



## SPIRITUALITY: A WAY OUT TO COPE WITH COVID -19 PANDEMIC INDUCED STRESSES

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### ABSTRACT

The coronavirus Disease (COVID -19) is a unique pandemic. Sudden appearance of disease altered pace of our life and sends the people into a state of panic. An unimaginable and unmanageable global health crisis happened. This is the time of extraordinary disruption and anxiety. It affected us mentally, physically and spiritually. Nevertheless, COVID-19 with its challenges for health care system has offered invaluable opportunity as well. An opportunity understood of importance of spiritual care in pandemic. In this period of isolation, anxiety, stress and uncertainty, spirituality could be one of the appropriate ways to create mental peace and relaxation. This study is the result of personal observation and experience of covid -19 crises and study of the English and others language article using the words, spirituality, stress and religious advises and teachings were assessed in times of present crisis. In this article the concept of spirituality immunity is introduced to manage covid 19 induced stresses and to come to term with reality. This concept can help us in the process of spiritual growth, wholeness and holiness. The author advocates that spirituality can helps to people to gain mental relaxation in time of crisis and dangerous disease. Various religious solutions are also proposed against the covid-19 that could be likely beneficial and helpful to cope with extra ordinary situation.

**KEYWORDS :** spirituality, stress, covid -19, pandemic

### INTRODUCTION:

Millions of people worldwide are affected by "novel corona virus". The scientific nomenclature of the virus is **severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)**. Infection with it produces the respiratory disease called COVID-19 that identifies with cough, throat ache, loss of taste and smell, problem of breath and fever. In the beginning, COVID-19 was reported from the city Wuhan (china) in late 2019 and then spread to nearly thirteen countries till January 24, 2020. Around end-March, panic and fear began to spread through India. Covid -19 cases would be growing exponentially. "India's number of covid-19 patients under medical supervision was the second highest in the world after the US, whose corresponding figure is over 2.5 million (telegraph, 31 august)". Pandemic was a stressful life event. It disturbs and corrupts the natural functioning of life. Covid pandemic Triggered social transformation, influenced our values and hit available economic resources. It also affects our mind, spirit and reason. The unfamiliar nature of this virus, lack of vaccine, meditation or an all agreed treatment protocol have made the process of handling the crisis more difficult and the emotional, social, and economic consequences of the disease have brought about more complex situation and more vulnerable people (Heidari, 2020). Consequently, our response to disease was irrational and cruel. Rational responses go away. "People have always responded to epidemics by spreading rumor and false information, and portraying the disease as foreign and brought in with malicious intent" (Pamuk, 2020). During the covid-19 pandemic, all of us have been plunged into a new way of living (New Normal). The new normal affected all sphere of life. The psychological, social and economic consequences of disease were beyond any immediate experience. "This pandemic was a transformative experience that is shared to all human around the world in form of stress, personal threat, ambiguity, social isolation, and the most severe global economic recession in century, which shall have a lasting impact on our lives" ( Jeronimus,2020). Organizing the life has become difficult. There is uncertainty, powerlessness and a feeling of being out of control. We could feel depressed and frustrated in anxious time. Life is full of ironies, particularly in the realm of health. "Anxiety and fear adversely affect the psychological system that protect individuals from infection"

(Koenig, 2020 ). It is difficult to predict which person will fall sick and which one will remain healthy. We are all susceptible to the dreaded virus. Good health is determined not only by

our lifestyle but also interaction among genetic, psychological and social factors (Baron, 2015). We adopt different mechanism to cope with stress and use behavioral, emotional, and cognitive approaches to manage stress. Unfortunately, we remain ignorant of spiritual approaches. Psychologists have ignored the importance of spiritual dimension in the field of stress management. Spiritual practices can be antidotes to the negativity present in our private and public life. Spiritual practices could provide inner confidence to disarm fear and uncertainty in social distancing and quarantine situation. We should use the lockdown days as an opportunity to deepen our spiritual and religious practices.

### IMPACT OF COVID ON VARIOU ASPECT OF LIFE

Covid pandemic was a universal phenomenon. It has been six months since our country of 1.3 billion went into lockdown. "The coronavirus 2019 pandemic was a large-scale disruptive and stressful disaster event that pushed most human outside their usual range of experience" (Jeronimus, 2020). "This worldwide pandemic is certainly not the first. Nor will it be the last. Pandemics spare no one, rich or poor." (Walia, 2020) .No one is spared from its impact. Impact is direct or indirect, but happened. The country's Covid -19 infection tally has sprinted beyond 4.7 million.( Chisti, Telegraph, 13 ,September). There are changes all around us. Every domain of human life is influenced and a vicious circle of negative took place. It makes Life hard and uncertain. The aspect of life those most affected are as follows:

### ECONOMIC IMPACT

Pandemic wreaked the world economy. India's economy suffered its worst slump, with the GDP contracting by forty percent as the coronavirus-related lockdown happened. Every sector of economy was suffered. It induced unemployment and million become the victim of it. Lockdown perpetrated an unspeakable hardship on migrant workers and forced to walk thousands of miles.

