

Social Distancing and Covid-19: Morphing Cafe Desk into Web Desk

Bedanta Bora and Anindita Adhikary

Department of Management Studies, Sikkim Manipal University, SMIT Campus, Sikkim, India

Abstract

Human Civilization, this time is being introduced with a rarely used vocabulary named 'Social Distancing' on the 100th anniversary of health pandemics in the history. The cycle '1720–2020' brings to light a few disasters which placed the world at standstill at an interval of 100 years. Currently, the 'Covid-19' pandemic is causing a bizarre crisis with 3,727,947 infected cases and 2,58,344 subsequent fatalities around the world¹⁶.

The pulse of this economic calamity is unusual and challenges to counteract with are also exceptional. Survival plan of the mankind seems to be extraordinary at present keeping aside the entire growth dynamics on halt. Albeit, a concrete cure against the pandemic is yet to demonstrate better than what was a century before. Medical remedy in this regard kick starts now to limit the consequential loss of lives.

As such, the current study is a humble initiative to undertake a case review on 'Social Distancing' that has finally altered the global face. The study aims to portray 'Social Distancing' as a phenomenal buzzword across the globe. An effort is made here to objectively assess a few viral impacts of Covid-19 on Indian economy. The methodology is fundamentally based upon the published data followed by a short primary research undergone for the purpose. Special focus is conferred to strengthen the case through a handful of lessons being learned during post Covid-19 era. Findings presume that there is utter ambiguity on 'What Next' and 'How'. The same infers it as inconclusive too. Thus, the authors wish to conclude that any revival endeavor to offset this disaster is expected to be prolonged and so its end result as well. The present study is an attempt at micro level to review this in said direction.

Keywords: *Social Distancing, Covid-19, Global Disaster and Viral Impacts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

'Social Distancing', perhaps an alien phrase in world dictionary, becomes a buzzword now and the Novel Corona Virus Disease (abbreviated as Covid-19) is only the driver towards this. The term may be weird to mankind, but the concept has been in practice since long during any viral transmission across the world. Social distancing is defined as a practice of keeping a physical distance (six feet and above) from others. It is to evade direct contact with humans and contaminated surfaces or address in public gatherings during the outbreak of an infectious disease. The basic purpose is to lessen the exposure and minimize transmission of a contagious spread.

'Social Distancing', interchangeably known as 'Physical Distancing', is proved as one of the most accepted measures to avoid exposure to viral infection spreading locally and in time across the globe. Social distancing makes utmost sense for human beings with lower immunity and minimal physical resistance against any viral transmission.

At this moment, the entire world is advocating social distancing. The Covid-19 began in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province in China in late December, 2019 has re-defined our life style. It makes its presence in 212 nations and territories around the world.¹⁷

The known sources perceive that the Covid-19 belongs to same cluster of virus that emerged in the year 2003 as a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) followed by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012. Besides, the Corona Virus falls in the range of 0.1% to 3.4% in terms of its fatality rate. Table-1 reflects that the corona fatality is noticeably lower than 50% for Ebola and 10% for SARS. On the contrary, the same is evidently more than that of Seasonal Flu which stands at 0.05%. In fact, the virus is said to get instigated from living animals and incidentally contaminates human being through a gradual transmission. The contagion rates of Covid-19 appear higher in relative terms. Table-1 below depicts an indication of the same.

Table-1: Fatality and Infection Rates of Epidemics

Epidemics	Fatality Rates : Death/Case (%)	Infection Rates (Per Infected Person)
Ebola	50	1.5-2.5
MERS	34.30	0.42-0.92
SARS	10	3
Covid-19	0.1-3.4	1.5-3.5
Seasonal Flu	0.05	1.3

Source : “The Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Outbreak on Developing Asia”, ADB BRIEFS NO-128, 6th March, 2020, www.adb.org/publications/series/adb-briefs and [www. http://ijahms.com/](http://www.ijahms.com/), Vol. 06, No. 04, Apr 2020, ISSN : 2395-0692

Covid-19 presently is a pandemic and the World Health Organization (WHO) defines ‘Pandemic’ as “Worldwide spread of a new disease.” Latest post on social media claims that the pandemics celebrate their century. 1720 — Plague; 1820 — Cholera Outbreak; 1920 — Spanish Flu; and 2020 — Chinese Corona seem to be in favour of this claim. The world is now with discrete efforts to cope with this virulent disease and consequently adopting ‘Social Distancing’ as a significant weapon. The challenge is unquestionably extraordinary, and perhaps the largest since World War II.

