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# COVID19 Lockdown Crisis: Life Vs Livelihood

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study made an attempt to review the impact of lockdown announced by the government of India which has restricted the mobility of people to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown policy has put everything in stand still; it has affected economy as well as our society. Large numbers of people working as daily wage labourers in informal sector are jobless today due to lockdown. The current paper will discuss the preventive measures taken by the government to minimize the negative consequence of the lockdown on people at the bottom to the pyramid working in informal sector. Whether the relief packages in form of cash or kind announced by the government is sufficient enough to support them? What all measures the government should take to improve the efficiency of lockdown policy to minimize the negative impact of lockdown due to COVID19 on Indian economy and society in the future?*

**Keywords: COVID-19, India, Economy, lockdown, unemployment, poor, informal sector**

## **INTRODUCTION**

There have been enough discussions, appreciations and criticism about the recent move of social distancing and lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID19 in India announced by government of India on 24 March 2020. Initially, it was announced for a period of 21 day starting 25<sup>th</sup> midnight, it was extended upto 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020 and later extended upto 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020. In the third phase, government allowed normalcy in the green-zone where there is no evidence of COVID19 cases. It is found that due to lockdown many people lost their jobs as most of the industries have stopped production. People got confined inside their home from March 25, 2020 and it has created a major set back in our society. People working as dally wage labourers in informal sector living at the bottom of the pyramid started facing lots of problem in procuring food and other basic necessities with the little money they have in their hand at this moment. Since the people in the bottom of the pyramid are largely depend on daily wage, which rarely have any saving for arranging food and other basic items. Most of them are basically from rural areas migrated to cities for working in the informal sector in urban areas. Large section of them got unemployed due to lockdown and they neither have any source of earning nor any money for paying house-rent and purchasing food and other essential items. They are engaged in informal sectors like fruits & vegetable vendors, construction workers, rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers, cab drivers, temporary workers, household maids, laundry workers, tailors, patty shop-keeper, electricians, plumbers, mansions, street-food retailers etc. They are looking forward to government for support and they are willing re-migrate their village. There is an urgent need to review the impact the impact of lockdown because most of them are migrated workers; many of them are not getting the benefit of the government schemes. There is an urgent need to analysis the impact of lockdown on people at the bottom of the pyramid, especially working in the informal sector. Government should formalize strategies to mitigate their problems, so that government can provide direct economic, health, and other necessary contingency protection and support to them.

## **FACTS ON COVID19 PANDEMIC**

The novel coronavirus (COVID19) emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019 spread within Hubei province and reached many provinces in China and soon it reached to other 20 countries by 30 January

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2020. COVID19 is primarily transmitted human-to-human by respiratory droplets. Transmission of this virus happens when people are in close contact with one another, usually up to six feet. It can also live on surfaces up to a few days. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough, some patients have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. The symptoms are more often mild and gradual; some people don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell in the beginning. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets infected by COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Fever, cough and difficulty breathing are some of the common symptoms. Hygiene practices and social distancing are effective solutions to prevent the spread of this virus. Since there is no vaccines and antiviral medicine for controlling the pandemic, it can be prevented by separating person-to-person through isolation and quarantine, social distancing and lockdown or community containment.

### **Preventive Measures**

'Isolation' refers to separation of an ill person with infectious diseases from non-infected persons to protect a non-infected person from infection. The incubation time of the COVID19 is around 14 days. To avoid viral spread of the virus, isolation is used deliberately to increase physical space between people to avoid spreading illness.

'Quarantine' refers to as an effective tool for controlling communicable disease outbreaks. This was practiced widely in fourteenth century in Italy, when ships are arriving at the Venice port from plague-infected ports. They were anchored and made to wait for forty days before disembarking their surviving passengers. Forty days are considered to be enough for the incubation time to identify asymptomatic cases. Quarantine means the movement restriction of persons who are presumed to have been exposed to a contagious disease but are not ill, either because they did not become infected or because they are still in the incubation period. Quarantine was also implemented successfully as an effective measure during the SARS epidemic in 2003.

