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SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID-19 WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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Abstract

The emergence of infectious and fatal disease COVID -19 has created an utter topsyturvy in the whole world. The entire gamut of human activities from social to political, from economical to environmental has been facing great challenges since its identification in the last December 2019 in Wuhan, China (Ma,2020). In order to mitigate and control the infection worldwide lockdown has been enforced. Social distancing, quarantining, restricting large gathering etc were being made compulsory time to time according to the seriousness of this disease in different areas. Since no clinically approved medicine or vaccine are invented or found till now the number of death report has been increasing rapidly day by day, though some countries are able to control it to some extent, only by maintaining basic hygienic guidelines suggested by WHO. Needless to say, the socio-economic state of the world are badly affected by. however, this lockdown proves a boon for natural environment so far as the pollution is concerned. A survey report given by NASA clearly shows sudden reduction of pollution in big countries like USA, Spain, China, India etc due to lockdown. This paper throws light on socio-environmental challenges and issues being emerged out in the entire world especially in India due to this pandemic and possible solutions accordingly.

Key words: Socio-environmental issues, challenges, COVID 19

1. Introduction

History repeats itself. A century earlier in 1918-1920 the world witnessed the outbreak Spanish Flue in 1918-20

taking toll of 500 million people from the South Seas to the North Pole (Jarus, O,2020). Apart from this the major pandemics in 20th century are Asian-Flue

(1957-1958), Hong Kong Flu (1968-70), HIV (1981-), Swine-Flu (2009-10), Ebola (2013-16), and the last and the worst being COVID 19.

The first confirmed case has been traced back to 17th November 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei, China, leading the Chinese health authorities to take prompt decision regarding public health measure and closure of market as well. Severe pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, septic shock, kidney failure are the complication that an infected patient experiences (WHO, 2020). Older people, and those suffering from above mentioned health issues are vulnerable to develop serious illness. The virus is spread primarily between people via droplets of saliva (produced while coughing and sneezing) or discharge from nose. So the best way to prevent this contagious disease is to protect oneself by wearing mask, frequent hand washing, maintaining distance from others. These are the primary guidelines prescribed by WHO. The number of confirmed cases is 16523815 in which 655112 are confirmed death cases in 216 countries till now.

Most of the countries are trying their level best to slow down the growth of the virus either by adopting various health policies and measures or imposing lockdown sensing the reality of this health emergency. The scientists of all countries are also trying to invent vaccine. The most successful (not yet approved by WHO) vaccine so far being the Oxford University one.

This critical health emergency triggers the fear of impending economic crisis since most of the offices, industries, economic sectors are forced to shut-down leaving the people jobless. Same is the case with India. More pathetic and grave situation is in social condition. Doctors, nurses, health workers who are frontline fighters are facing misconduct and harassment. The issue of migrant workers is the most highlighted throughout the country.

The environment and climate has greatly been affected due to halting of transportation and restriction of driving vehicles. Lockdown results in reduction of CO and NO₂ emissions which ultimately bring positive impact on environment.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Unlike environment the impact of COVID 19 disease and lockdown on people is negative. Poor people, daily-wagers, migrant workers are mostly affected by. All segments of population specially the older and the persons with disabilities, children are the most vulnerable groups. All the people are more or less, facing difficulty in having general health services and same is the case with non COVID patients. It is due to poor infrastructure and quality of care. This causes of fear or anxiety among the general public. Temporary unemployment, closure of institutions, lack of social gathering with family members and friends all are aggravating their mental health and thereby leading to social stress (Sing, 2020 National Herald). The sections of society who are mostly affected by this disease and lockdown, discussed here categorically-

Poor people: Poor people, laborers, daily wagers, farmers, who live below poverty line are facing endless suffering mentally and physically due to the COVID 19. Hossain et al. made a study on a poor farmer from U.P who was in debt committed suicide. Though the suicide of farmers is not altogether new in India, but here the very farmer is a victim of lockdown. He was not able to find laborers for harvesting.

Migrant workers: They are the most affected people. Sudden and unexpected lockdown forced them to a crisis. They were rendered without money, food and shelter and thereby leading them to encounter either with accident or death.

Doctors: In this global health crisis doctors along with nurses, health workers are the frontline fighters. But to their utter surprise and despair, they were being

attacked by the mob and are being misbehaved by miscreant neighbors (Trivedi, Ahmedabad Mirror, 2020). However, the picture is same all over India.

Old person: Since old people are the most susceptible to attack by any kind of diseases. Since risk of death for them is high (WHO, 2020) lockdown proves a challenge to them both physically and mentally.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Economy is collapsed. Education system is disrupted. Society is entangled. But environment is benefited. Lockdown seems to usher in blessings for nature and climate. The major cities with heavy traffics, high population, big industries and less forestation are always responsible for increasing pollution at a high speed. But during lockdown when sudden restriction of traffic, closure of industries there occurs a positive impact on environmental condition- quality of water in the Ganges as well as all big rivers where garbage are thrown from industries improved and the air gets purified. The wild life aquatic life feel free to roam about every -where during the period of strict lockdown. Lokhandwala et.al.(2020), in a study on environment shows the improvement of quality of air and quality of water during, pre and post lockdown of pandemic situation.

