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Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR)

Vol. 1, Issue 3

July – September 2020

Life in the Era of COVID-19: *Perceiving the Impact*

Editors:
Dr Simi Mehta
Dr Soumyadip Chattopadhyay

A flagship journal of

IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi

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Soumyadip Chattopadhyay is an Associate Professor in Economics at the Department of Economics and Politics, Visva Bharati University, West Bengal, and a Senior Fellow at Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI), New Delhi. He is the coordinator of the Center for Habitat, Urban and Regional Studies, IMPRI. He was associated with Graduate School of Geography, Clark University as a C.V. Raman Fellow, and with the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield as a Commonwealth Academic Fellow. His research interests lie in the field of development studies, and specifically in urban finance, urban inequality, and ongoing transformations in urban governance in Indian cities. He is currently serving as one of the Associate Editors of International Journal of Rural Management.

Simi Mehta, PhD (Managing Editor)

Simi Mehta is the CEO and Editorial Director of Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI) and Managing Editor of JDPR. She holds a PhD in American Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and was a Fulbright Fellow at Ohio State University, USA. Her areas of research include US and India's agriculture and foreign policies, international security studies, sustainable development, climate change, gender justice, urban environment and food security.

Editors' Note

Over the past year, India witnessed two waves of COVID-19, where the second wave unleashed brutal implications on all aspects of individual, familial, societal, economic and national life. With different mutations and variants of coronavirus emerging in different parts of the world, the pandemic threat continues to loom large. Quick development of vaccines and massive vaccination drives offer a silver lining. It is in this context that the hopes of easing of COVID-19 restrictions and unlocking of the various sectors of the economies lie.

In light of the above, we are happy to present to the readers Issue 3 of Volume 1 of Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR), a flagship journal of IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute. It is divided into the following sections: Insights, Policy Perspectives, Special Articles, Young Voices and Report Review.

The articles provide an in-depth analysis of the grassroots level realities, and makes room for further introspection and analysis in a pandemic-ridden world. These articles propose unbiased policy recommendations and addresses the underlying objectives of JDPR to demonstrate evidence and action-based research.

We hope that the articles in this Issue would greatly benefit the social science research community and policymakers and also foster healthy deliberations of development policies and decisions in India and the world.

We thank the Journal Advisory Board and Editorial Review Committee for their enthusiastic support for the Journal. We congratulate the authors for their insightful and

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well-researched articles. We also congratulate the JDPR Secretariat for their hard work and setting solid foundations of high editorial standards of the Journal. Lastly, we thank our publishers at IndraStra Global New York for joining us in our endeavor to disseminate the hard work of the contributors and editorial team to a larger audience.

With Gratitude,
Editors
Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR)

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Contents

Triple Whammy for the Muslims: *Poverty, Politics and the Pandemic*

Zakia Soman[1]

Abstract

The effects of the pandemic are felt by people across the globe. However, for marginalized and excluded communities such as Indian Muslims the effect has been devastating on many fronts including personal, economic and political. The community has been poor and backward through the last few decades. Additionally, the community has been denied a fair share in the welfare schemes owing to politics where in the name of secularism not much is needed to be done by the government other than pander to a few conservative religious voices. The political rise of Hindutva has led to normalization of political onslaught and exclusion of Muslims. There have been consistent attempts to communalize the pandemic. While the community reels under lack of awareness and education about the change required to cope with the pandemic, it is imperative that special steps are taken by the state agencies to rope in Muslims in the fight against the pandemic.

Keywords: Indian Muslims, poverty, politics, secularism, pandemic/ COVID-19

[1] Women's Rights Activist, Co-founder of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan. Email: zakiasoman@gmail.com

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The impact of the pandemic has been felt by people across the world in both developed as well as developing countries. The poor and marginalized communities continue to suffer greater hardships and losses owing to the severe health crisis as well as the economic destitution brought about by governmental measures such as social distancing and lockdowns in different parts of the globe. The pandemic has caused tremendous suffering to the poor who live on daily wages without any kind of social securities.

South Asia is home to over one-third of the world's poor population. It is not surprising that the pandemic has brought about intense suffering and greater socio-economic marginalization of the poor in the region. Many reports including one by Oxfam (Oxfam, 2021) highlight how the inequalities between the rich and the poor have increased since the arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 with the poor getting deprived of their meagre means of survival. Additionally, in the Indian sub-continent, the pre-existing fault lines along caste, religion and gender have exacerbated the effects of the pandemic. It would be naïve to assume that everyone is equally impacted by the pandemic; some historically marginalized communities such as Dalits, adivasis and increasingly Muslims have clearly borne a greater brunt.

In my opinion, Indian Muslims have experienced a greater impact of the pandemic owing mainly to two factors which are inter-connected: poverty and politics. I will attempt to provide an overview of both these factors here. It is not surprising for social backwardness and conservatism to flourish unchecked in a poor community existing on the margins of society. Besides, for many decades now, Indian Muslims have been at the center of a cynical politics of the supposedly secular variety on the one hand and divisive Hindutva on the other. Before 2014, different governments pandered to the conservative and patriarchal religious elements in the Muslim community in the name of

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upholding secularism. The Shah Bano episode of 1986 is a stark example. In this kind of polity, genuine concerns of citizens such as education, health, jobs, civic amenities, representation get relegated as regressive conservative elements keep making nonsensical demands from the government. Eventually, ordinary Muslims get disenfranchised despite Constitutional safeguards. As though the whole of India's Muslims do not need anything beyond protection of regressive misogynist practices! Such politics gave rise to the Hindutva bogey of "Muslim appeasement" whereas in reality, certain north Indian mullahs and religious men were the only ones appeased. Over the decades it gained sufficient momentum for the Bharatiya Janata Party to come to power at the Center. Meantime, the Muslim masses have continued to live in poverty and backwardness. The political onslaught has persisted even during COVID-19 times with allegations of "corona jehad" in March 2020 on the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi and through various attempts to communalize the pandemic (Soman, 2021).

A Glance at Poverty and Exclusion before 2014

Muslims are the largest minority in India. According to the All India Religion Census of 2011, 17.22 crore Muslims comprise 14.23% of Indian population. The community has by and large remained poor and educationally deprived since Independence, different governments and economic policies notwithstanding. In the 1980s and 1990s there have not been many civil society organizations that engaged in working closely with the community or collecting data empirically. Official figures of the Government of India and the Gopal Singh Committee report in 1982 have documented the condition of poverty and low education as well as weak economic attainments. A more systematic effort was made by the Sachar Committee (Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India) which

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published a comprehensive report on how Muslims fare poorly on all human development indicators. It highlighted that they live in poverty, without much education, without formal jobs, without access to government facilities on credit and without healthcare provisions. The Sachar report showed how only four in a 100 Muslims are graduates. It also highlighted that Muslim participation in salaried jobs was merely 13%. The report captured how Muslims lived with a sense of alienation, fear and insecurity owing to communal riots and violence in different parts of the country.

A national study conducted by us in 42 districts of 15 states across India found hardly any improvement in the lives of Muslims despite elaborate recommendations of the Sachar Committee and the PM's New 15-Point Program as well as the special program in the 90 Minorities Concentration Districts.

It can be seen that Muslims continue to be left out from educational support schemes, anganwadis, primary health care centres, below poverty line benefits, credit facilities etc. What is more, several ordinary persons voiced that there was a lack of a political will to include Muslims in the entitlements meant for the poor. Their feeling seems to be not unfounded as participation and inclusion of Muslims in various entitlement schemes meant for poor remains low.

Reproduced below is a sample about health care services across states in Muslim neighbourhoods surveyed by (Centre for Peace Studies (CPS)):

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Table 1: Status of Healthcare Services in Muslim Neighbourhoods, across eight Indian states

State	HCs* with doctors (%)	HCs with nursing staff (%)	HCs with medicines (%)	HCs with emergency services (%)
Kerala	*91*	*91*	*87*	*30*
Karnataka	*88*	*91*	*74*	*66*
Madhya Pradesh	*71*	*72*	*71*	*57*
Jharkhand	*71*	*72*	*54*	*22*
West Bengal	*74*	*63*	*64*	*50*
Gujarat	*70*	*68*	*41*	*16*
Bihar	*2*	*3*	*4*	*0.2*
Haryana	*13*	*0.5*	*4*	*0.0*

Source: Centre for Peace Studies, 2014
**Healthcare Centres*

Clearly, such a grim state of affairs pertaining to healthcare during ordinary times and particularly in states such as Bihar and Haryana cannot be expected to live up to the challenge of the currently raging pandemic.

In the Broken Promises survey (CPS, 2014), primary healthcare centres (PHCs) [which are envisaged as the first health contact point between communities and a doctor/ or medical professional], were reported to be accessible within their localities by just 22% of the respondents. Another 20% reported having sub-centres in their locality, 10% reported having cluster healthcare centres (CHCs) and 20% said they had other types of healthcare centres or facilities in their localities. Of this, 15% respondents further reported that the healthcare centres present were inactive in their village or locality. About 28% reported they had access to no public health infrastructure at all.

For a sizeable number of respondents, it was still acceptable to consider a health centre/facility active or functional even without a doctor or a nurse. It must be mentioned here that

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in our interactions with the community a lot of women and girls said that they were treated very badly at many of these centres.

Only about 5% of the respondents reported that the Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery (ANM) worker in their locality was a Muslim. Even in a job like that of the ANM, where cultural factors are very pertinent, the low presence of the Muslim community, even in providing services to the Muslim minority communities, is of concern. About 20% of the people surveyed by us said that they had no anganwadi centre in their village/ward/locality. It was found that overall 69% of the eligible children did not go to anganwadi centres. The low coverage of the Muslim community in the 'Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme continues to remain a concern.

About 39% reported that no woman in the family benefited from nutrition and health education while a significant 25% reported that they did not know anything about any scheme. Only about 19% reported that women in the family had benefited from the scheme. The low rate of benefits from nutrition and health education of the ICDS scheme remains a cause of alarm.

Renewed Political Onslaught

The reproduction of some findings above is to provide a sample of the extent of marginalization of Indian Muslims under the UPA government. The NDA government has stopped short of disowning the Sachar report with the then minister for minorities affairs questioning the minority status of Muslims! They have turned the logic of affirmative action on its head by contending that any special measures for supporting Muslims educationally and economically would amount to religious discrimination of other socio-religious communities such as Hindus! We have seen total inaction on the part of the government in the face of violence and lynching by gau rakshaks and during the Delhi riots. Despite Constitutional definition of equal citizenship for all Indians

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irrespective of faith background, the Citizenship Amendment Act has been brought in. Not much action can be expected towards poverty alleviation and inclusion of Muslims despite populist slogans such as sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas.

Issues faced during the Pandemic

Our work at the CPS and Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) in ten states suggests that the Muslim community faced major issues during the country-wide lockdown of March-May 2020. Large proportion of the community is employed in the informal sector and very small businesses. Lockdown meant stoppage of income and daily wages leading to the question of ration shortages and hunger. In the middle of this, in some states such as Telangana, the authorities unthinkingly cancelled thousands of ration cards leading to tremendous hardships to those in need. We received complaints about harassment by police during lockdown. A representation on these issues was made by S Q Masood, one of our volunteers in Hyderabad which received a good response from the authorities[i]. Lakhs of dry ration kits and food packets were distributed by social organizations and religious groups in different states to support hungry families.

The communalization of the pandemic by mischievous elements including TV channels about Muslims spreading corona jehad went unchecked. FIRs were promptly registered by Delhi police and some 30 individuals were arrested for violating lockdown and social distancing norms. All of them were released almost a year later by the Bombay and Delhi High Courts, which found the allegations unfounded and baseless. But in the meantime, the climate was vitiated resulting in the unacceptable behaviour of police, some hospital personnel and administration personnel in several places. This caused additional harassment for Muslims who tested positive or those who needed health facilities for routine medical problems. There have been reports of Muslim

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daily wagers being thrown out of jobs because they "spread virus" under "corona jehad" conspiracy. In cities such as Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad civil society activists found Bengali Muslim migrants living in very dismal condition with no food, no water, no sanitation facilities, no attention by authorities throughout the lockdown period.

The volunteers at CPS-BMMA received complaints from women about communal behaviour by hospital personnel in some cities. They talked about mistreatment in civil hospitals, rude behaviour by staff, no attention by doctors in some cases. Some of these complaints may be common across poor communities and may not be confined to Muslims alone. In Jaipur there was been an incident of forced testing of 40 Muslim men based on rumours. All 40 of them turned out to be COVID-19 negative.

We received many complaints from women about domestic violence and increased harassment by husbands and other family members during lockdown. Also, we received complaints from women themselves of at least 6 cases of instant triple talaq during lockdown. We are dealing with increased cases of women in depression with heightened hardships in daily life. The volunteers also find pregnant women facing particular hardships in the absence of special care in hospitals and at home owing to inability to afford necessities. There is a big need for hygiene related measures in Muslim ghettoes in cities. Women suffer because of lack of menstrual hygiene measures owing to expenses involved apart from lack of access to soaps and sanitizers during pandemic. With closure of schools, there are no avenues for children to keep busy. They have neither computers nor smart phones to participate in online classes or other educational activities. This is leading to further complications for children and women within families. Most Muslim women are engaged in low paying home-based economic activity. They depend on middle-men to provide job work to them. This meagre

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economic support is affected as the supply chain linkages are broken down during the pandemic.

Community awareness and education about the pandemic is still lacking completely. In 2020, many people in Muslim neighbourhoods were confused owing to contradictory messages from different quarters. There is no secular democratic leadership within the community and the barely literate maulvis are in no position to guide them. In fact, most maulvis and religious figures preach fatalism by asking worshippers to leave everything to Allah! Of course, there is no need for masks or sanitizers or physical distancing as Allah will protect every Muslim from the virus! This led to confusion and conflicting messages for ordinary persons. Many were not sure and were asking questions such as whether the pandemic is real or is it some rumour? Is it a conspiracy by some elements? Years of negligence and apathy from authorities has led to a trust deficit between the community and governmental agencies. Most families live in small 1-2 room homes in ghettoes in urban places making physical distancing next to impossible. There are no sources of credible scientific information within the community.

Poverty, low education, lack of healthcare are not the only factors that have come in the way of the Muslim community fighting the pandemic. The general lack of awareness about the pandemic led to continuation of mass namaz gatherings in Muslim-dominated localities in most cities. Ramzan Eid was celebrated with untampered gaiety in most cities in 2020 and again in May 2021. Men and children could be seen going around without masks in most places as reported by several volunteers within the community apart from I seeing it myself. The need for masks may not be felt by burqa-clad women but the same does not hold for others in the family. The second wave in April-May 2021 brought out the intense shortage of vaccines nationally on the one hand and on the other, there has been a huge vaccine hesitancy amongst people living in the Muslim ghettoes. It is observed that

the vaccine hesitancy still continues and must be addressed urgently. There are a number of media reports highlighting this.

Way Forward

There is a need for a systematic community education campaign about the effects of the pandemic and the inevitability of the change towards appropriate behaviour such as masks and physical distancing. There should be a comprehensive community outreach program in Muslim neighbourhoods as most persons there have low formal education and lack access to scientific information. Local government agencies and civil society must come together to educate the community about the pandemic and to ensure that every adult is vaccinated. The local agencies must take special measures to make announcements in mosques through microphones, posters in different languages and pictorials for need to vaccinate.

Conclusions

Needless to say, the government must take urgent steps to rein in those attempting to communalize the fight against COVID-19 without which the virus cannot be defeated. Punitive action must be taken against those spreading fake news in the media branding Muslim ghettos as COVID-19 hubs. Steps must be taken to sensitize health workers about Muslims being equal Indian citizens and penalize those who discriminate with them. Hospitals and police should show empathy rather than hatred based on prejudices.

I am not in the least suggesting that these special measures should be taken for Muslims on account of their religion. I am advocating these measures to include them as just as we take special measures to include poor and marginalized sections in every governmental program or scheme. Ordinary Muslims are

the most excluded and often misunderstood sections of our democratic society. Besides, this needs to be done by all socially conscious agencies as there is no secular democratic leadership in the community, which can take up the challenge to fight the pandemic. The fight against the pandemic cannot be successful without inclusion of the largest minority.

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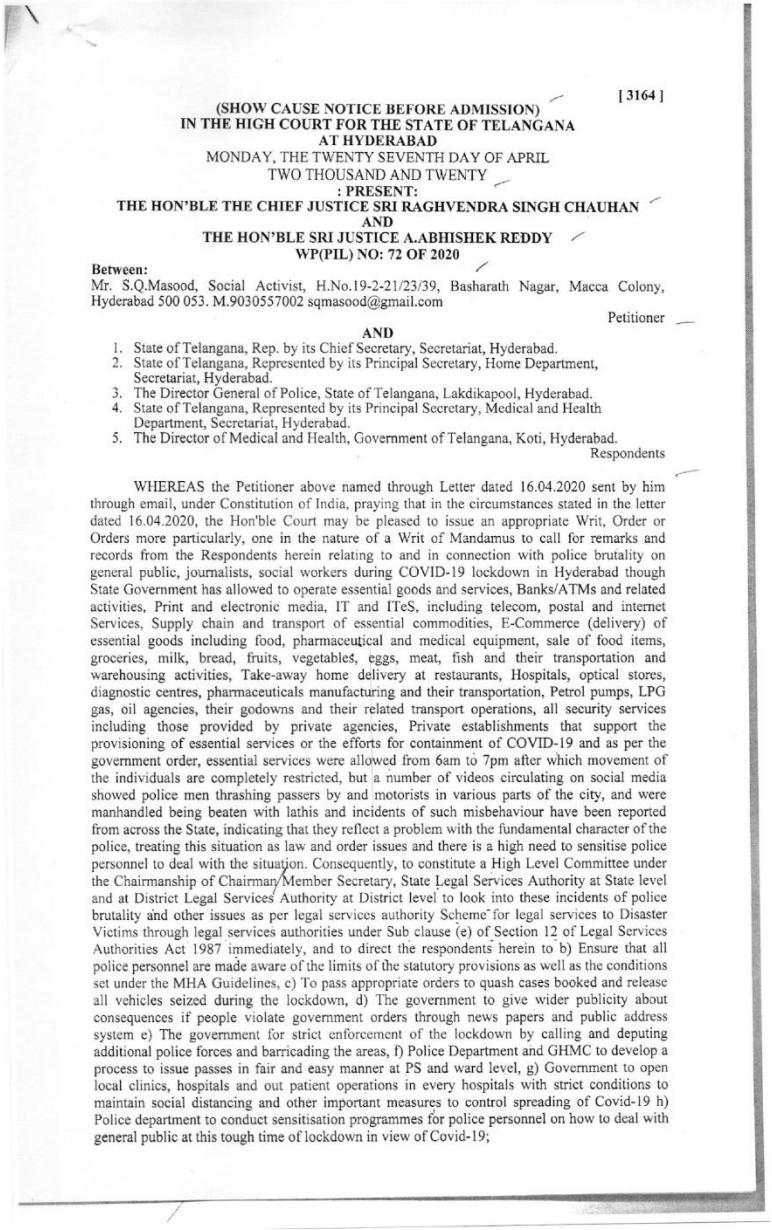
[i] Annexure 1 – Response to S Q Masood's representation by Telangana High Court

Annex 1: Response to S Q Masood's representation by Telangana High Court



[3164]

(SHOW CAUSE NOTICE BEFORE ADMISSION)
IN THE HIGH COURT FOR THE STATE OF TELANGANA
AT HYDERABAD
MONDAY, THE TWENTY SEVENTH DAY OF APRIL
TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY
: PRESENT:
THE HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE SRI RAGHVENDRA SINGH CHAUHAN
AND
THE HON'BLE SRI JUSTICE A.ABHISHEK REDDY
WP(PIL) NO: 72 OF 2020

Between:
Mr. S.Q.Masood, Social Activist, H.No.19-2-21/23/39, Basharath Nagar, Macca Colony, Hyderabad 500 053. M.9030557002 sqmasood@gmail.com

Petitioner

AND

1. State of Telangana, Rep. by its Chief Secretary, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
2. State of Telangana, Represented by its Principal Secretary, Home Department, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
3. The Director General of Police, State of Telangana, Lakdikapool, Hyderabad.
4. State of Telangana, Represented by its Principal Secretary, Medical and Health Department, Secretariat, Hyderabad.
5. The Director of Medical and Health, Government of Telangana, Koti, Hyderabad.

