THE LIGHTHOUSE

APRIL
2021
ISSUE #7

department of sociology,
miranda house



reverberations of
and responses to

COVID-19

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FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

"The highest result of education is tolerance." - Helen Keller

The year 2020 has been an unprecedented year. The world shut down in the blink of an eye.

We live in a world in which there is a new normal. Handwashing and wearing of masks are a part of the new social interaction. We bump elbows instead of shaking hands or doing a high five, while greeting each other. 'Namaste' as a form of greeting too has witnessed an unprecedented popularity. Holding online classes and virtual interactions are regular practice. Before 2020, who would have thought that that we would be living in a time when the students and teachers would be pushed out of physical spaces. It has its set of challenges and has redefined spatiality. Those who were uncomfortable or technologically-challenged had to take the bull by its horns.

Teaching in the online mode required a lot of relearning. Face-to-face interaction and the human element of it is perhaps missed the most. The emotional challenge has been a major one. The effects of social isolation and lack of interaction in the physical mode have been perhaps the most keenly felt. The break in routine, low motivation levels and a general lack of physical interaction has led to an absence of students from the virtual classroom. Even when they are present they may not be in a position to switch on cameras and mics due to a myriad of reasons. These range from poor networks to shared physical spaces with the family.

When cameras and mics are switched on, then it is not without its share of funny moments. Dogs barking, parents and siblings talking, cleaning going on in the background, eating and drinking are all a part of the online mode. You pretend not to see or hear anything. Once a student who had probably logged in due to parental pressure was inadvertently caught sleeping. The mother must have heard this and while trying to log out accidentally switched on the camera. Lo and behold, the student was sleeping in a dark room and had probably not started her day yet. After all, winter time at 9:30 in the morning is early for many - of course, one pretends not to see such things!

On a more serious note, the lack of physical interaction has led to a lack of peer socialisation. This is perhaps the important part of "going to college". The effects of this may be more seriously felt by the first-year students who have not yet experienced college life. Miranda House has students from diverse social, economic, regional, ethnic, sexual, religious etc. backgrounds. While interacting with each other in a classroom and in various co-curricular and extracurricular activities, they learn to adjust and appreciate these diversities. Cohesive functioning of a classroom and the college are

dependent on this. The College in several ways is a microcosm of India and the lessons learnt go a long way in preparing global citizens of the future. They learn lessons of tolerance, kindness and forgiveness. The pedagogy is geared towards developing a global citizen who learns that a different point of view is equally legitimate. They learn to examine their 'taken for granted, legitimate points of view'. Most importantly they learn to laugh at themselves and not to take themselves so seriously.

Taking yourself seriously has to do with your reactions to situations that you cannot control. It is about you trying to take control over occurrences that are beyond your control. With an extended period of social distancing, we are getting close to ourselves. One of the ways out is to develop a sense of humor and to learn to laugh at yourselves. Be flexible in your opinions and perspectives. It does not mean that you lack self-respect or that you are ambivalent about who you are. It means that you realise that you are an unfinished project. It also means that you are ready to accept that even though you are the main character of your story, the character is yet to reach its full potential. It makes you ready to explore, learn and change. When you loosen up only then can you explore and learn. You recognise that your self-worth is not dictated by the others. You cannot force others to learn and appreciate your point of view if you do not appreciate theirs. But that does not mean boundaries should not be respected. Societal norms and rules should always be followed, within reason. Not everything in life should be seen as evidence of your abilities, values, ethics and self-worth. An overemphasis on the seriousness in life leads to a narrow way of understanding the self. A relaxed persona is not a sign of irresponsibility.

I wish that we were back to a regular physical interaction, where we see each other and hang out with friends in the cafeteria. The pandemic and the closing down of the world has made us appreciate the value of friendship.

With good wishes for a new Lighthouse!

Dr. Reema Bhatia

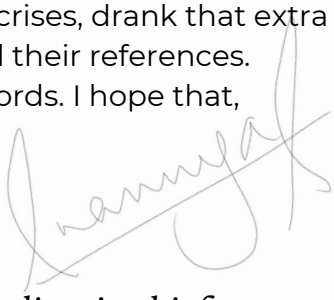
Head of Sociology Department, Miranda House

LETTERS BY THE EDITORS

It's difficult for me to describe what this magazine is, what it's meant to be; what I hope you experience when you read it. All I do know are the stories behind the next 30-odd articles that you'll read here. I was given the honour of leading a team of people who I saw, quite literally, become incredible writers over the course of the few months that I knew them. I say honour because the time I've spent as an editor in chief has changed me in ways I could never have anticipated, and I can only thank the ones who taught me what I know today - the team, my subeditor, the Cabinet.

This year has been incredibly difficult on all of us, has taught us what we believe in, who we are, what we give priority to. So I suppose, that when you choose to peruse or skim through this magazine, I hope you'll catch glimpses of my team and the contributors - the ones who stayed up till 2 a.m. to send me their final drafts, wrote despite facing personal crises, drank that extra coffee, opened those six extra tabs on their computers, edited and re-edited their references. The ones who showed the courage to be vulnerable through their words. I hope that, despite and because of the times we face ahead, we'll always have that courage.

Best,



editor in chief, 2020-21

I write this as I sit at my desk, eyes burning with screentime overdose - my only comfort is in knowing that for the last one year, I wasn't the only one going through this Zoom university ordeal.

March 2020 saw the whole world go into a standstill because of a raging pandemic, and one of my biggest getaways during lockdown had been working for this magazine. As a student of sociology, I've become so much more aware of how society functions, and have developed a critical eye in understanding the various aspects of cultural, political and economic stratification.

The Lighthouse provided a perfect medium to express my thoughts on myriad socially relevant issues while at the same time, letting me hone my writing and editing skills. Under the efficient monitoring of Anannya, working as the Sub-editor was an incredibly wonderful experience as it helped me overcome my anxiousness in hosting and conducting team meetings, really sharpened my organisation, time-management and multitasking skills, and got me all too familiar with Canva owing to numerous certificate-making exercises!



subeditor, 2020-21

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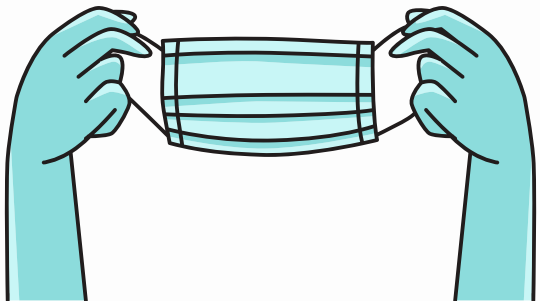
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22, 29, 6. 09.20

Strangers Abroad: the six-part film series

28.09.20

Webinar on Fieldwork and Anthropology with the Late Dr. V. K. Srivastava

Director, Anthropological Survey of India

09, 11 10.20

Film Screening: Cat Sticks + a Discussion with its Director Ronny Sen

18.11.20

Batch of 2023's online orientation

28.01.21

The M.N. Srinivas Declamation Award, 2021

5-6.03.21

Department of Sociology's Annual Symposium, Utopia

5 March 2021

Movie Panel Discussion - Identity Politics in Indian Cinema

Exploring Queer Representation in Regional Films with Ligy J. Pullapally, Dr. Navaneetha Mokkil & Dr. Kaustav Bakshi

5 March 2021

Open Mic

5 March 2021

Seminar on Social Policy - the Balancing Act of Governance & Welfare

with Mridhula Raghavan, Program Officer at PRS Legislative Research

6 March 2021

Student-Alumni Interactive Session

6 March 2021

The Vagina Monologues feat. the Ariels, the English Dramatics Society

6 March 2021

Webinar - a Narrative Toolkit for Sociological Inquiry

with professor Rukmini Bhaya Nair, IIT Delhi

M.N. SRINIVAS DECLAMATION

The Sociology Department of Miranda House, University of Delhi hosted its annual M.N. Srinivas Declamation on the 28th of January, 2021. The aim of the event was to encourage discourse and promote research on ideas relating to the field of Sociology. The theme of this year's Declamation was "Media (Re)production and Reality in the 21st Century".

The event took place via the online platform Zoom, and was attended by more than 100 people. There were a total of ten teams, consisting of two participants each, who were representing their colleges. The participating colleges were: Bharati Mahila College, Hindu College, Indraprastha College, Janki Devi Memorial College, Jesus and Mary College, Kamala Nehru College, Lady Shri Ram College, Maitreyi College, Miranda House College, and Sri Venkateswara College. The panel of judges included Dr. Rakesh Batayal, Dr. Dev Nath Pathak and Dr. Ketaki Chowkhani. The event started with introductions being made by Naina Yadav, President of the department, later followed by Professor Avantika Berwa, who gave a brief foreword on M.N. Srinivas. Class Representative Anmol Bannerjee and General Secretary Rinjini Majumder were moderators of the event that went on for about three and a half hours.

The participants explored a myriad of theories based on the digitisation and diversification of media content along with the issues pertaining to distortion of reality as a result of increased accessibility to information. One speaker argued that media does not exist in a vacuum and is an integral part of the larger society that everyone exists in. Media houses, like any other company, have a significant number of stakeholders who are involved and are also sometimes, backed by political parties. Therefore, in the 21st century, the media has become an invisible puppet of those in power and stimulates the construction of a dominant narrative promoted by its stakeholders. In this sense, it plays a quintessential role in amplifying a particular aspect of news and producing a subjective reality. As a speaker proposed, titles of media content like 'Hum Do Humare Do' promote an ideal and socially acceptable kind of nuclear family that is characterised by heterosexuality. Another speaker shifted their focus from media houses to the viewers while analysing the theme of the discourse. The speaker highlighted that there tends to be a lack of objectivity in the information that viewers consume because viewers themselves do not try to find the source of the information disseminated to the public. Thus, there seems to be a lack of accountability with respect to the authenticity of the source itself. Moreover, they pointed out that despite the diversification of media, people still tend to follow the news that fits into their ideal narrative of an event or one that fits into their ideology.

Participants also delved into the role journalism plays in distorting reality and encouraging vendetta politics. A speaker said that instead of being the watchdog of democracy, the media has become its lapdog, implying that instead of acting as the fourth pillar of democracy which keeps a check on the government apparatus, the media has transformed itself to a lapdog. Furthermore, during the event, it was also argued that the content disseminated to people is transient and what is actually lost in translation are the real human experiences. A participant proposed that media reproduces the events that occur in society so that they can be distributed to consumers; however, during the reproduction of these events, human experiences are lost, therefore, the reality of those events is also lost. A common reason for the distortion of reality through the media was capitalism.

Many speakers contended that the media functions as any other profit-making corporation; they manipulate information in order to sell their product, that is news, to their viewers. Therefore, the reality that viewers perceive is one that is artificially constructed through capitalists. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the viewers to separate the actual reality from the distorted reality presented to them.

The session was concluded by editor-in-chief Anannya Sharma as the judges shared their remarks on the event and the speakers. Professor Chowkani was pleased that all the participants were able to engage with theory and cite examples, but she wished that there was diversity in what people understood about what the media meant. Professor Batyabal felt that the arguments were a bit monotonous, but in general, he highly appreciated the participants and the faculty for hosting the event. Professor Pathak remarked that academic or otherwise, discourse is so polarised these days, the speakers have to be very sensitive, cautious not to fall for a certain side. And he then went on to say that it is good to consider theory - but with prudence.

The Head of Sociology Department, Dr. Reema Bhatia, congratulated the team on organising this event and thanked all the judges for taking the time to grace the event. The results were promptly announced; it was a tie between Lady Shri Ram College for Women and Hindu College. The Best Speaker award went to Riddhi Mukherjee.

The M.N. Srinivas Declamation of 2021 was a huge success, despite the difficulties of hosting it virtually. The event highlighted the importance of engaging in discourse and exploring differing ideas. The theme of the event brought to light numerous understandings of reality and media which included how narratives are constructed, who constructs these narratives, and who is to be held accountable for the construction of knowledge in the present-day society. Moreover, there seemed to be a common consensus among participants that the media is slowly losing its sovereignty and transforming itself from being the fourth pillar of democracy to a pillar that acts as a mechanism to construct pseudo realities. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the viewers to separate the actual reality from the distorted reality presented to them.

The viewer’s reality, as a speaker said, is like a sliding door, implying that as one achieves clearer insight of the events, one’s perception of reality and what comprises it shifts.

REVERBERATIONS

THE LIGHTHOUSE
TEAM

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE INDIAN ECONOMY

The COVID-19 pandemic is unambiguously the worst health and economic crisis in the last hundred years. The global pandemic has created a major upheaval in the world, largely with respect to economic activity and the loss of human lives. It has had unprecedented negative consequences for output, jobs and individuals' overall well-being. It has dented the existing world order, global value chains, labour and capital movements across the globe and, needless to say, the socio-economic conditions of large sections of the world's population. It perhaps represents - so far - the biggest test of robustness and resilience of Indian economic and financial systems.

Almost all sectors of the economy have been adversely affected as domestic demand and exports sharply plummeted, except some sectors where growth is observed. The announcement of sudden lockdowns paralysed the economy and had a devastating impact on people's lives and livelihood as shops, restaurants, eateries, factories, transport services and business establishments were shuttered. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has pegged contraction in India's economy at 8% in the financial year 2021-22. India's GDP contraction (i.e. drop in income) was the worst out of all of the world's biggest economies. Further ahead, we will discuss some of the sectors which have been hit hard by the pandemic.

The Aviation and Tourism sectors account for 2.4% and 9.2% of India's GDP respectively. They were the first to be affected by the pandemic. According to IATO (Indian Association of Tour Operations) estimates, these sectors may incur losses of about Rs. 85 million due to travel restrictions. According to the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the logistics sector estimated a loss of Rs. 50,000 crore, with the aviation sector taking the biggest hit, followed by roadways. Indian Railways had incurred a 87% loss in passenger revenue, down from Rs. 50000 crore last year to just Rs. 4600 crore, owing to the pandemic. Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled the existing vulnerabilities of India's banking sector. Apart from the work pressure, not only the public sector but also private sector banks are facing capital shortfalls in the wake of the pandemic. Data for the first quarter of the year 2020 showed that output contraction was sharper than in 2008-2009, and in some cases, it had registered the steepest drop on record.

The hastily imposed lockdown resulted in the loss of millions of jobs, forcing a majority of the population in urban cities to return to rural areas in order to sustain their lives. As mentioned in India Today, according to an estimate around 12.2 crore people lost their jobs. Almost 75% of them were small traders and wage labourers. The Consumer Pyramid Household Surveys carried out by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy showed a sharp rise in unemployment rates in the range of 8.35% to 23.5 2% during April – August 2020. It had a knock-on effect on the Indian economy. The labourers under MGNREGA (2005) and other construction services were the worst affected. Per capita income declined sharply. According to a UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) report, between 19 million to 120 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty in the developing world, with close to 300 million facing food insecurity. The condition of people below the poverty line has worsened and there is an increase in income inequalities in the wake of the pandemic.

Amid this uncertainty, there are some sectors where significant growth has been observed. While many companies and industries are attempting to cope and adapt with the new situation, digital marketing and e-commerce industries saw a rise in growth and are making the best out of this pandemic. Use of the internet and apps has increased. The education system became fully based on digital platforms like

Google Classroom, Blackboard, etc. The digital marketing sector received a major push. The implementation of 'work from home' proved to be beneficial for telecom industries. India is the largest global producer of generic drugs, and has seen a rise in the pharmaceutical industry since the start of the lockdown. Companies like Serum Institute of India have tied up with Oxford to mass-produce the vaccine developed by them. Health and Life insurance policies are being purchased by people out of fear of the virus. The total FDI equity inflow to India in the 2020 fiscal year was roughly USD 50 billion. In fiscal year 2020, the service sector received the highest FDI equity inflow which comprised 17% of the total FDI equity inflow in India. There has been an increase in agricultural output, especially of rabi crops.

India's economy is expected to struggle with the effects of COVID-19 up to 2025. It can affect Prime Minister Narendra Modi's target to make India a $5 trillion economy by 2025 from USD 2.8 trillion. However, the government is taking incentives to lift the economy. It had announced a special economic and comprehensive package under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, including measures taken by the RBI, amounting to about 27.1 lakh crore. This is more than 13% of India's GDP, and was aimed to combat the impact of the pandemic, as well as revive economic growth. The package included in kind and cash transfer relief measures for households, employment provisions, measures under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan, increased allocation under MGNREGA, credit guarantee and equity infusion-based relief measures for MSMEs and NBFCs, and regulatory and compliance measures. Structural reforms were also announced, including deregulation of the agricultural sector, changes in the definition of MSMEs, a new PSU policy, commercialisation of coal mining, highest FDI limits in defence and space sectors, and the development of industrial land/land bank and Industry Information System. The Government increased the amount of grains (such as rice, etc.) which were distributed through the Public Distribution System among people below the poverty line during the lockdown.

The UNCTAD report stated that India's GDP growth can rebound in 2021 in line with the growth rates of the Indian economy. It also pointed out that debt levels across the world, in both public and private sectors, have risen significantly. Furthermore, in this condition, wrong policies and politics could trigger further shocks which would not only derail the economy, but could also usher in a "lost decade", or a period of economic stagnation.

Along with the rest of the world, India is also facing an acute 'scissor effect' of decreasing tax revenues due to subdued economic activity and rising expenditure caused by a higher demand for health and social protection in the wake of COVID-19. Fiscal deficit is rising in the country and elsewhere. Good policies and politics can ensure that the suffering of the masses is minimal. The UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi said building a better world requires smart actions. He said that the "lives of future generations, indeed of the planet itself, will depend on the choices we all make in the coming times". There is a need for the government to take more and more incentives in order to combat the effects of pandemic in terms of employment opportunities, tax relaxations, etc.

Everyone can strive and do their best to turn this pandemic into an opportunity for good - let's all fight and conquer this virus together. It seems nature is again reminding us: Survival of the Fittest.

Akanksha Kumari
Year 1

CHILDBIRTH THROUGH THE AGES

Pregnancy is a big challenge.

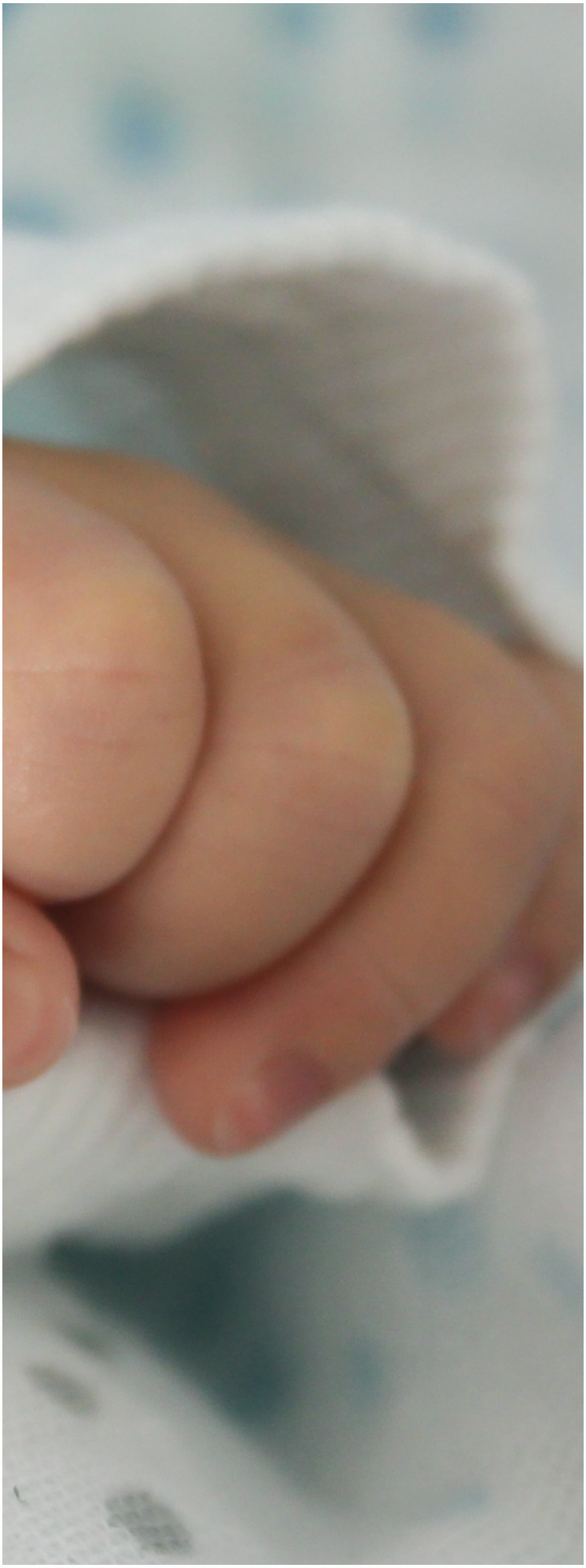
Even though childbirth is a process that has been taking place for centuries, it has not become any easier. Despite many interventions taken to make childbirth easier, a lot has to be done in addressing the mental toll it takes on a woman while being pregnant. In this article, we discuss pregnancy and childbirth during the 'COVID-19 era' and also talk about some historical and social aspects of childbirth and pregnancy, as pregnancy is more than just "biology".