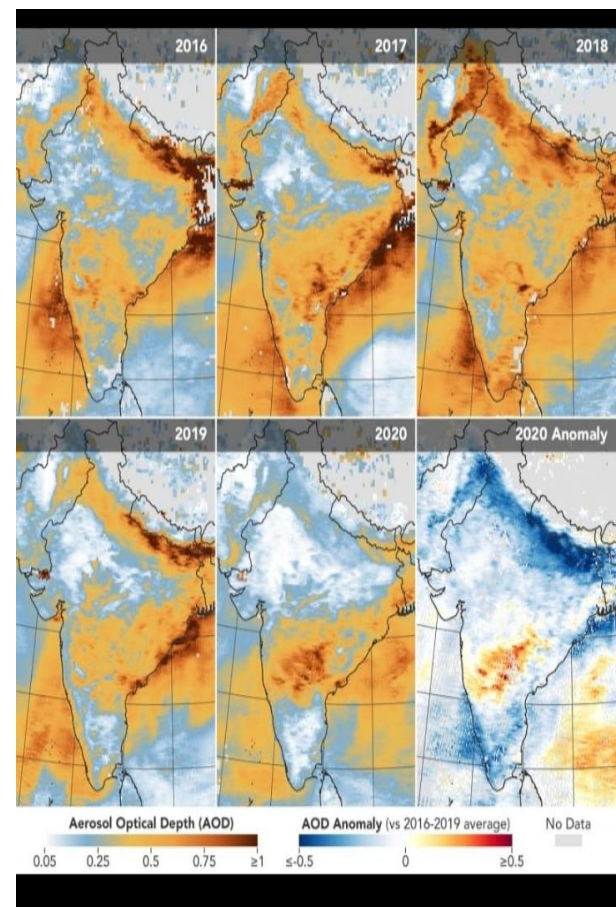
Condition of air quality:

During the total lockdown a significant and drastic change in the quality of air in the big cities full with industries is seen. From 24th march all the domestic and international flight trains vehicles were stopped and restricted (B.B.C.News,2020) . In this regard NASA provided a clear picture showing the difference in air pollution level in India before and after lockdown situation.

NO₂, CO, emitted from combustion of fuel, traffic fuels are highly detrimental to health are also been reduced to an unexpected lower level. According to SK Satheesh, professor at Center for

Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Bangalore this step resulted in the reduction in particular matter concentrations over Southern part of India is around 50-60% and Delhi, U.P, W.B etc. up to 75% (The, Hindu, 2020).

Fig. sequence of aerosol optical thickness concentration (month-Terra/Modis) in India from the period of March 31 to April 5 in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 (NASA 2020). First 5 maps above show aerosol optical depth (AOD) measurement over India during the same March 31 to April 5 period for each year from 2016 through 2020. The 6th map (anomaly) shows that how AOD in 2020 compared to the average for 2016-2019. An optical depth, or thickness, of less than 0.1 over the entire atmospheric vertical column is considered "clean". (data retrieved by Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer[MODIS]).



Condition of water (With special reference to the Ganga):

A large amount of industrial waste from a huge number of industrial cities like Kanpur, Varanasi, Patna is being dumped the Ganges daily, thereby polluting it. But after total stoppage of human activities, closure of industries the water quality in rivers is improving, especially with regard to Dissolved Oxygen (DO) and reduced nitrate concentration. concentration (The New Indian Express). What is more, a recent research by IIT Roorkee shows that the water of river Ganga has been found fit for drinking (The New Indian Express). rare South Asian River Dolphins are back across the ghats of Kolkata. It is only for low water pollution level. (Kumari, 2020,India.com).

SUGGESTIONS

Though various steps are being taken by the central Government and state Government here is some suggestions:

Social issues:

1. Realizing the crisis and urgency cash should be transferred to the poor people's account as early as possible.
2. Allowance or pension for the widow, old persons, and disabled persons should be given well in advance.
3. Free ration should be provided for up to one year.
4. Allowance should be given to these to migrant workers who become jobless.
5. Police should take strict actions against the neighbours who try to misbehave with doctors, nurses, health workers.
6. Along with financial support insurance to the health workers, job should be given to one of their family members.
7. Tele- health facilities, if possible, should be conducted for the old.

Environmental issues:

Since the quality of air and water is improving day by day during this lockdown steps should be taken for long term effect:

1. In future that is in pos- COVID era strict measures should be taken for the right implementation of existing the Ganga Rejuvenation plan which includes different missions for water reservation.
2. Rigorous and regular monitoring of water resources can prevent water pollution.
3. The government should think for an alternative whether in future short-term (2-3days) lockdown (after observing, researching and balancing minutely with economy or other serious issues) can be implement state wise.
4. Besides, forestation is of utmost important.
5. Pollution control devices which can absorb, filter, disperse the harmful pollution should be need on regular basis.
6. Not only strict laws but also it is the responsibility on the part of all law-abiding citizens can make the world worthy of living.

CONCLUSION

The world is in a phase of utter confusion, restlessness, imbalance, imbalance and disharmony due to this pandemic. Scientists, doctors all are trying their level best to find out any solution in order to control this health emergency. In new future, it is hoped, we will control it one day. Economic stability will be restored one day. But the social crises and environmental issues which become open to all due to this pandemic should be thought with due importance and seriousness in order to make this only planet worthy of living for our future generation.

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