

## Impact of COVID-19 on culture and society.

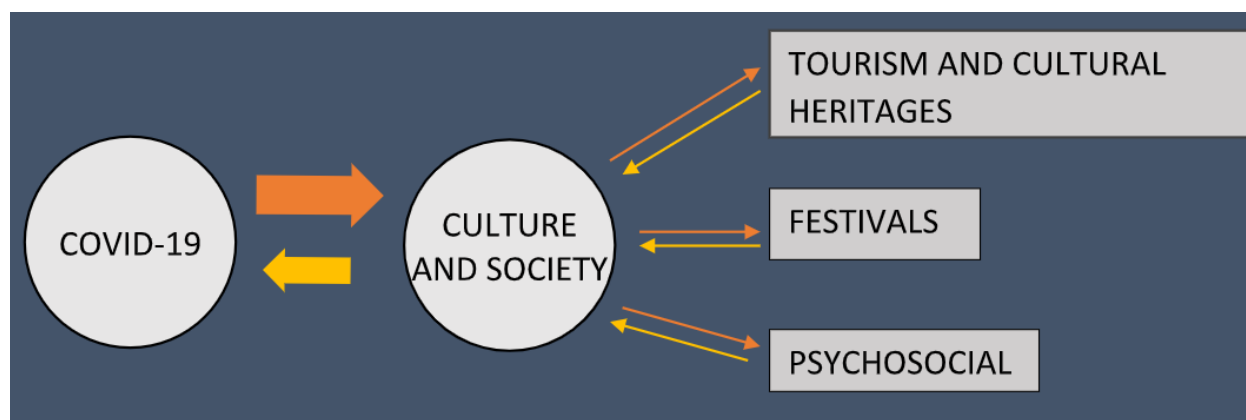
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Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) was declared as a pandemic by the world health organization (WHO) on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020. Since then, nations across the world have made efforts to save their nation from the pandemic. Despite efforts like implementing a nationwide lockdown, on almost all activities to slow down its transmission, COVID-19 took the lives of thousands of people, affecting millions of people across the globe. It's effects led to a drastic change in activities in all sectors in the world. The society is now facing a situation where almost everything, including its culture, is challenged due to this outbreak. A literature review is done using PubMed and Google scholar, newsletters, magazines, blogs with search terms “culture”, “society”, “COVID-19”, “psychological effects of COVID-19 on mankind”. Considering the results obtained, this paper is made to give a better understanding of how COVID-19 is impacting the culture and society, and what can we learn from this, from which we can find out the possible ways to face this kind of challenging situation.

**Key words:** Pandemic, COVID-19, cultural heritage, museums, culture, society, impacts of COVID-19.



**Figure 1.** Process showing how culture and society are getting affected by COVID-19. Brown arrows show the process of how COVID-19 is affecting the various sectors related to culture and society. Yellow ticks show the process (if preventive measures are not followed) of how various sectors related to culture and society can spread the COVID-19.

An area or nation in the world is identified as unique from others, based on the society that inhabits that area and the practices followed by them. The way these practices are followed may differ from one society to another. These practices followed by a particular society at any particular point of

time are named as its culture. From the beginning of mankind to the very recent time, individuals in a society maintained or followed their culture, despite the challenging situations. But the COVID-19, in a very short period, has become the biggest challenge that the societies have witnessed from the past few centuries.

China reported pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei province on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 to WHO (1). The primary cause for these cases seems to have been linked to the seafood market in Wuhan, where wildlife animals are sold for wholesale (2). The Chinese government implemented a lockdown in Wuhan on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January to prevent transmission of the virus (3). But, within a few days, many countries across the globe reported positive cases from the people having primary contact with the ones who traveled from China to their countries. This led to people across many countries questioning China and its culture as the reason for the outbreak. As of September 22<sup>nd</sup>, COVID-19 has resulted in 31.4 Million positive cases, taking the lives of 966 thousand people across the globe. Since the day when COVID-19 is declared as pandemic the Media, environmentalists, and people are raising their voices to impose a worldwide ban on selling seafood and wildlife animals, and countries boycotting Chinese products and apps.

COVID-19 not only affected the health sector but also affected the culture and economy of many societies. Since the government funds in many countries are being used to improve the health sector, other creative sectors that deal with culture and other aspects are facing severe issues, being not able to support the society. This review is made using news and information available from various platforms like newsletters, magazines, PubMed, Google Scholar, Blogs focussing on the impacts of this outbreak on culture and society considering both positive and negative sides as well, which in turn helps both the individual and the society to face this type of conditions both psychologically and physically.

### **Impact on sectors that depict the culture.**

*Tourism and cultural heritages:* Due to national lockdowns, and restrictions on

mobility, traveling between different places is being disturbed at a high level. Due to this, the tourism sector is facing a severe threat with many of the people in that sector losing their employment. The number of people visiting the cultural sites has also decreased in number, which is indirectly affecting the sector's overall contribution to the economy. According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 95,000 museums which are an icon to depict the culture and history are closed in May due to COVID-19 (4). Considering the effects of this issue, many nations are now providing emergency funds and opening them up virtually through digital platforms, to support cultural institutions like museums and art galleries (4). But, access to these digital platforms is not everywhere, as reported by the Broadband Commission, around 46% of the world population remains offline (4). So, there is a need for effective ideas to implement this on a large scale.