In early times, childbirth had been symbolised in various ways in different cultures. In the Old Testament, it was stated that women should endure 'painful labour' to give birth to children as a result of Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge. And a scroll from 12th-century Japan shows childbirth as so deadly that it attracted evil spirits who were drawn to near-fatal events. That is why in so many cultures throughout history, people have found ways to protect and comfort women during childbirth - often through rituals and the support of friends and family. In this, we can see how even childbirth has been interconnected to our culture and traditions. Even medical procedures like the Cesarean (C)-section, which is often considered a modern practice, has also been practised for thousands of years when the mother had less to no chances of survival. One of the first known successful C-sections where the woman survived was in South Africa in 1826, conducted by British surgeon James Barry.

Historically, it was women who occupied the role of 'midwives' to assist in childbirth, and the medical intervention in childbirth occurred when obstetrics as a medical profession started to emerge. In the 1700s in Europe midwives even opened up schools with more official training programs. And as European immigrants started to come to America in the following century, they brought these skills with them as they started to settle in the Northern states. While in the American South, enslaved black women were forced to attend the deliveries and care for white children, all while being torn from their own families. But they continued working as skilled midwives even after slavery ended; they were often referred to as "granny midwives" who were senior members of their community and were viewed with respect.

However, they were soon replaced by trained doctors who practised and formed ways to make childbirth less painful. One controversial pain drug that was invented in Germany was called the 'twilight sleep', a very dangerous concoction of narcotics. Interestingly enough, many of the women behind 'twilight sleep' were part of the suffrage movement and said that they had a right to painless childbirth. But the drug didn't do so, as most women suffered pain but ended up having no memory of it.

Birthing experiences differed enormously based on where one lived, their class and race. There was even a theory that "the more civilized a race or culture is, the more difficulty the women have experiencing childbirth". And as a result, often working-class women, women of colour and immigrant women were denied anaesthesia due to this stigma. Sadly this stereotype lives on today, and it is due to this that the maternal mortality rate among black women in the United Kingdom and the United States is quite high, places where historically sharp disparities exist at the level of income. The high mortality rate is also due to chronic stress caused by racism which converts into physiological stress. Back in the 1950s, while many black women didn't get pain medication even when they needed it, white women started to speak out about being "over-medicated". In 1958, The Ladies Home Journal published an



investigation titled ‘Cruelty in Maternity Wards’ which gave detailed accounts of abuses faced in hospitals where women were being medicated even without their consent. Many women believed that medicalising birth had made them miss out on such an experience and somehow made it more horrific.

Another problem which correlates with medicalising childbirth is the ever-ongoing debate between natural childbirth and a medical one. This is a debate that focuses on a woman's autonomy over her own body. One of the most influential voices in this regard was Ina May Gaskin, a midwife-turned-activist. In her 1975 book, ‘Spiritual Midwifery’, she insisted that each woman deserved to have childbirth in a safe and a comfortable setting without drugs. A lot of women on all sides of the spectrum were involved in the natural childbirth movement.

The method of childbirth does have an impact on the mother’s mental health. One study found that women who had unplanned C-sections were more likely to experience post-traumatic stress and depression. And Gaskin in her 2004 bestselling book wrote that more drawn-out labours could be “because of the lack of privacy or fear”. The idea that fear made childbirth harder was also preached by the French obstetrician Fernand Lamaze in the 1950s, who popularised a certain method which is now popularly called the “Lamaze Method”, essentially a set of techniques for pain-free, fear-free and drug-free birth. The reasons why women choose or reject pain relief are quite complex. In Japan, only 6% of women opt for epidurals because there is a cultural belief that suffering is a part of childbirth. Many researchers have found out that being relaxed does have real physical impacts during labour.

Natural childbirth advocates have been criticised for over-exaggerating the negative impacts of medical interventions, but their advocacy has improved dramatically. The doula is also an important part of natural childbirth and unlike a midwife or a doctor, she is a birthing coach who is there to support the labouring woman and help make sure that her wishes are being respected by the medical provider. A number of studies have

confirmed that the presence of a doula reduces the need for interventions. The underlying message of the natural childbirth movement continues to resonate throughout the world - that women should make their own choices based on what's best for them. COVID-19 situation. The initial situation added a mental stress on the mother as she would be alone in the delivery room without reassuring faces around her, but now in some hospitals they do allow the presence of one person in the delivery room. All restrictions are to be followed in the delivery room including the mother who has to wear a mask and protective shield while she's going through labour. There are women who have been infected with the virus during a certain trimester and have survived, and women who have been infected during the course of labour and survived. We are yet to know how the virus impacts the infant, as the research is ongoing.

Through this article I hope I was able to give a peek of what childbirth has looked like throughout the ages and how it is a process that has a social and psychological impact to not only to the mother but to society as a whole, and how various cultures and norms have impacted the way a woman decides to give birth.

Gopika Pramod Kumar
Year 1

ENVIRONMENTAL EUPHORIA AMIDST COVID-19 AND STEPS TO SUSTAIN IT

It all started on 27th January, 2020.

When the first case of COVID-19 (or SARS-COV-2), popularly known as coronavirus, was registered in India, it was soon after declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and towards the end of March, India went under a nationwide complete lockdown. Those were indeed dispiriting and gloom-ridden days, as people were forced inside their houses and movement was restricted to emergencies only with schools, colleges, offices, religious, and recreational places shut to prevent the disease from spreading. But these sombre days did have a silver lining to them, as mother nature received that slight healing touch and we experienced what is called an “environmental euphoria”. The world has been coming up against problems caused by pollution of multifarious types, which lead to significant climatic changes i.e. to greenhouse effects and global warming.

One of the most awe-inspiring changes were witnessed in terms of air pollution - when the air quality index (AQI) came down to amazingly low levels. Even New Delhi, which ranked third among the most polluted cities in the world in 2020 as per a WHO report and generally maintained an AQI value above 200 i.e. in the unhealthy range, experienced an AQI value of below 50 in the initial days of lockdown. The usually smoggy skies turned a piercing, clear blue with birds chirping merrily on treetops. One of the main air pollutants, PM2.5, which causes severe respiratory and other health disorders, was found decreasing drastically as soon as the lockdown commenced. As per New Delhi government reports, PM2.5 reduced by 71% - from 91 micrograms per cubic meter on March 20, to 26 mg/cm on March 27. Similarly, the NO2 averaged 90 µmol/m2 (from March 25 to May 2) in the initial weeks of lockdown than 162 µmol/m2 (from March 1 to March 24). Similar phenomena were seen in many other highly-polluted Indian metropolitan cities, including Mumbai and Bengaluru.

India, under the Paris Agreement, had pledged to reduce its emissions intensity of GDP by 30-35% by 2030 and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through additional forest cover by 2030. A modest step being taken in this direction was seen during this lockdown when the Environment ministry of India indicated a fall in carbon emissions by 8%.

Another set of blissful changes was in the case of reducing water pollution in the country. River water in many places became fit for consumption after decades, an example of which was seen at Har-ki-Pauri, where the Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board conducted tests of the Ganges water. The reason for its renewed potability, as cited by one of the CPCB scholars, was the cutbacks in the amount of pollutants being discharged to rivers by industrial facilities and Municipality Sewage Systems on ordinary days, now stopped or slowed due to lockdown and closures of such units. And because of this reduction in river pollution, the critically endangered South Asian river dolphins (also known as Ganges dolphins) have been spotted at numerous Ganga Ghats of Kolkata after nearly 30 years. Yet another tranquil scene was visible in the city of Navi Mumbai, where tens of thousands of flamingos were spotted migrating to the seaside this year; this was a massive increase in their numbers compared to previous years. Moreover, many species have been found returning back to their natural habitats since cruisers and fishing vessels were all anchored at ports, resulting in minimal or no disturbance in the waters.

A momentous change that brought some respite to marine animals and the aquatic ecosystem at large was the reduction in noise pollution from ships and powerful blasts from seismic air gun tests, which are used to locate deposits of gas and oil in the deep oceans. The closure of such facilities, although temporary, was crucial for such euphoric environmental events. Another reduction in the lockdown period was in the number of injured sea creatures, who, often fatally, ingest and get tangled into plastic and marine debris.

Clearly, the above occurrences happened mostly due to the positive impacts of the lockdown. A significant reduction in pollutants such as CO2, NO2, CO, PM2.5, Pb, As, etc. within a span of just two-three months very well indicates that the human-induced environmental degradation is to some extent reversible, and this definitely should motivate us to look for greater and more innovative ways to sustain such environmental euphorias. The current global pandemic provided an opportunity for humans to introspect our actions and imagine the world that existed centuries ago in regards to much better environmental conditions. It became evident that the decrease in pollution was mainly due to the shutting down of industrial units, halting of transportational activities and other small-scale production facilities at the city level that were generating large amounts of waste. So, to cut down on environmental degradation we need to work upon certain system controls. Some ways to do this can be:

- Reducing deforestation and encouraging plantation of trees as a basic and long-term measure,
- Building an efficient transport system, such as a strong bus network and laying down more metro rail tracks with regular monitoring of vehicular pollution and maintenance.
- Using eco-friendly fuels like CNG, and ensuring a greater availability of electric or battery-based vehicles in the market at feasible costs,
- Minimising the use of CFCs (or Chlorofluorocarbon) by promoting renewable energy resources,
- Keeping water contamination under check by framing stricter laws for industrial units to vigilantly recycle their waste before dumping them into rivers, or reuse it elsewhere. The use of pesticides should also be limited. Such laws should be firmly implemented and followed up on periodically to ensure they are being enforced, and
- Fitting sewage systems with innovative waste-filter technologies to filter out the maximum amount of contaminants from the wastewater before letting them flow into water bodies.

Apart from these rhetorical methods of improving upon environmental degeneration, efforts at the higher levels of the government also need to be made. The government should dedicate a greater part of its GDP towards protection of the environment than is currently allotted. As rightly mentioned by Jairam Ramesh, Rajya Sabha MP and former Union Minister, "... we should make efforts to ensure that the 'G' in GDP is not 'Gross' but 'Green'." (Ramesh, 2020, p. 8). In this regard, Sir Partha Dasgupta, a professor at Cambridge University and one of the world's leading environmental economists, has prepared a comprehensive and detailed framework for this approach and its implementation.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions cannot be easily limited, substituted, or stopped permanently, as we have come a long way post industrialisation, and are accustomed to the luxuries capitalist ventures and structures provide, but the engineer and scientists should continue to strive to come up with more efficient technologies and reduce these emissions to acceptable limits. Governments should also promote and provide enough support to the expansion of research and development prospects in environmental protection studies, one of which could be in-depth analyses of using partial "lockdowns" as a short-term or temporary measure to be implemented at certain times to encourage the effects we witnessed in the initial days of the COVID-19 lockdown. All while, of course, keeping in consideration its effect upon the economy and creating measures to combat any economic distresses it may cause.

Finally, the efforts and contributions of each one of us, as human beings, definitely would play a very



climactic role in materialising all of the above measures. Every individual needs to be aware of their actions in concordance with its impact on the environment, even if it seems to be minuscule on the grand scale of things. Only then will we be able to sustain the “environmental euphoria” we experienced in this era of rapidly increasing pollution, global warming, and environmental degradation. Together, we can make this planet a place with “cleaner air, clearer water and greener land.”

Harsha
Year 2

THE RISE OF HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

The pandemic forced us to remain inside our homes, and things seemed very bleak for a while. However, amidst all of that, like rays of sunshine, we saw small businesses open up. Everything from homemade baked goods to tie-dye clothing, accessories and clothing found a place in some home business or the other.

Social media and online avenues became the platform for many people, young and old alike, to put their products out into the world. Calls and online campaigns in the form of hashtags to support and shop local from homegrown businesses also became popular. According to a survey conducted by Adobe in the Asia-Pacific region, amongst all countries in the aforementioned regions, Indians (88%) were the most likely to support small businesses during the lockdown period as well as when restrictions eased.

If one were to open Instagram (which became the primary platform for showcasing and advertising products along with taking orders) one can now see a plethora of small businesses which were started during lockdown and revolve around creative products such as jewellery and online thrift shops have become common-place. Multiple home kitchens opened up along with bakeries and cake shops as well. Upon asking the owners of some of these small businesses as to why they chose this period to start on this venture and how the support was like, their response is recorded as follows.

Shivangi from Kolkata, who owns a business called Authentique which produces organic skincare products such as lip balms and lip scrubs said that the pandemic and its resulting lockdown did in fact help push her into starting her own business. She and many others did it out of a need to do something productive and was pleasantly surprised by the support they received from consumers. She mentioned the importance of such small businesses as the raw materials for the products are sourced directly from local vendors which helps push the local economy.

Another small business owner, Arundhati, who started a clothing store called Bagbig, said that seeing other online clothing and accessory businesses flourishing due to the network of support that emerged during local-surrounded shopping, she decided to take the leap as well. She also echoed the notion that a lot of young people and house-wives have picked up skills during the lockdown and this was an avenue to provide people with eco-friendly and sustainable products. She acknowledged how the pandemic helped popularise the concepts of shopping local and how that has propelled a lot of small businesses all over the country to grow.



Looking at the home-based business industry, it's visible that it is never easy, as they are often not registered businesses; however it is important to acknowledge their presence especially in the context of COVID-19 which has resulted in salary cuts for many - simple businesses such as these have helped give a boost to income. Another aspect to consider is the uneasiness people felt shopping from secondary sources or large corporations during the pandemic due to the communicable nature of the disease. Thus, as a consumer, home-based businesses were a welcome relief because one then knows exactly where their products are coming from and if they are packaged with the proper health precautions in mind. This became applicable especially for food and baked goods.

Shopping local and sustainable products instead from shopping from large corporations is something that has been in the limelight for a couple of years now but the pandemic, in tandem with the lockdown, combined with the fear of receiving products and packages from relatively unknown sources, opened the doors for home businesses to flourish in the current economy.

Kamalkoli Majumdar
Year 1

THE INDIAN MIGRANT EXODUS

India is a country with vast diversity, and has always been known for the unity it possesses. It is a land of dreams with significant history, vivid heritage and culture, and the world's largest democracy. It was often believed that a crisis brings out the best in Indians. Whether a natural calamity, violence of any sort, or a state of emergency, citizens have always selflessly aided those in need and supported government and organisations during such times. But the situation was different when the novel coronavirus entered India. Nobody would have ever expected that such a time will come wherein everybody will be confined to their homes for months, conducting all their day-to-day work from home itself.

The initial quarantine period not only affected normal routines, but it also influenced people's health (leading to issues such as obesity). Other problems that arose were financial instability, feelings of loneliness, shutdowns of companies and enterprises and a resulting decrease in the production and supply of products. So in and all, consequences in every area.

I believe that the hardest hit of pandemic was on daily wage workers in the unorganised sector. Following the announcement of the 21-day lockdown, both urban and rural areas shut down. Migrant labourers were left with no choice but to head towards their hometowns. Night shelters run by local authorities began overflowing, and supplies started dwindling. A boundless number of labourers migrated from cities to their villages. As all means of transportation was closed at that time, they had no choice but to travel by (bare)foot. And so, they started their journey walking miles upon miles without giving a thought as to whether they would manage to reach their destination or not. Also, with inter-state borders blocked, they were abandoned. Some of them migrated with their whole family - having kids, husbands and wives, and aged parents. Those who made it to their destination were asked to quarantine for at least two weeks. The photographs of migrants walking along national highways1, police excesses2 on them, thousands of them swarming the bus stations3 when State governments operated special buses4 to ferry them, and barricades5 staring at them in their home states - all these narrate the ordeals they have gone through. In my opinion, what made their journey more difficult was the callous attitude and mistreatment by the police. After civil society outrage, they attempted to be more patient and accommodating. Also, non-government organisations and citizens came forward to lend their helping hands through money, food and transportation contributions. A perfect example of this would be the role played by Bollywood actor Sonu Sood. He has proven to be a "messiah" for thousands of migrants who could not reach home because of coronavirus lockdown. He offered a much-needed helping hand to many, by arranging for buses and flights to take these stranded migrants to their homes. Recently, he was addressed in a function organised by Cyberabad Police to felicitate frontline warriors and plasma donors.

But then again comes a question: why were workers desperate to leave the cities? The total number of internal migrants in India, as per the 2011 census, is 45.36 crore, or 37% of the country's population. This includes inter-state migrants as well as migrants within each state, while the recent exodus is largely due to the movement of inter-state migrants. Over 400 million people are employed in the unorganised sector. 120 million are migrant workers. Living a hand-to-mouth existence, overnight factory shutdowns cut off their incomes, leaving them with little to no means of survival.

Government responses

On the 27th of March 2020, the Home Ministry ordered that States ensure that migrants not move during the lockdown, permitting them to use the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to provide food and shelter to the migrants on 28th of March. On March 29, the government issued sweeping orders directing that landlords should not demand rent during the period of the lockdown, and that



employers should pay wages without deduction. It also asked State governments to set up immediate relief camps for the migrant workers returning to their native states. After facing near-death experiences, labourers travelled back to their workplaces when in mid-September COVID-19 cases declined in hopes of new beginnings, where with all necessary safety protocols they were back to their earning positions.

The Conditions of Migrant Labourers

Conventionally, when workers shift to cities and towns they face many problems, such as surrounding their identity, housing problems, limited access to resources due to low incomes, exploitation, political exclusion, etc. They come to urban areas with hopes and dreams like educating their children, to make a better living than they had in their village, greater food availability, a better environment. However, they are unaware of the difficulties they will face while adjusting to a new place with a very dissimilar kind of crowd and the rapid pace of urban lifestyles. So initially, their situation becomes worse rather than better. Now, some of them migrated not because of economic factors but due to environmental factors or safety factors. They live in slum areas with uncertain futures, unsure whether they will be able to eat or not. Some of them are not able to make it to the slum area also because they are not capable of paying the rent. At the workplace, they serve at the cost of their health. They work for long hours without any breaks, without proper sanitation. They are also manipulated with regard to their wage rates, work records, etc. Sometimes they have to face physical and verbal abuse.

Steps Toward Change

There is no doubt that the government supports them and provides them with facilities through schemes. According to Article 38 of the Indian Constitution, the State must provide opportunities and reduce disparities among groups. Then there is the Janani Suraksha Yojana for poor pregnant women who are provided with case assistance during delivery; the Janashree Bima Yojana to provide life insurance to those

below the poverty line, and many such other schemes that give them assistance not only financially but also mentally and physically.

A basic overview of this complicated structure shows it is clear that labour contributions to the Indian economy are vast, it is protection and security that still remains a question. Their migration flow will continue or rise, as everyone desires and is entitled to a better life, and the urban area attracts them. If migrant labourers are still in distressed situations, then it is the government and states that have failed to provide them their rights.

Kulgaurvi Singhi
Year 1

COVID-19 AND ITS DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON INDIA'S MARGINALISED SECTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a standstill. With over one million people dead and innumerable suffering, the coronavirus has created social anxiety worldwide. Big economies are in shambles. The risk of starvation and malnutrition threatens the wellbeing of billions of marginalised people around the world. In January 2020, the World Health Organization released guidelines to contain the spread of coronavirus. It recommended 'social distancing' as a preventive measure and discouraged all sorts of public gatherings. This, in turn, brought a sudden disruption in the social life. However, the disruption has unevenly impacted people across societies. Social life that sustained human bonds seems potentially fatal now.

The Migrant Workers' Exodus

On 24 March 2020, the Indian Prime minister abruptly ordered a nationwide lockdown, confining around 1.3 billion people to their houses. This unprepared move had catastrophic repercussions. All the factories, shops, restaurants, schools were immediately shut down. Public and private transportation was prohibited. While the rich safely enclosed themselves in their houses, over 139 million migrant workers were left to fend for themselves. Millions of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and so on, live precariously in cities. Since most of them work in the informal sector, they have inadequate access to basic amenities such as healthcare, housing, drinking water, and sanitation. The sudden disengagement from work worsened their condition, bringing them to the verge of starvation. The suspension of public transport left them with no option but to travel on foot. Famished and distressed women, men, and children walked, cycled, and hitchhiked hundreds of kilometers to reach their native places. Many people met with road accidents. Several died of hunger and exhaustion. According to one report, 120 laborers in Gujarat were brutally beaten up by the police and forcibly stuffed into two container trucks. In Uttar Pradesh, the state health officials forced hundreds of migrant workers to take bath in harmful chemical solutions. Similar cases of police brutality and inhuman behavior were reported from other regions. In many states in India, the police even barricaded the borders, preventing the entry of laborers in their states.

According to the Census report of 2011, there are 1.77 million homeless people in India. As a result of systematic negligence, they have been excluded in most of the public policies. The current pandemic has further exacerbated their situation.

The World Health Organization has suggested physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene as the most effective ways to prevent the infection. The Indian government has instructed people to self-isolate and home quarantine themselves. However, for the homeless people, 'stay at home' instruction is not only impractical but also insensitive. They cannot follow the government's instructions as they lack the most basic amenities such as houses, clean drinking water, sanitation, etc. Coronavirus, lockdown, and quarantine are alien terms for them. Lack of information regarding the pandemic has increased the anxiety and stress among the homeless people. During the lockdown, the government officials practiced both overt and covert means to displace the homeless people. Nowhere to settle, they were

cramped in overcrowded shelters where no proper safety measures were followed. These shelters lacked sanitation facilities and clean drinking water. It is apparent that if one person contracted the virus, the entire group would get infected.

