

Does collective consciousness compromise during epidemics and pandemics?

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Abstract

The ongoing pandemic, COVID-19, has received unprecedented global attention. Though a pathogen is essentially the causative agent, the dynamics of the cause-effect in major events like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is not well understood. It is not even clear if the focused attention of the normal population impacts the safety and health of the exposed victims and in what way the different groups interact with each other, is also a big question. The idea of panpsychism and hierarchical consciousness suggests that consciousness functions beyond an individual and works at distinct levels such as family, community, state, territories, nations, and world. In this perspective, keeping in mind, the idea of hierarchical consciousness, the impact of higher consciousness in major events like the COVID-19 pandemic, on the well-being and fate of the exposed population along with the probable role of quantum entanglement, has been discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, consciousness, collective consciousness, hierarchical consciousness, epidemics, pandemics, mass casualty, global consciousness project, quantum entanglement, reality.

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Why is there a need to understand collective consciousness?

Collective consciousness is a compound word. Collective means a group or aggregate of individuals or things; taken as a whole; combined together and consciousness refers to the state of being aware; internal knowledge; of being able to subjectively experience something. In combination, it can be surmised that collective consciousness is a set of ideas, thoughts, proclivity shared by all, operating as a unifying force within the community [1],[2]. The term was 1st described by a French sociologist, Emile Durkheim in 1893 and according to him, it is the collective conscience of the people that allows the maintenance of social order. It is merely the collective perception of people in the society that becomes a driving force in any given situation [3].

Epidemics and pandemics involve the exposure of masses, which often result in devastating effects on a substantial number of people at the same time. During such mass exposure scenarios, the virulence of the pathogen is considered accountable for the rising number of infections and mortality worldwide along with other aggravating factors like stress and fear which can disturb the overall well-being of the people living in the affected regions. However, a better understanding of all the contributing factors resulting in mortality or other outcomes is necessary to facilitate improved management of the contagion [4]. The ongoing pandemic, COVID-19 has attracted worldwide attention, creating immense psychosocial disturbances. The disease is new with its cause and emergence still being a big question mark with no in-hand treatment and vaccine, has created a lot of anxiety and fear of the unknown, amongst the human population [5]. Here, in this article, how the focused thoughts of the unaffected population might impact the

safety and health of the infected people and overall mortality along with the possible role of global consciousness in driving the spread of the pandemic, has been discussed. Before analysing the role of collective consciousness and focused thoughts on the overall well-being of the society in mass exposure scenarios, it is important to understand the very basics of consciousness and how it connects a group.

The impact of Collective consciousness on day to day life and the thought process during the face of the pandemic-COVID-19

According to the psychiatrist Roger Walsh, “the state of the world reflects our state of mind” i.e. the condition prevailing in the world is the reflection of our collective consciousness (focused attention). The operation of collective thoughts can be seen all around us in everyday life which is necessary for the proper functioning of the society and can be recognised in community, organisations, nation, human population as a whole, and so on [6]. According to the Sociology Professor, Mary Kelsey at the University of California, instead of existing as individuals, we tend to survive in groups and communities, following the rules of the society. This behaviour is not just restricted to humans but many species around the globe tend to thrive together to optimize their survival. A glimpse of collective consciousness can be easily seen in classroom settings or group activities (sports, adventurous or risky activities) where the motivation of the teammates and the enthusiasm of people around them can bring positivity and lead to better understanding (collective efforts of a teacher and motivated students) and results, brought about by collective effort. Only hard work alone at the individual level cannot bear fruits until it is combined with the positive energy and the source of it can be from the team members, family, community, or entire nation. For instance, when we come across some tragedies occurring in other people’s life or the world, we can feel and connect with their pain and sorrows even without coming in contact with them [7]. This means that we all share a common belief and have an inner knowing which exists at a certain frequency, accessible to all. Amidst the on-going COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns imposed in many countries of the world, it has resulted in psychological distress, and signs of irritability, depression, anxiety, low mood, insomnia, fear, emotional exhaustion. These were also evident in those who were quarantined either within their homes or other facilities. This sense of detachment from the society is being experienced by a majority of the human population collectively, world-over leading to negative thoughts, fear of infection, stigmatization (health workers, doctors, essential servicemen) [8],[9]. Nevertheless, these have become the contributing factors in aggravating stress and