II. A GLANCE OVER SELECT LITERATURE

The authors attempt to have an insight on select periodicals and literatures related to social distancing and ongoing corona pandemic. It was observed that a few informative articles are being published at periodic intervals by the esteemed writers around the world. The said articles are of recent origin and still evolving. Considering this backdrop, the select literatures have been re-considered here in order to have a clue on the present state of affairs and its impact on the economy. To commence with, Medisetti¹ perceives that the word economy is on halt with various sectors being under severe impact of Covid-19. Abiad, Arao, Dagli, Ferrarini, Noy, Osewe, Pagaduan, Park, and Platitas in Asian Development Briefs (ADB)² anticipate that the Covid-19 outbreak is vibrant and positioned itself with three different cases (Table-2). The cases portrayed in Table-2 hint at a global impact of \$76,693 million to \$346,975 million or 0.089 % to 0.404 % of global GDP, with a reasonable case estimate of \$155,948 million or 0.182 % of global GDP. A United Nation (UN)³ Report alerts that the global economy would shrink by up to 1% in the year 2020 due to Covid-19, as against a previous estimate of 2.5 % growth. It foresees that the same may shrivel even more if economic precincts are extended without any fiscal stimulus. Baldwin and Mauro⁴ consider ‘Covid-19’ as an extraordinary incident in extraordinary circumstance. They significantly address a few questions like “How, and how far and fast, will the economic damage spread? How bad will it get? How long will the damage last? What are the mechanisms of economic contagion? And, above all, what can governments do about it?” Segal and Gerstel⁵ visualize tourism and its associated services to be severely hit when ‘Stay Home’ and ‘Social Distancing’ are encouraged. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) portend that the Covid-19 would burden the global air carriers between \$63 to \$113 billion in days to come. The share of major hotel chains too have dipped in past few weeks. A United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Release⁶ says, “Even so, the world economy will go into recession this year with a predicted loss of global income in trillions of dollars, this will spell serious trouble for developing countries, with the likely exception of China and the possible exception of India.” It, though, did not spell out any basis for the exceptions linked with China and India.

Referring to publications in Indian perspective, Asian Development Briefs (ADB)⁷ in its Outlook: 2020-21 predict Indian economy to slow down to 4% this fiscal due to ongoing disaster across the globe. Muthukrishnan⁸ in her periodical appends that nearly 162 countries are under standstill, and businesses are quite unsure due to this threat. With rising social distancing, Indian economy has been passing through a bad time. She adds again. Anbumozhi⁹ in his recent article brings to light a few determinants of Covid-19 impact on Indian economy. The virulent infection, the abrupt shifts in demand-supply chain, and the usefulness of defensive measures are to get mention in this regard. Agarwal¹⁰ assesses that the impact of extending shutdown and social distancing is at pick, with insistent stagnancy around all functional domains of the economy. The service industries namely tourism, hospitality, retailing, amusement parks and aviation have been strongly affected. The manufacturing sector too is

being disrupted because of work-flow interruption. Katoch¹¹ firmly believes that before Covid-19, many pandemics occurred earlier. Pandemonium across the globe is more now. For, the lessons learned from counteracting the past pandemics were mostly ignored and so are the end results. Maragakis¹² in a recent post meaningfully reviews the phrases like ‘Social Distancing’ and ‘Self-quarantine’ in terms of their live-focus in media and subsequent applicability on ground. Mair¹³ thinks about the possible future course of actions. He explores different possibilities for the regulatory bodies and societies to respond to. Bora, Adhikary, Parchure and Parchure¹⁴ undertake a case review on the Corona Epidemic which has changed the face of the world. They objectively evaluate ‘Covid-19’ as an Economic Tsunami across the globe. Sarma²⁰ considers rural economy as a real economy and emphasize upon building an agro-based sector where healthy productions need to be a priority if not huge productions are. Cox¹⁵ meaningfully infers that “The memory of this interlude of isolation will serve as a powerful reminder of what we’re capable of and how far we can push things if we have to or simply really want to. In that sense, the forecasters have probably got it wrong. This virus can be a catalyst for positive change but it's wholly up to us to make sure we use it that way”.