Most of the homeless people would not be able to afford treatment. The COVID- 19 pandemic has put pregnant women living on the streets in highly precarious conditions. They do not have regular supply of medicines. Some of them cannot visit doctors. The government has not ensured any special provisions to cater to their special needs. Several women have lost their lives due to the apathy of the Indian government. In Delhi, the state officials locked around 400 homeless people in a night shelter. They were not provided with food and drinking water. Several pregnant women and infants could not find food for days. Most of the homeless people are malnourished. Due to low immunity, they are more susceptible to COVID-19. During the lockdown, the availability of food became scarce. The fear of starvation gripped their minds more than the deadly virus. Furthermore, the loss of livelihood and lack of money have rendered these people helpless. Even after the unlock- one, they have not got jobs. Ironically, they are seen as the carriers of the virus; it has further led to their stigmatization, exclusion and marginalization. Evidently, the government has completely ignored its homeless citizens. There are no specific guidelines and precautionary measures for them. Several have died due to insufficient testing and starvation. Only Delhi, Maharashtra and Kerala have provided safety and food provisions. However, not everyone has necessary documents to avail the 'relief measures concerning food, shelter, health, hygiene, and livelihood.' The disturbances in social life and everyday interactions that came with the coronavirus pandemic have upended the lives of over one million homeless people. Their disadvantaged social location and the current crisis have proliferated their vulnerabilities more than ever.

The Women and their Woes

Evidence shows that women are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The social, political and economic marginalization comes off as the universal experience shared by women across borders. The disruption in social life had greater implications for women from all strata. A multitude of factors – increased care work, loss of financial independence, job insecurity, experiences of violence and abuse under lockdown had a serious impact on women's health. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the pandemic crisis has particularly hurt women in two ways. First, women hold a less secure position in the world market and their personal finances are lesser than their counterparts. The pandemic has devastated the female-dominated sectors, like restaurants, retail, hospitality and healthcare and thus rendered women more vulnerable economically. Statistics show that '70 per cent of the global health and social workforce— doctors, nurses and care workers are women. Cashiers and cleaners are largely female as well.' They work in precarious conditions with only minimum wages. They 'do not have the necessary platforms to raise their voices and articulate their concerns, even though they are at a higher risk of being exposed to the virus'.

Second, the crisis has overburdened women more than ever. Most of the household work is still seen as a woman's responsibility. For centuries, women in heterosexual relationships have done most of the unpaid work. Even during the pandemic this unjust division of work remains the same. Now, with the shutdown of schools and daycare centers, women have got extra responsibility of educating and rearing children. The case is even worse for the working women, who have to manage work from home and take care of the extra household responsibilities. This sudden disruption in social life has added on to their anxiety. Sudden loss of leisure, recreational activities and social support have particularly distressed the women. The looming recession and confinement at home have increased the stress levels. Home is not a safe place for women living with alcoholic and abusive partners. Since the pandemic, the cases of domestic and sexual violence have spiked. Women are at a greater risk of being abused by their counterparts and other members of the family. Due to the exhaustive lockdowns, women are trapped at home with their abusers. Home isolation has presented abusers with opportunities to inflict harm on



victims who have become vulnerable due to lack of support networks and limited ways of escaping from the violence. Women are harmed not only physically, but also mentally and sexually.

Women's healthcare needs are very crucial especially during epidemics and disasters. But during the COVID-19, most of the resources have been diverted towards the prevention and treatment of virus-infected patients. This has left women even more susceptible to severe medical problems. Pregnant women and newborn babies are under a constant threat of catching coronavirus. Furthermore, without Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (SRHS) the risk of unwanted pregnancies has increased manifold.

The Transgender Community

According to Census 2011, there are 4.88 lac transgender people in India. Their livelihood is dependent on daily wages and temporary jobs such as begging, street entertainment and sex work. Being deeply patriarchal, Indian society, does not give equal social status to transgender people. Their socioeconomic position is vulnerable in the society. Most of the families abandon their transgender children immediately after their identification. They are often ostracized and marginalized due to their gender transgression. The stigma attached around the transgender people has led to their social exclusion, which in turn limit employment opportunities and push them into begging and sex work. Due to disruption in social activities, they have lost their sole source of livelihood. Restrictions on social interactions, gatherings and functions such as baby showers, weddings and other occasions were a major source of their income. Without work and income, the transgender people are starving.

Owing to the decades of structural discrimination, exclusion and violence, the transgender community members are facing heightened risk of poverty and hunger. The government seems completely oblivious of their presence, as most of the social welfare policies are not transgender community inclusive. Despite their poor financial condition, the government has not extended any help. 'In order to fulfill their daily needs during the lockdown, they borrow from multiple loaning

sources. The money is usually not borrowed from banks rather from private moneylenders, as they do not have proper documentation or identity proof to open a bank account... Hence, they depend on private money lenders who charge higher interests and they remain debt trapped' (Bhattacharya, 2020). The community members cannot even avail the security schemes and benefits meant for the poor people, as they lack necessary documents such as Aadhar card, ration card, Voter ID etc. Since most of them left home at an early age, they lack educational degrees, birth certificates and other essential documents. The state also does not have a proper record of the transgender population.

The transgender people face discrimination while getting houses. Therefore most of them live in squalid slums, where it is very difficult to take all the required precautions. Most of the community members stay in cramped places, without proper ventilation. Due to their unsafe living conditions, the risks of coronavirus contagion remain high. Those who live in rented accommodations have been asked to evacuate. The transgender people who are staying with their parents and have undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) have experienced hostility during the pandemic. Moreover, in order to prioritize the COVID-19 patients, the hospitals have postponed non-emergency surgeries. The postponement of these surgeries has taken a toll on the mental health of transgender people. 'For instance, Sasha, a freelancer transgender writer who lives with her family in Bangalore, is on the verge of transition since September 2019' through hormone therapy. However, she is unable to meet her doctor due to lockdown, who is 20 km away. She is unable to recognize the changes in her body due to the therapy and is afraid of the consequences of being overdosed. Being a victim of depression and anxiety, Sasha is unable to spend an entire day with her family'. Lack of hormonal therapies, food, medicines and money have led to depression, anxiety and panic attacks.

Conclusion

The effects of COVID-19 are visible worldwide across different social strata. To many people, the crisis gave a chance to escape the inexorable momentum of life. It gave them time to focus on their health and virtually connect with friends and relatives. However, it has been extremely detrimental to the vulnerable sections of the society. The migrant workers, urban homeless people, women, and members of transgender community have suffered the most. For them, the disruption in social life resulted in loss of livelihood, starvation, and death. Undeniably, the governments around the world are functioning in highly uncertain and chaotic times. But, the most vulnerable people in the society must not be neglected. India has been unsuccessful in protecting its marginalized citizens from the adverse impacts of the pandemic. It lacks diverse safety net policies to safeguard and cater to the needs of people. With the proper inclusive approach, governments can make this world a better place to live in.

Nancy
Year 1

THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN KASHMIR DURING COVID-19

“We are ostracised by our own and the world follows the same approach. What are we supposed to do?”

These are the heart-wrenching woes of Naseer Ahmed, a member of the transgender community of Kashmir, a community that for centuries has been at the receiving end of much prejudice and disdain from the Kashmiri society at large. In fact, it would not be incorrect to conclude that the transgenders are by far the most marginalised community in Kashmir today. The COVID-19 pandemic has made matters all the worse for this already stigmatised and vulnerable community. The word ‘transgender’ is generally used to describe individuals whose gender identity is incongruent with the sex they were assigned at birth. It includes pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative transsexual people who strongly identify with a gender opposite to their biological sex. In Kashmir however, the transgender community comprises almost solely of non-operative transgender women.

The story of the transgender community in Kashmir is one filled with sustained and systematic isolation, subjugation and deprivation. It will not be wrong to say that the transgenders in Kashmir are treated like second class citizens, whose right to a dignified and honorable life is almost as unrecognised as the multitude of hardships they have to face every day for survival. The transgender community almost always ranks lowest on the socio-economic indicators of the valley. They have very few economic opportunities available to them and consequently their sources of income are extremely limited. They have been mainly restricted to occupations like matchmaking and performing at weddings, which are considered too lowly for ‘normal’ people to perform. The transgenders essentially have no participation in the formal sector including government service. They are mostly daily wage workers and as such live in perpetual financial insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic has only aggravated this problem as the number of weddings taking place has drastically dropped due to restrictions. As a result, their income for the past year or so has been virtually nil. Even prior to the onset of the pandemic, their condition had been dire for many months, as a consequence of the government-imposed lockdown in Kashmir post the August 5, 2019 constitutional changes during which all socio-economic activity in the erstwhile state had come to a grinding halt.

In the social sphere as well, transgenders have suffered immensely. The biggest example of which is the fact that most have been disowned and discarded by their families in fear of humiliation and embarrassment. They are essentially left to fend for themselves. Most go on to look for rented accommodations and seldom does any of them own property. Even then many find it difficult to get rented rooms and those who do manage to somehow get them must agree to act ‘normally’ in and around the space. The pandemic has greatly added to their problems of housing as inability to pay rent may very well cause them to come onto the roads. There are no avenues of education and learning for transgenders in Kashmir and only a handful would have received any formal instruction. This is a central reason for their never-ending misery and depredation.

Sexual harassment against transgenders is unfortunately very common. According to Mudassir Aziz, a psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences in Srinagar, almost all transgenders face sexual abuse but are afraid of seeing a doctor or expressing their feelings because they are faced with rejection from society. “Even their parents reject them”, he remarked. Besides a majority of them



suffer from psychological disorders like PTSD and depression. During COVID times, transgenders have had no access to good healthcare and judging by the social ostracisation they have faced over the years, it would not be surprising to see cases of even medical staff refusing to treat transgender patients in hospitals. There are various causes for such a hostile attitude towards transgenders. However, the most visible cause is the fact that Kashmir, like most parts of the world is a heteronormative patriarchal society where everything feminine is subjugated. Misinformation and misinterpretation of religion also fuels this stigmatisation. While Islam (predominant religion in the valley) expressly prohibits the mistreatment of transgenders, it is generally the opposite that is followed, which only tells us that culture and religion are not the same. Although many transgenders are vocally proud of their Muslim identity, the society at large does not accept them as such and on most occasions, they are not even allowed to bury their dead in local graveyards. Such is their level of alienation that they find themselves as alone in death as they were in life.

It is high time for the government to take responsibility for this institutional failure and come to the aid of this hegemonised and illtreated community. They have suffered long enough for authorities to take notice. The government amid the lockdown had made members of the transgender community eligible for a pension of a mere 1000 rupees a month under the Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS), which in the year 2021 is no more than a cruel joke. The society as a whole also needs to go through a process of reform vis-à-vis its attitude towards members of the transgender community so as to put an end to this collective moral failure spanning centuries.

Nureen Iqbal Shah
Year 2

CONDITIONS OF WOMEN DURING THE PANDEMIC

As United Nations chief Antionio Guterres rightly said about the period of lockdown, it was a “Horrifying global surge in domestic violence”. While the whole nation was waiting for the vaccine, women were facing a problem which has no solution. Women were not safe in their homes, falling into the trap of violence. Working women were also vulnerable in the presence of male members of their family. They were weakened mentally and physically by facing two viruses at a time. While working, she had to fulfill all the needs of her family by cooking food and caring for children, round the clock.

The Gendered Impact of the Coronavirus

Women were the main sufferers during the pandemic. Let me explain how it is. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already existing gender inequalities with substantial implications for women. With the closure of offices and educational institutions, the emerging norm of working from home and online education, along with the lack of services of domestic help, the need to perform unpaid chores in the household has increased. Simultaneously, the requirements of social distancing and sanitisation have created new chores. Owing to the sexual division of labour, and gendered roles and social norms of performing domestic and care work, the burden of unpaid work falls disproportionately on women. According to research conducted by the National Commission for Women (NCW), the limited availability of alcohol (for men) was also one of the main problems - upon intoxication, women became mediums for men to let loose their frustrations. The NCW has witnessed a two-fold increase in domestic violence and sexual assaults in the first week of lockdown since March 24, 2020. Of the 257 complaint calls received by NCW, one of them was by a father in Rajasthan who complained that his daughter was being beaten by his husband and not being provided food. Several other similar incidents were reported during this period.

We know that challenges women face are complex and often interrelated. For instance, a woman’s financial independence may be hindered by unequally-distributed domestic burdens and low decision-making power at home. The lack of women in leadership positions can result in policies that perpetuate existing gender norms and inequities across entire nations. Listing these issues as isolated events does not do justice to the interconnectedness between them. I will now discuss more about working women - how they were affected by this nationwide lockdown. Those in formal jobs faced salary cuts, informally-occupied women lost several months’ worth of income and were forced to cut down on basic necessities such as food and education for their children.

A Case Study in Bulandshahr

27 year old Guriya had twins who turned one year old in lockdown itself. She was living in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, with her husband, who didn’t let her eat. Her parents in Delhi wanted her to come to Delhi as she was facing domestic violence. After coming to Delhi, she struggled to even obtain milk for her children, and took debts to buy Amul milk powder.

The Role of Women in Homes During the Pandemic

With home-dynamics changing vis-à-vis a lockdown, several things have changed. Work-burden has increased manifold. The husband and children staying indoors bring incessant demands for cooked food round the clock, in addition to cleanliness and other chores. The situation is untenable without the usual household help - cook and domestic worker. Idleness stems from frustration and common-day disputes. Exploitation by other women in the house (mother-in-law, sister-in-law) is common in traditional patriarchal Indian households.



Whether the Working-From-Home (WFH) man assists with household work depends entirely on individual temperament. For education and literacy have nothing to do with men sharing an equal burden back home. There is no denying the fact that the most “intellectual” and “progressive” of them have the most sexist attitude to working with their wives, mothers or sisters.

Moreover, for a WFH woman, who is also a mother and a wife, the lockdown is especially unrelenting and an altogether different nightmare, with ruthless bosses expecting her to be available 24/7, and reprimanding her for not putting in “extra hours” considering she’s “at home”. Women, similar to their male counterparts, are working full time with the same velocity however, along with their household work and no help. Therefore, the biggest issue faced by women in this situation is mental instability.

A lady teacher who is neck-deep in work ends up not teaching from home but in “housework”. She complains, “The husband and the kids want four meals a day including tea-time snacks!” adding wistfully that “at this rate, I will need a vacation by the time lockdown ends. These few hours of “me” (which they usually get to spend away from work) have translated into back-breaking hours of never-ending housework”.

Catering to the ill members of the family (isolated or self-quarantined individuals in this case) is an additional responsibility upon the woman’s shoulders, as well as a danger to her health (as they are exposed to unfit conditions). Isolation has meant greater interaction among family members, an exchange of opinions on various issues and disagreements over others, causing altercations. “There was every reason to believe that the restrictions imposed to keep the virus from spreading would have such an effect” said Marianne Hester, a sociologist at the University of Bristol who studies abusive relationships. Domestic violence goes up whenever families spend more time together.

As quarantines take effect around the world, a

kind of “intimate terrorism” — a term many experts prefer for domestic violence — is flourishing. One cannot deny the fact, though, that not all men share the same attitude and might turn up assisting their wives in housework. However, that completely depends on personal disposition. Some would also opine that the opportune time for women to enjoy their autonomy and follow their passions has ushered in, ignoring, however, that lives and experiences of women differ in various ways. To be able to enjoy the fruits of her labour, she has to fight yet more milestones at times. Nonetheless, it is time that we take plenary measures to embattle ourselves in the face of this unanticipated tragedy that seems to have upended humankind all over!

Sakshi Singh
Year 1

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MEDIA: AN INTROSPECTION OF RHEA CHAKRABORTY'S CASE

"*Sushant par Rhea ka kaala jaadu*" (Rhea's black magic on Sushant)
"*Rhea ke jhooth par kya kehta hai India?*" (What does India have to say about Rhea's lies?)
"Sushant ko Rhea ke jeher ne mara?" or *"Riya ne Sushant par kia jaadu tona?"*
"*Rhea Chakraborty ki ye aukat nahin hai ki Bihar ke mukhyamantri pe tipanni kare*." (Rhea Chakraborty does not have the standing to comment on Bihar's chief minister).
"*Daulat Sushant ki, aish Rhea khandan ki.*" (Sushant's wealth, Rhea's family's luxury.)
"*Sushant ka pyaar, Rhea ka hathiyaar?*" (Sushant's love, Rhea's weapon?)
"Her entire game is up!"
"Rhea Chakraborty needs to be called a witch because she does witchcraft."

Remember these degraded, immoral, insensitive and proofless statements passed by the mainstream nationalist media? The media's primary role is to cover and serve the news as it is to the public. But it seems, these days, news has just become another commodity in the neo-liberal world that can be bought and sold in the market.

The right to dissent has been an indispensable part of our Indian Constitution. Historically there have been a lot of cases where media has stood up and has saved its reputation by giving unbiased, grounded reports and voiced on behalf of the victims and oppressed, like that in Nirbhaya case, Priyadarshini Mattoo case, and Jessica Lal case. However, there have been times when they have let us down. Whether it was the Arushi Talwar murder case or Rhea Chakraborty's case, in the neoliberalist era, media has exactly acted like the money-making industrialists and institutions.

What is not at all shocking when we look at the media trials is the inherent misogyny.

Mass media is considered the 'watchdog' of society that mirrors and guides the process of social change. Unfortunately, today media has become yet another corporate sector that is still dominated by men. The essence of social change and bringing just news to people is no more the goal of media, it has only become another money-making institution. Most of the higher posts in media just like other institutions are taken by men. Hence, it is less likely that a woman's perspective or her viewpoint is taken into consideration. The media has depicted women as mere commodities and "sex objects" through the ages. Women have been exploited by advertisers by exposing them as stereotyped homemakers or as visual props. Viewing them as a protagonist if she is dressed up in a "traditional" manner and bearing all the oppression silently and portraying them as vamp if they have slightly freedom of thought and expression and self-love is common on Indian television. Women are judged only through their physical appearances. This has minimised the respect and dignity of half of the population.

Why is it that Sanjay Dutt's drug case became a huge biopic, loved by everybody and he was considered as 'strong' enough as he went through a lot of things? His history of drug abuse has been considered as "just a phase" whereas female actors had to go through character assassinations on the national news



channels after the death of Sushant Singh Rajput. Also, the very fact that only female actors were in the grab of the NCB proves the existing gender gap. Do only women do drugs in Bollywood? Smoking and drinking are legal in India. However, if a woman is spotted engaging in these activities, they are considered as "characterless" or of "loose morale". It is one of the privileges women still can't afford.

Media plays a very vital role in influencing people's outlook towards these actresses. However, constantly chasing after them, violating their right to privacy and dragging them in a negative spotlight just enhance the deep-rooted misogyny and patriarchy in Indian society further. Since women came out of their "prescribed domain" and tried to do things that were inherently reserved for men, they had to pay a price. They often have to pay a price by losing their career. The recent omission of Rhea Chakraborty's face from the poster of her upcoming film *Chehre* is one of the examples of this. Because of the drug cases, which were in the spotlight following Sushant Singh Rajput's death case, all the female actors whose name was dragged inside had to face character assassinations. From media trials to abuses on social media to rape threats, they were in the probe of the "morality expectation" from the society.
In contrast, whenever male actors are alleged under the #MeToo campaign, it had been argued that they should be treated as innocent until they are "proved" to be guilty. Meanwhile, in Rhea Chakraborty's case, all the arguments come and stop at her gender. Being a Bengali woman, she was stereotyped for being very "cunning", doing "black magic", and looting her boyfriend. From where do these misogynist and stereotypical thoughts come from? All the allegations and comments, from Rhea, wearing a white *salwar-kameez*, being tagged as a "gold-digger" (which usually all women are considered to be) to her exploiting her "innocent" boyfriend - all this signals only one thing, that is, the presence of inherent misogyny in our society.

Contrasting Sushant Singh Rajput's case to Jiah Khan's case, one cannot see media or others attacking the character of Jiah's boyfriend Suraj Pancholi. Nobody is calling him a gold digger even after Jiah's mother's severe allegations against him. In what kind of double standards are we living in? Is it because Jiah was a Muslim woman, her case was sidelined without giving much attention and coverage in media? On one hand, one woman had to face witch hunting, another was seen as 'Bharat ki Beti'. Frequently posting videos on the case, whether it was linking Sushant's case to nepotism or with drug allegations, people viewed her as the only warrior in Bollywood who dared to speak against big film directors, businessperson, and politicians. She not only took advantage of the case by smashing Rhea and others but took the case to another political level, leaving behind the very essence of the case. Ironically, this way #JusticeforSSR came in trend.