negatively impacting the immune system and thus increasing the chances of infection and affecting the mortality rate. In testing times like this, the collective strength and unity of thoughts were observed twice in India; firstly, when Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi urged the citizens of the country to clap hands, ring bells, or bang plates on March, 22nd and secondly, lighting of lamps on the night of 5th April to express gratitude towards the corona warriors. This gesture of collectivity became an example for many countries as it marked the awakening of the feeling of togetherness (collective consciousness, focused attention), motivating the health workers and realising that the entire country can unite as one in the battle against COVID-19. This was nothing but an experience of shared consciousness that connected everyone and will probably give them the strength to not only fight the disease but also the mental distress that arose from isolation. Then again, how this collective consciousness connects the group and synchronise them as a unit, is still needed to be deciphered.

How are people connected to each other?

We humans along with other animal species display social behaviour and tend to survive in groups to optimise the overall survival. One of the possible theories of this behaviour is the Emergence phenomenon that occurs when simple entities interact to form a complex entity having new properties, entirely different from its parts i.e. ‘Complexity arising from simplicity’[10],[11]. It basically implies that many things interact with each under a certain set of rules, creating something above and beyond themselves. For instance, an individual ant is not smart and productive (simple) in itself, it cannot work as a colony of ants can. A group of ants can distribute their jobs (gatherers, workers, soldier, caretakers) by secreting certain chemicals and work in unison to build complex structures, waging war with other colonies thereby producing order out of chaos. So, what a colony (overall system) can carry out, a single ant (a simple component of the complex system) does not have that capability. In simple words when a bunch of small things can do some big things, that phenomenon is called Emergence [12]. Millions of molecules (not alive) interact to form robust structures like proteins, organelles subsequently giving rise to the smallest unit of life: a cell which further cooperate to form a complex organism with remarkable capacities. Consciousness is also regarded as an emergent property and combining consciousness of a group of people give rise to collective consciousness of the society, nation, world and so on [2]. Therefore, the emerging global consciousness has capacities that are superior and beyond its individual components [13].

According to Emile Durkheim, the division of labour in the society i.e. appointing specified tasks to certain people, is necessary for proper functioning and order in

the society and inculcates the feeling of solidarity among individuals [3]. This can only take place if the society is organised and follow certain set of rules, share common beliefs and this connection between the individuals and society is nothing but collective consciousness. For instance, anything committed outside the order of the society, on which we collectively don't agree upon is termed as a crime and is wrong in everyone's eye. Although a group or family of individuals (higher level of consciousness, focused attention) which functions efficiently as a unit, is not a physically connected arrangement but still somehow, they manage to communicate and thrive as a group by sharing a collective viewpoint. It may be due to non-physical factors, one of them being collective consciousness that contributes to the eloquent functioning of a group and maintain order in the society. On the other hand, a question may arise that how consciousness, that is the state of being able to subjectively experience something, can interact with anything beyond an individual's body.

