

# POST CORONAVIRUS WORLD: COULD WE EXPECT A BETTER DOMAIN?

ABDULLAH AL-AHSAN\*

## ABSTRACT

The Covid 19 pandemic has already made an impact on our life; it has changed the way we function. How lasting will its impacts go to be? Are there similarities between this pandemic and earlier pandemics in history? Why do pandemics happen? Some earlier pandemics have caused major civilizational changes. Is this pandemic going to affect our civilizations today? This article discusses and comments on these questions.

**Keywords:** Covid 19, Pandemics in history, Black Death, Civilization, International politics and National sovereignty.

\* Professor of Comparative Civilization, formerly at IIUM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Istanbul Şehir University, [abdullah.ahsan2011@gmail.com](mailto:abdullah.ahsan2011@gmail.com)

On witnessing the initial surge of Covid 19 last year, I wrote an [article](#) and observed, “The coronavirus pandemic is not over yet and anyone hardly knows when and how it will end, but many observers of international affairs are already expressing their views on the subject. The current situation is very worrisome and everyone wants to get out of it as soon as possible.”<sup>1</sup> I also noted that, although there was a consensus that the world would be different in the post-coronavirus atmosphere, there were sharp disagreements on the nature of those states of affairs. The overall situation has not changed much during the past year except for the innovation of some vaccines to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the disease. However, new variants have emerged that are more contagious than the original ones. Random lockdowns and other restrictions continue along with an increasing number of infections and deaths. I, therefore, continue commenting along the same lines.

“Global trade will partly recover, but more of it will be managed by governments rather than markets,” envisages Richard Haas, president of the Council of Foreign Relations. He also believes that “Civil liberties will be treated by many as a casualty of war,” and “Ideally, the crisis would bring renewed commitment to building a more robust international order.”<sup>2</sup> Stephen Walt, a Harvard academic, thinks that since 1918 “influenza did not change the big power rivalry;” this pandemic too will “strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism.”<sup>3</sup> Another establishment strongman Henry Kissinger, a former US national security adviser who is famously reported to have said, “Depopulation should be the highest priority of US foreign policy towards the Third World,” believes that, “The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order.”<sup>4</sup> On the political front French President Macron has said, “Many things that we thought were impossible are happening.”<sup>5</sup> So, what should we expect in the post coronavirus world? “The day after when we have won, it will not be a return to the day before, we will be stronger morally,” Macron claimed. Really? Wouldn't it be foolish to believe that one will come out strong when one does not even know what is happening? We need to examine possible scenarios in the post-coronavirus world. Honestly, since no one knows when this pandemic will end and how it will end, it is almost impossible to expect what to expect at the end of the tunnel. Yet ignoring such an enterprise will not serve the purpose of studying

history. Such studies, however in our view, one should take in a broader perspective of history.

## I. PARALLELS IN HISTORY

The closest parallel to the current pandemic, in our view, is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Black Death and the 6<sup>th</sup> century Justinian Plague. Referring to an earlier similar world crisis, one history textbook – *Worlds Together Worlds Apart* – quoting Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who lost both of his parents in the pandemic says, “Cities and buildings were laid waste, roads and way signs were obliterated, settlements and mansions became empty, dynasties and tribes grew weak,” he wrote. “The entire world changed.”<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, both the Justinian Plague and the Black Death, according to historians, [originated in China](#)<sup>7</sup> and resulted in millions of death all over the world. The first lesson that one derives from these two experiences is that it will be a mistake to expect that the crisis will be over in weeks or months. Some of the earlier pandemics lasted for years with aftershocks for decades. One of the aftershocks of the current pandemic is already happening – the economic depression. Literally millions had lined up for unemployment benefits in most developed countries. Economic depressions following pandemics are not a new phenomenon, however. We know little about the impacts of the Justinian Plague, but historians generally hold the view that the Black Death “actually created opportunities for Europe’s poorest people.” According to one author, “The end of feudalism, opportunities for entrepreneurs,<sup>8</sup> and the rise of the middle class all occurred [in the wake of the Black Death](#)”<sup>9</sup> in Europe. In Asia, Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal and Ming dynasties established powerful empires that participation of people belonging to all segments of their societies ensuing enormous economic growth that attracted Europeans. Therefore, if we were interested in learning from history, we should have empowered the poor and the middle class. Have the rescue packages declared by various governments benefitted the poor and the middle class? So far, only some huge corporations have immensely profited from the situation. This must lead us to contemplate in what direction we are heading.