This inherent misogyny is not a recent phenomenon, rather, it has always persisted in Indian society. The vindication of this point can be done by looking at religious texts like the Manusmriti. In texts like Bhaj Govindam and Prashnottari, men have been asked to stay away from women in order to attain salvation after death. We all have heard of various stories of beautiful apsaras trying to distract sages from deep meditations by seducing them. Our society equates a happy and self-made woman to a characterless and insensitive woman. And all the male chauvinists are only in search of helpless and weak women, whom they can help and then dominate.

Since ages, women have to fight a battle every day because of their gender. Till when are we going to deny the rights and the privileges to half of our population? When are going to start treating the other pairs of chromosomes exactly like that of privileged XX chromosomes? What makes them special? One doesn't know the answer to these questions. The argument is not if the problem can be eradicated easily from society; it might take a lot of time. It is to say that what is needed is the identification and understanding of the root cause of this structural problem prevailing in society. And understanding is an important start.

Sejal Pandey
Year 1

COVID-19: DISPARITIES OVER CENTURIES EXPOSED IN A YEAR

The pandemic has seen to widen one of the nation's sharpest inequalities, the social hierarchy determined by India's inherent discriminatory caste system, which can often determine everything from social interactions to economic opportunities. Public debates around covid-19 are largely revolving around the claim that the pandemic knows no race and class. The intent behind such a message is to counter racist assumptions and discrimination. However, we cannot ignore how different levels of vulnerabilities are produced during this crisis and the sole emphasis on 'social distancing' and 'self-isolation' reveals how caste and class influence our socio-epidemiological understandings.

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with social distancing norms has surprisingly laid bare the fragile livelihood situation of lower caste communities in the midst of massive job loss in the urban locations. It was the month of severe lockdown, April 2020, that witnessed a sharp rise in unemployment. As it is evident that people from higher income groups are less likely to be impacted while India's disadvantaged communities with a lack of access to resources will be intensely affected by the unprecedented global health emergency. The disadvantages faced by SCs extend beyond their disproportionate dependence on wage work, this is because SCs face caste-based discrimination when being hired, they thus have a greater unemployment rate than the rest of the population. If we assume half of India's 119 million workers who have lost their jobs are primary or single earning family members of an average-sized family, around one-third i.e. 60 million households of Indian's people could be facing a severe livelihood crisis.

On a more social and cultural front, the customs of purity and pollution are reflected even amidst of lockdown and social distancing measures. As millions of migrant workers made the arduous journey to their villages after India imposed a lockdown in the last week of March 2020, there were several observations to be made. Many lower-caste workers have cited instances where their returning to the rural hinterland had evoked the double stigma of coming from a lower caste and having travelled from major cities like New Delhi where the coronavirus is rapidly spreading. Many of these workers got home after their taxing journey only to realise that all contractual jobs had been redistributed among the upper-caste people. Other backward classes moving away from urban to their villages as the strict lockdown due to COVID-19 has shut their employment opportunities in the urban centres.



The bigger concern during this pandemic is the fair distribution of ration and other essential commodities sanctioned by the centre as well as the states. The hoarding and panic buying of food and other essential commodities by the privileged upper class and upper caste groups worsened the situation. Many Dalits did not receive any government-sanctioned rations that had been earmarked for them because the village headmen, who are often upper-caste, have been discriminating on the lines of caste. Social vulnerability perpetuated by the practice of untouchability may contribute to the potential rise in ethical concerns amid the national shutdown. Caste prejudice is clearly regenerated by social distancing regulations as the Dalits who are historically separated and isolated based on centuries of old untouchable practices, are still subjugated to such measures upon entering quarantine centres in their villages where the upper caste is separated from them and given treatment based on their social-cultural standing. There have been reports of Dalits being mandatorily forced into quarantine despite their displaying no symptoms and Brahmins refusing to eat food cooked by Dalit workers. As the whole education system has turned online, there are many dimensions that reveal the continued disparity between caste groups which would affect the ability of Dalits and other lower-caste communities to access online education. Issue of technology also stems from the inability to invest in technology which is essential when the pandemic has forced schools to close for a substantial period of time. We find that because of the caste gaps the resultant economic distress prevents parents of SC children to assist their children with any form of home learning, compared to parents of upper-caste children as they are much less equipped.

Urban middle-class mentality of seeing lower caste lifestyles as ‘unhygienic but necessary’ has made these communities forced to do their jobs on the frontlines without being offered any protection. The Dalits, although oppressed, are essential parts of India’s economy. Traditionally, they are a waste picker or sewage drain cleaner-occupations that are considered impure, yet fall under the category of ‘essential services.’ Due to this, while the rest of the nation was advised to stay safe at home, these workers were working as usual, without even the most basic of safety measures. The narrative that people of lower-caste were the ones responsible for bringing the virus to upper-caste individuals has predominated the detrimental situation of the lower-caste people during this pandemic. The violence that has stemmed from ignorance and a deeply-rooted sense of fear has led to a sudden spike in hate crimes across the nation targeting the lower-caste individuals. Paradoxically, in the fear of stigmatization, the people have been lying about their symptoms, avoiding quarantine and not going to hospitals which in turn is doing exactly the opposite of containing this virus.

The fact that the systematic caste structure is immune to an unprecedented event like this pandemic makes such a crisis certainly inevitable. India’s constitution provides that “no citizen shall, on grounds only of caste or race, be subjected to any disability and restriction.” However, under a microscopic view when examined culturally, it becomes clear that, despite such reforms, India’s caste system is alive and thriving. The pandemic has thrown a light on how the lower-caste communities have faced unbearable trials- including being blamed for spreading the coronavirus. Without proper protection from the government, they had to accept inhumane living conditions, suffer humiliation and violence as they continue their struggle to keep themselves from starving. Decades of reforms in India have suffered due to the pandemic, which has brought caste-based distinction into an even sharper focus. These discriminatory behaviours will serve to further deepen caste lines and legitimize the poor treatment of those who are seen as ‘lesser’ human beings.

Shreya Nag
Year 1

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SEX WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year, according to the joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO. The pandemic has mobilised the entire population, sex workers were hit particularly hard by the coronavirus pandemic, with a ban blocking them from doing their job during the multiple lockdowns. Although the term sex worker can be defined in multiple ways, for the purpose of this article, sex workers are adults who trade oral, anal, and/or vaginal sex for something of value. The term is used in reference to all those in all areas of the sex industry, especially those who provide direct sexual services.

With the ongoing pandemic happening, among the various sections of people who have been affected by it, the sex workers' plight has been beyond deplorable. It has rendered them homeless with increasing debts, unable to afford a daily meal because of their inability to make a livelihood due to the present circumstances and also, the lack of proper preventive measures whenever they are working. This leaves them even more exposed to the risk of getting the virus, along with other existing ones like HIV and other sexual diseases. The pandemic has not only taken away access to their source of income but also has also ripped them off of their basic human rights. In Kenya, for example, according to a report, incidences of violence against sex workers more than tripled during the first month of the pandemic, according to the Kenya Sex Workers Alliance. A sex worker in South Africa - Robyn Montsumi - died in the custody of police in April. Sex workers in South Africa experience systemic human rights violations and outright violence, discrimination, and harassment at the hands of the police at an alarming rate.

Thousands of sex workers have no other option but to continue working, placing their health and lives at risk to support themselves and their families. Driven by financial need, sex workers are more likely to agree to meet with clients they do not feel comfortable with or negotiate safety measures, such as condom use. Sex workers have also reported that clients are more likely to bargain over prices or push for services to be performed without condoms since COVID-19 measures were adopted in their countries. Knowing they were risking their lives, many women prostituted during the pandemic. "Poverty will kill us before the coronavirus," said an Indian woman in prostitution (Dutt, 2020). A woman in the US explained, "You might survive the virus, but you won't survive not eating for two months. If you ask any rational person if they'd rather take the virus, or not eat, that's not even a thought" (Gentile, 2020).

"When the lockdown happened, each and every community was affected. The government seemed to care about all and offered them some form of relief but there has been nothing for us", Lalita Harijan, who has been working as a sex worker in Karnataka's Belgavi district for over two decades, told PTI. In India, the Supreme Court on 29 September, directed all states to provide dry rations to the sex workers identified by the National AIDS Control Organisation and legal service authorities without insisting on any proof of identity, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, saying it is a matter of survival for them and the



government must come to their rescue as a welfare state.

Decriminalisation - the removal of criminal penalties for buying and selling sex - is key to protecting sex workers from abuse and exploitation. It is also a crucial step in improving the health of sex workers, their families, and their communities. This is especially true during a global pandemic. These measures would help sex workers receive a basic income, services, and the ability to provide for their families. In New Zealand, for example, the first country to decriminalise sex work in the world, sex workers were able to access the government's emergency wage subsidy within days, just like all the other workers in the country whose earnings had fallen because of the pandemic. Moreover, government staff worked closely with sex worker organisations, to ensure that sex workers had access to social support programs, and to define guidelines to return to work safely after the lockdown was eased. Recognition of sex workers as informal workers and their registration is important so they are able to get worker benefits. They should be provided with at least temporary documents that enable them to access welfare measures such as PDS and insurance benefits, Seshu, who founded SANGRAM, a Maharashtra-based NGO empowering sex workers, added.

Sneha Saikia
Year 1

LOOKING BEYOND THE SHADOW OF THE PANDEMIC

Undoubtedly the times of pandemic were marked by tremendous significant transformations across the globe. Apart from distancing people and masking them, COVID-19left its mark in every nook and corner of the world. Among the number of issues that popped up amidst the pandemic, that of the shadow pandemic is a grave one.

The rise in gender-based violence in times of lockdown and pandemic has been defined by UN Women as Shadow Pandemic- “A shadow that is accounted for by pandemic”. Women were actually facing issues of domestic violence, abuse and assault, attached to their gender roles. The pandemic has rendered them even more vulnerable. Graphs and statistics of the same have shot up. The National Commission for Women stated that the number of complaints it received exceeded 13000. But the harsh reality is that only 14% of women reveal the issue of domestic violence, which point towards the millions of females in households upon which light must be shed. Domestic violence that women face particularly in India can be cited as a byproduct of the patriarchy, which treats women as inferior and thinks it is right and it is alright for men to physically dominate women if needed. Lack of agency, freedom and economic stability eventually leads women to rely on husbands and shuts down the chance of dissenting or questioning their stance.

As the virus made millions of people jobless and challenged the livelihoods of many, access to resources for the breadwinners and homemakers of the family, therefore, became hindered. This contributed to the reason for further clashes. Apart from this, alcoholism and the use of drugs also aggravated issues. For a long time, we all were confined to a small circle of family and were detached from all sorts of gatherings, which made us feel lonely. Without hesitation, we can say that all the circumstances moulded the helplessness of women into a complex figure as there is less chance of getting help for solving the issues in this ‘new normal’. But the solutions that are effective in the long run should be emphasized. Access to community centres and services where one can express their hardships should be made functioning at grass-root level. Existing bodies like self-help groups and NGOs can be used as a platform for the same. Also ensuring that women households of the remote areas do have access to get their issues addressed along with also have the opportunity to present their problems through online methods of counselling and communication.

While dealing with the side of platforms to express, actions post the COVID-19 situation are vital too. Effective legislation to control and curtail the instances of domestic violence also matters. The pandemic is not over yet. We have to learn to live with the virus. Regarding the global pandemic and creating awareness among women, making them stand up to reach out remains relevant and becomes the need of the hour. It is the time to light up and let the shadow fade.

Sunfiya Mol
Year 1

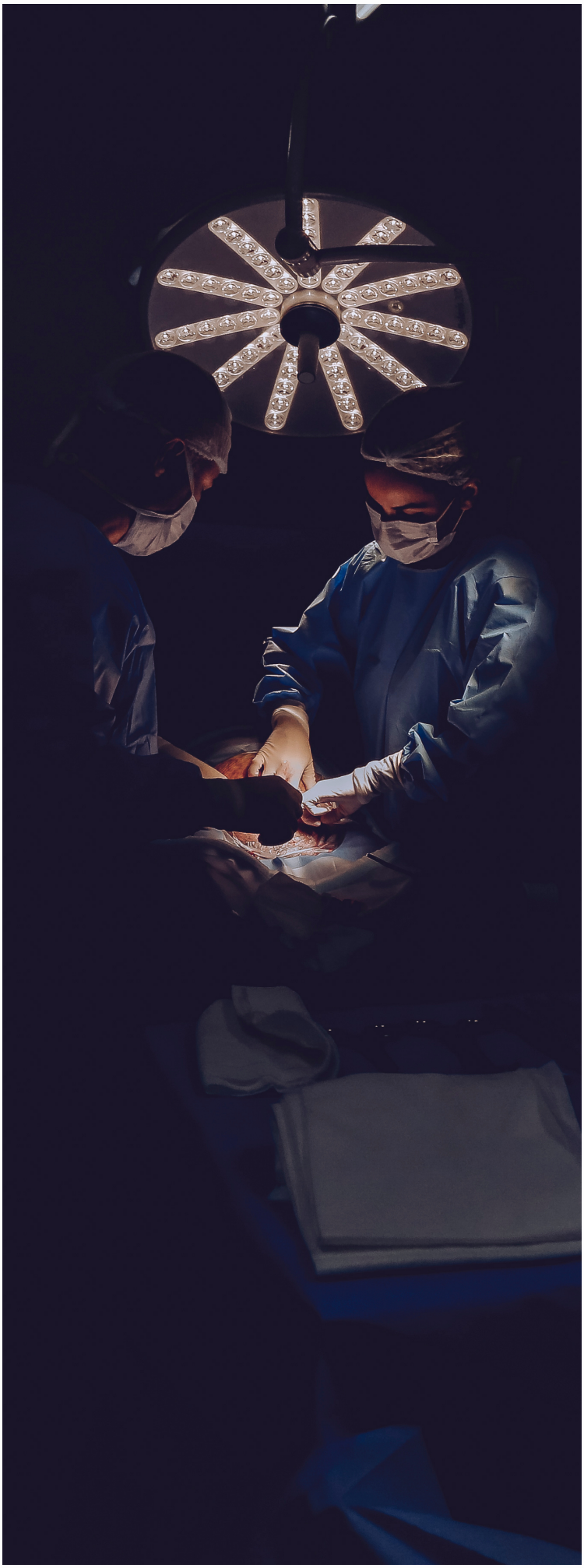
EXPLORING A "SUPERPOWER"'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The United States of America is viewed as one of the most developed and wealthiest countries in the world; however, it is far from the healthiest, owing to a highly fragmented health care system and limited public care resources. In this context, I shall first provide an overview of the COVID-19 cases by analysing its economic impact and the regulations imposed by the government to contain the virus in the US. Then, I shall explain neoliberalism with Adam Smith's economic theory of laissez-faire and link it to the privatisation of healthcare in the country. Next, I shall discuss the gendered impacts of the pandemic. Following that, I shall provide a brief introduction to socialist feminism and outline the socialist feminism model given by Iris Young. Later, I shall contest why socialist feminism allows an intersectional and equitable platform to rebuild a post-pandemic world.

In order to understand the relevance of neoliberalism and socialist feminism during the coronavirus pandemic in the US, it is first imperative to gain an insight into the impact of the pandemic on the American population. The World Health Organisation states that the US, as of January 2021, remains the worst affected country by the pandemic, with over 25 million cases and 421,570 deaths. The US confirmed its first case of coronavirus in February of 2020, and state governments imposed containment measures to stop the spread of the virus when the outbreak widened in March and April. According to the International Monetary Fund, the US economy contracted at a rate of 31.7%, and the unemployment rate increased to 7.9% in September. In some states like Texas and California, bars, theme parks, and convention centers remain closed to prevent large-group gatherings. The economic impacts of the coronavirus directly correlate to the accessibility of healthcare in the US, a case that can be conceptualised by studying the neoliberal ideology that implicitly presents itself in the privately-owned healthcare system in the country.

Neoliberalism, defined as the perspective based on a strong belief in a free marketplace and opposition to government intervention (Mintz 2019, 3.2), stems from Adam Smith's theory of laissez-faire, explained in his book, The Wealth of Nations. Smith, in the text, argues that the market economy is an amalgamation of individual transactions that are made in the pursuit of self-interest. However, the exchanges made in the pursuit of one's self-interest also takes care of the interest of society. He theorizes that there seems to be an unseen force in market economies called the 'invisible hand' which converts what is good for the individual into what is good for society. He uses his theory to support the argument that while a capitalist economy is driven by the self-interest of buyers, the 'invisible hand' benefits the entire society because it generates wealth and stimulates the economy. Thus, he believes that markets should not be regulated by the state and allowed to function solely based on the market forces of supply and demand (Smith 1776). The American healthcare system is an example of a free marketplace that is highly privatised and rooted in profit-making activities. The neoliberal foundations of the institution accelerate inequalities rather than combating them.

The number of infected persons and casualties during the pandemic have harsh implications on the country and reflect its preparedness to manage unprecedented crises. In the US, the coronavirus pandemic has put great pressure on its health care system and has brought forth a key issue in its public sphere: disproportionate accessibility to health care. The Guardian stated, "Year after year of underfunding of our [American] federal, state and local public health agencies has left us ill-prepared for



the Covid-19 challenge...containing the coronavirus will require those infected to seek medical care...fear of devastating ER or hospital bills, however, could keep some home - or at work" (Gaffney 2020). In the government package, the Trump administration responded to the growing health and economic concerns of the country with provisions for free testing; however, it is important to note that this law did not provide free treatment for coronavirus (Sprunt 2020). The Independent also reported that "the spike in uninsured Americans – adding to an estimated 84 million people who are already uninsured or underinsured – is 39% higher than any previous annual increase" (Woodward 2020).

Owing to high unemployment rates, many Americans have lost their insurance, thereby restricting them from accessing adequate medical care. Thus, the provisions made by the American government are insufficient because approximately 30 million Americans are uninsured. Additionally, as the economy further deteriorates, more people are likely to lose their jobs, and consequently, their insurance. So, while the law allows them to test for coronavirus, it largely keeps the health sector privatised and inaccessible, where only those who have enough capital can access its services. Moreover, in the early stages of the pandemic, states were forced to bid against one another to procure limited Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) supplies without federal help, driving up the prices for the equipment and increasing profits for the companies that were producing them (Neilson 2020).

In order to bridge the gap between the public and their inability to pay for medical facilities, one might contest that the American government should provide relief packages with a socialist approach. Socialism, an ideology characterised by social ownership of the means of production (Upton 1918), would thus, transform health care from being a profit-making sector to a common resource available to persons from all classes. However, if the impact of the pandemic is analysed in-depth, one will find that in most states, more women are infected despite men's

predisposition to the virus (Harvard University 2020). This is because 78% of the health care workers in the US are women (Haridasani Gupta 2020). Moreover, the United Nations reported that due to the tanking economy and stay-at-home orders by the government reported, women are more likely to perform domestic activities than men, are burdened with work of caregiving, vulnerable to losing their jobs, victims of crime, and subjected to unequal pay (United Nations 2020). Therefore, it would be injudicious to overlook the gendered impact of the coronavirus since social factors, such as gender and class play a powerful role in deciding one's accessibility to resources. "It is clear that with the continued existence of poverty and inequality, those living in less advantaged social circumstances receive the worst end of the deal whatever the actual diseases and the set of exposures which mediate between social disadvantage and disease are." (Shaw et al. 1999). Therefore, socialism alone cannot tackle the issue of coronavirus since it cannot explain gender inequalities emerging as a result of the pandemic.

Socialist feminism is an ideology that encompasses the beliefs of socialism and feminism. It views capitalism and patriarchy as being the principal source of women's exploitation, and capitalists as the main beneficiaries in the process of market exchange. The ideology draws parallels between the oppression of women to the production of wealth; and women's disadvantaged position in the economic sphere to their inability to own private property (Haralambos et al. 2014, 106). According to Iris Marion Young, socialism is gender blind and cannot explain inequalities specific to women. To provide an adequate understanding of gender-centered analysis of society, it is important to explore the concept of 'sexual division of labor.' She believes that a class analysis only highlights the roles of the proletariat and bourgeoisie in the market economy; however, the sexual division of labor analysis discusses who the people in power are, who gives orders in an institution, who takes those orders, who works more hours and earns high wages. Therefore, as compared to just a class analysis of socialism, the sexual division-of-labor analysis can provide a better explanation about why women do part-time jobs, earn low wages, and receive orders from authorities that are largely constituted of men. Young concludes in her thesis that capitalism and patriarchy are linked, and the sexual-division-of-labor analysis provides a total substitute to a class analysis of the society (Tong 2009, 116). A socialist feminism model of such kind would involve a struggle against patriarchy and a shift from capitalism to a more egalitarian socialist society.

To rebuild a post-pandemic world where governments are more resistant to economic and social collapse during a crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic, it is important to design a model using strengths of both socialism and feminism, offered by the socialist feminism ideology. It is crucial that the US adopts a socialist feminism approach to bridge the gap between women, economies, and long-term impacts of the coronavirus that are unmeasurable at this time. A socialist feminism post-pandemic recovery model would provide the US an opportunity to redistribute health care resources among all classes of the economy, acknowledge gender inequalities and allow space for women to remodel male-dominated areas of governance and policy-making.

