

*Covid-19 Pandemic - Dr. Suneem A. Khan*

## Coronavirus Outbreak An Unprecedented Situation

**C**OVID 19 : What the pandemic has taught us so far. The outbreak of novel coronavirus has created an unprecedented situation around the world. Mankind is no stranger to such calamitous outbreaks of diseases. However, this is the first viral-outbreak of this nature and scale in our lifetime, something that we have witnessed as a 'generation'. All of us have come to know this fairly by now that hygiene is the first and obvious take-away. Precaution is the only 'visible' cure for this new strain of coronavirus, so far. As precaution, what doctor's advice is basic hygiene, apart from social distancing. Sanitation and cleanliness are among the humblest of the civic virtues, and it's fairly easy for one to underestimate their significance. It needed a Mahatma to attach the utmost priority to them. In South Africa and in India, his historic campaigns always began with or ran parallel to the question of sanitation and hygiene. In the year

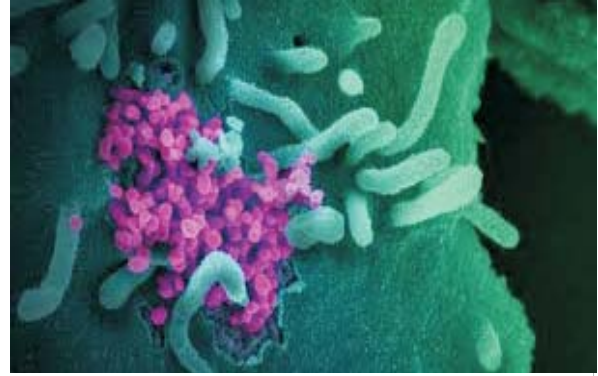
1896, Gandhiji was visiting India, and plague broke out in Mumbai (then Bombay). He offered his services to the state, which were accepted. As



a volunteer Gandhiji inspected latrines and exhorted people to pay attention to cleanliness. We need to imbibe all his lessons in our daily life, and in this ongoing year of his 150th birth anniversary, we may at least begin by rededicating ourselves to the cause of personal and social hygiene. The nation-wide 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' (Mission Clean India) is a precursor to this great social awakening. Incremented respect for nature may be another great lesson intended for us to shift our collective focus on. Homo sapiens are the only organism having overpowered all other animals, pretending to have assumed almost total control of the whole planet, and even set foot on the Moon. Now it stands humbled by a mere microorganism. We would do well to keep in mind the fact that at the end of the day we are merely biological organisms, dependent on other organisms for survival. Mankind's fetish to control nature and exploit all its resources for profit can be wiped out in a stroke by an organism and the mother of all ironies would be that we



cannot even see what's going to devour us with the naked eye. Time to remind ourselves that our ancestors saw nature as mother, and asked us to respect it. At some point in history, we forgot ancient wisdom. When pandemics and abnormal weather phenomena are becoming the norm, it's time to pause and seriously introspect about where did we go astray on our way, and how we can still make a comeback on a pre and well defined 'track of life'. This new virus strikes beyond man-made classifications of religion, race and region. The world has been busy drawing distinctions and waging wars over us-versus-them, have's-versus-have not's, fair-verus-black. But we suddenly realise that in the face of a grave mortal & a threat of microbiological size (I'm actually laughing while writing this one) like the CoV2019, we have none but one identity – 'that we are human beings, uniformly susceptible to pathologies'. We also happen to realise how deeply each one of us is connected with everybody else. We are as safe as the care we take of others' safety, not only of human beings but also of plants and animals. Faced with an extraordinary crisis, most people tend to be selfish, but this is a crisis that teaches us to think equally of others. Though



voluntary services through social mobilisation are not encouraged due to the highly contagious nature of the disease, there are many ways in which people can help contain and mitigate the viral spread. Every citizen can contribute towards raising awareness and equally by refraining from spreading panic, peddling fake news and taking prudent precautions advised by the government. Those who can, should also care to share resources, especially with ill-affording, daily wagers and less resourceful neighbours, and be extremely careful and cautious vis-a-vis senior citizens who are 'the most' vulnerable to the disease. Mother Nature is also giving us subtle hints to acknowledge, with humility, our basic equality and interdependence. It's a lesson - imparted though at a heavy price – that will come handy in mitigating global challenges for instance climate change as well as in building a better, common future.

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