Many instances from the past, somehow portray strong connection within the groups, leading them to follow each other's footsteps. The dancing plague is one such phenomenon that emerged around the 13th century in Europe, in which people would just gather and engage themselves in a dancing frenzy that would go on till the point of exhaustion which sometimes resulted in death. A single episode could afflict as many as 1100 people at the same time and the cause of this still remains elusive. It did not require any physical contact with the affected person and even the sight and sound were considered sufficient to contract it and start sporadically or even take form of an epidemic [14],[15]. Furthermore, in 1841, Charles Mackay explained about the madness of crowds and their psychology, highlighting many incidents from the past where humans displayed the potential of collective delusion. One of the most dramatic and popular episodes of such behaviour is evident from the witch hunts that began in the 1400s in Europe. It was an epidemic of terror that resulted in the torture and execution of a large number of people accused of witchcraft and were considered to be the cause of all the calamities that took place. It was probably the collective mindset of people that made them believe this delusion which turned into witch-mania and subsequently cultural madness. It was like a chain reaction triggered by one accusation that finally became a widespread hysteria (witch craze) [16],[17]. There are many such examples in human history that give us an idea that we have a potential to become insane together, influence one another so profoundly (connection between individuals) and how collective consciousness can compromise and give birth to negative results (collective madness) which can give rise to a delusional new reality.

Based on the above discussion and many such incidents from history and our daily experiences, it is evident that a strong unseen connection does exist and several theories have been proposed till date to explain it. The theory of panpsychism which states that everything has a mind or in

other words, every entity possesses some consciousness, seems to have a potential [18]. Additionally, it has already been proposed that an individual is made up of different conscious layers like atoms, molecules, cells, tissue, organs, systems, organism and the conscious level increases hierarchically giving rise to individual consciousness (the top most level). More importantly, human consciousness is just the result or the sum of all the conscious layers in the body that makes it unique and higher above all. According to this theory of hierarchical consciousness, a certain level of consciousness imparts control over its immediate lower level like within an individual, atoms are directly under the control of molecules [2],[4]. Since, the human consciousness has resulted from progressively increasing consciousness (hierarchical consciousness), it has been predicted that a group of individuals i.e. a family will form a higher level of conscious layer and similarly a community will be above it. So, based on these assumptions, it has been previously proposed that consciousness although a non-physical entity, can be extended beyond an individual to higher levels like family, state, nation, world, and even beyond it (entire cosmos), thus connecting everyone and everything.

Thus, the consciousness of a nation i.e. the focused thoughts of people living in it will certainly be higher than an individual and can impart control over its lower levels (family, individuals). However, its relevance is still qualitative in nature but its existence cannot be denied. Furthermore, this concept of collective consciousness and its capacity to extend beyond an individual, group, or nation can be applied to situations of pandemic (COVID-19) and mass exposures, to explain the impact of higher order of consciousness (collective thinking) on the exposed population and the overall well-being of everyone in the face of pandemic.

Collective consciousness and the spread of a pandemic.

COVID-19 has received unprecedented attention and has become a cause of global concern. This outbreak which originated in Wuhan, China has severely affected 217 nations with over 5 million confirmed cases of infection, costing the lives of more than 3 lakh people worldwide and still counting [19]. It has brought a sudden break in the daily life, adversely impacting the economy and overall mental health. Although, the underlying cause of the disease is SARS-CoV-2 but other non-physical factors are also contributory. Moreover, the problem does not reside in COVID-19 alone, rather it is in fear of contracting the virus, panic, temporary unemployment, distance from the family (social isolation) and terror, caused by the spread of this pandemic. Epistemology (a branch of philosophy) that is concerned with knowledge, states that all knowledge that we possess may not always arise out of our own experience [20]. It dictates the development and application of some cognitive processes

