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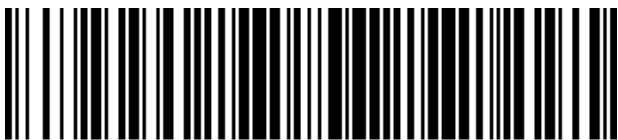
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**Covid-19 and its Impact on the Environment**

**Manorma Singh**

## INTRODUCTION

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The worldwide-declared pandemic COVID 19 has caused innumerable changes in human lives. Whether it is financially or socially every life is somehow or the other affected by this life-threatening virus. The novel coronavirus commonly known as COVID 19 got its first existence in a seafood market of Hunan, which is a place in Wuhan city of China on December 19. Slowly and gradually with the movement of people, it was spread throughout the world as it is a communicable disease. A global health emergency was declared and due to the arrival of this situation many restrictions were imposed and measures like lockdown, social distancing were taken to get control from the spreading of this deadly virus. Currently, worldwide it has been spread in 216 countries with 26,121,999 confirmed cases and 864618 confirmed deaths recorded.<sup>1</sup> With the growing number of days, these figures continue to shift.

The aim was to control the spread of the coronavirus but it consequentially had a great impact on the environment and climate change. Due to the imposition of several guidelines and lockdown as most of the transports, businesses, industries, and factories were closed it caused some dramatic change in the level of carbon emissions and pollution-causing gases like carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide. Water bodies have improved, animals can be spotted moving freely also along with the positive effects there are also negative effects of the pandemic like usage of water has been increased which is the most important for the existence of human beings wastage has increased.

This article is a brief study of what is COVID 19 and its impact on the environment.

## WHAT IS CORONAVIRUS?

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Coronavirus is a large family of viruses that may cause illness in animals or humans. Several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections in humans ranging from a common cold to more serious diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recent form of coronavirus discovered produces a disease called COVID 19<sup>2</sup>.

Most coronaviruses are not dangerous. The World Health Organization learned a new type of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. COVID 19 is a disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, which can affect a

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<sup>1</sup>Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, World Health Organization, Publication Date:09/04/20, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>, Last visited:09/04/20.

<sup>2</sup>What is coronavirus?, World Health Organization, Publication Date:04/17/20, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>, Last visited:09/01/20.

person's upper respiratory tract or lower respiratory tract. The upper respiratory tract includes sinuses, noses, and throats whereas the lower respiratory tract includes the windpipe and lungs.<sup>3</sup>

## **Symptoms of COVID 19**

The most common symptoms of coronavirus are dry cough, fever, and fatigue. Some other symptoms, which are not that common but may affect some patients, are diarrhea, nasal congestion, conjunctivitis, loss of taste and smell, aches, and pains. Recently it has been discovered that some of the positive COVID 19 cases remain asymptomatic reasons as to why a patient remains asymptomatic have not yet discovered but according to Warner Greene, is an immunologist and microbiologist at the University of California San Francisco tells that some people's innate immune system responds great to the virus and that's because they remain asymptomatic.<sup>4</sup>

## **IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON ENVIRONMENT**

This pandemic situation has changed our lives upside down but these changes have indirectly had a huge effect on the environment and climate change. Our lives are dependent on nature but we as human beings have never taken it seriously when it comes to taking care of it. This pandemic has made us realize how our actions greatly affect the sustainability of the earth, which should be most important for us as human beings.

There have been some appreciable changes in the environment but at the same time, it has increased our dependency on water and many other things so COVID 19 situation has both positive and negative environmental consequences.

### **o Positive environmental effects of COVID 19**

#### **1. Effect on vegetarian**

Lockdown in India since 24th march 2020 was a great help in the improvement of plants. As there was no human interference for quite a long time which gave time to plants to grow and produce more oxygen. Improvement in air and water quality allowed plants to grow better.

#### **2. Improvement in air quality**

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<sup>3</sup> Coronavirus and COVID-19: What You Should Know, WebMD, Publication Date:08/21/20, <https://www.webmd.com/lung/coronavirus>, Last visited:09/01/20.

<sup>4</sup> WHY ARE SOME COVID-19 PATIENTS ASYMPTOMATIC?, Inverse, Publication Date:04/19/20, <https://www.inverse.com/mind-body/why-are-some-people-asymptomatic>, Last visited:09/01/20.



