



## THE BOON IN THE BANE: INDIA GOES CLEAN-GREEN AMIDST CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN

**Samuel S Mitra<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Staff & Researcher in Commerce,  
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),  
Kolkata

**Milton Costa<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Deputy Super-Intendant of St. Xavier's  
Hostel and Research Scholar in Commerce  
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),  
Kolkata

**Peter Arockiam. A.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Vice-Principal of M.Com, B.Com (Evening)  
& BMS,  
Financial Administrator and Research Scholar  
in Commerce,  
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata,  
West Bengal, India.

**Joseph K.<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>Super-Intendant of St. Xavier's Hostel,  
Acting Vice-Principal of Commerce  
(Morning)  
and Research Scholar in Commerce,  
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),  
Kolkata

**Ruby Mary Notts<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Assistant Professor in Accounting & Finance,  
Department of Commerce (Evening) and  
Research Scholar in Commerce  
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous),  
Kolkata

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### ABSTRACT

*The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc all across the world, most importantly claiming lives of over 3 lakh people and blighting the economy of every nations thus sending the entire world into a ramshackle. The effects of Novel Coronavirus has entirely changed the modus vivendi of the people all over the globe and India is no exception. The aftermath of Coronavirus lockdown has left some miserable impacts leaving the world at an impasse. But among these, the lockdown has also bolstered the environmental quality as there has been massive reduction in the amount of pollution something which all the nations in the world have been mulling over the past. Truth to be told, the quarantines imposed following the potential outbreak of the Coronavirus was actually a harbinger of the astounding turnaround in the ambit of environmental sustainability that would soon be achieved. In this context, India, the world's 5<sup>th</sup> most polluted country finally unshackled itself from the stranglehold of pollution, a context in which India found itself mired throughout the years. The current research study aims to bring out how the Coronavirus lockdown propelled the environment quality in India, thereby, achieving the Clean-Green mission.*

**KEYWORDS:** Coronavirus pandemic; Lockdown; India; Pollution; Air and Water

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### INTRODUCTION

Novel Coronavirus has become a household name and every single day it is making broad headlines. Novel Coronavirus is an ongoing pandemic which was first identified in late November, 2019 in Wuhan region in China. The potential outbreak of the disease has thrown the world into a bedlam and the blood-thirsty disease

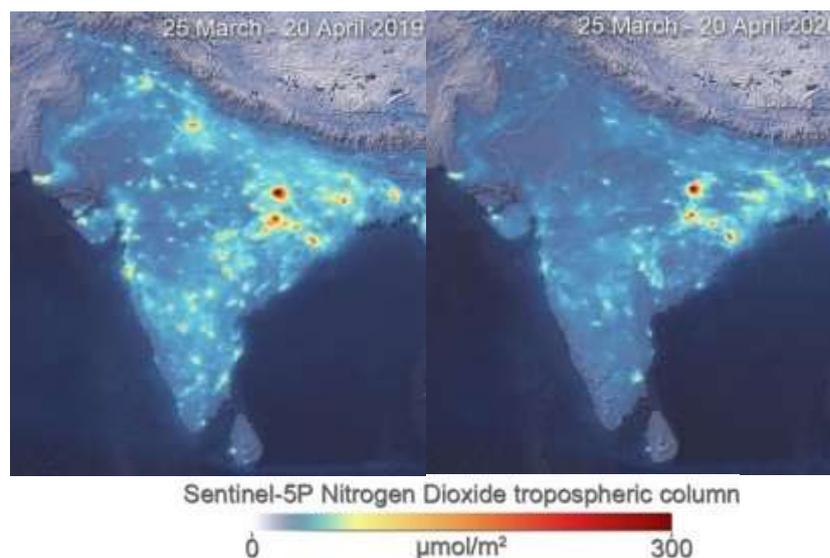
claimed lives of more than 3 lakh people all over the world. Some of the ugly aftermaths of the Covid-19 pandemic are quarantines, suspension of flights, closure of hotels, restaurants and social hubs, closure of school, colleges and universities, shutting down of manufacturing and retail sectors, suspension of events and programs, urban unemployment, etc. In order to curtail the menacing impact of the deadly