1 The Coronavirus and Geo-Politics: Trump’s Xenophobia and Weapons of the Weak (juancole.com)

2 “The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It”, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it>, accessed on 25 May 2021.

3 [The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Change the World Forever \(foreignpolicy.com\)](#).

4 [The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order - WSJ](#).

5 [Coronavirus: who will be winners and losers in new world order? | Coronavirus, The Guardian](#).

6 Robert Tignor, et.al, *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the World from the Beginning to the Present* (NY: Norton Co, 2011), 413.

7 <https://www.thehindu.com/society/the-strange-and-startling-similarities-between-the-great-plague-and-covid-19/article31183640.ece> - The Hindu Gallery -1

8 [Positives Of The Black Plague: Labor Shortages Empowered The Working Class, History Daily](#).

9 [How The Bubonic Plague Made Europe Great, Science 2.0 \(science20.com\)](#)

One *Forbes* article claims, “As the ripple of COVID-19 careens around the globe, it’s forcing humankind to innovate and change the way we work and live.”<sup>10</sup> The article makes nine future predictions – all technical – none philosophical or even structural. Will we learn from the Black Death experience? As noted above, our intellectual and political leaders would like to see stronger nationalist governments in post coronavirus world, but isn’t our current situation very similar to pre-14th century Europe? Aren’t certain elites manipulating both authoritarian and democratic regimes? Aren’t states trying to out-smart one another? In this connection, what comes to my mind is the story of Israeli spy agencies stealing coronavirus testing kits destined for another nation. In March 2020 *Israeli Mossad* was reported to have “obtained coronavirus testing kits for the country,” for which the spy agency received messages of appreciation both from the Prime Minister’s office and from the director general of Health Ministry for acquiring “required and vital equipment from abroad to help with the coronavirus crisis.”<sup>11</sup> Israeli media also reported that, “the Mossad haul included 100,000 kits procured from Gulf Arab states that do not formally recognise Israel but which have pursued low-level coordination on regional security challenges such as Iran.” The implication is that, since the country for which the goods were destined doesn’t recognize Israel, Israel had every right to “acquire” the equipment. Isn’t it bullying like medieval proprietors? I fail to understand how this conduct is any different from those of pre-14th century European feudal lords.

## II. WHY DO PANDEMICS HAPPEN?

Discussing the current pandemic in an article entitled “What to know about pandemics”, *Medical News Today* magazine says that, “Medical science has advanced rapidly in recent years, but it is unlikely ever to offer full protection from a possible pandemic because of the novel nature of the diseases involved.”<sup>12</sup> The term novel nature indicates the limitation of medical science on the subject. Therefore, one must admit that our current knowledge of natural sciences have failed the test of finding the origin of what President Macron calls “an invisible” enemy. As a student of humanities and social sciences, I am persuaded to look into history for possible clues, and interestingly although we find plenty of evidences of pandemics occurring

like of the Justinian Plague and the Black Death in history, they hardly provide any scientific explanations of such happenings in the world of civilizations. However, the question is – what lesson does one derive from the stories of pandemics and other catastrophes in history? Were those simple natural calamities or those events might have any deeper meaning? Is there a connection between social upheavals and natural disasters? Religions generally deal with such questions and discuss ethical and philosophical matters that also involve questions about the purpose of life and human creation. The question of religion is a sensitive subject, however, for most natural and social science disciplines today. One therefore should venture into examining the question from the perspectives of reason, science, humanism and progress.

Most scholars today try to comprehend the human nature by only studying post-14th century European history. Although historians generally agree that religions permeated life in all civilizations in history, religious teachings receive very little serious consideration when looking for causes of natural calamities mainly because religions have often given confusing, sometimes contradictory responses to many questions. One major issue in this context is that we have scant reliable sources about ancient civilizations. This has led to a great degree of misperception about our understanding of religion today. To complicate the subject, religion and science turned out to be opposing phenomena. George Sarton in his voluminous *Introduction to the History of Science* has demonstrated that until 18<sup>th</sup> century theology was a part of scientific enquiry, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century social sciences developed different methodologies for comprehending religions from practices of followers rather than their declared ethical and philosophical standing. Today one witnesses diverse responses to the current coronavirus catastrophe. President Trump declared a day of prayers but in practice has been using the phenomenon for his political milestone. Some Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim clerics came forward with solace and recommendation of prayers and contemplation during this time of tests and explanations about how pandemics occur due to their perceived immoral practices.<sup>13</sup> Some Hindus came forward with the recommendation of drinking cow urine to cure.<sup>14</sup> While some have identified the pandemic simply as a divine punishment, others, mostly fervent followers, have sought miraculous cure of the disease; some faultfinders found scopes for attacking religions.<sup>15</sup> According to a Bangladeshi writer when “human beings are in peril, gods flee first.”<sup>16</sup> A Pakistani “scientist” has found reasons to accuse Prime Minister

