



CENJOWS

OPERATION COVID-19: INDIAN WAY OF WAR

FIGHTING

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The World of Corona

The world is undergoing a revolution of uncertainty in an era where certainty of human survival itself is under threat. The erstwhile anxieties of threats to human lives are leaning towards fear of existence. Suddenly the world is looking at prayers as the best medicine and spirituality becoming the steering wheel from the erstwhile spare wheel. Chants, Shlokas, bells and lights seem more than symbolic but a mystic belief of chasing away the evil. Numerology, astronomy and astrology seem to have gained currency and belief. Ramayana and Mahabharat have replaced the prime time sizzlers on TV. Animals and birds uncaged are enjoying the newly unpolluted environment while humans remain caged; a reversal of roles to set the ecological balance right. Realization of our actual needs above greed's, and that offline friends and physical families are more real than the pursuit for online friends is finding realisation. Indeed, Covid has also sent a strong message that the world is one, environment the true ruler of universe and it doesn't recognize manmade caste, creed, religion, or boundaries. Humanity is back on mother earth and it's time for back to basics.

These are strange times we live in. In a technology driven world taking fancy to newly found AI, IOT and virtual reality; all our science and human advances seem to have been humbled. We seem more of “goal keepers” rather than “center forwards”. All fancy external and internal threats seem suddenly miniscule to this Chanakya’s internal threat internally abetted. Fancy seminars on multi domain warfare, future threats and sub conventional conflicts suddenly seem so mundane. Surgical strikes and hyper nationalism seem to lose both the surgical precision and strike capability in the present context. The China and Pakistan bashing strategic community or the so called specialist on sub conventional warfare are struggling to find fantasy linkages to keep their steam going. The voices at high places that played rhetoric’s and bravado, promising the sky seem to have suddenly got inflammation of the vocal cords. All the fancy scenario building strategic exercises or strategic war gaming seem to have missed the woods for the trees. Indeed, it’s time for introspection and cerebral diversification to look at the nation, redefine its threats, reassess its CNP (Comprehensive National Power) and its foundational structures more holistically. Maybe along with CNP the nation states need now to develop CNC “Comprehensive National Capacity” to deal with such calamities/ threats impacting mankind.

At the strategic level the much hyped globalization is now taking the shape of isolation with nations debarring all access beyond borders, strengthening territorial nationalism. Corona has indeed demystified the mystique of open borders, and reasserted the role of the nation state led by a strong decisive government. International organizations like WHO which are based on “last century’s models”, seem stymied by the COVID displaying their inability to *predict, pre-empt, protector* even institute measures to *prevent the proliferation*. Global leadership especially of the so called advanced nations and super powers find themselves in quick sand transiting from casual assurances to mental paralysis. When the safety and security of the entire population of a country is at risk, the national leadership is expected to play a strong, decisive and bold role. The governments are now forced to choose between containing the spread of the pandemic at the cost of economy, or tolerating a higher human cost to save the economy. A Hobson’s Choice, beyond vote bank politics in a “Catch 22” situation! It’s time for “Nation Above All” with “Whole of Nation Approach” to be won by the people for their own survival. The effectiveness of governments will now be measured by their capacity to effectively change people’s everyday behavior and attitude. It is Peoples War and it’s the People who can only win this war, to first survive and thereafter prosper. It’s time for every individual to be a leader within themselves. “If I lead and win, my family wins, if my family wins my nation wins, if my nation wins, the humanity wins”. Covid has shown healthcare is the invisible roots of the

tree, people the trunk to brave the storm and the crown the prosperity of the nation in a balanced ecological environment.

Indian Way of Fighting Corona

“If there is one place on the face of this Earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.”

-Romain Rolland (French Philosopher 1886-1944)

India was the fevered land of humanity and Sanskrit the mother of all languages. India was the mother of philosophy and of the ideals embodied in spirituality. Much of the evolution of mathematics, medicine, science, astronomy, statecraft, political science and economics were of Indian origin. Five thousand years ago, the Indian time tested system which embraced the Upanishads world view of ***“Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”*** (Sanskrit - “World is one family”) is again to the fore. Pandemic has possibly offered an opportunity to forge the deeper concept of globalization based on ***“Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”*** that doesn’t focus solely on an economic agenda and varying selfish interpretations of global threats but on the largess good of humanity. The four ***“Purushatthas”*** (“Objects of human pursuit”) based on ***“Dharma-Artha-Kama-Moksha”*** (Dharma is the nature, Artha is the means, Kāma is the desire and Moksha is the release from the desire) are redefining the universe. If there is no co-ordination between these four faculties, then life will be a total chaos as Covid creates today. Today teachings of mythological epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, values and education imbibed by ancient Veda’s, statecraft with threads from Kautilya’s Arthashastra are redefining the strayed path of humanity.

Strange is the truth of life when Gods’ balancing of mankind’s imbalance, forces a pause button to ponder and rewind history. I am reminded of the present “Corona Pause”, to an event of “Mahabharata”. Ashwatthama became very angry when his father Dronacharya was killed in the Mahabharata war. He shot a terrible weapon "Narayana Astra" on the Pandava army. None could retaliate it. It used to burn people and immediately destroy those who had weapons in their hands and were seen trying to fight. Lord Krishna ordered the army to leave their weapons and remain quiet with folded hands. And said "Do not even bring the idea of war to mind as that would also destroy you". Narayana Astra gradually calmed down, when its time expired. In this way, the Pandava army was saved. Battles are not just about attack and counter attack. Some battles are won by staying put with resolve, remaining patient and braving the storm by letting it subside before setting course. It also highlights the need for a visionary leader taking a tough decision, soldiers displaying solidarity,

discipline, patience, resolve and above all trust in their leaders. We are back to those days once more.