In the US, neoliberalism translates to market-based practice of privatisation that facilitates market mobility for economically advantaged communities; however, it prevents a large section of the population from accessing appropriate medical treatment for coronavirus. A surge in coronavirus cases in the country has put pressure on front-line workers, a vast majority of which are women. Furthermore, the coronavirus has unequally impacted women in the US, and there exists an urgent need to design policies to respond to their needs. Socialist feminism ideology would enable the US to create an intersectional and egalitarian society and liberate its citizens from patriarchal and neoliberal systems.

Taarini Manchanda
Year 1



Salaried Employees in 2019-20 **85.9 million**

Salaried Employees in 2020-21 **76.2 million**



Number of People Employed in Non-farming Activities

263.4 million
February 2019-20

-16 million

247.6 million
February 2020-21

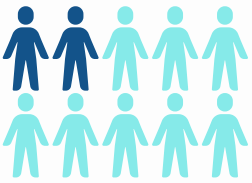
Vaccine Rollout
136 crore population

8.09 crore
vaccine doses administered

or

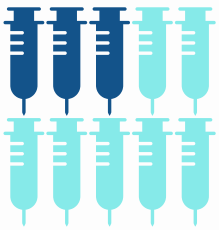
1 in 25
people in India

State of Healthcare 2021



8
physicians per 10,000 people

8.5
hospital beds per 10,000 people





March 2021

Consumer Confidence Index

Indicators to overall economy health. Measures how optimistic people are about their financial situation and spending and saving activities,

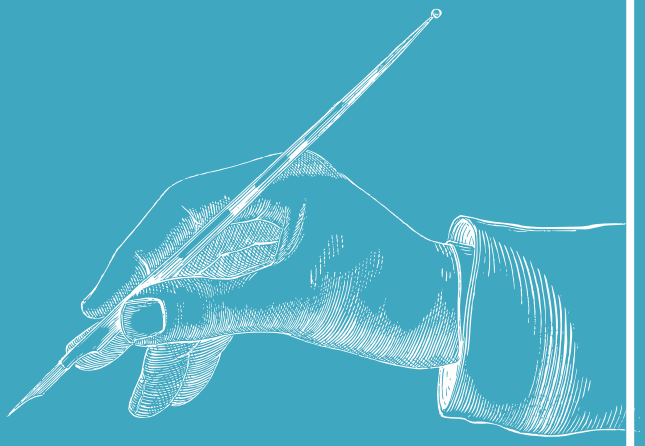
annual income of >40,000
lower than 2019-20 index — **43%**

annual income of 40,000 - 1,000,000
lower than 2019-20 index — **55%**

annual income of <40,000
lower than 2019-20 index — **40%**

Data from Fitch Solutions Inc., Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)

THE RESPONSE



THE LIGHTHOUSE
TEAM

THE GOOD THAT CAME OUT OF COVID-19

The year 2020: can we skip this year from our calendars? If there was an option like this, we all would probably be doing the same. This year is going to be remembered as the year of the global pandemic and the year of suffering and pain. And definitely an unusual year of times. But in the worlds of pastor Caleb D. Bradlee:

“Count up the joys, and not the pains
Think not of losses, but of gains.
Keep the clouds back, gaze at the sun,
Thus life will run smoothly with you.”

Everything has its negative and positive, it all depends upon us how we look into it. So, in this we are going to be looking at the pandemic from the brighter side and the positive “consequences” we can derive from it.

The most observable phenomenon has been the change in the lifestyles of people. When the pandemic forced people to stay inside there has been drastic change in terms of their health needs, food habits and sleeping pattern, etc. This was not earlier stressed upon because of the busy and hectic lives of people. This year gave them enough time to reflect on their actions and doings. According to a study conducted by the PARADA Magazine, 87% of the respondents would like to keep up with the healthy food habit in the post-pandemic period. There has been increased awareness about physical activities, yoga and exercise. It has been the year where “survival of the fittest” comes into view. The focus was mainly on the well-being of the individual. People became more concerned about their health and are paying more attention to it. According to data from Fitbit users, people are getting more sleep every night during the lockdown, thus getting a break from the busy lives of theirs.

One of the important things in this context is that people have become more hygiene-conscious with frequent washing of hands, sanitising things now and then, and maintaining clean surroundings in which they live. We moved from shaking hands to namaste. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested that his countrymen greet everyone with a namaste, it was an overwhelming moment for every Indian to see the world adopting our ways of life. The focus was given to the age-old tradition of Ayurveda to boost our immunity and have an upperhand in overcoming this virus; returning to our Indian roots, whose culture and practices are being recognised in the whole world.

People have been constrained to live inside, but this has helped many strengthen their personal ties and build stronger relationships. Families got a lot of time to spend together playing and making memories to cherish for a lifetime. One seemed to reconnect with their older hobbies and also with friends and loved ones with whom they didn't have much time previously.

This year made people realise the importance of the health sector of every nation. The governments in power realised the importance of the health sector, rather than just focusing on warfare, politics, etc. This helped us overcome all the gaps and lags in our facilities and made us prepared with equipment and policies for any future uncertainties such as this, hoping that we won't be facing any such problems.

Now, the focus is primarily on the revival of domestic economies in order to overcome the negative effects of the pandemic. The government initiative of Atmanirbhar Bharat will be beneficial for the



country and the strengthening of our business and people - supporting our indigenous products, services and technologies.

There have also been innovative inventions in the field of communication and information technology. The whole world turned to virtual modes of living with online education, business and job opportunities. There has been a rapid decrease in the crime rates across our country. According to a study, there has been a 42% drop in the crime rate in the capital city of our country. Similar observations have been found in other cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

This pandemic has been the biggest boon for nature, as it has given time for it to heal. Due to the stopping of factories, fewer cars on the streets, and other unanticipated consequences, countries across the world saw clearer air, blue skies and even animals back on the streets. Flocks of flamingos were seen in Navi Mumbai and nearby areas, and several wild animals were found roaming around the streets of the USA and London, giving hope to the dispirited global population. The air quality has improved and the use of paper reduced - Adobe Acrobat recorded that use of PDF documents increased by 50% resulting in reduced deforestation and helped in improving the environment, making it a better place to live in.

Although we cannot deny the fact that this year had a darker side and we faced lot of difficulties, the points above showed that it has some positive sides as well. We can hopefully observe this side of the pandemic by adding a bit of optimism to those suffering through difficult times.

Ananya Shree
Year 1

YOU, ME AND BHARAT

“Be mindful. Be grateful. Be positive. Be true. Be kind.”

Let us take a moment to feel proud of our country and each one of us for playing a substantial role during this pandemic.

Talking particularly about India we faced a lack of hospitals, staff workers, medicines, and a lot more. But here comes the creative minds of India who planned to help in every way possible like when we lacked hospitals - we used trains as mini travelling hospitals. Since India is known for its brotherhood and unity so apart from what the government was doing, there were also people of India who gave their private spaces for quarantine centres and that too with open hearts, different organisations and even student organisations and NGOs who were in forefront played a considerable role to provide any kind of help needed. We saw people of India taking little steps in distributing food and face masks, sanitisers, etc., and I want to emphasise on the distribution of PPE kits to hospitals that were “Made in India”. This generated a feeling of self-reliant India. There are thousands of such examples who gave their best to cope with the pandemic. Our country felt like a big family. The joint effort of every Indian proved to be very fruitful. The emotional and mental bond with families is not hidden from the world, even on two-day holidays, we see movement of people from their workplaces to their hometowns. This movement was also controlled to an extent by people themselves looking at the worsened situation.
While comparing the initial time of the COVID-19 pandemic in India till now we can easily make out India’s growth in every sector. The decision of shutting down all the movement was extraordinary, the supply of the hydroxychloroquine drug all over the world, a relief package of one lakh crore by the government. Today, I don’t hesitate to compare India with superpowers because from knowing nothing and waiting for the vaccine to be imported, we now stand with our own vaccine named “Covaxin” manufactured by Bharat Biotech, which is highly effective and “Covishield” created by Oxford University which is also manufactured in India. India also began with “Vaccine Maitri” which is a humanitarian initiative by the Indian Government to supply COVID vaccines to different countries like Canada, Mexico, UAE, Mongolia, Maldives, and the Philippines and pledged to help nations like the United States as well who are very advanced in resources and technology. The human thinking power and creativity of India proved to be something worth appreciating.

Individually we are each one colour, together our family makes a rainbow. The pandemic had many negative points but there are also positive ones that can’t be ignored. Caste, class, race, religion everything was kept aside and there was a feeling of unity. In Indian society, whether social, political, economic, psychological, agriculture was all affected. It had different impacts on different societies like



rural-urban, rich-poor, people living in India and outside India. Education which shapes today's upgraded society also faced a big hitch. But also, with all these hindrances we saw changes and confidence within ourselves for grasping every sector very well in such a crucial time. It has proved true to say that "crises give birth to the changes which were pending for many years" and we have seen changes which we wanted to see for so long. The most significant is the use of technology which was not well utilized before, work from home and online classes for schools and colleges kept our life going, home business, rediscovering ourselves, government working at its best, family bonds, need of county for those living abroad. Not to forget missions like Vande Bharat Mission's contribution in bringing back stranded Indians from foreign destinations after suspension of international flights.

As it appears that the pandemic is coming to an end, we must promise ourselves to live together like a family, become better day by day and never take this precious life for granted because at the end of the day what matters is that we are breathing and growing.

Anushka Poonia
Year 3

COVID AND THE CITY: LESSONS FOR URBAN PLANNING

Cities worldwide, owing to their high population density and advanced connectivity, have historically been hotspots of infectious diseases. From 6th century Constantinople to 21st century New York, pandemics have invariably preyed upon cities and urban centres, gathering the 'anti-urban' tag. They not only feed on our primitive impulses to congregate and socialise, but also exploit the traditional designs of cities that anchor its functionality on collective occupation and movement. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. It has sowed the seeds of unparalleled destruction, with 2.61 million lives lost and innumerable economies shattered worldwide. Predictably, urban cores and global cities were the first and worst hit of all.

It is interesting to note that, historically, much of the pathbreaking planning initiatives have been public health responses to communicable diseases. Planned housing and building regulation practises emerged in 18th century industrialising Europe as direct consequences of widespread pulmonary and respiratory illnesses. Cholera and plague epidemics of the 19th century brought about modern sanitation systems, drainage and underground water supply in the colonial cities of Calcutta and Bombay. Therefore, with concerns of sustainability, climate change and the recurring pandemics looming large, the post-COVID world provides us novel opportunities to rethink our urban planning practises by building sustainable and resilient cities. This article hopes to make a few proposals in this regard.

Rethinking Proximity and Accessibility

With a visible peak in the permeation of 'work from home' setups, remote learning and the necessity to socially distance, the need to decentralise and make avail public utilities within close proximity to housing has arisen. The concept of 15-Minute Cities, fundamentally rooted in the principles of New Urbanism and transit-oriented development planning, appears promising in this regard. This approach aims to improve quality of life by creating cities where the primary requirements of the resident can be met by a 15 minutes travel by foot, cycle or public transit. With an emphasis on prolific grass-root level neighbourhood planning, the idea is to empower every locality with basic requirements for a 'full life', like jobs, food, recreation, green space, housing, medical facilities, small businesses and much more. Decentralised, local availability of basic amenities improves accessibility and greatly limits the risk of public gatherings in the social distancing times. An added advantage is the improved sustainability in terms of low carbon emissions, as this model hopes to actively minimise the role motorised private vehicles play in everyday life.



Active Mobility

Public transport worldwide is recognised as one of the most environmentally sustainable means of mass mobility. However, the COVID times have witnessed an understandable peak in public distrust toward the same. In a situation where there are increasing concerns about public health and safety, promoting active mobility for short distances appears to be a plausible alternative. It can be comprehended as transportation through non-motorised means, with walking and cycling being the most prominent modes. Cities worldwide have begun incorporating and extending safe cycling routes and pedestrian infrastructure into city planning, with the Colombian capital of Bogota being a notable success story. In early 2020, the administration of Bogota added 84 km of temporary new bike lanes to the city's existing 550 km Ciclovía network, making it the largest of its kind in the world. This initiative doubled the number of people employing cycling as a primary mode of transport, from 8% to 16% within 6 months, actively contributing to overall sustainability and energy efficiency of the city.

According to the Census of India 2011, 47 percent of daily trips in urban India is via walking and cycling. In terms of distance, almost 60 percent of daily trips are within five kilometres. However, while the majority of urban India is walking, cycling and using public transport as a primary means of transit, actual investments in terms of infrastructure enhancement have generally remained narrowly focused on car-centric road construction and highway building. Data on implementation of smart cities by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs reveals that footpath and non-motorised transport infrastructure accounted for only 7 percent of the funds spent, in contrast to 50 percent spent on road and highway infrastructure. With concerns of affordable and sustainable mobility becoming central to city planning, it is imperative that India rethink and rectify this elitist bias, now more than ever before.

City-regional Planning with Emphasis on Granular Data

Cities do not exist in isolation, more so in a globalised post-COVID world, where quick accessibility to utilities and extent of resilience is determined by a compact network of inter-regional ties, grounded in shared wants. Effects of local initiatives might be carried over to a wider territory, posing a need for integrated economic, social, transport, and energy planning of regional areas to ensure that the ripple effects of local actions are foreseen and controlled. Emphasis on city level granular data bound to a strong digital infrastructure is necessary, as effective, targeted, and localised planning in unprecedented times can be greatly aided by the same.

The pandemic has systematically laid bare wide apertures in existing models of planning and mobility in terms of prolonged sustainability and practicality, which need to be accounted for through novel approaches. There exists an urgency for this shift, as the very functionality of the everyday lives of the inhabitants is fundamentally determined by the city's ability to evolve and adapt to new challenges.

Gowri Gokul
Year 1

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC CLASSIFIED ESSENTIAL WORKERS?

The pandemic flung everyone into a pit of anxiety, panic, and uncertainty. Everyone was worried about their health, their lives, and their livelihoods. However, life must go on and we must sustain ourselves even in these trying times. We continued to have a supply chain and people who came under the criteria of 'essential workers' continued to go to work. In this essay, I will try to look at this pandemic and the classification of its workers from a sociological perspective.

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines work as "the supply of physical, mental, and emotional effort to produce goods and services for own consumption, or consumption by others". Work involves doing any task for a wage and consumption, either by oneself or mainly for others. The purpose of work has always been to provide for human needs. However, due to the pandemic, its purpose has changed from a provision of all needs to a provision of mainly those that ensure the survival of human beings. So, the first lockdown listed the following as the essential needs in a pandemic situation and the workers that would be required to keep going to work:

- Supply of groceries (wholesalers and retailers), fresh fruits and vegetables (mandis and retailers)
- Supply of drinking water
- Dispensing petrol and diesel at designated pumps
- Milk shops, dairies and related products
- Food processing units
- Supply of cattle feed and fodder
- Medicines and other pharmaceuticals (retailers, wholesalers and, manufacturing)
- Banks and ATMs
- Supply of LPG (domestic and commercial)
- Health services (including the movement of staff thereof)
- Manufacturing of health and medical equipment
- Telecom operators and their designated agencies
- Newspapers
- Post offices
- Loading and unloading of wheat and rice at FCI and State Food depots
- Transportation of essential commodities through National and State Highways (petrol, diesel, kerosene, milk, vegetables, fruits, groceries, FC1 supplies etc.)

These are indeed our immediate needs in a pandemic that ensure our survival as a human race. Non-essential services are the ones that we don't necessarily need daily. However, there may be some essential workers within non-essential services and vice versa. For example, zoos are not essential services but the ones that feed the animals and take care of them are essential. Similarly, within essential services as well, there are some non-essential workers. A technician is an essential worker in an energy conservation plant but the administrative head isn't essential to the immediate functioning of the plant. This brings to our attention a class divide that can be witnessed during the pandemic. Most of the unskilled jobs which are considered essential are done by low or lower-middle class members. Most of the middle and upper-middle class workers could retain their jobs and work from the comfort of their homes, while the upper class and uber-rich reaped most of the benefits of their labour.

Within two months of the lockdown, India reopened financial, commercial, agricultural, and social services1. We even allowed for the movement of people and the opening of industrial establishments. This resulted in an expansion in our list of what classified as essential workers. Many more workers started coming under the umbrella of essential workers and were called to their offices and made to work. This sudden spike in movement of people was also a huge factor in the rise of coronavirus cases in the country.

The informal sector accounts for 80-90% of the total workforce in India and almost 80% of them have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Less than 7% of people used to be unemployed in the informal sector before the lockdown but after the lockdown, there were between 65% to 80% unemployed and less than 10% who still have work. The difference in the rate of unemployment was starker between migrant and non-migrant workers as around 81% of migrant workers reported losing their livelihood, as opposed to approximately 71% of non-migrant workers. The workers with low or unstable income are the ones suffering the most. There has been a decrease in food consumption amongst casual labour by at least 60%. They are caught in a vicious trap like such and are unable to get out of it.



Source: Firstpost

In a recent survey, only 7% of informal workers were found to be enrolled in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Programme, while only 5% were enrolled in PM-KISAN2. 78.76% of informal workers were unable to receive any form of cash assistance. This data goes on to show that the ones who came under the belt of “essential workers” were mainly from the middle classes. They were the ones who were able to continue their work and enjoy a stable enough level of employment.

A certain part of the healthcare sector also comes under the informal sector. This includes social service health workers like workers from ASHA who provide medication in villages and spread awareness about diseases, as well as help villagers find the required treatment. India has the lowest doctor-population ratio; there are 7.7 doctors for every 10,000 people3 according to the World Health Organization.

“ASHA went to another village (other than her own) with the ANM yesterday. The medical officer called her in the morning when she was working on the farm and had to leave everything and go accompany the ANM. She can’t do any housework when the medical officer calls. All her regular ASHA work is currently suspended such as immunisation. A mother came to her for paracetamol for her child’s fever, so she referred her to the primary health centre because she has run out of medicines.”

These workers are also essential but unable to fulfil their duties. India has had a diverse history with

epidemics and natural disasters. However, the sheer lack of preparedness still comes as a shock. Our classification of essential workers and services has not been very inclusive on a vertical spectrum (from a higher or formal level of service down to workers performing similar services in an informal setup) rather, we have tried to include workers from services on a horizontal spectrum (a bunch of workers from different types of services that are essential to the working of that particular service). This has led to a sort of class disparity and exploitation of the marginalised and poor while contributing to the profits of the already well-to-do.

Gaytri Rai
Year 1

THE INDIAN MORGUE CRISIS

With COVID-19's impact on practically every aspect of life, an aspect that is ignored or unspoken about is its impact on death. India, being a diverse country, with a multitude of religions, inevitably entails that different religions would have different traditions to grieve those who have passed away. However, due to the unsympathetic attitude of the government and the different departments under it, families do not have the opportunity to properly mourn. Honouring the dead is a "hurried affair." Therefore, we present to you the Indian Morgue Crisis.

New Delhi reported around 1,100 cases of death due to COVID-19 in the month of June, 2020. However, the situation at crematoriums said otherwise. There were several hundred more that are left unreported. Questions are raised about the official COVID toll released by the government, with morgue or crematorium data backing this. After a person passes away, the bodies are sent to the morgue in order to calculate the mortality rate due to COVID-19. However, in order to report inaccurate numbers, in order to hide the current state of the country and how it is failing to enforce health restrictions on its citizens, testing of the dead does not take place anyway. A body is meant to be in the morgue for 72 hours, but some are left beyond 60 days by the police, who do not want to hold accountability for the dead. The queues and waiting time for the body to arrive keeps on stretching, risking exposure to the virus. Neither are they tested, nor identified.

Crematoriums are running out of space as we speak. The bodies are left in overcrowded, unsanitised conditions, making those working around them more prone to contracting the virus; hence there is a shortage of staff, guards, sweepers, doctors, and attendants. There is a shortage of sanitisation products, like supplies for cleaning and plastic, making people want to stay away even more from crematoriums. Many steps are taken for solving this problem, but we must understand that renovation of the morgues and crematoriums is not a solution. Renovation would require years, and this would test the patience of some healthcare workers and police, who would become even more apathetic and indolent than they already are. Steps to be taken have to be approved and passed through the Public Works Department (PWD) - however, this would take several months to be cleared. Healthcare workers often have no option but to take action on their own and buy products from their own salary, yet they are rebuked for it for taking autonomous decisions. Therefore, we can also question how people in power want to maintain this power, privilege and authority just for the sake of it, and do not use it wisely. Crematorium workers say that the government does not do anything to protect them - the workers - from the virus. The hospital workers may come wearing PPE kits, but these workers are left to survive with nothing on but a mask.

There also lies the problem of completing the funeral rights for the dead. Firstly, only a limited number of people are allowed to attend funerals. Secondly, since crematoriums are overworked, there is not much time to perform the ceremonies. For example, in the majority of Hindu ceremonies, there are no extravagant individual cremation ceremonies to honour the dead. It usually includes just the burning of the body on traditional pyres, with only a few people around. Muslim mourners can not view the body of their loved ones before they are buried. No traditional ritual can be practiced in these times. The grounds are filling up further and further, with not a single person getting a satisfactory goodbye.