"Over 1.04 crore migrant workers had returned home during the lockdown period." ( Jha, 15 ,September,). Estimated hundred million emigrant workers were hit by strict lockdown which triggered a mass exodus from cities. Bad economy threatens to push million people below the poverty line. Salaried classes are hit on both ends. They lose job as well as unable to deposit banks loans. Society faced a grim situation where the lower and the middle classes are ground between the inflation and high taxation. Future was bleak. No sign of

improvement was appearing. In such condition very individual is under stress and fear consciously and unconsciously.

### **SOCIAL IMPACT**

Pandemic changed the social values and mutual relations. People belonging to all section of society are affected from coronavirus. The nature of impact may different, but sure. The most vulnerable student's composition was the children of skilled and unskilled labors, tribal, first generation learners and home based women laborers, migrant workers, daily wagers, and slum dwellers. This section of students was pushed in manual labor. Pandemic forced skilled and unskilled people to do whatever they could do, to survive and most of them turned vegetable, tea, toy and snack seller in their locality. Consequently, Pandemic induced downward mobility in society. The students from the tribal, the poor, the laborer, the migrant worker were becoming detached from studies in the absence of classes and had been put to work in agriculture field, brick factory, construction fields and many turn hawkers. Many students started grazing cattle or goats or helping parents in farm work. It is also observed that the pressure to run the family has led to several students to drop-out. Most of these students were from class VIII - X. they had taken up odd job to support families who are facing the adversities. . In pandemic hit economy, dignity of labor has increased. Many highly educated youth started to do manual work to share the family's burden.

It is an anxious time, for women who are highly vulnerable during this covid -19 pandemic. Pandemic induced economic crisis made women more vulnerable. Thousands of families were landed in abject poverty. The unexpected drops in income and insecurities of livelihood drive parents to marry off their daughter for relief or in the hope that the girl will find a better life in crisis time. Poor parents were not in position to bear the burden of girls. So, there is alarming rise in child marriage during pandemic. The untimely marriage pushes girl into family mores and their education suffered. So that life of young girl is endangered by the pandemic. In this way a vicious circle would be developed in life of women. Employment of women in India has a strange nature. Approximately 83 percent of the total numbers of women employed earn their livelihood as the casual labor. Census (2011) shows that women constitute almost 70 percent of internal migrant community. Women are engaged in home based labor such as rolling beedis, dhaga cutting and so on to add to the family income. In pandemic, the loss of livelihood brings unimaginable trauma and uncertainty to women. Their position in family and especially in the eye of husband is down. It is likely that this pandemic weakens agency of women, their position in labor market and deepen difficulties and inequities in social relations.

### **IMPACT ON EDUCATION**

With the pandemic running into months, education system of the country had been disrupted badly. All components of education system are affected by coronavirus. All level of educational institutions, teachers and students are disturbed. Restriction to check the pandemic has led to the closure of school and colleges. It is not possible to stop all teaching indefinitely. This creates the demand for education to go online. Online classes appear to be the only solution for both schoolchildren and university students, but the solution is far from perfect. Online teaching has given rise to numerous concerns about accessibility, availability, and affordability. Equal access to the internet or even marathons or others required devices are a dream for many students still. Digital divide is found in form of Disrupted internet connectivity, unavailability of smart phone, and lack of skill or interest to teach or to learn on line mode among rural and poor students. Online classes for children are possible only in 24 per cent of Indian house-holds (Telegraph, 24, September).

Pandemic has exposed the shortcomings of both traditional and online modes of teaching. We observed how the students from economically weaker and disadvantaged section were affected. Many students from rural areas and boarder areas could not appear in the exams because lack of proper gadgets and high speed internet connectivity.. Online exams from home, leaves a lot of scope for malpractice and impersonification. New method of teaching through online mode has created confusion among teachers, students, and guardians. Schools are closed. Students are not attending classes and a feeling of isolation persists among the students. Parents are in confusion and refusing to deposit tuition fees, school administration put the salary payment on hold. Teachers are unpaid or half paid. Uncertainty, confusion and fear seeped in teacher's fraternity.