When the AQI (air quality index) level is below 50, humans breathe fresh, clean air. People are no longer exposed to any health risks because air quality is clear<sup>5</sup>. The Center for Energy and Clean Air Research found that the average PM 2.5 levels were reduced by 22 percent on the first day of lockdown and a 15 percent drop in nitrogen oxide from burning fossil fuels.<sup>6</sup>

Delhi is considered as one of the most polluted cities in the world but due to lockdown there was no heavy traffic and shutdown of industries, Delhi had a dramatic decrease in Air quality index as when observed from 25 march and 18 may mostly it was falling under the satisfactory category as analyzed by the report of Air quality index India. Similarly, other cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai have also observed a fall in air pollutants.

### 3. Improvement in water quality

Another observance in the nationwide lockdown is the improved water quality. The major cause of water pollution is the industrial wastage discharged in the rivers. Since the lockdown temporary closure of the factories and industries, the rivers have become cleaner. One major instance was Ganges river dolphins were seen enjoying in the river Ganges in Meerut. These endangered freshwater dolphins are our national aquatic animal and lives in freshwater, which are now endangered.

According to B.D Joshi, Environmental scientist, the Ganga waters at Rishikesh and Haridwar have become very clean. Also according to Dr. P.K Mishra, professor at chemical engineering and technology, IIT BHU there has been a 40-50% improvement in the quality of water in Ganga.<sup>7</sup>

### 4. Free movement of animals

Wonder it took a virus to create space for other species. Another good impact of lockdown is May wildlife animals were spotted during this period. A lot of pictures and videos have been shared on social media platforms of animals roaming on the streets. In the streets of Chandigarh, sambar deer were spotted. Nilgai was seen roaming outside a mall in Noida. Malabar civet was crossing a road in Kozhikode. These instances show how lockdown helped the wildlife animals in creating space for themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> REAL-TIME AIR QUALITY INDEX(AQI), AQI India, [https://www.aqi.in/#how\\_it\\_works](https://www.aqi.in/#how_it_works), Last visited:09/02/20.

<sup>6</sup> Cleaner rivers, less pollution: India's Covid-19 lockdown has some positive effects, The Hindustan Times, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cleaner-rivers-less-pollution-india-s-covid-19-lockdown-has-some-positive-effects/story-Gq4loC6nuyOe7kInyQeHnM.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Bobins Abraham, River Ganga's Water Quality Has Improved So Much During Lockdown That Now It's Fit To Drink, Indian Times,2020, <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/river-gangas-water-quality-has-improved-so-much-during-lockdown-that-now-its-fit-to-drink-510758.html>.

## 5. Reduction in noise level from the environment

Noise pollution, unwanted or excessive sound that can have deleterious effects on human health and environmental quality. In many industrial facilities and some other workplaces, noise pollution is commonly generated, but it also comes from the activities of road, rail, and aircraft traffic, and outdoor construction. As the definition suggests the main causes of noise pollution are the above-mentioned activities<sup>8</sup>. All of these activities have been on hold due to the imposition of lockdown, this measure has acted as a boon for the population and the environment as environmental noise causes major discomfort.

### ○ **Negative environmental effects of COVID 19**

#### 1. Increased usage of water

Our existence majorly depends on one natural resource that is water. One of the precautionary measures we are taking to combat this deadly virus is washing our hands every hour for 20 seconds. Along with washing hands whenever a person comes from outside from some essential work or buying essentials, taking bath is also important as practicing it would sanitize the whole body and the risk of contaminating the virus would get reduce. Now with all of these measures, which are very important for us to practice, the usage of water has increased.

Approximately 98 percent of all Earth's water is in the sea. Freshwater accounts for less than 3 percent of the earth's water and almost 65 percent of this drinking water is wrapped up in glaciers. Rivers, streams, reservoirs, and freshwater dams produce 1% of drinking water, while groundwater accounts for 0.3%. Human life is made up of more than 60% of water<sup>9</sup> and therefore our body depends upon the water largely. It is a limited natural resource that we have to save for the survival of us and our future generation. The pandemic has left us with no option but to increase our daily usage of water in these tough times.

#### 2. Increase in wastage

The biomedical wastage has increased with the making of gloves, masks, PPE kits, syringes, saline bottles, etc. The government of each state has made it necessary for each person to use a mask whenever stepping out of the house. The number of COVID 19 patients are increasing every day,

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<sup>8</sup> Noise pollution, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/noise-pollution>, Last visited:09/02/20.

