

COVID -19 PANDEMIC AND CHANGING LIFE STYLE: REVISITING NATURE FOR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

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The human civilization has witnessed several pandemics creating a crisis of unusual kind. COVID-19 outbreak has been declared as the public health emergency of international concern on 30 Jan 2020 by the WHO. Like the covid-19 pandemic, when the Spanish flu broke out in India in 1918, the mortality rate was terrifically high that the nation ran into a shortage of logs to cremate the dead. Similarly the dreadful outbreak of Covid 19 has also left the humanity in a chaos leading to stress and anxiety as the signature mental health problem of the society along with numerous emotional outcomes especially depression and psychological disorders sometimes leading to suicides. As Emotional Health has been affected very severely during lockdown and changed life style of social distancing to contain the pandemic, we need to cope up with the situation strongly **to promote strength of the community**. There is an urgent need to attach primacy to unity and brotherhood, a common challenge about bringing togetherness and resilience.

Darwin, in his work 'On the Origin of Species' explicated that there is 'struggle for existence' in nature and species compete with each other for survival. The weak get diminished and their cultures delimited while the strong prevail. Following this, the human world at large began following the idea of "survival of the fittest," a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer. As a result, human life became a struggle and human beings became sinners. *This* Pandemic is all the result of humans trying to dominate nature instead of being a part of it. Covid -19 pandemic reminds us the theory of struggle for existence and

the survival of the fittest on all aspects of life today. Battling with some invisible virus and surviving in a new frame has become a challenge at present time. This is, therefore, a general conception that human being with superior powers to other living creatures can exploit Nature and mistook the vastness of nature and vulnerability of man. He became egocentric to find himself a part of the industrial and scientific advancements and broke the unifying spiritual element that forms the common bond between the divine, the human, and the material.

The great American poet Emerson believed that every one of us could move beyond the physical world of the senses into deeper spiritual experience through intuitive light of mind and soul to release ourselves from the burden of this mundane world. Though the society and its institutions have ravaged the purity of the human soul, the three essential values of individualism, idealism and the divinity of nature can solve the sufferings of man. In his essay *Nature* expresses his belief that each individual must develop a personal understanding of the universe. *“Why should not we enjoy an original relation to the Universe?”* Hr recommends an approach by which we may each arrive at our own vision of totality by establishing a communion with nature and realizing divine to procure mental and emotional wellness.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun . At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of Nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other ; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhoodNature , in its ministry to man , is not only the material , but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other’s hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seeds; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man .1

During such pandemic as Covid 19, seeking shelter in the lap of nature to fight with the stressful situations and acquiring the practices of Transcendental Meditation may allow

the mind to settle very deeply inward—in a natural way. The practice has extensive physiological effects. Spending even a few minutes in meditation can restore our calm and inner peace. Wordsworth, the Romantic Poet, seems to have experienced a state of consciousness that is simple and natural yet uniquely different from the familiar states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping. In fact, it is a major state of consciousness that is *Transcendental Consciousness*. In restfully alert state, mental activity settles down, like waves settling on the ocean, leaving the experience of consciousness in its most silent, wakeful state — unbounded awareness. At the same time, physiological activity spontaneously settles down and one experiences a state of deep relaxation that enables the body to dissolve stress with exceptional efficiency. His nature poetry took a new turn passing beyond sensuous penetration and description of nature with a keen moral and ecocritical insight. His poem “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” explains this feature more vividly:

A presence that disturbs me with the joy.....

A sense sublime.

.....That blessed mood,

In which the burthen of the mystery,

In which the heavy and the weary weight

Of all this unintelligible world,

Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood,

— In which the affections gently lead us on 2

Unfortunately man has failed to realize the grace that reflects directly from the heart of Nature, may be because of his ignorance or because of the over powering of materialistic outlook that has divided physical from spiritual. The poem ‘The world is too much with’ us laments the withering connection between humankind and nature, blaming industrial society for replacing that connection with material pursuits.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!³