Respondents

WHEREAS the Petitioner above named through Letter dated 16.04.2020 sent by him through email, under Constitution of India, praying that in the circumstances stated in the letter dated 16.04.2020, the Hon'ble Court may be pleased to issue an appropriate Writ, Order or Orders more particularly, one in the nature of a Writ of Mandamus to call for remarks and records from the Respondents herein relating to and in connection with police brutality on general public, journalists, social workers during COVID-19 lockdown in Hyderabad though State Government has allowed to operate essential goods and services, Banks/ATMs and related activities, Print and electronic media, IT and ITeS, including telecom, postal and internet Services, Supply chain and transport of essential commodities, E-Commerce (delivery) of essential goods including food, pharmaceutical and medical equipment, sale of food items, groceries, milk, bread, fruits, vegetables, eggs, meat, fish and their transportation and warehousing activities, Take-away home delivery at restaurants, Hospitals, optical stores, diagnostic centres, pharmaceuticals manufacturing and their transportation, Petrol pumps, LPG gas, oil agencies, their godowns and their related transport operations, all security services including those provided by private agencies, Private establishments that support the provisioning of essential services or the efforts for containment of COVID-19 and as per the government order, essential services were allowed from 6am to 7pm after which movement of the individuals are completely restricted, but a number of videos circulating on social media showed police men thrashing passers by and motorists in various parts of the city, and were manhandled being beaten with lathis and incidents of such misbehaviour have been reported from across the State, indicating that they reflect a problem with the fundamental character of the police, treating this situation as law and order issues and there is a high need to sensitise police personnel to deal with the situation. Consequently, to constitute a High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of Chairman/Member Secretary, State Legal Services Authority at State level and at District Legal Services Authority at District level to look into these incidents of police brutality and other issues as per legal services authority Scheme for legal services to Disaster Victims through legal services authorities under Sub clause (e) of Section 12 of Legal Services Authorities Act 1987 immediately, and to direct the respondents herein to b) Ensure that all police personnel are made aware of the limits of the statutory provisions as well as the conditions set under the MHA Guidelines, c) To pass appropriate orders to quash cases booked and release all vehicles seized during the lockdown, d) The government to give wider publicity about consequences if people violate government orders through news papers and public address system e) The government for strict enforcement of the lockdown by calling and deputing additional police forces and barricading the areas, f) Police Department and GHMC to develop a process to issue passes in fair and easy manner at PS and ward level, g) Government to open local clinics, hospitals and out patient operations in every hospitals with strict conditions to maintain social distancing and other important measures to control spreading of Covid-19 h) Police department to conduct sensitisation programmes for police personnel on how to deal with general public at this tough time of lockdown in view of Covid-19;

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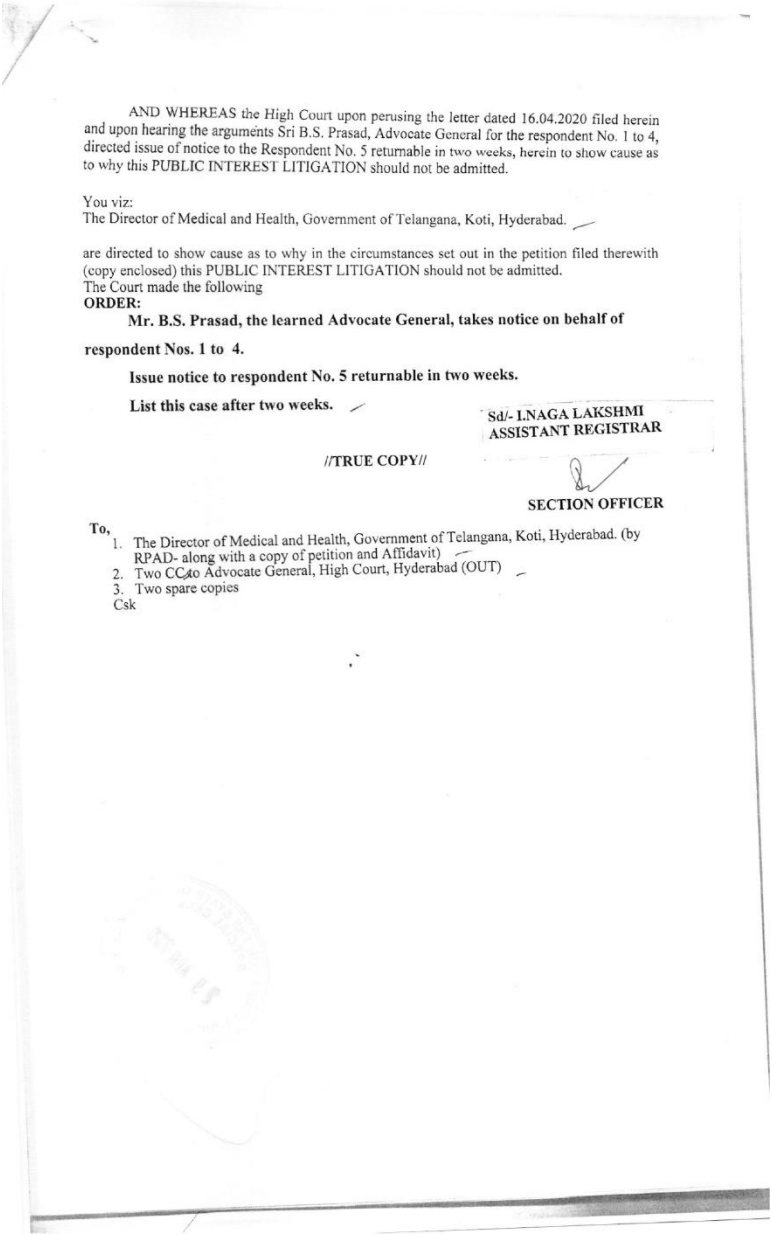

AND WHEREAS the High Court upon perusing the letter dated 16.04.2020 filed herein and upon hearing the arguments Sri B.S. Prasad, Advocate General for the respondent No. 1 to 4, directed issue of notice to the Respondent No. 5 returnable in two weeks, herein to show cause as to why this PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION should not be admitted.

You viz:
The Director of Medical and Health, Government of Telangana, Koti, Hyderabad.

are directed to show cause as to why in the circumstances set out in the petition filed therewith (copy enclosed) this PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION should not be admitted.
The Court made the following
ORDER:

Mr. B.S. Prasad, the learned Advocate General, takes notice on behalf of respondent Nos. 1 to 4.

Issue notice to respondent No. 5 returnable in two weeks.

List this case after two weeks.

Sd/- LNAGA LAKSHMI
ASSISTANT REGISTRAR

//TRUE COPY//

SECTION OFFICER

To,
1. The Director of Medical and Health, Government of Telangana, Koti, Hyderabad. (by RPAD- along with a copy of petition and Affidavit)
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Promoting Good Governance via Model Gaon Concept: *A Case study of Banda district*

Heera Lal[1]

Abstract

Poverty stricken backward districts, also known as 'aspirational districts' are plagued with multiple challenges, where the common people are the worst sufferers. It is the responsibility of the elected representatives, administrative officers and staff to work in tandem with the people to enable the alleviation of such challenges. Model गाँव is one such initiative through which people's aspirations to prosper and contribute to the holistic development of their villages were fulfilled. I highlight some of the steps taken by me in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh, during my tenure as the District Magistrate.

Keywords: Model गाँव, Good Governance, Banda District, Development

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Bureaucrats and civil servants are often regarded as the changemakers of modern India. And with a plethora of social and policy problems that leave their trail, only few could perfect the job they have been assigned - to undo the unjustness and unfairness of these problems.

I would like to share a similar story from my work in Banda district where I served as the District Magistrate. I was leading the district which had been backward striven for ages, in the essential categories of water accessibility, public health and nutrition, education and women empowerment. The success of my work has now become the face and aspiration of many; in the form of creating development models for the rural India where they are led with practical and implementable approaches. With this vision of transforming Indian villages, he is now the Honorary Advisor to Model गाँव (translated into English as model village), a non-profit and a dream project of his, which educates and empowers villagers to holistic and sustainable development.

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Figure 1: Map of Banda district, Uttar Pradesh

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Banda, being the best example as a case study of good governance, here are some of the policy interventions that were made:

Water Conservation

The district being plagued by water scarcity, I intervened by first introducing the drive Bhujal Bachao, Payjal Badhao (translated into English as enhance groundwater, protect drinking water). I took the initiative to build 2,605 contour trenches and held 469 jan choupals engaging around 35,000 villagers on water budgeting and groundwater recharge. Around 2,180 hand pumps were

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installed and more than 250 wells across 470 Gram Panchayats recharged. My efforts resulted in the accumulation of at least 1 lakh kiloliters of water annually. These initiatives were supported by eminent organizations like WaterAid India and People's Science Institute, thus also putting Banda in the national and global map.

Adding on to my work methods of involving people as a means to meet solutions, that is, a participatory approach, I was associated with the Banda Water campaign, which was later acknowledged as being a prime example of community engagement model which involved water parliaments for groundwater recharge, rain water harvesting and mass awareness campaigns.

Public Health and Nutrition

I personally spearheaded awareness campaign initiatives to make understand the importance of Yoga and finally led the different pillars of the district be it public offices, schools, colleges, prisons and in both urban and rural places of the district into adopting Yoga. I led the foundation stone for a recreation based and health wellbeing park 'Oxygen Park' in the district. Malnutrition and child stunting seemed to be an aggravating issue not just for Banda district but for a large portion of rural population and is still a major health crisis in India despite efforts of Mid-Day Meal and POSHAN. I strategized the intervention with the help of UNICEF by starting 'Bal Poshan Satra' (child nutrition sessions) which involved live feeding demonstrations and counselling sessions for mothers. Cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) were carefully examined and other efforts like growth monitoring and awareness about home cooked nutritious diet was also brought into place. It was a roaring success with more than 2000 undernutritioned children having fully recovered.

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Women's Empowerment

Taking one step further in the Model Village concept, the involvement of women in the development of the economy of any district and state cannot be negated. Whether it is about self-employability, participation in sports and related activities, formal education, my efforts brought in huge success. I firmly believe that 'women empowerment is a necessity, not an option'.

Education

Realizing that education is the root cause of many of the social evils present, I led innovations in the education sector as well. 'Prerna' app was one of those initiatives which helped increase the enrollment of children at the primary level, decreased the early exit of children from school, and checked if the students were present. Teachers had to click photographs and send it via app to the administration as a proof for class presence. This revolutionary app was soon realized as a model for the rest of the state.

Environment

Realizing early the importance of environment protectionism and climate change, I did not back out from making efforts which included planting thousands of tree saplings and also initiated a phenomenon called 'Ped Prasad', where I used religious places - temples and mosque to cater to the larger audience and instilling behavioural change in them about the importance of the cause.

Other significant feats

In addition to all of the above, I have also led prison reforms where he engaged the inmates with various sports and recreation-based

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activities and took a serious consideration of the physical and psychological health and well-being of the inmates present.

For the youth, I have initiated startup programs to elevate and accelerate employment rate in the district and what he referred to as 'a much needed exposure'.

He restarted the local dairy industry and had it incorporated in the larger dairy market which also led to economic upliftment for many.

I also conceptualized a massive voter mobilization drive to strengthen the very foundation of a democracy - the election. His initiative increased voter turnout throughout the district and is one of the better figures in the entire country right now.

Challenges

Banda district has now evolved to be truly a model village for the rest of the state and the country. The upcoming revised datasets of Census, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Statistical Survey and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Index will give a clearer, optimistic picture of the progress and will help fuel the development machinery running.

While the efforts and approaches at the legal, policy and administrative level may differ with the socio-political-cultural scenario of a place and also its topography; but the scope to reach for the higher in the most crucial of parameters is something to be endowed by the rest of the country.

The concept of replicating the idea of Model गाँव may not see the similar light of the day and will be full of hurdle and challenges –

Table 1: Challenges in replicating Model गाँव outside Banda district, Uttar Pradesh (in India)

Institutional	Challenges in the form of corruption, red tapism, mismanagement and inefficiency, lack of will, low skilled workers in the respective departments and lack of clear vision- both short term and long term, are some of the institutional lacunas one has to go through to make a change of some kind.
Social acceptance and Equity	While the community participation approach has been applauded, it is also to be taken into consideration the inclusivity criteria and the social acceptance at large of other groups. Issues like caste, gender and religion invariably will play a hindrance factor in effectively deploying communities towards development. Besides this, failed behavioural changes methods and techniques will result in communities not being able to grasp or accept new policy changes. This may include interventions in sectors like environment, public health, water conservation, sanitation, digital modes of financial inclusion and most prominently, tabooed topics of sexual well-being, menstrual hygiene, female labour participation, etc. Concept of incorporating even the basic services like for example, separate toilets for women and girls in the schools (which in many blocks and districts of the country shockingly lack) have to be strategically brought about and making the population understand the importance of it will be a challenge.
Effectiveness	Policy interventions will also face the hurdle of how effective they can be on paper or after being implemented, how well monitored and effective they have been on ground. Policies, Laws and initiatives focused on the rural population should be evidence based and have a specific time period for trials. The lack of political will, political acceptance and aggravated political pressure also adds up to the ineffectiveness of a policy design. The feasibility of the methods also plays a key role from social dimension and the present administrative capacity.

Source: Compiled by the author

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Suggestions

The concept of 'Model Village' is in line and accordance of PM Adarsh Gram Yojana's objective of social, cultural and economic development of a village and SDGs 3 (Good Health), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 6 (Clean Water), 10 (Reduced Inequality and Financial Inclusion), 11 (Sustainable Communities). Its nationwide implementation although ambitious is achievable for the present 718 districts of India. The hurdles and challenges can be best addressed and fought via intervening at the individual steps of any policy making.

Agenda Setting

The first step of policy making which involves brainstorming of ideas, suggestions, thinking of the problems at hand, different stakeholders to engage with stakeholders' analysis, project initiation. This step should be able to incorporate the beneficiaries of any policy into discussion, along with other relevant stakeholders and hold continuous meetings and sessions before going forward.

Problem defining

The next crucial step is Problem defining which will involve boiling down to a precise problem, that is, a substantive one from a metaproblem. Problem defining will be important because it helps to figure what issues to deal with. It will be relevant in the sense that the policy to be discussed and implemented in the villages doesn't go out of focus. A problem of lack of sanitation due to inefficiency in financial incentive should not be confused with lack of sanitation due to lack of adequate behaviour, as the

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former is a problem of financial inclusion while the latter is a cultural and behavioural problem.

Discussing and choosing the 'best' alternative

The next step is laying out the best possible policy solutions that can aid in resolving the issue and problem in hand. With engagements and discussions and profiling out the best policy choice for any district, the next step is to choose out of the alternatives.

An adequate trial phase should be mandated in a certain number of blocks in the district to check for its efficacy and worth. Appropriate corrections should be initiated thereafter. Taking the example of sanitation again where people are yet to realize its benefits, a short 4-6 month trial period should be initiated to check if people are adopting the new toilets or specifically, what changes are required, like size, color, location inside the premise, etc.

Taking public and expert opinions and suggestions for the proposed alternative

The proposed policy alternative should be released in the larger context for the views and opinions of the public, civil society, think tanks, and other relevant experts to fill any loophole that is present or might arise after implementation.

Implementation

After review and series of discussions and changes, the policy is finally applied and implemented. Herein, the challenges of Institution lacunas, Social acceptance and equity, and Effectiveness, as discussed in the table above will come into play significantly and should be accordingly dealt with.

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Monitoring and Review

Often an undermined and overlooked step, this is the most crucial because monitoring and review of any policy at work helps increase its efficiency and lays the path for better policies to be framed in the future. All the previous steps can be perfected depending on the importance given to this step of monitoring, reviewing, evaluating and rating a particular policy. As an example, a sanitation and toilet construction policy in a state can be well monitored by employing research professionals to visit different villages, discuss and interview Panchayat heads and Block-level officers, conduct focused group discussions, ground observations and report everything for analysis.

(*The author would like to thank Indranuj Pathak for his valuable inputs*.)

Small Jobs; Big Worries:
Insecurities of Gig Work in the Time of Pandemic

Babu P Remesh[1] & Tanya Chaudhary[2]

Abstract

This article highlights the insecurities associated with the gig work which have been amplified during the pandemic. It is shown that this new form of temporary work, based on technology-mediation, is characterized by inherent adverse terms for the workers. A crisis period like pandemic is found deepening the worker's worries, which emphatically underscores the need for strengthening regulatory measures to assure dignified work for gig workers.

Keywords: Gig Work, Gig Economy, Online-Platform, Labour standards

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Introduction

Of late, globally, there has been a proliferation of gig economy jobs, and India is not an exception to this trend. Though there is no authentic statistics available on the quantum of gig work in India, available estimates suggest that around 15 million people are currently engaged in gig based temporary work (Tiwari et al., 2020). There are also growing apprehensions that gig economy jobs are essentially non-standard by nature, with deplorable levels of labour standards. In this backdrop, the present paper attempts to analyze the inherent and deepening insecurities of gig work and workers in India. A special effort is made to understand the impact of the pandemic in further deteriorating the quality of work in the gig economy.

Conceptualizing Gig Work

In gig economy, working options are mostly based on very short-term jobs called 'gig jobs', which are normally for a single professional engagement and/or for a brief stipulated time period. So, one of the defining features of the gig work is the abysmally shorter length/duration of the contract. The term 'gig' stands for a one-time arrangement between the service provider and the user (through a mediator) which may or may not guarantee a long-term engagement. Woodcock and Graham (2020) use the term 'gig economy' to refer to the "labour markets that are characterized by independent contracting that happens through, via, and on digital platforms". As Harris (2017) points out: "All gigs are jobs. But not all jobs are gigs", where the requirement of the job is according to the need of the firm, which offers the work. However, the very short duration is not the only feature that makes gig work distinct from conventional and 'standard' jobs. Actually, it is the

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mediation of technology that helps in linking the workers with their job-providing intermediaries (and eventually with actual clients) is the most defining feature of gig economy. In other words, gig work can be seen as technology enabled/mediated short-term labour contracts.

Gig workers include a wide range of employees who are known by different nomenclatures such as: Temp-job workers; Sharing-economy workers; Collaborative economy workers; Workers employed with aggregators; Online-platform workers; Independent contractors; Contract-firm workers; On-call workers and so on. The most visible examples of gig workers in the Indian context are the drivers in application (app)-based cab services (e.g. Uber, Ola) and the delivery persons working with food delivery platforms (e.g. Zomato and Swiggy). There are many more examples such as delivery staff engaged in e-commerce (e.g. Amazon, Flipkart) and workers engaged in delivery of vegetables and grocery items. At present, the concentration of gig jobs is more in the metropolitan cities, though these jobs are quickly spreading to small towns. In urban areas, the influence of gig work has gained considerable momentum in the recent past. Accordingly, 'from buying groceries to writing computer codes', workers are available through app-based mediation.[1] The list of platform-mediated gig economy services can be extended to many other fields like online hospitality networks (e.g. Airbnb, Oyo Rooms) and online market places (e.g. Policy Bazaar) and so on.[2]

Essentially, the gig work is similar to freelancing work or part-time work of bygone days. But, one of the main distinctions between conventional freelancing and gig job is the presence mediating technology (e.g. app-based/technology-enabled platform[3]). It is the centrality of technology (Apps; ITES/Web-based intermediation) that defines the possibilities as well as inherent insecurities of work and workers in the gig economy.[4]

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The software application provides a platform that brings the service to the service requesters through a functioning set of workers. The intention is to provide an accessible, speedy and geographically broad ranged service to the consumers. It has given way to develop a market for aggregators who aggregates surplus of workers to provide a quick service to the consumers, where network between the service provider and the user is dissolved once the task is completed.

Based on the physical positioning of the workers, the gig work can be classified into two. The first set of gig workers are those who are engaged in *field-based gigs.* These workers are directly present in the field (e.g. food delivery executives or cab-drivers). In the second category, the workers are *remote gig workers* (e.g. tele-sales or tele-counselling persons). In terms of pooling of resources too, we can also broadly divide gig workers into two. The first category of workers is those who principally work by providing their efforts and skills (labour power) alone. The next set are those who also share their assets along with the labour power.[5]

Viewing Gig Work from Actors' Perspectives

Essentially, there are three actors in gig work, namely on-demand companies, service providers and customers. On-demand companies are essentially the platform owners, who do the matching between the actual employers (customers) and the actual workers (service providers). They are the entrepreneurs in gig business, though usually they prefer to use different nomenclatures such as aggregators; platform providers; app-owners; tech-corporates and so on.[6] Service providers are the *de facto* workers, who are denied of their worker status by the aggregators. Usually, in service related documents they are termed

as 'service providers' or as independent contractors. The third actor is the customer or client, who avails the services of the temp-employees through the mediation services of the on-demand firms.

Gig work offers different sets of possibilities and constraints for different actors in the gig economy. From the view point of the aggregators, gig work has many advantages. Firstly, organization of gig jobs reduces the costs in many ways. After initial investment (fixed cost) the recurring costs of running the platform/application is minimal, compared to the unlimited returns that the aggregators receive (as commissions from the workers/service providers, who use the platform). Once the platform/application is put in place, the recruitment cost becomes very minimal. Besides this, in zero-hour contracts, the employers are not liable to provide minimum hours of employment. Such a situation provides considerable levels of 'numerical flexibility' to the employers, especially when a large pool of reserve army of labour is readily available in labour-surplus economies (like India). As the workers are roped in through instant/very short-term contracts, the companies are also free from long-term obligations towards the workers. In addition to that, gig work arrangements also help the aggregators to become *de facto* owners of the resources shared by the other actors. In such situations, we can see emergence of a new class of 'capitalists without capital'![7] From the customers' point of view, usually, gig economy offers many advantages including availability of services at competitive prices, standardized/assured quality of services, numerical flexibility and so on.

For the workers also, there are some advantages, which prompt them to engage in gig work. Gig work options provide many workers to access employment (or enter in the labour market), without any operating cost (or prior investment). As the

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aggregators/platforms provide employment opportunities, there is ease of finding work. There is certain degree of inherent flexibility in the gig work options. Usually, the workers are free to work or quit the work, whenever they feel like. As there is no obligation to accept all the works offered to them, many workers find it as a convenient arrangement for flexibly engaging in the labour market. For some of the gig workers, gig options provide opportunities for converting their hobby as a source of supplementary income, whereas for some others gig-work is test-drive for a new job-experiment. The freedom to simultaneously work more than one platform is yet another attraction.[8]

Notwithstanding the above, there are reasons to believe that there are many demerits for gig work from the workers' perspective, which far-outweigh the merits mentioned above. Absence of employment-security is one of the major shortcomings of gig-work. On the one hand, there is no long-term assurance regarding the continuation of the job. On the other hand, even in the gig work option, there are uncertainties regarding an assured minimum level of work. Last minute rescheduling of work and cancellation of orders are quite common in gig-work options. Due to all these, the income from gig work is often irregular, inadequate and inconsistent.

