

## The Last Cause

“A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;  
For man shall not know the coming hour till its hour.  
And belief shall be not till the work is done.”

*Sri Aurobindo, Savitri*

In December 2019, a virus was reported to have infected some people in China. This virus was identified as a Corona virus, a class of viruses that affects the respiratory system in the humans and was named COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease- 2019). This family of viruses was first identified in 1930s and named *corona* meaning a crown because the virus resembled the halo of the Sun under the microscope. The origins of COVID-19 remain unclear with stories and theories ranging from bats to sea creatures to Chinese government labs working on bioweapons, have been proposed and, like always, people know very little of what went on as truth stands divided between reason, facts, and intuition. The world was caught up in its daily business and was perhaps used to other coronaviruses that have come and gone in the near past and hoped this will too die out sooner than later, but no one imagined what was to happen. By February 2020 the virus had spread to other parts of the world while the doctors and scientists had (and a large part of them still continue to) very limited knowledge on transmission mechanisms, prevention and cure. The lack of knowledge and the fear of the invisible and unknown, spreading rapidly across the international borders and economic classes, shook the world and COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. While its mortality rate in general is not higher than other pulmonary viruses, it has been dangerous and even fatal for people with co-morbidities like diabetes, heart diseases, lung diseases etc. In a world where health in general is plummeting because of lifestyle choices and stress from technology and work, COVID-19 virus created a wave of fatalities not only to the human bodies but also to its ego.

By April, over a third of the world's population was locked down in their homes; businesses, schools, and other daily distractions coming to a complete halt to prevent the transmission of the virus and give time for the governments and the hospitals to respond to the crisis. While the fear kept spreading, even more than the virus itself, and the healthcare industry got down to find the miracle cure, the golden vaccine for Corona virus, the lockdown proved to be a detoxification for the planet. Roads were empty, the air clean, the waters clear, animals, birds and sea life breathing in for the first time in centuries the purity of human inactivity.

Internet became the true playground for the world so used to being *connected always*. Quickly people found ways of doing what they were doing outside, in front of their screens, perhaps with even more vigor. Masks, social distancing and digital payments became a norm for the urban populations of the world.

New studies kept coming every day on the origin of the virus, whether it is natural or synthesized, how it spreads, what people should be doing and not, what governments should be doing and not, often with conflicting conclusions. The testing for infection in people started, but with very low reliability, adding more and more uncertainty and confusion, all appearing like a big game with ever changing rules based on fear and control by anonymous players. Many who questioned the response from the large geopolitical system were shunned, their information removed from the internet, perspectives pouring in from all sides, some furthering the paradigm that has been, and some seizing the opportunity to question it and offer alternatives. The truth of course lies muddled up in all the noise, waiting to be gleaned by the few who even believe that there is a truth truer than what has been advertised.

The virus impacted all aspects of the planetary life creating a scenario that few had imagined at this scale. While the health implications of the virus are not that extraordinary, the helplessness of not knowing what is to come brings out the fear humanity has always lived in, and has tried to conquer through knowledge and technology. Finally, humanity is together in something, consciously. The impact of the virus crosses all borders of geography, economics, class, power and everything that comes with and follows from the privileges that divide our world into haves and have-nots. Of course, the ones with resources have more means of protection but the potentiality of the virus manifesting anywhere, is something that scares us to our core. It brings forth also the realization of how limited we are in this world with death looming over us, remembering again our mortality, remembering again the question that we stopped asking a while back, are we more than our bodies?

The fear of the virus now has become the fear of others around us, because they could be carrying the virus. The fear runs so deep that you start fearing yourself. You might do something wrong, a moment of carelessness, leaving cracks in the formidable wall, allowing the virus to enter and establish dominion. All this drama goes on behind masked faces and constricted bodies unsure of themselves and everything around them, a new humanity without a face and without contact following orders as they are given. It is in times like these, we really see who we are, in relation to ourselves and the rest of the world.