The Covid-19 challenge called for not only strong, decisive leadership but also one with a human touch and symbolism of hope, backed by intelligent policy-making and time critical deliverance. It demanded understanding of the link between individual behavior and positive social outcomes in a new Citizen-State engagement. The focus shifting from building “State Capacity” rather than “State Power”. In these times of Nation’s biggest existential crisis, India took a daring decision to lock down a country of 1.3 billion people, to save their lives even at the cost of the economy taking a backseat. The nations path of righteousness believed, economy is revived by living people, not coffins - **“Jaan hai to Jahaan hai”**. Social distancing not only required a high measure of individual and collective discipline from the citizenry, but demonstrative commitment of the government to deliver on their promises of basic livelihood for all. India did not fail on this account. While there were hiccups like the laborer exodus, Tablighi Jamaat congregation and slums management, but these aberrations were handled expeditiously to curtail their devastating potential. In Fauji parlance some tactical reverses but steady on a path leading towards operational success and a strategic victory. While the world left people at sea, India sent flights to get back countrymen from the riskiest areas to relative safety. Incoming flights which could import Covid threat to the Nation were suspended. While these measures may have been ten days late but they are certainly arresting the storm, which is indicated by the comparative figures on COVID cases and deaths in India to date.

The Govt’s release of economic package for the poor and banking sector economic initiatives to minimize the setback have been a fair beginning, though a lot more action especially on issues of health care deficiencies is the need of the hour. India has led a fight where winning is not the goal, minimizing losses is, and survival is the key. While lights/torches/diya’s and clapping may be symbolic, but they carry the larger message of self-belief, solidarity and people’s commitment as a nation to overcome this calamity with resilience and resolve. The Indian qualities of “tyag” and “maya” are to the fore with free food distribution to the poor from sacred kitchen’s beyond religious affinity, ordinary people working to distribute money, goods, food; the rich pitching in their very best for the nation and the Indian industry realigning to the health care needs quick time. Imagine OFB quickly realigning from producing tanks, guns and ammunition to produce masks, protective clothing, sanitisation kits and other such health care equipment for the nation. The Indian Defence Forces besides braving the ongoing proxy war and manning the turbulent borders, opened another front “OP NAMASTE”, when they made the quarantine facilities at Manesar, Hindon, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Mumbai and Chennai

besides several other collaborative initiatives. Indian railways transformed coaches into quarantine facilities; schools and hotels offered spaces and above all the white coats and law and order machinery brave hearts bore the threats of exposure to their life with a smile. These are just a few examples of the Great Indian Spirit (sometimes referred as “*Jugad*” *albeit innovation*) and the unsung heroes/heroines. Indeed “**Hum Honge Kamyab**” is the unifying slogan and spirituality the belief. They say after every overcast sky is a blue sky, and so also is the Indian spirit. Only time will tell if this was our finest hour, but for the present its well begun though only half done. We need to brave the storm well with resolve, positivity and discipline, as responsible citizens of this great nation.

Calming the Storm

Social distancing is the only “brake” to slow the spread as people are contagious symptomatic or asymptomatic for longer periods, requiring longer bouts of quarantine. The ability of the government to envision future scenarios, forecast impact and have contingency plans to mitigate the impact by decisive actions will be the key to success. The principle challenge remains - **Can we flatten the curve?** Ironically, *How long could this last? How it might play out? When will a cure be found?*; are some unanswered questions. Presently India has to focus now on addressing the current health crisis and balancing the economic health above the redline. We need to be prepared for a lot more of sacrifices and trying times for the larger good of our nation and humanity. It is just the beginning, not the end, not even the beginning of the end but the beginning of the beginning. It’s time to act not react; prepare and prevent; make tests extensive, time sensitive and affordable; trace and isolate, and keep public well informed and on side. Fixing shortages of testing equipment, ventilators and enhancing capacities and expanding healthcare infrastructure including telehealth solutions need top priority. Financial aid packages to small and medium sized businesses and specific industries hit by the lockdown also merit consideration.

While there are several lessons and opportunities that COVID has thrown up but it’s not the time to focus on them yet. Also assigning blame and raising brownie points is a waste of time and effort, nor is it time to play party politics. We need to overcome this together as a single human community to combat a threat that disregards national boundaries and manmade divisions. Covid has no religion, no boundaries nor does it don a political cloak. Till the storm lasts as responsible citizens, we need to stay focused on good hygiene, think and act as a community, rediscover kindness, focus on mental health and above all stay informed, positive and disciplined. Our Rig Veda has taught us “**Where there is harmony between the mind, heart and resolution, then nothing is impossible**”. In the words of Indian PM “***Utsaho balavanarya nastyutsahat param balam,***

Utsaharambhamatrena jayante sarvasampadah”(there is no force greater than our enthusiasm and spirit in this world. There is nothing in the world that cannot be achieved with this force). Let’s come together to defeat Corona and make India victorious,”.

**Guzar Jayega yeh daur bhi Ghalib,
Zara itminan toh rakh,
Kushi hi nahi thehri toh,
Gham ki kya aukat hai!**

-Mirza Ghalib

Disclaimer: Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.