As opposed to regular employees in other comparable sectors, gig workers are denied of many benefits including assured minimum wages, over time, unemployment allowance, and social protection, medical/maternity leaves, paid leaves, severance packages/retirement benefits and so on. Quite often these 'self-employed' workers are on a continuous struggle for `self-exploitation'.

As many of these workers are often with some loan liabilities (and at times are in the clutches of micro finance and banking institutions, the gig workers are susceptible to burn out

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and do many hours of stressful work to make both the ends meet. For many of them, it is a struggle to move from one gig to another on a continuous basis. All these suggest that gig works are often comparable with works in informal sector, which are characterized by acute levels of precariousness. The precarious conditions of the workers are inherently built into the algorithms of the apps as well as the hierarchical structure of these companies. For instance, the delivery personnel with a good customer rating will get a badge which would assure him more orders, or getting a minimum wage or reward in case of completion of targeted number of rides or delivery, where the order or ride for achieving the targeted number is not given so easily as per algorithms; or the geographical areas where delivery personnel who ride along in the area would get more orders. The fact that even with all these insecurities there are many workers who are willing to participate in gig economy itself is an indication of the overall deterioration of labour standards in this sector.

Usually, the aggregators or platform providers dominate in the collaborative partnership. This allows them in charging exorbitant commissions (which even go up to 20-25%) and fixing abysmally low amounts as service charges for their on-call workers. The firms can also control the workers by monitoring and regulating their telephonic interactions. In certain gig-working arrangements, the workers are restricted from working with alternative platforms. At times, there are stipulations that workers need to fulfil a minimum number of tasks (target) to be eligible for certain benefits. In certain other cases the workers need to follow some of the guidelines and stipulations of the collaborating firm/brand (e.g. wearing uniforms, displaying signage and logo; using delivery bags of company; using of certain apps etc.)

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Yet another disadvantage from the worker's point of view is the absence of socialization and threats to collectivity. As the workers are all scattered and disorganized by design, it is difficult to organize the gig employees. Normally, gig workers are individually connected, circulating/floating personnel and often find themselves as 'self-isolated', as they may not be getting any chances to frequently meet or socialize with their fellow-workers.

Inherent Insecurities in Gig Work

Denial of 'workers' status to the employees has been a major issue concerning gig work in the recent past. By calling the workers by different nomenclatures such as 'delivery partners', 'independent contractors' and `aggregators', the employers (aggregators) are found shirking their responsibilities towards workers.[9] As the workers are not recognized as employees[10], there is a difficulty in establishing employer-employee relationship and this absence of worker status, push out from the protective cover of the labour legislations and welfare measures, which are accessible to many other workers in the service economy.[11] Due to absence of legislative protection, lower labour standards and precarious nature of work become characteristic features of labour in gig economy.

Of the many inherent insecurities of gig work, the most important is the platform dependency, which is in-built in gig work. As accessing work is strictly routed through the platform, owned by the aggregator, the free and active engagements of workers are restricted by the mediators and technology.[12]

Collaboration in gig-work is basically a collaboration between unequal partners, as the aggregators/platform providers enjoy greater freedom in terms of imposing conditions of work, controls and directives, which the 'workers' have to treat *fait*

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accompli. Besides this, the price and incentive structures and the larger workplace practices are also normally decided and dictated by the employers.

In labour-surplus countries like India, gig work has yet another underlying dilemma. In western economies, the gig-based freelancing usually provides income-supplementing and part-time working opportunities for seekers of temporary-jobs.[13] In lesser developed countries, gig work often becomes full time profession for those who fail to get a tenure-secure employment. Such situations often lead to a scenario where gig works are predominantly occupied by workers, who are permanently-temporary!

Deepening Insecurities during the Pandemic

Though there is no consolidated estimate of jobs lost during pandemic in gig work, it is now widely acknowledged and understood that the unexpected advent of pandemic and the lockdown that followed[14] resulted in considerable job-losses and/or short-term unemployment for many workers in the gig-economy. As per reports, in the first few months of the lockdown, the ride-hailing giant Uber registered a job-loss of about 25%, while in Ola cabs 1400 persons lost their jobs. Food delivery collaborators like Swiggy, Zomato had also fired many of their delivery partners as the firms had to scale down to operate in pandemic (Bhargava 2020).[15]

When the food delivery services and cab-services were soon included as permitted activities during the initial phases of relaxation of lockdown restrictions, many of these workers had to risk their own lives (and those of their family members), to retain their jobs. Many gig workers had to carry on with their field-based work, without any personal protective equipment (PPE) kits or

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safety measures. As social distancing was not feasible in most of the cases, the occupation-related health risks was at its maximum. For delivery persons, payment in cash (on delivery) itself was a major health risk (till payment through digital mode became the accepted norm). During this period, many of these workers also had to face customer abuse/ill-treatment, as these workers were viewed as potential carriers of the virus,[16] despite their status as 'essential workers'. In many cases, neighborhoods and housing societies not only restricted their entry but also harassed them during the lockdown while they were attending to their duties. Here, their identity as 'blue collar workers' has become the reason for the humiliation that they had to face. Along with this social stigma, incidents of harassment by police at check posts and attacking of food-delivery persons for money and food were also reported.[17]

Though drivers and delivery partners were directed by the aggregators to follow health-safety norms for themselves and their customers, often the cost and onus of having these safety measures (PPE kits[18], sanitizers; soaps – disinfectants, plastic shields between passengers and driver in cabs and so on) were shifted to the workers.

Acute income-loss was another issue faced by gig workers during the pandemic.[19] If we take the case of cab-services, lockdown implied considerable decline in the work of drivers engaged in ride-hailing services such as Uber/Ola. Closure of airports, stoppage of public transport, suspension of train services, closure of shops and establishments and so on cumulatively effected a huge decline in the demand for the services of these drivers, in the initial few months which were characterized by temporary unemployment or acute levels of under employment to majority of gig workers in the service sector.

The costs incurred by workers also increased considerably during the period, as the workers had to incur additional costs for precautionary measures (e.g. soaps; sanitizing material; healthcare related expenses). At the same time, the fuel costs also were on the increase. In addition to these, there has been an overall increase in the workload and work-related stress. The number of working hours increased for all gig workers, as they had to spend more time on ensuring health and hygiene related norms (e.g. disinfecting the vehicles; use of Aarogya Setu App; temperature checks and covid tests[20]).

Notwithstanding these increase in costs and efforts of the gig-workers, there was no revision in the per gig/per order charges paid to the workers by the aggregators. Nor was there any reduction in the commission rates charged by the platform owners (which were often as high as 20 to 25%).[21].

As platform-based activities require only minimal running cost, there is lot of scope for reducing the commissions. But none of the aggregators were implementing such reduction in commissions. Rather, there has been a visible trend among the aggregators to shift their minimum responsibilities (related to social security) towards the customers.

The relief-measures provided by firms were often limited to a public statement in media or sending messages to workers about hygiene and sanitization. Many of the platform giants had openly approached the customers seeking their help in financing their workers during the time of pandemic.[22] Medappa and Taduri (2020) explain how the aggregators were using `crowdfunding' as an option to shift their responsibility of providing basic social security for their workers (or 'partners' as they are called!). While doing so, adjectives like 'heroes' or 'warriors' were effectively used.

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There are reports that though these crowd-funding initiatives like Uber Care Driver Fund and Ola Care gathered huge amounts, only a small percentage of these resources reached the needy gig workers. Lalvani and Sitharaman (2020) point out that the insurance which Swiggy provided to the workers in case they test COVID-19 positive was not able to provide them adequate assurance. Many factors are believed to have affected the efficacy of these schemes including faulty/rigid definition of beneficiaries, lack of transparency, lack of awareness and so on. In certain cases, the stipulation of self-reporting by the gig workers to avail the assured social security benefits itself affected the performance of the welfare measure. As self-reporting was immediately followed by a disconnection from the app (in the larger interest of customer safety), many gig workers opted for non-reporting even if they are infected by the virus. Such situations were found to further endanger and worsen the working environment of the gig workers.

The aggregators were also found effectively utilizing the pandemic and lockdown as a possibility for expanding the business in new directions and for seeking tax exemptions. There has also been attempts to shift some of the labour related responsibilities to government. From the government side also, though food-app based delivery workers were considered as 'essential workers' during difficult times, these workers were not given priority while providing social security assistance.[23]

In the absence of effective protective measures, from both the aggregators and the state, often the get into debt-traps for meeting their daily expenses, equal monthly instalments (EMIs) and other contingency expenses during a pandemic-stricken period. Accordingly, more and more gig workers are now finding themselves as clients to informal money lenders and micro financing organizations, which further add to their vulnerabilities and insecurities.[24]

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Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly used the digital platforms and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for sustaining citizens as the time of lockdown through excessive use of digital payments, digital work, digital governance and policing and even digital healthcare through online suggestive consultations. Although these services were heavily disposed towards upper- and middle-class population, the platforms also played an essential role in distribution of ration to migrant workers or flow of information within and between the communities of workers. This axiomatic relationship between platform economy and state was visible in the times of crisis in big cities[25] and hence is suggestive of the fact that platform economy has become a fundamental part of urban lives in metropolitan cities. Notwithstanding this, it is evident from the foregoing discussions that currently, there are many decent work deficits in the gig work options. The workers are often forced to work with abysmally lower labour standards, without any system for redressal[26], healthy socialization/collectivization or social dialogue. With no regulatory mechanism in place for workers to address their issues concerning work and livelihoods, the growth of digital economy does not offer an all-inclusive story of development.

Presence of no authority where a worker or the 'dispensable partner' (Shipra and Behera, 2020) could go to address the conditions of work, unfair termination or even complaint against the consumer makes the systematic structure of platform work precarious. The ultimate reliance on customer ratings to assess and evaluate workers' income (through performative rewards and biases of algorithm to allocate more work) should be reduced to a balance between customer satisfaction and workers' dignity. The worker should be given

appropriate autonomy to take decision on behalf of company in case of customer dissatisfaction through refunds, which could be verified by a digital form or other means on a mobile-based application. Besides an apprehensive training to the workers to deal with plausible conditions of dissatisfaction, conflict and threat would ensure both customer and worker's welfare. The consideration of human capacities needs to be fed into the algorithm of these apps, which would then not lead to a disparaging working conditions and hence make companies accountable for workers' income and social security.

On the whole, the foregoing discussion emphatically underscores that strengthening regulatory measures to assure dignified jobs for workers in the gig economy is an important requirement. Inclusion of gig workers in the recently passed Social Security Code, 2020[27], and a recent judgement in the UK's Supreme Court[28,] approving 'worker' status to the Uber drivers and so on are some encouraging recent developments in this direction. Notwithstanding these, there is a long way to go for promoting fair labour standards in the gig economy.

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Notes

[1] Currently, there are many app-based services available in matching the customers with a wide range of workers such as home cleaners; home tutors; electricians; plumbers; yoga teachers; dog Trainers/dog walkers; care workers; tele-sales persons; content writers; translators; editors; accountants; Tele-Medicine consultants; counsellors, to name a few.

[2] The discussions around gig work and workers schemed in this paper gives more attention on the app-based cab-drivers and food delivery executives, who are the most visible gig workers in our contemporary urban space.

[3] Athique and Parthasarthy (2020) view that the platforms are market system instead of simple technical system. Borrowing from Appadurai (2012) and Srnicek (2017) the authors use the term `platform-capitalism' to ensconce and illustrate that how platforms are normalized as controlling our social, economic and cultural ambits of life.

[4] With the advent of gig work in a big way, distinction between short-term freelancing and gig work is becoming blurred. It seems as if the world of freelancing is transforming with technological intervention.

[5] For instance, there can be cases where cabs in the ride-hailing services are owned by drivers; or owners who have pooled their rooms to an accommodation where service aggregators are doubling as workers in their own premises.

[6] Assuming other names than that of employer or entrepreneur is viewed as a circumvention strategy followed by these firms, to avoid direct responsibilities towards workers.

[7] Examples for this include food delivery aggregators like Swiggy; Zomato enjoying control over hundreds of restaurants (even without having a single restaurant of their own) and cab and lodging aggregators like Uber, Ola and Oyo rooms handling cars and rooms pooled by their collaborating partners.

[8] For instance, we can see many cab-drivers working simultaneously with Uber and Ola.

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[9] This is quite similar to the case of Anganwadi workers and scheme workers, who are paid with a honorarium (instead of wages/salaries) as their work is considered as `honorary work'!

[10] The identification of workers as 'partners' was one of the main reasons that enabled platform based companies to elude legislative frameworks which ensures and safeguards workers' welfare and income security. Besides, this also facilitated the companies to get away with the cost of ownership of assets and maintenance of assets used in the job, such as fuel costs, EMI payments etc. The blurring of the labour's place in the present capitalist production process is because of constant push to evade the employer-employee relationship which thrives on the superficial idea of 'flexibility' and undermines the dangerously long hours, lack of social security, low pay, digital surveillance and unfair dismissal (Medappa 2021)

[11] Accordingly, quite often, occupation related accidents (e.g. road accidents) are not compensated and issues like insecurities during workplace (e.g. sexual harassment faced by a female beautician, who is on gig work) are not adequately addressed by the actual employers.

[12] From a Marxian perspective, this can be seen as alienation of labour from the means of production!

[13] In western-economies many people consider gig-based freelancing as an avenue for effectively utilising a few hours in a flexible manner for some additional income (e.g. Students working with fast-food chains such as Mc Donald's and those who engage in dog walking, snow-shoveling and so on)

[14] The nationwide lockdown was announced from 24 March, 2020. Subsequently, lockdown was relaxed on 1st June 2020.

[15] During the initial few months since the lockdown, there was considerable dip in the demand in the field of food delivery services, which deepened the hardships and worries of thousands of youngsters who were working in food delivery platforms such as Zomato and Swiggy.

[16] Chakravarti 2020 observes that workers from food and grocery delivery services such as Zomato, Swiggy, Big basket which delivered essential goods were not only facing threat to their

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health but were also harassed by authorities and residents of neighborhoods.

[17] During the days of panic and massive exodus of migrants towards their native places, there have been a few incidents where food delivery persons were attacked and their food packets are taken away.

[18] At times, though these health safety material were provided by employers, the workers had to travel long-distances to access these. One of the major demands in the protest done by Indian Federation of app-Based Transport workers (IFAT) based in Hyderabad in June 2020 was the distribution of PPE kits and masks at accessible places.

[19] As per reports, during the lockdown, with diminished orders in early days of lockdown, several workers in platform companies were left without even a basic level income, to sustain their families and meet expenses like payment of EMI on loans.

[20] Many cab-drivers had to do covid test multiple times, to follow the norms set by their employers or in certain cases, the government.

[21] One of the major demands of the protest of app-based cab-drivers (organized by IFAT in Hyderabad) was to reduce the commission rates. Similarly, the protest staged by All India Gig Worker Union in NOIDA in September 2021 was to increase the service charges per order for food delivery executives.

[22] Companies like Zomato, Uber and Ola had gone for such crowdfunding options. Interestingly, for these companies, supporting their own workers was financially non-viable!

[23] For instance, immediately after the lockdown a strike was organized by United Food Delivery Partners Union basically to fight for inclusion of food delivery executives (in relief measures)

[24] In the time of pandemic, many cab-drivers working with ride-hailing aggregators such as Uber and Ola had to seek and work in other jobs (under precarious conditions) or had to incur debts at high interest rates to pay the EMI of their cars. Some of them also sold/mortgaged their vehicles to money lenders and returned to their villages.

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[25] In case of Delhi where a major section of workers employed by informal sector of the city were unemployed and many of them became devoid of shelter as well. Shutting down of various industries, informal street work, markets had left millions of workers to be stranded. The primary objective of Delhi government became to feed these workers and hence it tied up with Swiggy, where the meals were prepared in government kitchen while food was distributed by delivery personnel. On an average 200,000 meals were distributed per day (Surie 2020). Later various other platform companies collaborated with Delhi government to distribute dry ration to people as well

[26] There is no redressal systems for the gig workers to resort to when they are denied of eligible payments by the aggregators or when they are met with issues such as customer abuse. A recent incident in Bangalore, in which a food delivery boy was beaten and ill-treated by a customer had once again highlighted of redressal mechanism for gig workers. The Bangalore incident suggests that even a formal SOS training to the workers will prove beneficial for both the consumers and the workers,

[27] As part of this Code on Social Security, a Gig Workers' Welfare Fund is also proposed which will be run charging 2 per cent on the turnover of the companies (as part of CoSS). Although the acknowledgement of gig work in CoSS seems a positive turn, there are many complexities involved when it comes to the implementation of this code, which needs to be realised through cooperative efforts from both the central and state governments (Mehrotra and Sarkar 2021)

[28] In 2021, February, Uber lost a major case in U. K's Supreme Court, with unanimous ruling pointing out that ride hailing giant's drivers are workers and not partners (Dash 2021).

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Community-Managed Piped Water Supply: *Issues and Challenges*

Amita Bhaduri[1]

Abstract

The performance of government supported piped water supply schemes can be improved with strong state-recognized community organizations in place that receive support to maintain service levels. Well-functioning committees and the larger involvement of beneficiaries in decision-making and implementation of piped water supply solutions can increase the efficiency of the operations, improve effectiveness/sustainability, enhance user satisfaction and lead to better equity outcomes. Financing mechanism under programmes such as Jal Jeevan Mission should enable full life-cycle costs to be met, particularly capital maintenance and post construction support.

Keywords: Drinking Water, Water Access, Community Based Water Supply, India

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As a part of its commitment to Goal 6.1 to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030, Government of India (GoI) has been endeavouring to deliver water supply facilities. However, 163 million people do not have access to safe water as of 2017 (Sarkar, 2019). As per NITI Aayog in 2019, only 25% of households have access to safe drinking water i.e., receiving 55 litres per capita per day (lpcd) on-premises and "about 20% of rural households have piped water access" (MoJS, 2021).

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) rolled out in June 2019 by GoI aims to provide functional household tap connection to every rural household by 2024. The mission that expands on the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) guidelines, 2013 provides a renewed thrust towards household level access to piped water supply to all on-premises. It calls for the involvement of the Gram Panchayats (GPs) in planning and implementation of the project, proposes performance-based funding to states, and ensures mandatory participation of women in Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs). Estimates indicate that for closing the gap in access in rural India as a part of JJM, the "expected cost of operationalizing is around Rs. 3.6 trillion" (*The Economic Times*, 2019).

Insights on Community-Managed Piped Water Supply

JJM focuses on small scale, community managed, groundwater schemes wherever possible, with emphasis on source sustainability through groundwater recharge and wastewater reuse. "Community participation in piped water supply is sought not only under the recent JJM but is also an inbuilt component of various national and state flagship programmes" (Bora, 2019). All rural water supply schemes are to be operated and maintained by local bodies such as GPs, VWSCs, Zila Panchayats (ZPs) and civil

society organizations as per the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, 1992.

The JJM as well as some of the programmes by the state governments are committed to delivering higher levels of service on-premises via piped networks as regards access, quality and reliability. State support and handholding by the implementation support agency is of crucial importance for the piped water supply to be sustainable and successful.

A study suggests that "centrally managed drinking water supply programs used conventional engineering solutions that resulted in an infrastructure that was beyond the people's capability to maintain" (Lane, 2004). Water infrastructure fell into disrepair, and users were unable or unwilling to maintain it themselves. The need for better operation and maintenance (O&M) capacities and better management capacity of the user institution constitutes a problem for large piped networks and multi-village schemes.

However, the challenges of providing access to groups belonging to various castes/sections in rural settings may pose social and political challenges, which go far beyond technical/financial issues. Studies point to the complexity of managing multiple stakeholders, the reasons for the success of these schemes and the challenges encountered in planning, operations and maintenance.

Institutional Arrangements and Capacity Building

Successful cases of community engagement typify community planned and managed schemes that are demand-responsive serving the needs of the user and where infrastructure investments were made through government, donor or NGO programmes. A drinking water user committee is formed, and given basic training and the scheme's responsibility handed over to them. Post-

construction support is provided to the communities mainly through the local government and the communities are not left to manage the schemes on their own. Piped water supply continues in such schemes often for decades and service levels are being maintained, and the sections of the network that have begun to deteriorate are being replaced.

Community-based action and supportive institutional dynamics play a key role in successful cases and community leaders, community-based organizations along with panchayat representatives such as ward members/*sarpanches*, implementation support agency, state department and other frontline workers are sometimes actively involved in grassroots mobilisation, spreading awareness towards the adoption of the piped water supply scheme. Further, the community receives direct support on technical aspects, finance and materials from the local government/local implementation support agency or NGO. The NGO at places works on aligning and supporting the government processes and provides expertise and momentum to the initiative.

Cases marked by strong institutional arrangements with clearly defined strategies and effective demarcation of roles and functions perform well. The formal recognition normally helps the committee in opening and operation of bank accounts and is also a necessity to support receipt of funds from the GP. The control of the water systems rests on these institutions which are spearheading the initiative. They are responsible for O&M as well as service provisioning.

