

Coronavirus: Reflections of a Layperson on Post-crisis Possibilities

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Sitting home, I scribbled a few points and mailed to a few friends, Akshay Anand being one of them. He wrote back and asked me to write for his journal. I was reluctant, for I am an academic nobody but he insisted all the same. So, brace for banality, so despised by intellectuals. Its beauty, on the other hand, is its simplicity which conforms to Occam's razor, so admired but not so much practiced by scientific community. Insights shared by some friends have been incorporated.

We are all isolated and imprisoned, physically and emotionally, these days. All talks of discriminations and protests, CRISPR and gene editing, Artificial Intelligence and machine learning have vanished. Rights and freedoms have been surrendered voluntarily and we are fanatically practicing untouchability as never before. Deadly arsenals, venomous words, and devious minds—the main weapons of humanity—are not working this time. Enemy is roaming free while we are imprisoned. Driven out of a busy world, our idle minds are racing in all directions and reclaiming our abdicated freedom in the fathomless depths of our brains. Let's use them more.

Here are just a few possibilities which occurred to me in a short span of time, although they might be brewing for a while in the back of mind. Their context is global and, hence, they are not a reflection on any one country even if a name is mentioned. The world indeed is too complex to predict with any accuracy. Then, these are not the derivations of method but the fruits of imagination. Problem, however, is that while human imagination is abundantly rich, human foresight is abysmally poor. So, this abacus is relevant only to make people think and develop foresight by critical vetting and adversarial analysis of each possibility, and also by expansion, deletion, and addition of possibilities.

1. Possibilities of bioterrorism by persecuted groups and biogenocide by States. Immediate to medium term. Might already be happening in proto-forms.

2. Over rind meeting culture. Proliferation of home office, videocon, telecon. Decline of real estate. Near to long term.
3. Human behaviours and habits. Handshake, hugging, dancing and partying become less popular. Trust deficit increases and community weakens. Continuing use of soap, sanitisers, and masks. Some aspects of modern western culture lose and alternatives of traditional cultures gain. Near to medium term.
4. Military. Proliferation of biological weapons and countermeasures. New military doctrines framed and approved. Medium to long term.
5. Travelling and touring. Decline of international and regional transportation and tourism industry. Growth of car industry. Near to medium term.
6. Politics. State becomes more powerful; free market and civil society lose their power. Rise of nationalism and xenophobia. Increase in racial discrimination and violence. Global tribalism. Proliferation of fascist leaders and parties in the world. Freedom and fairness decline. Autocrats emerge and become stronger. Near to medium term.
7. Society. Widening of rich-poor divide. Rise of criminal behaviours in marginalised populations. Rise in theft, mugging, robbery, and murder. Proliferation of AI in law enforcement. Police gain respect of middle classes (otherwise reserved for army) but generate more hatred in poorer sections. Near to medium term.
8. Humanity. Large-scale population decline as a result of side effects of mass immunisation programme based on a quick-fix fast-tracked vaccine. Coronavirus vaccine becomes a new benchmark of rich and poor. Some countries with large resources and less people immunise their populations rapidly while those with limited resources and larger populations remain susceptible. Within a country, a new rich-poor divide is created by access to this vaccine, the rich and powerful develop

immunity while the poor mass of people remains susceptible. Further decline of already-deficient morality. Near to medium term.

9. Geopolitics. Fragmentation of existing world order without a new order. Increase in instability and spectre of a great war. Decline of UN and its agencies due to decreased funding and trust. EU weakens. Medium to long term.
10. Economy. Profiteering and corruption grows in the name of fighting coronavirus. Might be under way already. Widespread chaos and collapse of many sectors and entities. Inflation increases. Dollar declines. Stock market goes haywire. Large-scale unemployment. International aid declines. Poverty increases globally. Self-reliance is stressed. Import restrictions and duties increase. Capitalism faces its greatest crisis without having an ideological enemy to rally against.
11. Religion. Faith remains intact but organised religion is hit. Followers decline. Religion is personalised. Rituals and gatherings decline. Cults increase.
12. Entertainment. Sports and entertainment industry decline. Mega events such as Olympics see less of live-audience. Cinema halls, concerts recede. Virtual entertainment increases. Proliferation of channels like Netflix.
13. Health and Medicine. Hoarding of ventilators and bio-hazard equipment continues even after coronavirus is controlled. Diversion of resources to coronavirus vaccination and other imaginary futuristic projects. Hitherto crucial areas of medical research and basic health programmes receive less attention. Future gets priority over present. Alternative health systems advocating total health and strong immunity gain popularity. Commercial gyms and group training decline while home gyms and personal training rise. Near to medium term. Community medicine gains in short term.
14. China. Rapidly gains scientific and technological prominence due to strategic planning and targeted investment in a void created by America and Europe but faces social discrimination and political isolation in an angry and vindictive world. Manufacturing takes a hit as capitalism wars against itself. Resorts to a deterrent fast-paced conventional militarisation due to enemy capabilities but develops a greater secretive reliance on biological weapons and cyber warfare. Near to long term.
15. Environment. Lockdown and slowdown breather is short-lived. Humanity quickly goes back to its old ways of consumerism and extractivism propelled by twin forces of greed and success. Earth system continues to recede from its point of current equilibrium. Animals and plants continue to suffer due to human infestation and its intelligent predation (if # 8 doesn't come to their help). Long term.

It will not be the same world that we welcomed in 2020 after coronavirus scare recedes. Problem at the moment, though, is that there is no end in sight to the prevailing crisis of viral infection, for so long as the virus and susceptible population remain, Covid-19 carries on in different ways—global, regional, and local.

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