Table-2: Estimated Global and Regional Impact of Covid-19, under Different Scenarios

Geography	Best Case		Moderate Case		Worse Case	
	GDP (%)	Losses (\$ Millions)	GDP (%)	Losses (\$ Millions)	GDP (%)	Losses (\$ Millions)
World	-0.089	76,693	-0.182	155,948	-0.404	346,975
PRC	-0.323	43,890	-0.757	103,056	-1.740	236,793
Developing Asia excluding PRC	-0.171	15,685	-0.244	22,284	-0.463	42,243
Rest of the World	-0.011	17,145	-0.020	30,608	-0.044	67,938

Source : “The Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Outbreak on Developing Asia”, ADB BRIEFS N0-128, 6th March, 2020, www.adb.org/publications/series/adb-briefs and [www. http://ijahms.com/](http://www.ijahms.com/), Vol. 06, No. 04, Apr 2020, ISSN : 2395-0692

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study encompasses the following key objectives –

- (i) To portray ‘Social Distancing’ as a phenomenal buzzword across the globe
- (ii) To objectively assess a few viral impacts of Covid-19 on Indian economy
- (iii) To sketch out a learning curve during post pandemic era.
- (iv) To conclude the case with a significant end note

IV. METHODOLOGY

The secondary data and subsequent observation form the basis of the present methodology. The sources of information consist of periodicals, few published literatures, and more specifically web database. The primary data is insignificant, and hence the authors initiate the project with a brief insight on select literatures available at disposal. Geographically, the study is confined to Indian economy with a semi-statistical focus on global parameters. It does not invite any pre-determined hypothesis. Rather, an open mind to the possibilities of derived information and perspective of social distancing is ensured for conceptualization and onward interpretation. As close participants-in-practice, the authors during their primary observation interacted with a group of stakeholders through an informal platform. The same provided them with a partial insight into changed dynamics of the world due to Covid-19 impact on the economy. The entire approach adopted here is micro level and carried out as a case review to validate itself.