As the news of the commencement of the lockdown spread, people frantically ran and hoarded items of daily use, food, and interestingly, toilet paper, creating a scarcity in an already stressed system. This first response of self-preservation was matched by multiple people and groups that came forward to fill the gaps in government help and support. Large quantities of food, sanitation, health supplies and other essentials were mobilized and distributed for those who do not have access to them even during *normal* times. This again shows the potency of the human nature and its strength in compassion and service. The pandemic at least clarifies for once, that we can change the course of things, clean the rivers and the air, redistribute where required and appreciate the invisible, if there is enough political and social will to make it happen. To say, that the pandemic caused the polarization would be inaccurate as the dualities of human perception and experience have always existed and our current paradigms thrive on these dualities of big and small, better and worse, rich and poor, white and black. What the sudden hit from the virus and its consequences did, was to bring out to the surface what had already existed, breeding secretly, in the minds and hearts of the people, bursting out in our emotions and behaviors with an intensity that we are not used to.

In India, the lockdown was instated on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Millions of people were stranded outside their villages and homes with no transportation to ferry them back, walking barefoot for hundreds of kilometers without food and water. People declared COVID 19 and the lockdown a humanitarian crisis more than a health crisis lamenting on the poor condition of the migrant labourers and people without means struggling even more in this time. But again, the pandemic did not create this humanitarian crisis, it only intensified it. The lives of the most vulnerable social and economic sections of this population- the labourers, the farmers, the craftsmen, the worker who sweats and bleeds for very little every day, have always been in crises, established by our socio-economic order and sanctioned by the governments and the capitalist machinery that strives to extract maximum profit from land and lives. Indeed, they have been and continue to be hit the worst during this time but while we take this opportunity to express our concern for the less privileged, we should also be asking why some have the privileges that others don't and how in a future society these privileges can be shared, for they are not born out of individual merit, but from the inequalities that plague mankind since millennia.

According to some conservative reports, over 6 million people moved back to the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bihar alone. This will cause unplanned pressure on the already stretched state system and cause labourer shortages as work begins to resume. Among other things, this could be the time where governments reflect on the usefulness of the money spent on building more and more infrastructure to cater to rich urban folks and to invite tourism in the state rather than investing that money in creating livelihood for their, that are sustainable and can eventually promote local crafts, art and enterprises also opening up avenues for ecological tourism.

On the other hand, many people were given the opportunity to stay home with themselves and their families and catch up on the years and moments lost in the daily train of serving the economic machine, to reconnect with their being and with the people around them. But again, not everyone was prepared for this pause. Globally domestic violence increased, many couples divorcing their marriage and the toxic compulsion to stay with each other, which uptil now was pacified by the distractions of work and social commitments. Many people continue to face psychological challenges from having to be stuck in a house with their families and themselves. While these are real challenges and we feel empathy and compassion on a human level to such instances, on a larger scale, this is only a reflection of what we have created for ourselves and our world. It may be time to observe these manifestations objectively and not blame them solely on a virus or an ineffective or even barbaric government policy(ies).

During the lockdown, the *essential* services were allowed to function as they sustain and nourish human life itself. But they were a very small percentage of the all the activities that have been invented to keep man busy and to keep the wheel of economy turning. With an unprecedented increase in physical and psychological illness in the last few decades, shouldn't we be questioning the nature of work that humanity is involved in, at the expense not only of its planetary health but also of its social and personal health. The pandemic taught us that, well, most of it is *non-essential*. The point, of course, is not to leave the non-essentials and curb human creativity and aspirations but to weigh the price Life pays for such indulgence.

Viruses have been an integral part of the fabric of life, even though they themselves are not capable of life. What viruses have done not only for human bodies but for all living organisms is to introduce new

genetic information that have allowed our biological bodies to evolve into richer forms over long periods of time. This is a simple and long running mechanism in nature. The response of the organism to this “genetic update” as one doctor puts it, of course varies depending on the health of the organism. The complications arising from the viral infection are because of a disharmony that already exists that we haven’t noticed earlier and/or are not ready to acknowledge now. For people already suffering from such ailments, it is going to be a tough battle. But this should also open up doors for a new health paradigm for the world. The basis and mechanisms of such a paradigm have already been established by sages and mystics of the ancient world, for example, in the east with Ayurveda and Yoga encompassing all spheres of human life providing tools to not only maintain but to enhance its physical and psychological health for the divine life that is the right of every human.