13 [Thinking like a Buddhist about coronavirus can calm the mind and help us focus \(theconversation.com\)](#)

14 [In a Pandemic, Religion Can Be a Balm and a Risk - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

15 [Does the Coronavirus become a Divine punishment? - Modern Diplomacy](#)

16 [Mecca to Vatican — COVID-19 proves when human beings are in peril, gods flee first \(theprint.in\)](#)

10 [9 Future Predictions For A Post-Coronavirus World \(forbes.com\)](#)

11 [Israel says its spies have procured coronavirus kits abroad \(yahoo.com\)](#)

12 [Pandemics: Past, present, and future \(medicalnewstoday.com\)](#)

Imran Khan of his alleged “denial” of Darwin’s evolution theory.<sup>17</sup> In India, the Islamophobic mass media outlets have found a good reason to attack a small minority Muslim group for “spreading coronavirus” in the country.<sup>18</sup>

Thoughtful scholars, however, have made a significant contribution in studying the subject. Based on his readings of earlier civilizations, 14<sup>th</sup> century historian Ibn Khaldun identifies “moral decadence” or *zulm* as “one of the great threats to civilization,” while defining moral decadence as inequality and injustice in a broad sense. In his *Muqaddimah* or introduction to world history explained how ruling elite monopolize resources and deny the common people of economic opportunities that leads civilization or ‘*umran* to decline.<sup>19</sup> The 20th century historian Arnold Toynbee is more specific. After studying world civilizations he explained “history as shaped by spiritual, forces,” and submitted that, “civilizations sank owing to the sins of nationalism, militarism, and the tyranny of a despotic minority.”<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, most policy makers and politicians today are either not familiar with pre-Renaissance history or they do not want to take so long view of history.

### III. IS THE PANDEMIC A DIVINE PUNISHMENT?

How does one differentiate between the explanations of researchers such as Ibn Khaldun and Arnold Toynbee and those of the Pennsylvania lawmaker,<sup>21</sup> or the Israeli Rabbi<sup>22</sup> or Al-Qaeda leaders?<sup>23</sup> Academically it is not difficult to distinguish between the two sets of observations. However, the question is – how does one relate social upheaval with natural disasters? The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant legitimized his “conjectural beginning of human history” with regard to the progression of the human actions related “their first beginning” with what he called “a pleasure trip sketched out in the Old Testament.”<sup>24</sup> Could we also visit the Old Testament for our purpose? Prophets Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah warned their peoples against

greedy wealthy moneylenders abusing and depriving small farmers of their possession and take them to bondage. The prophets, according to a history textbook, “denounced the pomp of the heartless rich and hypocrisy of the pious Jews who worshipped God in the prescribed manner but neglected their social obligations to their neighbor, and demanded justice.”<sup>25</sup> One will find similar ideas in the Qur’an (107: 1-6). In fact, these teachings are common in every civilization in history. However, one major problem in our understanding of early civilizations is that we simply don’t have credible sources for a sound foundation of those civilizations.

It is very difficult to establish connections between social upheaval and natural calamities. One major problem in comprehending this issue is that lay clerics try to relate every calamity with one or more perceived social evils.<sup>26</sup> It is important to bear in mind that warnings are not always followed by immediate calamities and not all calamities are punishment. However, if one takes the example of above-mentioned Biblical prophets, one finds the events occurring in a span of about two and half centuries. Prophet Amos lived in the middle of the 8th century BC; prophet Jeremiah lived during the earlier part of the 6th century who witnessed siege, occupation, and destruction of Jerusalem – an action that included the rage of the temple of Solomon that continued for almost two years. Historians have not recorded all natural calamities that occurred during the period between Amos and Jeremiah but the former’s messages must be considered a warning for a major disaster. Nevertheless, our knowledge of history suggests that one should not generalize all natural calamities into one category – some have been warnings, some punishments and some might have been normal events. The Qur’an utilizes history as a source of knowledge next only to revelation: It appeals its readers to travel around the earth and learn from the experience of earlier communities and from the ruins of earlier civilizations (6: 6; 10: 13; 10: 94; 10: 102 etc.) The Qur’an insists that its followers must seek guidance from history rationally and wants its followers to find signs of the Creator’s mercy and power in the transformation of lifeless earth to flourishing civilization (36: 31-34).