V. SOCIAL DISTANCING: A PHENOMENAL BUZZWORD

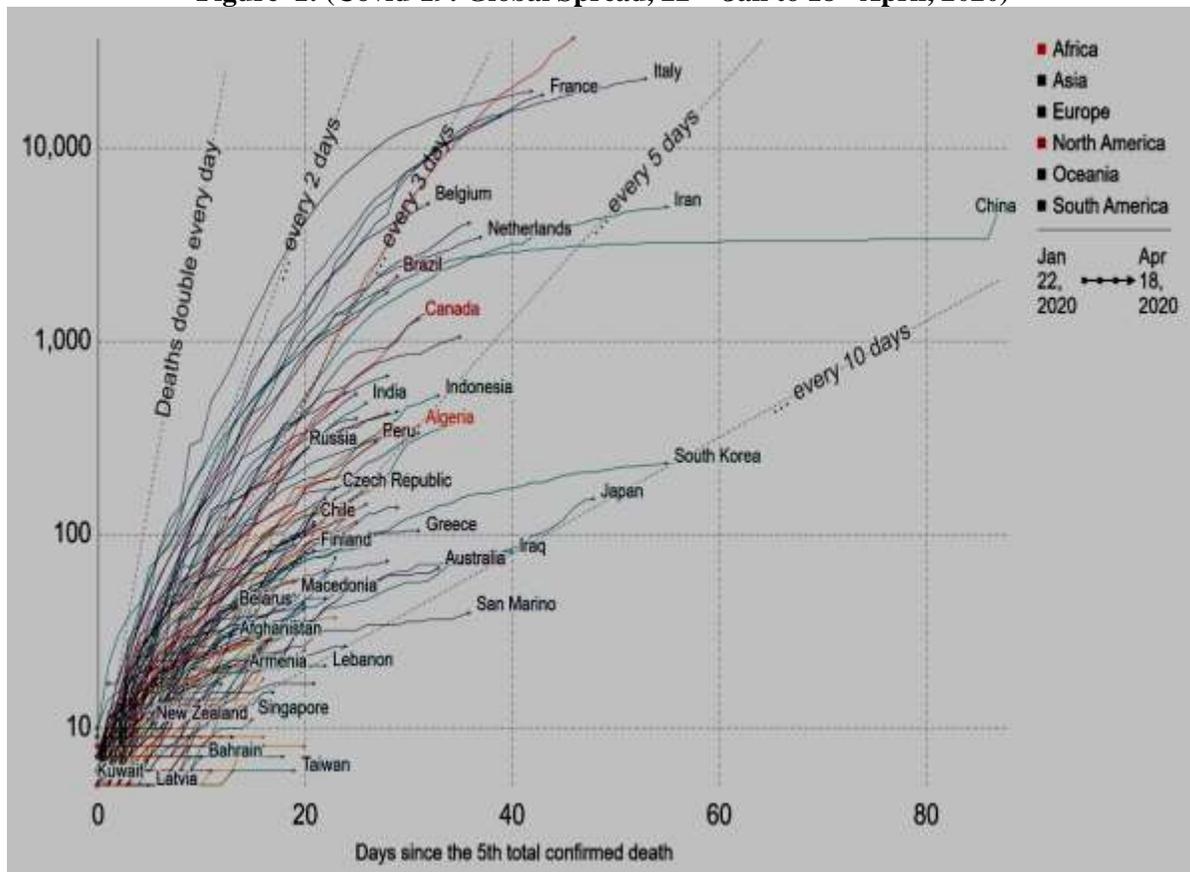
‘Social Distancing’, just being a phrase in English literature till a few months ago, is now a buzzword. It’s a phrase which was probably not evident in the memories as we haven’t experienced this phenomenon in our current birth. It is undesirable, daunting, and mystifying. But we need to align with as each day is a detached day for all of us. Covid-19 continues to multiply...surely. The fact is that we are in amid of a changing life style that takes time to adapt with.

There has been a ton of doubt on ‘What Next’. It is an unprecedented situation and does not furnish any specific answer. At this moment, only essentials are free to move and kept open. Rest apparently are in closed doors. That’s why, we need to fully realize; “This is not a state of being busy as usual”.

Social distancing as it applies to masses indicates no public meeting. It implies no close loop, no hand-greeting and no bear hug. Keeping a physical distance of at least six feet from everyone we encounter, turns out to be a primary mantra of this phenomenal buzzword. The same undeniably enhances anxiety. But to accept a fact that it is happening for a good reason; in the wake of a foreseeable spread of Covid-19 which places the entire world in standstill.

Covid-19 pandemic is one of the deadliest global disasters. Figure-1 noticeably depicts the same. The economic slowdown prompted by social distancing seems to have entered into a recession. The unoccupied workplace, deserted highways, emptied roads, unpopulated shopping arcades, grounded aircrafts, vacant cafeteria, ghost platforms are a few live examples of social distancing to quote in this interconnected global world.

Figure–1: (Covid-19: Global Spread, 22nd Jan to 18th April, 2020)