pandemic, governments of every country imposed strict lockdown measures. Everyone in the world has witnessed certain scenarios which has never been witnessed before. Truth to be told, the Coronavirus pandemic gave everyone a glimpse of the previous hundred year old pandemic called 'Spanish Flu' which occurred in the year 1918-1920. If people of that era are still alive, they would better know about the ruffling impact of such boisterous disease which leaves everyone reeling. Albeit the Coronavirus lockdown has brought many negative effects with it, but from the viewpoint of the environment, the pandemic has just brought a much needed stability to the environment. The emissions of carbon footprint and other toxic emissions have witnessed a significant plummet. The toxic effluents discharged into the rivers has also seen a drastic reduction, thus making it cleaner. These days of quarantines has actually been able to pull off a spectacular achievement in making our Planet Earth clean and green. Exploring some of these benefits amidst an excruciating Coronavirus lockdown is our purported endeavor. The present research study focuses on India on a general note.

solar energy has vitiated the demand for and dependence on fossil fuels. Adding to this, the unexpected emergence of a global pandemic calling for an urgent lockdown has reversed the growth trend of India's 37 years old emissions. According to the World Air Quality Report, India is the home to six of the world's most polluted urban areas with Ghaziabad leading the bandwagon in India. Nitrogen Dioxide ( $\text{NO}_2$ ) is emitted into the atmosphere from thermal plants, vehicles and other industrial sectors. But since the beginning of 2019, the demand for thermal power generation has been low, on top of that the lockdown has slowed down the demand for coal. Coal-fired power generation fell by 15% in the month of March, 2020 and 31% in the first three weeks of April, 2020. Oil consumption reduced by 18% in March, 2020 juxtaposed with the previous year while the production of crude oil nosedived by 5.9%. Researchers estimated a fall of 30 metric tons of  $\text{CO}_2$  emissions on the basis of data for coal, oil and gas consumption. In fact several places in India have been told to witness clear blue skies thus a harbinger of a mercurial improvement in air quality. Polluted cities in India like Delhi and Mumbai have reported massive drop in  $\text{NO}_2$  emissions with figures of 40-50 percent in comparison to the previous year.

### EMISSIONS IN INDIA GOES DOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALMOST 4 DECADES

Emissions in India has witnessed a drastic decline, courtesy of the Coronavirus lockdown which is excruciating yet has been a blessing in disguise. According to the release of data by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), decline in electricity consumption and stiff competition from renewable sources of energy like wind energy and



**Exhibit 1: Diagrammatic comparison of  $\text{NO}_2$  levels in India in March-April'19 and March-April'20**  
[Source of Image: SciTechDaily]

But there is still an anomaly remaining over this improvement in air quality as a result of

reduction in carbon footprints and other hazardous emissions. It is still unclear whether India would be

able to sustain the massive improvements which have taken shape amidst the lockdown. If the air quality is left unchecked post lockdown, air pollution will swiftly return continuing its hazardous impact on human health and environment in the long haul. Increased air pollution could be more vulnerable to Coronavirus and other respiratory syndromes leaving the humans subjected to even more grueling times. Analysts have given certain suggestions for keeping the level of carbon footprints low such as reinvigorating renewable energy programs post lockdown and continued decreased electricity demand through eye-twitching and innovative structural changes and bailouts. However, it still remains a mystery that how things will span out post lockdown talking in the context of air quality in India, nevertheless, it is no-brainer that during these lockdown times the emissions in India has seen a significant reduction something which the environmental activists and other associated potential stakeholders have been chuffed about albeit even if it does not have a prolonged effect.

