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Volume: 7, Issue2, 2020 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW, EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND SPORTS STUDIES (IJLESS)

A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal

DOI: 10.33329/ijless

<http://www.ijless.kypublications.com/>

ISSN:2455-0418 (Print), 2394-9724 (online)

2020©KY PUBLICATIONS, INDIA

www.kypublications.com

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THE VOICE THROUGH THE AGES- HOMO SAPIENS AND THE PANDEMIC

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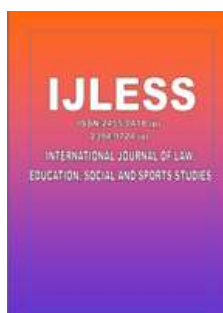
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DOI: [10.33329/ijless.7.2.42](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijless.7.2.42)



ABSTRACT

The Homo sapiens (wise man) a minor creature among billions of other living beings has been there on earth for 2.5 billion years, and man in less than 2 million years has made tremendous changes that have moved him to the top of the food chain. His cognitive capabilities have enabled him to have an advantage of other species and rewrite rules in his favor. Through the cognitive, agricultural, industrial, and scientific revolutions the Homo sapiens have created a cultural space, a connected and structured system that moves away from the greater Nature. However, there have been instances where man has faced the backlash of his assumed progress. Covid-19 is one such backlash of Nature that has made man rethink, recreate and reinvent himself, creating a new normal.

Keywords: Pandemic literature, Homo sapiens, man-made virus, Covid-19, the New Normal

COVID '19-14,348,858 confirmed cases, 603,691 deaths, the massive toll on the elderly and the advanced nations, global economy on doldrums, millions rendered jobless, homeless, lab research 24/7 with no positive results, countless mutations, post-Covid trauma, life to a standstill, a bizarre future. (WHO reports July 20, 2020)

“Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don’t know what they want?” (Sapiens, 466)

This is the predicament of modern man’s pursuit of advancement in life and the concluding lines in Yuval Noah Harari’s ‘Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind’ that takes a new meaning in the current scenario of Covid 19 pandemic. Harari is an Israeli historian and his work 'Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind' has enabled modern man not only to understand the bigger picture but also to rethink and reshape his goals in his pursuit of happiness.

‘184 Countries Going Through Hell-Trump Blames China for Virus Spread’ -CNBC

German daily sends a \$165bn bill to China as Covid-19 damages; Beijing calls it ‘xenophobia’- The Print.

“Just 6 million years ago, a single female ape had two daughters. One became the ancestor of all chimpanzees; the other is our own grandmother.” (Sapiens: 5) The statement presents the

evolution of Homo sapiens as a part of the greater Nature. The early man was just a hapless creature whose only goal was to survive and procure food. However, the cognitive capabilities of the forager enabled him to speedily move from the middle of the food chain to the topmost position.

In 'Sapiens' Harari traces the cognitive, the agricultural, and the scientific revolutions that happened from 70,000 years to 500 years ago that enabled man to dictate terms in name of civilization, empire building, science, and advancement in life. The Covid 19 situation is a watershed moment in human history that has prompted the man to pause, retrospect, reassess, reinvent his position, reset his goals, and move forward without disrupting the laws of Nature but to live in harmony with the celestial tune.

The genetic composition of a modern man is the same as our ancient forager forefathers who wanted to explore and question their limitations/boundaries. The Agricultural revolution that happened 20,000 years ago seemed to have brought tremendous changes in their way of life. The agricultural revolution brought in settlement, specialization, trade, community, and gender discrimination. An interesting note is that Harari states that the male and female were equal in terms of capabilities and capacities but in due course; the cultural setting forced certain limitations on the females and gave privileges to the males. Gender bias is culturally imposed as seen in ancient societies like The Hammurabi Code. The advanced Homo sapiens brought several changes in Nature's course.