Rhea Sethia
Year 1

THE SILENT RACISM OF COVID-19: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COVID-19 has effectively cut across all geographical regions, wreaking chaos and havoc in its wake. Yet analyses of the way in which the novel coronavirus has altered lives must not exist only as statistical figures of those recovered and infected. An unequal social system warrants the study of unequal impacts a common issue begets.

The United States of America, simmering already with racial tensions offers a starting point of analysing structural inequalities and the way a global pandemic has managed to exacerbate them. American healthcare systems has long been subject to vociferous allegations of race-based discrimination that has costed countless black people their lives. This claim finds a stronger footing with the spread of an infectious disease and has been subject to an enormous amount of commentary, both academic and personal.

Racism gets systematised and structured when discriminatory practices in one field support the origin and maintenance of parallel practices in other areas. This gives rise to social institutions inadvertently creating a nexus of mutual reinforcement of behaviors that privilege one demographic over the other. Systematic discrimination - that is now characteristic of the country's institutions - becomes an important mediating factor which affects one's access to basic necessities such as employment and healthcare. A two-levelled explanation could explain the linkages between COVID-19, structural racism and healthcare. At the first level, one deals with infection rates and the demographic disparity in exposure to the virus.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has produced data on COVID-19 which show specific geographical regions as having higher infection and mortality figures. One such region within Louisiana revealed that rates of hospitalisation and death in black patients were twice as high as would be expected on the basis of demographic representation.

These statistics have led to theorising that the greater presence of black Americans in service occupations and blue collar jobs as opposed to their white counterparts has greatly increased their ability to be exposed to the virus in view of these jobs requiring their physical presence. Another dimension within this scenario can also be explained by the intersection of structural racism with social location. Even within those black Americans afflicted by coronavirus, they do not have a cushion of social capital to fall back on. Financial inability to pay for testing, food insecurity, housing disparities, limited access to transportation and lack of insurance are some characteristic social risks the black population is vulnerable to, each of which tremendously magnify the impact of COVID, which no longer remains confined to a health realm.

Thus the first mechanism at play in producing disproportionate suffering is that black people and people of colour are more susceptible to be infected.
The second mechanism that supports this disparity of recovery and infection are divided further into two parts. First, is that COVID has a greater fatality rate for black people as they are priorly afflicted with chronic diseases stemming from their living conditions, which reduces their recovery scope. Studies reveal black people have 60 percent more diabetes and 40 percent more hypertension compared to



other races; this can be traced back to their environments of work and residence. Living in disinvested communities, many black people are subjected to more polluted air, lack of place to exercise safely, close proximity to toxic dump sites, which is why their not only their emotional and cognitive but also physiological health has been put at risk due to racism.

In Massachusetts, in view of overwhelming healthcare systems, guidelines prohibited race or language or zip code to determine access to medical equipment but allowed estimations of long term survival. This therefore puts black and brown people who have lower health and immunity due to their living conditions at a lesser priority or even disqualifies them from access to these life-saving interventions.
A secondary aspect to this is also the response of healthcare workers and a culture of medical mistrust characterising the American healthcare system. A white-oriented medical approach, for instance, uses blue lips as a metric to be alerted of oxygen deprivation - this conveniently sidelines the black and coloured population and the way in which race could manifest in anatomical differences. There is also a low number of black physicians because of structural inequities in access to education, which creates a lower percentage of healthcare professionals who can relate and understand the needs of members of their communities, which in turn affects the quality of care patients receive.

The COVID-19 pandemic thus has not had, and could not have had, a uniform impact. As the entire world wages a lengthy and exhaustive battle against a common public health concern, it is imperative to take into consideration that the consequences this disease has generated do not exist on a homogeneous equal plane, it has deepened the already existing institutionalised social disparities and caused much greater and lasting damage to those already oppressed by a skewed social system.

Shraddha Sadana
Year 1

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Netflix's *The Social Dilemma* (2020) is a docu-drama that self identifies itself as "explor[ing] the dangerous human impact of social networking, with tech experts sounding the alarm on their own creations." With ominous music and Joe Toscan, a former Google employee, nervously stating that he went back and forth with lawyers for months before the documentary was shot - *The Social Dilemma* perfectly sets up the scene in the first few minutes of the film announcing itself to be a never-witnessed before, expose of 'big tech', proving once and for all that social media is irreparably damaging the very fabric of society.

With families unable to eat dinner together without looking at their phones, teenagers being body-shamed on the internet, personified AI manipulating every action of social media users and dramatic voice-overs of creators of those very apps narrating their ethical concerns, the documentary utilises what Anurag Mazumdar (2020) identifies as "middle-class technological anxieties." In other words, Netflix identifies technological pessimism as a recurring phenomenon amongst its middle-class consumers and creates a sellable commodity that reinforces their anxiety. The aforementioned themes of *The Social Dilemma* are by no means novel, instead, audiences may find them resonating with often heard dinner table conversations.

The Social Dilemma in its endeavour to drive home the message of how new media impacts society, cloaks the fact that all evolutions in communication technology run parallel to changes in society, this is exemplified by the impact of the printing press on literacy rates and standardisation of languages (Anderson 1983) and radio's relationship with the changing nature of political campaigning (Marquis 1984). One only needs to go back a few decades to remember the moral panic in India, surrounding the introduction of satellite television and channels such as STAR and MTV.

The Social Dilemma's focus on the post-truth world and amplification of propaganda further reinforces the paranoia of 'dystopian mind control' through social media. It once again fails to place the internet within a larger historical context where media, even in its traditional forms, was (and still is) capable of disseminating propaganda. Even as the documentary makes passing mention of lynchings in India being fueled by disinformation spreading through Whatsapp, it fails to make a strong point for two reasons - one, as Adi Robertson (2020) notes, the documentary is less concerned with the ways in which disinformation spreads through Whatsapp, and more concerned with noting that Whatsapp is owned by Facebook which helps construct the larger narrative of the film. Propaganda and mobilisation by right-wing groups on messaging apps differ significantly from the way the same takes place on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Recent investigation has shown that messaging apps like



Whatsapp and Telegram are actually used for logistical planning of trends and troll attacks that take place on Facebook and Twitter (Newslaundry 2020). The second reason this example is lacking is that social media propaganda and disinformation does not exist in isolation and is intrinsically linked to echoing the same rumours in newspapers and news channels. Even before social media was instrumentalised by right-wing mobs, Indian vernacular language newspapers such as Gujarat Samachar and Sandesh were found fueling communal hatred during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and Gujarat riots of 2002 (The Wire 2016).

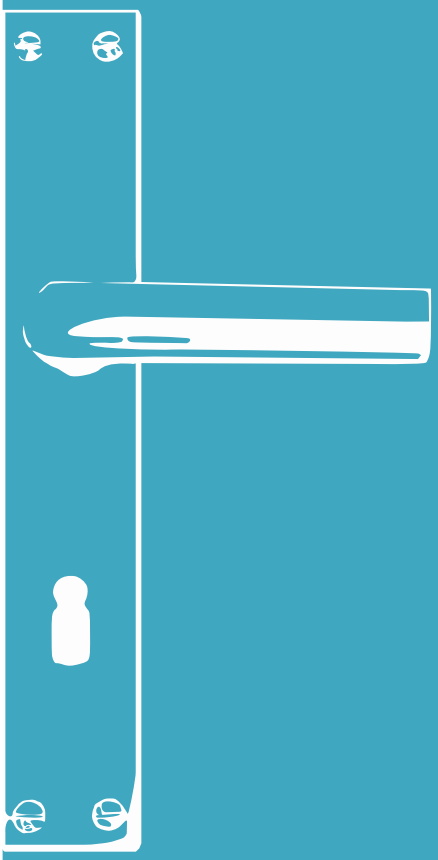
The documentary drives home the message that the internet and social media were 'being used for good until they took a life of its own.' This idea is tethered to a belief held by many in the 1990s such as John Perry Barlow who believed that the internet would result in "just, humane and liberal" societies. However, this reflects a fundamental misunderstanding - that communication technologies exist in isolation from the socio-historical realities of their users. To better understand this, one can consider the gig or platform economy which, Mazumder notes, found no mention in *The Social Dilemma*. In 2018, there were approximately 15 million Indian gig workers (Tiwari et al 2019). Thus, millions of Indians depend on the internet for employment. Employment that is insecure, leaves them with little to no autonomy and a high level of alienation. By choosing to not engage with the question of gig workers, the documentary circumvents a discussion about labour laws, because it is not the internet that lies at the heart of Swiggy, Uber and Amazon workers' problems but the lack of legislation that would protect them from being exploited by their companies. Even as it mentions the constant surveillance of Facebook users, it ignores how gig workers are surveilled by their platforms under the garb of efficiency.

While the documentary privileges the white, American middle-class audience, its resonance in India can also be linked to how autonomous access to communication technology threatens conservative ethos in the country. Gopalan Ravindra (2010) identified how access to mobile phones created a new form of "mobile phone intimacy" which resulted in periodic moral panics from the Indian middle class. India has seen numerous instances of Panchayats attempting to ban mobile phones and even attempts to pass bills in the Parliament that ban camera phones. Ravindra stated that these "agents of cultural politics are also [sic] working on behalf of the feudal and patriarchal order that is still going strong, but increasingly pitted against the forces of modernity and new media modernity." Thus, the documentary can result in the bolstering reactionary rhetoric that opposes the autonomy provided to the Indian youth by the internet.

Neither was the development of the internet and social media a noble mission nor is the future of the internet as bleak as the documentary portrays. This is exemplified by social media's essential role in mobilising people for social movements across the world. Facebook India's policy chief, Ankhi Das' resignation after her complicity in right-wing mob violence was revealed and public pressure on Facebook increased and the user migration from Whatsapp to Signal and Telegram after Whatsapp's new privacy policy was unveiled reveals that internet users are not a homogenous and lacking agency the way *The Social Dilemma* portrays them to be.

Yameena Z.
Year 2

ART OF ESCAPISM



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ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
COMPETITIONS

BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN THE 'MAGICAL' AND THE 'REAL'

Humans are ever evolving species and with our currently on-going technology driven century, when we are facing particularly isolated and turbulent times a skill that a vast majority of us have acquired is that of escapism. It's now one of our core competencies and has increasingly become a necessity, a term which, by now, we are all very familiar with.

But what is escapism? A distraction, a respite, a form of harmless entertainment, a phase of denial or a very dangerous indulgence too much of which results in disorientation and blurs the line between fantasy and reality. It's not time-bound, it can go up to minutes, hours, sometimes even stretching up to years.

The undeniable quality of emotional intelligence though, by shifting your focus point from unpleasant scenarios to something different in order to cope or survive cannot be overlooked. Disengaging from your ever so consuming emotions to allow your mind to think more rationally and to make decisions accordingly can be empowering.

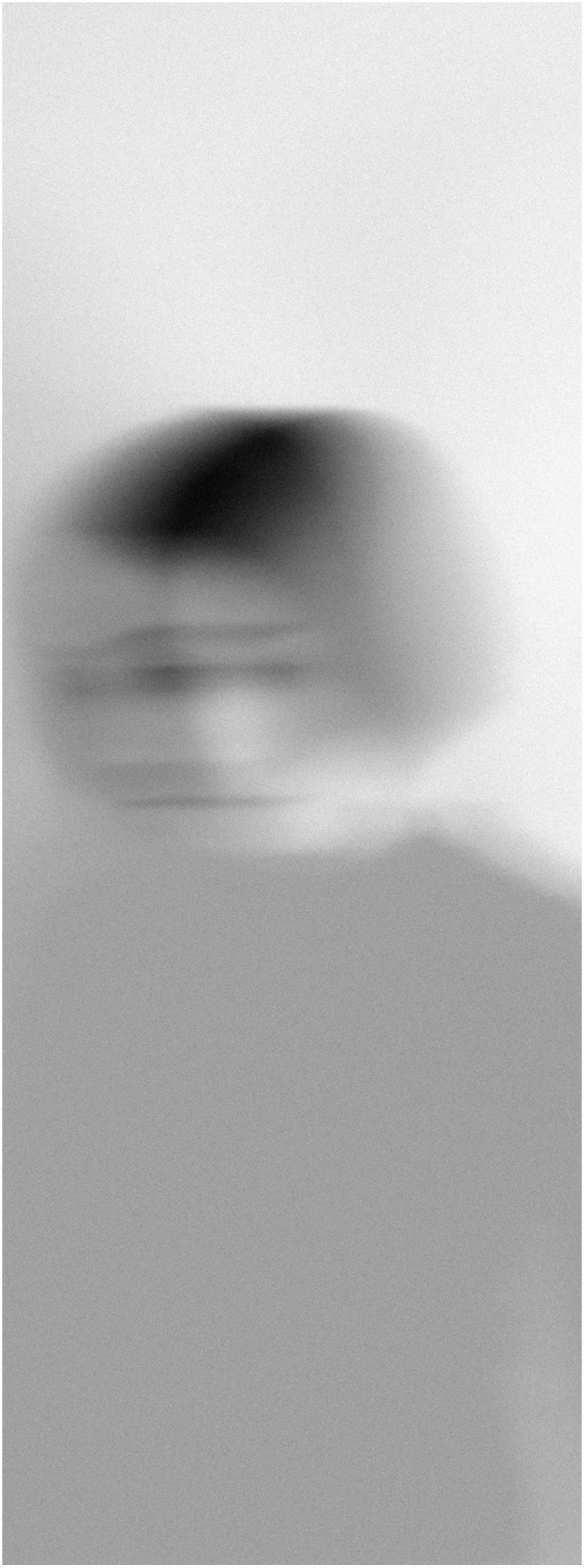
Psychologists term this as "Healthy Escapism". If you have the idea of when to stop and if used correctly this art is self-fulfilling almost as a form of nurturing. Some practice this art in a more tangible form, they find their sustenance not in some alternate imaginary universe but in the real one, motivated by their desire to escape reality and to embrace a new one which is very near to the fictional one, they switch places more popularly known as a change of scenery or relocation. Haven't we all considered the notion of moving to a villa near the beach or go up to the mountains decked up with tall trees?

But not all are satisfied with things which are binary or simple, some of us want to engage in simulation away from all the restraints of time and space just like our unconstrained imagination, starting from all kinds of different video games which bends our virtual reality this ranges up to places offering different experiences. Whether it is paintball smash clubs or 3D VR boxes, the art of escapism is inspiring ideas and driving all kinds of businesses. On a personal note, I would give anything to live even one day in the fictional world of Harry Potter at Hogwarts!

All of us do not have the means or the affordability to obtain all these methods of escape routes sometimes, so people turn to something much cheaper and accessible, the mind fantasy, the very same approach but without any price.

But this poses a problem, without a monetary price, without an end you don't know when to stop.

This art is something we practice very diligently almost as routine work every day until you attain the proficiency of an escapist. The fine artistry of your thoughts from which you create your perfect fantasy lays the foundation stone for your escape palace but that is just the beginning, bit by bit the escapist creates a whole city and eventually a whole life in this head space which according to him should be now his reality.



Now the escapism tactic has gone far from simply watching a movie, to socializing with friends or playing a game. It has penetrated the deep recesses of our mind where our desires and imagination lie and now, they will merge and become a flawless fantasy.

The most idealistic version of different lives for different persons with distinct preferences. And now they can't tweak their perfectly unattainable fantasies, so they start to tweak their realities instead, in hopes of making them both congruent.

What we don't realize is that our imagination is and can be influenced from outside elements, often it may not be entirely original or even our own, it evolves and changes just as we do and vice-versa. The ideal life with the ideal life partner which you are now dreaming of having may hadn't even crossed your mind if you hadn't looked at that distant cousin's Instagram post. We feel the need to escape because we are not content, we are not content because we constantly compare.

The escapist loses sense of distinctiveness which is not healthy.
Not all of us can dive into a beautiful world of fiction with different characters and come up with best-selling novels. Some just wind up confused in their own lives wasting away in thinking of living an absurd fantasy wishing they had the means to do it while their real life and real people slip away.

But even without the digital collaboration of our lives which can be attributed to social media and the comparative analysis which it presents us with as a by product of using it, human lives and its relationships are quite complex and hence the escapism. To escape is to avoid, to release your emotions you actually need to face and reflect upon them, that's the only way to accept them, we can't put off facing our realities and we can't put off living until we are ready.

Our escape routes are made by us, made for us and are made of us, perhaps the need is to find better escape routes, imagine attainable and

simple things to get away from complex emotions. Reading a book and listening to music could be starters, thinking of skydiving one day or to see the Northern Lights lights on a vacation to Iceland to get away from the monotony of life is not harmful.

Whether we'll tie a leash on our imagination or float away on it to a far-off destination, or will we ever limit our escapist habits for good or turn it into an addiction are things which are quite debatable and open to interpretation. Afterall, confrontation with the fact that I am binge-watching excessively just to put off the problem that I am facing could be quite controversial. But for now, I think I'll avoid that question and escape.

Prerita Shera
article writing competition winner,
Utopia 2021

MAGIC, MITHRIC AND REALITY

Beyond the edges of purple sky
And cracked golden leaves,
I traverse to the land of mortals
Where magic and mithric weaves.

I look at the birthing mother,
Drawing life out of triviality;
Yet fail to fathom how simplistically,
Magic pervades this superficial reality.

Fulfilling the prophecy of love,
When my beloved holds my hand;
Escaping reality, I wander in fiction,
Does he possess a magic wand?
Those days and nights I spent in sorrow
Now start to seem transitory,
How powerful this love strikes my soul,
Magic feels engulfing and reality turns momentary.

There stands the Nebulous Star, I fondly call the Sun;
So effortlessly guiding celestials,
Is it a new spell of magic, or reality undone?
For this chandelier shining in the middle of the sky;
And snowflakes that trudge, so we never go dry.
I follow in amazement, how bounteosly this magic sails,
Again fail to fathom, how mithric and magic prevails.

Winter's fury and summer's reign,
Hey yes! Oh yes! Reality does remainl
But unknown clouds burst, and
There's thunderous magic again.

Tiny dandelions and colossal pines,
Such awry, yet magical chemistry.
For glorious saints may know the answer,
I beg them now, to unfold this mystery.

Bud to flower, and flower to fruit
Reality I do perceive,
What gets me into thinking then-
"How easily does nature conceive?"

How effortlessly magic exists,
I find it difficuly to discern;
Fearlessly so, I question again,
"Is it realism or magic, at nature's every turn?"

Scanty truths and million lies,
They weave the reality we see;
What goes behind magic then?
I yet do not agree.

There's magic in sleep,
There's magic in pain,
There's magic in fall,
And magic in rain.

Past is gone and future's not known,
That's magic I call, cox reality is unborn.
How do you define the present then?
Is that what you say Reality?!
Oh man, you poor man! You're still deceived
Cox it's magical ways that forgoes actuality!

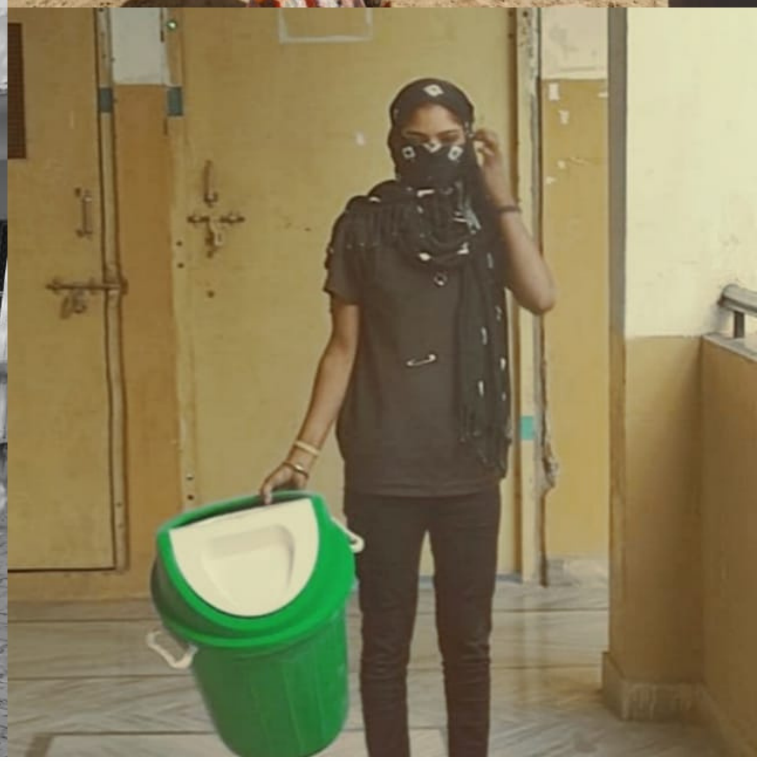
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THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE: PORTRAYING INDIA'S COVID-19 PARADOX









While the lockdown was a leisure time for the rich, it was a drastic setback for the improvised sections of the society. A great number of farmers, daily workers, labourers, etc. had a tough time in making through this pandemic.