### **IMPACT ON ENTERTAINMENT**

Pandemic has changed the parameters of entertainment. Pandemic induced lockdown seized the people and especially school going children into home. Outdoor entertainment of various kind become the victim of pandemic. Only indoor entertaining activities become the last resort of pastime in social distancing and quarantine period. Due to lockdown, engaging children round the clock inside the home may sometimes become difficult for parents. The children, the age group of three years to twelve years can find it very difficult to stay round the clock in a controlled situation, not meeting their friends and peers, not strolling in the neighborhood park, not doing most of the things they like. In such situation, it has become very important to keep children engaged with some other than prescribed homework and learning. Attending online classes and absence of human teacher have already become tedious for many children. Entertainment for children has become dependent on technology and digital version. It is not the natural way of entertainment for children. We should try to break with this virtual entertainment or digitalization of entertainment physical activities getting restricted during lockdown.

### **IMPACT ON HEALTH**

The covid-19 pandemic has led to unforeseen situation. Consequently, Health facilities have been seriously disturbed. Due to pandemic emergency, Entire health system is concerned to coronavirus. The patients of others diseases are completely neglected especially the patients of life style related disease, like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease. Such patients have to depend on online medication and consultancy. This manner of treatment did not satisfy the patients. The situation in rural and hinterland was more grim and critical. Health facilities are not up-to-date to cater the need of people. In this period of isolation, pregnant women are on high risk. There was marked increase in stillbirth as the coronavirus pandemic strains hard-pressed rural health service. Health facilities that once catered to pregnant women had been converted into covid 19 centers. Others general health care centre like Aganbari, where pregnant women 'needs fulfilled, are non-functional due to lockdown.

### **HOW TO OVER COME THE SITUATION**

Fear and anxiety during covid pandemic had weakened our resolve to fight the impending infection. We tried various ways to understand and to avoid the coronavirus infection. In the attempt, we glued to radio, TV, web site, indulged in social media to collect information that can be used timely. Honestly observed, the most stringent lockdown to avoid infection, maintain the social distancing and mentally prepared to go into quarantine, but fear of infection constantly haunted.

Consequently, it seem that there was no way-out to win the feared situation .Medical science efforts to invent vaccine was in progress but not materialized. Atmosphere of uncertainty encircled us. Continuous spike in covid -19 cases made

situation more grime. After passing, all above situation, we have to move towards religion and spirituality to counter the covid -19 induced fears, anxiety and uncertainty. Religions can play roles as facilitators, friends and even critics for special healthcare (Pattison, 2013). "Religious faith and practice can play role in helping individuals remain free from infection by the coronavirus and in helping to moderate the effect of infection if that should occur" (Koenig, 2020). Negative emotion (fear, anxiety, stress, etc) improves our susceptibility to the virus. On the other hand, positive emotion (joy, kindness, self control, love, etc) increase our immunity to face infectious challenges. In the same way, Islam gives its followers the hope that everlasting peace, freedom, and security from fear will be given in Heaven to those who performs good works and have faith in God existence (2:82). Staunch belief in God provides psychological strength to man to face challenges of life. Bhaggavad Gita point out that focusing one's mind on the Supreme God accumulates happiness and peace in the physical world (5:21). Reading and recitation of religious scripture provide solace to human in time of mental distortion.

"The Quran, a book which brings glad tidings to mankind along divine admonition, stresses the importance of man's discovery of truth on both spiritual and intellectual planes" (Khan, 2017). It is proper time to make strong faith and relationship with God by focusing on personal religious and spiritual actions.

It is human nature that he scared with any disease very harshly and tried to seek out solution immediately. But when he failed to achieved desired solution, he comes in depression. In such psychological strained situation, religious and spiritual practices could provide mental calmness and inner realization of self to coronavirus victims and others.