Thus "...humankind ascended to the top so quickly that the ecosystem was not given time to adjust." (Sapiens: 12) This resulted in the complete extinction of certain species, endanger of certain other species, and extensive multiplication of a few thus disrupting the natural order. These facts highlight the brink of danger that humans are exposed to as we have got many viruses from animals that we have domesticated or even misused.

The scientific revolution that began 500 years ago made things faster. Harari interestingly states that science and religion are two dichotomies while the former assumes that man does not know the truth while the latter assumes that man knows everything. Cultural myths, religion, and language created imagined realities that man vehemently strived to uphold resulting in disastrous wars, hopeless famines, and cureless diseases. Capitalism, communism, Marxism, consumerism are concepts that determined and dominated man's path to assumed progress.

The author states that science would be helpful only when it invents products that would be useful than cause harm. He states new scientific inventions and discoveries might throw open new avenues that could not be imagined before, for example, "When the nuclear age erupted in the 1940s, many forecasts were made about the future nuclear world of the year 2000. When sputnik and Apollo II fired the imagination of the world, everyone began predicting that by the end of the century, people would be living in space colonies on Mars and Pluto. A few of these forecasts came true. On the other hand, nobody foresaw the Internet." (Sapiens, 44), that shrunk the borders and challenged established perceptions.

We have learned from history that there were several pandemics that Homo sapiens have faced. The cognitive abilities of man have always helped him to react to a crisis. While records produce statistics, the literature of a period presents the psychological, humane, social aspects of such pandemics and reinstates the human behavior in coping with the crisis. Man's response to the pandemic was best captured by Boccaccio's in 'Decameron' and Daniel Defoe's 'The Journal of the Plague Year'. The writers while portraying the physical, cultural and psychological aspects of the pandemic bring out the fortitude required to withstand and reshape our thought process.

It has been often reiterated that literature is a mirror of the society; it not only presents the happenings during a particular period but also converts the mundane activities to fiction and

presents them to the society through which people may look at their follies and foibles and correct them. Aristotle in his concept of literary limitation has stated that "It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen...." (wikieducator.org) Writers like H.G Wells, through their works forecast a better future for mankind, despite political barriers. Writers like Stephen King, Mary Shelly, Albert Camus, and Margaret Atwood have all predicted the predicament of human civilization to the vicissitudes of Nature. The catastrophic literature, pandemic literature, and the dystopian literature have been restating the predicament of Homo sapiens in the name of progress.

Homo Sapiens, the wise man, has made tremendous advancements in science but there have been instances of history that have shaken the very foundation of his existence like the bubonic plague, the black death, yellow fever, cholera, Dengue fever, Ebola, SARS, including the novel Corona Virus. Most of them are due to viruses that have passed on from animals to humans and the domestication of animals is considered the reason behind such pandemics. These epidemics and pandemics have taken their toll and have affected global economies and reshuffled the game in favor of the universal law of Nature leaving powerful lessons of retrospection and revaluation.

The novel coronavirus was announced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on 30th January 2020 W.H.O named the viral respiratory infection as Covid-19. First found in Wuhan, China it has spread to more than 198 countries within a couple of months. Although it records a death rate of just 0.1 %, what makes Covid-19 deadly is that it has never been seen in humans, so no one is immune to it. It proliferates rapidly because it spreads through the upper respiratory system and there is no vaccine to date. What makes Covid more deadly is its asymptomatic properties and the mutations that keep the most advanced research labs on toes.

Coronavirus has challenged & changed how the world's top scientists work to find a cure-The Print.

Another reason for this to become a global terror is because of the changed global scenario, the connectivity across the globe. The Internet and the IT revolution have transformed the globe into a village shrinking the boundaries and this has favored the extensive spread of Covid 19 in all parts of the globe, within a couple of months. Moreover, the global population is much higher than it was before and with the shrinking of boundaries, the impact of the Covid 19 is manifold. Day 1(Wuhan, China)-34 deaths; Day 24 (Wuhan in lockdown) - 654 Day 72(WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic) - 1, 25,875, Day 100- 15, 11,104, spread across 213 countries and approaching 14 million cases.