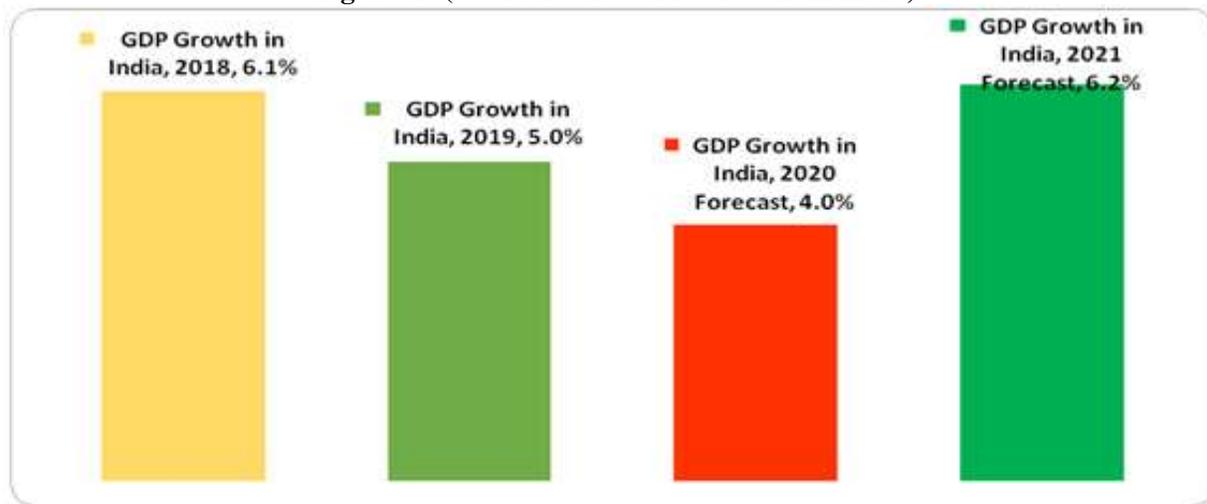
Source: Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) – Statistics and Research, Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Joe Hasell, Updated: 18th April, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirusand> [www.http://ijahms.com/](http://ijahms.com/), Vol. 06, No. 04, Apr 2020, ISSN : 2395-0692

VI. VIRAL IMPACTS ON INDIAN ECONOMY- AN INSIGHT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) feels that the world should be ready for a nastiest economic downfall due to recession. "Today we are confronted with a crisis like no other. Covid-19 has disrupted our social and economic order at lightning speed and on a scale that we have not seen in living memory," says, the IMF Managing Director.

The IMF is about to extend grant to 80 countries comprising of 50 low income nations. The overall funding need as per current estimate comes around \$2.5 trillion. The same makes us feel that the impact of covid-19 would be much more than its anticipation. As economic halt continues to swell, there would be butterfly effect involving a challenged economy. The GDP in coming fiscal is supposed to drop by 1% from the previous year as foreseen in Figure-2. Reuter's poll reflects that Indian economy has currently dipped to 8 year low and further fall is not unlikely. That's why, the impact is considered viral and it is not exaggerated saying so. Appended below some significant highlights in this regard.

Figure-2: (Covid-19 and GDP Growth in India)



Source: "What Drives Innovation in Asia?", Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2020:Asian Development Bank, 17th April, 2020, <https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-outlook-2020-innovation-asia> and [www. http://ijahms.com/](http://ijahms.com/), Vol. 06, No. 04, Apr 2020, ISSN : 2395-0692

◆ CONSUMERS' BUYING BEHAVIOUR

Consumers' buying behaviour indeed has changed. Social distancing warrants that business ventures involving physical interactions would see enormous vacuum. Entertainments, concerts, cinemax, eateries, lifestyle, fitness parlours, coaching clubs, sports centres, and hang-around platforms are already hit.

Besides, the hospitality sector, consisting of massage centres, spa therapy, welcomed home stays, guided tours, luxury conveyance, grooming stalls, Ayurveda healings, is also to refer to this context. At this time, these activities would neither find a place in priority list of the consumers nor can these be shifted from a physical platform to a web platform. This phenomenon incidentally reflects an altered consumer buying behaviour.

◆ CIVIL AVIATION AND TOURISM

It is wise to say again that what has outstretched around us is unusual. The hardest hit due to this are the civil aviation and global tourism. With every segment being on hold, it is the tourism and aviation sector that have been extremely impacted. Media coverage for grounded flights, emptied guest houses, vacant resorts, stranded cruises and unpopulated airports provide with a clear image of the same.

Same is the status in India. With flying restrictions, suspension of visas, border closures, and imprecise shutdown of tourism destinations, the entire tourism chain, comprising of hotels, flight, civil aviation, cafeteria, travel organizers along with related services are expected to face with a tremendous crisis. It won't be mistaken if we anticipate Indian tourism and aviation to slow down for an unforeseeable future too.