'Social distancing' is intended to reduce contacts between people in a community, in which individuals may get infected from persons who are not yet infected and identified, hence not yet isolated. As disease transmitted by respiratory droplets and require certain proximity of people, hence social distancing of persons will reduce transmission. Social distancing is found useful in social settings where community transmission is supposed to occur and where the linkage between cases is unclear. The restrictions imposed on persons known to have been exposed is considered insufficient to prevent further transmission. Social distancing includes closure of school, colleges, offices, marketplace and social gatherings.

'Lockdown' or 'Community-wide containment' refers to an intervention applied to an entire community, city or region designed to reduce personal contacts, except for minimal contact to ensure vital supplies. It is an expansion from social distancing to community-wide quarantine with major restrictions of movement of everyone. Enforcement of lockdown is far more complex since larger number of persons involved. Such measures are challenging with individual human rights weighing against the public health imperative. During lockdown government prefer to use electronic media and print media to communicate the reasons for quarantine and other practical advices and to pre-empt false rumors and panic. Implementation requires close partnerships and cooperation with law enforcement at the people and government, and often violation of norms may need legal penalties to implement the same.

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## **Facts from 1918 Pandemic**

Lockdown and social distancing are not happening for first time, it was practiced in 1918-20. The Great Influenza of 1918 was popularly known as Spanish Flu originated in Haskell county of Kansas, USA. It travelled to Europe and all parts of the world with young soldiers in warships. Spain was neutral to world war and press was free, and they reported it extensively and openly, thus it got the name of Spain. Albert Marrin mentioned in his book "Very, very, very dreadful" that "No country suffered worse than India. An astounding 6.1 percent, or 18.6 million, of its 305.6 million people died of influenza. In other words, India lost twice as many civilians as all soldiers killed during the World War". It killed around 50 to 100 million and infected 600 million people globally. The situation of today pandemic is very similar to 1918 pandemic; there was no vaccine, no medicine and lack of coordination between the countries. Some of the states declared victory over pandemic in June 1918 under the pressure to reopen and restart the economy; the death toll was mild during this phase. But the second wave started in July 1918 end which was very severe because people flocked to public places when they thought the flu had stabilized, but they were wrong. People were then re-ordered to wear masks, but lots of people refused to do so and received fines for not wearing a face mask. People formed the "Anti-Mask League and held large public protests defying orders to stay inside and social-distance. This sounds a lot like the people who are currently protesting around the United States to end lockdowns and let people go back to work. By the end of the pandemic, more than 500,000 Americans died. It was estimated that about 358 people per 100,000 died in St Louis while 748 per 100,000 died in Philadelphia during the second wave of the pandemic. A study conducted in 2007 published in the Journal of the American Medical Association analyzed that closing of schools, churches, theaters, and banned public gatherings was an effective measure to prevent the spread of the disease which allowed the scientist to develop vaccine and lessened the strain on health care systems. According to John Barry (2004) 1918 pandemic killed 5% global population, which was around 1.8 billion. If one want to avoid the repeating the same history, one have to learn from the experience of 1918 pandemic.

## **Government Intervention**

Inspite of the union and state governments appeals to the private sector to not lay off workers or cut their salaries during this time of crisis, large number of people are forced to leave their jobs due to absence of market, especially in informal sectors, where the people earn their income by working as daily wage labourers, running petty shops, vending fruits and vegetables, rickshaw pulling, driving auto-rickshaw, working as domestic help, small business and working in gig economy. Financial relief packages were announced by different government. For instance, Uttar Pradesh has announced a financial relief of over Rs. 3.53 billion for 1.5 million daily wage earners and 2.03 million construction workers across the state through direct benefit transfer (DBT). That means, the beneficiaries like rickshaw pullers, hawkers, and kiosk owners, will get the money directly into their bank accounts. Punjab government has declared an immediate relief of Rs. 0.96 billion has been earmarked and proposed to distribute Rs. 3,000 to each registered construction worker in the state. The Delhi government announced to pay upto to Rs. 5,000 as pension to the 850,000 poor beneficiaries and free ration to them who are entitled for food subsidies under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