We are seeing and will continue to see more suffering and death. But more than human suffering, the fact that someone profits always from death and this fear of death, must jolt us out of the dream that we have been sold under shiny banners and clever play of words. This has been a war on humanity and war creates as much business as destruction. As we witness the stress to the current healthcare system, the solution is far from more doctors and hospitals. The solution lies in people reclaiming their right over their health and eradicating sickness from within. The design of nature has given the creative power to every human being as any other organism to heal itself and there are multiple pathways to discover and practice this self-healing principle.

The Yogic science describes the human experience as a superimposition of different bodies or layers- the physical, the vital, the emotional, the mental and the blissful. The path of a healthy human existence is founded on a balanced nourishment of these bodies. All of them are integrated in a whole and none of them is independent of the other. Our belief that the virus affects only the physical body, limits also our remedies and preventions to the physical dimension.

But health in body is created by the balance of forces in its interaction. A body for which the food is medicine, work its exercise, its relationships with itself and others its doorway to emotional wellbeing, its experiences an unending learning experience and its environment its fortitude, must naturally be prepared for the shocks on its life pathway. A culture where this harmony is at least an aspiration would itself pave the path for its becoming. And each culture must have the choice of the philosophy and the methods for manifesting this aspiration attempting collectively to create an integrated science of human well-being that is beyond culture and class.

It seems that that vaccine industry is close to presenting their solution for the pandemic. But there is great resistance from people across the world who have identified the vicious cycle of biochemical drugs and vaccines and are preparing their bodies to receive and/or fight the virus and develop immunity to it. The vaccine doesn’t just sell us the idea that the virus will not affect us, it also creates an illusion that yet again human mind has solved a natural problem and re-establishes human supremacy over nature. It caters to a growing need for a solution, creates business where it makes sense, where people are ready to try whatever can possibly help them to get back to *normality*, because what is important is today and tomorrow we will have another solution. Such a conception will only undo the progress that has been made uptil now and further the time of ignorance.

The eagerness to go back to normality is mindless and even dangerous as we slowly unlock our lives and prepare ourselves for the business as usual. Every human being, every society must continue to progress in its ideas and systems, as an essential condition to Life. The pandemic has not been only of a virus, but of unbridled fear and unbounded hope. We have the perfect opportunity to use the force of the intensity of the polarization to catapult ourselves into an integrated reality. The transformation that we secretly have longed for is in front of us and within us, but we have, like we always do, the choice.

It is difficult to lay the plan for the future because our imagination of a new world will always be restricted and limited by the trauma and pride of our past. And our past isn't over yet.

The idea of the new world is too vast to grasp and too general to decisively move forward towards it. Also new is relative to time in our conception and it is not so much the question of new or old, but of progress towards a more perfect society and human being.

Thus, it is for all of us to question the foundations of our prevalent human tendencies and really imagine *a new humanity*, out of which will be born a world that sustains it and allows unending progress for all. It may seem an over-suggestion but it is the *inevitable fate*, as the sages of ancient and modern India have called it, of this world that seems too far off from this ideal.

Our choice will be to explore or to protect ourselves on this great adventure and to participate in or to resist against the birth of this new dawn. This story is still beginning and much waits to be unfolded. Humanity has always surpassed its own expectations and this pandemic comes at a time when many are already with deep dissatisfaction and concern with the world as it is and are working tirelessly to transform personal and collective lives. In a way, the pandemic gives a push to these efforts accelerating the slow process of change, impelling us to remember the future and realizing our destinies. Will this pandemic be the last cause of the death and a rebirth, is it Shiva asserting His power of transformation or Kalki's arrival to restore Dharma and inspire right Action, or is it just another obstacle that we will get over with, get used to and forget about? Time will tell.

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