For community management of piped water supply to be sustained-at-scale, the newly formed institutions would need strong leadership, clarity on ownership and long-term techno-managerial, significant financial and materials support to community institutions by the external donor and/or implementation support agencies/state agencies (local

government) on key duties including operation, maintenance and administration. These community institutions are entrusted with the responsibility of articulating collective demand for drinking water systems as well as to collaborate and/or negotiate with the local/state government agencies for the fulfilment of their water needs and aspirations.

The capacities of the community institution responsible for O&M and service provision on the management aspects of the system need to be improved. Further, these community institutions which are normally voluntary need to be legally recognized as the service provider. It may not be possible for the elected water committee to manage all the day-to-day O&M and administration work related to the piped water supply, and this may necessitate the sub-contracting of some of their tasks to a trained individual(s).

Apart from general awareness-raising in villages regarding the scheme, the committee needs to undergo an intensive preparatory period of capacity building before/during and after the construction of piped water supply. Only then will a collective initiative emerge from the community to take the responsibility for effective O&M of the scheme.

Gender and Social Inclusion

More thought needs to go into equity and gender considerations while designing the institutional arrangements, tariffs and technical design of the systems. Formal arrangements are needed where poorest households from socially marginalized groups, female-headed households etc., are exempt from payment. Overall, the tariff should take into consideration the community's ability to pay.

There is a need to actively promote women's role beyond just recipients of water services, and ensure through good gender

mainstreaming, practices that play an important role in the O&M of piped water supply. A gender-balanced community oversight role can be ensured through building the capabilities of the women in the management of piped water supply. A quota exists in the VWSC rules already for women; the programme can ensure that at least 50% of the community facilitators and service providers (pump operator) must be women. In general, care should be taken to maintain a fifty-fifty balance in the percentage of men and women engaged in initiating, siting, implementing, using, and O&M of piped water supply for proper gender mainstreaming.

Financial Sustainability

To sustain and expand the piped water supply scheme coverage at the designed service level delivery, ensure sustainability and to deal with its inefficiencies, there is a need to have a financing strategy based on a sound understanding of capital investment needs, operating expenditure, financial flows, different sources of funding and depreciation costs. Low sustainability of capital investments in most cases can be traced to the fact that while infrastructure is available, there is a lack of investment in asset maintenance i.e., there is a paucity of funds for operating costs. This undermines the continuous supply of services, and can eventually lead to facilities that underperform or go defunct.

Institutional support costs need to be considered right from the start as this helps maintain the expected service levels into account such as on capacity-building of local institutions or service providers (pump operator/mechanic), monitoring of water quality, administration (book-keeping etc.,) as well as the enforcement of regulations. For the schemes to be scalable, attention needs to be paid to cost-effective innovations that lead to better operational standards. The JJM apart from incentivizing adequate governance is also injecting public funds into capital

investments. There needs to be more clarity on the maintenance and the covering of operating costs and if a regular allocation of additional public funds would be done for them through GP funds for community-managed piped water supply services. It is still not clear whether water tariffs will be charged that enable the recovery of operating costs, as well as the depreciation costs and a surplus created to reduce dependence on government subsidies. Overall, there is a need to develop capacities to handle/monitor expenditure as well as the service level in the piped water supply to improve the accountability systems in the sector.

Source Sustainability

The success of the piped water supply also depends on source sustainability as well as the technology choice and construction quality of the infrastructure. Source sustainability needs to be taken into consideration during the design stage to maintain the desired quantity and water quality standard throughout the design life of the piped water supply. The depletion of water levels in groundwater and surface water sources is considered to be a major constraint along with water contamination due to saltwater ingress, fluoride, arsenic or other geogenic contaminants.

To address this, there is a need to shift focus from dependence on a single source to multiple sources. Also, water budgeting needs to be done to ensure household-level drinking water security. Issues related to reject management need to be addressed so that the contaminants do not re-enter into water, environment or food. Groundwater aquifer recharge through recharge structures and surface water harvesting needs to be prioritized.

Way Forward

The functionality of community-managed piped water supply schemes in rural settlements can be sustained with strong state-recognized community organizations in place that receive "external technical, managerial, financial, and social resources to maintain service levels" (Hutchings et al, 2015; Machado et al, 2019). Experience from the ground indicates that well-functioning committees and the larger involvement of beneficiaries in decision-making and implementation of piped water supply solutions can increase the efficiency of the operations, improve effectiveness/sustainability, enhance user satisfaction and lead to better equity outcomes.

VWSCs are a mandated standing committee of the GP but rarely exist on the ground. These need to be created and their capacities strengthened. "When decentralized schemes are functioning at a habitation level; a local water management committee often has to be created. There needs to be a mechanism for recognition of sub-committees of the GP and VWSC to manage decentralized water supply schemes. This formal recognition will ease opening and operation of bank accounts and can support receipt of funds from the GP" (Bora, 2019).

While an enabling environment has been created through dedicated national/ state/district level organizations and specially designed units with the formal mandate to build institutions as well as develop professional capacities to manage them, for sustainable services delivery, a combination of community engagement and continued state support is required. This backed by the state's long term responsibility for service provision and support – technical, financial (deficit financing as only a part of O&M costs can be raised through tariff) and managerial to handle the services can go a long way in improving the functioning and sustainability of the system. "The VWSCs should be

professionalized to take over the operation, administration and management of the systems. The operator should be trained or a cadre of self-employed mechanics developed in the area for minor repairs and the committee should be aware of the supply chain for spares/services needed by the system to reduce the downtime period for repair" (Bhaduri, 2020).

Financing mechanism under programmes such as JJM should enable full life-cycle costs to be met, particularly capital maintenance and post construction support. GPs should play an important part in leveraging resources to support capital maintenance expenses i.e., major repairs and replacement. There should be clear tariff policy in place to enable operational expenses recovery along with subsidy mechanism to support the marginalized. There is a need to prepare local government annual maintenance and medium-term asset management plan and ring-fence budgets. Also, pooled support and financing mechanisms need to be established for major capital maintenance by local governments.

The technical agency of the government should provide close supervision as well as undertake inspection and audit of installations, replacement of spare parts and preventive maintenance. Under JJM, the capacities of the state, district and block need to be strengthened and institutional support through Block Resource Centres/Institutional Support Agency/cadres of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) etc., is needed to scale up the capacity-building interventions in state-wide programmes on piped water supply. This needs to be provided for high levels of post-construction support to the community managed system.

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Prospects and New Trends in Tourism in the Post COVID Era and Strategic Policy Options for Sustainable Tourism in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has generated unprecedented impact for the world turning it into life changing situations for individuals, organizations, industries and community. Tourism is one of the hardest hit industries due to the pandemic, with travel bans, closing of borders, lockdowns of countries and cities and quarantine periods severely impacting national economies including their tourism value chain, that is accommodation, travel and transport, gastronomy, MICE sector and the entertainment industry. With the tourism industry bouncing back, this paper attempts to identify the changes and new trends that can be expected in the global tourism industry particularly highlighting the role of slow tourism, technologies, travel behaviours which ensure the economic, social, and environmental sustainability in post-COVID era. Further, strategic policy options to rejuvenate and rebuild the tourism industry in Sri Lanka while ensuring the confidence and safety of travellers are also presented in this paper. It is concluded that creation of a new tourism ecosystem is a shared responsibility of all the stakeholders in the tourism industry globally.

Keywords: COVID-19, New Normal, Slow Tourism, Sustainability

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Introduction

Unlike the previous pandemic outbreaks such as SARS in 2002, H1N1 in 2009, MERS in 2012, and Ebola which was peaked in 2013, the COVID-19 still remains as the deadliest global pandemic of the 21st century. The COVID-19 outbreak has created the largest healthcare, financial, economic, and educational crises in the world in this century so far. Consequently, majority of the existing systems, practices, and protocols are now irrelevant and invalid due to this catastrophic outbreak. It has already altered the lives and livelihood of the people around the globe providing a new perspective towards almost every aspect of the societies.

One of the severely affected industries due to this deadly epidemic is tourism which is the third largest export sector in the global economy (UNWTO, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic episode has caused severe downturns for many tourism dependent economies of both developed and developing countries. On the other hand, international tourism and business travels may have accelerated the spread of the deadly virus across the globe (Farzanegan et al., 2020). Škare et al. (2021) highlight that the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry is incomparable to the effect of previous pandemic outbreaks.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), from January to October in 2020, the export revenue lost from international tourism sector recorded as US$ 935 billion which is ten times larger than the loss of global economic crisis in 2009 (UNWTO, 2020). It is further expected that this will reduce global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 1.5% to 2.8% affecting economies and livelihood of both developed and developing countries. This will result in an economic loss of US$ 2 trillion in global GDP (UNWTO, 2020). On the other hand, one out of ten

people in the world depend on tourism industry directly or indirectly and 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs are at risk due to the decline of international tourists' arrival by 70-75%. Consequently, UNWTO (2020) predicts that the tourism industry will bounce back to its 1990s level.

The time when both the global economy and social life of people restore or become stable is still uncertain even one year after the outbreak (Tsai, 2021). However, the global tourism industry and the related service sectors and providers are now preparing for the recovery stage. Therefore, it is of paramount importance in identifying the impacts and new prospects in the tourism industry to be more resilient in the new normal context. Further, this will assist in making policy decisions by the governments in recovery and post-recovery stage. This paper shed lights on the changing tourism prospects and strategic policy options for sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka.

Tourism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, an island blessed with numerous natural and cultural attractions, was still boosting its international tourism after the tragedy of Easter Sunday attack when the COVID-19 started spreading rapidly around the globe. The country's economy is of US$ 84 billion and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner after foreign remittance and textile industry (CBSL, 2020). Sri Lanka tourism contributes approximately 5% to the national GDP and it is inevitable to the economy since 11% from total employment is also generated through tourism (SLTDA, 2019). However, Sri Lanka suspended international tourist arrivals from all countries on 18 March, 2020 due to the COVID-19. On the other hand, the country's top five source markets; India, United Kingdom (UK), China, Germany, and France, have been severely

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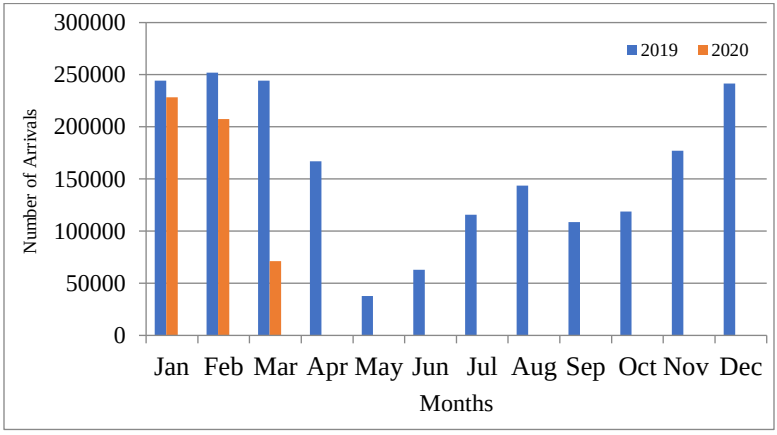
affected by the pandemic both in terms of spread of the virus and the mortality rate. Yet, the country was highly praised and recognized internationally in the initial months of the pandemic for its successful control of the outbreak. Thus, it was planned to reopen the country for international leisure tourism in August, 2020, but unfortunately reopening had to be abandoned due to emergence of the second wave of the pandemic.

The following graph reveals the movement of international tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka in 2019 and 2020 until the country's border is shutdown.

Figure 1 – International Tourist Arrivals into Sri Lanka



Source: SLTDA, 2020

Since the tourism is an umbrella industry, no country, no company, or no individual can recover on its own or by themselves. Temporary shut downs and lockdowns of tourism and tourism supporting businesses may create many unparalleled socio-economic impacts (Williams and Kayaoglu, 2020). Moving skilled workforce away from the tourism industry is one among many critical issues in Sri Lankan context. However, the Sri

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Lankan government has taken few initiatives to prevent moving the skilled workforce from vulnerable tourism sector to other stable industries. Offering cash grants, tax relief/extensions, loans/loan repayment support, rules alleviation, license fee waivers for businesses, retraining tourism workers to support the health crisis, and extending visa period of foreign employees and tourists stranded in Sri Lanka due to port closure are few among them.

Prospects and New Trends in Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic episode may change the societies and economies globally including the tourism sector. The tourism essentially involves human interaction and movement. Thus, the pandemic has significant impact on travel behaviour and interests of tourists. According to Assaf and Scuderi (2020), the government should play a crucial role in the recovery stage of the tourism industry since there will be many differences, which are discussed below, in the industry after the pandemic.

The world is now moving to new normal situation and tourism has also been rejuvenated with many prospects. The researchers need to understand and predict the changes in the industry in order to contribute to ensure a sustainable post-COVID tourism sector. Therefore, these new trends and prospects, discussed below, should be taken into consideration, when planning and implementing new policies and strategies by relevant regulatory bodies and tourism service providers.

Prime focus on health, safety, and hygiene

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) has emphasized that health, safety, and hygiene will be of prime

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concern of the tourists in the new normal context. Tourism suppliers such as hotels, restaurants, travel agents, entertainment and activities, Destination Management Companies, Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions (MICE) operators, airlines, cruise lines, and other transport service providers should implement many strategies to ensure the safety, security, and hygiene of their operations to lure tourists. It is mandatory to introduce necessary protocols to the tourism stakeholders in close collaboration with medical experts and industry leaders. Consequently, the UNWTO and other governing authorities have set new protocols to be followed and therefore tourism service providers are obliged to provide necessary facilities to tourists such as health certificate requirement, mandatory room and public area disinfections, provision of hand sanitizers, maintenance of proper ventilation, and effective screening and crisis communication procedures and so forth. Incorporating operational changes and new employee practices may increase the cost of the tourism businesses. However, contentedly, the tourists in new normal era will pay even a premium price to the service providers who ensure the safety during their tours. This has been further confirmed by a survey carried out by Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA, 2020) involving more than 1200 tourists. Thus, it will be a win-win situation for both tourism practitioners and tourists.

Sustainability as the New Normal

Three pandemics: Spanish flu, Asian flu, and Honk Kong flu, were occurred in the 20th century and, four pandemics have already occurred in the 21st century (Gössling et al., 2020). The irresponsible and unsustainable practices in social, cultural, economic, and environmental activities of human beings have led

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the world into a disaster including the increased number of pandemics occurring frequently. Tourism activities, including different modes of travelling, irresponsible travel behaviours and so forth are also contributing in increasing the risk of epidemics and frequency of epidemics directly and indirectly. However, the COVID-19 has given the world a unique opportunity to seriously reflect on what kind of planet we envision for the present and future of all living beings. Therefore, according to UNWTO (2020), sustainability should no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of tourism chain.

At the COVID-19 recovery stage, the governments and other relevant authorities should consider introducing new tourism models which are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable in long run. UNWTO's The One Planet Sustainable Tourism Program, Hilton's Travel with Purpose Program, Programs of Tourism Cares, Impact Travel Alliance are few examples on how the world is embarking on restarting tourism in a sustainable way. The entire sector including tourism service providers, travellers, local communities, and regulatory bodies should make an extra and conscious effort on learning their roles in new sustainable tourism models. Tourism stakeholders can support and ensure the sustainability through abiding with health and safety protocols, supporting local communities and small scale businesses, protecting culture and heritage, educating travellers on sustainable behaviours, preserving natural environment, understanding humans' impact on the environment, and many more. It should be a continuous process of combined efforts which need expert knowledge and vast experience for shifting towards sustainable tourism. These measures will ensure and take care of the entire tourism industry to everyone's betterment.

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Travel in small groups avoiding crowded places

Since tourism had come to a standstill and social distancing was paramount, even a small-scale tourism activity could have produced harmful outcomes in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the world is now shifting towards a new normal situation and new forms of travel behaviours can be expected. Mainly the demand for mass tourism; where large number of tourists travel together to popular destinations, will not be the same in this new normal era as it used to be. Seraphin and Dosquet (2020) also share the same opinion that the travellers may select less crowded destinations that practice social distancing. Particularly at the initial recovery stage, the potential tourists may tend to travel in smaller groups avoiding crowded destinations. Tourists' desire to spend more time in open spaces, with fresh air ensuring their personal wellbeing will be of major concern. Travelling with family members or close friends using private guides, drivers, and vehicles will give them the sense of confidence and security. Further, the demand for small scale accommodation providers and homestays will be drastically increased over high-density large-scale hotels.

On the other hand, it would give the travellers the benefit of last minute amendments or cancellations by the service providers easily than for larger travel groups. Providing free cancellations and flexible pre-sale bookings to tourists is important in this uncertain condition after experiencing the biggest pandemic in the modern history. Further, the airline sector will experience an increased demand for direct flights or direct connectivity to destinations over transit flights to ensure minimum contact and lower possibility of transmission.

Role of slow tourism

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Slow tourism where tourists are staying in one destination for a long time; for weeks or even for months exploring local people and their culture will have a new trend in the post-COVID era. In slow tourism, travellers interact with less number of people yet experience a lot deeply during their tour without feeling overwhelmed by restrictions and fear. The concepts such as Community Based Tourism, Rural Tourism, and Home Stay Tourism have a major role in slow tourism which highlights quality over quantity while encouraging many sustainable tourism practices. Small scale, local tourism service providers play a vital role and their livelihood will be well secured in Slow Tourism. Therefore, governments should introduce mechanisms to promote small scale local tourism businesses.

Technology will be essential and not an option

Technology is no longer an option in the post-COVID 19 era, but an essential for every traveller irrespective of their demographic background. In order to limit the interaction between employees and guests and to prevent the contamination, contactless solutions are needed. Technology plays a vital role in it and the tourism and hospitality practitioners need to prepare themselves to survive in the new technologically oriented context. However, in this crisis, with reduced income, it will be an additional cost for them to apply new technological features while implementing the safety measures insisted by the authorities. Hence, tourism and hospitality service providers advised to reevaluate their business models to adapt in the new normal context (Fotiadis et al., 2021). Along with the new technological solutions, the concern for security in digital services and identity protections has also increased among travellers. The digital assistance with human interfaces such as self-check-in and

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check-out, contactless paying methods, mobile apps, mobile room keys, robotic maids, in-room technologies for entertainment and e-shopping, and virtual tours etc. will increase the comfort and confidence of travellers in the post-COVID era.

Thriving through Domestic Tourism

The international travel restrictions still remain in many countries in the world and consequently the bounce back of international tourism is not in sight. Understanding and accepting the vitality of promoting domestic tourism as an alternative for the standstill international tourism by the governments and regulatory bodies is crucial in the new normal context. Consequently, the countries with high tourism dependent economies have already commenced promoting domestic tourism to lead the recovery of their tourism sectors. Demand for domestic air travel has strikingly increased and returned to pre-COVID levels in countries such as China and Russia (Fotiadis et al., 2021). In many countries, at the initial stage, the domestic tourism was limited only to visiting friends and relatives, but gradually it was expanded further to leisure travels. Therefore, the countries should keep encouraging their domestic travels further by introducing domestic tourism promotional campaigns, increasing the affordability of tourism products and services, loosening restrictions, and gradually lifting lockdowns are motivating people to travel again. On the other hand, people who have been stranded in their homes for long time are itching to get out and move again particularly within their home countries due to the fear of infection and uncertainty.

According to UNWTO (2020), Malaysia allocated US$ 113 million worth of travel discount vouchers and personal tax relief of up to US$ 227 for encouraging domestic tourism. Costa Rica has moved all their holidays of 2020 and 2021 into Mondays

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to enjoy long weekends to travel domestically. France also has launched a campaign called *#CetÉtéJeVisiteLaFrance* ('This Summer, I visit France') highlighting diverse destinations across France. However, it should be kept in mind that even though promoting domestic tourism is comparatively easier and is beneficial in short term, highly tourism dependant countries may not be able fill the gap entirely by domestic tourism.

Crowd Management

As health and safety is the biggest concern for travellers in new normal situation, tourism regulatory bodies must and will incorporate many measures to avoid overcrowding and to control the crowd in destinations. Smart tourism, in which information and communication technology is highly involved, will be of a great benefit in controlling the crowds, screening and crowd management in tourism destinations. Automated technologies in monitoring physical distancing in crowds will be highly beneficial in smart tourism. Further, it allows monitoring and tracing of the ttravellers' movement across destinations which is an important aspect of both crowd management and controlling COVID-19. However, it should not be ignored that implementing these new technologies may lead to many challenges such as securing the privacy and sensitive information of the tourists while providing real-time precise tracking information with high accuracy.

These new prospects and patterns emerged during COVID-19 pandemic should be key concerns in introducing and implementing new policies and strategies by any governments, authorities, and/or service providers. Moreover, it is mandatory to be conscious that some of these prospects are temporary while some of them may redefine the tourism sector in new normal and in years to come.

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Recovery and resilience

The entire world is dominated by health concerns which apply to tourism industry as well. Therefore, at the recovery stage, numerous actions should be put in place to ensure the destinations are safe to travel. Rebuilding consumer trust and confident is paramount to protect not only the travellers but also all the stakeholders in the tourism industry. In order to reassure the trust and confident of travellers, Sri Lankan government; Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), has taken many initiatives which are listed below.