at the expense of others. Thus, even without experiencing the disease, the knowledge of fear (experienced by others) that is somehow communicated through the collective consciousness, creates disturbances and changes our thoughts. This pandemic is a situation where massive number of people all over the world have concentrated their attention on just one thing i.e. COVID-19. Additionally, with lockdowns implemented worldwide and increasing mental stress, collective consciousness has somehow compromised which may worsen the situation. As Dr. Hagelin once said “Our minds profoundly mirror the hierarchical structure of nature”. So, based on the idea of hierarchical consciousness if the superior layer like family community, nation is severely compromised, it would adversely affect the lower layers. Here, higher level of consciousness being massive human population having a negative viewpoint (collective focused thought of unaffected population) about COVID-19 which may impact the outcome of infected population. This can be best explained by the global consciousness project that began in the 90s to study the presence and activity of global consciousness in the world and its interaction with physical systems. Random number generators were used, that produced completely random sequences of zeroes and ones which deviated from this unpredictable pattern during group settings i.e. when human consciousness became coherent [21]. At various events, it was evident that the network of RNGs became slightly structured whenever feelings of large number of people synchronized. This project, originally started at the Princeton University, has become the scientific basis for the existence of global consciousness and connection between humans. They could also conclude that under certain circumstances, human consciousness (collective), also affected the outcome of the events [22]. Several empirical studies involving global events have been carried out. During terrorist bombing in Iraq, the bomb explosion was like a stimulus that evoked emotional reactions among people all around the world which synchronised their response (Global consciousness) as recorded by RNG [23]. 9/11 terrorist attack was one of the major events that attracted global attention and according to Roger Nelson, the data collected from the RNG started changing (synchronising) even before the attack and displayed departures from random expectation after it (due to coherent emotional response) [22],[24],[25]. It would not be wrong to say that global consciousness impinges on the physical reality. Additionally, pleasant occasions like New year’s Eve or when group meditation event take place, a spike/a pattern is observed in the data [25]. The deviation from the randomness was also observed on March 22, when the Indians clapped as that event was responsible for synchronising the feelings of millions of people and when human consciousness becomes coherent, the network of RNGs became slightly structured [26]. There are various such incidents that are recorded and analysed under the ongoing GCP which supports the impact of collective consciousness [27]. Thus, it can be comprehended that praying (focused

attention) together during crises like this on-going pandemic, is more than just positive thinking and may have verifiable benefits [21].

On the contrary, when everyone in today’s world has an easy access to internet, social media and 24hour news, with the media presenting the pandemic as if it were the end of the world, it is difficult to hold a positive view. So, the spread of negative, fake and exaggerated information increases the chances of global consciousness to hold negative thoughts [6]. Most of the people are under the impression that there is no escape from COVID-19, as cases continue to rise and no treatment as such, without considering the fact that if our immune system is strong enough, it can fight the disease and save our lives. This thought process of the masses can severely affect the infected population and may play a role in increasing the mortality rate. Since, the immune system is the key in combating the COVID-19, it is all the way more necessary to maintain positive thoughts collectively as the persistence of negativity in the collective consciousness can cause stress amongst the population which in turn can compromise the immune system and make the individual more susceptible to the virus. Henceforth, it can be implied that mortality due to COVID-19 does not depend solely upon the virulence of SAR-COV-2 but also on the collective viewpoint of the population. Apart from this, the imposed lockdowns have created mental stress and collective stress is also known to compromise the global consciousness. Some of the experiments involving a large group of people practicing transcendental meditation at a synchronised time have shown to display reduced violence, crimes and other social ills. Thus, it was proposed that criminal behaviour and other problems does not simply arise within an individual but it is a result of strain in the collective consciousness of the society or a community. The scientific evidence can be gained from several studies where RNG was used to collect data during group meditation practices, where transcendental meditation and yogic flying technique (by great yogi Maharishi) was performed and the data showed deviation from randomness to a more structured one (Maharishi effect) [28],[29],[30]. Therefore, it can be suggested that such practices could be performed during these stressful times to ameliorate situations that affect collective consciousness in order to divert the face of the pandemic. Nevertheless, there is a need to understand the scientific basis of how mass consciousness can influence the outcome in any given situation.

Does collective consciousness impact the outcome?