On 26 March 2020, the FM announced welfare measures under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) relief package, amount to Rs. 1.7 trillion (US\$ 22 billion) to cover 0.8 billion poor people or two-thirds of India's population. This fund will be transferred under various central schemes through the digital payment technology named Public Financial Management System (PFMS). The welfare measures were announced with an intended to reach out to the poorest of the poor so that they can get

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food, gas, and money in hand. Government announced to provide an additional 5 kg of rice/wheat to 0.8 billion poor people, along with 1kg pulses per household for a period of three months free of cost. Estimated budget for this new scheme is Rs. 450 billion under PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana. Under the existing PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, an installment of Rs. 2,000 will be transferred to the bank accounts of 87 million farmers in the first week of April. Estimated budget for this is Rs. 174 billion (87 million beneficiaries at Rs. 2,000 each).

Special insurance scheme was announced to provide Rs. 5 million cover to health workers fighting Covid-19 in government hospitals, wellness and healthcare centers. Under this new scheme, approximately 2.2 million health workers would be provided insurance cover for COVID19 warriors against this pandemic. Estimated budget for this is Rs. 150 billion (2.2 million workers). Some of other prominent components PMGKY are ex-gratia cash transfer of Rs. 500 per month will be given for the next three months 200 million women Jan Dhan account-holders as the relief package, the estimated budget is Rs. 306 billion (204 million beneficiaries at Rs. 1,500 each). Eighty million poor families will get free cylinders for three months under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana scheme. It was announced that the small companies having up to 100 employees, the government will bear the cost of Provident Fund (PF) contribution of both employer and employee (24%) for the next three months for the employees earn less than Rs. 15,000 per month. Estimated budget for this is Rs. 30 billion (30 million beneficiaries at Rs. 1,000 each for senior citizens (above 60 years), widows, and Divyang (persons with disability) will be given in two installments through DBT over a period of three months. The wages of daily-wage labourers under MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) have been increased to Rs.202 from Rs.182 per day to help the poor with additional income of Rs. 2000 per annum. Estimated budget for this is Rs. 100 billion (Rs. 20 wage increase for 100 man-days; 50 million workers at Rs. 2000 each).

Collateral-free loans for the 6.3 million women is organised through self-help groups have been doubled from Rs. 1 million to Rs. 2 million under the Aajeevika Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana or National Rural Livelihood Mission.

Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Regulations will be amended to include pandemic as the reason to allow non-refundable advance of 75% of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from the accounts of 40 million workers registered under EPF. State governments have been directed to utilise the welfare fund for 35 million building and other constructions workers created under the Building and other Construction Workers' Act, 1996 to protect them against economic disruptions. The state governments will be asked to utilise the funds available under District Mineral Fund (DMF) for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening, and other requirements to preventing the spread of Covid-19 and for the treatment of patients affected by this pandemic.

### **Impact of COVID19 Lockdown**

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), nearly 25 millions jobs could be lost worldwide due to the pandemic, which would mean income losses will be between US\$ 860 billion and US\$ 3.4 trillion by the end of 2020, it is expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours globally in second quarter of 2020, equivalent to million full-time workers. ILO warned that almost 90% of people working in informal economy, about 400 million workers are at risks of falling deeper into poverty during the pandemic crisis. CMIE reported that India's unemployment rate shot up to 23.5% in April 2020, and expected to reach 27.1% by May 3, 2020. Some of the states affected most are Tamil Nadu,

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Jharkhand and Bihar with an unemployment rate of 49.8%, 437.1% and 46.6% respectively. The states which will be least effected are Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Telangana at 2.9%, 3.4% and 6.2% rate of unemployment respectively. It is expected that 114 million of people out of 400 millions that is one in every four have a chance of losing their jobs. The participation of people in workforce was extremely low in April 2020 as much as 35.6% and it is expected to rise with extension of lockdown. This will translate into a fall in the consumption of goods and services, which will result in low production and in turn it will decrease in national gross production, slow down of economy. It will severely affect the employment of the people in informal sector; the people who are working in the informal sector in urban areas have already begun to face the acute shortage of fund due to lockdown. Many will lose their jobs, the source of income will dry up and they will depend on government and non-government support for food, shelters and other essential.