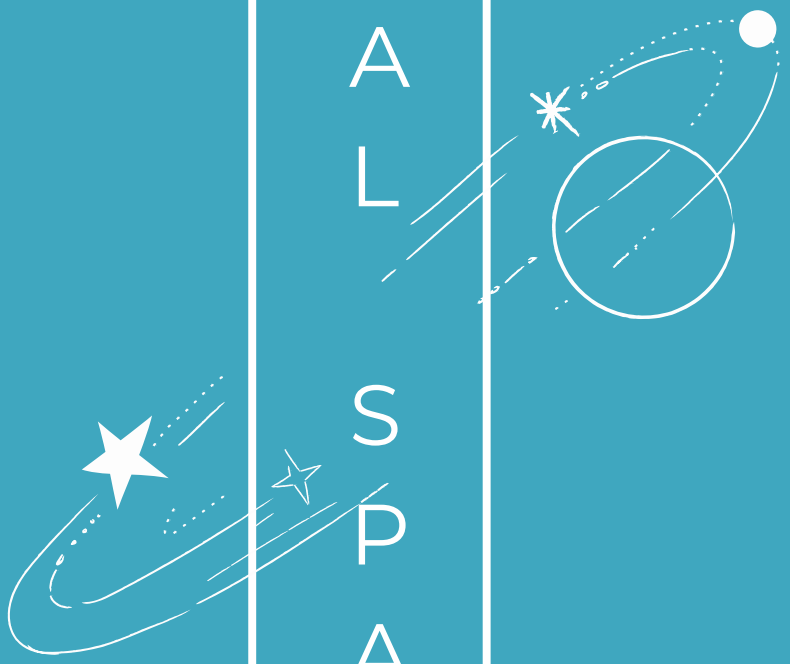
Where on one side the rich were busy trying cooking and having house parties, it was hard for the farmers to even earn their bread. The pandemic didn't differentiate between the rich and poor but where the rich could easily afford a good medication and take all the necessary precautions, the poor found it burdensome to lay hold of the guidelines provided.

In the end, I would like to say that though every person was a soldier in this battle, it was the marginalised who bled the most.

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LIMINAL SPACES



PERSPECTIVES FROM SOCIOLOGISTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

MIGRANT LIVES

Migrant lives are rarely photographed. The 2020 photographs and television images of thousands and thousands of migrants walking down highways right across India, hoping to get home in the immediate aftermath of the total lockdown, left urban Indians gob-smacked. Visual reportage brought Indians in general, and middle-class urban Indians in particular, in contact with migrants. From the point of view of the urban middle-class Indian, looking at one of the largest return migrations in history, the 2020 photographs were a window into a world of people we don't usually 'see'. The dramatic photographs and images in newspapers and television reports were a kind of contact zone between two categories of people – those who live securely in cities and others whose lives and livelihoods are precarious.

How is insecurity communicated? What is the visual language which elucidates precarity? To explore these questions I discuss photographs taken during the course of ethnographic fieldwork in two cities which have significant migrant populations – Jalandhar in Punjab and Guwahati in Assam. The fieldwork was part of a collaborative project "*From the Margins: Exploring Low Income Migrant Workers Access to Basic Services*" between the University of Delhi and the University of Edinburgh. The photographs speak for themselves and convey their message in languages of visuality. Rather than tame the images with written text, I invite you to consider the images as a text in themselves.

What impels people to migrate? For many it's the lack of livelihood in their places of origin. World Bank data suggests that roughly 35% of rural Indians live below the poverty line. Fifty-six percent of urban male migrants move to cities in search of employment. A great deal of the manual labour in cities is done by migrants. The 2001 Census of India counted about 191 million people—or 19% of the total Indian population at the time—as internal migrants who had moved long distances to other districts or other Indian states [Abbas and Varma, 2014] in search of work.

Personal or family crises can throw a rural household's ability to sustain itself out of gear. A single emergency can be a disaster, disrupting entire households. An injury to one member can force a rural household to migrate because earnings cannot absorb the costs entailed in coping with a crisis. When their daughter was left severely disabled after suffering a fall while gathering fodder for cattle from a high hilltop, D. and her husband were forced to leave their village, to earn enough to care for their child. In Jalandhar, both worked as labourers in a factory manufacturing valves, nuts and bolts. In the course of fieldwork interviews, the couple showed photographs of the daughter's injured feet to the researchers, Bharti Kumari and Anurag Sharma. In the photograph, the feet are at rest. It's an affective image because the feet, though at rest, are not inert. They ask us to consider the biography of this body and those who need to care for the person with injured feet. It's the marks of hurt, the signs of suffering that flesh out the biography of the person and of her household who were forced to migrate. Through the image D. and her husband spoke of many things - their daughter's pain and disability, the arduous treatments undergone, the precarity of the household. The photograph of the feet is the 'back story', the 'why' of migration.



Figure 1: One household's migration story. Photograph taken by a migrant mother

D. and her household's migration story might be discounted as an isolated case. It's not the life story of every migrant. Nevertheless, their story has more generalised implications. Estimates suggest that in Jalandhar, one of the key sites of the project From the Margins, migrants form 25% of the population [Sharma, Sharma, and Kapilashrami, 2021]. The 2011 national census suggests that migrants form about 15% of Assam's urban population. Historically, Guwahati, the other project fieldwork site, attracted migrants from rural Assam and north-east India more generally, as well as from Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and cross-border migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh. Coal and oil fields, construction of road networks and railway lines, erecting a bridge over the Brahmaputra, and other infrastructural developments pulled migrants into Guwahati. In almost every city across India, migrants work as vendors, loaders, construction labour, daily wage workers, helpers in restaurants, shop salesmen, domestic workers, garbage collectors, leather workers, delivery men – the list is ever expanding. Migrants are essential to the life of an Indian city and they are everywhere.



Figure 2: Bare shelter. Photograph by Anurag Sharma

How do Indian cities cater to their migrant populations, who are so indispensable to urban life? Let me begin with a sight familiar to urban Indians. People living on the side of a road. The common idea of a 'roof over one's head' governs middle-class ideas of home as shelter. For mobile populations of migrants who travel from homes elsewhere in search of work, a key element is the floor. The fact of a pucca, paved stone or brick floor, slightly raised, is invaluable when shelter is insecure and home is impermeant, in material terms as well as in terms of the right to urban space [Figures 2, 3 and 4]. Around construction sites, a major sector of employment for migrants [90% of labourers in the construction industry are internal migrants; Abbas and Varma, 2014], broken pavements are floor space for fragile rooves and small cooking hearths. But even these are temporary. Very soon, without being asked, migrant workers with their families will move. For migrants, their marginality is indexed on the constantly shifting housing that is interwoven into their working lives. The news images of migrants leaving cities on their long walk home are an explicit expression of precarious lives. It wasn't the virus from which they fled. It was the simultaneous cessation of livelihoods and disappearance of homes that forced migrants to begin their long walks home.



Figure 3 (left): A raised platform. Photograph by Anuj Kapilashrami



Figure 4 (above): Migrant paddy workers at the side of a road. Photograph by Anurag Sharma

Precarity is visual. Though the migrant is visually absent in Figures 5, 6,and 7 taken in different parts of a city, half brick walls painted blue bring precarity to the surface. Paint is a symbol of a minimalist claim that is neither exaggerated nor antagonistic. In the simplest visual language of colour, the absent person conveys a set of messages about the migrant self. Painted brick suggests that people who live behind, or next to, these blue walls are 'clean', modest, untroublesome, and have an aesthetic imagination that won't threaten the 'view' of posh middle-class neighbours. Even more clearly, visual practices in space are evidence of the migrants' knowledge of the city. Migrants know that the city isn't available to everyone. Pale blue is a soft-footed, cautious move by insecure people trying to create a sense of home in inhospitable spaces.







Figure 5, 6 and 7: Tentative measures to create home. Photographs by Anuj Kapilashrami

Another common sight on urban landscapes are people ferrying goods or carrying loads. Cities depend on the transport and movement of goods and material. Migrants are most likely to be the ones pulling loaded carts or carrying head loads.





Figure 8 (left):Ferrying loads in Rainak Bazaar, Jalandhar. Photograph by Anurag Sharma and Bharti Kumari
Figure 9 (right): Migrant with his load of goods Transport Nagar, Jalandhar. Photograph by Anurag Sharma and Bharti Kumari

The Cart - Rehri

For migrants, one of their most prized possessions is a wheeled cart, a *rehri*. A *rehri* [Figure 10] parked right outside shacks and doorways of small dwellings where migrants live, is a loaded sign. It signals the presence of a more long-term migrant who has tangible assets. A prized possession, the *rehri* and its goods are closely guarded. A fungible asset, a *rehri* is used to transport a variety of loads, becomes a mobile dukan-shop [Figure 12] or even a surface for an occasional nap.



Figure 11: Pulling goods with a hand cart, Guwahati. Photograph by Jeevan Sharma





Figure 12 (top): Rehri-dukan. Shop on a cart. Photograph by Anuj Kapilashrami

Figure 10 (bottom): A cycle rehri securely parked outside migrant rooming houses. Photograph by Anurag Sharma and Bharti Kumari

Once they arrive in a city, migrants can't afford to stay immobile. Migrants need to move constantly within the city to get to work. In many cities, industrial zones where factories are located are on the outskirts of city limits with irregular transport facilities. Though travelling to work is vital to livelihoods and earnings, it is by no means stress-free. Travel is labour-intensive and often risky. It requires agility and endurance [Figures 13, 14 and 15] reflecting the insecurity entailed in earning a livelihood.







Figures 13, 14 and 15:. Photographs by Anurag Sharma

What effect does precarity have on migrant bodies? Right across India, the scarcity of health services available to migrants is appalling. Few employers take care of sick labourers. If a migrant person suffers grievous injury or serious sickness, they are more likely to travel back in their injured state to villages or homes from which they came, to seek care and medical attention. In the city, private health care is available but expensive. As an option it is a poor one, though often the only available option. Areas where migrants live are usually ringed around by a network of small clinics and private doctors who dispense *goli aur sui ilaj* [pills and injection treatment]. The outcomes of such treatments [Figure 16] are unclear.



Figure 16. Dawai Medicines in a migrant home, photographed by Jeevan Sharma

What happens when a migrant person gets seriously sick? By mapping migrants and their health seeking practices, it was evident that a breakdown of health and the impossibility of finding health care in cities compels migrants to return to their homes of origin. This is especially true for those who suffer accidents or longer term illnesses. The absence of state-issued documents that entitles citizens to access government hospitals, means that even pregnancy and birth are reasons to return home. Returning home is not a permanent move – it is part of a circular pattern of coming-returning-coming back, that is intrinsic to migration movements. In the literature on circular migrations, economic reasons are offered as the framework of circular migration. There is little attention to health and the absence or paucity of health care in cities as the reason for circularity.

We know a lot more about transnational Indian migrants – the glamourous NRIs celebrated in literature and movies – than about the large numbers of people who migrate internally, within India. We often don't recognise that the cities in which we live would grind to a halt without migrants. Unfortunately, the lives of internal migrants remain in the shadows, and migrants themselves are rarely photographed. It needed a pandemic for us to see migrants who make it possible for us to live our comfortable middle class lives.

Prof. Radhika Chopra
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University of Delhi

A NEW VOCABULARY

On the flip side, there has been an emergence of a new vocabulary. About forty years ago, we had new terms like AIDS and HIV. The year 2020 has seen the emergence of an unprecedented number of new words and terminology. Phrases like "work from home", "online classes", "doorstep deliveries" and "online medical consultations" are a part of the new grammar of our lives.

Before 11 February 2020, the word Covid-19 or COVID-19 did not even exist. The term was coined only in February 2020 when WHO announced the virus. The term 'Coronavirus' itself was used for the first time in the 1960s. According to Fiona McPherson, the senior editor of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), till December 2019, the term coronavirus appeared only 0.03 times per million tokens (a token is the smallest units of language collected and tracked in the OED corpus). Coronavirus and COVID-19 are now at 1750 per million tokens. The word itself can be written as COVID or Covid depending on which part of the world you are in. The term COVID is popular in the USA, Australia and Canada. Covid is more popularly used in the UK, India, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa.

Google meets and Zoom meets are a part of the new lexicon. The word 'zoom' earlier meant travelling or moving very quickly, or in the context of camera when you moved in for a closeup shot. Today 'Zoom' is an online platform for meeting in the virtual world. The phrase 'let's zoom' has an entirely different connotation. Who would have thought that Google would let us meet in the virtual world? Not only do you meet on Zoom you also have 'virtual Happy Hours' when you meet your colleagues or friends for a drink on Zoom or other such online platforms. You may also have a 'quarantini', that is, a cocktail consumed during quarantine to help you overcome the challenges of the 'lockdown'. The word lockdown itself was declared to be the word of the year by the Collins dictionary. You can organise a 'covideo' party with your friends to quarantine and chill with them on an online platform. These are 'quarentimes' that is a period of the COVID-19 pandemic which witnessed nation-wide lockdowns. 'Quarentime' can also be the time spent in isolation, so that you do not infect anyone else with your germs. You could hang out with your 'antibuddies' i.e. - two friends who have tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies and are hanging out together. Alternatively, you could make 'quarenteams' i.e., a group of COVID-free neighbors who have created pods and are spending time together. You could also go on a 'coronacation', when you are paid not to work and have lots of extra time instead of a vacation or a staycation.

You could indulge in 'doomscrolling' and scroll endlessly for COVID news on the social media. 'Social distancing', 'contact tracing', 'droplet transmission' and 'flattening the curve' are also familiar terms for the doomscrollers. Name-calling and shaming people too has a new twist. You can now insult someone by calling them 'covidiots', if they ignore health advice about COVID-19. Like the Spanish, you could call them 'covidiota' and 'coronaburro' (burro means donkey in Spanish) to refer to people who ignore health and safety advisories. 'Mask shaming' someone is also an accepted practice for those do not wear a mask.

In a lighter vein, you could be suffering from 'coronaspeck', a German word which refers to stress eating while staying at home. You could suffer from 'maskne' - an acne outbreak caused by wearing a mask. Corona babies are babies born during the lockdown. Australians have come up with more hip terms like 'sanny' for sanitizer and 'quaz' for quarantine. Elsewhere 'Miss Rona' or 'Rona' is slang for the Coronavirus. The emojis too are not lagging behind - we have a new emoji with a mask and the one with folded hands is increasingly being used. Abbreviations like WFH and PPE are now commonly used. Pre-existing terms too have taken on a new meaning and their usage has changed. For instance, terms like 'stay-at-home', 'movement control order and 'enhanced community quarantine'. The term "community transmission"



is actually from 1959 and the term 'community spread' from 1903. Both these terms have taken on new meanings. 'Self- isolate' and 'shelter in place' too have seen a shift in meaning. 'Sheltering in place' meant seeking safety from a disaster like a tornado, and now it means a prolonged period of isolation.

War metaphors too have become *de rigueur*. Words that invoke 'battle' or 'front-lines' are commonly used and are a regular part of news reports. Doctors and health care providers have been labelled as 'front line warriors' and 'heroes' invoking images of soldiers fighting for their country. This in many ways undermines the complexity of their work. And they are thus not seen as frightened individuals who are at risk and need protective equipment. Some names of drugs too have become generic like Hydroxychloroquine for malaria, which is believed to be a bullet against the virus.
Let's hope that the 'quarentimes' end soon and we can all hang out with our buddies and not just our 'antibuddies'.

Dr. Reema Bhatia
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EMBRACING ABNORMALITIES: A PANDEMIC TALE

Disasters have become the new normal and cause devastating effects on the community worldwide. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the end of normal routines and the beginning of new ones. It has become the center of attention since its emergence in December 2019 from China and on March 11th, 2020, WHO termed it as a pandemic that has been widely spread in more than 200 countries all over the world. As we went a year around living with the virus in March 2021, situations have altered and escalated in multiple directions. The pandemic taught us that efficient administrative systems and healthcare facilities alone cannot ensure the proper containment of the disease; the involvement of the whole community matters! We often forget that community cannot be ignored in participating in the things that concern them. Community as a resource has not been utilised properly and always been underestimated. The current situation of an unforeseen health emergency is an illustration of this phenomena. We personalised the current crisis when things got out of control rather than handling it collectively. This seeks our attention towards a community resilience perspective during the COVID crisis. An effective response to the pandemic depends on the solidarity of the community members along with the scientific solutions. Here I discuss, how the public health response towards the COVID-19 pandemic could be improved through a social psychological approach that gives attention to the group processes and social identities in the community, which in turn contributes to the resilience and wellbeing of the community.

Individual or Collective Efforts: Community Resilience during the Pandemic

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, collectivity creates resilience rather than individualism. Psychological and behavioural elements play an important role in dealing with the virus and people in society. Harnessing mutual self-help in a collective form is therefore the best resource of society in this crisis. How do we act collectively or what constitutes collective behaviour during emergencies or disasters? This is particularly valid when we think about the current situation of promoting physical distancing to control the spread of the disease. Human behaviour has become the key factor in affecting the spread of the Coronavirus. This has led to the increased importance of understanding the psychological factors that influence human behaviour. The concept of togetherness has attained a contradictory meaning of being cognitively together, though being physically apart. This is where the framework of community resilience comes in picture. The resilience of the community makes the response to the pandemic more effective and binds us by collective consciousness to deal with adversities.

Community resilience, or the capability of the community to deal with the adverse circumstances to return to the normal situation, can help in responding to the pandemic in an effective manner. The recovery from the pandemic depends on the combined ability of the community to work towards the shared goal of eliminating the disease and adapting to the new normal. Along with the social capital and other factors, the political environment in a community becomes the deciding factor of involvement of citizens for attaining this shared goal. Efficient leadership, collaborative approaches within the system, social networks, relationships and communications serve as the lifeline of community resilience. Addressing the need of educating people continuously about the necessary precautions, setting up of additional health and care facilities and making it more accessible and inclusive to all sections of the society, and encouraging the whole of society for their participation, are some of the authoritative factors that are of paramount importance. Certainly, there are limits to the governmental intervention as the present crisis is wide spread, however it also taught us not to overlook the capability



of the community in any emergency.

At the present circumstances the ability of the community to adapt and transform to the necessary changes enhance the resilience. We have come across diverse responses from different places such as self-organising at neighbourhood, organising community kitchen, supply of basic necessities for the needy and formal coordinated efforts from the authorities. In all these efforts the role played by social networks and the cohesion existing between community members plays an important role. An in-depth analysis of the microprocesses under this community cohesion can be understood by a social identity perspective. The social identity approach of community resilience helps us to understand the processes behind collective action during an emergency. It enhances our understanding about the perceptions, expectations, motivations, and behaviours of people in emergencies. It details the process by which the psychological antecedents of shared identity contributes to the psychological and behavioural consequences. It can be used in encouraging compliance with the positive health-related behaviours in people.

Losing social connections, maintaining physical distance, stigma, and associated discrimination may culminate into hostility, and all of these can turn people's lives upside down. Empowering social networks and connections can be the ultimate solution for surviving the present, and the role of government as a catalyst will enhance the resilience mechanisms of the community. The present situation calls for our attention to the recognition of the importance of social networks and governance, the need for clear risk communication, understanding group behaviors and the micro-processes for emergency management, and the need for building and improving relationships with community members and authorities. When countries come together to tackle the common enemy (COVID-19) or common fate (isolation, loneliness and death); the willingness to work constructively depends upon inclusivity, interdependence, and trust, where the role of government and social networks are crucial. We will be able to

overcome this pandemic only if we overcome personal interests. The recognition of the importance of 'we over me' is the stepping stone of change during this period. A social identity approach to COVID-19 can help reduce political polarisations, discriminations, and prejudices, and create the 'we' feeling through invoking a strong social identity by means of an effective identity governance. The moral of the COVID-19 pandemic tale is that we need science and solidarity to go hand in hand in order to move forward.

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MANIFESTING THE PINTEREST LIFE?

One of the interesting takeaways of Sociology is its ability to turn the most mundane of habits into a revelation of something larger, keeping people out of reach within reach. This is not to say that social media doesn't fulfil a similar purpose but the awareness of asserting individuality while at the same time being part of the Simon Says game of social trends tends to be limited, at best. Social media offers a functional space to cultivate your own interests, thoughts and purpose but the increasing pressures to conform, to communicate tends to drive people away, in pursuit of what one calls a "social media detox". For reasons varied, users tend to disengage from the flood of content regarding other people's lives and the necessity to portray an aesthetic version of theirs. Aesthetic, of late, seems to be so overused in my social circle that instead of interrogating its meaning, I have started taking it for granted. One idea of aesthetics that seems to have been going over and over in my head draws from Shohat & Stam's (2002) debates regarding the nature of aesthetics which claim to be modern and post-modern. The shortest summary that I can offer is an overwhelming European version of the story regarding aesthetics seems to be at the forefront.

Challenges are aplenty on social media with artists from multiple social locations expressing art forms unique and completely their own, resting on the bedrock of active engagement which artists have to put a lot of work into to achieve. For some, the process seems to be easier. What I perhaps want to express then is an idea, simply an idea with no extensive research backing it up, an idea that draws from personal experience and may be more or less flawed but before I proceed with that for the sake of suspense and for the sake of limited validation of this piece, I'll take an academic detour.