Einstein talked about how we are all linked and how change in one thing in this universe affects others too. He explained entanglement in his EPR paper published in 1935 and called it as “spooky action at distance”. In simple words, Quantum entanglement means that all the energy or entities are intertwined and locked together

even if they are spatially separated and individuality of each entity is surpassed [31]. According to David Bohm the entire universe is whole, undivided and continuously flowing. Since the entire cosmos has originated from a single entity, it has been previously proposed that the entire universe may be connected in some way linking everything, irrespective of the spatial separation [32],[33]. Thus, it can be suggested that quantum entanglement might be behind the collective thoughts of the people that has the capacity to influence each other and the events that take place [34]. This might also invoke some questions in the mind of the readers whether free will exists or not and is reality, a mere illusion? Carl Jung once said that schizophrenia is a condition where “the dream becomes the reality”[6]. It can also be argued that there is no such thing as objective reality. Richard Feynman’s double slit experiment is a suitable example to explain the subjective nature of reality [22]. So, keeping in mind the concept of collective consciousness and quantum entanglement, it can be apprehended that reality is subject to change based on our collective thinking and we are capable of affecting each other and the final outcome especially during pandemics like COVID-19 which involves worldwide focused attention.

Collective consciousness: A possible step in combating pandemic in Smart cities.

We are all familiar with the old saying that strength lies in unity. Whether it is struggle for independence or fight for equal rights, there are great examples in our history, illustrating the united strength of people in achieving the unachievable. Thus, the concept of collective consciousness has been into play for a very long time but its potential and role has not been fully realised yet. It would not be incorrect to say, together we can move mountains! Keeping in mind, the power of collective thoughts, it can be put into action in the current scenario (ongoing pandemic). It is important to remember that 100 years back, when science and technology was not as advanced like the present day, humans were successful in defeating the pandemic, we surely are better equipped to combat it now. Moreover, many life-threatening diseases/ disorders exist but we don’t stress about them in a similar way.

Media plays a crucial role in moulding thoughts and changing a viewpoint. As it is said, with great power comes great responsibility, amidst the ongoing pandemic, the media should make use of their power and try to focus on the positive news like the increase in the recovery rate since the outbreak, the improving health care facilities, the journey of those who have successfully defeated the disease and also showcase that with proper precautions and safety measures, it is possible to protect oneself from COVID-19. If the number of increasing infections, is a reality and the public should be aware of it, then the rise in the recovery rate is also the truth and it should be

portrayed with the same enthusiasm or even more, like the spread of the pandemic (negative view) is displayed. Now a days when COVID-19 has become the talk of the town and it is all that everyone thinks about, promoting news like “COVID-19 may never go away”, only aggravates the negative thought amongst the population, leaving them in despair or without having something better to look forward to[35]. Fear and undesirable thoughts can create disturbances in the consciousness at an individual level and in case of a pandemic, a massive number of people experience such disturbances collectively.

The concept of hierarchical consciousness, where each entity is governed by the consciousness of its superior entity, can be utilised as an additional strategy to combat the pandemic to some extent. Organising thoughts and inculcating positive attitude at an individual level can bring about changes in the viewpoint of the masses. Some studies have reported the potential role of collective consciousness in the healing of culture, society, nation, etc. Repairing thoughts (through meditation, motivation) and promoting positive thinking can cause healing [36]. Moreover, it has already been tested that collective consciousness strengthens when a group of people focus on a common event or thought, creating coherence amongst group which is probably evident through group meditation events displaying ordered data on RNG whereas low-coherence events showing random data [37]. Restoring optimistic thinking amongst people (repairing the collective consciousness) and motivating them might prove to be an important measure in this ongoing pandemic.

Conclusion

Through this article, it can be put forward that collective consciousness is at play in every aspect of life. We have yet to realise its full potential in changing the outcome. In case of pandemics, like COVID-19 or any other event involving masses (terrorist attacks, sports, nuclear accidents), the impact may be governed by hierarchical consciousness. The viewpoint of higher consciousness (communities, cities, states, nation, entire world) may directly influence the infected/ exposed population (lower conscious level) which in turn is dependent upon prior knowledge (internet, media) and severely affect the mortality rate. Therefore, in tough times like these, along with following the safety measures, the world should unite in their thoughts and focus their views towards positivity in order to get a favourable outcome that can help us to fight this pandemic.

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