

The Curious Case of Corona Virus

Nirmala Nair

Health pundits across the world are panicking. The panic is becoming a regular pattern, every few years there is a pandemic of some kind or the other. Most of these have a source in various food chains - birds and bats (Avian Flu, SARS) primates (EBOLA). Listeria outbreak recently was another case originating from vegetables, especially lettuce and greens as well as processed meat.

While the world needs to be cautious, we also need to put things in a perspective. WHO reports that in 2018 alone 1.5 million people died from TB. “Worldwide, TB is one of the top 10 causes of death and the leading cause from a single infectious agent “ (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tuberculosis>)

Perhaps Corona Virus is a symptom of dwindling microbial biota - a result of the past 50 years of accelerated industrial food production, processing and movement of food around the world. The fall out of pollutants from such an aggressive food production is heavily impacting not just our soils, but all the water-ways, rivers and oceans there by contaminating sea food as well. Of course these are deep issues that the pundits are not interested in delving into.

Complicating matters further is the obsession with urbanisation- - typical monoculture (mal)development leaking out hazardous habitat syndrome from air pollution to heavily polluting chemicals from personal use onwards combined with the drug-waste byproducts, all stripping the living eco-system sterile, the only solution for the microbial biota is to become increasingly aggressive, they do so by mutating faster than we can grapple with in our laboratories scurrying to make the next vaccine.

There are questions that policy makers, politicians, citizens, academics, researchers, health specialists must ask... there has to be a serious discussion on our current “Unsustainable” life style sold to us in the garb of “sustainable consumption for example. Global funds and efforts diverted to more research need to be diverted to focus on more solutions oriented work and challenging the last 50 years of accelerated so-called-sustainable paradigm, which has now been morphed into Green economy. Unfortunately preventive strategies do not bring in multi-billion dollars investments therefore seeking simple solutions seem to have simply disappeared from the global agenda.

This is where permaculture, not simply as a food system but as a life style promoting real diversity and resilience can become a key factor in ramping up our internal and external immune system simply through increasing diversity, eating locally grown, enhancing our microbial biota; at least start moving away from mega

food chains that are globally moving food around. Avoiding supermarkets as much as possible is a good start.

We have forgotten that life is too complex. Life evolves and mutates in mysterious ways. Our scientists pretend to know everything from how to gene edit (Crispr technology-specially bio-engineered drought resistant cows and pigs for African farmers) to studying how ammonia can be used for powering ships - despite the fact that no one really knows if these cute creatures bred in the laboratory can survive real-life draught scenarios in Africa, or that production of ammonia itself produces carbon that has been conveniently shelved when 5 billion is set aside for powering the ships with ammonia.

Perhaps the new planetary crisis is finally going to awaken the people - at least those who are still able to wake up from the slumber of deep consumerism, fake news, fear psychosis and paranoia; perhaps the realisation is going to dawn that we do have a choice in how we live and die - in quarantine, and cut off. Or embrace vibrant local living, die any way joyfully, connecting and leaving a thriving ecosystem and abundance of nature behind for the young to enjoy, work on.