<sup>9</sup> How Much of Earth's Water is Fresh?, HARN R/O SYSTEMS INC., Published Date:06/23/20, <https://blog.harnrosystems.com/how-much-water-on-earth-is-drinkable#:~:text=Fresh%20water%20makes%20up%20under%203%25%20of%20all,is%20made%20up%20of%20more%20than%2060%25%20water.>, Last Visited:00/03/20.

so the demand for the masks, gloves, plastic shields are increasing simultaneously due to which plastic wastage has been increased.

According to SMS a private waste operator appointed by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the quantity of Covid-19 and biomedical waste increased from an average of 12,200 kilograms per day in June to the average of 24,880 kilograms per day in August carried in yellow bags from more than 12,000 Mumbai healthcare centers.<sup>10</sup>

All of these biomedical wastes, plastic waste are inorganic waste and these wastes are indirectly connected with major environmental issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, water, and air pollution.

### 3. Reduction in waste recycling

Recycling is a method of converting waste material into a reusable one. It helps in the conservation of natural resources and prevent pollution. However, waste recycling has been reduced, as authorities are concerned about the risk of spreading the virus from the waste generated from the hospitals. In addition, gatherings of people in the recycling center would amount to an increase in the risk of contamination of the virus amongst them.

#### • **Some case laws related to the right to live in a clean environment**

1. Subhash Kumar vs State of Bihar and others<sup>11</sup>

It was held in this case that the Right to live is a fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution and guarantees a citizen to live in pollution-free water and air.

2. Union Carbide Corporation vs Union of India<sup>12</sup> (Bhopal gas tragedy)

In this case, it was held that whenever a person undertaking is engaged in an innately dangerous or a hazardous activity and causes damage to anyone by a malfunction in the operation of such harmful or naturally it. Therefore, the Supreme Court of India applied the concept of absolute liability without any exemption.

3. Narmada Bachao Andolan vs Union of India And Others<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Badri Chatterjee, Mumbai's Covid-19 waste doubles in 3 months, treatment facility runs out of storage space, The Hindustan Times, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/city-s-covid-19-waste-doubles-in-3-months-treatment-facility-runs-out-of-storage-space/story-RB9z2efys8dlctdXXUxL0H.html>

<sup>11</sup> (1991) AIR 420,1991 SCR (1) 5

<sup>12</sup> (1992) AIR 248, 1991 SCR Supl. (1) 251

<sup>13</sup> AIR 2000 SC 3751

In this case, it was held that water is the basic requirement for the survival of human beings and is a part of the right to life and human rights under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

4. M.C. Mehta vs Union of India<sup>14</sup>

By implementing three principles called Sustainable Growth, Precautionary Principle, Polluters Pay Principle and Articles 21, 48A and 49<sup>15</sup>, the Supreme Court ordered the substitution of natural gas for fossil fuel to the 292 industries that caused pollution in TITZ. Industries that are not, for whatever cause, in a position to obtain gas link had to stop operating with the aid coke and coal in TITZ. There were also some privileges and benefits provided to employees working in the 292 industries.

### CONCLUSION

COVID 19 has both positive and negative effects but the negative effects are going to last for a long time where positive effects are just for a short period. There is no doubt that the emission of Green House Gases has decreased during the period of pandemic however it cannot be neglected that there will be very little impact on the harm which has been done in the atmosphere for decades now. As soon as the lockdown got over it can be observed that again the emission of carbon and other Green House Gases is increasing. Industries, factories will again start, people will gather again at public places, the water, and air, which got clean during these times, will start to get polluted again. So all the positive impact on the environment is temporary since when the pandemic ends, countries to revive their economies will work harder, and therefore along with the revival of economies, air and water pollution will also revive damaging our planet. There will be no surprise that in near future similar type of pandemic happens due to climate change, water pollution, air pollution, etc. therefore the people themselves must start taking care of their surroundings so that there is a longer positive impact on the environment.

Also, the government should start taking some innovative steps like using appropriate technology which is adaptable and eco-friendly, promoting environmental awareness, for minimization of resource use by using the 3-R (reduce, reuse, and recycle) approach for sustainable development. These steps would help in achieving the goal of a healthier environment.

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<sup>14</sup> (1987) AIR 1086, 1987 SCR (1) 819

<sup>15</sup> The Constitution of India, 1950.