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## COVID: A NEW PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS LIFE: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO COEXIST

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*“All birds find shelter during a rain but eagle avoids the rain by flying above the Clouds”*. (Attitude makes all the difference)

- APJ Abdul Kalam

At one stroke of nature the human species was locked inside their homes. Emotions of vulnerability, helplessness, fear and remorse took over the human mind. All the scientific advancement, triumph over space, navigation across the oceans and deep sea technology, achievements in medicine, biotechnology, physics, robotics seem to be futile. The world was gripped by a virus species which laid a scathing attack on the human race. This attack exposed the vulnerabilities that exist in the structure of human organization, its economic systems, its administration, unequal societies and its foundation. It laid bare mutual vulnerabilities, cultural fault lines, gender roles, class divide. This crisis questioned the fundamentals of units of socialization – family, marriage, state. Covid19 challenged the health infrastructure, educational facilities, public policy resilience and robustness of laws. It questioned the system of governance, liberal democracies, capitalist mode of living and the supposed hegemony of world superpowers. It exposed the rural urban divide, regional imbalance of intra and inter countries, unethical ways of leaving. The direction of modernity and its events of concretization, urbanization, mindless industrialization, ecological degradation, and globalization were questioned. The crisis questioned the foundational ideas of equality, justice and fraternity of modern nation states on ground. It showed us loopholes of global value supply chains, agriculture sector, manufacturing and limitations of the service economy. Humanity was under a civilizationonal, existential, spiritual and a cultural introspection.

And it is this very introspection that got me into thinking about the solutions to today’s world problems facing not just the human society but all the flora and fauna on our planet. Solution to all aspects of life is the need of the hour for a

world grappling with such an invisible enemy. In this article I shall try to propose alternative ways of living in a post covid world which shall take care of people, planet, profits; development and ecology , urban and the rural , democracy and development , gender and institutions , climate change , debates around modernity , education and aspects of spirituality and religion.

The pandemic showed us our weakness in the realm of polity, governance infrastructure and limitations of policy making. Lack of institutional capacity and erosion and shrinking of fundamental rights sphere with increasing state surveillance of state, non-implementation of fundamental duties, issues with parliamentary system, federal structure, productivity in parliament, judicial governance, panchayati raj system and municipality issues, challenges of institutional setup and political parties . The combination of weak state apparatus coupled with capitalism came to the fore in the ugly form of inequality.

Economic inequality resulted into disproportionate impact on different sections of populations with more than a million job losses, people slipping into poverty, breeding extremism. Harish Damodaran argues India is becoming conglomerate capitalism from an entrepreneurial capitalism, technical recession fiscal prudence, monetary and credit policy, inflation taxation NPA issue, stock market scams aggravate further crisis. Joseph Stieglitz argued the crisis of covid exposed the weakness of economies, governments, societies where there is no social protection. Milton Friedman –“inflation is taxation without legislation”. Economists Wilkinson and Pickett – inequality breeds mistrust, mental illness. Thomas picketty in his book Capital and ideology has said inequality is neither economic or technological but ideological and political.

People questioned religion and culture because of unexplained disaster and at the same time it also acted as a shock absorber. PM Modi called it as emotional recharge during the crisis. Ethics and sensitivity were at test, evils of superstition, blind faith; social evils came to the fore.

Social evils like caste, class, gender, race and religion plague the modern nation still. Fractures like this go on to widen such crisis, globalization, language, regional differences in India, sons of soil doctrine, intellectual discrimination became evident. Mother earth and its ecological degradation , dysfunctional

ecosystem , air , water, soil , noise, radio pollution , e waste, solid waste, plastic pollution , Himalayan degradation, sand mining , biodiversity loss , loss of flora And fauna , climate change, water stress and groundwater pollution , environmental issues and health effects were felt. Mindless development and construction of new resorts threaten tribal communities ,man animal conflict in kawal tiger reserve , agriculture encroachment and tribal issues , river pollution all contributed in aggravating the pandemic crisis.

Leadership in all sectors and the education system was put to test. Societies needed team building and leadership, a Schindler, a Gandhi and a Paul Bagina, a Vivekananda. Society needed the service leadership of Christ and Buddha and Teresa and Mandela. It needed the mental toughness and grittiness of a Dhoni and a Steve Waugh. The ill effects of the educational system in forms of rural alienation and moral blindness came to the fore. Empathy deficit spoke of the creation of citizenry who practiced social stigma and questioned friendship bonds. The principal of ‘‘atithi devo bhava’’ vanished under the garb of social distancing. It acquired the ugly face of social stigma. Practicing social distancing was a luxury which only the rich could afford

Domestic violence against women, violence and stigma against front line workers showed that we have miles to go before we sleep. The pandemic showed how desperately we need women participation outside education and health sectors. The dire need for women to be in fashion, films, politics, economics, sports, painting, science, business, we desperately need women friendly infra and transportation women reservation and feminization of India.

Health wise- stunting, wasting micro nutrition deficiency under and over nutrition of women and children bear disproportionate on the already vulnerable section. Rise of non conventional diseases, urban obesity, new diseases, rare diseases, tropical neglected diseases aggravated during the pandemic. It showed us ill effects of migration and uneven development of our country.

All these ill effects call on us to look for alternative and sustainable ways of living, do some soul searching, become resilient and not be another Harappa which supposedly came under water and vanished or the dinosaur species which could not keep up with the changes in the natural environment and became extinct.