Large number of migrated labourers is going back to their villages due to unemployment; it will lead to shortage of skilled labour in certain sector after withdrawal of lockdown. In India 25% of the workforce are working as casual labourers occupied with MSMEs, hotels and restaurants, multiplexes, retail, airlines, surface transportation, manufacturing and media are subjected to worse-hit due to job-cuts in emergency situation. The people living in urban areas are affected more the people living in rural areas occupied in agricultural sector, but the people in rural areas will also suffering losses due to uncertainty and falling demand of agricultural produce in the market. The people living in the bottom of the pyramid irrespective of the location will face tremendous pressure in maintaining day-to-day cost of living like food, medicine, clothing etc. Beyond this, they have to bear other overhead expenses like children education, electricity bills, fuel etc which will be addition burden for them today. In addition to regular and incompressible expenses there will be added unforeseen expenses like health shocks, payment of interest on loans or unpaid debt and so forth.

An economic downturn due to lockdown will result in increased unemployment, reductions in income and wealth, and increased uncertainty about future jobs and income for the people at the bottom of the pyramid. Under the prevailing condition, people will be compelled to borrow money from the money-lender at high interest for their survival. It will put them in to debt-trap with a little chance of escape as there will be no inflow of income to repay back in near future. The shortage of fund due to lockdown will force them to mortgage their land and gold as collateral security to get money with very little chance of retrieval. This may lead to social inequality and drag them into different type of unethical and criminal activities for survival and it may lead to increase in suicidal tendency among suffers.

This may adversely affect health of the people living in the bottom of the pyramid due to their poor economic conditions. The gravity of this problem will differ across generations, regions and socio-economic groups. Groups which are vulnerable to poor health due to malnutrition will attract more problems. Policies that the government has put in place and the subsequent policies that will be implementing in future will play an important role in determining the eventual health consequences of the people living in the bottom of the pyramid.

A study conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York noted from the experience of the pandemic 1918–20 that the pandemic had a negative economic impact. However, social distancing such as closing schools and businesses and ordering people to stay home ultimately had a positive economic impact during the pandemic a century ago. Specifically, the study reported that areas with no lockdown were more extensively affected economically by the 1918 Flu Pandemic. Secondly, it was

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found that the cities that implemented early and extensive social distancing and lockdown suffered adversely for the medium term. On the contrary, cities that intervened earlier more aggressively and start the economic activity early are affected badly. Thus, the study suggests that restraining virus ultimately leads to improved economic activity. Lockdown and social distancing should be the priority of the government instead of suppressing the virus which may eventually affect the economy negatively on massive outbreak. In a massive outbreak, it will be difficult for a country like India to manage large number of sick people as well as manage the supply and demand of essential goods, medicine etc. Moreover, government has to shift all its focus and resources towards caring for the people.

The government has to taken proactive step due to various reasons which is better than reactive strategy in case of developing nation like India, where population is over 1.3 billion, inept and crippling health systems, inadequate medical infrastructure, scarcity of trained medical professional and staff etc. As India was not prepared to take up the challenge of COVID19, prefer to go for preventive actions by announcing lockdown starting 00:00 hours on 25 March 2020, and enforced the Disaster Management Act, 2005 to prevent further spread of the virus. The announcement of lockdown before it started spreading has resulted in COVID19 infections remains relatively low in India vis-à-vis other countries. The irony of the situation is that while there is an urgent need for social distancing and self-isolation to prevent the spread of virus for saving human lives, it gives rise to a growing concerns related to economic crisis for the people living in the bottom of the pyramid. It is expected that it will lead to economic slowdown and fall in GDP growth rate and bring them towards brink of mass sufferings and social insecurity. It is estimated that over 50 million people are working in informal sector providing utility services finding it onerous to survive amid no work and lack of social protection and rights. The people who are self employed, owner of small businesses, working in gig economy are feeling the uproar of lockdown. While others somehow manage to get some jobs are also navigating through rough waters.