Thus Wordsworth had a belief that the presence of divinity and healing power in nature provide a balm to weary souls. Changing times with the pandemic and the resultant lockdown have made man lonelier and susceptible to an uncanny sense of uncertainty. Even the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's idea of inner strength and hope during the Covid-19 pandemic is transforming countless lives throughout the world. In these bleak times Tagore's writings remind us that no one is alone and that we are a collectivity. His writings inspire us to believe that through hope and through faith in ourselves we can face and overcome this global calamity. He also acknowledges that suffering is a fundamental human reality. He believed that science and technology should stand for the well being of humanity without dehumanizing the values of love and harmony in human world. His famous work Gitanjali is song offerings to the Higher Spirit with nature as a messenger. Verse 68 :

*Thy sunbeam comes upon this earth of mine
with arms outstretched
and stands at my door the livelong day
to carry back to thy feet
clouds made of my tears and sighs and songs.⁴*



He portrays nature as a colorful thread of communion between man and God, a tender bond of inexplicable kind. So we see in such a tough time of covid 19, nature is a great inspiration to a dejected soul. Nature should be preserved, because it gives us aesthetic joy, and, thereby, a bond of love is established between nature and man. This crisis of pandemic has entered in our lives just to make us more broadened in our outlook and more attentive to rebuild a synchronized world of Love and Harmony. Verse 82 of Gitanjali

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.

There is none to count thy minutes.

Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.

*At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate be shut;
but I find that yet there is time.*⁵

Time is ever moving factor where time cannot be wasted in brooding over uncontrollable things. Our concern should be to bring best out of everything. There is a need to understand the secrets of nature through greater partnership. There is a larger need of mindfulness that can help people see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness. When practicing a form of mindfulness, people can release emotions that might have been causing physical stress to the body. Some people prefer pursuing hobbies such as gardening, playing music and creating art, while others find relief in more solitary activities: meditation, yoga and walking. Careful and critical thinking of what we see and hear may bring sensible decisions during this war like situation. We should try to stay virtually connected to those who provide us real emotional support to relieve ourselves from distress because to face this pandemic mental attitude and emotional wellness is of supreme importance. Early sensitization of mental and emotional health can minimize the psychological disorders among the people. We have already seen the positive impact of nature on human mind and to maintain balance of head and heart eco therapy has proved to be the most beneficial in calming and balancing man –nature relationship.

We cannot deny the major devastation and disruption of lives due to corona virus spread, *there is a dramatic change in socio cultural setup of social distancing and disconnectedness from outside world.* We must adapt the relaxing techniques of keeping ourselves emotionally capable of facing the situation wisely. The world is changing fast where restaurants, mall culture, sports events, foreign travel, and family get together all have vanished from many of our lives. *The restricted human interaction with nature during the period of lockdown has miraculously restored natural surroundings. Reports from all over the country indicate the improved air quality and water quality in rivers and the blossoming of wild life. India's huge population and a hub of pollution has shown drastic fall in pollution level when the human activities have been put to restrictions due to lockdown.* The outbreak of Corona is a lesson to mankind to revisit nature by preserving its beauty and divinity

into us as we find in Terry Tempest Williams who has been at the forefront of American nature writing. Her poem "Refuge" shows her quest to discover her own values and visions

I pray to the birds because

I believe they will carry the messages of my heart upward.

I pray to them because I believe in their existence,

the way their songs begin and end each day,

the invocations and benedictions of earth.

I pray to the birds because they remind me of what I love

rather than what I fear.

And at the end of my prayers,

they teach me how to listen.⁶

Apart from the medical understanding of Covid -19 this pandemic has made us realize about the futile progress of modern civilization lacking into spiritual growth only leading to mental and emotional chaos. *Ancient wisdom took Nature as revered and sacred but the modern man who is busy in his mad pursuits often forgets bountifulness of Mother Nature. He seems too reluctant to preserve natural resources and the sustainable development. It is his growing ambition only that has replaced the sacredness of nature by the mundane ideas. The challenge to survive happy and healthy has made man an unpredictable creature, struggling within him and most of the times from outside world. This pandemic is a warning to mankind for self-introspection towards careful handling of Mother Nature and for self-assessment to be generous to the fellow beings to maintain a right blend of physical and spiritual in the post Covid -19 world. Revisiting nature for mental and emotional wellness is an inspirational task for ailing minds. It is the prevailing beauty and the splendor of nature that generates a perpetual joy, an everlasting sustenance and shelter to ailing heart.*

"When you realize how perfect everything is you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky." —Buddha

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