This man-made pandemic known as novel Covid 19 also called the new normal has disturbed man's routine and has brought about several questions that make us rethink are vulnerable and minuscule position in the geographical calendar. Covid 19 has affected social, biological, psychological, economic, cultural aspects of the sapiens causing a tremendous change in the thought process and the future of the human race. For centuries to come the entire globe would refer to post Covid and pre Covid situation as Covid 19 is bound to leave its footprint in all walks of life.

Covid 19 has shaken the social aspect of human beings their nature to socialize or to move in groups. It has disrupted social gatherings, celebrations which are an essential part of human existence. Cafés and small restaurants were spaces of socialization. The Covid situation made people rethink their priorities in terms of necessity and luxury. Tourism, hospitality, extravagant marriages, and luxury industry have undergone a U-turn. India known for its luxurious marriages is now going back to the old style where the marriage was a simple, affordable, and a family event.

Covid pandemic has created a lot of unrest among the people. There is a fear of the asymptomatic effects of the virus and it has created panic. There has been a frenzied shopping of essential commodities and people move around with fear and are apprehensive of the future. This

disruption from the usual state of affairs has erupted in psychological violence. Reports of domestic violence, violence against women, and child abuse have registered a marked rise. There have been instances of an excessive burden on women, due to the lockdown, although men do help in very minor proportions thus further escalating the gender imbalance.

Covid 19 has not only affected the psychological aspect but also the economic aspect. Covid 19 has seriously disrupted the unorganized sector a huge chunk of the global economy that extensively depends on other sectors. It has completely transformed the tables against the global oil giants The Middle East, as the world is experiencing a lockdown and people have stayed away from unnecessary traveling. Even after life starts resuming people will become more conscious before they move over. Tourism is the worst affected industry, people no more consider it safe to travel elsewhere but feel safe to stay at home. Although this has brought down the expenses of a common man it has adversely affected the tourism industry that contributes a good share of the global economy and a score of unorganized sector jobs that depend on the tourism industry.

However, Covid situation has given rise to spending time with the family an inherent feature that is often neglected in busy schedules and socializing circles. People who previously never had time to spend with their families have found an opportunity to bond as a family, cook for the family, share duties at home, etc. The Internet has created an online platform for people to carry on their work online and still stay safe at home. The Covid situation has changed trends and has made teaching and learning online a necessity than an add-on. On the positive side, the increase in online teaching and learning will break the distance barriers. People can learn from the best sources overcoming the barriers of place and time and also transfer knowledge likewise. Virtual space has acquired tremendous importance.

What differentiated Homo sapiens from other beings are sensations, emotions, and family ties that acted as a magic glue, binding people into groups. Centuries ago, the structure of society was different. There were three kinds of circles for every person- family, friends, and community and he/she was dependent on them for healthcare, money, business, and even law and order. This created a very intimate relationship among people and a sense of responsibility towards one's society. Later came, common administrative bodies like the judicial system, government, banks to lend money, and government healthcare. Until 200 years back, the concept of "Individualism" started being more prominent. This distanced people from one another, a sense of greed has exponentially widened the gap between "poor" and "rich". Adam Smith states "The best economic benefit for all can usually be accomplished when individuals act in their self-interest" (investopedia.com), but the true benefit is obtained when individuals act in their interest and that of others (society).

The current situation calls for "Unity and solidarity in isolation" and reminds us that being there for one another and working together above race, ethnicity and economic status is what keeps us safe and happy. Covid 19 has created a new normal that has helped man to pause, rethink, recreate, and reinvent himself for the greater benefit of the larger Nature. Covid 19 is one epoch in global history that has reiterated the need to establish a win-win situation as propounded by John Nash, whereby the wise man (Homo sapiens) learns to live in harmony with Nature and use his cognitive powers to improve his standards in line with Nature.

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