17 [Coronavirus is Pakistan’s debt for lifelong rejection of Darwin \(theprint.in\)](#)

18 [Coronavirus Exacerbates Islamophobia in India, Time](#)

19 [Ibn Khaldun and the Rise and Fall of Empires - Muslim Heritage](#)

20 [Arnold Toynbee | British historian, Britannica](#)

21 [‘Presumptuous sins’: Pennsylvania lawmaker says coronavirus is divine ‘punishment’, Washington Examiner](#)

22 [Israeli rabbi: Coronavirus outbreak is divine punishment for gay pride parades, The Times of Israel](#)

23 [FDD | How Jihadists Are Reacting to the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

24 Immanuel Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” in *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (NY: MacMillan, 1963).

25 Marvin Perry, et.al, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics and Society*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009), 43.

26 [“Katrina ‘divine retribution’ pastor promoted” \(nbcnews.com\), https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna28952871](#)

## IV. ARE WE MORE CIVILIZED THAN PRE-RENAISSANCE EUROPE?

We ask this question because scholars have observed progress of Western civilization differently. While sociologist Robert Nisbet in his 1980 publication has expressed skepticism regarding Western progress,<sup>27</sup> cognitive psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker in his *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (2018) claimed that “the Enlightenment, science, reason, humanism, and progress, keep improving our world until today, making it a better place day by day.”<sup>28</sup> Are we really making progress based on reason, science and humanism? On the eve of the last New Year’s Day, Pinker further supported his thesis with some statistical information that, “Though civil wars persist, the overall rate of deaths in wars of all kinds plunged a hundredfold between 1950 and 2005, from 22 per 100,000 people per year to 0.2. After rising to 1.5 in 2014 during the horrific Syrian civil war, it halved to 0.7 in 2018.” However, I fail to understand how Pinker could ignore almost half a million dead and millions more wounded and displaced in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early years of 2000s.<sup>29</sup> Even if one considers these numbers simply as collateral, how can one disregard abusive behavior that came with this? However, on human casualties Pinker has a cautious remark – “pandemics that could hop continents and cyber-sabotage that could bring down the internet” in 2020s, but “safeguards for such possibilities have worked so far, which “must be strengthened.”<sup>30</sup> Will strengthening of safeguards ensure our civilizational progress? I am not sure whether Pinker would hold on to his thesis in view of the developments since the beginning of 2020. Could we still assert that we are still walking along the Renaissance humanism? In fact, an in-depth analysis may demonstrate that the current situation could be worse than that of pre-Renaissance Europe.

We are all familiar with what nationalism brought to us during the first half of the 20th century. Witnessing developments in pre-WW1 Europe, Oswald Spengler came up with his *The Decline of the West* thesis.<sup>31</sup> Historian Arnold Toynbee then followed the same approach, studied 26 different world civilizations, and concluded that:

27 Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*. (NY: Basic Books, 1980), Chapter 9.

28 Enlightenment Now by Steven Pinker review – life is getting better, Society books, *The Guardian*

29 Steven Pinker: what can we expect from the 2020s? | *Financial Times* (ft.com)

30 Ibid.

31 Oswald Spengler. *The Decline of the West* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).

If there was any validity in the writer’s procedure of drawing comparisons between Hellenic history and Western, it would seem to follow that the Western society must, at any rate, be not immune from the possibility of a similar fate; and, when the writer, on passing to his wider studies, found that a clear majority of his assemblage of civilizations were already dead, he was bound to infer that death was indeed a possibility confronting every civilization, including his own.<sup>32</sup>

In order to prevent civilization from decline and fall, one should examine and identify fundamental characteristics of a civilization. Both the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian Ibn Khaldun and the 20<sup>th</sup> century historian Arnold Toynbee agree that civilizations emerge out of human necessity. Humans need to cooperate with one another not only for their survival; they also need and enjoy one another’s company. Civilizations originate out of human cooperation, not coercion. Social stratification occurs only when a civilization advances and become complex at a later stage of any given civilization. Will the current pandemic crisis push us toward Arnold Toynbee’s prediction? How can one be sure?