### What is spirituality?

Spirituality is a comprehensive term encompassing multiple domain of learning, used in abundance context and conveys different meaning to different people at different times among different culture. "Spirituality is better thought of as a boundary-less dimension of human experience" (Culliford, 2011). Spirituality is a state of consciousness. It is used to put forward the experiential and personal side of relationship to the transcendent. Spirituality is the process to lit inner fire to burn existential darkness. "Religion and spirituality are distinct yet related, not same" (Chandra, 2011). Religion makes man conformist and spirituality teaches to resist to external forces. In this way conformity is the creed of religion, resistance is the essence of spirituality. "Spirituality involves deeply personal, subjective experience, children's spirituality flows through their capacity for spontaneous joy and wonder. A sense of fascination of mystery, awe, and delight, are facets of adult spirituality too" (Culliford, 2011). Spirituality encompasses self transcendence, inner awareness and personal integration. "The spiritual motivation within us is an inner aspect of our being, and its fulfillment is our ultimate objective in life" (Utz, 2011. P133). those people fail to achieve or understand the inner aspect of life, will experience feeling of emptiness, despair and, anxiety. "Traditionally, spirituality referred to a religious process of reformation which aims to recover the original shape of man" (WIKIPEDIA, 2020). Spirituality compels us to ponder upon God and His creation, our purpose in life, and final destiny. It contains the power of an integrative and harmonizing function. It sustains on our inner unity, our relationship and connectedness with others. "Spirituality includes a sense of connection to something bigger than yourself and it typically involve a search for meaning in life" (University of Minnesota,). Spirituality detaches us from daily mundane experience and has positive effect on our lives and relationship. The knowledge and practice of the Spirit is

Spirituality (Husain, 2018). It search for higher value, inner freedom and things those give meaning to life. Spirituality is the condition of ultimate well-being. it is considered as a state of inner peace and tranquility. The concept of spirituality had been mentioned in the Bhaggavad Gita in various forms. (1) Spirituality is sovereign knowledge (4:38). (2) Enjoying peace within himself (4:38). (3) Controlling the senses (4: 39). (4) Free from false prestige, illusion and false association.(15:5). (5) Ultimate realization, and ultimate attainment (.p.28). (6) Turning one to the thought of the Supreme Being (p.27). (7) Purified consciousness (p.11).

Purified consciousness means acting in accordance with instruction of the Lord. Finding God in all things is also a simple form of spirituality. "Eight positive emotions: Awe, love/ attachment, trust /faith, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, joy and hope constitute what we mean by spirituality" (Vaillant, 2013). Spirituality can be felt and practiced in various form. In all form it gives calmness and wholeness. Spirituality supports people in exploring challenges, knowing personal truth and developing the sense of a personal philosophy.

### Impact of spirituality on covid situation

Covid -19 suddenly altered pace of normal life, and send all of us into new normal. Parameters of new normal (lockdown and social distancing) are very strange to people. In the process of adjustment to new normal, we have to pass through emotional detachments, depression, anxiety and stress. The impact of coronavirus in the form of domestic alienation, uncertainty, depression was matters of concern. The multiple deprivations inflicted bad impression on millions of people during pandemic, resulting a tragic loss of self-esteem and future.

The covid 19- pandemic produced the devastative impact on all domain of life. All aspects of life were influenced during lockdown. Financial distress destroys the hope in life. Loss of jobs makes man depressed. Social relations were transformed to save themselves from impending disease. Generally, observed that friends and neighbor shut their door for virus victim, though no fault of the victim. Victim's mental torture was unmanageable. It has become very difficult, how to respond to covid-19 related stigma and ostracism in the society.

Educational disturbance made students life difficult. Hope and enthusiasm in future was blocked. The students of secondary level were more in difficulty in regard to admission in professional courses. Postponement of examination put the brake on continuous educational activities. This change creates the psychological disturbance and it was manifested in development of suicidal tendency among students. As the students were remain stuck inside homes because of the pandemic. Nothing was in home that would give students an opportunity to channelize their energy and free time and something positive while they remain at home. The entertainment for children, especially outdoor games come under total denial. This situation negatively impacted on cognitive development of children. In lack of entertainment facilities, children become haughty and stubborn in dealing with parents and peer.

The health facilities come under stress due to pandemic's urgent and extras needs. The scarcity of proper health care impacted negatively on all section of society. But, the most neglected and vulnerable were senior citizens and hinterland people and especially pregnant women. Village pregnant women faced very grim situation in absence of proper facilities in maternity. The stressful situation negatively affected the new born babies in this "severe global health emergency and psychological shock event (Jerominus, 2020).



Disease related information or misinformation in electronic or print media was influencing the dimensions of personality and normal behavior. "As we see the red dots on the maps of our countries and the world multiplies, we realized there is nowhere left to escape to. We do not even need our imagination to start fearing the worst. We watch videos of convoys of big black army truck carrying dead bodies from small Italian town to nearly crematories as if we were watching our own funeral processions" (Pamuk,2020). The impact of coronavirus brought tremendous changes in human emotion (frustration, fear anger, anxiety), health, personality and values. It is matter of shock for every person that there are rapid changes in behavior during coronavirus pandemic in observing the social distancing. Millions of people with unexpected illness, sudden death, job loss, financial insecurity, truncated relationship and postponed college admission were in psychological disequilibrium. Estimate showed that the graph of trauma, anxiety and depression was shooting up alongside the covid rise. Experts warn of a looming mental health crisis especially post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in this disorder, people have to tackle the constant threat of potential death.