◆ HOUSING AND REAL ESTATE

Housing happens to be a primary need for every citizen in a country. However, Indian housing sector, more precisely the real estate industry, presently is in severe liquidity crisis with vacant blocks in high rise apartments. Fuelling this, the Covid-19 outbreak and the absence of building materials have placed all construction activities on complete stop. The site inspection has been debarred and fresh projects are kept on hold. As a matter of fact, the Chinese dependency for majority of real estate needs has worsened the scenario further.

◆ MIGRANT WORKERS

More than 100 million Indians do survive in an informal economy and earn their lively-hood on unorganised basis. They are primarily migrant workers and consist of day labours, contractual workers and self-employed earners. The world's prevailing lockdown to counteract the pandemic has left these workers with too little to fight back. They have seen their earnings greatly corrode in view of this. How they would abide by social distancing where their entire survival is linked with an interfaced work invites no answer.

◆ AUTOMOBILE SECTOR

“The Indian automotive supply is heavily contingent on our Chinese partners. And we don't say that lightly. An estimated USD 4.5 billion worth of auto-component imports was seen from China in 2018-19. A whopping 27 % of the automotive parts are manufactured in China and imported to the Indian companies valued at, as we said, 4.5 billion. Even a minor blow to this relationship can lead to us paying a very heavy price as far as the growth of the industry is concerned”, says DivyanshiBhardwaj, Editor, Cars-24¹⁸. The automobile sector with stiff completion amongst its players will surely experience an added downfall in days to come. Thus, time has come for Indian automotive to source alterative vendors on a greater scale, where China is assumed to be the sole supplier. Eventually, a back-up plan to domesticate the manufacturing process may also be thought of.

◆ SECURITIES MARKET

“It is difficult to predict how the stock market will move. When there is panic, investors tend to make their decisions emotionally, rather than rationally. This is a Black Swan event, whose impact may be deeper and longer than what was estimated a few weeks ago”, says Yagnesh Kansara¹⁹.

Recent studies forecast that the global economic crisis shall multiply. The same incidentally will result in less appetite for non-priorities; implying a situation with no players in securities markets, dearth of start-ups, absence of venture capitalists, and very fewer stake-holders in financial system. As Covid-19 emerged in no time as a health pandemic, it has equally evolved itself as a financial pandemic. This crisis is deeply blooming to visualize an awaiting collapse of the global financial health. India too is not an omission in this case with index noticeably flooring at three years low.

◆ SUPPLY-CHIAN AND LOGISTIC FRAMEWORK

The import dependency of India on China is noteworthy. China shares a major stake in export towards India with pharma, organic chemicals, textiles, apparel, and automotive being the significant ones. China supplies 45% of India's total electronic requirements. Around 70% of pharmaceutical ingredients are imported by India from China. China also exports around 1/3rd and 2/5th of the machinery and organic chemicals to India. On the contrary, India happens to be the 3rd largest export partner for China. Because of this logistic framework, India will be the 10th most impacted economy to be triggered by Covid-19. According to Arun Singh, Chief Economist, Dun & Bradstreet India, “As lockdowns are imposed in other global manufacturing hubs, besides China, the extent of impairment to global supply chain and global growth is likely to increase”.

◆ E-RETAIL

Currently, the e-retailing is confined to essentials consisting of pharmaceuticals, groceries and specified emergencies. According to a revised notification, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Govt. of India reckons 'E-Commerce' as a vital service during the extending shutdown. Meanwhile, the government has advised the suppliers on e-commerce platforms to collaborate with local vendors to facilitate delivery of essentials at select locations. Due to this inducement, the e-retailing sector experiences a little hike in their demand-supply dynamics. Meanwhile, India's key retailers and e-grocers have reinstated their operations in few cities. Expansion plans are in pipeline. But the accumulated backlogs and lack of field personnel have caused a noticeable delay in execution of this new business model.

VII. COVID-19 AND ITS LEARNING CURVE

In one sense, it is a fiddly challenge to anticipate growth dynamics of a country in this deadly environment. The disaster today is global and it is no longer unilateral or multilateral. All economic activities around the world have seen something abnormal. However, every crisis serves as a learning platform too. This pandemic also draws a learning curve for the mankind. We are getting ourselves ready for an evolving society with new normal. Here is a gist of how we would figure out our next course of actions to align with an amended life style in days to come.