- Introducing a comprehensive operational guideline with health protocols
- Issuing COVID-19 safety compliance certification for hotels by SLTDA
- Introducing all-inclusive Sri Lanka Tourism App
- Working closely with the Ministry of Defence
- Obtaining "Safe Travel" Stamp issue by World Travel and Tourism Council

Additionally, national and regional tourism organizations should change their strategic approach towards tourism. SLTDA should develop a strong and long-term vision for a sustainable future of tourism in Sri Lanka in collaboration with wide range of consultation representing all levels of tourism stakeholders such as all sizes of tourism service providers, communities, acidemias, and the travelers. Ensuring that all parties are well aware and understood of their roles in sustainable tourism is vital for the success of the effort.

In addition, I would like to suggest that the domestic tourism sector should be strengthened and stimulated through various strategies as mentioned earlier in this article. Crowd management and crowd control guidelines should be put into

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practice by the government and the support of law enforcement bodies should be employed. Thereafter, regional cooperation with neighboring countries towards restoration of the industry is vital since the travellers will begin to explore regional countries in the second recovery phase.

Formal regional partnerships with neighboring countries allow governments to focus on next level of recovery through sharing the lessons learned. Understanding travellers' new behavioural patterns, monitoring search demand, emerging trends and sharing them at the regional and international levels is also vital in post-COVID era. Further, Establishing travel bubbles; Travel Corridors or Air Bridges, will establish a safe zone between two countries or among group of known counties.

The countries which are highly depending on international tourism from one of few specific countries; source markets will be highly benefited from travel bubbles. Consequently, Sri Lanka can consider their major source markets such as China, India, UK, Germany, and France etc. In addition to that, with the time, facilitating and improving accessibility for international tourists in second or third phase of the recovery stage can be considered in various ways such as removing visa restrictions, improving access to infrastructure (roads, ports, rail, and air), aviation deregulation, and easing border crossing formalities.

However, only after ensuring the control of spreading the COVID-19 virus through effective measurements, can the Sri Lankan tourism pay attention on applying recovery strategies to all the possible source markets despite the fact whether there are travel bubbles or not. The existing markets in Europe and Middle East and other possible potential markets can be strategically approached thereafter.

However, we cannot deny the fact that social distancing rule and other health instructions must be followed for a long time until a successful vaccine against the virus becomes available.

(This Policy Perspective is based on the speech made by the author on "Changing tourism prospects during Covid-19: Policy options for sustainable tourism in Sri Lanka" at the #WebPolicyTalk by South Asian Studies Center, IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi on 5 January, 2021. The lecture can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ow0n-UXPL8)

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History Matters:
A Comparative Exploration on the Spanish Flu and the COVID-19 in India

Jenia Mukherjee[1]

Abstract

The history of the world is the history of pestilences, epidemics and pandemics, affecting humanity – storylines of getting bogged down and bouncing back to crises. The influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 has been called the greatest medical holocaust in history and the mother of all pandemics. The country that faced the greatest devastation in terms of human mortality from influenza is India. After a century, India has been hit by COVID-19, the greatest pandemic of the contemporary times, exposing systemic failures in the functioning of the statecraft. This article is a comparative exploration of the two pandemics along survey of historical sources and secondary scholarship to finally forge the critical discussion: are we in a better position to tackle crisis? Lessons from previous pandemics, most importantly the Spanish Flu of 1918 can be significant in terms of analysis and assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the country – then and now. This article conveys the larger rationale of looking back to look and move forward in terms of crafting just, inclusive and resilient policies from a diseased to a desirable (non)Anthropocene.

Keywords: Spanish Flu, COVID-19; India; SWOT; history

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Introduction

The history of the world is the history of pestilence, epidemics and pandemics, affecting humanity – storylines of getting bogged down and bouncing back to crises. The word 'quarantine' is derived from the Italian *quaranta*, meaning 'forty'. Frank M. Snowden (2019) explains in *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present* that the practice of quarantine originated long before people understood what, exactly, they were trying to contain. Moreover, the period of forty days was chosen not for medical reasons but for scriptural ones, "as both the Old and New Testaments make multiple references to the number forty in the context of purification: the forty days and forty nights of the flood in Genesis, the forty years of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness…and the forty days of Lent." From bubonic plague to small pox to cholera to avian influenza to recent pandemics like Ebola, SARS, MERS, etc. the world has been ravaged time and again only to re-emerge as a resilient system. However, the frequency in the disruption of pandemics, shaping and in turn getting shaped by the Anthropocene are warning signals, pushing us to rethink our strategies towards resilience planning. It is imperative to turn to the pages of history to learn more about the pandemics of the past, to devise strategies of the present, and remain ever more prepared for the future. This article is based on a comparative exploratory study between the Spanish Flu of 1918 and the COVID-19 within the Indian context.

That the 1918 Flu was a pandemic finds clear justification in the most recent book (2017) on the topic: *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World* by Laura Spinney. Spinney (2017) pointed out*, "In 1918, the Italian-Americans of New York, the Yuptik of Alaska and the*

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residents of the Persian shrine city of Mashed had almost nothing in common – except for a virus."

The influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 has been called the "greatest medical holocaust in history" (Waring, 1971: 33) and the "mother of all pandemics" (Taubenberger and Morens, 2006). In *The Great Influenza: the Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*, historian John M. Barry (2005) estimated that globally, the 1918 pandemic killed more people in a year than what the Black Death of the Middle Ages killed in a century. More people died in this flu in 24 weeks than the fatalities caused by HIV/AIDS in 24 years! The country that faced the greatest devastation in terms of human mortality from influenza is India (Johnson and Mueller, 2002). The enormous numbers of casualties and people sickened by the virus had consequences that lingered through successive generations at least till the middle of the 20th century (Almond, 2006; Johnson and Mueller, 2002; Mazumder et al., 2010; Mills, 1986; Morens et al., 2009).

After a century India has been hit by COVID-19, the greatest pandemic of the contemporary times, exposing systemic failures in the functioning of the statecraft. Indian socio-political complexities have made her situation extremely challenging, which is evident during the second wave of the crisis. Lessons from previous pandemics, most importantly the Spanish Flu of 1918 can be significant in terms of analysis and assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the country – then and now. This article conveys the larger rationale of looking back to look and move forward in terms of crafting just, inclusive and resilient policies from a diseased to a desirable (non) Anthropocene.

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The Outbreaks

The 1918 pandemic was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is no universal consensus regarding where the virus originated and it is commonly called the Spanish Flu, the 1918 pandemic likely began in Kansas and killed between 50 and 100 million people worldwide. [2]During the early months of 1918, the virus incubated throughout the American Midwest, eventually making its way east, where it travelled across the Atlantic Ocean with soldiers deploying for WWI (Fig. 3). M. Chunn who completed her thesis entitled *Death and Disorder: The 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic in British India* in 2015, has recently written a more popular piece tracing the route of the virus:

> *"Introduced into the trenches on Europe's Western Front, the virus tore through the already weakened troops. As the war approached its conclusion, the virus followed both commercial shipping routes and military transports to infect almost every corner of the globe. It arrived in Mumbai in late May."*

In *An unwanted shipment: The Indian experience of the 1918 Spanish flu*, the Stanford University Professor Amit Kapoor (2020) describes:

> *"A ship carrying Indian troops reached the shores of Bombay on the 29th day of May in 1918. It remained anchored to the city's docks for about 48 hours. The world was on its last leg of the First World War, so the Bombay ports were usually busy with the movement of troops and goods back and forth from England. The*

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> *ship, thus, remained an inconspicuous visitor on its waters among the humdrum of activity around it. However, the city was not prepared for some unusual cargo that had come unbeknown to anyone on the ship: lethal strains of the H1N1 influenza virus right from the trenches on the Western front."*

An element of racism can be traced in the colonial attitude about the outbreak of the disease. The British authorities differed over the source of the infection. Though the then British Health Inspector J.S. Turner believed that the people on the docked ship were carriers of the disease and they brought the influenza to Bombay, yet the government believed that the crew had caught the flu from inside the city itself. In *Western Medicine and Public Health in Colonial Bombay* 1845-1895, medical historian Mridula Ramanna (2002) shed light on the perils of racism evident in colonial India: "This had been the characteristic response of the authorities, to attribute any epidemic that they could not control to India and what was invariably termed the 'insanitary condition' of Indians." Local newspapers complained that the British officials stayed in the hills during the emergency throwing common people to face crisis by themselves.

There is scientific controversy on the origin of COVID-19. It was projected that in late 2019, someone at the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan was infected with a virus from an animal. From that first cluster in the capital of China's Hubei province it became a global pandemic affecting almost every country in the world. There is uncertainty on the animal from which the virus has been transmitted. While some studies demonstrate that it has high level of similarity with viruses found among pangolins (Cyranoski, 2020), others have compiled evidences to suggest that it is bat-borne (Zhou et al., 2020).

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Scientists assume that it is likely that the virus came from bats but first passed through an intermediary animal in the same way like the 2002 SARS outbreak – moved from horseshoe bats to cat-like civets before infecting humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it to be a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 with massive rate of human transmission simultaneously across different parts of the world. The first case of the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic in India was reported on January 30, 2020 from Kerala, which rose to three cases on February 3. The affected people were students who had returned from Wuhan, China.

Transmissions at Clock-speed

J.S. Turner, remarked that the disease came “like a thief in the night, its onset rapid and insidious" (quoted in Biswas, 2020). Originally being spread from the port (of Bombay), Indian transportation system played an important role in the diffusion of the disease. “The railway played a prominent part as was inevitable,” remarked the Sanitary Commissioner (1920). From the hilltops of Shimla to the isolated villages of Bihar, no part of the country remained unaffected. The speed and extent of the fatalities were overwhelming.

Bombay remained the entry point of the disease. There were two distinct epidemic waves, a mild one in the spring or summer of 1918, and a second and much more lethal one in the autumn or winter. The second wave originated in Bombay in September 1918, simultaneously spreading north and south, and reaching Sri Lanka and the northern Indian provinces in October 1918 (Patterson and Pyle, 1991).

It was the first to experience the first and second waves of the epidemic, with an autumn wave that was shorter and more

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pronounced than those for the other cities like Madras and Calcutta. Madras experienced the wave slightly later and in a less (albeit still) pronounced manner, and Calcutta experienced a prolonged but altogether less prominent second wave. That there is a direct correlation between location, timing, duration, and severity of the pandemic had been manifested through the progress of the pandemic across British Indian cities. The provincial death rate in the Bombay Presidency was a relatively high 54.9 people per thousand inhabitants (Sanitary Commissioner Report, 1920).

The most detailed study and robust analysis of the speed and duration of the virulent autumn wave of the disease as it evolved and diffused throughout India has been conducted by Chandra and Kassens-Noor (2014), estimating weekly deaths through computational statistics in 213 districts from nine provinces: Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, Northwest Frontier Province, Punjab, and United Provinces for the five-year period from 1916 to 1920.

Different regions of India experienced successive episodes of peak mortality. The week of October 13, 1918 shows the early regional peaks in the western province of Bombay, the south-eastern province of Madras, and a small area on the eastern coast of India near the important Hindu pilgrimage site of Puri. Four weeks later, the epidemic peaked in the Central Provinces and the northwestern province of Punjab (week of November 10). Finally, another four weeks later, the epidemic peaked in the northern and eastern parts of the United Provinces, Bihar, and Bengal (week of December 8). This last set of peaks appears more scattered and sporadic than the more synchronous peaks seen in Bombay, Madras, the Central Provinces, and Punjab.

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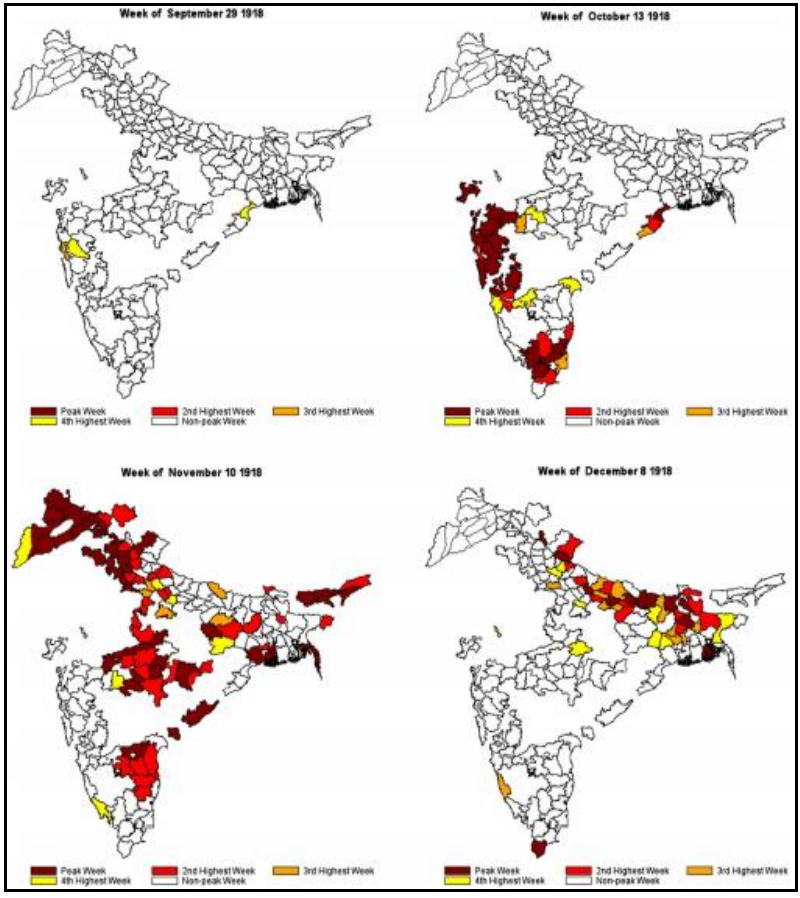
Figure 1: Districts with peak mortality, 1918-1919



Source: Chandra and Kassens-Noor, 2014: 2

The above four maps are striking in that they demonstrate that over time (a) the severity of the epidemic diminished (b) the velocity (average time to death) of the wave slowed down (c) the wave grew longer in duration and (d) the eastern portions of India were the last to experience the pandemic (Chandra and Kassens-Noor, 2014) (Map 1). The severity of the wave was

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negatively correlated with the length and variance of the wave, suggesting that waves that lasted longer tended to have lower peak mortality weeks. Weather might also have played an important role in the spread of the pandemic. Humidity hypothesis by Shaman and Kohn (2009) and Shaman et al. (2010) suggest that absolute humidity constrains both influenza virus survival and transmission efficiency. Bengal and Bihar were least severely affected. Bombay had a paucity of rains and the summer monsoon ended early which might had triggered the virus spread during autumn. Calcutta, which had a wetter and longer summer monsoon than Bombay, may have been spared the virulence of the pandemic because of higher humidity.

On 4 March, 2020, 22 new cases came to light, including those of an Italian tourist group with 14 infected members. The transmission escalated during March, after several cases were reported all over the country, most of which were linked to people with a travel history to affected countries.

Different incidents (religious and social gatherings) triggered the disease to travel from on stage to the other. A Sikh preacher who returned from travel to Italy and Germany, carrying the virus, attended a Sikh festival in Anandpur Sahib between March 10 and 12. Twenty-seven COVID-19 cases were traced back to him. Over 40,000 people in 20 villages in Punjab were quarantined on March 27 to contain the spread. On March 31, a Tablighi Jamaat religious congregation event took place in Delhi. The location emerged as a new virus hotspot after numerous cases across the country were traced back to the event. Over 9,000 missionaries may have attended the congregation, with the majority being from various states of India, and 960 attendees from 40 foreign countries. According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), 4,291 out of 14,378 confirmed cases were linked to this event in 23 Indian states and

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union territories till April 18. The cases kept increasing and within a short period of time, India reached the third stage of community transmission. An Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) research found that 40 among a total of 104 (over one-third) COVID-positive cases in a sample of 5,911 severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) patients had no history of international travel or contact with any known COVID-19 case. The sampling was done from 41 sentinel surveillance sites across 52 districts in 20 states/union territories. The 40 cases with no apparent link to identifiable source of infection were from 36 districts in 15 states, and that is a large fraction (69%) of the identified districts for surveillance (Ramachandran, 2020).

Though subsequent phases of the Indian lockdown could arrest transmission, the second wave between March and May 2021 with the peak period affecting 4 lacs people on a daily average in early and mid-May also led to the proliferation of COVID in rural quarters.[3] The mutant varieties remained woes nation-wide leading to rapid outspread of the disease and in some cases compromised immunities and reduced effectiveness of the vaccine. India's complacent attitude during the intermittent period and violation of COVID-19 protocols through mass social and political (election) gatherings led her to encounter the avoidable disaster and its multi-faceted implications apart from and along with loss of lives and livelihoods.

Unfortunately, the weather factor or the humidity hypothesis does not seem to hold ground in the disease transmission. A nine-page report submitted to the White House by the Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and 21st Century Health Threats of the U.S. National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine entitled *Rapid Expert Consultation on SARS-CoV-2 Survival in Relation to*

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Temperature and Humidity and Potential for Seasonality for Pandemic COVID-19 mentions:

> *"Although experimental studies show a relationship between higher temperatures and humidity levels, and reduced survival of SARS-CoV-2 in the laboratory, there are many other factors besides environmental temperature, humidity, and survival of the virus outside of the host, that influence and determine transmission rates among humans in the 'real world'."*

Implications across Provinces/States, Cities and Communities

The pandemic affected a third of the world's population and claimed between 50 and 100 million lives. The focal point of the epidemic in terms of mortality was India, with an estimated death toll range of 10–20 million, and a point estimate of population loss of 13.8 million for the British-controlled provinces, more than all the casualties in World War I. India lost 6% of its population.

The northern and western provinces of India saw death rates between 4.5% and 6% of their total populations, while the southern and eastern provinces (where the virus had a late entry), lost between 1.5% and 3%. In terms of severity, Bombay, the Central Provinces, and parts of Madras were hardest hit. Calcutta had a mild surge. In Bombay, 768 people died in a single day on October 6, 1918. Nearly every house in Bombay has some of its inmates down with fever. The severity and mortality in cities were much higher. Spinney (2017) mentions:

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> *"It led to famine in large parts of the country, so the flu is going to pick on people who are already weak. On top of that a lot of doctors were away at the war. Death rates were higher in cities than in country areas as a rule. Bombay was a very unhealthy place at the time because you have refugees flooding in from the countryside who were starving. Population of the city was swollen and there was also cholera, because of the refugee problem."*

The highly infectious Spanish Flu had swept through the ashram in Gujarat where 48-year-old Gandhi was living, four years after he had returned from South Africa. He rested, stuck to a liquid diet during "this protracted and first long illness" of his life. When news of his illness spread, a local newspaper wrote: "Gandhi's life does not belong to him - it belongs to India" (Spinney, 2017).

The 'colonial divide' had severe ramifications manifested through spatial inequities across 'white' and 'black' settlements. While the British inhabited spacious houses with gardens and yards, the lower classes of city-dwelling Indians lived in densely populated areas. The rich colonizers could employ household staff to care for them in times of health and sickness. They were only lightly touched by the pandemic and were largely unconcerned by the chaos sweeping through the country. In his official correspondence in early December, the Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces did not even mention influenza, instead noting "Everything is very dry; but I managed to get two hundred couple of snipe so far this season." To the Indians, it was devastation beyond redemption. The fatalities across the social divide clearly brings out structural inequities in colonial India (Figure 2).

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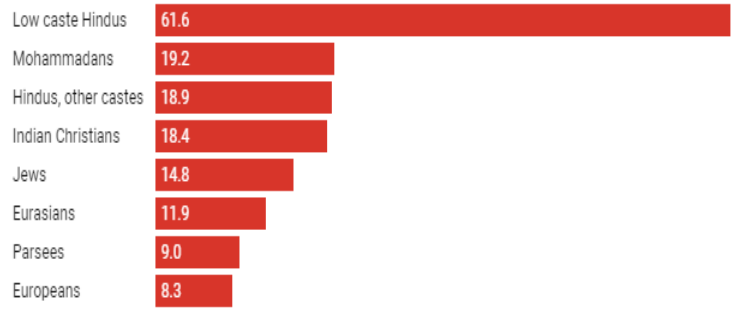
Figure 2: Higher mortality rates among poor and vulnerable communities



Source: A 1919 British Report summarizing the previous year's death tolls per 1,000 people in Bombay, cited in Chandra et al., 2012.

The Health Officer for Calcutta remarked on the stark difference in death rates between British and lower-class Indians: "The excessive mortality in Kidderpore appears to be due mainly to the large coolie population, ignorant and poverty-stricken, living under most insanitary conditions in damp, dark, dirty huts. They are a difficult class to deal with." Among Indians in Mumbai, socioeconomic disparities in addition to race accounted for these differing mortality rates. In Mumbai, almost seven-and-a-half times as many lower-caste Indians died as compared to their British counterparts - 61.6 per thousand versus 8.3 per thousand.

Again, India was the only country where more women than men died across all age groups. Spinney (2017) explains:

> *"One theory is that women tended to eat less well. Boys and men were given priority where food was concerned in many households. Women were also more likely to nurse the sick. Not only were they more exposed to the disease as a rule but they were also less resistant*

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> *because they were more likely to be malnourished. There may have been a factor of vegetarianism, it is not clear."*

Bodies piled up. There was not enough firewood to cremate them. A delayed and failed monsoon led to a drought and famine-like situation, leaving people underfed and weak, making matters worse. Many migrated to the cities triggering the rapid transmission of the disease. Nearly every household was the Hindi poet, Suryakant Tripathi, popularly known as Nirala, wrote in his memoirs that "Ganga was swollen with dead bodies." And it was not just Ganga that was clogged up with bodies, but all rivers across India. "The burning ghats and burial grounds were literally swamped with corpses; whilst an even greater number awaited removal" (quoted in Chunn, 2020).