If this piece is to be placed within the domain of this discipline of sociology, Lupton (2012) puts forward 'Digital Sociology' as a sub-discipline which primarily focuses on digital technologies through the investigation and analysis of the manner in which it incorporates itself into social worlds and may also build concepts of self-hood. She further outlines four arenas of work in which digital sociologists can engage with, namely: use of digital media for professional purposes, sociological analyses of digital media use, usage of digital data for qualitative or quantitative social research and finally, engaging in reflexing and critical analysis of digital media informed by social and cultural theory (Lupton, 2012).

Coming back to the idea, what I wish to talk about is the kind of pressures and hierarchy of aesthetics that may find itself in social media spaces where active engagement is far from necessary. You may have guessed it right, I'm talking about Pinterest, one of the spaces best haunted by those who are willing to step only one foot in the icy, cold waters of social media which it is most days. Pinterest, the social media site famed for artistic and off late education curation functions on the simple task of creating boards on a range of topics, each board dedicated to the collection of visual content for that topic only. Sometimes we deviate like I do, I have a board called "Things which caught my attention" simply to find an alternative to creating boards of visual content for an agenda my brain clearly isn't in the mood to set. This social media site has also found space among scholars who wish to use it for classroom teaching and related academic practices (Lupton, 2012; Pearce & Learmouth; 2013) as well as scholars such as Lui (2015) who has analysed the production of knowledge on Pinterest through processes of social curation for professional and private reasons. Gretzel (2021) goes on to talk about collection of travel dreams and the associated emotions of longing and the use of affective labour on travel boards in Pinterest during COVID.

I too engaged in my share of affective labour on Pinterest excessively during the start of COVID in an



attempt to engage in what Tumblr accounts tend to call “manifesting the dream life”. It is the attempt afforded to those with the luxury of time who can at best dream while all their plans dissipate into thin air and life comes to a standstill. But when it comes to the dream life, where do the ideas come in? Who has put forward the standards of what is and isn’t a dream life? When you open Pinterest, which has also been taken over by the spectrum of advertising and their ideas of desirability which is visible, especially if one looks at the kinds of images that are bombarded in the home décor section, suggestions varied from something as basic as chairs to modern-day equipment for domestic purposes whose use I still am a bit unclear on. Let’s stick with home décor then, aside from advertising, a closer look at the images that you find and the ones that make their way into your board tend to be primarily those of apartments in cities of the Global North. Even if you choose to deviate from this and I applaud you for that, one cannot deny that the first set of images that turn up on your search bar tend to primarily follow the line of European aesthetics. If we move towards boards dedicated to Travel, again the places which tend to come up first and thus push you towards designing a travel plan dedicated to fulfilling these trips are primarily of European cities. Paris, Rome, Barcelona, Greece - you know how it goes. Even in spaces which you believe are completely your own, you can’t deny the dominating, overarching influences present and the hierarchies that tend to be reproduced even when you’re trying to design a life of yours. The emphasis on visual content is increasing as the days go by but whose visual content comes to the fore-front is an arena that is in need of critical analysis.

This is not to say that such processes cannot be subverted but subversion requires recognition of what is there and isn’t there. One of the interesting options that Pinterest offers to us is the ability to add images of your own, add images from multiple sites by simply a click of their button. If their button is indeed to be used in favour of images and aesthetics that continue to be present but not part of the mainstream, is

it possible to change the algorithm? And if that be so, doesn't Pinterest indeed offer us the opportunity to dream our own dreams as real as it feels to us, and as distant as it feels from the dominant affairs, idealisations of the world? Social media always offers us the opportunity, if we are willing to take it. To be fair, it's not a simple choice of yes or no, of grit and will. Material resources also come into play, endless persistence which a lot of us can't afford has a decisive influence. I am guilty of dreaming of a life that others have set out for me, conforming to European aesthetics, but perhaps now I can actively acknowledge that this is only the tip of the iceberg of what I can do for myself. It's not a very sociological conclusion, mostly a personal perspective of viewing aesthetics critically, of looking into not simply possibilities but what already exists in terms of aesthetics, not simply subversion but also appropriation. A judicious use of social media is of urgency where we engage in as active consumers as opposed to passive consumers. It is possible, it need not be far reaching either. Do what you can, with what you have.

The social production of knowledge is one of the most powerful things that social media allows us to do and in this case Pinterest as well. So much of what you've been collecting all this while has been important to you, has helped you have dreams in the trying time which doesn't seem to end. In subversion and appropriation, there does not exist rejection, in no way are your ideas of aesthetics wrong if that really appeals to you; what critical engagement tells you that this is not the limit. This is not the exact picture you have to become because there is so much that continues to be out of our field of vision. You can build your own aesthetic the way you want, the important idea is to move beyond the boundaries that have been set out for us, that we continue to live in, unknowingly. One can only break those barriers down if one recognises in. In recognition lies knowledge, the social production of knowledge that you can readily partake in without the need to conform.

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SMART LEARNING

Teaching involves not only one-sided lectures being given to the students. Ideal teaching must be a two-way interaction wherein students are also allowed to speak up, whatever they have understood in a given topic. The traditional method of classroom teaching which requires the teacher to come to the class, deliver a lecture and leave the class, can be called a 'passive learning mode of teaching'. In this, the classroom environment is teacher-focused and no attention is paid to the students. Students here are on the receptive side where he (she) is quiet and trusts the teacher without questioning him (her). It gives teachers more control over the learning environment. It makes the presentations of material organised and more understandable. Passive learning allows for lecture notes to be planned, replicated, and reused by more students.

But as there is another side of the coin, similarly passive teaching can have some shortcomings also. Students can have a tendency to become disengaged and unmotivated. There is minimal feedback. Active learning entails any class activity which involves students as well. They do things (action) and think about their actions. Active learning focuses on developing cognitive skills of the students. In active learning, the students get an opportunity to voice their opinions and develop confidence.

Active learning strategies include:

1. **Discussion**: Students give their opinion and construe the discussion in a time limit.
2. **Roleplaying**: Students take hypothetical roles and enact them – for example, they can become counsellor and a client.
3. **Debate**: Through debate we can get multiple perspectives on an issue. It can help develop critical thinking amongst the students.
4. **One Minute Paper Reflections**: This can be used when a teacher has to observe how students reflect on what they have learned. This teacher poses a general question like, "summarise the main point of today's lecture in one sentence" and expects students to respond to that.
5. **Pausing**: This involves giving a pause in the middle of the lecture and making students write on the topic which is being discussed.
6. **Three-Step Interview**: Here students are placed in groups of three. Each student is assigned a role. Interviewer, interviewee and reporter. Interviewer interviews the interviewee and the reporter reports the information. After each interview the roles are rotated.
7. **Case Study Method**: Where students study individual cases, which could be fellow students, etc.

Furthermore, Cooperative Learning is the process of breaking students into small groups so they can discover a new concept together and help each other learn. The core element is to showcase the positive effects of interdependence while underlining the importance of personal responsibility. The experience of working socially can help students with soft skills i.e. negotiating with other people.



In the Jigsaw Technique approach, groups of students work in a team of four to become experts on one segment of new material. Other expert teams in the class work on other segments of the new material. The class then rearranges, forming new groups that have one member from each expert team. The members of the new team then take turns teaching each other the material on which they are experts.

Some potential challenges in the use of active learning strategies are:

- Lecturers are very strong in their fields and disciplines but often do not have any background or training in pedagogic methods,
- Lack of time for preparation of active learning techniques for courses, and
- Reluctance to reduce the amount of material covered, which is perceived as necessary in order to use active learning methods.

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PANDEMIC TIMES IN METROPOLITAN INDIA

The ongoing pandemic caused by the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is shaping ways in which we understand human life. This article is concerned with the question: 'How has the pandemic affected our sense of time and as an ongoing process?' Drawing on a series of telephonic interviews with differently located individuals across classes in metropolitan India, personal diary entries and a digital archive I started in April 2020, this paper is an initial exploration of how the pandemic may have altered a sense of time, especially of the present and the future [1], taking the example of the lockdown that took place in India in 2020.

In an essay that explores the pandemic in the United States in March 2020, the author writes that the pandemic 'ruined time' setting the "tone for a year characterised by uncertainty, confusion, stress, and anxiety — all of which mess with the way we experience the passage of time" (Wetsman 2020). While this captures a sense of what many of us felt at that time and continues to do so, I wonder if there is more that can be considered, given the phenomenon of time. Anthropologists like Alfred Gell (1992) have been critical in seeing our experience of time as a physical phenomenon, and as a form of social framing and personal experience. The awareness of time in structuring our life goes back even further. As Edmund Leach points out, with reference to religion and rituals, time alternates between periods of secular time marked by moments of sacred activity. "We create time by creating intervals in social life. Until we have done this, there is no time to be measured (Leach 1961: 135). An engagement with time as a socio-cultural and even personal phenomenon becomes important as it speaks to a structuring of our lives. In that case one could ask the question: How does the pandemic provide a way to think about our relation to time and the ways in which it restructures life?

Early Days of Uncertainty

The lockdown called by the Indian government to stem the initial spread of COVID-19 began in March, 2020 and ended almost three months later. While forms of lockdowns such as curfews have been a part of life for areas marked by conflict where ordinary life is subject to periods of suspension, the lockdown was unprecedented in placing an entire population indoors and suspending ordinary life for all. While the beginning of the lockdown began with attempts at creating sacred rituals of the state in the form of the Janata (people's) curfew and then marked by alternating events such as the banging of utensils and later on the lighting of lamps, then followed by a profane everyday of the lockdown, it was clear that the lockdown was a period of time when many people in India had to confront the pandemic as a time of crisis. The time of lockdown is marked by a tremendous sense of uncertainty. For many, particularly the poor and working classes who saw the lockdown force a stop to their ability to work and earn an income, the question of survival became especially acute. Those who were fortunate to remain indoors and work from home, watched the unfolding tragedy of those referred to as labour migrants who took the risk to leave the cities to return to the places they were from on foot anyhow and anyway. The unfolding images of horror to be recorded was a response of people to an absolute uncertainty where the prospect of survival seemed to have disappeared instantly, suggesting the withdrawal of the state

[1] When the pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation, I was at a loss. How would I respond to what is to come? While I am an anthropologist who is not a specialist in the study of public health, I wanted to capture an unfolding event that has affected our lives in a profound way. This involved trying to save any piece of news, photo, story or meme that reflected the time, almost in the form of a digital scrapbook, maintaining a diary with entries of varying length and conducting a series of telephone interviews. A total of 18 interviews were conducted. Much of this work came to a halt with the resumption of regular work and projects which had been suspended initially in the lockdown. Nevertheless, I continue with occasional diary entries on days that do not overwhelm or when something is too urgent to ignore and the digital scrap file has continued like a reflex.

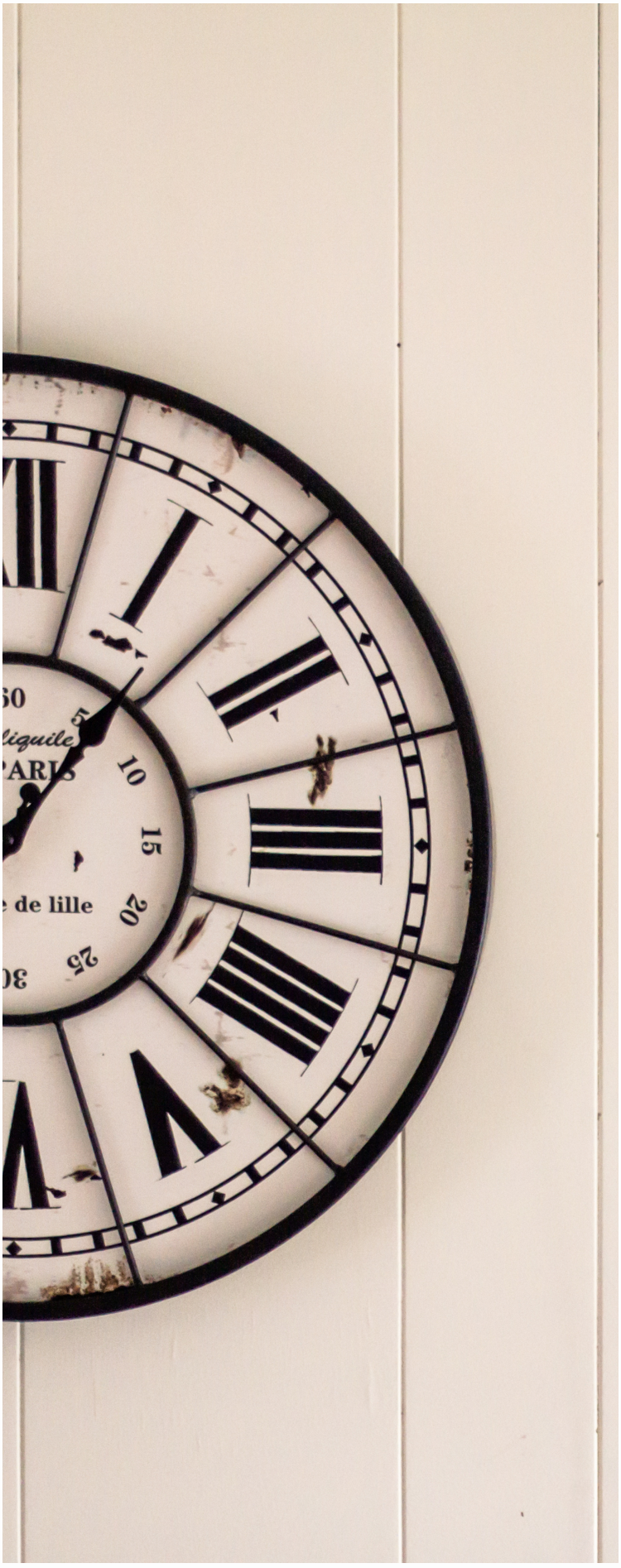
for some people.

But the sense of uncertainty was building up even before. This emerged in a conversation with Suraj [2]. In his twenties, Suraj had already spent a few years in Mumbai after moving from Dharbhanga, Bihar, working as taxi driver. Like others I had interviewed, Suraj had been hearing about a new illness that was spreading from China. Like others, he did not expect the pandemic spreading in India. He had returned to Mumbai from his village in the month of February in 2020. Hence when the lockdown was declared and work stopped he had found himself in a hard place as he had not been able to manage enough savings from work. Sharing accommodation with other men from his village, they spent the days indoors waiting for whatever was to come, rules that seemed to change every now and then, rumour, gossip and speculation that circulated on mobile phone networks. Eventually when trains were arranged for people to leave the city, Suraj took the chance to get on one. After hours of waiting at a railway station amidst large crowds he managed to board a train to Dharbanga. The journey that took more than 40 hours on a service finally organised by the Railways to facilitate the return of many from cities to the countryside, was a hard one, taking place in the high heat of the summer. Suraj and his fellow passengers were provided a bottle of water and biscuits and nothing else. They were not permitted to get off the train when it would stop at any station. When the train was finally resupplied with food halfway in the journey, food packets were thrown at the windows by station crew. Suraj finally made it back to his village and spent his quarantine at the village school. Fortunately, his family home was close by and he could be provided food from home. Throughout our conversation, Suraj kept speaking of not knowing what to expect during a crisis that overwhelmed the present. While Suraj returned to his village safely, he did not know when he would be able to return to Mumbai and what he could do for a living. His experience resonates with those of many men and women leaving cities sustained by their labour but that could not provide them safety, security and shelter when everything had shut down.

Yet there are those who found themselves unable to leave. Sanjay is a plumber who had come to New Delhi many years ago from Odisha and who saw the lockdown put a stop to his work initially until restrictions were eased for those providing essential services which he as a plumber had qualified for. He had told me that the early period was spent in fear of an unknown and unprecedented experience and spent much time waiting for things to clear. Unlike Suraj who had been in Mumbai for only a few years, Sanjay had brought his family to the city many years ago and his children had grown up in New Delhi. When I had asked him if he had thought of leaving like so many others, he admitted that that thought had come to them as there were not many cases reported in Odisha. What dissuaded him was the experience of a nephew who worked as a taxi driver in Delhi and who decided to drive back to their village. However, when he reached his village, he was not allowed in as his villagemates who feared what he may have brought with him and eventually he returned to New Delhi instead. Sanjay managed to resume some work though his income took a severe hit and any new job brought with it a sense of fear and uncertainty of exposure to the virus.

Alongside a sense of uncertainty, the lockdown time was also marked by a sense of boredom. Many found themselves at home with nothing to do nor able to attend to life in the way they did before. Saraswati, who works as a cook and domestic helper in Kolkata expressed this sense of duality. There was the uncertainty of not knowing what to expect, the uncertainty of an epidemic that was not yet fully understood. Yet life had become very boring as there was otherwise little to do being stuck at home. Like Sanjay, Saraswati was settled in Kolkata, and lived in a home her family owned which made her relatively fortunate in comparison to many others. Yet the lockdown also had stopped work for her husband who worked at construction sites. One had to kill time while facing the loss of income, though Saraswati was fortunately paid her salary by her employer.

[2] Pseudonyms used for all respondents



The experience of boredom was circulated across conversations I had across the class spectrum, especially among the elderly I spoke to and kept in touch with. But it was a sense of boredom punctuated by periods of waiting and household routine, punctuated by odd rituals such the Prime Ministers address, announcements from the state and reports of scenes of horror and suffering, and the occasional news that someone one knew had caught the virus and may have even succumbed to it. For those fortunate to continue work from home, it was a different story to some extent. My family's life in lockdown was limited to one indoors punctuated by the weekly visit to a nearby market that had remained open for essential services. To work from home is and remains a privilege. However, given our dependence on domestic labour like any other member of the Indian Middle Classes, we saw the day fill up with routine tasks that were otherwise outsourced, from cooking and cleaning to childcare. While we were able to work from home and apparently justify our incomes, the day seemed to fill up with something to attend to. In that sense the insertion and intrusion of work life into an increased domestic life left little time to think of anything else. Derrick, an old friend I had interviewed who worked in the media in Mumbai, found routine office time including its coffee breaks transplanted to his home. Derrick realised that working from home showed that companies did not really need large office spaces and even allowed savings of time and money spent in commuting, which many other friends and family of mine who were able to work from home had noticed as well. But the intrusion of the workplace, affected how daily time was structured where separation of public and private life was no longer possible. The demands of work continued, which among other things led me to stop the interviews as prior teaching and research commitments resumed centre stage, amidst tasks that we were privileged to pay others to do. Nevertheless, I was not on the road looking for shelter somewhere.

After the Lockdown

The gradual opening up of life in India began in the summer of 2020, slow and deliberate. While numbers of new cases increased, I had stopped following daily COVID-19 counts. People seemed to begin venturing out with certain limits. By the beginning of 2021, the count in India started to decline. A colleague of mine even spoke of how things might clear completely in the summer of 2021 if the pattern continued. Many people were planning for the future to the extent possible, attending to work, applying for programmes of study and other things. My colleagues and I are about complete an academic year spent teaching online and looking to the next round of admissions to the university, as well as planning some research though I had approached the pandemic first as a period of deskilling as classic ethnography in the form I had practiced during graduate studies would be difficult.

However, looking back at the lockdown from this present moment with the second wave in India, becomes difficult. The new numbers and reports of much suffering related to failures of the state in different ways which are being currently documented, appears to make a discussion of a future time to be difficult and has even dented the optimism we seemed to have had in the month of February in 2021. The lockdown of 2020 was an episode that took place during an event that was and is still unfolding in further episodes of despair. Rather we are in a different episode, and this overwhelming present makes the future hard to imagine. Time in a period of crisis appears to be marked by what Rebeca Bryant refers to as an 'uncanny present', 'creating an awareness or perception of present-ness that we do not normally have' (Bryant 2016: 21). In the uncanny present, it becomes impossible to think of the future. In turn the past before the pandemic appears as an ideal time, possibly subject to some kind of nostalgia which will be interesting to explore further.

I wonder how the lockdown, and the experiences of those who I have spoken of will appear as we look back to that time in this second wave? Suraj had found himself in his village for some time tending to his family's land. Most households in his village had a member or more working in a city in India and the lockdown saw the return of these members resulting in a sense of crowding for the first time in years and consequently saw a resumption of disputes which had remained dormant as no one was around. Eventually he moved to a new job in Haryana, replacing his father who was due to retire. In New Delhi, Sanjay's work had started to pick up again but with the new wave and lockdown I wonder how recovery will be for him. Saraswati had become optimistic and even started to feel there was nothing to worry about anymore. Furthermore, for many people, the pandemic is one of many crises they face. In recent conversations, Saraswati was disturbed by the large scale election campaigns and violence she was witnessing in Kolkata for quite some time, which may have contributed to the spread of Covid in the city and general sense of unease. The layering of different crises has been a feature of life for many people in India. Life before the pandemic for residents of New Delhi for would include the communal riots of February 2020 and consequently the survivors of the riots had to deal with the losses from violence as well as the pandemic. Inhabitants of regions at the peripheries of the Indian nation state, who have lived in conflict for decades perhaps see the pandemic as another episode. A student I have taught from one of these regions had once commented that most people in India will now face what her people have endured for a long time. Thinking about the lockdown in the second quarter of 2021 during another lockdown (and a worsening situation when medical infrastructure in India has been stretched to its limits), in a crisis that continues to unfold, how can we look back at 2020? What is time, when the present overwhelms?

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