If we dig a little deep we can find answers in our epics of Ramayana and the Mahabharata, our syncretism and tradition of gaga jamuni tehjib , in the teachings of lord Jesus . The present crisis has clearly showed us that we cannot overpower nature and the natural habitat of our planet and therefore our way of living has to be inclusive, sustainable and compassionate. We will need to instill some core values right at the foundation of human society and its organization. Some principles like the principle of pluralism, accommodation, empathy, justice, truth, courage and honesty are non negotiable. Any future society has to be based on such value. New higher education economics , symphony of life , integration of villages, integration of films as source of education , reforms in primary secondary and tertiary education and tackling problems of education infrastructure , teacher quality and teacher absenteeism , student teacher ratio, focus on soul transformation rather than rote learning has to be the priority . Mentorship and guidance can be available to students at every step of their life and experience could be transferred to them.

At the environmental front we can introduce Bogotá's cyclova programme in our society by reviving of cycling culture, delinking it with social status and prescribed norms. Environmental ethics should be the way ahead, gandhian ethics and economy proves central in treading any path like this which believes in simplicity on all fronts. Small revolutions in districts could take place like strawberry in Jhansi is cultivated now, in koraput organic coffee; food processing could take a central role in development of India. We can market our tropic drinks like chaas , mattha, sharbat at the global level . Organic agriculture or functioning of SEWA social entrepreneurship show us the way ahead . SC guaranteed in subash Kumar vs. state of Bihar right to pollution free air and water for all. Besides these developments redefining social norms shall be a priority in the coming times. Not just 7 pheras in Hindu marriage but the 8<sup>th</sup> phera in marriage after 6 years and 9<sup>th</sup> phera after 12 years should be a promise of equality and equal partnership for the couple , democratization of household has to take place and parenting aspect acquires importance in that respect. Reforms in judiciary, police, prison and administration is the need of the hour which shall centre around reformation.

Gandhiji spoke about ethical citizenship, empathetic friendship, empowerment of others, civilizational moral compass, moral interconnectedness, empathetic pluralism, common suffering through non violence. He said civilization should aid moral progress rather than futility and violence and further collaborative

consumption. Stressing the idea of community life, Martin Luther king jr said we must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

Our new economic outlook could focus on small MSMEs and cottage industries like Wig making, jute making , apparel sector , export led growth , connecting ports and hinterland, exploiting the untapped potential of India. Poultry farming in Bharatpur , Mexicos program of cash transfer- Progressa , inclusive development in terms of small units like khakra making units in Raigadh district ,one product one district scheme ,digital governance ,community vigilance , wellness centers ,accommodation and pluralism ,decentralization ,handloom industry ,an atmosphere of compassion and empathy and cultural resurgence . Emotional intelligence and spiritualism, gramin banks, atmanirbhar villages ,grass root innovation , stopping migration ,no urban ghettoisation, community radio movement in taluka areas , farmer producer organization , yoga , Kabirs idea of social amity, footwear making in Dumka, creative disruption in agriculture , sericulture and handicrafts ;CSR; scientific social responsibility; zero poverty , unemployment and zero carbon emissions; promotion of scientific temper everywhere. This interconnected web of life and a balance between individual autonomy and authority is the way to go to achieve socio economic growth in an environment enveloped by the teachings of our great saints, leaders and public servants. There is a need to shift from silos approach to landscape area approach in order to save wildlife, tapping the untapped potential of blue economy and green recovery together can come handy. There is a need to improve the demography of our young population by giving them energy sufficient diet (staples), nutrient adequate diet and healthy diets. Institutional collaboration, development in horticulture, emotional integration in terms of security is what is needed.

Emerging issues of digital apartheid , empathy deficient need to be tackled holistically in today's times , democratization in truest sense, grass root leadership, strengthening value system , power decentralization, antyodaya, establishing village republics, local leadership, establishing family bonds, resurgence of a strong civil society , 'good – constitutionalised ' human beings. Establishment of network economy cluster of villages could be made. Ila bhatts 100 mile radius concept which encourages production of goods locally in 100 miles and empower these clusters, sectoral industrial zones, factory spaces.

Prakriti rakshate rakshatah (nature protects if it is protected). Verses in national anthem Jan – people, Gann – community, Mann - ideas provide

a clue to leading a meaningful life from a great Tagorian lens. Mother Teresa had said poverty of being unwanted, uncared for and unloved is the greatest poverty of all. Looking ahead we can have universal basic income, universal Access to health, education and housing differential urbanization and improvement in rural economy.

In the words of Robert frost two roads diverged into the yellow wood and I took the one that is less travelled by. The alternative way is hard, difficult and different than the route that developed world has taken. Some might even argue that this is ideal but Gandhiji's thoughts are apt for those, when he said 'hesitating to act because the whole vision might not be achieved or because others do not yet share it is an attitude that only hinders progress'. We can chalk a new path for the world to follow and fulfill Ghosh's ambition of making India a Vishwaguru. The arc of universe shall bend heavily towards justice as the famous lines in the movie gladiator resonate with us – 'what we do in life echoes in eternity'. All persons ought to follow what is right and not what is established. And to do all that our targets must be the children to who I say 'your beliefs become your thoughts, your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions, your actions become your habit, your habit becomes your values and your values become your destiny. The collection of all these destinies will shape the destiny of our INDIA.