## YAMUNA AND GANGA SEES MAGNIFICENT IMPROVEMENT IN WATER QUALITY

The lockdowns imposed in India has had a profound impact on the health of rivers most noticeably two major rivers of India which are Yamuna and Ganga. The quality of water in River Ganga, India's most sacred river has seen a spectacular improvement. The national lockdown meant no industrial activities therefore no discharge of effluents into water bodies. According to the Central Pollution Control Board's real time water monitoring data, out of the 36 monitoring units placed at various points of river Ganga 27 points were found suitable for bathing and propagation of fisheries and wildlife. While the domestic sewage has not reduced but reduction in industrial discharge has seen a rapid decline. It is not the organic pollution which deteriorates river water quality as organic pollution gets diluted in the river but it is actually the industrial effluents that destroys the river's self-cleansing properties. Experts have told that the quality of river water was checked in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh and was found to be of much better quality.



**Exhibit 2: River Ganga flowing thorough Varanasi and Haridwar are cleaner than ever before due to lockdown [Source of Image: The Economic Times]**

Not to forget Kanpur is a city which is a source of huge industrial waste generation into rivers. The reports about better quality water in Kanpur speaks volumes about the astounding turnaround in script talking in the light of making water bodies more cleaner.

However, it is not just river Ganga which has seen drastic improvements in water quality, the river Yamuna has also witnessed a significant enhancement in water quality largely due to the

nationwide lockdown meaning no bathing in the river or dumping wastes or discharge of sewage from industrial plants. Adding to this, recent rainfall in the region of Varanasi increased the level of water. As a result, better marine life was found in the river. In fact according to experts there was a 40%-50% amelioration in water quality. It has been reported that there has been a reduction of human excreta by 34% and biochemical oxygen demand by 20% in Haridwar region of Uttarakhand resulting in the

water in 'Har-ki-Pauri Ghat' in Haridwar being history.  
stunningly ranked in Class A for the first time in



**Exhibit 3: Water in Yamuna looks cleaner due to the lockdown**

**[Source of Image: The Economic Times]**

### **INDIAN ROADS CLEANER THAN EVER BEFORE**

Indian city of Delhi along with 13 other Indian cities feature in the list of the top 20 most polluted places in the world. By 2019, undoubtedly pollution in India had reached catastrophic levels. Too add to the woes, Indian roads were frequently found dirty with the irresponsible and carefree citizens littering the streets thus further exacerbating the problem. However, the Coronavirus lockdown proved to be a healing touch on the streets of India which now seems extremely clean, to be precise cleaner than before. Due to the lockdown there has been a total reduction in traffic in India much more than 98%, an unprecedented change which was not witnessed before. Due to the lockdown, people are staying at home with absolutely no or minimal outdoor activity like emergencies. Archetypal Indian citizens are have been quite famous over the years when it comes to littering the roads by throwing eatables or chewables, throwing packets, spitting, etc. The lockdown has somewhat healed the entire roads of India as there has been no or minimal outdoor activities from the public as a result littering activities has also seen a sharp drop. However, there is still a basic question remaining as to whether the current situation of clean and tidy roads could be continued for a long time even post lockdown. Questions still hovers over the situation once the lockdown is lifted. Nevertheless, the lockdown has brought certain respite albeit even if it is for a short period of time.

### **CONCLUSION**

The unprecedented emergence of Coronavirus has left the world reeling calling for massive lockdowns all over the world. The lockdown imposed in India has had a miserable impact on the Indian economy, left myriad workers unemployed and claimed lives of more than 3000 people. But amidst this, the bane of Coronavirus has actually proven to be a boon for the entire nation and the world in general. Talking in this context about India, one could easily see blissfully clear blue skies and clean fresh water a manifestation of the 'unbearable levels' of air quality in Delhi which regularly records some of the foulest air in the world leaving people gasping for breath has seen a mercurial transformation in its hazardous air quality. Not forgetting, the Haridwar region of Uttarakhand which has long been mired bearing the ignominy of Class B water quality suddenly finds its water in the Class A grade. There has been a bewildering change in the air quality in India as tested over 85 cities as well as the quality of water as the Ganga and Yamuna now looks much cleaner than ever before. The roads of India have also become cleaner somewhat reminiscent of Calgary in Canada. Albeit the astounding turnaround witnessed in the expanse of air and water in India, things are still unclear if the same could be maintained for a better sustainability India and planet Earth in general.



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