## **DISCUSSION**

There is a big gap between the number of poor people government is targeting to serve and number of people holding Ration card in India. Currently, only 234 million people are having Ration Cards (90% of them are linked to Adhaar card) under National Food Security Act which is less than one-third of the people planned to be served. According to the survey (2016-17) two-fifths of the people i.e., bottom 40% of the population in the economic ladder are deprived of PDS in 2016-17. It is difficult to understand, how the government will reach to the poor who are actually looking forward for help and support. There is no clear cut measure to implement the schemes announced by the government, we are reading the news of suffering of the poor in television and newspapers, there is a gap between the plan and implementation, the government machinery should ensure there reach to the poor, otherwise we will loss of life through lockdown, large part of our population will starve to death due to shortage of food. If we critically evaluate the benefits government is trying to give through different schemes may be very small to support them. The government announced amount of Rs. 500 per month will be given for the next three months to 200 million women and Rs. 1,000 each for senior citizens (above 60 years), widows, and Divyang (persons with disability) will be given in two installments through DBT over a period of three months. If we try to calculate the amount of money they are getting on daily basis it stand out to be very small, it will be difficult for them to purchase food and essential goods. It is not at all sufficient enough to support basic nutrition security. Thus, it a matter of concern for them as well as for the government, if some concrete steps are not taken quickly, India's rank in the Global Hunger Index

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will slip further down. The poor people are not only suffering from food security, but they will have lots of other problems which will get affected due to lockdown, they will stop sending their children to school, they will prefer to send them to work, so that they can earn something more. This will generate surplus of labour in the market, which will reduce the price of labour, the labourer will land up working for less wages. They will earn less, they will have less money in hand to spend, demand for each and every product will go down, and industries have to countenance the falling demand. The economic growth expected to be getting affected.

Another important area for immediate attention is on general health issues other than COVID19, government need to address. Currently, government is focusing on COVID19 related treatment and prevention. There is urgent need to address other health related issues through OPD and hospitalization. Government need to pay attention to some of the flagship programmes like Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna are National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and Ayushman Bharat Yojana and Health and Wellness Centres. Further there is a need to be strengthened various component of National Urban Livelihood Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, etc so that people get better health support. There is urgent need to train and equip our frontline health worker like Safai karamcharis (cleaners), ward-boys, nurses, ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists, so that they can execute their task efficiently and effectively.

Government has already announced collateral-free loans for the 6.3 million women organised through self-help groups by doubling loans from Rs. 1 million to Rs. 2 million under the Aajeevika Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana or National Rural Livelihood Mission. The government is already running some of the programmes like Make in India, Digital India, Skill India (PMKVY), Stand up India, Start up India, Mudra Yojana, Khelo India and Rashtriya Yuva Karyakram, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao to cultivate and encourage people towards innovation and entrepreneurship. Looking into the prevailing condition, it is forecasted that due to lockdown there will considerable retrenchment, declining job opportunities and reduction in new employment, in such situation government can help the people in generating employment for themselves as well as for others through entrepreneurship, it will be an welcome move from the government to fill the unemployment gap and develop sustainable solution for economically weaker section.

In the present context, many households lost their source of income. The households at the bottom of the pyramid are badly affected by the situation, the daily-wage earners, migrant labourers are left without resource and even shelter. The difficulties in managing the smooth supply of food and other essential goods is leading to shortage, which in turn lead to increase in prices of food and essential item. The government may intervene to set up price caps on necessary items. According to the latest 2019 estimates, India ranked 102 out of 117 countries on the Global Hunger Index, the lowest among South Asian countries (despite higher GDP per capita). India has long history of fight against hunger and malnutrition, India has introduced the National Food Security Act (also known as the Right to Food Act) in 2013. Given the current emergency, the government announced certain measures, according to Jayati Ghosh this scheme “embarrassing” given the small amount put on the table and “inadequate”. The poor people will get the benefit of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) if they manage to get back home, where they are administratively registered. The government wants to expand the Public Distribution System (PDS), but it will be difficult to implement the promises. Officials have also pointed out that it will be difficult to deliver, since private millers are

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facing a shortage of labour. In addition to this the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) a free meal to every kid enrolled in schools, is currently stopped which plays a critical role in child nutrition.