In the last 120 years of recorded economic history in India, 1918 was the worst (Figure 2). Recorded growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) was the lowest (-10.5%) while inflation was near all-time highs, a cocktail much worse than any other tragedy that has hit India—including the world wars or the Bengal famine. 1918 was a unique phase in India's macroeconomic history and a supply-side shock as people had to stay home.

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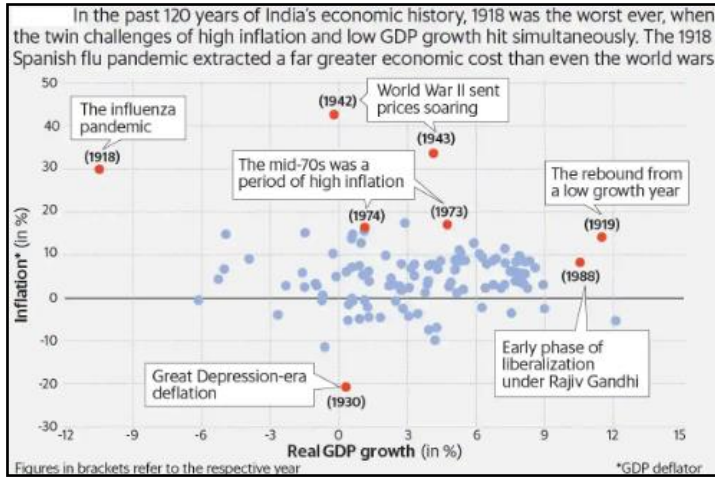
Figure 3: The GDP compared to other big events



Source: Central Statistics Office, OECD, retrieved from https://www.livemint.com/. Accessed on April 27, 2020.

The implications of COVID-19 are highly un-uniform across different regions and social communities. The different states qualify differently in terms of performance encompassing preparedness and other factors pertaining to response to the crisis. By the end of April there are 35,000 positive cases with 1150 deaths. The state of Kerala performed well with a very good recovery rate and a quick reduction in transmission. Karnataka relied on numerous voluntary organizations to spread awareness and mobilize emergency health. Karnataka has identified 18 government hospitals and 27 private hospitals in Bengaluru for COVID-19 patients. The coverage in the districts beyond Bengaluru is fairly poor, with only 34 hospitals in 28 districts designated to treat positive cases. And this also makes evident the partisan approach and the divide between cities and rural districts. Despite posting impressive recovery from a sharp

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spike in COVID-19 cases, Tamil Nadu is worried about losing a battle as lack of adequate testing kits has hampered aggressive testing during the lockdown. After initial denials and reckless statements, the Chief Ministers of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have attempted to rise up to the COVID-19 challenge and its economic fallout. Lockdown failures, charges of data suppression on cases and deaths, very low testing, lack of protective equipment for health care workers and the need to have at least some sections of industries up and running are some of the issues West Bengal is wrestling with. After the initial slow response to the sudden migrant onrush, the Delhi government has retrieved lost ground to launch containment and surveillance measures, besides providing relief to the stranded migrants. Odisha has been able to keep a lid on the coronavirus infection through a strategy involving setting up of response teams, enforcing containment measures, ramping up testing, and using effectively the experience gained in handling natural disasters.

Again, COVID-19 is very urban-centric. The more urbanized states are among the top ten states impacted by corona. These are Maharashtra (45% urbanization), Gujarat (43%), Delhi (98%), Rajasthan (25%), Madhya Pradesh (28%), Tamil Nadu (48%), Uttar Pradesh (22%), Andhra Pradesh (29%), Telengana (39%) and West Bengal (32%). While Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are less urbanized than the national urbanization average, they have been catapulted into this list on account of their geographic and demographic size as well as the presence of large cities such as Jaipur, Indore and Hyderabad in their fold (Jha, 2020). Ten cities of India had over half the coronavirus cases. These cities comprised Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Indore, Pune, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Chennai, Surat and Agra. Their share as a total percentage of cases increased over time. If we take the figures of 30 April, Mumbai and Delhi,

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the two largest Indian cities alone had about 30% of all the cases in the country.

The implications of COVID-19 have been diverse across different social classes and communities with their own sets of challenges and coping mechanisms to adapt and adjust to the crisis.

Working class (including India's 'floating' population)

Box 1: Dharavi: Mumbai's ticking bomb

> "If we don't die from the disease, we will die of starvation," says a woman, 45, who lives in the sprawling Geeta Nagar slum near the World Trade Centre in Mumbai. "They (police) have been patrolling our lanes ever since the lockdown started. They allow us to go to shops only within the slum. Those shops charge us three times the price for rice or *dal* (pulses). We heard the Prime Minister saying all food will be available at fixed price. But the shopkeepers charge us whatever they want. It is robbery."
>
> Barely 100 metres away are buildings that house some of the richest in the city. "Physical distancing and lockdowns are for the rich. In the beginning, we thought it was temporary. If we do not get work when the lockdown lifts, there will be a rebellion," argues another male resident of Dharavi.

Source: Ethnographic account of A. Katakam (2020)

The lockdown caused untold hardship and suffering to migrant workers, dependent on daily wages. It disrupted their daily work and their ability to earn wages. It created panic and resulted in their mass exodus to their villages on foot. Even those who were in shelter homes were being herded together, which exposed

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them seriously to the virus. The lockdown and the subsequent government orders to prevent their reverse migration had subjected migrant workers to unimaginable distress and misery. While the government ordered that employers should pay wages to all the labourers employed by them, the private sector companies might not be able to fulfil these directives as many of them were on the verge of closure. The condition is India's slums are painstaking (Box 1).

Farmers

To understand the impact of COVID and the nationwide lockdown on the rural sector, the Foundation for Agrarian Studies (FAS) canvassed a set of questions among 43 residents of 16 villages in 10 states across India. The respondents represented a cross-section of village society—from large landlords to agricultural and manual workers, from ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers to individuals engaged in large and small businesses and other non-agricultural activities. The questions sought broadly to understand how a three-week lockdown period, which sought to pare down economic activity to a minimum, impacted the life, work and economic status of rural families. Two patterns have emerged in respect of the impact of the lockdown on agriculture. In rain-fed villages, this is normally the lean season and there is no standing crop, so there is little direct effect on agricultural operations and production. In irrigated villages, this is the harvest period, normally the busiest time of the year, and a peak work season for agricultural labour. In such villages, where the harvest is either just over or will begin this month, respondents report a dramatic drop in work, whether on the fields or in non-agricultural activities. In villages where harvesting is yet to begin,

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particularly in the wheat belt of Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, landowners use combine harvesters or family labour for harvesting operations. In West Bengal, there is a concern about adequate labour for the harvest of boro paddy due in May. In Bihar, because workers cannot migrate or have returned to their villages, their numbers have increased in the village labour force, forcing wages down. Moreover, non-agricultural economic activities that usually absorb surplus labour in the lean agricultural period like construction activity, businesses, brick-kilns, have almost totally stopped. In West Bengal, the breeding and sale of fish in village ponds is an income-earner in the lean season. Although there is good local demand for fish, this year this avenue of employment has been restricted severely by movement restrictions and the partial closure of markets.

The massive contraction in employment and incomes for manual labourers in the lockdown period had an almost immediate impact on the quantity and quality of the dietary intake of rural families, aggravated by the malfunctioning of the public distribution system (PDS) in different states. It is not just a matter of having less money in the wallet for food. Poor farming families have been hit by the rise in prices of vegetables and other commodities. With a few exceptions, including Tamil Nadu and Kerala, rations in states comprised only cereals. The only two states that reported distribution of cooked meals during the lockdown period were Kerala and Punjab. In Kerala, Kudumbashree-run kitchens provided food for migrant camps, while in Punjab the long tradition of *langars* serving free food was reinforced during the COVID-19 crisis.

Students

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Lakhs of school students are staring at an uncertain future, not knowing when their derailed career plans will get back on track. Over 31 lakh students taking the Class X and XII board examinations conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) have got stuck midway because of the pandemic. Another 2.5 lakh students of who take the exams conducted by the Council for Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) find themselves in a similar predicament. In addition, over 15 lakh students who were to appear for their Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Advanced test and another 14 lakh who were to appear for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to medical colleges across India suddenly find themselves grounded. Lakhs of students who take the school board exams conducted by the State education boards are on the same boat.

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), in collaboration with the CBSE and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), has been working on projects to make academic content available to learners across India through the digital medium or through the direct to home (DTH) mode. Four DTH TV channels on the *Swayam Prabha* bouquet of channels is yet another initiative of the NIOS. Channel 27 and *Panini* are dedicated to secondary classes while Channel 28 and *Sharda* are dedicated to senior secondary classes and Channel 30 and *Gyanamrit* use sign language. Channel 32 and Vagda are platforms to foster interactive sessions and exchanges. The switch to and progress made in the DTH mode and online platforms are quite impressive. But it has a long way to go. Moreover, millions of students being affected due to lack of access to digital infrastructures sharply manifests the irony associated with the socio-digital divide scenario (Bhowmick and Kaushik 2020).

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People with special needs

The pandemic and the lockdown have worsened the existing barriers, leading to further curtailment of the independence of disabled people (Awasthi, Chattopadhyay and Kumar 2020). Public health system has become much more inaccessible for persons with disabilities, with hospitals refusing to attend to other medical conditions in the wake of COVID-19. Guidelines issued by the Department of Disability Affairs in the COVID-19 situation have failed to address gender issues. Purchase and maintenance of wheelchairs, aids and appliances, services of caregivers, hiring of private transport owing to inaccessibility of public transport all entail additional expenditure. In a situation of continuous lockdown, boredom, loneliness, fear and anxiety have gripped large sections of society. The loss of employment and livelihood, loss of housing, depletion of support mechanisms and gender-based violence is also having an adverse impact on mental health.

Preventive Strategies and Socio-Economic Challenges

With not much medical progress in vaccines and antibiotics worldwide, control efforts during the 1918 Flu were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, use of disinfectants, and limitations of public gatherings, which were applied unevenly. Citizens were ordered to wear masks, schools, theatres and businesses were shuttered and bodies piled up in makeshift morgues before the virus ended its deadly global march. In India, people were instructed to remain in homes and take adequate rest. Knowledge of the pandemic reached the eastern part of the country via conferences held on the topic. This allowed design and

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proliferation of simple social distancing measures which were enacted. Early detection through influenza awareness of inspectors and doctors were conducted, lowering virulence in the later stages of the epidemic (Sanitary Commissioners Report, 1920). "The colonial authorities also paid the price for the long indifference to indigenous health, since they were absolutely unequipped to deal with the disaster," argues Spinney (2017), the *author of Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*. She draws our attention to the fact that there was also a shortage of doctors as many medical practitioners were away on the war front. However, different volunteering organizations set up dispensaries, removed corpses, arranged cremations, opened small hospitals, treated patients, raised money and ran centres to distribute clothes and medicine. Anti-influenza committees were formed by citizens.

So far as COVID-19 is concerned, keeping in tune to the WHO guidelines, the MoHFW, Government of India clearly chalked out protective measures to fight the contagion. The country declared series of lockdown and is continuing awareness through both offline and online modes and formats.

In *The impact of COVID-19 in informal settlements – are we paying enough attention?* The Institute of Development Studies, Sussex researcher Annie Wilkinson (2020) drew our attention to how the most marginalized people are not in a position to adhere to the preventive measures being prescribed by the health department. “As we in the global North brace ourselves for the coronavirus pandemic we are being told to wash our hands (for 20 seconds!) and self-isolate if sick. But what if you cannot do either of those things? One billion people live in slums or informal settlements where water for basic needs is in short supply – let alone 20 seconds worth – and where space is constrained and rooms are often shared. Yet discussion about

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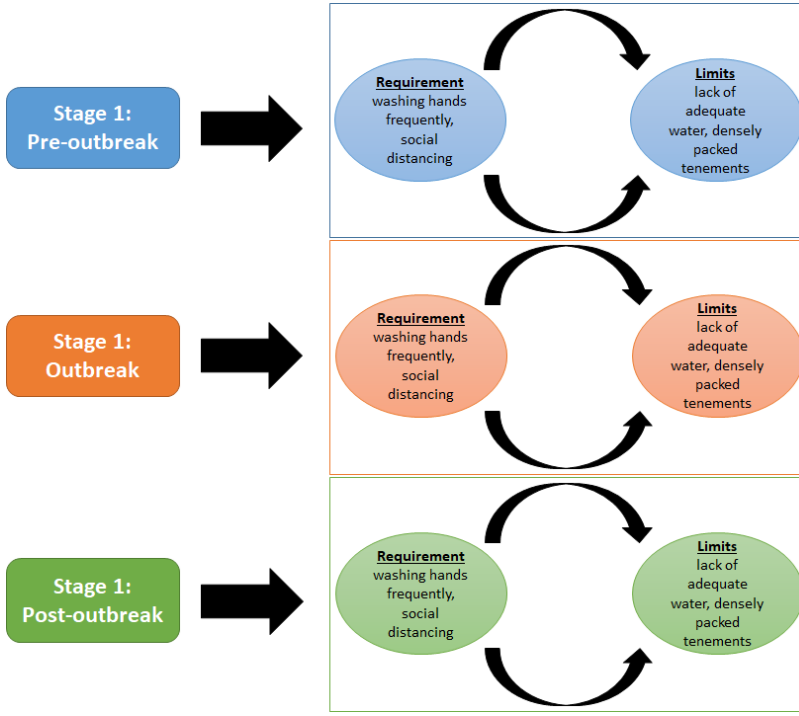
vulnerability in these contexts has been startlingly absent" (Wilkinson, 2020). This is highly valid in the densely packed informal settlements of the Indian cities.

Figure 4: COVID-19 challenges in Indian urban informal settlements



Source: Mukherjee and Sen, 2020

(*Note: The circular arrows between 'requirements' and 'limits' for each stage suggest that the problem will recur unless interventions are effectively planned and implemented.)*

Mukherjee and Sen (2020) argue that COVID-19 in the slums and squatters of Indian metropolises like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, etc. presents a classic case of 'wicked

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problems' – a tangled mess of thread where it is difficult to know which to pull first. Often labelled by city authorities as 'informal' or 'illegal', these settlements do not receive basic services such as piped water, sanitation or electricity. They are not served by primary healthcare facilities or regular solid waste collection, yet these settlements often house over half of a city's population, being the only affordable option for many residents. Squatters can be the worst sufferers from the outbreak of coronavirus with continued and spiral effects during the pre-outbreak, outbreak and post-outbreak stages (Figure 3).

Past, Present and Posterity: The Way Forward

A multi-layered (descriptive) strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis for the two scenarios within the Indian sub-continent is significant for this comparative exploration to address if we are better prepared to tackle the crisis and the way forward.

Strengths

1918 Spanish Flu: The demographic size and density and lower rates of travel within and across nations implied less transmission rate and also ensured greater effectiveness of home stay measures. Different historical sources suggest that the dying numbers further triggered nationalist mobilization when participants in the Indian struggle for independence were motivated to free the nation from the shackles of imperial rule which was apathetic towards fatalities caused by the pandemic as part of its exploitative bureaucratic machinery.

COVID-19: Any sovereign country remains in a much better position to respond to crisis, and India is not an exception.

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Within her emerging economic context, the country has seen profound advancement in terms of technology including medical apparatuses and arrangements. The functioning of various technological institutes geared to national benefits during disasters and disease scenarios, in tune to global guidelines including the WHO has drawn global applaud and appreciation.

Weaknesses

1918 Spanish Flu: It occurred during the pre-antibiotic era, and there was simply not enough medical equipment to provide to the critically ill. The country lacked access to prophylactic measures which was not part of the colonial agenda for a long period of time. Economic historian Amiya Bagchi (2005) has discussed this in his book *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Power*. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40-year age group, was a unique feature of this pandemic. The influenza also affected more women who were relatively undernourished and cooped up in unhygienic and ill-ventilated dwellings, nursing the sick. The mortality rate of Indian children was also high. Public health provision was massively underpowered (Spinney, 2017). As India faced this scourge in 1918, scientists lacked the technology that would allow them to see the virus that caused it.

COVID-19: The skyrocketing numbers of the Indian population and increasing mobility within and across borders along with a fast pace of life as part of the global mass culture are huge challenges to control the transmission rate and arrest the spread of COVID-19 through the successful implementation of preventive measures including social distancing and quarantine. With COVID being mainly urban-centric and with Indian

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megacities brewing with multi-faceted problems including densely packed slums with lack of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, the crisis can be catastrophic.

Opportunities

1918 Spanish Flu: The voluntary organizations came forward consisting of people from diverse social strata. "Never before, perhaps, in the history of India, have the educated and more fortunately placed members of the community, come forward in large numbers to help their poorer brethren in time of distress," a government report mentioned (quoted in Biswas, 2020). Again, Spinney (2017) elaborates:

> *"This is where you see a lot of local and caste organisations mobilizing, coordinating themselves and stepping in a magnificent manner. In political terms, what was interesting was that it got grassroots organisations talking to each other and going out into remote areas and coming into contact with people like Adivasis and different parts of the communities. It created a lot of bridges. Certain historians argue that it mobilized the grassroots and connected it up to the national movement. National organizations were providing the resources, the money, medicines, blankets and so on with which the local organizations went out to help the population. So, you see this kind of coalescence of the whole movement."*

COVID-19: The medical realities are vastly different now. Although there is still no cure, scientists have mapped the genetic material of the coronavirus, and there is the promise of

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anti-viral drugs, and a vaccine. The information and communication technology (ICT) is playing a crucial role in awareness and mobilization strategies and also tracking and deployment of essentials. India's emerging expertise and excellence in artificial intelligence (AI), big data, cloud computing, etc. can be a game changer in the war against pandemics. The *Aarogya Setu* App created within a very short time is just one of the examples of the several other forthcoming ones. The community organizations and good Samaritans traversing the country have come forward to help the vulnerable and the most marginalized communities. Thousands of Indians are finding ways to help the vulnerable by sewing masks, holding donation drives, feeding stray dogs and countering fake news.

Threats

1918 Spanish Flu: The World War I context already laid the catastrophic context on which the pandemic was posed. "In that particular situation it wasn't in the virus' interest to moderate its virulence. There was no evolutionary pressure to do that. So it just raced through the trenches, killing as it went. And then when you get those troops finally going home, if they survived, they take the virus with them," says Spinney (2017). The war ended on November 11, making it worse because soldiers returned to different corners of the world. "It is hard to think of a better vehicle for spreading a lethal respiratory disease," says Spinney (2017). The colonial scenario made the situation worse for the Indian population who were exposed to racist torture and ostracism as everyday lived realities. "In no other civilized country could a government have left things so much undone as

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did the Government of India did during the prevalence of such a terrible and catastrophic epidemic" (Young India, 1919).

COVID-19: There is much reason to have rational hope for India in terms of waging the corona war, but there are apprehensions against reckless optimism and we should be wise to collectively understand today's complex scenario and provide solutions from an integrated perspective beyond myopic or sectoral recommendations. In today's world of 'infodemic' it is quite challenging to reach a consensus, leave aside the political!

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1. It is believed that though the infections were noticed across military camps but countries in the midst of World War I—Britain, Germany, France and the US, it was kept a secret in the beginning. However, Spain, which was not a party in the war, reported the outbreak of the disease accurately. So, it seemed to have emerged in Spain, and hence it was named as the 'Spanish Flu.
2. For state-wise expert opinions on "rural realities" and the COVID crisis, please refer to panel discussions and reports under the aegis of IMPRI:
   https://www.impriindia.com/tag/rural-realities/.
   Accessed on June 12, 2021.
3. https://www.nap.edu/read/25771/chapter/1. Accessed on April 29, 2020.

Pause, research, scrutinize, cogitate... but don't destroy

Iván G. Somlai[1]

"Because each nation has its own history of thieving and lies and broken faith, therefore there can flourish only international suspicion and jealousy; and international moral shame becomes anaemic to a degree of ludicrousness".

Rabindranath Tagore (1917)

Abstract

Since the December 2019 notice of the first case of a coronavirus pandemic, there emerged a contemporaneous and globally proliferating protest movement that spread to all 50 states of the USA and to many countries around the world, destroying statues. Often a person's complex history arouses contradictory understanding of past actions. Sadly, perhaps because of the complexity, we have seen only minimal efforts at conciliation and restoring civility. Now there seems to be sustained divergence between governments and corporate interests on one hand and disenfranchised, economically and racially discriminated, non-dominant others. The resultant social calamity considerably impacts adults, children, government and civil society in ways as yet difficult if not impossible to assess, as both the pandemic and protests relentlessly continue. We need deeper historical understanding through public education and acceptable plans for memorials.

Keywords: COVID-19, Black Lives, Memorials, International

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Introduction

It is natural that significant events, whatever they be and however they be described, are often caused by a complex array of concatenated elements that, in turn, contribute to often unexpected consequences. This refers to both natural disasters and social calamities.

Thus, in natural disasters, we recognize common overlapping aspects: health and safety; food; shelter; social protection; education; transportation, economic support and so on. A singular disaster, itself, may trigger succeeding devastation, such as flooding (including ash, mud and vegetative debris) and landslides precipitated by an earthquake or wildfire; or forest fires themselves caused by lightning. There are innumerable anthropogenically and technically induced catastrophes too.

