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*Editorial*

## **COVID-19: Impact and Implications**

The world we knew changed in an unprecedented way on 9th January, 2020 when the novel coronavirus disease was identified as the cause of pneumonia cases of unknown origin observed in Wuhan city of Hubei province in China. Within weeks, the world was in the grip of a global pandemic.

Words such as PPE (personal protection equipment) kits, masks, gloves, sanitizers, social distancing, quarantine, isolation, lockdown, Janata curfew, to name a few, soon became a part of our day-to-day vocabulary. These terms are now a part of the discourse of the 'new normal' that the pandemic has created. In spite of remarkable medical advancement, the world has been struggling to tackle the pandemic effectively. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the economy of the mightiest of nations has suffered and the livelihood of approximately 1.6 billion people is threatened (Inman, 2020). People without a steady income are the worst hit.

As we are slowly inching towards completing a year coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, the question looming large in everyone's mind is how and when this pandemic will end. Interestingly, although humanity has endured numerous pandemics before, the answer to the question is still obscure. Deadliest till date, the Spanish flu which eradicated almost one percent of the world population at the time, ravaged for almost two years. After a series of lockdowns and war like measures around the globe in the past ten months, the challenge at present is how to restore normalcy and at what cost.

Based on past experiences of pandemics in the last 100 years, it is predicted that there could be three possible ways to end the pandemic viz. aggressive containment, development of effective vaccine, or herd immunity (Denworth, 2020).

Aggressive containment implies isolation and quarantine of all contacts of the affected people and implementing strict social distancing norms to restrict the outbreak.

Till date two vaccines, against SARS-CoV-2 have been approved in Russia - Sputnik V and EpiVac corona - although both never entered into phase 3 clinical trials. As of 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 there are eight COVID-19 vaccine candidates in phase 3 clinical trial (Cravern, 2020). The Herculean efforts being made across nations indicate that a vaccine could be available in the market for use in the first quarter of 2021. Covaxin, India's first indigenous vaccine candidate, developed by Bharat Biotech India Limited, has also been approved for the final phase trial and could be available in the market by June 2021 (*Financial Express*, October 24, 2020).

Herd immunity could be effective only when a large population gets infected and develops resistance against COVID-19. However, the cost of herd immunity is difficult to envisage, and may be much more than we comprehend at present. As rightly emphasized by the director general of WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the governments around nations have to take cognizance of the long-term effects of COVID-19, which could last up to 7-8 months. Hence, he maintains, natural herd immunity would be "morally unconscionable and unfeasible" (October 31, 2020).

Nevertheless, in these trying times, experts and scientists from across the world have joined hands and have been sharing their expertise, ideas and equipment to combat this pandemic. It is imperative that the governments around the world pay heed to their findings and formulate policies keeping both short- and long-term goals in sight .

The highlight of this period is the emphasis on physical distancing as a means to check the spread of the deadly disease. A variety of strategies such as lockdowns, voluntary home isolation, restrictions on the numbers of people in a gathering, suspension of public transport and restrictions on travel have been imposed to ensure physical or what is called 'social distancing'. These have had intense social, economical, political and psychological implications. The familiar has become alien, daily routines of life are disrupted and individuals are facing the existential dilemma of making meaning out of the dire situation.

The current issue of *Vantage: Journal of Thematic Analysis* engages with some of these issues and their various dimensions through its theme ‘**COVID-19: Impact and Implications**’ The paper by Prof. Balagnapathy Devarakonda and Saathvik Devarakonda explores the intricate relationship between health and environment. The authors argue that COVID-19 is an accidental solution to environmental problems and measures like the human lockdown have helped nature recoup and rejuvenate itself.

The article by Dr. Pranav Ish and Dr. Neeraj Nischal emphasizes the preventive measures that can help in controlling the spread of COVID-19 in the absence of an effective vaccine. Nikita Goel et al., review the epidemiology, life cycle and pathogenesis of SARS-CoV-2 to understand ways and means of combating the re-emergence of such pandemics. Jaspreet Kaur et al. attempt to understand the relationship between SARS-CoV-2 and other taxonomically related coronavirus. Their study focuses on spike and nucleoprotein genes that are crucial for the pathogenicity of the virus.

The enforcement of nationwide lockdowns to ensure social/ physical distancing as a measure to control the spread of the pandemic has had tremendous social implications.

Michel Foucault’s description of the administrative measures taken against plague in the 17th century in terms of ‘strict spatial partitioning’ give insights into these. Identifying the characteristics of such spaces, he writes: ‘It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment.’ (Foucault 1975/1995: 195).

Richa Chilana’s paper focuses on women, and looks at how the lockdown has resulted in the intermeshing of personal and professional spaces for them, thereby impacting the social and economic life of middle-class working women.

Measures of social distancing have a significant impact on our social, economic, and political setting which ultimately affects the volume and distribution of crimes worldwide. In their study, Priti Mendiratta Arora et al. attempt to understand and analyze the impact of social distancing policies on crime.

Rukshana Zaman's paper explores the role played by social media in equipping people with knowledge about the virus and how that has helped in slowly acclimatizing to a 'new normal' way of life.

Drawing attention to the various social factors impacting labour in the informal sector, the paper by Anmol Chugh et al., highlights the plight of the manual scavengers that has worsened in the times of COVID-19.

The present issue also includes a paper by Smriti Singh and Srijala Bagai which provides a very valuable insight into the struggles of the disabled in coping up with the 'new normal'. Amrita Ajay provides a curated list of 'must-reads books' on COVID-19 that traverse multiple disciplines.

We hope that the articles of this current issue and the next issue of *Vantage* aid in exploring diverse aspects of the pandemic through a multidisciplinary lens. Academic inquiry like this is urgent and necessary to open up new avenues that will help us to understand and cope with the enormous challenges posed by the pandemic for individuals and society worldwide.

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