We all are aware of the failure of the League of Nations in preventing the WW2. Is not the performance of the United Nations much worse than that of the League of Nations? Some UN member nation-states are nakedly using the concept of national sovereignty to suppress dissent voices as evidenced in the case of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.<sup>33</sup> Should one accept civil liberty just as a consequential casualty of reinforced nationalism when one reads reports of healthcare workers in many countries being punished only for highlighting facts that their governments were lying about providing them with adequate necessary kits for treating infected patients?

After the latest outbreak of pandemic in India in April 2021, when miles long dead bodies for cremation made international headlines and havoc in the social media, the government came forward to accuse those who complained about losing loved ones. According a BBC report, Officers in Uttar Pradesh state charged Shashank Yadav for spreading a rumour over oxygen shortages “with intent to cause... fear or alarm”.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the protection of the “national image” is more valuable than human life! The earliest documented COVID-19 case caused by the delta variant (B.1.617.2) was first found in the Indian state of Maharashtra

32 Arnold J. Toynbee. *A Study of History*, Abridgement by D.C. Sommervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 912.

33 Jamal Khashoggi: All you need to know about Saudi journalist’s death - *BBC News*

34 India coronavirus: Man charged over oxygen SOS for dying grandfather - *BBC News*

back in October 2020, and has since then spread widely throughout India and across the world.<sup>35</sup> However, India would not let this variant to be called the Indian variant like earlier variants such as [UK variant](#)<sup>36</sup> or [South African variant](#).<sup>37</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) labelled it a “variant of concern” (VOC) on May 11 and then it came to be known as the delta variant. Such is the power of national sovereignty in the world today! Is this civilization? Is this behavior any different from the pre-14<sup>th</sup> century feudal Europe? One finds similar treatment of Palestinians in Israel. The International Monetary Fund has reported that, “The severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly seen in the numbers: more than 3.1 million deaths and rising, 120 million people pushed into extreme poverty, and a massive global recession. As suffering and [poverty have risen](#), some data show an increase in another extreme: the wealth of billionaires.”<sup>38</sup> Weren’t the feudal lords making money in the pre-14<sup>th</sup> century Europe”? Could we still call ourselves civilized! Could we still subscribe to Francis Fukuyama’s optimism on liberalism and the role of the UN in the post-Cold War world as reflected in his *the End of History and the Last Man*? If the current situation does not lead us to contemplate and look for its causes and remedies, I do not know what will!

## V. WHAT DOES THE CURRENT SITUATION INDICATE?

If we analyze the current situation in the light of our discussion above, we should not miss the point that influential politicians and policy makers are unwilling to draw any lesson from history. President Trump is not only politicizing the pandemic, his administration is also reported to be permitting [federal loan](#) indiscriminately to large corporations.<sup>39</sup> However, the most dangerous is the growth of Sino phobia in US politics. President Trump is accusing China of concealing information about the outbreak of the disease although according to an Israeli media report the “[US alerted Israel](#), NATO to disease outbreak in China in November.” One author wrote, “The Pandemic Won’t Make [China the World’s Leader](#).” Another has claimed

that, “China, America’s most powerful rival, has played a particularly harmful role in the current crisis, which began on its soil. Still another says that, “the diplomatic, economic, and military pressure that Washington can bring to bear on Beijing will put Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) he leads under enormous strain.” Is the US considering a regime change in China? We have witnessed regime changes in Iran in 1953, in Iraq in 2003 with devastating consequences.

This raises a question about the objective of social science research. Should the researches be directed toward finding the truth or directed toward promoting certain interests? Is it very difficult to identify certain elites within the nation-states promoting their group interests in the name of national sovereignty? Within the last three decades, we have witnessed how the former Harvard academic Samuel P Huntington had manipulated history to [promote his clash of civilizations thesis](#). He said, “50 percent of wars involving pairs of states of different religions between 1820 and 1929 were wars between Muslims and Christians.”<sup>40</sup> Even a primary student of history knows that these wars were not religious wars; colonial interests and nationalist ideologies motivated actors of these wars. In addition, more than 50 percent of the total world population during this period was either Christian or Muslim. Is it then surprising that these actors happened to have been either Christian or Muslim? In other words, the clash of civilizations thesis seems to have been contrived to promote certain interests, but unfortunately, the thesis became the cornerstone of US foreign policy during the first couple of decades of the 21st century.