Spatially and temporally distinct disasters, of any origin, may become circumstantially connected: *e.g.* peat fires in Borneo causing haze pollution in Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines; Chernobyl nuclear plant breakdown sending fallout as far as Sweden and UK; a building collapse in Bangladesh killing hundreds of employees and disrupting a global chain of production; the Tohoku earthquake in Japan triggering a tsunami and causing the Fukushima nuclear reactor meltdown. The one common aspect to any source, origin or kind of disaster is the inevitable, massive social disruption.

Iterative changes in vulnerability as a disaster progressively changes—*i.e.* reduces, expands, increases, alters or joins another major event that, in combination, magnify certain outcomes. This illustrates the necessity to have comprehensive planning together with an improved culture of anticipation for potential consequential events.

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Similarly, sectoral entanglements may be made to significant and potentially disruptive social catastrophes, as we shall see in the following discussions. And therefore, I see parallels in that we should try to approach, understand and respond to the current severe societal tensions spearheaded by COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement holistically, that is, by respectfully communicating and purposefully collaborating with all essential stakeholders; and by steadfastly persevering at meaningful change. "*Simply because change is slow does not mean change agents have to move slowly towards it*" (Brookings, 2020).

Present context

> *"Morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."*
>
> (Heschel, 1972)

The BLM movement, initiated in the United States (US) in 2013 and extended to the UK and Canada as well, has as its mission "*to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes*" (Black Lives Matter, nd).

This coronavirus pandemic has been contributing to massive unemployment, severe economic downturn, reduced remittances from abroad, increased costs of essential commodities, disruption of education, travel, tourism, commercial life as well as separation from family and public life. Beyond the general health impact of COVID-19, the especially inordinate impacts of higher infection and morbidity rates on the poor and on

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non-dominant minorities has served to highlight disparities in governance and social service delivery systems, challenging trust levels between the state and its citizens.

In one of many crackdowns on ensuing protests in the US, George Floyd was ignominiously and brazenly killed by a local policeman on May 25, 2020. This instantly catalyzed years of pent-up frustration in the Black community, supported by a great number of multiethnic and multi-background citizens tired of unresponsive governance, leading to the damaging or removal of statues across the country. Protests have been held in all 50 states against racism, white supremacy, and police brutality.

Unsurprisingly, like seeds blown by strong winds and germinating elsewhere, this impetus spread to other countries (*The Guardian*, 2020a) wherein locals likewise recognized similar issues in their respective histories and contexts, and felt the time to be ripe for proactive mass displays of dissatisfaction. Stimulated by each succeeding protest, localized reproductions speedily progressed around the world. Each event focused predominantly on issues related to historical wrongs committed on minorities. Expanding awareness of social and economic injustice had motivated people of all racial, ethnic, religious and otherwise different backgrounds to participate, for the most part, peacefully (ART, 2020).

Concomitant and collateral impacts

> *"What then is, generally speaking, the truth of history? A fable agreed upon."*
>
> (Napoleon Bonaparte de Las Cases, 1823)

Contributing to people's having time to protest during this COVID-19 pandemic have been the high levels of unemployment

and lengthy lockdowns, both availing time, despite the risk of arrest. Mixed messages from seemingly uninformed or unbelieving leaders allowed the proliferation of conspiracy theories, fake news and consequently, at times, the need find an outlet for frustrations. Further aggravating the tensions in some (usually democratic) countries were groups of people claiming to be "sovereign citizens", outside of normal laws, therefore claiming their aversion to and inherent right to ignore precautionary government directives, such as masks, distancing, hand-washing, minimal grouping and so on.

For protest participants, technology has proved to be bifarious: while more people have been able to connect to others faster and disseminate more information to start with, increased electronic surveillance via cell phones has become regularized in many countries, often lacking clear understanding for the user, nor verifiable safeguards against abuse. As such, this technology threatens civil liberties and even fairness of criminal justice proceedings: *e.g.* to see who may have been in the vicinity of a crime, pinpointing a nearby cell phone user has led to innocent people being wrongly arrested, or labelled as criminals (Fair Trials, 2020).

While COVID-19 impact on minorities has been disastrous, it has been especially so among native populations. Having been rooted in a particular geographical area for millennia, autochthon elders' valuable knowledge is passed down through their oral traditions and culture and contributes to forming their indigenous society's identity and culture; when elders die prematurely before they have had a chance to teach what they know, historical memory of a people can be lost forever (*BBC*, 2020a).

The coincidental reinvigoration of the BLM movement, as a result of a police homicide of a Black American and other

flagrantly discriminatory acts against non-dominant minorities, has coalesced more people than ever to express dissatisfaction with the governance. Much anger has been levelled at statues representing disgraceful histories in the minds and eyes of non-dominant members of society.

Along with increasing protests, there was –and still is--an oscillating spike and remission in COVID-19 transmissions. The wearing of face masks by seemingly a majority demonstrated health consciousness, while it also prevented accurate facial recognition by police (NIST, 2020).

On the other hand, other public health experts have also made the argument that the goals of the protests may be worth the costs. "Over 1,000 health professionals sign a letter saying, "don't shut down protests using coronavirus concerns as an excuse" (CNN, 2020).

These and other miscellaneous impacts of the current pandemic and the contemporaneous global antiracism manifestations are revealing the complexity of cogent government and civil society responses, with a pandemic exacerbating antiracism protests.

The remaining focus of this article is on the statues and other memorials being targeted by protesters. Starting with some illustrative laws, I shall then review the focus and impact of the widespread destruction-centred protests.

Illustrative jurisprudence

Various governments have laws and/or other supportive statements for preserving memorials, as shown by these three examples.

In denouncing racism and white supremacy, the European Parliament voted in a resolution to declare BLM. While this

resolution has no legal ramifications, it does send a signal of support to anti-racism protests (*DW*, 2020a) from a highly visible and respected multinational body.

So as to safeguard humanity's cultural heritage, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 was passed unanimously in March 2017 in response to the Islamic State's destruction of historic sites in Iraq and Syria. That resolution "deplores and condemns the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, *inter alia* destruction of religious sites and artifacts, as well as the looting and smuggling of cultural property from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites, in the context of armed conflicts" and states that such acts could constitute war crimes. Yet, despite the US being signatory to that document, President Trump had warned that "cultural sites could be targeted if Iran retaliates for Soleimani strike" (*ABC*, 2020; *The Hill*, 2020).

In some jurisdictions "*local governments have the authority to authorize the building of war memorials, but they are forbidden from removing, damaging or defacing them. That power rests with the state government*". But even some elected and appointed officials believe that it is based on an unsound premise (Irish, 2019).

The three examples above elucidate the following:

a. The current protest movements resonate internationally;
b. There are jurisdictions at all levels which have related regulatory directives;
c. There must be clarity and specificity about any provisos to protective regulations;

d. There is the need for clarified definitions and designations as to how particular statues could also be considered as "cultural heritage";
e. A common understanding need evolve of what constitutes any kind of memorial that deserves protection;
f. There must be correlated maintenance, monitoring and enforcement capability; and
g. Laws and resolutions imply acknowledgement of a perpetual challenge.

So now, on to the statues!

> *"A statue does not proclaim a truth, but encourages people to seek it,"*
> (Bernhard Ilg, Mayor of Heidenheim, Germany DW, 2020b)

Many events are emulated. Most recently, spurred by the BLM movement, demonstrations, protest marches and various forms of damaging structures have simmered and percolated across the world. In places, statues had been destroyed to counter perceived --or to purposely cause-- "*disruption (to) social and religious harmony*", such as in Afghanistan and Nepal (*The Guardian*, 2001; *Nepali Sansar*, 2019; *Dawn*, 2020).

Collectively, we accept many aspects of dissatisfaction, because much of it is too obscure or wickedly complicated to pursue by all but those dedicated to extensive research and pursuit of solutions. So then, focus shifts to visible, physical representations of systemic weaknesses, especially during increased societal tension; and then, each concrete symbol demolished energizes those wishing to similarly act. Yet, statues are not the only simulacra of histories forgotten, repressed or revived.

Around the world, roads, canals, railroads and bridges have been built wholly or partially through slave or indentured labour; yet without a thought we continue to tour on them. Historical ruins, palaces and temples have been constructed with bonded labourers, thousands of whom have perished in the process; yet we travel great distances to behold and marvel at the beauty of such structures, few of which have any signs of contriteness. Fashionable clothing is fabricated in sweatshops by poor underpaid women and children in hazardous environments; and we, whilst browsing on Vancouver's Robsonstrasse shopping core, remain oblivious to this. Even the ubiquitous face masks have debatable origins (*The New York Times*, 2020; *Jamestown*, 2020). Why do these not elicit the same fervor for change as statues?

We are consumed by statues as they are visibly symbolic reference points.

I am not judging the correctness of attacking statues. No person who has used offensive language, communicated negatively about or expressed hatred of particular peoples, caused misery, famine, death and destruction deserves a podium. Anger is understandable. In fact, for thousands of years, adulatory sculptures have been installed and, at one time or another, defaced or removed. Even since the early 1900s, statues in Russia, France, Hungary, Greenland, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Mongolia, Cameroon (*DW*, 2020c) among scores of other countries, have been either toppled by protesters or dismantled by government edict. Often such removals and, especially replacements such as in Thailand (*Crisis*, 2020), are unabashed efforts at rewriting history. That said, were we to seriously research the background of those represented in the statues or other memorials, many of us may be surprised.

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The births of many modern nations had been initiated by the arrival of "western" interlopers or, as Nepal's founding monarch Prithvi Narayan Shah is said to have quipped, those bringing bazaar, bible and *banduk* (*i.e.* trade, religion and guns to motivate obedience), leaving an undoubtedly confounding legacy! It would be exceedingly difficult to find a name or representation of one from any culture whom we could comfortably absolve of any and all atrocities. Thus, unless one prefers statues of only Mother Teresa, Chief Dan George, Albert Einstein, Greta Thunberg (*Times*, 2020) or Gandhi (though even that has been disfigured recently: *vide BBC*, 2015; *BBC*, 2020a; *The Telegraph*, 2020), almost any other historical statue will inevitably be of people who have had binary actions and impacts (think Genghis Khan; Mao Zedong; Simon Bolivar; Kwame Nkrumah, and even Nobel laureates like Nelson Mandela (*The Conversation*, 2020) and Aung San Suu Kyi (*The Atlantic*, 2019).

Many of the memorials erected have been for multipolar, compartmentalized characters with a record of welcome changes for some, but blood on their hands for others: *e.g*. one who helped liberate a country, only to then abet massive programmes of executions and famine to bring people to accept a "utopian reform" (Lenin and Mongolia); another, intimately involved in liberating a continent, while simultaneously allowing a famine to overtake millions on another continent (Churchill and Europe, and India); and the righteous ones with contradictory legacies in surreptitiously saving multiple thousands of persecuted citizens while simultaneously supporting (presumably and understandably for their own lives' sake) the vile regime's bureaucracy (*DW*, 2020d).

Then there were those who did unforgivable things from which, in the end, they personally profited. It is reasonable to assume that their decisions were calculated with knowledge of the

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consequences: Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Hoxa, Mugabe...the more infamous of the most egregious instigators, along with innumerable slave traders. Targets for mass killings and enslavement included those who were indigenous, or from a different religious, ethnic, racial, economic or political group. So, for those enmeshed in the purposeful planning, commitment and/or oversight of major atrocities, I have no sympathy. Yet many inbetween, such as Castro, Kagame and Mohammad bin Salman, have been implicated in contradictory liabilities.

It may thus be evident that difficulties begin when considering people who were basically well-intentioned within incredibly complex contexts, wherein their weighing of best alternatives sometimes resulted in decisions with deleterious impacts. So, were these errors of character, of fact, or of process? Were people purposely targeted and were people harmed or killed or allowed to die? Did they anticipate that there may be many people injured or killed? Would the then available alternative options have caused even more deaths and destruction? While a person may have done wrongs, had he (or she) also set in motion reforms that resulted in iterative –though not immediate-- betterment of lives?

If we want to be part of a generation that makes an extraordinary effort to improve lives, we must demonstrate maturity in our ethics, morals and obligations to human rights with people of every race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language and culture. From this manner of reflection then, protesters should decide: if the statue is an affront to current values, would it be best to deface it, bury it in a harbour or melt it down for scrap, situations in which no one may ever see it again? If so, many among us shall, or might, remain oblivious to particular gross wrongs committed and those who had been responsible for them.

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Or would it serve a higher edifying purpose to leave it in place with an explanatory memorial tablet or remove it to a museum for posterity's historicizing? Rather than a statue to one who in the future might become embroiled in controversy, explanatory signs could be a proactive cultural option to memorialize a tragedy or famous event; however, the jurisdiction composing plaques must make a sincere effort to faithfully discuss input from the concerned groups so as to avoid lingering controversies.

Illustrations of alternative memorial management include the "Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm" established by London's Mayor, Sadiq Khan, to recommend which statues in London should be removed; and in Cambodia, a committee to designate historical battlegrounds as national monuments to teach younger generations about Cambodia's history (*Phonmpenh Post*, 2020). Discrete options already in practice elsewhere include Coronation Park in Delhi, where effigies of former officials from the colonial era have been relocated (*BBC*, 2020b); and the Spandau Zitadel special museum repository in Berlin, (Spandau, nd).

Many decades ago, an eminent lawyer and genocide historian stated that *"the destruction of a work of art of any nation must be regarded as acts of vandalism against world culture"* (Lemkin, 1944). In the same vein, South African artist and anti-apartheid veteran Pitika Ntuli, who spent decades in exile, maintains that a statue, even of an offensive individual, is a work created by an artist and, as such, 'should be put in a theme park', not destroyed, but as a reminder of colonial and racist history (*BBC*, 2020c).

A civilized option

Committing to a sustained dialogue would reflect

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acknowledgment of the need to confront colonial history. As a recent evocative example, children visiting a British colonial homestead in England "*came across stands depicting African men in chains – they had an important discussion about whether they should be on display. Some felt yes because it shows the house's connection to the slave trade and the Royal African Company, while other children felt it was offensive*" (*ibid*). It is heartening to see such discussions initiated amongst school-age children.

Patient and respectful convening and supporting of exchanges between different sides should serve to elicit knowledge and empathy for each other's views; and if, indeed, mutual respect and understanding could prevail, then it would be much easier to work on compromises and cooperation (Somlai, 2007).

A failure to recognize contestations in the past contributes to the politics of selective memory that is reproduced every time we evade our past instead of confronting it directly and truthfully (*University World News*, 2020). Of course, if the leader of an influential democracy repudiates the existence or severity of COVID-19 and calls attempts to rectify documented racist history by removing a statue as "bullshit" (*HuffPost*, 2020), this emboldens other populist heads of government to do likewise and therefore undermines conciliative efforts.

As far as names of any flawed benefactors on buildings, cities, streets and academic programmes, these could, indeed, be exchanged for contextually more appealing and appropriate names. Optionally, societies could consider shifting to a culture without person-based monuments to their heroes.

Have we learned?

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> *"It is our great opportunity today to shape our present action, based on our aspirations of the future rather than let it be governed by the baggage of hostility from the past".*
>
> (Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India, 2010)

Even if one could be reconciled to the aforementioned, we need admit that in every age and culture there have, indeed, always been upright people opposing maltreatment of others; human rights, even if differently expressed, are not an invention of our recent past. Sadly, in every age, disenfranchisement, hatred, vindictiveness, selfishness and exploitation have continued. Viewed in a historical sense, it can be said that we have not sufficiently learned from the past (*The Guardian*, 2020b).

Amongst millions of examples, perhaps the most poignant in the recent past were the photographs of two drowned migrant children—a 3-year-old boy on a Turkish beach in 2015 and a Salvadoran girl, not yet 2, on the banks of the Rio Grande in 2019. While having provoked widespread outrage, no lasting changes in immigration policy have been materialized (*National Geographic*, 2020).

In our "COVID-19 year", the same photographer believed that images of coronavirus victims could "*force the public to take the lockdown seriously and hold leaders of various nations accountable for their response*" (ibid). Has that worked?

We need to realize that without a holistic approach and sincere collaboration, nor trust in respected scientists' advice, just as a particular nation's internal response remains uncoordinated and divisive, an international crisis does not necessarily lead to intergovernmental and global collaboration.

Conclusion of remaining challenges

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The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.
(William Shakespeare from Julius Caesar,
Marc Antony in Act 3, Scene 2, 1599)

We have seen and felt now the coincidental, still evolving global cataclysms –COVID-19 and BLM protests--and their interrelated effects. Both have instigated awkward political controversy yet also inspired remarkable cooperation, or *samfundssind*[i] as they more precisely term it in Denmark, within and across societies.

This pandemic is challenging the brightest minds in all sectors, the most powerful security forces and all levels of society. Coronavirus will continue to be a proximate cause for delay and non-delivery of goods and services from previous months to the next few months (*TradeReady*, 2020), continuing to disrupt basic needs of communities. Economic contraction "*heightens the near-certainty that the pandemic will produce the first global increase in poverty since the Asian financial crisis of 1998*" (*Politico*, 2020). Major societal disequilibrium, along with an already coincidental and broadening protest movement, is expected to result in critical unexpected interactions that may yet exacerbate tensions and take peace and governance to *terra incognita*. At the very least, in many countries, trust will need to be rebuilt between government and civil society.

Altering, dismembering or stomping on statues or other representations, protesters transform their frustrations onto a rehumanized embodiment of their focus. But by doing this, are they not exemplifying a moral reaction obverse to their own desired ethical behaviour by others?

Toxic outrage may force the elimination of symbols of racism and other atrocities, and it may likewise motivate

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proliferations of similar resistance to other displays of imperialism, colonialism and racism; but consequences may also include the realization of erroneous understanding of the subject; as well as counter reprisals in this "monument war" (*Global Times*, 2020).

One internecine after-effect in South Africa, attributable to black parents withholding painful histories from their offspring, has been that upon their eventual realization of past atrocities within a system of institutionalized racism, "*the anger of the young has pointed towards their parents and black elders. Over the course of the year, the young South Africans moved from throwing stones at statues of dead white men to throwing them at live black ones – President Zuma and South Africa's education minister Blade Nzimande, who rose to fame as an anti-apartheid activist*" (*The Guardian*, 2015). What the older generation thought would be a blessing by not dredging up horrendous history, has turned out to be a curse for the present impatient generation not averse to confronting adversarial and immoral dominance.

We cannot blame the elders. This situation has analogies in other cultures and contexts: for example, many Jewish survivors from the Second World War have kept mum about horrid details to their children and grandchildren so as to avoid stress, enmity and any potential violence. Yet nowadays, there is a more confident, energetic and vocal generation prepared to counter persistent prejudice. In Japan, the Hiroshima Prefectural Office has recruited *denshosha*, or "legacy transmitters", who volunteer to orally recount their experiences to survivors and visitors so that the evil would not be forgotten but that peace should prevail (*Japan Times*, 2020).

For those unconvinced that history could actually be forgotten, one need only refer to the relatively recent war in Iraq (2003-2011) and the superseding DAESH/ISIS terrorist regime

(2011-2017), wherein the war and illegal trade of cultural heritage created an environment for illicit excavations, pillaging of museums, looting and burning of libraries, galleries and homes. In Iraq alone, 41 major cultural sites--oldest from the 8th century -- were damaged through wilful acts: 11 were completely razed; the rest ruined to varying degrees (OCHA-RASHID, 2017). Robert Mugabe, head of Zimbabwe until 2017, had condoned the state slaughter of thousands of his own people, referring to the massacres as simply a moment of madness and thereupon embarked on a programme of collective amnesia. Such is the intentional devastation of collective memory and identity. As noted by filmmaker Tim Slade, "*The whole point about erasure of physical trace is to allow you to pretend that nothing ever happened*" (Studio International, 2016).

Memorials can precisely serve the function of remembrance. The Hiroshima bombing sites, left in their haunted states, serve as effective symbols both of premeditated devastation as well as of the spirit of survivors. Either way, the memory endures. Statues could be considered in the same way.

Improving society is not "*about rewriting history, but it's encouraging broader, evidence-based conversations about our past. We shouldn't confuse national pride with history, which is always warts and all – history is full of violence and injustice, that's nothing new*" (*BBC*, 2020b). Improving society must be undertaken as deliberately as the effort that detractors and anarchists expend in opposing democratic, orderly, equitable and cooperative society.

Thus, in the long term, it can be only deliberate, participatorily developed deconstruction and reconstruction of policy, regulatory improvements, governance, education and civic action that would gradually change the culture of attitudes and behaviours towards an increasingly equitable society. In this

process, it is necessary to have the will and ability to look at a person's gore and glory and the contexts within which they took place, not so as to absolve hideous, maniacal and calculatingly evil individuals, but to enhance our collective understanding and knowledge.

I do acknowledge that there are limits to the level of systemic change achievable for a non-dominant group through peaceful persuasion. This is especially true for prolonged, morally justifiable efforts in the face of injustices—efforts that may have been undertaken for generations and reaching levels of frustration no longer restrainable (Somlai, 2016). The shocking discovery in May 2021 of 215 unmarked graves of native children in the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation (Kamloops, 2021) has served to provoke action on simmering, unresolved issues of colonial enforcement. Had it not been the serendipitous use of ground penetrating radar, this may have remained hidden for generations.

Delay can be catastrophic. Many countries have gone through several iterations of regrettable, uncompassionate circumstances followed by promises, appeasement, accommodation, and even attempts at reconciliation. But as great a country as most of us indeed have, well-intended efforts can be stalled or forgotten. It is conceivable that unless past issues be seriously tackled, the cumulative effect of unresolved serious grievances may severely impede the progress of harmony within our society.