◆ ‘NAMASTE’ – A GLOBAL NORM NOW

Greetings involving physical interface are utterly ‘No’. Various centers for disease control and prevention urge people to opt for a nudge ‘No’ over hug and handshake. By this time we have learned to accept ‘Namaste’ as new alternative to physically interfaced greetings. Namaste being an indigenous origin would definitely find itself as a greeting norm across the globe.

◆ NO PUBLIC ASSEMBLY

No festive celebrations are visible now. Eateries, restaurants, snack bars, shops, all have shuttered down except in few essentials where crowds may form with well defined restrictions. This situation expedites the existing digital platform where delivery of essential merchandises would be on line. Never know, in coming future, we might have to celebrate festivals on-line too. This clearly denotes public assembly which is prohibited; a new era of remote linking is evolving shortly.

◆ DISTANT WORKING

With extending lockdown, the employers around are left with no choice but to frame a contingency plan. Covid-19 has massively instituted a ‘work from home’ drill in almost all functional domains with a few exceptions to essentials and emergencies. That being said, distant working has its inherent limitations and cannot be imposed on few specific sectors. Agriculture, hospitals, nursing, manufacturing, research initiatives do invite a special mention in this regard.

◆ TELE SCHOOLING

What ‘School’ indicates perhaps need not be explained. But ‘Tele School’ as a growing tool needs to be understood and is defined as "Education in which students receive instruction over the Internet, from a Video, etc., instead of going to School." All of us are to gradually migrate from a physical class room to a virtual classroom. An era of teaching-learning through Tele-School begins here and is already adopted by many.

◆ STOCK PILING OF ESSENTIALS

The Covid-19 has been branded a pandemic by WHO and incidentally led the consumers head towards grocery stores to pile up daily essentials. Images of empty aisles and long quos in this context are live on social media. Few countries have released a joint advisory to resist people from panic buying. The supermarkets have also urged people to be selfless in their buying behaviour. A recent statement read: “We understand your concerns, but buying more than is needed can sometimes mean that others will be left without”. It now seems that the corona has made us learn to live pro-actively...at least for our own hunger.

◆ ANXIETY AND FEAR

‘What Next’? This uncertainly leads towards fear and anxiety amongst the masses. “With day-to-day life at a standstill, anxieties around the disease and the future have been heightened”, says Dr. Anne Maria Albano, Professor of Medical Psychology, Columbia University. Due to exaggeration, anxiety and fear may soar up. Anxiety is a natural phenomenon and we need not actually re-learn from Covid-19.