If an attempt is made to achieve a regime change in China, there is a strong possibility of the current situation deteriorate to a very low level. One opinion essay has already claimed “that [China is pursuing](#)<sup>41</sup>—mainly [cyberwarfare techniques](#) and antisatellite weapons.”<sup>42</sup> I do not know whether Pinker even conceived of the current pandemic situation when wrote the article, a cyber-warfare will definitely lead our world to Stone Age. This reminds me of Pakistan’s former president Pervez Musharraf’s statement that, “The US had threatened to bomb Pakistan “back to [the stone age](#)” in ’01 unless it cooperated in the US-led war on terror.”<sup>43</sup> The clash of civilizations thesis soon brought the War on Terror that resulted in millions of death, wounded and displaced. The process of demonizing the people of Palestine

35 [Fact check: What do we know about the coronavirus delta variant? | Science| In-depth reporting on science and technology | DW | 30.06.2021](#)

36 [U.K. coronavirus variant is now the dominant strain in the U.S. \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

37 [South Africa coronavirus variant: What is the risk? - BBC News](#)

38 [Inequality and COVID-19 – IMF F&D](#)

39 [Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee governors announce plans to ease coronavirus restrictions - The Washington Post](#)

40 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 210.

41 [Why China’s Anti-Access Strategy Matters | RealClearWorld](#)

42 [The End of Grand Strategy | Foreign Affairs](#)

43 [The End of Grand Strategy | Foreign Affairs](#)

and Kashmir had begun almost at the same time as the establishment of the United Nations and by the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century the Uyghurs and Rohingyas joined group of deprived and dispossessed. The rest of the world hardly saw this development as discrimination and injustice against innocent people.

## VI. WHAT WE CAN DO TO RESTORE NORMALCY

Our knowledge of history convinces us with certainty that normalcy will return but nobody can determine a timetable for that. Our knowledge of the history of the Black Death also tells us that the post-pandemic Europe witnessed opportunities for the poor. Circumstances forced economically weak feudal elites give in to demands of time: Opportunities had to be opened to the public. Could we do the same this time? The current international structure will hardly allow such opportunities for common people very easily. Policy makers are already talking about “reinforced nationalism,” but our knowledge of history suggests that such solutions will be disastrous. The pandemic may slow down or perhaps be brought under control, but that is not going to take care of the ripple effects – the financial and perhaps food crises that are going to follow. The Trump Administration’s recovery packages look so superficial – most likely, it is simply printing notes, but this will definitely backfire. Gold or similar wares – not gun power – must support currency notes.

Almost all civilizations in history teaches us that religions permeated creation of trust in securing cooperation of people through ideas of divine authority. The divinely selected chiefs were entrusted with the responsibility to treat every single human being with dignity, equality and justice. If we apply this principle today for recovery from the pandemic, we must free ourselves from the control of institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and the UN Security Council etc. We must understand that these institutions are not just mid-20th century creation: their foundations are centuries old. Behavior of the elites that control these institutions is not very different from the “heartless rich and hypocritical pious” against whom the Old Testament prophet Amos had warned. The plunder of Bengal wealth at the end of the 18th century, confiscation of the Suez Canal in the 1870s, scramble for Africa are only some known events in this regard, but the suppression of Indian cotton industry to promote British cotton industry is not widely known.

Are we in a position to challenge the ruling elite today? My understanding of history and

world affairs today tells me that, we are. The Palestinians, Kashmiris, Uyghurs, Rohingyas and perhaps many more are perhaps under are artificially locked-down, but the rest of the humanity is capable to stand against arrogance, corruption and exploitation by a tiny elite. They are capable to bringing change – not Obama type change, but real change. What is needed is to come out of the corrupt financial system. It should not be difficult to begin with low-level barter trade and establish confidence and trust based on human dignity and mutual respect. This approach will build trust among participants – a criterion that Ibn Khaldun has pointed out as necessary for a flourishing civilization. Mutual trust will demand transparency in governance and in the process; common people will find opportunities that in turn generate economic growth and prosperity. It will be a slow process but it will be more dignified, durable, participatory and respectful.