Spirituality offers us sustenance and inspiration during covid-19 pandemic. Spiritual practices provide opportunity to disarm fear and uncertainty in dealing with social distancing and quarantine. "Spirituality can be a good sedative facing the outbreak covid -19".( Vaillant,2013). Religion creates positive emotion in people. Religious texts have a rich store of spiritual and moral wisdom (Husain, 2018). "Spirituality and religion can help humans in bereavement and times of crisis" (Krysinska, Andriessen, Corveleyn,j, 2013). Religion has positive impact on mental health through social support, and enhancing self-efficacy and cohesion. For example, "if you hear that plague or any other dangerous infectious disease has broken out in a land, do not go to it, but if it breaks out in a land where you are living, stay at home in your city" said Prophet of Islam(Ghareeb,2010). In another situation, Prophet said that "cleanliness is the half of the faith and faith leads a man to heaven" (Maigari, 2016). For a follower of Islam five times prayer in a day must clear his mind from psychological strains and provide opportunity to make connection to God. Regular recitation of scripture has psychological and physiological influence (the control of heart rate, the blood pressure and muscle tension) on individuals. It is an opportunity for corona victims " to deepen their religious faith or personal relationship with God through prayer, meditation, reading scripture , reciting scripture, listening to inspirational programs, or reading uplifting literature that nourishes the spirit"(Koenig,2020). Studying the scriptures give us strength to live harmoniously and peacefully in our daily life. Reading scriptures protect us in life obstacles. It is the path of peace invocation. While studying scripture we directly experience blessing of God (Husain, 2018). Spirituality and religion could be useful sedatives for humankind in the current situation.

#### Impact of spirituality immunity on personality

"We are blessed with an immune system that protects us from all sorts' stresses and diseases" (Husain, 2013). Human beings have natural immune system that maintains the health. As we have physical immunity in body, same way, we need to have the immunity of the spirit to save the purity of mind, heart and soul and remain free from stress. Spiritual immunity defends us from distresses and negative vibrations of life. It makes us emotionally and mentally stable and builds up self-confidence. "Owing to spiritual immunity our innate powers are awakened and activated. We not only realize but also actualize that we are born as light to spread light" (Husain, 2013). Meditations are ideal for generating spiritual immunity. With the help of spiritual immunity, we need to transform our self from within to overcome distress. Stress blocks the soul and lesson cognitive ability of mind.

Mind is a natural gift and we should not get it contaminated. In order to nurture spiritual immunity, we must overcome stresses and unnecessary aspiration and desires. In this way, we can return to the original state of purity and develop the immunity of spirit. When stress disturbs us, we should develop patience and not get upset, react calmly to any stressful situation. Consequently, we should acknowledge that stress is a part and parcel of life. Spiritual immunity protects us from distresses and negative vibration induced in current covid 19 pandemic.

#### CONCLUSION

Pandemic was a triggering event, with which the people could not cope easily. Diseases are stressful for all. When medical facilities were proved inadequate in crucial need and constant watching and listening to the news of covid-19 death toll and infection was demoralizing the people. Impression was emerging that there was no medicine, vaccine and medical treatment to control disease. In this time of uncertainty, it seems that a way (bonus way) to face the danger of coronavirus is to adopt and realized religious faith and spirituality. Spirituality comes as boon to ameliorate the victim's spirit and inner courage. "To deepen their religious faith or personal relationship with God through prayer, meditation, reading scripture reciting scripture, listening to inspirational program, or reading uplifting literature that nourishes the spirit" ( Koenig,2020). Religion and spirituality could play role as facilitators, friends and even critics for victims .Spirituality is man's spiritual food for the soul. Spirituality boosts man's inner personality on positive line. Spirituality helps people to maintain mental relaxation in period of dangerous disease. Taking help of spirituality against the uncertainties induced by coronavirus pandemic could be assumed as a method of health promotion and disease prevention. The group of spirituality seekers is big and covers not only immediate patients but also various groups, including patients nearest, doctors, families world to emerge after this pandemic, we must embrace and nourish the feeling of humility and solidarity engendered by the current moment"(Pamuk, 2020).

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