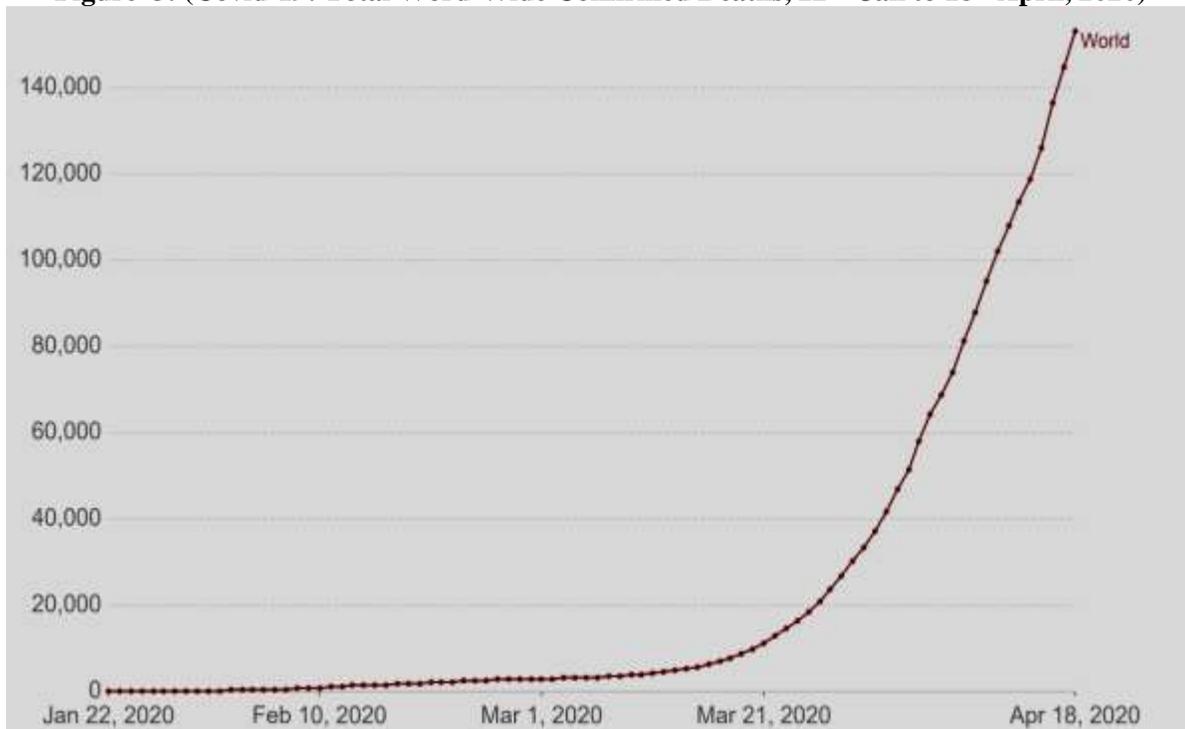
◆ COVID-19 - A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY ?

Several corporate houses including Indian conglomerates are aware of the challenges they face with due to their excessive dependency on a single market. The prevailing situation can surely be a learning opportunity for all of us. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in its recent annual meeting perceive that Indian business can easily lure away 40% of their competitor’s market through domesticated manufacturing technology- a step towards furthering the country’s highly acclaimed ‘Make in India’ campaign.

VIII. CONCLUSION

'Covid-19' is indubitably a unique phenomenon for mankind, at least once in a cycle of 100 years, where 'Social Distancing' continues as a buzzword. 'Social Distancing' and its pace of intensification give birth to an abridged spirit amongst all stake-holders in the economy. Various studies currently propose an intensive focus on medical and allied sectors to counteract this disaster. On the other hand, in order to re-capture the lost market shares, business houses are to be incredibly cautious in terms of their strategy formation and its ground execution. Thus, the crisis today is persistent and reflective. The entire demand-supply chain moves with social distancing now. Needless to state that these detachments have paralysed the world to a substantial extent. Economists feel that the global world would not be able to achieve its targeted growth of 2.9 %. It is deemed to grow up slowly at 1.5 % in current fiscal. With this profound fall in growth rate, the projection further reveals that the economic stagnancy induced by Covid-19 pandemic will be prolonged and evident beyond its immediate impact in future. May we now capitalize on this crisis through a different economic model to rebuild a humanitarian approach... even if there seems to be a possibility of sliding down.

Figure-3: (Covid-19: Total World-Wide Confirmed Deaths, 22nd Jan to 18th April, 2020)



Source: Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) – Statistics and Research, Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Joe Hasell, Updated: 18th April, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirusand> [www.http://ijahms.com/](http://ijahms.com/), Vol. 06, No. 04, Apr 2020, ISSN : 2395-0692

END NOTE

Nevertheless, will 'Corona' continue as an economic standstill for long? Just couple of months ago, mankind was neither having any clue of a health disaster, nor any threat to global world; bilateral issues were reasonable; growth parameters were hopeful if not ample; and the economy was intensely linked. At this time, it seems, all are de-linked through a single phrase 'Covid-19'. 'Social Distancing' comes to play a major role now with incremental threats to human beings as portrayed in Figure-3.

As such, where does our probable future stand? Or will 'Social Distancing' be seen as a de-linking fact across the world? There is supreme uncertainty on 'Who and What Next'? Answer is perhaps.. "Morphing from a Café Desk to a Web desk". Yet again...the same is inconclusive. Even then, the current situation, so far, is worth reviewing.

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