So, I favour decisions with adequate understanding of the antecedents of the disliked person represented in a memorial, and of the consequences of any actions which may elude the preferred education of future generations. At times, through historical research and/or evolving contextual appropriateness, we even have examples of reputation rehabilitations that satisfy

contemporaneous morals, ethics and practices, such as Qin Shi Huang and Hu Yaobang (China); Pearl S. Buck (China, USA); Henry Morton Stanley (USA, Africa); Louis Riel (Canada); Emil Zátopek (Czechoslovakia); Saigō Takamori (Japan); and currently, even Joseph Stalin (Russia) within a societal seesaw of alternative memories (*NPR*, 2019).

As noted by former President of Israel Golda Meir in 1975, "*one cannot and must not try to erase the past merely because it does not fit the present*". Rather we must take advantage of history, including unsavoury history, and keep it visible so as to enable enhanced learning from past misdeeds and errors by showing measured, humane, non-violent rectification.

Young and old alike must learn that there is not just light and darkness...but dawn and twilight as well.

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[i] Desire to do things for the good of the community

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the LGBTQIA community of Northeast India

Md. Farijuddin Khan[1]

Abstract

The northeast region of India has been an isolated frontier yet strategically very important for the country. This article highlights the plight of the region's vulnerable LGBTQIA/LGBTQ+ community in the context of the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. It gives an insight into the lives and struggles of LGBTQ+ persons and makes an attempt to highlight the impact it has had on their lives. Through some exemplary issues, it tries to showcase the level of vulnerabilities the pandemic has created that has only added fuel to the already burning community, that is, the community has been facing a horde of issues such as harassment, discrimination, and humiliation due to structural discrimination/ oppression and constant marginalisation in the society. These are socio-psycho distresses and they have been facing before the pandemic even started. It tries to explore if the challenges faced by the community are different from those faced by other vulnerable groups such as women, children, senior citizens, etc. It finally lays out some policies/suggestions that need to be taken up by the Indian government to protect and support the LGBTQ+ people.

Keywords*:* Queer; Pandemic; Northeast India; LGBTQ+; Stigmatization

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The region known as northeast India or simply, the NE, is a peripheral entity of the Union of India. It has always been considered a "peripheral frontier" of India. The region is a contested region marked by racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Moreover, claims of contested 'self-determinism and 'integration' have existed for a very long time. It also serves as a launch pad for India's ambitious *Act East Policy* to integrate the region to the rest of Asia, particularly, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Within this 'fringe' region, there exist fringes whose social, political, economic, and cultural identities are shaped by various forces and regional structures from which they have been marginalized.

The Case for LGBTQIA/LGBTQ+

The pandemic has caused major disruptions in every person's life. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by all groups and communities across the world. In India, the worst impacts have been faced by the poor, migrant wage-earners, lower-middle-class people, children, and senior adults. Millions lost their lives, and a billion suffered huge economic, financial, mental, and physical problems. Among the marginalized community who took unseen/unheard tons of the impact is the *LGBTQIA – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Ally* – community. The group is also known as *LGBTQ+*.

Least research and documentation has been done on the impact on this community. Media, including social media, have been relatively quiet when it comes to highlighting their plight - their survival strategy, migration pattern, violence inflicted, discrimination, alienation, etc. The community in this peripheral region, as happened in other parts of the country, faces huge challenges in their daily lives. Feelings of exclusion, hatred,

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bullying, discrimination in public places are some of the common problems they often face. Even before the pandemic, many had to migrate to bigger cities to move on in life, whereas, those who could not afford to migrate continue to face poverty, joblessness, and other interconnected issues. These are the people whose legal identity has been consistently put into question in the Indian context. This is partly due to a largely conservative Indian society and, partly, due to India's historical legacy of a colonial state.

The onset of the pandemic along with its series of mandatory conforming rules and restrictions added an extra burden on their already difficult lives. Many who had migrated in the hope of finding better places to live have to come back to their previous places pushing them into further vulnerabilities. Apart from the economic collapse, the pandemic brought into a series of unusual experiences such as the mental health issue, shrinking space for community-solidarity, and also the scope for exhibiting their arts and expressions. The northeast region, being a less connected and isolated region, faces a huge shortage of essential items with the coronavirus outbreak. Shortage of utility items, a spike in hoarding, and the resultant rise in commodity prices led to massive panic situations in many states.

The old biases and stigmatization added fuel to the already burning community. The community has been facing a lot of issues such as targeted discrimination, harassments, and public humiliation due to structural discrimination and constant marginalisation in the society. In many cases, they don't get to stay with their families – the beginning of their ostracization process. Inability to cope up with the family pressure for 'sex reassignment surgery', they have to leave their home town for another city. This is a main reason for their shift to big cities such as Delhi, Bengaluru, and so on. This is not an uncommon thing in

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the NE states. Hence, these issues did not just disappear with the outbreak.

The Impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQIA community

Based on observations and conversations with the community members residing in the states of the region and listening to the webinar-talks of a few prominent faces among the queer and trans-community in the region, the impacts of the pandemic may be assessed and discussed as follows:

Impact on Mental Health

The issue of mental health got mainstream attention in many decades, perhaps, in a century all over the globe. The pandemic not only ravaged the livelihood of LGBTQIA people but also restricted their movements and expressions at a level they have never experienced in their lifetime. This has certainly affected the mental health of many queer and trans people. They are prone to fall into depression due to age-old non-acceptance by society and hence lack of support systems. The consequences are self-inflicting harm.

Lack of 'mainstream' support contributed to their indulgence in substance-abuse, drug-use, and even committing suicide. In many cases, stigmatization, cultural discrimination, and the group-members' unconscious/conscious reluctance to share their true identity contributed to their lack of effective mental health care. Implicit preferences for heterosexual patients are pervasive. The mental issue face by the people of this community has been largely unaddressed. The issue is further aggravated by limited resources at their disposal to take care of their mental health. The most vulnerable among the fraternity are

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those who have become homeless and are outcast by their own families. Moreover, disparities of affected people within the community in the region tell us more about varied policy and resource availability in different northeastern states of India.

Impact on Arts and Expressions

Attempts to express queers' perspective of life through creative representations have been historically misunderstood and often censored. Visual arts and artistic expressions on different platforms such as street arts, exhibitions, talks, and creative writings in e-zines and other platforms are some of their useful tools to express dissent, protest against scuttling their basic rights, making space for their 'radical' thoughts and worldview. They are potential means to showcase their originality, pride, and courage to stand up for their marginalized identities. The pandemic brought a temporary halt to their movements and artistic expressions. Many offline projects highlighting achievements in queer struggles in the northeast region, thereby eliciting responses and reactions from the fraternity and outside were halted. The pandemic has made them focus on daily survival issues rather than higher goals.

Impact on Migration

Moving into bigger cities of India provides many opportunities for LGBTQIA people of northeast India. The perks of collaborating businesses with like-minded people, being an active member of a relatively vibrant queer movement, the ability to have one's own space in the large city, etc. are some of the pull factors of migration. However, the avenues and opportunities come with opposite challenges such as racism, outward bullying, loneliness,

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and so on. These challenges were made more vulnerable during the pandemic. The pandemic brought in extra issues such as racism against northeasterners. Outright harassment in public spaces as carriers of COVID-19 – a possible deduction from the *'Chinese virus'* (Reja, 2021) tag used by the former American President is an example. Further, many LGTBQ+ people are uneducated. Many of them were deprived of systematic education at the early stage due to poverty and other inter-related problems. They were compelled to return to their original places due to the pandemic. On returning to their original home-states, losing of jobs and livelihood in these *'karmabhoomi'*, or the land where one works, cities were not compensated by warm welcome and support at home. Instead, they become part of the 'procedures on arrival' rigorous checks including scanning, selection, testing, and quarantining that often push their queer and trans identities into other levels of vulnerabilities (Bhandara, 2020). They were subjected to 'migrant returnees' attitude even within their families.

The Way Forward

While many people had the luxury to share quarantine pictures on social media with their families in bedrooms, kitchens, lawns, and living rooms, there were millions who could not afford to do so. Millions became jobless and homeless. Lakhs of migrant daily wage earners got exposed to the worst form vulnerabilities in their lives having no job to pick up for survival and having no one to take care of. The pandemic has instilled a fear-psychosis among the affected people. Isolation and loneliness have become the norm. For the LGBTQIA community, isolation and loneliness have been integral ingredients of their daily lives. The resilience they have inculcated along their extraordinary journeys,

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simultaneously, may become their strongest weapon during the whole pandemic period.

In this context, the pertinent question asked by a famous queer activist, Kumam Davidson, could be re-visited. He asks, *"Must resilience be celebrated or must the system be reimagined and reshuffled?"* (Davidson, 2020). The LGBTQ+ people have suffered a lot for centuries. Their peripheral-ness in social settings has not been given adequate attention. The outbreak of the coronavirus has made their lives the most vulnerable among others. Taking a cue from the experiences gained from the pandemic, some community-specific measures by the state may be taken up.

i. Protecting LGBTQIA persons from violence, discrimination, and stigmatization.
ii. Involvement of LGBTQIA/queer organizations, bodies, etc. in developing a state response to any prohibited acts against the persons of the community.
iii. Awareness campaigns and legal support for a comprehensive law for the protection and preservation of their rights.

Existing laws upholding the sexuality of transgender community has limitations. In a breakthrough verdict *(Navtej Singh Johar and Ors. v. Union of India)* in 2018, the Hon'ble Supreme Court had clearly stated that consensual homosexual intercourse between two consenting adults in India is legal and it should be applied without any discrimination. This was a positive change in the sense that the Court was bringing up sexuality and queerness in the public domain for discussion. However, the Parliament passed another controversial bill in 2019.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, Kirpal said, *"is a very problematic as it does not allow self-*

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determination of transgender status…does not offer reservations in public employment and education as had been directed by an earlier Supreme Court judgement…While the Constitution prohibits discrimination, that injunction only applies to the government and its instrumentalities. The private sector thus can discriminate with impunity in matters of employment, housing, health and education among other areas" (Kirpal, 2020).

According to Supreme Court Advocate, Saurabh Kirpal, India lacks a "comprehensive anti-discrimination code" to protect and preserve the rights of LGBT+ community. Although talks for such a comprehensive law are still an ongoing process, there appears to be a lack of political consensus for such laws in the country. Other issues of concern are the illegal status accorded to the choice made by a same-sex couple to adopt a child in India and that of same-sex marriage. These issues bring back the significance of the above point (iii), that is, the need for a comprehensive law to fully recognize and protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people in India.

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Surrender or Survival:
Covid-19 and the Chhaus of Charida, West Bengal

Archita Chatterjee[1]

Abstract

Several folk communities became the victim of the Covid-19 and its lockdown and the Chhaus of Purulia, West Bengal is not an exception. The Chhaus are the dancing and mask-making community, residing in the village of Charida in Purulia which is the field of this study. The struggle for finances and the efforts to recover their loss with alternate options has placed these mask-makers in a huge mental burden. From the cancellation of dance-shows and fairs within India and abroad to the tourism-influx, as the village was an eco-tourist spot, has put both the mask-makers and the dancers in despair. This article is the result of a study that collected data of 308 mask-makers to understand the challenges faced by this community and their coping strategies. It describes whether these challenges led to 'surrender' or 'survival' against the major threat so far as this community is concerned.

Keywords: Chhau Community, Charida, Purulia, COVID-19, Lockdown.

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Introduction

Charida, a small village of Purulia district of West Bengal, is situated on the lap of undulating hilly tracts of the Ayodhya, interspersed with rice fields, water streams and the Matha forest. She has been declared as the eco-tourist heritage village for her endeavors in the field of art and is renowned for mask-making village in the world. According to the Census of India 2011, Charida has a total population of 2,568 (1,353 males and 1,215 females), across a total number of 546 households involving all castes.

The recognition of the village as an eco-tourist heritage site has also promoted ecosystem and cultural heritage preservation ethos in the local community. She had gradually gone global when the famous craftspersons traveled to the foreign countries to showcase their works and thus popularizing *Chhau*, not only as a dance but also as a community. With Charida's transformation into the UNESCO eco-tourist heritage site, the non-*Sutradhar* (agriculturist) families, besides the 308 traditional mask-making households, have also become enthusiastic in setting up mask-shops to cater to the tourists.

Figure 1 shows three important maps from the specific district-division map of the state of West Bengal followed by the map of specific district of Purulia having the exact location of the village of Charida in the Baghmundi block of the district. The village of Charida is the main area of this study. The map is collected from the official Livestock Atlas of West Bengal, Director of Animal husbandry & Veterinary services.

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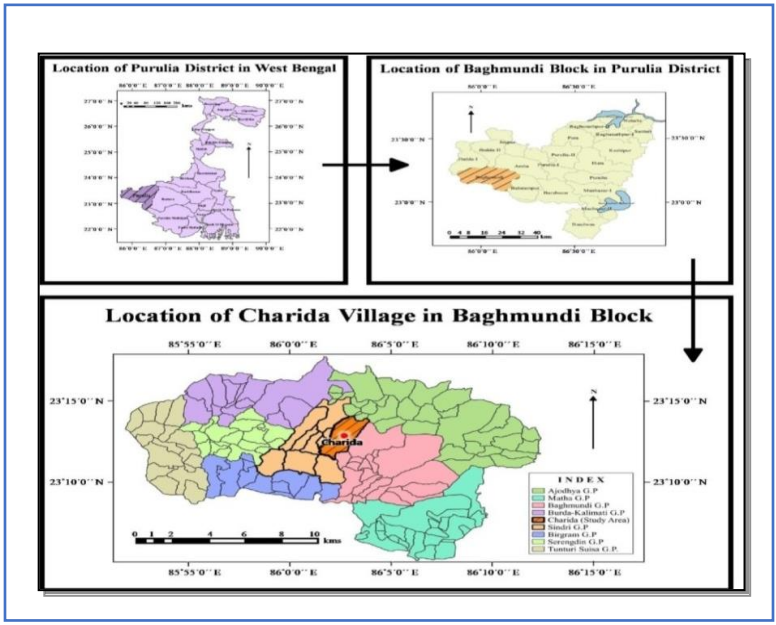
Figure 1: Location map of the study area



Source: *Livestock Atlas West Bengal, Director of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Services, West Bengal*

Chhau Dance and the *Sutradhars*

Today most of us know about the well-known folk dance of the western part of Bengal – *Chhau*. But the dance would nott have been gained popularity without the *Chhau* masks. It is an acrobatic martial art-based dance form enlisted in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Traditionally, under the Baghmundi royal patronage, *Chhau* ritualistic performances with variant themes were organized during *Chaitra Parab* and *Shiv Gajan*.[1]

The oral narratives attest that the image or idol makers were brought to Purulia from the adjacent district of Bardhaman

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and from adjoining states of Bihar and Odisha when the Baghmundi and *bhumij* chieftains ruled in this region. After Charida was declared as the eco-tourism hub, a major shift happened in the themes and sizes of the mask – from large-ones to small decorative. The switch to various designs took place with the production of *kirat-kirati*[2] and *Kathakali*[3] masks.

Ecosystem Resources

The following table (Table 1) illustrates the ecosystem resources and their places of abstraction with their uses in the specific process of mask-making. The data was collected by the author from the field using ethnography as the research methodology with a survey questionnaire based on the specificities.

Table 1: Ecosystem resources required for *Chhau* mask-making

Ecosystem resources	**Place of abstraction**	**Uses**
Water	Deep tube wells, wells nearby Rabidh river	Model making
Soil	2 *bigha* of soil region is located near the Rabidh river	Model making; mixed with water
Hot and arid climate	--	Drying and baking of the mask
Sunlight	--	Drying and baking of the mask

Source: Researcher from field ethnography, 2018-2020

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Figure 2: Process of making the *Chhau* mask

Source: Clicked and compiled by author, 2020

Charida, *Chhau* and Covid-19 pandemic: Impact on livelihood

Triguni Sutradhar, the owner of the *Adarsha Mukhosh Ghar*, unfolded their conditions during the COVID-19 induced lockdown. Before 2020, the mask-makers used to see their peak season between October and February, however, the dancers' highest earning period was April and May. When asked about the COVID-19 crisis he said, "*We have no money saved. We have nothing in our hands. What do we do?*"

The nation-wide lockdown declared on March 24, 2020 led to several miseries to the *Chhau* community- both the mask-makers and the dance groups. "*The lockdown left us with huge debt as there was sudden cancellation of more than 50 shows. There was also cancellation of the dance-dress orders*," said Monoranjan Sutradhar, a mask-maker-cum-dancer.

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Figure 3: Mask shops during the lockdown

Source: Dharmendra Sutradhar (Field investigator), 2020

Figure 3 displays the effect of the lockdown in the village of Charida taken by the field investigator, Dharmendra Sutradhar who himself is a mask-maker. During the lockdown period in 2020, he forwarded me these pictures that showed all the workshops were closed and the village main road was also empty.

Furthermore, the traditional dancing session starts between mid-march and mid-April and the performances in

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foreign countries begin from late November-March. Each year, these mask-makers take a high amount loan from the money lenders with an interest rate of 50% for their businesses. Banking facilities are all present but the *sutradhars,* being aware of all of them, are still unable to trust the banks. They also invest this money for *Chhau* performances outside of the village or district but this year the story was different.

The pandemic has impacted economic development of the mask-maskers. They always buy the resources for the decoration and colouring of the masks in advance and also keep stocks of other natural sources. This habit of stocking has left them with high debt. Post-lockdown, though there was an influx of tourists but it was very low compared to other years.

According to the mask-makers, tourism in this region saw a slow start post-lockdown from November 2020. People engaged in product collection from the forest and selling them at the local or district market, also saw a big hole in their pockets. Another lockdown which started from May 15, 2021 accompanied by the cyclone '*Yaas*' led to disruptions in their livelihood.

Coping with COVID-19

With COVID-19 affecting the entire community and its livelihood along with the *Chaitra Parab* being cancelled last year, the *Chhau* mask-makers have transformed hundreds of masks into safety masks. The mask-makers experimented with the designs of the masks keeping in focus the pandemic. Using three layers of cloth material – cotton-fiber-cotton – the mask-makers have introduced new designs considering customers of all age groups. This can be seen in the photograph in Figure 4.

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Figure 4: Mask-makers wearing *Chhau* Covid-19 masks

Source: The Telegraph, May 17, 2021

Dharmendra Sutradhar (Figure 5) is one of the very few young artists who rely on natural colours to design and decorate masks. The COVID-19 lockdown did not prevent him to explore new designs using nature's services. He also emphasized the usage of traditional method of cleaning- *hathmati* i.e., use of soil as soap to clean hands, which is an essential protocol in preventing the spread of coronavirus infection.

Figure 5: Dharmendra Sutradhar depicting a nature-based mask designed and developed by him

Source: Author, 2019

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Due to lockdowns, the artisans witnessed a huge drop in demand of the traditional mask usage as fairs were cancelled. So, they are now making protective masks using paper and cloth that having the imprint of *Chhau* design on them (Figure 6). According to Falguni Sutradhar, the doctors and health officials were examining the ability of these masks to be used as protective face gear. A government official said that they can help the mask-makers to sell their designer masks through *Biswa Bangla* Market.

Figure 6: Falguni Sutradhar with the COVID-19 mask

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/society/jharkhands-chhau-dancers-and-artisans-take-a-battle-stance-against-covid-19/article31407096.ece

These same kinds of safety masks have been witnessed by the neighboring state, Jharkhand. Falguni Sutradhar, being the father of such safety masks, resides in this village of Charida, the study area. These masks were sent to Jharkhand as a part of trade. In order to help the artisans and their families, Khadi, in collaboration with UNESCO, gave each of them ₹ 400 per month and basic food items like vegetables, rice and dal during the lockdown.

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To help the artisans and their families, Khadi, in collaboration with UNESCO, gave each of them ₹ 400 per month and basic food items like vegetables, rice and dal during the lockdown.

Chhau dancer Sambhunath Karmakar and his group choreographed an eight-minute dance-drama titled '*Coronasur*' where COVID-19 was personified as a demon that has affected India and two performers represent social distancing.

Though the caste-based divisions are disappearing and crop cultivation is becoming the second source of income, the mask-makers or *Sutradhars* are not willing to give up their traditional mask-making procedure as their main livelihood.

Due to COVID-19, many *Chhau* groups were forced to migrate in and around Bengal as well as outside Bengal in search of alternative livelihoods once the unlock process started. Furthermore, some of these *sutradhars* are idol-makers and with initiation of the unlock process; those *sutradhars* again started this secondary livelihood of idol-making. Though the campaign for Assembly Elections 2021 brought them back in action, their income remained low. Chinibas Mahato, a *Chhau* dancer, opined, "*Last year, we were left with no shows due to Covid-19. The election campaign had given us a little something to cheer about. We performed at three roadshows for the ruling party in Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore.*"

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Key Informant Interviews of mask-makers including Dharmendra Sutradhar, Bijay Sutradhar, Monoranjan Sutradhar, Kaberi Dutta, Falguni Sutradhar and Triguni Sutradhar and dancers Shambhunath Karmakar and Chinibas Mahato.

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[1] Chaitra Parab is the spring festival taking place in the month of Bengali month of Chaitra corroborating to April. Gajan is observed to honour Lord Shiva.

[2] The kirat-kirati masks project episodes from the Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana.

[3] Kathakali masks are the replica of facial images from the oldest classical dance forms of South India.

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Life in the Era of COVID-19:
Perceiving the Impact

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