*Festivals:* Long back from history, festivals are given prior importance all over the world, as they contribute to showcasing the culture and cultural practices of different societies to the world in an effective way. They help in maintaining healthy communication between different societies. To prevent the transmission of COVID-19, nations are following measures like social distancing and preventing mass gatherings to avoid physical contact. Due to this, many of the festivals across the globe got postponed, while some were not being held completely for this year.

*Religious Festivals:* Religious practices like greeting each other through shaking hands, giving a hug, and mass gatherings in holy places are being avoided by many religions. To prevent the spread of disease, the Hajj pilgrimage which was scheduled to take place from the 28<sup>th</sup> of July this year, was prohibited to international visitors from traveling to Saudi Arabia (5). Several other religious festivals like Easter in many parts of

the world and Ganesh Chaturthi in India and many worship meetings are canceled.

*Sports Festivals:* Sports festivals are a form of encouragement to the people showing talent in sports. The Tokyo Olympics which had to be held this summer have been postponed till the summer of 2021 (6, 7). The major football event, EURO 2020 has been postponed for 12 months (7). India's most awaited cricket tournament, Indian premier league (IPL)2020 which is to be held in India this summer is now being held at UAE, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> of this September (8). There are many other sports events related to tennis, basketball, cycling, golf being postponed, while some being canceled completely due to this pandemic, which is leaving athletes and many others related to the sports industry mentally disturbed and depressed (9).

*Musical and Film Festivals:* Many of the musical concerts got canceled (9). The sale of tickets in concerts and live performances, which is considered as one of the sources of income to the music industry, is getting affected. Considering the risk, digital platforms, and streaming giants such as Spotify, Amazon music etc. are being used for streaming live performances (10). Film festivals are all about displaying culture, sharing emotions, and co-ordination between film industries of different societies (11). Amidst the outbreak, and ban on shootings and canceling some events and festivals which require public gatherings, the film industry tried to entertain and connect to the public by making use of digital platforms to host some of their services and film festivals by streaming them online and making them available to the public (12).

**Impact on society.** From a psychosocial point of view, COVID-19 has affected all sections of society by and large.

*Age groups:* It is shown that the extreme ends of age groups who are children and old age

people are most likely to face adverse effects. Old age is the period during which people suffer from diseases both psychologically and physically. Adding a high risk of these people getting infected, and isolation may lead to depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders which makes situations too worse for them to handle (13, 14). As schools are banned due to lockdown children are confined to homes, this affects their lifestyle which can indirectly affect their health psychologically (13, 15).

*Livelihood:* With no doubt, COVID-19 has put the employment of many people at risk leading to social inequality. Due to lockdown, daily wage workers lost their work, which is leading them to poverty. Migrants are the ones who got hardly hit by these crises. Some of them are paid low wages while some completely lost work or employment. As per the COVID-19 livelihood survey conducted by Azim Premji University, nearly 80% of urban workers lost their jobs (16). According to ILO (International labor organization), many laborers faced violence, insecurity (17). Many are uncertain of how to make a livelihood, which is making them feel pressure and distress.

*Social norms:* COVID-19 changed the way society responds to social activities like maintaining the surroundings clean and hygiene has been seen during these crises. A decrease in pollution levels is also seen. It also influenced the way we behave and think. People are now preferring natural against artificial, spending more time with family, acquiring new skills, which all seems to be good on one side of the coin. But to look at the other side it is the opposite. Studies say that violence has been increased both in the lives of individuals and among societies (18). This could eventually lead to a fall in the global peace index (19). Fake news is becoming viral and spreading, faster through the active involvement of media (20).

Unproved data and myths are being circulated in the community regarding the use of taking different measures that can prevent being attacked by the virus. People in some societies who got affected by COVID-19 are still being isolated and are being treated as untouchable even after they got cured. This could eventually lead to the disruption of society.

### **Why does India have a low mortality rate when compared to western countries?**

According to the survey done by Johns Hopkins University, India's mortality rate stands at 1.7% as of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020, which is considered surprisingly very low when compared to other countries (21). While this has nothing to do with climatic conditions because even in the summer the infection rate is still the same as present in colder countries. Well, then what could be the reason for this? The possible reason could be that India is considered as a young nation with many people at a young age, who will be having an immune system potential to fight against the disease. While the other possible reason could probably be related to the culture and society of India. Many people in India also mentioned their opinion on social media saying that having a low mortality rate is only due to their culture. This is because Indian people are regularly exposed to pneumonia-like diseases, so their immune system remains well activated by producing antibodies to fight against this type of pneumonia-like viruses. Apart from these, it is also being said that India is infected with a less virulent strain. There were also some researchers from India suggesting the reason could be because, all the death cases are not getting into records, as most of the people who are getting affected are staying at homes due to the fear of stigmatization, and as a result, hospitals are not maintaining the accurate record of the number of death cases (22). There are no shreds of evidence and

proof to support any of the above-mentioned issues as an accurate cause (23). The above mentioned are only possible reasons to answer the question. Researchers are still trying to find out the right cause for this, as this could help in understanding the disease pathology better.

**Concluding remarks.** It is evident to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has been highly affecting culture and society. Culture plays a very important role in each one's everyday life. "Humans are social beings", hence it is the sole responsibility of each one to take care of themselves and also for the people around them to maintain our culture and thus, society in a good shape. "Humans are highly evolved species on this planet" and a pandemic like this does not mark the end and a start to everything, but we can say that this could be an end for a few things and start for many things. In other words, this pandemic taught us that maintaining proper health and having harmony with our surroundings in every aspect is very much important. So, let us play our role in evolution and contribute as much as we can to the society in which we live, despite the conditions we face.

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