illegal ivory and animal skin smuggling, deforestation, etc. Such laws should be made inflexible and stringent. The punishments and penalties for conduction or involvement of any such business related directly or indirectly must be dealt with severity.

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<sup>14</sup> [Coronavirus: Wild animals enjoy freedom of a quieter world](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52459487), BBC News, (Apr.29, 2020)

Talking about the current scenario of corona virus pandemic, the probabilities of an increase in animal hunting and poaching business is high in African and rural regions. To deal with the shortcomings, one must be prepared with the most effective set of rules and regulations. Wildlife protection must be improved and affirmed only then can the stability be maintained.

- ii. In India, the pandemic screenplay is dealt with under the Epidemic Act of India, 1897, a 122-year-old act. The act was brought into play at the time of the bubonic plague detected in Mandi, now in Gujarat. But in today’s era, it has various limitations as:
  - a) The act was enacted by the Bruisers with the ulterior motive to curb and arrest Indians. Prevention and control of the epidemic was not their prime concern.
  - b) Act dealt with the prevention of the spread of the disease and not measures to curb or eradicate the disease. No detailed methods to follow at the time of the epidemic.
  - c) No guidelines established for the formation of a special Disaster Management Committee to act during the state of emergency.
  - d) No provisions for the formation of isolation centres for the infected people and their treatment.
  - e) And the most important limitation, no provision stated for the development and distribution of the vaccine when created.
- iii. In a country as vast as India, the vulnerability is exacerbated. Thus the lockdown period must be utilized as an opportunity by the government authorities when the common people are grappled by the novel corona virus pandemic, for further development post-pandemic as <sup>15</sup> said by Brazil’s environment minister Ricardo Salles.
- iv. Irregularly deforested areas the Amazon Rainforest in South America internationally and such irregular areas in Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc. must be recovered. Investing in Green Projects for natural development.
- v. Treating grubby rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Gomti infested by the industrial wastes.

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<sup>15</sup> Robson Rodrigues, *COVID-19 pandemic ‘opportunity’ to change environmental laws: Brazil minister, Down to Earth*, (May 28, 2020) <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/environment/covId-19-pandemic-opportunity-to-change-environmental-laws-brazil-minister-71416>



- vi. Work enhancement in clean energy i.e. energy derived from renewable, zero-emission resources. For eg.- rooftop solars, which is good for both the environment and the existing resources. Decentralizing solar power in remote areas.
- vii. Increasing job opportunities in areas like the Renewable Energy Department since the majority of Indians (say 80%) are informally employed and are extremely vulnerable to economic shocks.
- viii. Promoting a circular economy- reuse, recycle, and repair. This undeniably encourages the conservation of energy.
- ix. Modern problems require modern solutions. Methods of tariffs and reforms should be used in the process of energy usage. This will encourage people to drive down consumption and thus absolute sustainability.
- x. Promoting e-commerce deliveries of product to save resources, encouraging telemedicine. Professionals to evaluate, treat, and diagnose patients in remote areas using telemedicine. Online learning also to be promoted and enhanced.
- xi. Laws dealing with green criminology to be analyzed and reviewed and made stringent for such crime.
- xii. Promoting innovations that meets the current needs of the pandemic stricken society, its people, and the environment.

### CONCLUSION

To begin with the conclusion, it is too wonderful to see how nature has redeemed itself miraculously. The beauty, the wellness, and its creature's ultimate proof that nature is strongest of all, no matter how hard you endeavour to ace all rules of nature. Mankind too, sooner or later, learns to live along with changes and in the same technique; the “*pandemic way of life*” is accepted. This is the new “*normal*”. Irrespective of all grief and miseries one can complain about the lockdown or the pandemic, there always lays a Silver Lining.

The biodiversity, the wildlife, and the environment flourishing are the brighter side or the Silver Lining of the novel corona virus pandemic. But the greatest challenge tolled on humankind was to continue such flourishing scenario. The best way to keep up with the scope of improvement is to treat the novel corona virus pandemic as an opportunity and not misery.