Above all, in the mid of existing corruption and exclusion errors, it will be difficult to cover everyone in need in the present situation. Many people, NGOs, Sikh temples hosting have come forward to support the government and help the poor by feeding the poor and homeless.

### **Way Ahead**

Once the pandemic crisis will be over, the post-lockdown will be quiet different from the past. There will be change in the trend of doing business, number of virtual offices and work from home will increase. Since many people will work from home, there will be less traffic on road, less energy consumption, more use of internet, people will have more time to spend at home with families, there will be a greater need for home offices, demand for commercial office space may go down, and people will spend less money on goods and services. This transition will be applicable to all types of business. People will do more online shopping, less visit to malls and markets, less going out for entertainment and shopping. There will be radical change in supply chain for farm produce, it will become more organised, many platform based retailer will emerge to manage the supply of fresh farm produce. More and more people will start using video calling instead of travel to visit a doctor in a fear of exposed to infection. It is predicted that starting from automobiles to food and beverages the demand will go down. The demand for electronics products, computers, laptop, smartphone etc will increase.

It is expected that there will be drastic fall in demand in labour market due to slow down in the economy, the companies will produce less and wait for demand to rise. This will lead to an increase in prices due a surge in demand with insufficient supply. Such bottlenecks will affect the poor most, they will have to pay high price for essential commodities when there will be short supply of products in the markets.

The people who are directly or indirectly associated with entertainment sector will be badly affected because public will stay away from visiting malls, movie theaters, restaurants and tourist spots due to fear of contagion and decrease in consumer discretionary spending. The income of the people in the bottom of the pyramid involved in entertainment sector will get affected.

Since the economy is heading towards a recession, it is not clear how deep it will be, how long it will last, and how fast the economy will bounce back, it is predicted that it will take time to put things in place. It is also predicted that domestic consumption and investment will get affected and there may be decline in export demand and decrease in prices of the goods manufactured in India. This will result in a decline in export revenue for emerging nations like India, thereby increasing unemployment and will damage the ability to service foreign currency debts.

### **CONCLUSION**

The government intervention at the time of crisis is very important to mitigate the pain of the people living in the bottom of the pyramid. There is an urgent need to develop robust economic growth plan to uplift the millions of people from suffering created by pandemic. On other side, the government has to prevent the spread of pandemic in India and the fatal problems caused by the spread of COVID-19. In spite of problems caused by lockdown, the government is not in position to withdraw same because it is critical tool for combating the pandemic. The government has to balance the trade-off between the life



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and livelihood. The government has to save the life of people, as well as livelihood of millions people at bottom of the pyramid. Thus, while responding to the pandemic, the government has to give special attention to the economic condition of them. Since the public health care system in India is very weak, India spends just 3.6% of its GDP on public health lower in comparison with its neighbouring country like Nepal. There is shortage of doctors (8 doctors per 10,000 people) and medical staff in India, thus the immediate nation-wide lockdown was only tool to control the spread of COVID19 and manage the pandemic crisis inspite of its negative consequences on livelihood of people in the bottom of the pyramid. The government has taken several steps to ensure food security and reduce their miseries and many more steps need to be taken in future to combat the situation arise due to lockdown. The people in the bottom of the pyramid need to gear up themselves to face many more challenges and higher responsibilities in future..

The consequence of this pandemic is likely to change the global order; the life will not be same after this pandemic will over. There will be drastic changes in the world of business, the demand and supply of workforce will change, companies will replace people with robots. The use of artificial intelligence, block chain, internet of things, digital platforms will increase.

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